

RACKET TOWN

Maxwell Grant

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RACKET TOWN

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CHAPTER I. THE DEATH CRASH

THE Daylight Limited was chugging slowly through the city limits of Parkland. One passenger viewed the city with an intense gaze, noting numberless grade crossings that explained the limited's slackened speed. He was a swarthy, stocky-built man, who was seated in a Pullman car. The porter had already carried his bag out to the vestibule.

That passenger's name was Joe Cardona, and his destination was Parkland. Cardona was ace inspector of the New York police force; he had come to Parkland on a mission that seemed strangely remote, as he eyed the passing panorama.

Fading daylight showed well-kept streets; orderly lines of automobiles waiting at the gates of crossings. Where street lights glimmered, they outlined the fronts of prosperous-looking stores and theaters. At intervals, between well-built houses, Joe spied the pleasant parks for which the town was noted.

Then came the city's center; an electric sign marked the modern Park Hotel amid a sky line of office

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buildings, the tallest a dozen stories high. Cardona arose from his Pullman chair as the limited clanked to a stop at the ornate stone station that served this city of sixty thousand inhabitants.

Nothing wrong with Parkland, from the surface view that Cardona had gained. The city looked like a swell place to live, as well as being something of a resort. But that wasn't the way it had been pictured to Joe, when delegates from the city's chamber of commerce had pleaded with the New York police commissioner to send his ace inspector to Parkland.

Those chaps had told of hidden crime that could not be spotted. They had sworn that the town was racket-ridden; but with no crime-leader visible. The city officials were free from corruption, with the police force loyal, but the civic machinery seemed inadequate to cope with present conditions.

That was why responsible citizens wanted Cardona's services. They figured he could find out what was wrong in Parkland. Every other man might be a crook, for all they knew. Perhaps Cardona could pick out some of the bad ones. Certainly, he could reorganize the police force on a more efficient basis.

A TRIO of friendly greeters welcomed Cardona on the station platform. Joe had met them in New York.

The spokesman of the greeters was a man named Walton. He had his car at the station; he took Cardona in the front seat and put the other two men in back. Just as the limited was pulling out from the station, the sedan started along a street in the same direction, following the line of the railroad tracks.

"We're going out to Mayor Carley's," explained Walton. "He's giving a small dinner for you, Cardona. After that, he'll probably talk about the mess here in town."

"Any new developments?" questioned Joe, "since I saw you in New York?"

"No," returned Walton, "and that's the worst of it. The money's being drained from every business; and where it's going, or how, nobody knows. That is, nobody who's willing to talk."

Walton paused, shaking his head, as he eyed the street ahead. The headlights showed a tree-lined avenue. There were houses on one side; on the other, a high hedge that screened the railroad.

"There are strangers in town," declared Walton, "but they have money and look respectable. No, we can't accuse them of these rackets. In a way, the whole thing seems to have started locally. It began with a huge real-estate smash.

"Old Warren Knightson was the cause. He owned many properties; held options on others. He controlled building-and-loan associations. Every one followed Knightson's lead, until, suddenly, every enterprise of his went broke. From then on —"

Walton's words ended. Without warning, he was confronted by an emergency that threatened sure death to himself and every one in the sedan. Joe Cardona clutched the sill of the opened window, his own right foot jamming at an imaginary brake pedal.

At twenty-five miles an hour, the sedan had reached a corner that was obscured by trees. It had the right of way; but that wasn't going to save the passengers from a trip to the cemetery.

A bulky truck was roaring down a slope from the right, about to cross the avenue. To the left, that cross street went over the railroad tracks, where there were no gates; merely a warning signal that was starting its blink while a huge bell jangled.

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The truck driver was aiming for the tracks before the train came. The sedan was rolling squarely into his path.

Cardona saw the truck driver yanking at the handle of a huge emergency brake that had no effect whatever, for the truck was weighted with a load of crushed stone. Walton couldn't swing left, for his speed was too great to make the turn. The move would have wrecked him on the railway tracks, in the path of the limited.

He saw the warning lights; the steel tracks burnished by the glare of the locomotive's searchlight. His foot on the brake pedal, Walton realized that he was heading for a deadly stop, for the truck was almost upon him. He did the best he could.

Veering for the left side of the avenue, he smashed his foot to the accelerator and gave his car the gas.

As the sedan whipped forward, Cardona saw the truck driver let go the brake handle and start a huge tug at the wheel. He, too, was doing the natural thing. He was yanking the truck to the right. As luck had it, that move was offsetting Walton's spurt.

Though Cardona didn't analyze it in those exciting instants, the moment of the crash had simply been postponed for a matter of another second. The truck was due to demolish the sedan a short distance beyond the corner, instead of at the spot where the streets actually crossed.

Rescue came, though, with a speed that eclipsed a hurricane. Rescue, fraught with danger for the person who provided it.

NO one in the sedan was looking to the left. None saw the trim coupe that had leaped suddenly from the other side of the railway tracks, straight across the path of the locomotive. It was there, outlined vividly by the searchlight, hurtling for the safety of the corner that the sedan had just passed.

An ordinary driver would have been worrying about his own plight; he would have had both hands on the steering wheel, as the pilot of the locomotive almost nosed the rear wheels of his coupe.

Not that driver. He gripped the steering wheel with his right hand alone, as his head and left arm thrust from the open window beside him. The locomotive didn't worry him. He had calculated that he would beat it over the grade crossing.

He wasn't watching the sedan. It was using his own tactics: speed to avert collision. What he sought was to avert the truck's mad career to the right. Could that be halted, the sedan would clear.

The driver of the coupe was garbed in black. The light from the locomotive showed a slouch hat above cloaked shoulders. The extended left hand formed a tight, black-gloved fist that gripped a .45-caliber automatic. A trigger finger pressed.

The thunder of the locomotive, the screech of brakes were drowning sounds that muffled the gun's report. But the stab from the automatic's muzzle was plain. It tongued straight for the driver of the swinging truck. The bullet found its mark.

The coupe was off the railroad tracks, the locomotive a blur of blackness behind it. The sedan was slithering for safety, rescued by the fraction of a foot. For the truck driver, slumped behind his wheel, was no longer yanking his juggernaut to the right.

Its wheels had straightened; it hurtled across the avenue at an angle and bashed its big bulk against a box car on a siding.

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The sedan stopped. The lights of the grade crossing were no longer bobbing with red when Cardona and Walton reached the demolished truck, for the train was past. Crushed in the truck's wreckage was the driver. The smash had killed him.

Cardona's professional eye saw more. Joe pointed to the dead man's shoulder.

"Somebody clipped him," declared Cardona. "That's why he couldn't handle the brakes or straighten the wheel!"

Joe's guess was wrong. That bullet had averted tragedy, instead of causing it. The truck driver had faked his play with the hand brake. The shot from the dark had halted his last deeds. Hands that were still yanking to the right were numbed. A pressing foot had been literally pulled from the truck's accelerator pedal.

The mysterious rescuer was gone. He and his coupe had disappeared, unseen by Cardona and the men whose lives he had saved. He had accomplished his vanish by swinging his car to the right, extinguishing the lights, as he parked beneath the darkening coverage of overhanging trees. Dusk was fully settled. The coupe was lost in gloom.

Keen eyes watched from the coupe while Cardona and Walton hustled back to the sedan. They drove to a service station around the next corner, in order to report the accident. When the sedan had made the turn, there was a glimmer from the lights of the coupe.

Housed in darkness, the black-clad driver started his car forward. As he drove beneath the hush of the tree-lined avenue, his unseen lips provided a strange, solemn laugh, that whispered mirthlessly through the thickened dusk.

That tone was the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. CRIME'S VERDICT

THE SHADOW'S deeds did not pass unseen; nor was his laugh unheard. Soon after the coupe had left, a taxicab pulled from a driveway deep beside an old house and headed for the center of Parkland. The cab stopped in front of a three-story structure called the Knightson Building.

That building represented the first of the real-estate enterprises that had made Warren Knightson a rich man. When Knightson had gone broke, the building had been taken over by receivers. A barber shop occupied the ground-floor office that had once been Knightson's headquarters.

The passenger alighted from the cab. He was a dapper-looking man, fastidiously dressed. His face was mild; his manner was fussy. He gave the driver a ten-dollar bill and pointed him in through the entrance of the building. To all appearances, the driver was going into the barber shop to get change.

Instead, he went past the door of the barber shop and waited at the foot of a stairway. He was a big, ugly looking rowdy, that cab driver; but he looked no tougher than the dapper man, when the latter joined him. Once clear of the street, the cab passenger dropped his fastidious manner. His chin had a hard thrust, as he growled:

"All right, Dingo. Let's go up and talk to Mart."

They went up to the third floor, to an office door that bore the legend:

RACKET TOWN

OLD LINE INSURANCE COMPANY

M. Kilgay, Manager

Inside the office, they found Kilgay awaiting them. He was a man of medium height, with dark hair and sallow complexion. His face was a square one, that bore a pleasant smile. But when he saw the dapper man, Kilgay changed. His eyes flashed, with merciless glint. His smile hardened at the corners of his lips.

"What's happened, Ducky?" he demanded. "Didn't Wrecker make a go of it?"

"Ducky" shook his head.

"So Wrecker didn't rub out Cardona." Kilgay's tone became a hard purr. "You'd better give me the whole dope, Ducky. Maybe we'll have to croak Wrecker. Guys that fliv don't go with me."

"Wrecker's already croaked," growled Ducky, in the tone which so poorly fitted his appearance. "What's more, you can't blame the guy. He was bearing down with all he had."

"Then what went sour?"

Ducky hesitated; then turned to "Dingo."

"You tell him, Dingo."

"There's not much to tell, Mart," said the husky cabby. "Walton was trying to get clear, and Wrecker had him bottled. Then, like that" – Dingo snapped his fingers – "out pops The Shadow from across the tracks! He puts a slug in Wrecker, so's he can't handle the truck. So he misses Walton's bus and cracks up when he rams a freight car."

IF Ducky and Dingo expected Mart Kilgay to show tremors at mention of The Shadow, their guess was a bad one. The fake insurance man became savage in his manner; but he classed the presence of The Shadow as a nuisance, rather than a menace.

"Did he tail you here?"

Mart rasped the question. It brought a goggly look to Dingo's squinty eyes.

The cab driver shot an anxious glance toward the door. It was Ducky who spoke up, nervously:

"I – I don't think he did, Mart. His car was started again, before ours. Only – well, he could have laid for us."

"And if he did," snorted Mart, "he tailed you! Which means that The Shadow was walking into something. Dingo Swark, a tough guy" – Mart grunted, as he looked at the jittery cab driver – "yeah, tough enough for slugging guys in alleys or handling a crew of gorillas!"

"As for you" – Mart turned to the dapper man – "they told me Ducky Murrick was the guy to handle the front of a racket. I'll give you credit for that, Ducky. But the lugs that said you were tougher than you looked, must have given me a bum steer."

Mart opened the office door. From the front end of the floor came the muffled crackle of an electrical instrument. Bluish light was flickering beyond a glass-paneled door. Mart grinned.

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"Go to Doc Arland's office," he told Dingo. "Tell him I want to see Brace Lurbin, the guy that's in there supposed to be getting an electric treatment. After that, scram back to your hack; and post the boys to be looking for The Shadow."

When Dingo had gone, Mart talked to Ducky, clipping his words with a harsh, confident tone.

"When I came to this burg," recounted the big-shot, "it was to settle a grudge with an old geezer named Warren Knightson. This was my home town; but nobody remembered me when I came back, using the name I've got now. What my old moniker was, doesn't matter.

"Neither does the reason why I was sore at Knightson. I just never liked the old sourpuss, from the time he threatened to have me sent to reform school. Anyway, putting the skids under him was a cinch. So easy, that I figured this whole town was a sucker burg. You know the rest of it, Ducky."

DUCKY knew it well enough. The call had come from Parkland, summoning every racketeer who was on the loose. Pickings were ripe in Parkland, for the "right" guys who would take orders. Like "Doc" Arland, Ducky Murrick had been among the first to arrive. Mart had made them his lieutenants.

Doc posed as a specialist in electrotherapy, giving treatments that required no physician's license. Ducky ran a wholesale gown shop, on the second floor of this same building. Mart expected to buy the Knightson Building later; he said he got a laugh out of the name, every time he walked through the door. Until to-night, Mart Kilgay had found plenty of cause to laugh.

Acquainted with every form of racket, he had taken over the town in wholesale fashion. Doc and Ducky were the "fronts" who put smooth propositions to local business men, acting always as though forced by pressure. They had shoved the dirty work along to many of the suckers themselves, and there was trouble for those who didn't listen.

Trouble that came from Dingo Swark, at Mart's order. For Mart had gained secret control of Parkland's three taxicab companies, and the drivers had been gradually replaced by Dingo's hoodlums.

If it came to a clash between Mart Kilgay and the law, Parkland's force of fifty-odd police would be outnumbered two to one. Mart had a hundred shock troops; and four times as many reserves, in case of a pinch.

But Mart wasn't hoping for that. Besides Doc and Ducky, there were plenty of other fellows who posed as new business men in Parkland. All took orders from Mart; and all got theirs, with a cut to the big-shot. Hotels, theaters, restaurants and night clubs were paying plenty up the line to Mart Kilgay. So were groceries, filling stations and the like. Parkland was a racket town, and Mart Kilgay was king.

Other crooks were welcome – if they were smooth ones. There were pickpockets. Dope peddlers were on the job, too, which accounted for an influx of so-called tourists who were actually hopheads. You had to have the "cokies" here, Mart argued, so there'd be somebody to buy the "snow."

Dips and dope sellers paid their price to Mart. So did the dope users. Mart had a squad of shake-down artists on the job, making them cough over cash for the privilege of staying in Parkland.

A sweet set-up, as Ducky saw it. But there was plenty of trouble due. Joe Cardona was bad enough; The Shadow made it worse. But Mart Kilgay still maintained his contemptuous smile. He was wearing it when Doc Arland arrived with "Brace" Lurbin.

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Doc was a tall, bald-headed man, whose face had a horsy look. Doc wore a bushy, black mustache.

With Doc was Brace Lurbin, so called because he toted a brace of revolvers. Brace could use that pair of shooters; but he'd never had the chance since he joined up with Mart. Guns hadn't been needed in Parkland; but it struck Ducky that they would be, very soon.

Brace was Mart's ace in the hole. His wide, flat, high-cheeked features were the face of a killer. His eyes, steely through their narrow-slitted lids, were the sort that would be steady above the barrel of a big revolver. Brace had his guns on him. The bulges above his hips were proof.

"YOU'RE getting a chance to use those smoke-wagons, Brace," rasped Mart. "I got a job for you."

Brace took the news in poker-face fashion. It was Doc who shot the eager, sharp-pitched question:

"You're having Brace rub out Cardona?"

"I guess Dingo told you that Wrecker fluked," retorted Mart, "Did he tell you who else was in town?"

Doc supplied a headshake.

"The Shadow!" informed Mart. "That's who Brace is going to croak."

Doc Arland gaped. So did Ducky Murrick. That didn't bother Mart; he wanted Brace's reaction. Mart saw the two-gun man bring a slow grin to his thick lips. Brace spoke in a harsh guffaw.

"The Shadow, huh?" queried Brace. "That's a good one, Mart! I tell you what; you point out The Shadow and I'll croak him."

"That's just what I'm going to do," rasped Mart. "That's why I've been keeping you under wraps, Brace. I'm not going to flood this town with a mob of torpedoes, when one trigger-man's enough. You want a guy to locate The Shadow for you? All right, I've got five hundred."

The idea dawned on Brace. Dingo's taxi drivers, con men, dips, small-fry crooks everywhere – they were the eyes that would find The Shadow. The word had gone out through Dingo. Whoever spotted The Shadow would pass the news along, until Brace heard it.

"New York's made to order for The Shadow," spoke Mart, "but this burg isn't.

"The Shadow can't keep under cover and stay here. Even our own bunch won't know you're the trigger-man, Brace. That gives you the edge on The Shadow. You croak The Shadow; I'll handle Cardona. I've fixed dumb dicks before."

The glare of Brace's narrowed eyes told that the assignment suited him. He strolled from the office, unfastening the front button of his coat as he went.

"That guy can reach for a rod when he needs it," approved Mart, speaking to his lieutenants. "It's curtains for The Shadow."

Doc Arland and Ducky Murrick believed the big-shot. When Mart Kilgay pointed the finger, it meant sudden death. Crime's spies were everywhere in Parkland, the town that Mart already owned.

This city of rackets could prove itself unhealthy for The Shadow.

CHAPTER III. CROOKS SEE THE SHADOW

THE death of a truck driver named Luke Pardee was a story that the newspapers could not ignore. They didn't know that he was a crook, whose pals called him "Wrecker." But they did have proof that Wrecker had been shot at the wheel of his truck.

That was more than accident. It brought big headlines the next morning, with a picture of Wrecker's demolished truck.

The story was totally twisted. The newspapers had it that some one had winged Wrecker, in the hope that his truck would bear down on Walton's car. But the muddled facts made it all the worse. The evidence indicated definitely that some hidden big-shot had tried to erase Joe Cardona, within twenty minutes after the ace detective had arrived in Parkland.

The Shadow, in handling the murderous Wrecker, had turned Mart Kilgay's death thrust into a boomerang, that was scaling back toward the big-shot. The law wouldn't pin the goods on Mart, just yet, but it had a chance to cramp his style.

Joe Cardona could do more than merely give advice to the local authorities. He was starting with an opportunity to investigate an attempted crime.

All that next day, the city buzzed with talk of the truck crash. It filtered to the small-fry crooks who served Mart Kilgay. From them, it worked up to the lieutenants. The Shadow had started trouble in Parkland. Rumor had it that some of the town's bolder business men were getting ready to shake off the shackles of the racket ring.

Glummost of all strangers in Parkland was Brace Lurbin. Brace had been told to pick up news about The Shadow. But Mart's hordes weren't producing it. They had too much else to think about.

The end chair in the barber shop in the Knightson Building was a swell place to pick up grapevine information. Half of the barbers were working for Mart Kilgay, and they formed a line leading away from inner end. Whoever parked in that chair could get an earful, if he belonged to the crowd.

That was why Brace sauntered in there, that evening, and took that particular chair. He stroked the back of his neck and said he'd have a haircut. As the barber tucked the bib around his neck, Brace growled, in an undertone:

"Any dope on The Shadow?"

The barber shook his head. He knew that Brace was in the racket, but he hadn't been told that this customer was looking for The Shadow. Nor had Brace advertised that he packed a pair of rods on his person. He had a vest with special flaps that could cover the guns when he took his coat off, provided he kept his elbows back. That helped while he was climbing into the barber's chair.

"Not a thing," whispered the barber, as he clicked his scissors. "Something may be piped, though, before the night's through —"

"Psst!"

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Brace's interruption made the scissors stop their clicking. From the side of his lips, Brace gave the order:

"Take a gander into that mirror in back of you. Maybe you'll see what I see, through the glass door."

The barber put down the scissors by the mirror. He picked up a pair of clippers; then discarded them to take the scissors again. He was straining his eyes as he noted the reflection of the door. Returning, he voiced to Brace:

"What was it?"

"A shadow, on the floor;" returned Brace. "It slid away, while you were looking in the mirror. Didn't you spot it?"

"I wasn't looking at the floor outside the door," admitted the barber. "That was too low to see in the mirror. Say – do you think it was The Shadow?"

"Maybe. Who's upstairs?"

"Only Ducky Murrick," began the barber. Then, recognizing that Brace rated well in Mart's organization, he added: "And the guy that handles the hackies. Dingo Swark."

"You're sure Mart isn't up there?"

"Positive! He went out half an hour ago. So did Doc Arland."

Brace decided to let the barber finish a quick hair trim, but told him to do it inside five minutes. Brace hadn't been ordered to protect guys like Ducky and Dingo, while looking for The Shadow. He'd cover up in Mart's case; but that was all.

THERE was good reason for The Shadow to be in the vicinity of the Knightson Building. Mart Kilgay's rackets were undergoing a strain that demanded important conferences among his lieutenants. A visit by Dingo to the office building meant that the head of the taxi mob had news too private to be piped along the grapevine.

Dingo Swark felt secure, as he sat in the little office that formed part of Ducky Murrick's wholesale dress shop. With windows locked and shades tight drawn, Dingo was spilling some inside information.

"The squawk's coming from the theaters," asserted Dingo. "They don't like the strangle hold that Mart's got on their bank–night racket."

"Why should they holler?" demanded Ducky. "They stuck an extra dime on the admission price, didn't they? They can afford to give out five hundred bucks on bank night. Every one of those six houses is doing big business."

"Sure! Only they don't like the way we've got it fixed. It's risky business, switching the number that the kid pulls out of the box, so one of our bunch will get the dough."

"The suckers haven't wised to it yet. We always have a different guy there to collect. We use enough molls, too. Listen, Dingo, you know what this racket means. Three grand a week; and that just about pays the freight for our outfit."

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Dingo nodded.

"All I'm doing is telling you," he insisted. "The bank–night stuff is going sour, unless you watch it. Mart ought to know it, in a hurry."

"He'll know," assured Ducky, "and he'll find the way to handle it. He'll drop in on George Larmon, the guy that manages the Crystal Theater."

"Larmon knows who Mart is?" queried Dingo, surprised. "I thought you were the front for that racket, Ducky."

"I was – and still am. Only, we had to sell one guy on the idea and sell him right! So we picked Larmon. He double–crossed the rest of them. Every time some theater manager begins to beef about the racket, Larmon tips us off. Mart sees him personally; and they dope out some way to scare the squawker."

The news pleased Dingo. He asked if Larmon received a cut for his services. The question brought a contemptuous snort from Ducky. That wasn't Mart's way of working.

"Larmon doesn't own the Crystal Theater," explained Ducky. "He just manages it. He was raking in some dough on his own, by faking the ticket numbers. We spotted it; that's why he listened when we talked to him. He's still working his own gyp on the owners; and they're the ones who put up the five hundred bucks on bank night. Why should Larmon worry? If he –"

Ducky's hard tone ended. His expression reverted to a baby–faced stare. He looked like the Ducky who posed as a modiste. The gasp that he gave came in falsetto pitch.

Ducky was gazing toward the door, which he had left open in case any one entered the dress shop. There were lights in the main room; they caused the sight that had startled Ducky. Upon the threshold of the office, Ducky saw a streak of blackness, that was fading at an angle.

Some intercepting form had caused that shadow. The figure, itself, had gone from sight before Ducky noticed it. Only one eavesdropper could have possibly approached with such silent glide, to listen in on the conferring croons and then retire.

It was Dingo who gulped the answer: "The Shadow!"

As he uttered the name, Dingo whipped a revolver from his pocket. Ducky's nerve returned. His teeth gritted as he yanked open a desk drawer to pick out a gun of his own.

The blackness was gone from the doorway. Dingo, bolder than he was wise, took a long spring out into the showroom. Ducky stopped at the door.

Ducky expected to see Dingo sprawl; clipped by quick shots from The Shadow's guns. What Ducky was counting on was a chance to supply a return fire. But The Shadow had chosen stealth instead of battle. Dingo reached the showroom safely; stood there, gawking in sheer amusement.

Ducky joined his tough–faced pal. His expression, too, showed bewilderment. Though the showroom was twenty feet square; despite the fact that its lights revealed every possible cranny, the place was empty.

The two crooks circled slowly, turning their gun muzzles in every direction. As they finished that circle, they came face to face, staring at each other blankly. That streak of blackness on the floor had been real; some

living being must have caused it. Nevertheless, that being had vanished in the same ghostly fashion.

