

REIGN OF TERROR

Maxwell Grant

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REIGN OF TERROR

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CHAPTER I

YAWNING, the tired doctor waved a lackadaisical hand good night to his nurse. She said, "Don't forget you have to be in surgery at nine tomorrow, Dr. Brandon."

"Okay. See you then." The doctor leaned back in his chair. He was bone weary. It was fine to be a top-notch surgeon, but it was exhausting. The door closed behind his nurse and he was alone. He riffled through a book which he had received that day. It was about block anesthesia, a subject dear to his heart. He read on, becoming more and more engrossed. There was a strong possibility that in a period of a couple of years, localized anesthesia would take the place of gross ether anesthesia.

Time passed over the doctor's unaware head. It was near midnight when the door bell rang. The book dropped to the doctor's lap as he wondered what this late call presaged. He got to his feet and opened the door.

He looked at the two men in the doorway with no recognition. Well dressed, too well dressed, they bulked large in the aperture. One was medium height, medium weight, medium everything until you came to his eyes. They were slits. The pupils were pin points in the low light. The darting pin points shifted to the doctor's face. The man spoke.

His voice was shrill, high pitched.

He said, "Back into the office, Dr. Quack."

The other man who was taller, fatter, said slowly, "Yare. Back up."

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The doctor retreated, his brain in a whirl. This kind of thing was foreign to him. What could the men want? Drugs? Some kind of outside-the-law medical assistance?

"Down in the chair," the medium sized man said. He re-inforced his command by showing just the muzzle of a pistol. It poked out of his overcoat pocket for a second and then dropped back out of sight.

The doctor sat down.

The other man took something out of his pocket. It was not a gun, although the single lamp in the room cast highlights on the metal that formed the object. It was heavy and made a dull and ominous sound as it clumped on the surface of the desk.

"Be with you in a second, Dr. Quack." The man whose eyes were slits moved his hand in his pocket.

The other man tightened a screw on the bottom of the object. Only then did the doctor realize what it was. A vise. The man was fastening the incongruous object to a corner of the desk.

Three men in an office. A machinist's tool fastened to the corner of a doctor's desk. What could it mean, the doctor wondered? He was not left in doubt for long.

The man with the gun said, "Put his thumb in it, Larry."

"Yare."

Before the doctor quite knew how it had happened, his right hand thumb was being forced in between the steel jaws of the vise. A turn of the handle and his thumb was pressed with agonizing force.

The man tightened the turning handle of the vise an extra quarter turn. The blood drained out of the doctor's face. The other man took his gun out of his pocket and, holding it negligently, said, "One sound and you get one through the head."

The doctor froze. This was fantastic. Incredible as a nightmare. But the pain in his thumb was real. His precious thumb. With that injured, he could never operate again...

The two men watched as they saw realization dawn in the doctor's eyes. The one with the gun said, "Get the picture, Doc? One turn of the vise and your thumb is out of commission... forever. No more operations. No more high fees. Nobody can operate with a flat thumb. Not even you, the wonder working Dr. Brandon!"

It was true, the doctor thought, looking down at his thumb. Without that sensitive rotating digit he would be as helpless as if he were handless.

The doctor forced the words out of his dry throat. "What do you want?"

"This will come as a surprise, Dr. Quack. A big surprise."

The doctor looked up. Were these men after revenge? Were they relatives of someone on whom he had operated and failed? But that would be absurd. Every doctor had failures... even the best...

The man said, "Yep. Some surprise. We want dough. Money. The long green. That filthy stuff that greases the wheels and makes them go round."

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"Money? Of course. But... I have no money here. Perhaps fifty dollars in my wallet. Will that be enough?" The doctor's voice was choked, pinched. His thumb hurt even though the pressure from the vise was not particularly hard. He could imagine what one more turn would do.

"Fifty clams!" the man said. "The doc's some kidder, ain't he Larry? A comic. You should be on the radio, doc."

The other man said, "Yare, and less comedy out of you, Barrels. Cut the barbering and get to work."

"Okay. Look, doc, we'll take the fifty for now. But we'll be back tomorrow night. That'll be Wednesday. We'll come for our weekly two hundred. You can afford that... you could lay down even more, but we're nice kids and we dowanna put you out of business. As a matter of fact, you could look at it like you just got some new partners. We want for you to make lots of dough. Cause then we make lots of dough, get it?"

"You want two hundred dollars a week?" The doctor thought fast. He would promise the money, promise to pay off weekly and then, tomorrow night, have the police in hiding, and...

The man with the gun grinned. He said, "Look, I'm a mind reader! You know what Dr. Quack is thinking, don't you? He's thinking of having a reception committee ready for us tomorrow night."

The other said, "Yeah. They all think of that. Show him your clippings."

A hand went into an inner pocket and came out filled with newspaper items clipped from the papers. The clippings fell with a soft plop on the center of the doctor's desk.

The doctor forced his unwilling eyes downward. He saw, "Acid Ruins Doctor's Hands." That was the headline on one item. Another was slugged, "Strange Series of Accidents Dogs Doctors." He ran his eyes down the finer print and read about three doctors who had been singularly luckless. One had been in an auto accident and had his arm smashed. Another even more unfortunate had caught his hand in a window and had all his fingers mashed flat. The third had lost a thumb in an odd accident that had been brought about by his slipping on some icy pavement.

The doctor looked up from the clippings. There were more, many more of the newspaper items but he had no desire to read them. He said, and his voice was dull, "I see what you mean. If I call the police you will know about it and will not be here."

"He's a smart kid, this doc." The man grinned. "He catches on fast. Sure, if you call for help we don't show... not when the cops are here, anyhow. But we come back for a visit. Don't worry about that, we come back..."

"I'll have the money for you," the doctor said.

The vise flipped open. His thumb was released. The man who'd been operating the device said, "Don't think that this won't go back on just as easy as it came off!"

They left then. The two men went out through the door and it closed softly behind them. The doctor was alone. If it hadn't been for the pressure marks on his thumb, tiny dimples left by the inside of the vise, he might have doubted his sanity. But as it was, he sat that way for a long time looking at his digit.

Sure, he could afford the money. This time. But for how long? Ten thousand dollars a year it worked out to. Ten thousand four hundred dollars. But it was either that or... he looked at his thumb again.

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They were smart, making it in weekly installments. He might have trouble in raising ten thousand in a lump. He might have had to sell some stocks and that would have left a record. This way... Only then he remembered that he had to be in the operating room at nine the next morning.

He got to his feet and turned off the light. The office was empty now. He went out the door. It closed behind him. Darkness filled the room. Black shadows that made weird patterns on the light grey rug.

There was a whisper of sound at the partly open window. So faint as to be but the veriest echo of an echo, a sinister laugh came into being and then was gone. If there had been ears to hear they would have wondered where the sound could have come from and what could have made it. But as it was the sound died away as though unborn.

Now the office was really empty.

CHAPTER II

SHE was unusual in that she was almost as pretty off stage as on. Generally the kind of face that looks exquisite from the audience is a little coarse at close range. But she was the exception to the rule. She sat down in front of her make-up mirror and in that crowded little dressing room she was like a lambent flame.

Outside her door the hubbub of a nightclub went on. The orchestra finished the chord that had brought her off. She smiled as she heard the last bit of applause die away. The audience had been receptive that night. They had liked every song she had sung, every special intonation that was her identification mark.

Looking at herself in the mirror she was glad she was alive, glad she was a performer, glad she was getting the recognition she had always wanted. She took a deep breath. It had been a long, tough climb, but now, at moments like these, she regretted nothing.

Savoring the moment to the utmost, she was deaf to the little sound of her door opening. She didn't even realize that there were two men in her room till she saw their reflection in the mirror.

Pulling a wrapper up about her, she said angrily, "You might have knocked!"

One of the men said, "Why?" in a flat voice that denied the question it asked.

For a long moment there was complete silence in the crowded little room. The outside noises seemed to die away. Fear came slowly to the girl. She had been around. She knew the score. But this didn't add up. The men looked at her coldly. They didn't look at her the way she was used to being eyed by men.

One of them who was medium sized opened his clenched hand. After all the melodrama of the silence, the content of his hand was an anti-climax. In the center of his palm was a little bottle.

She looked at it. Through the glass she could see an oily fluid. It shimmered slowly in the light from the unshaded bulb over her make-up mirror.

The man held the bottle gingerly at his finger tips. He removed the glass stopper from the top of the bottle. Then his slits of eyes flicked around the room. He saw, thrown on a settee, a rag doll.

He walked to it and slowly tilted the bottle over the doll's idiotically smiling face. Drops of the liquid poured down. The girl watched, hypnotized by what was happening.

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A tendril of smoke wafted upward from the painted smile on the doll's face. And then, suddenly, there was no face! The doll's head was a smoking, roiling mass. The cotton batting of which the head was made was puffing up into view as the plaster of the doll's face was eaten away.

The girl looked from the destroyed doll's head to the bottle. From the bottle her eyes went up to the face of the man who had poured the liquid on her doll.

He said, "Get it, dearie?"

She shuddered.

The other man said. "Don't get in a hassle, darling. We won't do that to your face... not unless you force us to."

"What do you want?" she whispered.

"Money."

"How much?"

"You make five bills a week. We want two."

"Sure." She smiled hysterically. "Sure, I get five hundred a week. But how much do you think is left after I pay my agent ten per cent, my personal manager ten, Uncle Sam his tax cut, and the hundred I pay my press agent a week?"

"Enough so you can give us two... or..." The man's slitted eyes went to the doll's head. He lingered over the cotton batting which was smoking now.

"You're crazy. I don't see that much money free and clear," she said, angry now.

"So you'll have to make a couple of extra bucks a week," the man said. "That's your business, not ours." His voice was flat. "First payment is due by Friday. And no cops." He grinned and it showed yellow broken stumps projecting from the gums.

She dropped her head into her hands. She didn't even see them go, but there were eyes that saw them leave. At the window, the tiny dirty window that never allowed any sun to enter the dressing room, there was a patch of shadow which seemed just a degree darker than the real shadows.

The darker shadow faded away. The frightened girl was alone with her fears.

The prelims were over. No one had watched the fighters. People milled around, late comers bustled down the aisles. In the ring the last pair of prelim fighters were finishing their mechanical chores. It was a six round bout. This was the last round. The fighters were evenly matched. As a matter of fact, they had put on a fairly good fight. But no one was interested. They were lightweights and the attention of the evening was focused on the middleweight championship bout.

In the ring, one of the men was on the receiving end of a left jab. He staggered, the right came through and the bout was over.

The ring was cleared.

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The first of the middleweights, the contender, came down the aisle. Now the seats were all filled. The last, last minute bets had been made. The men in the seats eyed the man in the bathrobe. A lot of money was riding on him.

He climbed up through the ropes. The white harsh lights bit down into his face making the ring scars on it stand out like primitive sculpture. He bowed to the audience. There was a cocky little smile twisting the corners of his mouth. It disappeared as his handler put the rubber mouthpiece in place.

There was a roar welling up in the arena. That meant the champ was coming down. The contender didn't even look around. He hunched his shoulders.

The champ got into the ring and bowed. If he was frightened he didn't show it. He looked out into the audience. But there was no help there. There was no help anywhere. Those guys who had come into his dressing room. He clenched his hands inside the adhesive tape. If he could only get his fists on them... But if he had clouted them there would have been others. Always others... more and more of them. You couldn't fight them all.

He sighed. He'd had his orders. He looked over at the contender and wondered if the contender knew the fight was in the bag. Ah, what difference did it make? The only thing was to make it look good, so the stink didn't attract too much attention.

The sixth round he'd been told to flop.

From the audience the champ looked as if he was raring to go. He slipped off his bathrobe. His body was peculiar. Long bodied and short legged he looked like some link with man's past.

He had a primitive sort of energy that had carried him to triumph over the prostrate bodies of men much his superior in boxing skill. Forty-seven k.o.'s, three decisions, and one draw. That was his record and up to twenty minutes ago it had been his proudest boast.

The time keeper clanged the bell. The two men came from their corners and the huge arena was quiet. This was what twenty thousand people had paid a small fortune to see. It has been said that no coward ever gets in the ring because no coward can force himself into that white square. There is a feeling of isolation there, of being back in the dark ages when man was pitted against man or beast...

The contender felt his man out. His left tapped out almost delicately. The champ's guard came up instinctively. There was a flurry of blows.

The third man in the ring, watching closely, couldn't see anything wrong and yet the contender could feel it. The champ was off. Just a split second off, but he was off. The contender relaxed a bit.

The referee circled around the men. He hoped it would be a clean fight and a quick one. He was tired and he wanted to go home and go to bed. He thought maybe he had a cold coming on.

The champ hunched his head into his shoulders and held his guard a little higher than usual. Just because he was going to take a dive there was no sense in taking a real beating.

The contender landed one that jolted the champ. He sucked wind in. That had hurt. He backed away. The contender came in faster now, surer of himself. The champ smiled to himself. He knew just how the contender was feeling.

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From the ringside the fight looked good. There were plenty of exchanges. The radio announcer was working himself up into a frenzy adding artificial excitement to his words so that some of the feeling would come across into the homes of his listening audience.

The television cameras were focused on the center of the ring where the action was at its peak.

On the screen of a television set the fight looked as if it were being fought by marionettes, by stringed puppets. The little men in the white ring didn't seem real.

The three men who were sitting around the television set leaned forward in the soft chairs as the champ flicked a long right out. It caught the contender right on the tip of the chin. He staggered and fell back into the ropes.

One of the three watching men said, "Is that fool selling us out?"

The fat man who had a bowl in his lap in which he was mixing something said, "Don't be an idiot. He wouldn't dare. Sit back, relax. When I take care of something, it stays taken care of."

The third man whose dull, blank eyes seemed to be barely focused on the scene, said, "Sure, when Ed Corre puts a fix in, it stays fixed."

The fat man said, "You tell him, Buster."

"All right, all right," the thin man was querulous.

"That's what's the matter with you, Corbaccio," Ed Corre said, "you worry too much."

"There's a lot of my money riding on this," Corbaccio snapped.

"Sure, sure." Corre used the fork in his hand to mix the salad in the bowl more thoroughly. "Sure, a lot of money." He grinned. It drew his soft bulbous mouth up into a Cupid-like bow.

The television announcer said, "Only thirty seconds left in the sixth round of the championship match, folks, and... oh... oh! Watch this!"

The three men, Corre, Corbaccio, and the man called Buster leaned forward in their chairs. Corre forgot to mix the salad in the bowl. The contender was coming in for the kill. The champ was on the ropes. He was bleeding from the nose, from a cut over his eye. He was gasping around his rubber mouthpiece. His lungs strained.

One blow... two... One to the head, one to the bread basket. That snapped the champ's head down right into the path of the right that came up from the ankle. The champ's head snapped back.

His body slumped into the ropes. The elasticity of the ropes threw him forward as though rejecting him. He fell downward on his face.

Corre reached out and flicked off the switch on the television set.

Corbaccio stammered, "Aren't you going to wait and see what happens?"

"You kidding? I ordered him to flop in the sixth. This is the sixth."

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Buster said, "Don't you believe the boss when he says somethin'?"

"Sure, but..." Corbaccio looked undecided.

"But what?" Corre asked, his cupid's bow mouth curved in a sweet smile.

Corbaccio stammered into silence.

"That's better," Corre said. "Now I want your honest opinion about this new salad dressing. Your honest opinion, mind you. Don't say you like it if you don't."

Buster left the room to get plates. Corbaccio sat back in his chair and looked at Corre. How much of this food business was an act and how much real? He could never make up his mind. The phone rang and he watched Corre waddle over and answer it. The man was so fat. He almost abused the privilege. Three hundreds pounds of soft blubber... and inside it that hard brain. It didn't seem possible.

