

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Maxwell Grant

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A QUARTER OF EIGHT

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CHAPTER I

FOUR men were in Sargon's back room that night.

What their names were didn't matter, because nobody used his right name in Martinique – not if he could help it.

These were the times when the island was dominated by the Vichy government, when a man's life was valued only in terms of his wits. What these men were was known only to themselves – individually.

In those days, almost everything was illegal in Fort de France, the capital of Martinique. Tension smoldered like the hidden fires of Mount Pelee, the towering volcano which twenty years before had all but blasted the island off the map.

What might blast Martinique next was anybody's guess.

Men who used their boats to carry supplies to waiting Nazi submarines might, on the return trip, bring in weapons from Free French freighters, for distribution among the local Underground. Yet no one could

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question this inconsistency; it might simply be a cover-up.

The greater a man's value to one side, the greater his value to the other. That was the law on Martinique, during this fateful period while the outcome of the war seemed hanging in the balance. It was policy for a man to think only of himself.

Simon Sargon followed that policy to the letter.

It was against all regulations to allow clandestine meetings on one's premises, so Sargon didn't allow them. To prove the fact he left his back door unlocked every night, so that the gendarmerie could look in for themselves and see that all was empty. Only the gendarmes never looked in, because Sargon had forgotten to tell them that he alone, of all the distressed merchants in Fort de France, lacked the sense to lock and barricade his store.

Sargon couldn't help anyone's wandering into the place. That would be his alibi if he ever needed it. Sargon always turned in early, and it wasn't until long after his lights were out that these four men stole indoors to discuss their plans for the morrow.

Sworn comrades, these four, but only until they found out too much about each other. It was that uncertainty of the future that disturbed them now, for the business before them was unquestionably a post-war project.

The business concerned a large and curious silver coin which lay on the wrought-iron table that graced Sargon's back room. It bore the inscription BOBADILLA – IMPERATOR and it showed the face of a stern Spanish grandee, topped by a plumed helmet. On the other side, the coin bore an unidentified coat-of-arms, and it was scored deeply with two cross-lines which divided the coin into four sectors. Each of these quadrants in turn had a furrow that ran horizontally across the coin, making eight divisions in all.

One man put a sudden question:

"You say this was found in the ruins of St. Pierre?"

"In the cellar of an old house," another replied. "A house that belonged to a family named LeClerq before the great eruption of 1902."

Both men looked toward a third, who was studying the coin with care. When he spoke, the man's tone carried authority.

"This explains the mystery of Bobadilla," he asserted. "It fits with a theory that has lingered through four centuries. Shall I expound it?"

There were nods from the other three.

"Bobadilla was the first Spanish governor of Hispaniola," related the speaker. "His misrule was so notorious that Columbus was sent on one of his later voyages to order Bobadilla back to Spain. Only Bobadilla didn't wait; he set out with his entire fleet, carrying all the treasure that he had accumulated at the expense of the enslaved natives."

A chuckle came from the fourth man, who so far had remained silent. Then:

"I'm glad you're telling us this," the man said. "Go on."

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"Bobadilla sailed right into a hurricane which he knew was coming," the narrator resumed. "His ships were sunk, his treasure lost and with it his famous golden table, which he was reputedly taking to the King of Spain as a peace offering. But there is another theory, the one I have mentioned; namely, that Bobadilla intended to keep his treasure for himself."

Pausing to note that the fourth man was alert, the narrator continued calmly:

"It was in 1500 that Bobadilla arrived in Hispaniola and his first act was to arrest Columbus, who was already there, and send him back to Spain in chains. The year 1502 was when Columbus returned with authority to order Bobadilla home. Meanwhile, during the year between, another explorer named Americus Vesputius had discovered new lands to the South, the country now called Brazil. Unquestionably Bobadilla had heard of this, so what could have suited him better than to sail to that vast continent and set up his own empire there!"

Reaching to the table, the speaker fingered the ancient coin and finally clinked it upon the ironwork.

"This coin proves the theory," he declared. "Having cast his gold into one great piece, he must have used his silver to strike off his own currency for the empire that was to be, but never was."

A nod of agreement from the fourth man, who suddenly became spokesman for the first two.

"Then where did this coin come from?"

"From wherever Bobadilla stowed his treasure," was the prompt reply, "in the hope that he could return for it in whatever ships outrode the hurricane – which none did."

"But how did the coin arrive here in Martinique?"

"That is the problem which we must solve in order to learn where Bobadilla buried his hoard."

There were words of unanimous assent; then the man who had spoken most picked up the coin and weighed it.

"Whoever keeps this coin," he declared, "will hold our secret. Its value as a curio is slight in comparison, particularly as there are probably thousands more like it in Bobadilla's treasure chests. Is it agreed that when the time is right, we shall start our treasure hunt?"

Nods from the others.

"And that our basis will be share and share alike?"

More nods, then one man put the canny question:

"Suppose one of us should want to sell his share?"

"That would be fair enough," decided the man who held the coin, "and it solves our own problem. Here."

Without waiting consent from the others, he broke the coin in half along one central scoring, then snapped the two pieces apart in the crosswise direction. He gave a quarter of the coin to each of the other men, retaining the last for himself.

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"These represent shares of ownership," he declared, "whenever or however the treasure is found – or in the hunt for it. What may become of us" – he shrugged – "we do not know in these times. So we may sell or even give away our shares if we wish."

Again, the fourth man, the canny objector, had an amendment.

"Suppose a token should be lost or stolen?"

"We can have a password to go with it. I would suggest the famous motto: 'One for all' –"

Catching the appropriate suggestion, the others chimed the rest:

"– And all for one!"

Faint glimmers of dawn were tracing through a tiny, high-set window. One of the men noticed it and arose, saying:

"It is almost time for Sargon to come down."

"We must wait for him," declared another. "From the way my mind feels now, I intend to leave Martinique. My life means more than the money I can make here, with so much more money to think about."

The others agreed, so one went through an inner door and up a short flight of stairs. They heard him knock at a door above; then he returned and waited with the rest. Soon a stocky man in pajamas shuffled downstairs with his slippered feet and rubbed his sleepy-looking eyes.

"Ah, mes amis," he queried thickly. "Why do you wake me quite so early? Besides, I like to find my visitors gone."

"We are going away to stay," replied one of the visitors. "Perhaps you will never see us again, Sargon."

Sargon's broad, thick-featured face showed an expression which left doubt as to whether he was glad, sorry, or both.

"Ah, mes amis –"

"But we intend to hold a reunion," put in another of the visitors. "It might be two, three, five years from now – who knows? And besides" – he threw a glance at his companions – "it just might be that one or more of us might send another in his place."

As the rest nodded, Sargon spread his hands, but before he could say anything, one of the four men announced:

"We have a password, Sargon. If anyone comes here and says 'One for all' you will say nothing until he adds: 'And all for one.' Then you will know that he is the same as one of us."

The others were chiming their agreement to this formula when Sargon, recognizing the motto of the Three Musketeers, began to chuckle.

"Ah, mes mousquetaires," he laughed, "you do well to leave Martinique. But do not expect to find me here even two months from now. If I can sell this business and ship whatever antiques that remain, I shall do so,

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and go with them!"

This silenced the four for the moment, since their plan, so simply laid, could not be discussed in front of Sargon. Then one man had an idea. He asked:

"Go where, Sargon?"

"To Port Au Prince, perhaps," replied Sargon. "Better still, to Havana. Maybe if business is fine, I shall even get to New York!"

"And still continue your antique business?"

"Of course. It shall be my business until I die" – Sargon was glancing anxiously toward the window where dawn hovered – "and that may be too soon in Martinique!"

This struck a complete chord of agreement. One man voiced it promptly for the rest.

"Wherever you are, we'll find you there," the man told Sargon. "Good luck until then, Sargon, and remember the password that others may use if we are not so lucky!"

Like men with prices on their heads, which they were, the four holders of Bobadilla's quartered coin sneaked from Sargon's back door, glancing about as though they expected to see enemies arise to seize them, which was likely. As they separated, they moved swiftly, as if intending to leave these parts immediately, which they did.

Shrugging, Simon Sargon closed his back door and locked it for the daytime. He went through his antique shop, unlocked the front door, and let down the big awning. There was no law against opening a shop early in Martinique; the only regulations were that shops should close early.

Fort de France was stirring for another of its frightful days which would result in further pruning of its forty-odd thousand inhabitants. Beyond the harbor the blue Caribbean twinkled with all its tropical beauty, but like an ugly sentinel, a symbol of war amid peace, Sargon could see the outline of Diamond Rock which a century ago the British had fortified and held for a short while against the French.

The Rock didn't scintillate as a diamond should. Its name simply applied to its shape. Maybe it was waiting for the British to come back and take it again, but Sargon wasn't wondering about that as he stared out to sea.

Like many others who lived in Fort de France, Simon Sargon was wondering how soon he could afford to leave Martinique, meanwhile making the most of whatever opportunities he could find.

There were four others who thought differently.

They were the four who used other people's names as their own and another man's premises as their meeting place.

Patriots, renegades, whichever they might be, they had shown a certain honor among themselves in acting out the prologue to a story which – as they themselves had specified – would bide a few years or more until its climax!

CHAPTER II

THE man in the cell was shaking the steel bars of the door and howling that he wanted to get out.

That was logical enough, since most prisoners had the same sentiments, but this one was mixing his facts and seemed to have himself confused into the bargain.

He was shouting about volcanoes, buried cities, earthquakes and destruction. He localized this finally by shrieking that unless he was let out, the whole island of Martinique would explode around him.

Oddly, this was the enactment of a scene that occurred in 1902 when most of Martinique did explode. There was a prisoner then, in the jail at Saint Pierre, who had felt that he was surely left to die, only to wind up as one of the few survivors among the city's population of thirty thousand.

But this wasn't 1902, it wasn't Saint Pierre, it wasn't even Martinique. If it had been, there wouldn't have been any danger, because the only thing that had exploded in Martinique within the past few years had been the Vichy regime. The man in the cell was muttering something about that recent period of misrule. Suddenly, his eyes narrowing with the sharpness of a rat's, the prisoner took in his real surroundings.

Through the bars he was viewing a group that included the warden of a modern American penitentiary. He recognized the warden and snarled. No longer did his language include the jargon of half a dozen tongues common in the West Indies.

"You framed me!" the man snarled. "You knew I wouldn't have gone to kill him if he hadn't wanted to kill me. You're as bad as he was. All of you!" Head bobbing back and forth so that his eyes could dodge the upright bars and view faces better, the man gave a fierce, venomous laugh. "You'd like to steal what you won't ever get because you don't know what it is!"

The stern-faced warden gave a significant look toward a tall man who stood beside him. That caused the prisoner to stare the same way too. Sight of a calm, impassive face only ruffled him further.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "Another of those lawyers? No, you can't be" – the prisoner's tone became contemptuous – "because they talk and you don't."

Steady eyes stayed on the prisoner and briefly they had a quieting effect. Then:

"Trying to guess what I'm talking about, aren't you?" the prisoner sneered. "Well, you never will. There's only one man I ever told, because he was a friend –"

Pausing as sharply as he had begun, the prisoner spat a finish to his sentence. His face becoming a sullen glower, he viewed the group with the manner of a monkey watching visitors outside his cage. Evidently knowing that the prisoner intended to retain his silence, the warden turned to the tall man and said:

"There's no use staying any longer, Cranston."

They left the old cell block where the prisoner was confined in what practically amounted to solitary. Outside, the warden spoke apologetically to Cranston.

"I wouldn't have put him in there," the warden explained, "except that he insisted on it. He's the first prisoner who ever complained that our regular accommodations were too good for him."

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The warden thought he saw a faint smile trace itself on Cranston's lips. Maybe it was just the light, for Lamont Cranston seemed to be taking this business very seriously.

"It wasn't a case for a psychiatrist," expressed the warden. "The man's request was reasonable in its way. We don't object to prisoners denying themselves certain privileges and occupancy of a modern cell could be classed in that category. Our own objection to this obsolete cell block is that it drives prisoners into the very mood this man is showing now. So we can't blame him for his behavior and if we do the usual thing of putting him in a better cell we'll be right back where we started."

"An interesting dilemma," concurred Cranston. "You would be punishing the man for denying himself a privilege."

"Exactly," the warden agreed. "Of course, if other prisoners objected to the fuss that he is making –" Here the warden paused and shook his head: "But there are no other prisoners in the cell block," he added "and our own regulations prevent us from putting them here without their consent. Still, we have accomplished one thing. We have made the man talk."

"He hasn't before?"

"Not a word of importance and not a word at all, when psychiatrists have questioned him. That is why I prefer not to class him as a mental case."

"You will soon."

As if to corroborate Cranston's prediction there came a wild, insane laugh, filtering through the thick door of the old cell block. Even the veteran warden showed alarm.

"You are right, Cranston! The man will soon crack. I never expected it, not from him. Read this."

What the warden handed Cranston was a report on the prisoner. The man's name was Hugh Stolt, but he had a half a dozen aliases. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Artie Duvan, an unsavory character, whose death wouldn't have warranted such penalty for the dealer, except that Stolt had rather embellished it.

According to the report, as Cranston already knew from newspaper accounts, Stolt had literally carved Artie to ribbons with a quaint weapon known as a machete, a knife the size of a broadsword that West Indian sugar workers used for cutting cane.

A jury had logically decided that parties addicted to such heinous practices did not belong at large. Otherwise Stolt might have been given a manslaughter conviction, instead of first degree, since witnesses agreed that Artie had participated in an altercation with Stolt prior to the machete carving.

"There's something behind all this," mused the warden. "Stolt keeps referring to himself as Jacques, which isn't one of his aliases. You heard him mention some other person and hint at something that Stolt himself fears may be stolen."

Still studying the report sheet, Cranston nodded, apparently oblivious to a new wave of mad mirth that grew in its crescendo from beyond the door. The warden's face tightened; he seemed to be counting time on Stolt.

"I can keep this report?"

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The warden nodded in reply to Cranston's request. The tall man stooped to put the sheet in a briefcase that was leaning beside the door. Meanwhile, the wild laughter continued, passing its proper limit. The warden's face was really grim.

"Wait here, Cranston," said the warden. "Unless this has stopped when I return, you will see some firm and rapid action. At least we'll make your trip here worth while."

Hardly had the warden left before Cranston showed some rapid action of his own. Inverting the briefcase, he whipped open a hidden zipper in the bottom and from a V-shaped compartment removed a black cloak and a slouch hat. With one sweep, Cranston was caparisoned in both garments and his figure seemed actually to vanish as he opened the door and stepped into the gloom of the cell block beyond.

So silent was the stride of the cloaked intruder that Stolt was not aware of his approach until blackness clouded the space outside the cell. In the midst of a madman's howl, that he accompanied with a clanging of the bars, Stolt froze and let his eyes grow so large that they became glittering white surrounding blackened pin-points.

Then came the prisoner's frenzied snarl through tight-clenched teeth:

"Who are you!"

"You heard of me in Martinique." The whisper came from lips that Stolt could not see, for they were hidden by the upturned collar of the cloak. "They called me L'Ombre."

There was no need to specify that L'Ombre meant The Shadow.

"And they called you Jacques," The Shadow continued, "or rather you chose that name for yourself."

Evidently Stolt had forgotten his own mutterings for it astounded him to hear this alias mentioned.

"I choose names too," observed The Shadow. "In one place where you nearly met me, I was known as La Sombra."

This was a double stroke. Quite sure that Stolt must have traveled widely in the West Indies, The Shadow was equally convinced that crime had always attracted the man. Stolt would have met up with company in certain Spanish speaking countries where men of evil feared The Shadow as La Sombra.

Stolt's breath came with a sharp, deep-drawn hiss. Then, defiantly, the prisoner retorted:

"If I killed Artie, who are you to care? He'd have killed a friend of mine if he'd known where to find him. You ought to know that friends are few."

"Friends are few," repeated The Shadow, "but enemies like Artie may be many."

Alarm registered itself in Stolt's bulging eyes. Those shreds of loyalty that were in his spotty make-up were being tested to their limit. Gripping the bars, the prisoner gasped:

"You won't let them, Shadow! You won't let them get Cap Winslow! They'd do it, fellows like Artie would, if they knew he had what I gave him —"

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Standing like a weird inquisitor, The Shadow did nothing to break the spell that had grown upon the man who once called himself Jacques. What broke it was the sound of the opening door, accompanied by heavy footsteps on stone. Instantly, Stolt's manner changed.

"Get away!" he shrieked. "You've framed me, too, like the rest of them! You and that —"

The rest of the prisoner's outburst was drowned by the clatter of the bars as he rattled them, but some of his profanity was coherent, punctuated frequently by the word "warden." Then Stolt found himself railing at the Warden in person, instead of The Shadow, who had somehow vanished during all this ranting. A guard was unlocking the cell door; then two others, huskies both, were planting Stolt in a strait-jacket in the fast firm style that the warden had promised.

From the gloom of the wall opposite the cell, blackness skirted the group and reached the door. When the guards brought Stolt past, Lamont Cranston was standing there, briefcase in hand, calmly viewing the removal of the howling prisoner. Compared to his former outburst, Stolt's present exhibition was fury incarnate.

It seemed a long time before those maddened shrieks faded from the departing truck in which the guards were taking the prisoner to the hospital's psychopathic ward. The warden shook his head, with a trace of sympathy. He had seen convicts crack before.

"Crazy as a loon," defined the warden. "Howling at somebody he thought he could see, but who wasn't there. That finishes him, Cranston. When I left I was sure that nobody could get anything out of him."

The clang of the cell block door, given as the warden closed it, suppressed the whispered laugh that issued from Cranston's lips, a sound that was strangely reminiscent of The Shadow's tone when he had talked to the man who once was Jacques.

Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, could not agree that nothing could have been gotten out of that prisoner who was in the last stages of his crack-up.

The Shadow had gotten it.

CHAPTER III

THE name beside the apartment number 3-D was brief and to the point. In irregular capital letters it simply said:

CAPTAIN WINSLOW

In a way, the name wasn't necessary. Anyone who had seen that style of hand-print would have recognized it. Certainly Claire Winslow did when she saw it. Claire smiled, particularly because she knew the name that was missing between tile Captain and the Winslow.

That name was Belshazzar.

Pressing a gloved finger against the call button, Claire waited for an answering buzz from the door knob, the way it always responded in the one apartment house in the town of Lakewood.

Only there wasn't any answer, so Claire tried the door and found it open.

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By her calculation, 3-D would represent the back apartment in this old house that had been converted into an apartment building. It proved to be just that. Only nobody answered when Claire knocked at the door, so she tried it, found it open, and walked right in on her Uncle Belshazzar.

The old captain was sitting up in bed and he looked a lot better than Claire had expected from his last letter. Maybe his smile was withered, but it was genuine enough to make Claire think he wasn't dying, as he had assured her that he was when he wrote her. About all that seemed wrong with Uncle Belshazzar was his wheeze.

"Sorry, Claire." The tone came like the low whirr of old clockwork. "I knew it was you when you knocked, but I couldn't answer loud enough."

"Don't try to talk," Claire told him. Sitting down in the only chair that looked tenable, Claire laid her bag and gloves on a four-legged table that had three legs. "I'll ask questions and you can just answer with nods. First, do you mind if I call you Uncle Belshazzar?"

The captain didn't answer. He just shook his head.

"I'm glad you don't mind," assured Claire. "It's kind of nice to belong to a family that picked off-trail names. It was intended as a sort of object lesson, wasn't it?"

Old Belshazzar nodded.

"I catch," Claire continued. "Belshazzar was a king who lost his temper and threw a goblet at the wall. Only it didn't stop the hand from writing there and marking up his doom. So anybody with a name like Belshazzar wouldn't lose his temper easily, would he?"

The captain's face had tightened. His stare worried Claire.

"I'm sorry!" the girl exclaimed. "I shouldn't have mentioned –"

She paused, hesitating at the word "doom" which she knew her uncle feared, otherwise he wouldn't have insisted that she come here.

"My temper," wheezed her uncle. "I've never lost it. I mean, I've never lost having it to lose."

Claire smiled and the old man's eyes lighted, with good reason. He was appraising this niece of his, with a gaze that had covered about every form of maiden in every clime, and somehow Claire brought back the spice of the Indies to the captain's memories. When he thought of Indies, Belshazzar didn't differentiate between East and West. He'd been to both so often that he had them mixed.

Of course the Indies weren't stocked with blondes, or hadn't been when Captain Belshazzar was last there, but that didn't injure Claire's case. Her svelte figure accounted for itself, even though encased in civilized attire; her smile had the naive welcome that Belshazzar remembered as worn by the Polynesian ladies who had swum a few miles to sea and climbed on ship board; while her eyes had the illuminating blue that the Winslow family must somehow have borrowed from the tropical seas in which the Captain had sailed and sunk more vessels than he cared to count.

