

THE MURDER MASTER

Maxwell Grant

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THE MURDER MASTER

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CHAPTER I. THE MURDER MASTER

STATION WQJ was on the air. Its waves were spreading through the ether, seeking the favor of a vast audience that ignored it. Few radio listeners had ever heard of WQJ. Their dials were tuned for larger and more popular stations; particularly at this hour – eight in the evening – when national networks were parading their best-liked programs.

Those millions who scorned station WQJ were to miss the most sensational radio mystery that had ever been staged. Real tragedy, not the mock variety, was on the air tonight.

One group of listeners was interested in the program from WQJ, although they had not been forewarned regarding its real significance. That group was gathered in a small, well-furnished office that formed part of an apartment. They were the guests of New York's police commissioner, Ralph Weston.

The commissioner, a brisk man with a military mustache, was still explaining matters to his friends, while a voice from the radio was filling in with a drab announcement of the program. Beside the radio set was a stocky, swarthy man who was trying to hear the announcer over Commissioner Weston's voice. The swarthy

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man was Joe Cardona, ace inspector of the New York police force.

"It's a new kind of mystery drama," stated Weston. "This letter" – he showed a typewritten sheet – "suggested that we listen in. Apparently, the program has some features that give new slants on crime detection. That ought to interest you, Graham."

The man that Weston addressed was a tall, aristocratic individual, whose high nose supported gold-rimmed spectacles in front of his mild gray eyes. Faultless in attire, Melvin Graham was quite the most distinguished looking person in the group, not excluding the police commissioner. The smile that Graham gave was indulgent, but well-mannered.

"I am interested in crime elimination, commissioner," observed Graham, his voice a modulated baritone. "Once it is accomplished, crime detection will be a secondary matter. Reform, not reprisal, is the way to deal with criminals."

Weston didn't agree; but there was no time to argue it. Cardona motioned that the announcer was about to say something important. Commissioner Weston shrugged his shoulders and turned toward the radio. As his eyes took a last flash at the group, he muttered:

"I wonder why Allard didn't get here."

The commissioner had reference to Kent Allard, a friend of his who had a strong liking for adventure. Weston had called the Cobalt Club, which they both belonged, to invite Allard to join the group tonight. Allard had not been there, so Weston had left a message for him. With another shrug, Weston decided that the message must have been overlooked or delayed.

At that particular moment, the police commissioner held the opinion that Allard wouldn't be missing anything of consequence. Weston was due to change that impression within the next few minutes.

The announcer's voice had come at last to a dramatic pitch. With a sudden gusto, it declared:

"WQJ presents – the Murder Master!"

There was a blare of music from a tinny orchestra. It took a peculiar discord; faded out. Cardona was thumbing the dials; the program seemed to be cut off. It came back again, but the music had changed.

The orchestra must have added a few members, or changed entirely, for its tone was much improved. So was the theme. There was a grip to the haunting tune that strained from the ether. It brought creeps, even to this group of blase listeners. The music swelled; finished with a sharp blare that echoed with the crash of cymbals.

A voice took the air. It was cackly, incoherent, like the babble of a self-satisfied maniac. Its words gained a chuckling tone, direct and insidious. That voice from the void was speaking directly to this audience. Its words were addressed specifically to one man present: Commissioner Ralph Weston!

"DO you hear me, commissioner?" The cackle was frenzied. So was the crazed laugh that followed it. "Yes – you hear me. You shall remember me! I am the Murder Master!"

A lull brought gasps from the listening group. Weston looked toward Cardona; the inspector's poker face was grim. Beside the commissioner, Melvin Graham gripped the arms of his chair. There was horror in the pale eyes that peered through the reformer's gold-rimmed spectacles.

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"I am the Murder Master!" The chuckle from the radio was a forced monotone. "I decree death! It shall strike within five minutes. The victim – a lawyer. His name" – the pause was the space of a long–drawn breath – "his name is Richard Hyvran!"

Weston had heard that name; he couldn't place it for the moment. He looked toward Graham, who nodded. He, also, had a recollection of a man named Richard Hyvran. It was hard to place thoughts, though, under that strain, for the Murder Master had resumed his insidious chortle and was holding it prolonged.

It was Joe Cardona who had the right idea. He was grabbing telephone directories from atop the radio cabinet. He shoved the Manhattan book to Weston; tossed another, at random, to Graham. With a third book for himself, Cardona thumbed the pages to find the letter "H." Weston and Graham started the same process.

It was Cardona who found the name of Richard Hyvran; it was in the Queens directory, which the inspector had chanced to keep. Pouncing for the telephone, Cardona began to dial the lawyer's number. By odd coincidence, the Murder Master's voice spoke fitting words from the radio.

"Efforts to save Hyvran will fail," gloated the voice. "He is marked to die! Marked!" The words rose shrill. "Marked, I tell you! It is I who have marked him – I, the Murder Master!"

Cardona received an answer to his phone call. There was only a faint crackle of static from the radio. Everyone in the room was intent upon Cardona. His end of the conversation told everything.

"Hello..." Joe was gruff, but rapid. "I want to talk to Richard Hyvran. I'm Inspector Cardona, of the New York police... Yes, it's very urgent... Still time to reach him? Good... Yes, summon him at once..."

The inspector's grim face relaxed into a smile. Holding the telephone away from his ear, Cardona faced the group. He gestured toward the radio, where the subdued half–chuckle of the Murder Master had resumed.

"We'll soon have a line on that hoax," expressed Cardona. "I just talked to Hyvran's butler. Just in time to catch Hyvran before he left. He's started out to the garage to get his car. The butler is calling him –"

A sound interrupted. It didn't come from the radio; instead, the telephone produced it: a splitting crackle that vibrated the instrument in Cardona's hand. Faint echoes rattled from the receiver. They were audible to every person in that room. Cardona, with the telephone in his own fist, showed a look that told he recognized the sound. He shouted into the mouthpiece.

The Murder Master had resumed his cackle. Again, it was that crazed incoherence; but the babble was toned with satisfaction. The words took sense, but the listeners scarcely noticed them. Cardona was getting an answer from the telephone.

The inspector's features froze. Stolidly, Cardona replaced the telephone on the desk. He turned to the anxious group.

"The butler didn't get to the garage," Cardona told them, solemnly. "That sound we heard was an explosion. The butler says the blast wrecked the garage. All that he saw in the flash were chunks of an automobile, flying everywhere."

"And Richard Hyvran?"

It was Weston who shot the question. Cardona slowly shook his head. He answered:

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"The butler says there's only one place that Hyvran could have been. That was in the automobile!"

NEWS of grim tragedy awed the listeners. There was to be no rest, though, for their jarred nerves. A voice was rising in that very room – the chortle of the Murder Master gloating its satisfaction over the air.

"Five minutes have ended!" The glee was high-pitched. "My prediction of death has been fulfilled! Richard Hyvran was doomed, as I declared!" A chuckle; then the question: "Do you hear me, commissioner? Do you believe me? You do! Very, very good!"

The frenzied laugh descended the scale, a full octave. Dryly, the voice resumed its words, at lower pitch. It repeated its reminder of accomplished murder, and in its harsh cackle the tone earned the ominous impression that it intended another prophecy.

"Five minutes have marked the death of Richard Hyvran." The gloat was ugly; contemptuous in its satisfaction. "Five minutes is but a fraction of our program. Shall we have another murder? Why not? I am the Murder Master!"

The voice scaled its chortle upward, shrilling to its former frenzy. It shrieked with new prediction:

"Another five minutes! Within that time, another murder! One that you cannot prevent, commissioner, though I shall name the man – likewise, the place where he shall die!"

Static crackled with the glee that furred from the radio. Slumped men sat helpless; chief among them was Commissioner Ralph Weston. He, the commander of the law's entire force, was most powerless of all.

The proof of the Murder Master's strength had been established. Weston could do no more than listen, until the fiend's new croak pronounced another stroke of doom.

CHAPTER II. DEATH IN THE CROWD

BRIEF seconds lingered; the pause was torture for the listeners, especially Joe Cardona. The ace inspector hadn't yet admitted the cause impossible. Cardona thought there would still be time to avert another killing, if the Murder Master would hurry with his promised decree.

Moments were precious, since five minutes were to be the time limit.

The murderous cluck came from the air:

"My second victim is a retired manufacturer! His name is Justin Palbrock! His place of death" – the cackling voice delayed, enjoying a malicious pleasure – "the Pennsylvania Station!"

Justin Palbrock!

All the listeners knew that name. Palbrock was wealthy; he had spent large sums in civic welfare; he had championed the building of low-rental apartments, to replace slummy tenements. Hyvran, perhaps, had made enemies; certainly Palbrock had not.

Those thoughts were striking Commissioner Weston; but Joe Cardona's mind was centered elsewhere. He was thinking of the Pennsylvania Station, a huge haystack in which to find a human needle. It was a place, though, where things could be started in a hurry and finished in short order.

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Five minutes! Cardona set his lips as his finger hurried the telephone dial. Maybe it would be time enough.

In less than one minute, Cardona had the railway station on the wire and was talking to the man he needed. All the while, the Murder Master was gloating over the radio.

Weston turned the dial down, so Cardona could talk. But the commissioner didn't turn the program entirely off. There was no telling what gruesome clues might suddenly come from the Murder Master. That killer seemed to think he could spread his cards so everyone could see them, and still win.

"The ball's rolling," assured Cardona, as he finished his phone call. "It won't take them long to locate Palbrock at the Pennsy Station, if he's there."

"There are only five minutes –"

"That's more than enough, commissioner. There'll be a report back before that time is up. Leave it to them; they'll handle it!"

Confident in his statement, Cardona tuned the radio to hear the full tone of the Murder Master's voice. This time – Joe was sure of it – death would be foiled. Justin Palbrock would receive protection that could defeat the murderer's swiftness.

EVENTS at the Pennsylvania Station seemed to be justifying Cardona's belief.

A human voice, amplified dozens of times its normal strength, was calling a stentorian summons over a loudspeaker. That impressive announcement reached every nook of the vast terminal. Hundreds of persons halted, riveted by its call.

"Justin Palbrock!" The name came clear from the loudspeaker. "Justin Palbrock! Wherever you are, declare yourself to the nearest uniformed attendant! Justin Palbrock! This is urgent! Make yourself known at once! To any attendant in the station –"

Cardona had started action at precisely five and a half minutes after eight. The big clocks in the huge terminal showed eight minutes past the hour. Cardona's headwork had clipped into the five minutes that the Murder Master had allowed.

A rangy, gray-haired man was standing at a telegraph booth, while a porter waited, holding a heavy suitcase. The man had just arrived on a train from Washington. He had come directly to the booth to write the telegram.

There were usually pencils at that counter. Tonight, there was a shortage. The rangy man had found a pencil in his own pocket. The lead was hard; he was chewing the end of it, as he paused between the words he wrote.

"Justin Palbrock!"

The rangy man snapped his head upward, as he realized that his own name was issuing from the loudspeaker. The big-throated voice had an impelling tone:

"You are in danger, Justin Palbrock! Declare yourself at once! To a uniformed attendant only. This order comes from police headquarters! Justin Palbrock –"

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Mechanically, Palbrock let the telegraph blank flutter. His hand shoved the pencil in his pocket. He stared at the waiting porter; he wondered whether the redcap rated as an attendant. He looked toward the information booth in the center of the concourse. There were several attendants there.

Palbrock hurried toward the booth. He quickened his step as the resonant tone from the loudspeaker began to repeat his name. As he hastened, Palbrock winced. He had to halt; a sudden pain had gripped him at the side of the stomach.

After a momentary waver, Palbrock resumed his course. He stretched his hand toward the information booth. An attendant saw the gesture; sensing something wrong, he beckoned to some passing redcaps. They came on the run.

Palbrock's hands were clutching the edge of the booth's counter. The attendant saw a face that had gone suddenly haggard. Eyes were bulging; lips looked bloated, puffy, as they gasped.

"I'm – I'm Justin Palbrock!"

Hands slipped. The attendant made a futile grab for them. Scrambling redcaps arrived to catch Palbrock's slumping body before it hit the floor. There were three of them, yet the weight was all that they could manage. The man in the booth knew the reason, when Palbrock's head rolled backward.

The haggard face was ashen. Bulging eyes had glazed. Foam flecked those puffed lips. The attendant gulped one word

"Dead!"

The long hand of a huge terminal clock was marking the ninth minute past the hour.

THIRTY seconds later, Joe Cardona was taking the report by telephone. He turned to Weston, Graham and the others of the gloomy group. They knew from Cardona's expression that new doom had struck.

"They paged Palbrock in the Pennsy Station." Cardona's glum announcement was given to the accompaniment of a tuned-down chuckling from the radio. "Right after that, a man collapsed at the information booth. They don't know for sure yet, but they think it's Palbrock. They say it looks as if he's dead."

There was a trace of vaguely hopeful doubt in Cardona's statement, but there was none in the harsh ripple that rose from the radio. The tenth minute had ended. It was time for the Murder Master to cluck new evil triumph.

Commissioner Weston turned the knob, to bring the mysterious speaker's voice to its full pitch. Much though he hated it, the commissioner could not ignore the Murder Master. With two men mysteriously assassinated, the only clue to the man who ordained death would be the memory of that voice from the ether. Commissioner Weston urged his companions to listen to every peculiarity of tone.

"Five minutes have marked the death of Justin Palbrock!" The evil confidence of the Murder Master dispelled Cardona's last hope to the contrary: "Our time on the air" – the voice was precise – "is not yet ended! For your entertainment, commissioner, I shall decree another death! Again, it shall strike within five minutes!"

Moments seemed endless; yet only a few seconds lapsed before the next pronouncement.

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"The victim – a politician!"

Quick looks passed between Weston and Cardona. This might be someone known personally to both of them.

"His name – Frank Denniman!"

They did know Denniman. "Big Frank," a friend to every cop in town. One fellow who had gained his influence through good will. To Frank Denniman, politics was a game, and he always played it square.

"The place – the Metrolite Hotel!" The Murder Master paused; then added another detail. "To be specific, Frank Denniman will lie dead outside the hotel's main entrance. Within five minutes!"

Mumbled laughter followed. Again the Murder Master was filling time while the law sprang to futile effort. Cardona was at the telephone, calling the Metrolite. Joe was assuring the commissioner that he would have doormen, bellboys, house detectives flocking to the space outside the Metrolite before the precious five minutes were half gone.

To Commissioner Weston, that promise meant nothing.

Weston was resigned to the belief that Denniman's death was a certainty. Looking further, the commissioner groaned with the conviction that the Murder Master, himself, was out of reach. The program, Weston remembered, was a fifteen-minute one. That, at least, indicated that the chain of death would soon be finished.

But what of the future? Who could cope with a monstrous fiend like this killer, whose cackled laugh reeked with malicious pride in his own security? That high pitch from the radio was proof that the Murder Master regarded himself immune. If the law could take no steps against him, who else could?

Commissioner Weston was too strained to think of an answer to his own mental question; but there was one. Already, a friend of justice was taking measures to combat the Murder Master before the superfiend could leave the studio where he issued his decrees of doom.

The Shadow, foe to all who dealt in crime, was nearing a swift-chosen destination.

That goal was the obscure radio station, WQJ.

CHAPTER III. THE LAST DECREE

COMMISSIONER WESTON had mentioned his friend, Kent Allard. Though Weston did not know it, Kent Allard was The Shadow. (Note: See "The Shadow Unmasks," Vol. XXII, No.5.) That was something, too, that the Murder Master had not guessed. He would probably have given his broadcast a different twist, had he known that The Shadow had been invited to Weston's apartment to hear the mystery broadcast.

Luck had favored the Murder Master. Weston's message to Allard had been temporarily forgotten by a negligent clerk at the Cobalt Club. The fellow hadn't remembered it until just before eight o'clock. Finding a note that Allard was visiting a friend in New Jersey, the clerk had phoned the message there.

The Shadow's intuition was acute. He had sensed the ominous in the request that Commissioner Weston listen in on the program from WQJ. It couldn't be a publicity stunt; in that case, the commissioner would have been invited to the studio. A hoax was out of the question. WQJ couldn't risk its license with a proposition of that sort.

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Something definite lay at stake. That was why Kent Allard had started at once for New York.

Allard's big limousine had reached the Skyway leading to the Holland Tunnel when the program began. While the chauffeur kept the car at the top speed the law allowed, Allard was tuning in on the limousine's radio. His long, hawk-featured face was immobile in the tiny light of the dial. Keen ears heard every tone of the Murder Master's threats.

Allard's eyes, usually quiet in their gaze, had taken on a strange, far-seeing burn.

They were the eyes of The Shadow.

Hyvran was dead. So was Palbrock. The Shadow took those deaths as certainties, when he heard the Murder Master's chuckles. The very confidence of the evil voice proved that those murders had been prearranged, so cunningly that nothing could avert them in the brief periods that the Murder Master allowed.

The limousine was almost through the Holland Tunnel, when The Shadow heard the announcement of Denniman's doom. There wasn't a chance that it could be halted, even by The Shadow. The Murder Master's insidious gloat was still audible, despite the poor reception of the radio while the limousine roared up the incline leading from the river tunnel.

OUTSIDE the Hotel Metrolite, at that very moment, hastily called men were learning that their efforts were too late. They were on the sidewalk, looking anxiously about, one minute after they had received Cardona's call. They saw a taxi swing up to the curb.

Large hands were on the ledge of the door window; a broad face was pressed against the glass, the head above it hatless. Before the driver could reach out to open the rear door, a hotel detective sprang to do it for him. The door whipped open; the bully passenger pitched headlong to the sidewalk.

Eager hands raised the body. A policeman, pressing through the throng, saw the face and gulped:

"It's Big Frank! Big Frank Denniman! Dead!"

The group stood silent, for five stunned seconds. Then a house dick made a sudden dash into the hotel to give the news to Joe Cardona, who was holding the wire open.

The clock above the hotel desk pointed to thirteen minutes after eight.

DOWN near the tip of Manhattan, The Shadow's limousine was making its final spurt along a cross-town street. The passenger was no longer Allard. Every trace of his tuxedoed figure had disappeared. From beneath the seat, The Shadow had pulled out a drawerlike shelf that contained garments of black. He was attired in long cloak, a slouch hat on his head. His hands were gloved.

The limousine slid to a stop beside a dingy, six-story building where lights glowed on the top floor only. To The Shadow, those lights were a beacon. They marked the location of the broadcasting rooms used by station WQJ.

With his left hand, The Shadow cut off the car radio, stopping the chortle of the Murder Master as it rose to the high pitch that predicted a new announcement.

Simultaneously, The Shadow opened the door with his other hand. He was out of the limousine. Swiftly, unseen, he crossed the sidewalk as the big car started away. Reaching the darkened entry to the building, The

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Shadow glimmered a flashlight on the door of an elevator shaft.

The dial showed that the elevator was at the sixth floor, and The Shadow decided immediately that it must be out of use. Lights were off in this lower entry; that was sufficient proof that something had gone wrong. The Shadow's flashlight showed a stairway – the only available route to the sixth floor.

The Shadow began the long ascent. He had one minute to spare before WQJ went off the air.

BECAUSE of his effort to reach the studio in that last minute, The Shadow was unable to hear the finish of the Murder Master's program. That climax was reserved for the group assembled at Weston's.

Amid the glee of the Murder Master, Joe Cardona was repeating facts that came across the telephone from the Hotel Metrolite. Denniman was dead, like Hyvran and Palbrock. The cab driver was being questioned, but the fellow was too overwhelmed to give any details. It appeared he didn't know what had happened to his passenger.

That seemed proven by the announcement that came suddenly from the Murder Master.

"Five minutes have marked the death of Frank Denniman," croaked the voice. "A third mystery to baffle you, commissioner! Perhaps" – the tone had a bitter ugliness – "you regret, as I do, that this program is finished.

"More time – more deaths! More deaths – more clues!" The laugh went high. "Clues? There will be none, commissioner! Unless, perhaps, a final death will serve! Very well, we shall have one, as a fitting sequel!"

Cardona wasn't listening. For the first time, his own folly had struck him. He'd wasted fifteen minute trying frantically to halt three sure-fire murders, and, all the while, he'd missed the biggest bet of all. That was the quest of the murderer himself.

Cardona would have given plenty to have that quarter hour back again. He knew what he would do with it. He would head hotfoot for WQJ, to snag the killer in that lair. It wasn't too late to try it, anyway. Cardona was dialing the operator, to get headquarters on the wire, to start police squads on their chase.

The hoarse orders that Cardona shouted were brisk but adequate. Soon, patrol cars would arrive downtown. The law would form a cordon. Maybe the nest would be empty. Cardona would find out for himself, when he reached there.

Slamming the telephone on the desk, the ace inspector grabbed for his hat. He halted before he reached the door.

Cardona had seen the tense expression on the faces of the listeners. They were clustered close about the radio, with Weston and Graham in the center of the group. They were straining to catch the last falsetto pronouncement from the Murder Master. Only fifteen seconds left; that quarter minute was to prove as vital as the quarter hour that had just gone by.

In those fifteen seconds, Joe Cardona was to realize the value of the quick orders that he had just dispatched to headquarters.

"One more death!"

The precise chuckle over the radio repeated the promise that Cardona had failed to hear.

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"This time," came the gloat, "I shall name the place first! Murder will occur here, in this very studio!"

A PAUSE, so timed that it had a terrific effect upon the craning listeners. It was almost as if the Murder Master were present, the way he held the attention of the group. This was no aftermath; it was a superclimax. Those tragedies that had gone before were a build-up to this monstrous, sensational finish.

Everyone present knew it; Joe Cardona was so powerfully gripped that he couldn't budge beyond the door until he heard that final sentence. It didn't occur to him that the threat itself made it all the more imperative for him to be on his way. He had to listen to that last pronouncement. Like the others, Cardona was oblivious to all else.

"The scene is set," voiced the Murder Master. "The victim will be —"

A gong struck. That reverberation over the ether indicated a studio signal, announcing that the program's time was up. It seemed that the Murder Master heard it, for he halted. The listeners thought, for the instant, that he would not complete his sentence.

Then came the cackle once again, its tone determined. Despite the signal, the speaker was snatching a last few seconds in which to complete his ominous decree. Defiantly, the Murder Master croaked:

"The victim will be the meddler who calls himself The Shadow!"

The name was uttered with a rising pitch, that broke into a screechy jubilation. The hideous laugh trilled, blended with a sudden crackle of static. Then came the blot of an abrupt silence.

That hush solemnized the Murder Master's decree.

Station WQJ was off the air.

CHAPTER IV. LURKERS OF DEATH

SILENCE gripped the sixth floor; with it, darkness. The entire studio was blanketed with a gloom that had occurred within the past few dozen seconds. Two minutes ago; The Shadow had heard the air-cast voice of the Murder Master. He had seen lights in this very studio. The voice had silenced, the lights had faded while The Shadow was on the stairs.

The situation offered no surprise. The Shadow had more or less expected it. It was logical that the Murder Master would have called for lights off the moment that the broadcast was concluded. Unquestionably, the killer-chief had aids. Darkness would help their departure. Probably they would take precautions when they fled. That did not trouble The Shadow.

As The Shadow considered it, the odds were all in his favor. He had arrived at the most timely moment, when crooks would think that they had gained security. Darkness had produced the situation that he liked best. Gloom was the favorite shroud in which The Shadow moved to his attacks on crime.

So natural was this sequel that The Shadow failed to sense the trap that it concealed. The subtle Murder Master had called for The Shadow's own element, darkness, to make a perfect lure. In delivering other deaths, the Murder Master had left little to chance. This time, he was risking more; nevertheless, he had provided death that was prearranged.

