

THE KEY

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE KEY</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
CHAPTER I. HALF A MILLION.....	1
CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW ENTERS.....	5
CHAPTER III. THE LAST GASP.....	10
CHAPTER IV. FROM THE DARK.....	14
CHAPTER V. AT PERNAMBUCO.....	19
CHAPTER VI. OUTSIDE THE HARBOR.....	24
CHAPTER VII. NEW DEATH ARRIVES.....	28
CHAPTER VIII. THE MAN WHO FEARED.....	32
CHAPTER IX. THE KEY.....	36
CHAPTER X. SWIFT DEATH.....	42
CHAPTER XI. THE CONFERENCE.....	45
CHAPTER XII. A CLIENT ADVISES.....	50
CHAPTER XIII. CLUES IN THE DARK.....	53
CHAPTER XIV. MOVES TO A FINISH.....	58
CHAPTER XV. CROOKS UNITE.....	62
CHAPTER XVI. CARDONA MAKES A CALL.....	66
CHAPTER XVII. THE BAIT.....	70
CHAPTER XVIII. DORRINGTON RESPONDS.....	75
CHAPTER XIX. DEATH FAILS.....	80
CHAPTER XX. ATTORNEYS SPEAK.....	83
CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW SPEAKS.....	86

THE KEY

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I. HALF A MILLION](#)
- [CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW ENTERS](#)
- [CHAPTER III. THE LAST GASP](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. FROM THE DARK](#)
- [CHAPTER V. AT PERNAMBUCO](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. OUTSIDE THE HARBOR](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. NEW DEATH ARRIVES](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. THE MAN WHO FEARED](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. THE KEY](#)
- [CHAPTER X. SWIFT DEATH](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. THE CONFERENCE](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. A CLIENT ADVISES](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. CLUES IN THE DARK](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. MOVES TO A FINISH](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. CROOKS UNITE](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. CARDONA MAKES A CALL](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. THE BAIT](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. DORRINGTON RESPONDS](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. DEATH FAILS](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. ATTORNEYS SPEAK](#)
- [CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW SPEAKS](#)

CHAPTER I. HALF A MILLION

"HALF a million dollars!"

The speaker, a bluff-faced man with angry eyes, brought his fist upon the table with an emphatic stroke. The action brought solemn looks from the others gathered in the conference room. Silence followed.

"A paltry half million!" With this surprising modification of his first statement, the bluff-faced man arose to tower above his companions at the table. "Upon that sum depends the success of our entire enterprise. Mind you, gentlemen, investments of more than fifty millions are at stake unless we can acquire that money!"

New silence. Perplexed, troubled looks appeared upon the faces of the executives who were gathered at the table. The bluff-faced man studied his companions. He noted that certain latecomers to the conference were looking for an explanation. He gave it.

"Let me repeat the situation," declared the speaker. "I, Charles Curshing, am president of the Dilgin Refining Corporation. Our company and its subsidiaries are engaged in destructive competition with the Crux Oil Company. If this fight keeps on, one concern is bound to fail; and the finish of the conflict will inevitably draw the other into bankruptcy with it.

THE KEY

"There is only one hope of avoiding this catastrophe. That is for us, the directors of the Dilgin Corporation, to acquire a controlling interest in the Crux Company within the next sixty days. Such action will preserve both concerns; but we must not sacrifice any of our present holdings.

"We require a total of ten million dollars to swing the deal. By pressing every available spring, I have arranged to obtain to within a half million dollars of that sum. The limit has been reached. Unless we can manipulate the half million, my efforts will be to no avail. We will be unable to negotiate for Crux control before the deadline has been reached."

"How about Torrence Dilgin?"

The inquiry came from a man near the foot of the conference table. It brought a grim smile from Charles Curshing. Leaning forward on the table, the president spoke in a confidential tone.

"Torrence Dilgin," he stated, "is a wealthy man. He was the founder of our corporation. Retired, he is living in Rio de Janeiro. It would be logical to suppose that Torrence Dilgin would aid us in this crisis. It is also natural that I would have looked to him for such assistance.

"I communicated with Torrence Dilgin. I did not over-emphasize the present situation, because I did not choose to alarm him. Torrence Dilgin is past eighty, gentlemen. He is enjoying the twilight of his career. This grand old man responded to my cautious inquiry. His letter told me that his estate is in the keeping of a New York attorney, who is with us here to-night. Let me introduce him: Lester Dorrington."

DIRECTORS shifted in their chairs as a tall, cadaverous man arose at the side of the table. Lester Dorrington was a prominent New York attorney; one noted for his skill in handling criminal cases. It was something of a surprise to learn that Dorrington, who specialized in defending men charged with heavy crimes, was the attorney whom old Torrence Dilgin had chosen as manager of his estate.

There was magnetism in Dorrington's personality. Keen eyes gave light to a face that was almost expressionless. A man of fifty odd years, Dorrington had gained the steady persuasion that characterizes the successful criminal lawyer. Though his manner was quiet, it brought a dominating effect. The conference room was hushed as this pallid, cold-lipped attorney bowed in response to the chairman's introduction.

"Upon his retirement from active business," announced Dorrington, "Torrence Dilgin conferred upon me the honor and trust of handling his affairs. I have followed his instructions to the full. His will is in my keeping.

"This crisis in the affairs of the Dilgin Corporation has brought an inquiry regarding the total amount of Torrence Dilgin's holdings. Despite the fact that your president, Charles Curshing, has summoned me here at Torrence Dilgin's order, there are certain privileges which I must exert as custodian of Torrence Dilgin's private possessions.

"I cannot, for instance, announce the size of Torrence Dilgin's estate. That would be unfair to my client. I can, however, state the nature of his assets. Gentlemen, Torrence Dilgin's estate consists entirely of stock in Dilgin Corporation and associated enterprises, with the exception of certain trust funds that cannot be touched.

"Mr. Curshing has stated that it would be unwise to utilize any Dilgin Corporation securities in the acquisition of the needed half million. His point is well chosen: any use of such stocks would injure the standing of your enterprises. Mr. Curshing's own decision automatically makes it impossible for Torrence Dilgin to aid you with half a million dollars."

Pained hush resumed sway when Dorrington ceased speaking. The tall lawyer sat down, his face

THE KEY

expressionless as before. The last ray of hope had flickered. It was Curshing, however, who revived it.

"One possibility remains," stated the corporation president. "Mr. Dorrington has given us a clear statement of Torrence Dilgin's holdings. We know that Torrence Dilgin is living upon the interest from his investments in Dilgin Corporation.

"Torrence Dilgin, therefore, has as much to lose as any of us more in fact should Dilgin Corporation fail. If he is properly informed of this crisis, he will certainly rally to our aid, if possible."

"But his holdings are frozen," came an objection. "According to Mr. Dorrington "

"Mr. Dorrington," interposed Curshing, "has spoken only of Torrence Dilgin's known assets. Why should we presume that the grand old man now in Rio de Janeiro has placed all of his holdings in Mr. Dorrington's keeping? Torrence Dilgin was a financial genius. It was never his policy to carry eggs in a single basket "

Curshing paused. A buzz of acknowledgment was coming from the directors. The corporation president had hit home. All could visualize the possibility. Torrence Dilgin multimillionaire might well have some large amount of money tucked aside for old-age emergency.

The buzz subsided as Curshing raised his hands for silence. Dorrington, his own statement ended, was sitting like a statue. On the opposite side of the table, however, was a keen-faced, middle-aged man whose dark eyes were staring toward Curshing from beneath close-knot brows. It was to this individual that Curshing turned.

"Gentlemen," suggested the president, "let us hear from our own attorney, Edwin Berlett."

THE heavy-browed man arose. Stocky, of middle height, his face square and dark-skinned, Edwin Berlett was a man of action. As a lawyer, he formed a marked contrast to Lester Dorrington, whom he faced. There was a tinge of irony in his voice.

"Gentlemen," said Berlett, firmly, "I represent the Dilgin Corporation. I owe much to Torrence Dilgin. He and I were close friends. Mr. Curshing is right. Torrence Dilgin did not carry his eggs in one basket.

"For instance: he raised me to the position of attorney for the Dilgin Corporation. But when he came to arrange his private affairs, he chose a man whose selection came as a surprise to me, namely: Lester Dorrington.

"Such was always Torrence Dilgin's way, so far as people were concerned. But Torrence Dilgin has another peculiarity. When he trusts any person, he does so to the full extent. Having chosen Dorrington as his own attorney, he would give him entire capacity to act. Therefore, I feel positive that Dorrington has given us a statement of all the assets which Torrence Dilgin possesses. In my opinion, it would be useless to approach Torrence Dilgin for aid."

"You're wrong, Berlett!" The challenge came from Curshing. "The very fact that Dorrington was chosen out of a clear sky to handle Torrence Dilgin's estate shows that there may be more to this matter.

"You, Berlett, are going to Rio. You are to see Torrence Dilgin. You are to state our case. As president of the Dilgin Corporation, I impose this duty upon you."

"The trip will be useless."

THE KEY

"Not in my opinion."

"It will mean a large fee if I go."

"We shall pay it."

Berlett shrugged his shoulders as he resumed his chair. He seemed to take Curshing's words at discount. The president, however had won the support of the directors.

"I have cabled Torrence Dilgin," declared Curshing, in a decisive tone. "In my message, I told him that you are on your way to Rio. You will leave today, Berlett, by plane."

"At what time?" questioned the lawyer, indignantly.

"Two o'clock this afternoon," returned Curshing. "I sent the cable two days ago. Remember, Berlett, this corporation holds the privilege of calling upon your entire services at any time. We are exerting that privilege right now."

Approval came from the directors. Hearing their audible expression of unanimous agreement with Curshing, Berlett submitted. He smiled sourly as he arose from his chair.

"Very well, gentlemen," he declared. "I must leave you and return to my office. I shall have to hurry to arrange my own affairs and prepare for my trip "

"You will meet me here at half past twelve," ordered Charles Curshing, as the lawyer started for the door. "It is ten o'clock now, Mr. Berlett."

As Berlett passed out through the door, Curshing waved his arms as a signal for adjournment. Approaching Lester Dorrington, Curshing shook hands with the cadaverous lawyer and thanked him for his statement. He ushered Dorrington out through the offices of the Dilgin Refining Corporation.

AS soon as he had left Curshing, Dorrington permitted himself to smile. The twist that appeared upon his pale lips was a knowing one. It still existed, half an hour later, when Dorrington appeared in his own offices.

Standing in a private room, amid heavy, expensive furnishings of mahogany, Lester Dorrington stared from the window as he surveyed the steplike skyline of Manhattan. He was thinking of the events that had taken place at the directors' meeting.

Moving to a corner of his office, Dorrington brought a telephone from a little cabinet. This was a private line one that was not connected with the switchboard in Dorrington's suite. The lawyer dialed. He heard a whiny voice across the wire.

"Hello, Squeezer," began the cadaverous man, in a cautious tone. "This is Mr. Dorrington... Yes. From my office in the Bylend Building... Yes, a job for you... Go to 918 Hopewell Building. Trail Edwin Berlett, the lawyer... He's going out from Newark airport at two o'clock... Right..."

Dorrington hung up the receiver. He paused thoughtfully, smiled in dry fashion, then decided to call another number. It was plain that Lester Dorrington was deeply interested in the affairs of Edwin Berlett.

THE situation, however, was mutual. While Dorrington was telephoning from his office in the Bylend Building, Edwin Berlett, seated at his desk in room 918, Hopewell Building, was also busy on the wire.

THE KEY

Berlett had arrived at his office fifteen minutes earlier.

"Hello..." Berlett's tone was keen. "Yes... You'll take care of everything... That's right... Through the proper parties. Be sure that the messages are sent. Very good, Morgan.

"When everything is done, keep an eye on Lester Dorrington, 2416 Bylend Building... That's right... No... Nothing more. I'm all finished. Ready to leave..."

Berlett's lips wore a hard smile as the receiver clattered on the hook. The stocky attorney was ready to leave for Rio. He had placed his affairs in order. He was starting upon a mission that Charles Curshing believed would involve half a million dollars.

Why did Lester Dorrington mistrust Edwin Berlett? Why, in turn, did the corporation attorney decide that the criminal lawyer would bear watching? What sinister factors were involved in the affairs of Torrence Dilgin?

No one could have gained an inkling of the actual suspicions from either of those poker faces. Dorrington and Berlett were cagey men, of long experience. Each had preserved complete composure during the directors' meeting. Only when alone and apart, outside the conference room, had they shown their individual craftiness.

Half a million dollars seemed the sum at stake. It had loomed as probably the issue of Edwin Berlett's coming trip to Rio. But the actions of the two crafty lawyers indicated that more lay in the balance.

Hidden schemes; vast sums; the lives of unsuspecting men such were the factors in the coming game. Charles Curshing, honest president of Dilgin Corporation, had unwittingly touched the spark that was to loose a blast of evil!

CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW ENTERS

NIGHT in Manhattan. The glare of the metropolis cast a flickering glow upon the walls of massive buildings. Light, reflected from the sullen sky, gave artificial dusk to silent offices that would otherwise have been filled with inky blackness.

A blackened figure was moving through the gloom of a long corridor. Like a phantom of darkness, the mysterious shape approached a door and paused, crouching. Dully, words showed upon the glass panel of the barrier:

INTERNATIONAL

IMPORT COMPANY

A soft laugh shuddered in the corridor. The phantom shade came close to the door. Soft clicks sounded as a blackened hand worked upon the lock. The barrier gave. Entering the office of the International Import Company, the gliding figure straightened as it neared the window. Momentarily, it was revealed as a form clad in flowing cloak, with head topped by a dark slouch hat.

The Shadow!

Weird prowler of the night, strange adventurer whose paths were those of danger, this sinister visitor had come with some known purpose to the office of the International Import Company. He had picked the lock of the door; his next design would soon be evident.

THE KEY

For The Shadow was a master who battled crime. A lone wolf amid the towers of Manhattan, a traveling, living phantom who could fade into unseen hiding places, a fierce, ready warrior who could spring into view with the same startling rapidity, The Shadow had chosen a career that meant death to crooks.

His presence in this office could mean but one thing. The Shadow had come to forestall crime. A master investigator, aided by capable agents who did his bidding, The Shadow had a remarkable ability for ferreting out the truth in evil schemes. Crookery was afoot tonight. The Shadow was ahead of it.

Gliding from the window, The Shadow reached a corner where the heavy door of a vault showed dimly in the gloom. While distant electric signs brought dull flickers to the office, The Shadow's flashlight directed a steady beam upon the combination. His right hand held the torch; his left, ungloved, was working with a knob. A sparkling gem The Shadow's girasol glittered changing hues amid the light.

THE SHADOW'S touch was uncanny. A soft laugh came from above the flashlight. The left hand slipped into its thin black glove. The same hand drew open the door of the vault. In the space of half a dozen minutes, The Shadow had solved the combination.

A locked gate showed within. The Shadow made short work of it. He found the combination of this second barrier. He stepped into the vault. The flashlight glimmered upon metal drawers set in the wall. Suddenly, the light clicked out.

Swishing toward the front of the vault, The Shadow drew the outer door shut. This done, he softly closed the metal gate. Dropping to the rear of the vault, he crouched in Stygian darkness. His keen ears had told him of approaching footsteps in the outer corridor.

The Shadow had acted with swift precision. Less than five seconds after the big door of the vault had closed, a key clicked in the office door. Two men entered. One crossed the room and drew the shades. The other then turned on the office light.

"Open the vault, Hurnor," ordered the man who had gone to the windows.

"All right, Frenchy," replied the other, in a cautious tone. He strode across the room, turned the combination and drew back the heavy door. He paused, with hand upon the inner gate.

"Ready?" he asked.

"No," returned "Frenchy." "Just wanted to make sure your vault was locked. We'll wait for Lapone."

The interior of the vault was blackened, hence The Shadow was invisible to the men in the office. They, however, were plainly in view to The Shadow. Keen eyes that stared from beneath the hat brim were studying the waiting men.

One, a bald-headed man of portly build; was Cyrus Hurnor, who owned the International Import Company. The other was Frenchy Duprez, a crook known in Europe as well as America; a man who had cunningly evaded the law by scampering from one continent to the other when places became too hot for him.

"Worried, Hurnor?" Frenchy laughed in grating tone. "You don't need to be. Lapone and I have been behaving. We're supposed to be has-beens so far as crooked work is concerned."

"But both of you were in wrong "

THE KEY

"A year ago. They thought we had a lot of stolen rocks on us. That's when we unloaded the swag to you for safe keeping. Don't worry about Lapone and me. We're ace high right now. I've got a clean bill of health in Europe; he has the same in South America. We're going back where we belong. You'll get your cut when we fence the stuff. It's cold now those jewels have been forgotten in a year."

Hurnor nodded. His doubts were fading. His face, however, showed one last qualm.

"But you come here at night," he protested. "That means that you think some one may know "

"I'm taking no chances," interposed Frenchy, "and neither is Lapone. I don't think any one is on my trail; neither does Lapone. I called him at noon to-day."

"Was that necessary? I thought you arranged this meeting last night."

"We did. I called Lapone on another matter "

A soft tap was sounding at the outer door. Hurnor shivered. Frenchy smiled and nodded.

"It's Lapone," he stated. "Let him in."

HURNOR went to the door to admit a tall, dark-faced fellow who looked like a Spaniard. Lapone waved a greeting to Frenchy. With Hurnor, he approached the vault.

"I'll open the gate," said Hurnor, nervously. "Are you ready?"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Frenchy. Then, to Lapone: "Did you send that cable?"

"Sure," grinned the dark-skinned man. "Here's the copy of it."

Frenchy took the paper. He nodded as he read the message; then tore the sheet in quarters and threw the pieces in the wastebasket.

"You're sure your friend in Rio will understand it?" questioned Frenchy.

"Positive," replied Lapone.

"He'll be sure to find Warren Sigler?" came the next inquiry.

"Why not?" demanded Lapone. "You said Sigler's at the Hotel Nacional. That's the first place my friend will pick."

"All right."

"What's this about?" The question came nervously from Hurnor. The fake importer wanted an explanation from Duprez. "I thought you fellows were keeping clear of complications. You weren't to unload the swag yet "

"Easy, Hurnor," interposed Frenchy. "This has nothing to do with the jewels."

"What is it then?"

THE KEY

"Lapone has contacts in South American cities. Friends, like I have in Europe. What's more, we've both got friends in New York. This morning, I received a call from a man whom I know. He wanted a job done an important one down in Rio. It was something that he had anticipated. I had already told Lapone to notify his contact in Rio, should a message be going through. Well the message came to me I called Lapone and he sent it. That's all."

"But why didn't this man send the message himself?"

"You were never cut out for real work, Hurnor," returned Frenchy, sadly. "My friend did handle his own communications until this one was necessary. Then he wanted something that couldn't be traced. He had a job, I tell you. A job to be done. That's why the word was to be passed by Lapone."

"It's got nothing to do with jewels. So keep your shirt on. Let's get busy. Open that gate. Lapone and I will each take half of what's inside."

"We'll let Hurnor make the division," suggested Lapone.

"No need," decided Frenchy. "We'll get it fifty-fifty, in a rough way. In a hurry, too; there'll be no time for argument."

The gate had swung open under Hurnor's pull. The portly man had pressed a light switch. His bulky form obscured the view of the others. Suddenly, Hurnor emitted a gasping cry. He came staggering backward from the lighted vault.

"Get him!" he screamed. "Get him! Quick!"

Frenchy and Lapone had thrust hands to pockets even before Hurnor shouted. As the stout man cleared the opening by his backward motion, both crooks aimed for the vault, knowing that an enemy must be within. As Hurnor's words rang in their ears, they saw their rising foe.

THE SHADOW was in the center of the vault. A blackened outline, his shape made a perfect silhouette target for the upcoming guns. Snarling vicious oaths, Frenchy and Lapone sought to fire.

One revolver spoke. It was Frenchy's. The crook loosed his first shot too quickly. A bullet winged the side of the vault. Lapone, determined upon perfect aim, pressed finger to trigger a half second after Frenchy's futile shot.

To The Shadow, half seconds were long intervals. Between Frenchy's shot and Lapone's attempt, The Shadow acted.

Long tongues of flame spat from his extended hands. The roars of twin automatics came cannonlike from the echoing hollow of the vault.

Lapone's finger wavered. Frenchy lost his hold upon his gun. Side by side, these crooked pals went slumping to the floor. They had shared the spoils of crime in life. They had gained their reward death together.

Frenchy and Lapone had found the contents of the vault. They had split fifty-fifty, in a hurry, and in a rough way that they had not expected. Each, instead of stolen jewels, had received a hot bullet from an automatic.

It was Hurnor, roused by the shots, who provided the most startling opposition. Wildly, the false importer leaped forward as his companions fell. Lunging through the door of the vault he hurled his huge bulk upon

THE KEY

The Shadow.

As Hurnor grappled for an automatic, his adversary whirled in his grip. Together, The Shadow and his bulky antagonist came spinning from the vault. Gloved fists opened. Automatics clattered to the floor. Hurnor screamed in triumph as The Shadow's form sank beneath him.

Then came a wild gasp from the big man's lips as the black-garbed form shot upward like a massive spring of steel. The Shadow's hands gained their grip. Hurnor rose struggling toward the ceiling. His body did a cartwheel as snapping shoulders acted beneath the black cloak.

Landing flat on his back, Cyrus Hurnor lay stunned. He did not hear the ring of a distant alarm; the response of a whistle from the streets. But The Shadow heard. He knew that a watchman in the building had caught the sounds of the fray.

Whirling toward the wastebasket, The Shadow stooped and gained the pieces of the cable message. Yellowed paper disappeared beneath the black cloak. Swiftly, the black-clad figure, clearly outlined in the lighted office, moved toward the outer door.

THREE minutes passed. Cyrus Hurnor moved. He came up to a seated position and rubbed the back of his neck. He stared at the prone forms of Frenchy and Lapone. Footsteps were pounding along the corridor. Wildly, Hurnor looked about him. He saw that The Shadow was gone. These were human enemies who were arriving!

Gaining his feet, Hurnor grabbed Frenchy's revolver. Hurnor knew that the police investigation would uncover the wealth in stolen gems that lay within the opened vault. Caught with the goods, Hurnor swung to the door just as a policeman hurled the barrier open.

Hurnor fired. The excited shot went wide. The policeman responded. Hurnor fired again, but he was slumping. The bluecoat, pumping lead into the big target before him, had gained the edge in the fight. Hurnor's spasmodic, dying shots were useless.

The Shadow had broken the jewel ring. He had dropped two enemies who had sought his life. He had left the third to meet the law. His hand remained unseen. By the cards, to-night should have ended The Shadow's work.

CROSSING trails, however, had changed the story. While the police were studying the scene of death in the import office, The Shadow was studying the clue to other crime. A bluish light was burning in a black-walled room. Its rays, focused upon a table, showed hands that held torn sheets of paper.

The Shadow was in his sanctum a hidden abode which he alone could enter. Before him, on the table, his hands placed the fragments of Lapone's cable to Rio de Janeiro. The message read as follows:

GUYON, RIO:

DISCHARGE EXECUTIVE BEFORE REPRESENTATIVE ARRIVES.

LAPONE.

To The Shadow, this cable, apparently addressed to a concern in Rio de Janeiro, was the tip to crime. "Executive" meant some one to be eliminated; "representative" signified a person en route to Brazil.

THE KEY

The Shadow recalled words uttered by Duprez, in questioning Lapone. Frenchy had made it plain that the instructions were not for the man to whom the message had been sent Guyon but for another whom Frenchy had named.

Upon a blank sheet of paper, The Shadow inscribed the name that he had heard Frenchy mention; with that name, the address:

Warren Sigler

Hotel Nacional

Rio de Janeiro

A soft laugh whispered through the sanctum. The writing faded from the paper a peculiar phenomenon due to the special ink that The Shadow used in transcribing written thoughts.

Hands stretched forward and gained earphones. A little light glowed on the wall. A quiet voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

In a weird, clear whisper, The Shadow began to speak. To Burbank, his contact agent, he was announcing his intended plans. Danger joined with crime lured The Shadow. He was responding to the beck.

The Shadow was setting out for Rio de Janeiro. On the morrow, a swift plane would be carrying him en voyage to the Brazilian capital. The master who hounded men of crime was ready to take the course that Edwin Berlett had already begun.

Twenty-four hours behind the corporation lawyer, The Shadow would be on the trail of crime! The Shadow had entered the field where insidious evil lurked.

CHAPTER III. THE LAST GASP

"I DID not expect you so soon, Mr. Berlett."

The speaker was a crafty faced man who was seated in an armchair in the corner of a small but luxurious living room. He was looking toward Edwin Berlett who was standing by the curtained window.

The lawyer did not reply. He was staring from the window, out into the night. From this suite in the Hotel Nacional, he could view the brilliant lights of Rio de Janeiro. Beyond a balcony outside the window, he spied the long, curving twinkle of the crescent waterfront that seemed to dwindle endlessly in each direction.

"I supposed," said the man in the chair, "that you were coming by boat. Mr. Curshing, when he sent his cable, announced that you were on your way. I did not expect you, Mr. Berlett, for a few days to come."

"Quite right." Berlett was terse as he swung from the window to face the man who was hunched in the chair. "I would have come by steamship, Sigler. It was Curshing who insisted that I come by plane. I thought that he would send a second cable. Evidently he decided it was unnecessary."

There was a tinge of annoyance in Berlett's tone. It brought a response from a third man who was seated in another corner. This man was a gray-haired Brazilian. He spoke in English, with barely a trace of Portuguese

THE KEY

accent.

"It is well, Senhor Berlett," he announced, "that you did come by air. The doctor does not think that Senhor Dilgin will live past midnight. His sudden illness is most unfortunate."

"It is," agreed Berlett. Then, swinging to Sigler, he ordered, brusquely: "Give me the exact circumstances."

"The cable came from Curshing," explained Sigler. "Mr. Dilgin had not been well; nevertheless, I showed him the message. I have been his secretary for seven years; I did not expect that so simple a cable could produce a shock."

"Mr. Dilgin began to worry. He said, sir, that the message meant trouble with the corporation. He wanted me to cable to New York. I restrained him, assuring him that you were on the way."

"I see."

"Mr. Dilgin called in the physician. The doctor seemed worried. Mr. Dilgin then insisted upon an attorney. That is why I summoned this gentleman" he indicated the gray-haired Brazilian "Senhor Dario."

Berlett nodded. He again returned to the window. Staring out toward the crescent beach, he inquired:

"So you sent no cable to New York?"

"None, sir," responded Sigler, with emphasis. "I went to the cable office; but merely to learn if other cables had come."

"And you received no message outside of Curshing's cable?"

"None, sir."

"All right." Berlett swung to Dario. "I have heard Sigler's statement. Tell me your connection with the case, Senhor."

BERLETT was looking squarely at Dario. The Brazilian was facing the American attorney. Warren Sigler relaxed. A slight smile showed on the secretary's crafty face.

"Senhor Dilgin was very ill," declared Dario, seriously. "I thought he wanted to make a will. He said no. He wanted to speak to you, he said, so that you could help his company."

"Exactly," returned Berlett. "That is why I have come here, Senhor. But since he wanted to talk to me, why did he send for you?"

"To have a witness," explained Dario. "I handled some legal matters – of a slight sort for Senhor Dilgin. He placed reliance in me."

"I understand. Then you have, as yet, learned nothing?"

"Nothing. Up to last night, it was not alarming. But this morning, Senhor Dilgin became very bad. He has not been able to speak all day. We were sure that he would die."

As Dario concluded, a door opened. A tall Brazilian, obviously the physician, came into view and looked

THE KEY

toward Berlett. The lawyer returned a bushy gaze as he saw a smile upon the doctor's lips.

"The patient has awakened!" exclaimed the physician, in English. "He has come from his coma. He can talk, Senhor. He has asked for you!"

The doctor held his hand upon the door knob, expecting Berlett to respond. The bushy-browed lawyer shook his head.

"Not yet, doctor," he declared. "Let him recover his strength. He may have much to say."