Almost under the observing eyes of two quick-witted crooks, The Shadow had performed a spectral fade-out that brought new astoundment to his enemies.

CHAPTER IV. THE VANISHED SHADOW

IT took Ducky a full minute to gain a sensible reaction regarding The Shadow's disappearance. Dingo was still staring stupidly when the suave smile came to Ducky's sallow features. He saw Ducky move back to the doorway of the office.

"Look, Dingo" – Ducky's whisper was cautious – "over at the hallway door. The Shadow couldn't have come in from there. I'd have seen him, because it's on a line with my desk."

"Yeah?" growled Ducky. "Then where did he come from?"

Ducky pointed to a rear corner of the showroom, indicating a door topped by a transom.

"That leads into the storeroom," he whispered. "It's the only place The Shadow could have come from."

"But how'd he get in there to begin with?"

"Through a door at the end of the hall. Maybe he came in earlier – to stow his black rig until he needed it. We can bag him, Dingo, if we're quick!"

"How?"

"I'll handle this door. You take the one at the end of the hall. We'll both cut loose as soon we barge in there."

Dingo liked the idea. He realized that Ducky must be right. Dingo stepped to the hall door, put his hand on the knob.

There was a quick, but cautious, rap from the other side of the door. It came in a rat-tat-tat that Dingo recognized as a signal. The ugly faced crook gave the hoarse query:

"That you, Mart?"

"No." Dingo recognized the hard tone from the other side. "It's Brace!"

Dingo opened the door. Brace Lurbin peered in from the hall. His keen eyes were quick to note the strained expression that was mutual with Dingo and Ducky. A wise expression registered on Brace's wide, flat face.

"You guys seen The Shadow?"

"We seen something on the floor," informed Dingo. "A lot of black, that moved away –"

"The same thing that I spotted downstairs. Where did he go?"

It was Ducky who pointed to the corner door that led into the storeroom. Brace leaned his head back; saw the door at the end of the hall. Ducky didn't have to tell him that there were two routes into that storeroom.

RACKET TOWN

"He's still there, then," decided Brace. "I'd have met him in the hall if he'd tried to slide out to the stairs. I'll handle this hall door. You take the inside one, Dingo."

Dingo started for his post. Brace beckoned to Ducky. He wanted the soft-looking crook to stand in a midway position, to give a signal that would start the others on a properly timed attack.

But Ducky had another idea. His headshake showed that his gathered wits were working well.

Hopping into the office, Ducky came out with a pineapple-shaped object. He grinned as he showed it to Brace. Lifting off an outer case, Ducky held a fragile bomb within.

"Tear gas," said Ducky. "I'll chuck it through one of those transoms. Get posted, Brace. You'll hear it crack."

AN approving grin came from Brace. Two big revolvers in his fists, the trigger-man moved to the end of the hall. Ducky crossed the showroom. Near Dingo's corner, he planted a light chair and carefully ascended it. With delicate touch, Ducky budged the revolving transom.

Through a tiny crack, he could see into the storeroom. Two wall lights were glowing there, as Ducky always left them. One gave a view that made the crook chuckle. Beyond a row of tailor's dummies stood a screen. It was at an angle, in a corner near one light.

The material of the screen was dark, but very thin. The light showed through it. Beyond the screen, Ducky could see the outline of crouched, cloaked shoulders; above them, a broad-brimmed slouch hat.

The Shadow was waiting the attack; but he had taken a hiding place that suited an ostrich. Ducky's next move was a cinch.

He swung the transom wide, then chucked the gas bomb through the opening, scaling it on a long, high arc that would carry it past the screen.

The bomb smashed. Smoky fumes partly obscured the light; but Ducky could see the result. The cloaked form was tilting forward. It toppled the screen. The two came crashing to the floor, just as Brace and Dingo ripped open the doors, to enter.

Arms across their faces, the two were aiming, in squinty fashion, to avoid the tear gas. They saw the sprawling shape of The Shadow, and would have riddled it but for Ducky's sudden warning. The tear gas couldn't bother Ducky, up by the transom. He gave an order to hold it.

Fumes cleared. The attackers saw the sprawled figure more plainly. It looked rigid; bulgy. Ducky knew why. Coming down from his chair, he entered the storeroom and whipped up the hat and cloak.

The framework of a dressmaker's dummy rolled across the floor. Again, The Shadow had chosen to depart and leave crooks guessing. This time, however, he had been forced to supply them with proof of his visit. Proof in the form of a discarded cloak and hat, that they could keep as empty trophies of their living enemy.

Ducky found an unlocked window. He opened it, stared down into a blackened courtyard. That was where The Shadow must have gone. A sheer descent of twenty-five feet; for the court was depressed to a basement level. Brace nodded as Ducky pointed.

"You cover," said Brace to Dingo. "I'm going down and around. Three blinks of the flashlight will tell you when I'm there."

RACKET TOWN

While Ducky fumed with the hat and cloak, Dingo watched the courtyard. Soon, three blinks came from a corner of the building. Then the flashlight gleamed steadily, here and there.

Brace was boldly searching the courtyard, confident that in case of trouble, Dingo would supply a barrage from above.

The test did not arrive. Brace scoured the courtyard to find The Shadow absent. There had been plenty of time for the cloaked prowler to make another get-away. From below, Brace gave a growl to inform Dingo that he was coming up.

MEANWHILE, Ducky heard footsteps from the hall. At first, he had been jittery; but when the paces continued to the third-floor stairs, Ducky knew that it must be Mart Kilgay. The big-shot had announced earlier that he would be back in his office before the evening ended. Carrying The Shadow's cloak and hat, Ducky went upstairs.

That left Dingo alone when Brace returned. The two-gun man noted Ducky's absence, and snapped out a sudden question to Dingo:

"Where's Ducky?"

"Mart came in," replied Dingo, sourly. "Ducky went up to see him. That's where we gotta go, too; and I'm telling you that Mart's going to be sore."

"What about?"

The question struck Dingo as a dumb one.

"What about?" he rapped. "Because we didn't use our noodles! We didn't nail The Shadow. Mart don't like things to fluke. First it was Joe Cardona, getting clear of Wrecker. Right now, Ducky's telling Mart that the bank-night racket is going sour."

"And to top it, we're going to tell him that The Shadow made dummies out of us. Maybe you can laugh that one off; but I can't. You gotta think fast and talk fast, when Mart's sore."

"The Shadow made a dummy out of himself," sneered Brace. To emphasize the jest, he nudged his thumb toward the dressmaker's dummy that had shaped the cloak and hat. "That's a wisecrack; but it means plenty. It was The Shadow that fluked, not us."

Dingo didn't grasp it.

"Why do you think The Shadow pulled that gag?" demanded Brace. "I'll tell you why. To make monkeys out of us. He wanted us to barge in here and shoot that screen full of holes."

"That's so!" exclaimed Dingo, with a dawning nod. "Then the cops would have breezed in here."

"Sure thing," added Brace. "And they'd have wondered what you were doing up here – and me – shooting up the joint. Ducky could hand them an alibi for himself, because this is his place. But our talk wouldn't have gone over."

Brace shoved his revolvers back into their holsters. Dingo put his own gun away. He was grinning when Brace motioned to the door. Together, the pair went up the stairs, Brace remarking on the way:

"We've got our story, Dingo, and Mart's going to like it. When he begins to hand out gold medals to guys that used their brains, we'll be the first in line to get them. The Shadow tried to slip one past us to-night; only we were too smart to fall for it."

Dingo remembered that it was Ducky Murrick who had supplied the actual brainwork; but he didn't mention that to Brace. The trigger-man was going to take some credit for himself, and his remarks showed that he expected Dingo to do the same.

It wouldn't matter to Ducky, either. Results were what counted in this game. The Shadow had vanished; but his ruse had failed. Crooks had held their strong position, despite The Shadow's strategy. That would count with Mart Kilgay. The big-shot would be ready for The Shadow, if the black-garbed prowler tried his stunt again.

CHAPTER V. CROOKS TAKE COVER

DUCKY was glad when his two pals reached Mart's office. The big-shot had seen the cloak and hat that Ducky carried. The result was a cross-fire of questions that Ducky had to answer. Mart was so savage in his criticism that Ducky actually flopped in his chair when the others arrived. They could take it for a while.

Mart started on Dingo; and didn't give him a chance to spring an excuse. But when he swung to Brace, the two-gun man was ready. He had an answer for Mart's first question.

"What was the matter with you?" demanded Mart. "Were your dukes paralyzed? Couldn't you yank a rod from your hip?"

"Sure I could," returned Brace, bluntly, "if I'd been working for The Shadow. That's what he was listening for – a lot of shooting that would have put us all in wrong."

The logic struck Mart instantly. He let Brace talk some more.

"You're right, Brace," admitted Mart, finally rising behind his desk. "There's times when a guy is smarter to hold his trigger than he is to snap it. You fellows showed the right stuff in the pinch."

Mart's last display of anger was directed toward The Shadow's hat and cloak. He grabbed those garments with a yank; flung them at Dingo, with the rasped command:

"Hang those duds in the closet! Lock it and stick the key in the desk drawer. I'd like to see The Shadow come back for them. Only he won't. He's probably got another outfit."

While Dingo was thus engaged, Mart turned to Ducky.

"You were trying to tell me about the theaters," reminded the big-shot. "You said the racket was going sour. Let's hear about it."

Ducky repeated details that he had heard from Dingo. Taxi drivers had picked up reports that bank nights were to be run on a new basis. Theater managers had evidently started the rumors through the ushers; thence to the public.

"You'd better talk to Larmon," concluded Ducky. "He's the fellow that can fix it. Only, there's going to be more trouble, now that people know Cardona's in town. He's somebody that they can squawk to. If you can get rid of him, Mart –"

RACKET TOWN

"I'll talk to Larmon," interrupted the big-shot. "I'll handle Cardona, too. Go on downstairs, Ducky, where you belong. And you, Dingo – scram. Stick with your cab and keep the other hackies posted. The one guy we've got to get is The Shadow."

Mart sat stroking his hard chin, after his lieutenants had left. He had kept Brace in the office, just in case he needed the trigger-man. Mart was trying to dope out some way to trick The Shadow. He couldn't think of any new one.

"I'm going over to see Larmon," he announced suddenly. "I don't need a bodyguard, but I want you to come along, Brace. Just in case The Shadow tries to mooch in on my business."

It wasn't far to the Crystal Theater, so Mart walked. Brace sauntered along, some distance in the rear, so that people would not suppose that the two were together.

Mart bought a ticket at the box office. That was always his way when he dropped in on Larmon. No one knew that the mobleader was acquainted with the theater manager.

Brace, coming separately, stopped to look at a billboard. Mart paused to count his change. Without looking toward Brace, he undertoned:

"Scram for half an hour. That's when I'll be coming out again. I'll time it, so be here."

Mart went into the theater. Brace finished his scrutiny of the billboard and sauntered away.

Neither Mart nor Brace had glanced at the alleyway beside the Crystal Theater. A look would have told them nothing; for the blackness seemed quite empty. In fact, there was no stir there for some time after Mart entered the theater. The thirty-minute period was about half gone when motion occurred.

A cloaked shape glided through the darkness, to pause by a blackened building wall. Keen eyes looked up toward the theater's office window. The Shadow had trailed Mart to his new destination. Garbed in new attire of black, he was ominous and invisible.

Clinging like a bat to the brick wall, The Shadow made his way up to the window.

The window was unlocked. Gloved fingers worked it upward, noiselessly, to a space of three inches. As voices reached his ears, The Shadow raised the shade imperceptibly. Through a one-inch opening, he saw Mart Kilgay in conference with George Larmon.

The theater manager was an undersized man of frail build. He seemed half pleased, half worried by Kilgay's unexpected visit. From their conversation, Mart had evidently watched the movie for a while, before he came into the manager's office.

"The racket's getting shaky, Mart," admitted Larmon, in a wheezy whine. "It won't do me much good to talk to the other managers. I've been shouting 'wolf' all along."

"You're going to talk to Joe Cardona," Mart announced.

He chuckled as he saw Larmon's eyes pop.

"Why not?" demanded the big-shot. "Somebody's due to spill the beans. So you're elected, before the clucks get around to doing it. That will help us two ways. It will make you look on the level; and Cardona will

believe the line you hand him."

"I get it," nodded Larmon, with a sudden grin. "The other managers will be glad to let me take the dangerous job of spokesman. But what I tell Cardona won't help him much. Only –"

"Only what?"

"Only, what am I going to tell Cardona?"

Mart thought for a minute; then replied:

"I'll have that figured out by to-morrow night. You're seeing Cardona at eight o'clock. Make a note of it, so you won't forget it."

Larmon made a notation on a memo pad that formed part of a desk calendar. As he wrote, he questioned:

"How will Cardona know about this appointment?"

"Write him a letter," ordered Mart. "Mail it after the theater lets out, so he'll get it to-morrow afternoon. Use your own stationery, and tell him you'll drop in to see him at his hotel room at eight o'clock sharp. To give him facts of important value."

Larmon went to his typewriter. He clicked off the letter and showed it to Mart. The big-shot nodded his approval; Larmon signed the letter. While the manager was typing an envelope, Mart glanced at his watch.

"I'm leaving," announced Mart. "There'll be a cab here for you, at quarter of eight to-morrow night. Keep out of sight in the cab, when it stops near the Park Hotel. I'll get in and talk to you. We'll frame a story for Detective Cardona."

MART went from the office. The Shadow eased the window tight. But before he could begin his descent, he sensed that something was wrong.

A motor was throbbing from the street outside the alley. Turning his head, The Shadow saw a cab driver slide from behind his wheel and scurry across the street to talk to another hackie. Easing down from the window, The Shadow clung to the sill and watched the first driver point in his direction.

The fellow had spotted The Shadow's silhouette against the lighted window shade. He was sending the second cabby around the block to watch the other end of the alley. In another few minutes, the word would be out. Dozens of crooks would hem in their quarry.

Stealth was still The Shadow's policy. He dropped into the alley; made a quick start into its blackened depths, unseen by the cabby who watched the outlet by the theater.

When Mart Kilgay reached the street, he saw that something was up. Three cabs were at hand. A couple of dips were also on the job. All were watching the alley.

Mart's fists tightened. If they'd cornered The Shadow, he hoped the word had reached Brace.

Another cab wheeled up, with Dingo driving it. Before Mart could contact Dingo, another man appeared. It was Brace, strolling toward the theater, to cover Mart's departure. The triggerman was on time, to the dot.

RACKET TOWN

Dingo leaned from his cab. Mart motioned him to leave it.

With Brace and Dingo beside him, Mart arranged a quick campaign.

"Brace goes into the alley," he instructed. "You stay with me, Dingo, so we can cover this end."

Brace eased into the alley, huddling close to the wall, his flashlight showing guarded blinks, while his other fist carried a gun. Shifting past the corner, Mart and Dingo waited. They saw the blinks dwindle; then return.

"Nobody along the line," informed Brace. "Only there's a blind alley in back of the theater. He may be in there."

"The old stage entrance," recalled Mart. "They keep it locked from the inside. The Shadow's in that blind alley. Let's get him!"

Brace needed no urge to lead the way. He halted when he reached the cul-de-sac, only to let the others know that they were to come no farther. Brace took a peek past the corner.

"Look, Mart," – Brace was breathless – "there's a light the other side of the fence, and you can see what's below the fence!"

Mart saw, when he thrust his head around the corner. A crouched shape with slouch hat was close in the shelter of the fence. Mart grabbed the triggerman's arm.

"Give it!" he hoarsed.

Brace's big revolver spoke, jabbing three quick shots for the huddled target. Loud clangs echoed from the blind alley; but the cloaked figure did not topple. Brace mouthed an oath as he sprang forward. Three seconds later, he was whipping away a cloak and hat to reveal an ash can beneath.

"The same game again," growled Mart. "Left us these; and used the ash can to hop the fence!"

To the tune of police whistles, Mart and Brace escaped with Dingo in Dingo's cab. Some distance away, the cab stopped. Brace was to go to his quarters in the Park Hotel; Mart to his apartment. Dingo then drove away, keeping The Shadow's hat and cloak as souvenirs.

Mart hoped to meet The Shadow again. To-night's fiasco had provided Mart with a new and cunning scheme. One that could settle two problems: It would strengthen the theater racket, and dispose of Joe Cardona.

Crooks were taking for cover to-night; but, to-morrow, they would be on hand again. That was when Mart Kilgay would have an answer to The Shadow's game.

CHAPTER VI. THE FRAME-UP

LATE the next afternoon, a letter was delivered at the Park Hotel. It was addressed to Joe Cardona; but he didn't find it when he came in at six o'clock. A slinky clerk had removed that letter from the box.

Mart Kilgay's scheme was moving, so smoothly that even his lieutenants were not informed. Mart knew how to reach the most lowly of his followers, by telephone calls in which he used special passwords. The big-shot had picked the men he needed for the coming job.

RACKET TOWN

Cardona left the hotel for a stroll. The streets were lighted; the town looked anything but worried. Every one seemed to know Joe Cardona. A clerk nodded to him from a cigar-store window. A newsboy spoke his name when he tried to sell Joe a newspaper.

The proprietor of a shooting gallery offered Cardona free shots at the targets; the girl in a theater box office gave him a smile. Soda jerkers waved a greeting when he entered a drug store. Joe felt like buying aspirin instead of cigarettes. This job was giving him a headache.

How could anybody pick out crooks, from friendly people like these?

There were fellows on the street who looked like dips; but if they were, they didn't hail from New York, for Joe had never seen them before. Some taxi drivers were tough-looking mugs; but Cardona couldn't remember them from any police line-up.

Arriving back at the hotel, Cardona found an invitation for dinner. It was from an elderly lawyer named Louis Wenwold. Joe had met him at the mayor's house, and had liked him. The invitation said that Wenwold would be at the Palace Restaurant, a half block from the hotel. So Joe went there. On the way, he read another message.

Some one had called the hotel by telephone, but had left no name. The person, whoever it was, was going to call again, after eight o'clock. Cardona decided that the matter might be important. When he sat down at the dinner table with Wenwold, he told the lawyer that he would have to leave before eight.

Wenwold was withery and dry-faced, like an ancient mummy; but his tight lips had a friendly smile. He listened sympathetically to Cardona's criticism of the Parkland police.

"I've told them plenty," declared Cardona. "Maybe I've put myself in wrong, but I'm here to make things move. The trouble is, I can't even find a starting point. All I've learned is that an old duck named Warren Knightson gypped half the town; and since then, it's been anybody's turkey."

"They have blamed a great deal on Warren Knightson," observed Wenwold, in meditative tone. "That has caused them to overlook the most important factor in his case."

"What was that?" asked Cardona, eagerly.

"His innocence," smiled Wenwold. "I was Knightson's attorney. I can recognize when a man is helpless."

An idea hit Cardona.

"You mean that Knightson was framed?"

"I think so," declared Wenwold. "There was a peculiar angle to the Knightson case. He claimed that he had thousands of dollars, mostly in negotiable securities, with which he could have paid his creditors. He went to the bank at three o'clock one afternoon and took the funds from his safe-deposit box. He thought that no one knew about it."

"But some one did?"

"So Knightson testified. The funds were stolen from his home, during dinner, before the creditors arrived. Knightson claimed that he had been robbed, and went to his office to get the list that would have proven it. The list was also taken."

RACKET TOWN

"Couldn't he remember what the securities were?"

"Some of them, yes. But he did not have the numbers. It sounded like a feeble alibi. So feeble, that I believed it. Some one" – Wenwold emphasized the words with a wag of his forefinger – "still has those securities! If we could find them, with the original list, which was certified by a notary, we might trace the man who actually started crime in Parkland. The man who, in my opinion, is in back of all these rackets that no one will discuss."

WENWOLD'S statements impressed Cardona so much that he did not notice a cab that rolled slowly past the restaurant window. In that taxi was a man who was to play a big part in Cardona's immediate future. The passenger was George Larmon.

Mart Kilgay saw the cab from the window of a cigar store. The big-shot stepped into a telephone booth and made a prompt telephone call. After that, he came out and joined Larmon in the cab. Cardona did not see that meeting; but there was an observer who did.

The Shadow was in the darkness of a coupe, parked by a side alley near the Park Hotel. From his position, The Shadow had a perfect opportunity to follow the cab or its occupants. The alley was shrouded by the lower floors of the hotel; it furnished the sort of darkness that The Shadow liked.

As the cab rolled past The Shadow's darkened coupe, he saw Dingo at the taxi's wheel.

Foot on the starter, The Shadow waited until the cab had reached the next corner. There it turned slowly right. It struck The Shadow instantly that Dingo was circling the block. There was a service entrance at the rear of the Park Hotel. There was a chance that the cab intended to stop there.

Dropping from the coupe, The Shadow started through the alley on foot. Though he moved swiftly, he was only at the halfway mark when Dingo's cab rolled past the rear end of the alley, along the narrow street at the back of the hotel.

Twenty seconds later, The Shadow was peering from the corner. The cab was stopped at the curb. It started away, two seconds after The Shadow spied it. The passengers were out. They had gone in through the service entrance. The Shadow covered that space rapidly; but when he reached the door, he found it locked.

His ear close to the door, The Shadow heard the rumble of an ascending elevator. He knew that Mart and Larmon were taking the service elevator up to the sixth floor, where Cardona's room was located. Indications were that Larmon would be waiting there when Joe arrived.

The Park Hotel was shaped like a square-blocked U, with the points toward the back. Those wings were connected by a smaller structure that housed the dynamo rooms, with the kitchens above it.

The extension was about one story and a half in height. It blocked The Shadow's view of the floors above. Cardona's windows opened into the courtyard; hence The Shadow could not see them.

A trip around the block meant double delay. Not only would The Shadow require time to reach the hotel lobby; he would have to discard his cloak and hat, to appear in another character. He decided, instead, to scale the rear extension and find a window by which he could enter.

The climb would require three to four minutes, for the wall was smooth. There were grated windows, set at odd intervals, which forced The Shadow, to ascend at an angle. The time element did not seem essential; but, as luck had it, much was to happen during those next few minutes.

RACKET TOWN

THE service elevator had already reached the sixth floor. There, Mart stopped it; motioned for Larmon to wait. Mart snapped out the lights, whispering that they could sneak from the elevator.

But Mart did not open the elevator doors. Instead, he reached into a bag of waste paper that was just below the light switch. From it, he pulled a buried revolver.

Coolly, Mart fired three shots in the darkness. He moved the gun slightly from left to right, to make sure of a mortal hit. The roars from the gun were terrific, within that tight-closed space, but steel walls and doors confined them to the elevator.

Mart turned on the light. Larmon was sprawled on the elevator floor. Wiping the revolver with a handkerchief, Mart dropped it back into the wastepaper bag. He opened the door. A limber man awaited him. Above his peakish face, the fellow wore a derby hat. He was Grivlen, the house dick at the Park Hotel. He was the man that Mart had called by telephone, from the cigar store.

They lost no time with Larmon's body. They carried the frail weight into a room and shoved it through an open window, to a darkened outside balcony. Mart put a quick question to Grivlen:

"You're sure the rods match?"

"Positive," replied the house dick, "Cardona thought he had to register his gun in this burg. So he showed it down at headquarters. You used his rod in the elevator. The one I left in his trunk is a dead ringer for it."

"All set, then. Scram!"

Grivlen made a quick departure through the room. He was lucky to get away in time, for events were coming swifter than either he or Mart anticipated.

Out in the hallway, the house dick saw a light that indicated an elevator was coming up. He shot a quick look toward the service elevator; made sure he had closed its door. With that, Grivlen ducked around the corner.