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The murderer had calculated that The Shadow would start for the studio while the broadcast was still in progress. He had estimated The Shadow would arrive near the finish of the program. Where the murderer had seemingly taken a long chance was when he had added that final threat. Had The Shadow still been in his car, had he reached the sixth floor a half minute sooner, he would have been prepared for a direct thrust of doom.

Curiously, the radio broadcast itself bore proof that the Murder Master had not left that detail to chance.

The gong, had the Murder Master wished it, could have meant the cut-off of the program without the addition of The Shadow's name. The reason that it had gone through completely was because The Shadow's big car had been spotted – not from the studio, but by a watcher in a house on the other side of the street.

The Murder Master had foreseen that The Shadow would be the first comer to reach the studio. The time element had suited the watcher, even though he had not spied The Shadow's blackened form. Therefore, the complete threat had been delivered.

Moving through the darkness of the sixth floor, The Shadow heard muffled pounding. He discerned white faces pressing against glass. They were the personnel of the office, locked in an unused broadcasting room.

Easing along the wall, The Shadow found another panel of glass. This was the darkened room he wanted – the one that the Murder Master's crew had take over for their own insidious program.

THE door opened silently under The Shadow's grip. He came into the stillness of a soundproof room. He blinked his flashlight warily along the floor, keeping its rays well controlled. In his other fist, The Shadow gripped an automatic.

The broadcasting room was empty. No one had left it by the main door. There was only one plausible answer: Exit had been managed through the control room on the other side.

Working in that direction, The Shadow eased past a microphone. His flashlight revealed other equipment among tangled wires. Familiar with methods that he himself had used in broadcasts, The Shadow decided that the Murder Master had not spoken from this room at all. Instead, his voice had been piped in from elsewhere.

That meant that a meeting with the supercrook would have to be postponed. The discovery, however, changed none of The Shadow's determination. The quest was still important, for others must be lurking here. Those tools of the Murder Master would be the persons through whom The Shadow could locate their evil chief.

There was an element in the situation that The Shadow missed.

Proof of the Murder Master's absence made the present quest seem easier. Instinctively, The Shadow increased his progress. He had less need of caution, dealing with hirelings, than if he actually had to encounter a foe so crafty as the Murder Master.

That made the coming trap a surer one.

It was an odd case, this venture of The Shadow's; different from any that he had previously encountered. Though WQJ was an insignificant station, there were a few thousand scattered listeners who had heard the Murder Master's frenzied broadcast.

Every one of those persons – with a single exception – had been horrified by the final utterance. The lone person who had missed that promise of an added murder was the one for whom the death was designed: The

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Shadow!

The master who hunted down crime was thrusting himself into the snare that the Murder Master had not only provided, but had announced to all the world – except The Shadow!

The door of the control room swung open; its hinges were noiseless. The slight click of the knob was almost inaudible, so trivial that The Shadow thought that no one could have heard it but himself. He thought the same when he closed the door behind him. The latch seemed to muffle the knob's click.

That latch was a give-away of The Shadow's moves. The socket in which it fitted had been wired. The opening of the door broke a contact, that resumed when the door was closed. Lurkers knew that The Shadow had reached the control room, was ready to move through it. They did as ordered.

A light came on suddenly from a corridor. At the far end of the control room, The Shadow saw an opened door; beyond it, two men huddled and masked. They were trying to shove a large square box into a waiting elevator that would take them down to the ground floor, away from the entry through which The Shadow had come.

Dragging after the box was a long, heavy-insulated wire, coiled so snakily that it looked loose. One man was reaching, as if to gather it. The move deceived The Shadow. He hissed a fierce command, as he took a long surge across the control room. The Shadow wanted to reach that far door, threaten the two masked men into terror before they could enter the elevator.

THREE seconds were all The Shadow needed; that wasn't long enough for the rogues to recover from their startlement in seeing the cloaked avenger looming upon them. It was time enough, though, for one of the crooks to perform an intended move. The fellow snapped a switch on the side of the square box.

At the same instant, The Shadow took a half sprawl, that would have been unlucky on any other occasion. This time, it proved more fortunate than anything else he might have done. The object over which The Shadow stumbled was the rim of a steel plate, invisible on the darkened floor of the control room.

Tripping, The Shadow nearly cleared the steel plate, before he hit it on one hand and the other knee. His body still had momentum when he struck. But it wasn't cold metal on which The Shadow landed. The thug at the elevator had altered that when he pressed the box switch. The wire was connected to the plate.

There was a crackle, a flare of lights, as The Shadow's body took an upward jolt. Quivered by thousands of volts, the cloaked figure jerked upward, did a grotesque back-spin in the air. The Shadow had received a shock as powerful as the current used in an electric chair.

Dimming lights in the corridor told how the juice had been diverted. Flayed by the voltage, The Shadow was hurled bodily through the door, to end with a fantastic sprawl beside the masked men who had tricked him. Grins spread on ugly lips behind bandanna masks.

"It's The Shadow!" growled the man at the switch. "He fell for it, like the chief said he would. Say, did it hook him? I'll say it did!"

"He oughta have fried longer," objected the other. "We was supposed to let him sizzle a full minute, before we cut off the juice."

"Shove him back on again. We got time."

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The crook who had suggested it made a reach for The Shadow's shoulders. He became jittery when he looked at the box. He made a gesture toward the switch.

"Yank that off," he told his pal. "Whatta you want me to do? Burn, too? Say – we can't stall all night!"

The thug at the box threw the switch. He started to help his companion lift The Shadow. Both paused when they heard a faint, distant sound. It wouldn't have been audible in the soundproof control room; but in this outside corridor it could be heard. It worried the two lurkers, because it was the last thing they expected.

The sound was the wail of a police siren.

One tried to laugh it off, saying it was a fire engine. The other shook his head. He thought he could hear another shriek, from a different direction. For the first time, something had gone wrong with the Murder Master's plans.

The master of death had concentrated upon settling The Shadow. He hadn't figured that Joe Cardona would do anything about it until after the broadcast was completed. Cardona, though, had anticipated matters by two minutes or more. That time was just sufficient to save The Shadow from another jolt of electricity.

"He's croaked," assured the first crook, nodding his head at the cloaked form. Then, amending his statement: "He will be, anyway, when we're through with him. Shove him aboard."

THEY rolled the inert figure into the elevator. They yanked the heavy wire from its socket; hauled in the steel plate. The metal was still too hot to handle; the killers kicked the plate aboard the elevator and dragged the box in after them. The door clanged; the elevator rumbled downward.

Crooks were under a strain, but their grins still showed. They had reason for their satisfaction, as they gazed through the slits of their masks. Prone, motionless, The Shadow was dead, to all appearances. As the downward ride continued, the murderous men were becoming more convinced that the powerful shock had finished him.

Nobody could take a jolt like that and still live, one assured the other. His pal agreed. He'd seen a lineman take hold of a high-tension wire, a couple of years back. That fellow had been cooked by the time he hit the ground. The same with The Shadow. Once a guy was knocked stiff, he couldn't come out of it.

The elevator reached the basement level. The thugs opened the door; they heard new wails of sirens, as a third husky beckoned for them to hurry. Hoisting The Shadow, they chucked him into a darkened car that was parked in the alley. The equipment followed swiftly. The crooks piled aboard.

Lurkers of death were on their way, confident that they were carrying The Shadow's corpse as a trophy for the Murder Master.

CHAPTER V. THE LAW'S TURN

THE car that bore The Shadow had scarcely reached the front street before the driver spotted the lights of a police car. With a snarl, the driver changed the sedan's direction. He swung another corner in a hurry. The crook beside him turned around to see if the police were following. They were.

The third thug was crouched above The Shadow, pointing a revolver at the cloaked figure. The man beside the driver sped a quick hand to stop his pal's shot.

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"Hold it!" he snapped. "You gone screwy?"

"Whatta you mean?" was the rejoinder. "We're croaking The Shadow, ain't we? I'm making sure of it!"

"With the bulls almost on us? Lay off with that heater! Wait'll we clear, so's they won't hear us shoot."

These crooks weren't the only ones that scented trouble. In the next block, another pair came dashing from a house door, to pile into a coupe. The sedan's driver grunted.

"They're scrambling in a hurry," was his comment. "They should 'a' brought the machine along with them. Bad stuff, leaving it up there."

"It don't make no difference," objected the man beside him. "The chief won't care if the cops find out about the record. He said so. Only, he didn't figure they'd be tailing us like this."

"We'll shake 'em!"

The driver didn't keep that promise. He made a bad mistake at the end of the third block, when he turned right instead of left. The coupe went in the other direction; it slipped through the closing cordon. The sedan, though, was almost boxed when it crossed an avenue.

Police cars showed up from both directions. They guessed the sedan was in flight, because of its speed. They took up the chase that the first patrol car had lost.

It was a race through twisty streets – the driver fuming, the man in the back seat anxious to load The Shadow with lead, then open fire on the police. The one cool head was the fellow who sat on the driver's right. He had handled the switch on the electric box; he was showing the same quick thought that he had used in downing The Shadow.

"Keep dodging," he told the driver. Then, to the man in back: "No trigger work! We've got too much to lose!"

"Where's it getting us?" demanded the driver. "They're closing in from everywhere!"

"We're heading for the chief's. You can make it."

The driver shook his head.

"That'd be a give-away," he declared. "They'll box us there –"

"Sure – while we unload. But when we get started again, we can shoot it out! We won't be carrying anything that we won't want them to find."

Prospects of gun work brought the approval of the man in the rear seat. The plan was won by a vote of two to one – a plan which was to have much bearing on The Shadow's future, though neither he nor his captors recognized it.

THERE was no fakery in The Shadow's motionless condition. Had he possessed one trace of consciousness, he would have shown it during that twisty ride.

Shots were pursuing the sedan. Not one of its occupants offered battle in return. That helped them; for there were times, when they scudded corners, that other police would have marked them, had they shown a spurt of

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guns.

The driver doubled on his course, shook off pursuers long enough to make a straightaway run. He had reached the numbered streets when he took a quick turn to the left.

The sedan pulled along a narrow street, rolled into a little alley between two blank walls. The driver turned off the motor. He and his pals listened.

They could hear sirens, whistles, that indicated the police were circling this neighborhood. They lost no time with their task. The driver jumped from the car, hauled out the equipment. The other pair carried The Shadow.

They unlocked a door, moved through a passage. They had a key to another, stronger, barrier; beyond it, they reached a darkened room. The pair that lugged The Shadow eased him to the floor. The one who wanted to do the gun work growled that his chance had come. He met with double objection.

"Whatta you want to do?" snapped the self-appointed leader of the trio. "Queer the works? The Shadow's croaked, I tell you! Didn't you feel the weight of him?"

"Yeah. He's heavy, like a stiff. Only some lead would make him weigh more!"

"He don't need it. We don't want nobody hearing us in here. Get busy. Heave some of this junk."

The three moved tables and chairs. They found the center of the floor; lifted a trapdoor. Dank coldness issued from below. At a whispered word, two men assisted the third. They lowered The Shadow's body, then let go.

The thump that followed brought satisfied mumbles from the trio. It had a sound that indicated hard stone below. The trap went back in place; there was another shift of furniture.

The crooks stole out by the route they had used to enter. They reached their car; the driver backed it from the alley. A few minutes later, he was picking a cautious route, still trying to avoid the persistent sounds that told of circling police.

The sedan covered about a quarter mile before the driver could chance a run along an avenue. He'd hardly gotten under way, when a police whistle blew. The driver snarled that the cops had previously spotted the license number, were now looking for it. The man beside him said that didn't matter. They were through with this bus, anyway.

Whatever usefulness the car possessed was due to be ended with that chase. Police were already in the offing, firing as before. At last, the killers were free to blaze away.

They waged a fast battle as they sped northward. When the going became hot, the driver headed east. He was a block ahead of the pursuers; he saw a subway station. He didn't wait for the approval of his pals. He careened the car around the corner, jammed the brakes as it hit the curb.

The sedan did a half climb on a pair of house steps. Whipping off his mask, the driver sprang from the car and made for the subway. The two other thugs followed his example.

They were lucky in that dash. Not only were they gone when the police arrived; the three reached the subway just as a train pulled in. The change-maker saw them from his booth, but thought they were ordinary passengers trying to catch the train.

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It was five minutes before any officers arrived to ask questions. It was too late, then.

UP on the street, a grim man was examining the car that the mobsters had abandoned. Joe Cardona had received reports of the chase and had managed to get into it, although his car had been at the rear of the pursuers. The wrecked sedan showed cracked windows, where police bullets had hit; but there were no signs of bloodstains.

Two things were evident: The occupants had escaped unscathed; they certainly had not time to drag anyone with them. Nevertheless, from all reports, this was the only car that had left the building where station WQJ was located. There had been another machine – a coupe – but it had ducked in later and had ducked out again.

Cardona subtracted one from one, to make nothing.

The Murder Master had promised The Shadow's death, which indicated that he had held The Shadow, helpless, at the radio studio. But The Shadow hadn't been there when Cardona arrived. Joe had supposed, therefore, that he had been carried away in this car. The minus quantity in the case was The Shadow's own absence.

Usually, in a wild chase like this, The Shadow would move in from nowhere, to take his hand in it. Tonight, that hadn't happened. True, there were plenty of chases when The Shadow wasn't about. He didn't show up every time the law went after a handful of thugs. But this was one time – of all times – when Cardona had held a definite hunch that The Shadow would appear. That was why Joe Cardona retraced the whole course of the chase, following back to every spot where the sedan had been reported.

Cardona's car circled through many districts, stopping often, while accompanying detectives alighted to look for traces. That search seemed thorough; but it wasn't. It went bad in the very district where The Shadow had been dropped.

Reports from that sector were erroneous. Cardona's car didn't even go along the street where the fleeing thugs had made their brief halt in an alley. After an hour of futile search, Cardona found himself back at station WQJ.

Cardona had business there; for Commissioner Weston was on hand, quizzing the personnel of the radio station. Gloomily, Cardona went up in the elevator.

By the time he reached the sixth floor, Cardona had brightened. He figured he had seen through a bluff maneuvered by the Murder Master. Somehow, that hidden killer–chief must have known that The Shadow was busy elsewhere. Maybe the Murder Master had decoyed The Shadow out of town.

Nobody would take a chance, announcing by radio that he would trap The Shadow, then be so foolish as to attempt it. Subtracting one from one, Cardona decided upon his answer. The zero meant that The Shadow had not been here at all.

That, in turn, gave Cardona the opinion that he would hear from The Shadow, later. Joe was glad that the Murder Master had talked so big, across the air. That sort of stuff was the very type that would bring The Shadow on a criminal's trail. Confidently, Joe Cardona looked forward to The Shadow's prompt cooperation with the law.

The ace inspector would have lost that confidence – and more, besides – had he even guessed of The Shadow's present plight.

CHAPTER VI. BROKEN CLUES

THE next day marked steady investigations by the law. The police were seeking the Murder Master through his crimes; but each retraced trail – like Cardona's hunt for The Shadow – went astray.

In the case of Richard Hyvran, tiny pieces of wire were the threads that enabled the law to reconstruct how the lawyer had died.

Someone had planted a bomb in Hyvran's automobile, wiring it to the motor. When Hyvran had stepped on the starter, the car had instantly gone sky-high. That scheme, concocted by the Murder Master, had been almost certain of success.

Hyvran was the only person who ever used that car. He carried the only set of keys. He drove the car only in the evening, for he lived close to a Long Island Railroad station and commuted to and from the city. As for the fact that Hyvran intended to use that car at eight o'clock, nearly everyone who knew the lawyer could have supplied that information.

Once a week, Hyvran attended the meetings of a club composed of suburban business men. The meetings were held at eight-thirty. A man of punctuality, Hyvran always left his home at eight o'clock on those nights. His regularity was such that when he stopped at houses to pick up other friends, they knew almost to the minute when he would arrive.

The Murder Master had simply learned of Hyvran's schedule and had suited it to his own purposes. When the bomb was planted, no one could guess. The range of time ran from eleven o'clock the night before, until just before the explosion – a period of about twenty-one hours. No prowlers had been reported around Hyvran's home. That was no surprise, for the house was well obscured by hedges and the detached garage was never locked.

That, in substance, was all that Inspector Cardona could learn regarding the murder of Richard Hyvran.

The case of Justin Palbrock promised more; but it petered out in the same rapid fashion.

Palbrock had been poisoned. The pencil that he had used to write his telegram was tipped with a most virulent substance, as a chemical examination proved. The circumstances, however, that led up to Palbrock's death were so natural that they afforded no loophole.

Palbrock had made a trip to Washington, to discuss a legislative matter with some New York congressmen. The subject had involved costs of a government project in New York City. Palbrock had left the matter of costs an approximate one, until he talked with the congressmen. Since they had been favorable to the plan, Palbrock had spent most of his return trip working at a table in a Pullman car.

Someone must have filched Palbrock's pencil and planted the poisoned one in its place. Arrived in New York, that same person – or a waiting confederate – had walked off with the pencils at the telegraph booth. The wire that Palbrock was about to send had been a telegram to Washington, giving the complete estimates.

Unfortunately, none of the train personnel remembered any suspicious party watching Palbrock. The clerks at the telegraph booth had not observed the disappearance of the pencils. Both moves had been bold; but therein lay their perfection. Handled by a cool worker, they were the sort of actions that would not be noticed.

As for Palbrock's visit to Washington, it was a publicly known matter. Palbrock had told many persons that he was going to the capital; and that he would go into the matter of detailed figures after he had presented his

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plan. Since he was due back in New York for a nine–o'clock banquet, it was obvious that he would be on the train that arrived at eight o'clock.

The Murder Master had allowed five minutes for Palbrock to come up from the train and make his stop at the telegraph booth.

THE murder of Frank Denniman introduced a remarkable chain of consequences.

At eight o'clock, Big Frank had been playing pinochle in a political club near Seventy–second Street. That was Denniman's habit, seven nights a week, except when he had special appointments elsewhere.

Somebody had called saying that Big Frank was wanted at the Hotel Metrolite. That was the usual tip that certain political friends of his were having a gabfest. Mention of names was never considered necessary in such cases; in fact, there were times when it was inadvisable.

Big Frank had hurried from the club; he had taken the first cab that he saw. It was the only cab waiting outside the club. Usually, there was none.

The cab was driven by a hackie who worked for a large company. He was one of a few dozen who had been laid off, awaiting a shipment of new cabs. He had received a typewritten post card telling him that his new taxi was at a Seventy–second Street garage.

He had gone there to get it. He'd hardly arrived there, before there was a call on the telephone, ordering him to go to the political club and wait outside for a passenger.

The taxi company disclaimed all knowledge of the cab. The garage was also perplexed. The cab had been stored there, money in advance, late the night before. The attendant on duty hadn't particularly noticed the fellow who handed him the cash, for the cab was driven into a darkened corner of the garage.

The cab, itself, held the secret of Denniman's death.

Its windows were airtight, shatterproof. They could not have been opened with anything less than a crowbar. The inside door handles were dummies, which meant that the cab could be opened only from the outside.

Fitted to the exhaust pipe was a broad plate, with small outlets attached to holes in the floor. Through those had fizzed the full quota of carbon monoxide produced by a spluttery motor that had an ill–regulated carburetor.

Big Frank Denniman had absorbed enough of the deadly gas to finish him at the end of a five–minute ride. There had probably been monoxide in the cab when he stepped aboard it; but the poisonous fumes were odorless.

Those clues looked great to Joe Cardona; but they went awry when he tried to trace the death cab back to its source. It had been shipped by the manufacturer to the company that wanted it, fully a week ago; but it had gone astray. Neither organization had been able to locate it. How and where it had been outfitted with its death device, was an absolute mystery.

LATE that afternoon; Cardona arrived at the police commissioner's office, wondering how his superior was going to take these incomplete reports.

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When the inspector was ushered in, he found Melvin Graham with the commissioner. That pleased the inspector; for Commissioner Weston seldom cut loose with caustic comments when a visitor was present.

Weston wanted the reports; Cardona gave them. He was surprised when Weston and Graham exchanged smiles.

"You missed something, inspector," chided Weston, mildly. "The link between the three murdered men."

"What link was that?"

"A political one. You should have discerned that, Cardona."

The inspector was puzzled, until Weston mentioned that Richard Hyvran was a State assemblyman, representing the Long Island section where he lived. Cardona knew that, but had seen no connection between the fact and Hyvran's death. Compared with his large law practice, Hyvran's membership in the State legislature seemed of minor importance.

"That links Hyvran with Denniman," reminded Weston, "because Big Frank was a politician. I know what you are thinking, Cardona: the link seems slight. But it will grow in significance when I tell you something else. Justin Palbrock intended to announce his candidacy for the State senate."

That galvanized Cardona. He was quick with his question: "Who told you that commissioner?"

Weston bowed toward Graham. Removing his gold-rimmed spectacles, the distinguished man explained.

"I met friends who were at the banquet where Palbrock was expected," declared Graham. "The word had gone around among them. I was surprised, until I realized that Palbrock had been coming more and more into the public eye, thanks to speeches that he had given. I would say, also, that he was the sort of man who would gain a large support."

Cardona considered. He was well up on politics; enough to see the set-up. Hyvran represented a different group than Denniman; but that could have meant a compromise. This news regarding Palbrock made Cardona picture the retired manufacturer as a political candidate seeking double favor. From that, Cardona jumped to a prompt conclusion.

"Maybe the Murder Master is boosting someone for the State senate!" exclaimed Cardona. "He figured his candidate would be out, if Palbrock went after it. The easiest way was to get rid of Palbrock."

"Extreme measures," objected Weston, "with nothing more at stake than a seat in the State senate. What is more, Cardona, we must consider the sentiments of the candidate chosen by the Murder Master. If there is such a man, he would never have sanctioned Palbrock's death."

"Maybe he didn't know about it, commissioner."

Weston shook his head; that idea didn't suit him. Graham had a different suggestion.

"I would class the murderer as a fanatic," he declared. "His whole process indicates it. He must be a man who has some insane aspiration to power, and considers that he has made progress toward it."

The commissioner nodded. This was more like it.

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"He naturally chose men in the public eye," continued Graham. "He picked each as representative of a group that has much to do with public affairs. Hyvran, a lawyer and member of the State legislature. Palbrock, a champion of civic welfare. Denniman, an out-and-out politician. There is one question, though." Graham seemed suddenly loath to accept his own theory. "Why should he pick men who were largely confined to New York in activity?"

CARDONA had the answer. He had seen soundness in Graham's comments.

"A crazy man would do just that," he asserted. "I've run into plenty of them. They get all hopped up over one idea. It's what those psychopaths call a 'fixure.'"

There were smiles from Weston and Graham.

"You mean what psychoanalysts term a 'fixation,'" corrected the commissioner. "Allowing for your mistaken nomenclature, Cardona, I would say that you are correct. Your conclusion supplements and substantiates the one advanced by Mr. Graham. We have to deal with a fanatic, whose one idea is to murder men whom he considers to be important. How long he will continue quiet is a matter for conjecture."

Weston paused; then added:

"Fancy it! A man so exaggerated in his notions, that he would occupy a radio studio and flaunt his evil deeds over the air!"

Cardona remembered a last-minute report that had come into headquarters.

"The Murder Master wasn't in that studio at all," affirmed Cardona. "We found a big phonograph in a house across the street. It was all wired up to connect with WQJ."

"A transcription!" ejaculated Graham. "Did they find the record, inspector?"

Cardona shook his head.

"That was gone. But it's a bet the Murder Master wasn't the fellow who took it. He wasn't anywhere around."

"Which means," asserted Graham, to Weston, "that the Murder Master may have been away from New York at the time of the broadcast."