"No, no!" exclaimed the physician. "You do not understand, Senhor. The patient is not improved. He may die at any time. There is no chance for him" the speaker paused with a sad shake of his head "but it is possible that he will talk to you if you come quickly."

"What do you think of it, Sigler?" inquired Berlett, turning to the secretary.

"I agree with you, Mr. Berlett," returned Sigler. "Mr. Dilgin is apt to weaken when he sees you."

"It will strengthen him!" protested the physician, in an excited tone. "Every minute counts, Senhor. Every minute! Come! At once!"

"Sigler tells me that Mr. Dilgin experienced his first shock when he read a cablegram," retorted Berlett. "If that is true, he may experience another through the excitement of seeing me. I rely upon you, doctor, but remember: Sigler has been with Mr. Dilgin for years."

The doctor waved his hands excitedly. He swung to Dario and loosed a flow of voluble Portuguese at which the gray-haired lawyer nodded. Firmly, Dario turned to Berlett.

"Senhor," he said, "you must be guided by what the physician has said."

"I do not want to be responsible for Dilgin's death," returned Berlett, coldly.

"Remember!" Dario wagged a finger in Berlett's face. "I am here to represent Senhor Dilgin. We are in Brazil, not in the United States. I can protest to the law!"

Berlett stood indignant at the challenge. For a moment, conflict seemed impending. Then came an interruption. The door of the bedroom opened. A Brazilian nurse appeared. The woman shook her head as she spoke in Portuguese to the physician.

"You see!" exclaimed the doctor. "It is too late, Senhor. The nurse thinks that Senhor Dilgin has died. Come! You have delayed too long."

SOBERLY, the four men filed into the sickroom. Stretched in a bed lay the withered form of Torrence Dilgin. Illness had played havoc with a frame that Edwin Berlett had remembered as robust. Scrawny hands; cheek bones in a dried face; these were the motionless impressions of Torrence Dilgin that showed above the sheets.

Life had apparently ended. The physician approached the near side of the bed to make an examination. Dario was beside him. Berlett crossed the room and stood at the other side of the bed.

"I think," announced the physician, "that he is dead. If you had come sooner, Senhor "

THE KEY

"This is no time to discuss the matter," interposed Berlett. "The fact that he subsided quickly proves that he could not have talked."

The sound of Berlett's voice produced a magical effect. Like a corpse from its coffin, Torrence Dilgin came to life. Scrawny hands twitched while blued eyelids opened. Torrence Dilgin was staring straight toward Edwin Berlett!

"You are here!" gasped Dilgin. With an amazing effort, the old man clawed his body half upright. "Here! Berlett! With witnesses! Listen!

"The key! Get it, Berlett. For for the company. The key! One one million dollars "

Berlett caught Dilgin's shoulders. The withered frame was sagging. Leaning along as Dilgin sank, Berlett spoke these words.

"What key? Who has it?"

An incoherent gasp came from Torrence Dilgin's lips. Dried lips twitched, trying to repeat a name. The gasp, however, made the word inaudible. Slipping from Berlett's grasp, Torrence Dilgin rolled sidewise in the bed and spoke no more.

It was the physician who took charge. No question remained. That gasp had been Torrence Dilgin's last. When the doctor announced that the old man was dead, the three visitors filed from the room. They assembled beyond the door which the nurse closed behind them.

EDWIN BERLETT strolled to the window. He stood staring toward the lights. It was impossible to determine the emotion that the death scene had inspired in his mind. When Berlett swung from the window, his face had all its firmness.

"Sigler," he ordered, "get your notebook. Take down the death statement as I heard it."

"Yes, sir," replied the secretary.

Word for word, Berlett repeated the dying words. Finished, he turned to Dario. The Brazilian lawyer nodded.

"It is exactly as I heard it," he announced. "But there was one thing, Senhor. There was a name which Senhor Dilgin tried to speak "

"Did you hear it?" questioned Berlett, keenly.

"No, Senhor," returned the Brazilian, "but you were close "

"I could not catch the name," interposed Berlett simply. "In accordance with Torrence Dilgin's apparent wishes, I shall require affidavits from you, Senhor Dario, and from the physician. Did you hear the last words, Sigler?"

"No, sir. Only a few of them."

"Your statement will not be needed. Perhaps, after I have made my report in New York, I may be able to trace this reference to a key and the sum of one million dollars.

THE KEY

"However" Berlett paused to eye Dario steadily "that will be my concern. You, Senhor, are but a witness. Your affidavit will end your connection with the case. It will be a matter for the United States, not for Brazil."

"Very well, Senhor," bowed Dario, in acknowledgment. "I understand."

Edwin Berlett returned to his window. His meditative gaze again sought the sparkling lights of the city. Beyond the glow of lights in the Parque da Acclamacao, he stared toward that inevitable stretch of landlocked bay.

Dying words! Edwin Berlett had heard them. They were the beginning of a revelation; Torrence Dilgin's statement of a strange secret which involved a key and the sum of one million dollars.

Yet more important than the words themselves had been the final gasp. A name lost amid the dying breath was the answer upon which Torrence Dilgin's secret hinged. To Edwin Berlett, the old millionaire had tried to give the all important words.

Who was the person whom Torrence Dilgin had tried to name? What could that person reveal regarding the old man's statements of a key and one million dollars? Had the secret died with Torrence Dilgin?

From the solemn look upon Edwin Berlett's steady face, one would have supposed the secret gone. Senhor Dario, viewing Berlett's profile from one side, was clucking sadly. Warren Sigler, seeing that same profile from the opposite angle, was repressing a triumphant smile.

Brazilian and American had watched by Torrence Dilgin's bedside while awaiting Edwin Berlett's arrival. Yet the effect of Dilgin's apparent failure to convey a final clue to Berlett had produced an opposite effect.

Where Senhor Dario felt that misfortune had been the reward of a long vigil, Warren Sigler was satisfied that his own hopes had been fulfilled.

CHAPTER IV. FROM THE DARK

TWENTY-FOUR hours had elapsed since the death of Torrence Dilgin. The piazza of the splendid Hotel Nacional was thronged with evening visitors. The glittering lobby buzzed with gaiety. A death in an obscure suite high above was no disturbance in the life of this huge hotel.

A tall stranger entered the lobby. American in appearance, he was evidently an arriving guest. Stopping at the desk, he received a registration card and signed his name as Lamont Cranston. The clerk affixed a room number and asked if any special service was required.

"Yes," came the statement, in a quiet tone. "I believe that I may have friends stopping here. Do you have a list of Americans registered at this hotel?"

"Certainly, Senhor." The clerk turned and obtained a card that bore a list of names. "We have occasional inquiries like yours. We keep this list in readiness."

The clerk watched the new guest as he studied the list. The man behind the desk at the Hotel Nacional had observed many unusual travelers, but never one who had impressed him more distinctly. Lamont Cranston's countenance might well have been hewn from living rock. Molded with the firmness of a statue, it was almost masklike.

THE KEY

Though Cranston's head was slightly inclined, the clerk could catch the flash of burning eyes. Involuntarily, the man behind the desk followed the direction of Cranston's gaze toward the list that the new guest was studying.

Beside one name was a check mark in red ink. Cranston's eyes were focused upon that name. Almost involuntarily, the clerk found himself leaning forward to deliver a low-toned explanation.

"The red mark sir," said the clerk. "It is most unfortunate. Senhor Torrence Dilgin died last night. He was a very old man. He had been ill "

"I understand." Cranston's quiet interruption came as the guest returned the list to the clerk. "I suppose you naturally keep such matters quiet. I see no persons whom I know upon this list. Thank you."

The blaze of Cranston's eyes had faded when the guest faced the clerk. Stepping from the desk, the firm-faced arrival followed the waiting attendant to the elevators. He was conducted to his room.

LAMONT CRANSTON'S lodging was at the front of the hotel, a floor below the suite in which Torrence Dilgin had died. As soon as the bell boy had gone, Cranston extinguished the light and walked through darkness to the window.

Across the outer balcony, he commanded the brilliant view of the Parque da Acclamacao and the crescent of lights that indicated the shore line of Rio's bay. These lights, however, were not the ones that had attracted him.

Leaning from the window, Cranston gazed upward, at an angle. He located two lights on the floor above; they were situated in adjoining windows. One was bright; the other dull. These marked the rooms of Torrence Dilgin's suite.

A soft laugh came from Cranston's lips. That tone was a weird echo of The Shadow's sinister mirth. Death at the Hotel Nacional was in itself significant. On the list, however, Lamont Cranston had noted a name directly below that of Torrence Dilgin. It was the name of the man whom The Shadow sought: Warren Sigler.

The list was not alphabetical. Guests had been marked according to the date of their arrival. The fact that Sigler's name was with Dilgin's, coupled with the location of Sigler's room on the same floor, near Dilgin's was proof sufficient of a connection between the two.

Dead man and living! This new guest who used the name of Lamont Cranston was determined to gain an insight into their affairs. Motion occurred within the darkened room. A bag clicked open. The folds of a dark cloak swished in the blackness. Shortly afterward, a figure emerged upon the balcony.

Each window, on every floor, had its own railed projection. These had been designed for appearance rather than occupancy. No persons were visible along the front of the dull-surfaced hotel. Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow. His form, garbed in black, was no more than a moving splotch of darkness as it rose upon the rail.

A swinging spring carried The Shadow to the adjoining balcony. He repeated his maneuver and gained the next projection in the line. Continuing, he came directly beneath the balcony outside of Dilgin's living room. Grasping the projection above, The Shadow swung himself clear of the wall. A few moments later, his form swung over the upper rail.

THE night was mild; the window was open. Yet The Shadow's arrival, accomplished with the utmost stealth,

THE KEY

was unnoticed by those within the room. Three men were engaged in conversation. They were Warren Sigler, Edwin Berlett and Senhor Dario. To-night, Berlett was seated in an armchair. He was not near the window.

"We have arranged everything, Senhor," Berlett was saying to Dario. "The Southern Star sails to-morrow; Sigler and I have engaged passage. We shall have the body transported aboard the ship."

"Very well, Senhor Berlett," returned Dario, with a bow. "I shall aid you by making the proper reports to the authorities. The death certificate has been prepared."

"You saw the physician?"

"One hour ago. He will be here shortly."

Berlett paced across the room. The Shadow, watching from the balcony, eyed him closely. He had noted Berlett's name upon the clerk's list. It had been at the bottom, signifying that Berlett was the most recent arrival at the Hotel Nacional.

"Here are the affidavits, Senhor." Berlett ceased pacing as Dario spoke. The lawyer was drawing folded papers from his pocket. "One is mine. The other is Doctor Antone's. They correspond exactly with yours."

Berlett nodded as he received the affidavits. Sigler arose and approached the lawyer. He put forth a natural question regarding the pipers.

"Shall I file these, sir?"

"Certainly," decided Berlett, handing the affidavits to the secretary. "Keep them with my own statement. I can repeat mine verbatim from your notes when we arrive in New York."

"Very singular, Senhor," mused Dario. "We all heard the same a key a million dollars then a name which none of us could catch. I have been thinking about it, Senhor. I have wondered "

"Wondered what?"

"If Senhor Dilgin tried to say a name. Perhaps, Senhor, he thought that you would know the person who had the key. Could that be? You have known Senhor Dilgin for many years."

Edwin Berlett stood stock-still. He rubbed his chin and furrowed his heavy brows. Sigler, placing the papers in the drawer of a trunk, paused, listening. His face was away from the other men. The Shadow, however, could spy the secretary's profile.

"No." Berlett shook his head. "I can think of no one. Lester Dorrington the attorney who will handle Dilgin's estate said nothing about a key when we had our last conference. I know of none."

"Another lawyer? A friend, perhaps?"

"I do not know of any. Frankly, Senhor Dario, I believe that Torrence Dilgin was delirious when he died. I am preserving his death statement purely as a matter of procedure."

A smile showed on Warren Sigler's face. Again, The Shadow detected the secretary's expression. Edwin Berlett had turned. He was moving toward the window. The Shadow crouched into the darkness below the level of the sill. His action was unnecessary. Berlett turned as some one knocked at the door. Sigler answered

THE KEY

the rap.

It was the physician. The man bowed politely; then spoke to Dario in Portuguese. The Brazilian attorney nodded. He turned to Berlett, who had swung back to the center of the room.

"We must observe a formality," explained Dario, "to comply with the law. As Senhor Dilgin's legal representative in Rio de Janeiro, I have made out papers turning the body over to you. Doctor Antone has prepared the death certificate.

"You and I must identify the body in his presence. Suppose we step into the other room and go through the procedure. No other witness is necessary. You have the papers, doctor? Good. We can sign them in there."

THE three men stepped into the inner room. Doctor Antone closed the door behind them. Immediately, Warren Sigler sidled over to the barrier to listen.

The Shadow saw the action; but he did not linger. Moving to the edge of the balcony, he mounted the rail and swung headforemost to the adjoining projection. Like a trapeze artist, he caught the further rail with silent skill. He brought his tall form up to the next balcony.

Peering through the opened window of the dimly lighted room, The Shadow saw the three men Berlett and the two Brazilians gathered at the foot of Dilgin's bed. The withered form of the dead millionaire was lying in full view while the trio spoke in whispers that one might have expected in a death room.

But The Shadow's keen ears detected a different reason for their soft tones. Senhor Dario was explaining to Edwin Berlett that this formal view of Dilgin's body was unnecessary. The old Brazilian attorney had a different purpose. He wanted to speak to Berlett, without the presence of Warren Sigler.

"Doctor Antone," Dario was saying, "has made a very serious discovery. He believes that arsenic was administered to Senhor Dilgin; that the poison caused the old man's death."

Berlett's raised brows demanded further explanation. It came.

"The doses," interposed Antone, "could have been given in the medicine that Senhor Dilgin took before I came on the case. They would account for the sudden illness."

"But after that?"

"A few heavy doses, given with my prescriptions, would have finished the work."

"You are sure of this poisoning?"

"No, Senhor; but I suspect it."

"Whom do you suspect?"

Doctor Antone pointed toward the door, to indicate the man beyond Warren Sigler. Senhor Dario nodded his belief. Edwin Berlett, however, shook his head.

"Warren Sigler was with Torrence Dilgin for many years," declared Berlett. "I cannot believe him guilty of such crime. Never with mere suspicion as the only basis."

THE KEY

"That is the reason we have brought you here," whispered Dario, gripping Berlett's arm. "There is only one way to gain the proof. An autopsy."

"Which would mean?"

"That the body would have to be turned over to the local authorities. It would be a matter for the Brazilian courts. You, Senhor, would be detained for weeks."

"Impossible! I must go back to New York."

"Exactly," whispered Dario. "That is what I told Doctor Antone. That is why we wished to speak to you. If you wish, Doctor Antone will not mention his suspicions to any one."

"Good. Very good."

"But when you reach New York, you can have an autopsy performed upon the body. Then you will learn the truth. However, Senhor, you must protect Doctor Antone."

"In what way?"

"By stating that the suspicions were your own; that you wondered about Senhor Dilgin's death after you were on the high seas. You, yourself, must cast suspicion upon Warren Sigler. It must never be known that Doctor Antone and I permitted the body to leave Rio de Janeiro suspecting that the dead man had been poisoned."

"I understand." Edwin Berlett nodded. "I promise you, gentlemen, that the autopsy if there is one will be privately conducted. But I doubt very much that I shall have one at all."

"That is your own choice, Senhor," declared Dario, in a relieved tone. "We are your friends. We could not let you leave Rio de Janeiro without this information. It was also necessary, however, that we protect our own positions. If we can all three forget this entire discussion, all will be well."

"It is forgotten, gentlemen," affirmed Edwin Berlett. "Forgotten entirely. And now, Doctor Antone" Berlett's voice was rising as he strolled to the door "you have your papers. Since Senhor Dario and I" he was opening the door "have identified the body and signed the documents, the last formality has been completed. Good evening, gentlemen."

Standing in the doorway where Sigler could observe, Berlett extended his hand to Dario. Antone made a presence of fumbling with papers in his inside pocket. Then he, too, shook hands with Berlett.

The American lawyer conducted them to the outer door of the suite. As soon as the Brazilians had left, he turned to Sigler.

"I'm going down to the lobby," Berlett announced. "After that, to my room. Call me there if you have anything important."

"Yes, sir," responded the secretary.

"And in the meantime," added Berlett, "clear up here. There will be no more visitors, until the body is removed. Have everything ready for the removal."

"Yes, sir."

THE KEY

WHEN Berlett had gone, Sigler locked the door. Smiling, he strolled to the inner room, where The Shadow was still watching from behind the window. Stooping beside the bed which held the body of Torrence Dilgin, the secretary shoved his hand beneath the mattress and brought out two small bottles.

Sigler grinned shrewdly as he pocketed these objects. He pulled the key to his own room from his pocket and left the death room. The outer door of the suite closed behind him.

Darkness edged in from the window.

The form of The Shadow became visible. Like a tall specter of death, the eerie visitor advanced and viewed the corpse of Torrence Dilgin. A soft, mirthless laugh came from The Shadow's hidden lips.

The tall shape stalked across the room, passed through the outer portion of the suite and faded in the corridor. When Warren Sigler returned a few minutes later, he found no traces of The Shadow's brief visit.

ONE hour later, The Shadow was standing by the window of his room. He was again in the character of Lamont Cranston. A single desk lamp cast sufficient illumination to reveal his chiseled countenance.

There was a hawklike expression to that visage. Burning eyes, staring out toward Rio's splendor, were both thoughtful and predictive. Again, a laugh came from The Shadow. Motionless, the lips of Lamont Cranston delivered the whispered sound. This time, the laugh was tinged with mockery.

The Shadow had seen the justification of the suspicions held by Senhor Dario and Doctor Antone. He had watched Warren Sigler enter to remove the hidden arsenic bottles which he had not had opportunity to take away before to-night.

Sigler was a murderer; that was obvious. Dario and Antone were reputable Brazilians; their conversation had proven that fact. But Edwin Berlett, New York attorney who had come to talk with Torrence Dilgin, was a character of doubtful species.

Berlett's belittlement of Dilgin's dying statement; his crafty behavior in his conversation with Dario and Antone; his subsequent statements to Sigler all were evidences of a cunning game.

Plans lay behind the lawyer's poker face. The Shadow, as yet, could not divine them; but he knew that Berlett was scheming for the future. The Shadow, though he needed more facts, was trying to ferret out the part that Berlett was playing in a game that had involved death.

Another laugh from steady lips. It was one of keen understanding. The Shadow had found his answer. He had formed a theory which enabled him to place Berlett. More than that, The Shadow had formed a plan of his own.

Edwin Berlett could wait, along with Warren Sigler. When the time for action had arrived, The Shadow would be capable of handling the clever lawyer as well as the stupid murderer.

CHAPTER V. AT PERNAMBUCO

DAYS had passed since The Shadow's arrival in Rio de Janeiro. The Steamship Southern Star had made its scheduled sailing from the Brazilian capital. Steaming more than a thousand miles northward, it had reached the final Brazilian port. The ship was at anchor in the harbor of Pernambuco.

Edwin Berlett was standing beside the rail of a stern deck. The lawyer was studying the widespread city, with

THE KEY

its causeways connecting a central island with mainland and peninsula. Strolling across the deck to gaze out into the harbor, Berlett looked toward the open sea.

Somewhere in the direction of the ocean lay the hidden reef that served as protection to Pernambuco's harbor. Within a few hours, the Southern Star would be steaming through one of the navigable passages that pierced the reef, guided by a pilot who would know the hidden channel.

Passengers, standing by, were discussing the harbor, which had been improved to accommodate vessels the size of the Southern Star. Among them was a distinguished looking personage whose acquaintance Berlett had made. He was Lamont Cranston, wealthy New Yorker, who had come aboard the ship at Rio.

"Mr. Berlett."

The lawyer swung at the sound of his own name. Warren Sigler had approached. Berlett raised his eyebrows quizzically.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"I have completed all the work you gave me, sir," responded the secretary. "Is there any other duty?"

"Not at present."

"Then I shall go ashore, sir."

"For how long? The boat sails in three hours."

"I shall be back in one."

"Very well. Come to my stateroom when you return. No I shall not be there. I am going down for a while; but after that I shall be in the smoking salon. Come there."

"Yes, sir."

Sigler walked away and descended by a companionway. Berlett remained by the rail to finish the perfecto that he was puffing. Unnoticed by the lawyer, Lamont Cranston left the group of passengers. He had overheard Berlett's conversation with Sigler.

FIVE minutes later, Edwin Berlett finished his smoke. He threw his cigar stump overboard and strolled along the deck. He stopped at a passage that led into the ship. Reaching a door, he unlocked it and entered a sumptuous cabin. Furnished in old-fashioned style, the stateroom was almost a combination of living room and bedroom.

The bed was large and comfortable. A huge wardrobe closet provided space that Berlett did not require for his limited supply of clothing. A writing desk was stationed in the corner. Upon it lay an opened box of cigars. Berlett advanced to fill his pocket with perfectos.

The lawyer stopped. Beneath the box was a sheet of paper, folded in peculiar, diagonal fashion. Berlett recognized that this must be a message. Unfolding the paper, he read the note.

A steady, crafty look showed on the lawyer's face. Berlett gripped the message between his hands. He tore it while he nodded; then smiled as he pulled the paper to shreds. Strolling slowly from the cabin, Berlett

THE KEY

returned to his spot on deck.

Lamont Cranston had come back. Keen eyes were watching Berlett as the lawyer let fragments of paper drift into the harbor breeze. Fifteen minutes passed; then twenty. Berlett shifted to the shore side of the ship. He eyed the wharf as though expecting Sigler's return.

In contrast to his usual calm, Berlett seemed unusually anxious. When a half hour had passed, he left the deck and went into the smoking salon. Here he was greeted by a trio of card players who were whiling away the harbor hours with pinochle. In response to their insistence, Berlett joined the game.

IT was not long before Warren Sigler entered. The secretary had arrived back well within the hour. He saw Berlett at the card table and approached. The lawyer looked up from his hand.

"I have an appointment in fifteen minutes," he announced, glancing at a clock in the smoking salon. "It will be in my cabin. It is very important. I do not wish to be disturbed. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," returned Sigler.

"I shall return here afterward," added Berlett. "You will find me after my appointment. But do not come to my cabin while I am there. If any one inquires for me, say that I am ashore."

The pinochle players were studying their hands. They thought nothing of the conversation. Berlett rejoined the game in casual fashion. Warren Sigler strolled from the smoking salon. His face wore a knowing smile.

The secretary made directly for Berlett's cabin. He found the door unlocked. He entered. He went to the wardrobe closet and stepped inside. He closed the door behind him. He was waiting ready to be a hidden witness to the interview.

IN less than fifteen minutes, Edwin Berlett arrived at his cabin. He closed the door and seated himself at the writing desk. A few minutes passed. A cautious knock sounded. Berlett went to the door and opened it.

A tall, dark-visaged stranger entered. Berlett invited the visitor over by the desk and offered him a perfecto, which the arrival accepted.

Seating himself, Berlett faced his visitor. Both men were smoking; through clouds of smoke, Berlett studied the face of the man before him.

The stranger was evidently a Brazilian. Berlett did not seem surprised at that fact; indeed, his first statement, a question, indicated that he had expected a visitor of that nationality.

"You are Carlos Mendoza?" he asked.

"Yes," returned the stranger, "a fellow passenger from Rio."

"I have seen you on the ship.

"Only occasionally, I suppose. I have been keeping out of sight."

"So you mentioned in the note that you left here."

There was a pause. Mendoza was talking in excellent English, but it had the peculiar accent common to

THE KEY

Portuguese and Brazilians.

"Senhor," announced Mendoza, "I shall tell you my exact purpose here. I was once a secret agent of the Brazilian government; I am now engaged in private investigation."

"So your note informed me."

"I took passage at Rio de Janeiro at the wish of Senhor Dario, the lawyer. He placed me here that I might afford you protection; and that I might also deliver you some important evidence."

"Regarding Warren Sigler?"

"Yes."

"Hm—m," mused Berlett. "I thought that Dario had told me all there was to know. He spoke to me the night before I left Rio."

"I know that, Senhor. But he did not tell you that I was working on the case. I was watching the room of this secretary, Warren Sigler. Let me tell you what the man did."

"After all had gone, he appeared in his room bringing two small bottles. He wrapped them in pieces of crumpled newspaper. A chambermaid was on the floor. He told her to empty the wastebasket, in which he had placed the hidden bottles."

"You saw Sigler do this?"

"No. I heard him instruct the maid. I went into his room and searched the basket. I found the bottles and removed them before the maid took away the waste paper. Those bottles, Senhor, I have with me, wrapped in cotton. They had contained arsenic inside; on the outside, they have traces of finger prints which must be Sigler's."

"Why was I not informed of this?"

"I made my report to Dario just before the Southern Star left Rio de Janeiro. Dario ordered me aboard. I came as an ordinary passenger. I hold the evidence, Senhor."

"With you?"

"Yes, Senhor."

"Show me the bottles."

Carlos Mendoza arose with an apologetic laugh. He placed his hand upon his pocket, as though seeking to protect his prize.

"I cannot do that, Senhor," he announced, politely. "Unless you wish to "

"Wish what?"

"To remain in Pernambuco."

THE KEY

"I don't quite understand."

"You should, Senhor," laughed Mendoza. "I am a Brazilian, like Senhor Dario. I must obey the law of my country. Should I give you this evidence, I must announce the fact to the authorities. That will mean the arrest of Warren Sigler. He will be held in Pernambuco."

"The same trouble as at Rio," observed Berlett.

"Exactly, Senhor," responded Mendoza, wisely, "but Pernambuco is the last port in Brazil. The ship sails after sunset. Once it has reached the open sea "

"I understand. The Southern Star flies the American flag. It will be a case for my country."

"Yes. Should we be stopping at another port in Brazil, the captain would turn the case over to the authorities of that city. But we are leaving Brazil altogether, Senhor. Once I have given you the evidence, we can visit the captain. We shall demand the arrest of Warren Sigler."

Edwin Berlett pondered. Mendoza watched him shrewdly. The lawyer put another question.

"That will work," he decided, "but it still might make trouble for Dario and Antone "

"No, Senhor. All is different now. Here is the story. I was hired by Senhor Dario simply to watch Warren Sigler, because Dario represented Senhor Dilgin, who died very suddenly. The night before the ship sailed, I found these bottles. I did not report until shortly before the Southern Star left Rio de Janeiro.

"I kept watching Warren Sigler, seeking to obtain finger prints that would match those on the bottles. I failed, until after the Southern Star was leaving this harbor, Pernambuco. Obtaining the finger prints, I was unfortunately beyond Brazilian law. That will be my story. What could I do but come to you, Senhor?"

"It sounds well," agreed Berlett, "but for one thing. You will have to get Sigler's finger prints."

"I have them already, Senhor," laughed Mendoza, in a cunning tone. "I found a paper in the file which Sigler used in the Hotel Nacional. It had finger prints that match those on the bottles. It was a blank sheet, Senhor.

"I shall say that I placed that sheet of paper in Sigler's cabin, here aboard the Southern Star. I shall add, Senhor, that it was not until the ship left Pernambuco that I obtained the impressions."

"Good." Berlett arose and clapped Mendoza on the back. "Your plan will work. It is justifiable under the circumstances. Sigler will have no come-back."

"Then I shall see you, Senhor "

"In this cabin, after the pilot ship has left the Southern Star outside of Pernambuco harbor."

"Very good, Senhor. That will be our last contact with Brazil. But remember, you must be careful that Sigler does not suspect."

"That will be easy. Come here with your evidence. Bring your credentials. You can then tell me your story officially and present the evidence. We will go to the captain, with the evidence still in your possession."

"It is agreed, Senhor."

THE KEY

Edwin Berlett conducted Carlos Mendoza to the door of the cabin. He waited until the Brazilian had passed along the corridor. Then Berlett, himself, stepped from the cabin. As he turned to close the door, the lawyer stared back into his room. He smiled as he noted the door to the wardrobe closet, which was visibly ajar.