Claire could read all that in Belshazzar's own blue-eyed gaze and she tried to hold back the dew that was creeping into her own. She knew how hollow her uncle's title of captain was. About the only ship he'd commanded that had carried anything more than sail was a Gulf of Mexico rum runner that had gone out with

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Prohibition. But Claire wasn't a stickler regarding the checkered and unsuccessful career of the last living relative for whom she really cared.

"Well, uncle," asserted Claire, "I'm here, and I'm going to look out for you, a long, long while to come."

Belshazzar answered with a headshake.

"Now don't argue with me," began Claire. "It won't be any trouble –"

There was an interruption. Belshazzar supplied it by picking up a newspaper from the table beside his head and thrusting it into Claire's hand. With a shaky finger, the old man pointed to an item which Claire read.

It stated that a convict named Hugh Stolt had suddenly gone crazy at Sing Sing, but that the prison doctors declared that it could have no bearing on his case, since he was entirely sane when he had been incarcerated there, following his sentence for murder.

"And I thought," wheezed Belshazzar, "that Jacques was crazy all along!"

Claire's frown would have been prettier if a strew of blond hair hadn't hidden so much of her forehead. Still, those blonde locks were not bad in themselves, for old Belshazzar was speculating on their potentialities in a spanking Caribbean breeze. Then came Claire's question:

"Who is Jacques?"

Belshazzar's finger indicated the name Stolt. Then, not from just beneath his pillow, but from somewhere deep inside it, the old captain drew out an object which he dropped in Claire's hand.

More puzzled than ever, the girl stared at the piece of silver. It was a quarter of a coin and about the only thing decipherable was the word *ILLA* that ran around its margin.

"Take it to Sargon," wheezed Belshazzar. "An antique dealer – used to be in Martinique –"

The story broke off with the old man's cough. He gestured to a bottle of medicine and a glass that was on the table beside the bed.

"Tell Sargon: 'One for all.'" Belshazzar's voice was back. "He won't understand. So then you say 'All for one.' You understand?"

Claire understood and nodded. She was mixing the medicine with water from a pitcher, one spoonful of it. Her uncle shook his head and raised three fingers. Looking at the bottle, Claire saw that it said 'One spoonful every hour, or proportionately up to four hours.' Rather a funny thing with medicine, still with such things as penicillin and other modern remedies that weren't in the family doctor book back in Lakewood, Claire was in no position to argue. So she mixed two extra spoonfuls to make up for the hours that her uncle had missed.

"It's worth a quarter –"

Claire couldn't help but smile, even though it was another cough that interrupted her uncle's wheeze.

"Of course it's worth a quarter," returned Claire, as she dropped the piece of silver in her bag. "It's a quarter of a coin."

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"A quarter of a million dollars," added Belshazzar, reclaiming his funny throat whirr. "Maybe a quarter of a lot more, whatever it turns out to be."

The girl couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her eyes showed it and her uncle returned a smile.

"It's what Jacques told me," assured Belshazzar. "I can believe it, now that I know he wasn't crazy. I saved his life."

A cough spasm followed, but it didn't detract from the positive effect of the old captain's tone. In the language of the seas where this unsuccessful skipper had sailed, the term 'I saved his life' went back to prehistoric law. Brutally incongruous that Belshazzar had saved Jacques' life that the latter might spend it in a prison or asylum, but that was the law of the land, not the sea. Then, old Belshazzar added in a series of broken wheezes:

"They were after him – he knew it – he didn't care what happened to himself – he owed me a debt – I didn't ask him to pay – he wanted to pay – wanted to go his way – wanted to kill – wanted revenge –"

It was hard effort to include all those phrases in one speech. With a surprisingly firm hand, Belshazzar plucked the glass of watered medicine from his niece's hand, raised it and paused as if for a toast.

"So Jacques gave it to me," the old man whirred, "because he knew then they would never find it!"

Triumphantly, the old man drained the glass. Hardly had he finished before he threw his free hand to his throat. His gargly gasp seemed to stifle itself. From the writhe he gave, Claire realized that her uncle was in his death throes. But he still was able to live up to his name.

As if from the recoil of his own body, Belshazzar flung his arm forward and hurled the glass toward the wall, beside a blackened window that showed only the thick darkness of the outside night.

Spontaneously, Claire came to her feet to stop the wild gesture, only to stand rooted, her eyes following the course of the flying glass. Claire herself was not only visible, but conspicuous in relation to the window, but she didn't think of that.

Etched on the wall like a thing of fate, was the silhouette of a moving hand, a replica of the moving fingers at which an ancient Belshazzar had flung a goblet when he realized that his death was signified!

Before Claire Winslow could even scream, the glass crashed and with it the swift – moving silhouette became a real hand, a gloved one, that plucked the light switch!

CHAPTER IV

A SUDDEN change from full light to pitch-darkness produces a brief but startling optical illusion, which was precisely what Claire Winslow experienced on this occasion.

Such illusions, however, are always stepped up under stress, sometimes imbuing the mind with a fantastic, imagery. With Claire, that added effect was double. Her uncle's frantic death throes, the dramatic smashing of the glass upon a silhouetted hand that never paused its cavort across the wall, were the sort of events that could snap taut nerves.

Oddly the tonic was the blackness. It obliterated reality, threw everything into the realm of the incredible. Claire saw purple, green and pink, a flood of twisting, kaleidoscopic after-images, saturated with the

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blackness that was about to swallow such hallucinations themselves.

Yet most vivid was the etched recollection of the room itself. One crawl of blackness represented the moving hand that Claire had seen; another, a block with criss-crossed lines of color, stood for the back window, though she didn't know it. For that back window had been blackness before, and though all that Claire had seen beyond it was the thick night itself, she had been completely outlined in that frame, from the viewpoint of anyone who might have been staring in from outdoor darkness.

That factor was far more important than Claire at this moment supposed. Her thoughts were actually lingering back upon another moment, the fearful instant when the light had been extinguished.

It seemed an hour, yet it was hardly more than a scant second that Claire behaved like something tottering upon a brink.

Something solid met Claire before she could fall. The skidding thing was an old fashioned chair, with heavy baggy cushions. Old castors were shrieking as if in agony when the tumble-down relic struck Claire and pitched her headlong.

Only the intruder who had clicked off the light could have slung the chair, for it came from his direction; but as the girl sprawled in a dive, carrying the chair with her, another missile asserted itself from a different quarter.

The window crashed to the whine of a rifle bullet which was accompanied by the ping of a bullet against the wall beside Belshazzar's bedstead, punching right through the very space where Claire had been standing before the chair bowled her over!

Nor was that the only shot.

Scrambling on hands and knees toward where she thought the door must be, Claire heard other bullets whistle behind her with that same impact that brought an echo of falling plaster. They were gunning for her, whoever they were, but they couldn't shoot around corners.

It wasn't until she reached the door that Claire remembered the moving hand that had produced the blackness. Her own hand on the knob, the girl hesitated to open the door for fear the light from the hallway would betray her. Quick though her other reactions had been, Claire didn't yet realize that she owed her life doubly to that hand; first for its quickness in bringing darkness, again because of its prompt work with the chair that had knocked her from the path of harm.

Claire's realization of the truth came only when a big gun blasted from the window itself. A sudden fear that the menace was actually here, was smothered by the fact that this gun was shooting outward. It was that stranger of the darkness, fighting on Claire's side, answering those rifle shots that had come from a row of buildings on the back street.

Thoughtlessly the girl yanked open the door and sprang into the hallway, only to turn and look back, fearful that she had betrayed her unknown friend. Such hesitancy was even worse, for the light from the hall cut a clear swath to the window; but fortunately it was only Claire who saw the cloaked figure that crouched there.

The Shadow had taken his stance beside the window and was gunning from its edges. Even as Claire stared, he jabbed a few with a quick hand that whipped back as the riflemen answered with a useless fusillade which only brought a weird, mocking laugh from the strange fighter within the window. Then, her wits returned, Claire slammed the door and fled madly downstairs. Occupants of the apartment house came dashing from

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their doors and reached the street along with Claire. They stopped abruptly as they met a pair of policemen coming from a patrol car. Before she could stop herself, Claire was telling them:

"The third floor – the back apartment – you'll find him –"

Find whom?

Claire didn't supply the rest. She meant her uncle, but she was afraid the police would think in terms of her rescuer. It was too late now to make amends, for the patrolmen were storming indoors and up the stairs. Frantically Claire started after them, a full flight of stairs behind, but no one else followed. The people who had reached the street were too glad to be there.

That fact proved for the best.

Hardly was Claire on the stairs, before a hand came around the corner and clutched her arm. The cry that the girl couldn't quite stifle would have caught the attention of other persons, had any been present.

As it was, Claire found herself alone with The Shadow and the sight of burning eyes, peering from beneath a slouch hat brim, allayed her fears instead of stirring them.

That gaze had a way of terrorizing only those who deserved it. To others, it gave confidence, as Claire learned. Almost as though hypnotized, the girl nodded her willingness to obey The Shadow's mandates.

Then the very hand that had so startled Claire earlier was drawing the girl along the hall, out a back door into darkness. How The Shadow had come downstairs so swiftly was in a sense explained by the speed he showed now. In the Stygian gloom that Claire mistook for house walls, all barriers seemed to melt as The Shadow threaded his way through passages that he had picked while coming here.

The men who had done the shooting must have fled from the rear houses for all was silence there. Only once, looking back, did Claire see faces; they belonged to the two policemen, who had turned on the light in her uncle's apartment and were looking from the rear window that no longer was a target. Next, Claire suddenly found herself in a cab that was pulling away from another street. Gratefully, the girl turned to speak to the cloaked friend who had brought her here.

Just then the cab rolled into an avenue where a glare of lights showed the whole interior of the vehicle.

Claire was alone. Somewhere, somehow, The Shadow had silently gone his way, sending her off on a journey of her own!

Where next?

While the girl was still debating the question, the cab pulled up in front of a hotel and the driver, speaking back from the front window, informed her:

"This is where you said you wanted to go, lady."

Claire couldn't remember having said a word. Nevertheless, she paid the driver and left the cab, deciding that this hotel would be as good a place as any to stay. Inside she found a clerk whose patient smile indicated that the hotel was full, which was a way with New York hotels. But, before he could speak, the phone bell rang.

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While the clerk was answering the call, Claire signed the register. Laying down the telephone the clerk looked at the name Claire Winslow and promptly produced a room key. Soon afterward, Claire found herself staring from another window, but this one was too high up for anybody to shoot at it from across the way.

Her senses really back, Claire realized there was no use in trying to find out about her uncle. The police would attend to that and for the present it seemed more sensible for Claire to depend upon the mysterious friend who had aided her in this time of startling need. What troubled Claire most was the unreality of it all. Actually, she was beginning to class her whole experience as a wild, impossible dream.

And then, Claire had a recollection.

Fumbling in the bag which she had clutched all through the turmoil, finding the purse from which she had taken change to pay the taxicab, Claire came across the object that proved her story wasn't fiction.

Clanking the token on a table, Claire stared at it, the fourth of a strange old coin that bore the letters "ILLA" on one side and a section of a coat-of-arms upon the other.

Half-aloud, the girl repeated the password that her uncle had given her:

"One for all" – there Claire paused – "all for one."

Those words were familiar, because Claire had read them often in a Dumas novel; but there was something else that she recalled, though she had heard it for the first time tonight. That was the name of Sargon, the antique dealer in Martinique.

Claire Winslow could only wish that she understood what all this meant.

Perhaps The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER V

THE morning newspapers carried accounts that were accurate only so far as they went – accounts of a singular shooting fray wherein a dead man had been the only witness. Lately, New York had been troubled by some sporadic quarrels that were reminiscent of the gangster era, except that they were disorganized affairs, and this looked like just another instance.

Apparently some feuding gentry had trapped somebody they didn't like, only to have him gun back at them from a window of an obscure apartment where an old sea captain, a victim of heart attacks was lying at the point of death. Captain Winslow just hadn't been able to stand the strain, that was all, not even with all the medicine he'd been taking.

It was just passing news for most people who read it, even to a young man named Kim Radnor, the Kim being short for Kimball. Yet Kim found it food for reflection as he sat at the window of his own apartment and idly flipped the coin that he carried as a pocket piece.

Then the point of the coin jabbed Kim's fist as he clenched it, and he remembered that this wasn't exactly a coin, but only a quarter of one. Opening his fist, Kim stared at the thing as he had done often, ever since Rico gave it to him.

The coin was very old, of that Kim was sure, and it was probably Spanish, for the chunk that Kim owned had the word "A TOR" stamped on it. Kim decided that "a tor" was probably a bull, though in Spanish it would

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have been el toro. So maybe the inscription was a misleader, but anyway, this was a quarter of a piece of eight.

A couple of old coin dealers had decided it was Spanish and in the same breath pronounced it worthless. But Rico hadn't felt that way about it, during his last few minutes of survival on the raft where Kim had hauled him. He'd panted something, Rico had, about the coin being worth a fortune and he'd mentioned somebody named Sargon in Martinique.

Only Kim wasn't to tell Sargon anything, because Sargon didn't know anything to begin with. All Kim was to say was "One for all" and if that didn't satisfy him, to add "And all for one." But that was only the beginning and what was to happen afterward, Rico hadn't lived to relate.

Since Kim was in New York and not in Martinique; also considering that Rico had shipped from here originally, it seemed that the best answer to the enigma was to find somebody who had known Rico before he joined the Merchant Marine. Only it wasn't easy tracing Rico's friends, as Kim had discovered. Indeed, it seemed that Rico hadn't any friends at all.

Which meant that Kim was about ready to give the whole thing up, except that he hadn't anything to do until he signed for a new berth. Besides, Kim wasn't used to giving up, not after his various experiences in life boats and on rafts during his Atlantic crossings in the days when the U-boats had been their toughest.

So to link Rico with an old sea captain who might have been to Martinique was worth trying as a last resort, even though the sea captain was dead. Maybe somebody would know somebody who'd known Captain Winslow and maybe that somebody would know somebody else who had heard of Rico.

At least it would give Kim something to do tonight and that something might help toward the solution of a trifling personal problem; namely, the handling of a couple of chaps who had been following Kim around lately. Who they were, Kim didn't know, but if they were after the few hundred dollars that Kim had gotten as extra pay, it might relieve Kim's boredom to let them have a try for it.

Elsewhere, that very day, both the question of Captain Winslow and his acquaintances were under discussion, along with finances. Claire Winslow was having an interview with an investment broker named Rutledge Mann.

This was the result of a phone call that Claire had received that morning, inviting her to come to Mann's office. Since only one person, Claire's cloaked friend of the night before, could know where Claire was stopping, the interview with Mann promised some solution to any mystery involving the girl's uncle.

At sight, however, Claire had recognized that Rutledge Mann could not be the heroic fighter of the night before.

Mann was rotund, deliberate – the very opposite of The Shadow. He spoke as though voicing someone else's opinion and was very precise about it. Nevertheless, in his conservative way, Mann supplied some valuable suggestions.

"Of course you did not arrive in New York until today," announced Mann, as though he really meant it, "and since you have no desire to be interviewed, it is hardly necessary to announce that you are here."

"Not if I can avoid it," agreed Claire.

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"I believe it can be avoided," decided Mann. "As a friend of the family, I shall be only too glad to render any service in settling your uncle's affairs."

"That would be very nice," conceded Claire.

Inwardly, the girl was doing some canny calculation. She was not only sure that her uncle had no affairs to settle, other than the mysterious matter of the broken coin, but she was equally certain that Mann knew nothing of that token and the passwords that went with it.

"I shall report all developments," Mann assured. "Meanwhile, if there is any information that you can give me regarding your uncle or any of his friends –"

Claire was interrupting with a headshake. She had come to New York only because her uncle had written her after many years during which she had scarcely heard a word regarding him. Now she was beginning to think that there might be something in this business of the odd coin, something that Mann might be trying to probe at Claire's own expense.

"May I ask," put Claire abruptly, "just why you are so interested in my uncle's problems?"

"My interest is quite impersonal," returned Mann. "A client of mine had an obligation to your uncle which there was no time to fulfill. He simply feels that any help in this matter would be a completion of unfinished business."

Mention of a client spurred Claire's mind to recollections of The Shadow. She didn't guess, however, that The Shadow's obligation was one of his own choosing, based upon what he had learned from a convict once known as Jacques who hailed from the island of Martinique.

Yet there was something of intuition that caused Claire to ask with sudden anxiety:

"That trouble last night, could it really have concerned my uncle?"

Mann's eyes lifted as though puzzled.

"I know it did," affirmed Claire. "It was meant for anyone who came to see him. They wanted him dead, whoever fired those rifle shots. They wanted him dead before he could talk to anybody. When they saw me in the window, they thought –"

Claire stopped. Mann was sitting with clasped hands, patiently waiting for the girl to finish her wandering statements. But it was plain to Claire now that those shots might have been meant for Mann's client or anyone else who had come to talk to Belshazzar Winslow before death took him.

"The medicine!" exclaimed Claire suddenly. "Uncle Belshazzar took too much of it at one time! Maybe whoever brought it to him knew he would. Perhaps it wasn't exactly what the doctor ordered, if there was a doctor in the case!"

Mann shook his head as though such notions were absurd, but he could see the tight clench of Claire's fists, the fighting spirit that seemed to sweep her. Then:

"I shall report on everything," Mann assured methodically. "From what you have just said, it is all the more advisable that you should let the matter rest in my hands. If you declared yourself publicly, as you have just spoken to me, some people might not understand."

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"And particularly the wrong people."

Mann didn't amend Claire's final statement. He simply arose and bowed the girl out, as though all had been finally settled. At the door, Mann said in parting:

"It would be best for you to stay at your hotel. You might hear from me at almost any time. Should you decide to change this arrangement, please be good enough to notify me first."

Claire left with a nod, which Mann was willing to interpret as meaning just whatever Claire might want it to mean. When he returned to his inner office, Mann found Lamont Cranston seated there. Cranston was of course Mann's so-called client and he had heard all that was said from an adjacent office.

"Congratulations, Mann," complimented Cranston. "It was nicely handled and makes a good official arrangement, but I think Miss Winslow will do whatever suits her – unofficially."

Soberly, Mann nodded, having come to the same opinion. Then, unable to withhold his alarm, he exclaimed:

"She wouldn't go back there!"

"Why not, Mann?"

"But if she might, you should have let me tell her that her uncle was murdered!"

"And make it a police case?" inquired Cranston. "If she told the police – as she would – she would have to admit that she visited her uncle last night. They might even suspect her of having arranged that overdose of medicine."

Mann's odd nod showed that he was thinking oddly. Cranston supplied the slightest of smiles.

"Only she didn't," he assured. "She will prove it by going back there to learn what she can."

"So will Artie's friends," reminded Mann. "Maybe they will try to kill her again."

"Not now," returned Cranston. "They overdid their last opportunity. They will follow her, perhaps try to kidnap her. They may even plan murder, but not until they learn how much she knows."

Cranston did not specify what Claire might know and Mann recognized that his client, who was actually his chief, The Shadow, was probably seeking that very same information. In fact, Cranston gave an inkling of it as he rose to leave.

"The question is," summed Cranston, "who knows the more, Claire Winslow or the enemies she has inherited as part of her uncle's legacy?"

Cryptic though such a remark might have been to others, Mann understood. With Cranston's departure, Mann stood looking at Manhattan's skyline from his office window, watching the buildings darken under the decreasing sun of the late afternoon. He could picture this night's potential events, Mann could.

If The Shadow wanted to know more than Claire Winslow could tell him, his best way would be to ask those enemies he mentioned. Since they in their turn would be looking for Claire to find out how much she had learned, The Shadow's best plan was to let the girl inadvertently lead him to the men he sought.

Simple, direct, effective; such were The Shadow's methods, the sort that could not fail. So thought Rutledge Mann, whose methodical mind was too geared to the obvious to consider the possible cross-purposes that might even balk the plans of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI

CLAIRE WINSLOW had sometimes wondered what a murderer must feel like when returning to the scene of his crime.

Tonight, she no longer wondered.

Stealthily, furtively, the girl was picking her way through the route by which The Shadow had led her from the apartment house where her uncle had died. She was making a bad botch of this return trip.

Either Claire's memory was bad or everybody in the neighborhood had put up new gates and filled their alleys with ash-can's. The best Claire could do was stifle each blunder that she made, slowing the gates so they wouldn't creak or rattle; recoiling every time she met an ash-can before she knocked the lid off and sent it rattling on the cement.