"That's an idea, all right," agreed Cardona. "But here's another. Whoever the Murder Master is, he's got thugs working for him. He needed smooth workers to set those traps for his victims; and there was a bunch that blew into WQJ to take over last night's broadcast."

Commissioner Weston nodded solemnly. He asked what results Cardona had gained from the round-up that had been in progress ever since last night.

Cardona was forced to admit that there had been no results. Stool pigeons had brought no worthwhile information. Whoever the Murder Master's workers were, their insidious chief had ways of covering them.

Weston and Graham showed mutual disappointment. There was a light, though, in Graham's gray eyes, as they gazed patiently toward the commissioner. At last, Weston rapped the table. He looked to Graham and voiced a decision.

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"You may be right," declared the commissioner. "The measure that you proposed seemed useless, but I am ready to give it a trial. You may send for those men at once."

Graham looked pleased as he picked up the telephone. Cardona was puzzled. What Graham had proposed; who the men might be, were new mysteries to Joe Cardona. He realized, though, that he would soon have the answer.

The law was about to take a drastic step. Melvin Graham had presented it as a sound one, and Commissioner Weston had come to agree with him. With that move, however, were hidden factors so deep that it was only logical that both Graham and Weston should overlook them.

The law was making a play straight into the hands of the Murder Master.

CHAPTER VII. THREE STRAIGHT CROOKS

WHILE Graham was on the telephone, Weston undertoned a preliminary explanation to Cardona. It was almost unnecessary, for the inspector was catching the gist of it from Graham's telephone talk. The double conversation had Cardona dizzy, however, so he finally concentrated on what Weston had to say.

"The reform of criminals," spoke the commissioner, "is valuable to society. I admit that heartily, although I do not agree with Graham, when he says that it will abolish crime entirely. However, Graham has done fine work, putting ex-crooks straight."

Cardona nodded. Nevertheless, he grumbled something about the State parole board being too lenient with convicts.

"Not when a man like Graham takes charge," argued Weston. "He makes those fellows toe the mark; at the same time, he gains their good will. That puts them on the right path, and we are to witness the proof of it."

"The proof of it?"

"Yes. Graham was approached today by three of the men who have most benefited through his interest in them. All were shocked by the Murder Master's crimes. They are anxious to cooperate in tracking down the murderer."

This news gave Cardona a medley of thoughts. The idea was new to him; but the more he juggled it, the better he liked it. As a reformer, Melvin Graham had certainly done excellent work in voluntarily aiding the parole board. He had seen to it that convicts, out on probation, were given jobs to which they were suited.

If they were fired from those jobs, Graham looked into it. If he found that they had been treated unfairly because of their past records, he raked the persons responsible. He either saw that the ex-cons got their jobs back, or were put on better ones.

Cardona could remember the old horse-and-wagon days when old ladies waved umbrellas at horse-whipping teamsters, threatening to bring down the wrath of the law. Graham reminded him of that, when the reformer shouted at people who were unfair to paroled convicts.

Joe had been brought into some of Graham's wrangles as a qualified witness. He'd laughed to himself, sometimes, regarding Graham; but in boiling it down, Cardona had to admit that the reformer got results.

His present efforts showed it.

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Graham was bringing in the services of reformed crooks, to help the law snare the Murder Master. If he wanted to class them as detectives, that would be fair enough. These fellows would be on their old home ground, when they looked into affairs of crime.

If, instead, they were to be regarded as a flock of stool pigeons, and serve as such, the law would still be benefited. These chaps would certainly be superior to the squealer type of lowbrow crooks that the police managed to enlist as stoolies.

By the time Graham had finished his call, to announce that the men were on their way, Cardona's interest was keen.

THE men, themselves, looked good when they arrived. Graham introduced them one by one, though that was hardly necessary. Joe Cardona had met them before they went to the big house.

The first was "Ace" Curdy, a long, lean, block-faced man with peculiarly deep-set eyes. Ace gained his nickname from his ability with a revolver. Around shooting-galleries, he had used a .22 to drill the center of an ace of diamonds without fringing the edges of the red spot. In gun frays, Ace had shown that same uncanny marksmanship. He nicked his foemen, instead of killing them; that was why he had escaped a murder charge.

"Dobie" Kring was the next – a jolly, big-faced fellow who didn't look like a crook. His hands, though, weren't so pudgy as the rest of him. Those fingers had managed lots of things – forged checks, the combinations on safes. Dobie had been a mine worker once; he knew the art of mixing "soup" that would blast a strong-box when skill couldn't open it.

The third man, "Doc" Harstell, had a professional air. He was a graduate of a medical school who had chucked his career, then taken it up again, for illicit profit. Doc was a "sawbones" who had helped out wounded crooks. He'd worked with a lot of gangs; knew every cranny of the underworld. He had finally taken a rap for those services to society's lower crust.

With each introduction, Graham put a single question. He asked each man to tell why he wished to aid the law.

"I wanted a mouthpiece once," declared Ace. "I went to Hyvran, asking if he'd take the job. He wouldn't have it. I told him I put round holes in guys that didn't listen. He said that put us out of the same class, because he shot square.

"I liked the guy. I've been for him ever since. That's why I asked Mr. Graham if I could go after the mugs that got Hyvran. There were some sharpshooters in that car that was chased last night. Maybe I can find out who they are."

Dobie's story was one of a more recent event. Like others under Graham's wing, he had experienced trouble keeping jobs. He had finally wound up as a bank clerk, and again found prejudice against him. But he hadn't needed to go to Graham. It happened that Justin Palbrock was a director of that bank.

Palbrock had taken up Dobie's cause; had kept the job for him. Dobie had been promoted to a teller; and he owed it to Palbrock. Whatever phony work the Murder Master had used in getting rid of Palbrock, Dobie figured he could help in ferreting it.

Doc Harstell owed a lot to the dead politician, Denniman.

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"I've got a job in a dental lab," stated Doc. "Making good money, but there's a lot of fellows trying to coax me back into my old racket. When I haven't listened, they've tried to shake me down. All I had to do was tell Big Frank about it.

"I'm the sort that crooks are always trying to reach. Sooner or later, I can get a line on that Murder Master, through his mob. That's why I came around today and talked to Mr. Graham. I hoped he would consider me useful."

THERE was earnestness in every story. That, plus the qualifications that the men possessed, sold them to the commissioner.

The grudge angle was the one that Cardona liked. He figured these fellows would go the limit to get back at the murderer who had slain their benefactors.

The three were told that work would be arranged for them. Dire necessity called for extreme efforts by the law. Weston shook hands all round; told the trio to keep in touch with Graham, so that whatever they learned would be forwarded to the police.

Graham received Weston's congratulations after the paroled men had gone.

"If we had selected those men ourselves," asserted the commissioner, "we could not have made a better choice. The old saying, 'Set a thief to catch a thief,' should still hold good. Your pardon, Graham" – Weston had noted a disapproving look on the reformer's face – "I recognize that these men must no longer be classed as criminals. I merely had reference to their past."

"The present suits me," put in Cardona. "Those lads know their onions! They'll kid their old pals into thinking they're off the straight and narrow. You'd better keep tabs on them, though, Mr. Graham."

"That has been arranged," assured Graham. "Both my secretary and my chauffeur are in my confidence. They have always kept careful check, without the paroled men suspecting it. Right now, they are delivering them to their respective lodging places."

That met the approval of Weston and Cardona. But they, like Graham, would have been badly jolted had they gained a television flash of Graham's big car at that very moment. Ace, Dobie and Doc were in the back seat, as the limousine rolled through the dusk. In front, the secretary was leaning back to chat. The chauffeur was chuckling with him.

"So you put it over?" laughed the secretary. "Say – we'd sure like to have seen it! Who busted the ice?"

"I did," returned Ace. "Just the way the chief wanted it. Why shouldn't they fall for it? Nobody can tell them that I planted the pineapple in Hyvran's car."

"My trip to Washington also passed unnoticed," reminded Dobie. "I suppose I was mistaken for a lobbyist, returning to New York. Even Palbrock didn't know I was looking at him. That pencil switch was a cinch! Palbrock was half asleep when I made it."

"I didn't dwell too long on my mechanical ability," added Doc Harstell, dryly. "No one could connect me with that fixed cab Denniman was in, and those timely phone calls."

Chuckles followed – less hideous than those voiced by the Murder Master, but sufficient to show the delight that these unreformed crooks took in crime. In brief statements, all concurred that their main job was to keep

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Graham totally deceived. The secretary and the chauffeur assured them there would be no trouble on that score.

Already, the pair had mentioned phony alibis covering Ace, Dobie and Doc at the time of the Murder Master's broadcast. The car kept southward; it neared the street with the alley-way where crooks had carried The Shadow last night. Ace beckoned to the two men beside him.

"Give me the reports," said Ace. "I'll shove them in the door for the chief."

Dobie and Doc passed him envelopes. Ace alighted at a darkened house and thrust the envelopes through a mail chute, adding a report of his own.

"The chief's not back yet," remarked Ace, as they drove away. "It was a smart gag, him being out of town for a couple of days. He pulls that professor stuff swell, I guess. I'd like to hear one of his screwy lectures."

"We ought to hear from him tonight," said Dobie. "Come on down to my place. I got the mixer working swell. We won't miss anything that comes over it."

Only Doc Harstell was silent. Ace nudged him.

"What you thinking about, Doc?"

"I'm thinking about the professor –" Doc caught himself. "I mean the chief. When he goes away, he leaves that fellow Thoyer there."

"Why not? Thoyer's a boob. Makes a good blind."

"But maybe he gets a look at our reports."

"What if he does? They're in the code the chief gave us, ain't they? Forget Thoyer! Say – he wasn't even awake last night when me and the guys with me dumped The Shadow."

Soon, the three criminals were dropping off at the places where they lived. The big car headed back, to pick up Melvin Graham and take him to his apartment. Those lesser tools – chauffeur and secretary – were straightfaced when Graham entered the car, along with Weston.

Graham had invited the commissioner to dine at the Cobalt Club. The men in the front seat were listening intently as they heard their employer chat with Weston. The smiles that were secretly exchanged in the front seat were proof that the pair regarded Graham as the greatest dupe with whom they had to deal.

The real master of the servants that Graham trusted was the same master who ruled the paroled crooks that the reformer had so carefully put along straight paths.

That master was the Murder Master!

CHAPTER VIII. THE DOOMING EYE

CROOKS had good cause to praise the Murder Master.

Crafty were the methods of that supercriminal; many were his exploits. Greatest of all, he had accomplished the result long sought by all the underworld.

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The Murder Master had conquered The Shadow.

Men of crime believed The Shadow to be dead. Ace Curdy had emphasized that belief in his statement to Dobie Kring and Doc Harstell. If any of those three had been told that The Shadow still lived, they would not have worried.

The Shadow had been placed where he was at the mercy of the Murder Master.

The Shadow, himself, realized that plight when he awakened, a few hours later. His first glimmering sensations gave him an impression of his surroundings. When he revived further, he began to reconstruct the circumstances that had brought him to the depths of a pitch-black cell. He also understood why he still lived.

Recollecting that terrified shock in the control room of WQJ, The Shadow recognized that it had been intended to do more than stupefy him. The huge voltage was enough to deliver death, under certain conditions. The Murder Master had overlooked one important provision.

Killers had hooked the metal plate to the radio station's current. Like most of the buildings in Manhattan, it used direct current. Long ago – so many years that it had almost been forgotten – experimenters had learned that direct current lacked destructive force. That was why State prisons used alternating current to burn persons sentenced to the electric chair.

Direct current could kill; but if it failed, there was always a chance of the victim's survival. The Shadow had demonstrated that by his present revival. Oddly, he owed his recovery partly to the men who had served the Murder Master.

Rocketed from the floor plate, The Shadow had been alive when his captors carried him away. Not only had they decided that bullets were unwise and unnecessary; they had placed The Shadow in a spot best suited to restore the flicker of life that remained to him.

This cell was damp, its floor streaked with moist, oozy mud that formed a long accumulated sediment. Friends of The Shadow could have chosen no better place for his recuperation than the one which his enemies had so unwittingly selected.

Feeble at first, The Shadow moved more steadily as he began his exploration of the cell. He was utterly unable to calculate the time that he had lain helpless. That, however, seemed of little consequence, compared to the prospect of escape from this pit.

The door was evidently that of an old, abandoned cellar. The Shadow's fingers found crevices between the flagstones, as he crawled about. Those cracks along the ancient floor accounted for the muddy surface. At first, The Shadow held the hope that this was merely some forgotten pit where he had been flung by persons who believed him dead.

That hope faded when The Shadow reached a wall.

There, he encountered a smooth steel surface. Groping along that wall, he came to another, also of metal. A complete tour of the cell proved that it was square, and entirely lined with steel. This chamber was evidently one that the Murder Master had reserved for prisoners who might be capable of escape from ordinary traps.

THE SHADOW'S flashlight was gone, like his automatics. Ace and his pals had found time to take those trophies the night before. Unable to see the ceiling, The Shadow rose in a corner of the wall, stretched his arms high above his head. The ceiling was beyond his reach.

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Stone floor – steel walls – such were formidable barriers. Whatever the structure of the ceiling, it would be the logical spot to attack, particularly since it would offer a route above ground. In the blackness of the pit, however, The Shadow could not even see the ceiling, let alone climb to it.

Given a wall with the scantiest crevices, The Shadow could scale it like a human beetle. These steel walls were impossible. Except at the corners, where steel plates joined, they had no cracks.

For smooth walls like these, The Shadow had often used rubber suction cups that gave a powerful hold. He seldom carried them, except on planned expeditions. He lacked the suction cups this night.

The Shadow's only course was to wait, while he learned what might befall him in this trap. The longer he waited, the better; for his strength was below par. As minutes passed, he could feel a distinct recuperation. Perhaps, at the end of hours, he could decide upon some plan of escape.

The Shadow followed the assumption that every trap had a loophole. Past experience had demonstrated that fact to his satisfaction. Unfortunately, there was another quality that many traps possessed. They sometimes became more than pitfalls, turning into death devices under the control of a master hand.

Such was to be the case with this metal-lined pit. At the end of a long, leisurely hour, The Shadow saw symptoms of arriving hazard.

A dull glow began to fill the prison room. It came from the ceiling; there, The Shadow noticed four small glass sockets, their surfaces on the ceiling level. Each contained a bulb that glowed with greenish light that increased with painful slowness. At first the rays were hazy; but as their emerald flicker became stronger, The Shadow could make out the entire cell.

The ceiling, like the walls, was of steel; the rounded glass-surfaced light sockets were too small to be of consequence. There was a larger opening, however, that intrigued The Shadow the moment that he observed it.

That was a circular object, squarely in the ceiling's center. It was metal-bound; fitted with glass, like a large porthole. It was large enough to allow a person's passage.

The difficulty was to reach the porthole.

It was fully nine feet above the stone floor. There was nothing that The Shadow could use as a ladder. Even the walls were useless, should he find a way to scale them, for they were too far from that center opening.

It seemed like a tantalizing bait, that porthole, put there to give mental torture to the prisoner who would find it out of reach. It had a simpler purpose, as well. It was obviously the hole through which The Shadow had been dropped to this steel-lined dungeon.

IT was not until the lights had reached their full glow that The Shadow learned another reason for that metal-rimmed glass.

The glare produced a ghastly green that brought a curious reflection from the glass. Light became vivid on the floor, showing The Shadow fully outlined as he stared upward to the glass-blocked opening. That glass, The Shadow noted, was concave. Staring toward it, he saw a curious blur of color that came from above the entire surface.

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The hues were circular; but they wavered and shifted. Sometimes they dimmed; whenever they increased, they did not pass the blurry stage that The Shadow had first observed.

Suddenly, the answer linked.

The concave glass was the lens of a gigantic microscope. The blurred color above it was the outline of a human eye!

The Shadow had become a laboratory specimen for the superkiller who had captured him. The Murder Master, possessed of a new victim, was studying his captive at leisure. Every move The Shadow made was magnified. That curious eye – rendered mammoth by the microscope – was calmly surveying the black-clad fighter that all other foemen feared.

The Shadow became motionless. He was standing near the center of the dungeon, his head tilted slightly upward. His eyes peered past the front edge of his downturned hat brim. The eye of the master murderer was steady, also. In that period of fixation, neither observer learned facts regarding the other.

By the time the Murder Master had focused the microscope, The Shadow had taken his position. His hat brim sheltered, his face from his foeman's view. Similarly, the big eye above was too blurred for The Shadow to note features by which he might later identify it.

The situation, though, was not an even break. The Shadow's instinctive interest in the rising glow had caused him to play into the enemy's hands. The Murder Master had come to his laboratory for one primary purpose: to learn if The Shadow still lived. Having discovered the prisoner to be alive, the supercrook was ready for new measures.

The Shadow saw color dwindle. The eye had moved away. The Murder Master was satisfied with the trap; convinced that The Shadow's position was a helpless one. Slowly, the green lights faded; as token that the master killer was through with his brief study of the biological specimen called The Shadow.

As the ghoulish green diminished, The Shadow sensed new danger. He knew that he could expect but one verdict from the Murder Master: that of death. The thrust would come when darkness was again complete; for the present, The Shadow could not surmise what its source would be.

He foresaw only that the Murder Master would choose one of two measures, whichever suited his whim. Either the death method would be swift, almost instantaneous; or it would be agonizing and prolonged. Halfway measures did not belong in the Murder Master's catalogue.

THE prison room was a vague green outline when the move began. From somewhere beyond steel walls The Shadow heard a thrumm of muffled machinery, that pounded with a beat of doom.

Straining his eyes toward one wall, The Shadow detected a slow, quivering motion. Before he had time to study the wall further; the lights were totally blotted.

The wall that The Shadow had observed was to his left. The same thrumm was coming from the right. It was toward that wall that The Shadow moved. As he spread his gloved hands against it, he could feel the steel's steady pressure. For a dozen seconds, The Shadow held his ground; then he was forced to shift away, or be shoved off balance.

Crossing to the opposite wall, The Shadow met the same incoming power. Each wall was thrusting inward at the rate of a foot a minute. Each minute, therefore, cut down The Shadow's dwelling space by two feet.

It was a dozen feet across the room. Six minutes more, the walls would clamp together. But, to The Shadow, as he now stood, there belonged only a five-minute life span. The sixth minute would not be his.

Those final sixty seconds were the time when crushing walls would shatter bone and pulpify flesh. That minute would bring death that would prove the lone relief from the horror that produced it.

CHAPTER IX. MADDENED MINUTES

STEADILY, like living things of doom, the creeping walls loomed closer. Twin Juggernauts, each possessed of a huge crushing force, they were fated to complete their appointed course. Only the Murder Master could have halted them, and he was not the sort to have last-moment regrets.

In the darkness, The Shadow remained motionless. Had there been light, with the Murder Master viewing from above, the supercrook would have supposed that The Shadow was resigned to his fate. Actually, the black clad prisoner was tense.

For one minute only, The Shadow had stood fully helpless. Then the slow closing of the walls had itself given him a plan. This was one trap that had no available loophole. It also filled the qualification of being a death device. It was that double feature that produced its weakness.

The Shadow had not forgotten the mammoth lens that filled the opening above. It could never have served him had the Murder Master let the cell remain as it was. The master fiend, in providing two separate purposes for his dungeon, had outrun his own craftiness.

The Shadow wanted those steel-sheeted walls to close. His arms extended, he was welcoming them – not as jaws of doom, but as the one means that might enable him to effect his own rescue. In a sense, those first minutes were The Shadow's greatest strain. Once they were ended, he could begin the action that would make him forget the menace of the pressing walls.

At the end of three minutes, The Shadow could feel each wall touching an outstretched hand. Still, he remained rigid. Effort would be wasted until they were even closer. Mechanically, The Shadow was counting off the seconds; all the while, his hands were coming closer to his shoulders. He could tell by touch, as well as time, when the right moment had arrived.

That was at the end of four minutes, when the walls were four feet apart. The Shadow's waiting ended. He came to action.

His first move was one of pressure. With all his strength, he forced his hands against the walls. He was like a Samson, thrusting against temple pillars; but these walls were inflexible. Compared to the motors that impelled them, The Shadow's strength was puny.

Thrumm – thrumm –

The dooming throbs seemed to mock the victim, as hideously as if the Murder Master had been on hand to add his insidious cackle. Inch by inch, the walls closed unflinchingly. The Shadow's hands were forcing upward under their pressure. From his lips came a whispered laugh.

The trap was working as The Shadow wanted it.

JABBING one foot against a wall, The Shadow utilized an angled pressure with his opposite arm. That gave him a free hand to thrust higher. His opposite foot came up; he shifted pressure. His next crisscross shift was

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swifter, likewise longer. Swaying back and forth in the darkness, he jockeyed from wall to wall with an eccentric upward course.

The Shadow was scaling four feet to every foot that the walls closed.

He was near the top before the walls had reached his shoulders. In coming closer, those barriers had added ease and speed to The Shadow's progress. At the start, there had been danger of a slip. That was ended when he neared the top.

With outthrust elbows and pressing feet, The Shadow held himself fixed between the walls, and their increasing pressure added to the surety of his position.

Hands upward, The Shadow was clutching at the steel-rimmed porthole. He couldn't break the glass; he was depending on the chance that the rim would loosen. A portion of the rim wobbled upward, taking the glass with it; but The Shadow could not push it clear until he utilized his last resort.

For a few seconds, he rested; then, as the walls pressed his shoulders, he spread his knees and worked his whole body upward. Sidewise pressure was no longer necessary. The walls, with their crushing force, were supporting The Shadow in place.

Head tilted back, The Shadow thrust his arms straight upward in front of his body. His hands bashed the glass hard. With the smaller supporting frame, the lens whipped upward on a hinge, into a large cylindrical space above.

The Shadow could clutch the interior of the upper tube, but he could no longer pull his body upward. The walls had him clamped with torturous pressure that was almost at the bone-breaking stage. Crosswise between those slow-vibrating slabs, The Shadow had scant seconds in which to act. He used them to their limit.

Hands clutching the sides of the uptilted lens frame, The Shadow gave a powerful twist. His shoulders, body, legs – all figured in that wrench. His body did a quarter turn. Instead of being hard clamped, crosswise, he was dangling almost loose, his face to one wall, his back to the other.

There wasn't time for The Shadow to slip downward, even if his hands had released their grip. Thrumms from the machinery brought the walls two inches closer together; enough to sandwich their victim between the metal slabs.

As that pressure came, The Shadow's arms pulled upward. His body slithered from the closing walls, bringing him hip-high in the space above the ceiling.

There, with a final heave, The Shadow braced upon an interior ledge. His feet, pushing hard against a moving plate, forced his legs up through the hole. Curling about the inside of the darkened cylinder, The Shadow found the framed lens and slapped it downward. As it thumped into place, he rolled upon it, to lie exhausted.

THE SHADOW had cleared the pressing walls when they were scarcely more than a foot apart. Less than a half minute remained after he had flattened the porthole; yet that time seemed far longer than the maddened minutes that The Shadow had spent in his climb.

The token that told the finish was a clang as the walls came together. The shudder of that metallic meeting brought a tremble to the cylinder where The Shadow rested secure.

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The machinery had stopped automatically. There was a whirr of a sound; then it went into reverse. The Shadow could hear the slow rumble of the receding walls. They had a grind that reminded him of a grumbling monster, angered at loss of its prey.

The pit below was safe; but The Shadow had no desire to return to it. Rising in the cylinder that formed his present prison, he found another glass just above his head. From its shape, it was probably another lens that served as part of the oversize microscope;

The overhead frame was wedged more tightly than the lower one. When The Shadow finally released it, the glass swung downward on a hinge.

Just above, The Shadow found a trapdoor. He worked it upward; threw it open. He drew himself up into a room above. There, The Shadow's first action was to feel for the upper lens and put it into place, after which he edged the trapdoor into position.