Corre said, "You got the money? Okay, put it in the safe and then you can beat it." He hung up the phone.

"We get paid off," he said to Corbaccio. "You can really relax now. I like that. You should never eat when you are the slightest bit upset. It's not fair to the food." He turned as Buster came in with plates and silverware. "Ah, thank you, my genial fool."

He separated the salad into three portions. Two normal size and the third gigantic. He would allow no talking when he ate. The two men observed the silence rule. They ate. When the plates were clear Corre asked, "Now, how do you like it?"

"Good. Very good. One of the best salads I ever ate!" Corbaccio said truthfully.

"One of the best?" Corre looked thoughtful. He lifted his head, tightening his neck line so that only three of his double chins showed. "Where have you ever had any like it?" He was really curious.

"Why... I don't know. I don't remember. But really, this is great."

"Pity you don't remember." Corre looked sorrowful. "However, to work. Have you taken care of the booking angle?"

"Uh huh," Corbaccio looked wary. "Corre, are you sure this is going to work? It's a peculiar angle, it's never been done before."

"It'll work," Corre said.

"Sure." Buster shook his head anxiously. "It's the boss' idea and they always work. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER III

THE comedian bowed to his applause and walked off the floor. When he got to the side of the club the maitre d'hotel was waiting for him. The maitre d'hotel said, "Over there. Table number six."

"What's up?"

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"Some guy says he can do you some good." The maitre d'hotel was not interested.

The comic walked to the table. He sized up the two men sitting there. If they were booking agents he'd never seen them before, but that wasn't surprising. There were almost as many bookers as acts.

One of the men whose slitted eyes seemed to hurt even in the dull blue lights of the nightclub said, "Sit down."

Seating himself the comedian waited.

"You finish here tonight." It was not a question but a statement of fact.

"Yes, why?"

"How'd you like forty weeks booking at five bills a week?"

Since the comedian was only making three hundred a week he was very interested. He said, "Tell me more."

"That's all, you want the booking or not?" the man with the tiny pupils in his slits of eyes said. "Speak up. There's plenty of crumby m.c. comics who are starving. You want the booking or don't you?"

It was true about the comics starving. The entertainment business was way off from the war time boom. The comedian said, "Sure, I want the booking."

"It'll cost you five grand. You drop the dough and you sign the contract." This was from the other man who up to this point had not spoken.

"Five thous... Ya kiddin'?"

Slit eyes said, "In or out? You want in say so. If not we go next door. There's a comic there too."

"But where would I get that kind of dough?"

"Questions he asks," Slit eyes said.

The other man said, "Don't you know any shylocks?"

"Yeah, but..."

The two men stood up. Slit eyes said, "Ya can't do business with some of these creeps, that's all there is to it."

The comedian gulped, then said, "Gimme twenty-four hours to try and raise the dough, will you?"

"We'll be back tomorrow night this time. Don't louse around, if you don't think you can raise it, tell us now. We're busy."

Forty weeks... even in his best year the comic hadn't worked more than thirty. He said, "I'll have the dough somehow." He paused, lowered his voice and said, "When'd you guys move in on this business?"

Looking down at the comedian, slit eyes said, "We've always been in it. We just decided to make it pay off faster. Tomorrow night." It was an order.

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They left.

Slit eyes was in a phone booth. He spoke with his lips barely moving. "A pushover. Yeah."

A voice on the phone said, "Good. Look, I'm sorry, but something has come up. All the other boys are busy. Do you mind doing one more thing tonight?"

"What's on your mind?"

The phone said, "Look up James Ravvel."

"And?" The question hung in the air.

"He decided not to pay off tonight."

"Okay. His address is 342 Larren St., isn't it?"

"Sixteenth floor," the phone said. "He's there now."

"When we finish this shall I check with you?"

"No... don't bother. I'm going to bed now."

The phone clicked as the receiver slid into place.

The elevator door opened at the nineteenth floor. Two men stepped out. The door closed behind them. They walked down the hall. At the end of it there was a fire door. They looked around them. No one in sight. The door slid open and closed behind them. They walked down three flights of stairs. They walked easily, unhurriedly. They might have been two men coming home from the office after working late. Or, they might have been inspectors examining the walls. That is if it hadn't been three o'clock in the morning.

Unhurriedly they walked out the fire door on the sixteenth floor. No one in sight here either. They walked perhaps twenty paces and paused in front of a door. A neat little tab on the door read James Ravvel.

One man stepped further toward the door. In his hand was a slim piece of blue steel. He inserted it in the keyway of the lock. He pressed on the steel. Then he took another curiously shaped piece of steel from his pocket. One end of it curved down. He inserted this on top of the slimmer object. He jiggled it patiently. There was a series of clicks.

The other man reached his hand down and twisted the knob. The door clicked open. They stepped in as though they were coming home.

The apartment was in darkness. They walked surefootedly through the foyer that led into the living room. The fatter of the two men reached out and turned on a bridge lamp. The light was warm, comforting. There was a door leading off the living room.

One of the men, the fatter one, reached in his pocket and took out a roll of nickels that was wrapped in paper the way a bank packs theirs. He placed the package in the center of his palm. One end of the roll of coins butted against a big heavy ring that the man wore on his smallest finger. He tightened his hand around the roll.

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The other man slammed the bedroom door open. He walked into the darkness to the side of the bed. A man sat up in bed. Light spilling in from the other room illuminated his regular features. Throat dry, he croaked, "Wh... who is it?"

The man said, "Visitors. Get up."

Eyes wide with fear, the man staggered out of his bed. His foot caught in the bedclothes. He pitched forward. As he fell the man who had awakened him lashed out and his hand smashed down on the nape of the other man's neck.

Ravel grunted with pain. He was not out, but he was groggy. A foot in his chest brought him forward onto his knees. He got to his feet and holding onto the wall for support he made his way into the living room.

Pin point pupils dancing in the light, the slimmer of the two men said, "C'mon, get this over. I'm tired. I want to go to bed."

The other grabbed a handful of Ravel's pajamas coat into a bunch and shook him. His right hand was heavy with the roll of nickels. He said, "No matter how I muss pretty boy's face up, it ain't gonna show when he lands on his puss. Sixteen floors, is a long drop."

"Go ahead, but hurry it up. I'm tired."

"You're not tired, you need a shot. G'wan in the bathroom and get it over. I can handle pretty boy." Making a period to the sentence the man's heavy fist cut across Ravel's face. His heavy ring ripped a segment of skin off the face. Blood spurted.

The thinner man left the room. As soon as he was gone there was a susurration in the bed room. Not quite a sound, just below the hearing level there was a trace of movement. A dark figure detached itself from the darkness around the perimeter of the light that came in from the other room.

A dense shadow formed in the doorway. Eyes flickered into being. From below the brim of a black slouch hat an aquiline face took form. The Shadow had entered the scene!

Ravel, eyes glazed with pain, realized there was no use in pleading for mercy. His attacker was too obviously enjoying what he was doing. The fist lanced down again. Again there was that tearing, fiery pain. Ravel's eyes closed.

He waited for the next blow, sure that it would ease him into unconsciousness. Even the knowledge that as soon as he passed out he would be thrown out of the window did not suffice to make him anxious to stay conscious.

The man tightened his hand till the skin was taut across his knuckles. He was smiling. He raised his hand. This one would rip from the forehead down across the nose.

But then, suddenly, his hand would not descend. He was so surprised that he froze in the position he had assumed. His one hand high in the air, the other clutching Ravel's pajamas coat, he stood stock still.

An eerie laugh rolled through the room.

Ravel moaned but didn't open his eyes.

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The Shadow exerted a little more force and brought the man's arm backwards. It gave a little. That was enough. The Shadow pulled hard and the roll of coins from the now flaccid hand fell to the floor.

Whipping his free arm around the man's neck The Shadow squeezed, choking off a call for help.

Ravvel dazedly wondered what was holding off the blow he was tensed for. He opened his eyes. The sight was too incredible. He blinked his eyes, then opened them again. The man who had been attacking him was being attacked in turn. A black caped man whose face was completely hidden in the shadow cast by the edge of his broad black hat was wrenching the man's arm backwards.

Ravvel spun around. He had heard his bathroom door open. Slit eyes was coming back into the room. Ravvel said, "Look out, here's another one!"

The black garbed man held his pose. He continued to apply pressure on the man's windpipe. The man framed in the bathroom door moved as though balanced on springs. His hand whipped under his jacket. When it came back a split second later it was heavy with a gun. He aimed it at Ravvel. He said, and his voice was shrill, "Let him go or I shoot the sucker!"

Never had Ravvel seen anything like it. The black garbed man suddenly bent over. The man he had been grappling with flew over his head. The human catapult flew straight at the slit eyed man.

His gun went off. He'd been too nervous. His shot was too new, he couldn't control his reflexes, the bullet landed in the hurtling body.

When the man's body hit against the frame of the door he was dead. The Shadow had barely moved after that lightning-like flash of action. His hand seemed to disappear and reappear. When it came back into sight it was holding a .45.

For the first time The Shadow spoke. He said, "Get, behind me, Ravvel."

Scurrying to obey, Ravvel saw out of the corner of his eye that slit eyes was moving his gun to fire. There was a double crack of thunder.

Ravvel spun around. Slit eyes' bullet had crashed into a picture in the wall. The Shadow's bullet had smashed into slit eyes. Ravvel watched as the man seemed to crumple. His hands curled into his stomach as though he were grabbing at a button. His fingers uncurled and the gun fell to the floor. He fell on top of it. His arms were at his sides. For a second his fingers dug into the carpet. Then they too were motionless.

The Shadow said, "Unfortunate."

Ravvel said, "What do you mean? They meant to kill me."

"Yes, I realize that; that's the only reason I intruded. But I wanted to question at least one of them." Under the black cape The Shadow's shoulders shrugged. "Too bad. However, we have a problem about the disposition of the bodies. Ordinarily I'd tell you to call the police and say that you had shot two burglars. But if this gets out you'll have more visitors..."

Shuddering, Ravvel agreed to that logic. He strained his eyes trying to penetrate the darkness that lay over The Shadow's face. It was useless. He could sense a strong nose, deep set eyes, but that was all.

"Surprising that the sound of those shots hasn't attracted any attention."

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"No." Ravvel pointed to a piano in the corner of the room. "I'm an arranger. I had to have the apartment sound proofed so that I wouldn't drive the neighbors crazy."

"I see. Very well. Sit tight." The Shadow went to the phone and dialed a number. It was answered immediately. The Shadow said, "I have a disposal problem."

There was a pause, then Ravvel heard the man in black say, "Two. Very good. Immediately."

Hanging up the phone, The Shadow said, "I'd advise you to go back to bed and try to relax. Close the door and don't open it no matter what you hear for the next hour. Can I trust you?"

Ravvel spluttered, "Can you trust me? How can I ever thank you? Who am I indebted to?"

His question was directed to the black hat of the man who was going out the front door. Just as the door closed behind his saviour, he heard a low voice say, "The Shadow." The door closed on a whisper of a laugh.

Ravvel stood in the center of the floor digesting that for a moment, then studiously keeping his eyes away from the two cadavers on the floor, he went into his bedroom and closed the door.

He waited two hours, an hour more than he had said he would. In all that time and it seemed like three lifetimes, he heard no sound. Yet when he opened the door at the end of the two hours, his living room was empty.

But for the ruffled rug and the broken picture on the wall, there was no sign that anything amiss had ever occurred. There was a note on the piano. It said, "Would advise you to get rid of that picture and plug up the bullet holes in the wall with plaster of Paris. Carbon tetrachloride will remove the blood stain from the carpet."

That was all. It was over. He shook his head dazedly. Sleep. He would have to get some sleep before he could think coherently. He went into bed.

In his ears he could still feel an echo of that uncanny whispered laugh. 'The Shadow'... he was under the protection of that fabled creature of the nether world! When he went to bed he fell asleep instantly.

CHAPTER IV

A CAT, statue still, watched with saucer eyes as its quiet alley was disturbed. It was poised on the rim of a garbage can. It watched unblinkingly as the men got out of a car. The car was parked at the entrance of the alley. One of the men turned a flashlight on the alley. He saw ahead of him the tangled mess of broken boxes, cardboard, paper, and garbage cans each of which was a potential booby trap. He whispered to the two other men with him, "Take it easy." They nodded. He said, "I'll hold the flash. Wait a second though, till I check."

He bathed the wall of the alley with light. C..O..R..B..A..C..C..I..O Funeral Home, was spelled out there. He said, "We're on the ball. Hurry up the delivery now."

His voice brought the cat into motion. It scampered away with an irate flick of its tail. He heard it go and smiled into the blackness. That got rid of the only witness. He then stood still, holding the little flashlight steady while the other two men made their 'delivery.'

The two men carrying the bundles had no trouble in opening the back door of the place. They entered. The

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man with the light turned it off as they vanished into the funeral home. They were back almost immediately.

They got back into the car. It drove off. The alley was quiet again. For a long time there was no motion. Then an exploratory paw came over the fence. It was followed by a head. The cat squatted on top of the fence and looked around. All was as it should be. Satisfied, the cat surveyed his domain.

Nothing else bothered the cat till dawn came up and with it the garbage trucks. He eyed them truculently for a while and then at last went his lonely way to wherever it is that alley cats hide out in the day time.

Perhaps two hours later the porter of Corbaccio's Funeral Home came to work. He pattered about, pushing a broom from place to place, hardly disturbing the thin layer of dust that covered the floor. He ran the shades up, glared out at some neighborhood children who were peeking in between the two potted palms in the window.

He bowed a good morning to the two morning coated assistants who came in next. They barely glanced at him. Superior creatures these. They held themselves very straight, walked with almost military bearing, with composed features. Each of them fussed a bit with the Ascot that flared up under his chin.

The door opened and they practically came to attention as Mr. Corbaccio entered his emporium. They said in the same tone, and at the same time. "Good morning, sir."

Nodding, Corbaccio said, "Morning. Anything come up?"

"Not a thing." the porter said.

The two young men in morning coats glared at the porter. The insolence of the creature!

"Nothing at all. Good. I'll be back in the office." Corbaccio walked toward the back of the room. "What about Mr. Clancy and Dominique?"

"All embalmed and ready to go at ten." The porter beat the two young men to the punch again.

"Fine." The door closed on Corbaccio.

The porter, grinning to himself, swept, or pretended to sweep, near the two young men. They backed away with their nostrils curling in dismay.

He forced them out of his way. Back bent, face turned to the floor, he was, in his own way, having a fine time. He enjoyed baiting the men.

One of them said, "I'll go check on the coffins."

The porter said, "What's to check? The stiffs are all set, the turn screws are in place, all you clucks gotta do is stand around looking like dummies while the bereaved come in for a peek." He laughed to himself. The young man, without a word left the room.

The other one posed in the front door where anyone going by would be bound to see how well dressed he was. He held his hands at the binding that ran down along the side of his striped pants.

Severe as he looked he jumped when a voice came booming from the back of the funeral parlor. The voice was yelling, "Mr. Corbaccio! C'mere! Hurry!"

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Corbaccio slammed the door of his office open. He was angry. He said, "How many times I tell all you fools to keep your voices down? What if somebody goes by and hears yellin' in here? What they gonna think?"

He didn't stop muttering till he was in the back of the place and saw what the young man was making all the fuss about. The young man pointed to two coffins.

Resting on top of the coffins, hands folded on their chests, were two men whom Corbaccio knew.

He said under his breath, "Dios mio! Larry... and Barrels! Wait'll he hears about this!"

The young man stammered, "They're dead, Mr. Corbaccio." He gulped, "They've been shot... for a minute I thought... I had some crazy thought that our two customers had gotten out of their caskets... but these are fresh. And they've been shot!"