STROLLING to the smoking salon, Berlett seated himself in a chair and lighted a cigar. Five minutes later, Sigler appeared. Berlett was writing memoranda upon a sheet of paper when the secretary found him.

"Take care of these letters," ordered Berlett, passing his penciled items to Sigler. "Hurry them through and mail them ashore, by air mail. You have an hour yet, Sigler."

"Yes, sir."

The secretary thrust the notes in his pocket. He left the smoking salon. Edwin Berlett settled back in his chair.

Glancing about, he saw no sign of Carlos Mendoza. Edwin Berlett chuckled. Strolling from the salon, he reached the gangplank and also went ashore.

Carlos Mendoza had suggested a clever game as a follow-up of his note to Edwin Berlett. Warren Sigler had overheard the talk in full. There was a reason for Edwin Berlett's chuckle. The crafty lawyer could foresee a different outcome than the one called for in his conversation with Carlos Mendoza.

CHAPTER VI. OUTSIDE THE HARBOR

DYING light of day guided the Southern Star on the final stage of its passage through the Pernambuco reef. The ship had been delayed due to loading. The Brazilian pilot, however, had still gained sufficient daylight to reach the open sea.

Then night had arrived with the booming suddenness so common in the tropics. Edwin Berlett and other passengers were standing near the stern of the Southern Star gazing toward the distant lights of Pernambuco.

A hand plucked at Berlett's sleeve. The lawyer turned to see the steadied face of Carlos Mendoza. Berlett nodded. He spoke in a low tone.

"In fifteen minutes," said the lawyer, "in my stateroom. The door is open."

Mendoza stalked away. Warren Sigler, peering from a group of passengers, observed the Brazilian heading for a companionway. Sigler had overheard the words between the two men.

Edwin Berlett walked toward the steps that he customarily took to the smoking salon. Reaching another deck, he hurried along and neared the bow of the ship. There were no passengers in sight. Berlett glanced over his shoulder. Confident that he was unobserved, he descended by a companionway.

Picking a course which he had evidently chosen beforehand, Berlett reached the forward hold. He stepped through a bulkhead. Straight in front, he saw starlight glittering through the side of the ship. A coal hatch was open. Berlett reached his goal.

Below, the pilot ship was ready to cast off. It was nestled against the side of the Southern Star, resting in a calm sea. Calls from above indicated that the steamship was about to drop the pilot.

Directly below, two men were standing beside a heap of sacks near the stern of the pilot ship. Burlap showed almost white, in a blackened stretch against the side of the Southern Star. The sacks were less than ten feet

THE KEY

below the spot where Berlett stood.

The lawyer gave a soft hiss. He could see the white caps nodding on the heads of the men just below him. Edging out through the coal hatch, Berlett half dropped, half sprang. He thudded softly on the pile of sacks.

The two men, roustabouts from Pernambuco, were quick to act. Stepping together, they formed a shield as Berlett dropped into a space beside the engine room of the pilot ship. Heaving sacks aside, the men let the burlap pile upon the lawyer. Each stooped and mumbled low words in turn. In response, Berlett's right hand slipped money into eager fists. The roustabouts seated themselves beside the sacks.

The pilot was aboard his ship. The little craft moved clear of the Southern Star. The big engines of the liner grumbled; the twenty-thousand-ton ship moved forward, while the pilot's boat swerved for its return through the reef to Pernambuco.

The coal hatch had closed in the side of the Southern Star. The last sign of Edwin Berlett's clever departure had been eliminated. Under the protection of the bribed Brazilians, the American lawyer was returning in safety to Pernambuco. With the harbor reached, his departure from the sacks that hid him would be a simple matter. Expectant roustabouts were counting on another bribe. Their lips were sealed. The story of Berlett's escape would remain unknown.

ABOARD the Southern Star, Warren Sigler was watching the fading light of the little pilot ship. The secretary's face wore a thoughtful smile. He was planning a surprise trip to Berlett's cabin. The time was here. Leaving his place by the rail, Sigler strolled, whistling, toward the companionway.

Three men by the rail new passengers on at Pernambuco stared as Sigler passed. A few minutes later, they left the place where they had been standing and entered the ship.

All this while, Carlos Mendoza was seated in a small cabin, waiting. Satisfied that the time for his appointment was nearing, the Brazilian arose and picked up a small bag that lay beside him. He left his own cabin, walked along deserted passages and reached Berlett's stateroom. He opened the door and entered. He laid his bag on Berlett's bed and unlocked the little grip.

Warren Sigler, watching from the end of a passage, had seen Mendoza enter. He had seen Edwin Berlett leave the deck some time before. Evidently Sigler was not worrying about his new employer. Mendoza the man with the evidence was the arrival for whom Sigler had posted himself.

Sigler sneaked forward. Softly, he opened the door of the stateroom. He entered. He looked about for Mendoza. All that he saw was the open bag upon the bed.

Advancing, Sigler glanced about. Still no sign of his man. Puzzled, Sigler stood still. Then curiosity gained the better of him. He pounced upon the bag, only to find it empty.

A creepy laugh came from the corner by the open door. Sigler whirled. He shuddered at the form which he saw before him. Instead of Mendoza, he was viewing a tall being clad entirely in black. Cloaked and with broad-brimmed hat, this spectral figure was covering the astonished secretary with an automatic.

A crook by profession, the false secretary knew the identity of the being who trapped him. He was faced by The Shadow. Dully, he realized that the role of Carlos Mendoza had been but a disguise for this supersleuth. Living in Rio de Janeiro, Warren Sigler had thought but little of The Shadow, the grim fighter whose prowess was so famous in New York.

THE KEY

To-night, he was learning that the arm of The Shadow reached far. Minion of a master crook, Warren Sigler was trapped aboard the Steamship Southern Star, less than an hour out of Pernambuco.

"Speak!" The Shadow's tone came in a shuddering hiss. "Speak, murderer or die "

The challenge ended in a whispered laugh. It brought stark terror to Warren Sigler; with terror came the futile frenzy that only horror can produce.

With a wild cry, Sigler leaped forward toward The Shadow. He was pouncing for that looming automatic. The Shadow did not fire. His free arm, swinging like a plunger, sent Sigler sprawling by the stateroom door. The man's cry, however, had served as a signal.

There were bounding footsteps in the passage. As The Shadow whirled out from the door, he was met by three men, two coming from one direction; one from the other.

Hired thugs from Pernambuco, Sigler had held them in readiness. The secretary had entered the stateroom to parley with Mendoza. With all passengers on distant decks, enjoying the welcome cool of the night, assassination had seemed an easy task.

THE SHADOW, in his whirl to the passage, met the two men first. His automatic thundered as these fighters raised revolvers to shoot him down. Two quick shots; the hired assassins sprawled wounded in the passage.

The Shadow whirled, dropping as he did. The third assailant had swung to aim. The man fired; his bullet whistled through the tip of The Shadow's slouch hat.

The Shadow's laugh came resounding as his black-garbed shoulders dived forward. Tripping over the plunging form, the third Brazilian went headlong upon his fellows.

The Shadow had played a daring game, counting upon the inefficiency of the would-be slayers. He could not have battled thus with New York gangsters. The hired South Americans, however, were of inferior caliber in a close-range fight.

One man was prone on the passage floor as The Shadow rose. The second, wounded, had struggled to his feet and was diving to the passage that led to the deck. With him was the unwounded man whom The Shadow had spilled.

The two men fired wildly as they hustled for cover. As they headed for the deck, The Shadow swung in pursuit. Trapped by the rail, the startled South Americans turned to aim back into the side passage as The Shadow came lunging upon them.

The Shadow had picked the unwounded man. Like a living avalanche he struck the thug before the man could fire. The automatic, swinging, dealt a glancing blow to the fellow's head. The South American sprawled to the deck as The Shadow whirled free.

The wounded man was shooting. His aim was wide. His shots missed the swiftly-moving target; it was not until The Shadow swung upright that he gained a perfect chance to fire. As the man's nervous finger fumbled with the trigger, The Shadow loosed a slug from the automatic. The shot found the man's right wrist. Already wounded in the left shoulder, the fellow dropped his gun and fell groaning to the deck.

Again, The Shadow's laugh; with it a sudden shot from the passage. Warren Sigler, recovered, had dashed to the scene of the fray. Arriving at the deck, the frenzied secretary had staked all on a quick shot at the

THE KEY

black-garbed figure that had whirled to a spot beside the rail, more than twenty feet away.

Sigler could handle arsenic better than an automatic. The bullet from his .38 whizzed through the sweeping fold of The Shadow's cloak and found its only lodging in the rail. Sigler steadied for a second shot that never came from his gun. It was The Shadow's .45 that boomed instead.

Aiming for a murderer who sought his life, The Shadow did not fail. His single shot was the final reward that Warren Sigler gained for treachery to a kindly master. The false secretary fell dead upon the deck.

Cries from above. Scurrying feet on the deck above The Shadow's head. The black-garbed victor made his quick return toward the inner passage. Leaping over Sigler's dead body he gained the inner passage before ship's officers arrived. Choosing an open course, he faded from view.

CONFUSION reigned aboard the Southern Star. Warren Sigler was found dead; also a passenger from Pernambuco. Two other South Americans, one wounded, the other stunned, were discovered on the deck.

Quizzing convinced the captain that these men were of criminal status. One hour later, all the passengers aboard the ship were assembled in the dining salon for a rigid check-up. Two were found to be missing.

One was a Brazilian named Carlos Mendoza, concerning whom no information was available. The other was Edwin Berlett, a prominent New York attorney, in whose stateroom the battle had begun, and whose secretary, Warren Sigler, had been killed.

There was but one conclusion. Despite the denials of the stunned South American who had come to his senses, it was decided that the armed thugs had thrown Berlett overboard. The ocean, too, was picked as the final resting place of Carlos Mendoza.

Because Mendoza was unknown, it was decided that he must have been a member of the crooked crew. A fight was pictured on the deck. Berlett, going over the rail, dragging Mendoza with him, while Warren Sigler not suspected of treachery battled to save his helpless master, Edwin Berlett.

The captured South Americans admitted that they had been hired to come aboard the ship; but they claimed that their orders had been gained from Rio. They had been told to aid a man who whistled; that was all. Their nationality was a point that incriminated the missing Carlos Mendoza as their leader.

LATER, a tall figure was standing alone near the stern of the Southern Star. The deck light revealed the steady, masklike features of Lamont Cranston. But the whispered laugh that floated across the propeller-churned tropical sea was the echoed mirth of The Shadow.

Alone, of those aboard the Southern Star, The Shadow knew the true story of Carlos Mendoza. The Shadow had booked two passages on this ship. He had come aboard twice; once as Lamont Cranston, again as Carlos Mendoza. No one had suspected that a single passenger had played the part of two men between Rio and Pernambuco.

It was with faked talk of evidence that The Shadow had brought about a climax. His threatened exposure of Warren Sigler, based upon observations at the Hotel Nacional, had been sufficient to prepare a death warrant for the so-called Carlos Mendoza.

Also, The Shadow alone could have revealed the fact that Edwin Berlett had not perished. The Shadow knew that Berlett had followed through a clever scheme. He knew that the pilot ship, returning to Pernambuco, was the only way by which Berlett could have escaped from the Southern Star.

THE KEY

Why had Berlett fled? Why had he not remained to keep his appointment with Carlos Mendoza? The Shadow knew the answer. It was the note from Mendoza not the interview with the pretended investigator that had made Berlett decide upon his course.

The Shadow had not witnessed Berlett's reading of the note; but he knew that the clever lawyer, shrewd in the past, crafty in the thought of the future, had decided that refuge in Pernambuco would be better for his plans than a further voyage aboard the Southern Star.

Edwin Berlett had departed. More than that, he had gained a reputation that might help him. Presumably, Berlett was dead. Where crime lay in the offing, a living dead man might hold a real advantage.

The Shadow had triumphed to-night, in pitched battle with vicious foemen. He had delivered necessary death to Warren Sigler, a murderer who deserved a violent end. But the swift battle aboard the Southern Star and the check-up of the passengers afterward, had proven of aid to the schemes of some one other than The Shadow.

Edwin Berlett, safe in Pernambuco, had played his cards well. He had read between the lines of Carlos Mendoza's notes. He had played a crafty part during his interview with the pretended South American.

The Shadow, fighting for his own welfare and working in behalf of justice, had automatically performed another function when Warren Sigler had precipitated the struggle. The Shadow had abetted the cause of Edwin Berlett!

CHAPTER VII. NEW DEATH ARRIVES

DEATH aboard the Steamship Southern Star. This news, flashed by radio, created an immense sensation. Within a few hours after the fight on the liner, New York newspapers were running scare-heads based upon the meager reports from the northward bound vessel.

First announcements were followed by new details. The reported death of Edwin Berlett was blared forth by the journals. Radiograms dispatched to the Southern Star brought back terse replies. The ship was heading into Barbados. More details would be dispatched when it arrived in port.

Like an avalanche increasing in size and fury, the story of the fight on the Southern Star was magnified. To cap it came a new sensation. This was the burial, at sea, of a corpse that had been aboard the ship since Rio the body of Torrence Dilgin.

The New York newspapers had not made much of Dilgin's death. The passing of an old, retired oil magnate, living south for his health, had not been considered important enough for heavy space in newspaper columns. But the reported death of Edwin Berlett had brought out the fact that the lawyer was bringing Dilgin's body back to New York. The captain of the Southern Star, like journalists in America, had taken an interest in the body that was stored aboard his ship.

Investigating, the captain had made the discovery that Torrence Dilgin's body had not been embalmed. He had taken an ice-packed corpse aboard the ship. This was entirely contrary to orders. The captain had exerted his authority as dictator of law aboard a ship at sea.

Funeral rites had been read above the coffin of Torrence Dilgin. The casket, with the remains of the millionaire, had been consigned to the ocean. The captain, firm in the belief that the disposal of this corpse was essential to the welfare of the passengers, had unwittingly disposed of the last evidence that could have pointed to Torrence Dilgin's murder.

THE KEY

But the burial itself was newspaper copy. The mystery of Dilgin's body; its hasty shipment from Rio; the fact that Edwin Berlett had been bringing it north without embalming all were built into newspaper stories.

New York journals had their readers expectant. Each day was bringing new reports. Lester Dorrington, lawyer in charge of Torrence Dilgin's estate, was deluged by a flow of reporters. Testily, Dorrington refused interviews. He had no statement.

LATE one afternoon, a few days after the first reports had been received from the Southern Star, an old man was seated in a small, dilapidated office, scanning the early edition of an evening newspaper. The letterhead on a sheet of stationery that lay upon the man's desk announced his name and his profession:

HUGO VERBECK

ATTORNEY-AT-LAW

Verbeck's eyes were staring through the heavy lenses of rimmed spectacles. The old chap's hands were trembling with nervousness as they clutched the newspaper. Verbeck was devouring the gruesome details that concerned affairs aboard the Southern Star.

Some clever journalist had speculated upon Torrence Dilgin's death. Basing his column on the burial at sea, the writer had suggested that the millionaire's demise in Rio might be worthy of investigating. Reading this discussion, Verbeck rested his forefinger upon the name of Torrence Dilgin. He stared through his glasses at a photograph of the millionaire.

With a shake of his head, Verbeck laid the newspaper aside. He went to a safe in the corner of his old office. He opened the door, found a metal box and raised the lid. From the box he took the key to a safe deposit vault; also a folded paper of identification.

Verbeck left his office. He descended to the street and hailed a taxicab. He directed the driver to take him to the Paragon Trust Company. Arrived at the bank, Verbeck entered, showed his paper and was conducted to the safe deposit vaults.

The old lawyer used the key to unlock a box. He peered into space and saw a metal container that half filled the safe deposit box. Drawing the container forth, the old lawyer undid its clasps. He raised the lid. He stared in bewilderment.

The metal coffer was empty! Where Hugo Verbeck had definitely expected to find something of importance, he had discovered nothing.

A full minute passed while Verbeck blinked in owlsh fashion. Then, with slow, methodical movement, the old attorney replaced the coffer and closed the door of the safe deposit box.

Verbeck was muttering as he left the bank. His lips were still moving as he called a cab and rode back to his building. When he reached his office, the old lawyer's face was a study in worry and perplexity.

Pacing back and forth across his little room, Hugo Verbeck was in a quandary. He mumbled incoherent words. He mopped his brow. He stopped at the desk and picked up the newspaper. Dusk had settled; it was too dark to read in the gloomy office, so Verbeck turned on the light, by pressing a switch at the door.

BLINKING in the light, Verbeck went back to the desk. He picked up the newspaper with apparent determination. He placed his forefinger upon another name mentioned on the front page. That was the name

THE KEY

of Lester Dorrington.

Doubt registered itself on Verbeck's pinched features. Plainly, the old lawyer was perturbed about something that concerned Torrence Dilgin. From the reticence of his actions, it was apparent that he would have kept the matter to himself under ordinary circumstances.

Speculation on Dilgin's death and its aftermath had produced a different effect. Hugo Verbeck was beating down his own resistance. Whatever his secret and plainly he had one it was troubling him to the extreme.

Verbeck mumbled. He nodded. With sudden determination, he pounced upon a telephone book and hurriedly opened the pages until he found the name of Lester Dorrington. Verbeck's mind was made up, he was determined to call the attorney who was handling Dilgin's estate.

Verbeck gripped the telephone. He was facing the corner where the safe was located. He had not noticed that the door of the office had opened to the extent of two inches. Receiver in hand, Verbeck began to dial. It was then that a hair-streaked hand crept through the opening of the door and pressed the light switch.

As the office was plunged in darkness, Hugo Verbeck uttered a startled cry. He swung toward the door, which was opening to its full extent. The lawyer's body was silhouetted against the dull light of the window.

A revolver roared. Three shots came in quick succession, accompanied by bursts of flame that seemed like darts projected toward Verbeck's form. His cry ending in a rattled gurgle, Hugo Verbeck collapsed. His body fell across the desk; his convulsive fingers gripped the telephone book and dragged it with him. Hugo Verbeck sprawled upon the floor.

The door of the office slammed. A strange hush followed; it seemed to pervade the building as well as this single office. Then came calls; feet pounded in the hallways. Late stayers had heard the shots. Voices neared Verbeck's office.

Some one opened the door and turned on the light. Two men in shirt sleeves gasped as they observed the sprawled form of Hugo Verbeck. One man moved inward, mechanically. The other stopped him.

"Call call the police from my office," the man stammered. "Don't – don't touch anything in here. It's it's there's been a murder. A murder!"

HALF an hour later, the police were in charge of Hugo Verbeck's office. A police surgeon was talking to a swarthy, stocky man who had just arrived. This fellow had an air of authority. It was natural, for he was taking charge of the case. He was Detective Joe Cardona, ace of the New York force, at present serving in capacity of acting inspector.

Bluecoats watched while Joe Cardona stalked about the room. There was challenge in the dark eyes of the detective; there was determination in the firmness of his swarthy visage. To Joe Cardona, the solution of crime was a grim game.

One look at the body. Joe Cardona nodded. He turned toward the door and measured the distance. He strode to that spot and turned to face the desk.

"The killer knew how to handle a gun," declared Cardona, firmly. "Three bullets, doctor, every one a real hit. The man we want will turn out to be a professional with the rod."

Some one was approaching in the hall. Cardona turned to face a wiry, friendly-faced chap. He recognized

THE KEY

Clyde Burke, police reporter of the New York Classic. Cardona scowled; then laughed.

"On the job already, eh?" questioned the detective. "I suppose you heard what I said? Well you can put it in your sheet. The killer didn't try to cover up what he was. We'd be dumb if we didn't pick him as a regular thug."

That was all. Joe Cardona walked to the desk. His keen eyes spied the newspaper that Hugo Verbeck had been reading. They wandered to the telephone book that had spread out when it reached the floor.

"All right," announced Cardona, suddenly. "That's all. We'll look for the killer."

Clyde Burke had watched Cardona's eyes. The reporter saw Cardona's glance at the newspaper; then at the telephone book. Clyde realized that the detective had gained a hunch. Clyde, himself, had caught an inkling of it.

Joe Cardona was wondering if a connection existed between the latest news sensation and the murder of Hugo Verbeck. Clyde Burke, a keen journalist, had naturally asked himself the same question. Clyde had caught the train of Cardona's thoughts.

"I'm going down to headquarters," announced the detective. "There's nothing else, Burke. You'll have to see me later. To-morrow "

"All right, Joe."

Cardona lingered in the office, to gather routine data. Clyde Burke departed. When he reached the street, the reporter was smiling. He stopped in a cigar store and entered a telephone booth. He dialed a number. A quiet voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

Clyde Burke began to talk. He was an agent of The Shadow. He was reciting facts concerning crimes to The Shadow's contact man.

"Report received," came Burbank's quiet announcement, when Clyde had finished his remarks. "Instructions: keep close to Joe Cardona. Report all new developments promptly."

Clyde Burke left the telephone booth. He was confident that The Shadow would have a real beginning in the game of tracking crime. Clyde was sure that his report was already being forwarded by Burbank. Perhaps it had already reached The Shadow.

For Clyde Burke had no inkling that The Shadow was not in New York. He did not know that Burbank was temporarily in charge of the active agents. Only Burbank knew the truth concerning The Shadow's whereabouts.

The contact man, stationed at a hidden post where Clyde and other active agents could report, was the only person who had the facts. Burbank alone knew that The Shadow was far away a passenger aboard the Southern Star which to-night was steaming into Bridgetown, the principal harbor of Barbados!

CHAPTER VIII. THE MAN WHO FEARED

LATE the following afternoon, a chubby-faced man was seated at a desk by the window of an office high in the towering Badger Building. Complacent, leisurely in action, he was studying an evening newspaper which was spread on the desk before him.

A ring at the telephone. The chubby-faced fellow stretched out his hand and took the instrument. He spoke in a voice that was almost a drawl:

"Rutledge Mann speaking... Yes, Rutledge Mann, investments... Ah, yes, Mr. Brooks. I have arranged for the purchase of the securities that you require... Yes, they will be here at my office... Ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

The receiver clicked. Mann returned to his study of the newspaper. He seemed well suited to his chosen business. As an investment broker, Mann had an easy, unruffled manner that gained the confidence of his clients.

Early lights were twinkling in the dusk outside the window. Mann needed none, for his office, facing to the west, was still well illuminated by the setting sun. Apparently, Mann's work was finished for the day; but the investment broker showed no signs of leaving, nor did he look toward the window, to view the twinkling lights that were appearing in Manhattan's towers.

Drawing a pair of scissors from his pocket, Mann began to clip items from the evening newspaper. Certain paragraphs referred to Torrence Dilgin; others to Edwin Berlett; more, however, concerned the murder of Hugo Verbeck. Mann laid the clippings on his desk. He opened a drawer. From it, he produced other clippings. He placed the entire batch in an envelope.

From another drawer, Mann produced two yellow papers. One was a radiogram from the Steamship Southern Star; the other, a cable from Barbados, where the liner had docked this very day. Both messages referred to investments; both were signed Lamont Cranston.

Rutledge Mann was an agent of The Shadow. Serving in that secret capacity, he was a useful cog in The Shadow's anti-crime machine. Yet there was a puzzled look on Mann's face as the investment broker studied the yellow messages. Mann himself did not know their meaning!

RUTLEDGE MANN had received messages from The Shadow. Ordinarily, he would have supposed these to be such. But the securities mentioned were ones that Mann did not recognize. Hence he supposed that the messages were for The Shadow not from him. Even to such trusted agents as Mann, The Shadow remained a mystery.

Mann placed the messages in the envelope that held the clippings. Sealing the container, he arose from his desk. He left the office and descended to Broadway. There he hailed a cab and rode to Twenty-third Street. Strolling along the old-fashioned thoroughfare, Mann paused at the entrance of a dilapidated building. He entered.

Ascending a creaky stairway, Mann stopped before an isolated door that bore a name up its grimy glass panel. The title on the frosting read:

B. JONAS

Mann dropped his envelope in a mail slit. He left the door and descended to the street. His work was done. It

THE KEY

was Mann's duty to forward clippings, messages and written reports to The Shadow. Mann had never seen any one enter the office that bore the name of Jonas. Yet he knew that envelopes deposited there invariably reached The Shadow.

Minutes passed outside of the office with the grimy pane. The little hallway was illuminated by a flickering gas jet. Under ordinary circumstances, it would have remained deserted; for The Shadow used a secret entrance when he paid his visits to this secluded spot. Present circumstances, however, were not ordinary. The Shadow, despite Mann's belief to the contrary, was absent from New York.

Light footsteps sounded in the hall. A man appeared. He was of medium height. His features were obscured, not by design, but merely because the light jet was behind his head. The arrival drew a key from his pocket. He inserted it in the door marked "B. Jonas." The lock grated. The door whined as it opened inward. Cobwebs were wrenched from their moorings.

Rutledge Mann's envelope was lying on the floor just inside the door. The newcomer picked up the packet, retired to the hall and locked the door behind him. His face was again obscure as he departed, for he was looking at the envelope which he had gained. He thrust the packet in his pocket as he descended the stairs.

Dusk had settled when the man with the envelope reached the street. His countenance was still obscure in the intermittent light of street lamps as he walked rapidly toward an avenue. Following the structure of an elevated, the man reached a quiet side street. He entered an old house and paused in the darkness of the vestibule. He bolted the door behind him.

The man ascended a darkened flight of steps. He reached a room on the second floor. Drawn shades made the place totally dark. Closing the door behind him, the man groped his way to a chair, and seated himself. He pulled a cord; a lamp light glowed above his head, behind his back.

The man was seated at a little table. In front of him was a switchboard. Beside him was a filing cabinet. A light was glowing on the switchboard; the man plugged in hastily and spoke in a quiet tone:

"Burbank speaking."

This was Burbank, contact agent of The Shadow! He, alone, knew that the chief was not in New York. Following complete instructions, this trusted operative was directing activities of other agents until The Shadow might return.

CLYDE BURKE'S voice came over the wire, in response to Burbank's statement of identity. This telephone was hooked up with a regular unlisted number. The Shadow's agents knew its number; it was through Burbank that they made their calls to be relayed to The Shadow.

"Report," ordered Burbank.

"Just left headquarters," informed Clyde. "Talking with Cardona when he got a call from the police commissioner. Cardona talked cagey because I was around. But he's leaving in half an hour and he's going to meet the commissioner somewhere."

"Report received," returned Burbank.

The contact man pulled the plug from the switchboard. He waited; then formed a new connection. He dialed. A voice responded:

THE KEY

"Hotel Metrolite."

"Room 1412," ordered Burbank.

A few moments later, a man's voice came over the wire. Quietly, Burbank questioned:

"Is this Mr. Sully?"

"No," came the response. "This is Mr. Vincent Room 1412 "

"Sorry," apologized Burbank. "My mistake."

In that call, Burbank had delivered a double message. He had actually wanted Room 1412 at the Metrolite, for that was the room occupied by Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow. But Burbank had not wanted to give instructions over a wire on which an operator might be listening in.

Harry had recognized Burbank's tones. The giving of a false name was merely a signal that he was to call back to Burbank. There was a further significance, however. The name Sully began with the letter S. That meant that Harry should proceed southward from the Metrolite while on his way to make the return call. Thus Burbank was automatically heading Harry in the direction which he must later take.

Five minutes passed. During the interim, Burbank had drawn Mann's envelope from his pocket. He was reading the radiogram and the cable. Burbank's head was in front of the lamp; his face still remained hazy. But the messages that he was reading were lying in an illuminated spot.

Turning to the filing cabinet, Burbank drew out a folder. It proved to be a book of coded names. With its aid, Burbank was ready to decipher the messages that had come from The Shadow. Before he was able to start, a light glowed on the switchboard.

It was Harry Vincent. The active agent was calling from a pay station five blocks below the Metrolite. Burbank was terse in his instructions.

"Cover headquarters," he ordered. "Cardona leaving in less than twenty-five minutes. Report where he goes."

"Instructions received," came Harry's response.

The light went out. Ten minutes passed, while Burbank decoded the messages from the Southern Star and Barbados. The contact man was making penciled notations when a glow came from the switchboard.

"Burbank speaking," announced the contact man, as he plugged in.

