

THE BLUR

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. ODDS ON DEATH

TERRY RADNOR was down to his last chip.

One chip meant five dollars in the classy Century Casino where Terry was playing roulette. Newest and most palatial of all the illicit gambling clubs in New York, the Century Casino was no place for pikers, as Terry was finding out.

Harboring the lone chip, Terry watched the wheel spin. He wasn't taking the ride this trip; he'd had too many rides. His only way to make up the few hundred dollars that he had lost would be to build up slowly, taking even chances on the red or black.

The trouble was, Terry couldn't decide which he wanted, red or black; or, for that matter, odd or even numbers, which the roulette board also offered. He found himself staring at the board, to learn which the players preferred.

Sight of the board only bewildered him. At least a dozen players were putting larger sums than Terry's original stake on a single turn of the wheel.

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Looking at the players, Terry understood why.

Tex Winthorp, owner of the Century Casino, had been smart when he opened this gambling club deluxe, in the heart of Manhattan, in defiance of the law. The place had attracted a clientele that was not only wealthy, but inveterate in its gambling. The faces that Terry saw about him were those of persons to whom the click of the roulette wheel carried the rhythm of pulse beats.

Here were dead-pan sophisticates, bejeweled dowagers, all strangers to each other; strangers almost to themselves, as their eyes watched only the gyrations of the roulette ball. They weren't typical New Yorkers; they were persons who had sojourned abroad, spending and gambling fortunes, until the war had forced them to return to America.

One thing New York had lacked: the thrill that these expatriates had found at Monte Carlo and other European gambling resorts. So Tex Winthorp had provided a Monte Carlo in miniature, with all the frills. He'd seen to it, too, that the people accustomed to such thrills made up the bulk of the patronage.

Terry Radnor, coming to the Century Casino on a chance invitation, had unwisely climbed out of his proper league. He couldn't stand the pace that these serious gamblers demanded. His losses were bad enough, but the impressions these people gave him were much worse. They had begun to look like creatures from another planet, machines timed to the whirl of the roulette wheel.

The croupier was raking in the loser's chips, and paying out to the winners. Still clutching his last token, Terry stared about, hoping that he'd see at least one face that appeared human. Across the table, he saw a tall young man with marcelled hair, who was weighing chips with one hand, while he used the other to raise a lengthy cigarette holder to lips that wore a rather indulgent smile.

The young man shrugged, which was another human symptom, but as Terry caught his eye, the fellow turned away and strolled in the direction of the faro table, as though preferring to try his luck elsewhere.

The wheel completed another spin. This time, Terry felt he had to bet. He edged forward, his hand wavering with its last thin chip. Observing that the croupier did not notice him, Terry fisted the chip again and started to withdraw his hand.

It was then that the voice purred smoothly in Terry's ear; a voice that made him stiffen, despite its oily tone.

"Play your chip on any number," advised the voice. "Keep watching the wheel, but, meanwhile, listen. You are going to win, but not at roulette. I'm letting you in on another game, where the odds are sure."

Mechanically, Terry placed his chip on number fifteen just as the wheel was about to spin. Remembering the injunction to watch the wheel, he kept his eyes fixed in its direction, as he drew back, hoping to hear the voice again. It came, and with it Terry felt a hand brush lightly against the side of his tuxedo jacket.

"I am putting an envelope in your pocket," undertoned the purring voice. "It is for Tex Winthorp. Take it to him personally, and tell him that it is important. Wait until he has read the message, then ask him what it is worth."

Terry waited for more, but there was none. The wheel stopped on number twenty-two, and Terry's last bet went the way of all his chips. Sliding a hand to his pocket, he felt the envelope crinkle. Turning, he glanced aside, hoping to see the man who had spoken. He was gone.

ELBOWING against Terry was a middle-aged woman who had just won a two-to-one bet on the first twelve numbers. She couldn't have had anything to do with the mysterious voice. Gripping the envelope as earnestly as he had previously clutched the final chip, Terry looked across the glittering casino to the door of Tex's office. He decided to go there.

On the way, Terry passed the faro table and caught a passing glance from the marcelled man, who was lolling there. It struck him that the chap could very possibly have been the "voice," but Terry decided to look for other candidates. He promptly saw one.

At a little side table, a man was sitting down to rejoin a friend in a private game of ecarte. Terry caught a full-face view of the man who had just returned. He saw a darkish face, with pointed mustache features which had the look of a professional gambler's, even to the cold eyes that met Terry's glance.

Terry decided to remember those faces, and as he neared Tex's door, he saw a third countenance which interested him. A stoop-shouldered man cut in ahead of him, threw a glance back at Terry, and quickly entered the office.

In that glance, Terry observed a long, chinless face, colorless except for sharp, beady eyes. The man might be the voice. He could certainly have reached the office ahead of Terry.

There was a bouncer inside Tex's door, but he let Terry through. Terry looked presentable and when he showed the envelope, saying it contained a personal message for Mr. Winthorp, the bouncer believed him.

At a desk Terry saw Tex Winthorp, a square-jawed, baldish man who looked tougher than the bruiser who guarded his portal. Tex was busy talking to the stoopish man with the colorless face.

"Gadgets!" scoffed Tex, in a deep tone. "Everybody wants to sell me gadgets! They think I need ways to keep the coppers out of here. Bah! Any time the police want to pay a visit, they'll be welcome. Sorry, I don't need your gadgets whatever they are, Mr. —" He paused, studying the stoopish man suspiciously; then queried: "What was your name?"

There was a flicker of beady eyes. The gadget-seller was hesitating because of Terry. Tex hadn't yet noticed the second visitor, so his suspicion of the stoopish man increased. The fellow realized it.

"Dunvin is my name," he said wheezily. "Hector Dunvin. I'm an electrician —"

"I remember now," interrupted Tex. "You've been here before." Noting the direction of Dunvin's gaze, Tex swiveled in his chair and saw Terry. Abruptly, he inquired: "And who are you?"

Terry supplied his name and handed Tex the envelope, stating that its contents were important. As Tex opened the envelope, Terry folded his arms and waited patiently.

To resist the temptation of glancing at Dunvin, Terry focused his eyes on a big diamond that gleamed like a miniature searchlight from the center of Tex Winthorp's tuxedo shirt. Anyone who could afford a shirt stud the size of that one could certainly pay well for the valuable information which Terry hoped the message really contained.

But Terry's mind kept reverting to the "voice."

Dunvin might be the "voice." The fellow's wheeze was so different from the smooth purr, that it roused Terry's suspicion. Still, Terry couldn't forget those other candidates — the idler with the wavy hair and the

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darkish-faced gambler. He remembered that both had looked his way. He wondered if they knew each other.

They did.

OUTSIDE Tex's office, two persons among the chronic gamesters were thinking of something other than the play. One was the young man at the faro table, the other, the mustached gambler who was dealing two hands of ecarte.

From across the faro board, the first looked toward the second, at the side table. The young man used his cigarette holder to gesture toward the door of Tex's office. The other man returned the gesture with a nod.

It seemed that they were both thinking in terms of Terry Radnor – and perhaps of Hector Dunvin.

Neither happened to glance toward a decorative telephone booth in the far corner of the casino. There was a girl in the booth, a brunette, whose face was as earnest as it was attractive. She was making a call which she regarded as very important, for her tone was breathlessly subdued.

"Hello... Is this the Cobalt Club?" The girl's expression showed relief. "I want to speak to Mr. Cranston. Tell him that Miss Lane is calling –"

During the brief interval that followed, the girl gazed from the booth, her eyes fixed upon the door of Tex's office. When the expected tone came across the wire, she forgot that door for the moment.

"Hello, Lamont!" Though eager, the girl remembered to subdue her voice. "This is Margo... Yes at the Century Casino. I think that something is due... No, I haven't seen Tex, but a young man just went into his office –"

"I don't know his name, but he had an envelope and it looked important... Yes, I had a good look at him. I'll remember his face. When he comes out, I'll find out who he is, if I can... You'll be right over? Good!"

Margo Lane wore an expression of firm confidence, when she finished that call and came from the booth. She was always confident when she knew that Lamont Cranston was due upon a scene where trouble brewed. For Margo was quite convinced, through experience, that Lamont Cranston was a double personality. In his other self, Cranston was The Shadow, arch-foe of all criminals.

Important though The Shadow's coming arrival might seem to Margo Lane, there was one person whose affairs it could even more deeply concern. That person was Terry Radnor, who had followed the promptings of a mysterious voice without identifying its owner.

The voice had told Terry that he was going to win in a game where the odds were sure. If the voice proved right – and it had been positive enough – Terry would win something that he did not want.

The game was one of crime. Its odds were on death!

CHAPTER II. MURDER'S TWILIGHT

TEX WINTHROP finished reading the note for the third time, and turned his square-jawed face toward Terry Radnor. Though he tried to meet Tex's eyes directly, Terry found it difficult. He'd stared so long at the big diamond shirt stud, that it still captured his attention.

"Who gave you this?"

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Tex was referring to the note, and his sharp tone jarred Terry out of his hypnotic mood. Truthfully, Terry answered.

"I don't know."

He wondered if Tex believed him. Maybe the gambling king expected the answer and considered it the proper policy on Terry's part. At any rate, Tex dropped the question. He merely snapped:

"All right. What are you waiting for?"

"To find out how much it's worth," Terry returned, thumbing toward the note. "I've already invested in your roulette wheel, and I'm looking for a dividend."

Tex took it as a matter of course. He eyed Terry in appraising fashion before offering the price. Tex had a way of estimating people and their ideas about big money. He gauged Terry as a man of about twenty five, who had knocked around some without taking too many bumps. The sort who would spend it if he had it, and might on occasion plunge.

Terry's face was squarish, like Tex's. Too, the young man had a steady eye, though he was still finding it difficult to pull his gaze away from Tex's diamond stud. Tex noticed it, and the fact was in Terry's favor.

It was the beauty of the gem, not its value, that impressed Terry. He was admiring the diamond, not coveting it. Terry lacked the attitude of a crook, so Tex put the final test.

"How much did you lose?"

"Not much, in proportion to the play," answered Terry honestly "Only about three and a half."

Tex pulled a wad of money from his pocket, counted off three one-hundred-dollar bills, added a fifty.

"That covers it," said Tex. "As for this" – he crinkled the note – "if what it says is right, I'll hand you a grand. Only first, I'm going to make sure it's right."

Tex reached for the telephone with Terry still wondering what the note was about. It certainly had the earmarks of importance, considering that Tex was willing to pay a thousand dollars to the man who had delivered it.

While Terry waited, Dunvin turned as if to go. Tex told the stoop-shouldered man to remain.

"No special secret about this," declaimed Tex. "Stick around, Dunvin, and maybe you'll learn why I don't need to buy any electrical gadgets."

Getting a response on the telephone, Tex asked if he had the Cobalt Club. Learning that he did he said he wanted to speak to Police Commissioner Weston. Tex gave his name, and it worked like a charm, for a minute later the police commissioner was on the line.

"Hello, commissioner." Tex spoke with a patronizing tone... "Yes this is Tex Winthorp... I just received a tip-off that you're going to raid the Century Casino this evening. So, what about it?"

There was a pause, while Tex's square face flexed into a smile. Then:

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"Why stall, commissioner? You wouldn't, if I hadn't called the turn... Come on over, and bring the boys along. Only tell them to go light on the furniture because they won't find any gambling paraphernalia... You think my place is a gambling joint? No, no, commissioner. It's just a friendly social club –"

Hanging up, Tex turned to Terry, with a nod.

"He'll be over," assured Tex. "Your tip was straight. You get your grand, and maybe a bonus. We'll settle afterward. Meanwhile, come along – you too, Dunvin – and see how smooth my system works."

IN the grill room of the Cobalt Club, Commissioner Ralph Weston was undergoing a series of facial contortions for the benefit of his ace inspector, Joe Cardona.

Weston had a broad face that could go purple, almost to the tips of its military mustache, and his complexion was showing its chameleon traits. Cardona, however, showed no signs of emotion. The stocky police inspector had a swarthy face that very seldom varied.

"Somebody has tipped off Tex!" stormed Weston. "We're going over there, inspector, to find out who did, if we don't learn anything else!"

"They say Tex's joint is usually crowded," responded Cardona. "It won't be easy picking one guy out of a crowd."

"Then you'd advise calling off the raid?"

Cardona shook his head.

"We're all set, commissioner," he said. "We can move in on Tex a lot faster than he thinks. Maybe fast enough to catch him, yet. Besides, perhaps that call of his was a bluff."

"A bluff? How?"

"Maybe Tex isn't fixed to clear out the equipment in ten minutes flat," suggested Cardona. "That's all the time it's going to take us to breeze in on him. The longer we talk it over, the better Tex may like it."

Commissioner Weston sprang to his feet, grabbing up a hat that lay on the chair beside him. In his hurry, he overlooked his new alpaca overcoat, which was hanging on a wallhook behind his back. Cardona didn't notice the omission, for he was picking up his own hat and wasn't wearing a coat.

On the way to the door, Weston halted abruptly.

"Where's Cranston?" he demanded. "I thought he said he'd be back."

Cardona shrugged. He'd long ago given up trying to keep tabs on Weston's rather eccentric friend, Lamont Cranston.

"I wanted Cranston along," grouched Weston. "He'd know the right names of some of those habitués at the Century Casino. Where could he have gone?"

A clicking sound supplied a possible answer. It was the muffled impact of billiard balls, meeting one another. It came from beyond a closed door that opened off the grill room. Weston took a step in that direction.

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"At billiards, maybe," Weston began. "Cranston plays frequently with that chap Kelford, who is always in the billiard room." Then, halting, the commissioner added: "No. If Cranston came back, he would have stopped here first. I know what happened. His telephone call must have come from that Lane girl, and he's gone somewhere to meet her. Those two are always wasting time together."

"And we're wasting time, commissioner," Cardona reminded. "Want me to go ahead and start the squad cars?"

Angrily, Weston responded in the negative. Still forgetful of his new alpaca overcoat, the commissioner strode from the grill room by the usual door, expecting Cardona to follow, which Joe did, with a grin.

THOSE few minutes that the commissioner wasted were actually unimportant. Over at the Century Casino, a rapid transformation was under way. Tex Winthorp had come from his office to stop the play at the roulette and faro tables. He was standing in the center of the big gambling room, making an announcement.

"We are going to call a recess," declared Tex. "There is not time to cash in the chips. Simply keep them until later, while we entertain our friend the police commissioner."

There was merely a murmur from the listeners. Most of them were too well versed in the ways of gambling parlors to be at all perturbed. To Terry Radnor, however, the scene was a novelty, and the thing that fascinated him most was the way the attendants were handling the gambling equipment.

Large tables, even a drinking bar; were being pushed across the floor to conceal the faro layout and the roulette wheels, along with other gambling devices. The place, as Tex had stated, was swiftly becoming a social club. Terry wondered, momentarily, how that would solve the problem, since the police might tear the furniture apart despite Tex's protest.

Then, as camouflaged equipment was rolled to the corners of the room, one object stopped near Terry, who was standing just outside the door of Tex's office. Distinctly Terry heard a low thrum that other patrons were not close enough to notice. He had his answer.

From beneath the shell furniture that covered them, the gambling devices were secretly descending through the floor on trapdoor elevators!

Terry recalled that the Century Casino was over a garage that opened on another street, because he had tried to park his car in the garage, only to find it full of trucks.

Those trucks, too, had a purpose. They were taking in the gambling equipment, and would be out of the garage, off on a rapid journey elsewhere, before the police arrived!

Terry wondered if Dunvin had caught on to the trick. He looked for the stoop-shouldered man, but Dunvin wasn't around. Remembering two more men – one wavy-haired, the other mustached – Terry looked for them, too, but couldn't sight them in the throng.

His gaze returned to Tex Winthorp.

On an ordinary table in the center of the transformed room, Tex had opened a large suitcase and was stuffing it with miniature mountains of currency, which the croupiers brought him. The money was the evening's "take," and it certainly totaled into six figures. Indeed, considering the way that wealthy customers had been tossing chips around, Terry felt sure that the cash must amount to a quarter million dollars.

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Tex was personally taking charge of the heavy funds, for safekeeping, and Terry wasn't the only person intrigued by the ceremony. The fashionably-dressed patrons were watching in silence, all riveted where they stood.

Among that throng was Margo Lane; she, perhaps, was the only one who stirred. The girl saw Terry over by Tex's office, but that was not the cause of her restlessness. Margo's eyes turned the other way, toward the main entrance of the casino, where a lookout stood on duty beside a wicket in the door.