Looking more closely Corbaccio saw that there was not a doubt in the world that Larry and Barrels had been shot.

Someone once said that if the average man could come to life he would be a monster. This is probably true since the average man is only possible statistically. However, the man who lounged in front of the candy and cigar store across the street from Corbaccio's Funeral Parlor came very close to being the stereotype of averageness. He was so completely ordinary looking, so grey almost, that he seemed to blend into the background no matter where he was. Of all the people who had walked down the busy street in the last half hour, not one had wasted a glance on him. He had bought a paper and dawdled over looking through the want ads. Then he had ordered a two cent glass of seltzer.

He was just finishing it when he saw the door of the funeral home across the street open. He finished his glass, and went into the candy store. There were only two phone booths in the store. He entered one.

That meant that when Corbaccio came into the store he had to use the remaining one. He slammed the door behind him.

The extremely ordinary looking man in the first phone booth didn't have long to wait. Corbaccio's message was brief, whatever it was.

Corbaccio hard heeled his way back out of the store. As soon as he was gone the man in the first booth dialed a number. It was answered instantly.

"Hello? This is Hawkeye."

"Yes. I've been waiting. What happened?"

"Just what you figured: Even after the belt that Corbaccio must have gotten when he saw those bodies, he was still too shrewd to use the phone in his funeral place. He beat it across the street to the candy store where I was staked out. I was in the next phone booth when he called."

"Well?" If a great deal depended on this you could not have told it from the tone.

"Not so well. He's a shrewdy, that kid. I couldn't even hear his voice when he spoke. I think I tabbed the clicks when he dialed, though."

"That's a good break. What did you get them as?"

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"This is just guess work, chief, you know that, but I got the dial clicks as 764-0022."

"If you're even close, this'll be of great assistance, Hawkeye. Thank you."

"Is that all, chief?"

"It is until I can get past Corbaccio. I was sure that he wasn't the top man. This test this morning, his running to the phone, supports my contention. However, you may have solved all that if you got the phone number right."

"Uh, chief," Hawkeye was hesitant. "Don't sell this Corbaccio cookie short. I been digging around the neighborhood. They don't have the vaguest idea that he's anything but what he seems to be, a respected figure in business for twenty years. Lately though, there have been rumors, ugly ones. He's not so well liked."

"I won't sell him short. I'm just sure that the real top man, the brain guy, is of a different calibre."

"You always know what you're doing, Shadow, I just wanted to let you know what I picked up."

"I appreciate it. Oh, there're two new rackets under way. Performers are being approached two ways. If they are vain, their looks are being threatened with acid."

"Even if you aren't vain that's pretty lousy."

"Of course, but the vain ones pay off with less fight. The other gimmick is that the 'boys' seem to have moved in on the booking end of show business."

"How does that work, chief?"

"A guaranteed amount of work if they'll pay some huge amount of money."

"Do the racket boys come through with the engagement?"

"Yes... or at least they have been so far. They may just want word to get around that if you pay off you work. Then once that's established they may clean out as many performers as they can and just fold their tents and vanish. I don't know."

"Where do I come in?" Hawkeye asked.

"There's a new booking agent who's just become big. I don't know much about him. I'd like to know more. His name is Bill Martin."

"I'll dig around and see what I can excavate. So long."

In a room, on the top of a high office building, a room whose windows were always blacked out, a silent sanctuary, sat a figure of the night.

A lamp on a desk cast a circle of light. In the patch of light a hand that seemed disembodied was at work. It scribbled on and on. Just at the edge of the light was the phone which had just been set in its cradle.

The Shadow continued to write. Forming under his hand was a pattern. An ugly pattern of which he had only recently become aware. His agents, sending in reports, had sensed a new force at work in the underworld. But

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they had only been bits and pieces of the overall plan. The Shadow was adding and subtracting at the moment, trying to force the jigsaw puzzle together.

Not a sound reached that stygian room. It was as separated from the busy world around it as though it had been set on a lonely planet. Only one man knew the number of the phone that rested at The Shadow's elbow. That man was Burbank. Even The Shadow's most trusted agents, like Hawkeye, had to dial Burbank's phone answering service. Burbank rerouted the call to this phone.

That way The Shadow was not disturbed unless the circumstances warranted it. And Burbank weighed the calls very carefully before he put them through.

'Barrels and Larry, guns for hire,' The Shadow wrote. 'Good capable gunmen both. Trustworthy for most uses. One a hophead, though that meant that no real information would have been given to him.'

The Shadow sighed. It was still a pity that they both had died. Some shred of information might have escaped them. This way...

Writing again, The Shadow penned, 'To date we have a list of twenty men all of whom check in with Corbaccio. If we can find out who Corbaccio relays to...'

He laid the pencil down. There was not quite enough to go on... yet. He stood up. His low menacing laugh, foreboding and warning, filled the dark, shrouded room.

He would know and soon, for The Shadow had ways of getting information...

CHAPTER V

THE kitchen, clean, sparkling white, modern, would have delighted the heart of any housewife. Everything was laid out with an eye to efficiency. The stove, within hands' reach of the cutting board, the electric refrigerator on the other side so that barely a shift of the body brought one to it. It was a perfect kitchen except for the size of it. It seemed to have been laid out for a giant.

The giant came into it rubbing his hands. He called out, "Hey Buster, prepare your stomach for a treat. This is going to be Eggs Benedict a la Ed Corre."

He stood in the center of the kitchen and smiled with pleasure as he always did when he surveyed his domain. He set the pan of water on the fire. That would do to poach the eggs. He split the English muffins so they would be ready for toasting at the last possible moment.

Now, the hollandaise sauce. He put the double boiler on the flames. He broke two eggs and saved the yolks. The whites he placed in the refrigerator. He scooped a half a cup of butter out of its dish. He squeezed one half a teaspoon of lemon juice into a glass. The butter went into the top of the double boiler.

While it was melting, he began to whip the egg yolks. As they thickened he added one half a teaspoon of salt, and a speck of cayenne pepper to the thickening yolks. The lemon juice went in a drop at a time.

That done, he poached four eggs. He went back to the sauce. He added the melted butter a drop at a time. The sauce looked perfect. He popped the muffins into the toaster. Just before they were done he sliced some imported Swiss cheese in readiness. A few drops of sherry? He dropped the sherry into the sauce and beat it as though he had gone mad. Had it curdled? He looked at the sauce. No, all was well.

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The toasted muffins popped into view. He placed them on plates. He buttered them quickly and placed the Swiss cheese on top of them. Next an egg went on each muffin.

On top of each poached egg he poured the hollandaise. He looked at the yellow sauce which dripped from the mounds that the eggs made. He said, "Luscious!"

It was just then that the phone rang. He swore and ran into the other room. His bulk moved with an almost obscene grace. His too small feet almost pattered as he ran.

In the other room Buster, his face looking as though it had been roughly cast out of cheap concrete, looked up. His glazed eyes which might have had a film over them, so dull they looked, were incurious.

Corre ripped the phone off the cradle. "Who is it?" He swore under his breath. "Corbaccio! You know I hate to be disturbed at my meal time!"

Some of the fury went out of him. He said, "Larry and Barrels. I see. What should you do with them? You run a funeral home, don't you? Well, give them a funeral!"

He slammed the phone down. "Someone got Larry and Barrels and dumped them in the funeral parlor."

"Humph," was Buster's only comment.

"This is ugly. There's been a leak somewhere. How would anyone know of the connection between those two redhots and Corbaccio?" The fat man was worried. He stared off into space, his china blue eyes blank.

His hands, as small comparatively as his feet, looked ridiculously inadequate for the job of holding his head up. He sat with his chin in his hands for a long time. Then suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"My eggs Benedict!" It was a wail. He ran into the kitchen. He looked down at his eggs. The sauce, so delectable a while ago, now was hard, and crusty looking. He snorted to himself and stamped his foot down on the pedal of the garbage can. The top whammed up. He poured all four eggs into the pail.

Then sighing, he opened the refrigerator and began his preparations anew. He got out the eggs, the butter, the lemon... and for each new object he swore a new and more horrid death on the head of whoever had interfered with his breakfast.

When they were done, he brought the four new eggs into the other room. Three of them there on his plate one on the other. He said plaintively, "These didn't turn out as well, they never do the second time. See what you think of these, Buster. Ordinarily you know, eggs Benedict are made with Canadian bacon. I like mine with Swiss cheese. See what you think of it and tell me the truth."

Buster ate slowly, lethargically, like a cow munching on its regurgitated cud. When he was through he wiped his plate clean.

Corre said anxiously, "How do you like them?"

"Not bad." Buster wiped his chin off. "Not bad at all."

"Is that all you can say? I work and slave over a hot stove and that's all you have to say?" Corre worked himself up. "First that idiot Corbaccio calls up with bad news that ruins not only my appetite but my eggs... and now... Faugh. I might as well go back to bed. This is going to be one of those days. I can tell."

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The door bell rang. Buster who had merely blinked his eyes when Corre rambled on, got to his feet and opened the door. It was a messenger boy. He extended a yellow envelope and said, "Sign here."

Buster brought the pad to Corre who was still making petulant noises. He scribbled his initials on the pad. He said, "Give the boy a half a buck. No, a dime. Why should anyone be happy on such a miserable day?"

The door closed on the sour face that the messenger boy made. Corre slit the envelope open. He swore sadly and monotonously. He extended the message to Buster. He said, "This is one of those days. I knew it."

Buster ran his glazed eyes over the message which looked like jabberwocky. It read, "The ties were the wrong pattern. Send another set, no bows this time. Farren all frammises." It was signed D.

"Bad, huh?" Buster said.

"Of course. How did the Uncle's men get wind of that shipment? What's going wrong with the organization?"

Corre said, " 'Farren all frammises,' yipe. That means the boys either got killed or caught. Caught, I guess or it would have had a double in front of the code. Two men shot by someone and left with Corbaccio, four men caught by the Feds. Great!"

"We got lots more men," Buster said flatly.

"Sure, but how long can this go on? Besides, Rowley is one of the men who was picked up. He knows Corbaccio... he might even have smelled out the connection to me."

The fat face squinted off into space. "Rowley better die..." he said softly.

"Right under the nose of the Feds?" Buster asked.

"Umm. If it can be rigged so it looks like a suicide..." The fat man waddled to the phone.

The office was sparsely furnished. Well furnished, but bare, lots of room. The man behind the desk, tall, spare, greying at the temples, said to the man who faced him. "This is the kind of break we rarely get."

"It was luck, let's face it," said the younger man. "If the suitcase hadn't fallen out of Rowley's hand and split open..."

"Yes, but we had them under observation."

"Still it was a break that he dropped the suitcase. You should have seen Rowley's face to say nothing of the three pick up men! They were caught so flat footed they didn't even object when we arrested them!"

The grey haired man said, "Good. How's the interrogation going?"

"Slowly," the younger man said almost sadly. "You know these rats. We're concentrating on Rowley. I don't think the others know much. They look like peddlers to me."

"You're probably right."

"There was a fast two hundred grand's worth of the stuff packed away in those bundles! That means Rowley must have been pretty high up."

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"Let me know if he cracks."

"Sure." The younger man turned to leave. As he did so the door opened. Simultaneously the interoffice communicator buzzed. The man at the desk flipped it on. A voice barked. "Rowley did the dutch!"

The man who entered the door said, "Beat me to it. I was just coming to tell you the same thing. He's dead as the proverbial door nail!"

"How?" the grey haired man clipped.

"He was writing a letter, we let him, hoping he might give away something in it. He signed his name to it, put the pen away, and that's all. He died about thirty seconds later!"

"Skunked again!" the young man said. "This is the closest we've come since the post war revival of the drug trade from Europe. Now we're back where we started, nowhere!"

The phone rang in Ed Corre's apartment. He answered it. He said, "Good news? I see. Thank you for calling."

He turned away from the phone. He rubbed his small hands together. "This day may not be a complete loss at that."

"How come?" Buster asked.

"Rowley used the fountain pen."

No flicker of expression passed over Buster's incurious face. He said, "That's good."

"There are some forms of insurance that pay off." The fat man looked happy. His pursed cupid's bow mouth curved up. "To work. We can't sit around all day my boy. Let the first caller in." He drew his tent-like silk bathrobe around his mountains of fat.

Buster said, "It's Bill Martin."

"Good."

Martin was six feet tall, spare, almost ascetic looking. His harsh good looks contrasted oddly with his precise almost affected looking clothes. His tie was too straight, the knot too precise, his suit was too well pressed, his shoes too shiny. He looked as if he dressed with a slide rule. He said, "Hello, Mr. Corre."

"Sit down, Bill. How is the theatrical business?" The fat man leaned back in his special over sized chair.

"Bad for everybody else, good for us." Martin allowed himself to smile. He opened a note book. "The collections are up. We took in forty thousand yesterday."

The fat man nodded. "Glad to hear it. I have suffered a slight set back. Nothing serious but no one likes to lose a few hundred thousand dollars. It distresses one."

Martin said, "Yes, I can see how it would."

"Continue."

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"I've arranged the collections so that most of them are on the same day."

"That's efficient."

"Here's a list. These people are not playing ball."

The fat man took it. He said, "It will be taken care of."

"In such a way," Martin leaned forward a trifle, "that I'll be in the clear?"

"Sure."

"I wouldn't want any kick back on this acid in the face stuff," Martin said.

"The boss said it would be taken care of," Buster said. "Why don't you listen to him, huh?"

"Oh... to be sure. Of course." Martin rose to his feet. "That finishes up my business, Mr. Corre."

Corre glanced at his watch. "Ah, lunch time. Would you care to join me in a snack?"

"Sure, I'd love to. I've heard about how good your food is." Martin smiled. This meant he was on the inside. Corre had never cooked for anyone but Corbaccio before. This should be a good sign. Martin relaxed a bit.

Looking off into space, Corre said, "Something light, some vichyssoise, some stuffed oysters and perhaps a chop. How does that sound?"

"Wonderful," Martin said. As Corre left the room, Martin tried to engage Buster in conversation. He had tried before and always failed. This time was no exception. The man sat heavily staring off into space. He grunted his answers if you could call them that. Martin wondered as he had before why Corre kept the man around. Of course he acted as court jester, he always responded when Corre gave him a hot foot, but even so, you'd think Corre would get tired of that after a while.

Corre came bustling out of the kitchen, "I almost forgot about replacing our... departed business members. Who can I replace Barrels and Larry with? Let me see..." He picked up the phone. He barked into the mouthpiece, "Corbaccio? Get Garrand and Venables. They take over for our... our dear friends. Yeah. Give them the lists. Don't forget about the doctors. I think that's due to grow into a nice little side line." He hung up the phone.

As he went back to the kitchen Martin wondered what in the world Corre could be doing moving in on the doctors. Maybe, he thought, it was just as well if he didn't know any more about it. Maybe he should just concentrate on his business and let Corre worry about the other things.

Corre came bustling back out of the kitchen as the phone rang again. He said, "Wouldn't you think these fools would know by now that I hate to be disturbed at lunch time?"

He picked up the phone. His china blue eyes were piggy with anger. He barked, "Yeah? What? I'll take care of it." He slammed the phone down.

He turned to Buster and Martin. "That does it! That reporter Corbaccio has on the payroll is getting ready to blow!" He sat down. For once all thought of food was gone from his mind. The gelatinous mass of his face twisted up so that it was almost stern. His eyes landed on Martin. He said coldly, "You, beat it. I have to

think."

Martin left gladly.

Corre said, "Buster, now I know why they had that St. Valentine's Day massacre in Chicago a few years back. When you buy a man, he ought to stay bought it seems to me. This has got to be good. The papers will go wild when a reporter gets knocked off. Yeah... this better be good." He paused, then said slowly, "And it will be!"