At last lighted windows gave Claire an inkling of her location. Looking up, she estimated where her uncle's apartment was – the only blank one in its building. Blacked-out too was the house in back, for it was empty; otherwise the snipers wouldn't have used it as their nest the night before.

If there were police around, and Claire was quite sure there must be, they would be watching that house. The newspapers seemed to think the trouble had been centered there and merely carried over to the old building where Belshazzar Winslow had been lying on his death bed.

Perhaps others were watching this house?

If so, they should be out front by Claire's calculation. So with no further ado, the girl entered the back door and started a sneak for the stairs, hopeful that she'd make them unobserved.

The creaks of the stairs, the thought that behind every closed door might be a listener, were a combination that had Claire really taut when she reached her goal. But that was nothing to the suspense that a sight of her uncle's apartment brought, when Claire viewed it under the beam of a flashlight that she carried.

Everything had been removed from the place since the night before. It was as if the whole history of Belshazzar Winslow had been obliterated. Logical enough, when Claire came to think of it, for her uncle had rented the apartment at a cheap rate because of its ramshackle furniture; therefore the owner had probably decided to have it done over and refurnished, now that he would have to attract a new tenant.

But the effect was appalling, with the grotesque splotch upon the wall where a rain of bullets had tumbled the plaster, ripping a great gap in the faded wallpaper. It was a warning to Claire – a warning to keep away from the line of the window. So Claire used the flashlight to circle along beside the inner wall of the room, so far with no particular purpose.

What Claire was doing was traversing the space where the old-fashioned bedstead had been, but she didn't quite realize the fact until she reached the very corner of the room. There her flashlight, purposely trained toward the floor so it wouldn't reveal too much, disclosed something that Claire hadn't even hoped to find.

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A small section of the floor was loose, as indicated by the uptilt of some floor boards. Hidden by the head of the bed, it was where no one would have noticed it, at least not while the bed itself was there. This was just the sort of spot that Claire's uncle might have rigged to stow away something of special value!

On hands and knees, the girl was eagerly raising the improvised lid, pouring the glow from her flashlight into the small cache beneath, only to finish with a disappointed gasp. The hiding place was empty.

Of course it had to be empty. The very fact that Claire had found the lid canted meant that somebody had gotten here ahead of her. There was nothing to do about it except find the person in question. Her apprehensions now dulled by her indignation, Claire left the apartment and started boldly down the stairs, not caring whom she might meet.

If her own uncle's ghost had confronted the girl right then, Claire would have hotly accused it of duplicity. But Claire was faring to a meeting with creatures much more tangible than ghosts.

The ghost notion held briefly, though, as Claire stormed from the front door of the house.

Across the street, the girl thought she saw a shadowy figure grow, then fade fantastically, in the glare of the headlights from a passing car. Maybe it was just Claire's own imagination, stirred by the way she herself drew back as the lights came along. But the sight was reminiscent of the creeping hand that had behaved so weirdly with the wall switch, the night before; except that now its effect was larger and represented the head and shoulders of a form much like The Shadow.

Why should The Shadow be here, and if so, why had he shown himself?

Her suspicions misguided, Claire didn't stop to reason that The Shadow's presence might be chiefly for her own protection; nor did she realize that in watching for persons who might approach the house, he was more interested in concealment from angles than straight across the street. Claire was simply swept with a deluge of blind fear that drove her to a foolhardy course. Madly, she darted from the house steps and along the street in the direction that the car had taken.

Something popped from the darkness to meet her. It came in the shape of a creature as gray and as vicious as a rat, except that it was a lot larger. Claire's interceptor was a huddly, sweated man who spelled thug in his very mien, or lack of it. He was repellent at sight, this creature, which was somewhat to Claire's advantage, for she recoiled so suddenly that she spun on the high heels of her shoes and started an immediate dash – in the opposite direction.

There, another menace loomed from the other side of the house steps. Bulky in contrast to the first man, this human obstacle looked sluggish in comparison, but that could have been merely an illusion created by his size. Bigger than the first, the second man could cover more ground with less motion, giving the effect of being slower, which he wasn't.

For Claire, when she reversed her course and ended with a spin, found herself squarely between the two and equidistant from each. Which meant, if she'd stopped to think it over, that she had gotten away more quickly from the small man than the large.

And now there was only one avenue of escape. A dash across the street would have brought the pair converging on Claire's trail. Up the steps and into the house again; such was Claire's outlet, if she could make the grade.

Only she couldn't.

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Stumbling on the steps, Claire shrieked as a big hand clamped upon her neck. She wrested away, her scream choked until the collar ripped half from her dress. Then hands like claws were clutching her from the other side of the steps; one digging her shoulder, the other her arm.

The rat-man this time. His clutch was more tenacious, except that Claire's sleeve was even less built for strain than her collar. Her arm came free, without the sleeve, and she spun to a sprawl upon the steps themselves, thinking that in the next instant both attackers would suppress her.

What Claire hadn't noticed was the living cyclone that lashed across the street, starting its drive at the very moment of Claire's own dash into trouble. Claire didn't cover much ground in her back and forward darts, but the arriving avalanche was really a distance burner. It was always that way when The Shadow timed an attack and he had been gathering himself for this one. In fact, the cloaked figure didn't seem to lose a stride in gauging his arrival at the exact spot where Claire had landed.

Two thrusting menaces melted as Claire stared. One moment she was viewing a pair of faces that to her frantic eyes were hideous; an instant later they were gone; caught in a black swirl that threatened to obliterate them. There were shouts, a flay of arms, gunbursts with the puny effect of cap pistols. Claire couldn't even see The Shadow, but she knew that he must be there. This was too similar to last night's timely work to be attributed to any other fighter.

Through the house was still Claire's proper course. She'd arrived by that route without any interference; besides, it was the way out that The Shadow had taken and Claire was sure she now could find her way along the intricate path beyond. So Claire scrambled straight up the steps and through the gloomy hall which was getting to be her regular beat.

Cops had their regular beat too.

Out front a patrol car was pulling up in timely style, its occupants a bit amazed by what they saw. Lurching up the steps of the old apartment house were two men who seemed to be wrestling with each other in some impossible fashion. One was a big man, brandishing his arms, the other a ratty little character who clawed the air.

They couldn't be fighting each other and getting such poor results, so the two patrolmen took it for granted that someone else was in the brawl, even though they couldn't see him. But when the cops came dashing up the steps, the two thugs twisted and lunged straight for them, though not of their own accord. That was obvious from the surprised expressions on the thuggish faces when the police began to clout them into submission. Whatever they'd been fighting, the thugs hadn't taken it for a brace of cops.

But when the patrolmen looked for the third and most important participant in the fray, he wasn't there. The Shadow, like Claire, was gone and by the same route.

Claire's headstart was considerable, however, and she was making good time at the expense of clattering ash-cans and banging gates. The girl was sure that somebody was after her and she hoped it was The Shadow, but she wasn't taking chances. All through those passages, Claire was sure that she heard foot-beats echo after her and that some of the rolling ash-cans clattered as if kicked out of the way.

At the end of the run, however, Claire drew her breath in a quick, relieved sob when she saw what she took for The Shadow's very appropriate token, a waiting cab, its motor running, the driver at the wheel. Claire grabbed at the door and tried to tug it open, but tonight it stuck until the girl's efforts were aided by a firm hand which came across her shoulder and turned the handle for her.

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Thanks were on Claire's lips when she noted that the hand wasn't gloved. She swung about to meet a firm face which certainly wasn't The Shadow's, for he would rightfully be cloaked, his features hidden by the inevitable hat brim. This face was darkish in the gloom, its half-smile threatening, as Claire saw it. In a mood to fight off menace now, Claire tried to swing her bag against the face as she opened her mouth to cry for help.

The face bobbed and Claire's own went shut under the helpful jog her jaw received from an expert fist that seemed to shove, rather than punch her right into sleepy-bye. Catching the girl, the man poured her into the cab; following, he slammed the door and gave a sharp order to the driver.

The cab had wheeled around the corner, when The Shadow arrived to meet the glow of another pair of approaching headlights. A few moments later, The Shadow was in this cab and speaking with its driver, who answered to the name of Shrevvy.

"Sorry, boss," responded Shrevvy to The Shadow's immediate query. "I didn't see the Winslow dame. She must have cut through while I was coming around from the front street. There was a hack pulling out when I turned the corner –"

The Shadow's tone interrupted with orders to take up the trail if possible. In one quick appraisal of the route through the rear alleys, The Shadow's keen eye had spotted the glimmer of overturned ash-cans and knew that they must represent Claire's wake.

So Shrevvy was off, but the quest soon proved itself hopeless. The other cab had gained too good a start. From the front seat, the driver heard a strange, low laugh that he couldn't quite interpret.

When The Shadow laughed that way, it didn't mean that a cause was lost. Rather, it seemed to symbolize the beginning of a trail that might lead anywhere. Whatever had happened to Claire Winslow, The Shadow was counting upon past clues to trace her.

At the same time there was something in The Shadow's singular mirth denoting his recognition of a cross-trail that had somehow produced itself in opposition to his well-laid plans!

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Claire came out of it, she looked at the glass and wondered what she had been drinking.

Certainly it must have been potent to put her mind in its present whirl, but that didn't account for the way her jaw reacted or rather didn't react when she tried to work it sideways.

An apologetic voice interrupted Claire's reverie with one word that it put very nicely:

"Sorry."

Looking up, Claire saw the face that she'd regarded as a menace not so long ago, and identified it as if from a fog. Only that face, in better light, and lacking the smile that Claire had mistaken for a smirk, no longer symbolized enmity.

In fact, it was a rather handsome face, curiously pale through its coat of tan. It was rugged, like the man who owned it, and without his hat, this chap showed a shock of somewhat wavy hair that wasn't sleek enough to be a villain's.

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These were evidently his diggings, here in the rather comfortable apartment where Claire now sat, for the man was filling a pipe from a humidor on the table. The man was wearing civilian clothes, but odds and ends around the room, from twisted rope ornaments to a blue dress-cap, indicated that he'd been to sea, which was helpful in Claire's case.

Before she could think better of it, Claire blurted:

"You knew my uncle?"

The young man weighed the question in steady-faced style. Having gone that far in identifying herself, Claire decided to continue.

"His name was Winslow," she stated. "Captain Belshazzar Winslow."

"I've heard of him," the young man replied, "but I didn't know he had a niece." Lighting his pipe, he hid his expression except for his eyes, which seemed honest, even in the steel-blue glint of their searching glance. "And your name?"

"Claire Winslow," the girl replied. "What's yours?"

"Kim Radnor. Maybe your uncle mentioned me."

Claire shook her head.

"He never" – There the girl halted, feeling that to be truthful might prove helpful later, so she modified her statement – "I don't think Uncle Belshazzar ever mentioned any of his friends."

Those steely eyes were very sharp. Maybe Kim knew that Claire had heard of somebody named Sargon and was expecting her to say so. If he pressed the subject, Claire could argue that she hadn't thought of Sargon as one of her uncle's friends, but merely as a man who dealt in antiques.

For that matter, she could pretend that she thought Sargon was a place, not a person. The same however wouldn't apply to Jacques, another man mentioned by Belshazzar. But Jacques, whose real name was Stolt, was a criminal, so he certainly shouldn't be included in Belshazzar's social circle.

Or should he?

Judging from things that had happened around where Belshazzar Winslow lived, and the kind of characters who had evidenced themselves in battling with The Shadow, Claire's uncle might have made a specialty of undesirable acquaintances.

However, Kim didn't intimate such. He merely questioned rather pointedly:

"Your uncle never mentioned Rico?"

"Puerto Rico?" responded Claire, innocently, inspired by her notion that Sargon could be classed as a place name. "I know that Uncle Belshazzar sailed the Caribbean. He must have been to Puerto Rico."

"I mean a man named Rico," specified Kim, "but speaking of places in general and islands in particular, did your uncle spend much time in Martinique?"

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That question settled itself. Belshazzar had mentioned Sargon in connection with Martinique. Only Belshazzar hadn't said anything about being in Martinique himself. So Claire decided to keep on being truthful in a dumb way. She just shook her head and Kim looked disappointed. Nevertheless, he wasn't one to play dumb.

"Now that it's all over," said Kim quite casually, "tell me just what happened at your uncle's apartment last night."

"Why, I went there –"

Claire caught herself and changed her story to beg the question.

"Tonight, when I went there," she declaimed, with emphasis on the word 'tonight', "I just wanted to be sure that they had taken care of everything –"

"I'm talking about last night," interposed Kim. Taking a long draw on his pipe, he added: "What happened?"

"Last night?" echoed Claire.

"Why, last night, I wasn't even in New York –"

It wouldn't do to deny the fact; not now. It would throw doubt on all of Claire's previous statements, particularly if Kim happened to have seen Claire one night ago, as he might have. It was imperative that those statements should stand, for right now Claire was beginning to believe that Kim might have some answer to the riddle of the quarter-coin that her uncle had valued so highly.

Having made the slip when Kim artfully mentioned 'last night,' Claire had to cover it in a positive rather than a negative way. Her wits supplied a method.

"I mean I wasn't here officially," Claire corrected. "You understand, of course."

"I think I do," nodded Kim. "you just don't want to be mixed in something that wasn't your fault, and I don't blame you. But what happened?"

The question came so frankly that Claire was sure she had scored all the points she needed. Kim would believe her from now on, if she talked in earnest style. So Claire did.

"You must have read about the shooting," stated Claire. "Well, it was meant for me. Evidently somebody didn't want me to talk to my uncle before he died. I don't think those shots would have missed me either, if somebody else hadn't turned off the lights."

Watching Kim, Claire could tell that he was deducing things already, which was just what Claire wanted.

It meant that Kim was jumping ahead of the fact that Claire had glossed so lightly, namely her interview with her uncle. Kim was taking it for granted that old Belshazzar must have missed his last boat, so far as telling his niece anything she should have known.

"And then," continued Claire, simply, "I got out. In a hurry, too, because there was somebody who helped me. Next thing I was riding in a cab to a hotel where I registered. Only last night" – she rubbed her chin expressively – "it didn't take a sock in the jaw to win my cooperation."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Sorry again," apologized Kim. "Who was last night's Lothario, the gentleman whose technique surpasses mine?"

"I don't know," Claire confessed. "But this morning I received a phone call from an investment broker who said he would clear up my uncle's affairs."

Kim's eyes became intent.

"Who is the broker?"

"His name is Rutledge Mann," declared Claire, "but he wasn't my shadowy hero. He just didn't fit. Mann is a chubby, self-effacing type, the sort that couldn't even play the scared rabbit, because he couldn't run fast enough."

Kim's deductions were continuing; he was thinking it out just as Claire had, taking it for granted that Mann must be acting under someone else's instructions. Then:

"This hotel you're staying at," remarked Kim. "I don't think it would be smart to stop there any longer."

A suspicious flash came from Claire's blue eyes.

"Why not?"

"Because you were really there the night your uncle died," stated Kim. "So if you want to stick to what you call your official story, you'd better change your residence." Pausing, Kim interpreted Claire's cold stare, and added bluntly: "I don't mean I'll put you up here. I'm just suggesting that you switch to a different hotel and under another name."

Claire became a little less icy.

"Good advice," she conceded, "but what about my friends?"

"You mean Mann and that shadowy chap you can't describe?" queried Kim. He shrugged. "I don't see how they rate any better than I do, if as well."

"They helped me first."

"Before I met you, yes. But that was when you had a reason to go and see your uncle, since he was still alive. You might have trouble explaining off tonight's expedition. This time was the real test and I was the lad who came through."

Claire had to admit that Kim was right, though she could have told him that The Shadow had again been on the job. Then, as a help to Claire's quandary, Kim put the question:

"Just why did you go back tonight?"

"To look for something," replied Claire. "Something that wasn't there. You see –"

New suspicion swept Claire with a mighty surge. It could be that Kim was looking for that very token, the quarter-section of a very mysterious coin that right now was parked in Claire's bag. It wasn't what Claire had looked for tonight; she had been hoping to find something – in fact anything – else. But having won Kim's

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understanding, it would be smart right now to make him think she hadn't even found the two-bit portion of the piece-of-eight.

"You see my uncle said he had a legacy," expressed Claire. "What it was, he didn't specify. I went back to see if he'd hidden anything in his room. I found nothing."

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Nothing and double. There was a hole in the floor where the head of the bed had been, and it was empty."

Kim shifted his pipe in a way that traced a smile upon his lips.

"Maybe your friend, The Shadow, was there first tonight," he commented. "Since he'd delegated Mann to handle matters for you, he wouldn't have expected you around at all."

The indictment was strong, so strong that Kim was quite sure he was convincing Claire. Through the girl's mind, however, was running a whole gamut of mistrust, which included Kim Radnor along with The Shadow. Of the two, Claire gave The Shadow precedence as a rescuer, recalling that he'd played a part again tonight, something which Kim didn't know.

Assuming, however, that both The Shadow and Kim were seeking that quarter-coin, The Shadow in all probability knew that Claire had it, which Kim didn't.

It was time for Claire to keep somebody guessing for a change and she'd fared better along that line with Kim. Certainly Rutledge Mann had kept Claire guessing and then only as The Shadow's proxy. So Claire nodded, indicating that she was willing to switch friends, or at least to rely on Kim in preference to others.

"Good enough," decided Kim, knocking out his pipe. "Our job now is to find you a new hotel. After that, I'll arrange to get your things over from the other hotel – say in a day or so."

As they left Kim's apartment, Claire discovered that it was in a neighborhood quite as secluded as the one where her uncle had lived. Somehow, the darkness of the street made Claire shudder, and she looked back, worried by thoughts of followers. That brought a smile from Kim for two reasons.

First, it proved that Claire had really begun to trust him; again, Kim was getting a lesson in how easily people could imagine things. Funny, until tonight, he too had thought that he was being stalked. Now Kim was getting over it.

There was such a thing as getting over something too soon. In thinking that he'd outguessed Claire's friend The Shadow, Kim Radnor was making a mistake in discounting other factors in this case!

CHAPTER VIII

THE two men under the glare of the big lights knew from less than nothing and kept insisting so. They'd just about convinced Inspector Joe Cardona, but he didn't care to admit it yet.

It was never good policy to stop a quiz too short when the police commissioner was witnessing it from the darkness behind the glare. Commissioner Weston was a stickler for a thorough grill where small-fry like Beef The Butch and Mongoose Morry were concerned.

Not that they were exactly small-fry.

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For one thing, Beef The Butch was very big in brawn if not in brain. The fact that a half-pint like Mongoose Morry was the big man's running mate, gave the little character an intelligence quotient that couldn't be under-rated, the smartest thing about it being that Mongoose knew how not to show it.

But whatever the pair knew, the big lights weren't sweating it out of them, though the heat was really on. Both looked as though they'd lost a lot in weight under the burn of the big kliegs, and they'd shed enough perspiration to prove the fact.

Cardona had gotten a share of the sun-ray treatment with them, and felt that he'd better sum things.

"So it was The Shadow," stated Joe. "He gunned for you and you gunned back at him."

The two thugs nodded.

"He had you trapped one night in the house in back of Winslow's," continued Cardona. "He started shooting from the old captain's window."

More nods.

"And the next night," specified Cardona, "last night I mean, you came back for more."

This time headshakes were in order.

"We were just mooching by," argued Beef The Butch gruffly. "Thought maybe if we showed ourselves nice-like, The Shadow would lay off."

"We wanted to know why he was gunning for us," added Mongoose Morry. "After all, we weren't doing nothing."

"Nothing except carrying these!" With the accusation, Cardona clanked a couple of revolvers on the table. "Since they're enough to send you up the river, why don't you come clean on the rest of it?"

Beef The Butch looked toward Mongoose Morry with an expression both weary and wary. Mongoose rallied with an oft-repeated story.

"It was on account of Artie," he said hoarsely. "You know we was pals with Artie Duvan, because you said so, Joe. You know what happened to Artie, too. He got carved and plenty."

"And with a gun on him," reminded Cardona. "If Artie hadn't time to use one, where do you fellows figure you would? Besides, it was Stolt who fixed Artie, and Stolt isn't around any more."

"Maybe Stolt has friends," argued Mongoose, "and besides, you're just explaining why me and the Butch here have been going around together. Just to look out for each other. Only, how did we know The Shadow was going to move in on us?"

"It's on account of Stolt," broke in Beef. "The guy's gone stir-bug. Blaming everybody else for what he done. Maybe The Shadow took him serious. Only you know we didn't knock off Artie, Joe. Artie was our pal."

Cardona could hear the commissioner muttering to somebody who sat beside him and that, more than the combined pleas of the two thugs, caused Joe to end the quiz. Lights were turned off, the two prisoners were removed, and with the room restored to normal, Cardona mopped his swarthy face and turned to obtain the

commissioner's opinion.