The room in which The Shadow found himself was pitch-black. As he felt his way through the darkness, he encountered tables and other items that were apparently part of a laboratory's equipment. Reaching a wall switch, The Shadow listened intently. The room was definitely deserted. The Shadow turned on the light.

The room proved to be a laboratory – well outfitted but little used, judging by the dust that streaked some of the benches. Moreover, the place was untidy; papers, notebooks, jars and other items were piled hodgepodge on tables. It looked as though the owner had started certain experiments, then discarded them. He was probably an inventive genius as well as a scientist, for a workshop adjoined the lab.

One table, pushed into a corner of the laboratory, was fitted with a large microscope. Examining it closely, The Shadow found that the table had a metal rim which could be removed by loosening corner screws. That allowed a central board to slide out from beneath the microscope.

This table had simply been pushed over the mammoth lens tube below the floor. By adjusting the ordinary microscope, the Murder Master had been able to enlarge his vision to include the prison room. In searching for the switch that controlled the cell-room lights and the moving walls, The Shadow could not find it.

The walls of the room had panels; probably one hid the switches. That was likely, considering the state of the trapdoor through which The Shadow had arrived here.

Instead of showing conspicuously on the floor, the trapdoor was invisible; so closely fitted, that The Shadow had to probe to find it. There was no give when he stepped upon the trap. Its boards extended between those of the solid floor. A person who did not suspect the trapdoor's presence would probably never locate it.

The laboratory had a heavy door that apparently led to the front door; another that looked like an entrance to a side passage. Both doors were locked; before trying to open them, The Shadow decided to inspect the workshop.

There, he made a definite discovery. On a workbench were items of radio equipment. Beneath the bench was a large phonograph, with a stack of big records, the sort used in electrical transcriptions.

The inventor who occupied these premises had all the equipment needed to deliver the Murder Master program. Probably one of those records had been used for the broadcast at WQJ, The Shadow needed the inventor's name; he found it, painted on a box of electrical equipment that had come by express.

The box was addressed to Professor Jerome Quedden, New York.

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AT the back of the workshop was a spiral staircase that led upstairs. A further search of the premises promised more important results. A forgotten flashlight, dropped behind a workbench, was all that The Shadow needed. Taking the flash, he extinguished the lights in the laboratory, then picked his way to the spiral stairs.

On the second floor, The Shadow found another laboratory, evidently the one that Quedden used more regularly. It was equipped with chemical appliances; everything was in shipshape order. Under the only door, The Shadow saw a glow that indicated a hallway light. He extinguished the flashlight and tried the door. It was unlocked.

There were several doors opening from the hall. All were closed; they looked like living quarters. There was a curtained passage to the left of the laboratory door, which was at the hallway's end. Spreading the curtain, The Shadow saw a long side hall, with an open room at the end.

Passing one door that stood ajar, The Shadow flicked his flashlight to see a storeroom that had side windows. They were shuttered, like all other windows that he had seen. There was a squatly window, though, at the rear of the storeroom. It was wide, but very low. It was set high in the wall, indicating that it opened on a roof. The wide window had no shutters; simply a drawn shade.

About all that the storeroom contained were old trunks, boxes, and a few articles of furniture. The Shadow passed it, went on to the rear room. It was furnished like an office.

Evidently the office was vital to Professor Quedden, for its shutters were newer and heavier than any others. The room had a desk, a metal filing cabinet, a safe in the corner. There was a curtained doorway opening into a closet; there, The Shadow found a discarded wooden filing cabinet.

Before The Shadow could give closer inspection, his ears caught a distant sound. It gave the faint impression of a clicking door latch, carrying through the passages of the old house.

Edging from the office, The Shadow listened; there were footsteps on the front stairs that came directly to the upper hall.

The logical place to go was the storeroom; but there was no time to reach it. The curtains stirred at the front of the long hall, proving that the person who had entered the house was coming directly to the little office.

Extinguishing his flashlight, The Shadow whisked back into darkness.

He had already picked a good spot in the office itself. Silently, The Shadow reached that place: the curtained closet. He wedged past the old filing cabinet; found the exact space that he required, in back of it.

Thanks to a slight adjustment that he gave the curtain when he passed it, The Shadow had a clear view to the desk. Once the office lights were turned on, he could see whoever sat there, although The Shadow's own lurking space would be unseen.

The Shadow had begun his quest for the Murder Master. As the situation stood, The Shadow seemed due to gain his first view of Professor Jerome Quedden.

CHAPTER X. HIDDEN CRIME

THE lights of the little office came on within a half minute after The Shadow had taken to his hiding place. The wall switch was by the office door; that was why The Shadow did not immediately see the man who

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entered. Instead, he received nothing but audible impressions of Professor Jerome Quedden.

Those were sufficient to form a link with the past. The sounds that Quedden emitted as he fussed about the room were low mumbles – odd clucky sounds that indicated he was in good humor. Though less dramatic than the tones that had come over the air, those mutters were highly reminiscent of the chuckling remarks that the Murder Master had used to fill in time between his announcements of death.

Alone, Quedden could hardly be expected to provide such high-pitched utterances as he had used for that recorded program over WQJ. At moments, his voice was precisely as The Shadow had remembered it. At other times, it dropped to a half whisper that could hardly have registered on the microphone.

By the time Quedden finally decided to approach the desk, The Shadow had formed half a dozen impressions of his possible appearance. The final one was accurate in many details, although The Shadow missed in gauging the professor's height. Jerome Quedden was so short of stature that his hips barely reached the desk top when he passed it.

Undersize, wizened, baldish – those summed the professor as The Shadow first saw him. When Quedden seated himself in the big swivel chair behind his desk, he looked like a dried peanut in its shell. His eyes, though, proved him to be more than a wizened old fossil.

Those eyes were beads that shone with blackish brilliance. Their glow revealed shrewd thoughts that were in the old man's brain. Perhaps the mutters that came from Quedden's dryish lips were maudlin expressions that showed a mental let-down between his keener thoughts. On the contrary, they could have been intended – a pretense to make it seem that he was absent-minded.

One fact was positive. Whenever he muttered, Quedden emitted no words that could be understood. Nor did the flashes of his eyes, the odd smiles of his lips, give any clue to his actual thoughts.

Looking about the desk, Quedden stroked his chin. His eyes fixed toward the door; they registered anger, then suspicion. That look turned to a crafty one, with an accompanying smile, as he pressed a button beneath the desk.

Soon, there were footsteps in the hall. A sleepy-faced man entered, wearing slippers, trousers, collarless shirt. He had a dull look on his roundish features; but there was something methodical in his manner, by the time he reached the desk.

That was where The Shadow first saw him. He noted that the man had a weak-chinned profile. The man's tone, too, was a rather weak one, as he asked:

"You rang for me, professor?"

"Use your wits, Thoyer!" snapped Quedden. "Who else could have rung for you? Do you think that I would have visitors at this hour of night?"

"I didn't know, sir."

Quedden shook his head.

"You are an excellent laboratory assistant," he remarked, testily. "For the ability that you show in your work, I would expect you to be intelligent in other matters! However, we can let that pass. What messages came today, Thoyer?"

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THE lab assistant fished in his hip pocket. He brought out a long, fat envelope, with a few smaller ones. Quedden leaned far across the desk, snatched the big envelope greedily. He ripped it open, spilled the contents on the desk.

There, The Shadow saw crisp currency: bills of large denomination. There was five thousand dollars in the packet. Quedden counted it several times, to make sure. He finally peered inside the big envelope, then tossed it toward a wastebasket. The envelope fluttered to the floor. Thoyer methodically picked it up and put it in the basket.

"From the Foundation," chuckled Quedden. "They are doing well with my inventions, Thoyer. This time, they have paid me in cash. Last time, it was bonds."

"It's odd, sir," put in Thoyer, as though he for once had an idea, "that they never sent payment by check."

"Not a bit odd," retorted Quedden. "My arrangement was made on a cash basis."

"But bonds are not cash –"

"They are as good as money," cackled Quedden, tilting his head. "I keep all that I gain. So where is the difference, Thoyer?"

The assistant shook his head. Evidently the whole matter was beyond him. Quedden turned to open the safe and put the money away. While he did, he chuckled some more statements for Thoyer's benefit.

"The Foundation for Inventors is an excellent institution," declared Quedden. "They seem to understand an inventor's problems. After they negotiated with me and learned my wants, they equipped this house in precisely the fashion that I desired. When I first came here, I was amazed at the thorough preparations that they had made! They even provided you, Thoyer!"

Quedden swung around from the safe in time to hear Thoyer offer an objection.

"I never heard of the Foundation, sir."

"You told me that before, Thoyer," interjected Quedden. "They had heard of you, though. That is why you were recommended. The fact that I communicated with you, and actually hired you, does not lessen your obligation to the Foundation."

Thoyer was prompt to say that he was grateful to the Foundation for Inventors. That appeased the old professor. He waved his hand in dismissal, with the remark:

"You had better get to bed, Thoyer. If you don't get up early, you will never find time to put the lower laboratory in order. I am going to need it, soon; and the workshop, too."

Thoyer started to go. He suddenly remembered the envelopes that he held in his hand. He passed them to Quedden, who noted that they were blank, and lightly sealed. His eyes glaring angrily, Quedden ripped open the envelopes and brought out folded papers.

As before, Quedden's mood changed with the quickness of a summer squall. He indulged in a hearty chuckle when he spread the papers.

"Another joke," he told Thoyer. "Where did you find them? In the mail box, as usual?"

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"Yes, sir." Thoyer craned timidly to look at the papers. "What are they, professor? More of those coded notes?"

Quedden nodded. He was eyeing Thoyer, with that head tilt which The Shadow had noted before. It added to his shrewd expression; but Quedden's attitude seemed unnoticed by Thoyer. Turning to the messages, Quedden scanned them one by one; then placed them in a desk drawer.

"I shall keep them," he decided. "They may prove important, later. Do you agree, Thoyer?"

"I don't know." The assistant was dully doubtful. "It may be that they have simply been left at the wrong house."

"Bah! There have been too many of them, Thoyer."

"Maybe the sender is wondering why he receives no answer."

A pleased smile showed on Quedden's lips, as he arose from his desk. Stepping to one side, he clapped an approving hand on Thoyer's shoulder.

"Good logic," commended Quedden. "You may have struck it, Thoyer. You relieve me of much anxiety."

Thoyer looked blank. The professor explained.

"BEFORE I came here" – Quedden's tone was a confiding whisper – "I received many threats. The Foundation has protected me against such nuisances. Against persons who plotted to steal my inventions. I was afraid that the trouble had begun again."

"I understand, sir." Thoyer was hurried. "You mustn't get started on that again, professor. You know what the physician said –"

"Bah! I trust no physicians!"

"But the Foundation sent that doctor here, sir."

"That's so!" Quedden's wild look faded. His lips took on a childish smile. "Therefore, the doctor's advice was good. The Foundation always advises me properly. I shall worry no longer."

They walked away from the desk. Thoyer was humoring the professor, asking if a lecture he had given in Rochester had been well received. In chuckly fashion, Quedden declared that he had gone over his allotted time; that was why he had missed his train. His late arrival in New York was the result.

Though the professor and his assistant were out of sight, The Shadow could hear them converse at the door. There, Quedden chided Thoyer for not having shut the office. Thoyer excused his oversight by the fact that he had expected Quedden earlier.

"After this," clucked the professor, sourly, "see that the door is shut. Once it is closed, this office is protected. Remember, Thoyer, should an intruder enter this house, the office would be his goal. That is why I have prepared against such emergency:"

The door closed. From it, The Shadow heard a loud click that sounded like an automatic lock. The door must have been a tight one, for there were no traces of departing footfalls along the hall. The Shadow was satisfied,

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however, that Quedden and his assistant were actually gone.

The professor had extinguished the lights. Coming from his hiding place, The Shadow reached the door, made careful inspection with his flashlight. He was correct in his surmise about the door. It fitted so tightly that it could cut off light as well as sound. The Shadow turned on the room lights.

Five minutes later, Quedden's safe stood open. From its interior, The Shadow was bringing stacks of currency and bonds. It did not take him long to identify them. These were spoils from recent robberies in and around New York.

ALL in all, Quedden's hoarded wealth totaled about forty thousand dollars; a meager sum, considering the size of some of the reported hauls.

Crooks had made sharp inroads recently, cracking safes in big business houses as well as those of outlying banks. That, plus unreported robberies of certain gambling places and racketeering headquarters, had put the reputed loot above the half-million mark.

Nevertheless, that was no reason why the Murder Master should have retained a large proportion of the swag. It was plain that many criminals were involved in his enterprises. They could be paid off cheaper by giving them plenty from the earlier robberies.

A mastermind intended greater crimes. That was apparent to The Shadow, without the evidence in Quedden's safe. That night of triple murder, during the broadcast from WQJ, was definite proof to The Shadow that a surge of crime would come. For some reason – as yet, an evasive one – the Murder Master had found it necessary to eliminate three men who stood in the way of his plans.

The Shadow had not forgotten that the Murder Master had planned the finish of a fourth. That last victim was to have been The Shadow. In fact, the Murder Master already believed The Shadow dead.

That was a factor that gave The Shadow a powerful advantage. He had met with such circumstances before. Always, he had been able to play a strong counterthrust against hidden crime, when enemies believed that he was eliminated.

The Shadow intended such measures in this case. Not only was he alive; he was occupying the most unlikely spot where crooks would expect him to be. This office, vital to the crooked game, had become The Shadow's own headquarters. Here, he could analyze crime; plan steps against the Murder Master, with plenty of evidence at hand.

Professor Quedden had spoken of the office's protection. But the shrewd old professor had apparently overlooked the possibility of a person being in the office when he closed it. Like the trap in the cellar, this was a snare that had a loophole.

That was why The Shadow lingered, confident. His laugh was a whispered one, confined to the soundproof office. The Shadow was picturing how easily he had offset Quedden's craftiness.

For once, The Shadow had laughed too soon.

CHAPTER XI. FROM THE TRAP

QUEDDEN'S safe contained many items other than the incriminating swag; but little else pertained to crime. In searching, The Shadow found plans for various inventions, along with records of chemical formulas. Few

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of these were in a complete state.

It seemed that the professor was versatile, as well as creative; but he apparently had the habit of dropping one endeavor to take up another. It was likely, therefore, that many of Quedden's inventions might have flaws that would make them impractical.

They ran a long range, those inventions; and The Shadow immediately saw that they had insidious possibilities, not mentioned in the specifications. Quedden's radio experiments, for instance, involved a system of remote control that had probably been used during the episode at WQJ.

The professor had also experimented with lethal gases. A bulky envelope was packed with data on that subject. Its only relation to crime, however, seemed to concern the handling of criminals. Along with Quedden's own formulas were reports that described the efficiency of existing vapors, from tear gas to the lethal gas used in legal executions.

Like much that pertained to Professor Quedden, these finds were uncertainties. While the funds in the safe were evidence that Quedden had acquired stolen goods, there was no proof that he had put his inventions to criminal use. The radio link was the likely one.

To follow it, The Shadow finished with the safe; as soon as he closed the heavy door, he turned to the desk.

There, The Shadow produced the coded messages and began a study of them. They appeared to be ordinary cryptograms; but the letter frequencies did not check. It was obvious that these must be reports from crooks who served the Murder Master; that made it unlikely that the system could be complicated.

Searching for the answer, The Shadow found it by checking short words in different messages. He discovered that three simple codes were used in every message. In each case, the first word followed one system of letter substitution; the second word, another; the third word, the last system.

The fourth word reverted to the first code; the fifth, to the second; the sixth to the third. The rule of one, two, three was followed throughout. It was a clever idea on the part of the Murder Master, for it made the messages more troublesome than ordinary cryptograms. At the same time, it was easy for the lesser crooks to code their reports; almost as simple as if they had used a single cipher.

The messages were rather cryptic, even when translated. The writers did not refer in detail to deeds that they had accomplished. Instead, they mentioned matters that were evidently understood by the Murder Master, which was proof that he had some method of direct communication with them.

There were references to "garage," to "telegram," to "taxicab;" these, oddly, meant very little to The Shadow, for he had not yet learned the manner wherein victims had met death during the broadcast period from station WQJ.

More illuminating was a message that referred vaguely to The Shadow's own experience. It stated that the "box" had worked; that the body was in the cell.

There was another message, declaring that the machine had been left in the house, but that the record had been replaced where it belonged. To The Shadow, that last phrase signified that the record used in the WQJ broadcast was back in the workshop that adjoined Quedden's lower laboratory.

LEAVING the messages in their drawer, The Shadow folded the odd sheets of paper on which he had decoded the notes. He began an inspection of the desk; there, he found typewritten letters addressed to

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Professor Quedden. All were from the Foundation for Inventors, but they bore no signatures.

They proved conclusively that the Foundation was a myth. The Shadow had never heard of such an organization; its letterheads bore no address other than New York.

The only other Foundation literature was a printed folder, giving a list of lecture engagements that Quedden was supposed to keep. The Rochester lecture was specified; in his talk in that city, Quedden had discussed the subject of stellar rays.

A clock on Quedden's desk showed that The Shadow's investigation had taken nearly a full hour. The Shadow, however, was in no hurry to leave. Seated at the desk, his long-fingered hand penciled notations of their own. The Shadow was analyzing the situation as the evidence showed it.

Identifying Jerome Quedden as the Murder Master, facts fell steadily in line.

Here was Quedden, posing as an inventor financed by a mythical organization called the Foundation for Inventors. An expert in radio, Quedden could communicate with his followers whenever he chose. They, in turn, could send back coded reports. As for Quedden's shares of stolen wealth, those were left in envelopes that bore the name of the nonexistent Foundation.

Crooks also had access to Quedden's premises, but not by the front door. They obviously used a side entrance that led into the lower laboratory. They could come and go secretly, bringing and taking whatever Quedden's instructions might require. Quedden, himself, could enter that side entrance when he chose.

The one weakness was Quedden's alibi. The fake Foundation for Inventors would not stand the strain, if the law investigated it. Offsetting that was the fact that the law probably would have no occasion to look into the Foundation. If crime continued smoothly, the law would never even hear of the fake organization.

Why, then, should Quedden, as the master criminal, bother with the Foundation hoax at all?

There was a plausible answer to that question. The answer was Thoyer. He was the one man who remained close to Quedden, and never took part in outside crimes. Taking Thoyer for what he looked to be, The Shadow saw how useful the man could prove to Quedden.

The professor needed a competent assistant to work on his inventions with him. Evidently, Thoyer filled such qualifications, while available crooks did not. On that simple assumption, the bluff regarding the Foundation for Inventors was necessary, to keep Thoyer ignorant of true conditions.

It was a curious set-up – one of the strangest that The Shadow had ever encountered. To all outward appearances, Professor Quedden was an eccentric inventor; gullible when he trusted people, highly suspicious of all other persons – even imaginary ones.

Thoyer, in contrast, was a slow thinker, methodical and used to taking orders. He was satisfied to stay here constantly, and his one anxiety appeared to be humoring Quedden when the old professor started a tantrum.

Beneath that surface lay a hidden purpose. A schemer was doing his utmost to keep a dupe under complete control. That precaution was constantly successful; it served as vital protection to the Murder Master's game. From The Shadow's viewpoint, it showed a flaw in the supercrook's armor.

This would be the place to have the show-down, with Quedden and Thoyer as participants. If each could be forced to tell only a part of what he knew, while existing evidence lay in light, the criminal career of the

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Murder Master would come to an abrupt finish.

That climax could wait. There was much to be accomplished before it arrived. Matters would remain static here, during the time that The Shadow required. Meanwhile, The Shadow's task was to delve into other angles of past crime.

Those coded notes told that many dangerous criminals were in the Murder Master's service. Unsigned, printed only in pencil, the messages gave no clues to their senders. The Shadow intended, therefore, to learn who were the members of the crooked band before he made his final stroke.

RISING from the desk, The Shadow did not have to glance at the clock to know that he had stayed a long while. The tight-closed room was becoming stuffy. Its heavy atmosphere produced a physical weariness that brought a tingle to The Shadow's nerves. He realized that his steady concentration had produced a strain, for he could hear a sound that he had not noticed before. It became more distinct as he approached the door.

The sound was the whirr of a small fan. The Shadow located it in a box beneath a table near the door. Through holes in the box top, he could see the revolving blades. The fan was controlled electrically.

The device looked like some odd motor that Quedden had put under test. It seemed to have no purpose that concerned The Shadow.

Extinguishing the room lights, The Shadow tried the door. It came open easily; he glided through to the hall. When he tried the outer knob, he gained his first surprise. The knob was loose. The door had not been latched at all.

That was curious, since Professor Quedden had spoken of protection from the closed door. Coupled to the riddle was another factor that The Shadow immediately noticed. The whirring fan was slowing to a stop. Evidently, the door latch controlled it.

There was a way to make certain. The Shadow closed the door from the hallway side. He waited a dozen seconds; then quickly opened it. Leaning into the room, he heard a dying whirr. The fan had started when he closed the door; stopped again, when he reopened it.

This time, The Shadow closed the door and left it shut. He was out of the trap, whatever it might be. He had other matters to concern him; chiefly, an inspection of the downstairs laboratory and the workshop. After that, The Shadow needed a mode of exit. It would not be difficult to find one.

As for the office, The Shadow had left it exactly as he found it. Since the fan was again in motion, Professor Quedden would find no clue to the fact that an intruder had visited the office. The Shadow's campaign against the Murder Master looked like a clear one. It would have been, but for an important fact.

The spinning fan within the office had begun its motion at the time when Quedden had first closed the door. It had not been necessary for an intruder to enter, to put the device in operation.

That fact was springing to The Shadow's mind as he stood outside the door. He dropped the thought almost instantly, as his strained ears caught a sound that made him forget the fan. The noise came from the hallway, near the side door that led to the old storeroom. The Shadow turned, expecting to see Quedden or Thoyer.

Instead, he faced an unexpected challenger. A girl stood in the hallway, covering him with a leveled revolver. Who she was, how she had come here – for the present, both were mysteries. But there was no doubt about the girl's determination. That was told, doubly, by her grim stare and her grip.

To her, The Shadow was an enemy. Her purpose was to hold him helpless.

CHAPTER XII. FUTILE BATTLE

THE SHADOW stood motionless at the end of the hallway, his hands half raised. Unarmed, he was forced to that position, until he could parry with this new challenger. Even his breathing was slow; so slight that there was not the slightest sway to his flowing cloak.

That pose puzzled the girl; she showed her uncertainty. It was obvious that she was not a crook; had she been, she would have recognized who The Shadow was. In the half light of the hallway, she wondered whether this strangely silent figure could be human. All that the girl could see of The Shadow's features were his eyes. They had a fiery glow that worried her.

In his turn, The Shadow was taking this respite to decide his next course. He was reading the girl's expressions; from them, he realized the factors that limited her action. Like himself, she was an intruder. Also, she had expected to meet Professor Quedden; not someone else.

She had come from the storeroom; its door was opened wider. Though determined to keep The Shadow at bay, she was anxious to do so without noise, for she had not uttered a word. Only a gesture of her gun had encouraged The Shadow to lift his hands.

That meant that the girl would avoid gunfire, except in an extreme emergency. The Shadow was gambling on that prospect; his best game, therefore, was to lull the girl. Calmly, The Shadow waited. All the while that the girl tried vainly to see his face, he was studying hers.

Her features were well molded; they gave her a definite beauty, marred only by the thrust of her chin. That, however, was only temporary, forced by the girl's effort to be determined. So was the glare of her dark-brown eyes. Naturally, they would have appeared much milder.