CHAPTER VI

NIGHT came to the city. In power houses the dynamos increased their surge of power. Subways passed their peak loads and eased off for their lighter evening schedules. Movie houses began to fill more rapidly.

With the disappearance of the sun, people moved more slowly. Those who were going home were almost there. Those who were going out were going for fun, for relaxation. Some of the strain went out of urban life. Bars were fuller, night clubs began to get ready for the evening influx.

And the man whose name instilled fear in even the creatures of the night? He got up from the desk at which he had been working all day. He took his cape off. He took his jacket off. His shoulder holsters were hanging on the wall. He put them on. Then he remembered to load the clip of the gun he had used the preceding night.

Too bad about that phone number. Hawkeye hadn't gotten the clicks right.

He looked around the dark quiet room. He glanced at the papers he'd been working on. The jigsaw was beginning to come together. That call from Burbank. The arrest of four dope peddlers. The suicide of one... were they related to the over-all pattern?

Perhaps that evening would tell.

Of course it was too bad about Hawkeye. Bill Martin had evaded even that master man hunter. Martin had escaped surveillance somewhere up around Columbus Circle. But, it was doubtful if he would be able to pull the same trick twice. The Shadow's grim saturnine face softened a bit as he remembered how crestfallen Hawkeye had been when he checked in and reported defeat.

At that it was almost a good sign. Since Martin had been sufficiently on his toes to duck Hawkeye that meant that he must be a hot lead. Otherwise he wouldn't have bothered with all the double dooring, the taxi switches and the subway maneuvering that he had gone through.

Corbaccio's name and Martin's were now both double checked, The Shadow looked down at the list he had prepared. There was one name with a single check next to it and a question mark. Waldo Teller. The latest columnist sensation. Kiss and Teller, his column was headed. Not since Winchell burst on the publishing business in the twenties had there been such an overnight success. Teller seemed to know things before they happened. So far not one of his bombshell items had been wrong.

His column had rocketed the circulation of the New York paper it appeared in. If it had not been a paper which was staggering along on its last legs, it is doubtful if Teller's column would have ever appeared. The Shadow had heard that the paper had had to retain a huge staff of lawyers to fight the daily libel suits which were being brought against it.

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But libel suits or not, the column was on everyone's lips. Just as The Shadow had wondered about the sudden upsurge of business that Bill Martin was getting in the show world, now he wondered about what kind of backing Teller had that was responsible for his upsurge.

From such deviations from the norm The Shadow was able on occasion to build up an edifice of deductions that eventually melded together.

He turned off the lone light in the room. His cape back on, his slouch hat pulled low over his eyes, he left the room. It was dark out now. Dark enough for that eerie figure of the silences, of the shrouded night, to go about his lonely business.

The headwaiter bowed so low that it seemed doubtful he'd ever be able to straighten up again. He managed it and said, "Mr. Teller, we are delighted to have you with us."

Waldo Teller, pudgy, sharp nosed, wearing pince nez glasses, sloppily dressed, smiled. He said, "Good evening, Charles." He looked around the crowded night club. "Nice crowd tonight. I'll take my usual table."

"Of course sir." Bowing and scraping, the headwaiter made a path through the crowd.

Teller beamed as he heard the whispers behind him. "That's Teller... Waldo Teller... You know..." This was balm to his ego. He loved it, gloried in it.

He sat down and took out his inevitable pad and pencil. He said to the headwaiter, "What's new, Charles?"

"Is there ever anything you don't know, Mr. Teller?"

"Umm... there might be."

"You know about Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson?" the headwaiter asked behind his hand.

"He's going with that gal from Chicago and she's going with a boy from the Coast. Mrs. Jefferson has bought her plane tickets to Reno," Teller said.

"That's what I mean sir. I just heard it from the ladies' room attendant not ten minutes ago."

"She called me twelve minutes ago," Waldo Teller said, smiling.

The headwaiter tried again. But he had no gossip that Teller didn't already know about. What's more, Teller knew more about it.

The headwaiter said, "How you get it all beats me." He turned to leave.

Teller said, "Charles."

The headwaiter turned, "Sir?"

"You've been dabbling in the market," Teller said didactically.

The headwaiter looked surprised.

"Get out tomorrow. First thing. There's going to be a slump. Either get out or sell short. Don't pass it around."

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The headwaiter's thanks were so fulsome, that they would have nauseated a weaker stomach than Teller's. He enjoyed every second of it.

When Teller was alone he sat with his drink in front of him and eyed the group in the club. He ran his eyes around. Each person he saw he knew something about.

Something that they did not want the world to know. Sometimes he printed the items he had, sometimes he used the knowledge as a lever to pry other pieces of information from the people.

Sure it was blackmail, he thought, but it worked like a charm. It was astounding how people would rat on each other to try and protect their own reputations.

He sipped his drink. He had one huge bomb to drop and then his own skirts would be perfectly clean. He smiled as he drained the glass. What a stink that was going to make! If he could have avoided the showdown he would have. But... if it had to be, and he thought it did to protect himself... well...

This way, with the 'boys' taken care of, he, Teller, would be free and clear. With that out of the way, the sky was the limit. As long as anyone had anything on him he was chained, he was not a free agent.

No, the blow off would clear the air. And he knew how to blow the lid off.

He sat back and enjoyed himself. He had covered every angle. He was sure of that. The private detectives who were guarding him were the best that money could buy.

He was a little surprised when the headwaiter came to his table. The headwaiter looked discomfited, which was unusual. Teller blinked up at him.

"Sir, I hate to disturb you but there are some policemen outside who want to see you."

"Probably a tip. Thanks." He started for the front door.

The headwaiter said. "Not there, sir, the back door."

He made his way through the kitchen and out back. In the alleyway behind the club he found two of his private detectives engaged in an argument with two policemen.

One of his men was saying, "But look here, no flattie is going to push Teller around, he'll have your badge for this, bud."

The cop said, "What are you getting tough for? He's wanted downtown for questioning, that's all I know. I got a call in the radio car. Go fight with City Hall if you don't like it."

Teller said, "All right, everyone relax. I'm a good boy. I'll go quietly." To his aides he said, "I think this is about the paving scandal I put the finger on. The D. A. probably wants to know where I got hep. As if I'd tell him!"

Teller walked toward the car that was parked at the curb. "Mind if we take my car, boys?" he asked the policemen.

"Okay by us." The five men got into Teller's car. One private detective drove with a policeman next to him. In the back seat Teller was flanked on one side by his own man and on the other by the man in uniform.

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There was not much said as the car drove downtown. Down around Canal Street the policeman in the front of the car said, "Oh, I forgot. Not, the D.A.'s office. He's holding some people incommunicado in an office building."

"That old stunt?" Teller was contemptuous. "Treat them nice, don't throw them in the can and maybe they'll spill the beans faster? That never works, I don't know why they try it."

The driver asked, "What building?"

"Down that street. 10 is the number."

They came to a halt in front of an old but still attractive looking building, a relic of the nineties which looked out of place, cold shouldered as it was by newer buildings.

"Quite a parade we make," Teller said as the five of them went into the lobby of the building.

One of the cops grunted.

The other said, "Sixth floor. Room 602."

The sign on the door of room 602 read, 'Acme.' Merely that and nothing more. One of the policemen said, "Here we are."

Teller opened the door and walked in. He was flanked by his two private detectives. Behind them came the two men in police uniform.

Pausing in the doorway, Teller gasped, "What the hell is this?"

He tried to back up, as he did so his back pressed into his two men. They were helpless. They turned their heads and saw the police positive .38's in the hands of the two uniformed men.

They couldn't turn, couldn't get their hands on their guns because Teller was jammed into them.

Blinking incredulously, Teller finally took a step forward into the office. He said, "What goes here?"

The masked man behind the desk ran his hand along the sub machine gun that took up a section of the desk and said, "Guess."

"Put that away, turn it away or I'll tell these men who you are, Corbacc..."

The machine gun stuttered.

The men in police uniforms looked just as surprised when the bullets raked through their chests as had Teller and his two men.

Corbaccio got up from behind the desk. He hoped the gun hadn't jammed. He stepped forward toward the huddle of five men who lay like discarded garments in a pile on the floor. He pointed the nose of the gun down. He said, "Just for luck." The gun stuttered again.

He threw the gun on the heap of men, snapping the buttons on his gloves as he walked out of the office. He closed the door behind him.

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His right hand was in his coat pocket. He held onto a .38. There just might be a cleaning woman or some busybody working overtime... He looked up and down the hall.

Not a sign of movement. He walked down the stairs. He took his time. He passed no one. On the street level an old man was just coming in the revolving door. He had a pass book under his arm.

He said, "Oh, I guess I just got here in time. Would you mind signing this, sir? Have to get the name of anyone who's in the building after closing you know."

Corbaccio said, "Yes, I know." He waited while the little old man opened the book at the proper place.

The old man said tiredly, "Right here, sir. The time you came in and left, if you will."

"Of course." Corbaccio pulled his gun out. He shot the man through the head. The old seamed worn face fell forward on top of the pass book.

Walking out the revolving door, Corbaccio looked around. No nosy cabbies around? None. He was in the clear. He walked down the block to his parked car. He got into it and drove away.

CHAPTER VII

BURBANK kept dialing the number that only he knew. There was no answer. The Shadow was out. Burbank had no idea where he might be. He kept looking at the screaming headlines on the paper he had in front of him. If he could be sure The Shadow had seen the papers he would be able to relax. But till then he'd have to keep trying...

At that moment a dark clothed arm reached out and deftly picked a paper off a stack. A dime dropped onto the stack of papers. The arm and the gloved hand that held the paper was gone as if it had never been there.

The newsie saw the dime and wondered casually where it had come from.

In the front of his cab Shrevvie shifted his weight and slid down further under the wheel. No telling when The Shadow would get back in the cab.

Suddenly, from nowhere a voice said softly, "Uptown, Shrevvie."

Shrevvie spun in his seat. Sure enough, The Shadow had done it again. He always swore that just once he'd see the shifting black cloud enter the cab. But he had failed again.

In the back of the cab The Shadow unfolded the paper. He looked at the headlines. 'Gossip Columnist Mowed Down. Gang War On!' The details under the head were almost as lurid. Five men machine gunned. Two policemen, two private detectives, and one gossip columnist. The paper which had not run Teller's column hinted that the situation might well be parallel to the St. Valentine's Day massacre when Jake Lingle, a reporter in the pay of the underworld, was killed along with six other men.

They couldn't go too far for fear that Teller's paper would sue, but the hints were clear enough. On the one hand they smeared Teller but then on the other hand there was a screaming editorial about the death of a reporter, a man hired to tell the truth...

The paper promised that if the police were helpless that the matter would not end so, that the paper was

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starting a crusade for the arrest and death of whoever was behind the massacre.

The Shadow folded the paper up. Another lead gone. He had been right. There had been something suspicious in the meteoric rise of Teller.

This wholesale killing was proof of that.

The policemen. Had they really been on the police force or were they Judas goats designed to lead Teller to the abattoir? The second guess seemed likely since they had accompanied Teller and the two private detectives.

Then why had the fake policemen been killed?

That seemed clear, too. Either the whole set up was designed that way, or Teller recognized the man who had machine-gunned him. If that were the case the gunner must have felt impelled to kill his own hirelings to protect his identity.

This in turn would indicate that the killing had been done by one of the higher ups. This was no job consummated by a hired gun. It was too important. The next question then was, why was Teller's death so important?

The Shadow looked at the paper and saw Teller's address there. He said, "Shrevvie, 58th Street."

Perhaps Teller's effects might have a tale to tell.

The cab drove into Fifty-eighth Street. The Shadow said suddenly, "Park here a second, Shrevvie. I want to think something out."

"Just as well, the street is swarmin' with the boys in blue."

The Shadow looked down the street. Policemen were filing into Teller's building. Leaning back in the darkness in the back of the cab, The Shadow thought, if Teller was as smart as he seemed, and if he did have a tie in with the underworld, wouldn't he try to cover himself? Of course. Any knowledge that he had he would probably keep somewhere as a threat to the men he had something on. Where would he keep such data?

He was a reporter before he was a columnist. Once a newspaperman always a newspaperman.

Out loud The Shadow said, "The Clarion office, Shrevvie, and don't take your time."

The street was thick with paper trucks. The cab eeled its way in and out between them. Shrevvie said, "This do?"

"Around in back. I think I remember a fire escape there."

This street was comparatively deserted. The Shadow said, "Shrevvie, park directly under that fire escape. See the ladder there?"

Shrevvie nodded.

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"While I'm gone, open the sun window in the top of the cab. Leave it open and don't stir from here if you can help it."

"I gotcha. Think you may be leaving in a hurry?"

But there was no answer. Looking in the back of the cab, Shrevvie saw that the back seat was untenanted. He sighed. "No dice. You just couldn't keep an eye on The Shadow."

Swarming up the fire escape, avoiding any stray light that might have given away his presence, the man who was dressed in the cape and hat made no more noise than the soft whisper of silk on silk.

Baby blue eyes cold and direct, Ed Corre said, "How stupid can a man be and live?"

"How was I to know?" Corbaccio almost whined.

"Now you know." Corre flicked the piece of paper back to Corbaccio.

He picked it up and re-read part of his fate. The paper said, "To whom it may concern... and you know who I mean, Corbaccio... the records of my criminal transactions are on file in the morgue at the Clarion. They are filed under Waldo Teller. If... and when... I die, the first thing my paper will do is go to the morgue to get the details of my life. When they do they will find a lot more than that... won't they?" It was signed Waldo Teller.

"You got this letter this morning," Corre said unbelievably, "and you just opened it a half hour ago?"

"You know I was... busy... today," Corbaccio said. "But I'll go down to that office and blast it apart if I have to!" He got to his feet.

"There's been enough blasting for one day," Corre said. "By the way, why did you shoot our two boys who were dressed as cops?"

"Teller knew me even with the mask on my face. I had to, Corre. You woulda done the same thing in my place." He whined. "Let me go knock off the paper office."

"Sit down there and shut up." Corre's voice was like dry ice. "Teller must have had this dope on you for some time. Why did he tip you off today and why... this is the real big question, why did he tell you where the dope was stashed?"

"How do I know?" Corbaccio was sunk in depression. His head snapped when Buster caught him with the back of his hand across the cheek.

The sound made a splat.

Buster said. "Now that's no way to talk to the boss. He don't like to be talked to that way. Do you boss?"

"No.., but it's all right, Buster." Corre ran one of his small hands across his forehead. "Why would Teller have revealed where he had hidden the info?"

The fat man walked back and forth across the floor. He kicked a chair out of his way. It splintered against the wall. He said, "That was a stupid thing to do and Teller was not stupid. Therefore he had a reason."

"Maybe." Buster said hesitantly, "maybe he did it because the information was no good any more."

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"How could that be?" Corbaccio asked.

There was a silence. Corbaccio broke it. "How could that be?" he asked again. "Either Teller had the dope or he didn't."

"You've put your grubby finger on it, Buster," Corre said softly. "It's like the riddle about when is a door not a door, the answer is when it's ajar. Our riddle is, when is good info no good. The answer is when it's been given to the world. No blackmail hold is any good if everyone knows it. Teller must have planned to blast you today, Corbaccio! Sure, that explains why he suddenly blossomed out with those private detectives. He told you that was because someone he had nailed in the column threatened him. Really they were supposed to protect him from you!"

"But..." Corbaccio's face went white. "You mean my goose is cooked!"

"Unless you can prevent a newspaper from printing the information Teller gave it."

"I can do it. I swear I can." Corbaccio scrambled toward the door. "I'll do it..." The door closed after him.

Corre said. "Idiot. As if the paper hasn't already called the cops in. Once a leak starts you can never stop it. No, the thing to do is get rid of the place the leak came front."