"Marsland," came a steady voice over the wire. "Still out at the airport. The plane is late. Not expected for another hour. Thought I'd better send in word."

"Report received," returned Burbank.

THE contact man returned to his deciphering. These were not the only messages that he had received through Rutledge Mann. Previous radiograms had come from the Southern Star, bearing terse, condensed messages. But the code words used were parts of a remarkably complicated system. Orders to buy shares; to wait for fractional point risings; dates and names of securities all formed a part in this cipher that permitted thousands of variations.

THE KEY

Men of wealth like Lamont Cranston frequently kept in touch with their investment brokers while inbound to New York. These messages could not possibly have excited suspicions. Burbank had sent one reply back through Mann. No more would be necessary. The cablegram from Barbados told that The Shadow was coming in by plane.

Thirty minutes forty the time passed while Burbank sat stolidly at his post. The contact man was slowly chewing on a stick of gum.

To Burbank, long, lone vigils were nothing. He was not a man of action; he was one of endurance. Prompt, precise and always dependable, Burbank had served The Shadow well. His post was the connecting link between The Shadow and the agents in the field. When emergency demanded, Burbank served as he now was serving. Instead of making calls to the deserted sanctum, he was issuing orders in The Shadow's stead.

The light showed on the switchboard. Burbank plugged in and spoke. It was Harry Vincent, announcing that he had trailed Joe Cardona, using taxis to follow the detective's car. Joe had gone in an ordinary machine, not in a police automobile.

The trail had led to an old house in the Nineties. Joe's car had parked alongside a limousine that Harry had recognized as belonging to Police Commissioner Ralph Weston. Harry was reporting the address.

The report received, Burbank turned to the files. He obtained a listing of telephones arranged according to street addresses. He found the one he wanted; with it was the name of Kelwood Markin.

Taking an ordinary telephone book, Burbank checked by finding Kelwood Markin's name in the big volume. But Burbank did not stop there. He ran down the list of Markins which was a short one and found this listing at the bottom:

Markin Tharxell... attys... Bushkill Bldg... DUblin 6-9438

There was no Markin listed as an attorney, under his own name. In the book, however, Burbank found the name of George Tharxell, listed as an attorney, in the Bushkill Building. Burbank made a penciled notation. Presumably, Kelwood Markin was the onetime senior of the firm, now no longer engaged in active work. Burbank filed this supposition for investigation on the morrow.

HARRY VINCENT'S trail had ended at the old house in the Nineties. Burbank had gone further; he had gained some useful data concerning the person who resided in that house. Between them, The Shadow's agents had learned much about the man whom Cardona and the police commissioner were visiting. But they had not been able to penetrate to the actual scene within Markin's house. Only The Shadow could have done such work as that.

Police Commissioner Ralph Weston and Acting Inspector Joe Cardona were seated in a comfortable living room, which seemed hushed by its dark-papered walls and heavy curtains. Before them was a stooped-shouldered man, whose eyes were keen despite the age that showed upon his withered face.

There was pleading in Kelwood Markin's eyes. His thin hands trembling as they clutched a small table before his chair, the old man was speaking earnestly.

"I am an attorney," he was announcing. "I know the law, commissioner. I know that it is impossible to arrest a murderer without actual evidence against him. But this man is a double killer.

"Two persons have gone to their deaths at his order. I am sure of it, commissioner. It was he who designed

THE KEY

the killing of Edwin Berlett. He is responsible for the murder of Hugo Verbeck.

"But that is not all. This fiend" Markin's lips quivered with the pronouncement "will be sure to murder others. How many, I do not know; but I can promise you that one, at least, is marked for death."

"Do you know the name of the potential murderer?" inquired Weston.

"Yes," assured Markin. "But he is more than potential. He is actually a murderer."

"And the potential victim?"

"Yes. I know him also."

A pause. It was Detective Joe Cardona, weighing the duties of active inspector, who put the question that he thought most important.

"Who is the murderer?" demanded Joe.

"His name," announced Markin, raising a shaky hand, "is Lester Dorrington."

A look of incredulity showed on Cardona's face. Cardona knew Dorrington by reputation. The man was renowned in New York as a criminal lawyer Cardona sat stupefied.

The old attorney had delivered the accusation in a hushed voice. His lips were quivering, now that he had named the man whom he suspected as a villain.

It was Commissioner Weston, unstunned by Markin's pronouncement, who put the next question. The commissioner's train of thought was different from Cardona's. Weston was looking beyond the murderer; anxious to foresee the menace of some coming crime.

"You have named the murderer," declared Weston, in a steady tone. "Tell us the name of the man whom you are sure that he will seek to kill. Who is to be his victim?"

Kelwood Markin turned at the question. His face seemed whiter than before. His hands had slipped to the table. Scratching fingers, wordless lips were testimonies of mute fear.

"The victim," quavered Markin, in a tone of senile terror, "is to be myself!"

CHAPTER IX. THE KEY

KELWOOD MARKIN had startled Joe Cardona when he had named Lester Dorrington as a deliverer of death. Markin's second statement, announcing himself as a potential victim, produced a similar effect upon Ralph Weston.

As Markin leaned forward in his chair, weary elbows on the table, pallid face turned pitifully toward these representatives of the law, Cardona and Weston sat staring in profound amazement.

If ever fear had been displayed upon a human countenance, Kelwood Markin showed it now. Noting the stupefaction that had fallen upon his listeners, the old lawyer raised his hands pleadingly. He seemed unable to voice a single utterance.

THE KEY

It was Commissioner Weston who broke the impressive silence. Rising from his chair, the official began to stride back and forth across Markin's living room. At last, Weston swung to Joe Cardona.

"When Mr. Markin called me this afternoon," announced the commissioner, "I knew from his tone that he was troubled. When I questioned him, he admitted that he could tell me facts that concerned crime now in the news. He spoke no further. That, Cardona, was why I summoned you here to-night. I had no idea that Mr. Markin's statements would prove so startling. I had not suspected this link in crime."

"I had," declared Cardona. "In Hugo Verbeck's office, I found a newspaper and a telephone book upon the floor. I mentioned those items in my report. I had a hunch that I did not mention."

"Verbeck had been reading the evening newspaper. He had decided to call some one. Who could he have called? Not Torrence Dilgin, nor Edwin Berlett. Both of them are dead. The only man whom Verbeck might have called was Lester Dorrington."

"That was just a hunch, mind you. It made me see a link between the crimes. But to consider Dorrington as the murderer I can't see it, commissioner. He's a man of reputation."

"Even though he does handle criminal cases," reminded Weston, dryly. "Do you realize, Cardona, that Lester Dorrington has a close association with members of the underworld?"

"In a legal way, yes "

"And otherwise, perhaps. That, however, is not sufficient. This man" Weston swung toward Kelwood Markin "has a story to tell. Come!" He was addressing the old lawyer directly. "Let us hear it."

MARKIN'S countenance had changed. The old attorney had recovered from his display of fear. He was sitting silently in his chair. His keen eyes were steady as he surveyed the men before him.

"I told you when you came here," stated Markin, "that I could reveal the name of a murderer. In return, I wanted two things: action and protection. You have promised me neither."

"We cannot promise action without proof," insisted Weston. "Protection yes whenever you require it. But how can we promise action unless we know the facts?"

"Should I tell my story," declared Markin, "my own position may be jeopardized. Mind you, I have done no wrong. But a publication of the facts might place me at a schemer's mercy. Unless my testimony is kept in confidence until the proper time, it will be useless. Not only that, it may be disastrous to me."

"Your testimony will be kept confidential," snapped Weston. "Come, man! If new murder is in the offing, now is no time to tarry. Why do you suspect Lester Dorrington of murder? Why do you fear him?"

"Because of what was found in Verbeck's office," returned Markin.

"You mean the newspaper?" questioned Cardona. "Or the telephone book?"

"Neither," returned Markin. "According to the newspapers, Verbeck had been to the Paragon Trust Company, shortly before his death. That was why you stated that robbery might have been the motive for the murder. In Verbeck's pocket, you found "

"A key!" cried Cardona, leaping from his chair. "The key to the safe deposit box."

THE KEY

"Exactly," returned Markin. His hand, now steady, drew open a drawer in the table. "That is why I fear death. That is why I know that I like Verbeck am in danger."

The old lawyer thrust a fist above the table. He opened his clenched hand. Something clattered upon the wood. It was a key to a safe deposit box.

"You mean," exclaimed Cardona, "that this is the duplicate of Verbeck's key!"

"I do not," declared Markin. "That key belongs to a safe deposit box in the Farley National Bank. What I do mean, gentlemen, is that I received this key under circumstances similar to those in which Verbeck received his key."

"Can you be specific, Mr. Markin?" questioned Weston, pausing in his pacing to resume his chair. "What is this riddle of the key? I can see no connection. Let us have the story."

Kelwood Markin bowed. He spread his hands for silence. In the hush that came with Markin's pause, Cardona and Weston stared intently at the old lawyer. With eyes that turned from one man to the other, Markin began his tale.

"SOME years ago," stated the old lawyer, "I was approached by a man named Rufus Gilwood. He came to my office in the Bushkill Building, where my partner, George Tharxell, is now conducting my former practice. Perhaps you remember Rufus Gilwood, commissioner."

"I do," inserted Weston. "He was a cattle king, from Wyoming. He died a year ago."

"That is the man," affirmed Markin. "I had never seen him before he stepped into my office. He introduced himself, established his identity and proceeded to state the purpose of his visit.

"Substantially, Gilwood told me that he had placed certain funds in a safe deposit box at the Farley National. That money was intended for distribution to certain persons. Gilwood spoke of the funds as a gift. He asked me to be custodian until I heard from him again. Should he die he specified that distinctly I was to open the box and distribute the cash to the persons whose names I would find in the box."

"Gilwood gave you the key?" questioned Weston, sharply.

"Yes," responded Markin.

"And did you hear from him again?" quizzed Weston. "Did he call upon you before his death?"

"No," was Markin's answer.

Weston nodded wisely. He smiled. Markin saw his expression and nodded in return.

"Rufus Gilwood paid me one thousand dollars," explained Markin, "which I accepted as a retainer fee. He told me that he relied upon my integrity not to open the box until called upon to do so. He added, however, that another attorney knew of the transaction."

"Did he name the other lawyer?"

"No. I assumed that he mentioned the fact purely to impress me that my actions would be watched."

THE KEY

Commissioner Weston settled back in his chair. His smile broadened. He turned toward Joe Cardona. The acting inspector was displaying a perplexed expression.

"Don't you get it, Cardona?" questioned Weston.

"No," responded the sleuth.

"It's simple," explained Weston. "Markin, here, was duped by a scheme to avoid the inheritance tax. His possession of the key gave him access to the funds from the time when Gilwood visited his office."

"I expected Gilwood to return," added Markin. "He did not. When I learned that he had died, I was bound to deliver the gift funds to the proper recipients. The transaction was entirely clear of Gilwood's estate. There was no conspiracy on my part. Naturally, I decided to go through with the bargain."

"So you went to the safe deposit box," prompted Weston. "How much money did you find there?"

"You have struck the point of my story," replied Markin, solemnly. "When I opened the safe deposit box, I found a small iron coffer. I opened it. The coffer was empty!"

"A hoax?" demanded Weston.

"Hardly," responded Markin. "Gilwood had paid me a thousand dollars, a high price for a hoax. No, commissioner. I knew the truth. That coffer had been rifled of its contents!"

"I see," nodded Weston. "I see the game now."

"Some lawyer," asserted Markin, "played Rufus Gilwood false. He had Gilwood put funds into that box. Probably the lawyer placed them there for him. Gilwood brought me the key. I found nothing after his death. The swindler had gained ill-gotten wealth. It was useless for me to tell my story. Such a deed would only have placed suspicion on myself. I could not describe the funds that had been taken from the safe deposit box."

"A smooth game," clucked Weston.

"One that made me fearful," added Markin. "I preserved silence; but I thought a great deal. I learned the name of the lawyer who had handled Gilwood's estate."

"Lester Dorrington!"

"Yes. But I could make no statement against him. I had no proof. The matter of Rufus Gilwood's empty coffer became a canker that troubled me. In fact, it was hopeless worry over the situation that brought about my retirement from active practice."

"I can understand it," agreed Weston, sympathetically. "Gilwood had relied upon your integrity. You felt yourself to blame; yet you were helpless."

"More than that," declared Markin, in a sober tone. "I realized that the swindler, with one soft game to his credit, would not have stopped with one scheme. I visioned other helpless attorneys like myself, holding keys to empty safe deposit boxes, all afraid to speak!"

"But if you had spoken "

THE KEY

"I could not have proven my statements. Nor could others who might have risen with the same story. No, commissioner, the swindler who planned that game chose an iron-clad proposition. The men whom he swindled were dead; the duped attorneys were helpless."

"But you are speaking now "

"Because circumstances demand it. The schemer has struck a snag; one that he overcame only through the aid of some killer. Commissioner, I have kept track of the estates which Lester Dorrington has handled during the past year. My eyes were opened when I learned that he is handling the affairs of the dead oil magnate, Torrence Dilgin.

"A lawyer named Edwin Berlett went to Rio de Janeiro to see Dilgin. Why? Because Berlett was the corporation lawyer who handled the affairs of Dilgin's company. Why did Berlett go to Rio? Probably to discuss financial matters.

"Dilgin died about the time that Berlett arrived. Berlett disappeared from the Steamship Southern Star on the way home. When I read the news, I realized the truth. Torrence Dilgin was another man of wealth who had been swindled!"

AS Weston nodded, Joe Cardona joined in the sign of affirmation. Kelwood Markin licked his parched lips and resumed his theory.

"Dilgin must have told Berlett that certain funds had been stowed in a safe deposit box. Berlett was on his way to gain them. He was murdered by hired assassins. Then came the huge stories in the newspapers. They unquestionably brought doubts to a certain man namely, the lawyer to whom Dilgin had given the key of a safe deposit box."

"You mean Hugo Verbeck!"

"Certainly. Verbeck went to the bank. He found an empty coffer. He was in the same dilemma that I had encountered. Ordinarily, he would have maintained silence; with murder involved, he probably intended to make the matter public. He was slain before he could do so."

"He was going to call Lester Dorrington," blurted Cardona. "I'm sure of it, commissioner!"

"Verbeck was murdered," continued Markin, ignoring Cardona's interruption. "But his death has only added fuel to the flames. It has roused me to action; it has probably excited the suspicion and the fears of other attorneys whom Dorrington duped when he swindled his clients.

"I can picture it, commissioner. Dorrington talking to a client persuading the man to entrust a key to a certain lawyer named by Dorrington a way to avoid a tremendous inheritance tax.

"And I can see lawyers now pitiful men like myself realizing that Verbeck's death was a safety measure that may be applied to themselves. Perhaps they also know that Dorrington is the murderer."

"How can we find them?" questioned Weston.

"Only by waiting until they die," returned Markin, solemnly. "Unless they choose to speak, as I have spoken. Unless they call for protection and plead with you to apprehend a fiend who deals in murder."

"You shall have protection," asserted Weston. "Cardona, put two men on duty outside of this house. We will

THE KEY

forestall any attempt upon Mr. Markin's life."

"You are protecting me alone," warned Markin, "but not the others whose lives may be at stake."

"We do not know who they are."

"But you know who seeks to kill them."

"This is in your hands, Cardona," decided Weston. "It's up to you to watch Lester Dorrington. Use all the men you need. If you gain sufficient evidence against him, we shall issue a warrant for his arrest!"

Rising, the commissioner waved Cardona to the telephone and instructed him to call headquarters to get two men for guards at Markin's house. Striding across the living room, Weston pulled aside draperies. The action revealed windows, closed with iron shutters.

"These look safe enough," declared the commissioner. "No one will come in by that route."

He opened a door at the rear of the room. It showed a small bedroom. Kelwood Markin, at Weston's side, explained that he could use the little room as sleeping quarters. He pointed to a window that was also shuttered.

"Very good," decided Weston. "What about your servants?"

"I have only one," returned Markin. "He is my secretary and attendant Howland is his name and he can be trusted."

"Where is he now?"

"In a little room at the end of the hall. I used to use it as a study. Ordinarily, Howland and I sleep on the second floor."

"Is there a telephone in the study?"

"Yes. This one is an extension."

"All right. Howland can occupy the study. What about visitors? Do you have many?"

"One only. Tharxell my partner comes here frequently in the evening."

"Can he be trusted?"

"Tharxell? Certainly."

"Very well, then. Conduct your affairs as usual. Two men will be on constant duty outside of the house. Your statement will be kept secret, Mr. Markin. Rely upon us to follow the clew that you have given regarding Lester Dorrington."

WHEN Commissioner Ralph Weston and Acting Inspector Joe Cardona left Kelwood Markin's home a half hour later, two men from headquarters were on the job. Patrolling the street outside of Markin's, they were on the constant lookout for suspicious characters.

THE KEY

The man with the key had told his story. Joe Cardona, on his way to headquarters, was planning immediate measures to keep tabs on Lester Dorrington. A motive had been found for the murder of Hugo Verbeck; more than that, a definite suspect had been uncovered.

Joe Cardona was satisfied that prompt observation would prevent the murders that Kelwood Markin believed were due to come. In person, the acting inspector was going out to Long Island to keep a watch on Lester Dorrington's secluded mansion.

Cardona, thinking over Markin's statements, had become convinced that Lester Dorrington was the man to watch. With that belief in mind, Cardona had a hunch that Dorrington's Long Island home would be the spot from which crime orders would be issued. He believed that his vigilance would prevent new murder.

Little did Joe Cardona realize that new crime was due to-night. His trip to Long Island was to prove a useless journey. Murder planned ahead was scheduled for Manhattan. Joe Cardona was traveling from not toward the spot of its beginning!

CHAPTER X. SWIFT DEATH

FLOODLIGHTS were brilliant at the Newark airport. Watching eyes were turned toward the sullen sky. A plane from the south was long overdue. The ship had lost its course, but was reported safe. It was bringing passengers from South America.

Among the watchers at the airport was a stalwart man whose face was marked by ruggedness. He was standing by the side of a coupe, at the limit of the field. This was Cliff Marsland, agent of The Shadow.

The thrum of motors came above the fainter murmur of automobiles that were passing on the Lincoln highway. High lights picked out the shape of a huge trimotor plane. It was the ship from the south. Watchers saw it pass above the field. It circled; then made a perfect landing.

The ship came almost to a stop. Circling on the ground, it taxied toward the hangars and finally came to a standstill. Spectators followed the attendants who raced up to the big plane. Cliff Marsland left his coupe and followed the small throng.

Among the passengers who stepped from the ship was a heavy man of medium height. On the ground, this arrival studied the people whom he saw. His eyes peered from beneath bushy brows. Bags were on the ground; he stepped over to identify his luggage and spoke to a waiting attendant.

"This is my bag," he declared. "The name is on the tag. Edmund Talbot. I want to go by cab to the Hotel Goliath, in New York city."

"Yes, sir," replied the attendant.

Cliff Marsland turned and strolled back to his coupe. He was unobserved by the man who had landed. Cliff's face wore a grim, satisfied smile. He had discovered the man whom he had come to seek. He knew the destination which the fellow had chosen.

Cliff Marsland knew that the name of Edmund Talbot was a false one. He had been informed by Burbank that the stranger would not give his true identity. The man whom Cliff had sighted from the crowd was Edwin Berlett, arrived directly from Pernambuco.

When people had left the field, Cliff went into the waiting room and found a telephone booth. He put in a call

THE KEY

for the special number that he knew. Burbank's quiet voice responded. Cliff gave his report.

"Arrived," he stated tersely. "Identified. Assumed name, Edmund Talbot. Hotel Goliath."

"Report received," returned Burbank. "Instructions: go to the Goliath; learn the room number and register on the same floor, close by."

"Instructions received" acknowledged Cliff.

CLIFF'S coupe made good time Manhattanward. The Shadow's agent sped along, a mile or more behind Berlett's cab. Cliff was not attempting to overtake the taxi. He did not sight a cab even from the heights of the huge spans across the Passaic and the Hackensack rivers; but he did see one entering the tube as he neared the Holland Tunnel.

Passing under the Hudson River, Cliff reached Manhattan and took a swift course uptown. He reached the street where the Hotel Goliath was located and grabbed a bag from the floor beside him. He entered the hotel just as a cab was drawing up to the door.

It was Berlett's taxi. Strolling toward the desk, Cliff allowed the lawyer to pass him. He saw the man register under the name of Edmund Talbot. He heard the clerk give the room number: 2036. Berlett followed the bell hop who took his bag.

"How about something around the twentieth?" questioned Cliff, casually, as he registered.

"I'll give you a nice room," assured the clerk. "Front, boy!" He pounded a bell. "Show Mr. Marsland to 2012."

The rooms were not as close as Cliff had hoped. The twentieth, nevertheless, was Berlett's floor. Cliff decided that he would look the place over before calling back to Burbank.

Room 2012 was near the elevators. That was a point. The night was sultry; a partly opened door might well be intended for a breeze. Seating himself by the window of his darkened room, Cliff found that he could watch the elevators with ease. That was a decided advantage, even though Berlett's room was on the opposite side of the hotel.

In Room 2036, Edwin Berlett was standing in his shirt sleeves. His bag was opened on the floor beside the bed. The supposedly dead lawyer was staring from the window. He seemed to be contrasting the pinnacled skyline of New York with the crescented stretch of illumination that he had observed in Rio de Janeiro.

A ring at the telephone. Berlett stepped back from the window. He picked up the receiver and spoke. A smile appeared upon his face.

"Yes..." Berlett paused. "Yes... This is Mr. Talbot... Yes, I arrived later than I expected. Ship delayed... All is arranged? Good... I'll be here. Staying close to the hotel... Yes... Tired after the trip. Of course... Of course.

"You'll call me to-morrow... Good... Everything is working out as planned... Yes, of course... I understand... Yes, I'm marking down the number..." Berlett's hand began to inscribe figures on a pad beside the telephone... "I'll call you if I need quick service..."

Berlett hung up the receiver. He folded the slip of paper on which he had written and tucked it in his watch pocket. A crafty, satisfied smile appeared upon his face as Berlett turned out the light. A few minutes later,

THE KEY

the creaking of the bed announced that the lawyer had retired.

CLIFF MARSLAND, not long after, passed through the corridor outside of Room 2036. The Shadow's agent saw darkness at the transom above Berlett's door. Returning quietly, Cliff entered his own room and called Burbank. He reported Berlett's arrival and the fact that the man had evidently turned in for the night. Burbank's instructions were to remain at the Goliath until Harry Vincent came as relief.

Logically, Edwin Berlett would have supposed that no one knew of his presence in New York, other than the man who had called him on the telephone. The caller, addressing Berlett as Talbot, was evidently a participant in a prearranged plan.

But The Shadow, knowing that Berlett would not tarry in Pernambuco, had radioed through Rutledge Mann to have an agent on the lookout for the lawyer. From now on, an agent of The Shadow either Cliff or Harry would be stationed close-at-hand to Berlett's room. Chance visitors, should they appear upon this floor, would be followed by The Shadow's men.

One man whom old Kelwood Markin had picked as a person murdered by Lester Dorrington's design was still alive, namely Edwin Berlett. The other Hugo Verbeck was most certainly dead. The newspapers had suggested no connection between the two lawyers; but Kelwood Markin had done so, naming Dorrington as the link between. Markin had declared himself a dupe, along with Verbeck. He had suggested that there might be others of the same sort. It was a correct belief.

A DREARY-FACED man was seated in the smoking room of the Tarpon Club on Forty-sixth Street. Chewing at the end of a half-smoked cigar, he was reading the latest reports in the final newspapers. The subject that interested him was the death of Hugo Verbeck.

In a parallel column, this solemn man had spied the name of Lester Dorrington, mentioned in connection with the death of Torrence Dilgin. The newspaper stated that Dorrington was still withholding statements regarding the millionaire whose estate he was handling.

The dreary man came to life. He cast the newspaper aside. He walked out into the small lobby of the club and entered a telephone booth. There was a purpose in his action; in a sense, it resembled the futile phone call that Hugo Verbeck had tried to make.

The dreary man, however, did not put in a call for Lester Dorrington. Instead, he called detective headquarters. When a gruff voice responded, the caller spoke in a worried tone:

"Hello... This is Clark Durton speaking... Clark Durton, attorney... I am calling from the Tarpon Club, on Forty-sixth Street..."

"No, no. There's no trouble here... I want to speak to one of your inspectors... Not just any one a particular man an acting inspector..."

Durton paused to recall a name that he had read of in connection with the death of Hugo Verbeck. Before he could speak again, the gruff voice suggested Joe Cardona.

"That's the man," responded Durton. "Cardona... Yes... Is he there?"

Again an expectant pause. Then, in a disappointed tone, Durton resumed:

"I see... You expect him in shortly... No, don't have him call me... I'm coming down to headquarters. I'll see

THE KEY

him in person."

Durton hung up the receiver. He went through the lobby, gained a gray overcoat and hat of the same color and continued to the street. He stood on the gloomy sidewalk and looked for a passing cab.

There was something conspicuous about Clark Durton. He was holding a cane that he had obtained with his hat and coat. He was swinging the walking stick with his right hand, tapping it against his left palm. This was a habitual action of Durton's.

A low-slung touring car was parked across the street, a trifle to the west. As Durton stared in hope of hailing a cab, the touring car moved forward. As the driver shifted into high, he swerved directly toward the curb where Durton was standing.

THE lawyer leaped back; fearing that the automobile was about to mount the curb. Against the stone front of the Tarpon Club, his gray-clad figure stood like a living target. An order hissed within the touring car.

Then came the rattle of a machine gun. Bullets spattered the wall; other slugs raked Durton's standing form. The lawyer collapsed without a murmur. His cane clattered across the sidewalk and rolled toward the spot where the touring car had been.

But the automobile had not lingered. Gathering speed, it was whirling down the street, making for the green light that showed by the nearest avenue. The speeding car had passed the crossing before shouts arose in Forty-sixth Street as bystanders sped to the spot where Clark Durton lay.

Kelwood Markin had spoken true. He had told of approaching death. He had expressed the fear that other men held keys to empty safe deposit boxes. He had warned that a wholesale slaughter was impending.

Clark Durton, attorney-at-law, had gone the same voyage as another member of his profession: Hugo Verbeck. The owlish old lawyer had been riddled by bullets from a killer's gun; this dreary-faced victim had taken a dozen slugs from the muzzle of a machine gun.

Swift death had struck. It had come from gangster minions of the insidious plotter who had chosen murder as his course. The perpetrator of gigantic swindles was wiping out all lawyers who might remain to end their testimony in the exposure of his evil scheme for wealth!

CHAPTER XI. THE CONFERENCE

THE next afternoon had ended. Acting Inspector Joe Cardona was at his desk in headquarters. A frown on his swarthy face, the star sleuth was reading new accounts of death. The murder of Clark Durton outside the Tarpon Club had been welcome fodder for the presses.

"Guy outside to see you, inspector." The announcement came from a detective who had opened Cardona's door. "It's that fellow Burke the newshound from the Classic."

"Hello, Joe." Clyde Burke, shouldering his way past the detective at the door, was prompt with a wave of greeting. "What's the idea of keeping us out? Getting snooty on this inspector's job?"

There was banter in Clyde's tone. Cardona smiled sourly and waved the detective from the door.

"It's all right," ordered Joe. "I said keep the reporters out. That doesn't include this bird. He's no reporter."

THE KEY

"You're right, Joe," laughed Clyde, as the door closed. "I've graduated. I'm a journalist!"

"You're a pest!" growled Cardona. "Listen, Burke. There's no use of coming in here until I send for you. I've given you breaks before; I'm not going to let you down. But you hit it when you spoke about this inspector's job. There's no time to chew the rag here at headquarters. I've got two dozen men out on the street. There's no telling what may turn up "

Cardona broke off as the telephone rang beside him. Lifting the receiver, the sleuth growled a hello. Then his tone changed.

"Yes, commissioner..." Cardona's voice was easing. "I understand... Yes, I can drop up there again... In an hour? Very..."