The girl's paleness, too, was forced by circumstances. Her skin had a sheer whiteness, against the dark background of her hair. The tight clamp that she gave the revolver was an effort to control her nervousness; not a desire to be quick with the trigger.

Whatever the reason for her expedition to Quedden's, she had carefully prepared for the trip. Her clothes were dark, of rough cloth. They were tight-fitting except for her skirt, which was of an athletic type that allowed plenty of freedom.

As the lull continued, The Shadow saw the girl's free hand clench tightly. She was fighting off her nervousness, more than ever. Her lips opened; she seemed ready to give a command, then changed her mind. Her eyes narrowed, as she stepped slowly forward. Closer to The Shadow, she spoke in cautious contralto.

"Step toward me!" was her command. "Keep close to the other wall!"

The Shadow obeyed. He saw that the girl wanted him to pass her, so that she could force him into the storeroom. She was still too distant for The Shadow to spring to action. Nor did he make any unwise move as he went past the girl. That was the moment when she was most on edge.

It was at the storeroom door that The Shadow halted, his breathing as slow and controlled as before. His hesitation showed no tenseness; on the contrary, it was natural, as though he expected another command. One came – close to The Shadow's ear. With it was the nudge of the gun muzzle against the center of his back.

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"Move into that room –"

THE girl's whisper ended with a sharp gasp. Imperceptibly, The Shadow's shoulder blade had edged backward beneath his cloak. The twist that he made was swiftly unexpected. His shoulder blade clipped the gun muzzle, joggled the revolver in the girl's hand.

Before she could recover it, The Shadow's fist was clamping the weapon. His digging fingers forced the girl's clutch from the trigger.

The girl put up a fierce, but silent, struggle. Her left hand clawed for The Shadow's throat, only to be gripped by his free fist. Her efforts to regain the revolver failed; it was slipping farther from her grasp. Frantically, the girl tried to wrench loose toward the storeroom door. The Shadow let her take that direction; in her eagerness, the girl lost the gun entirely.

Once in the storeroom, she tried to gasp a cry. The Shadow prevented it by tilting her head with easy throat pressure. Looking upward, the girl stared straight into The Shadow's eyes. She still had fight, but he held her helpless, with a clutch that was almost velvet.

The girl realized, though, that those easy fingers would turn to steel, if she forced it. She quieted; but her eyes flared with anger, as she panted long deep breaths. It was her turn to play a waiting game. She withheld the useless cry that The Shadow could so easily prevent.

For the first time since he had left Quedden's office, The Shadow took a deep breath of his own. The effect was more startling than his encounter with the girl. Compared with the stuffy office, this air had the sting of tart wine. The strong scent of ozone tinged the entire atmosphere.

Another breath; it came with intoxicating strength. The Shadow found himself gulping the air with an instinctive eagerness that he could not resist. The room swayed; the girl seemed to melt from his grasp. Confused thoughts drilled The Shadow's brain.

He had to hold the girl; to question her. It was vital to learn who she was; why she had come here. With his campaign against the Murder Master dependent upon his own disappearance, The Shadow could not afford to let it be known that he still lived.

Conflicting with those impressions was a flash-back to the scene in Quedden's office. The Shadow remembered the dank air; the whirling fan that he had discovered near the door. They fitted with the information that The Shadow had noted in Quedden's safe, but to which he had given too little attention.

The office was a trap; rendered so by an odorless gas that Quedden loosed every night, when he closed the door. That fan had stirred the vapor through the office. A person breathing it would neither suspect it nor feel immediate effects.

It took draughts of clear air to make the gas effective. Anyone who inhaled it would experience the results on the way out from Quedden's office. Had The Shadow gone to the lower laboratory, he would be swaying there, instead of here in this storeroom.

Old Quedden might have lost his faith in that delayed-action gas, had he been here to witness The Shadow's resistance against its effect. The Shadow had been in the office a full hour; hence he had inhaled more than an ordinary quota of the vapor. Nevertheless, he was still possessed of energy.

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REELING across the room, shaken by every new breath of air that he inhaled, The Shadow had the strength to guide his actions. If he had been in the lower laboratory, he could have forced his way out to safety before the gas took its full hold. Here, he was restrained by the girl who was still anxious to take him prisoner.

Partly released from The Shadow's clutch, she was battling with new fury. Numbly, The Shadow tried to hold her. He let the gun go from his hand, kicked it mechanically when it hit the floor. If the girl had tried to regain it, The Shadow might have had a chance to rally. Instead, she continued her battle with the cloaked fighter. Her own wrists wrenched free, the girl shoved her hands to The Shadow's throat.

Frail fingers showed remarkable tightness when they gripped. Half sagging, The Shadow was forced to clutch the girl's arms to prevent his fall. The whole room was whirling; his eyes closed, The Shadow sensed nothing but darkness. The hold on his throat was relentless. The girl wasn't handling The Shadow as easily as he had treated her.

Then, while his head roared with rolling throbs like kettledrums, The Shadow felt the floor become steady. The girl, ignorant of what had caused The Shadow's dizziness, was actually aiding him by her pressure on his neck. The Shadow could no longer get the air that he wanted, even though it overpowered him.

Gloved hands tightened. The Shadow's eyes came open, to see the girl against the dim light from the hallway. She was panting, with long gasps of weariness. Her fingers yielded. Again, she was almost helpless. Victory had returned to The Shadow – until he took another breath, which he so badly needed.

That one deep puff of air was charged with all the power that The Shadow had escaped while he choked. It filled his lungs like a tidal wave of ozone. His head split with the crackle of a million insects. The Shadow's hands fell away; his arms spread wide as he rolled to the door. With that fall came blankness.

Steadying, the girl stared at her cloaked adversary, wondering if his sprawl was another ruse. Slowly, she realized that The Shadow was unconscious. Stooping, she listened for his breathing; she could scarcely hear it. The Shadow was no more than a huddled shape, in which life seemed dwindled to low ebb.

THE girl found her revolver. She groped toward the high-placed window at the back of the storeroom. She halted there, to listen for sounds that she heard from the hallway. Tensely, the girl waited, as footsteps came along. When they were almost at the door, she suddenly aimed her revolver.

It was Thoyer, not Quedden, who went past the door. The girl let the gun lower. She could hear the professor's querulous voice from the front of the hall.

"Never mind the door, Thoyer!" Quedden's cackle took on an expectant glee. "The sounds that we heard no longer matter. If anyone has gone in the office, let him remain there! We shall find him" – the chuckle was prophetic – "after he comes out!"

Thoyer returned; he stopped at the storeroom and glanced into its gloom. He did not see The Shadow flattened on the floor. The girl was also obscure; she had pressed close to the wall beneath the rear window. She heard Thoyer go front, to report to Quedden.

"I guess we imagined things, sir," said the assistant. "I don't think that anyone has been up here."

After the two had gone, the girl peered out into the hallway. She saw the curtains at the front. She knew that Quedden and Thoyer were in rooms beyond them, but she fancied that both might be on guard. Any unusual sound might warn them.

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Another look toward the office door; the girl shuddered. Quedden's words had explained The Shadow's plight. Though the office had been her original objective, the girl no longer cared to investigate it. Instead, she returned softly through the storeroom, reached high and flickered a flash at the little window.

Soon, her summons were answered. The window was opened from the outside; two men held a whispered consultation with the girl. She moved to the center of the floor, turned her flashlight toward The Shadow. The men came through with a short ladder.

Working with all possible silence; they raised The Shadow and hoisted him toward the window, where they finally rolled his inert form through to the outside roof.

The girl listened at the door to the hallway, ready with her revolver. Hearing nothing from Quedden or Thoyer, she came back and climbed the ladder. As soon as she reached the roof, the ladder was drawn through. The girl lowered the inside shade; the window was closed afterward.

The trio of new intruders had gone, taking The Shadow with them. Quedden's trap had shown its efficiency, for it had caught a victim in the manner that the professor had hoped. The Shadow had been rendered totally helpless by the soporific gas.

That, however, was something that Professor Quedden would not learn when morning came. He would find no evidence whatever to prove that an intruder had entered the gas-laden office.

Whoever the girl and her followers might be, they certainly were not tools of the Murder Master. Chances were that The Shadow's future would prove more pleasant than if he had been left in Quedden's domain.

There, the power of the Murder Master held full sway.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S ALLY

WHEN The Shadow awakened, he was conscious of dim daylight, enough to give him an idea of his new surroundings. He was reclining on a couch in a small room that appeared to be part of a large, old-fashioned apartment.

His cloak was still on his shoulders; his hat lay on a chair beside the couch. The dimness of the room was caused by the lowered shades. Rising, somewhat shaky, The Shadow went to the window and raised the blind.

He was gazing from a fifth-story, over low-lying blocks of buildings in the neighborhood of the Greenwich Village section of New York. The spire of the Empire State Building, glistening in sunlight, formed a fairly distant mark that enabled him to gauge his present location.

Air still seemed touched with ozone, but its freshness no longer had that overwhelming effect. The Shadow felt weak; he attributed that to his need of food. In fact, the daylight bothered him more than the air. He decided that it would be best to rest his eyes while the dawn increased.

Again stretched on the couch, The Shadow looked occasionally toward the window. He noticed that the glare was becoming gradually less. That puzzled him, until he made another trip to the window. Noting the glisten on the Empire State Building tower, The Shadow recognized his previous error.

This was not dawn; it was sunset. It had taken him a full day to recover from the effects of Quedden's high-powered gas.

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Since dusk was near, it would not be long before someone came to this room. The Shadow thought of that, while he stood beside the window. As he started another trip toward the couch, he heard a soft knock at the door.

There was something hopeful in that knock; when The Shadow replied, he heard a girl's exclamation beyond the door. She was giving orders to someone outside.

When the door finally opened, The Shadow saw the girl who had battled him the night before. She was bringing a tray holding foods of various sort, that he might choose for himself. There was small table near the window. The girl placed the tray there, invited The Shadow to a chair.

The Shadow placed himself away from the light. His face was only vaguely visible to the girl as she stood by the window; but her features were plainly outlined. The girl seemed to prefer that situation, for she had much to tell and wanted The Shadow to believe her.

"My name is Elsa Wendley," she stated, as she faced about from the window. "You are known as The Shadow. I am sorry" – her smile was regretful – "that I did not know that when I first met you, last night."

The Shadow did not ask who had given Elsa her information. The girl explained that herself.

"One of my servants had heard of you," she said. "I realized then that you could not be my enemy. I had my servants bring you here. Since then, I have been waiting, hoping, for your recovery."

The Shadow put a calm-toned question: "Why did you realize that I could not be an enemy?"

The question brought a quick flash from Elsa's eyes. It reminded The Shadow of the fury that she had shown the night before. That glare, however, was not intended for The Shadow. It was Elsa's recollection of another personage.

"You are opposed to crime," declared the girl. "You could only have had one purpose in visiting Quedden's house. That would be to expose him as the criminal that he is! Professor Quedden is the Murder Master!"

ELSA picked up a newspaper, spread it before The Shadow's gaze. Shifting from behind the table, The Shadow read the columns by the light from the window. The news interested him immensely. For the first time, he was learning the details that surrounded the deaths of Hyvran, Palbrock and Denniman. He saw how they fitted with the coded messages that he had deciphered at Quedden's.

As The Shadow placed the newspaper aside, Elsa pointed from the window. Her finger indicated a squatly house, set in a near-by block. The Shadow saw a roof that jutted back from a wide window.

"That is where Quedden lives!" exclaimed Elsa. "We have been watching that house for weeks! Last night, we entered by the back roof. I intended to find Quedden's headquarters, to gain whatever evidence lay there."

"After your experience" – the girl turned toward The Shadow – "I knew that it would not be safe to enter the office. Also, I supposed" – her tone was hopeful – "that you had already gathered whatever evidence might be there."

The Shadow was back in his chair. His eyes were steady toward Elsa. The girl met them with a frank gaze. She waited, expecting the command that came. The Shadow's calm tone carried the friendship for which Elsa had hoped:

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"Tell me your entire story."

Elsa began the story. It involved her brother, Richard; she winced, at first, when she mentioned his name. Dick had gone from the up-state town where they lived; and he had turned crook, afterward. He had been sentenced for embezzlement; had served a term in the penitentiary.

By the time Elsa completed that portion of the narrative, her reluctance had vanished. Deepening dusk had obscured The Shadow; finished with his meal, he was silent in the chair. All the while, though, Elsa could sense his presence. She knew that he was listening with keen sympathy; that every detail she recounted might prove valuable.

"Dick was given a parole," declared Elsa. "He was enthusiastic, eager for a new life. He didn't come home, because people there would know him for a convict. Instead, he found a job here in New York, thanks to a man who understood him."

This time, The Shadow's voice supplied a quiet interruption, with its question:

"The man's name?"

"Melvin Graham," replied Elsa. "Dick wasn't the only one that Mr. Graham helped. There were others – and they've all gone straight; but Dick couldn't seem to do the same. I learned that" – Elsa choked, to hold back a sob – "the night when Dick came home!"

It was an ordeal for Elsa to describe that night; but she managed it. A car had come up the driveway, stopping with its wheels against the front steps of the house. The grind of brakes had alarmed Elsa; she had reached the door as soon as the servants. Dick had staggered in from the darkness, his hand pressed to a gory shirt-front.

Dick was dying from bullet wounds. There hadn't been time to summon the town doctor. A call to his house brought the reply that he was away on a case. Dick didn't want the doctor. He said there would be no use to bring him; that it would only mean trouble for Elsa afterward. He had time to gasp his story; he wanted Elsa to hear it.

He had gone back to crime, without Graham's knowledge. Old pals had talked him into it; but they weren't to blame. The man responsible was Jerome Quedden, who posed as an inventor and lived in New York. He was the criminal-in-chief to whom chaps like Dick reported.

Quedden's orders came by short-wave radio, over some special apparatus that Dick and the others used. They, in turn, left reports at Quedden's home. They had gone out on ugly jobs; Dick hadn't minded that, until it came to murder. Quedden, it seemed, could cover murder as easily as other crimes.

Dick had broken with the others. He had started home. Outside of town, his car was overtaken. There, his former pals had loaded him with bullets; left him for dead. But Dick had driven the rest of the way, to tell his story to his sister.

ELSA ended her account abruptly. It was almost dark outside; The Shadow could scarcely see the girl, as she took a chair beside his table. The Shadow knew that she expected questions, for her narrative had been a strained one. Moreover, she had not explained why she had come to New York.

"The others," quizzed The Shadow. "Dick's pals. Did he name any of them?"

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"No," replied Elsa. "He said that maybe some were as sick of it as he was. If Quedden could be brought to justice, they would have their chance to clear themselves from him. So Dick thought; but I believe that none of them will try to break away as he did."

The Shadow shared Elsa's opinion. He asked the girl how she had explained Dick's death. She hesitated; then admitted that she and the servants had secretly buried the body. That had been Dick's last request. His parole term had ended; hence the parole board did not wonder at his absence.

"I came to New York," added Elsa. "Of course, I feared that I had acted illegally in not reporting Dick's death. That was why I was careful when I went to see Mr. Graham, who had been Dick's friend."

"What did you tell him?"

"I saw his secretary first. I said that I had not heard from Dick for a long while. The secretary produced letters, typed and with Dick's signature. Presumably, Dick had a job in Texas. But I know that those letters must be forgeries. More of Quedden's work."

"And when you saw Graham –"

"I saw him only once. He was too busy to give me a long interview. He promised to write to Dick personally, to ask him why he had not written me. I asked him to find out all he could regarding Dick. My hope was that he would first learn something for himself; after his suspicions were aroused, I could talk freely.

"But I never went back to see Mr. Graham. A few days later, I learned where Professor Quedden lived. From then on" – Elsa's voice had low, cold firmness – "I have been watching Quedden! Always waiting for the time when I could meet him, in his own abode, and there confront him as my brother's murderer!"

Elsa's statement explained why she had not again visited Melvin Graham. Gripped with hope of vengeance against Quedden, she had thought it best that no one should know that she had remained in New York. Perhaps, at first, she wondered if her course could be justified; but it was evident that, at present, Elsa had no doubt.

"When I read of the Murder Master," she told The Shadow, "I was sure that he must be Professor Quedden. I felt that I had made a terrible mistake in not revealing him to the law; then I realized that such a step would have accomplished nothing.

"Quedden's position is too secure. My story is weak – the sort that would not be believed. The Murder Master would be warned of danger, and would easily divert it. My servants advised me against it. I concluded that the way to end the Murder Master was to follow my own planned course."

This time, Elsa waited, hoping for some word from The Shadow. She did not have to tell him that she trusted him. The fullness of her story gave proof of that. Elsa had found The Shadow already at Quedden's headquarters. He had penetrated there ahead of her. She was sure that he could give the advice and aid that she could gain nowhere else.

THE SHADOW arose in the gloom. His hand rested lightly upon Elsa's shoulder. His calm voice was token of his approval.

"Your choice was fortunate," affirmed The Shadow. "It enabled you to bring me away before I was discovered at Quedden's. The Murder Master cannot know that I am still alive.

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"But before we can move against him, we must know more. I have learned something of his methods. You have told me other facts. There are ways whereby I can acquire the needed details. When I have them, the Murder Master can be given to the law."

Elsa began a protest. The law had shown its inability to trap the Murder Master. She repeated her belief that proof could not be had. The Shadow's calm tone silenced her. It gave a positive assurance.

"I shall gain evidence," promised The Shadow, "that will link the deaths of Hyvran, Palbrock and Denniman. With it, the law will learn the names of those who serve the Murder Master. He will stand exposed, with his guilty crew. The law will believe the proof that I produce."

Elsa needed no more. She spoke her confidence in The Shadow's ability, her willingness to accept his decision. All that she asked was how The Shadow wished her to cooperate. She received that, in a single sentence.

"Remain here," came the whispered answer, "and be ready, until you hear from me again."

There was something strange in The Shadow's tone. Its words lingered in Elsa's mind. Particularly, the last word: "again." What did The Shadow mean by it? Puzzled, Elsa spoke a question; she received no answer.

Wonderingly, the girl groped for a lamp cord; she tugged it, to bring a glow to the darkened room. She found herself staring at vacancy. With his last statement, The Shadow had departed.

Elsa Wendley stood alone; but she no longer felt that she was engaged in a solitary cause. She had become The Shadow's ally. When the time came for a meeting with the Murder Master, The Shadow would remember Elsa Wendley.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW'S RETURN

SOON after he had left Elsa's apartment, The Shadow arrived at his sanctum. There, in a room with black-lined walls, he worked at a polished table beneath a bluish light. The Shadow was studying clippings that concerned the three murders of a few nights ago.

The Shadow was considering what the law had learned. Its progress had stopped with the political link that Commissioner Weston had mentioned to Inspector Cardona. That link had weakened the more that it had been tested.

Granted that three murdered men had planned a united campaign involving different factions, none could have made positive statements without talking to some of his own supporters. Nobody close to Hyvran, Palbrock or Denniman had heard of any vote-getting arrangement between the trio. The deeper that the law went in that investigation, the less likely the theory seemed.

That was why The Shadow gave credit to the theory.

It fitted exactly with the methods of the Murder Master – to point the police along the proper trail, then leave them guessing. His talk of murders had sounded like hoaxes; but that talk had teeth, as The Shadow, himself, had learned.

The same with this fading theory. The Shadow believed that the link was there. The Murder Master had faults in his methods. One was a tendency toward too great efficiency. He worked with purposes; then tried to cover them.

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Viewing the Murder Master from that angle, The Shadow was digging deep into the schemer's armor. So deep in fact, that it became obvious why the Murder Master had been so anxious to eliminate The Shadow. He had guessed that only The Shadow had the ability to see where a trail went wrong.

Three names appeared in ink, as The Shadow wrote them:

Richard Hyvran

Justin Palbrock

Frank Denniman

The Shadow transcribed those names into a coded message of his own. With the names went brief instructions. All facts concerning the three were to be sifted; particularly the most obvious ones, such as statements that they had made publicly. All, to some degree, had been in the public eye. Newspapers would carry the sort of facts The Shadow wanted.

Those, peculiarly, were the very sort of facts that the law would overlook. The fact that both Hyvran and Palbrock had been on their way to public meetings, that Denniman had been eager to get with certain politicians, was something that had been taken as a matter of course. To The Shadow, it offered a deeper significance.

Placing his message in an envelope, The Shadow addressed it to Rutledge Mann, an insurance broker who was one of The Shadow's agents. Mann's specialty was the gathering of the type of information that The Shadow needed in this case.

THERE was another detail before The Shadow left the sanctum; one that Elsa Wendley would have appreciated. The girl had given The Shadow a most vital clue, when she had told the story of her brother. It explained exactly why The Shadow had been unable to place his fingers on members of the band that had been so active in recent crime.

Constantly, The Shadow's agents had been scouring the underworld for traces of the hidden crooks. Similarly, the police had been urging stoolies to tap the "grapevine" telegraph. Both efforts had brought nothing. Seemingly, the criminals, now identified with the Murder Master, had been wizards when it came to hiding out.

Elsa's testimony had ended that situation. Her brother had definitely belonged to the group that served the Murder Master. Dick Wendley had been a paroled convict. He had joined up with his old pals; yet the parole board had not discovered it.

There was a lot wrong with the present parole system; but, at best, men on probation could merely get around it, not trample over it. It would have been difficult for Dick Wendley to openly associate with crooks who were under police observation.

Moreover, The Shadow had Dick's record. He brought it from the files in the sanctum, spread it on the table and studied the names of the dead man's former associates. The majority of them had gone to the State penitentiary, for various offenses.

The list was a long one; with a dozen names were checkmarks indicating that those men had been paroled. That was their most recent link with Dick Wendley. The Shadow remembered Elsa's mention of her visits to Melvin Graham. From all reports, Dick had apparently been keeping out of mischief; yet Elsa knew

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otherwise.

What applied to Dick Wendley could apply to all others who served the Murder Master.

Paroled criminals were the men he used. The very precariousness of their situation was in keeping with the Murder Master's methods of turning weakness into strength. The Shadow's laugh was a solemn whisper that brought mirthless echoes from the sanctum walls as he pictured the gigantic possibilities of the Murder Master's schemes.

Criminals on parole, with records kept clean, were men that the law had never suspected. The Shadow could not criticize that error. He had also made it. But that stage was past. Beginning with tonight, The Shadow intended to investigate the ex-crooks whose present paths were most pleasing to the parole board.

Behind good records would be clever alibis, hatched by a close-knit crew. Alibis supplied through the ingenuity of the Murder Master, to protect the men he needed. Again, the Murder Master had demonstrated his ability to play a double game.

Not only had he chosen henchmen who could be kept safe through his clever maneuvers; he had been able to pick the types of crooks he wanted. On parole, even the most crafty workers would have to turn down offers from known bigshots. But the Murder Master was unknown. It was safe to work for him.

MORE files were lying on The Shadow's table, when a tiny light beamed from the wall. It signified a call from Burbank, The Shadow's contact man. Word had just come through that Commissioner Weston was on his way to his apartment.

Extinguishing the blue light, The Shadow postponed his present work in order to visit the commissioner. When he left the sanctum, he had little prospect of gaining valuable facts. They did not bob up overfrequently when The Shadow visited the commissioner. Tonight, however, The Shadow was due for a welcome surprise.

At Weston's, he was to learn more than his own files showed. His postponed work would prove unnecessary after the visit.

When he reached the commissioner's apartment, The Shadow was in the character of Kent Allard. He sensed something in the air the moment that Weston's houseman admitted him.

Allard was usually a welcome arrival; tonight, the servant wasn't quite sure how to greet him. He said that the commissioner was in an important conference; that he expected no one else.