He rubbed his fourth chin. He said, "Buster, don't you think it would be nice if he was buried from his own funeral parlor?"

"Yeah. With lots and lots of flowers!" Buster said. His voice sounded happy but his face was as immobile as always.

Trying to drive fast and yet carefully was a trial. Corbaccio knew how sensitive the contents of the satchel at his feet was, and yet he had to get to the Clarion office fast.

He risked a red light and the car high tailed across the intersection like a rabbit. He eased off after he had crossed, no sense in being blown sky high.

A flash of reflected light in his rear view mirror caught his eye. He slowed down even further. The car behind him slowed down too. He thought frantically. No... Corre can't do this to me... No...

He pressed his foot down to the floor boards. The car leaped ahead as though jet propelled. Ahead was a busy cross street. No chance of jumping that. He twisted the wheel of his car sharply. It spun around.

His car skidded as he pulled it by main force around a corner. There, the car was no longer in sight. Three seconds later its lights were flashing in his mirror again.

Was this what he had robbed and cheated and killed for? A scream welled up in his throat when he saw a flash of red. They were firing at his gas tank... and if that went... He looked down at the bag.

There was no sanity in his eyes now. He jammed the brakes on. He leaped from the car with the bag in his arms. The other car slowed down. As it did so, he raised the bag to throw it.

A burst of bullets from the car ripped the bag in half. That was all he ever saw.

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The explosion rocked the street for hundreds of feet. Glass shattered by the force of the impact fell from windows. Concrete where his feet had just been ripped and tore as though a giant had scooped it up.

Ten blocks away Shrevvie heard the deep dull boom and wondered what it was. He shrugged. None of his business. All he had to do was stay put till his darkly clad passenger returned.

The cab moved a trifle under a sudden impact. The Shadow, who had dropped through the open roof, said, "Hurry Shrevvie."

The cab drove off into the night. From the rear of it welled up a mocking bitter laugh.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN The Shadow had made his way up the fire escape and wormed his way into the office of the Clarion, confusion had greeted his view. Men milling around in ordered chaos were busy with the task of putting an edition to bed.

Directly in front of the patch of darkness that concealed The Shadow was the circle of desks that is known as the Slot in newspaper parlance. In the Slot the copy readers, the men who wrote the headlines, were working fast.

The editor was looking with raised eyebrows at a folder that lay on the desk before him. He said, "Whew... so this is Teller's legacy to the Fourth Estate!" He read rapidly and before he had finished he yelled out, "Hold everything. Replate the front page. Teller Tells All is the news head!"

Men swarmed around him at his call. The Shadow watched quietly while the preparations were in the making. He was still quiescent when a copy boy came running to the editor with a sheaf of galleys in his hand. He put them on the desk. As the editor began to read them over, The Shadow moved for the first time. He reached in his pocket and removed a coin. It was a quarter. He held it by its rim and tossed it.

It landed with a ping against a window that was to the editor's left. The editor looked up puzzled. He got up from his desk and went to investigate. When he returned after finding nothing his desk looked undisturbed.

It wasn't till five minutes later that he found that one set of the galleys was gone from his desk.

When he discovered this loss, The Shadow, comfortably ensconced in the rear of Shrevvie's cab, was just finishing a rapid skimming of the missing galleys.

He placed them in his lap and looked off into space. This was dynamite. Teller had known quite a bit about Corbaccio's past. He had known even more than The Shadow about Corbaccio's early rise to fortune. It was all in the galleys. The time that Corbaccio risked some money on industrial diamonds during the war and had cashed in for a three hundred per cent profit by selling the industrials to Germany through South America. That had been just the beginning. There didn't seem to be a single dirty racket that Corbaccio had missed.

No wonder Teller had been gunned!

"Ja hear the explosion?" Shrevvie asked.

"No. What was it?" The noise of the presses had drowned any outside sounds.

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Shrevvie went into detail. "The sound," he finished up, "seemed to come from down here." He gestured with one hand at the street ahead.

Ahead policemen were busy roping off an area. The Shadow saw the size of the hole in the pavement. Shrevvie whistled, "Wow! Somebody drop an atom bomb?"

"I'm afraid," was The Shadow's answer, "that if it had been an A-bomb you wouldn't be here to ask the question." He stared at the torn car, the broken windows. "I would say, however, that it was T.N.T."

"Should I scoot around it?" Shrevvie asked.

"May as well. There's no way of telling from this what the explosion was about."

"Where to?"

That was a question. The galleys held the answer to why Teller had been rubbed out. The next question was why had Corbaccio not tried to get the data before killing the columnist? Which in turn led to the next question. Who was Corbaccio's superior? Even Teller's information had not contained an inkling of that.

The Shadow said, "Stop at the next phone booth."

In the darkness inside the booth The Shadow dialed Burbank's number. He asked, "Any news from Hawkeye?"

"Glad you called." Burbank said. "I've been trying to get you. Are you up to date on what's been going on?"

"I know about Teller's death."

"I thought you would."

"I want to know about an explosion at..." The Shadow gave the address.

"Haven't heard anything about that yet. I'll get someone out on it," Burbank said. "Hawkeye did check in. He's still tailing Bill Martin. He picked him up again near his office. He swears he won't lose him this time no matter what happens."

"Nothing else?"

"I had a man on Corbaccio but he lost him in the same neighborhood that Hawkeye lost Martin. Up near Columbus Circle."

"I see. Thanks." The Shadow hung up.

Back in the cab he said, "This'll be all for a while."

Shrevvie knew what that meant. He drove carefully to the building that housed The Shadow's hidden aerie.

In that quiet dark room The Shadow lost no time in getting a map of Manhattan. He laid it out on his desk. He drew a circle around Central Park South. All trails seemed to end there.

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Could the hidden head of all this tangle of greed, chicanery, torture and death be hidden somewhere in this area? The little circle of light from the single lamp acted like a spotlight on the section of the map that occupied the attention of the man in black.

In an apartment well within the area that The Shadow was speculating about there was an air of camaraderie. Ed Corre held a glass high. He said, "Here's to Bill Martin!"

Martin smiled and waited while Corre drained the glass at a gulp. Under the smile Martin was thinking fast and furiously. So there had been some significance in his being invited to eat with Corre and Buster. The king is dead... long live the king... or the crown prince, rather. Corre had made it plain that Corbaccio was dead and that he expected Martin to take over Corbaccio's duties.

Buster asked, "No kickback about the way Corbaccio got his?"

Grinning, Corre answered the question with a question, "How can there be a kickback when the cops are never going to be sure what was in the hole in the sidewalk? Corbaccio played into our hands by hauling that load of high explosive along with him."

"Yare," Buster said. "There's that, ain't there."

Buster was leaning back in a chair, his head back, his glazed eyes looking at some unidentifiable spot in space. Corre winked at Martin.

Getting down on all fours, a position in which he looked even more fat than usual Corre made his way closer to the chair where Buster sat.

Martin wondered what in the world had come over the big man. He understood a moment later when he saw Corre insert a match in the ridge between the sole and the upper on Buster's shoe.

Craftily, with the ease of long practice, Corre set the match in place. Next he lit another match and set fire to the match that was in readiness in Buster's shoe. As the match flared into flame, Corre eased backward. He was standing up near the kitchen door of the suite when the flame got close enough to the upper of Buster's shoe so that the heat made itself felt.

Leaping straight up into the air, Buster yelled, "Ow!"

Corre bent double with laughter. Martin pretended to be amused. He watched with a fake smile on his face as Buster hopped around on one foot like an infuriated stork.

"My foot... it's on fire..." Buster's face was still immobile but his voice was anguished. As the pain in his foot eased up he said gently, "Aw gee, boss, ya shouldn't do that. Ya know I got sore feet!"

Taking a handkerchief about a yard wide out of his pocket, the big man wiped his eyes. Tears of laughter were running over the hillocks that were his cheeks. He said, gasping, "Wouldn't you think he'd learn not to leave his feet unguarded?"

Martin did think so, but then Buster didn't strike him as being any intellectual giant. "You sure would." He faked a chuckle.

"Ho ho..." Corre was still laughing but the titanic convulsions were easing up. He wiped his eyes again. "Oh my... ho..."

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Buster had his shoe off and was massaging his foot. "Ya shouldn't oughta do it, boss. It ain't dignified. Now what's Mr. Martin gonna think?"

"He's going to think you are an idiot. You are an idiot, aren't you Buster?" Corre asked.

"If you say so, boss." Buster went on massaging his foot.

"Say," Corre said, "did you ever have my crepes suzette?"

"No," Martin said, "As a matter of fact, I've only had them a couple of times."

"Then you haven't lived. Wait, I'll go whip some up." Corre went out into the kitchen.

Martin was grateful for the chance to get his thoughts in order. So this was it. He'd worked his way too far up. He hadn't wanted to get this high. He'd been contented taking care of the theatrical racket. He rubbed his throat. But... as he thought of the money and power that his new position would bring him, he relaxed a bit. He'd play it carefully. No one would ever get anything on him. He'd be smarter than Corbaccio...

When Corre had fed Martin and sent him on his way, Corre said, "New regime, Buster."

Nodding, Buster waited.

"I think Martin is a better man than Corbaccio ever was. Besides Corbaccio was getting a little big for his boots." Corre smiled and it made his little china blue eyes almost disappear. "As it happened, everything has worked out for the best. Corbaccio had a regrettable tendency to get over excited. Martin is calmer. I like that.

"Strange how they never see the pattern. When I had Corbaccio kill off Lazarus and take his place you would have thought that he would have seen that if the necessity arose I could get rid of Corbaccio in the same way, but they never seem to see it that way.

"Take Martin, he's so impressed with the amount of money he's going to make and the power he's going to have that I'll bet he hasn't even considered how easily I can rid myself of him in case he should get too... ambitious."

"Lazarus," Buster said. "I'd almost forgotten him. He had Corbaccio's job before Corbaccio, didn't he?"

"He was a good man before he thought he maybe could take over from me."

Corre sat down. His overflowing bulk strained the capacity of even the specially built chair that received him. "You know what the secret is, Buster?"

"Huh?" Buster's blank face was, if anything, even more blank than usual.

"No one has ever put their finger on it but there's a reason why my subordinates come and go and I go on. A good reason. They've never put their finger on it.

"None of them. And yet it's such a simple little secret. If they only knew. The secret is that I am a coward. I am probably the most cowardly man who ever lived." Corre was, to all intents and purposes, talking to himself. "The others may have been cowardly but not quite as cowardly as I am."

"How's that, boss?" Buster asked.

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"Hmm?" Corre suddenly realized that he wasn't alone. He looked at Buster's dull face. He was alone. So he said, "Because I am so cowardly I strike first. A brave man can afford to take chances. A coward can't. A coward must strike first. A coward must see danger where there is no danger. That way he is always protected."

"I fear no brave man. But if ever a man should work his way up in the organization who was more of a coward than I am, then my goose would be cooked."

Corre laughed. "But since I am the greatest coward who has ever lived there is not much chance of that ever happening. Until that moment happens I am safe."

Buster said appreciatively, "You're some kidder, boss. I almost believed you there for a while. You, a coward. You the greatest racketeer who's ever lived. Why, you make Capone look like a punk!"

"Yes," Corre said slowly, "I'm some kidder."

They sat quietly for a while. Corre said at last, "But kidder or not, there's a small matter that has arisen that I want all our attention focused on. There's the matter of who killed Barrels and Larry and dumped them in our dear lamented friend Corbaccio's funeral parlor."

"Until I find that out I will not rest comfortably. And I like to rest comfortably!"

CHAPTER IX

IT was a paradox of sorts. The huge fat man whose white flabby skin represented all that was evil, the man in black representing the forces of good, the white hope. Black was white... white was black.

And black and white were girding themselves for a battle. A battle in which neither knew his antagonist... yet!

The Shadow picked up the phone. Burbank had transferred Hawkeye's call. Hawkeye said, "It's incredible!"

The Shadow waited. His hand moved across the desk. The desk was the only thing visible in the room. The light traced the path his hand made as he picked up a pencil.

"I don't know what to say." Hawkeye said.

"Take it easy and tell me exactly what happened."

"Burbank told you I lost Martin up near the Circle?"

"Yes."

"I waited near a newsstand there. I didn't know what to do. There wasn't anything I could do. If I went back to Martin's office I had no guarantee that he'd go back there tonight. If I went back to his house, what would that prove? So I'd see him come home."

Hawkeye paused. He quite evidently was not happy about his report up to this point. "While I was standing there like a mope trying to makeup my mind what to do, Martin suddenly appeared in front of me. As far as I'm concerned he popped out of the ground."

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"Get the picture, chief. The newsstand is at the entrance to Central Park. There's no houses on that side of the street. Just the park. Across the street, of course; are all those swanky apartment houses and apartment hotels.

"Now, I'll swear Martin didn't cross the street. He just appeared out of nowhere as if he'd come from the Park!"

"I see." The Shadow stared off into space.

"When I lost track of Martin it was on the south side of the street near the apartment houses, he comes back into view on the north side of the street. Now, if he came out of the Park he could have been coming from the north, south, east, or west." Hawkeye gulped, "Honestly, I've never been so badly licked in my life."

"You can't do better than your best, Hawkeye. Take it easy. This just re-inforces my belief that we are up against a really brainy master criminal."

"But what can I do to redeem my self respect?"

"Just keep doing your best. I can't ask for more than that." The Shadow's voice was warm.

"The boys have had a tap on Martin's phone. I've listened to the playbacks till I'm sick of them. If any messages go over that phone I'll eat them," Hawkeye said.

"Then," The Shadow said, "since I respect your opinion I can only say that no messages are sent over that phone: In all probability Martin always uses some public phone when he checks with his superior. Any calls he gets from the superior must be couched in such guarded language that they seem to be ordinary calls. That would be easy to arrange. The code word could be something completely ambiguous.

"Don't worry about this, Hawkeye," The Shadow said.

"Okay chief, if you say so. What shall I do now?"

"Go home and go to bed. Get on Martin's tail early in the morning. I am just as interested in who he sees in the normal course of his day as I am in who he sees when he disappears."

Hawkeye didn't sound happy as he bade his chief goodbye.

The Shadow sat down at his desk. He looked at his scribbled notes. Somewhere in the notes was Martin's home address and his phone number. Suppose... The Shadow thought, just suppose, he could bluff Martin into reporting to his superior. Martin could lose a visible trailer like Hawkeye despite the fact that Hawkeye was probably the best tail in the world. But could Martin lose an invisible trailer?

That was the question and it could only be answered if Martin could be made to fall for a bluff phone call. It was certainly worth the risk. There was no other feasible plan that occurred to The Shadow. With the master man hunter, to think was to act.

In the cab Shrevvie was roused from light slumber by a voice which gave him an address. Shrevvie blinked his eyes open, got the cab started and was halfway down the block before he was fully awake.

He shook his head and concentrated on driving. The Shadow didn't sound as if he was in the mood for any chit chat.

REIGN OF TERROR

There was an all night drug store near Martin's home. The Shadow had Shrevvie park near it. He said, "Shrevvie I want you to dial this number." He handed a slip of paper to the cabbie. "If the phone is answered, if Martin is home, I want you to say slowly and distinctly, 'Come on over.' That's all."

Shrevvie got out of the cab wondering what it was all about. When he returned he said, "It got a rise out of Martin. He said, 'But I just got back.' I hung up while he was saying it."

In the darkness in the rear of the cab The Shadow allowed himself the luxury of a smile. The fish had risen to the bait. The bluff had worked. So far so good.

He looked up at the face of the building where Martin lived. There was a single light lit. Even as he watched it went out. Martin was on his way down.

There was no other cab in sight. The Shadow got out of the cab. He said, "If the man who comes out now will take you, drive him to where he wants to go. Pay no attention to him. Don't try to watch where he goes. When he leaves the cab drive away. I don't want you to frighten him in any way. Got it?"