Joe Cardona was in the ascending elevator. Beside him was a passenger who looked like another guest. Cardona never suspected that the fellow had been waiting for his return to the hotel. That other passenger was one of the pickpockets that Mart Kilgay had imported from another city.

Just as the elevator slackened for the sixth floor, the dip nudged against Cardona. From his pocket, the light-fingered man brought an envelope, which he slipped into Cardona's pocket instead. It was the letter that Larmon had written; and the envelope had been opened. Cleverly, the pickpocket added it to the letters that Cardona had previously found in his mail box.

The room that Cardona unlocked was the very one through which Mart and the house dick had carried Larmon's body. Inside, Joe turned on the lights. He noticed a breeze from the window; he swung toward it. From the corner of the window, Joe saw a gleaming revolver.

There was a strained voice from the balcony. It seemed forced; half whine, half growl. The sort of voice that couldn't be identified. Its words were a threat:

"Stick 'em up, copper!"

CARDONA complied. He couldn't see the man outside, for the blackened balcony ran past the edge of the window. But the gun gestured as the voice added:

"Back into the corner! There, by the trunk!"

Grimly, Cardona retreated. He was looking for a break. Maybe he could grab a chair and heave it; or duck into a near-by closet. Then, like a gift, came a break that was made to order.

"Open that trunk;" whined the voice. "Hand over any papers you got there. No reaching for your pocket. If you grab a gun, I shoot!"

His back to the window, Cardona had his chance. His gun was in the trunk. It shone from the tray the moment that Cardona lifted the lid. There wasn't any trick to it, either. Cardona could see the cartridges in the chambers.

With a swift grab, Cardona scooped up his revolver and wheeled about. He was blasting shots at the window as he came around.

The gun wasn't showing there. Instead, a figure gave a funny, sideward lunge. It shoved toward the path of Cardona's fire; then away again. There was a whiny shriek; as Cardona halted his trigger tugs, he glimpsed the figure again. It straightened upward at the window edge; gave a backward pitch over the balcony rail.

Instants seemed eons until the crash came from the courtyard. His gun smoking from his fist, Cardona stood rigid, staring at the empty window. Vaguely, the ace grasped the fact that his quick work with the trigger had sent a man to doom.

Cardona's own word would be the only proof that he had acted in self-defense. That story might be difficult to sell, when Joe talked to the Parkland police.

There would be a lot more for Joe Cardona to explain; with plenty that he couldn't answer. Mart Kilgay and his criminal followers had framed the ace investigator who had come to clean up Parkland.

CHAPTER VII. BATTLE BELOW

THE barks from Cardona's revolver were a spurring force to The Shadow. Those quick shots started when the cloaked climber was just below the top of the rear extension to the hotel. The last blast still echoed from the depths of Cardona's room when The Shadow came above the ledge.

The Shadow saw Larmon's figure hurtling down from the balcony; heard it crash in the confined space of the courtyard. Losing no time, The Shadow swung himself over the edge of the roof.

His next look was toward Cardona's window. He saw Joe, staring from the lighted background. The Shadow needed no further proof that Cardona was shaken by his own deed. In his right senses, the ace would never have put himself into open view.

A figure had swung from the end of Cardona's balcony to land on a similar railed space just beneath. Mart Kilgay had again outwitted Cardona. Heaving Larmon's body was simply Mart's first move. Dropping out of sight was the sequel.

It worked, so far as Cardona was concerned; but The Shadow spotted Mart before he could crawl through the fifth-floor window. At that instant, The Shadow had his chance to settle crime in Parkland. He jabbed a quick succession of bullets at the fifth-floor balcony.

RACKET TOWN

Mart went diving through the open window of the room beneath Cardona's. Luck, not foresight, insured Mart's escape. The outer rail of the balcony was of picket design, its posts only a few inches apart. From The Shadow's angle, they formed an actual barrier that bullets could not penetrate. Every shot glanced from that protecting wall.

Before The Shadow could reach a new position, Mart was gone.

So was Cardona. He heard the ping of the bullets just beneath him and thought that some marksman was trying to pepper him. Joe dived back into the room.

The Shadow wanted to view the face of the murdered man who had been tossed down into the courtyard. Quickly, The Shadow dropped from the inner wall.

A few seconds later, a gloved fist focused the beam of a tiny flashlight upon the features of George Larmon.

THE discovery did not surprise The Shadow. He had been considering this prospect from the moment that he spotted Mart Kilgay on the balcony. The Shadow had uncovered the main feature of Mart's frame—up.

Larmon's letter to Cardona, when produced, would stand as proof that the theater manager had come on a peaceful errand. There could be any one of several reasons why Larmon had gone out to the balcony. Maybe he had been followed to the hotel; perhaps he had heard some one knock at Cardona's door – any such arguments would be sensible.

A man wouldn't mail a letter incriminating himself before he attempted a murder.

The letter was something that could come afterward, along with other details. Soon, police would flood this courtyard; for many persons must have heard the crash of Larmon's fall. It wouldn't do for The Shadow to be here when they came.

There was just one question to be answered at this moment. That was whether or not Larmon had a gun on his person.

If the dead man proved to be armed, Cardona would have a story. But there was no gun on Larmon. The Shadow found that out in a search that took less than twenty seconds.

Coolly, The Shadow produced an extra gun of his own. He wiped the weapon on his cloak; set the handle in Larmon's dead fist. With a squeeze of his gloved hand, The Shadow pressed Larmon's fingers upon the weapon.

Lights were showing from ground–floor windows. The court was on the basement level, the windows around it were grated. The arrivals would need ladders to come down into the courtyard; but that did not stop them from using flashlights.

Taking the revolver by the muzzle, The Shadow drew it from Larmon's fist. Quickly, the cloaked figure blended with a darkened corner of the courtyard, while a flashlight beam went past.

The glow wasn't sufficient to show The Shadow; but it revealed Larmon's body. The Shadow heard shouts to hurry with the ladders. At the windows, he saw the uniforms of local police.

The man who held the flashlight was keeping it steady on Larmon's body. At the very fringe of the beam, The Shadow saw a chunk of blackness. It was close to the wall, a dozen feet from Larmon's body. The blackness

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was the square entrance to a small drain pipe.

Edging along the wall, The Shadow eased his hand downward to lower the revolver into the drain. His fingers encountered a grating as he laid the gun at the bottom. Deftly, The Shadow twisted the revolver so that its barrel dropped point-first through the grating. Only the dark butt of the gun kept it dangling in place.

The beam of the flashlight began to move. With a silent whirl, The Shadow reached another corner of the courtyard and started a rapid climb to the top of the rear extension. By the time the courtyard filled with police, he was flat on the roof of the rear extension, listening to what occurred below.

There were mumbles of recognition from officers who knew Larmon's face. Somebody spoke about a gun; there was a search of the body. Then, as flashlights lowered, The Shadow peered from the ledge to see two policemen carrying Larmon's racked form toward the ladder at the front of the courtyard.

It would not have spoiled The Shadow's plan if the police had found the planted revolver. It was better, though, that they missed it. No one else was going to search this courtyard after the officers had gone their way. Crooks would shun the spot. The gun would remain until the time when The Shadow wanted it produced.

In crawling fashion, The Shadow crossed the roof and took a drop into a darkened sector of the rear street. His form was revealed momentarily as he neared a light; no eyes were there to see it before the shape again blended with blackness.

Nor were there ears that heard the rasped whisper of The Shadow's laugh; a sinister tone that told of other work ahead. Even at this moment, further circumstances could be developing against Joe Cardona. The Shadow planned to uncover those important details.

IN his room on the sixth floor, Joe Cardona was staring glumly from a chair. His revolver lay on a table beside him. Grivlen was in the room with him. The derby-hatted house dick was solemnly finishing a telephone call.

"Don't worry, inspector," urged Grivlen. "You've told me what happened; and it makes sense. The boys down at headquarters will figure the same."

"Maybe they will," admitted Cardona. "But maybe they won't. Who was it I shot? Did you find out?"

"A fellow named George Larmon." Grivlen's face betrayed a well-faked look of trouble. "He manages the Crystal Theater. That's the only bad part about it. Larmon isn't the kind of guy that would be shoving a gat in through a window."

Grivlen picked up Cardona's revolver.

"I'll meet the elevator," he said. "I'll tell them you turned your gun over to me. That'll make things look better, for a start."

"Thanks, Grivlen."

His eyes fixed gloomily toward the window, Cardona forgot Grivlen the moment that the house dick left the room. But Grivlen hadn't forgotten Cardona. The action that he performed was one that concerned Joe very definitely.

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Grivlen's quick footsteps were lost in the deep carpet of the hotel corridor, as he hurried for the service elevator. Arriving there at a half run. Grivlen yanked open the door and dropped the planted gun into the wastepaper bag that stood there. In its stead, Grivlen brought out Cardona's own gun.

Again, the house dick held the weapon that he had stolen from Cardona's trunk; but, in the interim, Mart Kilgay had used Joe's .38 to murder George Larmon.

Thought of that made Grivlen grin. A swell frame-up; nobody but Mart could have thought of it.

The house dick shut the doors of the service elevator and jogged back along the corridor until he reached the line of passenger elevators.

Grivlen was standing there, solemn as before, when doors opened and a pair of policemen piled from the elevator. The foremost growled:

"Where's Cardona?"

"In his room," replied Grivlen. "Don't get excited. Here's his gun. He turned it over to me."

"He admits the shooting?"

"Sure! He says that Larmon shoved a gun in through the window. Cardona had to work quick, or Larmon would have plugged him. Say" – the house dick looked puzzled – "is there something cockeyed about the story he told me?"

"Plenty!"

The policeman took Joe's gun from Grivlen. He and his companion headed for Cardona's room, with Grivlen following. Joe heard them enter and arose to meet them. The cop who had the .38 shoved it under Cardona's eyes with the blunt question:

"Is this your revolver?"

Cardona studied the weapon. It was the first time that he had really looked it over. He nodded.

"It's the one you used on Larmon?" demanded the policeman. "And the gun you surrendered to Grivlen?"

"Certainly," replied Cardona. "That's all admitted."

"O.K. Let's go down to headquarters."

Cardona offered no objection. Even the brusqueness of the local police did not surprise him. The jolt came when they reached the elevators. Grivlen supplied it.

"I'll be down to headquarters later," said the house dick. "I'd like to see how big a gun that Larmon guy had on him."

"You'll have a long look, Grivlen," volunteered one of the cobs. "There wasn't any gun on Larmon. You ought to have looked into that before you swallowed the line that this guy Cardona handed you!"

The elevator doors clanged shut. As they closed, Grivlen saw the stare of bewilderment that came upon Cardona's swarthy face. As the elevator thrummed downward, the house dick tilted back his head and gave a raucous laugh.

Grivlen wouldn't have missed that pay-off for a hundred bucks. Joe Cardona was through in Parkland; framed with a manslaughter charge. This was one spot from which no one could pull Joe Cardona.

No one, in Grivlen's opinion, included The Shadow.

CHAPTER VIII. EVIDENCE REGAINED

GRIVLEN did not hurry to make contact with Mart. Instead, the house dick attended to a few essential details. He went back to the service elevator; pocketed the gun that he had placed there in the wastepaper bag. He took the service car down to the basement and came up through to the lobby.

A wide-faced man strolled in from the street. The house dick recognized him as Brace Lurbin. When Brace went to the telephone booths, Grivlen found a chance to join him.

"Where's Mart?" growled Brace. "I got a lot to tell him."

"Up in Room 406," returned the house dick, "playing pinochle."

"With the alibi artists, huh? That's where I should have been. I'm going up to see him."

"Tell him everything was O.K."

Brace looked puzzled at Grivlen's remark. The house dick grinned.

"Mart will know what I mean," he said. "Tell him I'll be up there in about ten minutes."

Room 406 was the "alibi factory" for Mart's outfit. Fake salesmen, drifting in and out of Parkland, used it as their pinochle headquarters. Their real purpose was to accept any one in the game who gave the right countersign. Such visitors could always depend upon an alibi from the pinochle crowd.

They didn't know that Mart Kilgay was the big-shot. Mart had matters so much his own way that alibis, though provided, had never been needed.

THE door of 406 opened when Brace gave the right rap. Brace strolled in; saw that the two tables were filled. One of the stooges offered to drop out of a game; but Brace shook his head and said he'd be back later.

That was enough for Mart. As soon as Brace went out into the hall, Mart came to join him. The big-shot took the trigger-man into a room across the hall.

"Where were you to-night?" demanded Mart. "I thought you'd got a line on The Shadow by this time."

"So did I," growled Brace. "Instead, he gave me the runaround. Somebody shoved a phony rumor along the grapevine. Said The Shadow had been spotted out at the Club Cagliari. So I chased out there."

"The Shadow must have piped that one himself," snarled Mart. "That's how he ducked you, Brace. I should have wised you to what was up. If I had, I could have kept The Shadow off me."

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"Say, what's the lowdown?" quizzed Brace. "First, Grivlen says to tell you everything's jake. Then you say The Shadow was in it. The two things don't fit."

Mart indulged in a wise smile. The news from Grivlen pleased him.

"I croaked Larmon," explained Mart, "and I used Cardona's heater. Grivlen switched rods on the guy. I had the stiff lying on the balcony outside the window. When I poked a rod in at Cardona, I let him get to his trunk. He cut loose with the phony gun. I shoved Larmon's body down into the courtyard."

A smile curled the corners of Brace's lips. It showed his approval of Mart's crafty stunt.

"I wasn't taking chances, either," added Mart. "The .38 that Grivlen planted had some of those amalgam bullets in it. They look real and give a kick to the rod; but they go blooey."

Brace nodded. He knew about the special bullets. He didn't have to be told the rest. He voiced it for himself:

"What did Grivlen do? Switch the rods again, afterward? So the slugs in Larmon will match Cardona's rod?"

"Yeah," replied Mart, "and the right rod has gone to headquarters. That's what Grivlen meant when he said it was O.K."

"But where did The Shadow come in?"

"He spotted me" – Mart's tone was a sour one – "and nearly clipped me. Don't ask me how he wised to it. The thing's got me beat. But you're not to blame. I should have had you cover."

The door started to open. It was Grivlen, grinning as he displayed the duplicate gun that he had taken from Cardona.

"I told you they matched," said the house dick. "You should have been there, Mart. It was a cinch! And when Cardona heard from the cops that Larmon didn't have a rod –"

"I know," rasped Mart. "He looked sick! Like he was meant to. Give that rod to Brace, so's he can sink it somewhere."

Brace thwacked his hips, already encumbered with a pair of bigger revolvers.

"You'd better take it, Mart," he suggested. "I got nowhere to put it."

"I'm playing pinochle," said the big-shot. "You'd better get rid of it yourself, Grivlen."

"A cinch," returned the house dick, pocketing the revolver. "Just forget all about it, Mart."

THE trio separated. Mart went back to his pinochle. Brace took an elevator to the ground floor. Grivlen lighted a cigarette, and strolled along the fourth-floor corridors as if on a tour of inspection. He came to a stairway and started down to the third floor.

Grivlen always used the stairways, going from floor to floor.

Almost at the third floor, the house dick stopped suspiciously. The stairs were dark ahead; and beyond, a blot extended into the third-floor corridor. That streak of blackness was motionless; but it formed a silhouette that

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oddly resembled a hawkish profile topped by a slouch hat.

Fumbling, the house dick pulled the revolver that he was supposed to put in some permanent resting place. That move, itself, was proof of Grivlen's nervousness. As he aimed at the shadowy shape on the floor, Grivlen forgot that the .38 contained only dummy bullets.

Step by step, Grivlen descended, his eyes bulging straight ahead. Almost at the bottom of the steps, he halted. He thought he heard a whispered tone beside him. The profile was still motionless on the floor; but that didn't help. The whisper was real. It came like a shuddering laugh, confined to Grivlen's ears.

Wildly, the house dick wheeled. The silhouette moved; but Grivlen didn't see it. Before he could point the useless gun, solid blackness engulfed him. Fingers pressed his throat with a paralyzing torture that tingled clear to Grivlen's finger tips. The gun dropped from a hand that couldn't feel it go.

Grivlen subsided upon the steps. Powerful arms hoisted him to the landing and left him there on the darkened floor. Grivlen was as cold as if he had taken a dose of knock-out drops.

The cloaked figure of The Shadow emerged from the darkness of the stairs, to pick up the revolver that had tumbled to the corridor. The Shadow saw instantly that it was the type of gun that Cardona carried; and that the weapon was of the same caliber.

Breaking open the revolver, The Shadow found three empty chambers. He removed another cartridge and studied it in the light. The bullet looked genuine; but when The Shadow removed a glove and scraped with his finger nail, he noted that the metal scratched.

The Shadow took out the remaining cartridges. He put the revolver beneath his cloak and faded into the blackness of the stairway that led down to the ground floor.

OUTSIDE the Park Hotel, Dingo Swark was seated at the wheel of his cab when Brace Lurbin strolled up. Leaning on the ledge of the open window, Brace inquired in low tone:

"Any one spotted The Shadow?"

"Not yet," returned Dingo, in the same cautious fashion. "The boys are all busy gabbing about Joe Cardona. Mart sure framed that guy! What's more, he's fixed the theater racket. With Larmon croaked, all the other managers will think they're next. They'll guess that Cardona didn't do it. But that won't help him."

Brace rasped an oath that included mention of Joe Cardona.

"Forget the lug," he told Dingo. "Cardona's due for a rap. Good! But that doesn't take out The Shadow. Buzz these mobbies that run the hacks and see if they've spotted him. I'll be in the barber shop."

Brace stalked away. Dingo grunted. Nobody would be meeting up with The Shadow to-night. What did Brace expect The Shadow to do – climb into a cab and give some thuggish driver the laugh?

While Dingo was snorting over that idea, a passenger entered his cab and ordered briskly:

"City hall, driver. Promptly!"

Dingo didn't look back at his fare; for he figured the passenger was some city official. He reached the city hall and stopped beside a dark row of cars parked at an angle. A five-dollar bill fluttered through the window

into Dingo's hand.

"Got anything smaller?" quizzed Dingo. "Maybe I can't change this –"

Dingo stopped short. He turned on the dome light. The rear seat was empty. Dingo's eyes blinked their surprise. It was his ears that received the answer to that riddle.

From darkness beside the cab; close, yet impossible to locate, came the rasped mockery of a sinister laugh. That taunt was not new to Dingo. It was the laugh of The Shadow.

Ten seconds later, Dingo's cab nearly toppled as it jounced high over a corner curb. Badly scared, Dingo was streaking off for safety as rapidly as the old hack could haul him.

CHAPTER IX. THE FRAME THAT FAILED

MATTERS were looking black for Joe Cardona, within Parkland's city hall. Joe was in the coroner's office, watched by a pair of detectives. On the coroner's desk lay the revolver – Cardona's own gun – that had produced the death of George Larmon.

The coroner was summing the case.

"Larmon's body is at the morgue," he said. "The death bullets will be brought here. We shall use a laboratory test to learn if they were fired from this revolver."

"Meanwhile" – the coroner referred to some report sheets – "there are some other angles to be considered. Detective Tyler has been to Larmon's office. There, he found a notation in Larmon's handwriting, stating that the dead man had an appointment for to–night.

"That appointment, Cardona, was with you. It was marked for eight o'clock."

Cardona showed real surprise.

"First I've heard about it!" he exclaimed. "There was a telephone call, asking me to be back at the hotel at eight –"

"We have checked on that," interposed the coroner. "We know that the caller left no name. But one of the hotel clerks remembers that a letter came for you to–day; the envelope had the name of the Crystal Theater printed on the corner."

Cardona shook his head. He pulled some letters from his pocket and slid them across the desk.

"Here's my mail," said Joe. "Look it over."

The coroner stopped at the third envelope in the batch. He showed it to Cardona with the question:

"What do you call this?"

Cardona's poker face lost its stolid expression. The letter was the very one that the coroner had mentioned. Moreover, the envelope was opened. Before Joe's staring eyes, the coroner removed the letter and spread it on the desk.

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"From Larmon," declared the official, "stating that he would be in your room at eight o'clock. Waiting there, to give you important information. Didn't you read this letter, Cardona, after you opened it?"

"I don't even remember the letter," protested Joe, weakly. "If I had – well, I'd have known who Larmon was, wouldn't I?"

The coroner shrugged. Before he could answer, the door opened and an attendant announced that Louis Wenwold had arrived, to act as Cardona's attorney. Placing the letter with the other exhibits, the coroner conducted Joe to an outer office, where the lawyer was waiting. The detectives went along.

THINGS happened promptly in the secluded inner office. Curtains parted at a window; from between them came The Shadow. He had scaled the outside wall to make silent entry. This was the opportunity that he had awaited.

The Shadow picked up Cardona's .38; he cracked it open and removed the cartridges. He slid the emptied gun beneath his cloak. In its place, he brought out the revolver that he had taken from Grivlen. Speedily, The Shadow inserted the cartridges that he had left on the desk. He placed the substitute gun at the precise spot where Cardona's .38 had been.

Voices sounded as the door opened inward. The Shadow was on his way to the curtains. Darkness swallowed him; the drapes rustled as they closed, but no one saw them. Nor did any one hear the slow shutting of the window sash that followed. The Shadow closed the window as smoothly as he had opened it.

Head tilted, Louis Wenwold eyed the evidence that the coroner showed him.

The lawyer looked toward Cardona; asked if he would like to talk with him privately. Joe shook his head.

"My story stands," gruffed the ace. "I never saw that letter. The first I'd ever seen or heard of Larmon was when a gun poked through my window. That's why I cut loose."

"You never saw a revolver in Larmon's hand, and you know it!" whipped out the coroner. "Larmon was unarmed. No one could have been in the courtyard when he fell there, because the police arrived immediately!"

Cardona came angrily to his feet.

"It's a frame-up!" he blurted. "Who's responsible, I don't know. Only I don't trust anybody – not even your local police force! This evidence won't hold!"

Wenwold quitted Cardona. The lawyer's headshake refuted the last portion of Joe's statement. Wenwold recognized the case as a frame-up; but he also saw that it was strong enough to stand.

Lighting a long, thin cigar, the lawyer began to pace the floor. The puffs of smoke that curled from his lips didn't help him toward a solution.

That came unexpectedly.

A detective entered the coroner's office, bringing a note that had arrived for Wenwold. The lawyer opened it; began to read terse statements written in vivid blue ink. Halfway through the note, Wenwold paused in astonishment.

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The first words that he had read were vanishing, one by one, as if wiped away by an invisible hand.

The lawyer rallied from his surprise. He scanned the remaining sentences. Holding the paper in both hands, he saw the rest of its contents disappear. Wenwold's lips tightened in a dry smile. Crumpling the sheet of paper, he tossed it into a wastebasket.

Turning to the coroner, the lawyer asked:

"Who is the most trustworthy man available?"

"Detective Tyler," was the prompt reply. "He found the notation in Larmon's office."

"May I use Tyler and another man, to seek new evidence?"

"Certainly. Tyler is in the outside office."

WENWOLD went to see Tyler. When he returned, the lawyer began a crisp statement of his own. He was banking on information that he had gained from the mysterious message.

"I understand," said Wenwold, "that some shots were fired from the rear extension of the hotel, immediately after Cardona shot at Larmon."

Cardona started to say something. Wenwold motioned for silence. The coroner was nodding. He stated that there had been shots from below. That was in the evidence.

"Then let us consider this theory." Wenwold spoke slowly, between puffs of his cigar. "Larmon was on the balcony with a gun, exactly as Cardona has stated. When Cardona fired, Larmon sprang away. He was safe, at the end of the balcony. Until those shots were fired from below."