In the even tone that suited Allard, The Shadow insisted that Weston be informed of his arrival. The servant delivered the message. There was considerable delay; finally, it was Commissioner Weston himself who returned.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Allard" – Weston was brisk, almost abrupt – "but matters are rather unusual tonight. Definitely so, in fact. Rather different, you understand, from the evening when I invited you to hear the radio program."

"I was detained that evening," was Allard's reply. His lips showed a reminiscent smile. "Of course, commissioner, I would not care to intrude tonight. I merely thought that you were having another get-together, of the same guests."

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There was a peculiar significance to Allard's tone that struck Weston instantly. Bluntly, the commissioner demanded:

"What gave you that impression, Allard?"

"I saw one of the group come in here," answered Allard, calmly. "Let me see – what is his name? – the chap who wears the gold-rimmed spectacles. I have it! Melvin Graham!"

The Shadow was playing a long-shot stroke, on the chance that there was little to lose; much to gain. If Weston said that Graham was not here, Allard could apologize and say he was mistaken. If Graham actually happened to be present, Allard would appear to have an inkling regarding the present conference; enough to worry the commissioner.

The long shot clicked. Weston's jaw stiffened; his fingers plucked the tips of his military mustache.

"I didn't suppose that anyone had seen Graham come here," he declared. Then, anxiously: "Did you see any of the others?"

The commissioner's tone indicated that he did not expect Allard to know who the "others" were. The Shadow parried promptly.

"I saw two other men," he remarked in Allard's tone. "They were strangers; but I would recognize them if I saw them again."

THAT was enough for Weston. He motioned for Allard to accompany him to the office. On the way, Weston confided:

"No one must know of this meeting. I must have your promise, Allard, before I admit you."

Weston's hand was on the doorknob. Calmly, Allard assured him that the visit would be confidential. Weston opened the door; one minute later, Kent Allard was shaking hands with Melvin Graham, while Weston was waiting to introduce him to three other visitors.

Those three were Ace Curdy, Dobie Kring and Doc Harstell. Although they didn't guess it, the introduction was unnecessary. Kent Allard had recently been viewing their rogues' gallery portraits. Those were in the file that lay on the table in The Shadow's sanctum.

Inspector Joe Cardona was also present. He wasn't worried when Weston explained why the three ex-crooks were here. Of all the commissioner's friends, Allard was the pick, in Cardona's estimation. There were times, Joe remembered, when Allard had supplied some worthwhile ideas to the law. Weston, himself, had thought of that, in admitting Allard.

The three crooks began their reports. Singly, they had visited their old haunts, as they had promised. Ace had tried to get a line on the shooting that had followed the flight of thugs from WQJ; but there had been very few guesses regarding the identity of the triggermen involved.

Dobie Kring had looked up some old specialists among safe-crackers; none knew anything about the Murder Master.

Doc Harstell had simply let it be known that his old shingle was out; if needed, he would be ready to look after wounded thugs who came to him.

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"It's tough, working like a stoolie," declared Ace. "It never was my line, commissioner. I thought it would be easy; but it ain't. I get an idea every now and then that the guys are wise."

"That's not it, Ace," put in Dobie. "They figure we're regular enough. But they're holding back because they think the parole board is keeping tabs on us. They got an idea they may be reached through us."

"They'll get over that," assured Doc. "I've taken it easier than you fellows. They'll look you up if they need you – just like they will me."

Cardona liked Doc's attitude, and said so. He had a hunch that the Murder Master would plot new crime, more extensive than before. Joe summed his opinion with the statement:

"The guy may be crazy; but what if he is? That's all the more reason he won't stop. His ideas will get bigger and bigger. He'll need more crooks to work for him. He's got feelers everywhere, even though we haven't spotted them. These are the fellows that will hear from him. Our regular stoolies won't."

The three crooks were pleased to hear Cardona term them in a class other than ordinary stool pigeons. Weston gratified them with a handshake all around. Graham told them that his limousine was waiting, that it would take them to their lodgings and return for him.

AFTER the trio had departed, Graham expressed disappointment because the reformed prisoners had gotten no results. Weston and Cardona were still hopeful, however. They felt that the paroled men could produce real information. Kent Allard was a silent listener to that theory. He expressed no opinion.

When The Shadow left, he reviewed the scene that he had witnessed. It was the most brazen sham that he had ever encountered. It stood as new proof of the Murder Master's cunning. The supercrook had unquestionably ordered his choicest workers to offer their services to the law. They, the actual accomplices in murder, were moving about unwatched. Under the circumstances, they could alibi anything that happened.

To the law, perhaps; not to The Shadow. For in the strength that the Murder Master's men had acquired lay a weakness, as apparent as the death trap that The Shadow had escaped. Formerly, such thugs as Ace, Dobie and Doc would have been difficult to watch. Moving in the open, they were easy game.

The Shadow had agents of his own. With tonight, they would begin a new task. No longer would they scour the underworld for facts that never came to light. They would watch the trio of crooks that the law had so obligingly come to trust.

One hour later, Burbank relayed those orders from The Shadow. The campaign against the Murder Master had begun in full.

CHAPTER XV. INTO THE MESH

DAYS had passed since The Shadow's return. Tense expectancy gripped Manhattan's underworld, thanks to persistent rumors that were piped along the grapevine. Those referred to the night when crime had gone on the air from WQJ. That night, the Murder Master had announced swift death. Three victims had been found by the law.

The Murder Master had promised a fourth, The Shadow. Since then, The Shadow had been definitely absent. If he had survived the Murder Master's trap, whatever it was, he would be searching for the supercrook and the underworld would know it. The Shadow had a habit of scouring scumland, meeting up with small-fry crooks to make them talk.

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So far, there were no such cases. Each day made it more evident that The Shadow must have met with disaster. The Murder Master stood supreme. Seemingly, he had enveloped himself with The Shadow's own cloak, to become as mysterious a figure as the black-clad fighter once had been.

Soon, the Murder Master would move to new crime. How, where, were unanswered questions. These rumors, however, had an authentic touch, because of their repetition. It was plain that they were sponsored by the Murder Master himself.

There was a reason why the underworld had not seen The Shadow. Playing his cool game to deceive the Murder Master, The Shadow was staying close to his sanctum, except when he appeared publicly as Allard. The grapevine rumors were not all that reached him. Day by day, The Shadow was accumulating concise reports from his agents.

Rutledge Mann had provided the newspaper clippings that The Shadow wanted. The Shadow had studied them, and had arranged them as required. From that research, The Shadow had learned the reason why the Murder Master had ordered triple death. It fitted neatly with The Shadow's other facts.

Mann's information could wait. It was ready, when the time came. For the present, The Shadow was concerned with the movements of the paroled crooks who served the Murder Master.

Ace Curdy had been around shooting-galleries, winning bets by triggering the spots out of playing cards. Dobie Kring was frequenting gambling joints, playing poker with old acquaintances. It was Doc Harstell who used a different policy.

Doc had chosen an underground stronghold near the border of the badlands. He was ready to take care of crippled mobsters who came his way. Meanwhile, Doc's hide-away served another purpose. It was the one spot where Ace and Dobie could meet with him and be completely in private.

Doc Harstell expected his pals tonight. The Shadow's agents had learned that from casual telephone calls that they had overheard. Moreover, one agent – Cliff Marsland – had provided The Shadow with a complete description of Harstell's hide-away. Cliff had posed as a visiting thug, the sort that Doc was always ready to welcome as a future customer.

THE night was dank and foggy when The Shadow approached the block where Harstell's new headquarters was located. The darkness, tinged with mist, was the sort that best suited The Shadow. This was his first foray since his return; a ticklish one, under present circumstances.

If any shuffling underworld denizen should spy The Shadow and pass that word along, the news would reach the Murder Master. That would ruin The Shadow's entire campaign. Nevertheless, this expedition was essential.

Tonight, paroled prisoners expected word from the Murder Master. Only The Shadow could penetrate to intercept the message. His familiar garb of black was the only attire that could serve him.

There was an alleyway that led to the door of Harstell's stronghold. At present, the windows of a small store cast a light on the front sidewalk. That had been arranged so that watchers across the way could spot any person who entered the alley.

There was another route, however, to the alley's depths; a precarious one, across the roofs. The Shadow chose that path.

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Picking an inset fire escape, The Shadow silently drew down the hanging ladder. His weight upon it, he blinked a tiny flashlight as a signal. There was a wait, while a car rolled along the rear street; then two men slid from a coupe and joined The Shadow in the darkness.

One was Cliff Marsland, a brawny chap clad in rough, dark clothes. The other was a hunchy fellow, with wizened face; his name was "Hawkeye." Both were secret agents of The Shadow.

They were the exact pair that The Shadow needed. Cliff, when need be, could match any thug in toughness. Hawkeye was a crafty spotter who could spy danger at almost any range.

The two were provided with bundles of compact rope. The Shadow sent them up the fire tower ahead of him, so that he could raise the lower ladder when he followed them. He accomplished that without noise. When he reached the roof, his agents were awaiting him.

The first need for the rope became apparent when they reached the gabled roof directly in back of the alleyway. That roof sloped steeply toward the front. The Shadow could gain a grip there, but he doubted that his companions could. That was why he took one end of the rope as he started a lone descent.

The roof was black; the swirling wisps of fog gave added cover, enough for The Shadow's aids to follow later. At the bottom of the slope, The Shadow reached a ledge; there, he stretched over and looped the end of the rope around a rain spout.

A single tug of the rope: Cliff caught the signal and tightened the upper end of the rope to a chimney. The rope had become a taut rail, making the roof a catwalk for The Shadow's agents.

As yet, they were not needed. The Shadow craned from the ledge to learn what lay below. He was above a blank wall – an extension of a house that made the alley a blind one. The wall was about two stories high; approximately sixteen feet.

There were men below – a pair of them, judging from the mutters of their conversation. On watch in the thick blackness at the interior of the blind alley, they could not be seen by those who spied from across the front street. It was obvious that the lurkers in the alleyway were on similar duty to those out front.

No entrance could be effected into Harstell's stronghold without a preliminary encounter with the two guards. That, in turn, was difficult business, for any undue noise would spread the alarm to those out front. The Shadow decided that swiftness would aid silence.

EASING from the front of the ledge, The Shadow lowered himself into the darkness, hanging by his hands. Neither of the watchers guessed that a dangling shape hovered only a few feet above their heads. Listening, The Shadow gauged the position of the watchers. He shifted, hand over hand, along the ledge, until he was directly over one man's head. Stretching, The Shadow tugged the rope twice – a signal for Cliff and Hawkeye to descend the sloping roof.

Two seconds later, The Shadow's hands released.

The first token that told the watchers of The Shadow's presence was the swish of his fall. The first of the pair had no opportunity to look up. The Shadow landed squarely on his shoulders; flattened him to the darkened alley.

The other thug caught a hazy impression of the sprawling figures; he knew that the attacker must be uppermost. He did exactly what The Shadow expected. He piled in, swinging a revolver, hoping to sledge the

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intruder's head.

The Shadow's arms were crossed above his slouch hat. They warded off the revolver slug. Simultaneously, The Shadow jolted upward, as though recoiling from his plunge. With the rebound, his crossed arms caught the crook's arms.

The Shadow twisted back toward the wall; as he braced himself, he whipped his arms apart. The move spun the thug completely over; he was back upward when The Shadow jolted him against the ground. With arms like steel bars, The Shadow shoved his foeman forward, then did a powerful back buckle. That lashed the crook upward toward the wall. The fellow took the impact head-on.

Letting that foeman slump, The Shadow turned for the man who had taken the first sprawl. He met him, as he came to his feet. The Shadow's fists took the thug's throat, throttled the gargle that came from ugly lips. The crook's hand loosened, to let a half-drawn gun slide back into his pocket.

Deftly, The Shadow changed his grip into a one-hand hold upon his silenced prisoner's neck. His free hand brought out a gun of his own. When that cold muzzle pressed the captive's forehead, the fellow gave up all fight. He knew that his enemy was The Shadow.

There was no mistaking the whispered order with which The Shadow told the mobster to turn about. Keeping his .45 against the prisoner's neck, The Shadow shifted so that his own form was toward the mouth of the alley. Producing his tiny flashlight, he gave blinks from the folds of his cloak.

Those flashes could not be seen from the street, but they were spotted by eyes above. Quick dots and dashes told what The Shadow wanted. A coil of rope dropped down beside him. With whispered threats close to the prisoner's ear, The Shadow withdrew his automatic. The thug didn't budge; he knew how quickly The Shadow could whip the gun forth again.

A few minutes later, the thug lay trussed in the rope, chewing at a gag between his teeth. Muffling his flashlight, The Shadow studied the foeman who had bashed the wall. That fellow would stay silent for the brief time that The Shadow required.

THE door to Harstell's hide-out was unlocked. Doc kept it that way as a come-on to crooks. The Shadow entered, moved through darkness, picking the course that Cliff had given him. He saw a light in a little room that served as living quarters; but that was not The Shadow's objective.

He chose a larger room, that Doc Harstell had fitted out with medical apparatus. It was dark; that suited The Shadow all the better. He closed the door; moved about with blinking flashlight. He came to a stack of boxes, carefully unplied them and worked at one. After replacing the boxes, The Shadow moved elsewhere.

He was busy for about five minutes. After that, he opened the door and glided out again. When The Shadow reached the alley, the stunned crook was showing feeble signs of life. The Shadow blinked his flashlight. The guarded signal brought down another rope; but this time, Cliff held onto the other end.

The loose rope snaked along the ground. The Shadow hitched it under the stunned crook's arms. His next signal was a tug of the rope itself. Cliff and Hawkeye pulled together, while The Shadow shoved upward from below. The only sound was the slight scrape of the rope. It ended when the prisoner went over the roof ledge.

The Shadow released the bound man who lay upon the cement; but the fellow showed no effort to make trouble, not even after The Shadow cut his gag loose. Again, a big gun muzzle was nudging him. The crook

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couldn't see any advantage in trying to bring the crew from the front street. He knew that if battle started he would get the first bullets, at close range from The Shadow's gun.

Again, The Shadow voiced whispered commands; the surly thug grunted that he understood them. That meant he would follow The Shadow's orders. He had no other choice.

After a dozen minutes, the test arrived. Two men appeared at the entrance alley; from their gait, The Shadow recognized Ace Curdy and Dobie Kring. The Shadow gave his prisoner a gun jab. The fellow growled a challenge:

"Where are you guys going?"

"In to see Doc Harstell," returned Ace. "Say – who's asking us, anyway?"

"Herk Ringey," gruffed the helpless crook. "Me and another guy was just in to see Doc Harstell. We told him we'd stick around a while."

"Yeah?" Ace started to flash a light. "Where's the other guy?"

"Douse that glim!" put in Herk, inspired by a hard shove from The Shadow's gun. Then, as Ace complied, Herk added: "He's around here somewhere. Go on in and talk to Doc."

Ace and Dobie went through the door. Herk didn't hear the sound that followed the slow thrust of well-oiled bolts, to keep out any other visitors. The Shadow detected it, however, even though he was standing behind Herk. Pressed against the wall, The Shadow had remained unseen during Ace's brief use of the flashlight.

Herk expected The Shadow to follow the pair that had gone indoors. Instead, The Shadow waited, his gun relentless in its pressure. The Shadow simply intended to keep Herk here until the others again appeared.

Whatever the message that the Murder Master might send tonight, The Shadow was satisfied that he would learn its import.

CHAPTER XVI. THE MASTER'S MESSAGE

INSIDE his headquarters, Doc Harstell welcomed Ace and Dobie. He took them to the very room where The Shadow had been, a short while before. Turning on the light, Harstell indicated the place with a sweeping arm wave. Ace and Dobie viewed medicine cabinets, operating table, sterilizers and other equipment.

"How do you like my operating room?" he asked.

"More like a hospital," returned Ace. "Say, this is a swell set-up, Doc!"

"That's not all." Harstell opened a door to show a room with half a dozen cots. "This is the hospital part of it. Just a ward – no private rooms – but that ought to do."

"A slick come-on," put in Dobie. "I'll bet this layout has started a lot of talk!"

"More apparatus over there" – Harstell pointed to the stacked boxes in the operating room – "but I haven't had time to unpack yet. The main thing right now is to set up the radio."

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Harstell went to a corner, where a radio set rested on a large table. A wire ran from the radio to a wall socket. It passed beneath a square box that was beneath the table; but Harstell did not particularly notice that. After he had adjusted the dial, he made a connection with a small box that stood on the floor beside the table.

"I've got the mixer just right," he assured. "I was testing it again, this afternoon."

Ace gave a troubled look.

"What do you leave it out in sight for, Doc?" he asked. "It ain't a good idea to have guys looking at it."

"They don't know what it is. The clucks that come in here never heard of a mixer. I saw one guy looking at it – Cliff Marsland – and he asked if it was a storage battery. So I told him it was."

While Harstell was tightening wires to the mixer, Ace and Dobie indulged in comments on their own recent work. Both had been serving the Murder Master capably. In their pretended search for crooks that were wanted by the law, they had picked men who would be useful to their chief.

Neither Ace nor Dobie had approached any of those candidates. They had simply left reports, telling the Murder Master who the crooks were and how they could be reached. The Murder Master, in turn, had been buying up new talent, as recommended; he had done that through other channels.

"None of them knows we're in it," completed Ace. "That's what makes it jake, Dobie."

"Sure thing!" returned Dobie. Then, doubtfully: "We may run into trouble on account of the guys that Doc has lined up. Like this fellow Herk we saw outside."

Harstell heard that comment.

"Those birds aren't working for the chief," he told Dobie. "They're just part of the gag I'm working here. I've even told the police commissioner about them. This joint's supposed to be a hide-away. So I told that bunch they could case it and make sure the bulls weren't wise."

"The word's gone around that the place is safe. Only the right guys have been here. No wonder – because the cops are laying off! The commissioner fixed that."

There was a whine from the radio. A short-wave broadcast was beginning; it produced a chatter that would have done credit to a flock of blue jays. Ace gave a short laugh.

"Nobody's going to get anything out of that," he remarked.

"Nobody except us," corrected Dobie – "after Doc sets the mixer."

DOC HARSTELL was motioning for his companions to look around the place, to make sure that no prowlers had sneaked inside. Ace looked beneath the cots in the hospital room; Dobie made a trip through the hall, to inspect the living quarters. They returned with the report that the place was vacant.

Though they did not guess it, that proved The Shadow's wisdom. He had foreseen that Doc Harstell would order a search.

The mixer was adjusting to its right rotation period. The chatter from the radio changed, as various sounds were eliminated. At last, a voice predominated – a cackling tone that brought pleased grins from the listening

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ex-convicts. The Murder Master was on the air; this time for the special benefit of his three lieutenants.

"What a laugh the prof's got," confided Ace to Dobie. "He always cuts loose with it as a starter."

"That gives us time to tune in," observed Dobie. "Listen! Here it comes the dope we want to hear!"

Clucks had lessened. The Murder Master wasn't wasting time with his insidious chortles. His voice was at its lower pitch; precise, emphatic in its delivery. It lacked the insane deviations that had marked the program from WQJ.

Listening crooks were drinking every word. At the end of seven minutes, when the Murder Master finished with a sudden gloating chuckle, they sat in silent admiration of their chief. Every detail of his instructions had registered clearly.

While Harstell was turning off the radio and detaching the mixer, Ace voiced the sentiments that the trio shared.

"What a job!" he expressed. "A cinch, the way the chief has figured it! And what a pile of dough!"

"Ten per cent for each of us," put in Dobie. "That ought to come to two hundred grand apiece! The chief is welcome to his seventy per cent."

"Only sixty per cent," corrected Harstell. "Don't forget, he always has us kitty out ten per cent for what he calls the sinking fund. I'd say" – Harstell cut off the radio as he spoke – "that he spends a lot more besides. He's paying the freight on this job tomorrow night."

The three crooks were agreed on that point, until Ace had another idea. He sprang it with enthusiasm that showed increased admiration for the Murder Master's cunning.

"There won't be any pay-off!" exclaimed Ace. "None, except to us. Look – there's going to be a bunch of torpedoes there, to fight it out with the cops. But the way the chief has framed it, there's only one triggerman who can make sure of a get-away. I'm that guy.

"The same with the bunch that soup the vault. One man is going to shove the button, and that guy's you, Dobie. You'll be away from everybody else – there's no chance of you getting hooked.

"When the swag comes out, the boobs that bring it will shove it into one car, then make a break in another. That's to fool the cops, only it won't. Those saps will head into trouble. The swag car will get away. The guy driving it will be you, Doc; and Dobie and me will be riding with you."

ACE'S conclusions were accurate. The Murder Master had designed crime to bring in a host of ordinary mobsters and let them take the fireworks, while his lieutenants, their own work unknown, would ride free. Dobie liked the set-up; he turned to Harstell and chuckled:

"You'll have a lot of cripples to look after Doc."

"I'll look after them," was the dry promise. "I'll tell the commissioner when they get here. He'll take care of them after that. Which will square me very nicely."

"We'll be squared, too," said Ace, to Dobie. "All we've got to do is tip Cardona off to some of the names we've heard; only we won't know where the guys are. Before he can locate them, the job will be started.

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"He'll never guess we were in it, because we'll tell him that we were up at Graham's. Those birds up there will square us. Graham is going to be out of town tomorrow night, so he won't know they faked it."

Ace and Dobie were ready to leave. Doc Harstell decided to come along with them. It looked like a good time to pay another visit to the police commissioner. There would be nothing to report tonight, but they could at least assure him that they expected results soon. Tomorrow's events would prove the correctness of such a promise.

In the outside alleyway, Herk Ringey greeted the trio with a gruff tone from the darkness. He asked if Doc Harstell wanted him to stick around; Harstell decided it wouldn't be necessary.

"O.K., Doc," returned Herk. "I'll be going soon, then."

Herk was going sooner than he supposed. The trio had scarcely left the alley before The Shadow's flashlight was sending signals upward. The loose end of a rope came down as it had before. This time, The Shadow hooked it to Herk.

The crook didn't give a squawk when he was hoisted upward. He knew that The Shadow was covering him from below. He figured that he might have a chance when he reached the ledge; but Cliff and Hawkeye were ready for him. One had him covered with a gun the moment that he arrived. The other trussed him along with the first prisoner.

Below, The Shadow worked on the door that Harstell had locked. Lacking inner bolts, it was easily picked. When he reached the operating room, The Shadow turned on the lights. He opened the box beneath the radio table. It was a tricky box, that looked tightly nailed, until The Shadow manipulated it.

Inside the box was a phonograph; on it was a cylindrical record. The Shadow changed the needle; he turned on the radio dial and connected the mixer. Immediately, the record began to revolve. The phonograph was connected, through the bottom of the box, with the wire to the radio.

The Shadow had shipped this box into Harstell's along with medical apparatus that the fake physician had ordered. On his previous trip into this lair, The Shadow had attached the phonographic device so that the radio connection controlled it. The hidden apparatus had recorded the voice of the Murder Master.

STARTING the phonograph, The Shadow heard a repetition of all that the Murder Master had said. In those seven minutes, he gained vital facts regarding coming crime.

Tacked to the end of the master schemer's message were comments that lieutenants had made concerning their chief. Those ended abruptly with Harstell's mention of a ten-percent sinking fund; for that was the point at which the radio had been cut off. The phonograph had halted with it.

Further statements had not been recorded. That did not matter. Ace Curdy had seen the full purposes of the Murder Master. They were quite as apparent to The Shadow.

Tomorrow night, the reigning king of crime intended a stupendous robbery. One so daring that it made him look like the crazed fanatic that Joe Cardona considered him. Close study of circumstances showed, however, that the Murder Master would not be playing a hit-or-miss game.