In brusque style, Weston was already expressing it to a taciturn friend who was seated beside him. The silent man with the immobile features was Lamont Cranston.

"You told me you talked to Stolt," reminded Weston, "and from your account, Cranston, what these men just said makes sense. At least something has been gained; the terror that Stolt's crazy threats inspired has caused these undesirables to put themselves away."

Cranston's lips almost traced a smile as he amended:

"You might give The Shadow some credit, commissioner."

That brought a half-snort from Weston, a compromise between his official duty of not recognizing The Shadow – and his private opinion that that there was such a person. Then, tersely, the commissioner summed it:

"Let's hope that The Shadow will ferret out some more of Artie's worthless friends."

"Only he won't" added Cardona, promptly, glad of a chance to have the last word. "I've checked on Artie and he didn't have any except this pair of side-kicks."

How far Inspector Cardona hadn't checked on Artie's cronies was to be shortly demonstrated. It was still daylight when Lamont Cranston parted from his friend the police commissioner, so there was a necessary time element between the grilling of Beef The Butch and Mongoose Morry until a more important bit of quiz work took place.

Dusk was the time, the setting an East Side sector that looked like a hangover from the bad old days, which in some degree it was. There, the astute Mr. Cranston, alighting from a lavish limousine, prepared his coming path by obliterating it beforehand.

Lamont Cranston became The Shadow.

Cloaked in black, The Shadow threaded his way through a maze of chopped-up streets that could hardly be distinguished from the alleys that interlaced them. At length he entered the back door of a place for which the term "joint" was almost too elegant a term.

This was Red Mike's, so named after its proprietor, whose place was overlooked by the police because it had become too tawdry for even stool pigeons to patronize. In fact it was claimed that Red Mike had picked a cellar location so that bums would stumble into it, otherwise he wouldn't have any customers. Whoever came in always bought a drink, because Red Mike began to pour one when he heard the door clatter. That done, it was better to buy a drink than try to argue the question with Red Mike.

Only The Shadow didn't come in the usual way. Silent in his approach, he saw Red Mike seated glumly behind the bar, studying a vacant space that awaited the evening bum crop. This was just the time for The Shadow to have a confidential chat with Red Mike.

At The Shadow's first words, Red Mike thought he was having one of the hallucinations that were common with his customers. Hearing a weird whisper close to his ear. Red Mike turned, alarm upon his broad face.

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The alarm froze and stayed. Odd that eyes that burned like The Shadow's should produce a frigid effect, but they did.

"You remember Artie Duvan," reminded The Shadow. Then, his tone becoming sibilant: "Perhaps some friends of his have been here recently."

"Nobody's been here," gulped. Red Mike. "I ain't seen nobody –"

"Nobody except Beef The Butch and Mongoose Morry."

"They ain't been here. All they did was phone up,"

The Shadow's low laugh interrupted. It was wordless, but more expressive than a statement. Red Mike went white.

"They didn't talk to me," he pleaded. "Honest. It was another guy."

"A friend of Artie's."

"Yeah, yeah. A friend of Artie's. Only don't ask me who he was."

The Shadow didn't ask who. He told it:

"Doc Zurber."

Another gulp from Red Mike. Then:

"Yeah, Doc Zurber," he admitted. "Only don't ask me where to find him. He lammed two days ago."

The Shadow's steady eyes demanded more.

"They were covering for Doc," informed Red Mike. "I mean Beef The Butch and Mongoose Morry was. Only they didn't know it was Doc. They just knew it was some friend of Artie's who saw that they'd get the right dough for helping square something."

"He had a lot of friends, Artie did, only he wasn't close to any of them. Maybe you made a list of them, but how you picked Doc Zurber off it is more than I can figure. You're a smart guy, Shadow –"

It was always the same. When they began complimenting The Shadow, men of Red Mike's ilk did it to cover something that they had in mind. No exception to the rule, Red Mike was trying to act smart on his own. He'd noticed by now that The Shadow had no gun in either of his gloved hands and Red Mike felt that he personally could provide a weapon quicker than this cloaked questioner.

That was why Red Mike's hand was creeping around in back of him, on the side away from The Shadow. There it was finding a quart bottle, one that was weighted with nearly its full quota of liquid contents. Red Mike was gripping it slyly by the neck, confident that it would form a proper bludgeon.

After all, who was The Shadow to rate better than any other undesirable customer?

Red Mike had used the bottle treatment before; a whole bottle in the form of one big slug, bottle included. He was very adept at it, and very swift, but he was particular about getting the right grip.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Too particular in this case. Red Mike's hand was out of sight but his forearm wasn't, and its tightening muscles were telegraphing his intention. Imperceptibly The Shadow's gloved fingers were working toward his cloak front. They were ready when the moment came.

Around flung Red Mike, swinging the bottle in a wide, hard arc for a head that tilted inward and below his sweep. Up like a trip-hammer came an automatic jutting from a clenched fist. It stopped the bottle in midair, the glass crashing as the metal clashed it. With a mere drop of his wrist, The Shadow aimed the gun muzzle to cover Red Mike.

It wasn't necessary. The bottle had broken near the neck; the bulk of it kept flying ahead and smashed the mirror behind the bar. Down came a deluge of glass, jouncing bottles from a ramshackle shelf above. A moment later, Red Mike was dodging half of his own stock as he went to hands and knees, flinging his arms to ward off the avalanche.

When Red Mike crawled gingerly from amid the broken glass that marred the surface of a one-inch pool of assorted beverages, he found himself alone with the wreckage he had caused. Only the parting note of a taunting laugh remained as a reminder that The Shadow had come and gone.

The Shadow had learned all he wanted. His next step was to locate a certain crook who answered to the name of Doc Zurber. Meanwhile, however, The Shadow had not forgotten the strange disappearance of Claire Winslow.

One trail might lead to the other – and perhaps more. For The Shadow by now had analyzed the existence of several factors in this case, despite the fact that he had not yet seen a single portion of a broken piece-of-eight!

CHAPTER IX

AS a city of contrasts, New York was most unusual. For instance, the darkness that hid The Shadow's departure from Red Mike's wasn't apparent in the room where Jerome Claverly was seated at his desk.

The reason was that Claverly didn't live in a basement hovel surrounded by narrow alleyways. His residence was a penthouse on a tall apartment building and his windows still received the rays of the sun that was being swallowed by the Jersey meadows.

He was a strange man, Jerome Claverly, quite difficult to analyze. He might have been classed as middle-aged, but even that covered a wide range. His build was a cross between strong and wiry; it might have been both – or neither.

As for Claverly's face, it was a type, yet the kind that once seen was long remembered. Perhaps it was just the shape of those features that made them seem hard, for Claverly's smile was pleasant, yet cryptic. Even his complexion was an enigma; whether it was naturally dark or so produced by a long tropical treatment was a subject for sheer speculation.

Two other things were problematical in Claverly's case: his wealth and his business status. Maybe one counteracted the other; perhaps both were tied in the same parcel.

Certain it was that Claverly had money, but all his transactions went in cash, never by check. He had a way of borrowing a few thousand dollars when he needed it, just as he was always ready to lend large sums when he had them. If he was ever behind on the rent, he knew how to stall the landlord, without anything being said about it.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

If the way Claverly paid out money was any index to his ability at earning it, he probably rated in a high income bracket. But the man who was with him at present could testify only to Claverly's ability as a spender.

That man was named Jim Brodick and he looked like the very sort to be in Claverly's employ. Wise-faced, tight of lip, sallow from his deep-set eyes to the tip of his pointed nose, Brodick looked like a man with a past who was counting on a big future, otherwise he wouldn't be sticking along with Claverly.

Finishing the scrawled diary that he was reading, Claverly laid it aside, stared from the window and said:

"Poor Jacques."

He spoke the words "Poor Jacques" as though he didn't mean them, but that was a way that Claverly had. His idle tones were sometimes his most pointed, as Brodick could testify.

"Poor Jacques," repeated Claverly. "He put himself to a lot of trouble and a lot of danger, going back to France while the Vichy government was still in control. Nevertheless" – Claverly gestured to the diary – "he found out what he wanted about a family named LeClerq."

Turning from the window as he spoke, Claverly eyed Brodick narrowly. If Jim had ever heard of anyone named LeClerq, he didn't betray it.

Claverly purred the next question:

"Do you read French, Jim?"

Brodick shook his head.

"Nor bum handwriting, either," he returned. "If you're referring to that diary, I don't know what's in it. You wanted anything I could find at Cap Winslow's and that's what I found."

Slowly, Claverly nodded.

"We were right in the first place," he decided. "Jacques must have given the token to Cap Winslow. The diary went with it."

"Then the girl must have the token," remarked Brodick. Then, his own eyes focused steadily, he added: "Unless Doc Zurber got it."

Reaching a lazy hand, Claverly turned on the desk lamp, a natural action, since the dusk had begun to gather in the penthouse. But it could have been that Claverly wanted to study Brodick's eyes more closely, unless he actually wanted to reveal his own. Maybe the latter was the case, because Claverly's expression became quite frank and he always liked to display that manner to the man.

Very seriously, Claverly questioned:

"Do you think Doc murdered Winslow?"

"Why not?" demanded Brodick. "When I lost my license as a private dick, it wasn't because I was a bum guesser. In that racket, being too good a guesser is the wrong ticket."

"And you suspected Doc beforehand?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"If I had, I would have told you. I knew Doc was a friend of Artie's and Artie got his from Stolt, the guy you call Jacques."

There was a pause; then Claverly said:

"Go right ahead."

"Well, I was casing the joints where Artie's friends hung out," stated Brodick, "and that's how I ran into Doc. You know what Doc Zurber is, because I told you. Along with dope he handles a lot of funny remedies that go big with guys that have had tropic fever and all such. Native cures and all that; he even says he can get the stuff that turns guys into zombies down in Haiti."

A nod from Claverly.

"Zurber was kind of doubtful about this Jacques guy," continued Brodick. "Didn't want to be mixed up in the case. All squared where Artie was concerned, since Jacques had taken the rap. But was kind of doubtful about Doc Zurber."

Claverly offered a sharp amendment.

"You didn't say so at the time."

"Not at first," admitted Brodick. "I was just playing a hunch, I guess, until I overheard Doc talking on Red Mike's phone. I caught the name 'Jacques' and that was enough. Then I knew you'd want Zurber tagged."

Claverly reached for a fancy bottle that was worth about half the price of the whole row that Red Mike had broken. Pouring two imported drinks, he extended one to Brodick and began to sip the other, nodding that he wanted to hear more.

"The trail led to Cap Winslow," continued Brodick. "Checking on the guy, I figured he'd known Jacques. Only I didn't figure that Doc Zurber had gotten instructions to knock the old boy off. If he had, he'd have done it quick, unless –"

Frowning hard across his glass, Brodick stopped short. Letting his chin rest in his hand, Claverly gave Jim a tilted look and inquired coolly:

"Unless what?"

"Unless somebody smarter was telling Zurber what to do," asserted Brodick bluntly. "That was to stage a slow poison job instead. Zurber must have had to speed it when he heard the dame was due. That's where we missed out, or rather I did."

Quite pointed, that last comment, and it brought an indulgent smile from Claverly. Or perhaps the smile was one of satisfaction. Jim Brodick never could quite tell about those smiles that Jerome Claverly delivered.

"Tell me," inquired Claverly. "How do you feel about it now?"

"I'm sticking with the job." Pausing, Brodick finished his drink with a long swallow. "Even when I guess right, I like to prove it."

"And when you guess wrong?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Sometimes it's better to guess wrong. I told you that a little while ago. Whichever way I guess, I don't broadcast it. What I learn gets told to the guy who hires me and I only take one customer at a time."

"A good rule," approved Claverly. "Like taking one drink at a time. You've finished one, so have another."

As Claverly poured a refill into Jim's glass. Brodick decided to pour a few more theories in return.

"Zurber hired a couple of gunzels just for sure," resumed Brodick. "Or maybe the guy who hired Zurber hired them on Doc's recommend. I wouldn't just know" – Brodick was looking across his glass again – "but you can figure it your own way if you want. However the case, Beef The Butch and Mongoose Morry got excited and let off too much fireworks. That heart failure verdict on Cap Winslow was a break for Zurber, but anyway he lammed."

"You're sure?"

"There's the evidence;" Brodick pointed to the diary on Claverly's desk. "Doc Zurber wasn't around yesterday when I mooched into Winslow's apartment with the moving men when they needed an extra helper."

"That was nice work, Jim."

"That was only the beginning. Spotting that sawed floor-board was even better. I let the movers lug out the bedstead while I grabbed the diary from where it was hid."

Claverly smiled in a manner which Brodick interpreted as appreciation for a service rendered. Then, with a wave, as though one case had been dismissed, Claverly announced in a half-pathetic tone:

"Now about poor Rico."

"I've tagged that buddy of his," stated Brodick. "You know, young Radnor. I had to lay off on account of getting into Winslow's. Only Radnor seems kind of lost, on his own."

"He's trying to learn more about Rico."

"Yeah?" The drinks were warming Brodick to inquiries of his own. "Then why don't you tell him?"

"It might not be too safe."

"For you or Radnor?"

Claverly chuckled as though he felt quite secure. That left only Kim Radnor to worry about. From his desk, Claverly brought an envelope and opened it.

"Radnor is either dumb or slow," Claverly analyzed. "Otherwise he would have gained this information before I did."

He tossed a letter across the table; rubbing the blur from his eyes, Brodick read it and opened his eyes wider.

"You think that's where we'd find out something about Rico?" asked Brodick.

"I'm sure you would," returned Claverly, pointedly, "if you happened to get there first. Maybe they'd want something as an identification. This might help."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

The thing that Claverly clanked carelessly across the desk was the quarter of an ancient coin that bore the letters "BOBA" on its rim.

"Lie about it all you want," suggested Claverly. "I don't suppose you'll need my help in concocting fabrications. But be sure you bring it back. I wouldn't want to ask the police to look for you. I might have to tell them that I hired you without knowing that you'd lost your license as a private operative."

The coin was already in Brodick's hand when he clenched his fist in anger. The pointed corner of the quadrant jabbed him sharply, a timely reminder that it wouldn't be wise to rouse Claverly's animosity. This was just another of Claverly's tests to learn if Brodick had a proper share of self-restraint.

At least Jim interpreted it that way, though he felt that so far Claverly was keeping him under wraps. In Brodick's opinion, when Claverly wanted action, he would call for it.

This was action of a sort; enough to mean using wits if other weapons were barred, though Claverly hadn't specified that they were not allowable. So Brodick turned and went out to the elevator, wondering what Claverly would expect if he went the limit. Under his breath, Brodick muttered:

"Maybe Doc Zurber could tell me that."

Whether Jerome Claverly was thinking in terms of Jim Brodick or Doc Zurber, he didn't state. As he stood alone, there by the penthouse window, Claverly might have been thinking of Kim Radnor, considering the dry chuckle that he gave.

Or perhaps, as he stared into the thickening darkness, Claverly was considering a certain mysterious personage called The Shadow, whose famed ability had so far proved rather spotty in this case of the broken piece-of-eight!

CHAPTER X

KIM RADNOR slapped the letter on his desk and gave an annoyed growl. If he'd had sense enough, he'd have inquired about this matter before, the simple business of learning where mail addressed to Enrico Envares was being forwarded.

Enrico Envares was the long name for a former friend who was called Rico for short. His forwarding address, Kim had just learned, was a place called the Cafe Trinidad, down by the waterfront. Kim knew right where it was because he'd passed by the place so often while hunting up Rico's acquaintances and not finding them.

A squalid place, the Cafe Trinidad, and somehow Kim hadn't connected it with Rico. Maybe because Trinidad was English and Martinique was French, but they both belonged in the Caribbean and so did Rico. A bit mixed up anyway, those nationalities among the West Indies.

So it was a trip to the Cafe Trinidad tonight, but first it would be a good idea to phone Claire Winslow. But before Kim could even turn around, the telephone began to ring, so he answered the call cautiously, intending to dispense with it quickly.

It was Claire. Apparently she too had been thinking that a little chat would be helpful.

"I'm calling from my hotel," announced Claire, cheerfully. "The new one. Remember?"

"I ought to," returned Kim, "considering that I dropped by with your bags this afternoon."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"So it was you!" Claire's voice feigned surprise. "I wondered who else knew that I'd moved."

"Maybe your friend The Shadow did," suggested Kim. "Have you seen him lately?"

"You know I haven't. He's practically invisible. Did you ever hear of anybody like him?"

"Only myself. You can count me completely invisible this evening, Claire."

"You mean you're going somewhere?"

"I mean I'm staying right here. What's more, I'm not answering any further phone calls."

"Something serious has happened?"

There was anxiety in Claire's tone, just the right touch of it, but Kim didn't consider it good policy to let her know that it pleased him.

"Something serious might," Kim cautioned. "But don't worry about it, Claire. I'll call you later, about ten o'clock. You'll be there, won't you?"

"Of course."

"Good. If I have a chance, I'll phone before ten. Good-night until then."

Hanging up, Kim decided that he was very smart, keeping Claire immobilized for the evening, by leaving the time of his next call indefinite. As for Claire, she was deciding that she wasn't smart at all.

Claire's reason was a valid one. She was across the street from Kim's apartment; not at her new hotel, as she had stated. Coming out of the store where she had made the phone call, Claire looked up, saw the lights in Kim's apartment, and felt that she'd been very unfair to mistrust him.

Maybe the honest course would be to go right over and apologize. The fact that Kim wasn't going to answer phone calls didn't mean that he wouldn't admit a visitor.

While Claire debated the question, it was answered for her. The lights in Kim's apartment blinked off. Waiting across the way, the girl saw Kim come out the front door and start in the direction of the nearest subway station. Irked at learning that Kim was playing her own game, Claire followed.

Trailing someone in the subway was neither as easy nor as difficult as Claire expected. That was to say, she encountered obstacles as well as opportunities. Hardly had she passed the turnstile before she saw Kim wheel about from further up the subway platform and finding it too late to reverse her course, Claire thought surely he would discover her.

Only just then a train came roaring into this local station and Kim forgot other matters while he boarded it. That in turn gave Claire a chance to do the same and it wasn't until the train was under way that the girl realized she had been as careless as Kim, where followers were concerned.

Claire and Kim were in different cars, she had seen to that, and maybe somebody else might be stalking them from a third, which would make it all one very happy party.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

At least the next play was Kim's. At every stop, Claire started to get out, then ducked in again, hoping that Kim wouldn't be smart enough to stay in his car until the last moment. Kim did prove smart, only again he was too brief about it.

Just as Claire's door was closing for about the dozenth time, she saw Kim emerge from the next car. Claire's shoulder was just quick enough to hold her own door as she twisted through and took refuge behind a friendly pillar on the platform. All Kim gave was a quick back and forth glance along the platform; then, confident that he had outsmarted any followers, he left by an exit.

In her turn, Claire played smart and became the follower that Kim didn't expect. The only man who witnessed the way she dodged after Kim toward the subway steps, was a stoop-shouldered man with a drawn, droopy face who was lighting a cigarette outside the exit turnstile.

Claire ignored the man, as Kim must have, since he was there ahead of both of them, but the flare of the match gave her a passing look at the droopy man's tiny, nervous eyes. Claire didn't like those eyes, but as far as she was concerned, they didn't matter.

Or at least Claire thought they didn't matter.

A shrewd smile became a suitable accompaniment to the droopy man's glinty stare. Quitting his fidgets with the cigarette, he took up the double trail of Kim and Claire. Much smarter at this business than either of them, the droopy man didn't assume he wasn't followed.

Pausing near the top of the steps, the man finished lighting the cigarette, darting looks from the street exit, down to the bottom of the steps. He was tabbing where Kim and Claire had gone while he checked his own status, and he was the type to suspect anything.

Even the darkness at the turn of the steps worried this shrewd observer. He watched as though expecting it to come to life and his manner indicated that if it had, he would have whisked away in quick flight along the street.

Only the gloom didn't stir. The droopy man gave a laugh and started away briskly. Down below, there was a shift of darkness, so slight that it could have been no more than the droopy man's own shadow, cast by his stooped shoulders, as he moved into the path of a street lamp.

He didn't notice it, this droopy man, but he was worrying about shadows. Perhaps he was thinking of one known as The Shadow, from the way he kept eyeing every darkened doorway along the street. Odd that this new factor in the case of the broken piece-of-eight should be so troubled.

But was he a new factor?

That was debatable. From the man's very manner, he was the sort who might figure in a deep-laid plan of crime. Even in the darkness of these side streets, his pasty face showed its quota of cruel cunning. He had the quick, nervous way and the hollow stare that was the mark of the dope addict; but with it a peculiar self-control that proved he had not yet reached the status of an outright hop-head.