"They were the bullets that picked off Larmon and hurtled his body down into the courtyard. Some person unknown is responsible for Larmon's death; not Inspector Cardona."

The theory didn't make sense to Cardona. He knew that the shots from below had been fired after Larmon's fall. He wanted to say so, but a warning glance from Wenwold stopped him. It was fair enough, trying to beat a frame-up by bringing in twisted facts.

"Must I state again and again that Larmon had no gun?" demanded the coroner. "Must I also add that we intend to compare the bullets in Larmon's body with the markings of this revolver barrel? The gun that Cardona admits is the one he fired?"

The coroner was pointing to the revolver. Looking at the gun, Cardona suddenly became uncertain. It flashed to his mind that Grivlen had carried that gun from the hotel room. Joe shot a quick glance toward Wenwold. He saw the lawyer's head shake. Joe said nothing.

The coroner did not notice the exchange of looks between prisoner and attorney. New arrivals were here – men from the morgue, bringing the bullets that had been dug from Larmon's body. The coroner picked up the revolver to send it out for a full test. Smoothly, Wenwold intervened.

"One moment, coroner," said the lawyer. "I wish to reiterate that Inspector Cardona has declared that revolver to be his own. Is that fully understood?"

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"Certainly."

"Then," advised Wenwold, "place a mark upon it, so that there can be no question later."

Obligingly, the coroner supplied the mark. The revolver started its trip to the laboratory. Wenwold leaned back in his chair and pulled his cigar contentedly. As he watched the lawyer, Cardona felt a sudden return of confidence.

A man couldn't take this whole mess as easily as Wenwold did without having something to work on. Joe eyed that crumpled sheet of paper in the wastebasket. An idea had begun to click. The paper was so wadded that Joe could see portions of both sides. There wasn't an ink mark on it.

From the past, Cardona remembered messages from The Shadow. Inked lines that vanished when read. Maybe The Shadow was in this. If he had entered, a real surprise was due.

It came. There was a rattle of the office door. In bounded Detective Tyler, another dick at his heels.

"You were right, Mr. Wenwold!" shouted Tyler, "Look at this gun!" – he was dangling an automatic. "We found it in the courtyard! You were right when you said it might have slid out of sight somewhere. It was wedged down a drain."

THE coroner was on his feet, suspicious as he glared at Wenwold. He was thinking that somebody could have tossed that automatic into the courtyard. Wenwold ignored the coroner's gaze. He simply asked Tyler:

"Did you finger–print it?"

"We did," replied the detective. "Here's the sheet. The finger prints tally with others that we just took from Larmon's body. We stopped at the morgue, like you suggested."

Wenwold drew his cigar from his lips and pointed it toward the coroner.

"Let him see the evidence," the lawyer told Tyler. "It's his job to certify it."

The coroner's suspicion ended. The new evidence looked indisputable. The coroner made new notations on the report sheet; then said:

"This ends any manslaughter charge. We can accept Cardona's story that he shot Larmon in self–defense."

"If he shot Larmon at all," reminded Wenwold. "We'll know that very soon. I hear them returning from the laboratory."

A detective came in, carrying the marked revolver. He handed it to the coroner.

"The slugs weren't from this gun," announced the dick. "They came from another .38, but they don't match the test bullet that we shot from this one. The photos are coming up as soon as they're developed."

Wenwold arose; motioned Cardona to come along with him. Dryly, the lawyer commented:

"You won't need us any longer, coroner."

"Only for this" – the coroner was finishing his report – "the verdict that I intend to give. 'George Larmon was slain by a party unknown, while attempting armed entry into Room 628 at the Park Hotel. The resistance offered by Joseph Cardona, occupant of that room, was lawful; but had no bearing upon the subsequent death of George Larmon.'"

Joe Cardona was in a daze as he walked with Louis Wenwold from the city hall. There were questions that Joe would have liked to ask the lawyer; but he refrained. Something in Wenwold's speculative look gave Cardona the hunch that the attorney, himself, was short of a full explanation.

There were two points that seemed certain to Cardona. He hadn't drilled Larmon, even though he first believed he had. Nor had The Shadow fired those death shots – not even to protect Joe. Larmon had been murdered by a party unknown. Though the law's facts were entirely twisted, they had produced the correct verdict.

As Wenwold and Cardona started away in the lawyer's car, a parting laugh toned from the row of darkened automobiles that projected from the curb.

Low-toned, that mirth did not reach Cardona's ears; but the strange mockery carried a double significance.

The Shadow's laugh told of the triumph that he had gained to-night, in defeating the frame-up of Joe Cardona. It betokened new thrusts for the future, when The Shadow would strike down men of crime.

CHAPTER X. FROM THE PAST

A CURIOUS deadlock existed in Parkland during the few days that followed. On the surface, it looked good for Mart Kilgay's game of greed. The death of George Larmon had kept the bank-night racket on a paying basis.

No one could figure just why Larmon had sent Cardona a letter, then come to threaten the ace investigator. That kept people guessing, particularly the ones who thought they had known Larmon best. They were the other theater managers.

They didn't know which side of the fence Larmon had been on; but he had played with fire, and had paid for it. They stopped the rumors concerning the bank-night policy. Numbers were switched as usual when the drawings were made. Six theaters – the Crystal included – paid their weekly tribute of five hundred dollars each, through the persons who were planted with the winning numbers.

That was small satisfaction to Mart Kilgay.

Beneath the smooth surface lay trouble. Joe Cardona was the visible reason. Reinstated with the local police, Cardona was beginning a system of organization that would grow stronger day by day. Mart didn't dare to strike.

If the big-shot tried to murder Cardona, by accident or otherwise, public indignation would sweep the city. If Mart attempted another frame-up, it wouldn't work. The local authorities were too apologetic toward Cardona to believe anything that did not favor him.

Behind Cardona stood an invisible protector, The Shadow.

That mysterious avenger was the real threat; and his power seemed more substantial than ever before. Since the time when Dingo had made a terrified, belated report that The Shadow had ridden in his cab, no one had

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spotted the slightest trace of the cloaked fighter.

The most useless member of Mart's outfit was Brace Lurbin. All the target practice that the trigger-man could find was at the local shooting gallery, with a .22 rifle.

LATE one afternoon, Mart sat at his desk, scanning an evening newspaper. It told of a raid conducted by the local police, that had resulted in the capture of a group of dope peddlers. Joe Cardona had engineered that victory.

It didn't put Mart in a jam, because the dope sellers didn't know he was the big-shot. But it clipped off a source of income.

Angrily, Mart crinkled the newspaper and started from his office. He stopped in to see Doc Arland; found the fake medico testing a new electric appliance. He showed the newspaper to Doc.

"We've got to get rid of Cardona," snarled Mart. "He's queered one graft; by to-morrow, he'll be starting on another. We can't kill him; we can't frame him. What else –"

Mart stopped himself.

"Say, Doc" – Mart stroked his chin as he stared out through the window – "did you ever stop to figure what Cardona is here for?"

"To clean up the town."

"Right!" Mart looked down toward the street. "And when Cardona's finished with it, he'll go back to New York. So will The Shadow."

Turning around, Mart faced Arland with outthrust jaw.

"That's what we're going to let Cardona do," rasped the big-shot. "We'll have him clean up and get out!"

Arland shook his head.

"It won't work," he objected. "You can throw over some of the rackets and lay low with the others. But until Cardona's pinned something on somebody, he won't be through here."

"I'll find somebody to take the rap," promised Mart. "I fixed old man Knightson, when I first came to town. This is a bigger proposition; but I can swing it."

MART was still pondering on that subject when he began a lone stroll through the business blocks of Parkland. He was thinking of prominent persons in the city, rejecting them one by one. There wasn't any one who suited Mart's need. Half aloud, the big-shot growled:

"If I could only hear of the right guy –"

Mart was going to hear of one, just around the next corner. But he was due for a big surprise first. As he turned that corner, a woman's voice gave startled recognition:

"Mart!"

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The big-shot stared into a lovely, rounded face. He saw blue eyes that once had danced with their sparkle, back in the long-distant past. Eyes that looked tired; but regained their gladness when they met his. Sweet lips showed a quivering smile. Mart could feel the tremble of the small hand that settled on his arm.

There wasn't any gruffness to Mart's voice when he spoke. His tone had a softness that would have amazed his fellow racketeers, although his words explained it:

"Hello, sis!"

"I didn't know you were back in Parkland, Mart," said the girl, softly. "Why didn't you let me know?"

"I looked you up in the phone book, Ruth," replied Mart. "You wouldn't think I'd forget my sister, would you?"

"You forgot me for a good many years."

"I know. But that was because I was in bad here. I cleared out when they had me slated for a stretch in the reform school."

"It was your own fault, Mart. You could have stayed here if you had behaved yourself. We all wanted you to stay."

Mart didn't care to argue that point with Ruth. Whether or not he believed that his sister was right, he was at least feeling a new emotion. It was remorse, not for the crimes that he had done but because he had neglected Ruth's welfare. She looked as if she needed help, too, with her tired look and the threadbare overcoat she wore.

"Listen, sis," confided Mart. "There's something you've got to promise me. I'm using a new moniker – a different name, than my own. I call myself Mart Kilgay. You're not to let any one know who I am. Promise?"

Ruth nodded. She had always trusted Mart.

"You see," continued Mart, "I'm in the insurance business. Thought this would be a good town for it. I figured I'd do better under my new name; it's one I've been using ever since I left here. Mart Kilgay. That's me."

"I shall remember," said Ruth, with a smile. "My name is changed, too."

"You're married?"

Ruth nodded. Mart scowled as he surveyed his sister's attire. He growled:

"Looks like the guy hasn't done much for you."

"He couldn't," protested Ruth. "He lost his money, Mart. Until then, everything was lovely. And since then" – the girl's lips were brave – "he's been as splendid as ever. Tom's the best husband any wife has ever had."

"Glad to hear that, Ruth," acknowledged Mart. "You say it like you meant it."

He looked at the frayed hand bag his sister carried. It was pitifully flat. Before Ruth realized it, Mart had the bag open and had thrust a wad of bills he tugged from his pocket into the empty bag.

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There was five hundred dollars in that roll. Tears blurred the luster of Ruth's eyes.

"I can't take all that money from you, Mart –"

"Forget it, kid! It makes up for a lot I forgot to do. I'll have more for you when you need it. Now, tell me what's the trouble."

Ruth gave her story. Tom had left Parkland soon after he and Ruth were married. He had gone into business for himself, in another city. All had been well until Tom's father lost money. Tom had pawned his own business to help out. His father had failed; the money had never been repaid.

"The old man must have been a fine guy," snorted Mart. "Who was he, somebody here in town?"

Ruth nodded; then replied: "Tom's father is Warren Knightson, the real-estate man."

THE rage that surged through Mart Kilgay wiped out every jot of better emotion. He had forgotten that Warren Knightson had a son; just as Ruth no longer remembered that it was the old man who had taken Mart to task, so many years ago.

Ruth saw the anger on Mart's face; but misunderstood it.

"I know what they think of Warren Knightson," she protested. "But Tom doesn't believe it. Nor do I. Anyway, Tom wasn't concerned in his father's failure. Tom is back here trying to straighten out matters. We've been here for weeks; but very few people know it. They are all so prejudiced against Tom's father, that we couldn't –"

"I know," interrupted Mart. His fists were unclenched; he was talking in the crisp tone that had long deceived people. "That's why I saw red, Ruth. There's no reason why Tom Knightson should suffer because they're sore at his old man. I'll fix that."

"You will? Can you, Mart?"

"Sure! Don't say anything to Tom about it. All that somebody's got to do is break the ice. Tom can get his real estate moving; and people will forget the old man. Leave it to me, Ruth."

Gently, Mart patted his sister's shoulder. He staged that soothing act so smoothly that the gladdened girl never suspected the real thoughts in her brother's mind. Mart was deadliest when he put on a pleasant pose.

"I'll see you later, kid," he told Ruth. "Remember to keep mum on everything I've told you. One word would spoil all of it."

THERE was a sequel, though, to Mart's gift, that would have horrified his trusting sister. It took place in Mart's office, where the big-shot sat in conference with Doc Arland and Ducky Murrick. As Mart related his meeting with Ruth, the vicious tone of his voice told that his own selfishness and hatred had wiped out all pity for her plight.

"Joe Cardona's building-up to nab a big-shot," jerked Mart. "All right, we'll build one for him! The one guy in town that people will figure could be behind our rackets, when they find out he's here. That's Tom Knightson!"

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"They've got his old man labeled as a crook, haven't they? All right, I'll pass it down the line. I'll take it out on the whole Knightson family. That includes my sister, since she's Tom Knightson's wife."

Neither of the listeners felt any sympathy for Ruth. They liked Mart's attitude. The crime leader noted it, and added a few remarks that were uncomplimentary to any one's sister. He wound up with the statement:

"She's found it tough, marrying that Knightson guy. But she'll think she had it easy, after I begin to crack down! And she'll be helping it, without getting wise. That's the neatest part of it."

The confidence in Mart's evil tone was proof that his plans were made. Rackets were due to flourish anew in Parkland, when Mart Kilgay unloaded his guilt upon an innocent man.

"They'll all be satisfied they've got the right guy, when I've fixed Tom Knightson," summed Mart. "And that includes Joe Cardona and The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XI. CRIME'S PROLOGUE

ANOTHER week had passed in Parkland, with the law increasing its strength. With the help of Cardona, dope peddlers had been cleaned out of town. Pressure was being put on pickpockets, and they were lying low.

It was evident what Joe was after. Once the town was cleared of lesser crooks, he could make a drive against the bigger ones.

By the use of a city ordinance, Cardona cut down the number of taxi drivers. The last ones taken on were the first to go. Thus the ranks of Mart's roving mobbies had thinned, and among the latest to be dropped was Dingo Swark.

Worry was losing its hold upon the citizens of Parkland, thanks to Cardona's efficiency. There was one man, however, who was finding business better for a reason he could not quite explain. That man was Tom Knightson.

Ruth's husband was a likable young fellow, although he didn't come up to all the claims that his wife made for him. Tom was clean-cut and a hard worker; but bad breaks jarred him much more than Ruth supposed. Until last week, he had been ready to leave Parkland without going through with his original intention of rebuilding his father's broken business.

Then Ruth had produced a reserve supply of money. She had paid the office rent to the end of the month; and the next day, some customers arrived. They were old residents of Parkland, who seemed ready to give Tom a break.

They wanted Tom Knightson to rent properties that they owned; but they didn't say that they had been inspired to that wish by threats from unknown channels.

Tom listed the properties; and within two days, he had them rented to strangers who happened into town. News of his quick work must have spread; for more and more business was pouring into the tiny office.

To-morrow, Tom Knightson was moving into larger quarters, to take care of his increasing business. Also, he and Ruth were going to move from the squalid rooms where they lodged, to a better place.

His day's work ended. Tom walked along the main street of Parkland, nodding affably to people who greeted him. But Tom would have lost all future hopes, had he been able to listen in on a conference which was under

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way in Mart Kilgay's office in the Knightson Building.

MART had summoned his lieutenants. Doc Arland and Ducky Murrick were seated opposite him, sharing his confident look. Dingo Swark, slouching in a corner, had a disgruntled air, for things didn't look so bright to him. Brace Lurbin, last to arrive, was standing just inside the door. His wide face wore an expression of stoical indifference.

"It's all set," announced Mart, in short-clipped tone. "We've built up Tom Knightson to where we want him. Everybody in this burg knows that the guy's back in town and doing business in a big way."

"They know that about Joe Cardona, too," put in Dingo, sourly. "Give him another week, and there won't be any gorillas left running the hacks. You know what's coming next, don't you?"

"Sure, I do." Mart purred his answer. "Mugs without employment are going to be pinched for vagrancy. That means that you and those fired hackies will have to lam."

"Then where'll you be?" demanded Dingo. "With only half an outfit left, and me not here to run it?"

"There's been a lot of trailers rolling into town," returned Mart, smoothly. "Take a walk down to the trailer camp, Dingo, and you'll find your old pals back again. They're lying low until you need them. That's going to be soon."

While Dingo gaped his admiration of Mart's method, the leader rammed his fist hard upon the desk.

"We're going to crack things wide!" rasped Mart. "So far, we've laid off the rough stuff. But, to-night, it begins. When crime hits this burg, Cardona will get busy, thinking we're on our last legs. He'll go after a head man and he'll find one. The guy in town that's coining the biggest dough – Tom Knightson!"

Settling back in his chair, Mart looked straight at Dingo.

"The first job is yours," said Mart. "I rigged it so it would come into your line. You're going to crack McCleer's jewelry store. I've fixed the whole lay for you."

From a desk drawer, Mart produced a batch of papers that bore the name of the Old Line Insurance Company.

"I insured McCleer's joint," he stated. "That gave me a chance to look over the safe and the alarm system. Here's the combination to the safe, Dingo. Don't worry about the alarm. A fake gas man went in there this afternoon to read the meter, and he fixed the alarm system."

"There's a watchman inside; all you've got to do is slug him so he won't wake up. The same with old McCleer, when you find him in his office. I happen to know that he's going to be there to-night."

Dingo's face was eager; but it showed one trace of doubt, as he questioned:

"You want me to croak both of them?"

"Why not?" snapped Mart. "Tom Knightson's going to take the rap, later. He might as well go up on a murder charge. One more thing, Dingo. There was a box left in McCleer's office today. It's got a pineapple in it. After you've grabbed the swag, stick the bomb in the safe and start the fuse. Don't forget to lock the safe door."

"So the pineapple will blow it," nodded Dingo. "Afterward, the bulls will think the box was souped."

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"That's the idea."

MART arose. His manner told that he wasn't finished with his instructions to Dingo. The big-shot went to the closet and opened the door. From the shelf above The Shadow's hanging garments, Mart brought down a bottle of liquor and some glasses. He poured a drink for himself; put the bottle and glasses on the desk.

While others were helping themselves, Mart gestured his thumb toward the black garb in the closet.

"Brace will be looking for The Shadow," reminded Mart, eyeing Dingo. "So you won't have to worry about him."

Dingo gulped his drink, as if to drown out the thought of The Shadow.

"You're on your own," added Mart. "So pick your own system. The less guys that know about this job at McCleer's, the better. But if you want a crew to cover you –"

"I won't need anybody," put in Dingo. "I'll take it alone. If only –"

"Only what?"

"I'm thinking of that open space in back of the jewelry store." Dingo was staring as he spoke. "There's a light in back there. It's the only place anybody could spot me."

"Nobody's going to spot you, if you stick close to the wall." Mart paused; then gave a hard smile as an afterthought. "We didn't spot The Shadow, the night he laid low in back of the Crystal Theater."

There was a sudden change in Dingo's stare. His eyes did not change direction; their squinty look merely steadied, as Dingo's leathery lips produced a smile.

"I'll handle it alone, Mart," informed Dingo, wisely. "All alone. Remember that nobody covers. When am I due there?"

"Nine o'clock," returned Mart. "On the dot."

Holding his grin, Dingo watched Mart pick up the bottle and glasses. The big-shot replaced them in the closet and closed the door.

Dingo arose; he retained his wise look as he glanced around the group. Mart hadn't caught on to Dingo's sudden inspiration. Nor had the others, as Dingo judged their faces.

"Nine o'clock," affirmed Dingo. "And remember – nobody covers!"

The meeting ended. It was dusk when the plotters reached the street, one by one. Dingo sneaked away along an alley. He didn't want to be seen around Parkland, since he was no longer a cab driver.

There were eyes, though, that followed Dingo's course. The darkness of rear streets shrouded a moving shape that the crook neither saw nor heard. From somewhere, The Shadow had come to take up Dingo's trail.

Ever alert, the cloaked investigator had picked out the very crook who had been chosen for a murderous deed of crime.

CHAPTER XII. THE CLOAKED VICTIM

IT was half past eight when Brace Lurbin strolled past the barber shop on the ground floor of the Knightson Building. As the trigger-man stared through the window, the innermost barber gave a wigwag with his razor.

Brace entered the building lobby and waited by the connecting door. The barber found an excuse to come there. In a quick whisper, he told Brace:

"Mart wants to see you!"

That meant Mart must be in the office. Brace went up to the third floor. He found Mart at his desk, bottle and glass beside him. Mart had finished several drinks, for the bottle was almost empty. But Brace remembered that booze seldom had much effect on him.

"Sit down, Brace," ordered the leader. "Where've you been?"

"Around town, same as usual," grumbled the trigger-man, "Listen, Mart, this Shadow stuff is hooley. I'm telling you, the guy's cleared town!"

"What makes you think that?"

"I'm not the first bird that's gone gunning for The Shadow. From what I've heard, he doesn't dodge the guys that try it. If he's still here, he ought to have showed up by this time."

Maybe Brace was right; but Mart had an answer.

"The Shadow will be back here soon enough," he told Brace. "When McCleer's safe blows and the cops find him croaked, along with the watchman, The Shadow's going to figure that Cardona needs a helping hand."

"That suits me," returned Brace, starting for the door. "I'll see you later, Mart. I'm going to head out for the Club Cagliari before nine o'clock."

"What're you going out there for?"

"Just in case The Shadow is around and looking for me. That ought to keep him away from Dingo."

"Wait!"

Mart came up from behind his desk. He had not forgotten the reason why he had left word for Brace to drop in. It concerned The Shadow.

"Suppose The Shadow's still here," suggested Mart, "lying low, but keeping tabs on everything. Don't you think there's a chance that he'd be watching Dingo?"

"Not much," returned Brace. "I still say Dingo's yellow."

"Dingo's good with the lead pipe," he said. "What's more, it's time he lammed out of town. Dingo's the right guy; but he's got the wrong idea. We gotta cover him."

"Bad stuff," was Brace's opinion. "You can't shove a crew into that jewelry store. Some cops might get wise."

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"We don't need a crew. Come along."

MART took a swig from the bottle and parked it on the closet shelf. He made a contemptuous gesture toward the hat and cloak that hung below. He and Brace left the office. Mart ordered a stop when they reached Doc Arland's door.

Arland's office was dark, when Mart opened it with a duplicate key. He found his way through a maze of electrical appliances that looked like fat-bellied dwarfs in the dimness. Stumbling over a box, Mart stooped and brought out a heavy suitcase. He carried it to the door, where he told Brace:

"This just came in to-day."

"What's in it?" inquired Brace. "It looks like it weighed half a ton."

"A special rifle, with a silencer," informed Mart. "I can put it together in three minutes. Maybe we'll need it."

Down on the street, both men looked out to see that they were unspied. Mart led the way to a parking lot. They boarded Mart's coupe, with the suitcase on the floor between them. Mart drove a roundabout course that brought them to another parking lot, wedged between two old buildings.

The lot was too inconvenient to attract many evening customers, for parking restrictions were lifted from the main streets after six o'clock. No one was on duty, to collect dimes; and there were only four cars on the lot.

Mart parked his coupe near a brick wall. Dragging the suitcase from the car, he pointed Brace through a tiny gate into a narrow passage.

There, Mart stopped at the side door of an empty house, which was soon to be demolished. He wrenched away the slim fastenings. The two entered and went up a stairway. Mart found the room he wanted; he told Brace to raise the window. The trigger-man managed it without much noise.

Once the grimy pane no longer obstructed the view, Brace saw where they were. The window opened into the rear space behind the jewelry store.

The scene proved that Dingo's worry had been justified. The light on the rear wall of McCleer's store illuminated most of the square area. Mart hadn't taken chances with that light. The watchman would certainly report it if he found it out.