He had found a weakness in a hitherto impregnable place that furnished remarkable opportunities for crime. Two million dollars was the stake; but to render his endeavor certain, the Murder Master was forced to marshal hordes from the underworld. Once the expedition was completed, those new henchmen would be no

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longer needed.

Always crafty, the Murder Master intended to dispose of them afterward. He would sacrifice his new recruits to the law. He would never have to make a pay-off for their services. By shoving the burden on them, he would divert suspicion from the paroled convicts who were his permanent lieutenants.

Those three were to take the swag, to stow it in some secure place. Later, it could be left at Quedden's, less their shares. Colossal crime accomplished, the Murder Master could bide his time, thinking out new campaigns. He could always depend on his same lieutenants, for they had gained the law's trust.

The Murder Master had foreseen one obstacle to this superscheme of crime. That was The Shadow, whose far-reaching fingers had so often felt the pulse throbs of the underworld. Unquestionably, the Murder Master was sure that he had eliminated The Shadow; otherwise he would not be launching his coming crime.

A laugh came, sinister, low-whispered, from The Shadow's lips as he detached the phonograph and packed it. Crime would begin tomorrow, as the Murder Master planned; but before it reached its climax, crooks would learn of The Shadow's return.

That could strike terror into vicious hearts. It would scatter attacking hordes more effectively than any thrust the law could make. It could bring madness to the real lieutenants of the Murder Master. That panic might reach the supercrook himself.

Tomorrow, men of evil would know the power of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII. THE LAW LEARNS

AT half past eight the next evening, Inspector Joe Cardona was pacing the office in the police commissioner's apartment. At his desk, Commissioner Weston was indulgently trying to calm the ace inspector.

"Compose yourself, Cardona!" urged Weston. "Patience is essential. It is only half an hour since we received these reports" – Weston waved his hand toward the desk – "yet you already expect results."

"Why not?" demanded Cardona, abruptly. "Look at all the names Ace Curdy and Dobie Kring got for us! Enough for us to start a round-up! We ought to have a line on some of them, by this time. I've put twenty men on the job.

"But they haven't spotted any of these fellows at the places where they usually are. That shows just one thing, commissioner. Something's doing tonight, and all of them are in on it."

Weston remarked that the situation proved the efficiency of Ace and Dobie. Cardona agreed; but didn't see how it was going to help, if the law couldn't find the numerous crooks who had been spotted by the paroled men.

Weston suggested that Ace and Dobie might run into something more. Cardona hoped that they would, and expressed the wish that they would accomplish it soon.

There was a knock on Weston's door. It was the houseman, announcing Kent Allard as a visitor. The commissioner went out to greet his friend. They came back into the office together. While Weston was showing Allard the reports, the telephone bell rang. Cardona pounced for the instrument.

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The call was not from headquarters; nor were there new reports from Ace or Dobie. Instead, Cardona heard a methodical voice that he recognized from the past. The man on the wire was Burbank, The Shadow's contact agent.

There had been times before when The Shadow had used Burbank to telephone information. Even if Cardona had not previously heard that steady tone, he would have been impressed, for Burbank spoke with a ring of accuracy. The link with the past merely spurred Cardona to hurried action. The moment that Burbank's call ended, Cardona sprang for an evening newspaper that lay on Weston's desk.

"What's happened, inspector?"

Cardona did not bother to answer Weston's question. The ace dick thumbed through the pages; found the paragraph he wanted, to thrust it before the commissioner's eyes.

The item stated that a large steamship company had concluded a transaction that had required the deposit of half a million dollars in the Mid-Town National Bank.

"What of it?" demanded Weston. "Such occurrences are frequent, Cardona."

"Funny it happened today," returned Cardona. "There's plenty of dough in that bank, to begin with. This makes a lot more."

A faint smile rested on the lips of Kent Allard. That money had actually been intended for deposit today, swelling the cash funds of the Mid-Town National to considerably more than two million dollars. It happened, though, that the steamship company had postponed the deposit, with the request that the bank say nothing.

Also, a large mining syndicate had privately presented a huge check for payment. Those funds had gone out from the bank. Branch offices, too, had done unusual business. Cash had been shipped to them. Tonight, the vault of the Mid-Town National Bank was remarkably short of funds. That had been engineered by The Shadow.

"The Mid-Town National," emphasized Cardona. "That would be a swell nut for those crooks to crack!"

"Too large a nut," returned Weston. "That bank is one of the best protected in the city."

"But where have the crooks dropped to?" demanded Cardona. "I'd be willing to look anywhere for them."

"By anywhere," suggested Weston, crisply, "you should mean anywhere that is logical. The Mid-Town National is not."

ALLARD was studying the report sheets on the commissioner's desk. In their argument, Cardona and Weston naturally looked to the visitor as one who might decide the matter. Allard had a sensible suggestion.

"Why not summon these informants?" he questioned calmly, as he pointed to the reports. "Ace Curdy and Dobie Kring might piece together something for you."

The trouble was how to reach Ace and Dobie. Again, Allard had a suggestion. Perhaps Melvin Graham would know where they would be found.

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Weston put in a hurried call to Graham. He learned that the reformer had left for the Grand Central Station, intending to take a night train for Buffalo. He was stopping at a travel bureau to pick up tickets that he had ordered. There might be a chance to reach him there.

Weston called the travel bureau. In five minutes, there was a return call from Graham. He had no idea where Ace and Dobie could be reached; but he remembered that this was a night when they usually stopped at his home, to make a routine report for the parole board.

"Graham is coming right over," announced Weston, as he hung up. "I did not care to say much over the telephone. He understood that, of course. He says that he can take a midnight train for Buffalo. Meanwhile, he has called his house. If Ace and Dobie come there, they are to call here."

Allard arose, expressing regret that he could not stay to meet Graham. The clock showed quarter of nine when he left; and again, Allard's lips wore their slight smile.

The Shadow had spiked the alibis that crooked lieutenants intended to use. Their story was to be that they were at Graham's before nine, the hour for which crime was timed. Since they were supposed to call Weston's immediately upon arrival, the neglect of such a call would prove later that they had not gone to Graham's.

The telephone bell was tingling as Allard departed. It was another call from Burbank, as The Shadow knew.

This time, Joe Cardona listened to another tip from the methodical informant. Again, he snatched the newspaper to look up a timely paragraph. What Cardona saw there, was a link that nullified Weston's statement regarding the protection of the Mid-Town National

"Look at this, commissioner!" exclaimed the inspector. "They're running night shifts on that street—repairing job, working cross-town. That means they'll have the steam shovel operating right alongside of the Mid-Town National Bank!"

That meant little to Weston, even when Cardona added:

"That's bringing them to the avenue, where the new subway excavation has just been completed. The avenue runs right in front of the bank."

Weston didn't see the connection. Cardona did.

"Don't you get it, commissioner?" demanded the ace. "That's where those crooks have gone for cover! Down in the new subway. What's more, it's the one spot where they could start blasting through into the bank."

"They might attempt it," admitted Weston. He was worried, but doubtful. "It would mean a lot of noise, though, Cardona —"

"With those steam shovels pounding? They'd cover it, commissioner. This is a real tip-off! If we only knew when —"

Again, the telephone bell. This time, Cardona heard a different voice — one that carried a chilling tone. It was the unmistakable voice of The Shadow, providing the last news that the law required.

"Crime will strike tonight," came The Shadow's whisper. "The zero hour is nine o'clock!"

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IT was eight minutes before the hour. Cardona snapped a call through to headquarters, letting Weston guess the import of The Shadow's call. There wasn't time to waste in preliminary discussion, even with the police commissioner.

"I'm heading for the bank," informed Cardona, grimly. "We'll have a cordon there inside of fifteen minutes, and it will close in without those fellows knowing it. If there's any orders, commissioner, send them to the radio cars. There'll be plenty of them on the job near the Mid-Town National."

With that, Cardona was gone, leaving Weston half bewildered at his desk. Though the commissioner commanded the forces of the law, he could see nothing else to be done, until he heard how Cardona fared. Weston decided to curb his impatience until Graham arrived. Then, at least, there would be someone with whom he could talk.

It took Joe Cardona exactly seven minutes to reach the neighborhood of the Mid-Town National. He dismissed his cab; found a good lookout spot in the corner entrance of a small cigar store. From that point, Cardona studied the entire field of coming action.

The bank occupied an opposite corner; it was a bulky, old-fashioned building, but its grimy granite walls had the look of a fortress. Weston was right; ordinarily, that bank would be too big a nut to crack. But circumstances had altered its normal strength.

The avenue had been excavated; the subway hole was boarded over, on the cut-and-cover system, so that the avenue could be used for traffic. Cardona noted that the tunneled half of the avenue was on the side toward the bank.

There was a deluge of noise coming from that part of the cross street on the other side of the avenue. That thoroughfare, too, was half torn up. A big steam shovel, almost at the corner, was scooping up huge chunks of broken asphalt. Its big arm swung to poise above a truck that stood alongside. The rear of the shovel opened; the huge fragments dropped into the truck with a terrific rattle.

That work would be finished tonight. Already, men farther along the street were laying new paving. There was a steamroller parked in a cut-off space at the corner. It was waiting, with steam up, until the big shovel finished. Then the roller would move through and start its own work on the fresh paving.

Cardona looked at his watch. Three minutes after nine. The zero hour was past. There had been some delay. That would work well for the law.

Within five minutes, the police cordon would be ready, awaiting Cardona's signal to close in. Joe's best stunt would be to move away; give the order for the police to tighten.

With that thought, Cardona shifted from his lookout spot. Just as the steam shovel ripped another clatter of broken paving, Joe heard a muffled sound – one that he would never have noticed, had he not expected it.

There was a tremble, too, of the sidewalk; so slight that it would have escaped Cardona's attention, if he had not heard the muffled blast. Those linked occurrences told their story. Crime was under way.

Mobsters had blown a path into the Mid-Town National. They had started their thrust for wealth before the law was ready. But they had not outwitted the master fighter who had prepared to break their game.

Across the avenue was a silent figure in black, waiting against a building wall. Burning eyes saw Cardona start off on the run, to hurry up the cordon. A whispered laugh issued from hidden lips.

Events were developing as The Shadow wanted them.

CHAPTER XVIII. GUIDED FLIGHT

IF lookouts from the covered subway entrances had spotted police about, crime would have been canceled for tonight. That was why The Shadow had purposely delayed information: so that the law would not arrive too soon. Only Cardona had shown up; he had kept himself inconspicuous. Mobsters had loosed their blast.

Down in the newly excavated subway, gas-masked men were piling through the broken wall where fumes teemed forth. Their flashlights showed the way to the huge vault they wanted. Others followed, bringing new charges of explosives. Working with skilled speed, they prepared to blow the vault.

The word was passed. Criminal workers retired to the subway, following the line of a long wire that they had dragged through. At the end of that wire, tucked in a niche of the subway wall, was Dobie Kring. He pressed the button.

A new blast shattered the vault. Again, a picked crew headed through. When they returned, they were carrying bags and boxes that they had lifted from the vault. They were taking their loot to an opening that led up to the side street. Dobie followed after them.

Like the swag-bearers, the sappers had ripped off their gas masks. The blasting crew had orders to go out by the avenue, where cars would await them. But when they poured from the boarded entrances, a surprise awaited them.

From a lower corner came a siren's wail – the first sound of the police attack. As the sappers tried to enter parked automobiles, police cars whipped toward them. Revolvers barked; tear-gas bombs hit the street.

Trapped crooks had no time to don their discarded gas masks. They were clawing at their eyes, rolling from the car steps to the curb. Officers were piling out to capture them, while more police arrived in cars and on foot.

Perched in a second-story window on the side street, across from the bank, Ace Curdy saw the round-up of the blasting squad. It had come quicker than he expected. Police were here in uncommonly large numbers. That wouldn't matter – not when the triggermen got started.

Down the avenue came the roar of motors. Cars filled with triggermen were driving through in a phalanx, with revolvers spurting from their windows. Those were the prelude to a clatter that never came. The gunners were supposed to use machine guns when they neared the police, but they never found the chance.

From a corner of the avenue, The Shadow tongued the first shots. His big automatics spat bullets that reached the drivers of the leading cars. Two automobiles went skidding in the street. Other cars had to wheel to miss them. They were floundering when they reached the cross street.

From the portion of that thoroughfare where paving construction had not begun, came the shriek of police cars. Others answered from a block above, as they roared along the avenue to overtake the crook-manned cars.

The triggermen were trapped between two fires. Police revolvers were dropping them before they could unlimber the machine guns. Their plight was as bad as that of the captured sappers. The Shadow could have added shots from his own direction; but they were unnecessary. Moreover, he had other work ahead.

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ACE CURDY hadn't expected such a quick wipe-out of the gun crews. There had to be more delay so that the men who had brought the swag could stage a get-away by the avenue. That was supposed to lead the police on a false chase.

Ace had a rifle; he aimed it, intending to snipe all the policemen that he could spot.

Ace never pulled that trigger.

Down at the corner, where wooden horses barred traffic from the side street, Ace saw a figure that he had never expected to view again in life. That was the cloaked form of The Shadow!

Coolly, The Shadow was aiming for Ace's own window. While Ace gawked, the rifle a dead object in his half-raised arms, The Shadow's .45 spoke. With the spurt from its muzzle came a crash above Ace's head. A scatter of glass clattered upon the frozen rifleman.

Ace didn't stop to wonder why The Shadow, usually so accurate in fire, had shattered the window instead of picking off the figure framed within it. Ace chucked his rifle; dived through the darkened room and headed for the stairs. He reached the street in fifteen seconds flat.

Ace's exit brought him to a little alleyway. There, Doc Harstell was seated at the wheel of a sleek sedan, with Dobie Kring beside him. In back were the piles of swag. Ace leaped into the rear seat, hoarsing the question:

"Why don't you get going, Doc?"

"He's waiting for the other bunch to start," returned Dobie. "They've got to stage their fake get-away, so we can slip the coppers!"

"But they can't pull it!" protested Ace. "The triggermen didn't clear the way for them!"

"They will, all right."

"Not with The Shadow there!"

As Ace spilled that announcement, his companions stared. They thought him crazy; but his face showed too serious. Ace gulped an account of all that he had seen, finishing with The Shadow's lone shot for the window. Doc Harstell stepped on the starter.

"The bulls will be coming through," he declared. "The boys can hold them for a while. That's our only chance!"

MATTERS were proving as Harstell said. On the side street, a touring car was waiting, four impatient men within it. They wanted to make that spurt for the avenue; but it wasn't possible. Worse than that, police had spotted the touring car. A police car was starting to nose past the barricade.

Supposed workmen sprang suddenly to action. They were other thugs, signed up by the Murder Master. They had shoved the foreman and the labor gang into an empty house. These crooks were desperate. They had to stop the law's advance in order to assure their own escape later.

Back at his corner, The Shadow saw sudden action from the steam shovel. It had halted operations during the fight on the avenue, but it was again scooping asphalt. The police didn't particularly notice it as the shovel lifted. They received their surprise when the first patrol car started past the truck that stood beside the steam

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shovel.

The big crane swung. It didn't stop above the truck. It went beyond; let its load of crushed stone drop for the oncoming patrol car. The cop at the wheel had just time to yank toward the curb.

The chunks of asphalt hit; they shattered the patrol car's hood, ripped away fenders and steps. The car was wrecked, but its occupants managed to dive safely from the far door.

Another car was coming through. Its course was slowed by the debris. The steam shovel was scooping more ammunition. Its long arm hoisted another devastating load of paving. The driver of the second car had just time to shove into reverse, when another half ton of paving was dropped.

That load sliced off the radiator, flattened the front wheels. The wrecked automobile bowed forward, as if acknowledging defeat. While another pair of officers were hopping to safety, the steam shovel went after more rock.

Police were firing at the control house of the big scooper; but the mobsters inside were keeping low. Meanwhile, fake workmen along the barricaded street were spattering shots that prevented an advance on foot.

The derrick was lifting, ready with another supply of stone. The crooks who handled it didn't expect their challenge to be accepted. They didn't figure that any machine could smash their blockade.

They were mistaken. Already they had a challenger who had found a way to meet them. There was a hiss from the avenue corner; a rumble as the parked steamroller lumbered forward.

While crooks and cops stared alike, they recognized the driver who was coming through. He was clad in black; they heard his strident laugh above the steamroller's roar. They knew the fighter who was making this lone attempt. The Shadow!

As the steamroller hit the stone-strewn street, it pressed between the wrecked police cars. Chunks of debris were flattening beneath the roller's pressure. Bullets were flattening too as they hit the steel surface of The Shadow's vehicle.

Low behind the throttle, The Shadow was as secure as the thugs in the control house of the steam shovel.

Those crooks let the loaded shovel open. Big chunks of asphalt showered the steamroller, bounced from its steel sides as uselessly as pebbles. The steamroller was through; up from its helm, The Shadow was firing with an automatic. His shots were for the thugs who had lined themselves along the street. He had passed the shelters that they used as barricades.

The steam shovel was starting again, going after more asphalt in frantic haste. It was too late. The Shadow had smoothed a clear path for the police cars. They were ramming through while the shovel was still-scooping stone. Flanking the steamroller, two patrol cars bore down on the touring car that was scheduled for a fake get-away.

The driver jammed that car forward to whizz between them. His pals were exchanging shots with the police as they passed. None of the combatants had time for proper aim, for the touring car was shoving to its limit in second gear.

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Ahead was the steamroller, lumbering toward it. The touring car swerved right; but The Shadow outguessed its driver. The Shadow already had guided the roller to the left. The driver of the touring car wrenched his wheel in the opposite direction; his frantic move was badly belated.

The crook-filled car met the steamroller in a head-on crash. The driver was giving it the brakes; but they served him little. The entire hood of the touring car telescoped back into the body. The impact was so swift that a single instant turned the automobile into a mass of wreckage.

The Shadow sprang to the sidewalk. He reached the alleyway, where he knew another car should be. He saw taillights whisking a block away, as the sedan turned into the next street. The Shadow delivered a triumphant laugh, telling that pursuit was still possible. He sped away, on foot, through the darkness of the alley.

Joe Cardona, arriving in a police car, heard The Shadow's laugh. Joe understood. He took a quick glance along the street. Battle was ended. Those in the touring car were crushed or trapped. Those who had fled their barricades at The Shadow's approach were wounded or taken prisoner. The crew that manned the steam shovel had lifted their hands in surrender.

More important to Cardona was the shout that officers were giving as they peered into the wrecked touring car. The swag wasn't there. Cardona knew where it had gone – through the alleyway, in another car.

THE SHADOW had reached the next street. A coupe wheeled up to receive him. Cliff Marsland was the driver. He pointed-out the swag car, speeding a block away. The Shadow paused; he stepped into the glow of the coupe's headlights. Cliff saw him raise a beckoning arm.

That signal was to Joe Cardona, whose car was starting into the alley. Three seconds later, The Shadow was entering the coupe; his strange-toned voice ordered Cliff to take up the chase. The coupe lashed forward.

Three blocks ahead, the pursued sedan took to an avenue. As Cliff made the same turn, The Shadow opened long-range fire from his window. Crooks heard the shots; their car wheeled into a side street. Half a minute later, new shots burst behind them. The sedan turned another corner.

Those shots were harrying the crooks into a twisty route; at the same time, they were guiding Cardona and bringing roving police cars into the chase.

Criminals were boxing themselves, although they didn't realize it. Unwittingly, they were playing into The Shadow's hands; he was forcing them to a course that would mean disaster for themselves.

From that forced flight The Shadow foresaw a result far greater than the capture of the paroled convicts.

This chase was the measure that would bring a show-down with the Murder Master.

CHAPTER XIX. THE LAST REFUGE

IT was Dobie Kring who voiced the thoughts that gripped the trio in the pursued sedan. As he heard the increasing wails of sirens, Dobie voiced it in a single sentence:

"They're hot after us, Doc!"

That brought a savage growl from Ace Curdy. He wanted Harstell to slow the car, so that he could take pot shots at the coupe that kept so close along their trail.

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"The Shadow's in that bus," affirmed Ace. "He's the guy I'm out to get! Give me a chance at him!"

"And then what?" snapped Dobie. "The cops will be on us! What we've got to do is shake The Shadow. Right, Doc?"

A nod from Harstell as he yanked the car around a corner. Half a block, and Harstell heard the shriek of a siren coming toward them. He took the next street to the right. His mutter was a grim agreement with Dobie:

"If I can shake The Shadow –"

"What then, Doc?" Dobie was eager with the question. "Can you make it to the warehouse?"

"Not a chance, Dobie! But we could head for Quedden's. That's the only direction that's safe."

Dobie started a protest. Ace intervened.

"Why not?" he demanded. "I got there, didn't I – the night I had The Shadow?"

"A fine botch you made that night," retorted Dobie. "You claim you croaked The Shadow – and here he shows up again!"

"That part doesn't matter. I got into Quedden's, didn't I? And away again, afterward. Those crooked streets around his place are made to order for us. Besides, we've got to let the prof know that The Shadow's loose."

That convinced Dobie. He craned from his window for a look backward as they turned a corner. He didn't see The Shadow's coupe. It was off the trail at last. Sirens, though, proved that police were coming in from everywhere.

"You can make it to Quedden's, Doc!" enthused Dobie. "Only don't stop too near the house. We'll have to ditch the bus, so the bulls won't know where we've gone."

The twisty course ended. Harstell took a straightaway to gain the opportunity they needed. Police cars sighted the sedan at crossings; but none was close enough to do more than follow, well behind. When Harstell jammed the brakes, the sedan halted in a narrow street.

The three paroled prisoners piled out. Each bundled a portion of the swag. They rounded a corner, came to another street that went off at an angle. It was only half a block to Quedden's house, but long-drawn shrills from police whistles told that the abandoned sedan had been found.

"I'll get ahead," panted Ace. "I'll hammer at the front door! We can get in quicker that way, if Thoyer shows up! If he don't, we can duck in by the alley!"

ACE was pounding the front door when the others arrived. Impatiently, they pointed to the alley. Ace shook his head. He could hear the slide of an opening bolt. A moment later, Thoyer was blinking at them from the open doorway.

Ace didn't give the fellow a chance to argue. Instead, he flourished a revolver under Thoyer's nose, to shove him back.

The three convicts entered the lower hall, closed the door behind them. Ace grinned when he shoved the bolt. He turned toward Thoyer, who was staring from across the piles of swag.

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"Listen, lug!" snapped Ace. "Tell the prof that we want to see him!"

Thoyer tried to protest. It didn't get far. Ace's gun nudged him.

"You heard me! We want to see Prof Quedden!"

Reluctantly, Thoyer started for the stairs. He halted when he heard a sudden stir among the invaders. It was Dobie who caused it. He was leaning his ear against the door.

"There's a car stopping out front! Wait! – it's going away again. Listen! Those whistles –"

The trio was tense. They were beginning to guess what had happened. Somehow, The Shadow had found out where they had headed. His car was the tracer that Cardona wanted. The coupe had suddenly shown up again, to lead the police here.

All three of the crooks were listening at the door. Sounds outside had ended, which made it all the more ominous. Minutes crept along, with Thoyer still standing on the stairs. Ace grunted that maybe the bulls hadn't found the place. Dobie shook his head.

"Cardona's smart," declared Dobie. "If he's spotted this joint, he'll wait until he's got it covered. We may be in for it; tougher than we think. Wait a couple of minutes more. Then we'll know what's what."

More minutes trickled. Dobie stepped away from the door, with a satisfied grin.

"All right," he told the others. "Let's go up and talk to the chief –"

A hammering sound broke Dobie's sentence. It came from the door. Outside, a heavy voice demanded:

"Open in the name of the law!"

Ace sprang toward the door, drawing a revolver. Dobie stopped him.