"I gotcha." Shrevvie nodded.

Just as Martin came out of the doorway, Shrevvie's cab drove by. It was the very picture of an idle cruising cab. Martin hailed it. Entering the cab, he clipped, "Columbus Circle. The south side. At Seventh."

The cab drove off through the night. In the front seat Shrevvie drove along minding his own business. In the back seat, Martin wracked his brains trying to imagine why he had been re-called. Flat on his stomach on top of the cab the second passenger sprawled. His black cape was pressed tight around him by the force of the wind. His hands clasped at the sides of the roof of the cab.

His face was near the glass insert of the roof of the cab. He was near enough so that he could see a bit of Martin's face. Martin never looked up. Even if he had it was too dark. He would not have been aware of the eyes that searched his countenance so avidly.

The Shadow did not make a move till the cab stopped at its destination. Martin stepped from the cab, paid off the driver and did not see the flurry of darkness that seemed to melt from the roof of the cab down the opposite side and then vanished into the secrecy of a patch of shadow behind a stanchion set in the street.

Martin watched till the cab drove off. Nothing to fear there. He looked around him carefully. No one was on his tail. He wondered again as he had earlier whether the man whom he had suspected of tailing had been really a tail or if it had just been his imagination.

Real or fancied, Martin thought, no tail could follow him this next step of the route. He walked off rapidly, confident that there was not a soul within blocks.

He crossed the broad street and entered the park. The twisted trees cast even more twisted shadows on the pathway. Vagrant lights from infrequent lamp posts made pools of white.

To the left lay the zoo. To the right a winding path led away into the darkness. Martin didn't even know where it ended. He assumed rightly, as it happened, that it led in time to the Seventy-second entrance to the Park.

Martin turned to the left toward the zoo.

REIGN OF TERROR

Railings curved off into the distance making curves of a rather delicate beauty. The Shadow had no trouble in blending into the varying degrees of light and shade. He could not decide where the man he was after was going. This path that they both walked... surely it led directly to the zoo?

Just when he had decided that Martin was heading straight for the closed entrance to the zoo, the man stopped. He stood perfectly still and once more made a reconnaissance. If he could have seen the darker shadow under a bent tree he might well have worried. As it was he merely looked around carefully. Satisfied that he was alone and unseen, he stepped over a railing.

Perfectly still, statue like, The Shadow watched as Martin walked across a patch of lawn. In the center of this particular stretch of land there was a pedestal on which stood a monument to some now forgotten hero of the past.

The stone statue peered with sightless eyes at the night. Martin was near the pedestal now. He turned right at a low bush to the left of the statue.

The Shadow was no more than thirty feet away. He could see Martin perfectly well. Martin bent down near the bush, then an amazing, a magical thing occurred.

Martin slowly shrank from sight!

He seemed to diminish and vanish. In fifteen seconds he was gone as though he had never been.

The Shadow waited a minute, then another long minute before he moved. He raced across the lawn toward the bush where Martin had disappeared like a vagrant puff of smoke. As he came closer to the statue his eyes moved, restlessly searching for some clue to the vanish of a living breathing man.

Light from a near-by lamp post made the scene clear. There, above the black figure stood the eight foot tall marble statue. Pigeon droppings stained parts of the statue white. The Shadow looked about him.

There was the bush. It stood right next to a stone paving that circled the base of the statue. Martin had been on the paving when he had vanished.

Some leaves drifted across the pavement. The soft whisper of their movement was the only sound. Far away, dimmed by the distance, The Shadow was vaguely aware of the sounds of the city. The honkings of cars, the murmur of life seemed to be blanketed out.

The zoo, so near now, must be asleep. The Shadow was more aware of the smell of the animal houses than of any sound from them. Then a restless carnivore, awakened perhaps by some dream of life in the open, suddenly howled.

The sound was shocking. The animal's howls went way up till they became a scream. Only then did it become clear that it was a coyote who was disturbing the silence. The hyena's laugh diminished and then was gone.

Again the leaves made the only sound.

Directly in front of The Shadow there was a leaf which did not respond to the soft urging of the gentle breeze. He bent over wondering why it did not scurry away.

REIGN OF TERROR

It was bent at right angles to itself. He pried at it. It broke off in his fingers. He straightened up. In his fingers he held half the leaf. The other half?

He took a fountain pen flashlight from his pocket and directed its knife-like beam at the ground. There was a line of leaf still visible to this close scrutiny. Just a line. That meant that the other section of the leaf was down under the pavement.

Bending again, The Shadow picked at the edge of the leaf that he could see. He pulled. It gave. He pulled again. Now the rest of the leaf slid free. He looked at it. It was at least three inches wide. That meant that it had gone down that slender crack in the pavement for three inches.

The Shadow smiled as he followed the crack in the pavement with his flashlight. It went off for about three feet. Then at right angles it continued. Another right angle and still a fourth finished the square.

Here was the explanation of where Martin had gone.

Where one man had gone The Shadow was sure he too could go. He bent his attention to the task. He had seen no flurry of movement before Martin had disappeared, that should mean that the pavement had not come up but had gone down.

Since that was the case... The Shadow turned the beam of light to the pedestal of the statue. The release, and he was sure there had to be one, must be such that no amount of casual inspection would reveal it. Too, it had to be near the bush since that was where Martin had stood.

Around the pediment of the statue there was a frieze. The bas-relief was made up of stylized helmets. They made a chain that ran around the base. He pressed them. He turned them. Nothing happened. Martin could not have reached more than two feet of the frieze from near the bush. The answer had to be in the two feet that The Shadow was pressing. He bent over and lifted the edge of the frieze. Nothing. He pressed it down.

Perhaps a combination of movements? The Shadow ran his sensitive finger tips along the helmets of the bas-relief. His other hand pressed down on the lip of the frieze.

To his side there was a stir.

The segment of the concrete near the bush was slowly moving downward. A black square was revealed. Without wasting a second The Shadow stepped into that blackness.

He felt stairs under his feet. He vanished from sight as had Martin. The square of concrete came back into place. This time no vagrant leaf landed on the line of demarcation.

The Shadow had vanished completely.

CHAPTER X

IN the private elevator that went directly to Corre's suite, Martin racked his brain trying to imagine what was up. He'd soon know, he supposed. The door opened and he stepped directly into the apartment.

All was quiet. It was dark but for the lamp over Corre's head where he sat in the corner of the room. The light made bright reflections on the gun he held pointed at Martin's chest.

REIGN OF TERROR

Martin said, "Corre! What's up? Why the gun?"

"What do you expect when you come sneaking through the secret way at this time of night?" Corre was bland.

"Bbbbut..." Martin was conscious of the fact that he was stuttering. Only now was he aware that Buster sat at the other side of the room with a sub machine gun cradled in his arms. The muzzle never wavered.

"You'd better make it good," Corre said, and he smiled.

Back to the door through which he had entered Martin held his arms stiffly at his sides.

Corre said, "I allowed you to get this far because I knew you were the only one who could have come through the passage without setting off more than the initial alarm." Corre looked affectionately at the annunciator board on the wall near the door. His smile faded. He said, "Who's with you? Fast or I'll chop you down!" His eyes went back to the lights that flickered across the board.

Martin looked up at the lights. He said, "Corre! What are you doing to me? You had Buster phone me and tell me to come here. Then you greet me with these guns! There's no one with me... no one followed me. I'll swear it. I looked all around me over and over again. There was no one within blocks when I came down behind the bush!"

"You got a phone call that you thought was from Buster?" Corre asked.

"Yes, yes! Please believe me!" Martin was sweating.

"You could be telling the truth. After all," Corre ruminated, "if you had brought someone along, you wouldn't have allowed them to set off all those..." He pointed with the nose of his gun at the lights on the board which made odd patterns as they flicked on and off.

Corre got to his feet. He paced his way to the desk that was against the wall. He placed both hands on the surface of the desk. His fingers curled under the edge of it. He lifted. The whole top of the desk lifted.

Even with fear making his skin horripilate Martin watched closely. He'd never known about this!

With the top of the desk lifted, Martin could see an involved series of electrical switches, wires, jacks, and other electrical equipment.

Corre stood over the desk. His eyes followed the lights on the board on the wall. The lights made a straight line now. The straight line was the tail of a Y. The first lit bulb was just below the fork of the Y. Corre grinned malevolently as he pressed a series of switches.

He said, "If it's a friend of yours, Martin, you can kiss him good-bye right now!"

Watching the lights, Martin realized that the tail of the Y must represent the straight section of the tunnel through which he had just come. He remembered that when he came through the tunnel he always went to the right at about that point. He had never known there was an alternate left route which could be taken. A bulb lit on the left of the Y.

"The switch worked," Buster said, speaking for the first time.

REIGN OF TERROR

"Of course," Corre said.

"Yeah, I always knew it would, but you never done it before," Buster said, quickly.

"Umm... I have done it a few times," Corre said. "You are not always here, my dear Buster."

Martin looked from the fat face to the immobile one. There was hidden secret horrible amusement reflected in Corre's piggy blue eyes. Buster as always looked uninterested.

"Corre," Martin said, "you do believe that I came here in response to what I thought was a legitimate call, don't you?"

"Sure..." Corre said, "sure, anything you say, Martin." He swiveled his heavy head. "But who would know that a call to you would bring you here? Who would know about that bush... and the monument?"

"Good heavens. I don't know," Martin said. Fear returned.

"Ummm." Corre said thoughtfully. "Perhaps you'd better start to think about it. I'd like to know more about all this." His eyes returned to the lights on the board. The third little bulb was now lit in the left arm of the Y. There were ten little bulbs more. They stopped at the extreme end of the panel. After the Y there was a blank in the panel.

Corre put his gun away. Buster still held the sub machine gun. Walking across the room, Corre grunted as he lifted a window. He looked out the window. He knew just where the zoo was. He looked at it.

He said, "We should hear soon."

"Hear what?" Martin asked.

"Hear my friends getting an unexpected snack," Corre said as he walked back from the window.

Martin was a hard man. He had engaged in many activities that would qualify him for a cell. He prided himself on being hard... But hard as he was, he felt an involuntary shiver go over him as he saw the look on Corre's fat face. The cupid's bow mouth was drawn up in a sweet smile. It was the eyes... those china blue eyes. The fat pads over them were heavy. The corners of them turned up. Martin thought he looks like an evil Buddha... An evil Buddha who waits for his human sacrifice.

The little knife edge of light was enough for The Shadow to see that he was in what could only be an old, old disused water pipe. He knew that a hundred years ago or more, New York's water system was fed by reservoirs in what is now Central Park.

For part of the way the tunnel had been made of rusted iron pipes. Then a long stretch was made of wood. Wood that green slime had transformed into a hideous nightmare. Then the wood had changed back into iron.

Bent over so that he looked like a hunchback, The Shadow made his way through the narrow tunnel. But for his flashlight that picked out footprints in the surface below him he might have thought that no feet but his had ever traversed this secret labyrinth way.

And then, as he sensed that he was going to the left, he saw that there were no footprints in the mould under foot. He stood stock still.

REIGN OF TERROR

Mentally he tried to figure out how far he had come since he had ceased to see Martin's footprints. He turned around and retraced the path his own feet had made.

Twenty, thirty feet... He stopped. His path was blocked. Surely this was where he had just come from? And yet... He ran the flashlight along the iron wall that curved out at him. His footprints stopped here, for this was where he had entered this arm of the water pipe.

Obviously his escape had been blocked off. There was no way to go but back along the pipe where no footprints preceded him. He went back cautiously.

How could Martin have known that he was being followed? He couldn't! The Shadow was sure of that. It stood to reason that someone else was aware of his presence in the pipe. And that someone had cut off his retreat. Ahead must lay danger...

Unknown danger. What kind of trap was hidden deep under the quiet purlieus of Central Park? The silent black-pipe gave no answer. The Shadow went ahead. The black velvet wall receded as he progressed but it always seemed to be just ahead. It absorbed the light from the little fountain pen flashlight.

The Shadow turned the bulb toward himself and ripped the adhesive tape off the lens. Ordinarily he wanted just a sliver of light to escape from the bulb. Now he needed much more light than the tiny bulb could supply.

Released from the adhesive that had covered almost the whole top of the bulb the light spilled out. In comparison it seemed like an arc light. The light pushed the wall of blackness perhaps three feet.

The Shadow paced on. The light before him swept up, down, all around the narrow pipe. He watched particularly carefully the section under foot. Any kind of trap there would drop him down... down to what?

When the danger came it was not under foot. The Shadow raised the flashlight sharply. Ahead of him there was a door. It was a curved door set in the dead end of the pipe through which he had walked.

Set exactly in the middle of the door there was a wheel. It was clear that to open the door it was necessary to turn the wheel. The Shadow readied out a gloved hand and spun the wheel. It turned easily. Too easily. With all the pervading rust that surrounded him it did not stand to reason that the wheel should operate properly. It did operate though, so it had been oiled recently.

The hinges of the curved door worked smoothly, too.

Standing still, The Shadow pulled the door open quickly. Blackness again faced him. He turned his flash on the new darkness. About ten feet through the door he could just make out a stairway. It looked exactly like the one he had descended after finding the trap door next to the statue.

The Shadow stood poised on the sill of the door. He looked at the ground that separated him from the stairs. It looked undisturbed. But that was no guarantee.

Leaping, The Shadow sailed over the ten feet and landed lightly on the bottom step of the stairway. If there had been a trap in the ground, he had avoided it.

Aided by the flashlight he looked up the stairs. At the top of them there was what seemed like a trap door. The circumstances were exactly like those under which he had descended those other stairs.

REIGN OF TERROR

The Shadow went up the stairs. One by one he carefully made his way. He stood on the inner side of each step knowing that normally one would proceed up the center of the stairs. There was no rail to cling to. He took his time and placed his toe on each stair before trusting his weight to it. Nothing happened but The Shadow was too shrewd a campaigner to be lulled into relaxing. When he had come to third from the top step he was still proceeding as cautiously as he had started.

Directly over his shoulders was the outline of a rectangle. He looked around to try and find a release for what he assumed to be the trap door. Search as he would, he could find no sign of anything but moisture, decay and silence.

He took one of the .45's out from under his arm. Holding it at the ready he reached out with his other hand and pushed. The door gave. Nothing was holding it in place.

It was heavy but it moved. He found it necessary to get right under the door and push with his shoulders. The door gave a couple of inches.

He straightened his back further. Now the door inclined upward further. Suddenly he froze as his nostrils were assaulted by a pungent odor so unexpected in the circumstances that it almost stunned him.

The heavy rank smell could come only from an animal's cage. And only one carnivore had quite that massive a smell. Lions!

The door to escape was guarded by the king of beasts!

He could hear a pad, pad of sound. One of the lions, curious about the sound of the door opening in the center of his cage, was coming closer to investigate.

With the speed of lightning a heavy paw, fanged with heavy claws, ripped in and under the edge of the door.

The Shadow dropped to his knees. This allowed the trap door to fall closed. The lion's claw got out from under the edge of the door just as it closed.

Breathing a sigh of relief that he had not stepped directly into the cage without any warning, The Shadow sat down on one of the steps. Over his head the nine hundred pound animal padded back and forth... back and forth, patiently... so dreadfully patiently...

Back the way he had come, The Shadow knew there was no escape. When the tunnel had changed behind him he was blocked off from egress in the direction from which he had come.

That left the lion cage...

The Shadow put his gun back in its holster. He walked down the stairs, flashlight on. Even under the circumstances, he descended every bit as carefully as he had gone up.

At the foot of the stairs, he looked around. Another cul de sac. No point in retracing his path. No point in going up and meeting the waiting lion.

Was there any alternative?