"It's lucky we decided to cover," Mart grunted. "Some harness bull might just happen to come through here at the wrong time. If Dingo does a neat sneak, though, he won't have much trouble. He can open that door in half a minute."

Mart's watch showed ten minutes of nine. It wouldn't be long before he and Brace would witness Dingo's arrival. Whatever Dingo's technique as a prowler, he would certainly be visible when he neared the door. In anticipation of that, Mart decided to assemble the special rifle.

It took him longer than the three minutes that he had specified. The drinks that he had taken, plus the darkness of the lookout post, caused Mart to fumble. A big clock was chiming nine from the distance when Mart had finished.

"That clock's ahead of time," growled Mart, looking at the luminous dial of his watch. "This turnip says three minutes of nine –"

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"Psst!"

Brace's warning made Mart stare from the window. There was a stir at the edge of the courtyard; motion along a grimy wall. Some one had arrived from the street.

"IT's Dingo," muttered Mart. "Doing like I told him – sticking to the wall. Say – he's handling it neat; only he's a couple of minutes ahead of time –"

"Like he ought to be," put in Brace, "so's to be sure of making it by nine o'clock."

"Got a rod ready? Just in case somebody spots him?"

"Sure. You watch Dingo, Mart. I'll cover the edges."

There was a tense lapse of ten seconds. Suddenly, Mart gripped Brace's elbow. From his throat, the big-shot rattled the fierce news:

"Take a gander, Brace. Tell me if that's Dingo."

Brace looked. The approaching figure was almost at the light. Crouched, its shape was difficult to observe. There was something weird in the prowler's approach to the door. An instant later, the form was outlined against the wall, as it made a long move for the doorway.

Mart and Brace saw the shrouding folds of a black cloak; above it, the familiar shape of a slouch hat. Mart's whisper was venomous:

"The Shadow! Plug him, Brace!"

"Wait, Mart," returned the trigger-man, his voice a trifle shaky. "We got half a minute yet –"

"While he gets inside? To lay for Dingo?"

As Mart jabbed those questions, he looked toward Brace. He saw his companion straining his gaze. Brace's gun hand was lowered. For a moment, Mart was infuriated. Then, an answer struck him.

"Shove that gat away," ordered Mart. "I get you, Brace. You're figuring a big smoke-wagon makes a lot of noise. Take this."

With that, Mart pushed the special rifle toward Brace. The latter gave a nervous headshake. Brace's left hand pushed Mart back. He didn't want the rifle.

"Hold it, Mart –"

Mart saw the motion of The Shadow's figure at the door of the jewelry store. The cloaked shape was edging inward. Brace's delay had given him time to get the door unlocked. That was enough for Mart.

"You're yellow, Brace," snarled the big-shot. "As yellow as Dingo ever was!"

A hiss finished Mart's sentence. It didn't come from his lips. While he spoke, Mart was hoisting the rifle to his own shoulder. His press of the trigger produced the sizzle beside Brace's ear. Mart's aim was straight for the center of the blackened doorway; and his single shot scored a hit.

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Cloaked shoulders heaved outward; the light showed The Shadow performing a twisted stagger. Mart's voice delivered a pleased oath when he saw the human target sprawl.

"That clipped him, Brace! How'd you like the way that silencer worked?" Then, angrily: "Say, yellow guy, what've you got to say for yourself? Looks like one peek at The Shadow took the nerve out of you."

"I'm saying nothing," returned Brace. His words were choppy. "Not just yet."

"Keep The Shadow covered," ordered Mart. "Maybe he's only faking. He's smart enough to know that these silent shooters only hold one slug."

Mart broke the rifle apart and packed it in the darkness. He was watching Brace; the trigger-man was stolidly covering the black-clad victim who lay below the window. The packing done, Mart looked out to make sure that The Shadow had not moved.

"Come along," growled the big-shot. "We've got time to haul away The Shadow before Dingo gets here."

They left the suitcase in the coupe and cut through a short route to the back of the jewelry store. While Brace watched, Mart pulled the slouch hat from the head that wore it. He tugged at The Shadow's cloak; felt the weight of the body beneath.

"Croaked," pronounced Mart. "The slug took him in the neck. The cloak ripped under Mart's pull. The inert body did a slow, sideward turn. An ugly face, with glazed eyes and fishlike mouth, came beneath Mart's scrutiny. For the first time, the big-shot thought he was feeling the effects of the liquor that he had consumed. Mart's voice was subdued with astonishment as he uttered:

"Dingo Swark!"

SHAKILY, Mart still clutched the hat and cloak; but he seemed to feel the courtyard spin as he stared at Brace. The trigger-man didn't share Mart's astonishment.

"You wouldn't listen, would you?" Brace's hard voice knifed Mart's eardrums. "You wouldn't give me time to tell you I thought it was Dingo."

"What made you guess it, Brace?" gulped Mart. "Figuring that The Shadow wasn't in town?"

"That was part of it," replied Brace. "But the rest was something I remembered, all of a sudden. You'd have remembered it, too, if you hadn't been soaking up the booze, Mart. Dingo was taking a long squint at the cloak and hat you had in your closet, this afternoon."

"That's right!" remembered Mart. "He was looking right past me. That's what gave him the idea. If The Shadow could do a sneak in a black outfit, so could Dingo. He had one, too, down at his place. These –"

Mart gestured with the garments that he held. He turned savagely toward the door of the jewelry store.

"We'll go in there ourselves, Brace!"

"Shh! Hold it, Mart."

Brace's warning was timely. They had made too much noise. The watchman must have heard them and put in a call for police. A whistle shrilled from the front street. Mart legged for the parking lot, carrying the cloak

and hat. Brace wasn't far behind him.

They could hear the pounding foot-beats of police, coming to the spot where Dingo's body lay. But there was something else that caught Mart's ears while he was on the run. It was a strange, sibilant laugh that came from some untraceable spot.

"Hear it, Mart?" panted Brace, as he overtook the big shot. "The Shadow! He was around here, after all! He must have spotted Dingo and let him go through!"

Mart was shoving the starter of the coupe when Brace added:

"I'm going back after the guy. I've been waiting for this chance –"

"Not with those coppers," snapped Mart. "You'll get your chance when our own guys are around to cover. The stunt's queered to-night; but that don't matter. Forget what I said about you being yellow. You won't have long to wait, Brace. To-morrow –"

Mart didn't add the details of what was due to-morrow. He was driving from the parking lot, putting on speed to avoid police cars that wailed from that vicinity. But the snarled oaths that fumed from the big-shot's lips were proof to Brace that Mart intended plenty.

To-night, The Shadow had outguessed Dingo Swark, thereby staving off a thrust of crime. He had let Mart himself eliminate the thug assigned to the job.

To-morrow, The Shadow would have more to deal with. More, perhaps, than he could handle.

CHAPTER XIII. DIVIDED CRIMES

ALTHOUGH The Shadow had put a twist into Mart Kilgay's plans, the big-shot benefited from his own mistake. Mart hadn't sent Dingo just to get the few thousand dollars' worth of swag in McCleer's safe. What Mart wanted was to stir up excitement in Parkland; and Dingo's death did it.

Who shot Dingo was a mystery; but Dingo's purpose wasn't. The lead pipe that was on his body proved that he intended to slug the watchman and the jeweler. The fixed burglar alarm told that the way had been paved for Dingo's entry.

Crime had reared itself in Parkland, even though it had not struck. The town was startled, as Mart wanted it to be. It fitted his schemes for the next day; plans that Mart figured would be too much for The Shadow.

There were only two men to whom Mart confided, for he needed them both. They were Ducky Murrick and Doc Arland, always accessible, for their offices were in the building. Even Brace Lurbin wasn't in on what was brewing; for it would have been bad policy for Brace to visit Mart's office, the way things stood.

It was half past six when Mart left his insurance office. He left a message at the barber shop and went to the Park Hotel, where he made a few telephone calls from a pay booth. At half past seven, Ducky closed his dress shop and went out.

The only member of the racket ring who remained in the Knightson Building was Doc Arland. He had regular office hours in the evening. To-night, however, his appointment book was empty.

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There was a side window that opened from a little room where Arland kept old equipment. While he waited, Arland looked from that window and grinned.

The telephone bell rang. Arland answered it; Mart was on the wire. Arland informed him that Ducky had gone out to the Club Cagliari, fifteen minutes' drive from the center of town. Aloud, Arland repeated instructions that came from Mart:

"Half past eight? Sure, I'll tell Ducky. He's due to call... I get it. Either one of us can hold things off if there's a hitch... Leave it to us, Mart..."

Arland thought he heard something when he hung up the receiver. He stole to the door of the office, peered toward the stairs. He watched a streak of blackness that lay along the dimly lighted hall. It worried him for a while; then Arland went back into the office. That was when the blackness disappeared.

Doc Arland's end of the telephone conversation had been heard by The Shadow.

DOWNSTAIRS, Brace Lurbin strolled into the barber shop, where the clock showed quarter of eight. He ran his fingers up the back of his neck, to show that he didn't need a hair trim.

"Just stopped in to say hello," he told the end barber. "What's new, Cholly?"

"Nothing much," replied the barber. "Except that a couple of good pinochle players just came to town."

It was a message from Mart. The big-shot was cooking an alibi, and Brace was privileged to do the same. Brace started out, but Cholly stopped him.

"Got a good story, Brace," said the barber. "From one of the customers." Then, close to Brace's ear: "I saw it – that shadow you spotted – same place it was before. Only five minutes ago!"

Brace clapped Cholly on the back.

"A good one, Cholly," he said. "See you later."

Brace headed promptly for Doc Arland's office. He entered with a drawn revolver. Arland gave a jump; then showed relief when he recognized the trigger-man.

"One of the barbers spotted The Shadow," informed Brace. "Was he up here?"

"I don't know," admitted Arland, chewing his pasty lips. "I hope he wasn't, because he could have heard a lot. Mart called up and so did Ducky. We've got two jobs set for half past eight, so The Shadow can't clamp down on both. Ducky's giving the flash at the Club Cagliari; I'm doing the same for the Parkland Trust Company, next door."

Brace motioned for silence. He opened the door and peered out into the hall. Anxious-eyed, Arland craned over Brace's shoulder. He pointed to a corner by the stairs.

"There was a shadow, right there," said Arland, huskily. "That was a while ago. Maybe you ought to stick around, Brace."

Brace stole toward the stairs. He made a careful inspection and came back. He went to the front window; gave a look across the street. He motioned to Arland.

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"I'll be over there, Doc," he said, "in the alley past the Star Theater. My car's on the next street. I'll be covering the door. If you think The Shadow's around again, wigwag me, once, like this. Only I don't think The Shadow will chance it coming in here, with me on watch."

Brace spoke that with hard-voiced confidence that eased Doc Arland. Thoughts of The Shadow, however, aroused another speculation. Arland expressed it:

"He may have headed for the Club Cagliari."

"You'll hear from Ducky, if he has," said Brace. "If that's the dope, give me a double wigwag and I'll hop out there."

Arland watched until he saw Brace sidle into the alley opposite. Mopping his forehead, the phony medico resolved to be alert. He hoped that Ducky wasn't running into trouble out at the Club Cagliari.

IT happened that Ducky was due for trouble that he didn't know about. Ducky was seated at a table near the side door to a veranda. While he watched the floor show, he was listening for sounds from outside.

Ducky had presumably come here to look over some costumes that the management thought could be improved. His actual purpose was to flash the signal for lurking crooks to enter. That was to come at half past eight, unless the crew was delayed. Mart had ordered a batch of thugs in from the trailer camp.

Only five minutes to go. Ducky smirked as he glanced at his watch. This was going to be a swell job; the crooks were coming in with tear gas, to bombard the place. In the commotion, they intended to grab all that they could get; then decamp.

The swag, however, was unimportant. This job was intended to bring havoc that would make all Parkland conscious of crime in its midst.

There was darkness along the wall behind Ducky. It led to the obscure telephone booths. Ducky, watching the floor show, failed to see the motion that stirred behind him.

Dim light by the telephones barely showed the cloaked form of The Shadow, as his gloved hand lifted a receiver. This was The Shadow himself, no imitation of the sort that Mart and Brace had seen the night before.

The number that The Shadow dialed was Doc Arland's. He heard Arland's voice come husky across the wire; the tone proved that the crook's nerves were on the edge where The Shadow wanted them. His lips close to the mouthpiece, The Shadow spoke in a precise tone that was easy to imitate.

He was using the type of talk that was customary with Ducky Murrick. Though that crook was only thirty feet away, he could not hear the voice above the strains of the orchestra.

"Hello, Doc," spoke The Shadow. "This is Ducky. Part of the outfit is here; but the rest are fixing a flat tire. We're going to hold it until quarter of nine."

Arland's hoarse voice gave agreement.

"If you see Brace," The Shadow added, "you'd better send him out here. You remember the time The Shadow kept Wrecker from finishing Joe Cardona? I saw the car The Shadow drove that night, and the same bus just showed up here. If Brace comes right away, he'll have his chance to get The Shadow."

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Arland's reply was one of eager approval. The Shadow hung up the receiver; a few seconds later, he clipped the telephone wire. Not only in that booth but in two others adjoining it.

There were stairs to a balcony that fringed the walls of the club's main floor. The Shadow ascended them and came to an office that bore the manager's name. The Shadow expected it to be empty; and it proved so.

He cut the wires of the manager's telephone; and with that move, he isolated the Club Cagliari.

On a side highway, four miles outside the city limits, the fancy road house was distant from any other building. The quickest way by which news could be carried would be by automobile, once the telephones were out of commission.

JUST as The Shadow glided to the stairway, a husky waiter bobbed into view. He was on his way to the manager's office, bound on some errand that he promptly forgot when he saw The Shadow. That waiter chanced to be one of a group that had been planted here by the racket ring.

Head downward, the thug hurled his chunky shoulders toward The Shadow. He bowled the cloaked fighter clear to the rail of the darkened balcony. As they landed, the thug was on top. His quick hand pulled a blackjack and thwacked the weapon toward The Shadow's skull.

A jabbing hand gripped the descending wrist. It arrived with the speed of a trip-hammer; the clutch of the closing fingers had the power of a vise. Not only did the waiter's hand lose the blackjack; it twisted, and his whole arm went with it. Then his body floundered, under the wrenching leverage that The Shadow supplied.

As the waiter flattened, there was a swish above him. The Shadow was on his feet, with no time to bother further with the thug.

From across the balcony rail, he saw a tiny spurt of ruddy flame in the darkness where Ducky's table was located. The zero hour was here. Ducky had lighted a trick match, as a signal for outside thugs to attack.

By the glow of automobile headlights beyond the veranda, The Shadow saw figures piling for the open door. They were enemies who would strike the instant that they entered, out of a darkness that some had already reached.

Vaulting the balcony rail, The Shadow seemed to poise himself in mid-air as he straightened downward in the blackness. Arms spread, with the cloak sleeves wide, he landed squarely upon a table surrounded by four diners.

Women shrieked as the black mass spread upon the table, obscuring the glasses and chinaware that crackled beneath The Shadow's crash. The Shadow had doubled to take the force of the drop.

Before the diners realized that a human being had landed amidst them, he was launching for the center of the dance floor.

One of the men who formed an adagio trio was sending the girl member of the troupe in a long spin through the air. As the girl arched into the high pirouette, The Shadow came sweeping into the spotlight, directly beneath her whirling form.

Big guns were in The Shadow's fists. As he halted, he aimed toward the darkness of the veranda door. A half-second later – at the instant when the girl dancer landed safely in the arms that awaited her – The Shadow's fierce laugh burst high above the music of the orchestra.

Music ended with The Shadow's taunt. He provided his own accompaniment for the aria that he uttered. It came from the automatics that he wielded. Gloved fingers pressed their triggers. Pumping muzzles tongued their deadly hail for the blackness toward the veranda door.

For the first time since crime had come to Parkland, crooks had arrived in massed formation. The Shadow was on hand to greet them.

CHAPTER XIV. DOUBLE DELIVERY

IT was blind battle for The Shadow; madness that no other fighter would have dared to attempt. But The Shadow had calculated the conditions that had caused him to use this madcap method.

The Shadow knew that crooks had come to hurl confusion into the Club Cagliari. Chances were their guns were pocketed, for later use. Gas bombs were their logical weapons.

By quick bombardment, The Shadow strove to scatter the entering horde before they could accomplish their first purpose. He was underneath the spotlight in time to do it. He could hear the clatter that followed his echoing shots, as the invaders dived back for the outside porch, some sprawling on the way.

Guns barked; but not from the veranda door. The rest of the crooked waiters had pulled revolvers, to fire at The Shadow.

Blackness swallowed the bounding figure of The Shadow. Once in the veranda doorway, he wheeled; picked out the waiters who had guns. Quick shots clipped those traitors in staccato precision.

The Shadow didn't forget the thug on the balcony. He winged him with one well-aimed shot that brought him headlong over the rail, to crash a table beneath.

Patrons of the club were settling the wounded waiters. The Shadow swung about and sprang to the veranda. Ducky, crouched beneath a table, fired shots that might as well have been blanks; for he aimed at a place that The Shadow had left.

The outside crooks had rallied. They had guns instead of gas bombs, for this new attack. The Shadow met the surge before the outside crew expected it, on the veranda itself.

Sledging gun-strokes were The Shadow's close-range tactics. Attackers sprawled beneath the flaying power of those metal cudgels. As the remainder dived, The Shadow sprayed fast fire before they had a chance to aim. Clipping bullets rolled their human marks to the ground beyond the porch edge.

The Shadow was down the steps, sweeping low through the darkness, with no guns spitting behind him. Police whistles shrilled; there were a few cops stationed in front of the Club Cagliari. Officers who did regular nightly duty there.

They were enough to handle the crippled crooks.

The Shadow's car was some distance away. He could not waste time going after it. Gleaming a flashlight into one crook sedan, then another, he picked the car that had a square wooden box resting on the floor in front of the rear seat. Springing to the wheel, The Shadow shoved that car in gear.

A gibing laugh was his departing token. It brought spasmodic, useless shots from the guns of a few wounded crooks. In firing, they became victims of another ruse. Arriving officers picked out the few who were still

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capable of battle. Betrayed by their own futile fire, the last of the raiding band were subdued by the police.

FIVE minutes were all that The Shadow had required to cut his way to freedom with a squad of broken enemies in his wake. Valuable minutes, of which he had ten more. Enough to reach the center of Parkland, at the clip The Shadow drove.

Fifteen minutes was the usual time required to reach the isolated Club Cagliari. The Shadow was confident that he could cut that time by one-third.

In doing so, he stirred up trouble. No news had come of the raid at the night club, for the telephones were useless; and no radio car was stationed there. But The Shadow's ride was sufficient in itself to bring pursuers on his trail.

As he rocketed along the short-cut to Parkland, sirens whined behind him. Every motor-cycle cop that The Shadow passed was prompt to give chase.

The Shadow wanted those chasers on his trail, provided they did not come close enough to pepper him with bullets. He couldn't win a long race in the straightaway against the motor cycles; but he counteracted that by twisting from street to street as he roared into the outskirts of Parkland.

A police car joined the chase; another came later. Only once did The Shadow have to cut away from the zigzag route that he wanted. That temporary shift helped more than it hurt. The police thought it was the change of direction that they expected.

When The Shadow finally cut back toward the city center, he could have shaken his trailers by the move. Deliberately, he slackened pace for half a block just to be sure he didn't lose those persistent pursuers.

There was one picture that came to The Shadow as clearly as if he had viewed it. That was Doc Arland, standing at the side window of his offices. The Shadow had learned enough by his trips to the Knightson Building to know what Arland was about.

The baldish man was actually there; his long, horsy face was drawn, his eyes blurry as he watched the street. He could see cars rolling past; knew that some contained crooks who awaited his signal.

But Arland was methodical to the last degree. He had fallen for that phony telephone call that he thought came from Ducky. The word had been to hold it fifteen minutes. Arland was going on that order.

What Doc Arland didn't know was the fact that The Shadow – not Ducky Murrick – was depending upon the punctuality for which Doc was noted. The Shadow wanted those fifteen minutes, and thought that he was getting them. Offsetting The Shadow, however, was another factor: the big clock above the public library, that Arland could see from his window.

That was the clock that had chimed too early the night before. It was still ahead of time, by a full three minutes; and Doc Arland didn't know it. He was waiting nervously for the two hands to point to nine. He saw them reach that position, with a slight jerk.

Arland sprang to an old electrical machine; wheeled it to the window and clicked the switch. Blue sparks crackled; filled the window with a purplish glow from which Arland withdrew. Just a usual test of his electrical equipment, so he could say, if asked; but, tonight, it was the signal for crime.

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Doc Arland had clipped three of the vital minutes needed by The Shadow. One was regained, thanks to the fact that certain automobiles had passed from view before the signal was given. Worriedly, Arland counted that one long minute; then his horsy lips opened for a long, pleased sigh.

A SEDAN with another State's license hauled up to the open space in front of the Parkland Trust Company, which kept open at night until nine. A local sedan pulled in back of it; then another out-of-towner. The middle car was squarely in front of the bank door. Three of its five occupants remained inside the car, while the other two leaped to the curb.

Each of the other cars disgorged a full quota of five men. A dozen strong, the group piled for the entrance of the bank, pulling masks up over their faces with their left hands, while their right fists produced revolvers.

Eight poured into the bank. Four formed two pairs, on each side of the wide doorway, to take care of any attack from the street. A policeman spied them; he blew a whistle that brought other blue-clad men. The four outside guards started fire.

Pedestrians scattered for cover, while the four thugs, spreading, were driving the police to shelter. The three in the sedan were ready to cut loose through opened windows. The raid was on in full; so quickly started that it brought swift action inside the bank.

Holding the middle of the banking floor, the masked crooks were ready for business. Like other institutions in Parkland, the trust company was not equipped to stave off supercrime. An alert teller might have grabbed a gun under average holdup conditions; but this band was too formidable. Every man in the place was covered.

Two minutes were occupied in the swift moves that put crime in control. Those marked the end of a time limit that crooks knew nothing about. The unexpected came, with amazing suddenness, out on the main street.

A roaring sedan swept through stalled traffic. It swerved to a racking stop alongside the three cars that the crooks had left.

The shriek of brakes told the men in the middle car that the arriving machine meant trouble. Crouching low, behind protection of the doors, they shoved their revolvers toward the car beside them.

Quick shots could not have clipped those desperadoes. By the very swiftness of his arrival, The Shadow had given them the bulge. But he had a remedy that he delivered before a single thug could shoot.

The Shadow's hands were off the wheel as he shoved the foot brake. He was stretched back, giving hard leverage to that stop; and his right hand was in the wooden box that lay on the sedan's floor.

With one move, The Shadow plucked a rounded object and gave it a toss through the window of the sedan that the crooks were using as a fort. Revolvers barked as the missile landed. Those shots missed The Shadow in his stretched position; and they were the last the crooked trio fired.

The bomb smashed. Tear gas filled the parked sedan. That bomb was but one of many that the band of raiders had taken to the Club Cagliari. By capturing the bombs, The Shadow had gained the very ammunition he required to put a finish to the second crew's work.

WHILE three sagged crooks were clawing at their faces, The Shadow bundled a batch of bombs and hurtled from his captured car. Springing between parked machines, he streaked across the sidewalk. His strident laugh pealed forth as he sprang through the doorway of the bank.

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Eight crooks forgot the tellers; turned to aim at the foe whose mighty challenge had proclaimed his dread identity.

The Shadow's arm was swinging as they turned. A bomb smashed a counter in the very middle of the throng. Its fumes swept the crooks as they sprang away. They were shooting as they went; but they couldn't aim in such haste.