"Not that way, Ace! We've got to be smarter when we shoot it out!" He swung toward Thoyer; pointed to the door that opened into the lower laboratory: "Unlock it!"

Thoyer came down from the stairs to obey. When the door opened, Dobie nudged.

"Let's get in there and wedge the windows open. Those shutters will make slick loopholes! We'll give those bulls more than they expect! You and me, Ace."

"What about Doc?"

"He can go up and talk to the chief... Tell him the whole lay, Doc. Better take this mug Thoyer with you."

THE evil trio made an odd tableau at that moment. Dobie was standing halfway toward the open door of the laboratory, pointing in that direction. Ace, nearer the front door, was looking in Dobie's direction. Doc was standing by the stairs that led to the second floor; his left hand was half raised to beckon Thoyer.

Each of the invaders held a drawn revolver. Only Thoyer was unarmed. He was standing at the door of the lower lab, but he was facing Doc Harstell. That was why Thoyer, alone, could see new arrivals who had joined the scene.

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They were at the top of the stairs. Foremost was a dark-haired girl; her face was pale, but firm; she held a steady grip on a revolver. So did the two men who were on each side of her; stolid fellows, who meant business.

Again, Elsa Wendley and her servants had taken their own route to Quedden's premises. They were here in time to prevent besieged crooks from starting battle with the police. Elsa was covering Ace Curdy. The servants were taking care of Dobie Kring and Doc Harstell.

"Stand where you are!" Elsa was the spokesman. "Let those guns drop!"

She was stepping downward as she spoke. Her right foot went too far; the girl stumbled. Without thinking, one of the servants reached to aid her. Elsa caught herself; but in that brief instant, Curdy saw a chance for fight.

"I'll get the moll!" Ace was coming up with his revolver. "You fellows clip the others!"

Dobie and Doc didn't budge. As for Ace, his gun hand stopped halfway. From the very stair top came a shivering laugh – a tone of mirth that no criminal could forget. The trapped trio saw another figure, revealed by Elsa's advance.

The Shadow had come to support his allies. His automatics were unlimbered, pointing downward toward the lower hall. Those burrowing muzzles seemed double-focused on every crook.

Mechanically, Ace and his pals let their revolvers hit the floor. A moment later, Elsa and her servants were again advancing downward, each covering a prisoner.

THE SHADOW ignored the covered trio. He looked toward Thoyer, whose face showed a mingling of bewilderment and fear. Thoyer was starting to sidle into the lower laboratory. The Shadow stopped him with a sharp command.

Thoyer saw a muzzle tilted toward him. The gunpoint moved; like a magnet it drew Thoyer across the hall, toward the front door.

"Unlock the door!" commanded The Shadow. "Then turn about!"

Thoyer drew the bolt. Police were hammering on the outside; they must have heard something, for their pounding ceased. Meanwhile, The Shadow beckoned Thoyer with a gun. Shakily, the man came up the stairs.

The Shadow stepped aside, toward the direction of the bedrooms, to point Thoyer through the curtained hallway that led to the rear of the house. In sibilant whisper, The Shadow gave the final order:

"Summon Professor Quedden!"

As Thoyer started toward the curtains, someone tried the door below. It swung inward under pressure, revealing a sudden movement of flashlights on the front steps. Police didn't know whether or not the unlocked door was a trap, until they saw the crooks who stood with lifted arms.

Then came a surge of the law's invaders, Joe Cardona with them. The ace inspector saw the heaps of swag, for a moment, he was amazed at sight of the paroled convicts, as prisoners. Joe almost had the whole scene reversed, until he realized that Elsa and her servants couldn't be the persons who had fled here.

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Who the girl was didn't matter, for the moment; and the same applied to the men who served her. Cardona had found the real lieutenants of the Murder Master. Men who were supposed to be at Graham's, but who had been at the Mid-Town National instead.

"Line up!" Cardona told them. Then, to Elsa: "We'll take over."

Relieved, the girl lowered her revolver; and the servants did the same. Trapped crooks backed away sulkily, under cover of police guns, while Joe Cardona called them several kinds of double-crossers. Cardona could be choice in adjectives; but his style was somewhat cramped, with Elsa present.

There was a stir outside as Cardona finished his accusation. In from the street stepped Commissioner Weston, accompanied by Melvin Graham. Both showed astonishment when they viewed the prisoners. It was a shock to both of them to see these captives.

That, however, was nothing compared to the surprise that still was due. The Shadow had stepped from sight, but he still held control. His next move was to be the trapping of the Murder Master.

CHAPTER XX. ONE MORE VICTIM

WESTON was brusque as he began a quiz. In a few short minutes, he learned more than he had guessed in days. Sullenly, the paroled convicts admitted that they served the Murder Master. Their first balk came when Weston demanded the name of their chief.

Elsa supplied it while the prisoners glared.

"Professor Jerome Quedden," she stated. "He lives in this house. At present, he is in an office at the back of the second floor. The door was closed; he did not hear us enter."

Since Elsa knew the way, Weston ordered her to conduct Cardona there. As they turned toward the stairs, they saw Thoyer gazing across the banister at the top. The assistant darted a nervous glance along the hall. He was looking for The Shadow; he did not see him.

Thoyer made a sudden dash away from the stairs. Cardona gave a loud shout, then fired. Those warning shots echoed loudly through the house. Thoyer bobbed back to view again, his arms raised high. Cardona covered him.

"I'll tell everything!" whined Thoyer. "Everything I know! All about Professor Quedden –"

At that moment, a short-built figure appeared behind the rail where Thoyer stood. The man was Quedden himself; his wizened face peered from a level with Thoyer's shoulder. On Quedden's features was registered a wild, fanatic look, yet one that showed harsh glee.

In his hand, Quedden gripped a revolver. He seemed oddly disinterested, though, in Cardona. The man who concerned Quedden was Thoyer; for the baldish professor had overheard his assistant's whine.

"What will you tell, Thoyer?" demanded Quedden. His voice became a hiss, as he added: "The secrets of my inventions? Never! I have trusted you too much, Thoyer! If you speak –"

For the first time, Cardona saw Quedden's gun between the banister rails. Quedden was half behind Thoyer; Cardona couldn't risk a shot at the professor. With a bound, Joe went for the stairs. Thoyer, in turn, became frantic.

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Madly, the assistant sprang for Quedden; hurled the frail professor for the curtained hallway. Quedden was wiry; amazingly sly. He rallied; made a dart after Thoyer. The assistant had only one route; that was through the upstairs laboratory. He took it, with Quedden after him.

Joe Cardona was too late to overtake them. All that he could do was follow; and behind the inspector came a pair of detectives. Others were busy holding the downstairs prisoners. Elsa decided that she and her servants should join in the chase.

Only Weston and Graham remained, free for action when they heard a sudden clatter from the depths of the lower laboratory. Before Weston could understand the new noise, Graham grasped the answer.

"Quick, commissioner!" Graham snatched up a revolver from the floor. "They are heading down this way! We must block them off!"

WHILE Graham was dashing into the darkened room, Weston tugged at a revolver that he carried on his hip. Unfortunately, the commissioner needed a gun so seldom that he usually forgot to keep his hip pocket unbuttoned. That was the case on this occasion. It took Weston five seconds to yank the gun loose, bringing the button with it.

The clatter had ended when Weston reached the door of the lower lab. It was just when he arrived there that he heard the roar of a revolver. Then came the pound of more footsteps on the spiral stairs; amid it, Graham joined Weston at the hallway door.

"We've got to find the light switch, commissioner." Graham was fumbling along the wall as he spoke. "Ah, here it is!"

The lights came on. At the door of the little workshop they saw Thoyer, gasping on the floor. Beyond him was Quedden, half crouched in the center of the workshop. The professor had his revolver in his fist. He waved it crazily, as he warned:

"Go back! Both of you! Out of this house!"

It wasn't necessary for either Weston or Graham to use a revolver. Men surged from the spiral steps; Cardona pounced first, with the two detectives close behind. They hit Quedden so hard, that he jounced from his feet. His gun scaled from his fist, flew clear across Thoyer, to hit the laboratory floor.

Graham grabbed for the weapon. He was holding it when he saw that Quedden was helpless in the grip of captors. Weston received the revolver that Graham handed him, with the comment that the commissioner would need Quedden's gun as evidence.

Cardona was stooped over Thoyer's body. The dull-faced man was gasping his last few breaths. Cardona reminded him that he had promised a statement. Thoyer managed a nod; then coughed:

"Quedden – Quedden is in –"

That effort finished Thoyer. The flicker of his glazing eyes told that he wanted to reveal all he knew about the Murder Master, but was unable. That shot in the dark had come too close to Thoyer's heart.

SINCE the lower laboratory was the scene of new murder, Weston decided to hold his investigation here. Quedden, clamped with handcuffs, sat in the chair where they put him.

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The three lieutenants of the Murder Master, also handcuffed, were brought in to witness Weston's quiz. Meanwhile, Cardona scoured the house in search of evidence.

There was plenty of it in Quedden's office. The old professor wouldn't talk, except to cackle defiance at his accusers. He knew what they were here for, he told them. They were trying to steal his inventions. He had expected this; that was why he had tried to prepare for it.

Quedden's words became incoherent. They let him mutter to himself, since further questioning was useless. The commissioner concentrated on the documentary evidence. He studied the coded notes that had come from Quedden's desk. Cardona had already searched the other prisoners, and had found a code in Ace's pocket. From it, the notes were translated.

Quedden's safe had been open in the office. Cardona also had the meager swag from previous robberies. Summary of this evidence caused Weston to resume his quiz of Quedden. The professor finally became coherent when Weston asked him where the funds had come from.

"The Foundation sent them," clucked Quedden. "My royalties. I suppose you intend to steal them, along with everything else!"

"This Foundation is a palpable fraud!" snapped Weston. "A product of your own imagination! A very weak pretense, to cover up your crimes –"

Quedden interrupted with a maddened shake of his manacled wrists. His rage was directed toward Weston.

"You lie!" Quedden's voice was high. "You say the Foundation does not exist! I knew you would say that! You want an excuse to rob me –"

Again, Quedden's words became a crazy mutter. Weston gave a shrug; turned to Cardona, with the comment:

"Take him away, inspector. We'll charge him with the murder of Thoyer. Remove the body; here is the gun that he used to kill his victim."

"One moment, commissioner." Cardona had something else. "Wait until we try this big record we found with those crazy phonographs."

The record was of the disk type. Cardona fitted it to a suitable machine. Haunting music sounded; its strain carried a creepy spell that listeners remembered. Then came a frenzied cackle, forced to a dramatic pitch.

"Do you hear me, commissioner?" A crazed laugh followed. "Yes – you hear me. You shall remember me! I am the Murder Master!"

Weston couldn't help a shudder as he motioned for Cardona to stop the record. He had heard enough to prove that this was the "canned" program that had cut in on station WQJ. Enough, too, to recognize the similarity of the Murder Master's tone to that of Professor Quedden.

ODDLY, one of the most curious listeners had been Quedden himself. His face had taken on a childish awe. His beady eyes had lost their flash. He was shaking his bald head, as he muttered:

"I don't understand – I don't understand!"

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Cardona hoisted the professor by the shoulder. It was Elsa who halted him before he could start Quedden's march from the room. The girl had an important task to perform; one that she had kept until this opportunity. She spoke to one of the servants. The man handed her a small cardboard box.

"I was told to give you this" – Elsa was speaking to Cardona – "told to do so by – by a friend. One who helped us."

The girl was speaking of The Shadow. Cardona suddenly realized that when he opened the box. Inside was a cylindrical phonograph record. Coiled within it was a sealed envelope.

The case against the Murder Master was not yet closed. The law had still to review The Shadow's evidence.

CHAPTER XXI. THE MASTER SPEAKS

THERE was an old-style cylindrical phonograph in Quedden's workshop. Cardona put the record on it. Listeners heard a cackly voice issue from the big horn. The tone was much like Quedden's usual speech, until thirty seconds had passed. Then, it took on a lower pitch, free from gloating chuckles.

The voice was giving instructions for the robbery of the Mid-Town National Bank.

"This dope went out last night!" exclaimed Cardona. He pointed to the paroled convicts and demanded: "You've heard this spiel before, haven't you?"

There were snarls of denial from the trio. They silenced when the proof of their lie came from the horn. Their own voices were registered at the record's finish.

"The Murder Master, talking to his crew," summed Cardona. "Somebody was smart enough to make this record, commissioner."

By "somebody," Cardona meant The Shadow. Weston, however, was thinking of something else. He had clutched an idea of his own. He told Cardona to run the record a second time.

While it was repeating, Cardona opened the envelope that had come with the record. He found a sheet of paper, pasted with fragments of newspaper clippings. They had been cut from various news stories; then pieced together to make a concise report on a single subject.

"Here's the motive for the three murders!" interjected Cardona, when the phonograph had finished. "Parts of talks that Hyvran and Palbrock gave! An interview – or part of it – with Big Frank Denniman!"

Weston didn't respond. He was deep in thought, his chin buried in his hand.

"They'd gotten together on something we didn't know about," went on Cardona. "They all wanted a reform of the State parole system, and they all mentioned it. They'd have managed that reform, too. Hyvran in the State assembly; Palbrock in the senate; Denniman working to get everyone else in back of it.

"The Murder Master had to get rid of them, because he was using paroled prisoners. The new system would have put that bunch under the watch of the parole board, keeping them out of circulation. That would have queered the racket for the Murder Master."

Cardona expected approval when Weston looked up. Instead, the commissioner pointed to the phonograph.

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"That record," emphasized Weston, "carried the voice of the Murder Master! But I am positive" – he swung his finger toward Professor Quedden – "that it was not the voice of that man!"

MENTALLY, Cardona compared the record with the broadcast from WQJ. Weston was right; the record had been too precise. The voice had lost its cackle too early. It had been free from absentminded mutters. Those were a habit with Quedden.

Cardona looked at the old professor. Quedden was scowling from his chair. Why should he be, when evidence was favoring him, at present? He wasn't putting on an act; he was muttering, still holding to the idea that his inventions were at stake. Cardona decided that the old man was what he appeared to be: a curious creature who lived with his own thoughts.

"You're right, commissioner," declared Cardona. "That record spills the real story! It wasn't Quedden who fixed that program for WQJ. It was somebody who faked the prof's voice, laugh and all. That's why the disk was planted here along with the other evidence.

"But the Murder Master didn't worry much when he sent out his own orders. Only his own bunch listened. He wanted them to think that he was Quedden; but he didn't bother to go strong with it. He didn't know we were going to get a record of that talk, too."

The Shadow's evidence was coming home. Together, Weston and Cardona had pieced its portions. Their conclusions, however, were nullifying their past accomplishments. Being a police official, Weston was quick to realize the fact.

The commissioner glanced at Quedden. After all, the muttering professor was the law's only suspect. There was plenty of evidence to prove him the Murder Master. It wouldn't do to clear the fellow until someone could be arrested in his place.

That was why Weston quelled Cardona's enthusiasm. Cardona, always fond of hunches, was trying to move too fast, in Weston's opinion. The commissioner wanted conservative advice; particularly, he needed an excuse to withdraw from the theory that he himself had advanced. He turned to Melvin Graham.

"What is your opinion?" Weston inquired. "Do you think that this discrepancy, in the matter of voice, is a sufficient factor in Quedden's favor?"

"Decidedly not," replied Graham. "You speak of a disguised voice. Why wouldn't Quedden have disguised his own, when he talked with the men who served him? He would naturally have wished to preserve his identity from them."

"Of course!" exclaimed Weston. "We had it the wrong way about! Quedden is the man we want, after all! Take him away, Cardona!"

THE logic didn't quite suit Cardona. If crooks had not known Quedden as the Murder Master, why had they headed here with the swag? They certainly regarded him as their chief. It didn't fit – Quedden disguising his voice for the benefit of men who already knew the part he played.

"I'm taking him, commissioner," declared Cardona, as he laid his hand on Quedden's shoulder. "But I'm still not sure that he's the murderer –"

"Graham has settled it, Cardona."

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"I have," added Graham, in support of Weston's statement. "Yet my argument was scarcely necessary, inspector. After all, you saw Quedden murder Thoyer. You have the gun with which he did it."

A thought flashed to Cardona's mind. He hadn't seen Quedden shoot Thoyer. Joe had heard the gunshot; that was all. Pulling the death gun from his pocket, Cardona thrust it under Quedden's nose, with the question:

"Is this your revolver?"

The old professor suddenly showed interest. He studied the revolver with beady eyes, then glared, as he shook his head.

"True to form," remarked Graham. "He denies everything. Can't you ever make him say yes, inspector?"

"Maybe I can." Cardona reached in his pocket, produced a box of cartridges that he had found in Quedden's desk. He showed it to the professor with the question: "Are these yours?"

Quedden nodded.

"There's one 'yes' for you, Mr. Graham," declared Cardona, bluntly. "Maybe I can get another from him. If –"

Cardona was hefting the revolver as he spoke. Its weight was the factor that caused his interruption. He looked at the gun; it was a .38 caliber weapon. A glance at the box; its label stated that it contained .32 cartridges. Cardona opened the box; the cartridges suited the label.

"Here's one for you, commissioner!" exclaimed Cardona. "The cartridges don't fit the revolver! Quedden had the gun, though; and the bullets were in his desk."

"May I see the gun?" put in Graham. "I feel sure it is the one that Quedden dropped when you seized him. Of course, there was also the gun that I picked up in the hall."

"Let's see that one," suggested Cardona, "while you look at Quedden's."

Graham produced the hallway gun. He handed it to Cardona.

"This is a .32 caliber!" exclaimed the inspector. "It must be Quedden's!" Joe cracked the gun open. "Say, this gun isn't loaded!"

There was a sneer from Graham. Cardona looked up to find himself staring into the muzzle of the .38 that he had handed Graham. The tall reformer's eyes were brilliant through the gold-rimmed spectacles that fronted them. He had come to his feet; he was stepping back, so that he could cover anyone who tried a move.

"I rather suspected that it wasn't loaded," snapped Graham. "You see, inspector, that gun is actually Quedden's. I fired the shot that killed Thoyer! I handed you the revolver that I used, instead of Quedden's. I am the Murder Master!"

NECESSITY had forced Graham's bold declaration. The Shadow's evidence had brought the trail too close. In a few minutes more, Cardona might have guessed the truth. As it was, Cardona stood cursing his own dumbness. He should have seen it all, before Graham tricked him.

Always, the Murder Master had thrown a trail; then covered it. Paroled crooks had been in his charge; he had made them his aids in crime, without letting them know he was their hidden chief. All the while, he had

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previewed the prospect that the police might some day close in upon him.

That was why Graham had set up this headquarters for Professor Jerome Quedden, duping the old inventor through a fictitious Foundation for Inventors. That told the part that Thoyer had played.

Thoyer was Graham's man. His dullness was a pretense. Thoyer, alone, had known that Quedden was not the Murder Master. It was part of Thoyer's job to make Quedden fit that part.

It was Thoyer who had decoded the messages from the lieutenants. He had sent them along to Graham, accompanied by the swag that crooks delivered. All except the ten per cent, that the Murder Master termed a "sinking fund;" that share was stuffed in Foundation envelopes, for Quedden.

Hoarding that money had kept the old dupe happy. All the while, he had been stowing away the strongest of all the evidence that wrongly branded him as the Murder Master.

Graham had heard Thoyer cry that he would talk. That was why Graham had been forced to slay boldly his accomplice. Even then, true to form as ever, he had seen a quick opportunity to pin his own crime on Professor Quedden.

Right now, Graham was facing big odds; but he did not fear them. He was the Murder Master. His own announcement had given him a menacing prestige. Coolly, he ordered Elsa to get the handcuff keys from Cardona's pocket; to release the crooks who lined the wall. The Murder Master intended to take his three lieutenants with him.

Cardona nodded for Elsa to obey. The girl had long ago discarded her revolver. When she reached into Cardona's pocket, her hand felt the metal of the inspector's gun. Elsa gripped the weapon. She was ready for the Murder Master.

Cardona suddenly felt what was due; he couldn't warn the girl to forget the gun. That would bring prompt shots from Graham.

An instant more, Graham would have guessed it anyway; with that, he would have opened fire. Other eyes than the Murder Master's, though, were watching Elsa. Eyes that Graham did not suspect. He had come here too late to know that The Shadow had been on the premises.

Like others, Graham had failed to hear the silent tread of a personage who had descended the spiral staircase.

A laugh chilled from that gloom. It was perfectly timed. The Shadow had given Elsa the utmost limit to get at Cardona's gun, for he saw likelihood that her shot would be needed. It was. Graham showed all the nerve that suited the Murder Master.

He spun for The Shadow, because he knew that his only chance lay in meeting that challenger. He guessed also that his chance would be slim, unless he added some protection for himself. As he wheeled, Graham grabbed for Weston; he shoved the commissioner between himself and The Shadow.

THE SHADOW fired as Graham spun; but the only target was the criminal's left shoulder. Graham jolted, but showed the endurance that The Shadow expected. Bobbing past Weston, he blasted at The Shadow. His shots were wide, for The Shadow had faded. Graham guessed wrong, when he tried to pick the right direction.

Elsa had the gun she wanted. The girl jabbed a shot while her hand was on the move; but her marksmanship was true. The Shadow had counted upon it. He knew the righteous vengeance that she sought for her brother's

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death. Elsa had waited long for this meeting with the Murder Master. Graham's scheme to shift the blame on Quedden had added to her intensity.

Elsa's lone shot staggered the Murder Master. He reeled away from Weston. He was an open target for The Shadow; but the cloaked fighter did not fire. He had promised the Murder Master to the law. Graham's gun hand was drooping. This was the chance to take him.

Cardona pounced forward; detectives piled with him. They carried Graham to the floor, where he formed the center of a struggling pack. The crooks along the wall saw a wild chance for escape; they began to sling their manacled wrists at Elsa's servants, who had sprung to guard them.

Graham's lieutenants halted suddenly. Again, they heard The Shadow's taunting laugh. This time, it was meant for them.

Out from the workshop, The Shadow stood in view; his two guns held the three crooks covered, as they had from the stairway when the trio had first arrived at Quedden's. From then on, those crooks were mere spectators; added witnesses to Graham's sudden finish.

One man had watched the battle with strangely gleaming eyes. That man was Quedden; he saw the attempt that the thugs had made to use their handcuffs. He remembered it, when, from the surging group upon the floor, Graham came crawling free.

Despite his wounds, the Murder Master still showed tenacity. He had kept his gun; with bloodshot eyes, he was looking for the nearest victim. He saw Quedden – and the professor saw him.

As Graham strained to lift his revolver, Quedden sprang to meet him. On hands and knees, Graham was down to the midget inventor's size.

Before that lifting gun could aim, Quedden's hands were sledging downward. Quedden did not see The Shadow aim for Graham. The professor could save himself from the Murder Master; and he had his own score to settle with this fiend who had tried to frame him.

No skull could have stood the bludgeoning crash of Quedden's gun. All his nervous strength was in the stroke. Steel drove hard to Graham's head. The blow floored the Murder Master, while excited detectives added gunshots to the sagging body.

THE Murder Master was dead. He had spoken, that master of evil, only to be outvoiced by the master of justice, The Shadow. The paroled convicts who had served Melvin Graham heard the tone of a strange, mirthless laugh. It sounded as a parting knell; for when they stared, they saw The Shadow no longer.

The cloaked avenger had faded to the darkness of the workshop. Silently, he was ascending the spiral stairs, to leave by the route across the roofs. He had left the lieutenants of the Murder Master as trophies for the law.

Their part in crime was known. Soon, they would return to prison walls. This time, their sentence would be one from which they would never find parole.

The electric chair awaited the servers of the Murder Master.

THE END