Clever indeed was his stalking process, showing the same chameleon qualities of the man's countenance. In the open, he shuffled carelessly but rapidly; once under the gloom of those same doorways that he shunned until he studied them, his pace became a swift, springy gait. Even yet, he was not convinced that he remained unfollowed, for he threw back quick shoulder glances while picking up Claire's trail.

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Half a block ahead, Claire hadn't a notion that she was being followed. Maybe, that was because she was thinking in terms of Kim.

There were moments when Kim became suspicious, but somehow, Claire was able to time them. When Kim stopped abruptly to look back, the girl found no trouble stepping out of sight, along this dreary street that led to the waterfront. In fact, Claire was quite amused by the way that Kim stared past her, as if at some imaginary follower who was trailing them both.

Then came the all-important corner.

Here, only a short block from the waterfront, the blare of big fog whistles sounded mournfully from a mist that was creeping in from the river. A raw, unseasonable shudder brought chills to Claire as she sidled to a welcome doorway, which not only cut off the damp air, but kept her from Kim's sight.

About to cross the last street, Kim had paused. He was drawing back to watch a figure on the opposite corner, one that loomed spectrally in the fog. For the moment, Kim's imagination was stirred by recollections of Claire's account of a strange being called The Shadow.

It was just imagination.

Kim forced a laugh when he saw the man across the way dwindle to human proportions. The only thing he didn't like was the fellow's slow gait. It reminded Kim too much of the popular conception of a headquarters detective. Even when the man paused, he looked like someone on patrol.

With a quick turn, Kim started down the other street, the one that ran parallel to the waterfront. It would be considerably longer, going around to the Cafe Trinidad and approaching it from another direction, but it seemed worth the trouble.

So that was the route Kim took and Claire tagged after him, with the droopy man following in the wake of both. All because of the stolid figure across the way, a man who might have no bearing on the case at all.

Except that his connection was most important. Hardly had Kim changed course before that watcher from across the street stepped idly into the fog, quickening his pace as soon as he knew that the mist had swallowed him. He intended to reach the Cafe Trinidad first and with time to spare.

That man who had touched the triple trail like the cog of a passing wheel was none other than Jim Brodick, the former private detective now working for Jerome Claverly!

CHAPTER XI

FROM the moment that he entered the Cafe Trinidad, Jim Brodick wisely decided to make his business quiet and confidential. That meant going to the back of the bar-room that constituted the visible portion of this waterfront dive, because the place was well stocked with a noisy throng of typical characters found in these parts.

The back of the place was even noisier because of a strident, garish juke-box standing by a door that led to a rear room. But there was a long-jawed, high-shouldered man behind the bar who looked ready for an interview, particularly when Jim heard one of the customers call him by his name, which happened to be Charley.

Propping an elbow on the bar, Jim gave a nod and said:

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"Howdy, Charley."

The long-jawed man gave a narrow-eyed squint as though trying to recognize this stranger. Then:

"Rico told me to stop by," said Brodick. "Provided I didn't hear from him, which I haven't."

Charley's eyes stayed steady and hard.

"Which Rico?"

"The one from Martinique," supplied Jim. "Down there they knew him as Enrico Envares."

Big Charley stepped from behind the bar, opened the door to the back room and bawled above the racket of the juke-box:

"Hey, Juju!"

What stepped to the doorway was so big it made Charley look little. It was so big, in fact, that Brodick wondered how it had gotten through the doorway in the first place. Such was Juju, a huge West Indian, whose complexion had the tawn of a lion's mane. With features as massive as his build, Juju specialized on ears. Evidently he was proud of them, because he had adorned their lobes not merely with coins, but with a pair of unmatched bronze medals that dangled from gold rings.

Little Big Charley said something in a gibberish tongue that Juju understood. It referred to Jim Brodick because Charley helped the visitor into the back room by clamping a hamsized hand upon his back and hoisting him across the threshold. Brodick would have sprawled if it hadn't been for Juju. With a raucous laugh the giant spread one great paw, caught Jim with it, propelled him to a chair and eased his landing by clutching his vest with a plucking motion.

Juju didn't sit down. There wasn't a chair in the place that would have supported him. He just touched the door with his elbow and it slammed; then, spreading himself against the door, Juju queried:

"You friend of Rico?"

"Used to be," nodded Brodick. "Up to his last cruise."

"Where you meet him?"

"Lots of places. Martinique for one."

"When you meet him in Martinique?"

It took plenty of nerve for Brodick to grin; more for him to do it in wise fashion, nevertheless Jim managed it. Then he explained himself by simply saying:

"We don't talk about Martinique."

When Jim Brodick played smart, he played smart. His statement satisfied Juju for the giant gave a short nod that made his ear-medals swing like pendulums. Then he asked:

"Why you come here?"

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"To get some mail that came for Rico," explained Brodick. "He wanted me to pick it up if anything happened to him."

"Mail from where?"

"From Spain for one place."

"You stay here."

With that, Juju went out through another door and Brodick saw that it led to a stairway. There was also a passage which Jim figured might lead to a side door, but he didn't deem it expedient to look, not even when Juju went upstairs. Brodick wasn't particularly worried now, because he couldn't picture Juju talking it over with friends. Juju wouldn't need any help if he decided to get tough and what with the chairs and tables in the small back room, the place was too crowded anyway for a man of Juju's size.

Besides, from the creaks that threatened to cave in the ceiling, Brodick decided quite correctly that Juju had simply gone up to a room above to find and bring down Rico's belongings.

It didn't take Juju long. He returned with a large, thick envelope plastered with a lot of funny looking stamps. Instead of handing the envelope to Brodick, Juju demanded:

"What you show me to prove you know Rico?"

"This." Brodick produced Claverly's quarter-token. "Rico gave it to me. He told me what it means."

"You tell me what it means."

"Can't do it, Juju." Brodick shook his head. "Not telling was part of my deal with Rico."

Brodick was playing it more than smart now; he was acting on Claverly's advice. Jim's refusal to talk pleased Juju, who responded with a great gleaming smile. He handed Brodick the envelope and with finger and thumb gently closed Jim's fist over the precious quarter-coin, meaning for Jim to put it away. Brodick did, stretching his hand to see if it still worked. Juju's idea of being gentle was about the equivalent of a pair of oversized pliers.

Now Juju was gesturing to the door, but Jim shook his head and waved the other way.

"I need a better way out," informed Brodick. "The guys who were after Rico. They're after me."

That satisfied Juju. He was about to show Jim the other way out, when the door flung open, revealing Big Charley with his hand clamped on another visitor's back. A moment later, Kim Radnor was coming headlong ahead of Charley's growl.

"Another guy who knows Rico. You sort 'em out, Juju."

Catching Kim with one hand, Juju brought back Brodick with the other. Juju's grin was very happy; here was his chance to do a favor for Brodick, an established friend of Rico. But there was something in Juju's leer that Brodick didn't like. Charley's suggestion about "sorting them out" appeared to have registered with Juju.

As for Kim, he took a look at Brodick and preferred Juju, particularly when the giant asked:

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"You friend of Rico?"

"That's right," rejoined Kim, promptly. "Rico gave me this."

What Kim supplied was his quarter of a certain silver coin that was much rarer than he supposed. To Juju's eyes it was a duplicate of the token that Brodick not only carried, but was bringing out again to prove his prior claim. Juju didn't just smile; he tilted back his head and laughed.

"So Rico have two friend!" voiced Juju. "Both get same thing from him. Very funny when Rico only have one!"

Eyes glistening in a dangerous way, Juju lowered his head and let his features turn savage. Big hands extended, one to each man's neck, he shifted his gaze from one claimant to the other, as he told them:

"Rico only give to one. He say other people may show same thing, but he only have one to give. Anybody get the same somewhere else" – Juju jangled his medals with a headshake – "they now say Rico give it."

Pausing Juju studied the two faces, then added:

"Maybe you both tell lie."

Kim flashed a sharp look to Brodick. This was no time to dispute minor issues. The man mountain that answered to the name of Juju was apt to try the egg trick of Columbus, using two heads as eggs and balancing one on the other. Only the way you balanced eggs was to crush their shells.

Maybe Juju knew that trick too.

Brodick seemed to understand Kim's flash, to interpret it as a suggestion that they both get out if possible and settle their own dispute later. Ganging up on Juju looked like the only course, but it was preferable to humor him first. Because ganging up on Juju called for a gang in the full sense of the word.

"Sure, Rico had two friends," began Kim. "I know this fellow" – he gestured to Brodick – "not by name –"

"Because I don't go around giving my name," interrupted Brodick. "That's the way it was with most of Rico's friends. Any way, I know this guy; he was a friend of Rico's too."

Suspicion still was flashing from Juju's eyes, until Brodick allayed it with further reference to Kim.

"Yeah, he was a friend of Rico's," added Brodick, "except that Rico didn't give him that chunk of coin. Rico couldn't have, because he only had one."

Not only was Brodick fixing matters his own way; he was establishing claim to the envelope that Kim didn't even know about, the envelope that was already stuck in Brodick's own pocket. But even without knowing that added detail, Kim was ready to brand Brodick a double-crosser, whoever or whatever else the fellow was. Kim worked a hand toward a pocket where he had a gun; maybe that was why Brodick softened his impeachment:

"Let me handle the guy, Juju. You don't want any killing around here" – Brodick's hand was also moving to a draw – "and anyway, he knew Rico."

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Juju was laughing beyond control, inspired perhaps by Brodick's suggestion that killing wouldn't be in order at the Cafe Trinidad. Shifting his big hands like a seamstress taking in a tuck, Juju gathered both men into the clamp of his tree-trunk arms, squeezing the breath half out of them.

Each man let his fist go open, so that the tokens dropped into the respective pockets where the guns were. But neither Kim nor Brodick could budge a hand an inch further to reach their individual guns. Turning toward the door that led upstairs, Juju was about to lug his cramped prisoners along, when something stopped him short.

That something was a gun, held in a thin hand, with a pair of beady eyes narrowed above the revolver muzzle, eyes that stared from a pasty, droopy face. This man was the one who had trailed Kim and Claire from the subway.

Vaguely, Kim Radnor remembered the face as one that he had seen somewhere and didn't like. But Jim Brodick did more than merely recall a face; he recognized the pasty man.

In a tone as startled as the breath-crushing clamp of Juju's arm would allow, Brodick exclaimed:

"Doc Zurber!"

CHAPTER XII

TRAILS were crossing and with a vengeance, or something that rather closely resembled it.

Just who was out to avenge whom was the question. If Doc Zurber wanted to square anything, it could only apply to his stooges Beef the Butch and Mongoose Morry. Only Doc apparently had other things in mind along with vengeance.

Covering Juju with his gun, Zurber did other things with his quick eyes. He took in the status of Kim Radnor and Jim Brodick, their hands hanging loosely at their sides. He saw the envelope poking from Brodick's pocket, on the side away from Kim. Next Zurber made an appraisal of the room.

What Zurber didn't like was the door leading out to the front room of the Cafe Trinidad. So he gestured for Juju to move back in that direction, which the giant did, hauling Kim and Brodick along like a pair of puppets.

With a quick, sidling move, Zurber reached a deeper corner of the room, from which he could watch the side door that he himself had entered. In the process he gave a quick, darty shoulder glance and saw a narrow window in the rear wall, its level slightly above his head.

That window was open, but it was useless as an exit. It wasn't large enough to admit anything much bigger than a cat and only a cat could have reached it from outdoors, because the window was above a deep-set courtyard that Zurber had traversed in finding his way in here.

Across the court was the edge of a roof, with black sky above it. Even the lights of the city didn't penetrate sufficiently to throw a glow on the roof edge.

The scene was becoming more than a bit fantastic, with Juju, who looked like something out of this world, still clutching his two captives as he glared at Zurber, who was a human oddity in his own right. In every action, Zurber showed that lazy speed which characterizes a certain breed of dope addict. Maybe the fantasy of the thing fitted with some of his occasional pipe dreams, for Zurber's smile was more than cunning.

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But there wasn't a doubt that Doc Zurber was in his right wit. Jim Brodick appreciated the fact and only too well. On it, Brodick based his own craft.

"You remember me, Doc," spoke the ex-dick. "I'm Jim Brodick."

"Sure I remember you," returned Zurber. "Kind of seems we always had different ideas, didn't we?"

"Until now," stated Brodick. "What we've been after lately is one and the same thing. I might say things."

"We've been after them," agreed Zurber, "but did we get them?"

"No. Because the right people no longer had them."

"And does it matter who has them now?"

"Not a bit."

With that, Jim Brodick laughed and Doc Zurber relaxed into a wise smile that properly suited the quick darts of his nervous eyes. As for Kim Radnor, he was quite astonished. Above him, like something from the clouds came a raucous laugh that fairly quivered through the room.

It was Juju, relishing this comedy, having his laugh at the expense of these little people. A primitive type, Juju, and therefore quite to the point in thinking things out. If Zurber and Brodick turned out to be friends, so much the better from Juju's standpoint. Holding Brodick as a hostage, Juju could afford to laugh off the threat of Zurber's gun.

They weren't through yet, Doc and Jim.

"Naturally it doesn't matter," decided Zurber, in a sneering tone. "Jacques and Rico knew what their tokens meant. These people who now have them are ignorant."

"They know the pass words," reminded Brodick. "Maybe Jacques and Rico told them more."

"Telling wouldn't help them," retorted Zurber. "They would need proof."

Brodick understood. That proof could be summed very simply. In the case of Jacques, it was the diary he had given to Cap Winslow, now in the possession of Jerome Claverly. With Rico, the item in question was the precious packet with the Spanish postage stamps, that now reposed in Brodick's own pocket.

A wise pair, Jim Brodick and Doc Zurber, but Brodick fancied himself the wiser. To prove it, he queried:

"What about Van Der Van."

The question really broadened Zurber's smile.

"Van Der Van," sneered Doc. "Have you ever seen him?"

"Never," admitted Brodick. "He's hard to reach."

"Did you ever write to him?"

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"No. What good would it do?"

"It might bring him into the open. Then he would tell what he knows – if anything."

"But suppose he knows nothing?"

"All the better. Anyway, I wrote to him."

"Any answer?"

"No." Zurber shook his head. "But I expect one. When he reads what I wrote, he will do what I want. I know enough about Van Der Van to be certain of it."

Brodick started to move forward but Juju's heavy clamp restrained him, even twisting him into a position where he served as a better shield against Zurber's aim. Relaxing, Brodick stated for Zurber's benefit:

"It looks like we're both working for the same guy."

"I wouldn't be surprised," conceded Zurber. "Anyway, I'll take a chance on it." Steadying his aim above Brodick's head, Zurber snapped to Juju: "Let him go!"

Juju's response was to play dumb. He looked from one prisoner to the other as though wondering which man Zurber meant. Then, rather blankly, Juju decided in favor of Kim Radnor. He thrust that young man forward so vehemently that Kim stumbled, which gave Juju a chance to pluck him back again.

Zurber's reaction was an ugly snarl. He accentuated his shoulder stoop by thrusting forward with his gun, to show he didn't like Juju's idea of by-play.

That was when Claire Winslow became a witness to the proceedings. The girl appeared quite abruptly at the door where Zurber had entered, stopping short on the threshold, when she viewed the gripping scene within.

It was truly fantastic, viewing Kim in the clutch of the titanic Juju, with Brodick, a man Claire didn't recognize, held in a similar vise. As for Zurber, the man who in some degree controlled the situation, Claire remembered him immediately as the droopy-faced character who had been lounging at the subway exit.

Maybe Claire's wits were quick, but she had the answer instantly. Zurber must have tagged along from Kim's apartment. Riding the subway, he'd adopted the expedient of getting off first at every stop, then hopping on again when he failed to see Kim emerge from another car. Maybe Zurber had figured on the station where Kim really intended to get off; at any rate, Zurber was out through the exit by the time Kim really left the train.

No wonder Kim and Claire had both passed him by as a mere lounge! Now, Zurber was reaping the benefit. By merely tagging along, he had become the master of the show.

Even the massive Juju showed respect for Zurber's present mood. Crouched almost to the level of the men he gripped, Juju was cringing forward as though drawn by a magnetic beckon from the gun muzzle that covered him. Of all the men in that tense scene, not one noticed Claire's arrival. Their own problems held their full attention.

Drawing deep into her own doorway, Claire looked toward the other exit, the one that led out through the front of the cafe. She could have sworn that the door was opening, as if to admit a gliding figure. Then she

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realized that what she was seeing was the illusion caused by Juju's mammoth shadow, sidling grotesquely across the room, growing as the giant moved away from it, because Juju was looming closer to the light.

For a moment, Claire thought that it might have been The Shadow!

That however was impossible or practically so because Claire herself had cut off contact with her former rescuer. She'd let Kim Radnor assume such responsibilities and that Kim had botched the job was evident.

Claire wasn't quite sure about this set-up. Who was making a deal with whom seemed something of a mystery. The only sound that could be heard was a swell of the juke-box music from beyond the front room door; then, above that discordance came Zurber's sharp, harsh tone.

"Let him go!" This was again for Juju. "If you don't, I'll croak you like I croaked Cap Winslow! He and I are working for the same guy, I tell you! Maybe you'd like to know who the big shot is. All right, I'll tell you. He's got dough, the big shot has, and plenty; and he's where you can't reach him. His name is –"

The penetrating music of the juke-box muffled itself, giving the singular effect of silence producing an interruption. But there was more than a hush in the scene that followed. There was action, with results as amazing as they were swift.

Claire saw the blackness from the closed door come to life, thrusting forward as though to launch itself past Juju, in hope of reaching Zurber before he went busy with his gun. Juju's own action, however, was enough to explain that weird phenomenon of a living shadow.

For Juju had reared high and given his great form a forward fling as he hurled two missiles at Zurber. Those missiles were two men named Radnor and Brodick; Juju was heaving them crosswise at Zurber to screen his bulk from Doc's aiming gun.

Doc Zurber needed a split-second decision, whether he should dodge or try to shoot between those pell-mell figures. In that instant, Claire saw a glint that she momentarily mistook for a silent gun flash, except that it couldn't be, for it didn't come from Zurber's hand.

The thing zinged from the window behind Zurber, arrowing straight for Doc's crouched back. He hit the floor face forward, so hard, so suddenly that he was out of the path that Kim and Brodick followed in their headlong sprawl. They were rolling under the shelter of the window, those two, with Zurber lying behind them, the handle of a wicked-looking knife jutting from between his shoulders.

That Doc Zurber had taken his death stroke, Claire knew upon that instant. He'd played big on his own; too loudly had he shown his willingness to name the master of murder who was behind this whole strange game.

Outside, watching from the roof across the court, that master had heard and acted. He couldn't have trusted so swift and timely a stroke to a mere apprentice. In fact, his disposal of Doc Zurber proved that this unknown had decided to dispense with bunglers wherever possible.

Murder from the air – and it was still in the air, for all Claire knew. Who was there here who could challenge such quick death from the dark?

As if in answer, there came another proof that the impossible could happen. The cramped room of death was filled with the strident, chill provoking laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII

HE was here, and real: The Shadow!

Now he was taking over and in fast style. Claire had really seen The Shadow's shrouded form, coming from that other door; the swell of the music had accompanied his entrance. But The Shadow had been timing his action to Juju's, rather than precipitate new problems.

Unfortunately, The Shadow hadn't arrived quite soon enough to prevent that murder from the dark; or rather, Doc Zurber had spoken out of turn too soon. Now The Shadow in his turn was seeking to amend Zurber's error.

In one sense, Zurber's death didn't matter because the crook was a self-admitted murderer in his own right. What did matter was the fact that Zurber hadn't lived long enough to spill the name of the man higher up. The Shadow had been giving Zurber time to do just that, but now the chance was gone.

The Shadow's present chance was to deal with the killer in person, to halt his flight from the opposite roof edge. That was why The Shadow whirled past Juju, beyond the dazed figures of Kim and Brodick.

Even The Shadow's laugh had special purpose. It wasn't a giveaway; it was a tantalizing taunt, the sort that would hold the murderer where he was. Killers who thought themselves secure were invariably gripped by the magnetic force of that mirth; they usually deemed it expedient to stay and learn what happened to someone else.

This murderer was no exception. From the window, The Shadow saw his crouched form vague across the roof edge, an arm extended as if in completion of the death throw that had finished Zurber.

Before The Shadow could act, Claire shrieked.

Finger on trigger, gun aimed at the lurking killer, The Shadow twisted as Juju loomed upon him. That was the reason for Claire's scream, and The Shadow recognized the fact. His gun spurted in a quick effort to wing the unknown killer, but it was too late. Juju's giant grip was already upon The Shadow.