More bombs were coming. The Shadow placed them where they did the most good.

Most of the attackers were down; but a few, with masks clutched tightly to their faces, were staggering past The Shadow to reach the outside air. The Shadow's cloaked sleeve was raised to his eyes, as he turned about to avoid the approaching fumes.

Bedlam had arisen from the street. Half of the police in Parkland were arriving on the job.

The Shadow himself had brought them. Cops were flinging themselves from motor cycles. Others were shooting from police cars. Bullets raked the four thugs who were out in the street. More slugs dropped three who came pellmell from the bank.

A dozen loiterers on the street had started to pull guns, proclaiming themselves as a reserve squad. They regretted that move as they scattered. Police pistols were spitting from every direction. The last of the crooked tribe took it on the run.

Coolly, The Shadow turned to face the banking floor. The tear gas had settled around the crawling figures of crying thugs. A swift passage was possible, to a side door that was bolted on the inside. His arm still raised, The Shadow crossed the floor with a long, steady stride.

Peering tellers gaped. Startled bank patrons, eyes running tears, gawked as though they viewed a ghost. To them, The Shadow was a superhuman figure, whose daring, unheralded arrival passed all explanation.

They saw him reach the side door and pull the bolt. The door swung open; with one long step, The Shadow faded into the blackness of the obscure side alley.

With departure, that amazing being left the most astounding of all tokens – a shivering laugh, more eerie than the challenging mirth that had announced his arrival. The weird tone rang like a note of retribution; solemn as a knell, it told that men of crime had gained the only results that they deserved.

Echoes faded, to leave a profound hush that swallowed all sounds from beyond that battleground. Strained listeners remained motionless with awe.

They had heard the most uncanny tone that any human lips could utter; the triumph laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. MART TAKES OVER

IT was after ten o'clock when Mart Kilgay rapped cautiously on the door of Room 406 at the Park Hotel. The pinochle game had ended abruptly, more than an hour ago; for there had been so much shooting along the streets that the players, like every one else, had rushed down to the street.

There was some one in the room, however. A harsh question greeted Mart's knock: "Who's there?"

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Mart announced himself. He entered to find Brace Lurbin trying to figure out a way to play solitaire with a pinochle pack. Brace chucked the cards across the table. His bluff face looked worried.

"What about an alibi, Mart?" questioned the trigger-man. "I got to have one."

"Grivlen's fixed it," replied the big-shot. "He's been around to see the pinochle crowd. You were here with them, until the shooting started. Here's a list of the guys that were here, with their winnings. You lost twelve bucks."

Brace lost his sickly look as he mopped his forehead with a fancy handkerchief. Mart could always see to it that his pals had an alibi. Moreover, Mart's didn't conflict with Brace's; for Mart had run into a good break to-night.

"I muscled into a service-club dinner," explained Mart. "In the banquet room, here at the hotel. I was sitting alongside of Joe Cardona, all the time. When the fireworks started, he chased outside and I stuck with him, so I'm sitting pretty."

"There's one guy that won't be" – Mart's gaze hardened – "and his name's Tom Knightson! He was at the dinner, too, but he got a business call at eight o'clock. I fixed that one. Knightson is still out at an empty house that he's trying to rent, waiting for a customer who won't show up."

The smoothness of Mart's pleased tone ended. He came to the subject that irked him; that of The Shadow.

"I've heard from Doc and Ducky," growled Mart. "It seems Doc got a call he thought was from Ducky; but it wasn't. It was a gag sprung by The Shadow, to hold off the bank job while he handled the Club Cagliari."

Sudden enlightenment spread over Brace's features.

"So that's the gag, huh?" grunted the trigger-man. "That's why Doc Arland gave a wigwag along around half past eight. He had it right, tipping me to head for the Club Cagliari; but when I got there, The Shadow was gone."

"I didn't stick my nose inside the joint. Too many coppers. Instead, I hopped back to town. It was worse here. Cops grabbing every guy they didn't like the looks of. It took me pretty near an hour to sneak in here and tip off Grivlen where I was."

Mart nodded. Grivlen had told him of Brace's difficulties. Mart was glad that the trigger-man had slipped the law. He was going to need Brace's big guns; for the police were rounding up hoodlums right and left, cutting down the number of Mart's forces.

"The Shadow's handed us a jolt," rasped Mart, "but he hasn't queered the game. It's ripe, just like I wanted it. Just as good as if we'd put the jobs across; maybe better."

"Cardona's a hero. All he needs is to snag the big-shot. He'll have his chance; I'm greasing the skids, to-morrow. The guy that Cardona's going to get is Tom Knightson! That's my job to fix; I'm taking over."

THE next day brought the hubbub that Mart wanted. Citizens of Parkland praised the law; but added the shout that crime must be obliterated from their fair domain. Suspicious characters were rounded up, but the police were forced to release most of them.

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Mobbies at the trailer camp had ditched their revolvers, to show bank rolls instead. That proved they were not vagrants. The cops found guns everywhere – a full kegload of them – but no persons admitted ownership of the weapons.

Mart still had a small force of armed men. They were phony taxi drivers who had passed muster and knew where to keep their guns hidden.

Mart Kilgay dined that evening at the Palace Restaurant with local business men, that included McCleer, the jeweler. Choosing his words, Mart summed matters for his listeners.

"Some one is back of these outrages," said the big-shot. "A hidden criminal who pulls the string, while he poses as a respectable citizen, like one of us. We must be on watch. He has made a pile of cash from his rackets. He may give himself away by becoming too prosperous."

Mart saw assenting nods that pleased him. He spied something else that suited. Through the front window of the restaurant, he saw a brand-new automobile, driven by Tom Knightson.

Mart's brother-in-law was on his way to visit prospective real-estate purchasers. They would keep him busy for the next few hours. Mart had arranged that.

After shaking hands with his business acquaintances, Mart went to the parking lot where he kept his car. It was dark there – a likely place where The Shadow might lurk; but Mart wasn't worried.

It was after he had driven away that a hidden shape stirred within a seemingly empty coupe. Another car rolled from the lot.

Mart arrived at a small house of a bungalow type, some blocks from the city's center. The place was freshly painted; newly tenanted. When Mart rapped at the door, it was Ruth who admitted him.

The girl greeted her brother with a glad cry. She conducted him into a well-furnished living room. Ruth's eyes were tearful.

"We owe so much to you, Mart –"

"Forget it, sis," Mart faked a sheepish air. "The five hundred bucks I gave you wasn't much."

"That wasn't all, Mart. Luck has come Tom's way, because you sent people to see him. Of course, he doesn't know –"

"What do you want Tom to do?" quizzed Mart, abruptly. "Lose the confidence he's got in himself? That's what he would do, if he figured it was me – not him – who was responsible for the boost.

"That's why we've got to keep it quiet, sis. Particularly" – Mart's tone was sly – "because I'm counting on doing something even bigger."

Ruth's lovely eyes were rounded with surprise. Mart saw Ruth's look, and knew that it was right for the coming game.

"Tom's under a cloud," stated Mart, "on account of his old man. He wants to clear his father. Maybe there's a way to do it. Do you know Louis Wenwold, the lawyer?"

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"I have heard of him," replied Ruth. "He was the attorney who represented Tom's father. I never knew Mr. Wenwold, though."

"You'll meet him soon." Mart was brisk. "But remember, sis, mum's the word. Just as before."

Ruth nodded. She was only too glad to continue her promise. Ruth was eager to hear the rest. She was sure that Mart had struck something worth while.

"I'VE been putting two and two together," informed Mart. "You see, Wenwold claims old man Knightson is innocent. His argument is this: Warren Knightson had a lot of securities with which he could pay his creditors. He had a list that went with them."

"I know," put in Ruth. "Both were stolen."

"Sure! But those securities were registered; if sold, they could be traced. Whoever stole Knightson's securities didn't have a chance to sell them without incriminating himself. That's what I'm trying to explain. The crook still has them."

"About the list, I've got a hunch that maybe it wasn't taken. Old Warren Knightson may have given it to somebody; and then forgotten it. With a notary public, for instance, like Arthur Lockett."

Mart settled back in his chair. Ruth had never heard of Lockett; but she was naturally curious to know why Mart had specified that particular person. She asked if there was any reason.

"In a way, yes," said Mart, as he lighted a cigarette. "Lockett is a funny old fossil; and he used to be a friend of Tom's father. He's forgetful, too. I placed a fire-insurance policy on his office equipment, and he made up an inventory to find out how much the junk was worth."

"One item was valuable papers. Affidavits and such that he's kept in his files for years. He said they weren't worth much to him, those documents weren't; but some people might be worried if anything happened to them. So I had him put a rough value on the lot and let it go at that."

Ruth's interest increased. She remembered that the missing list had been attested by a notary. Warren Knightson had used it as proof of his assets, to save opening the safe-deposit vault. But he had not been able to find it when the emergency came.

Ruth recalled, too, that her father-in-law had suffered an actual shock when the securities were stolen from his home. Tom had been informed of that. Broken by his loss, the old man could easily have forgotten that the list was elsewhere than in his office.

"Go and see Wenwold to-morrow," advised Mart. "Make out that the idea is your own – to ask Lockett, the notary, for a look at his files. You see" – Mart shook his head as he rose from his chair – "I'd look like a chump if I suggested it. I should have thought of it before this."

"Besides, you're the right person to make the request. It might be a giveaway if I showed an interest in the case. I want to stay what I am – Mart Kilgay – because I've made good since I took my new name."

To Ruth, Mart's statement seemed one of utter modesty. She thought that her brother had a heart bigger than any other in the land. The girl was beaming when they reached the front door, she scarcely noticed that it was unlatched when she drew it open.

Ruth was wistful, as she spoke parting words: "If you could only, meet Tom, Mart –"

"That will come, later," inserted Mart, briskly. "Wait until he's up where he ought to be, before we tell him who I am. Only, I may meet him sooner" – Mart snapped his fingers suddenly. "Say, Ruth, I'm going to give Tom a call to–morrow!"

"What about?"

"Some real estate. I've done fairly well in Parkland, and I've been looking for a good investment. Land's going up in this section, and I'd be wise to buy some. It will be another lift for Tom."

RUTH lingered in the doorway, until Mart had reached his car. Her happy wave of farewell was the sort that would have melted many a hardened heart; but not the chunk of rock that pounded out Mart's life–beat.

His reaction was a low–snarled oath, too guarded for Ruth to hear. The higher Tom Knightson went, the farther he would tumble, when Mart pulled out the props to–morrow. And with Tom's hopes would go those of his loyal wife, the sister whose goodness had produced Mart Kilgay's hate.

Mart's car was gone; the door of the house was closed. In the blackness of the little lawn there sounded another tone of mirth, its whisper as subdued as Mart's evil scoff. A cloaked figure glided swiftly for a side street, where a darkened coupe was parked.

The Shadow had silently entered the house to overhear the talk between Mart and Ruth. He had moved outside before they arrived at the front door. The Shadow knew details of Mart's coming scheme. He could foresee certain necessary steps.

The Shadow was speeding on his way to prepare the antidote for the poison that Mart intended to deliver.

CHAPTER XVI. FUNDS FROM THE PAST

MART KILGAY did not drive directly to his office. It was better to make a stop at the hotel; to look around a bit before he attended to some private business. That was where Mart made something of a mistake.

The Shadow, too, was bound for Mart's office, and had time to reach there ahead of the leader of crime.

Entering unseen past the barber shop, The Shadow saw a customer reclining in Cholly's chair. He was getting a shave, and his face was tilted back from sight. He wore heavy shoes like those that Brace Lurbin often sported; but the upraised feet weren't sufficient to identify the customer.

Once he reached Mart's office. The Shadow used a tiny flashlight. He ignored the closet where his old cloak and hat were hanging. The little time that he had was needed for another purpose. The Shadow twinkled the little light on the front of Mart's squatty safe.

A tough strong–box, that one. Nevertheless, The Shadow began operations on Mart's safe.

The process that The Shadow used was unusual. He produced a stick of brownish substance that looked like a combination of putty and wax. He rubbed it on the dial of the safe. If a safe–cracker had been on hand to watch that operation, he would have supposed that The Shadow was trying to "soup" the dial. That had a ridiculous touch. No charge of tricky explosive could blast a safe combination.

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However. The Shadow continued that process. Whatever else he might have intended was destined to long postponement. Keen ears heard ascending footsteps on the stairs. The Shadow whisked toward the door, extinguishing his light as he went. He was in the hallway, lost past a turn, when Mart arrived.

Mart found nothing to prove that The Shadow had made a visit here. Nevertheless, he was taking nothing for granted.

He drew the blinds of the office windows; turned on a well-shaded desk lamp. Stepping to the door, he listened. He thought he heard sounds in the hall. Moving out, Mart caught a glimpse of darkness by the stairs; a tiny patch that was gone an instant later.

Mart didn't show lack of nerve. He whipped out a revolver and sprang to the stairway. Peering downward, he saw gloom below, except for the dim glow furnished by the light in the second-story hall. Mart watched steadily. He thought that his gaze covered every available foot of space.

Pocketing his revolver, Mart went back into the office. As soon as he was gone, solid blackness materialized from the stairway wall and continued its descent.

IN the office, Mart was muttering to himself. He wasn't totally satisfied. Every time he went toward the safe, he fancied he heard something in the hall. He made three trips back and forth, wasting a good six minutes. Just as he was ready to give up that pacing policy, he did catch a sound from the stairway.

Footsteps were coming up; cautiously, but with creaks that made a give-away.

Leveling his revolver through the crack of the door, Mart held a steady bead for the spot where the intruder was due to appear. A wide face poked into sight. Mart recognized Brace Lurbin.

Again, Mart put away his gun. He opened the door and beckoned to Brace. The trigger-man joined him. Mart wanted to know what brought him.

"Cholly saw you come up," explained Brace. "I was in the barber shop, and he mentioned it. I figured maybe you'd been trying to get hold of me at the hotel."

"I was," rejoined Mart. "You're just the guy I want. Cover that door, and get an eyeful of the hallway. Just in case The Shadow barges up here."

"Got a heater? I'm not packing mine to-night." Brace thwacked his hips. "I don't know the bulls as well as you do. I couldn't laugh off a couple of big rods if they stopped me on the street."

Mart handed Brace his own gun. The trigger-man gave the .38 a heft, as though he considered anything smaller than a .45 to be a toy. The rod was a nifty, though; Brace's approving nod showed that it suited him. Stepping through the door, Brace took up hallway duty.

The trigger-man wasn't interested in what Mart intended to do. Cooking up crooked schemes was the big-shot's business. Stooped at the safe, Mart, glanced over his shoulder; was pleased when he saw that Brace was beyond the door.

As Mart's thumb and fingers gripped the dial, they fixed there in normal fashion. It was when he had given several turns to the combination that Mart gained his first impression of The Shadow's interrupted work. Mart's fingers had a sticky touch as he lifted them.

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Puzzled, Mart rubbed thumb and fingers together. They were smooth. Mart forgot all about the waxy sensation. He opened the safe; brought out a flat metal box and carried it to the light.

GREEN paper showed when Mart opened the box. On the desk, Mart spread securities that showed big figures. These were the trophies of his first job in Parkland – the one piece of crookery that had ruined old Warren Knightson.

They were the funds filched from Knightson's home. The securities that the ruined man swore he owned, only to find that no one believed him, with the exception of his own attorney.

There was cash in addition; bills of high denominations. Altogether, the funds totaled close to one hundred thousand dollars. Big swag, that most criminals would have tried to liquidate, despite the risk. Not Mart Kilgay. His job had been one of vengeance.

Mart had cleaned up plenty, though, with the collapse of Knightson's business, for he had known that it was coming. Moreover, he had been profiting heavily since. One hundred grand was less than a month's "take" for Mart Kilgay.

It had irked him, though, to know that these funds of Knightson's lay useless. He had intended to unload them little by little. He was glad, to-night, that he had delayed that plan.

By sacrificing this one batch of stolen wealth, Mart Kilgay intended to clear the way for an annual profit of one million dollars. His high-pressure rackets would be good for another year, at least, when he had finished his present scheme.

With the funds was the list that Mart had also stolen. It was in the form of an affidavit, bearing a notary's seal. Not Lockett's, but that of another notary in Parkland, a man who had died a while before Warren Knightson went to ruin. Mart began a careful check-up of the securities.

Thick stock certificates, crisp bank notes crinkled as Mart sorted them. The big-shot's eyes showed a greedy gleam in the light. One hundred thousand dollars was far too big a sum for what he needed. Twenty grand would be enough.

Mart put aside one fifth of the total, choosing securities only. His fingers handled the papers deftly.

Keeping twenty thousand in securities, and the list, Mart put the rest back into the safe. When he spun the dial, he again looked at his fingers; then studied the shiny dial itself. No traces of The Shadow's preparation were visible. Mart did not guess that any one had been tampering with his safe.

The leader of crime inserted the securities in an official-looking envelope that bore no name. He placed the envelope in his pocket and did the same with the securities list. As he started to rise from the desk, Mart saw Brace coming in from the hall door.

"Thought I heard something," informed the trigger-man. "When you're ready to scam, you'd better let me slide ahead."

"I'm all set," returned Mart. "Go ahead, I'll follow. Wait for me; I'll need you to cover later, Brace."

WHATEVER Brace had heard, he found nothing during his downward trip. Mart joined him at the outside door; Brace returned the big-shot's gun. Mart ordered him to trail along, until they reached the parking lot.

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There, Mart drove for a destination several blocks away, Brace riding with him. Mart's goal was a tiny arcade, that was lined with small offices. Brace accompanied Mart to the darkened back of the arcade. The trigger-man remained there with the gun.

The office to which Mart made easy entry was one that bore the name of Arthur Lockett. With a flashlight, Mart found an old filing cabinet. Among a batch of disheveled papers, he stowed the certified list that bore the names and numbers of securities and currency that had once belonged to Warren Knightson.

Mart kept the envelope with the twenty thousand dollars in securities, until after he and Brace had returned to the Park Hotel.

Shortly afterward, there was a visitor to Mart's room; a sly-faced chap known as "Billy the Dip." He was the respectable-looking pickpocket who had shoved the Larmon letter into Cardona's pocket.

With Brace doing lookout duty from a room that adjoined Mart's, the big-shot had no qualms when he talked to the pickpocket. He gave that rogue the envelope containing the telltale securities and voiced low-toned instructions that brought a grin to the dip's sly features.

When the pickpocket had gone, Mark dismissed Brace. Standing alone at a window of his hotel room, Mart looked out upon the lighted streets of Parkland, where vigilant police kept up a steady patrol.

So far as the law was concerned, the riddle of crime would be solved to-morrow night. Tom Knightson would be behind bars, a scapegoat in place of Mart Kilgay. Joe Cardona would be finished with his mission. The ace would leave; and The Shadow would follow.

Parkland would again be a racket-run town – a city where the greed of Mart Kilgay stood dominant.

Mart might not have pictured that vicious future, had he known of The Shadow's visit to his office. Instead, he would probably have posted guards at the office, to make sure that The Shadow did not resume operations at the safe.

Such precautions would have been useless. As night continued, Mart's office lay dark, silent and empty.

The Shadow's work was finished.

CHAPTER XVII. THE TRAP CLICKS

AT half past four the next afternoon, Mart Kilgay was making a telephone call from his office. His voice was smoothly deceptive. Its tone carried an affectionate touch.

"Wenwold's in his office, sis," spoke Mart. "You'd better get there right away. And listen: If you do have luck – if Lockett has that list – let Wenwold handle it.

"Yes, you get home right away. Give me a call so I can know what happened... That's the idea. I can do a lot more when I know how things have gone... Good-by, sis."

A man entered the office as Mart completed the conversation. The arrival was Tom Knightson. That young man heard Mart's final words, including the term "sis"; but that supplied no clue. In fact, Tom would have been bowled over had he been told that Mart was talking to Ruth. Because of Mart's alias, Tom could not identify the criminal as Ruth's long-absent brother.

RACKET TOWN

Tom introduced himself to Mart, with the statement that one of his customers had advised the visit. Mart nodded his head.

"You're handling a property I'd like to buy," said Mart. "The old Redwood mansion, on the turnpike. What are they holding it for?"

"Thirty thousand dollars," returned Tom. "A pretty high price."

"Do you think they'd take twenty?"

"I doubt it, Mr. Kilgay."

Mart brought a bundle of securities from his desk. Tom watched him sort them. They were utility bonds, that Mart had actually purchased; quite a contrast to the stolen stuff that he had entrusted to Billy the Dip.

"These may bring better than twenty thousand," observed Mart. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Knightson. You take these to Jennings, vice president of the Parkland Trust. Leave them there for him to value, while you hop out to the Redwood place.

"Offer them twenty thousand, cash. If they want more, call Jennings. Ask him the total that he's figured and give it as a final offer. Maybe the few extra thousand will swing the sale."

Tom agreed. He offered to give Mart a receipt for the utility bonds. Mart suggested that Tom write out the names of the securities and their numbers, so there could be no error.

Tom did it; and affixed his signature. Mart pocketed the detailed receipt. He thrust the securities into an envelope, which he sealed before he handed it to Tom.

LEAVING Mart's office. Tom bumped into a man coming up the stairs. The blunder seemed accidental; but it wasn't. The arrival was Billy the Dip. The pickpocket's hat tumbled to the steps. Politely, Tom picked it up.

The envelope was sticking from Tom's inside pocket. Billy the Dip reached for the hat also; as he did, his free hand came from his coat, bringing his own envelope between thumb and forefinger. With one move, the pickpocket stowed that envelope into Tom's pocket and plucked away the other envelope between two fingers.

Continuing downstairs, Tom remembered the important envelope that he carried. He brought it from his pocket to make sure he still had it. The envelope was in his hand when he reached the Parkland Trust Company.

Jennings was busy; so Tom left the envelope with a secretary, along with a note stating what he wanted.

Meanwhile, Billy the Dip dropped in on Mart and handed him the switched envelope. Mart opened it; took out the utility bonds and put them in his safe.

The situation was a sweet one. Unwittingly, Tom Knightson had left an incriminating batch of securities at the bank. Funds that had once been stolen from Tom's own father!

AT about that time, Louis Wenwold received Ruth Knightson in his office. When the girl told him the reason for her visit, the lawyer shook his head.

RACKET TOWN

"There is not one chance in a thousand that Lockett has that missing list," he declared. "Still, we can find out. Suppose we go over to the arcade."

They found the notary in his office. Wizen and testy, Lockett grumbled his willingness to look through his files. He admitted that the affidavit might be found there; but he wasn't hopeful. The only possibility lay in the fact that odd papers frequently bobbed up in Lockett's files.

After ten minutes of rummaging, Lockett came up with the long-wanted affidavit. Blinking amazement through his spectacles, the notary handed the planted list to Wenwold.

The lawyer's usual dryness vanished. He cut loose like a schoolboy, as he brandished the certified paper before Ruth's pleased eyes.

"This vindicates Warren Knightson!" exclaimed Wenwold. "It proves that he did possess the wealth that he claimed was stolen! It gives the law something to work upon. If these securities can be uncovered, or traced, we may bring the criminal to justice!"

"It is not a case for me to handle, with you as my client, Mrs. Knightson. This find must be made public, at once. With your permission, I shall notify Inspector Cardona."

"That's what I want you to do," asserted Ruth. Then, remembering Mart's admonition: "I shall leave it entirely in your hands, Mr. Wenwold."

Ruth hurried home. As soon as she arrived, she telephoned Mart's office. Her brother seemed delighted at the news. He advised Ruth to remain at home; and take good fortune calmly.

"I'm waiting here until Tom comes back," mentioned Mart. "When he starts home, I'll call you."