Struck by a sudden thought, The Shadow walked under the stairs. He bathed the wall with the flash. Was that... he went closer to the wall. In the dirt almost invisible was a line, a thin line.

Bending till his eyes were inches away from the line, The Shadow was able to see that the line, infinitesimal at best, was straight.

Nature never makes a straight line. She always works in curves. Therefore, this line would seem to be the work of man.

Could this be another door?

Getting down on his knees. The Shadow pulled a jackknife from his pocket. He slid the straight blade into the slit.

CHAPTER XI

IN Corre's apartment six eyes were glued to the indicator board. To Corre the lights made a distinct and understandable pattern. To Martin they were baffling except for the clipped explanatory words that Corre threw out occasionally. To Buster? Who could tell from the lackluster eyes?

Corre said, "Whoever this character is, he's no dope. He's stepped down from the stairs that lead to the lion cage." Throwing his head back the fat man laughed. "Ho," he finished his paroxysm, "this is one time when it doesn't pay to be too smart."

"What do you mean?" Martin asked.

"I assume the character is packing a gun. Of course it would take some doing to stop a lion with a pistol but you might do it. However, this alternative path that our friend has chosen will take him to an even more unpleasant death, and one that no gun ever made can protect from!"

Deep beneath the earth the eerie figure that was The Shadow bent to work with a will. Using the knife blade as a chisel he insinuated it into the line that he was busy working at.

His flashlight was on a step behind him casting less and less light as time went on. Its beam was yellow now. The end was not far away. The flashlight was designed for an occasional flash, not continued use.

When it went out The Shadow, creature of darkness, would be in darkness as complete as even he had known...

Nevertheless he proceeded as though he had all the time in the world. He slid the blade up and down till he felt it catch on a tiny projection. Holding the knife still for a second he then bent his hand back and forth. This communicated a jiggling to the blade. The blade suddenly slipped and went all the way down. Either it had dropped off the projection, or it had depressed the projection.

The second was the case. The Shadow ripped one of his gloves off. He forced his finger nails under the edge of the slit. Something gave.

He pulled gently, and then more forcefully as he overcame the inertia of this odd door. It slid further toward him. Just as it opened wide enough to admit his body, his flashlight went out.

It was black with an absence of light that was awe inspiring. It was black as though there had never been such a thing as light. It was the way interstellar space must be minus the flare of a sun.

REIGN OF TERROR

Martin said brightly, trying to ease the tension that gripped Corre's fat body, "You know, this is the longest I've ever known you to go without either mentioning food or eating."

"Uh," Corre responded. "There are a few things that I enjoy even more than food." His eyes never left the board. The lights on it were almost all out. Three little bulbs were lit.

"What is going on, can you tell me?" Martin asked.

Corre responded with what seemed to be a non sequitur. He said, "How do you think the majority of apartment houses here in the midtown area are heated? What do you think supplies the radiators, keeps the hot water hot?"

"Why... I never gave it any thought," Martin said truthfully. "I suppose coal and oil. Why? What's that got to do with this?"

"A great deal," Corre said, his eyes still glued to the board. Only two of the little bulbs were lit now. "I'll ask you another question. How do they make electricity?"

"With a dynamo." Martin was even more puzzled.

"How do you run a dynamo?" Corre asked. "Electricity comes out of a dynamo because something has turned the dynamo. What?"

"Steam, I suppose."

"Correct." Corre laughed. "And whether you know it or not, there is a surplus of the steam. That surplus is piped from the powerhouse and sold to the owners of various apartment houses. It's a perfect heating system. No worry about fuss or dirt. No furnace bothers... you just have a pipe that comes off one of the main steam pipes. You have a thermostat that controls how much heat you use in your house. Nice arrangement for a landlord."

"But what's all that got to do with this?" Martin pointed to the board where a single bulb was lit.

"Just this," Corre said, bubbling with good humor. "When that last bulb goes out, our very clever friend will have stepped directly into a cut off from one of the main pipes that carries the live steam to the buildings in this neighborhood!"

"Live steam!" Martin gulped. "Just the rush of that when he opens the door will broil him!"

"Yes, there is no chance that he can live in such an atmosphere, I am sure," Corre agreed.

Buster suddenly laughed. It was the first time that Martin or Corre had ever heard the man laugh. Even Corre looked surprised. Corre said, "What's up, Buster?"

Buster's face was set even while laughter slid out of his slit of a mouth. He said, around the laughter that sounded as though it pained him, "Funniest thing I ever heard of. The guy's gonna get a hot foot that covers his whole body. An all-over hot foot!" He laughed on, tears running out of the corners of his eyes.

Corre looked back at the annunciator board. The single bulb was still lit. The fat body leaned forward. Martin watched as the man's too small hands wrapped themselves around each other in an obscene embrace. They rubbed each other tenderly... softly...

REIGN OF TERROR

All their eyes were again glued to the board.

In the blackness that pressed down around him, The Shadow continued to open the door. In the last bit of light before his flash gave out he had seen ahead of him still another door. This one looked modern. It also looked vaguely familiar as though he had seen a door somewhere, some time, made something like it.

He stood still, wondering what that familiarity was.

There was no use in searching his pockets for matches. He knew he had none on his person. That door... what was it? Why did he have this frustrated feeling of having seen one before? The edges of the door? The way they turned over in a U. Could that be it? Was it the way the turnover fitted with such air tight precision that was teasing him?

Suddenly memory surged.

During the war. Under the sea. A diving bell! That was it. The diving bell had such a door, as a matter of fact it had two of them to withstand the pressure of the water. A diver in a protected suit would open one door, go through it, close it after him and only then open the outer door. The sea would rush in but be stopped by the inner door.

But what was such a door doing here under the center of Manhattan Island? Water? But if it were a water main The Shadow knew it would be much bigger in diameter. The pipe that the odd door was set in was too small to be a water main. Of that he was sure.

He reached out and touched the pipe, not the door. He burnt his hands, but he knew the answer. Steam...

He turned away, grateful now that his flashlight had gone out. If he hadn't paused and thought that out...

He went back toward the path that led to the lion's cage. Better a duel with a lion or lions than instant death by scalding!

Corre swore. He swore loudly and for a long time. Then finally he stopped. The lights on the board were flickering back into life. He said, "Buster, get over to the zoo. That guy, whoever he is, is a shrewdy. He's bypassed the steam!"

"Anybody as smart as this character should have an eye kept on him. If the lion gets him all well and good! If not... use this!" Corre threw his pistol to Buster who had placed the machine gun on the floor.

"Cut him down, huh?" Buster asked.

"Of course, that is... if he should get past the lion which I doubt. Now, no more talking! Get over there fast! Use the tunnel!"

Buster paused at the door. "Don't forget to throw the switch. I don't wanna end in the cage with this creep!"

"Don't worry about that, get a move on!" Corre snapped.

Martin watched the fat man. He looked almost rattled. Although it was hard to tell through all the fat that masked most of the man's emotions.

REIGN OF TERROR

As the door closed on Buster, Corre said shrewdly, "I wonder if this smart apple is the operator who knocked off Barrels and Larry? It figures. Nobody else around has the brains to come in out of the rain. It could be."

Saying nothing, Martin looked up at the little electric light bulbs that mapped out a man's path toward death. Corre was eyeing them speculatively. He let a breath, a sigh of relief, escape him.

He said, "Three more minutes and he'll be in the cage. It shouldn't take Buster more than that to get there."

Buster waited impatiently. There, the switch worked. He raced through the tunnel, gun out and pointed ahead of him. He was almost out in the open now.

He came up, not out of the door near the statue, but another one near the wall that surrounded the zoo. The gate was locked as it always was at night.

That didn't deter him. He climbed up it after looking around to be sure that there were no park guards observing. No one was in sight. There... not two hundred feet away were the lion cages.

As he slid down he caught the tail of his jacket. He wasted a long minute disentangling himself. Once free and clear he ran toward the cages.

Even while caught, he had been able to hear a low rumble of sound like a cat's purr magnified a thousand fold. As he got closer the rumbling purr got louder... louder.

He could see one of the big carnivores pulling something from the outer cage, the one where the public could view the animals, into the narrow recess that led to the building that housed the animals.

He squinted. The lion had backed all the way into the house. His paw was still in sight. Caught in the huge talons was a long strip of what? He strained his eyes... Black cloth?

And in the center of the cage there was a circle of blackness. A hat? Yes, that was it. A black slouch hat. He had a flicker of memory. He had heard of a man who always wore a black cape and a black slouch hat. The Shadow!

He returned to Corre's apartment even faster than he had come down. He burst the door open.

Corre asked, "Well?"

"Boss! You'll never guess who's been on our tail!"

Even then, Martin noticed there was no real change in Buster's face. His voice was excited but his features weren't.

"Guessing game!" Corre spat.

"This is important! No wonder he was so smart! Boss... it was The Shadow!"

Corre's face blanched. "The Shadow... speak up! Did the lions get him or not?"

Buster described the scene as he had come on it. "And there was this big lion draggin' the last of his black cape into the inner cage!"

REIGN OF TERROR

"But that's no proof," Corre said bitterly.

"It was proof if you'd heard the big cat crunching bones in his teeth," Buster said with relish.

"That's better!" Corre relaxed visibly. "So that's the end of the master man hunter... the weed of crime bears a bitter fruit, huh? It bears a sweet one for me!" He savored his triumph. His precautions had worked where so many criminals had failed.

He got to his feet. He puffed his chest out. He said, "I must say that's given me a real appetite! Gentlemen, let us eat as few men have ever eaten! I shall cook as I have never cooked!" He licked his pursed lips at the prospect.

And then, right then when Corre was feeling invincible, there came a sound. It was a low sound, not one that you would think could possibly have the effect that this one did.

Almost inaudible at first; but welling up in a crescendo, there came to their dazed ears the sound of The Shadow's laugh. It was bitter, triumphant, jeering, all at once!

CHAPTER XII

"You dim witted punch-drunk fool!" Corre turned on Buster. "So The Shadow is dead... he's been eaten by a lion, has he? He followed you back here! He's escaped the lion and used you as a pigeon!" Corre grabbed a gun.

"But the blood..." Buster said dolefully: "I saw the blood in the cage..."

"Lions bleed, too," Martin said. "Especially when they're shot!"

Out in the hall leaning against the door The Shadow pulled his shoulders back and tried to stop the waves of pain that bathed his body. Should he enter? He had used up one clip of bullets. That meant one .45 was useless. There were two bullets left in the clip of his other gun. And through the door he could hear three voices. Two bullets... three targets.

He balanced the weakness of his position against the fear that he had seen on the face of the girl when she had seen acid eat away the head of her doll. He thought of the hopelessness he had seen on the face of the surgeon when the doctor had thought of having his thumb ruined in a vise. He multiplied these two people by the hundreds that he knew lived in terror and walked in fear because of the men behind this door.

He thought of the holocaust in an office building downtown, of the five men piled in disarray when death struck them down from a machine gun, of an old man, a night watchman whose brains had been blown out.

Of the explosion that had torn up a street.

Of all the rackets whose myriad seamy threads emanated from this headquarters. Of numbers, and vice and dope. Of death and destruction.

He thought of the way he had felt when he had come out of a door into the cage that held a ravening carnivore. He thought of the mind behind that fate, of the alternate, the live steam that might have scalded the skin off his body.

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But most of all he thought of the faces of the doctor and the girl. That must not be allowed to continue. Tonight was the night to end all this.

He rubbed the back of his hand across his face and was surprised at the blood that he saw on his hand when it came down from his face. He drew what remained of his tattered black cape around him and then he opened the door.

Inside the room Corre said as the door opened, "I'll take this up with you again, Buster, after this is over!" He swiveled the gun which had covered Buster to the door.

Letting the breath ease out of his lungs, Buster picked up the sub machine gun. He turned it toward the door. Martin took a little pistol out of his pocket. It was no more than a .25. But even that calibre can be deadly at ten feet. He aimed at the door.

Despite all their armament the three men were tight with strain as the door continued to open. Corre made sure that the sub machine gun in Buster's capable hands was pointed about three feet off the ground. That way one burst would cut a man in half.

So great was the aura cast by The Shadow that even when the door was completely open and they saw that his hands were empty of guns, when they saw the blood that made a splotch of his face, a patch that hid his identity as if he were wearing his slouch hat, even when they saw the torn pieces in his clothes where the raking lion's claws had cut deep, even then they knew fear.

The Shadow swayed. He knew at the moment that he dominated the scene. But for how long? That was the question. He looked at the three men who faced him one by one. All he had was two bullets.

But was that all? He allowed himself a twisted smile as he recognized Buster. Two bullets and some information. He eyed Corre, ran his gaze over the mountain of fat that was the man. He stared so that Corre squirmed under those hot eyes. Yes, he had some more ammunition... ammunition in the form of data on the fat man.

Martin he barely glanced at. And yet, when he spoke it was to Martin that he directed his attention.

He closed the door behind him and leaned back against it. He said, "Imagine, Martin," and his voice was low, "imagine, if you were to walk over here and go out this door, you could keep on going. You've never been in jail after that first time. Three to five years they gave you. It must have scared you. It must have. Of course, you didn't reform but you played it smart. So smart that even now there's no warrant out for you anywhere.

"You could go out this door and keep on going," The Shadow repeated. "But you won't, I don't suppose. You'd rather stay here and use that little gun. I wonder, if sometime in the future you're going to wish you could make the bullet go back into the gun. Sometime when your number is up like Lazarus' and Corbaccio's..."

Corre started. How could even The Shadow have known of Lazarus?

The Shadow paid no attention to the fat man even though he could see that his dart had hit home. He kept on talking to Martin. "The fat one has you buffaloed, hasn't he, Martin? All you can see is that you're really a big timer now. Nothing can stop you... nothing. In fact, I'll wager you've begun to make plans to wipe the fat man off the face of the earth. Sure..." The Shadow said, and it was like an insinuation inside Martin's brain, "if the fat man has stayed on top this long it means that the rackets are safe... safe and sure. All you have to do is knock off the big boy and then you'll be the big man. The top of the heap.

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"Haven't you stopped to wonder why no one else got that idea?" The Shadow asked. "Haven't you wondered what happened to the men who got that idea? Corbaccio was one of those men... and yet, I don't seem to see him around anywhere. There was a time he was a pretty constant visitor here..."

"But, no," The Shadow said decisively, "you wouldn't want to get out of here and keep on going. You'd rather stay and be killed when your time comes, wouldn't you, Martin?"

The Shadow didn't wait for an answer. He could feel a stir in the air. The fat man wasn't going to stand for much more talking... and yet, the fat man wouldn't be human if he weren't wondering at this time why The Shadow had come into the room despite the fact that he was injured and empty handed. Curiosity should keep the balance of power in The Shadow's hand for a little while longer... how little The Shadow couldn't tell. He proceeded as though he were in an invulnerable position.

"I heard the fat man call you Buster," The Shadow said, leveling his gaze at the man with the immobile face. "So you don't even use your own name any more... what's wrong, Buster, have you forgotten the way you have forgotten so many other things?"

Buster looked helplessly from The Shadow to the fat man. Why didn't Corre give the order to fire?

The Shadow said, and his voice was gentle, "You know, Buster, the other night... or was it last night?" He brought himself up short. That was a slip, he mustn't show that he was getting muzzy headed, forgetful... "I thought of you. I was watching a fight. A prize fight. It was a pretty good one. Two good middleweights, evenly matched... except that the fight was fixed. Of course, you knew about the fix I'm sure."

Nodding his head involuntarily, Buster looked to Corre for aid. Why didn't Corre give the word? Just talking about fighting was bringing that buzzing sound back in his head. He shook his head to clear it and went on listening to The Shadow.