Her expression eased as she saw the lookout turn to answer a knock from outside. Margo was sure that Cranston had arrived.

He had.

Opening the wicket, the lookout peered at a calm, hawklike countenance. He recognized the arrival as Lamont Cranston, an accepted patron at the Casino Club. What he did not see were the garments across Cranston's arm.

They consisted of a black cloak and a slouch hat, the garb of The Shadow. Cranston was keeping them below the wicket, and therefore below the lookout's range of vision.

About to open the door, the lookout hesitated.

"Sorry, Mr. Cranston," he confided through the wicket, "but we're making a quick change. I don't think I'd better let you in until I've asked the boss."

He turned away from inside the door, leaving Cranston a view through the wicket, which wasn't much larger than a loophole. It enabled Cranston to see the center of the gaming room, where Tex was busy with the money, but most of the thronged customers were out of range. The Shadow saw enough to know what was going on, and there was nothing ominous about the scene.

It simply fitted with the conclusion that The Shadow had formed from Margo's phone call: that someone had tipped off Tex to the prospective raid by the police.

JUST as Tex Winthrop was about to close the suitcase with its hoard of tightly-packed cash, the stroke came. It was a phenomenal thing, quite different from any event that The Shadow had previously encountered in his career against crime.

The lights in the Century Casino began to blink.

Off – on – off – on – the rapid changes produced sharp flashes from sudden blots of darkness, producing a blurred effect that was uncanny. Startled persons, suddenly springing about, were as weird to view as a flock of stampeded ghosts. Tex Winthrop, grabbing for the suitcase, looked like a ghoul beginning a slow-motion dance.

Tex's face was no longer recognizable, nor were those of any others present. The whole place was filled with a man-made twilight that confused the human eye. The Shadow could still make out Tex's figure, but only while the gambling king stood alone. That status was quickly changed.

Another figure looked into the intermittent glow. Blinking lights gave momentary glitters to a gun. As the two forms met, the revolver muzzle knifed a dart of flame. One figure sprawled crazily, while the other wheeled to snatch the suitcase from the table.

An unknown had fired that shot, but Tex Winthorp was the victim, amid a twilight expressly arranged for murder and the escape which the killer intended to make!

CHAPTER III. BLURRED BATTLE

ALL was confusion in the Century Casino. The man who had murdered Tex Winthorp wasn't alone. He had helpers, who, though few in number, made up for it by teamwork. They were hurling themselves upon a knot of men who were trying to seize Tex's murderer; and the blurred killer and his pals were gaining the upper hand.

The swift-blinking lights were to their liking, for they had arranged them. They were slugging down croupiers and attendants, adding gunshots when the opposition became tough. Tex's faction had revolvers, too, but they were disorganized, bewildered by the blurry light.

Patrons were diving for the corners, seeking shelter behind the hollow furniture that had been used to hide the gambling equipment.

Had the lookout opened the outer door to admit Lamont Cranston, the battle might have taken a different turn. Already, the last arrival at the Century Casino was undergoing a change as speedy as that of the blobbing lights.

With a single sweep, Cranston had his cloak across his shoulders, the slouch hat on his head, rendering himself a being in black: The Shadow!

The problem of reaching the battleground came next. Shots through the loophole wouldn't do, there was no telling who might be tangled in the fray around the fallen body of Tex Winthorp. The flashing lights were so rapid that faces could not be identified, while the figures themselves darted and jerked like people in an old-fashioned movie reel. The Shadow, to enter, had to blast the door, and it was a formidable task.

Tex Winthorp had designed that door to hold off attacks by the law. The Shadow's only chance of cracking it lay in using bullets from an automatic that he had drawn. At that, he knew it would be useless to try to demolish the lock. It was specially strengthened to withstand the effects of gun slugs.

The only way was to get at the hinges, which were hidden somewhere in the woodwork. Planting the gun muzzle against the hinge side of the door, The Shadow probed it with bullets from his .45, choosing the logical spots where the hinges would be. Thick wood splintered, baring steel that glinted in the blinking light. Even out here, in the entry, the illumination was that of the peculiar flickering.

Hacking with the butt end of his gun, The Shadow wrecked the hinges that his bullets had revealed. He shouldered hard, driving the door ahead of him, and plummeted into the main room of the Century Casino, drawing a fresh automatic as he came.

By then, the whirling brawl had shifted toward the door of Tex's office.

A gun stabbed from the mass of kaleidoscopic figures. It sprawled a man squarely in The Shadow's path. The victim was the lookout, who had so unwisely hesitated at admitting Cranston. Killers had been expecting him, and dealt with him as planned. But they weren't expecting The Shadow.

With a long spring across the falling lookout, he came like a black cyclone into the midst of the murderous tribe and the faltering men who struggled against them.

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The blobby light helped The Shadow even more than his foeman. Though he couldn't see their faces well enough to recognize them, they couldn't see him at all. He used his guns as cudgels, jarring men right and left, in order to get at their chief, the blur-faced murderer who was starting into Tex's office with the bag of cash.

BY then, the fray had reached Terry Radnor. Until it did, Terry had been too bewildered to take a hand; but now he saw his opportunity.

He could tell the killer by the bag the man carried, and he made a grab for him. They locked, and as they spun about, Terry heard a snarl in his ear. It was much like the voice that had told him to take the note to Tex. It hadn't lost any of its disguise, but it was ugly instead of persuasive. The snarl was the blurred man's call for his helpers to free him from a troublesome antagonist.

Hands gripped Terry in the unreal light. He wrested free from them with a roundabout twist. Encountering a driving figure, he thought he had again found the killer. He was wrong. Terry had found The Shadow.

Swung hard, a gun skimmed past Terry's ear and landed heavily against his shoulder. The Shadow's stroke only increased Terry's delusion that he had gripped the foe he wanted, and he tightened his clutch.

Hurled backward, Terry bounced hard against the wall beside the office door, and as he reeled, partly losing his hold on the fighter in black, something cold pressed against his neck.

Luckily for Terry, The Shadow caught the glint of the object in the flickery light. It was a gun, that either the blur-faced killer or an equally indistinguishable subordinate was shoving Terry's way.

These murderers had finished Tex and the lookout; now, it was to be Terry's turn, for he was the only remaining man who might furnish damaging information concerning certain persons among the casino's clientele.

The Shadow did not have to analyze that set-up. It was enough that Terry was threatened by one of the escaping crew. Swiping another blow past Terry's face, The Shadow struck the gun, and the hand that held it, so forcibly that their owner took a side stagger through the office door.

It was Terry who didn't recognize the situation. He made another lunge at The Shadow, and instead of grappling with an adversary who had previously out-clinched him, he used his fists. Terry was hitting hard, though blindly, and The Shadow had to wheel away to ward off the attack.

Other mistaken fighters fell upon him. They were the rallied croupiers. The Shadow went down in the midst of a pile of men.

Exultant, Terry thought that he had settled one member of the murderous tribe. He figured, too, that he was capable of doing it, not knowing that his life had been saved by the very fighter that he had so foolishly attacked.

Knowing that killers had dived into Tex's office, Terry went after them. Lights was blinking in the office, too, but in the intermittent glare, Terry made out a yawning block of blackness on the far side of the room. He made for it.

On the way, he stumbled over desk drawers. They had been pulled from Tex's desk and their contents dumped. Hands stretched ahead of him, Terry tried to catch his balance against the block of blackness as it winked at him from the quick flashes of ever-changing light.

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Instead of stopping, he went right through the blackness, took a long spill and went tumbling down a flight of stairs.

Those crazy lights had made everything unreal, but this fall was even crazier, during the breath-taking moments that it took Terry to reach the bottom, of the steps. He stopped with a sharp jar that knocked some understanding into him. The black oblong hadn't been part of the wall; it was an open door, probably a sliding one, that Tex used as a private exit from his office.

Killers had turned it to their own use, leaving it open when they fled. Chance had brought Terry along the very route that the blur-makers had chosen!

On his feet, Terry groped and found another door. It led outside to an alleyway. He heard a car spurting from the nearest street and hurried in that direction. By then the car was gone, and there wasn't a cab in sight. But from the next street, Terry heard the blare of a police whistle. On sudden impulse, he hastened off in the opposite direction.

UPSTAIRS, the huddled customers of the casino were watching the finish of a fantastic fray which left them utterly aghast. Previous events had been illusive, like the happenings in a dream, but this present scene took on a nightmarish quality.

Men were bouncing, diving to the floor in jerky, curious fashion, but no one could see what was sending them. The Shadow was brushing off the misguided croupiers and other attendants with hard swings of his gun-weighted fists, but his black-clad figure wasn't visible in the brawl. Intermittent light was so infrequent after each momentary blackout, that eyes couldn't distinguish the swift-moving form of the black-cloaked fighter.

Others belonged to the light, and were simply blurred by the intervals of patchy darkness. But darkness was The Shadow's chosen habitat; mere moments of light were not sufficient to reveal him. To one person, alone, came understanding: why men were going down from unseen causes. The person who understood was Margo Lane.

She had expected The Shadow. He was here. Detaching herself from the huddled customers, Margo hurried forward blindly, ducking the slow-motion sprawlers who came her way. Near the vortex of the confusion, she gave a quick low-voiced call:

"It's Margo!"

A gloved hand caught Margo's arm. The Shadow's opponents were fully floored. So speedily that she seemed to become a dream-creature, Margo was whisked through the one avenue open for departure: the doorway to Tex's office.

She heard shouts as she went; they came from the outer door that The Shadow had previously shattered. Then, beside her, The Shadow's whispered tone:

"Cardona and his squad. We're getting out. This way."

Despite the flickering lights, The Shadow had identified the blocky oblong across the office for what it was, an open exit. To Margo, the experience of going through that opening was even more uncanny than Terry had found it.

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Shouts dwindled as they reached the bottom of the steps, where The Shadow found the lower door. Margo had a brief taste of reality when her cloaked companion hurried her through the alley. On the street a cab wheeled up as though The Shadow had magically produced it.

Thrust into the cab, Margo settled in the cushions, shutting her eyes to end the recollection of the blotchy light. She heard the swish of a cloak beside her, the slam of the door as the cab started. As they whipped around a corner, Margo felt something tumble from against her arm, into her lap. She opened her eyes and stared at the objects that she clutched.

Margo Lane was holding a black cloak and a slouch hat. No longer needing those garments, The Shadow had tossed them into the cab when he slammed the door.

As for The Shadow, he was gone, leaving Margo to wonder where – and why!

CHAPTER IV. TRAIL OF THE BLUR

THE law's arrival at the Century Casino did not do much toward immediately quelling the confusion. The gasping lights were quite as much a headache to Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona as they had been to the customers of the gambling establishment.

Both Weston and Cardona were giving orders and countermanding them, while they stumbled over people on the floor. It was bad enough running into bodies, but when some of them were getting up, the situation became worse. Lost in the twilight of the blinking lights, the members of the raiding squad became quite as confused as their leaders.

Detectives were mistaking each other for customers, and one even had the commissioner in his clutch, until he heard Weston bawl out that no persons were to be taken into custody until the lights were fixed. At that very moment, Cardona was shouting orders to hold everyone, and hearing him, Weston broke into an irate outburst.

Weston wanted lights; that part of his theme made sense. Detectives supplied flashlights, but they weren't enough. In the rapid spasms of strong light that came from all about the room, the flashlights were feeble things. They would have done in total darkness, but not amid the razzle-dazzle light that dominated the entire premises.

Nevertheless, the commissioner's howl for lights gave Cardona an excellent idea. Steady light, or no light, anything would be better than the blinkers. Since the flickering was going on everywhere, the trouble must be with the main switch, so Joe set out to find it.

He'd reached Tex's office, which he identified by blurred glimpses of the furnishings, and he figured that the room would be the logical place for the main switch.

Feeling along the wall, Cardona ran headfirst into the edge of a closet door. Ricocheting into the closet, Joe grabbed for the solid wall and found the switch with it. When he pulled the switch, all the lights went out. Joe yelled for a flashlight and a detective arrived with one. It revealed the source of trouble.

Hooked to the main switch was a small metal block that looked like a toy transformer. It had wires attached to the switch, and when Cardona yanked away the gadget and shoved the switch, the lights came on, but no longer blinked.

Expecting trouble, Cardona dashed out into the main room, but nothing happened.

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Commissioner Weston was standing in the center of a room which didn't look at all like a gambling parlor. He was glaring about as though he, too, expected trouble, and was angry because there wasn't any.

Detectives were standing by with guns and flashlights; club attendants were on their feet, looking very shaky; while from corners of the room, patrons in rumpled but fashionable attire were crawling out, as if coming from bomb shelters.

The scene had a comedy aspect, until Cardona spotted Tex's body, with the dead form of the lookout lying beside it. Joe stepped over to look at the victims, and Weston started to follow, only to pause when he noticed a stir at the outer door.

A detective was trying to keep someone out, and when Weston went to investigate the matter, he found that the arrival was his friend Cranston.

"So you got here after all," said Weston testily. "I left word at the club, hoping you'd come along. But it doesn't matter. We were late, too."

THEY joined Cardona beside the bodies, where the inspector was learning the details of Tex's death. Considering the haze that the blinking lights had produced, Cardona was inclined to class the death as partly accidental.

"Nobody can identify the killer," he said. "They all say his face was just a blur. If they couldn't see this Blur, whoever he was, how could he have picked Tex out?"

Without realizing it, Cardona had given the unknown killer a name that was to stick. As a descriptive title, the "Blur" fitted the murderer. But that point was passed by, for the time.

It was Cranston who suggested why Tex had become a prompt and certain victim. He pointed to the gambler's bloodstained shirt front

"Notice the sparkle of that diamond," said The Shadow, in a calm tone that went with the personality of Cranston. "It must have been a perfect target even while the lights were blinking in the fashion that the commissioner just described."

"You've struck it, Cranston!" exclaimed Weston. "A perfect explanation!"

"Yeah?" grunted Cardona. He gestured to the dead lookout. "What about him? He isn't sporting a big diamond."

Cranston turned his head toward the outer door and traced an imaginary line straight to the lookout's body.

"They knew the direction this chap was coming from," he remarked. "They were waiting for him. They didn't have to identify him any further."

"So they wiped out Tex and his lookout," conceded Cardona. Then, bluntly, he queried: "All right – why?"

"It might be" – Cranston's tone was speculative – "that they were the only two men who could have given us the names of all the customers who were present this evening."

The Shadow had struck the exact reason for the double murder. From that moment on, it was the theme of the entire inquiry. Cardona began a quiz of all the patrons, as well as the attendants who worked for Tex.

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It became more and more apparent that only two persons could have supplied the needed information. They were the only ones who kept tabs on the customers by name: Tex Winthorp and the trusted lookout, both stone dead.

In Tex's office, the ransacked desk drawers were further proof that the Blur and his followers had foreseen the need of concealing their identities to cover up the robbery. They'd needed more than blinking lights and a double kill. They had taken along Tex's private list of customers who were in good standing at the Century Casino.

ONE hour later, Commissioner Weston was still glowering as he paced back and forth in the fashion of a permanent resident of the Bronx Zoo. But his cage was no longer the fancy gambling parlor of the Century Casino.

The commissioner was back in the grill room of the Cobalt Club, where only two persons were on hand to witness his unrestrained fumings. Those two were Joe Cardona and Lamont Cranston.

"Those fools that were at Tex's place!" stormed Weston. "Hardly any of them knew one another – and some didn't even seem to know themselves! The Blur, as Cardona calls him, cleared out with more than two hundred thousand dollars and we haven't a single link to his identity!"

"We can't even guess the names of any of the men who helped him, nor what they looked like. There must have been three or four, at least, and just one name – or one face – might lead us to the Blur. But how are we going to get that lead?"

Cardona thrust a sheet of paper toward the pacing commissioner. Angrily, Weston brushed it aside.

"Names – names – names!" snorted Weston. "All of people whom we quizzed at the casino. But what good are they? We know that none of them were involved in the crime. They've told us all they know: nothing!"

Calm in his guise of Cranston, The Shadow was watching Cardona. An idea was coming – one that The Shadow already had in mind, but was sure would strike Cardona, so preferred to let the inspector take credit for it.

"These are part of Tex's list," argued Cardona. "We know the kind of people who went to his place. People who used to spread themselves around Monte Carlo and all the high class gambling spots when they were abroad. If we started with the list we've got and began to build up from it –"

Weston interrupted by snatching the list from Cardona's hand. Ardently, the commissioner exclaimed:

"You're on the right track, inspector!" With that, Weston swung to The Shadow. "You should be able to help us, Cranston. You've traveled everywhere; you know important people. You can suggest names that should be added to these."