Mart gave a gloating chuckle when he had hung up the receiver. He had an idea that it would be a long while before Tom started home. As events were shaping, Mart's guess looked right.

SUMMONED by Wenwold, Joe Cardona had come to the arcade. The ace agreed with the lawyer that old Warren Knightson stood vindicated. Joe didn't want to lose any time tracing the funds that were listed in the affidavit.

"Maybe the crook had nerve enough to try to peddle them here in town," suggested Cardona.

"Don't forget, though," reminded Wenwold, "that the certified list was not stolen, as we thought. Therefore, the thief would be cautious about unloading his spoils."

Cardona agreed with that. Like Wenwold, he had taken Mart's bait. Both thought that the list had been in Lockett's files, all along.

"Suppose we check with the local banks," said Cardona. "That's the first step. Most of them are closed, for it's close to six o'clock."

"Call the Parkland Trust," advised Wenwold. "They stay open late. Jennings there might help us."

Cardona made the call. Wenwold heard him tell the story to Jennings. The vice president must have asked for a description of the stolen securities, for Joe reached for the list. He called off the names of the securities and their numbers, intending to finish with the serial numbers of the currency. Cardona never reached that point.

RACKET TOWN

Wenwold saw the ace hang up the receiver, with a grim stare on his face. The lawyer couldn't understand what had happened not even when Cardona inquired:

"You say that Tom Knightson's wife helped you find the list?"

Wenwold nodded.

"That makes it tough," declared Cardona. "I'm mighty sorry for that girl. If there's any job I hate to go through with, it's this one. Jennings just received a bunch of that stolen paper, to turn into cash. It came from Tom Knightson!"

Wenwold stood amazed. Despite his dislike for the situation, the lawyer saw how perfectly the facts pieced. The one man who could easily have pilfered old Warren Knightson's wealth was Tom; for the son had access to his father's home.

Tom, presumably, had not been in Parkland at the time of his father's failure; but that meant nothing. A secret visit would have been an easy matter.

"I've noticed Tom Knightson," said Joe. "He was crying poor-mouth, they said, until about ten days ago. Then things began to ride high. He's been cleaning up dough like nobody's business. It's a cinch that he hasn't been doing it through real estate, though he's made it look that way.

"Local people have been buying from him; and so have a lot of strangers. That's the way rackets are usually handled. The fellows who collect pass it up to the big-shot through fake business transactions."

JOE reached for the telephone. He called police headquarters and made brisk work of his painful duty. Cardona had learned from Jennings that Tom was out at the old Redwood mansion, for Jennings had received a call from there. By the time Cardona stepped from the arcade, a pair of police cars were there. Joe stepped into one.

Louis Wenwold watched the lights of those police cars as they disappeared. They were heading for the main street; from there, they would take the turnpike and intercept Tom Knightson on his way back from the Redwood place.

Sadly, the old lawyer walked toward the city hall. He knew that Tom would want him as an attorney; but this was one case that Wenwold would have to refuse. Tom's father was still Wenwold's client. That meant another lawyer would be needed. Wenwold would have to take up cudgels against Tom.

That wasn't the part that hurt. When the law brought in its prisoner, Wenwold would have a duty as tough as Cardona's. He would have to call Ruth and tell her of her husband's arrest, with the developments that had produced it.

ANOTHER man saw the rolling police cars, and his ugly glee was quite the opposite of Wenwold's sorrow. Mart Kilgay was standing at Doc Arland's front window when the motor squad went by. Arland was there; so was Ducky Murrick.

"There goes bad news for Tom Knightson," gloated Mart, as he peered toward the darkening street. "They'll bring the guy in soon. It's time for you fellows to get started. Before the news gets somewhere else."

The lieutenants looked uneasy. Mart saw it.

"Cold feet?" he snarled. "Say – if the moll don't count with me, why should you guys worry about the job?"

"The moll don't worry us," retorted Ducky, in the hard tone that he used among his pals. "But the job does! It don't come in our line."

"The crew will handle it," rasped Mart. "You've got to be there to see the job's done right. I can't use Brace; he's lying low, till he's needed. If" – Mart's grin was a confident one – "he's needed at all."

With a wave of dismissal, Mart started his lieutenants on their way. He followed to the stairs; before he stepped toward his own office, he added:

"Don't worry about The Shadow. By this time, he's learned that Cardona's after Tom Knightson. That will keep The Shadow guessing, for a while."

When Doc Arland and Ducky Murrick reached the street, their own confidence had returned. They passed the alleyway beside the Parkland Trust Building without bothering to glance toward its depths. That was one reason why they failed to see the shrouded figure that was lurking in the darkness.

The whispered laugh that came from the deep gloom was proof that The Shadow knew much more concerning Mart Kilgay's dirty work than the big-shot had even begun to suppose.

CHAPTER XVIII. RUTH BRINGS NEWS

RUTH was busy preparing dinner in the bungalow kitchen when the telephone bell rang.

The call was from Louis Wenwold. Ruth stood horror-struck when she heard the lawyer's mournful news.

"Tom – Tom had the stolen securities?" she gasped. "But – how did he get them?... He says they were given to him by Mart Kilgay? Why, I –"

Ruth hesitated. It was belief in Mart that stopped her. She didn't see a threat that promised to cut short any statement concerning Mart. The front door had wedged open. A revolver muzzle was gleaming in the hallway light.

"I'll call you later, Mr. Wenwold," promised Ruth, brave despite the quiver in her voice. "Yes. At city hall..."

She hung up, and hurriedly dialed Mart's number. Her brother was not surprised by the news of Tom's arrest. He told her that he had received a call from city hall on the same subject. But his final words – they sounded kindly – were sufficient to leave Ruth hopeless.

"I gave Tom some bonds," she heard Mart say, "but they were not the ones he claimed. It's a bad mess, sis. I'll do all I can to help; but I'm afraid Tom's in it deep."

Another revolver was looming from the dining room as Ruth hung up the receiver. A third appeared, in the gloom of a little entry that led to the kitchen. Ruth saw none of the threatening weapons. She was staring at the telephone.

At that moment, Ruth had come to a decision. It was a choice between Tom and Mart; and her newer loyalty was stronger than her old belief. Whatever Tom's faults, he wasn't a crook. The decency that Mart had shown was nothing but a cover-up for his criminal nature. Ruth had been duped by her brother and she knew it; but without proof.

RACKET TOWN

Nevertheless, the proof was to be thrust upon her.

Ruth saw the gun at the front door. She turned toward the dining room, then in the direction of the kitchen. Other bristling weapons blocked those outlets. Into the light moved the men who threatened her; masked thugs like those who had invaded the Club Cagliari.

The extent of Mart's vicious treachery left the girl dumfounded. She knew instantly what these enemies wanted.

She was to be abducted, so that the world would think that she had fled after hearing Wenwold's news. Probably, her death would follow; framed to look like suicide.

From the approach of the masked crew, Ruth realized that they preferred to avoid gunfire while here. It was that thought that gave her a wild hope of escape.

Turning, Ruth sprang for the stairs. With snarls to halt, the three men loped after her. Others bobbed into sight. Ruth heard some one hiss:

"Snatch the moll, before she starts a squawk!"

Ruth tried to scream. She was too late. A huge paw swooped up from the bottom step to clutch her dress at the back of the neck. The tug of the garment choked her. With both hands, Ruth ripped the cloth. The dress tore half from her shoulders, leaving a strip of cloth in the thug's hand.

Free, Ruth tried to scramble farther up the stairs. She stumbled; felt herself sprawling downward.

Then came the amazing sequence that entirely changed the scene.

AN arm gripped Ruth as she fell. It was a long-reaching arm of blackness that came swishing downward from the darkness of the stairs. The arm twisted the girl about; blackness blotted her figure from the view of the thugs who were pounding upward toward her.

Ruth was flung higher up the steps, where she landed, clutching the banister posts.

Against the light from the lower hall, she saw the rescuer who had intervened. He was a being cloaked in black, a slouch hat fitted to his head. He was still spinning from the whirl that he had taken to lift Ruth upward. Never halting, the black-clad fighter launched himself upon the men below.

There was chaos in the hallway. Flinging back the nearest opposition, The Shadow used those thugs as buffers against the rest.

Revolvers spoke; their savage stabs made Ruth shudder. Crooks had taken the first shots; but The Shadow's laugh still mocked them. Ruth saw a foeman slip from The Shadow's grasp. That thug had stopped the bullets meant for The Shadow.

In with the staccato barks of the revolvers came the roar of an automatic. Its bursts were thunder in that low hall. The Shadow was turning, as he warded off the slugs of two attackers. He was poking his shots past the elbows of the men who tried to sledge him, dropping the marksmen who attempted revolver shots.

One of the sluggers shoved a gun muzzle beneath The Shadow's hat brim. Ruth screeched a warning that The Shadow heard after he had used his own antidote.

RACKET TOWN

There was a muffled gun blast with the beginning of Ruth's scream. The aiming thug sagged. The Shadow had pressed a gun muzzle to the killer's heart, to fire that one needed shot.

The last surge rolled The Shadow back to the steps. Three foemen were upon him. Ruth didn't see that two were crippled; the third without a gun. She thought that The Shadow needed aid; more than she could give.

Ruth came to her feet as the struggle began. She ran for the top of the stairs.

There was an open window above a low roof – the path by which The Shadow had entered through the cordon of crooks. Ruth scrambled through; clambered down a trellis where rambler rose thorns plucked her hands and face.

She saw two cars stopping on the street. Clutching the remnants of her dress, Ruth shouted for help. Four men sprang from a sedan and came dashing toward her. They were almost across the lawn, when Ruth saw that they had guns.

"It's the moll – grab her!"

Ruth tried to regain the trellis. She was boxed in a corner of the wall. Because of the gunfire that they had heard, the reserve crew was ready to deliver murder as the quickest way to end Ruth's outcries.

That was the murder crew's mistake.

A window splintered from the ground floor of the bungalow. Through the shivering glass came a long, cloaked shape in black. The Shadow had settled matters indoors. He was his own reserve squad, when it came to the outside crew.

THE SHADOW landed squarely beside the startled thugs. As they swung to aim for his lowered form, he came up with a long, driving bound. He slugged with his empty gun, while he fired with a fresh automatic that his other hand had drawn.

Two thugs took bullets. The other pair sagged groggily, from the strokes The Shadow had delivered. They were clinging to their cloaked opponent; but the fight that they gave was feeble. The Shadow reached out to clutch Ruth's arm.

Deception was the wise course at that moment. The other car, a coupe, was standing by, its occupants ready to open fire. The Shadow knew the men who were in it: Doc Arland and Ducky Murrick. The lieutenants were practiced marksmen.

His own guns almost emptied, The Shadow would have to pick up other weapons. Such delay might bring shots, disastrous to Ruth. The plan that The Shadow chose was better. He whispered words to the girl. Ruth understood.

A cluster moved from the corner of the bungalow. Ruth, her arms behind her, was staggering along, half surrounded by a semicircle, consisting of The Shadow and the two groggy crooks he dragged.

With The Shadow in the center of the trio, the appearance of the group totally deceived the watching lieutenants.

They thought that Ruth was in the grasp of the thugs; for neither Arland nor Ducky could see The Shadow. They supposed that the girl's weak resistance caused the zigzag course. They watched; saw the cluster reach

the sedan.

Under cover of the car, The Shadow thrust the thugs into the rear seat and told Ruth to crouch there. Taking the wheel, he slammed the doors and drove away, blinking his lights as he made quick departure.

Taking the signal to mean that all was well, Mart's two lieutenants drove away. They would have liked to stay and pick up The Shadow; they were worried, also, about leaving the shattered crew behind. But they figured that their one bet was to clear the vicinity and get back to their offices. They couldn't afford to be linked with the fray.

The lieutenants had need for haste. Shots had been heard; a police car was coming to the scene. The coupe dodged it; but The Shadow deliberately changed direction to cross the police car's course. He heard a shrill whistle. He gave his car the gas.

Shots came from the police car. The Shadow answered them with two last stabs from his second gun; shots that were as wide as the police fire.

Ruth couldn't understand it for the moment; then, the sedan swung a corner, where The Shadow deliberately ran it up on the curb. Ruth heard the last whispered order that he gave. She spoke her understanding, as her rescuer slid to the ground and closed the door.

The Shadow was absent when the police car arrived, some twenty seconds later. Piling out, the officers stared into the car; saw the front seat empty. They spotted the two groggy thugs in the rear; they saw Ruth tug away from hands that could not hold her.

"It's a girl!" gulped a cop. "They've handled her rough, too! Keep those rats covered, while I help her out."

FIVE minutes later, the police car was whining toward the center of Parkland, with Ruth Knightson huddled between the two officers. Her lips were smiling; her eyes sparkled as she brushed away the wisps of hair that covered them.

Ruth was bringing news of thwarted crime. The cops had liked her story; so would Joe Cardona, when she arrived at city hall. These facts were the sort that would damage the game that Mart had perpetrated. Ruth was joyful that she could do her part to aid Tom.

With her gladness, Ruth Knightson felt a surge of overwhelming gratitude toward her mysterious rescuer, The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S PROOF

EVIDENCE was building heavily against Tom Knightson. That young man's astonishment had begun with his arrest. It had increased when he arrived at the city hall in custody of the police.

There, Tom was shown the securities that he had left at the Parkland Trust, together with the incriminating list that had come from Lockett's files.

Tom's denial that he had left those securities at the bank was refuted by Jennings. Tom, himself, had marked the envelope for Jennings. The vice president had opened it in the presence of his secretary and the cashier. All swore that the securities were the ones that Tom had delivered to them.

RACKET TOWN

Mart Kilgay was Tom's only hope. That was why Tom asked that the law summon the pretended insurance broker. It was the worst move that the accused man could have made. He was playing straight into the hands of the crook who had framed him.

On arrival, Mart was prompt to testify that he had given Tom a different batch of stocks. As proof, he produced the detailed receipt that bore Tom's own signature. It hadn't occurred to Tom that such a paper would add to the case against him; but it did.

"So what?" quizzed Joe Cardona. "Mr. Kilgay gave you some utility bonds; you were supposed to turn them in at the bank. Instead, you shoved across some stolen stuff. Come on, Knightson. You might as well confess the whole game!"

"But it was the same envelope," protested Tom. "The one that Kilgay gave me."

Mart's eyes hardened; but his voice was smooth as he turned to Joe Cardona.

"Knightson checked my bonds himself," asserted the crime leader. "He took them in the envelope. As I remember it" – Mart added a lie that he knew would go across – "the envelope was one of my usual ones, with my name in the corner. This envelope is a plain one."

"Which means," put in Cardona, "that you accuse Knightson of a new theft, in addition to the present charge against him?"

Mart flashed a look of well-faked surprise. He became suddenly anxious regarding his own property.

"That's right!" he exclaimed. "My securities are gone! You've got to get them back, inspector!"

"We'll get them!" Cardona was grim. He turned to Tom. "The set-up is a plain one, Knightson. You saw a chance to unload some of the swag you've been holding. You kept Kilgay's good securities and passed the stolen stuff on Jennings. You figured you'd swing the real-estate sale that Kilgay wanted, and he'd never get wise."

Tom began to protest. It reached ignoring ears. Cardona looked to Wenwold, as though seeking the lawyer's opinion. The attorney shared Joe's theory.

CARDONA had Tom Knightson handcuffed, started an order for the dicks to take Tom to a cell. He figured that the prisoner would drop his sham after he'd cooled a while.

Joe held the order when he heard commotion outside the office. Others were staring with him when the door swung open.

There was Ruth Knightson, with the escorting policemen. One glance at her disheveled attire told that she had been through battle. Ruth had twisted the remnants of her house dress to form a skirt. She was wearing a policeman's coat above it.

Ruth let one of the officers speak first.

"A mob tried to snatch her," informed the cop, with a gesture toward Ruth. "She says somebody stepped in to stop it; and whoever it was, did a good job. He left a flock of cripples lying out there."

RACKET TOWN

Ruth saw the handcuffs on Tom's wrists. She hurried to her husband's side, to tell him that all was well. While Cardona was getting more details of the fray at the bungalow, Ruth looked up to see Mart. She pointed to the crook.

"He is the man that is responsible!" accused the girl. "Mart sent those men to seize me!"

"She's crazy," said the big-shot, smoothly. "Who is this woman, anyway?"

Ruth was too dumfounded to retort. Mart was informed that Ruth was Tom's wife. The big-shot had a sudden idea.

"That explains it," Mart told Cardona. "I guess she's all right. Probably her husband has her buffaloed. Maybe, though –"

"Maybe what?" quizzed Cardona.

"It's just a guess," replied Mart, with a laugh. "Figuring out what crooks are up to, is part of your line; not mine. Only I'd say that Knightson wasn't sure about how much his wife knew."

"If he's the big-shot that you say he is, that gang must have been his. Having them grab his own wife would keep her from talking out of turn. It would make him look like an injured party, besides."

Mart's logic was a clincher. It went across with Wenwold, as well as with Cardona. Both remembered that Ruth had uncovered the missing list. If she had mentioned her proposed search to Tom, that would account for the kidnaping attempt.

Coolly, Mart Kilgay had turned Ruth's arrival to his own advantage. Mart was thinking fast; a jump or two ahead of every one else.

"Too bad," mused Mart. "A husband turning against his own wife –"

Ruth's challenge produced an interruption. Again, her accusing finger was straight toward Mart. She seized upon the words that the crook uttered.

"Why speak of husbands?" demanded Ruth. "When a brother renounces his own sister – his only sister – and tries to murder her, that shows him for a villain! This man" – she turned to Wenwold while her finger still waved toward Mart – "is my brother!"

PERFECT amazement showed on Mart's face. He played a game of complete denial and did it with confidence. No one could ever prove that Mart was Ruth's brother. Forgotten in Parkland, the crook could produce a faked life's history establishing himself as Mart Kilgay.

"Ruth had a brother," began Tom, eagerly. "They called him Mart –"

"So that's the bluff," interrupted Mart. He appealed to Cardona. "It's a stall for time, inspector; but let them have their fun. When I'm proven to be Mart Kilgay and no one else, it will be just one more count against Knightson."

Knowing Mart of old, Ruth realized her helplessness. He had always been able to argue black into white. Ruth thought he had outgrown that old habit; she was coming to realize that, instead, Mart had increased his pernicious ability.

Wenwold's sympathetic look, his headshake, were a sign to Ruth that the less she said, the better. If Wenwold couldn't believe her excited statement, would Cardona? Ruth wasn't sure.

Joe seemed disposed to listen; but the girl had a sickening feeling that Cardona considered her involved in crime with Tom. It still was possible that the kidnap attempt had begun as a fake, even if some one had intervened.

Actually, Cardona was thinking along that line; but he was considering The Shadow's angle. Joe knew that only The Shadow could have staged that battle at the bungalow. The question was whether he had let Ruth come here to clear Tom; or to prove the girl's complicity in crime. There was one person who could give the answer.

The Shadow.

Timed almost to Cardona's thoughts, the telephone bell rang. Joe reached for the telephone; a hunch gripped him at the same instant. Cardona knew that he would hear a whispered voice across the wire, the moment that he identified himself.

The voice came.

Low, even-toned, The Shadow's words reached Cardona's ear alone; and Joe listened. His expression was pokerfaced as though he were receiving a mere routine report. Actually, Cardona was learning his own next move – the way whereby he could solve crime's riddle.

The Shadow was disclosing his own proof to Joe Cardona, that the law itself might trap the master-crook who controlled all crime in this city of greed.

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S RALLY

STOLIDLY, Joe Cardona hung up the receiver, to make a monotoned announcement implying that he had received a police report.

"Some of that gang came from the trailer camp," said the ace. "We'll take a look there, later. Meanwhile, let's finish this important business."

Joe turned to Mart.

"I'm for you, Kilgay," said the ace, bluntly. "They tried to frame me in this town; and it looks like you've been picked for the same dose. It doesn't go!"

"Thanks, inspector," returned Mart. "I'm glad you look at it that way."

"We'll settle it once and for all," continued Cardona. "Look, Kilgay. Here are the stolen securities that Knightson left at the bank. Did you ever see any of them before?"

"Never!" rejoined Mart. "I'll take oath to it."

Cardona produced the list that had come from Lockett's files. He held it in front of Mart's eyes. The big-shot studied it and gave a close look at the notary's seal. He heard Cardona ask:

"You never saw this affidavit?"

RACKET TOWN

"Positively not!" replied Mart. "I swear to that, too."

Cardona laid the evidence aside. He rummaged in a desk drawer and brought out some sheets of paper. He picked up a pencil; motioned Mart toward the desk.

"I want you to dictate a statement, Kilgay –"

Chopping his sentence short, Cardona acted with a speed on which The Shadow had depended. He whisked away a piece of typewriter paper, to reveal a smoother sheet beneath. With the same move, Cardona let the pencil scale across the desk.

As Mart watched the sudden motion of Joe's right hand, Cardona's left clamped hard on the crook's right wrist and yanked it forward. Before Mart could tug away, Joe's right hand swooped upon the big-shot's spread fingers. Hard, firmly, like the precise application of a rubber stamp. Cardona flattened Mart's thumb and finger tips upon the smooth paper.

With a strong shove, Cardona sent Mart reeling away from the desk, snapping an accompanying order to two detectives:

"Hold Kilgay! Don't let him budge!"

Glaring from between the men who gripped him, Mart watched Cardona apply brush and black powder to the smooth paper. Mart's finger prints etched into view. Cardona inspected them; next, he beckoned to Wenwold and others.

Still holding the brush, Cardona dabbed along the green borders of stolen securities. Finger prints came into view. Strong light showed the perfect match. They were Mart's impressions, revealed on stolen swag that he had sworn he had never seen before tonight!

WHILE the others were absorbing that discovery, Cardona held the old affidavit to the light. Setting the paper on the desk, he made another stroke with the brush. The all-important document showed another replica of Mart's finger prints.

"You've convicted yourself, Kilgay," declared Cardona, sternly. "These witnesses have heard your statements. You never saw the stolen securities nor the affidavit; yet your finger prints are shouting from them. Let's hear you explain it."

Mart had no explanation. The detectives tightened their grip as he tried to struggle. The crook subsided; but his lips showed sullen motion. The words that he muttered were as dirty as his look. Since Mart didn't care to answer the present question, Cardona did it for him.

"You stole Warren Knightson's funds," accused Joe, "and the affidavit, also. How you switched the securities on Tom Knightson doesn't matter. You managed it, just like you planted the affidavit in Lockett's files. We don't need to know any more."

There was more; and Mart remembered it. That sticky safe dial, last night. He could guess who had waxed it. The Shadow had been there. Foreseeing Mart's game, The Shadow had used that special substance to implant Mart's finger impressions upon the necessary documents, without the big-shot's knowledge.

Though Cardona did not follow Mart's thoughts, Joe had the safe in mind.

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"We're going over to your office, Kilgay," announced Cardona. "You'll open that safe of yours for us. In it, we'll find the rest of the stuff belonging to Warren Knightson. There'll be something else, too; your own utility bonds, the ones that you gave Tom.

"You're holding his receipt for them; but you're the person who has them. Looks like he'll have the new theft charge against you. All right, men" – Joe nodded to the detectives – "put on the bracelets and start him going."

THERE was dynamite in Mart Kilgay. Cardona knew it, but thought the crime leader to be helpless in the presence of nearly a dozen captors. But Mart Kilgay never followed rules; even those of criminals. Crossing the dope was his favorite type of work.

In a space of time that seemed instantaneous, the big-shot ended his plight, to again become the public enemy that all Parkland dreaded.