A gun from the roof edge repeated answers to The Shadow's single shot. Bullets were hailing down through the narrow window, following the general course that the whizzing knife had traced. They were spattering the stone floor, those bullets, ricocheting all around Zurber's body, but they weren't finding living targets.

The Shadow and Juju had wheeled clear across the room, while Kim Radnor and Jim Brodick had dived for handy corners. Still somewhat dazed, they were poor witnesses to the amazing struggle that Claire Winslow watched.

It was something like a cobra and a mongoose, with Juju the cobra, The Shadow the mongoose. Except that Juju handled himself as no snake ever could. One of his stunts was picking up tables and chairs, flinging them like chips at The Shadow's weaving head.

Conversely, The Shadow had a weapon better than a mongoose's teeth. He was using his heavy automatic as a bludgeon to bash at Juju's skull. But reaching Juju's head was a problem in itself; to dent it, was something still more difficult.

However, The Shadow gained one quick advantage and made the most of it. Juju wasn't using the furniture in expert fashion; therefore it was plain that he regarded chairs and such as obstacles more than as weapons. In

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brief, Juju was cramped. He wanted scope. This room wasn't big enough for a fighter of his bullish propensities.

So The Shadow worried Juju, twisting every time the giant charged, letting the huge man bash himself against the wall. Kim and Brodick were staring steadily now, awed by the terrific fray. Shots had ceased from the roof edge across the court. Zurber's murderer had decided to be on his way. That thought made Claire frantic, but she felt herself glued to this spot until she saw the finish to the battle.

The finish came unexpectedly.

The door from the front room flung open, admitting the man called Big Charley. He hurled himself upon The Shadow, hoping to aid Juju. The struggle became a triple tangle and Juju saw a way to end it. He started for the open door, carrying the others along. In that front room, Juju would have all the scope he wanted.

Briefly the human cluster jammed the door, then punched through and reached the main room of the cafe. Kim Radnor bounded after the brawlers and Jim Brodick started along, only to turn and change his mind. Claire guessed what Jim intended; he was coming her direction. So the girl took the only course; she fled out through the side door before Brodick had a chance to spot her.

In the front room, The Shadow showed what he could do with the space that Juju wanted. Clouting Charley, The Shadow sagged the fellow, then used him as a springboard to reach Juju with a telling gun-swing.

That stroke reeled Juju. Half-staggering he blundered up against the juke-box. All was black in front of Juju's gaze, but he knew what he'd bumped, because the music machine was giving in its usual uninhibited style. Picking up the huge contrivance, Juju whirled, shouting defiance at The Shadow.

Men dropped away and stood there frozen, Kim among them. The path was open, out through the front of the cafe, but Kim didn't take it. This Gargantuan action of Juju's was something to watch. Not only did the giant hoist the juke-box, in his madness, he handled it like a trifle.

The music snapped off as Juju wheeled. With full force, Juju hurled the juke-box at the blackness which confronted him. But the same half-blindness that added to Juju's super-strength made it impossible for him to distinguish The Shadow from the surrounding darkness of the wall.

That wall was a dark-stained partition to a hallway of the house next door. The Shadow wasn't at the particular spot where Juju aimed the juke-box; he was at least six feet away. He was reversing his course, however, to trick Juju in case the huge man tried to change his fling, which Juju didn't.

With a mighty smash, the juke-box split the partition and crashed a solid wall across the hall beyond. Amazed men were staring at a great, gaping hole in the side of the Cafe Trinidad. Then, with a twist, a mass of living blackness whirled through the improvised exit.

Back came The Shadow's laugh, triumphant, mocking in its departing strains. The Shadow had more important tasks than battling with Juju. He was practically thanking the stupid Goliath of the Cafe Trinidad for having provided him with a quick and satisfactory exit, a path that would enable The Shadow to take up a murderer's trail.

Kim Radnor decided that he too should be going. The front door being handy, Kim used it, while the patrons of the cafe were still staring dumbly at the jagged space that had absorbed The Shadow.

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As for The Shadow trailing a murderer, he might have, if he'd been able to find Shrevvy's cab. But Shrevvy had already given priority to another person from the Cafe Trinidad. Dashing around through the courtyard behind the cafe, Claire Winslow had reached the street and found the cab waiting there.

Hardly was the girl in the cab and away, before Jim Brodick came along. Staying back from sight, Brodick watched to see if anything else happened and it did. A rakish car pushed from an alleyway and took up the cab's trail. With a short laugh, Brodick clutched the envelope in his pocket to make sure it was still there; then, hustling across the street, he took off through the alley that he knew must now be empty.

It didn't take Shrevvy many blocks to guess that his cab was being tagged. His process therefore was to shake off any trailing cars, which he attempted in his most adept style. Only tonight, it didn't work.

At one corner or another, the same car – or its twin – would pop into sight from an unexpected direction. It dawned on Shrevvy that there might be as many as a dozen such cars and Claire was beginning to get the same notion.

It was a game of cat and mouse with a flock of cats all after the same mouse. To clash with any of these mystery cars would be suicidal, for then their occupants would really become tough. About Shrevvy's only course was to zigzag all through Manhattan, so he tried it.

During an hour of this, Shrevvy discovered one neighborhood that was helpful. Among the twisty streets of Greenwich Village, he shook off the pursuers, only to run into them again. At least the brief respite gave Shrevvy an idea.

Shortly, Shrevvy hauled up in front of a red light, alongside another cab that had a keen-eyed driver. This was some thirty-odd blocks from the Village and Shrevvy knew that at least one car was close at hand, keeping close watch on him. Nevertheless, Shrevvy maneuvered a knowing glance to the driver of the other cab, conveying the fact that as one hackie to another, Shrevvy was in a bad spot.

The other cabby nodded to show he understood. Just as the traffic light went green, Shrevvy flipped a wadded note through the other cab's window.

The paths of the two cabs parted, but that made it all the better. In the back seat, Claire noted that Shrevvy's cab was cutting loose with new maneuvers, beginning a valiant effort to shake off the opposition.

Just where this would lead and to what, Claire couldn't guess. To another meeting with The Shadow, Claire hoped. In fact, that was just what Shrevvy was aiming after, but there was no predicting what might happen.

Actually, Claire Winslow was entering the most singular episode of all that she had so far encountered!

CHAPTER XIV

SHREVVY'S cab screeched into a three-quarters turn and jolted to a sharp stop. Through the window, Shrevvy gave Claire the quick order:

"Hop out!"

"But – but –"

"Don't argue," broke in Shrevvy. "Keep within these few blocks and I'll be back. Only you've got to let me shake those cars first. Catch?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Claire caught and got out.

When the cab had disappeared around a complicated corner, Claire tried to figure where she really was.

Somewhere in Greenwich Village; at least she knew that much. The best plan now was to shift around and get new bearings before some of those troublesome cars came along.

On foot, Claire began a sneak through silent, ominous streets. Odd how few cars there were around here, or at least how few there were until Claire reached a thoroughfare where traffic was heavier. Across the street, a car stopped suddenly and Claire didn't wait to find out who was in it.

Instead, the girl darted back into the crooked criss-cross streets where she felt safer. Only that illusion wasn't going to persist.

Within a block, Claire sensed that she was being followed. She saw men cross the street, keeping parallel to her own course. When she tried another street, a man appeared at a far corner, as though waiting her arrival.

It was the same as with the cars. Just as they'd boxed Shrevvy's cab all around Manhattan, so were these unknown men closing in on Claire here in this restricted area.

Fortunately there was another street that cut in at an angle, so Claire took it. Again she changed direction at sight of a suspicious stranger. Claire was half running now, her breath coming in short, despairing gulps. At last she had to pause and did, pressing close against a brick wall, darting unhappy glances along the street.

She'd wandered from where Shrevvy had left her and would never find her way back to that exact spot now. Only Claire seemed safe here, until she saw a man blundering around, back near the last corner. So Claire hurried along another block and a half, if you could measure blocks in this crazy district. There they were waiting at another corner, two of them, with a car parked off beyond.

The next three minutes were maddening, like an impossible dream.

Here, there, back and forth, Claire was on the half-run all the time. At last she found herself sagging on a doorstep in a very quiet street. Everywhere she'd run, people had blocked her, but they'd apparently expected her to turn back and be trapped by others.

There was a doorway across the street and a deep one, right in the middle of the block. It would be the perfect place to stay until Shrevvy's cab came roving back – if ever. Claire's pursuers – if they were really something other than her imagination – could lurk and wait for her, wherever they were. So Claire hurried across the street, reached the doorway and stopped there, panting heavily.

If only she could get inside somewhere and stay until her fears subsided!

Looking at the door, Claire saw that it was some sort of a shop. There was a bell beside it; maybe she could rouse someone and try to pretend she was a customer, wanting to buy whatever the shop sold. So Claire rang the bell.

In about half a minute a light turned on. As it did, Claire saw the name that was painted on the glass front of the door. Her breath came again, this time with huge amazement. The sign read:

SIMON SARGON

ANTIQUES

While Claire was trying to swallow this impossibility, the door opened and she was faced by a stocky man with a broad, thick-featured face.

His expression was both tired and patient; that of a man who looked neither glad nor sorry at finding a late customer.

Claire's voice came low, as if far away, which wasn't surprising, because she felt that this ought to be in Martinique instead of Manhattan.

"You are Mr. Sargon?"

The man bowed politely.

Claire's tone came even lower:

"One for all."

Sargon's eyes blinked and then waited, not a trace of his expression changing. He seemed really something made of dream stuff until Claire added:

"And all for one."

The introduction clicked. With a bow, Sargon ushered Claire inside, closed the door which Claire was glad to see had an iron grill work, and threw the bolt. Ushering the girl through an elaborately-stocked antique shop, Sargon followed along, his slippers shuffling steadily.

Claire could tell that Sargon was a specialist in his business and also that he hailed from the West Indies. His stock represented a potpourri of early Colonial furniture and ornaments, with a Cosmopolitan trend that only the West Indies could have provided.

English furniture in aged mahogany instead of old oak; heavy Dutch tables, even quaint ovens; graceful French suites that had survived the Revolution – all these vied for supremacy, just as their early owners had battled for the rule of the Caribbean.

But the Spanish predominated. Claire had never seen so many wonderful furnishings and the greatest surprise was to come. Opening a heavily barred door, Sargon bowed the girl into a replica of an early Spanish patio with a magnificent tiled floor and a lovely tinkling fountain playing against the background of a beautiful wall inlaid with delicate mosaics.

There was furniture in the patio, fronting the fountain and it was made for outdoor use. Chairs of wrought-iron, delicately modeled, surrounded a large, ornate table of the same motif. Whether polished, stained or painted, the ironwork showed a beautiful black gloss finish, which made a pleasing contrast to the lighter hues of the tile-work, mosaics, and white marble of the fountain.

Drawing up two chairs, Sargon invited Claire to sit down; then waited patiently for her to speak.

The girl put a query:

"You knew my uncle?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Not knowing your name," replied Sargon, "I can hardly say."

"My name is Claire Winslow. My uncle was Captain Belshazzar Winslow."

Sargon shook his head to show he didn't recognize the name. Then:

"If that happened to be your uncle's right name," said Sargon blandly. "I would not know it. There were four men –"

He halted, tilting his head as though to test Claire.

"One was Jacques," said the girl. "He was the one who knew my uncle. He gave something to my uncle –"

Here, Claire paused in her turn, thinking to test out Sargon. Quite wisely, the stocky man nodded.

"I know," stated Sargon. "The passwords. That was the arrangement. The four were to meet; they or friends that they might appoint. That is all I know."

"All?" echoed Claire.

"All except the names they used." Sargon smiled as he counted them on the stubby fingers of his left hand. "Jacques, Rico, Van Der Van, Cheerio."

Sargon specified no further, so Claire risked a further question.

"Why are you here?" she asked. "Instead of Martinique?"

"That was understood." Sargon's eyes narrowed as though giving Claire a silent quiz. "I intended to move from Fort de France to Havana and I did, at the first opportunity. That was where I assembled so many fine Colonial antiques that I came here to New York which I had also planned. I have been here only a month" – he paused to smile again – "but I felt that I would soon have visitors."

"When do you expect the others?"

"Quien sabe?" Sargon shrugged. "Who knows – except the men themselves? After all, their business is their own, not mine. It is only that I was once their friend."

Rising, Sargon politely handed Claire a card that had the telephone number of the antique shop along with the address. Then, bowing Claire past the fountain, Sargon unlocked a little door in the stone wall.

"Wherever you are going," said Sargon, gesturing to a short street that ended at his wall, "this is probably a shorter way. Good-night, Miss Winslow. I shall be glad to tell you when your friends arrive."

There was nothing much to do but leave and Claire hoped that by now the way was clear. But she hadn't gone three blocks before she sensed that stalking men were again on her trail. Turning another corner, Claire was terrified at sight of a rakish car, swinging her way, apparently at someone's call.

Then, as if from nowhere, Shrevvy's cab showed up. Its door popped open and Claire was helped in by a cloaked figure that came twisting out. Then the cab was off and in the distance, Claire heard sounds that reminded her only too much of those shots that had poured in through the tiny window at the Cafe Trinidad.

Except that now, such shooting helped. It meant that Claire's trailers were being scattered and sent their way by her staunchest friend, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV

JEROME CLAVERLY laid the map beside the diary and nodded his approval.

"Good work," said Claverly to Brodick. "This map that Rico sent from Spain covers the Bobadilla question quite well. It at least shows his intention. I am pleased, too, that Rico mailed it instead of bringing it on his last cruise. He was always careful, Rico."

Jim Brodick showed a sudden indifference that was rather puzzling to Claverly. Coolly, Claverly asked:

"You follow me, don't you?"

"I've followed you right along," returned Brodick. "Maybe too far."

"What makes you think that?"

"Seeing what happened to Doc Zurber. He didn't die of heart failure."

Claverly's face became very serious.

"Zurber was a self-admitted murderer," stated Claverly. "He got what he deserved, according to your own report, Jim."

"That wasn't why he was killed."

"Apparently not." Claverly toyed with the quarter-coin that bore the letters "BOBA," which Brodick had returned to him. "You stated yourself that Zurber was about to name the man who hired him."

"That's right."

"Then that was why he died. He was a traitor. I can hardly blame Van Der Van for killing him."

"Van Der Van?"

Brodick put the question so sharply that Claverly's eyes went cold and hard.

"Van Der Van," repeated Claverly. "In private life a man named Thomas Ingleby. Who else could have had Zurber working for him?"

Brodick's lips went very tight.

"Who else?" repeated Claverly. Then, coolly: "Except myself? With Jacques and Rico dead, that leaves only Van Der Van and Cheerio. No others knew about the Bobadilla coin."

Brodick still was silent.

"You phoned while I was out?" queried Claverly, idly.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"That's right," returned Brodick suddenly. "It wasn't long after I'd left the Cafe Trinidad, either."

"A distressing coincidence," expressed Claverly. "If I had vaguely foreseen that murder was in the wind, I would have stayed home, just to allay your suspicions. But I can assure you, Brodick, I never went in for murder, even when I answered to the name of Cheerio."

"I suppose Van Der Van did?"

"I wouldn't be sure. We didn't ask too many question about each other."

"But you must have known after Doc Zurber knocked off Cap Winslow. That is, if you were so sure Van Der Van was in back of it."

"It might have been Zurber's own idea," speculated Claverly. "Besides, there was the police report –"

"Of heart failure," snorted Brodick. "The cops might have thought different if they'd known Doc Zurber was peddling the medicine that Winslow took."

"And you might have told them," remarked Claverly. "It was you, not I, who suspected Zurber. Remember?"

"I told you once that I don't broadcast," reminded Brodick. "When I take a job, I stick. Maybe I just got the wrong notion, thinking Zurber and I were both working for you. I guess you wouldn't need two of us, would you?"

"Hardly."

Claverly put a dry note to the word that made Brodick stare. Maybe Claverly had begun to realize that he didn't need two men on the same job. Dispensing with Zurber would therefore have been a due procedure.

"According to your report, Jim," weighed Claverly slowly, "Zurber said he had contacted Van Der Van. That supports my theory that Ingleby, otherwise Van Der Van, is behind the plan to acquire all the facts concerning Bobadilla's treasure. It is Ingleby, of course, who has the fourth fraction of the coin.

"Now as a former comrade, Ingleby must have my trust until he declares himself a traitor. He might be such; he was the only one of the four of us who actually concealed his nationality under the name of Van Der Van. He did business in Martinique that involved some coded communications which may have come from the wrong sources."

"Funny he'd show them around," put in Brodick.

"He didn't, exactly," stated Claverly. "He just happened to receive them while he was in our company. I remember that twice the police seized him in the little restaurant where those messages came. They searched him but never found the messages."

"What did he do? Burn them?"

"In Martinique?" Claverly gave a short laugh. "If Van Der Van had dared strike a match, the police would have pounced on him. No, his system was to hide the message in a sandwich."

"Lucky the police didn't think to search the sandwich."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"They couldn't," smiled Claverly, "because Van Der Van always ate the sandwich – while they were watching him. He said it improved the taste."

Brodick managed a smile of his own and the atmosphere seemed to clear. Rising from his desk, Claverly strolled toward the window and stared out into the night.

"Tell me, Jim," said Claverly quietly, "how would you like to meet Van Der Van?"

Brodick's answer was blunt.

"I wouldn't."

"I have to know how he stands," continued Claverly. "Until I learn, it wouldn't be wise to call on Sargon, now that he has arrived from Martinique."

"Why not?"

"Because Sargon knows nothing." Watching the reflection of Claverly's face in the window, Brodick could see it's worried frown. "We were careful not to mention the Bobadilla business to him."

"Maybe one of the others did."

"None of them were that crazy."

Claverly turned around to give Brodick a straight stare. "Sargon could have hired a boat-load of adventurers and gone into the treasure-hunting business on his own, while we four were searching elsewhere for facts to help our future quest.

"Jacque's went to France and gained facts about LeClerq." Claverly gestured to the diary lying on the desk. "Rico found the Bobadilla map in Spain. Van Der Van was following some clue in England. I was here, doing nothing except make money."

Brodick studied Claverly's face against the pitch-black background of the window. It was odd that the reflection of Claverly's back did not show in the pane the way his face had. But Brodick was too interested in other facts to worry about such trifles.

"Money for our coming treasure hunt," resumed Claverly. "I've made it in a lot of unusual ways."

"Such as buying up old cars and their drivers with them," remarked Brodick. "That was a great way to get into the drive-yourself business when gas rationing was heavy. Particularly when the guys that owned the cars all had special ration cards, however they got them."

"It was legitimate," smiled Claverly. "It wasn't my business to ask too many questions. I suppose there were some rather questionable characters among my owner-drivers."

"I'll say there were," returned Brodick. "I saw some of that mob tonight."

Claverly gave a shrug.

"I sold that business, Jim."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Maybe," nodded Brodick, "but that wouldn't prevent hiring the boys back, say at a cut rate."

"Anybody else might hire them too," reminded Claverly. "Somebody like Van Der Van for instance."

"And that," put in Brodick promptly, "is just another good reason why I don't want to call on Van Der Van, either under his own name or as Ingleby."

An answer occurred to Claverly.

"Suppose I send someone else, Jim."

That suggestion nearly froze Brodick. He was thinking in terms of Doc Zurber. Maybe if Claverly got rid of one accessory in favor of another, he would do the same with Brodick, once he found a suitable substitute. Sensing the source of Brodick's worry, Claverly fairly purred his next statement.

"I mean somebody like Kim Radnor."

"Say, that's something!" exclaimed Brodick. "It ought to work out easier than it did with Juju. Except –"

"Except what?"

"Except that The Shadow tagged Radnor to the Trinidad Cafe. How he picked up the trail, I can't guess."

"I thought you were a detective, Jim. It's quite obvious that The Shadow gained the trail through the girl."

"But she switched hotels –"

"And Radnor must have gone back to the old one to get her things."

"Say, that answers it!"

"It answers only one question, Jim. There is another, even more important. Did The Shadow trail you here?"

That called for a real laugh from Brodick.

"Not a chance," claimed Jim. "He's probably still down at the Cafe Trinidad, battling Juju."

"Very well then. Get any lead you can to Ingleby and steer young Radnor to him."

Claverly finished with a wave of dismissal. Quite sure that he rated solid with his boss, Brodick took his leave. Looking back, he saw Claverly still standing at the window, but now the light was such that it cast a proper reflection.

Maybe the light had been right all along. For there was something about that window blackness that Brodick hadn't calculated. Outside, the window was clearing as though a quota of black smoke had cleared itself from the glass surface.