"Hardly commissioner," came the response. "I never sought glitter in my travels. I preferred the Amazon to the Riviera. You will have to find someone else."

Weston's face went dour. His annoyance was increased by the occasional smash of billiard balls from the adjoining room. Glaring toward the closed door, Weston opined:

"I wish that billiard fiend would quit! Why can't Marvin Kelford find some other way to amuse himself? You'd think he had a permanent lease on the billiard table. I wonder if he sleeps on it. He's been at billiards

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day in, day out, ever since he –"

The commissioner interrupted himself. His own words gave him an idea.

"Ever since he came back from Europe!" spoke Weston. "Why, he used to spend all his time there. In southern France, too, the mecca of the money–spenders. Kelford is the very man who can help us with our problem!"

STRIDING across the room, Weston yanked open the door and shouted for Kelford. The man appeared, stared quizzically into the grill room.

Marvin Kelford looked dignified, despite the fact that he was in shirt sleeves and carrying a billiard cue.

He was middle–aged, with slightly grayish hair, but he had the erect build of an athlete, and his face, strong of mold, gave him the appearance of an aristocrat.

In fact, Kelford would have shown indignation at the brusque summons which Weston gave him, if it hadn't been for an affable greeting that came from Cranston. Men of Kelford's ilk, long established as members of the exclusive Cobalt Club, regarded Weston as something of an upstart; but they esteemed Cranston.

When Weston handed Kelford the list and explained that it contained names of persons taken in a raid at the Century Casino, Kelford gave the commissioner a contemptuous stare and turned back toward the billiard room. It was The Shadow who stopped him, furnishing the details of Tex's murder in the quiet tone of Cranston. Learning what Weston was really after, Kelford became mollified.

"Very well, commissioner," he said haughtily. "I shall help trace other persons who might have been at the Century Casino, provided that I have your assurance – with Cranston as a witness – that none of the people I name will be subjected to any indignity unless you first prove facts against them. Facts that are satisfactory to me, or to our mutual friend Cranston."

Weston gave the required assurance. Kelford parked his billiard cue in the corner and sat down to study the list. He called off the names in alphabetical fashion, and Cardona copied them. For every name on the list, Kelford added at least two more as they occurred to him. By the time he had finished, the list spread over several sheets.

"Not all acquaintances of mine," expressed Kelford. "Some are just persons whose names I have heard mentioned around Monte Carlo. How many of them are in New York, at present, you'll have to learn for yourself, commissioner. I suppose that when you do find them, you'll have to check their alibis."

"We'll attend to that," assured Weston briskly, "to your satisfaction, Kelford. Many thanks for the assistance you have given us."

Kelford had other assistance to offer. Seeing that Weston was about to leave, Kelford, in the manner of the true aristocrat, reached for the commissioner's alpaca overcoat and held it for him. By that time Weston was striding from the grill room, chatting with Cranston as he went. Kelford, still holding the overcoat, was staring in blank surprise, when Cardona happened to notice him.

"The commish is always forgetting his new benny," confided Cardona reaching for the overcoat. "Let me take it, Mr. Kelford. I'll catch up with him and give it to him before he starts off in his car."

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Cranston was gone by the time Cardona overtook Weston. Neither the inspector nor the commissioner considered him a further factor in the coming investigation. They were interested only in the names that Marvin Kelford had so obligingly provided.

So, for that matter, was The Shadow, until, as Lamont Cranston, he met Margo Lane a short while later.

Though she was quite sure that Cranston and The Shadow were one, Margo methodically recounted all that had happened at the Century Casino. The cab into which The Shadow had put her happened to be his own, piloted by Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's agents.

"I left the hat and cloak with Shrevvy," explained Margo. "Since then I've been looking for you, Lamont, to show you something that will interest you."

From her handbag, Margo brought a folded sheet of paper and opened it to display a sketch that she had penciled. It showed a youngish man, with square jaw and steady eye, whose face, none the less, carried an expression of doubt. Though sketched from memory, Margo's graphic effort was an excellent likeness of Terry Radnor.

"I don't know who he is," declared Margo, "but he's the chap who went into Tex's office just before the trouble began. He may be able to tell you a great deal, Lamont, if you can ever find him."

LATER, riding alone in his limousine, Lamont Cranston studied the picture that Margo Lane had given him. One thing was certain, even from the sketch: this man wasn't the type who would have wasted years, along with cash, in the gay setting of Monte Carlo and the resorts of the French Riviera.

Terry's name, whatever it was, wouldn't be found on the copious list that Marvin Kelford had supplied to Commissioner Weston. Yet it might be that this young man could supply a direct lead to a master criminal, at present known only as the Blur.

A whispered laugh came from Cranston's fixed lips. The mirth was the tone of The Shadow. It told that crime's arch-foe preferred his one lone trail to any of the many that the law had gained!

CHAPTER V. ONE FROM THREE

THE Blur was the talk of the town.

For three days, the newspapers had been steaming over the details of crime at the Century Casino, upbraiding the police for letting criminals get away with robbery and murder on so extravagant a scale.

So far, the law hadn't done a thing about the case, except to provide the newspaper reporters with plenty of good copy, that came walloping back like boomerangs.

The Blur!

It was a name that told a story. Unwisely mentioning it in the presence of reporters, Joe Cardona had given them a lot of ideas. The newspaper writers were pointing out that the Blur and his followers had accomplished the equivalent of masked crime, but in streamlined style. Masks hadn't been needed when they used the blinker gadget that made the lights flicker.

The question was: would the Blur and his band of unrecognizable crime-makers proceed with new measures of robbery and death? Would they be satisfied with the "take" from Tex's gambling place, or would they

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embark upon further schemes of accumulating wealth, through the secret weapon that they had introduced to disguise themselves and confuse the opposition!

Reading such speculations in the newspapers, Terry Radnor was badly bothered. For three days, Terry hadn't left the house where he roomed, except to go out and buy newspapers or lunch. The guilt that everyone was pinning on an unknown killer known as the Blur seemed to Terry to be something in which he shared an unwilling part.

Terry knew the inside story.

It began with the note that he had delivered to Tex Winthorp at the suggestion of a "voice," who could only have been the Blur. That tip-off to Tex was the factor that caused the gambling king to call in all the cash and put it in one bag. The result was the very set-up that the Blur wanted. Of course, Terry hadn't known what was coming – but who would believe that story?

Terry doubted that the police would. Nevertheless, he was the sort who would have taken his tale to the law, except for one thing. On his brief excursions from the rooming-house, Terry had felt a sickening sensation that he was being watched.

It was logical enough. He had mentioned his name in Dunvin's hearing, and Terry was quite positive that the stoop-shouldered electrician was the man who had applied the blinking gadget to the main switch in Tex's office.

As for locating Terry afterward, crooks could have done that quite easily. Terry's address was on Tex's stolen list, otherwise, he wouldn't have been admitted as a patron to the Century Casino.

This third evening had brought Terry's nerves to the breaking point. If something didn't strike to relieve the strain; he'd head for the nearest police station and be done with it. He looked at the ash trays that he had overloaded with cigarette stumps. Pulling a pack from his pocket, he found that he had only two smokes left.

Terry lighted one of the remaining cigarettes. When he had finished these two, he would go out and get some more. But he wouldn't come back to the misery of this room. He'd risk a trip to police headquarters, even if it brought an encounter with the Blur's men on the way.

The thing that ended Terry's decision was the cautious rap that came at the door. The tap was almost plaintive; not the sort that would indicate a threat. Boldly, Terry stepped to the door and unlocked it. A stoop-shouldered man pushed through, darted to a corner, and turned to confront Terry with a gun.

Terry's unwanted visitor was Hector Dunvin.

SOMEHOW, the threat of the gun muzzle calmed Terry instead of alarming him. Three days of inaction had prepared him for almost anything. Not only did he face the gun coolly, he elbowed the door shut. He saw a grin flick across Dunvin's rather pasty lips.

"Nervy, aren't you?" queried Dunvin, in that wheeze of his. "Well the chief likes guys that show nerve."

The "chief" must be the Blur, of course. But Terry was wondering if bluff lay in back of Dunvin's statement. It might be that Dunvin had not only placed the blinking gadget, but had taken charge of crime itself. If he happened to be the Blur, Dunvin would naturally try to cover it.

But why wasn't he doing it with bullets, as someone had attempted at the Century Casino?

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In some way, Terry's status had changed. Men who had done murder at the casino no longer wanted his life; at least, so it seemed. Then, just as Terry was congratulating himself that he was out of serious danger, he heard Dunvin croak:

"There's a guy waiting for you in a cab out front. Go out and join him. Don't try any nonsense!"

To Terry, the trip down the front stairs and out to the cab was like a death march. He could hear Dunvin creeping down the steps in back of him; he knew when the stoop-shouldered fellow began a sneak through the rear hall. But that part didn't start until Terry was actually through the front door and, therefore, covered by someone waiting in the cab.

Lighting his last cigarette, Terry stepped into the cab, wondering how he could best offset the climax of a one-way ride.

The man in the cab had a gun, as Terry expected, but he was handling it idly. He leaned forward and told the cabbie to start. Terry caught a good view of his fellow-passenger's face. He was the youngish man who had preferred the faro table at Tex's; the chap who sported a long cigarette holder and wavy hair.

Pocketing his gun, the debonair man extended his hand and introduced himself.

"I'm Roy Marne," he said. "I'm telling you my name just so you can forget it, if you ever have to."

Had Marne still been pointing his gun, Terry would have expected it to deliver the element of forgetfulness. But it seemed that Marne didn't have murder on his mind at all. From a menace, this trip was developing into something of an adventure, particularly when Terry noted that the cab was zigzagging into a darkened East Side neighborhood, which was strange to him.

At length, the cab stopped in front of an old office building, a fire-trap too ancient even to have an elevator. Terry observed that a light was trickling from a shaded window on the second floor. Marne pointed.

"Go up there," he ordered. "You'll know the office by the light from the transom. The Blur wants to talk to you."

Terry ascended the stairs, found the door and knocked. A voice told him to enter. He stepped in, to find a small outer office, with a man seated at a desk. The man was the darkish gambler with the mustache, the one who had been dealing *ecarte* when Terry noticed him at Tex's.

"I'm another of Tex's customers," said the gambler blandly. "I used to play the boats a lot, and got to know important people. Marty Callew is my name. Maybe you've heard of me."

Terry hadn't, and said so. Marty didn't seem to mind. He rose from his desk, nudged at a door marked "private."

"The boss is inside," said Marty, "I'll tap to tell him you're here. Wait until he opens the door for you."

Marty tapped, then left, while Terry began to perform some mental calculations. These three – Dunvin, Marne and Callew – were evidently giving him the run-around. For some reason, they were friendly, but they wanted to keep him guessing. It was something like the three-card game, but with men involved instead of playing cards.

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One of the three must be the Blur; that, to Terry, was the plausible answer. By keeping Terry waiting in this outer office, any one of the trio could easily find time to get into the other room and be there to admit the visitor. Then it would be Terry's job to guess which was the Blur. The three figured he wouldn't guess right, but Terry was determined that he would.

FOOTSTEPS sounded beyond the closed door. The doorknob turned. Terry came to his feet, watching the door sharply, confident that he could burrow through any disguise the Blur might happen to wear. But from the moment that the door began to swing, Terry's chance was gone.

The opening of the door produced a blinking of the lights, the sort that Terry had viewed at the Century Casino. The flash—flash was occurring both in the outer office and in the inner one, where the Blur stood. Ghostlike in the mechanical afterglow, the man's features, like his figure, were deceptive.

His shoulders were stooped, like Dunvin's. His hair seemed vaguely wavy, as was Marne's. The rapid changes of the lights made his complexion appear darkish, which fitted him with Calley. But there wasn't enough of each man in his make-up to establish him as any one.

A single point assured Terry that this man was the Blur. It was his voice, the same purred tone that had persuaded Terry to take the message to Tex Winthorp. It was something that couldn't be mistaken. Even though disguised, the voice had its own characteristics, which would render it almost impossible for anyone to imitate.

"We owe you an apology," spoke the voice, from amid the flickering light. "One of our number was too ardent, the other night. He nearly did away with you, in the belief that you had learned too much about us. Of course" — the tone itself seemed to brush the matter lightly aside — "the action was excusable. It happened before you had proven your worth."

Terry was thinking rapidly, despite the troublesome dazzle of the preternatural light. Not long ago, his life had been at stake. It still would be, if the Blur suspected that he did not agree with men of crime. Fortunately, Terry's face was also rendered expressionless by the blinking flow.

"Why shouldn't I prove my worth?" Terry queried boldly. "You helped me get my cash back. Tex didn't matter to me one way or the other. I didn't see any reason to go blabbing to the police. So I kept mum."

"I refer to an earlier incident," declared the Blur. "You gave us more than passive aid when you stopped The Shadow."

Instantly, Terry realized that the Blur referred to the fighter cloaked in black, who had actually saved Terry's life. Terry's own recollections of that fray were very hazy; he hadn't realized that he had grappled someone apart from the Blur's outfit until long after he had fled from the Century Casino.

Later, reading the newspapers and realizing that he hadn't trapped a crook, after all, Terry had regarded the matter as another black mark against his already doubtful record. Now, he recognized that his tussle with The Shadow had been a lifesaver.

That struggle was the reason why the Blur had let Terry live! Murderers had watched the rooming house just to assure themselves that he was what they thought him to be — a crook. Three days had been enough; convinced he was of their own ilk, they were ready to sign him up as a new member of their band.

Promptly, Terry took his cue.

"The Shadow!" His tone was scoffing, as though a meeting with the cloaked avenger could be welcomed any time. "Why shouldn't I have stopped him? He didn't have the dough. You did. I'm for the guy who has the money, no matter how he gets it. The Shadow wouldn't have cut me in on anything, but you might."

The Blur purred a laugh.

"I not only might," he assured. "I shall. Take this money" – he was thrusting a wad of bills in Terry's hand – "and move to the Hotel Metrolite. It's a better address than your present one. Be ready, because we may need you very soon, particularly because of The Shadow. He has a way of appearing where he is not wanted."

LEAVING the realm of the blinking lights, Terry reached the street. No one was in sight. The game of "guess who" was still a three-man proposition: Dunvin, Marne and Callew.

But Terry wasn't thinking of that game. He was fingering the bills that the Blur had given him, counting them by the glow of the street lamps that he passed. They amounted to five thousand dollars.

Blood money stained with the gore of a murdered man, Tex Winthorp. Terry still had funds enough of his own to follow the Blur's instructions without spending any of this tainted cash. He intended to follow those instructions as his one hope of escaping from his muddle.

Three names, now, instead of only one. Terry had added those of Roy Marne and Marty Callew to that of Hector Dunvin. They were self-admitted criminals so far as Terry was concerned, but he had nothing to back his accusations, if he carried those names to the police. Nothing, except his own admission that he had played a part in crime at the Century Casino, something which the others would deny if the police questioned them.

What Terry needed was bigger, better proof against these men of crime. Proof that would concern one in particular, the master criminal who called himself the Blur. By working with them, Terry could redeem himself by actually trying to stave off crime, instead of helping it. More than that, he could gain complete vindication, by learning the true identity of the Blur.

A hard task, and a dangerous one, but luck had served Terry that night at the Century Casino, and could therefore swing his way again.

Luck – and The Shadow!

In congratulating himself on the matter of luck, Terry, even yet, did not appreciate how little that element had really counted, compared to the timely aid that The Shadow had inserted.

Terry Radnor was to learn, in the near future, that when luck and The Shadow came in combination, it was always the cloaked fighter who furnished the breaks that made luck good, instead of ill!

CHAPTER VI. CRIME TO COME

ANOTHER day had passed and the police were still befuddled. Cardona's bright suggestion, to hunt down a murderer by the process of trial and error, wasn't panning out at all.

For four days, the newspapers had kept up a steady stream of criticism that Commissioner Weston could not answer. The simple reason was that unless the police appeared idle, their present process wouldn't work.

To avoid interviews, Weston was practically living at the Cobalt Club, where he kept checking on the reports that Cardona brought him. All those reports concerned prosperous persons who had lived abroad, the sort

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who might be on Tex's stolen sucker list. They were the names provided by Marvin Kelford, and tracking down their owners was no small task.

Some were in Florida, others in California. Many, of course, were still in New York, but tracing their whereabouts on the night of Tex's murder, without rousing their suspicion, took time and ingenuity. It was Cardona's job to find out if these people had alibis, without asking them, personally, and Joe was doing it, but not fast enough to satisfy Weston.