"I guess Weston's worried," remarked Clyde as Cardona hung up the receiver. "How's he acting, Joe? Tough?"

"Yeah," returned Cardona. "That's his way. I saw him last night. Nothing important. Just put me on the fire because I hadn't grabbed the gorilla that bumped off Verbeck. Suppose I'll get the same dose on this Durton case."

"Got the dragnet working?"

"On its way. But the birds we're after are pretty foxy. We're not grabbing a lot of small-time crooks wholesale just yet. They haven't had time to wise up to who's done the jobs. Scram now, Burke I've got to check up on a batch of reports before I leave."

Clyde strolled from the office. He reached the street. Arriving at a cigar store he entered and put in a call to Burbank. Definitely, Clyde assured the contact man that Joe Cardona was making a trip uptown, evidently to the same destination that he had chosen on the previous night.

IN his secluded switchboard room, Burbank sat patiently after receiving Clyde Burke's call. To-night, the contact man had no instructions for Harry Vincent. Apparently, Burbank was not planning to put a trailer on the job. Ten minutes passed. A light glowed on the switchboard. Burbank plugged in and gave his statement:

"Burbank speaking."

A quiet voice responded. It was a tone that Burbank recognized at once.

It was the assumed voice of Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow had arrived from Barbados. Burbank had expected this call. He had checked with a call to the Newark airport. He had learned that the plane from the south was due on time to-night.

Burbank's response was brief. The contact man knew that time was pressing. He told The Shadow the location of Kelwood Markin's house in the Nineties. He stated that Joe Cardona would be there within the hour. When his report was ended Burbank gathered papers and thrust them in an envelope. Rising, he extinguished the light above his head, donned hat and coat and departed from the darkened room. He was on his way to Twenty-third Street to drop accumulated data through the mail slit in the office that bore the name B. Jonas.

FIVE minutes before Joe Cardona was due to arrive at Markin's, a cab stopped at the nearest corner to the old

THE KEY

house. The driver turned to speak to the passenger. A ten-dollar bill floated through the window and landed in his hand. Staring into the back of the cab, the driver saw that his passenger was gone.

Chuckling, the cabby drove away. He had gained full fare and a large tip for his rapid trip in from the Newark airport. The jehu gave no further thought to the startling disappearance of his passenger.

A cloaked shape was gliding along the street where Cardona's men were watching. The Shadow seemed to sense the presence of observers. He stopped at a deserted house a few doors from Markin's. He spied a loose grating in the basement window.

With swift precision, The Shadow removed the yielding bars. He slid downward, invisible in the blackness. Finding a stairway, he ascended. The path was clear to the top floor. There The Shadow, using a flashlight, spied the outlet that he sought a trapdoor in the ceiling.

A gloved hand opened a door; then a second one close by. The two barriers came well together. They made an excellent support. The Shadow raised his lithe form atop the doors. With a jimmy, he pried the trapdoor loose. Rising through the opening, he reached the roof.

With rapid strides along the housetops, The Shadow arrived on Markin's roof. He worked with the jimmy and pried a trapdoor upward. He dropped through to the deserted upper floor; then headed for a stairway distinguishable by a light below.

As The Shadow began his descent, there was a ring at the front door. A stocky man appeared, on his way to answer the summons. As his figure disappeared in the vestibule, The Shadow gained the ground floor. On his left he saw an open door the entrance to Markin's living room.

The Shadow saw that the chamber was empty. Gliding into the partly lighted room, he spied a pair of hanging draperies at the front. He slipped between the curtains and gained a vantage spot upon the broad sill. He was not a moment too soon. The stocky man, returning, came through the living room and rapped at a closed door.

"What is it, Howland?" came a querulous voice.

"Two visitors, sir," responded the secretary. "Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona. They have come in with me, sir."

Weston and Cardona were entering the room as Howland spoke through the closed door. They had arrived outside almost at the same time. As they stared toward the door of Markin's temporary bedroom, the barrier opened. The old lawyer, his face drawn, stepped into view.

"You can go, Howland," said Markin. "Remain in the study."

"Yes, sir."

MARKIN sat down with his visitors. The lawyer chose the spot behind the table. His face, though it showed tenseness, also carried an expression that indicated justification of his fears.

"I am glad that you have come," declared Markin, in a steady tone. "New misfortune has proven my theory. I think that you will agree that my qualms were not merely the meanderings of an old man's mind."

"Quite right, Mr. Markin," asserted Weston. "I learned that you had called my office. I arranged to come here

THE KEY

and I ordered Acting Inspector Cardona to join us. I thought, perhaps that you might have gained new information."

"How?" queried Markin, with a spread of his hands. "What else can I say? I told you that other lawyers might be on the death list. I hoped that you might have information."

"We have," declared Cardona. "We found the key to a safe deposit box among Durton's effects. None of his family could identify it."

"He is one of us," nodded Markin. "Let us hope that there are none others beside myself."

"The key is the only piece of evidence," stated Weston. "It supports your statements, Markin. I believe that Clark Durton received that key from a millionaire. I am sure that he, like yourself and Verbeck, found the safe deposit box empty. But there the trail ceases."

"It would," said Markin. "In Verbeck's case, it seemed certain that he received the key from Torrence Dilgin. I have already stated that I gained mine from Rufus Gilwood. But there is only one man who can tell you who gave the key to Clark Durton. That man is Lester Dorrington."

"If we knew how many millionaires were swindled," suggested Cardona, "we could figure how many lawyers are slated for the spot. I'm putting four men on guard here, Mr. Markin. There was only one killer who went after Verbeck, but a bunch bumped Durton."

"That is something gained," decided Markin, in a wise tone. "You have learned definitely that the slayers are gangsters. But have you followed my suggestion of checking upon Lester Dorrington?"

"I covered his house last night," returned Cardona. "I had three men with me on Long Island. Dorrington was there all the while."

"He would be!" exclaimed Markin, pounding his fist on the table. "If your visit here to-night, gentlemen, is in hope of gaining information, I can give no more than I have already. I told you how I received a key from Gilwood; how his dodge to escape the inheritance tax failed. Dorrington appropriated those funds from Gilwood's box at the Farley National, just as he took the cash which Verbeck was supposed to find at the Paragon Trust."

"You have the information; what you need is advice. Here it is: remember that Lester Dorrington is crafty. He is too wise to form contact at his home. His plans have undoubtedly been made in advance. There is only one course for you to follow. Look for crooks whose cases he handled in court. They are the ones who will be in this game."

"That's right, Cardona," agreed Weston, turning to the ace sleuth. "That limits your hunt. Get the stool pigeons on the job. Keep away from the dragnet. These killers are men who are working from some hide-out."

"I've got the stools working," insisted Cardona. "I've been looking up facts on Dorrington, too. I haven't used the plan that Mr. Markin here suggests we "

"Use it then," interposed Weston, "and pass the word to-night. Others murders may be in the making. Two have come in two nights. One may be on its way even now."

Rising, the commissioner extended his hand to Kelwood Markin. The retired lawyer received the shake. As

THE KEY

Weston and Cardona turned toward the hall, he uttered words of thanks, particularly because four men were now on duty outside his house.

"There is no use in trying to deceive Dorrington," declared the old lawyer. "He has watched others; he will be watching me. He must certainly know by now that you are guarding this house. He knows that I have spoken.

"That, in a sense, is unfortunate. It may mean that Dorrington is all the more anxious to kill off other persons who may testify against him. I am still fearful, gentlemen. You can appreciate my qualms. By gaining your protection, I have unquestionably made Dorrington all the more desirous of killing me."

Weston nodded from the door. This angle of the case was serious. Yet the commissioner expressed the assurance that four men outside the house, with Howland inside, should be sufficient for Markin's safety.

The visitors departed. Markin summoned Howland. He gave the secretary brief orders for the morning. The old man entered the bedroom and locked the door behind him. Howland turned out the lights in the living room, but did not lock the door.

Curtains stirred. The Shadow emerged from his hiding place. Crossing the living room he reached the hall and gained the stairs. He went up through the trapdoor and across the roof; when he descended through the deserted house, he found a side door that opened into a narrow alleyway. He used this as his exit.

LATER, the blue light shone in The Shadow's sanctum. A soft laugh sounded as the master sleuth studied the gathered clippings and reports. By his trip to Markin's, The Shadow had, since his arrival, gained the real facts in the secret that lay behind a chain of deaths.

Facts, undisclosed while The Shadow was in Rio, were pointing the way to the measures which must be taken to aid the law. By his actions aboard the Southern Star, The Shadow had sought to end the run of crime. Yet murder had followed in New York and The Shadow had learned why.

Piecing the remarks which Markin, Weston and Cardona had made concerning their previous conversation, The Shadow had gained a practical knowledge of Markin's revelations. The hidden listener at the conference to-night was the one who had profited through the discussion.

New murder might be on its way. Another lawyer as yet unknown might be the next victim set for murder. When crime struck, The Shadow would be there to meet it. He had gained the ground that he required to overtake new bursts of violence.

Earphones clicked. A light glowed upon the wall. Burbank's voice came across the wire. The Shadow responded, in his whispered tones.

"Instructions to Marsland," were his words. "Go to the Pink Rat. Await written orders that he will receive there."

"Instructions received."

Earphones clattered; hands disappeared from the light. When they returned, they were carrying folders that were identified by names. The Shadow began to study reports on crooks definite data which he had produced from his exclusive files.

Half an hour passed while The Shadow engaged in research. Then came a click of the light. A laugh crept through the darkened sanctum. The Shadow was departing. He was on his way to the underworld.

There he would form contact with Cliff Marsland. The Shadow and his agent, independently, would seek the information that was needed. The Shadow had taken the same advice that Joe Cardona had received from Kelwood Markin.

On this, the first night of his arrival in New York, he was seeking first-hand information concerning the whereabouts of crooks who had been legal clients of Lester Dorrington.

CHAPTER XII. A CLIENT ADVISES

ON the following afternoon, a tall, cadaverous man entered the lobby of the Bylend Building. He purchased a newspaper at the stand; he paused to glance at the headlines. The murders of Hugo Verbeck and Clark Durton were still in the news, but no new killings had been reported.

The tall man was Lester Dorrington. He was returning to his offices after lunching at his club. His expressionless face revealed nothing of his thoughts as he strolled toward the express elevator that awaited passengers for the twentieth floor and those above that level.

When Dorrington's footsteps clicked along the corridor of the twenty-fourth floor, a door opened across the way from the lawyer's suite. Peering eyes watched Dorrington pass. A detective, stationed by Joe Cardona, was watching the lawyer's return.

From the time that he had left his house that morning, during the lunch period that he had spent at the club, Lester Dorrington had been under police surveillance. Yet there was nothing in the lawyer's attitude that indicated suspicion of that fact.

Arriving in his inner office, Lester Dorrington began to study papers that were upon his desk. While the solemn-faced attorney was thus engaged, a ring came from the private telephone. Dorrington went to the little cabinet in the corner. He brought out the telephone and answered the call.

"What's that?" he questioned, sharply, as he recognized the voice over the wire. "Ace Feldon? I didn't tell him to come to see me... I see... He wants to talk to me, eh? Put him on the wire... What's that? Well... All right... Send him down..."

Dorrington deposited the telephone in the cabinet. He strode swiftly across the luxurious private office and locked the door that led to the outer rooms. Dorrington had half a dozen workers in his general office, with lesser associates in private rooms of his extensive suite. He did not want to be disturbed by any of them.

Coming back to the corner by the little telephone cabinet, Dorrington unlocked the door of a closet. He pressed a shelf upward. A click followed. A panel raised in the rear of the closet.

The opening showed a spiral staircase.

DULL footsteps were clanging down the stairway. Dorrington stepped back into the office. A hard-faced, big-fisted man appeared from the open panel. His thick lips wore a pleased smile.

"Hello, Dorrington," growled the arrival.

"Hello, Feldon," responded the lawyer, dryly. "Sit down. I shall talk with you immediately."

As the hard-faced man sauntered to a chair, the lawyer stepped into the closet and closed the panel. He left the door open, then came back to his desk. Taking his swivel chair, he stared coldly at his visitor.

THE KEY

"Hope you ain't sore because I dropped in," began "Ace" Feldon. "Say, Dorrington that staircase is a swell gag. I knew most lawyers have got a good way out of their offices. You've got a couple here on this floor. But that office upstairs is the best stunt yet."

"This was the first time you used it," reminded Dorrington. "Your previous visits, Feldon, did not require secrecy."

"That's right," nodded Feldon. "You always told me, Dorrington, that if I wanted to see you on the q.t., all I had to do was drop in on a guy named Loven, who has his office on the floor above this. But I never figured that you'd have a way between. It's a pip, Dorrington, that staircase is."

"I appreciate your commendation," declared Dorrington. "Now that we have discussed the staircase, let me hear the reason for your unexpected visit."

Ace Feldon shifted in his chair. Hard-boiled though he was, this toughened fellow was ill-at-ease as he met Dorrington's searching gaze. Feldon fumbled with a hat that he was holding in his hands. Then, with a tone that indicated final decision, he put a definite question.

"Listen, Dorrington," he growled. "What's the idea of picking Whitey Calban to do your bumping for you? What was wrong with me?"

"Calban?" questioned Dorrington, in apparent surprise. "I haven't seen the man for months, Feldon."

"That ain't the point," retorted Ace. "Maybe you haven't seen him; but you're using him."

"For crime?"

"Yes. For murder."

Dorrington smiled slightly as he shook his head. The lawyer was accepting the statement as preposterous.

ACE FELDON, now that he had begun, was not ready to desist.

"Listen, Dorrington," he stated, "you've represented Whitey Calban and you've represented me. Both of us are smooth workers. The bulls don't mean nothin' in our sweet young lives. If you wanted anythin' done along our line it's a sure bet that either Whitey or I would pull it for you."

"Granted," agreed Dorrington. "Murder, however, is something which I have found entirely unnecessary so far as my business is concerned. I have represented killers; but I have never hired them."

"There's a difference between Whitey Calban and me," resumed Feldon, steadily ignoring Dorrington's statement. "I'll tell you what the difference is. I'm a square shooter, but Whitey Calban ain't. I've got it in for that guy Calban."

"So I have heard," remarked Dorrington. "Feuds between gangleaders are not unusual. It seems to be part of the racket."

"I ain't one that goes out of my way to find trouble," retorted Ace Feldon. "There's just one reason why I've got it in for that louse Calban. He's a double-crosser, that's why. And when a guy like Calban begins to slip one over on a friend of mine, I do somethin' about it. Savvy?"

THE KEY

"I take it then," observed Dorrington, mildly, "that you have come here to discuss certain activities of Whitey Calban's."

"You've got me right, Dorrington. Dead right. Listen; if I'm workin' for a big shot and usin' a bunch of gorillas to help me with the jobs, I ain't goin' to spill nothin' to the heels in my mob, am I?"

"You bet I'm not. Neither is any other guy that's on the level. But Calban ain't a straight shooter. He's been blabbin' to the crew, lettin' his gorillas know who's hirin' him. That ain't good policy, particularly when the work ain't finished yet. Calban's the mug who bumped Verbeck an' Durton."

"Quite interesting."

"It ought to be to you since Calban's spilled it to his mob that he croaked those lawyers because you told him to!"

Lester Dorrington sat rigid as a statue. Not a muscle twitched upon the lawyer's cadaverous face. Dorrington's eyes were fixed steadily upon Ace Feldon. The gangleader nodded sourly.

"Calban let it slip," he insisted. "He yapped the facts to his gorillas last night, down at their hide-out. Told 'em last night was a lay-off but to-night there'd be another job. Then he got mouthy and spilled your name as the guy that's backin' him."

"Quite odd," observed Dorrington. "Quite odd, Feldon, that you should tell me this."

"Tell you that Whitey Calban's a double-crosser? Put you wise because you're a friend of mine?"

"No. That part of your story is plain. What puzzles me is how you happen to know so much concerning Calban and his gang."

"That ain't no riddle," snorted Feldon. "I ain't never liked Whitey Calban; but that wasn't no reason why I should try to make trouble for him. It was reason enough though, for me to want to watch the guy."

"There's a fellow named Steve Quigg who used to work for me when I had my squad of gorillas. Calban never knew that Quigg was with my crew. When I busted up the outfit, he signed with Calban. But Quigg sees me right along. He knows that Calban is a louse. That's why he tips me off to what Whitey's mob is doin'."

"So Quigg serves you as undercover man?"

"Right. But I ain't never tried to pull nothin' on Calban. Just keepin' a line on him, that's all. When Steve Quigg calls me up to-day an' tells me that Calban's told his mob about you, I figured it was time you knew it."

"Suppose that job goes sour to-night. Suppose the bulls grab Calban. He's goin' to blab, ain't he? He'll tell the bulls that you're the guy that hired him. But he'll never admit he squealed. He'll lay it on some of the gorillas that he talked to."

"I'm tellin' you Calban's a double crosser. You've got the proof of it right now. You've treated me good, Dorrington. I'm your friend an' you know it. I'm puttin' you wise."

LESTER DORRINGTON was leaning upon his elbows. Staring squarely across the desk, he spoke firmly to Ace Feldon.

THE KEY

"Thank you for the information," stated the poker-faced lawyer. "I can assure you, however, that it is unnecessary. Outside of the legal case in which I represented Whitey Calban, I have had nothing whatever to do with the man."

A buzzer sounded as Lester Dorrington ceased speaking. The attorney waved his hand toward the closet. It was the sign for Ace Feldon to depart. Some one in the outer office required an interview with Dorrington.

"I ain't askin' nothin'," declared Feldon as he rose from his chair and slapped his hat upon his head. "But I'm tellin' you, Dorrington, it works both ways. If Whitey Calban is workin' for you, he's pulled a fast one, talkin' to those loud-mouthed gorillas.

"If he ain't workin' for you, he's a real double-crosser. A louse like him ain't fit to live. You're a real guy, Dorrington, an' I'll leave this with you: anythin' that I may be doin' will be on your account. Savvy?"

The gangleader had reached the closet. There were knocks at the panel of Dorrington's office door. The lawyer had no time to reply. He shoved Ace Feldon through the panel and pulled down the shelf that locked the secret barrier. Closing the door of the closet, he went to answer the knock at the outer door.

Important clients were awaiting. Within five minutes after Ace Feldon's departure, Lester Dorrington was engaged in prolonged conference. Afternoon waned, while the discussion continued. Dusk settled; lights were turned on; it was six o'clock when the conference was ended.

Alone, ready to leave his office, Lester Dorrington stood by his desk. He was recalling his interview with Ace Feldon; for once, doubt seemed to register itself upon Dorrington's cadaverous countenance. The attorney was pondering upon the situation as Feldon had outlined it.

At last, a knowing smile traced itself faintly on Lester Dorrington's lips. The lawyer shrugged his shoulders, turned out the light and departed from his office. He told a secretary that he was going to his home on Long Island; that he could be reached there in case of urgent messages.

On his way to the Pennsylvania Station, Lester Dorrington was trailed by two of Cardona's men. The lawyer did not appear to notice the stalking sleuths. Close-mouthed, crafty in every dealing, Lester Dorrington showed no concern regarding events that were to come.

CHAPTER XIII. CLUES IN THE DARK

"WHERE'S Cardona?"

"Out."

Clyde Burke was the man who asked the question at headquarters. The one word answer was all that he received from a laconic detective who was sitting in the acting inspector's office.

Something was in the wind, but Clyde could not uncover it. Cardona had been absent all afternoon. It was nine o'clock in the evening, still the acting inspector had not returned. Clyde strolled from headquarters, wondering where Cardona could be.

Clyde's supposition that Cardona was engaged in special sleuthing was not an idle one. At the very moment when the reporter was leaving headquarters, Acting Inspector Joe Cardona was alighting from an elevated train at a station near the Bowery.

THE KEY

Descending the steps, Cardona assumed a shuffling gait. Coat collar up around his chin, the acting inspector headed toward a narrow street. He followed the thoroughfare for several blocks, turned his course and reached an alleyway. Here he paused to light a cigarette.

The night was windy. Each match that Cardona used seemed to flicker automatically. With a disgusted grunt, the ace sleuth stepped into an opening between two dilapidated buildings. When he had reached this vantage point, however, he made no new effort to light a match. He waited until a whispered voice came from behind a broken barrel by the house wall.

"Joe!"

"O.K., Gummy. What've you got?"

"Nothin' much." A hunched figure shifted in the darkness. "Whitey Calban is the guy you want; but I ain't been able to spot his hide-out."

"Seen any of his gorillas?"

"No; but they've been around. Listen, Joe. Calban's the only guy that could've pulled those jobs the way they was done. He wasn't seen nowhere three nights ago; the next day the guys in his mob ducked out."

"But they've been back "

"Not enough for me to spot 'em."

"All right, Gummy. Scram."

Joe Cardona waited until footsteps had shuffled back toward the barrel. Lighting his cigarette, the sleuth emerged from between the buildings and resumed his progress. He slouched past the entrance to an underworld dive known as the Pink Rat. Joe did not enter.

The acting inspector had no desire to be seen in this locality. He knew that "Gummy" had covered the Pink Rat. Of all the stool pigeons in Manhattan, Gummy was the most dependable. The man had been a find. Cardona had kept him under cover. When Gummy spilled information, it was always at meetings somewhere within the confines of scumland.

Gummy had attributed two murders to a gangleader named Whitey Calban. Joe Cardona felt sure that the reliable stool had gained the facts. But there was no way of tracking Whitey to his present lair. Cardona's face showed grimly in lamplight as the sleuth neared the borders of the underworld.

This would mean the dragnet. Tonight, from headquarters, Joe would have to pass the word for a complete search of the underworld. Skulking criminals would be hauled before the law. Those most liable to suspicion would receive the third degree. Some one, Joe felt sure, would squawk on Whitey Calban, even though the gangleader might himself escape the mesh.

JOE CARDONA had passed the Pink Rat. Even had he entered the dive, he would not have learned more than Gummy the stool had told him. For the Pink Rat sheltered a cagey lot of ruffians. Little of importance was spilled within its walls.

Rat-faced mobsters men who had managed to dodge suspicion of the police were assembled in the smoke-filled room that formed the chief portion of the Pink Rat. Bottles were pounding upon tables. Glasses

THE KEY

were clinking. Oaths came in gnarling, raspy tones.

The Pink Rat was not a healthy place for strangers. Not more than three stool pigeons outside of Gummy would dare to enter its portals. But hardened, recognized denizens of the underworld were welcomed in this dive. It was the hangout for the toughest.

A fellow with a chiseled-face came sauntering through the door. Hands were raised in greeting as this newcomer better dressed than most of the other patrons sauntered to a table by an inner door.

This was Cliff Marsland. The Shadow's agent was regarded as a killer by those of the underworld. He belonged to a class of supergorillas. He was a fighter whom any gangleader would have chosen for a lieutenant.

No one suspected Cliff's real mission in the badlands. None of the denizens of the Pink Rat would have believed that Cliff was working for The Shadow. They did not know that Cliff, to-night, had just completed an intensive tour through the tenderloin, searching for Whitey Calban's hideout.

The Shadow's agent had learned as much as Gummy no more. His discoveries, however, had been shared by another. The Shadow had also been sojourning in scumland. He, like Cliff, had picked Whitey Calban as the probable killer of Hugo Verbeck and Clark Durton.

THE waiters in the Pink Rat were an odd lot of aproned ruffians who looked as tough as the patrons. Every one was a capable bouncer. All were ready to pounce upon stools, battle with police or mix it with unruly mobsters should occasion demand. New faces constantly appeared among their number. The waiter who thumped a bottle on Cliff's table was a long-faced fellow whom The Shadow's agent had never seen before.

The waiter was apparently left handed. As his fingers still encircled the bottle, Cliff Marsland stared. Upon the third finger of the left hand, The Shadow's agent spied the flashing sparkle of a strange gem that flickered changing hues beneath the light. It was The Shadow's girasol the strange fire-opal that was an unmatched jewel.

Cliff had been instructed to report here to The Shadow. With him, Cliff had the data that The Shadow needed. It was in a small envelope – a list of the places where Cliff had been in search of Whitey Calban.

Moistening his thumb upon his tongue, Cliff followed the action by placing his hand in his pocket. He found the flap of the little envelope; dampened it; then pressed it against the flabby surface of a banknote. Drawing a roll of currency from his pocket, Cliff peeled off the bill that held the envelope. He stared straight at the bottle as he laid the banknote a ten spot on the table, with the envelope beneath.

The girasol glimmered as the waiter's hand moved from the bottle. The hand crunched the ten-dollar bill. Cliff, glancing upward, saw a stoop-shouldered form shambling through the opening at the back of the Pink Rat.

Five minutes later, the waiter reappeared. His hand laid bills and change upon the table. Grasping the crinkling one-spots, Cliff could feel a little envelope among them. He thrust the money in his pocket.

Cliff knew that The Shadow, like himself, had been searching this district. Cliff had gone to certain places at The Shadow's order, which Cliff had gained through Burbank. Both searches had been futile. Hence this rendezvous at the Pink Rat.

The Shadow had added Cliff's list to his own. Striking off the places that had proven worthless, The Shadow

THE KEY

was ordering a new search. The Shadow would go to certain spots; Cliff to others.

Cliff's new list had reached his pocket with the money. Watching, Cliff saw the stoop-shouldered waiter nearing the door that led outside. That barrier was at the opposite end of the Pink Rat. Cliff knew that The Shadow was leaving.

Cliff's gaze wandered. It would be his turn to depart shortly. The Shadow's agent pushed bottle and glass aside. He was about to rise from his chair when he heard a sharp challenge from the other end of the room. Buzzing conversation ended as mobsters stared toward the other end of the smoke-filled dive.

Two regular waiters had blocked the path of the one who had neared the outer door. They were arguing with him. They did not recognize him as one of the regular waiters at the Pink Rat. They were not satisfied with his explanation that he had come on the job to-night.

"Yeah?" a beefy-faced waiter was demanding. "So you want to scram, do you? Well, you ain't goin' to. There's been too many stools around this joint lately. We ain't lettin' nobody like you get out."

In response, the stoop-shouldered waiter released a sudden jab to the beefy face before him. The challenger collapsed as the sock reached his jaw. The other challenger let out a yell as he pounced upon the false waiter. With one accord, the patrons of the Pink Rat were leaping to their feet to join in the fray. As the brawlers struggled by the door, burly mobsmen sprang to block the barrier.

THE Pink Rat was lighted by three sets of ceiling lights. Those at each end of the basement dive were clusters. The central illumination came from a single frosted bulb set in the middle of the ceiling.

Each set operated from a different circuit. One switch was by the outer door, the other was close to the table where Cliff Marsland sat. The third the central switch was in back of an improvised bar.

As mobsters, anxious for strife, were leaping to their feet, the false waiter sent his second antagonist sprawling from a vicious wallop. The challenger rolled across the floor.

The fake waiter did not pause. His left hand shot to the light switch near the outer door. Before mobsters could stop him, he had pressed the switch. At the same instant, his right hand came from the side of his smudgy apron. An automatic boomed; the aim was perfect. The bullet shattered the big light in the center of the dive.

Cliff was acting as The Shadow fired. No eyes were in his direction. With a quick grasp, Cliff yanked the switch by the inner door. The smoky dive was plunged in darkness; with it came the jeering, strident tones of a weird laugh.

The Shadow! Mobsters knew with whom they had to deal. The odor of powder mingled with the aroma of tobacco as revolvers barked wildly toward the spot where the enemy had last been seen. Flashlights glimmered; they dropped as booming shots from an automatic picked the hands that turned lights toward the door.

The mobsters at the entrance were pouncing in the dark. Fierce hands were grasping for the invisible quarry. The Shadow, close to the wall by the door, was eluding them. He had drawn a second automatic in the darkness. Swinging this weapon, The Shadow was clearing the path.

His adversaries were at a hopeless disadvantage. They were gripping for one among several; but to The Shadow all forms were those of enemies with whom he could deal.

THE KEY

Slugged gangsters staggered. Others, in the middle of the dive, blazed shots toward the door, unmindful of the fact that others of their kind might receive the bullets. Shooters were out to get their enemy at all cost.