It wasn't smoke, that substance that filtered rapidly along a narrow cornice that was scarcely more than a cat-walk. The blackness was solid, forming a cloaked figure that reached a corner and swung down to a window on the floor below.

Jim Brodick was wrong in thinking The Shadow hadn't trailed him. Finished with matters in the Cafe Trinidad sooner than Jim supposed, The Shadow had spotted the ex-dick going through the alley where the mystery car had been.

Soon after, The Shadow had watched Brodick dial Claverly's number, but with no response. Then had come the interval when The Shadow had rescued Claire Winslow after receiving Shrevvy's relayed message. Still, he'd had time to reach Claverly's before Brodick finally arrived there.

He could only be one place at a time, The Shadow, but he often created the impression that he could be anywhere or everywhere. Such was to be his specialty in seeking the remaining answers to the riddle of the Bobadilla piece-of-eight!

CHAPTER XVI

TWO days after the fray in the Cafe Trinidad, the case had simmered down to the status of a mere brawl, except for the death of Doc Zurber, for which no one in the waterfront joint had been held responsible.

The police had taken Juju's word that somebody had flung the knife from the roof across the court, because the circumstances indicated such. Furthermore, Zurber, as a known crook, was just the sort to be trying to stick up the place, a crime of which both Juju and Big Charley accused him. Some of Zurber's enemies had caught up with him during the job, that was all.

These theories were solidifying in the mind of Inspector Joe Cardona as he walked stolidly among the narrow streets of Greenwich Village, pausing at intervals to study doorways that were beginning to show the deepening touches of dusk. Turning suddenly, Cardona caught a glimpse of a tall figure turning a corner and made a quick dart after him.

Maybe the man heard Cardona coming; at any rate, he turned and calmly confronted the inspector, who blinked at sight of the commissioner's old friend, Lamont Cranston.

"Hello, Mr. Cranston!" Cardona exclaimed. "How come you're around these parts?"

"I might ask you the question," returned Cranston. "You don't buy antiques, do you?"

"Never have."

"Then you're in the wrong neighborhood. About the only attraction here is an antique shop that opened recently. I'm on my way there now."

Cardona suggested that he walk along and Cranston acquiesced, so they strolled together, Cranston's leisurely gait being just the pace Cardona preferred. It gave Joe a chance to look in doorways, a thing that Cranston promptly noted and therewith inquired:

"Looking for somebody, Inspector?"

"Just about," returned Cardona. "Remember that shooting down at the Cafe Trinidad?"

"You mean the Zurber case? I thought the man was knifed."

"Somebody plugged away with a gun afterward. What's more there were some shots fired back."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"By whom?"

Cardona halted his pace.

"I don't know," he admitted, "but they were slugs from a .45 automatic. Later there was some shooting around this neighborhood and the same type of bullets were picked up. They tallied with those out back of the Cafe Trinidad."

Mild interest showed in Cranston's eyes. He realized he'd been quite helpful as The Shadow, enabling the police to link up trails of crime by identifying the bullets that The Shadow had first dispatched after a murderer with those that he had later used to scatter some of the killer's henchmen.

"Doc Zurber was pretty much of a double-crosser," opined Cardona, as he started to walk along. "I think some big shot knocked him off for just that. Whoever the big shot is, he's got some new workers. I wish I knew who they were."

Cranston happened to wish the same.

For two days, The Shadow's agents had been checking on former drivers of a hire-your-own company which Claverly had financed, only to learn that at least a dozen had disappeared, cars and all, after Claverly had sold out the business. These men had been working under assumed names and therefore decided to dodge the bonding company that the new owner had called upon to bond all drivers.

Who they really were, where they had gone, was still a question. The police weren't interested because there were no criminal charges against any of the men named, since the names were assumed ones in the first place.

"A funny thing." Cardona was pausing again. "It always happens around here."

"What happens?" inquired Cranston.

"The business of feeling that I'm being watched," explained Cardona. "It seems as if there were eyes looking from windows or roofs, even doors. Then all of a sudden it quits."

"You mean while you walk along?"

"That's right. This couple of blocks where we are now, well it seems all empty. I mean like nobody was watching you."

It was as if a strain had fallen from Cardona's nerves. His gait quickened, his glances toward the houses that he passed were only casual. Cranston noticed this and if his companion had been anyone but Cardona, he would have attributed it to an overwrought imagination.

But Cardona didn't imagine things. His specialty was to have hunches, which was quite another story. Imagination was something that could grow; a hunch persisted even when you tried to shake it off. Cranston was taking this into full consideration, applying it to the case in hand.

They were still within the few blocks' area that Cardona had defined when Cranston paused and gestured to a store-front, saying:

"Here we are, Inspector."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Cardona was puzzled a moment. Then:

"You mean the antique shop," said Joe with a nod. "I'll wait here while you go inside."

"The window is interesting," remarked Cranston. "Some of the antiques have been preserved with an excellent lacquer finish. Such subjects as lacquer are worth studying. Knowledge of even the most trivial matters aids in crime detection."

Cardona was too busy looking along the street to appreciate this little lesson. So Cranston strolled into the antique shop and was met by its proprietor, Simon Sargon. Though this was their first meeting, Sargon had seen Cranston look in the window before. To Sargon, Cranston had the air of a customer – perhaps more.

It wouldn't have surprised Sargon too greatly if Cranston had delivered the curious password of "One for all." Cranston looked like someone who had been around a large percentage of the world and might have become acquainted with any of the four adventurers who had held their meetings in the back room in the shop at Fort de France.

In fact, Cranston mentioned Martinique, remembering Sargon from there, but he seemed somewhat surprised to learn that Sargon had run an antique shop there.

"I seem to recall seeing you in a restaurant," said Cranston. "You looked like a regular patron."

"The Cafe Madelon," corroborated Sargon. "I ate there often with my friends."

"There was a lot of excitement in the place the last time I was there. I remember that the police arrested someone."

"One of my friends," acknowledged Sargon. "There was one that the police arrested so often it became a routine."

Sargon's eyes regained their expectant stare, but Cranston didn't even ask the friend's name, let alone give the password. Instead, he became interested in antiques.

Particularly, Cranston liked some of the finely lacquered ornaments.

Sargon explained that the special finish went far to preserve rare items, particularly in tropical lands. As an example, he produced a handsomely inlaid cabinet, obviously of Spanish design.

"It belonged to Cortez," assured Sargon. "He probably used it as a repository for gems that he took from Montezuma about the year 1520."

"You brought this from Martinique?" inquired Cranston.

"Ah, non, m'sieu," returned Sargon, reverting to his habit of using brief foreign phrases. "It was in Havana that I found it."

"In its original condition?"

"Si, senior." Discussion of Havana switched Sargon from French to Spanish. "Precisely as you see it there."

"You have other antiques as old as this?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Very many. They were kept by the old families. Most of them have not been touched for years, sometimes centuries. But it is only those with fine lacquer finish that remain so well preserved."

Sargon was gesturing to other antiques that came in the same classification as the Cortez cabinet. Then he began extolling the merits of other West Indian curios until finally he and Cranston arrived in the patio with its ironwork furnishings and marble fountains.

There, Sargon laid some of his finest merchandise on the table and stood by while Cranston examined it. An interruption came when the telephone rang back in the shop. Excusing himself, Sargon left.

Immediately, Cranston pushed against the table so that his chair slid back lightly across the smooth tiling. Then, with unheard footfalls, he moved to the doorway and caught Sargon's telephone conversation.

"I am sorry, Miss Winslow," the antique dealer was saying, "but, I have heard nothing... Certainment, you should call often... Yes, almost any day I should expect another visitor..."

"Only now, a gentleman came into the shop who spoke of Martinique... No, he was not one of them, but soon they will learn that I am here... Yes, then, we may hope for a meeting of all... Of course they will consider you as one of them, but why, only they can tell you..."

Cranston was moving away when he heard Sargon end the call with an "Adios, senorita." Back in the patio, he was examining the objets d'art when Sargon returned. It was closing time, so Sargon offered to show Cranston out the short-route to the back street, but the customer decided to go the usual way.

Out front, Cranston rejoined Cardona and they strolled through the thickening darkness. After a few blocks, Cardona said suddenly:

"You know, I think there's a lot to it."

"The lacquer business," agreed Cranston, with a nod. "I knew you'd agree, inspector."

"Who said anything about lacquer? I'm talking about my hunch. They're at it again."

"Who?"

"Those snoopers. They'll be snipers next. It's giving me the creeps."

Hand to his gun, Cardona shifted warily, looking for figures that he couldn't see. Cranston's eyes, keener than Cardona's, detected motion at the nearest corner, a head, bobbing from sight. For a few blocks, Cardona kept his worried air; then shrugged away his qualms.

"We're out of it now," he grunted. "But it's kind of uncanny." Then, with a regretful laugh, Cardona added: "Guess I'm getting old, the way the jitters crawl up on me sometimes. I'd better go spend a quiet evening, like reading up on lacquer."

"You'll have to start your research with four hundred years ago," said Cranston, with a departing smile. "That's the age of some of the Cortez lacquer work that Sargon sells."

Once he parted from Cardona, Cranston walked swiftly, silently through the dark. His stride was in its way the forerunner of the character that he was to adopt tonight.

Again, Lamont Cranston was planning work for The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII

JOE CARDONA hadn't any copyright on the feeling that eyes were peering at him from unexpected places. Jim Brodick was worrying over the same trouble, except that in Jim's case, it wasn't confined to a restricted area of Manhattan. Anywhere that Brodick went and almost at any time, he might feel himself being watched.

The trouble was, Jim couldn't call the shots. He was always late in trying to spot the persons watching him. Sometimes he suspected passing cab drivers; at other times some fellow subway rider. Or it might be a girl, window shopping on the avenue; maybe just a door man, bowing a guest into a hotel. Occasionally some idler on the street would shamle away when Brodick glanced in the man's direction.

This wasn't all imagination. Jim Brodick was actually being watched and by a crew of experts, The Shadow's agents. For upon Brodick hinged the next step in the case of the broken piece-of-eight, the finding of Van Der Van.

Four men: adventurers at best; rascals at worst. Men who once had answered to the names of Jacques, Rico, Van Der Van and Cheerio. Of these, Jacques and Rico were dead, with substitutes appointed in their places; but those alternates, Claire Winslow and Kim Radnor, knew nothing of the stake involved.

Two men knew that stake: Van Der Van and Cheerio. One's real name was Thomas Ingleby; the other's, Jerome Claverly. Both had Jim Brodick worried.

What added to Brodick's worry was the business of finding himself watched by people he couldn't spot.

Thinking of The Shadow as a lone wolf, Brodick was positive that either Ingleby or Claverly was the person actually responsible for putting these spies on Jim's own heels.

It added up, this theory, because Brodick knew that some criminal brain was using helpers and that excluded The Shadow from Brodick's own mind.

Beef the Butch and Mongoose Morry had served as tools for murder, but had proved inadequate. They'd been handled by Doc Zurber, who had told them nothing, but had proved himself a blabber in his own right. So Zurber had been wiped from the slate and now the master mind was using a reserve crew that he'd had on tap.

Like Cardona, Brodick classed this bunch as snoopers and snipers, working hand in glove and for a price. If tracked down, they'd know nothing; the big brain would have planned for that. He wouldn't be trusting anybody after his experience with Doc Zurber.

Ingleby or Claverly.

One or the other and Brodick didn't want to meet the other. Knowing one, Claverly, was bad enough, but chances were fifty-fifty that Claverly wasn't the man behind murder. For Brodick to add Ingleby to his list of acquaintances would be like tossing a coin and calling both heads and tails as losers.

Nevertheless, Brodick was hunting Ingleby rather than run the risk of Claverly's displeasure. Whether spies were watching Jim in Ingleby's behalf, to see he didn't find the man he wanted; or whether they were appointed by Claverly to see that Jim went through with the hunt, was still a mystery.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

So big a mystery that it didn't actually exist. But even if Brodick had learned that the persons checking on him were agents of The Shadow, it wouldn't have changed Jim's analysis of the Ingleby – Claverly enigma.

At least Brodick had done a good job with his individual man-hunt. So far, he'd traced half a dozen places where a Mr. Ingleby had lived. He'd even found a picture of the fellow, among some old photographs of a Caribbean sailing cruise which Ingleby had managed when known as Van Der Van.

Ingleby was of blocky build with a square, chunky face that could have passed for English or Dutch, according to whichever name he used. Ingleby looked both tough and dangerous, his square face quite as hard as Claverly's tapering yet rugged features. One man that Jim Brodick didn't want to catch up with was Thomas Ingleby.

Jim wouldn't if he could help it. That part of the assignment was something that Claverly was willing to leave to Kim Radnor, provided that Jim Brodick supervised. Of course Kim wasn't to know that he had been appointed.

So now, with darkness, Brodick was making what he hoped would be his last stop, a boarding house which he had picked as Ingleby's probable residence. He was a keen hand, Brodick, at picking up shreds of evidence. He'd found at one place that Mr. Ingleby doted on apples, so in other neighborhoods, Brodick had talked with little store owners on the subject of apple buyers.

At present, Brodick had shaken off the feeling that he was being followed. Reaching the door of the house he wanted, Jim looked along the street and saw nothing but patchy blackness that didn't move. So Jim rang the door bell and the moment a tubby landlady opened it, the ex-dick bowed himself inside, closed the door behind him with one hand while he removed his hat with the other. Then the hat hand moved backward and smothered sight of the door knob while Jim's fingers shot the bolt beneath that knob.

Very cute, Jim's way of making sure that nobody walked in on one of his interviews. Neat, too, his system of asking for Ingleby. He didn't refer to him either by that name or the other, Van Der Van.

"I'm selling apples, lady," introduced Jim. "Not one at a time, nor even by the dozen, but by the barrel." Then, his tone becoming confidential. "I'm going to ask you to help me make a sale."

Before the landlady could say she didn't want any apples, Brodick explained further.

"There's one of your boarders likes apples," Jim confided. "He'll save money, buying choice Baldwins by the barrel, because he eats a lot of them."

The landlady nodded.

"You mean Mr. Carruthers?"

"That's right," bowed Jim. "But I know what Mr. Carruthers will say when I offer him a barrel. He'll say he can't keep them in his room, because you'd object, which would be reasonable. But if you had space in your pantry – or even in the cellar –"

Brodick's increasing smile won an interruption from the landlady.

"You sell the apples," she agreed, "and I'll find a place for Mr. Carruthers to keep them. Only you can't see Mr. Carruthers now, because he's out."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Jim Brodick was very disappointed; at least he looked it. Jim was good at looking that way when he didn't mean it.

"He was phoning somebody," recalled the landlady. "I think the number was Martindale 8-3642. I remember it because he tried it so often. Maybe you could reach him there later."

Brodick's hand was drawing the bolt and numbly. He knew that Martindale number and only too well. It belonged to Jerome Claverly, who happened to be out as the landlady intimated. Jim knew, because he'd tried Claverly's number himself.

A double-cross – or what?

Why should Van Der Van and Cheerio get together; or again, why shouldn't they?

At least it wasn't Brodick's business to be around when it happened. Furthermore, to find the trail leading back to Claverly's was something of a jolt. At any rate, it solved one problem which had given Brodick some qualms; that of precipitating Kim Radnor into anything resembling the Juju situation at the Cafe Trinidad.

If two of the Bobadilla coin owners were getting together, it wouldn't be out of line for Brodick to tell a third where to find them. So Jim bowed himself out of the boarding house, down the steps, and off in the direction of the nearest drug store telephone.

Blackness followed.

It was living blackness that had trailed Brodick to the boarding house, for with night The Shadow had personally taken over this task. The Shadow, fully cloaked, had been one of those motionless patches that Brodick had eyed across the street. Later, The Shadow had moved up to the door, but there hadn't been time for him to take special measures with the inside bolt that Brodick had so wisely thrown.

Likewise Brodick's conversation had been too brief for The Shadow to bring into play a special sound detector that he carried, but it was hardly necessary, since The Shadow was still on Brodick's trail. He became lurking blackness outside the window phone booth where Jim started to call Kim Radnor.

Brodick didn't get the number and The Shadow knew why. Kim was out; The Shadow's agents had so reported. Brodick sat back in the booth and waited; evidently he was going to try Kim's apartment again. So The Shadow decided to help Jim on his next try.

Away from the outer darkness of the drug store window, The Shadow signaled a cab that whipped up instantly. With Shrevvy at the wheel, The Shadow was off on a speedy trip that would get him to Kim's apartment within ten minutes.

Unless Kim Radnor happened to get back within those minutes, Jim. Brodick would find himself giving direct information to The Shadow, except that Jim wouldn't know it!

CHAPTER XVIII

MINUTES could make a great difference.

They did in this case, though at first they had seemed unimportant.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Claire Winslow was counting minutes as she stood outside of Kim Radnor's apartment door, wondering why he didn't get back. It was three minutes now, since Claire had heard the telephone jangling on the other side of the door, persistently too.

The telephone began to ring again.

Nervously, Claire tightened her hands on the bag she carried, the bag that contained that mystery token in the form of a quarter coin of Spanish origin. Then, when she was about ready to give up, Claire heard Kim coming up the stairs.

The trouble was the telephone gave up before Kim could unlock the door while saying hello to Claire. Once inside the door, Kim pounced for the receiver, but too late.

Claire smiled sweetly.

"Maybe it was your friend Juju," she told Kim. "Heard from him lately?"

Kim's answer was a rather sulky stare. He and Claire had been battling it out at every meeting since that night at the Cafe Trinidad. Claire felt she'd told Kim pretty much all of her business and that it was time he reciprocated, but he hadn't.

So far, Claire was still in the dark as to Kim's status except that she knew he'd been checking on a friend named Rico, who might have known Claire's Uncle Belshazzar. Unquestionably Kim wanted to help Claire by keeping her out of trouble, but for all she knew, he might have some special design behind that process.

Still, Claire was following Kim's advice about not going back to see Rutledge Mann, just on the chance that Kim was right and Mann was wrong. Finding out about one at a time seemed the best process. Claire was still concentrating on Kim because she'd almost learned a lot at the Cafe Trinidad; in fact would have, if she'd arrived a little earlier.

Now, just as Claire was laying her hat and bag aside, the telephone began another ring. Kim met Claire's expectant stare and gestured toward the door. Claire refused to budge until she realized the call wouldn't be answered if she didn't, so she stepped outside and slammed the door after her, hoping she'd hear some of the conversation, which she didn't.

Kim's talk was quite brief. He opened the door and bowed Claire to a chair. Then, stepping to an inner room, Kim called back:

"I'm getting ready to go out. Sorry I can't ask you to come along, Claire, but I'll call you later."

"I might be out," retorted Claire. Artfully, she was drawing pencil and pad from her hand-bag. "Where could I reach you?"

If Claire expected Kim to give an address or a phone number, she was quickly disappointed. Blandly he called back:

"I wouldn't know."

Claire scarcely heard. She was digging in her bag and frantically looking for that quarter coin which she regarded as unique. It was gone!

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

Only Kim could have taken it. He must have gone through the bag while he was talking on the telephone. If so, it was in Kim's pocket, unless –

A drawer was slightly open in the telephone table. Claire pounced for it; then restrained herself as she drew the drawer softly open. Glimmering in the light were two shiny objects: one a revolver, the other the quarter portion of an ancient Spanish dollar!

Coming out of the inner room, Kim stopped abruptly to find Claire facing him with both fists clenched. From one hand poked Kim's own revolver; he could guess what was in the other. Idly, Kim laughed:

"So you found it."

"You mean you found it," returned Claire, firmly. "That chunk of coin was in my bag."

Patently Kim shook his head.

"Look at it," he insisted. "You'll see that the inscription differs. There are four of those tokens, Claire."

The girl opened her hand, but her eyes still doubted. Then, rather than waste time, Kim was profiting by Claire's turn of attention. Leaping across the room, he grabbed for the girl's hands and caught them.

Claire let him get the coin, but she clung to the gun. Springing for the door she opened it and wheeled on the threshold, aiming straight at Kim. Framed against blackness, Claire's face was pale and defiant as she challenged:

"If you come one step closer, I'll fire!"

At that, Kim lunged. Crazy of him to rush the gun for Claire meant what she said. Still thinking it was all subterfuge, that Kim had actually stolen her token, Claire would have pressed the trigger automatically if blackness hadn't hit her all at once.

It was living blackness from the hallway with one arm that encircled Claire so that its hand could twist the gun from her grasp, while the other hand was snapping off the light switch. Then Kim was in the swirl, never realizing that it was The Shadow, not Claire, who had cut off the light.

Out of that twist the revolver thudded in the hallway. Kim scooped it up and slammed the door behind him. On a dash down the gloomy hall, he could hear Claire fuming from beyond the door and thought she was trying to find the gun at the same time thinking Kim was still around.