All the while that Weston brooded in the grill room, he could hear the annoying clatter of the billiard balls from the next room. The sound was driving him crazy, but Weston could not raise objection because he wanted Kelford around.

Every time Cardona showed up with a new report, the commissioner shouted for Kelford, and thereby gained a respite from the clicking of the billiard balls. But each of those conferences merely resulted in another name being crossed from the three-page-list. Kelford always went back to the billiard table, while Weston settled down to another nerve-gritting wait.

If Cranston had dropped in more often, Weston could have asked him to discourage Kelford from the incessant practice on the billiard table but Cranston had apparently lost all interest in the hunt for an unknown murderer called the Blur.

It didn't occur to Weston that his friend might be seeking a trail of his own – to a young man whose description was rather accurately known. That was because the commissioner did not connect Cranston with The Shadow.

So, finally, Weston decided to stop the ceaseless hammering of the billiard balls by a tactful process of his own. He went into the billiard room and found Kelford just finishing a game with another player.

Taking advantage of the break, Weston suggested that Kelford forego further practice for a while and do him a favor by flagging persons who came into the grill room to interrupt the commissioner's study of Cardona's reports.

Kelford obligingly agreed. Hence Cardona, arriving with a new report, was treated to the unusual sight of Kelford, wearing coat and vest, without the green eye shade that was generally part of his attire.

Solemnly, Kelford asked Cardona to wait, while he announced the inspector's arrival to Commissioner Weston. The formality gave Joe a laugh, as did the fact that Weston had at last managed to tear Kelford away from the billiard table.

Cardona didn't remain long. His latest reports proved duds, like those that had gone before. He left for a trip to Westchester County, where he intended to look into the affairs of a very reputable millionaire who had just come back from a week's trip in Canada.

Cardona wanted to find out if the trip had been a genuine one. If not, the millionaire, despite his reputation, might be the man who had maneuvered crime at the Century Casino, for his name was one of those on Kelford's list.

KELFORD was back at billiards when Cardona left, but a note delivered by a club attendant gave Weston an excuse to call for him. The note promised much.

It was from a jeweler named Dawson, who enclosed a crudely typewritten message, signed with a smudge of ink that might well represent the Blur. The note stated that Dawson would hear from the signer at nine o'clock

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that evening – and Dawson was naturally worried.

In his own note, he explained that he had many valuable gems in his stock, but had taken pains to protect them. However, he would be greatly obliged if Commissioner Weston could be on hand, in person, at the hour when the Blur promised to contact him.

"What do you make of it, Kelford?" demanded Weston. "Do you think it is just a hoax?"

Kelford studied the note. His aristocratic features displayed disdain.

"Nothing else," he decided. "First, the Blur did not announce himself when he made that attack at the Century Casino. Again, he is certainly a man of higher caliber than this crude note would indicate."

Cranston entered while Kelford was speaking. Weston handed him the note, and was pleased when his friend's opinion coincided with that of Kelford. Weston had it in mind to deliver an object lesson to these amateur sleuths.

"The Blur did announce himself at Tex's," corrected the commissioner, testily. "He did so indirectly, by somehow inducing Tex to call me in regard to the raid I planned. As for the crudity of the note, it is a common practice for intelligent criminals to disguise their real caliber by means of disguised correspondence.

"It is only seven, gentlemen, but I am going over to Dawson's at once. I shall take two detectives with me and either – or both – of you are welcome to come along. If you don't care to accompany me, I shall depend upon you to keep this matter confidential."

Both Kelford and Cranston declined the invitation. Kelford made a belated reach for the alpaca overcoat when Weston stalked out without it, but this time Cardona wasn't on hand to chase after Weston with it. With a shrug, Kelford replaced the overcoat on its hook and reached for his billiard cue.

"How about some billiards, Cranston?" he queried. "Or do I go back into my practice session?"

"Sorry," replied Cranston. "Some other time, Kelford. I have another appointment."

The Shadow did have another appointment, one that seemed important at the moment. He had just heard from Harry Vincent, an agent who lived at the Metrolite Hotel.

Harry had seen a young man leaving the lobby who looked very much like the subject of Margo's sketch of which all The Shadow's agents had photostatic copies. Harry had heard the suspect tell the clerk that he would be back shortly; hence, The Shadow had to hurry to reach the Metrolite before the man returned.

But something happened in the foyer of the Cobalt club that permanently postponed The Shadow's trip to the hotel.

STROLLING out as Cranston, The Shadow was accosted by a worried-faced man named Thomas Wellwood. Drawing him aside, Wellwood queried nervously:

"Have you seen Roger Doone? You know him, of course, Cranston. Doone, the financier –"

Noting Cranston's headshake, Wellwood changed his tune.

THE BLUR

"Tell me, then," he asked, "did Doone talk to Commissioner Weston? You and the commissioner are such friends, I thought you might know."

"Weston didn't mention Doone."

"Then Doone must have gone out to Carstair's," decided Wellwood, still quite worried. "Maybe I ought to speak to the commissioner myself. You can advise me, Cranston."

"The commissioner has left."

"Do you know where to reach him?"

"Yes." The Shadow's eyes had steadied on Wellwood. "But suppose you tell me the situation. You said something about asking my advice."

Wellwood nodded.

"It's this," he stated. "The three of us – Doone, Carstair and myself – have arranged a large transaction that requires cash and negotiable securities. Ordinarily, we would handle it in Doone's office, but recent crime has worried us. So Doone and I are going out to Carstair's instead."

"And the cash is out there?"

"Yes. James Carstair has it in his safe. His home is on Long Island, you know. Now, suppose that the news of this has leaked to the Blur. Well, we'd need police protection, wouldn't we?"

"Have you told anyone else?"

"Not a soul," assured Wellwood. "But Carstair is very wealthy. Someone might be watching him. Only one thing bothers me, about speaking to the commissioner. We've kept this matter very secret. If police showed up at Carstair's, it would be a give-away. I wonder –"

The Shadow was wondering somewhat, too. Wondering how Weston would take this news, if notified. Thoroughly satisfied that something was due at Dawson's, the commissioner certainly wouldn't leave the jeweler's. As for him sending Joe Cardona to Carstair's, that was out of the question, since Joe, at present, couldn't be reached.

Under such circumstances Weston would probably do exactly what Wellwood feared – and more. He'd give away coming events at Carstair's by sending a few detectives there, and the ones he chose for the job would probably be inadequate. If Wellwood and his friends wanted protection, a secret type would be best. The Shadow could provide it.

"Start out to Carstair's," suggested The Shadow in Cranston's quiet style. "Finish your business, and tell the commissioner about it afterward. That's my advice, Wellwood, considering that Weston isn't here to discuss the matter personally."

With the air of a man whose shoulders had dropped a heavy weight, Wellwood ambled from the club. The Shadow stepped to a phone booth and put in a call to Burbank, his contact agent.

In whispered tone, he ordered Burbank to relay instructions to Harry Vincent, to the effect that Harry was to find out all he could about the young man at the Metrolite Hotel.

Then, making another call, The Shadow used the tone of Cranston. He spoke to Margo Lane, asking her to get her coupe from its garage, adding that he'd ride over there in his limousine and meet her when she was pulling out. Margo said to make it in ten minutes; that she'd have the coupe by that time.

Entering his limousine, the leisurely Mr. Cranston delivered a whispered laugh. Though he was drawing his hat and cloak from a secret drawer beneath the rear seat, The Shadow felt that this was one case that he might easily handle without recourse to his garb of black.

Certainly, Carstair and Doone would not be alarmed if another wealthy gentleman like Cranston dropped in to see them; particularly when Wellwood would explain that he had invited the visitor. With so attractive a companion as Margo Lane, Lamont Cranston would be more than welcome at the Long Island residence.

Commissioner Weston had gone on what seemed a hoax. The Shadow was simply playing a long shot. As matters stood, it was doubtful that either would hear from the Blur tonight. Still, The Shadow was preparing for eventualities.

It was well that he was. Crime was to come tonight; crime served up double, with a multitude of consequences!

CHAPTER VII. TWO – NOT OF A KIND

STEPPING from the Long Island local train, Terry Radnor took along a little bag that he had picked up at the Pennsylvania Station with a baggage check mailed to him at the Hotel Metrolite. In addition to the bag, he had instructions, but they were verbal. He had heard them over the telephone, earlier, in the purring tone of the Blur.

Terry was congratulating himself on his departure from the Metrolite. If anyone, guest or house detective, had seen him leave, his bluff had probably worked. His mention to the clerk that he intended to return shortly was enough to induce a listener to wait, rather than to follow. Trailers would be bad tonight. This was Terry's first job for the Blur, and his new chief had given him a most-important duty. So important, that it promised Terry exactly what he wanted: a chance to gum the works.

Terry was going to the home of James Carstair, only a short walk across lots from the little railroad station. At Carstair's, his job was to find the main light switch and attach to it a gadget the bag contained. That was, Terry was to apply the blinker.

Small wonder he liked his chances!

Guns, threats, any kind of strong-arm work, would be only incidental in the coming crime. The thing on which the Blur counted was the blinker. Without it, he would be lost. If it didn't work, the Blur would be identified and confusion would be lacking. Victims could hold their own against the master of crime, particularly when Terry shifted sides to help them out.

Most important, though, was the matter of the Blur.

Terry's own vindication depended upon spotting the bad man of crime. That done, the police would listen to Terry's story, and there would be witnesses to guarantee it. At first, Terry had worried a bit about what would happen in case the Blur did not show up in person; but his worry had soon ceased.

Terry had suddenly realized that the master hand would have to appear.

THE BLUR

Cash was at stake, as at Tex's, and the Blur would not trust anyone to handle it. This was a one-man organization, though stooges had been made to seem important just to deceive the naked eye. "Cash and carry" was the Blur's motto; victims supplied the cash, and he carried it. He had proven the fact when he personally snatched the suitcase full of money at the Century Casino.

Yes, the Blur would be on hand, and Terry was grimly happy as he crossed Carstair's broad side-lawn and knocked lightly at a little door, where narrow windows disclosed dim lights from a hallway.

His knock was answered promptly by a sharp-faced, soft-footed servant. Terry wasn't surprised to see the fellow; this was all part of the routine provided by the Blur. All that Terry did was undertone:

"Is your name Albert?"

The servant nodded. He was an inside man, posted to keep tabs on Carstair. The Blur had said that Albert was of little value, and one look at the fellow was enough for Terry to decide the same. Albert's one asset was his dull expression, which would probably aid him to play dumber than he actually was, after the fireworks struck at Carstair's.

Albert, at least, showed some evidence of methodical caution.

"You'd better stay here," he told Terry, "while I take the bag. If anyone sees me with it, they'll think it belongs to Mr. Carstair."

Lurking in the entry, Terry waited while Albert rounded a corner of the hall. He heard a door close behind the servant. A few minutes later, the door opened again and Terry recognized Albert's tread. He stepped out to meet him.

"This way," said Albert. "Be careful! We will pass by Mr. Carstair's study. The door is open, and Mr. Doone is in there with him."

AROUND the turn of the hall, Terry saw the study door and heard voices coming from the lighted room. He saw other doors, one was obviously the entrance to a closet, for it was beneath a flight of stairs. Another, toward which Albert led him, went to the back of the house.

Frontward, however, beyond the study, Terry noted that the hallway opened very wide and that there were large, unlighted rooms on each side; rooms that had wide curtained doorways.

Through the door to the rear, Albert motioned Terry across a pantry and opened another door, disclosing a flight of steps down to the cellar. Descending, Terry found his bag at the bottom and picked it up. Albert accompanied him; he pointed across the cellar.

"You'll find the main switch over there," said the servant. "It works on the upstairs lights, not these down here."

"How soon do I start the blinker?"

"Any time after Mr. Wellwood gets here," returned Albert. "That's what the chief said, when he phoned. He said: 'After everybody gets here' – and since Mr. Wellwood is coming, we must wait until then."

Terry nodded. He looked around. "What's the best way out of here?"

THE BLUR

"The way you came in," Albert answered. "It will be very easy after the lights begin to flicker."

Albert was turning away. Terry stopped him.

"What's the set-up?" queried Terry coolly. "The Blur didn't have time to give me all the details."

For a moment, Albert's eyes betrayed a shrewd, rat-like doubt; then the fellow's suspicion seemed to pass. He spoke so bluntly that Terry was sure he wasn't covering any facts.

"Mr. Carstair handles large transactions," explained Albert, "but usually he conducts his business elsewhere. My duty is to report his comings and goings – to the right party."

To the Blur. Studying Albert, Terry knew that this man could not possibly be the Blur. In fact, Albert was a misfit, even in the organization. It gave Terry the hunch that Albert must rate in reliability what he lacked in brains. Which meant that Albert might be closer to the Blur than certain others in the outfit. As an informant, Albert might prove very useful if brought before the police.

"I reported that Mr. Doone and Mr. Wellwood were coming here tonight," continued Albert, dully, "but I felt that it meant very little. They come often, like many others, to see Mr. Carstair. Sometimes they talk business, but always it is to be done elsewhere, later."

"But this evening when I reported, I was told that tonight is very important. The business, whatever it is, will be done here. That is why I am to let you in first; then others, when the lights begin to blink."

As Albert concluded, Terry heard the sound of a door chime. Albert snapped into action.

"Mr. Wellwood!" he exclaimed. "I must go. Any time now!"

Albert went up the stairs. Terry picked up the bag. It had seemed heavy when he lugged it from the station, but it felt light, now, as he hurried over to the main switch. In his eagerness, Terry wasn't worried by so trifling a burden as a satchel. His time for action had come.

OPENING the bag for the first time, Terry found that it contained a squarish block of metal, with wires for attachment to the main switch. Tucked under the coiled wires was a slip of paper that gave a simple diagram for the attachment. It took Terry less than two minutes to have the gadget in place.

All set for the final instruction on the sheet, Terry pulled the switch, shoved a flat metal tab beneath it and pushed the switch back as it had been. He could picture what happened upstairs. A sudden blot of blackness when the switch was pulled, then lights again, but with flickers, because the metal tab connected with the automatic blinker.

Terry tried to visualize events amid that artificial haze of glow and darkness.

Carstair and his friends surprised in the study, while Albert, elsewhere, was admitting the Blur and his strong-arm crew, who would naturally interject themselves the moment they saw the lights begin their crazy flickerings.

They thrived on blinking of lights, that crowd. They'd be lost without it. Given proper illumination, Carstair and his friends could turn the tables, for the confusion would be all the other way. There were certainly loyal servants in the house who would help, and Terry, himself, could prove a most important factor. The marauders would think him one of their band and be caught off guard when he changed sides.

THE BLUR

There was a simple way to bring back full light, so Terry used it. He simply yanked away a wire connecting between the tab and the blinker box. That cut off the blinker, but the switch retained its contact through the metal tab.

Of course, Terry waited long enough for the Blur and his crew to be inside the house. He allowed a full minute, and found it desperately painful.

The deed done, Terry sped up stairs.

As he expected, the lights were glowing normally. But there wasn't a sign of confusion in the hallway. Only Albert stood there, gesticulating anxiously for silence as he witnessed Terry's sudden arrival. The servant was near the closet beneath the other stairway. Its door was open.

"Mr. Wellwood came," confided Albert. "Fortunately, they closed the study door after he entered, so they can't hear us. But why did you dash up here so soon?"

"Trouble with the blinker," responded Terry, seeking a quick alibi. "I think I set it wrong. I was afraid that maybe I'd blown the lights."

Albert gestured him to the closet. There, on a shelf, Terry saw a square box, much like a portable radio. On one side was a small red light, which wasn't burning; on the other, a knob that served as a switch. Wires, leading from the box, were connected with a floor plug in the closet.

"This is the real blinker." Albert's whisper was close to Terry's ear. "You brought it in the satchel. I removed it and installed it here while you were busy in the cellar."

"But, why –"

"The chief thought it best," continued Albert, as though Terry hadn't interrupted. "You see, you are a new man. He had to make allowance. Notice the little red bulb at the left of the dial."

Terry noticed it, and nodded.

"It is controlled by the dummy switch in the cellar." Albert's tone was a cold snarl. "When you attached the box you thought was the blinker, the red light came on, proving that you had done your job. But when the light went off, I learned that you were trying to double-cross us!"

"The Blur wanted me to find out. Your mix-up with The Shadow, the other night, struck the chief as a real one. Still, The Shadow saved your life. He is clever, The Shadow, and he has workers, too. The Blur suspected that you might be one of them. You are!"

As frigid as Albert's snarl was the gun muzzle that pressed Terry's neck. This time, he recognized the significance of that icy bore. With one hand, Albert held Terry helpless with the revolver. The servant was using his other hand to turn the switch of the real blinker that stood on the closet shelf!