It was Cliff Marsland who provided prompt diversion. Springing to the side wall of the room, Cliff was knocking tables from his way while he punched through the darkness toward the outer door. He had drawn a pair of automatics; with these weapons, Cliff delivered quick shots across the darkened dive.

Wild shots stopped the men who were aiming toward the door. This attack from their very midst sent gangsters dropping for the cover of tables. The Shadow had thrown aside the last blockers. Cutting in by the wall, he had kept them between himself and the interior of the dive. Bullets intended for The Shadow had clipped the intervening mobsters.

As Cliff's fire spelled an interval; as mobsters turned in the dark to aim for the unseen henchmen, The Shadow loosed shots from his second automatic. These bursts came from the door itself. The rapid fire ended as quickly as it had begun. Gangsters, dispatching slugs toward the door, were shooting only at the spot where The Shadow had been.

CLIFF had ceased fire. A light came on. Some one had pressed the switch at the inner door. Chaos showed in the Pink Rat. Groaning mobsmen and crippled waiters were lying on the floor. A cluster of crumpled forms showed by the exit to the alley.

Oaths rang through the joint as mobsters saw that their quarry had escaped. There was no sign of the stoop-shouldered waiter. Some one shouted the suggestion of following to the street. Half a dozen ruffians sprang toward the exit.

Cliff was among this throng. His smoking automatics marked him simply as participant in the fight, not as The Shadow's aid. Battering past tables, Cliff had traveled well toward the outer door. He was at the heels of those who sought The Shadow's trail.

Flashlights showed the alley empty. Swiftly, The Shadow had traveled from the outside street. Shrill whistles were sounding, less than two blocks away. A policeman had heard the gunfire. He was summoning other officers to the scene.

"Scram," came a growled suggestion.

Grunts of acknowledgment. One mobster leaped back to the Pink Rat to pass the word to those within. The others began to scurry along the alley. Cliff joined in the departure.

Staring back from the corner, The Shadow's agent witnessed a general exodus from the Pink Rat. Whistles distant sirens told that the police were closing in. Cliff darted for another alleyway and made good his escape.

FIVE blocks away, Cliff pulled the envelope from his batch of bills. Near a street lamp, he read the names of four localities that The Shadow had chosen for investigation. Cliff knew that The Shadow had taken other places for himself.

The nearest was an old, deserted house on the border of Chinatown. Cliff knew the place well; but he had not figured it as a hide-out. Nor had The Shadow, until after more likely spots had proven barren.

Cliff lost no time in heading for this first place on his list. He felt that success was improbable. When he reached the dingy building, he saw no lights among its broken windows. The back door offered possible

THE KEY

entry. Cliff found the rear entrance in the darkness. Suddenly, The Shadow's agent dropped beside a pair of battered steps.

Footsteps were coming toward the back of the house. They mounted the steps; a soft knock sounded on the door. Cliff could almost feel the swish as the door opened inward.

"That you, Steve?" came a voice from inside the house.

"Yeah," was the cautious response from the man on the steps. "What's the lay, Hunky?"

"Stick here," ordered the inside man. "Whitey's coming up with the mob. They're all in the cellar."

"We're startin' out?"

"Yeah."

"Where to?"

"Jake's joint, where we've got the cars parked. Then up to Eighty-fifth Street, in back of the old Budwin Garage. We'll get together there. The job's near the place."

"O.K., Hunky. I'll mooch over to Jake's. I'll be waitin' there."

"We'll be along in ten minutes."

Footsteps descended. The door closed. One minute passed. Cliff Marsland arose and moved stealthily from beside the steps. Reaching the street, Cliff traveled one block and reached a dilapidated drug store where he found a battered phone booth.

The agent was calling Burbank. Through the contact man Cliff would get much-needed word to The Shadow. There was no time to stop men of crime from leaving on their mission; but there was a chance to meet them at their goal.

Cliff Marsland, following The Shadow's tip, had located the hide-out of Whitey Calban, five minutes before the murderous mobleader and his crew of killers were leaving to deliver another stroke of death!

CHAPTER XIV. MOVES TO A FINISH

HALF an hour after Cliff Marsland had sent the tip-off to Burbank, a man was answering a telephone call at the Hotel Goliath. It was Edwin Berlett, in his room on the twentieth floor.

"Hello..." The lawyer's crafty face showed a smile. "Yes... This is Mr. Talbot... Good... Good... That means to-night will finish it... Yes... I'll handle it from now on... Certainly. I understand..."

The lawyer hung up the receiver. Satisfied, he laid the telephone aside and strolled to the window. As Berlett stared toward the lights of Times Square, his face showed the pleased expression of a man who was concerned with well-completed plans.

SINGULARLY, another individual was making a telephone call at the very time Berlett was talking. This speaker was Lester Dorrington. The criminal lawyer was standing in the spacious study of his home on Long Island.

THE KEY

"Stay on the job, Squeezer," Dorrington was saying in a cautious tone. "Watch him, but don't get too close... That's right. There may be trouble if he spots you... I know. He won't suspect I've got you watching him, but he might turn dangerous if he knew... No, no. It doesn't matter if he does talk. He can't talk, Squeezer... That's right... It would mean trouble for him if he said too much. More trouble for him than for me... To-morrow... Yes... Loven's office..."

These were not the only telephone calls in which lawyers were participating. Seated by the table in his living room, Kelwood Markin was also speaking across the wire.

"Very good," the old man was saying. "If you've found the identity of the killer, you should be able to stop the murders... Yes, I feel safer than before; but I shall be even more satisfied after you have acted... Yes, that may be true; at the same time, Dorrington may have more than one weapon in his arsenal... Gangsters... Yes, if they are eliminated, Dorrington's teeth will be gone... But he may still find a way to bite..."

The men who had telephoned were secluded, away from approaching crime. There were others, however, who were about to deal in action. A group of men were clustered in a darkened spot behind the old Budwin Garage on Eighty-fourth Street. They were awaiting the arrival of their leader.

"Here he is," whispered one of the gang.

A man was stepping from the sidewalk to join the crew. It was Whitey Calban, notorious gangleader, ready to give orders to his murderous cohorts.

"Listen, mugs," growled Whitey. "Remember all I've told you. After to-night, the guy we're working for won't need us. You can show your pans wherever you want. I've paid you off. I'm taking a trip.

"The job's mine to night. I've got you birds along just to make sure it goes all right. Six houses down the street; that's where I'm going. I'm ringing the front door bell and I'm going in. But I want you guys to stick around by the front door. If you hear too many shots, pile in. Got it?"

"How about the back, Whitey?" came a question from one of the crew. "Maybe that'd be a good spot to watch."

"A good idea, Steve," commended the gangleader. "You take the back. You can duck out after you hear me fire."

"You'd better give me time to get there, Whitey. I've got to double around the block."

"All right, Steve. We'll wait."

Steve moved from the group. The waiting mobsmen heard his footsteps click upon the sidewalk. Steve was walking past the garage, toward the corner of an avenue. His figure, however, was not the only one that left the blackness of the garage wall.

A figure that moved as silently as night itself had taken the opposite direction. Detached from a darkened portion of the garage wall, this shade moved softly along the sidewalk. Six houses from the garage, the phantom form paused. Keen eyes spied a passage that ended between buildings. The shape entered the opening and merged with the darkness of a bay window.

ON the avenue, a hard-faced mobster was moving toward Eighty-third Street. Steve Quigg, the gorilla who had practically appointed himself as guardian at the rear, was on the way to take his post. As he sauntered

THE KEY

rapidly, Steve made a motion with his right hand.

A man stepped from an entry and followed him. At the next turn, this fellow moved up and joined Quigg. The two talked in cautious tones as they headed toward the rear of the house that Calban had chosen.

"We've got to work quick, Ace," informed Steve. "Calban gave me five minutes to get posted."

"All right, Steve," came Feldon's response. "We'll jimmy that back door in no time. Which house is it?"

"The sixth. You made good time, Ace."

"Thanks to you, bo. That was smart stuff, calling me before you met the crew at Jake's."

The two men found an opening that suited their liking. Their talk ceased as they moved toward the rear of the house that Calban had picked for crime. It was only when they neared the door that they wanted that Ace Feldon put a whispered question:

"Anything more about Dorrington?"

"No," responded Steve. "But what's the difference? He spilled it once. The gorillas are all wise."

ON Eighty-fourth Street, a man had begun a steady pace from the direction of the garage. It was Whitey Calban. The mobleader had left his crew. He was strolling along in the manner of a regular pedestrian. Reaching the sixth house, the killer mounted the brownstone steps. He rang the door bell.

A timid-faced servant answered. He peered suspiciously at the visitor. Whitey's face was a tough one.

"I want to see Mr. Keith," announced the mobleader. "I've got an appointment with him."

"Yes, sir," responded the servant. "You must be the gentleman whom he is expecting. Come in, sir. Mr. Keith will see you."

The servant ushered Calban into a dim parlor. He went upstairs to announce the visitor. Whitey caught the tones of a wheezy voice; then the servant came down, followed by a middle-aged man who looked like a recluse.

"Good evening, sir," said the middle-aged man, as he peered through gold-rimmed spectacles. "You are the gentleman who called me this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Your name, please?"

"Calban."

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Calban; I am Kingsley Keith, attorney-at-law. From your conversation this afternoon, I presume you were coming for legal advice?"

"That's right."

"Thaddeus" Keith turned to the servant "turn on the light in the office. I shall talk with Mr. Calban in there."

THE KEY

The servant went to a door just beyond the entrance to the parlor. He stepped into a darkened room. He pressed a light switch; then stepped aside while Keith and Calban entered. Thaddeus left the room, closing the door behind him. Kingsley Keith occupied a seat behind a massive table. Calban took a chair at the other side.

This room was furnished in office style. Except for the bay window at one side, the walls were lined with bookcases that towered to the ceiling. Huge buckram-bound volumes loaded the heavy shelves. Calban looked about the room.

"Nice lot of books you've got here," remarked the gangleader. "Never saw so many in any other lawyer's joint."

"My work is almost entirely research," explained Keith. "That is why I have my office here in my home. These volumes constitute but a small portion of my law library. I have rooms filled with books throughout the house."

"You don't get many visitors, then?"

"No. Most of my clients are other attorneys. I was surprised to receive your call this afternoon, Mr. Calban. What brings you here?"

Calban had been stalling for time. He was studying the layout of the room. There were three doors: one from the hall, which Calban and Keith had entered; a second, to the left of the rear bookcase that Calban was facing; the third, to the right of the same shelves.

The door at the left, Calban decided, must lead either to a rear hallway or another room. The one at the right this barrier was obscured by the shadow of the bulky bookcase was probably the entrance to a closet. The shades were drawn at the windows. This was a factor that Calban relished.

"My business?" Calban's face wore a peculiar leer. "I can tell it to you in a hurry. Have you been reading the newspapers, Mr. Keith?"

"I have not," returned the lawyer. He stared in puzzled fashion at the blond-haired ruffian before him. "I must confess, Mr. Calban, that I seldom peruse the daily journals. My research work requires constant reading of law reports and briefs. I am not interested in current events."

"Well," declared Calban, "I'm here to tell you about a couple of guys who were bumped off. They were lawyers, like yourself. Hugo Verbeck was one guy; Clark Durton was the other. Did you know them?"

"Hugo Verbeck" Keith shook his head. "No. I have met Clark Durton; indeed, I believe that I did some research work for him, a few years back. Did I understand you to say that these men were dead?"

"You bet they're dead," responded Calban. "Plugged. Murdered. That's why I'm here."

"Regarding their murders?" Keith's eyes opened wide behind his spectacles. "Do you mean" the lawyer paused as he studied Whitey's leering face "that you know who killed them?"

"Sure," rejoined Whitey. "I'm the bimbo that croaked those birds."

Kingsley Keith pressed hands to table-top. He stared in amazement. He half rose from his chair; his face betrayed horror.

THE KEY

"I do not handle criminal cases," he announced. "You must go to some other lawyer, Mr. Calban. My advice, moreover, is that you be more cautious in your opening remarks when you discuss this matter with a criminal lawyer."

"Wait a minute." Calban snarled the order as he came to his feet. "I didn't come here to get advice. I've got business with you, Keith. I'm the guy that croaked Verbeck and Durton. I'm the guy that's going to croak you!"

With this insidious announcement, Calban yanked a .45 revolver from his pocket. He jammed the muzzle close to Kingsley Keith's ribs. He delivered an evil laugh as the lawyer sank back into his chair.

"You're getting a slug from this smoke wagon," jeered Calban. "You're the third guy that's on my list. Verbeck Durton now it's your turn."

KEITH'S hands dropped to the arms of his chair. The bespectacled attorney was horror-struck. Leering at his immediate victim, Whitey Calban placed his forefinger upon the trigger of the .45.

"Curtains for you," he gibed, staring toward the lawyer. "Curtains – and then I'm on my way."

Calban backed as he spoke. Petrified, Keith made no move. Faced by death, the research lawyer expected the shot of doom. But as he stared, Keith was amazed to see a look of terror creeping over Whitey Calban's face.

The mobleader's hand was trembling. His eyes were fixed on a spot beyond Keith's head. A slight sound had made the killer stare in that direction. His trigger finger had been stayed by the menace which now loomed before him.

Blackness had moved forward from the door on the right. Before Calban's bulging eyes, darkness had taken living shape. A being clad in black had materialized itself. Burning eyes were staring from beneath a hat-brim. A fist that protruded from an inky cloak was holding a huge automatic.

The muzzle of the gun was straight toward Whitey Calban. The would-be killer was at the mercy of the being who held the gun. Fear gripped the gangleader. He had been caught on the verge of brutal murder by a foeman who showed no mercy to men of evil.

Twitching lips, blinking eyes, shaking hands these were proofs that Whitey Calban had recognized the relentless enemy who had him covered. Helpless, the killer was staring into the eyes of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. CROOKS UNITE

TRANSFIXED by sight of that weird shape before him, Whitey Calban could make no utterance. In dulled fashion, the murderer realized that The Shadow must have learned his plans. The master of vengeance had entered this room by the bay window. He had chosen a darkened spot to lie in wait for the coming killer.

Curtains! Calban could see them for himself. Whether he tried to kill the lawyer or whether he made a futile effort to do battle with The Shadow, Calban knew that the result would be the same. Covered by The Shadow's automatic, Calban realized that he had no chance. The Shadow would surely beat him to the shot.

Kingsley Keith was still trembling. The lawyer was bewildered by the change that had come over his murderous visitor. He could grasp no explanation for Calban's sudden weakening.

There was another, too, who wondered at Calban's fright. The door at the left of the bookcase had opened.

THE KEY

Ace Feldon, with Steve Quigg at his elbow, was peering into the lighted room. The gangleader who despised Whitey Calban had a gun in readiness.

"Plug him, Ace," Quigg was whispering. "Now's your chance."

"I'm lettin' him get the lawyer first," returned Ace, also in a whisper. "That's what he's here for. But I can't figure it, Steve. Look. He's standin' there like a dummy "

Ace eased the door that Steve might see. The minion stared in wonderment. Neither Feldon nor Quigg could see The Shadow. Conversely, The Shadow could not observe the door through which the armed men were peering. Kingsley Keith was within Feldon's view, however. That was why the gangleader could not understand Calban's sudden terror.

Before Ace could make further comment, the startling situation was explained. A sound came from the book-lined office. Hollow tones made Whitey Calban quiver; they brought a grim look to Ace Feldon's face.

The Shadow, moving forward, had delivered his mocking laugh. Rising whispers rose to a shuddering, chill-provoking taunt. It was The Shadow's answer to the threat that Whitey Calban had handed Kingsley Keith. It was the token that presaged swift death to a murderer who deserved such fate.

Death! Calban saw it in the glint of The Shadow's eyes. The crook dropped his gun arm as he cowered away from the muzzle of The Shadow's automatic. The advancing form loomed like a mammoth of vengeance as The Shadow closed the space between himself and the table beyond which Whitey Calban stood.

FROM his hidden post, Ace Feldon saw The Shadow. In that brief instant of recognition, the watching mobleader was gripped with furious hatred. Ace, like Whitey, was of the underworld. The Shadow, common enemy of gangdom, was the one enemy whose presence could unite all crooks. Ace Feldon's feud with Whitey Calban was forgotten.

Tigerlike, Ace sprang into the office. As he flung the door inward before him, the fuming mobleader brandished his gat and aimed point-blank for The Shadow. With an oath upon his lips, Ace was set to kill the foe whom all scumland feared.

The Shadow whirled instinctively. As his eyes saw the gleaming muzzle of Feldon's revolver, the master fighter dropped as he twisted. This was the fadeaway that he had so artfully performed before the gun-barrels of other gangland foes. In Ace, however, The Shadow had met an adversary who was prepared for such an action.

Despite his frenzied eagerness, Ace had swung to a direct aim. His finger paused upon the hair-trigger of the revolver, while his hand swung the gun along with The Shadow's sidewise, downward shift. Ace was aiming low, confident that with his advantage he could surely beat The Shadow to the shot.

A factor intervened. The Shadow, instinctive in the face of danger, had chosen more than a mere change of position to aid him in this unexpected emergency. In his whirling fadeaway, he disappeared from Feldon's view, just beyond the seated form of Kingsley Keith.

In this action, The Shadow was seeking to save the lawyer's life, not to jeopardize Keith's safety. Well did he realize that this new intruder was out to get his own life, not Keith's. The Shadow knew that Feldon would not waste bullets on a helpless man while seeking to finish the menace of the underworld.

The Shadow was right. Feldon's finger stopped at the very point of firing. Keith was in the path of the turning

THE KEY

gun muzzle just as Ace was about to loose his shot. With a swift spring, Ace headed for the table, to get his aim beyond the angle of Keith's seated body.

The act was his undoing. The Shadow, too, was moving, in the direction opposite to Feldon. But where the gangleader, a dozen feet from Keith, was following an arc that might have represented the rim of a wheel, The Shadow was using the lawyer's body as a hub. His gun-filled fist swung into view from the lawyer's right as Ace still aimed beyond Keith's left. The Shadow fired.

The shot winged Feldon. The gangleader's leap ended in a lurch against the table. Ace sprawled across the surface, poised upon the far corner and went crumpling to the floor. His gun, flying from his hand, skidded past the spot where Whitey Calban stood.

Whitey had been rigid. The Shadow's drop had caught his eye; then he had turned to see Ace Feldon's surge. The burst of The Shadow's automatic brought him to his senses. Whitey, much though he sought The Shadow's death, had all the stubbornness of a mechanical killer. He was anxious to get Kingsley Keith, the man whom he had come to slay.

DROPPING toward the floor, he planked his right arm on the table, to loose quick shots in the direction where both The Shadow and the lawyer were located. Where Ace had failed by seeking The Shadow only, Whitey was ready to reach the black-clad warrior by first mowing down the blockading human who sat between.

The Shadow had not forgotten Whitey. He was coming up as the gangleader dropped. The automatic thundered through the room. The Shadow had picked the quickest target the gleam of Whitey's gun. He did not hit the bull's eye, but his shot sufficed. The bullet clipped Whitey Calban's forearm.

Whitey fell backward, groaning. Instinctively, he clapped his left hand to his right wrist, leaving his revolver useless on the table. Beyond the heavy piece of furniture, the crippled gangleader was out of The Shadow's range. The black-garbed victor did not attempt to follow up his shot. There was another man with whom he had to deal.

Steve Quigg had not seen the reason for Ace Feldon's inward surge. Steve, playing a two-way game, had purposely kept out of sight to avoid Whitey Calban, who did not know Steve was Feldon's spy. When Ace fell and Steve saw Whitey aim, the situation changed. Jumping in from the door, Steve turned toward the bookcase in back of Kingsley Keith just in time to see the flash of The Shadow's .45.

Steve leaped for The Shadow, swinging his gun as he sprang. Rising upward and forward, The Shadow swung his right arm like a mallet, in swift, backhand fashion. It was his quickest method of dealing with Steve's coming aim. Just as the mobster was pressing the trigger of his gun, the automatic smashed against the revolver. Steve's shot whistled past The Shadow's shoulder and bored deep into a buckram-bound book upon the nearest shelf. An instant later, the revolver dropped from the gangster's numbed fingers.

The force of The Shadow's blow had carried his hand past Steve's body. Wildly, the mobster grabbed for The Shadow's arm. Powerful, quick as a tiger, Steve Quigg locked in a forceful struggle with the enemy who had deserted his shot. The mobster's body swayed back and forth in the grip of The Shadow's binding arms.

Kingsley Keith was on his feet, howling for Thaddeus. The lawyer's cries ended with a gasp. Whitey Calban had come up in front of the table. Grimly, the wounded mobleader was gripping his revolver with his left hand. Elbow flopped upon the table, Whitey took unsteady aim for the struggling forms of The Shadow and Steve Quigg.

THE KEY

The Shadow, swinging Steve against a book shelf, caught a glimpse of the mobleader's action. But The Shadow observed more than the mere deed. He saw Whitey's good wrist sagging. He knew that the gangleader, weakened, could never steady for the aim he needed. Nevertheless, the situation called for prompt finish to the struggle with Steve Quigg.

With a mighty surge, The Shadow caught Steve in a jujutsu grip. The mobster's heavy body rose upward like an effigy of straw. As Steve struggled helpless, The Shadow bent for a mighty heave. The leverage that he employed was calculated to hurl Steve clear across the table, squarely upon Whitey Calban's wavering form.

Steve made a frantic clutch toward the wall. Just as The Shadow began a springlike snap, the helpless gangster clutched the end of a bookcase. As The Shadow delivered his terrific twist, an entire section of the bookcase came ripping from the wall with a resounding crash. Buckrammed books poured downward in an avalanche as Steve's form shot head forward to the floor. The Shadow, like the gangleader, was buried in the deluge that came from the laden shelves.

A lucky break had given Whitey Calban a chance; the gangleader was still too weak to take it. He could no longer see The Shadow; his loose hand was wavering. It was Kingsley Keith who provided the very opportunity that Whitey required.

THE lawyer was terrorized by the sight of the wobbling gun. Showing action for the first time, Keith came up from his chair and shot his arms across the table. Had he performed the simple action of wresting the weapon from Whitey's shaky hand, all would have been well. But the frightened lawyer behaved in a most stupid fashion.

He grabbed Whitey's wrist with both hands. He sought to beat the killer's forearm on the table. In so doing, he turned the muzzle of the gun directly toward himself. Whitey pressed the trigger.

A report. Keith's hold relaxed. The lawyer staggered back from the table, rammed his shoulder into the bookcase behind him, sidled to the right and sprawled among the pile of books from which The Shadow was emerging. Whitey Calban, a glassy glitter in his eye, leered as he saw the lawyer's fall. With a frenzied return of strength, the killer managed to steady his hand for another shot.

This time, Whitey's target was to be The Shadow. He tried to turn the muzzle of his gun, for direct aim toward the form in black. The Shadow ended his opportunity. Half crouching among the scattered piles of books, The Shadow aimed his automatic and fired a single shot. This bullet was dispatched with vengeance. Whitey slumped from the table, carrying his gun along. The gangleader rolled over on the floor, a bullet through his heart.

Rising, The Shadow cleared the heaps of law books and headed expectantly toward the door to the hall. He was none too soon. Continued gunfire had alarmed Whitey's henchmen. A police whistle from down the street had added to their apprehensions. One gunner had fired warning shots toward an advancing bluecoat; then the entire crew had smashed through the front door.

As The Shadow reached the hall, he saw two men advancing. He gave no quarter to these rats. An automatic in each hand, he opened fire. One man sprawled; another dove for the parlor. A third ruffian, covering Thaddeus, ran back into the vestibule.

Whistles sounded from the front. The Shadow's laugh resounded. The gorilla in the vestibule was firing toward the street. The police had arrived. Whirling as Thaddeus scurried to the safety of the stairway, The Shadow moved across the office. He gained the bay window. Shade and sash came up together. The Shadow's tall form swung out into the dark.

THE KEY

Police were coming toward the office. Steve Quigg, crawling bewildered from among the books, grabbed up Whitey Calban's gun. Before he could aim toward the door, a bluecoat entered. The officer shot down the lone gunman who remained. Other shots were barking in the hall and outside the house. The law was taking charge.

Bluecoats had driven the last remaining mobsters into the house. The space between the building and the house next to it was unguarded. It was through this opening that The Shadow glided. His swift steps, unseen, unheard, carried him from the vicinity.

A solemn, whispered laugh sounded in the gloom of a side street, three blocks from Kingsley Keith's. There was no mirth in the repressed shudder of the tone. The Shadow had gained a victory; with it, a loss.

He had dealt death to Whitey Calban, the murderer whom he had come to meet. But fate had tricked The Shadow. Though dead, Whitey Calban had accomplished his design. The killer had slain Kingsley Keith.

CHAPTER XVI. CARDONA MAKES A CALL

IT was the following afternoon. The newspapers had made huge stories of the fray in which Kingsley Keith had died. Photos of the dead lawyer; pictures of the house; diagrams of the downstairs room all had provided excitement for eager readers.

Seated at the big desk in his private office, Lester Dorrington was digesting the reports. The cadaverous lawyer was nodding as he rubbed his chin. The police had hinted at a feud between Whitey Calban and Ace Feldon. Dorrington knew that for once they were right.

A ring from the private telephone. Dorrington answered it. Tersely, he ordered the speaker at the other end to send the visitor down. Unlocking the closet, he opened the panel. A wiry, wise-faced fellow stepped from the stairway.

"Sit down, Squeezer." Dorrington waved the visitor to a chair. "Let's talk this whole business over."

"It looks bad," said the wiry man, in a whiny tone. "Trailing's my business. You know how I tagged Berlett when he took the plane to South America. But snooping in seeing what's happening well, that ain't so easy. Last night, for instance "

The speaker paused as a buzzer sounded. Dorrington frowned slightly. He pointed back to the closet.

"It must be something important," declared the attorney. "Duck, Squeezer. I don't know who's out there; it wouldn't be good policy to keep a visitor waiting to-day."

Squeezer nodded as he sidled for the closet. Dorrington closed the panel and locked the door. He strolled across his office and opened the door as a secretary appeared. The girl was followed by a stocky, swarthy-faced man. Lester Dorrington recognized Detective Joe Cardona.

"Step in," invited the attorney. "I'm glad to see you, sir. It is a privilege to receive a visit from one whose time must be quite fully occupied."

Cardona sensed the sarcasm. Dorrington was closing the door. He went to his desk, waved Cardona to a chair and offered the acting inspector a cigar.

"What can I do for you?" questioned the lawyer.

THE KEY

"Two crooks were killed last night," asserted Cardona, bluntly. "One of them, Whitey Calban, murdered a lawyer named Kingsley Keith."

"So I have learned from the newspapers."

"We think that Calban killed Hugo Verbeck and Clark Durton."

"So I understand."

"Well" Cardona stared steadily as he spoke "you've handled cases for both of those crooks. What can you tell me about them?"

"I represented them before the law," stated Dorrington, in an even tone. "The facts are in the records. I can produce testimony from my files."

"I'm talking about the present, not the past. Some one was in back of Whitey Calban. Somebody wanted those three lawyers to die."

"Probably. Your theory sounds logical."

"Can you suggest any one who might be a suspect?"

Lester Dorrington allowed a smile to flicker upon his face. He puffed at his cigar before he answered. When he spoke, his tone was calm.

"Certainly," declared the lawyer. "I can name such a person."

"Who?" queried Cardona.

"Myself," responded Dorrington.

THE detective gaped. He had come here, in his capacity of acting inspector, to parry with Lester Dorrington. Using the attorney's legal connection with the dead man, Cardona had seen a golden opportunity for a visit.

To Cardona, Kelwood Markin's suspicions of Lester Dorrington had been justified. But Joe had never expected the criminal lawyer to fall in line with his thoughts.

"I have named myself as a suspect," stated Dorrington with a smile, "purely because of certain circumstances. I note by the newspapers that all of Whitey Calban's mobsmen battled the police in stubborn fashion. As a result, not one of the so-called gorillas survived.