With a furious twist, Mart spun from the grip of the detectives. His long bounds carried him past blockers near the door. His hand yanked a revolver; he turned to fire as he reached the hall. Mart found Cardona ready.

While others scrambled aside at Cardona's shout, the ace had his own gun drawn. Joe and Mart exchanged a pair of shots each, in a short-lived duel that brought no results. Both were hasty, dodging as they pulled their triggers. Mart didn't wait for more.

The stairs were handy; the criminal took them. Cardona led the pursuit, followed by a foursome of detectives. They could hear Mart shooting as he reached the door below, warning all comers that bullets would reward any one who tried to capture him.

Mart's luck came strongest when he reached the street.

Arrived at the door of the city hall, Cardona and the squad expected to wing the crook in the midst of flight. But Mart had spied a passing taxi, with one of his own gunners at the wheel. He was aboard it, firing his last cartridge back toward the city hall, when the pursuers gained sight of him.

The taxi wheeled the corner before Cardona's marksmen could riddle it.

Turmoil followed – of a sort that the city had never before seen.

As the cab zipped along the main street, Mart was leaning from the window, brandishing his empty revolver as he shouted the cry for riot. He was proclaiming himself the big-shot; calling on all henchmen to thwart the law's chase.

Crooked cab drivers heard the summons. They shoved their taxis into the paths of police cars that came in from side streets. Others sped away to spread crime's alarm.

Mart had reached the Knightson Building. Followed by a quickly assembled squad, he dashed indoors. Crooks barricaded doors and windows. In brief minutes, the building became a fortress.

It was to be Mart's headquarters, while battle raged outside. When needed, he and a group of shock troops could sally forth. Mart was holding that, until the right time.

The big-shot was confident that his roving hosts could scatter the forces of the law. In quitting Parkland, Mart intended to leave the town a shambles.

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THAT probability had occurred to Joe Cardona. It explained why the ace did not follow Mart. Instead, Joe commandeered a car; with a small group of detectives, he sped for the trailer camp. As he neared that spot, Joe saw a flood of cars pouring for the city's center.

There were enough guns in that crowd to stave off Cardona's flank attack. But Mart's full mass of reserves was not on the move. There was battle in the trailer camp itself.

As soon as the first rush had begun, agents of The Shadow bobbed from trailers, to take care of the rest. Half of Mart's fifty reserves were on the way. The rest never started. Men who actually belonged in the trailer camp rallied to aid The Shadow's agents. Thugs were sprawling everywhere, under the unexpected sortie.

Cardona caught the situation at a glance. He ordered pursuit of those twenty-odd who were heading for the heart of Parkland. With police guns harrying them from the rear, the mob outraced the pursuit. As Cardona's car swung a corner, he and his few companions came suddenly into the thick of things.

Mart's reserves had stopped on a side street. There, they had joined another horde of crooks who had sprung from spots in town. The mob must have totaled fifty; and both ends of the block were covered by a handful of protecting gunners. Before Cardona could cleave his way through, he saw why the mob was here.

Crooks were converging at the shooting gallery. The place was a blind. It belonged to Mart Kilgay; the shooting gallery was the big-shot's arsenal.

Gaining the shelter of a doorway, Cardona gripped a useless, emptied revolver. He saw crooks clear the counter of the shooting gallery, to get at racks of rifles.

Those guns weren't the usual .22s that were used in target shooting. They were rifles of larger caliber; and there were enough to supply the fifty killers who wanted them. A dozen already had their guns; in three more minutes, the whole force would be armed.

Joe knew what that would mean. Mart Kilgay would come from his stronghold to take command. The city would be looted; buildings put to the torch. What would happen to helpless persons who had taken refuge in many buildings was something that Cardona hated to think about.

Cardona stopped short as he heard the sudden boom of gunfire. He saw spurts of flame that stabbed from an unexpected spot – the blackness that formed a background for the targets in the shooting gallery.

With that blast came another sound that Cardona recognized. It was the burst of a mocking, all-compelling laugh, that made a strident battle cry.

The Shadow, again within the midst of enemies, was giving the fierce challenge that he backed with sizzling slugs from big gun muzzles.

CARDONA saw crooks heel about. They saw The Shadow's cloaked figure, like a camouflaged pattern against the white targets and the black background of the shooting gallery. Those who had rifles aimed them. Cardona heard the crackle of those guns.

The Shadow never halted his withering fire. He had the edge against the dozen who opposed them. He was burning bullets into those riflemen and the milling throng behind them. Gunmen couldn't get the aim they wanted, amid the surge of jostling arms and elbows.

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Rifles, twisting in loosened hands, furnished only a scattering of wild shots that picked tin ducks and clay pipes from racks behind The Shadow's shifting shoulders. Sprawling on their weapons, crooks were out of the fray. Some of those behind them tried to snatch up the fallen rifles. Those stoopers tasted fresh bullets from The Shadow's automatics.

The mob broke. Springing forward, The Shadow slugged down foemen who were trying to grab guns from a rack. He hurled one emptied automatic into the ugly face of a crouching rifleman who alone remained unwounded. He flung the other .45 at the scattering group on the sidewalk.

With a quick sweep, The Shadow gathered up a rifle and cleared the counter with a long vault.

The Shadow's laugh pealed anew, as he trained the rifle and swung it in a semicircle toward the scattering mob. Attackers dived for cover, where they crouched with hands raised in surrender.

Turning, The Shadow began a quick barrage for the end of the block where Cardona's detectives had been halted. Guarding crooks knew that their revolvers could not match that long-range fire. They scattered.

The Shadow raised a beckoning hand to Joe Cardona. The detective ace understood the gesture. It was The Shadow's call for the law to take over the captured shooting gallery; to use the weapons that crooks had planted for themselves.

Lone-handed, The Shadow had turned the tide in the favor of the law.

CHAPTER XXI. BRACE MEETS THE SHADOW

THE capture of the arsenal did not mean that the cause was won. Crooks had been faring well beyond the corner that led to the main street. Taxi-driving thugs had outmaneuvered the police cars. Loose crooks had dug up revolvers from many hidden places.

Joe Cardona and his small group had their hands full, rounding up the reserve crooks. In addition, they had to guard the shooting gallery. The problem was to get word to fighting police, that loaded weapons could be had in plenty. Once those rifles reached the right hands, the law could triumph.

There were crackles from a fresh rifle, handled by The Shadow. Cardona saw the cloaked fighter's plan. The Shadow was firing for the corner of the main street, to drive off the few crooks clustered there.

They scattered, like the others had. Flinging his rifle across the counter, The Shadow picked up another loaded one that an attacker had let fall on the sidewalk.

Before Cardona could reach him, The Shadow was making long strides toward the main street. He was off to clear the way for hard-pressed police to gain this outlet. Once they reached the side street, the cops would find the shooting gallery.

To Cardona, The Shadow's new drive looked like suicide. Once he reached the main street, he would be an open target. Crooks would snipe him from ambush. The chance was too desperate, even for The Shadow.

Grabbing a rifle, Cardona shouted for his men to hold the shooting gallery. On the run, Joe followed The Shadow.

The instant that The Shadow turned the corner, Cardona could hear the fresh burst of opposing guns. When Joe arrived, he saw that his fears were realized. There was The Shadow, zigzagging in the middle of the

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street, while snipers tried to clip him.

They hadn't done it yet. Those crooks were wary; and the range was long. The Shadow paused suddenly; a shot from his rifle nipped a thug who was aiming from a doorway. A twist; another rifle shot; a second crook sprawled out from cover.

Cardona liked that system. From the corner, he began long-range fire with his own rifle. Every sniper that Joe handled meant further progress for The Shadow. If The Shadow could reach the next cross street, victory would be sure. It was beyond there that the police were congregated.

Vainly, the cops were firing at the Knightson Building. They couldn't get close enough to storm that stronghold; for every surge was answered by a toss of gas bombs from the window. Ducky had provided those useful missiles; and every burst of tear gas drove off the police.

Smart headwork on Mart's part. He was baiting the police; keeping them here until his riflemen showed up. Mart hadn't learned that the sharpshooters had failed to get their weapons.

The Shadow's rifle was empty. He reached a sprawled sniper; picked up the fellow's revolver. He seemed to twist himself away, before another hail of bullets came. Cardona saw him down a crouched gunman with a revolver slot.

Joe chucked his own rifle; took time out to reload his revolver. Cardona was far enough behind The Shadow to reload in safety.

CARDONA saw The Shadow wheel, to fire the one shot remaining in his revolver. Joe was hoping that The Shadow had reserve weapons; but doubted that he would have time to draw them. Cardona's own bullets were gone; his gun hammer clicked an empty chamber. In this pinch, there was no time to reload.

The Shadow was wheeling away, losing the precious ground that he had gained; but retreating tactics could not save him. In from the corner wheeled a pair of taxicabs. From behind The Shadow, three more cars were coming up. The first was a coupe; the next a sedan, the last was another taxi.

Killers in those cars could have dropped Cardona where he stood; but they were after bigger game. They wanted The Shadow. Cars veered as the cloaked fighter leaped to the sidewalk. The coupe was the first to reach him. Cardona saw a gun shoved from the window.

It was all up with The Shadow, in Cardona's opinion.

The cloaked fighter made one last effort, that seemed as futile as it was heroic. The Shadow sprang for the coupe, to handle the lone man who was in it. With a side twist, The Shadow yanked open the door; clamped his other hand inside to grab the crook's gun.

His foeman came up from the wheel. The Shadow locked with him, inside the car.

More than a dozen thugs spread around the coupe, to be ready if The Shadow won the fray with his lone adversary. Cardona was out of it, for a couple of extra men had spotted him and were pumping shots that sent Joe to cover.

The struggle in the coupe finished with the sound of a muffled gunshot. Bristling guns were leveled when the door swung open; but it was not The Shadow who stepped forth. Instead, crooks saw Brace Lurbin. The trigger-man was wearing a broad grin.

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"It took me to get him," boasted Brace. "I told Mart what would happen when I ran into The Shadow! Only I thought I wasn't going to get the chance."

Brace paused; he was holding one big revolver in his right hand. He pulled the mate from his other hip. Nudging a gun toward the huddled victim in the coupe, Brace rasped:

"Get rid of The Shadow, you guys! Stow him somewhere, if he hasn't croaked. I'm going through to talk to Mart."

Listeners were amazed. They started to tell Brace that he would have to shoot his way through a cordon of cops. Brace responded with a sneer.

"The Shadow was carving through you guys, wasn't he?" demanded the trigger-man. "And I got The Shadow, didn't I? See these smoke-wagons?" Brace raised his revolvers with a shake. "They say I'm going up to see Mart!"

BRACE started off. Welcoming crooks hailed The Shadow's conqueror. Back at the coupe, others were gleefully hauling Brace's victim to the sidewalk. The Shadow's cloak was twisted around the slumped form like a shroud. Rowdies pulled it away and picked up the slouch hat from the floor.

A thug who talked from the corner of his mouth was prompt to identify the pasty features that the crooks saw.

"Chee!" he voiced. "It's Cuckoo Berkell! De guy we t'ought was a sappo, down at de trailer camp. An' he was De Shadow, all de time!"

"Sure," voiced another. "He was foxin' us! Some boob told me he was one of the hopheads that Cardona run out of town. An' him tellin' us he was wid the mob."

Some one growled to pack The Shadow into a taxicab. There was life in the limp shape of "Cuckoo" Berkell. How long it would last was a question; particularly in the hands of these sworn enemies to The Shadow. But before the crooks could start, they had battle on their hands.

Cardona had survived a quick dash back to the corner. Reaching the shooting gallery, he had spied a couple of automobiles swinging in from the trailer camp. The Shadow's agents were bringing along visiting tourists, after winning the battle among the trailers.

Cardona had the rifle squad he wanted. He came around the corner of the main street at the head of a dozen willing fighters. They saw the limp, cloaked-wrapped figure that was going into the sedan. Rifles blasted a withering challenge.

Mobsters fled under fire. Cardona detailed men to carry The Shadow to safety. Still leading the drive, Cardona neared the Knightson Building in time to witness what was going on outside it.

Cops and crooks were exchanging a fusillade of bullets that kept both forces under cover. Suddenly, a long-limbed battler sprang across the street. It was Brace Lurbin, his guns spouting like volcanoes. The trigger-man wasn't stopping to take aim.

Brace's shots were meant to keep the police too low to fire; and they succeeded. Heads were ducked while bullets whistled over them. The police poked into sight the moment that Brace had reached the opposite sidewalk; for half a second, Cardona thought that they would manage to wing the fellow.

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Then came a flock of bombarding gas bombs from the windows of the building. Aimed for the cops, those missiles stopped the fire. Ducking, police lost their chance to drop Brace. Cardona tried to remedy it with a rifle shot; but he couldn't get the range in time.

One bullet was all Cardona fired. It whined above Brace's head, to ricochet from the building wall. Steel shutters opened from a ground-floor window, and Brace scrambled through. Cardona arrived to take up a more important matter: the siege of the building itself.

INSIDE the beleaguered fortress, Brace went upstairs. Crooks were at every window, peering through partly opened shutters, ready to chuck their few remaining bombs. They had revolvers, also; but Mart had told them to hold their fire for the present.

Brace found Mart in Doc Arland's office.

"Thanks, Mart," voiced the trigger man. "I knew you'd get the idea when you saw me running for it. That tear gas hit just in time. The boys were quick with the window, too."

"What're you here for, Brace?" snapped Mart. "I figured you'd bring the rifle crew. That's what we're stalling for."

"I had to get The Shadow," informed Brace. "I nailed him! So he's out."

Mart's eyes glistened at the good news. He thwacked Brace on the shoulder.

"With The Shadow through," declared Mart, "it's a cinch! We won't wait for the bunch with the rifles. We can handle Cardona and the cops."

"Except for one thing," corrected Brace. "They've got the rifles, Mart. With a bunch of fighting bozos from the trailer camp to use them."

Doc Arland was shoving Ducky Murrick from the window, as Brace spoke. Doc clamped the shutters just in time. The sharp ping that cracked the metal barrier was followed by a hail of bullets. The sound told Mart that the slugs had issued from rifle muzzles.

"So The Shadow mooched into the shooting gallery, did he?" Mart's question showed contempt. "And that makes Cardona think he's got us, huh? We'll show him what he's got. Trouble, from something worse than rifles!"

Turning about, Mart indicated Doc Arland's electrical equipment with a sweep of his arm. To Arland and Ducky, he snapped the order:

"Unpack the typewriters!"

The crooks pulled the equipment apart. The upright standards of electrical appliances were the muzzles of machine guns, that had long awaited this occasion. As other parts fitted into place, the room lights showed Mart's smile of anticipation.

"We'll shove these downstairs," said Mart. "Another shot of tear gas and we'll make a break for it. They'll hear these typewriters talk!"

The curl at the corner of Brace's lips showed his relish of the future. But Brace thought of something else.

"What about the stuff in your office, Mart?"

"We gotta pack it," returned the big-shot. "Hop in there and get started, Brace. I'll come in and open the safe."

Brace left. Mart waited to see the machine guns set up. He noted Doc Arland staring puzzled at one muzzle; then another. Ducky started an inspection; gave an excited cry.

"Spiked!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "Every one of them! There's not a good gun in the lot!"

Like his lieutenants, Mart stood silent. He heard a rifle bullet smack the closed shutters. That reminder of the present menace stirred Mart's memory of a past one. He realized that The Shadow had penetrated to this very office – days ago, maybe weeks – to identify the electrical apparatuses as what they actually were.

Powerful, needed weapons were turned to worthless metal. Spiked machine guns were The Shadow's legacy to Mart Kilgay and his remaining men of crime.

CHAPTER XXII. THE BLAZED TRAIL

SAVAGELY, Mart regained his desire for action. He yanked a revolver from his hip; told Arland and Ducky to do the same. Turning to the door, the big-shot beckoned.

"We're shooting it out!" rasped Mart. "The tear gas; then these rods. We've got gorillas downstairs, all ready to go."

"They'll quit when they know what's happened. Mart," objected Arland. "You told them you'd have machine guns."

"Nobody's got a show against those rifles," added Ducky. "We're through, Mart. That's all."

Mart didn't lose his confidence. He thumbed along the hall. His lieutenants looked toward the door of the rear office.

"You've forgotten Brace?" quizzed Mart. "You saw him shoot his way in here, didn't you? Alone?"

Mart's words brought nods.

"All right," added the leader. "What about going out? He'll do the same. Those cops will scatter like monkeys when they see Brace coming through. But this time" – Mart's eyes were vicious – "he'll be shooting to kill! With us right behind him."

Mart could never have played a better bet. His confidence in Brace was shared by the others. The lieutenants needed no further order to follow. Mart started for his office, with Arland and Ducky behind him.

"Hey, Brace!"

Mart spoke the words as he opened the office door. He stopped to gawk about. The room was lighted, but empty.

Mart was badly puzzled. He hadn't heard Brace go downstairs. The window was shuttered tightly. Brace couldn't have been clipped by a pot-shot from the rear of the building.

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Nevertheless, Brace was gone, with no hiding place to hold him. The door of the closet was half open. Inside, Mart could see the cloak and hat of The Shadow, hanging there. Mart blinked. There was something funny about that cloak and hat. They were closer to the door than they belonged.

As Mart stared, that black garb moved. The cloak bulged from the shape of a figure beneath it. Burning eyes shone from beneath the hat brim. Like a materializing ghost, the form of The Shadow issued into light. From hidden lips, Mart heard a sibilant laugh.

Gloved hands held mammoth guns; but they were not The Shadow's automatics. They were the .45 revolvers belonging to Brace Lurbin; the smoke-wagons that Mart had hired to produce The Shadow's death!

Rooted, Mart couldn't fathom it; nor could the gawking men behind him. Not until The Shadow deliberately tilted back his head so that they could glimpse his face. The flattish features that they saw were not the hawklike ones that rumor attributed to The Shadow.

The Shadow's face was the countenance of Brace Lurbin.

IT looked masklike, that visage, when crooks realized the truth. Almost instantly, riddles were explained. Mart Kilgay understood why Brace had failed to uncover The Shadow. As Brace Lurbin, The Shadow had joined up with Mart's own outfit.

Quick vanishes were explained. That night in Ducky's storeroom, The Shadow had arranged his hat and cloak; then become Brace. On another occasion, he had staged a similar change in back of the Crystal Theater.

Brace hadn't been on a false trail the night of Larmon's murder. He had been busy at the Park Hotel, performing more kaleidoscopic changes. As Brace, The Shadow had divined Dingo's plan for entering the jewelry store. Still in the guise of Brace, The Shadow had added his creepy laugh while following Mart.

On the night of double crime, The Shadow had an alibi for Brace; the claim that he had seen Doc Arland's signal. Brace hadn't been across the street watching for that flash.

To-night The Shadow, surrounded by crooks, had pounced on the thuggish driver of a chance coupe. Leaving his cloak and hat with the victim, he had revealed himself as Brace. Crooks had aided him to penetrate into Mart's headquarters!

Earlier, The Shadow had watched the plot develop against Tom Knightson; he had heard the plans for Ruth's abduction. He had spiked both of those moves, just like the machine guns in Arland's office.

THE SHADOW was here to clear crooks from their fortress; to save the lives of dozens of police. As a beginning, The Shadow had Mart covered; but the big-shot saw a chance to preserve himself at the expense of others.

Heaving backward, Mart went between Arland and Ducky, shoving them into the doorway. They didn't realize the betrayal. Their guns were up; each lieutenant was eager to get the first shot at The Shadow.

Gloved fingers tugged revolver triggers. With his pair of guns, The Shadow beat both crooks to the shot. Mart's living shields sagged away, guns dropping from their hands. Mart fired, but his slugs found no better target than the closet door. The Shadow was fading while Arland and Ducky fell.

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A .45 blasted a bullet through the crack of the open door, to skim Mart's coat sleeve. The crime leader did a wild dive and made the stairs. He turned to fire; ducked downward when he saw The Shadow's gun muzzle shove into sight. With a clatter, Mart headed for the bottom of the stairs.

During that mad race, the big-shot shouted, calling thugs from their stations to meet The Shadow's drive. They came, to find The Shadow aiming for their doorways. Guns roared a constant fray that Mart still heard when he reached the ground floor. He rallied the gunmen at the lower windows; chased them to the stairs.

From the front door, Mart saw the result. Along the entire route, The Shadow had been dropping foemen, always a jump ahead with his aim and fire. His revolvers were pumping downward when the last reserves aimed up from the bottom of the stairs. Mart couldn't see The Shadow; all he could watch was what happened to his crew.

There were four of them, withering as they fired. Two sprawled before they could tug their triggers. A third was sagging as he fired. His drifting gun slammed useless bullets into the stairs below The Shadow.

The last man fired savagely; his aim looked good to Mart. That was because the big-shot couldn't see The Shadow's shift.

Like an echo to the thug's shot came the answer from The Shadow's gun. The last of Mart's downstairs crew spilled crazily at the bottom of the steps.

From above came the chilling cry that reached Mart's marrow. It was the strident laugh of The Shadow.

With a wild yank, Mart pulled back the bar that held the big front door. He shoved the barrier outward; as it swung, he scooped up a pair of gas bombs. He hurled them ahead of him as he dashed out toward the sidewalk. Mart saw figures scud as the tear gas exploded in the middle of the street.

On the curb, Mart halted, aiming his gun to open fire. From the doorway behind him peered The Shadow. A gloved hand gripped a revolver that The Shadow had picked from beside a fallen crook. The Shadow was ready to drop Mart before the big-shot could pull his trigger.

It happened that The Shadow's bullet was unneeded.

Guns spoke from all about, with Mart Kilgay as the common target. With that medley of revolver barks and rifle shots, the crook spun crazily, buffeted by bullets. The Shadow saw him topple to the gutter. A dozen marksmen could take credit for ridding Parkland of that public enemy.

JOE CARDONA was the first to reach Mart's body. Looking toward the door of the building, Joe saw The Shadow approach. Waving his rifle, Cardona motioned every one back.

Agents of The Shadow saw the move and knew what it meant. A coupe started from beyond the corner; The Shadow was standing with Joe Cardona when the car arrived.

Brief words were exchanged. The Shadow explained the manner of his amazing reappearance. He pointed to the doorway; Cardona knew that the way was clear to Mart's office. There would be found the evidence that the law required: stolen funds, proving Mart's guilt along with Tom's innocence. Cardona would find the secret records of the racket ring.

The Shadow stepped past the bullet-riddled form of Mart Kilgay. The coupe started with its cloaked passenger. Herded crooks watched its departure. Those thugs were helpless under the guns of police and loyal

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fighters from the trailer camp.

Joe Cardona gave his arms a long, wide sweep. Hats came from the sweat-streaked foreheads of loyal men. Hands waved those hats while rousing cheers came from husky throats. Rescued citizens of Parkland, clustered at many windows, joined in the shouted acclaim for The Shadow.

As the coupe swung the corner, they received The Shadow's answer. A gloved hand swung a slouch hat from the window, in recognition of the hoarse-voiced cheers. A shivering laugh trailed weirdly; its fading tone seemed to linger like a living echo.

To Joe Cardona had come the realization of a long desire. Often, in the past, The Shadow had conquered crime, to turn the credit over to Cardona. By banishing evil from this city of greed, The Shadow had produced a new success for Joe Cardona.

At last, Joe was able to return the compliment. He had provided the sequel that he wanted. The Shadow's departure had been no unseen move, leaving nothing but a blackened void. The cloaked conqueror of crime had gone amid the roars of public approval that he had so long deserved.

This time, Joe Cardona had passed the credit to The Shadow.

THE END