A whirl of thoughts controlled Terry's brain. He should have suspected the lightness of the satchel! What a fool he was, to have trusted Albert. Even more, he should have armed himself for this expedition.

Now, as never before, he'd have to fight for his life.

Most of all, Terry Radnor wished that he really were an agent of The Shadow. In that case, he could have counted on the cloaked avenger to save him from coming doom!

CHAPTER VIII. FIGHTERS IN THE GLOOM

IN Carstair's study, behind a strong latched door, three men were apportioning funds that totaled a few hundred thousand dollars – a small amount compared to their combined fortunes, but enough to worry these men of finance when they remembered how eagerly criminals would seek such funds. All three looked serious; but there the resemblance ended.

James Carstair was a big, bulky man, clumsy of appearance and careless of dress. Thomas Wellwood was older and somewhat wizened, his hair thin and white. Of the trio, only Roger Doone was both dignified and fastidious.

Fairly tall, Doone held himself stiffly erect; for attire, he wore evening clothes, and in his coat lapel, placed there from constant habit, was a pink carnation.

The three were handling their business briskly. The real problem that confronted them was the keeping of the funds: whether all should be left with Carstair, taken away by Doone, or entrusted to Wellwood.

Carstair had already kept the money safely, but that wasn't surety for the future. Doone habitually looked after large funds, which he stowed in his burglar-proof office, but with crime in the air, it was a question whether such places could still be considered safe.

Wellwood was looming as the dark horse, the man that crooks – like the Blur – would not suspect as custodian of a quarter million dollars. The other two were getting ready to persuade Wellwood that he should serve as treasurer of their compact corporation.

Such discussion was suddenly postponed. The lights in the study began to blink. Albert had pulled the switch.

The effect on the three men was startling, yet not surprising. Others had gone totally bewildered when the lights blinked, as at the Century Casino. The Blur's twilight-maker wasn't just a device for covering the identity of himself and his companions. It was an aid to crime itself, that brought results which no other method could.

Here were three men in a locked room, its windows shuttered. No place could have been more secure against a surprise attack. Had gunshots or other symptoms startled them, they would probably have stayed right where they were. But the eerie, twinkling lights reached them despite locks and bars. The menace was with them!

Looking at one another, they saw faces blurred by the rapid flashes. Their voices, strained and excited, were no longer their own. Hands, pawing for the cash on Carstair's desk, seemed those of foemen, not of friends. They were unreal creatures in an incredible setting.

The Blur!

That name was pounding through the minds of three men, and each, in his horror, felt that the notorious crimemaster might be among them, even in the personality of one of their own number.

They were scrambling as they pawed, and their action threatened to become a brawl. It was therefore only natural that one man, in this unnatural emergency, should call for outside aid, particularly as he had it at hand.

THE BLUR

That man was James Carstair.

This house was his home. He trusted his servants, and with good reason. They were loyal men, with the sole exception of Albert, who had managed to make a capable pretense of honesty. So Carstair sprang for the door and yanked it open, shouting in a booming tone he hoped his servitors would recognize.

He didn't realize that he was playing right into the hands of the Blur. It took a keener brain than Carstair's to recognize all that might be happening within the beleaguered house with the blinking lights.

The keener brain belonged to The Shadow.

MARGO'S car was wheeling into the driveway. Margo was the driver, and she had made a fast trip to Long Island, with Cranston as a passenger beside her. But Wellwood must have known a shorter route to Carstair's, for his car was already parked in front of the mansion.

Tucked beside him, drawn from a brief case that he carried, Cranston had cloak and hat in readiness. It was his plan to pay a visit as The Shadow, in case a social call proved unwise. As the coupe took the curve of the drive, The Shadow saw that a social call was out.

So was he out – out of the car. So fast, that Margo had hardly shoved the brake pedal at Cranston's quick command before her friend was gone. Blinking lights throughout the mansion were a beacon that called for quick work by The Shadow, in his guise of black.

He was still Cranston as he sprang and Margo caught his final words – for her to wait. The girl stared ahead, thinking that Cranston would reappear in the glow of the car's headlights, which were directed toward the front door of the great house.

But Cranston didn't reappear. He had cut over to the right, taking a short cut to a side door which he knew because he had called at Carstair's before. In the gloom, Margo couldn't have seen him, had she looked the right way, because he was Cranston no longer.

With his speedy strides, the tall avenger of crime was whipping cloak about his shoulders, clamping slouch hat on his head. He was The Shadow, fully accoutered in black, when he reached the side door.

As he shoved the door open with one hand, he produced a gun with the other. Armed with that powerful .45 automatic, The Shadow sprang in the direction of Carstair's shouts.

Someone other than Carstair was in more imminent danger, and, as good fortune had it, he was right on The Shadow's route. The threatened man was Terry Radnor.

Still pressed by the revolver muzzle, Terry was wondering why Albert didn't fire. The answer dawned upon him amid Carstair's shouts. Blinking lights had brought Carstair from the study; the sound of a gun might send him back again. Albert was holding the death shot until the Blur and his companions entered, to handle Carstair and the other victims.

The thump of a door made Albert turn, because the sound came from the wrong direction. Albert was hearing the Shadow's entry, not the Blur's. A few moments later there were sounds from an opposite source, telling that the Blur had actually entered.

Albert had to strain to hear those sounds, because there was also a clatter from upstairs, that of Carstair's servants, hustling from their quarters to answer their master's call. They knew that trouble was at hand

because their lights were blinking, too.

However, it was The Shadow who really saved Terry, for the brief interlude in which Albert relaxed was the chance that Terry needed. Just as Albert was about to stiffen and jab the gun muzzle deeper in Terry's neck, the prisoner yanked away from it.

Albert fired; the bullet fanned Terry's ear lobe. Grabbing at the fellow, Terry tried to keep him from delivering another shot.

It seemed quite hopeless. Terry was deep in the closet, with barely enough space to turn. To get out, he had to bowl Albert ahead of him, which he did, but the murderous servant was smart enough to hop back and poke his gun straight at the closet door.

Having fired one shot, Albert could now afford to empty his gun, and there wasn't a chance in the world for Terry to beat the system. The lunge that Terry made was sheerly one of desperation.

Just then, something happened to Albert.

The servant was shooting, but he was somersaulting as he did. He looked like a straw scarecrow picked up by a cyclone. His gun was spouting upwards, sideways, like a display of fireworks. He looked like a human pinwheel that had fizzed. Only the blackness that persisted with each momentary flash of light told Terry why Albert had so suddenly gone acrobatic. Terry had witnessed that phenomenon before.

The swishing forte that struck Albert wasn't the nebulous apparition that it had appeared to be. Terry himself had once wrestled with that thunderbolt in black, and found it solid.

It was The Shadow, in from darkness!

One blast from Albert's gun and The Shadow had looked for the weapon. Spotting the revolver's glimmer in a flash of light, he had taken out its owner. Not permanently, for The Shadow hadn't yet recognized Albert's connection with the case. But he had taken it largely for granted that the man who began the shooting was on crime's side.

As Albert ended his pin-wheel spin and pancaked on the floor, Terry went after him with a shout that he hoped The Shadow would recognize. The Shadow did and left Terry to handle the servant.

Sweeping on, The Shadow rounded the corner, guided by Carstair's shouts, though they ended suddenly before The Shadow could reach the study door.

Terry didn't see what happened farther on. He made a bad mistake the moment The Shadow passed him. Grabbing Albert, Terry pinned the dazed crook with one hand and tried to find the lost gun with the other, just in case it still contained bullets. Had he known what Albert was to do, he would have choked the fellow.

Carstair's surging servants were arriving along this very route. They wouldn't have stopped, ordinarily, because they couldn't see the two figures on the door. But Albert heard them and yelled, which he couldn't have done had Terry's fingers been embracing his neck.

"Here he is!" hoarsed Albert. "I'm Albert... help me... he's got me!"

Terry was buried by a deluge of ardent men who should have kept on their way to aid The Shadow. For, at that moment, The Shadow was reaching a scene where assistance would be of importance.

THE BLUR

Through the door of the study three men were filing out with upraised hands. Even in the dusk of light and blackness, The Shadow could tell who they were. He didn't have to see their faces.

First, Carstair big and blundering. Behind him, Wellwood, wizened and crab-like. Next, the erect form of Doone, with a pale, sickly blotch upon his coat lapel a thing which, in good light, would have plainly been a pink carnation.

All were faltering forward at the bidding of a man whose face was an absolute blur. A man whose form was neither tall nor short, which indicated that it might be hunched. A revolver in the man's fist was sparkling with every gleam of the intermittent light. From other angles, round and about him, came the flashes of other weapons trained upon Carstair, Wellwood and Doone.

The chief mobster was the Blur. The only thing distinguishable about him was his tone, but its purr carried a forced note which marked it as false. In a cold voice, he was telling his victims that the slightest move against him would mean death.

"Death to you," he concluded, "and to anyone who challenges my way of crime!"

The Blur's men were turning, to be ready for Carstair's servants should they arrive. The Blur himself was keeping the men in the doorway covered; an easy task, considering the warning that he had given them.

It was then that the challenge came, a peal of strident mirth from the very direction toward which the Blur's men had begun to swing. It was creepier even than the weird light which the Blur had arranged, for in that fantastic glow, staring men could not see the author of the mocking challenge, as he shifted direction under their very eyes.

But they knew the tone and what it represented: The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. CHANCE MURDER

DOOM to crime!

Such was the threat behind The Shadow's laugh, and his opponents knew it. They blazed furiously, frantically with their guns, hoping to find The Shadow somewhere in the artificial twilight, which was proving better for him than for them.

They did find him, but not with bullets.

Very suddenly, The Shadow bobbed up in the midst of the shooters, swinging hard and speedily with a gun. They realized then, too late, how their cloaked antagonist had tricked them.

Diving at the finish of a shift, The Shadow had taken the one route where he couldn't possibly be seen, even as a sketchy outline. Along the floor, he was as good as invisible, with the echoes of his laugh persisting from the hallway behind him. He had clouded the minds of his foemen; the hazy setting which they preferred for crime was the very measure of their undoing.

Even the Blur was fooled. Knowing that his followers weren't getting results, he swung away from the helpless trio that he covered and tried to blast The Shadow. The Blur was firing at empty space, when the scuffle at his elbow told him that The Shadow was in the midst of the firing squad, slugging them down!

THE BLUR

The Shadow wanted to take the Blur. Had Carstair's servants come piling in at that moment, as The Shadow fully expected, crime would have met its finish. The Shadow had paved the way for the reserves, and was ready to leave the Blur's bewildered men to them.

But the servants didn't come. They had stopped to play hide-and-seek with Terry. The Shadow had to keep on slugging the men about him, so they couldn't insert a close-range fire.

Still, The Shadow did not lack assistance.

Famous for his headlong plunges, The Shadow always came up with something more, proving that he always looked ahead, even in the midst of hair-trigger action. When The Shadow found breaks, he had usually planned them himself, though it might be upon the instant; moreover, his plans were frequently double-barreled.

Though sure that the servants would arrive with Terry, The Shadow had an alternative: the three men at the door. He'd pulled the Blur away from them, and they acted as expected. They went for the Blur in a body.

It wasn't the way The Shadow wanted it, but it was proving good enough. His job, now, was to handle the tribe and leave the big-shot to Carstair and his fellow financiers. There were five men with the Blur, and The Shadow had sent three of them reeling. With a swing of his arms, he caught the other two and flattened them to the floor.

Just then, there was the encouraging sound of shouts. Carstair's servants, three in number, had pounded Terry enough. Hearing plenty of gunfire, they decided they were needed, and were coming.

All this was going on in a setting so weirdly lurid, that it was difficult to believe it real. Men were like specters, and felt it. The mere loss of a hold upon another struggler made him seem to melt into nothingness. Terry could testify to that, for he had benefited from it.

Despite the beating that the servants had tried to give him, he was on his feet and only slightly dazed. What bewildered him most was the medley of fighters down by the study, grotesque creatures all, who weaved and faded as the images of a dream. The effect of the blinking light was even more pronounced than on the occasions when Terry had previously seen it in action.

Only two fighters could fully find themselves amid that unreal mist of light and dark: The Shadow and the Blur. They were still apart, and each was getting clear of the occupying strugglers.

The Shadow was coming up from the floor, where two shaky foemen were frantically crawling away. The Blur was wresting himself from the clutches of the men he had sought to rob.

THE Blur reeled in The Shadow's direction. For the moment, a direct meeting seemed certain. The Blur's groggy henchmen were grappling with Carstair's servants, forming a cordon that allowed a perfect dueling ground for The Shadow and the Blur.

Then, before The Shadow could quite reach his feet, the Blur shifted direction. His stagger became a dive. He took a route where blinking lights beckoned: into Carstair's study!

A shout came, in Carstair's booming voice:

"He's gone after the money! Stop him!"

THE BLUR

Carstair meant that shout for The Shadow. Well did Carstair know the danger and recognize that it would take someone more capable than himself to deal with the Blur.

As Carstair shouted, The Shadow saw him, identifying him by his bulky size. But where Carstair hesitated, there was a man who did not.

Wellwood plunged for the study door. Pitifully small and crab-like, there was no mistaking him. The Shadow knew why Wellwood was after the Blur. Having mentioned the matter of tonight's conference and the stake involved, Wellwood had a guilty conscience and felt it his part to make amends. But Wellwood didn't reach the study.

The Shadow stopped him short of the door, carrying him in a long roll down the hall. This wasn't Wellwood's task any more than Carstair's. The Blur would keep until The Shadow stalked him. Bad business on Wellwood's part, holding up The Shadow's coming quest of the Blur. But it wasn't enough, in itself, to damage the situation.

Not serious in itself, but it paved the way to something worse. The strange thing that happened to Wellwood – the way he was plucked by blackness amid the intermittent light and flung amazingly away from the study door – should have discouraged other persons from attempting the same foolhardy process. However, it didn't.

As The Shadow swung around to make his own drive, another man flung in ahead of him. The man was Doone, the second of Carstair's associates. Erect, even when lunging, Doone was easily identified. The sickly pink carnation in his buttonhole was the final point that made The Shadow sure that it was Doone.

As Cranston, The Shadow had met Doone often at the club. Doone always sported the pink flower.

Doone, of all persons, shouldn't have played the fool; but he was doing it. Having a longer start than Wellwood he was through the door before The Shadow, could reach him. Sharply, a revolver spoke from inside the room.

Arriving, The Shadow was only a few feet from the threshold when Doone's figure took a long flop forward. Even before the victim struck, the door was slashing shut, flung hard by the Blur.

The door slammed in The Shadow's face. Its latch being automatic, it locked.

Doone was dead, murdered by the Blur, as Tex Winthorp had been. The killer's next move would be to bundle up the cash, yank open a shuttered window, and flee. Demolishing the door might take too long. The best course was to cut off the Blur. The Shadow turned to start; instantly, he was slammed back against the door.

Carstair's servants were the offenders. Albert's cry had brought them Terry's way; now, Carstair's shout to "Stop him!" was throwing these misguided fighters upon The Shadow. It took hard, twisting tactics to shake them off, but The Shadow managed it. However, it was all at the cost of valuable time.

MELTING suddenly, The Shadow was off through the hallway. The Blur's men had profited by the melee to make a staggers exit. They'd lost some of their guns and the servants must have picked them up, for shots followed The Shadow's dash.

Terry ducked for the closet and heard The Shadow swish safely past. The only man who lost out was Albert.

THE BLUR

Thinking the other servants were after the Blur, he sprang in to stop them. Seeing him coming at them, the loyal servants let him have it. Albert went down, thoroughly riddled. It was what he deserved, but it meant the loss of a star witness against the Blur.

Thought of that prompted Terry to do something he had overlooked before. He reached for the knob of the blinker device on the closet shelf and turned it. Flickers ended, bringing a steady glow, in which the servants recognized Albert as their victim, and stopped, quite stunned.

Cutting out from the closet, Terry headed cellarward. There, he snatched the device that he had planted on the dummy switch and stuffed it into the satchel. The way things had gone, Terry didn't want his own part known.

Meanwhile, The Shadow, coming from the side door, ran squarely into Margo, who held a flashlight. She gave a startled gasp as the cloaked figure loomed before her; then a gloved hand had clutched her arm, and she heard The Shadow's whispered query:

"Which way did the Blur go?"

"Over there, I think!" Margo gestured toward the rear of the lawn with the flashlight, which The Shadow promptly smothered. "But he wasn't alone —"

"Get back to the car," interposed The Shadow. His tone was totally unlike Cranston's. "Drive in to town. On the way, phone Commissioner Weston at Dawson's. Tell him what happened here."