Actually, Claire was still struggling with The Shadow. The struggle ended abruptly with Claire finding herself well-tangled in a cloaked grasp. The Shadow had pressed the light switch again and Claire was staring into burning eyes that seemed to commend her fighting spirit, despite the problems it had produced.

To Claire, The Shadow was now the friend that counted.

"He took the coin," the girl exclaimed, referring to Kim. "The token my uncle gave me."

The Shadow's eyes turned toward the chair where Claire's bag lay.

There beside the bag lay the missing token. Claire had dropped it when taking out the paper and pencil. She hadn't noticed it at the time; now she was all apologies.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Then Kim did have one of his own!" Claire exclaimed. "And now I don't know where he's gone. How can we find him, so I can explain?"

In answer, The Shadow started Claire out through the hallway and down the stairs. Outside, Shrevvy's cab wheeled up and a hunch-shouldered little man bobbed into sight from the doorway of an adjoining house. The little man who answered to the name of Hawkeye, was one of The Shadow's most reliable agents. He'd heard Kim give an address to a cab driver who had happened along before Shrevvy could pick up Kim as a fare.

All Hawkeye said was:

"Claverly's."

It wasn't far to Claverly's, but Kim Radnor with his head start was the first to arrive there. Finding Claverly's apartment wasn't difficult; you went right up to the penthouse. At least that was the method that Kim had heard across the telephone from a mysterious informant whose voice sounded a lot like that of Jim Brodick.

Whether this trip meant new complications or would simplify matters, Kim didn't entirely care. The voice had told him where to meet Van Der Van and that promise made it worth the chance.

Finding the penthouse door unlocked, Kim opened it and walked right in. Crossing a thick-tufted rug he came into a palatial living room which had a corner alcove. There, stooped in front of a very modern looking safe was a blocky man who was trying the combination while he referred to some numbers on an unfolded slip of green paper.

If this happened to be Van Der Van, his other name wasn't Claverly. This could hardly be his safe because he hesitated too much and even then didn't get the combination right. With a low snarl, the man arose and darted a look across his shoulder.

Seeing Kim, the blocky man went savage. Kim saw a square face, furious and purple, coming at him behind a pair of clutching hands. Kim hadn't time to draw his gun, even though he wheeled back to the door, to gain more time against the attack.

Just as the attacker was upon Kim, another man hurled himself into the fray, coming from the doorway. He landed a big fist to the blocky attacker's jaw and sent the savage man back to his haunches.

By the time Kim's gun was covering the floundered foe, the man from the doorway had drawn a revolver too. Nodding thanks for the assistance, Kim saw that his timely teammate was Jim Brodick.

In blunt style, Brodick waved his gun toward their mutual antagonist and announced:

"He's Van Der Van. His right name's Ingleby. We'll hold him until Claverly gets here."

Then, just to set all matters straight, Brodick added:

"Claverly is Cheerio."

CHAPTER XIX

A BIT stupefied, Thomas Ingleby came to hands and knees, then up to his feet. He paused long enough to pluck up the green slip that he had dropped and thrust it into his vest pocket. By then, Jim Brodick was

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frisking him; finding a gun, Jim tossed it on a table in the corner.

There was something else Jim found; a packet of old letters. When he started to take that trophy, Ingleby started an ugly snarl, so Brodick handed the packet back to him.

"This is all on the up and up," announced Brodick. "So sit down and take it easy until Claverly gets here and decides what he wants to do about it."

Moving around like a dog deciding where to lie down, Ingleby finally picked a chair by a sideboard in the corner. With a shrug, he sat down and let his broad face relax. Brodick watched Ingleby's eyes fix on a dish of fancy fruit, there on the sideboard.

"You're Ingleby all right," snorted Brodick. "I can see you like apples."

Ingleby let a sour grin grow on his lips.

"Why not?" he queried suddenly. "If you'd been in the tropics all your life, you'd like any kind of fruit that grows somewhere else. I like pears too."

"Sorry." Brodick looked at the fruit dish. "No pears."

Ingleby helped himself to an apple; then, poising his hand, he asked:

"Mind if I use a paring knife? Or are you afraid I'd turn it into a dirk."

"You might," confirmed Brodick, coolly, "but I doubt it. Those knives on the sideboard haven't any points, so help yourself to one."

Laying the packet of letters on the sideboard, Ingleby picked up a knife instead and pared the apple in smooth, accomplished style. Slicing it in quarters, he picked out some of the seeds with the knife blade, then clanked the knife on the sideboard. Holding the halves of the apple, he gestured toward Kim Radnor.

"Who's he?"

"Rico's friend," retorted Brodick, "as if you didn't know."

Ingleby simply lifted his eyebrows.

"What about Jacques?"

"A girl named Claire Winslow has his token," returned Brodick. "She got it from her uncle, old Cap Winslow. Anything more you I want to know?"

Instead of asking another question, Ingleby took both halves of the apple in one hand, reached into his vest pocket with his other fingers and brought out his quarter of the Bobadilla coin. He laid it on the table beside the packet of letters.

"Yes, I'm Van Der Van," conceded Ingleby. "When Cheerio gets here, we can all add up to one, like this."

He was putting the four sectors of the apple together, fitting them like a puzzle pattern, which was easy enough, allowing for the slight amount of core that he had cut out. Holding the apple reconstructed, except

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for its peel, Ingleby began to eat it in that fashion.

"Better watch Cheerio," remarked Ingleby, between chews. "He's a murderer."

Brodick gave a cold reply.

"I was thinking the same about you, Van Der Van."

"I'm talking to Rico's friend, not you," retorted Ingleby. Taking three or four more bites, he concentrated on Kim, then declared: "I only came here to find out if Cheerio had gotten hold of the things that belonged to Jacques and Rico."

"Like what?" asked Kim.

It wasn't Ingleby who answered. He was finishing his apple. The man who spoke was stepping in from the little ante room where the elevator was. The man was Jerome Claverly, arrived home just five minutes after Kim had reached the place.

"Like these," declared Claverly. "A diary from Jacques and a map from Rico. You wanted them, didn't you, Ingleby!" He produced the objects that he mentioned, bringing them from his pocket. "That's why you came here, hoping you'd find them in my safe!"

Angrily, Claverly was advancing across the room. He reached Ingleby, grabbed him by the vest and hauled him to his feet. Brodick was standing firm with his gun, saying nothing, but Kim, siding with Claverly, decided it was time to add the final evidence.

"Ingleby has the combination to your safe," Kim told Claverly. "It's in his vest pocket."

Sharply, Claverly quizzed Ingleby:

"Who gave you that combination?"

"I don't have it!" snarled Ingleby. "I tell you I don't have it!"

Pulling his vest pockets out, Ingleby showed them empty; then with a continuation of the gesture, he shot his strong hands for Claverly's throat.

Things happened in a trice.

Wrenching away, Claverly shoved Ingleby clear with no more than a sweep of his arms. Swinging about, Ingleby looked ready to drive in to a new attack, when suddenly he stiffened. A pained expression came to Ingleby's face as he tilted back his head and planted his hands to his stomach.

From purple, Ingleby's face wept red; then ashen. Reared to full height, he seemed to rise up further; then, as if someone had pulled a string that controlled him; Ingleby collapsed and sprawled face forward on the floor.

Dead silence followed and appropriately.

For Thomas Ingleby, alias Van Der Van, was dead. It didn't take an expert's eye to know it. That collapse was too complete to be anything but permanent.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

A strange shudder filled the room. It was a laugh, but mirthless. A knell from the hidden lips of a new arrival, The Shadow. The five minutes start that he'd given Kim had proven five minutes too many.

With The Shadow was Claire Winslow, very white and horrified. She looked to Kim for an explanation and he gave one with a sudden shout.

"The apple! The one that Ingleby ate!" Kim wheeled toward Claverly. "You poisoned it and planted it where Ingleby would find it! You can't deny it, Claverly!"

Claverly was shoving the diary and the map into his pocket. Thinking he was going after a gun, Kim hauled out his own. The Shadow drove in to stop his aim and Kim, too excited to reason, turned and tried to clout the cloaked interloper. Snatching up the packet of letters, Claverly started for the door, only to be blocked by Brodick.

He was a hard puncher, Brodick, but a slow one. He'd caught Ingleby off guard, but not Claverly. Doubling Brodick with a jab to the ribs, Claverly straightened him from the chin up and reeled him against Claire, before she could throw in any aid. Again came blackness; this time it was Claverly who pressed the light switch.

Amid the following confusion, Claire heard a clang from the elevator door, before she could find the light switch and turn it on. When finally Claire managed it, Claverly was gone and so was The Shadow.

Near Ingleby's body Kim Radnor was seated on the floor, rubbing his head. Jim Brodick was completely out. Ignoring Brodick, Claire helped Kim to his feet. Looking toward the sideboard, Kim exclaimed:

"It's gone!"

"The packet of letters," nodded Claire. "I saw Claverly take it."

"I don't mean the letters," snapped Kim. "I mean Ingleby's token. It was lying there too. Tell me, Claire, do you know how to get to Sargon's? You told me he was here in New York."

"I guess I told you everything," admitted Claire. "Yes, I can find Sargon's shop. Why?"

"Because that's where Claverly has gone," decided Kim. "I mean it's where he'll go if he can shake The Shadow. We've got to get there first, Claire!"

Leaving Brodick as a semi-conscious guardian of this scene of death, Kim Radnor rushed Claire Winslow to the elevator to begin the final chapter in their strange quest for a treasure of which they had never seen nor heard!

CHAPTER XX

QUITE unruffled, Jerome Claverly sat at the ornamental table in Sargon's patio talking with the antique dealer who a few years back had known him as Cheerio. Claverly was tapping the table with a curious bit of metal, the quarter part of a Bobadilla dollar.

"We each had one of these," explained Claverly. "Jacques, Rico, Van Der Van, and myself – as Cheerio."

"Good days, those," commented Sargon. "But what does the coin mean?"

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"Treasure," announced Claverly. "One for all and all for one" – his tone became bitter – "or so we thought. Except that Van Der Van was a traitor."

On the table, Claverly placed a diary, a map, and a packet of letters.

"The diary belonged to Jacques," explained Claverly, subduing his voice to the tinkle of the fountain. "He went to France – Jacques did – to check on a family named LeClerq, who had relatives in Martinique."

Next, Claverly tapped the map.

"Rico found this in Spain," Claverly stated. "It shows the course that Bobadilla's galleons followed before they foundered. Oddly, they passed close to Martinique."

Sargon showed an expression of surprise.

"These are letters that Van Der Van obtained in England," explained Claverly, referring to the packet. "They represent a correspondence with Rear-Admiral James Maurice of the British navy. Did you ever hear the name, Sargon?"

Puzzled, Sargon shook his head.

"He was Lieutenant Maurice," explained Claverly, "at the time he fortified Diamond Rock, off Fort de France, and tried to hold it against the French."

Things began to dawn on Sargon now.

"The British were forced to capitulate," continued Claverly. "The French destroyed the fortifications, flung the cannons into the sea, and even blasted some of the natural caverns on that rocky isle, so they could not harbor further expeditions. All that happened about the year 1805."

Sargon was nodding, because Claverly was relating history commonly known in Martinique.

"The British prisoners were released," added Claverly, "but among them were some French renegades who had aided them. Those men were held by the French authorities. One of them was named LeClerq. He went to the galleys."

Picking up the quarter coin, Claverly clanged it on the table.

"To the galleys," repeated Claverly, "carrying this bit of evidence that he must have found in one of the caves on Martinique. A coin from Bobadilla's treasure hoard, Sargon, buried on Diamond Rock!"

Sargon sat back, amazement in his eyes.

"We divided the coin, four of us," announced Claverly. "Now the problem is to find the treasure –"

So far, the tinkle of the fountain had drowned approaching footsteps. Claverly heard them at last and turned to find himself covered by a gun, gripped by Kim Radnor. With Kim was Claire Winslow, her face quite as determined as her companion's.

As Claverly rose, lifting his arms, Kim felt his pockets and found that he had no gun. Kim nodded to Claire, who placed a quarter-coin upon the table, saying:

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"From Jacques."

Fearing nothing from Claverly, Kim pocketed his gun and laid his quarter coin down, as he said:

"From Rico."

"And mine," added Claverly, coolly, "is from Cheerio, who happens to be myself. I was just explaining things to Sargon, particularly about Van Der Van."

"Did you tell how you murdered him?"

Claverly shook his head at Kim's question.

"I was more surprised than you were," asserted Claverly. "My only explanation is that Ingleby knew his game was up and decided to take his own life."

Kim laughed and coldly. He felt Claire grip his arm and saw the girl turn. Claire was hearing new footsteps coming into the patio. Reaching for his gun, Kim wheeled, only to relax. The arrival was Brodick, now a friend.

"Nice work," gruffed Brodick. "Leaving me to explain things, without the evidence."

Hand still on his gun, Kim gestured toward Claverly.

"He took the letters," stated Kim, "and probably Ingleby's token, too."

"I don't mean either of those," argued Brodick. "I mean the paper with the combination."

"Why should it matter?" asked Kim. "The combination didn't work."

"It didn't?" The eager query came from Claverly. "I get it now! Remember what you told me, Brodick, about Ingleby hearing from Doc Zurber?"

Slowly, Brodick nodded.

"Zurber must have sent a phony combination!" exclaimed Claverly. "One that he knew wouldn't work."

"You mean you had Zurber send it."

"But why?" demanded Claverly. "I'd hired you to find Ingleby. I only began to worry when murder started."

"Yeah, I admit that," nodded Brodick. "But what has that got to do with the fake combination"

"Because of something I told you about Ingleby. The last thing I would have ever said, if I'd planned to murder him. Because if I hadn't told you, nobody could have guessed."

Enlightenment dawned on Brodick.

"That habit of his!" Brodick exclaimed. "The way he got rid of code messages, by eating them in sandwiches."

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

A nod from Claverly. Brodick wheeled to Kim.

"That business with the apple!" asserted Brodick. "Ingleby knew he was playing crooked. He parked the paper with the combination inside the apple, where he'd cut out the core. It was the paper, not the apple that was poisoned."

"Easy enough to prove," put in Claverly. "You can have the police test the other apples up on my sideboard. They are not poisoned. I ate one myself, this afternoon."

"It goes back to Zurber," nodded Brodick. Then, to Claire, he said:

"We figured Zurber poisoned your uncle with some high-pressure pills. He fixed Ingleby all right, too."

"And under circumstances," added Claverly, "that would place the blame on me. There is only one place where Ingleby would have eaten that combination; in my apartment, if trapped there."

"You're right," conceded Kim, suddenly. "Somebody must have been playing you and Ingleby against each other, Claverly. But who could have tipped off Doc Zurber to the right way of polishing off Ingleby?"

Claverly's eyes were turning as Kim spoke, but he was too late to give a warning cry. Simon Sargon was standing coolly with two revolvers, covering the entire group.

"You've narrowed it down to the only man," sneered Sargon. "You were a fool, Cheerio" – his glare was straight on Claverly – "to think that I'd let you meet with your wanted friends, without knowing what went on in my own back room."

"I had the place wired. I listened in on everything you said. From the day you left to search the world for information on Bobadilla's treasure, I started working right in Martinique. I traced the LeClerq clue on its home ground and it was all I needed. But I couldn't afford to have the four of you complete your search and learn I'd double-crossed you."

"There are four of you now." With sweeping gaze, Sargon included Brodick. "Only one of the original four, but these new three know too much. So we shall have to do without the fourth token –"

A strange laugh interrupted, at Sargon's very ear. A gloved hand closed on one of Sargon's gun fists, twisting him so his other weapon pointed away from the group. Sargon in turn was staring into the muzzle of an automatic, clutched by The Shadow.

This master of vengeance had entered by the rear gate, early in the conference between Claverly and Sargon. The Shadow had waited to let the truth declare itself. Now, Sargon's guns were clanking the tiling, from which Claverly and Brodick picked them up at The Shadow's nod.

On the table, The Shadow placed a fourth token, for it was he who had picked it up at Claverly's. It bore the letters "IMPE." Arranging the coin, The Shadow showed its full inscription:

BOBADILLA... IMPERATOR

Two letters were broken, the "D" of Bobadilla, the "R" of Emperor, for they crossed the central groove along which the coin had been bisected vertically.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

"You made your own guilt plain, Sargon," accused The Shadow. "Certain of your antiques are fake and of the worst sort. Again, your trick of hiring men to cover this neighborhood has a serious flaw. You insisted that they stay clear of the few blocks directly around your shop.

"Perhaps you thought that such patrol would bring suspicion on you or cause trouble if any murder occurred too close to this shop. Your reasoning was wrong. A safety zone in the center of a danger area marks itself as a vortex of crime."

Those words gave Sargon all the inspiration he wanted. With a shrill scream, the man from Martinique sprang beyond the table. This was the one night when Sargon could risk crime on his premises, since it was to be the pay-off. Footsteps came pounding through the shop and in from the gate, bringing the murder crew that Sargon had hired because they had once been Claverly's employees, though only as drivers for a fleet of rented automobiles.

The Shadow, too was past the table, between it and the fountain, beckoning the rest along. They boxed Sargon before he could get away and he tried to slide under the table. It was then The Shadow gave the word for everyone to lift and they did.

Amazingly the iron table seemed anchored to the tiled courtyard. But the combined heave of The Shadow and three other men, with Claire adding her weight, brought it up and over. Sargon went scudding before it could land on him, for when the table hit, it cracked the tiling.

Then bullets were hitting the table top and stopping cold. The thing had incredible weight and shielding quality for a mere creation of ornamental iron. The Shadow from one wing, Jim Brodick from the other, were punching back shots at a dozen attackers, some of whom were sprawling, others diving madly for cover.

Then, from atop the wall surrounding the patio, came new shots, directed at Sargon and his scattered followers. With that deluge came the sizable voice of Inspector Joe Cardona, giving orders. Trapped in the middle of the patio, Sargon snatched up two guns his crew had dropped and began aiming madly along the wall, but his shots went wide.

Kim Radnor and Jerome Claverly each had picked him as a target as they poked up above the shielding table top. Staggering, Sargon could do no better than shoot awry; then, the response of police guns flayed him, curling him upon the tiles.

Claire Winslow felt shaky as she came out from behind the table. Then, Claire, like the rest, was staring in amazement at the broad surface which had shielded them.

The table was lying on its side, its top was dented with the marks of the bullets it had buffered.

Every one of those marks glistened with the yellow hue of gold!

This was Bobadilla's table, the famed golden prize that treasure hunters had sought for years. Sargon had found it on Diamond Rock, painted it to look like iron, and added a lacquer finish. He'd brought it to New York with a load of under-weight chairs, all labeled as iron-work!

Hearing a low, strange laugh, Claire looked across the patio to see the gate closing behind vanishing blackness. The Shadow's work was finished, but he'd be remembered if he claimed a quarter-share of the treasure.

A QUARTER OF EIGHT

For The Shadow had brought the fourth and final token, which no longer had a claimant, once Van Der Van was dead. Upon that final segment of Bobadilla's piece-of-eight had rested the fate of all.

There was just one last question and it was answered when Claire and the others met Lamont Cranston, who came up to Claverly's later with the police commissioner. It was Inspector Cardona who showered praise upon the commissioner's friend.

"You know, Mr. Cranston," said Cardona, "I learned a lot by reading up on lacquer. The stuff was never used in Europe until about the year 1700 and some of Sargon's lacquered antiques were supposed to be a lot older than that."

Cranston nodded indicating that he had suggested that very fact.

"And there's another name for lacquered stuff," continued Cardona. "It's gone out of date, but in the old days people used to speak of it as japanned."

"Quite logically," agreed Cranston, "since the original lacquer work came from Japan."

"And so did that junk of Sargon's," stated Cardona. "The Japs made a racket of it, some years back, faking West Indian antiques and shipping them there for sale here in America. Now we know who Sargon was working for, down in Martinique."

They knew that and more, those who heard. They realized now the kind of workers that Sargon had acquired for his secret excavation work on Diamond Rock; namely, Japanese who had had been in the West Indies at that time.

Along with the golden table, they'd entrusted great quantities of pieces-of-eight to Sargon, for Cardona was now reporting such a find. The Bobadilla coins had been discovered in the marble base of Sargon's fountain, which was hollowed for the purpose.

It would become government property, most of it, though probably the finders would be allowed a share. But to Claire Winslow, the real find was Kim Radnor, and he felt the same way about Claire.

A rather happy ending, in the opinion of Lamont Cranston. It would be recorded in the annals of The Shadow, along with the story of Bobadilla's treasure.

THE END