"Therefore, you failed to obtain a blind clue which you might otherwise have obtained. There is still a chance that you may get it from some pal of one of the dead gorillas. Had you used the dragnet, inspector" Dorrington emphasized the title with which he addressed Cardona "I believe that you might have heard some mention of my name."

"We got Calban," said Cardona, gruffly, "even if he wasn't dead, for his mob is done. We didn't need the dragnet."

"So I have saved you trouble," nodded Dorrington. "I would prefer to have you hear my name mentioned by myself than from some rat who knows nothing of the facts."

THE KEY

Joe Cardona sat dumfounded. This interview was staggering him. He stared at Lester Dorrington. The lawyer's face was solemn and inscrutable. Joe could not guess what might be in his mind.

"Yesterday," declared Dorrington, "I received an unsolicited visit from Ace Feldon. The gangleader came to this office and spoke to me in confidence."

"We didn't see "

"I know," smiled Dorrington, as Cardona paused abruptly. "You mean the dicks who were covering this office didn't see Ace Feldon. That merely proves the incompetence of the average detective. You should make a note of it, inspector. Pass it along to the police commissioner."

"But to resume. Ace Feldon came to warn me about Whitey Calban. Ace seemed to think that Whitey was a double-crosser. He told me that Whitey had killed Hugo Verbeck and Clark Durton. He was sure that Whitey intended to continue his career of murder."

"Where did Ace get that dope?" questioned Cardona.

"From a man named Steve Quigg," replied Dorrington. "He told me that Quigg was his man; that the fellow was one of Calban's crew."

"Say!" exclaimed Cardona, forgetting his antagonism toward Dorrington, "that explains how Ace Feldon horned in on the trouble."

"Yes," agreed Dorrington, "but let me proceed, inspector. Ace Feldon told me something else. He declared that Whitey Calban had told his outfit that I was the man in back of the murders. That was the real reason why Ace Feldon came to me."

"What did you do about it?" demanded Cardona.

"Nothing," assured Dorrington calmly. "Really, I regarded Feldon's visit as a consultation. As his attorney, I could keep his statements to myself. I am speaking to-day only because Feldon is dead."

"But at the same time, I doubted the veracity of Feldon's story. I knew that Feldon thought he was speaking true, but I was not at all sure about the unknown factor Steve Quigg nor could I see any reason for the actions and the statements attributed to Whitey Calban."

"I felt sure that Feldon was either totally wrong or totally right. Since I knew that Calban was not operating under my direction the idea was preposterous I assumed that he was not operating at all. I decided that Ace Feldon was merely filled with hatred toward Whitey Calban; that Steve Quigg, to play in with Feldon, had made damaging reports concerning Whitey Calban."

JOE CARDONA was nodding unconsciously. He was feeling the persuasive force of Dorrington's quiet tones. The lawyer was using the same easy manner of speech that had proven effective with doubtful juries. The effect was almost hypnotic.

"To-day, however," stated Dorrington, dryly, "I learned that Whitey Calban had actually murdered. I read that the bullet from his gun matched the one that slew Hugo Verbeck. I read that you inferred Clark Durton to be the in-between victim. I knew that Steve Quigg had told Ace Feldon the truth regarding Whitey Calban's actions."

THE KEY

"Therefore, I argued that he had told the truth in the matter of Calban's statements. Absurd though it seemed, I was forced to believe that Calban had told his thick-headed gorillas that he was working for me. The whole crew was dead; but some of them might have let out the word. Therefore, your visit pleased me. It enabled me to anticipate rumors that you might have gained."

"You haven't explained the reason why Calban laid it on you," announced Cardona suddenly.

Dorrington leaned his head back against the chair. He chuckled. Cardona's statement seemed to strike his sense of humor.

"Why should I know about that? quizzed Dorrington. "I have already told you that I did not believe the statements. Nevertheless, I have formed a theory. Would you like to hear it?"

"I would."

"For some reason one that I cannot satisfactorily explain Whitey Calban was out to murder a trio of lawyers. He did one job himself; he called in a crew for the second, which involved the machine gun. Obviously, he wanted the mob around when he pulled the third job.

"Gorillas are an odd lot. One-tracked minds; one-celled brains would be a better definition. Calban killed a lawyer. They knew it. He killed a second attorney. The gorillas wondered why. With a third member of the legal profession lined up for the spot, Calban evidently decided that an explanation was in order. He didn't want his mob to think he had gone crazy.

"So he probably decided to tell them that he was working for some one. He wanted to name a person whose name they would recognize; he also wanted to make his false statement sound logical. So Calban whom Feldon justifiably described as a louse picked my name as the best one to use. His gorillas knew that I had represented him. Probably they thought that I was taking payment for legal work on a barter basis."

Cardona had no answer. The story fitted. The longer that Dorrington talked, the less confident Cardona became. The acting inspector made one feeble effort at a challenge.

"What about Ace Feldon?" he demanded. "Why did he go to get Whitey Calban? Did you know he was going to mix into the mess? Did you send him?"

"Too many questions," returned Dorrington, coldly, "and the last one is uncalled for. Had I sent Ace Feldon to get Whitey Calban, I would certainly not be telling you that I had talked to Feldon yesterday.

"Remember this, inspector. I am an attorney and a highly paid one. I represent criminals; I never employ them. To think that I would summon a crook to my office to give him orders is as preposterous as to suppose that you would issue instructions to gangsters while giving a third degree.

"Ace Feldon had it in for Whitey Calban. When such feuds exist, they usually result in death. It was not my business to worry about a crook's plans. Ace was gunning for Whitey. Steve Quigg was with Ace. It was natural that Steve would tip Ace off to the coming job. That was the logical time for Feldon to have his battle out with Calban."

"But he let Calban get away with murder!"

"Why not? What did Keith mean to Feldon?"

THE KEY

"Nothing, I guess," admitted Cardona.

"You're wrong," snapped Dorrington, with a suddenness that jolted the acting inspector. "Feldon was fool enough to believe that Calban was actually working for me. Therefore, Feldon assumed that Keith was a man whom I wanted killed. That's why he let Calban do the job before he stepped in to fight it out with the man he hated!"

AGAIN, Cardona was lost. Dorrington had come through with another unexpected statement. The attorney had switched his conversation in bewildering fashion. His theories fitted with a remarkable perfection.

"Cardona," suggested Dorrington, in a serious tone, "you should spend more time in analyzing the criminal mind. As a detective still persisting in your stupid third degree you have committed the blunder of meeting single-tracked brains head on.

"I understand the real working of the thinking machines that crooks possess. Of course, I have a decided advantage. Such clients as Whitey Calban and Ace Feldon invariably confide in me; Perhaps, some time, I may be able to give you definite advice in the correct way to deal with such fellows. Frankly, I should be pleased to do so."

Cardona arose from his chair. He felt that the interview was due for a prompt ending. He could not tell whether Dorrington was using sincerity or sarcasm. As Cardona turned toward the door, the lawyer joined him and conducted the sleuth to the outer office.

"Call me in advance next time you wish to see me," suggested Dorrington, in a friendly tone. "I shall then be able to give you a definite appointment, with more time at our disposal.

"Of course, if you must see me on short notice, I can always spare you time. Either here or at my home on Long Island. You will always be welcome, inspector."

Cardona received the lawyer's extended hand. The shake completed, the acting inspector turned toward the hallway, while Dorrington went back into his office. Quietly, without a click, the lawyer turned the key in the well-oiled lock.

Lester Dorrington's cadaverous face was placid. In matter-of-fact fashion, the brainy lawyer went to the cabinet, removed the private telephone and dialed Loven's office on the floor above.

"My visitor has left," announced Dorrington, in an even tone. "Tell Squeezer to come down. I can talk with him without further interruption."

Dorrington hung up. He unlocked the door of the closet; he raised the secret panel. Returning to his desk, the solemn-faced lawyer helped himself to another cigar. He lighted the perfecto with nonchalant ease and drew long puffs while he awaited the arrival of Squeezer.

CHAPTER XVII. THE BAIT

"I WAS a sap, that's all."

Joe Cardona was rueful as he made the admission. Two listeners heard his statement. One was Commissioner Ralph Weston; the other was Kelwood Markin.

The trio had assembled in the old attorney's living room. Though it was not yet five o'clock, the room was

THE KEY

illuminated by lamps. Closed shutters and hanging draperies cut out all daylight.

"I went back to headquarters," said Cardona, "feeling like a fool. I was ready to choke a reporter who butted in while I was there Burke of the Classic. Then I got your call, commissioner, saying to meet you here."

"I thought it wise to hold conference with Mr. Markin," declared Weston, "even though we did have to disturb his afternoon nap. The death of Kingsley Keith most certainly appears to be another link in the chain of crime. Particularly since you found a safe deposit key in Keith's office."

"One that Thaddeus could not identify," nodded Cardona. "It belongs to a box at the University Trust Company. So far as I can see, Keith was another of the dupes."

During the short, gloomy silence that followed, Ralph Weston's face clouded. The commissioner stared hard at his ace detective.

"You had a good reason for seeing Dorrington," said Weston to Cardona, "but your results were by no means satisfactory. Let me see that report again, Cardona. You are sure that you remembered all the details of your conversation?"

"Just about," returned Cardona, bluntly. "If I was trying to ease it for myself, I wouldn't have left it as raw as it is. Dorrington twisted me just the way he wanted. I wasn't in his office to accuse him of murder. He talked suspiciously about himself. Had the jump in everything he said."

"Dorrington is crafty," asserted Markin, wisely. "That is why I fear him. This house, commissioner, is my citadel. I have not been out of it since murder began. My only visitor has been George Tharxell, the one man I can trust, excepting Howland."

"You're sure of them?" quizzed Cardona.

"Yes," stated Markin. "Nevertheless, I feel ill—at-ease even though I am protected "

The old lawyer broke off. A ring at the door had made him start. The three men sat silent; Weston ceased reading the report that Cardona had given him. A rap at the door; Howland entered at Markin's summons.

"Mr. Tharxell," announced Howland. "Shall I show him in, sir?"

"At once!" exclaimed Markin. "I had not expected him so soon. Perhaps he has the information that I told him to get."

A QUIET man of methodical appearance was ushered into the living room. Markin introduced Tharxell to Weston and Cardona. He pointed his partner to a chair. Tharxell sat down, produced a folded sheet of paper and handed it to Markin. The old attorney's face lighted.

"It's here!" he exclaimed. "It fits!"

"What's that?" quizzed Weston.

"Dorrington's activities in handling estates," replied Markin. "I told Tharxell to look up the records. Dorrington is a criminal lawyer. Estates are not ordinarily in his line. During the past five years he has not handled more than a dozen of any consequence.

THE KEY

"It occurred to me, commissioner, that I had opened Rufus Gilwood's safe deposit box less than one week after the old millionaire had died. Verbeck did the same with Torrence Dilgin's box. Tell me" Markin turned to Cardona "what about Durton's key? What about Keith's? Did you find out when they were used at their respective banks?"

"Yes," returned Cardona. "The banks told me the particular dates on which each of those keys were brought with papers of identity. Keith's is there in the report, commissioner "

"Twelfth of December, two years ago," announced Weston.

" And Durton's was used in June of the same year," recalled Cardona. "June the ninth, as I remember it."

"Let's see," chuckled Markin, running his forefinger down the list. "Ah! Here we have them. Parkinson Watts, the importer, died on the fifth of June that year. Hector Mell, Wall Street wizard, died on the seventh of December."

"Then Watts," exclaimed Weston, "was the man who gave the key to Durton. Mell was the dupe who handed one to Keith!"

"It appears so." Markin passed the list to Weston. "It seems more than mere coincidence, commissioner. "There are not many estates in Dorrington's list."

"A lucky point," decided Weston. "It looks like malice aforethought. A criminal lawyer like Dorrington handling a few choice estates. Why would millionaires have gone to him?" Weston's nod was the answer to his own question. "This is a useful point, Markin. It bears out your beliefs regarding Dorrington."

Handing the list to Cardona, the commissioner arose and paced the floor. He made no objection to George Tharxell's presence. Since Markin had taken his partner into confidence, Weston did the same.

"Your visit was a bull," said Weston, to Cardona. "Nevertheless, it has done no harm. I should like to talk to that man, Dorrington. I should like to hear him speak."

"Why not call on him, commissioner?" questioned Markin. "He is crafty enough to know that he is under suspicion."

"Never invade the enemy's terrain," declared the commissioner, "until you are sure that his defense is weakened. Make him come to you."

"Request him to come to your office."

"No. He would be too well prepared."

"Meet him somewhere then. Place him in a position where he is at a disadvantage. If you could only force him to join you at one of those places where crime was done at his bidding!"

"Verbeck's or Keith's!" exclaimed Cardona. "Say there's a real idea. I'd like to talk to Dorrington like I would to any crook "

"To try the third degree, I suppose," interposed Weston, coldly. "Very tactless, Cardona. Very. The suggestion is absurd. Nevertheless, it has the germ of an idea. If we could coax Dorrington to talk with some one who could match his cunning, under circumstances that would hold him at disadvantage in "

THE KEY

"How about here?" broke in Cardona. "Get him here to talk with Mr. Markin!"

CARDONA swung toward Markin. The old lawyer's face was a study. It showed eagerness to get at Dorrington; but with the expression came evidence of fear. The latter reaction gained predominance.

"No!" protested Markin. "No! It is most unreasonable. I am the one man who could testify to Dorrington's undoing. He needs my death more than Verbeck's more than Durton's more than Keith's "

"But his fangs are gone," interrupted Weston. "Whitey Calban is dead. So is Ace Feldon."

"He may have other underworld connections," warned Markin. "Should he come here, with assassins at his heels to "

"He would betray his own guilt."

Markin's trembling ceased at Weston's quiet, emphatic statement. A gleam of prospective hope showed upon the old attorney's face. Sagely, Markin nodded.

"That is true," he agreed. "Your men outside are my protection. Yes – Dorrington would enter alone; the others would have to follow. I would like to talk with him. The idea appeals to me if only you could both be here. That, however, is impossible."

"Do you want us present?" put in Cardona. "Or would it do if we were listening in?"

"How would you listen in?"

"With a dictograph."

"Where?"

"In the bedroom."

Markin shook his head. He looked toward the closed door at the end of the room.

"Dorrington would suspect," he protested. "The bedroom would not do."

"How about the study?" asked Weston. "The place where Howland sleeps?"

"It's close enough," added Cardona. "We could be in here inside of five seconds if any trouble started."

"That would do," agreed Markin, in a thoughtful tone. "Yes it would be an excellent arrangement. I see merit in the plan. Real merit. There is only one objection."

"What is that?" questioned Weston.

"The mental hazard," responded Markin. "I cannot let Dorrington know that I fear him. I must feel confident that he is not accompanied by thugs."

"We'll be here; a squad will be outside."

"I know. But if Dorrington sees that I am virtually in hiding, he will be contemptuous. He must not find me

THE KEY

cowering in this room. He must not know that I am afraid to leave the house.

"Suppose, commissioner, that I arrange an appointment with Lester Dorrington. Suppose I managed to bring him here to this very room. Could you call first and take me out with you? Could we watch the house, to make sure that Dorrington came unaccompanied?"

"Certainly."

"I could have Tharxell here meet Dorrington. Howland could usher Dorrington into this room. The door is thick. You, commissioner, could enter with and join Inspector Cardona in the study at the end of the hall."

"That would enable you to overcome the mental hazard?"

"I believe so."

"Good. Then you are ready to follow our suggestion."

"Yes."

AS proof of his decision, Kelwood Markin reached for the phone book. He found the number of Lester Dorrington's office. He dialed and asked to speak to the attorney. It was after five o'clock, but Markin evidently learned that Dorrington was still at his office, for the old lawyer's face showed a pleased gleam.

"Hello..." Markin's tone showed but the bare trace of a quaver... "Mr. Dorrington?... This is Kelwood Markin, attorney... Yes, of Markin and Tharxell... I have a matter to discuss with you, Mr. Dorrington... No, no, not a criminal case. This concerns an estate... A deceased client. It is a matter of long standing, yet one that I feel should be taken up between us.

"To-morrow?... At your office?... Hardly, Mr. Dorrington. I am retired... Yes, living at my home. I seldom go downtown. I thought perhaps you might come here to see me... Good... Could you come this evening?... Excellent... At eight o'clock, if you can make it... Not later than half past eight... I invariably retire before half past nine. I'm getting to be an old man, Mr. Dorrington..."

The receiver clicked. Kelwood Markin, his face elated despite the excitement which had gripped him, was staring toward Weston and Cardona.

"That will bring him!" exclaimed the old lawyer. "I shall discuss the Gilwood case with him. I shall get into ground that will prove treacherous to him. You must place the dictograph at once, inspector.

"Can you call for me before eight o'clock, commissioner? Good. I shall give instructions to Howland. As for you, Tharxell, you must also arrive about eight o'clock. You will receive Lester Dorrington. We can discuss business for a few minutes after I come in. Your presence will give me confidence. Then you can leave at my bidding."

Kelwood Markin arose. The others followed suit. George Tharxell departed. Weston and Cardona prepared to leave. The detective said that he would send up the men with the dictograph at once. He remarked that they would come in a telephone company car. The men outside would be instructed to let them pass.

"You stay here, Cardona," decided Weston. "See that the job's done right. Call headquarters and give the orders to the men."

"All right, commissioner."

Weston left the room. Howland showed him to the door. Markin beckoned to Cardona.

"You can call from the study," suggested the attorney. "Then you can also arrange the room for your occupancy. After that, we can come back here and pick the place for the microphone."

The two men left the living room. Howland returned from the front door and went back to the study. Silence prevailed within the confines of the living room. Then came a rustling of the curtains by a window.

BLACKNESS came from the heavy hangings. The form of The Shadow stood revealed. Gliding forward, the cloaked intruder crossed the living room, reached the hall and noiselessly ascended the stairs.

The Shadow had been tipped off by Clyde Burke. He had arrived here secretly; he had been an unseen listener during the conference. He was leaving by the exit in the roof, for the empty house some doors away.

The bait had been set for Lester Dorrington. Kelwood Markin, veteran lawyer, was to meet with the attorney upon whom suspicion rested. The law would listen in while the two men talked.

Half past eight. The Shadow must return before that appointed time should he, like Weston and Cardona, intend to hear the details of the coming conference. Kelwood Markin had become the bait; Lester Dorrington the fish; but in the offing was a hidden danger: Edwin Berlett.

Where Weston and Cardona counted upon a duel of wits between two keen-brained lawyers, The Shadow could foresee the entrance of a third. Brutality gang murder was an epoch of the past.

Strategy and hidden cunning were the factors that must bring the climax. Markin had accepted a definite course of action. Dorrington, playing his intelligent part, had agreed to the appointment. Berlett, to figure in the game, would have to make a move.

Three keen attorneys: one, retired; the second, active in his practice; the third, a man supposedly dead. These were the men whose cards would be played to-night!

CHAPTER XVIII. DORRINGTON RESPONDS

"HELLO... Yes... This is Mr. Talbot."

The speaker was Edwin Berlett. He was standing in his room at the Goliath Hotel. Evening lights of Manhattan were visible through the window.

"Yes..." The lawyer's face showed an intense gleam. "Yes... I have the information you sent... I understand... Yes. That's all I need..."

Berlett hung up. He went to a closet and obtained hat and overcoat. For the first time since his arrival in New York, Edwin Berlett intended to leave the Hotel Goliath. Until to-night, his longest trips from the room had been no further than the hotel lobby.

Berlett walked from his room. He reached the elevators. While he was waiting for a car, a young man strolled into the hall. It was Harry Vincent. To Edwin Berlett, The Shadow's agent appeared to be an ordinary guest.

Reaching the lobby, Berlett strolled out to the street. He hailed a taxicab. Harry, following, called a second

THE KEY

vehicle. As Harry entered his cab, a third taxi shot past. A few seconds later, the three vehicles were speeding forward in procession, Harry's at the rear.

"Where to?" the driver was asking.

"Turn right," ordered Harry, as he observed Berlett's cab swing up the nearest avenue. "Keep going until I give you another order."

Three blocks up the avenue, the trio of cabs threaded their way through traffic. Harry's cab was almost up to the one that seemed to be following Berlett's. Suddenly, the lawyer's cab swung right into a narrow street. Harry snapped an order to his driver.

Berlett's taxi had gained by the maneuver. It was half way down the block before the second cab made the turn, with Harry's close behind. Suddenly, Berlett's taxi came to a stop. Stepping from his vehicle, the lawyer entered a building. The cab pulled away.

The second jehu ground his brakes. As Harry's cab swept up, The Shadow's agent saw a man leap from the stopped cab and dash in pursuit of Berlett. Harry ordered a quick stop. He tossed a bill to the driver and hurried into the building.

It was the arcade of an office building. Though open at night, the place was deserted. Far ahead, Harry glimpsed Berlett leaving by the door on the next street. He saw a wiry pursuer hustling on the lawyer's trail. Harry walked swiftly. Reaching the further door, he stopped.

Out on the sidewalk, the wiry man was staring toward the avenue. Harry could not see the fellow's face, but he knew what must have happened. A single cab had been waiting at the rear entrance of the arcade. Berlett had gained the vehicle; he was again on his way. The wiry trailer had no chance to follow. Harry saw the man clench his fists, then walk toward the avenue.

Harry, too, had lost the trail. His one satisfaction was that Berlett had also slipped the unknown man. Harry walked back through the arcade. His job was to return to the Hotel Goliath and report to Burbank.

SOME minutes later, a taxi stopped at an avenue near Kelwood Markin's. Edwin Berlett alighted. He chose the street in back of Markin's home. Between two buildings, he could see dim lights in the lawyer's house. Berlett sidled along, studying other buildings.

He found one to his liking. He had made the same choice as The Shadow. Moving through a passageway, Berlett stopped beneath the boarded windows of an empty house. He looked upward, breathed tensely in the dark, then looked and found a rear door.

Cautiously, Berlett tried the knob. The door gave, almost at his touch. The lawyer hesitated; then entered. He produced a pocket flashlight and picked his way through a dusty hallway toward a flight of steps.

Berlett, apparently, was thinking that this house might have the same layout as Markin's, for he inspected the doorways that he passed. He reached the top floor and threw the beams of his torch along the ceiling. He saw the trapdoor.

Peering into a room, Berlett spied an object in the corner. It was a curtain rod, made of wood. He obtained the rod and carried it to the hall. He poked against the trapdoor. It yielded as easily as the back entrance. With the rod, Berlett had no trouble in shifting the trap door off from the opening.

THE KEY

Replacing the curtain rod where he had found it, the lawyer returned to make the ascent. Berlett had proven his agility in his flight from the Southern Star. He gave new evidence of his physical ability. He opened a door, gripped the top with his hands and drew his feet up to the knobs. Raising his right, he caught the edge of the opened trap. His left hand followed. Berlett swung free and kicked the door shut. With a strenuous effort, the lawyer reached the roof.

Crouching, Berlett moved toward Markin's. His feet crunched on cinders. Reaching the house he wanted, Berlett worked upon the trapdoor that he found. This barrier should certainly have been tightly in place. Yet it gave when the lawyer hoisted.

Smiling at the ease with which he had conquered obstacles, Berlett dropped boldly into Markin's house. He had left the trapdoor overlapping. Moving softly along a thick carpet, he discovered a stout table in the corner. Using this piece of furniture, he mounted to close the trap. Putting the table back in the corner, he stole to the stairs.

When he reached the gloomy first-floor hall, Berlett spied the yawning entrance to the living room. Darkness lured the intruder. Berlett moved into the living room. He spied the thick dark mass of draperies.

Again choosing in The Shadow's fashion, Berlett moved to the curtains and found a hiding place upon the window ledge.

Minutes ticked by. Something swished in the outer hall. Berlett did not hear the sound, nor did he see the form that glided in from the hall. The lawyer did not know that another intruder had arrived. The Shadow, following the very route that Berlett had picked, was in Kelwood Markin's living room.

THE SHADOW was stealthy, even in the darkness. He seemed in no haste to gain his usual hiding place. Hence he was not far inside the door when a sudden dingle announced a visitor to the house. Swerving silently, The Shadow headed for the door of Markin's bedroom. His action was well chosen.

Hardly had The Shadow gained this temporary hiding place before Howland arrived and turned on the living-room lights. The secretary looked about in methodical fashion, then continued to the front door. The Shadow, quartered in the gloom of Markin's temporary bedroom, decided to remain.

He picked a hiding place behind a huge chair that was close to a fire place. The chair was halfway on the hearth; evidently the gas-log in the fire place was seldom used by Kelwood Markin.

George Tharxell entered the living room with Howland. The junior partner took a chair; Howland left and went back into the study. Tharxell, awaiting the arrival of Lester Dorrington, sat alone, totally unconscious of the fact that two observers were close at hand.

OTHERS were awaiting the arrival of Dorrington. In a parked car across the street from the old house, Ralph Weston and Kelwood Markin were on the alert. In addition, four men from headquarters were posted at vantage spots.

Five minutes passed. A cab rolled along the street. It stopped in front of Markin's. A man alighted and went up the steps. It was Dorrington, alone.

"Wait," whispered Markin, nervously, as he and the commissioner saw Howland admit the visitor.

Another tense five minutes. Markin opened the door of the parked car. He stepped to the sidewalk. Weston followed. Both knew that the coast was clear. Dorrington had brought no aids. Together, Weston and Markin

THE KEY

crossed to the house. The old lawyer rang his own door bell.

Howland answered and motioned Weston toward the rear. The commissioner tiptoed past the closed door of the living room. Markin and Howland followed slowly, talking as they came. With Weston safely past, Markin opened the door and stepped into the living room. He was greeted by Lester Dorrington.

"Ah!" exclaimed Markin. "I am the one who is late. My apologies, sir. I was out for a short walk. How long have you been waiting, Tharxell?"

"About five or ten minutes before Mr. Dorrington arrived," replied Tharxell. "I can go, sir. If you wish, I can return later."

"No need, Tharxell. Here" Markin drew an envelope from his pocket – "I have gone over these papers in regard to the Stevenson claim. I can make no criticism of your work, Tharxell, although I have added a few marginal comments. You intend to see Stevenson to-night?"

"I can see him if necessary."

"Do so. Call me afterward. That is, if you finish the business before ten o'clock. Not after ten, Tharxell. I shall be sleeping soundly by that time."

Tharxell departed. Markin took his position behind the table and looked toward Dorrington. The visiting lawyer made a comment.

"You are still engaged in practice, I take it," remarked Dorrington, "even though you do not go to your office."

"My name is still on the door," returned Markin. "Tharxell, however, is in full charge. I have been actually retired for a full year."

"I see," nodded Dorrington. "Then you want to see me regarding an old matter. One of long standing, I suppose."

"Yes," declared Markin. "It concerns the affairs of Rufus Gilwood, deceased. You, I understand, handled his estate."

"I did," said Dorrington.

"I have something here that will interest you." Markin opened a table drawer. He searched without result. "Hmm. What did I do with it? Wait here, please. I must go to my study. I believe I left it there."

MARKIN went to the door and opened it. He entered the hall and closed the door behind him. He continued to the rear and opened the door of the study. He placed his finger to his lips as he looked toward the three men who were seated there.

"The key," whispered Markin. "The key of the safe deposit box. Where is it?"

"I left it at headquarters," returned Cardona, in a low tone.

"Do you have one of the others?"

THE KEY

"No."

"Here is a key" the interjection came from Howland. "It is one of your own, sir. Will it do?"

Markin nodded as he clutched the key. Howland had brought the object from a desk drawer. Pacing back to the living room, Markin entered and closed the door. Dorrington was puffing a cigar.

"This is it." Markin went behind the table and let the key clatter as he spoke. "This, Mr. Dorrington, was given to me by Rufus Gilwood."

"How long before his death?" inquired Dorrington, curiously.

"A year or more," recalled the old attorney. "I received it in confidence. Gilwood told me that he might return for it. If he did not, I was to open the safe deposit box and distribute the funds that I found there. They were to go to people named."

"Well?"

"Gilwood never returned to my office. I opened the box after his death."

"What did you find there?"

"Nothing."