The Shadow was gone, so swiftly that darkness seemed to absorb him. Dashing back to the coupe, Margo sprang behind the wheel and started the motor. As she did, her headlight showed a car spurt away from the other side of the house.

It might be the Blur!

In that case, Margo was wrong. She'd seen the wrong batch of fugitives, and The Shadow ought to know about it. Margo hesitated wondering if she could possibly overtake The Shadow and inform him. Her hesitation ended when a man swung into the coupe beside her and covered her with a revolver.

It was Terry Radnor. The gun was Albert's, and it happened to be empty, a fact that Margo didn't know. She was startled, moreover, at recognizing Terry as the young man who had gone into Tex's office the night when the Blur had struck at the Century Casino.

"Get going," ordered Terry coolly, "and don't try any funny business! We're following that bunch in the car ahead. So make it speedy."

Margo obeyed. The Shadow had taken one trail, and she was taking the other. Which would lead to the Blur, she did not know, but she had her hopes. Considering that Terry might have had a hand in crime, Margo hoped that The Shadow would be the one to find the Blur!

CHAPTER X. THE SHADOW'S TRAIL

THE SHADOW was out of sight of Margo's car before Terry reached it. Not only did he travel rapidly; he had been forced to pick an opening through a high hedge at the rear of Carstairs' lawn.

THE BLUR

Using a little flashlight, which he handled in a guarded fashion that would have amazed Margo, The Shadow spotted another patch of broken hedge, through which the fugitives had gone.

He also picked up a path that led through trees, toward a downward slope. It was easy enough to figure where it led. Carstair's house was close to Long Island Sound. This path was a route to the water.

Considering Carstair's wealth and the size of the estate, The Shadow looked for a boathouse, rather than a mere wharf or a simple bathing beach.

It wasn't long before the boathouse loomed from a heavy mist which shrouded the Sound. The struggling light of a half moon threw a very hazy pallor on the scene. The Shadow couldn't see any men around the boathouse, but he could hear them.

They were going inside, and as The Shadow skirted toward the shore, he saw that the boathouse was built high. The craft that they were using was beneath the building, and with the fog increasing offshore there wouldn't be any chance to follow it if it got started. So The Shadow approached from the land side; he found the door that the escaping crooks had used.

The door was bolted, but it gave enough to emit a crack of light. This was no time for wasted ceremony. The Shadow pressed a gun muzzle squarely against the bolt and pulled the trigger. The bolt came loose, a large chunk of wood with it. The bolt's clatter, when it hit the far wall, was louder than the thud of the bullet that preceded it.

Figures came lunging at The Shadow the moment he flung himself through the door. They were brawny men, roughly clad, who looked as if their main job had been to bring the boat here.

As he grappled with the pair, The Shadow saw a wide opening in the floor; beneath it the boat, about to start. More important than the boat, were the men in it.

They ducked away as they saw The Shadow, because they didn't want their faces to be seen. Those who ducked were in the stern of the boat; there were probably others up ahead who didn't have to duck, because The Shadow couldn't see the bow.

Of the duckers, The Shadow spotted just one. He was a stoop-shouldered man who seemed of some importance, the way the others made room for him. His face was chinless, colorless, but the eyes that darted at The Shadow weren't the sort that belonged to a mere fugitive.

They were beady eyes, more vicious than startled. Even as he turned his face away, the man was tugging for a gun. Perhaps he thought that The Shadow, busy with two bruisers, hadn't gotten a good look at him. If he so believed, the man was wrong.

In one glimpse, The Shadow had taken in the full facial characteristics of Hector Dunvin, the man who had visited Tex Winthorp and pretended to be an electrician – which he probably was. For Dunvin had remained in Tex's office that night, and was unquestionably the man who had placed the blinker gadget there.

It flashed to The Shadow that Dunvin might be the Blur. His colorless face was certainly one that would profit by any kind of uncertain light, to the extent where it would be hard to recognize. In scrambling forward in the boat, the man was stooping in a fashion that somewhat suited the Blur.

In their madness to get away from sight, Dunvin and his companions were playing right into The Shadow's hands. Sideswiping the two huskies who grappled him, The Shadow sprawled one across the other and made

THE BLUR

a spring toward the opening in the floor, below which confusion reigned.

But that chaos was deceptive. It was but the prelude to a turn of events against The Shadow.

Before the cloaked fighter could reach his goal, the lights in the boathouse blinked!

LIKE the wink of a magic eye, crooks were full about. This was the limelight they preferred. It did more than rally them. One man popped up from the stern of the boat like a human jack-in-the-box. Another was right behind him; then all were coming, imbued with the fighting tonic that the Blur had provided.

They were shooting before they reached the floor level, and they thought they had The Shadow flat-footed. In a sense, they did have, for he was right at the edge of the trap when the lights took their startling change. He could twist, though, and he did, hitting the floor shoulder first, taking a roll backward, away from the danger zone.

No human target could have withstood the rapid coughs of those guns, but The Shadow was fortunately below the level of the upward-angled fire. Bullets whined past him like a barrage, and he took a farther roll. He knew that the gunners thought they had finished him, for in the blurry light they couldn't have seen his fall-away.

He wanted to be ready for them when they poked up higher to shoot along the level of the floor. His gun would talk first, when that moment came.

If it came, was better.

The moment didn't come at all. A roar from beneath the boathouse marked the sudden starting of the motor. Shooters dropped back thinking they'd done their task. Vaguely, in the blinking light, The Shadow saw the two stumble-bums that he had first encountered, pitching frantically through the trapdoor.

They smacked in midair, but they must have landed in the boat, for there wasn't any splash. Instead, a whirling, followed by an echoing swash, told that the speedboat was away.

The Shadow might have clipped the stumblers when they went, but he was glad he desisted. It might be better, and certainly not worse, to let the Blur's crew think that they had really disposed of The Shadow, particularly if their leader happened to be with them. Whether the Blur would fall for the thing was another question. The Blur had, so far, proven himself very canny.

Since the front of the boathouse was solid, The Shadow had to go outside to look for the fugitive craft. He could hear its motor dwindling, but there wasn't any sign of the boat. It had sliced off through the fog, and the gray-black mist had instantly closed behind it.

Something singular had occurred, however, with the fugitive's departure. The lights in the boathouse weren't blinking any longer. They were off.

Either a wire that controlled them had gone with the boat, or the Blur had used some short-wave device that produced blinks at close range. The Shadow considered the latter unlikely, but did not wholly reject it.

He was quite sure that the Blur had many cute ways of producing blinks, a point to remember in the future. For crime would be getting tougher for the master crook, each time he tried to repeat it. The Shadow, personally, would see that it became tougher.

THE BLUR

It was seldom that The Shadow met with an enforced respite so soon after an event of crime. There was no use staying at the deserted boathouse, and no craft was available for a chase which offered but a trifling chance of success, even if undertaken.

As for mobsters who might have fled another way, probably by car, it was now too late to go after them. It might be that The Shadow had missed a better opportunity; perhaps the trail of the Blur himself.

So The Shadow took the only course that remained. He went back to Carstair's house and entered it unnoticed. Servants were scouring the grounds with lights, but none was in the house itself. The place was like the calm center of a storm, particularly the study.

Looking into the lighted room, The Shadow saw two men, too engrossed in their mutual sorrow to observe him at the door.

THE two men were James Carstair and Thomas Wellwood. To their credit, they weren't moaning over the loss of the fortune that the Blur had taken with him. Their grief was inspired by the body of Roger Doone, who lay on the floor between them.

Slightly below the pink carnation in the dead man's buttonhole was a stain of blood. The Blur's bullet had found Doone's heart.

"Poor Doone," Wellwood was saying. "He didn't have a chance! If only he hadn't copied my example!"

"Albert's case was even sadder." Carstair shook his head. "To think of how he stumbled right into the fire of those guns. I can't understand why the other servants were so hasty."

"Those lights unnerved them," asserted Wellwood. "It was bad in here, but even worse in the hall."

Carstair nodded agreement. Mention of the hall caused him to dart an unexpected look in that direction. He caught a chance glimpse of something black whisking from sight – the edge of The Shadow's cloak.

"He's back!" roared Carstair. "The Blur is back, hoping to kill us!"

Carstair grabbed the first available weapon, which happened to be his cane. Wellwood seized a log that lay beside an open fireplace. Together, they dashed out into the hallway, to see the front door slamming. They followed, yanked the door open and reached the front porch, Wellwood's high-pitched shouts joining with Carstair's booms.

Servants had found a car out front, with its motor still throbbing. It was another getaway car that crooks had not used, since so many of them had fled for the boathouse instead. The servants hadn't turned off the motor, for they had called the police, who told them to leave all evidence as it was.

Turning toward the lighted porch, the servants did not see The Shadow, for by then he was in darkness. He popped up suddenly among them, as he had done before.

Flinging off the startled men who made belated grabs, The Shadow sprang into the car, slammed the door in their faces and yanked the machine into gear. He whipped the car away so fast, that it was around the curve of the drive before a single man could fire after it.

Facts were linking in The Shadow's mind as he sped the car toward town. He knew why the Blur had so easily picked off Doone in the artificial gloom. Doone had provided a target: the pink carnation. Curiously,

that fitted with the death of Tex Winthorp. In Tex's case, a diamond shirt stud had served as a locator for the victim's heart.

Another point: the Blur hadn't snatched that valuable diamond after killing Tex, which indicated that the unknown crook had his mind on cash, not gems. That put an odd twist on the Blur's threat to rob Dawson, the jeweler, at nine o'clock tonight.

Such a point might have convinced Commissioner Weston that the Dawson case was a hoax, the opinion voiced by both Lamont Cranston and Marvin Kelford, the stand-bys of the Cobalt Club.

But was it entirely a hoax?

The Shadow had inclined to the hoax idea, even when telling Margo Lane to phone Commissioner Weston and inform him of the crime at Carstair's. He was glad that he had, for with Weston gone, The Shadow would have a better chance to look over the scene at Dawson's.

It might prove valuable, considering that the ways of the Blur were many. Hoax or no hoax, something might occur at Dawson's that would cloud the issue seriously. Ill consequences threatened, of a sort that only timely intervention could prevent.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XI. TERRY CHANGES SIDES

MARGO LANE was getting acquainted with Terry Radnor. Rather a difficult process, traveling at sixty miles an hour along Long Island highways, with tricky stops required at many turns. But Terry was making it easy.

Letting Margo guide the car and keep check on the elusive tail light that they trailed, Terry was putting his case in straightforward terms. He was playing the hunch that Margo was working for The Shadow, not the Blur.

It wasn't likely that a girl like Margo would belong to the Blur's organization. Besides, she hadn't been in a hurry to make a getaway when Terry popped into her car. Finally Terry was losing nothing by telling his story. If Margo did not trust him, or tried to trick him, he still had Albert's empty, but efficient-looking, gun as a persuader in his favor.

Terry had made a quicker impression than he hoped. The reason was the preamble to his story. He admitted that he had been mixed up in the mess at the Century Casino, because he made a visit to Tex's office.

Since Margo had witnessed that incident, in part, but was quite sure Terry didn't know it, she naturally gave credence to his story. The rest, as Terry unfolded it, was quite in keeping with the beginning. Most convincing was Terry's mention of names, those of three men, any of whom, in his opinion, might be the Blur.

"In a way, it doesn't matter much," concluded Terry. "I've got it in for all of them. Not just because they're crooks; I could be impersonal on that point. But they tried to double-cross me tonight!"

Margo couldn't help but laugh.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you tried to double-cross them."

THE BLUR

She was slackening speed for a turn, and managed a side glimpse at Terry's face. He gave a sheepish grin, then set his jaw firmly.

"I'll stick to my viewpoint," he decided. "I don't know who's in that car ahead but I'll bet that one of the three 'guess—who' chaps is there. Dunvin, Marne or Callew – any one of them will do, and the more the better."

Margo gave another glance, this time toward the revolver that Terry had.

"Sure you've got enough cartridges in that gun?"

Turning her gaze ahead as she spoke, Margo pressed the accelerator to the floor and raced along a straight-away in pursuit of the vanishing tail light. With another grin, Terry juggled the revolver and dropped it in his pocket.

"No cartridges at all," he confessed. "Albert used the lot. You might as well know."

"I'm glad you told me," returned Margo. "I'll keep it in mind, when we catch up with those people."

Terry stared in real admiration

"Say, you rate right!" he said. "I thought you deserved a break; that's why I told you about the gun. I wouldn't blame you if you braked this buggy and called it quits. The most I could do would be to ask you to be a sport and take me back to the city."

"But since you're keeping after them, we'd better get together on what's best. If they keep zimming right ahead, it's easy. All we'll have to do is make sure where they go, and then duck. But what if they begin to slow up?"

Margo shrugged. "Suppose we slow up, too?"

"And suppose they stop?" queried Terry. "What then?"

"We'll stop," assured Margo. "What's more, if they begin to turn around, I'll beat them to it. If they want to chase us, I'll take them right into trouble."

"You know these roads well?"

"Well enough to locate some town where we'll find police. But let's wait to see what happens, before we begin to worry."

SOMETHING happened, quite soon afterward. Margo had closed the distance somewhat, when the car ahead made a sharp turn. Following it, Margo saw a barrier that had been pushed aside. Crooks were taking a road that was under repair.

"It looks bad," vouchsafed Terry.

"Not so very bad," Margo argued. "They've been doubling back on their course. This road will take them to another through highway, where we'll strike more traffic. That may give us a chance to stir up some help."

"Good enough," decided Terry, "if this road isn't bad enough to ditch us."

THE BLUR

For a mile or two, the road did look bad. The car ahead was jouncing up and down like a lifeboat navigating a heavy surf. Margo in turn, took the bumps, profiting considerably by her observation of the other car. Then the bad road ended. Both cars were on a straight stretch that offered good paving and high speed.

The other car opened up, and Margo did the same. They came to a succession of long curves that didn't do much to ease the speed. Again, Margo was concerned only with the driving; but Terry, chin in hand, was musing, half aloud.

"There's something wrong about this," he insisted. "That barrier being shoved aside; this road leading to one where traffic is heavy —"

The other car was disappearing past a wooded bend. Holding to the high speed, Margo followed, and saw the road open straight ahead, running through an avenue of trees along the shore of a lake. The stretch offered such a chance for speed, that she forgot the tail light which had been weaving out of sight so frequently.

It was Terry who realized that the other car couldn't have cleared the straight stretch, and with that thought, his eyes took in what really lay ahead.

"Brakes! Quick!"

As Terry snapped the words, Margo saw the reason. It was as if a mist cleared from her eyes. It wasn't a road that lay ahead: it was a big advertising sign on the outside of a curve. Painted to represent a real-estate subdivision, the sign showed a road in perspective, leading past a lake that was nothing but a painted pool of blue.

Margo was headed straight for the wrong road: a road so wrong, that it didn't exist!

HAD Terry been at the wheel, he could have stopped disaster. The few seconds that it took for him to give the warning and get it home to Margo, were the moments that counted most. Brakes were screeching, the coupe was wavering, as Margo chopped its speed — too late.

The car was already off the road, chopping through the painted sign like a trained dog plunging through a paper hoop. Margo pressured the brake pedal with all her might, but couldn't escape the crash.

There were trees behind the sign, fair-sized ones, that provided glancing impacts. Skewed right and left, the car tilted crazily, then came down with a hard thump, tilting forward at an angle of thirty degrees.

Being in back of the wheel didn't help Margo. Contrarily, it worked against her. She was flung at a backward angle, and her head thumped the door. She slumped deep beneath the wheel, while Terry, faring better, was grabbing the hand brake.

It was fortunate that he was along to perform that act. The car was half over the edge of a rocky ravine, where it would have gone when Margo's foot subsided from the brake pedal, except for Terry's prompt use of the emergency.

Terry, too, was rather dazed, as he so recognized when he heard voices near. They belonged to the men from the other car. Crooks were coming back on foot.

"They took the sucker trap, all right." It was the bland voice of Marty Callew. "But they should have gone off the edge. How about giving them a shove the rest of the way?"

THE BLUR

"Not yet." Terry recognized a more deliberate tone, belonging to Roy Marne. "Let's take a look at them first."

Terry was all set when they looked. He stared at the glare of the flashlight that came poking through the window, as though he could view the faces behind it.

"You dopes," he accused. "Why didn't you slow down and wait for us?"