"Sure, you knew about that fix, but did you know about the fix the night you lost your championship? Did you? Did you know that the fat man fixed that one? That it's his fault that you're punch drunk now? That he's the reason your face doesn't move any more? Did you know that he caused the beating that changed you from a man to the thing you are? Did you?" The Shadow hammered and his voice was affecting Buster just like those short choppy jabs that he could still feel sometimes.

Buster put the machine gun down. His head hurt. The words hurt. He knuckled his eyes. Inside his head he could feel pandemonium. It was as if someone were pushing his brain around with a stubby finger.

Corre spoke for the first time since his antagonist had entered the room. He said shortly, "Buster, pick up that gun and don't put it down again!"

That was better. That was an order. Buster hastened to obey. He was all right. All he needed was somebody to tell him what to do. That way he didn't have to think. He picked the gun up again. As he did so he looked at The Shadow. He didn't like people who made him think and the man in black had made him do it. He didn't like that. It hurt his head.

The Shadow turned his attention away from Buster. He said, "So you're the big wheel." His hawklike face, bruised, unrecognizable under the mask of blood, was the complete antithesis of the shapeless circle that was Corre's countenance.

The two men, so opposite in outlook, in body and in face, stared at each other and it was like a duel. Despite the superiority of Corre's position it was his china blue eyes which dropped first. There was such anger, such

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a thirst for justice in The Shadow's eyes, that Corre was afraid, even though The Shadow still had nothing but his bare hands showing against the three weapons that covered him.

"You don't look much like your brother," The Shadow said, as though he were passing the time of day. Martin stiffened. Brother?

"Didn't it bother you to send even your brother to his death?" The Shadow asked.

Corre was silent.

"Edward and Thomas Corbaccio. One ran a funeral parlor for a long time. He was respected in the neighborhood. His friends looked up to him, liked him. And then his brother showed up. His brother was a very fat man, almost as fat as Edward was thin. And from then on, Edward Corbaccio became a different man.

"So different that when he disappeared in the middle of a huge explosion, not many of his old friends even wondered why he didn't come back to his funeral parlor. They didn't know he was dead, but even if they'd known, I don't think they would have cared, do you, Thomas?"

Martin was surprised to see the expression on Corre's face. Corre, Corbaccio. He'd just cut out the last two syllables of his name. But The Shadow was talking.

"Where were you all the time when your brother was building up his legitimate business, Corbaccio?"

The fat man tightened his finger on the trigger of his gun. Otherwise he did not move.

"Shall I tell you where you were?" The Shadow asked. "Because I know."

There was a silence.

The fat man thought, my God, how much does he know? How can he know all this? Should I kill him now? No, better wait and find out how much he does know. A lot of this could be just guesses... lucky guesses.

The Shadow took a deep breath. He was still in control of the situation. He knew what the fat man was thinking as well as if he had heard him say it.

"Marseilles," The Shadow said. He saw the fat man wince. "Istanbul." That scored too. "The gold coast of Africa... there isn't much that's filthy and horrible that you haven't turned your hand to, is there?" The Shadow watched as the fat man winced again. The Shadow thought, if I'd only known that this was the man at the top... He had heard whispers again and again of a huge fat man who had been involved in dirty rackets all over the world. A smart fat man who got what he wanted and left... leaving other people holding the bag.

It had been a guess that Corre was Corbaccio's brother. The Shadow had risked that because of the fact that the first syllables of both names were the same and because of a rumor that Hawkeye had related to him about Corbaccio having a fat brother whom no one had seen for a long time.

It just seemed that it would be too big a coincidence that there could be two grossly fat men engaged in the rackets on a huge scale, that was why The Shadow was tying up the whispers he had heard from all over the world with the person who faced him now with death in his pale blue eyes.

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"Gun running," The Shadow said conversationally. "Traffic in women from Marseilles to South America. A revolution that broke out south of the equator just after a fat man sold an order of new guns... guns that were supposed to be a secret..."

"Giant shipments of dope from abroad, distributed by a new set up that seemed able to avoid all precautions against them."

"And then," The Shadow said, "a reign of terror here in New York. Crime running rampant. New rackets. New terror, new murders."

It made quite a series of accusations.

The man whom The Shadow was accusing said, "Are you finished, Shadow?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Quite finished?"

"Yes."

"There's no reason, then, why I shouldn't kill you?" the fat man said, and as he spoke he smiled. His cupid's bow mouth turned up. "No reason at all?"

CHAPTER XIII

SUDDENLY there was a gun in The Shadow's hand. It was like that. One second his hand was empty, the next it was filled. The Shadow said, "No reason at all, but this."

The fat man's lips curved up in a bigger smile. "That doesn't seem like much of a reason." With his empty hand he gestured at the sub machine gun in Buster's hands. "Before you can pull the trigger Buster can cut you in half."

Two bullets, The Shadow thought. Just two. But their target was clear. They belonged in the fat man's body. The fat man certainly did not deserve to live. Even if it meant death under the sub machine gun, the ultimate good coming from the death of the fat man should cancel that out.

The Shadow didn't pay the slightest attention to Buster or the threat in his hands. He kept his eyes fixed on the fat man. He said, "You've asked me if I have anything to say before I die... On the other hand, do you?" The .45 in The Shadow's hand was steady despite the fact that his big frame shook with fatigue and pain.

"Are you kidding?" the fat man asked. "You think that pop gun is going to do you any good?"

"Oh, you are a gambler?" The Shadow asked, and he sounded amused. "You are willing to bet that I can't kill you before I die?"

Buster waited, his finger tense on the trigger. What was the boss blabbering about? One burst from the little baby in his hands and this would be all over...

Martin said, and his voice was husky, "Shadow, suppose... suppose I took you up on that offer of yours?"

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It had worked! The Shadow felt a little better. The odds were still impossible, but the chance, the thousand to one chance, had worked. He had figured Martin's psychology correctly. The man did not like killing. He was a smooth operator who liked to stay just at the edge of the law. He didn't like to go all the way...

The fat man said, "You turning yellow, Martin?"

"Nooo..." Martin said slowly, "I think I'm getting smarter."

"Much," The Shadow agreed. "Come over here, Martin."

"If he moves, Buster, shoot him!" the fat man said.

The muzzle of the sub machine gun moved.

The Shadow thought, now he had a diversion. It wasn't much, but such as it was, it helped. The machine gun on Martin, Martin's gun pointed at Buster. The Shadow covering the fat man... the fat man covering The Shadow.

Now was the time for the master bluff. The Shadow said, "You aren't very bright, are you, Corbaccio?"

The fat man was aware that his position had weakened. He asked, "Why?"

"Did you think I came here unprepared?"

That was the question. That was what had held the fat man from ordering the instant death of the man in the black. What did The Shadow have up his sleeve?

How come he had walked into the muzzles of three guns? Since the fat man was a coward he was sure that no man would be so foolhardy as to have done what The Shadow did...

The Shadow said, "Did you really think I would walk into this mess alone, practically unarmed? How stupid do you think I am? You've lasted a long time... but so have I."

That was true...

"In a vault," The Shadow lied, "there is enough evidence to tie you down to the electric chair in this state... to have you shot against a wall in South America... to die in various states in Middle Europe..."

Each word hit the fat man like a blow. He shriveled. He sat down, the gun in his hand pointed down toward the floor. His fingers loosened on it. This was what he had feared.

"If I don't check in inside of thirty minutes," The Shadow said, "a trusted man of mine will know that he must go to the bank tomorrow when it opens and get that information."

The Shadow saw a thought beginning to form in the fat man's light blue eyes. He spoke quickly, wiping the thought out before it became fully formed. "And the beautiful thing is... that I cannot reach the man. If you were to torture me to death I would not know how to get in touch with him! I don't even know where he is living now..."

Buster said, "What are you lousin' around for, boss? Whyn't ya knock the two of them off?"

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"Yes," The Shadow taunted, "why don't you?"

Martin watched the indecision in the man whom he knew as Corre. The struggle was clear in his face. He wanted to order the death of The Shadow... he wanted to wipe Martin out... but he didn't dare!

Buster glanced up from Martin's face and looked at the fat man. The fat man was sweating. Beads of perspiration formed and rolled down his high forehead. His hands were trembling. He bit his puffy under lip.

Watching the silent struggle, The Shadow thought, 'the coward dies a thousand deaths, the valiant only one.'

Buster said unbelievably, "Boss, you... weren't kidding the other night when you said you were yellow... I thought it was a rib. But you are yellow... you're scared now!"

And then a new factor entered the room, one that even The Shadow hadn't been able to calculate. For Buster was ashamed for his boss. It hurt him to see the fear on the fat man's face. In Buster's muddled mind there was only one thing to do. He must wipe out the boss' shame!

His finger tightened on the trigger. The machine gun stuttered. Martin fell to the floor, his hands across his middle. Just as the first sound cut through the silence of the room, The Shadow's reflexes functioned. He shot Buster.

Martin said as he died, "Even this way you're right, Shadow. I couldn't have lived the other way... not really."

Mortally wounded as he was, Buster still tried to lift the heavy sub machine gun. He said, "Boss... don't take this from him... I'll get him..."

The fat man said, "You fool, you've ruined everything!" He fired his gun at Buster. He was close to hysteria. He said, "I might have been able to think my way out of this... But no, I am doomed to have nothing but fools around me!"

The Shadow watched, pity in his eyes, as Buster realized that his hero had turned on him. Buster said, "Aw, boss...you shouldn't a' done it..."

The paralysis that had held Buster's face in life relaxed as death claimed him. His face changed. He said, his harsh features softening, "You shouldn't a' done it. He's bluffin' you boss. How could he know anythin' about you if he had to follow me here? If he'd a' known he could have walked in right through the front door... front... door..." Blood bubbled up in Buster's throat.

The Shadow thought, that does it. Buster, unafraid, had seen what fear had blinded the fat man to...

He saw realization come to the fat man, words formed in his throat. He said, "How could you have any dope on me if you didn't know before you came into the tunnel, who I was or where I lived?"

They had their guns centered on each other. The gun dwarfed by the fat man's bulk in his tiny hand.

A wave of pain rose in The Shadow. He could not last much longer. This had to end somehow.

The fat man said, "All my plans... all the care I took covering my every step... the intelligence I have expended... all jeopardized by you!" The gun was pointed at The Shadow's head now.

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"Not jeopardized by me," The Shadow said, "but by you. You have destroyed yourself by your own fear. And it is just that you who have fattened on misery, grown big on fear... should be destroyed by your own mechanisms!" Under cover of talking, The Shadow wondered where to place his last bullet. The man was so gross that it seemed doubtful that a single bullet could end his existence. He was so swathed in fat, so protected by the multiple layers. A head shot? It was risky in the shaky condition that wracked The Shadow. And yet a shot in any other place...

His indecisions were taken care of by the fat man. He fired at The Shadow. The Shadow sensed the resolution that had hardened in his antagonist. He snapped his last bullet at the fat man's hand.

His bullet scraped the bones in the tiny hand. The fat man's bullet went high raking across The Shadow's shoulder.

The fat man looked down at the bloody mass that was his hand. He screamed like a woman. He said, "You've hurt me!"

His gun had fallen from his injured member. Before he could stop and pick it up with his other hand The Shadow hurtled his body through the air.

He landed in the fat man's stomach. He bounced as though he had landed on a mattress. The fat man gasped with pain. He chopped down with his left uninjured hand. The blow caught The Shadow on the side of the head.

Strong the fight in the man might not be, but all that weight carried authority. It made The Shadow's head whirl. He was on his knees. He threw his right hand.

It landed on that mattress-like middle. The fat man doubled over. His breath whooshed out of his lungs. He said, "It can't end like this... it can't..."

His head whirling with pain, The Shadow wished desperately that the black clouds that were gathering in his brain would dissipate just for long enough to let him finish off his enemy.

The fat man, gasping with pain, came to his senses. He had one weapon against the slim man who represented the forces of law and order. One weapon that should turn the tables. A half smile flickered across his flabby features.

He threw himself on top of The Shadow.

It was like being enveloped in mush.

For once in his varied career, The Shadow was completely helpless. He was squashed, flattened. He tried to force some air into his collapsing lungs.

On top of him the fat man looked around for a more forceful weapon. There, not three feet away on the right lay Martin's gun.

He reached out for it.

CHAPTER XIV

THE two dead men in the room were the only witnesses to that bizarre conflict. The fat man whimpered with pain as he tried to force his injured hand to pick up the gun.

He clenched his fingers but they would not stay closed. It hurt too much. He groaned and gave up.

Under him The Shadow twisted himself a trifle. He managed to free his forefinger and his thumb. Puny weapons against the great weight that pressed him flat.

He grabbed a portion of the fat that covered him. His finger and thumb tightened like a pincer. He tightened still more, then he twisted.

Pain swept through the fat man. He rolled off The Shadow, anything to escape that bright lancing wave of pain that poured through him.

Freed from that preposterous burden that had bound him, The Shadow could not move for perhaps thirty seconds. He just lay gasping, forcing air into his lungs.

That respite came close to being fatal. The fat man didn't delay. He grabbed the gun with his left hand. He swung it around to cover his enemy.

The Shadow grinned at him. "You don't learn very fast, do you?"

They were both on the floor. The fat man couldn't get to his feet without an herculean effort. The Shadow didn't waste the necessary time. Instead he rolled over and toward the man.

The fat man shot him. But even at that close range the whirling twisting object was not an easy target. The Shadow gasped as another bullet bit into him.

This one in his chest. Blood was pouring down his shoulders from the fat man's first shot. This one hurt so much that it served to bring him to.

It drove away the nausea and pain that had been threatening to make him pass out. But even The Shadow could not last much longer. The lion's clawings had hurt him badly enough... but now...

Nevertheless, his teeth showed in a grin as he forced his wracked body across the intervening space. He crept on his knees. Closer... closer... the gun in his antagonist's hand was wavering now.

The fat man thought, it's impossible... he can't keep on fighting... no one can have that much guts... His fear returned.

The fat man said, "No... no... you can't..." He fired again. But his hand was shaking so badly that his shot went wild. It crashed into the wall. Plaster fell to the floor.

The Shadow said, "There are not enough bullets in the world to keep me from killing you! How does it feel, fat man? You've brought this to so many men... and women in your time... how does it feel to be afraid? To fear for your stinking life?"

The Shadow's hands reached out for the fat that hung like an albatross around his opponent's neck. He tensed

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his fingers. Revulsion went through him. It was like grasping lard. Nevertheless, he tightened his digits even more.

Somewhere under all that fat there had to be a windpipe.

The fat man choked. He managed to bring the gun up. It came higher... higher... He turned his left wrist in on itself. His skin was whitening. Blood vessels stood out on his high forehead.

He pulled the trigger. The shot ended all thought, the brain separated as the bullet tore through it. It came out the back of the head and continued on its way. It smashed into Buster's dead body.

It lent a curious semblance of life to the cadaver which twitched under the impact.

Still on the floor The Shadow reached out for the phone wire. He pulled. The instrument teetered on the edge of its table and then fell to the floor near him.

He dialed Burbank's number. When Burbank answered there was worry in his voice. He said, "Hello? Hello?"

The Shadow gasped as he realized that he still didn't know where he was. He said, "Burbank... hold on."

Slowly, painfully, he crawled to the window. He lay his head down next to the phone on the floor. His voice was a whisper. He said, "Burbank."

"Yes, chief... what's wrong?"

The Shadow whispered his location to his aide.

"Are you hurt badly?" Burbank asked.

"Yeah... pretty bad..." The Shadow said. This time when he passed out he was unconscious for two days. But when he came to it was all over.

Without even checking he knew that Burbank and his other aides had finished up his job for him. He knew that all the tangled threads of the fat man's crime empire were now being revealed to the police.

The Shadow had once again shown the members of the underworld, the evil-doers and arch-criminals, that crime does not pay.

THE END