Dorrington puffed calmly at his cigar. He made no comment. It was Markin who was forced to speak.

"I knew that you were the attorney in charge of Gilwood's estate," asserted the old lawyer. "But I hesitated to tell you of the matter. The box was empty. What could I do about it?"

"Old Gilwood was an eccentric sort," mused Dorrington. "That may have been his idea of a joke."

"He paid me a thousand dollars as a retainer," returned Markin.

"That makes it different," declared Dorrington. "It placed you under obligation. Under the circumstances, you should have come to me at once. Why did you not do so immediately after Gilwood's death?"

"Because the box was empty. I was its sole custodian. I might have been accused of theft."

"Of theft?" Dorrington snorted. "Accused of something, Markin, but not of theft. The facts of this case are evident. You and Rufus Gilwood were technically guilty of conspiracy to defraud the government and the commonwealth of inheritance taxes."

"Not so!" challenged Markin. "We did not discuss such matters. Moreover, there proved to be no funds involved."

"The intent for conspiracy was present. You have proven it by your own statement. I was the attorney who represented the estate of Rufus Gilwood. You should have brought the key to me before the box was opened!"

With this assertion, Lester Dorrington arose from his chair and stepped toward the door. Kelwood Markin stared, his hands clinching the edge of the table.

THE KEY

"You handled the estate," spluttered the old lawyer. "You knew about me about this key. You are to blame, Dorrington "

"I?" Dorrington laughed. "Talk facts, Markin, not fancy. You have admitted that your first negotiations with Rufus Gilwood were of doubtful quality. Your failure to communicate with me regarding the key points to conspiracy. Your silence since Gilwood's death is a bad factor in itself; your belated statement of your actions is final proof of the guilt on your conscience.

"I handled Rufus Gilwood's estate in a manner both legal and commendable. I do not care to have the dealings of a shyster foisted upon my enviable record. If you value your own position, Markin, you will keep your silence. Your statements are a discredit to you and to the profession which I represent and you belittle."

Plucking hat and overcoat from the chair where they were laying, Dorrington walked haughtily from the room. He left the door open behind him. He went out through the front while Howland, in response to Markin's call, was peering from the study.

Seeing the secretary, old Kelwood Markin clicked out the light in the living room and hastened along the hall. He joined Weston and Cardona. The old man was spluttering with rage as he closed the door of the study.

THE SHADOW was moving from the bedroom. Silently, unseen by Edwin Berlett, the phantom intruder gained the hall. He moved to the door of the study; merging with darkness, The Shadow listened. He could hear the tones of Markin's indignant voice.

A few minutes later, Edwin Berlett came stealing from the living room. As the departing lawyer neared the steps, The Shadow, hearing the sound of tiptoed footfalls, turned in that direction. Even in the gloom, sharp eyes could distinguish Berlett's dark countenance.

Then came a click from the study. The door opened outward. The Shadow swinging to the wall beneath the stairs, was out of sight behind the swinging barrier. Berlett, on the stairs, continued upward.

The intruding lawyer was on his way from Markin's. His mission here was ended. But The Shadow remained. Hidden behind the opened door, he awaited the events that were to come.

CHAPTER XIX. DEATH FAILS

"He tricked me!" Markin's tone was querulous as the old lawyer stood by the living room door. "His method proves his scheming. Dorrington accused me to cover his path of crime The man has cunning beyond all measure!"

"He's a fox all right," agreed Joe Cardona. "I never met one like him. He made a sap of me. He made it tough for you, too, Mr. Markin."

"Stamping out of here in indignation," snorted the old attorney. "Accusing me of conspiracy. I should have known it, however" the old man's tone was pitiful "because of Dorrington's amazing shrewdness. I tell you, commissioner, the man's methods are ironclad. There is only one way to thwart him; that is through his arrest."

"We still lack evidence," affirmed Weston. "All we can do, Mr. Markin, is afford you the same protection that you have had in the past. You should, however, feel relieved. You remain unharmed despite the fact that Lester Dorrington was here."

THE KEY

"I fear him more than ever," declared Markin, nervously. "I sensed a menace all the time that he was here. The living room seemed charged with a living threat. I am afraid. Terribly afraid."

"My men are on guard."

"I fear danger from within. This house is not safe. I have only Howland with me."

"Put a man inside, Cardona," ordered Weston. "Meanwhile, we'll get ready with a campaign to smoke out this man Dorrington. He's got something that he's covering. I could tell it by his tone, over the dictograph. I'm going home, Cardona."

"All right, commissioner," responded the ace. "I'll be here another hour, going over those notes that Howland took. I'll put a man inside before I leave."

Weston departed. Markin, reassured by the promise of an inside guard, retired to his bedroom. Joe Cardona and Howland went to the study. They left the door open. Seated by the desk, Cardona had a view of the entire hall. Until his departure, the acting inspector was serving as Markin's guard.

It was half past nine. While Howland typed off his shorthand notes of the talk between Markin and Dorrington, Cardona strolled into the living room. Turning on the light, Joe pried behind the curtains. Just as he finished his inspection, he heard Markin call through the bedroom door.

"Who's there?"

"Cardona," returned Joe. "Everything all right in there?"

"Yes," called Markin. "I'm going to sleep. Don't forget the man is to be on duty."

"I'll remember."

Cardona strolled back to the study. He sat at the desk and drummed while Howland typed. A monotonous half hour went by. At three minutes past ten, the telephone rang. Howland answered it.

"Hello..." began the secretary. "Oh, yes... Mr. Tharxell... Can you call in the morning? Mr. Markin has retired... Perhaps we had better not disturb him... Very well, sir, if the Stevenson case has been settled, Mr. Markin might be pleased to know it... Yes, I shall call him..."

The secretary left the study. Cardona watched him enter the living room. He could hear the dull sound of Howland's taps upon the bedroom door. Then came a wild shout. Leaping to his feet, Cardona dashed toward the living room.

Howland had turned on the light. Gaining no response to his knock, the secretary had opened the tight-fitting door to the bedroom. From the hall, Cardona saw Howland struggling to drag Markin from his bed. The smell of illuminating gas was coming from the inner room.

Cardona joined in the rescue. Together, he and Howland dragged Kelwood Markin to the front hall. Cardona yanked open the front door and gave a whistle. Two detectives came on the run.

Howland was reviving Markin. The old lawyer's eyes were bulging. His hands were moving feebly. Nevertheless, he was still alive. Gratified by that fact, Cardona dashed into the gas-filled bedroom and turned on the light. Holding his breath, the detective heard the hiss of escaping gas. He swung toward the fire place.

THE KEY

Stooping, he plucked at the handle beside the gas-log and turned off the flow.

Back in the living room, Cardona gasped fresh air. On his next trip to the bedroom, he managed to unbar the iron shutters. As the detectives joined him, Joe sent one to call Commissioner Weston. Stooping by the fire place, Joe began an examination of the gas-log.

It was then that he uttered a startled exclamation. Clamped to the side of the gas log was a device that captured the sleuth's attention. It was small, clocklike mechanism that issued dull, almost imperceptible ticks.

FROM the device projected an arm that ended in a tiny clamp. This had been attached to the key controlling the gas jet. Some one had placed the mechanism to do its deadly work. The set-up was so simple that it could not have required more than two minutes to affix it.

Joe unclamped the tell-tale machine and carried it to the door of the living room. The detectives arrived at his call, one bringing the news that Commissioner Weston was coming to the house at once. Kelwood Markin, recovered, but pale-faced as he leaned on Howland, also came in from the hall.

"Look at this!" cried Cardona. "It was set to turn on the gas jet. It must have been timed for ten o'clock after you were asleep, Mr. Markin!"

Eyes stared in amazement. Yet there was one onlooker who experienced no surprise. The Shadow had glided from his hiding place behind the door to the study. Gazing from the hallway, he saw Cardona exhibit the deadly clockwork. Then, with a silent swing, The Shadow moved to the stairs and ascended toward the darkness of the second floor.

Ten minutes passed. Kelwood Markin sat slumped in a living-room chair while Joe Cardona talked to the detectives. Then came a ring at the door bell. Howland answered. Two men entered. One was Commissioner Weston; the other, George Tharxell. The two had arrived simultaneously.

"What's happened?" demanded Weston, as he strode into the living room and saw the pallid face of Kelwood Markin.

Joe Cardona told the story. He displayed the clock-work instrument. Weston walked in and took a look at the fire place. He returned to the living room.

"That was put in here to-night!" stormed the commissioner. "Who was the man that did it?"

"Only three persons were in this room," asserted Cardona. "We've got two of them right here now. Howland and Tharxell."

"What brought you here?" demanded Weston, turning to Tharxell.

"I called just after ten," replied the lawyer. "Howland told me he would awaken Mr. Markin. Then the call was interrupted. I heard shouts across the wire. I came here at once."

"That's right," said Cardona.

"I found the receiver off the hook when I went to call you, commissioner," said a detective. "I had to juggle to get the operator. The receiver's on now."

"One minute, commissioner," asserted Cardona. "I heard that telephone call. It clears both of these men from

THE KEY

suspicion. The fellow who clamped this machine on the gas-log intended to kill Mr. Markin. The clock is set for ten. All the murderer had to do was leave it. In the morning, we'd have found Mr. Markin dead."

"Go on "

"Well, Tharxell called up right after ten o'clock. He wanted to talk to Markin. If Tharxell had set this device, he wouldn't have called up, would he?"

"Mr. Markin expected me to call tomorrow," put in Tharxell. "I happened to get through with Stevenson early "

"That's right," interrupted Weston. "We heard it over the dictograph. Proceed, Cardona."

"Howland here," resumed Cardona, "told Tharxell over the phone that Mr. Markin was asleep. He could easily have insisted that Tharxell hold the call until morning, like he was supposed to do. Instead, he went to rouse Mr. Markin.

"What's more, I don't think Howland was in the living room alone at any time. He helped me plant the dictograph here by the door. More than that, while we were looking for places, we happened to take a look at that fire place in the bedroom. This gimmick" Cardona raised the mechanism as he spoke "wasn't there at seven o'clock. I'd have seen it if it had been."

"Which leaves us one man," announced Weston, sternly. "Lester Dorrington. Was he alone in the living room?"

"Yes," rejoined Cardona. "When Mr. Markin came to get the key "

"That's it!" cried Weston. "The fellow was too bold for once. He thought he was alone with Markin. He didn't know that we were listening in. Well, Markin" the commissioner turned to the old attorney "I'm sorry that this happened. But you've pulled through it – a few minutes of gas didn't hurt you. You're lucky; and what's more, we're lucky."

Seizing the mechanism from Cardona's hand, Weston held it before the eyes of all. The commissioner was impressive as he spoke.

"We're going to Dorrington's with this!" decided Weston. "This is the time the fox will answer questions. Here is the evidence of crime. Come, Cardona; we will take the witnesses with us to Dorrington's home!"

Five minutes later, Weston and his companions had departed from the house. A light had been left on in the hall. It revealed the figure of The Shadow, coming from the stairs. The phantom shape merged with the darkness of the study.

A dial clicked a number on the telephone. Then came an eerie, whispered voice. The Shadow, speaking to Burbank, was giving orders to the contact man. The black-cloaked master was planning his own climax for the scene to come at Dorrington's.

CHAPTER XX. ATTORNEYS SPEAK

"STATE your case, Markin."

Commissioner Weston was the speaker. He was the central figure in a group that occupied the study of Lester

THE KEY

Dorrington's Long Island home. Weston had taken the chair behind the lawyer's desk. On his right front sat Kelwood Markin; on the left, Lester Dorrington himself.

Joe Cardona was on guard at the central door, directly opposite Weston. Tharxell and Howland were seated in a corner. The study, a paneled room with luxurious furnishings, had been turned into an inquisition chamber.

"There lies the evidence." Kelwood Markin pointed emphatically toward the desk, on which lay the mechanism found in the old man's fire place. "It proves that an attempt was made upon my life.

"I am a lawyer who was approached by a client of Lester Dorrington's, namely, Rufus Gilwood. I was given the key to a safe deposit box that presumably contained funds for distribution. That box was empty after Gilwood's death.

"Three lawyers have been murdered. Verbeck, Durton, Keith their deaths indicate that they, like myself, were approached by clients of Lester Dorrington. We have even decided upon the particular clients in question. You, commissioner, hold the threaded facts in this astounding case.

"I affirm that Torrence Dilgin, who died in Rio de Janeiro, was the last of the clients whom Dorrington swindled. I believe that Dilgin tried to speak before he died to name Verbeck as the man who held his key. I believe that Edwin Berlett, returning to America, was murdered before the other victims.

"Lester Dorrington is a master schemer. He sent his clients to different lawyers, each with a key to a safe deposit box. Dorrington robbed those boxes. I, like the other lawyers, was duped. In Dilgin's case, however, Dorrington feared exposure, because of the notoriety which involved the death of Edwin Berlett.

"Forced to slay Hugo Verbeck, he decided to continue. He used a gangleader, Whitey Calban, to do his dirty work. When Calban was killed, he had no other agent. He was forced to use measures of his own to do away with me. We know that Dorrington must have placed the mechanism in my fire place. I demand his arrest. I state the charge. Murder!"

GRIM silence succeeded. Lester Dorrington had not flinched. Virtually a prisoner, he seemed waiting for Kelwood Markin to be done. After the tense pause, he turned to Weston.

"You may speak," ordained the commissioner.

"These facts are interesting," announced Dorrington, in an easy tone. "They bring out points that had previously puzzled me. Kelwood Markin is right. There is a master schemer who has designed death. A crooked lawyer swindled millionaires by robbing their safe deposit boxes and letting other attorneys be the dupes."

Howland was taking down the statement in shorthand. Dorrington did not appear to be perturbed. He paused impressively; then resumed.

"The crook was evidently a remarkable schemer," declared Dorrington. "Our friend Markin has reasoned well; but his chain of thought ceases too abruptly. Let us picture this human spider, spinning his web. He chose innocent lawyers to whom he sent millionaires. But he did not stop there.

"He foresaw the danger of exposure. He feared that the men who held the keys might testify against him. So he went further than Markin has stated. He was too wise to handle the estates of the millionaires whom he swindled. He gave them advice; they followed it. He sent each of them to a different man so far as the keys were concerned; but he sent all of them to the same lawyer to handle their estates!"

THE KEY

Profound silence greeted this persuasive sally. Dorrington's cold logic was a refutation to Markin's accusations. The criminal lawyer proceeded with his case.

"I was the attorney whom the schemer picked to make out the wills. I, too, was approached by clients whom I did not expect. I, an attorney who handled criminal cases, was amazed when such men as Parkinson Watts, Hector Mell, and Torrence Dilgin came to me regarding their wills.

"I knew that some one must have sent them. I could not place the man. They gave me no information. So I accepted their fat fees and felt grateful. But all the while I was looking for a game. I was trying to find the hidden lawyer who stood behind the scheme.

"Torrence Dilgin died suddenly in Rio. Then came murders in New York. Ace Feldon told me that Whitey Calban was spreading my name among gorillas. I realized that the slain lawyers might be concerned somehow with the mysterious estates. Knowing nothing of the safe deposit boxes, I could not fathom the actual game. I appreciated but one important fact: namely, that my own safety was in danger.

"I was to be the goat for murder. I handled my cards as best I could. I had my suspicions, but my story, should I tell it, would have seemed more astounding than Markin's. All the while that I have been maintaining silence, I have been looking for the real crook in the game."

AGAIN, Dorrington paused. This time, he looked from man to man and finally steadied his gaze upon the commissioner. He put a question to Weston.

"May I count," he asked, "upon no interruptions, no matter how absurd my story may seem at its beginning?"

"Yes," came the assurance.

"Very well." Keeness showed on Dorrington's cadaverous countenance. "I wondered until recently why Torrence Dilgin had made me attorney for his estate. Dilgin already had the services of a competent corporation lawyer, namely, Edwin Berlett.

"When the Dilgin Corporation sent Berlett to Rio, he did not seem pleased with the assignment. I called upon an ex-stool pigeon Squeezer Tifkin, to whom I had been of service to make sure that Berlett actually departed on his plane.

"Berlett went to Rio. Then came the news of Dilgin's death; following it, the report of Berlett's assassination and the burial of Dilgin's body at sea. The two occurrences made me think. A boatload of passengers saw the lowering of Dilgin's coffin, but not one had seen the South American killers throw Edwin Berlett overboard.

"Sigler, old Dilgin's secretary, was slain in the fight that was supposed to have spelled the end of Edwin Berlett. I saw an answer. Sigler may have known too much. Maybe he was the man the killers sought to slay. Who hired the killers? I knew the answer. Edwin Berlett!"

Gasps came from about the room. There was logic in Dorrington's revelation. None could deny it. The smooth-talking lawyer, however, had not yet finished. Wagging an emphatic finger, Dorrington declared:

"Edwin Berlett never left Pernambuco. I was sure of it. I knew that he was crooked, even though I did not know his exact scheme. When murders began, I felt that he was in back of them. I was sure that he had arranged crime before leaving New York.

"Following my theory, I had Squeezer on the job, watching planes that came in from the South. One night,

THE KEY

Squeezer came back to Manhattan because a plane was overdue. He went out to the airport later, but too late. The passengers had landed. Nevertheless, he found names and listings. He learned that a passenger calling himself Edmund Talbot had gone to the Hotel Goliath.

"Squeezer watched the hotel lobby. He caught a glimpse of this Talbot. He recognized the man as Edwin Berlett. To-night, Berlett left the hotel. Squeezer lost his trail. Berlett has not yet returned; but I am positive that he will be back. I had not intended to inform the police of Berlett's presence in New York, until I was sure that the man was performing crime. To-night was the first time that he was at large.

"Under present circumstances, however, I am forced to release my accusation. I agree with Kelwood Markin. An insidious crook swindled millionaires and made attorneys his helpless dupes. My plea is this: I am the greatest dupe of all. To offset that, I have named the murderer. Edwin Berlett."

COMMISSIONER WESTON sat as stolid as a statue. Not a breath stirred within the paneled room. Berlett's own actions, particularly his pretended death aboard the Southern Star, were damaging accusations. Weston could see that the whole case rested on a single deed: the capture of Berlett himself.

"What's the room at the Hotel Goliath?" demanded the commissioner. "We'll watch the place for Berlett's return. We'll get him and we'll make him talk. Six men, Cardona "

The commissioner stopped short as a voice came from the side of the room. A door in the paneling had stood ajar. None had noticed it during the past few minutes. That door had opened.

Upon the fringe of the rug stood a stocky man whose eyes were peering from beneath heavy brows. In his hand, the newcomer held a revolver. From the spot where he stood, the muzzle of his gun covered the entire group.

It was Lester Dorrington who announced the man's identity. Weston and the others gasped as they realized that for the second time to-night, an accused man faced his accuser. Quivering, his calmness gone, Dorrington blurted forth the name:

"Edwin Berlett!"

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW SPEAKS

"I HAVE heard these accusations," came Berlett's unruffled statement. "In return, I demand that my story shall be heard. Do I have your assurance on that score, commissioner?"

"You you have," stammered Weston, as he stared into the gun muzzle.

"Very well." Berlett calmly thrust his revolver into his pocket. "I am here to speak, not as a criminal nor as a dupe, but merely as a chance person who can provide the solution to your problems.

"I held nothing against Lester Dorrington in the past. I never approved of him as Torrence Dilgin's personal attorney. I did not send Dilgin to him; nor did I send the other clients. I can see why Dorrington suspected me of so doing, for as a corporation lawyer, I have contacts with many big men of industry. But Dorrington was wrong.

"All I ever did against Dorrington was to instruct my man Morgan to keep an eye on him while I was in Rio. I doubt that Morgan did so. Morgan is somewhat incompetent. Moreover, he thinks that I am dead."

THE KEY

Preliminaries ended, Berlett resumed with a more steady tone. His voice came without interruption. Hushed listeners were swayed by the persuasive words of a story that was fully as convincing despite its incredible features as those which had been told before.

"In Rio," stated Berlett, "I was present at the death bed of Torrence Dilgin. The old man gasped words about a key. He named the sum of one million dollars. He tried to state the identity of a living person. He failed.

"Before leaving Rio, two Brazilians one an attorney, the other a physician told me that they feared Torrence Dilgin had been poisoned. They suspected Warren Sigler, the secretary, as the murderer. I decided to feign ignorance. In fact, I did everything I could to make Sigler feel that I was not concerned.

"I arranged prompt shipment of the body. I avoided embalming, for I wanted an autopsy when I reached New York. I thought that I could trap Warren Sigler here not in Brazil and in that way bring the matter to a rapid head."

BERLETT paused. As he came to the next portion of his story, he seemed to be picturing scenes aboard the Southern Star. At last, he faced the eyes that scanned him.

"In Pernambuco," related Berlett, "I found a note in my cabin. It warned me that Warren Sigler intended to murder me; that thugs were coming aboard the ship, to do their evil work outside the harbor. The note told me how I could avoid death. I was to rouse Sigler's suspicions the man had never trusted me by meeting the writer in my cabin. There, I was to discuss Sigler as a murderer.

"I went to the cabin. I met the writer of the note, a man who called himself Carlos Mendoza. Sigler had hidden himself in the cabin – his method was crude and he overheard all that was said. When the Southern Star left Pernambuco harbor, I went back in the pilot ship. Mendoza had arranged the ruse.

"Sigler and his thugs were beaten in their fight. I came on to New York, by plane, still following Mendoza's instructions. When I arrived at the Hotel Goliath, under the name of Edmund Talbot, I received a call from a man named Burbank, who was evidently an agent of Mendoza.

"Burbank told me all would be well. He had men watching me, to see that I was safe. I knew that Mendoza would somehow arrive in New York. Burbank assured me of that fact. I knew that Sigler had been in the employ of some swindler who had duped Torrence Dilgin. Therefore, I still needed protection.

"Meanwhile, lawyers were slain two of them while my benefactor, Carlos Mendoza, was still aboard the Southern Star. Just before the third death, Burbank informed me that Mendoza had reached New York; that soon, I would be called upon to play a part in return for the aid that had been given me.

"To–night, the opportunity arrived. Burbank instructed me how to leave the Hotel Goliath. He told me how to avoid pursuers; he even stated that one of Mendoza's men would make sure of my safe departure. He also told me where to go along a strange path that Carlos Mendoza had arranged for me.

"To–night" Berlett paused emphatically "I entered the home of Kelwood Markin, by coming through the trapdoor in the roof. I descended to Markin's living room. I lay behind the curtains of the window. I saw all that took place within that room."

A hush; then a sudden statement from old Kelwood Markin. The gray–haired lawyer was seizing upon Berlett's words to make a new thrust.

"He must have seen Dorrington "

THE KEY

"Berlett placed the death machine." It was Dorrington who spoke. "This sounds like a confession "

"Let him speak!" thundered Weston.

"I saw George Tharxell produce that device that lies upon the table," stated Berlett, simply. "I saw him return without it. Lester Dorrington is innocent!"

EYES toward Tharxell. The man was quivering. Edwin Berlett's tones began again.

"Through Carlos Mendoza," declared the third accuser, "I learned the truth concerning crime. Mendoza pieced the riddle. I am but his spokesman; He is the one who saw through the cunning game.

"A master schemer planned gigantic swindles. He spoke to millionaires. He showed them how through his device they could avoid inheritance taxes. Each gave the schemer a large sum Dilgin's contribution was a million and he in turn sent each man to a duped lawyer. Those poor chaps held the keys, to boxes already empty. For the crook kept their money for himself.

"He had the millionaires go to Lester Dorrington as the lawyer to handle their estates. Dorrington knew none of the men who held the keys. Thus conspiracy was avoided. The vicious schemer, however, chose Dorrington with a purpose. He knew that in emergency, he could sign up some killer whom Dorrington had represented for instance, Whitey Calban to slay the lawyers who held the keys.

"How was he to protect himself? There lay the deepest measure of his cunning. By naming himself as an extra dupe. By pretending that he, too, had been approached by a wealthy man whose estate had been handled by Lester Dorrington. He, like his victims Verbeck, Durton, Keith was ready to hold up a key and cry for pity!"

No name was needed. The accusing words told the final story. All eyes turned toward Kelwood Markin.

The old lawyer's face was purple. With clawlike hands upon the arms of his chair, he was trying to rise while his lips sputtered vain epithets.

"It fits!" exclaimed Dorrington, leaping to his feet. "Berlett is right! Markin never received a key from Rufus Gilwood! I remember now – I had known Gilwood slightly before he came to me to make his will. He was not one of the mystery clients."

"You did well, Dorrington," commented Berlett, from the door. "Markin failed to pin the murders on you. That is why he had Tharxell plant the mechanism in the fire place."

"Tharxell called up so we'd stop the gas," broke in Cardona, suddenly. "The game is up, commissioner. We've got our man "

As Cardona pounced toward Markin, the old lawyer leaped to his feet. He yanked a revolver from his pocket with amazing speed. Wildly, he aimed toward the man whom he had come to hate the most Edwin Berlett.

Caught off guard, Berlett responded as quickly as he could. He reached for his own gun, but his action was belated. Markin's aim was ready as Berlett's hand came in view. To those who watched, Berlett seemed doomed to the death that he had escaped.

THEN came an unexpected roar. An automatic flashed from the darkness beyond the opened door. A whistling bullet, aimed past Berlett's arm, found its mark. That shot spilled Kelwood Markin on the floor.

THE KEY

Writhing, the unmasked fiend coughed out his evil life.

With that shot came the weird rise of a taunting laugh. The triumph of The Shadow sounded through the paneled room. As Tharxell, yanking a gun, was beating Cardona to a shot, a second roar was followed by a cry from the man who had aided Markin. Tharxell's arm dropped while the laugh broke into its high crescendo.

As Howland also yanked a revolver, the smoking muzzle of the automatic turned straight toward the secretary. The third shot, however, was unnecessary. As The Shadow's laugh produced its shivering echoes, Cardona pounced upon Howland before the man could gain an aim.

As Edwin Berlett stepped inward, the men on their feet were staring toward the door. They saw nothing more than blackness. A gloved hand was dropping the automatic beneath the folds of a cloak. A swishing form was already making its departure. The Shadow had spoken with bullets.

Joe Cardona understood. He knew why Markin's schemes had failed. The old man had told Calban to tip off his gorillas with the false story regarding Dorrington. Scramming, Calban would have left the others for the dragnet.

It was The Shadow who had spoiled that scheme. He had begun the fight that had ended in the wiping out of Calban's mob. Again, he had spoiled Markin's last bet by placing Edwin Berlett as the witness of the old fiend's final scheme of treachery.

JOE CARDONA knew that Edwin Berlett's incredible story must be true. For Joe knew the identity of the personage who had worked as Carlos Mendoza. The Shadow! His uncanny power; his mighty hand these had brought justice as the final outcome.

Tharxell and Howland, pitiful tools who had known but shreds of Markin's game, were blurting out their stories. Tharxell had formed contact with Whitey Calban. He had carried orders to the killer.

Howland confessed a knowledge of the swindles. Berlett and Dorrington smiled in grim satisfaction as the secretary stated that Markin, a miserly hoarder, had stowed away the funds that he had gained. The keys to deposit boxes that Howland kept in the study would open the old fiend's hidden coffers.

A million would be gained to save the Dilgin Refining Corporation. Edwin Berlett and Lester Dorrington, friends at the finish, could arrange the financial aid that the great company required.

But these discoveries were mere words to Acting Inspector Joe Cardona. The star sleuth was finding answers to his mental questions. He could picture The Shadow listening in at Markin's, finding a clue to crime as he heard the statements of the cunning fiend.

Murders had struck while The Shadow was absent. Another crime had succeeded through the victim's own blunder. These had been triumphs for the insidious schemer, Kelwood Markin; but the final victory had been The Shadow's.

As he stared at the dead form of the fiend before him, Joe Cardona could still hear echoes of The Shadow's laugh. Whispers of triumphant mirth still seemed to linger as tokens of the vanished conqueror.

Righteous men had been cleared of suspicion. Millions would be restored to their proper owners. A murderous monster had perished. Justice had prevailed through The Shadow!

THE END