It rather baffled Callew and Marne. They opened the door and hauled Terry out. Callew gripped him by the arm, half mistrustfully, while Marne pointed the light behind the wheel and took a look at Margo, who opened her eyes and then shut them painfully. Marne turned to Terry:

"Who's the girl friend?"

"No friend of mine." Terry made his own tone as cool as Marne's. "She was outside Carstair's when I found her. She was going after you fellows."

"So you let her," sneered Callew. "That was smart!"

"Smart, considering I had this!" Coolly, Terry exhibited Albert's revolver. "It made a difference. I couldn't drop her off, because she got too good a look at me."

"You might have given her the blast," suggested Marty. "After all, you had a gun, you know."

"A gun, and that's all." Terry cracked open the revolver. "Plugging away at Carstair's servants, to help you chaps make a getaway, took up all the ammunition. I guess you didn't know how I was helping, or you'd have waited for me."

The fact that Terry had intimidated Margo with an empty gun was something to excite the admiration of both Marne and Callew. When he calmly added that he had later given Margo ardor for the chase by telling her that he was working against the Blur, they were further impressed. So was Margo, whose eyes, by this time, were wide open.

Terry's words, sincerely put, convinced Margo that he had changed sides once again. He had proven himself an opportunist, by his frank story of how he had tipped off Tex for cash.

An opportunist once, he would be one always. Right or wrong, whichever offered the best inducement, would be Terry's choice, impartially. Such was Margo's conclusion in her present plight.

FOR a clincher, Terry produced a proof that he hadn't mentioned in much detail. It was the satchel that he brought from Carstair's. Margo hadn't seen him dump it in the coupe, for she had been under the hypnotic spell of the gun that Terry carried.

"Here's the gimmick," Terry told his companions, opening the bag and producing a squarish box with wires. "I started the blinker right on schedule. But I didn't see any reason for leaving it around, like you fellows did at Tex's. The cellar was a quiet way out, so I took it and picked up the blinker on the way."

Vaguely, Margo was recalling Terry's original story. Something didn't fit. Therefore, he must have lied, because Marne and Callew were not only believing him; they were congratulating him.

"All right, Marty," said Marne to Callew. "I guess you can have your say. Terry here, will help us shove the car over the edge, girl and all."

THE BLUR

"And give the police a clue on the hunt?" demanded Terry roughly. "Not a chance! We'll keep them guessing."

"We set the sucker trap," reminded Marne, in an annoyed tone. "We know what the Blur wanted."

"Yes, you know," snapped Terry. "He wanted us to get rid of each other! Was that the idea? Don't forget, you nearly crossed me off the list, with that funny sign up on the road!"

Marne fumbled for excuses. Terry interrupted them.

"I bagged the girl," he claimed. "She wouldn't be here if I hadn't brought her along. I think she was working for The Shadow. If she wasn't she wouldn't have been at Carstair's. I say to take her along with us and let the Blur decide what next."

Margo shut her eyes. She didn't want to be questioned. The best plan would be a possum game, to make her captors think that she was again unconscious. She could hear the words, though, upon which her fate hinged.

"Terry is right, Roy," said Callew to Marne. "We'd better take the dame along."

It was a case of Callew adding his vote to Terry's, rather than an issuance of an order. It could mean that Callew was the Blur, and artfully covering the fact.

On the contrary, he might have been merely making a suggestion to his real chief, in which case the honors of being the master mind could belong to Marne. Or, by a process of elimination, it might mean that neither was the Blur. With Dunvin absent, there was still a missing factor in the three-card game.

Whatever the case, the vote stood. The three men took Margo from the battered coupe and placed her in the back of the car on the road, which proved to be a sedan. Marne drove with Terry in the front seat beside him. Callew sat in the back, watching Margo, who didn't stir.

The trip ended in a squalid section of Manhattan, a different neighborhood from the one where Terry had met the Blur under flickering lights. They deposited Margo in a windowless room on the second floor of an old house. There was a transom above the door, and they left it slightly open.

"Come on, Terry," said Marne. "We'll leave Callew here, and I'll drop you off somewhere near your hotel."

"What about the bag with the gadget?" queried Terry. "Want to leave it with Callew?"

"A good idea," decided Marne. "He's got the key. I'll tell him to lock the room up and come out with us."

At that moment, Callew wasn't with them. He'd gone to take a look around the house. Marne stepped from the room and gave a low call for him. Getting no response, he went to the top of the stairs. Terry swung quickly and stooped beside Margo's cot.

"Quit faking," he undertoned, "and listen. I've got to get you out of this, but I can't give myself away. Tell me how to reach The Shadow."

Margo opened her eyes, to deliver a cold stare.

"You've got to believe me," whispered Terry. "Can't you realize I played a bluff? Albert is dead. He never had a chance to spill what he knew about my double-cross. I've made these fellows believe that I thought I

was running the real blinker. It was the one way out – for both of us."

The final words convinced Margo. Terry had changed sides again, and anyone who could do it so often must have been on one side, all along. In a whisper, Margo gave a phone number; then added:

"A man named Burbank will answer –"

Finger to lips, Terry turned quickly away. Margo let her eyes shut again. Marne was returning and Callew was coming up the stairs. Terry cut his stride to an idling pace as he met them at the door.

The three stepped outside, and Callew closed the door. Margo heard the key turn in the lock; then footfalls descended the stairs.

It was then that horrible doubt pounded through Margo's aching head. She had staked all on Terry Radnor, and perhaps her guess was wrong. He might change sides again; or, rather, the side he actually preferred might be the wrong one. Then, panic passing, Margo decided that she could only wait.

Time would bring the answer in the form of an important visitor to this room that was a prison cell. She would know, then, how Terry really stood.

It all depended upon whether Margo's visitor would be The Shadow or the Blur!

CHAPTER XII. NINE O'CLOCK STROKE

IT was nearly nine o'clock, and Commissioner Weston was annoyed. He had wasted a full two hours with Latimer Dawson, a stodgy jeweler who didn't seem to have an idea in his egg-shaped head, even though he scratched its baldish top on every provocation.

Two hours which Weston could have spent in the quiet of the Cobalt Club, instead of in the ancient office of a second-rate jewelry store. The commissioner had been mentally beefing over that point, until he suddenly remembered that the Cobalt Club was no longer a haven of restfulness since Marvin Kelford had taken permanent possession of the billiard room.

That thought caused Weston to pay some attention to Dawson. He showed his interest by stating:

"You were saying, Mr. Dawson –"

Wearily, the egg-pated jeweler looked toward the two detectives who had accompanied Weston on this visit. What Dawson had to say was very little, but he had been repeating it off and on for two hours. He'd begun to wonder if Weston would ever really listen.

"I said that I have put my best stock in storage," declared Dawson. "None of these gems are valuable" – gesturing to trays of glittering jewels that topped his desk and overflowed to a table in the corner – "but they make an excellent appearance. If thieves were in a hurry, they would take them. Of course, if they had time to examine them –"

"Which they won't have," interposed Weston. "Particularly if the Blur starts to blink the lights. He and his men will see nothing but the glitter."

Dawson smiled wanly. This was the first constructive statement that Weston had supplied.

THE BLUR

"Ah!" said the jeweler. "Then you don't want me to put the gems in the safe?"

"Who said anything about the safe?"

"I did, commissioner," answered Dawson patiently. "Several times I asked if we should put the stock away in the safe, to make it more troublesome to get at them."

Weston looked at the safe. It was older than any he had ever seen. He couldn't see how it would delay crooks, even if they happened to be carrying toothpicks only with them, but he didn't express that opinion to Dawson.

"Leave the jewels in sight," ordered Weston. "They will be better bait. Now, Dawson, it is almost nine o'clock, if that wall clock of yours is right."

"Exactly right," assured Dawson. "It was adjusted only today."

"You sit behind the desk," declared Weston. "I'll be in front of it, with my back to the door, so I'll look like a customer. One man will be posted in here, the other outside the room."

Rising briskly, Weston posted the waiting detectives. He put one in an alcove that gave a straight view of the door; the other found an excellent place behind an empty counter in the shop outside the office. Weston left the door slightly open, so that light from the office trickled into the store.

Only a few minutes more. Hoax or no hoax, Weston hoped soon to return to the club, where Cardona was about due back from his trip to suburban Westchester County. No use in calling headquarters, since Cardona would report directly to the Cobalt Club.

It didn't occur to Weston that he might have learned direct facts concerning the Blur, if he called headquarters.

Having informed no one of this excursion, except his friends Cranston and Kelford, Weston was entirely out of touch with such a little matter as murder on Long Island, at the home of James Carstair.

At present, he had found something to really intrigue him – the octagonal clock on the wall behind Dawson's desk. Its big hand was only a fraction of an inch from the number twelve.

The hand reached its mark.

Instantly, the Blur declared himself, in a fashion that brought Weston jumping from his chair and caused Dawson to bleat with fright. The thing was so uncanny that it seemed that the Blur must actually be present.

For, with the touch of the minute hand at the exact top of the clock dial, the lights in Dawson's office began to flicker!

Crime's setting, without a criminal in sight!

Much different from Weston's experience at the Century Casino where he had made a belated arrival with the lights already blinking. This was more like Carstair's – an episode which Weston didn't know about – where men had been startled into forgetting their security and paving the way for crime to enter.

A GUN in his fist, Weston was waiting for something to happen – and happen it did, in a style that lacked finesse, but made up for it with rapidity.

THE BLUR

There was a crash from the glass door that fronted Dawson's store. Through the smashed barrier came a surge of men whose pounding feet were bound straight for the office with the rapid-blinking lights.

Dawson gave a howl and dropped behind the desk. The two detectives were utterly transfixed. They'd been told to watch, and show themselves only when crooks appeared. But there wasn't any telling men from ghosts amid these blurring lights.

Only Weston stood his ground, largely because he couldn't do anything else. The lights were flickering on and off so fast that they seemed like the pattern of a revolving checkerboard. The only thing real amid that dusty gray was the scintillation of the jewels spread over Dawson's desk.

They were cheap gems, but they made a show, catching each blink of light and holding it through momentary darkness. In the artificial dusk, they were even better bait than Weston had expected.

From the surge of entering men, the leader detached himself and sprang between Weston and the desk. Against the sparkling background of the cheap jewelry, the commissioner saw the glint of a gun.

Weston sprang for the intruder. Slashing guns clashed together. The pair veered the desk, and Weston slapped a hand toward the woodwork to catch himself. He hit a jewel tray and overturned it, spilling a kaleidoscopic cascade to the floor. His antagonist made a grab to stop him from strewing more of the gems.

The two were fighting for those trophies, and it was impossible for the rest to tell which was trying to seize the gems, or protect them. In piling toward the fighters, the others only balked themselves. Weston's two detectives had sprung to life and were grappling three opponents, but they couldn't risk shots for fear they would hit each other.

Only two persons were qualified to take extreme measures. They were the two at the desk: Weston and his adversary. Though shuffled so others couldn't identify them, each knew that he had an actual opponent in his grasp. Missing each other with their gun swings, they brought the weapons around to firing position.

The duel was forestalled by another smash of glass. This time it was a skylight near the rear of Dawson's office. A skylight that Weston hadn't regarded as important. It was small, its frosted glass was thick and it opened to nothing more than an air shaft. But air shafts could be entered, and even through frosted glass keen eyes could detect the blink of lights in the room below.

As the glass crashed, a cloaked figure was vaguely outlined against the faint glare of the city sky far up the air shaft. No one caught a good view of that form, for those close by were dodging the showering glass. The figure, itself, came through the opening like a human thunderbolt following a spasm of rain.

Striking the floor, the arrival was promptly blacked out. His quick vanish wasn't surprising for he was cloaked entirely in black, a garb perfectly suited for quick fade-aways amid this intermittent light. It had so proven on other occasions. This new arrival was The Shadow.

ONLY Dawson was close enough to grab for the thunderbolt in black. The Shadow hoisted the frail jeweler across the desk, hurling him in a long parabola against the contestants on the other side.

Dawson shrieked crazily, as he realized that he was landing upon two fighters, one of them the Blur, but he struck them off balance and they sprawled.

Then the desk, too, was hurling over, impelled by The Shadow. Gems were flying everywhere, encrusting the floor with a dewlike sparkle. The desk blocked off brawlers who had suddenly decided to go after the new

THE BLUR

adversary from the skylight. It delayed them long enough; for when they cleared the fallen desk, they couldn't find The Shadow.

He had sprung atop a table at the rear wall of the room. Despite the tumult, The Shadow was conscious of a foreign sound that came from high on the wall: an odd whir like that of an electric fan. The Shadow had already recognized the ingenuity of the Blur, and therefore took it that the whirring sound might have some bearing on the present strife.

It did have.

The thing that The Shadow encountered was Dawson's clock. He yanked it from the wall, and with that action, the curious buzz ended. The effect upon the lights was instantaneous. They stopped their flickering and the room was filled with a steady glow.

Dawson's clock, adjusted that day, was fitted with a blinker that had been set for nine o'clock!

Keen strategy on the part of the Blur, but The Shadow did not pause to analyze it. Flinging the clock in one direction, where its smash attracted attention, The Shadow took a swift leap the other way, toward the door out of the jewelry store.

Through before a single hand could grasp him, The Shadow pivoted in darkness beyond the door and pointed a gun in readiness for attackers. No one, not even the Blur, could have come through that doorway without disaster.

No one tried. The brawlers hadn't even seen The Shadow's long lope for the door. Their struggle stopped, frozen men were staring in the other direction.

They weren't looking at Dawson's clock, though it was worthy of inspection, with the broken wires protruding from it – hookups to the lighting system of the jewelry store. There was something more important – the two men who were rising from the floor, clutching guns that were muzzle to muzzle, like the faces of the men who gripped them.

Neither of those battlers was the Blur!

One, of course, was Commissioner Ralph Weston. The other, of all persons, was Inspector Joe Cardona!

DAWSON, on hands and knees, was still giving frantic bleats. He didn't know the situation, never having met Cardona. Weston shoved the jeweler aside and took a look at Cardona's companions. They were detectives, like the pair that the commissioner had brought.

"I came here to find the Blur!" stormed Weston. "I had a tip-off – a letter that came to Dawson, from the Blur, saying he'd be here at nine o'clock."

"I heard from the Blur, too," returned Cardona. He flourished a crude note that matched the one displayed by Weston. "This was in your box when I came back to the Cobalt Club. They told me about it, because it was addressed to me. Read it, commissioner. The Blur said he'd be here at nine, and would be glad to see me. So I came."

Understanding, Weston mopped his forehead. This was more than a hoax. It was a plot, on the Blur's part, to match two representatives of the law against each other, in the hope that they both would be eliminated. Weston and Cardona, either or both, would have suffered seriously, had The Shadow failed to arrive and end

the beclouded struggle.

Remembering The Shadow as an unseen factor in the climax, Weston strode to the office door. He called for Dawson to turn on the store lights, which the jeweler did. The outer shop was empty.

Perhaps it was Weston's strained imagination, but he fancied he heard a whispery laugh float back through the shattered door where Cardona and his squad had entered.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. WORD TO THE SHADOW

SAUNTERING into the Cobalt Club, Lamont Cranston nodded to acquaintances and kept on toward the grill room. His leisurely entrance was typical. It indicated, as usual, that Cranston was bored with life outside and was returning to the quiet of the club.

Immaculately dressed in evening clothes, Cranston was so unruffled that no one could have possibly imagined him as a recent factor in stirring exploits that had included a battle in a boathouse, and a trip down an air shaft, with a crash through a skylight for a finish.

Even afterward, The Shadow had shown speed quite out of keeping with his Cranston pose. Leaving Dawson's, he outdistanced Weston and Cardona in a trip here to the club. They'd be along shortly, and to emphasize his part as Cranston, The Shadow decided to make appearances show that he had been at the Cobalt Club a long while.

A faint smile traced itself on Cranston's lips as he heard the batter of billiard balls next door to the grill room. He entered the billiard room and found Marvin Kelford, in shirt sleeves and eye shade, practicing a very tricky reverse English shot.

The Shadow waited until Kelford had made the shot. Then:

"Hello, Kelford," he greeted, in Cranston's fashion. "Want to take me on in that match you suggested?"

"More than glad to," returned Kelford. "I've been practicing ever since you left, and I'm getting weary of it. Why I joined this club, I don't know. The old fogies here don't like you to invite too many strangers, but when you offer to play billiards with the members, themselves, they're too tired even to pick up a cue!"

Cranston was indicating that he didn't belong to the tired class. Through deliberate in manner, he meant business. He parked his dress coat on a hanger, gave careful choice to the selection of a proper billiard cue. He was chalking the cue tip and eyeing the table, when he asked:

"Heard anything from the commissioner?"

"Not a word," replied Kelford. "I suppose he's still soothing the intimidated jeweler. He ought to be back, though. His alpaca coat is still hanging in the grill room."

"That doesn't prove that he'll be back. The commissioner never remembers his overcoat. He's lucky to have a first-class man like Inspector Cardona. One of the inspector's side lines is hunting down the alpaca whenever the commissioner loses it."

THE BLUR

"I haven't seen Cardona, either," recalled Kelford. "Well, let's concentrate on billiards, Cranston. When they do get back, they'll be sure to interrupt us."

Kelford's prophecy was fulfilled. Soon after the game started, footsteps and voices sounded from the grill room, indicating that a sizable party had arrived. Then the connecting door swung open and Weston stood on the threshold.

"Come in with us, Kelford," barked the commissioner. "I have a lot to tell you. But first, have you seen Cranston anywhere?"

"Right over there." Kelford made a movement with his thumb. "I invited him to play billiards, right after you left, and he finally accepted."

Kelford's statement pleased The Shadow. It indicated that Cranston had remained at the club all evening. Though The Shadow didn't need an alibi to cover the recent whereabouts of Cranston, he felt that one would be helpful. He was convinced of that when he saw who had come in with Weston.

Two men had met the commissioner out front and accompanied him to the grill room. The two were James Carstair and Thomas Wellwood.

Detectives had come in with them from Long Island.

THE detectives gave a concise report of the robbery that ended with the death of Roger Doone. There wasn't a question as to the murderer. The Blur had killed again.

It was bitter for Weston, as he listened, considering the false trail that he had taken. But he felt he understood why The Shadow had come to Dawson's. Obviously, The Shadow had been at Carstair's first. Weston supposed that the cloaked fighter had taken up the trail from there.

The police report was based largely upon the testimony of Carstair and Wellwood. They went into further details for Weston's benefit. What baffled Carstair was how the Blur had learned of the opportunity for crime.

"No one could have known that the funds were in my possession," asserted Carstair. "I mentioned it to no one, and warned my two associates to be careful. Wellwood, here, can testify to that. He was with Doone when I warned them both."

Wellwood was nodding, but his lips were twitching as though he wanted to speak. The Shadow decided to drop a bombshell before one came his own way.

"Wellwood did not follow your admonition," he declared. "When he was here at the club, early this evening, he mentioned the matter to me." Turning to Weston, The Shadow added: "That was shortly after you went to Dawson's, commissioner."

"Before you began your billiard game with Kelford?"

"Yes," came Cranston's acknowledgment. "I ran into Wellwood upstairs. He'd come here to talk to you, but when he learned that you had gone, he decided to abide by Carstair's advice from then on. Of course, he may have discussed the subject with others before he met me —"

"With no one else, Cranston!" blurted Wellwood. "I knew you were the commissioner's friend, otherwise I would not have spoken, even to you. I'm sure I wasn't responsible for the news leaking out."

THE BLUR

The bombshell had worked. In putting Wellwood on the defensive The Shadow had diverted suspicion from himself – a good point, since it eliminated wasted time in useless investigation. Moreover, the alibi of the billiard game came in handy. It was Weston who mentioned it.

"I can vouch fully for Cranston," declared the commissioner. "I have often given him my complete confidence. To satisfy your doubts, if you have any, Wellwood, I might add that Cranston was playing billiards this evening, here at the club with Kelford."

"I haven't any doubts," returned Wellwood earnestly. "I did feel worried – guilty, in fact – when the trouble started out at Carstair's. I was so confused that I temporarily believed that any mention of the matter had brought on crime."

He turned to Carstair.

"That was why I rushed into your study," continued Wellwood. "A horrible mistake, for it set a bad example for poor Doone. If I'd only met Doone earlier, here at the club! Instead, I was late, and he had gone. Otherwise, we could have talked to Commissioner Weston before he left and the terrible outcome would have been avoided."

Looking toward Weston, The Shadow saw the commissioner nod, but there wasn't much conviction behind it. Weston was recalling how he had botched matters at Dawson's and realizing that he might have done even worse at Carstair's. Bluntly, Weston dropped his speculation and began to question Carstair.

"Your servants, Carstair. Could the facts have leaked out through them?"

"Positively not!" returned Carstair. "I brought the money in while they were out."

"You have checked on that?"

"Absolutely! It was never my practice to bring funds to the house so they couldn't have suspected it. Nor could any have been spying on me at the time. I cross-questioned them, and they bore each other out."

He reached for the report sheets and turned to the back pages. There Weston read the testimony of the servants. He'd gone through two paragraphs, when he queried:

"The dead man, Albert – what could he have learned?"

"The least of all," assured Carstair. "Read through the testimony, commissioner. You'll find that every one of the other servants can vouch for Albert, poor fellow."

SUCH evidence was doubly important, from The Shadow's viewpoint. He knew Albert to be a crook; therefore, it was plain that the false servant had been safeguarding himself through constant contact with the others.

But it was equally clear that Albert, thus engaged, could not have gotten information regarding the funds and passed it to the Blur.

There were deeper answers to the riddle. Answers that must hinge, not upon one fact, but several. Only a full view of the case – and more – could produce the real story. Matters outside the testimony would have to be considered. Conclusions could only be reached by comparing mentioned things with unmentioned possibilities.

Facts were piecing themselves together in The Shadow's keen brain, when an attendant entered to say that Mr. Cranston was wanted on the telephone. Excusing himself, The Shadow went upstairs. In a phone booth, he heard a methodical voice across the wire:

"Burbank speaking –"

It was word to The Shadow, of a sort that put all other matters in the background. When Burbank had finished, The Shadow responded:

"Report received."

Coming from the booth, The Shadow summoned the attendant.

"Take a message to Mr. Kelford," he said. "Tell him we'll have to postpone our billiard game until tomorrow."

"Yes, Mr. Cranston. Anything else?"

"Yes." A smile showed slightly on Cranston's lips. "You might remind Commissioner Weston not to forget his alpaca coat."

The added suggestion was merely The Shadow's way of adding a light touch to Cranston's departure, so that no one would suspect that a serious matter had summoned him away. But the semblance of a smile had faded from The Shadow's firm lips by the time he reached the outer door.

Never had word to The Shadow been more urgent. Burbank's call to Cranston concerned the fate of Margo Lane!

CHAPTER XIV. THE WAY OF THE SHADOW

PASSING minutes maddened Terry Radnor. His hotel room cramped him to the point where he wanted to hammer at the walls. Ever since leaving the house where Margo was a prisoner, he had scarcely been able to restrain his urge to return and attempt her rescue.

He'd thought of it while riding with Roy Marne. He might have overpowered Marne, taken the car and gone back to handle Marty Callew, man to man.

How he'd managed to restrain himself, Terry didn't know. Something told him that the shortest course wasn't the best one. Maybe he wouldn't have been able to overpower Marne. The fellow might be tougher than he looked; and he had a gun, which Terry didn't. Then, again, Callew might have provided trouble. It would have been great to conquer both and find out that one or the other was the Blur.

But suppose the Blur was Hector Dunvin!

In that case, the rescue of Margo would have been a give-away to the master mind. There would never be any chance to find the Blur; he would vanish permanently. It was better to count on The Shadow, since Margo had told Terry how to reach him. So Terry had neatly played his part while traveling with Marne. Once back in the hotel, he made the Burbank call.

It was helpful.

THE BLUR

In the dimness of his room, where he had turned on only a floor lamp, Terry could recall the methodical tone of Burbank. The sort of voice that inspired confidence. It meant that Terry's message would be relayed, and handled quite efficiently. But that was a half hour ago.

Had Burbank's steady tone been a blind? Had he voiced suspicions to his chief, The Shadow? Could this mean that Terry was regarded only as a man to be mistrusted?

It might well be. His story had flaws. He'd managed to convince Margo of its truth, but not without some difficulty. In talking to Burbank, Terry had been necessarily terse. Moreover, he might have given reason for mistrust.

Though stating that he was at the Hotel Metrolite, Terry hadn't named the address where Margo was held prisoner. True, Burbank hadn't demanded it, but that might be due to roused suspicions.

What Terry didn't know was that Burbank had also received a telephoned report from Harry Vincent, The Shadow's agent stationed in the Metrolite lobby. That call told that Terry had actually returned to the hotel. It was a better convincer than anything that Terry might have added.

Staring across the room, Terry rubbed his eyes. They were tired; they still seemed to quiver from the after-effects of that blinking light at Carstair's. Perhaps the pummeling from the servants and the crash of the coupe were also contributing factors. For the door of the room, lighter-shaded than the wall paper, kept clouding as Terry watched it.

He could almost believe that he saw the door move. Staring again Terry had to squint because his eyes were really tricking him. The door was really dark, and staying so.

Actual blackness swirled Terry's way. The thing was startling, reminding him of a motion picture in which he had seen a cloud of smoke rise from a bottle and transform itself into the figure of a genie.

Then, before Terry's eyes, this blackness did the same, but in a fashion even more amazing. It stayed black as it assumed a living shape. Out of the darkness came the burning glow of orbs that Terry suddenly recognized as eyes. An instant later, he determined the figure's outline. It was a human shape, cloaked entirely in black.

The Shadow!

TERRY sank back in his chair. An unseen hand drew another chair beside him. Swinging fully into the lamplight, The Shadow rendered himself quite visible as he sat down to interview the man who had sent word from Margo Lane.

It wasn't a case of Terry repeating a detailed story, The Shadow spoke first, and his tone was probing, bringing responses from Terry. Facts that The Shadow already knew came to the fore: he seemed to be merely piecing Terry's testimony into the pattern.

Terry didn't realize that in supplying the names of Marne and Callew, he was giving new information. Instead, he received the impression that The Shadow was checking his story from those men he mentioned.

In the case of Dunvin, it was partly so. The Shadow had actually seen Dunvin, and identified the man from Terry's description. The interview ended shortly, when Terry supplied the all-important address of the house where Margo was at present.

THE BLUR

Rising, The Shadow turned toward the door. This time, as he paused, Terry could distinguish the cloaked form. Terry was rising, too, but a gloved hand pressed him back toward his chair.

"Remain here," ordered The Shadow. "You have done well, so far. Continue with your policy of allaying the Blur's suspicions."

"But it won't be any use," protested Terry. "As soon as you rescue Miss Lane, the Blur will know I had a hand in it. If I come along, I might be able to help. The more of them we capture, the better."

"There may be no rescue," declared The Shadow. "In that case there will be no captures. I prefer to plan for the future. Your part is to persuade the Blur that Margo Lane is actually in my service."

"But if she remains a prisoner –"

"So much the better. You can then suggest that a trap be arranged, in case I come to rescue her. The idea will please the Blur."

The ingenuity of the plan struck home to Terry. The Shadow was right: it would intrigue the Blur. While Terry was nodding his understanding, he realized that The Shadow was more than right. The Shadow was gone.

NEAR the block where the old house stood, a car sidled to the curb and parked in darkness. From it emerged the cloaked figure of The Shadow. He was followed by Harry Vincent, who was long skilled in The Shadow's service. However, Harry kept well behind his chief, waiting for signal blinks from The Shadow's flashlight.

They came, in tiny twinkles of green and red, to guide Harry's moves and stops.

Well trained though he was, Harry couldn't hope to copy The Shadow's flitting tactics. The Shadow wanted to be sure that all was clear before letting Harry show himself. At last, a green blink brought Harry across the street to a doorway, where The Shadow pressed him into shelter.

The door opened; The Shadow had already picked its lock. They entered the house next door to the one that Terry had named.

If there were occupants in the house, none showed themselves. The Shadow's creep up a dingy stairway was absolutely noiseless; Harry's nearly so. They reached the top floor, where Harry boosted The Shadow up to a trapdoor.

Working it open, The Shadow went through to the roof; leaning down, he hauled Harry up through. The powerful feat didn't even seem to strain him.

They dropped to the next roof, which was a trifle lower. There was no trap in the roof, so The Shadow swung from the rear of it, to find a window with his feet. It was here that Harry took over an important duty.

From the roof edge, he watched the rear street, where a lamp threw an unwelcome gleam up to the very window where The Shadow was forcing an entry. It would be bad if the Blur or any of his followers should happen to arrive at the house by the rear street, while The Shadow was thus engaged. A chance glance upward would enable them to sight the intruder in black.

Therefore, it would be bad – for them. Harry was a crack shot up to a considerable range. He'd see to it that The Shadow wasn't disturbed, though such an emergency procedure would force a change in The Shadow's

plans.

No one showed up while Harry watched. The Shadow worked the shutters open silently, and handled the window next. Sliding through, he found himself in a small, empty room, which led to a hall. The hallway was deserted, and The Shadow saw a transom from which light issued. It was Margo's prison room.

Probing the lock with a tweezer shaped pick, The Shadow soon turned it in noiseless style. He whispered a low-toned greeting from the crack of the door.

Margo gave an eager response which she promptly stifled. Entering, The Shadow found her sitting on the edge of her cot. Margo was very glad to see The Shadow.

"Ready to go," she declared. "I was sure you'd be along. The sooner I'm out of this place –"

"The worse," supplied The Shadow. "It would be better if you stayed a while longer.

He told Margo why. Rather reluctantly, she agreed. She brightened when The Shadow added new assurance by giving her a small, compact automatic.

"I'm leaving Vincent on duty," informed The Shadow. "Others will join him. A single shot will bring them. So, if things go wrong, you can start a surprise attack from the inside. One that will receive immediate cooperation."

"But suppose nothing does go wrong?" Margo queried. "When do I use the gun, in that case?"

"You won't have to use it," The Shadow replied, "unless I start to do some heavy shooting on my next trip. In that case, you can supply the co-operation."

THE SHADOW left, and Margo was barely able to hear the click when he relocked the door. Listening at the stairs, The Shadow heard sounds below. A door opened and closed between footfalls that differed. One guard was evidently relieving another, but they were using the front door. The Shadow made no effort to learn which man had entered and who had left.

Instead, he found a rear stair, and started down as soon as he heard footfalls coming up the front. He had barricaded the window that he entered, so he chose a new exit, this one in the cellar. The cellar windows were heavily barred from the inside, but after releasing a catch to swing a grating open, The Shadow faked it very neatly with a tiny wedge of metal.

The catch looked tightly in place, but a hard jolt would knock it loose. This was the quick route that Harry and other agents would use, if Margo fired a signal shot.

Crossing the street, The Shadow found an empty house, with high stone steps that afforded excellent shelter. He tilted his flashlight upward and gave green blinks.

Harry saw the signal and came down through the house next door to Margo's. Getting another flash of green, he crossed the street and joined The Shadow, who posted him beneath the sheltering steps. As soon as his agent was properly placed, The Shadow departed.

A gliding shape, no more than a ghostly streak of blackness whenever it neared an area of light. Such was The Shadow on his return trip to Terry's hotel to tell his new ally that the plan was under way. A plan that might trap the Blur instead of The Shadow!

Such was The Shadow's prospect for the future as a whispered laugh foretold. But The Shadow would have curbed that mirth had he known of something that was happening in his absence from the Hotel Metrolite.

In preparing a future pitfall for the Blur, The Shadow had missed a present opportunity to meet the master foe who had twice escaped him!

CHAPTER XV. THE BLUR DECIDES

AGAIN, Terry Radnor was to blame himself for something that wasn't actually his fault. He'd gone down to the Metrolite coffee shop after The Shadow left him, and if he'd ordered a real meal, he would have stayed there longer. Long enough perhaps to pave the way to an immediate settlement of the Blur question considering that The Shadow was due to return.

As it happened Terry ordered only a sandwich and a cup of coffee and finished both quite briefly. Having nothing else to do, he returned to his room. Unlocking the door he took one step forward – and froze. He had left the lone lamp burning and one glimpse of it was enough.

The lamp was blinking!

Spotty light showed a figure seated in the very chair that The Shadow had earlier occupied. A hunched man who might have been anyone except for the purred voice that Terry heard. Only one man used that smooth yet forced tone. This visitor was the Blur in person.

"Close the door," invited the voice, as though the room belonged to its on owner. "Then come over here. I want to talk to you."

Terry complied with both requests. Much though he hated the creepy light, it had one merit: that of obscuring his own face as well as the Blur's. Terry was glad that the Blur couldn't see his expression as he approached, for it was very much a give-away.

One meeting with The Shadow had so relieved Terry that he wasn't pretending any longer. He knew he would have to play a part when he again met the Blur but he hadn't supposed that the man he falsely acknowledged as chief would call at the hotel.

Fortunately, whatever surprise Terry displayed by his hesitation at the door was expected by the Blur. The purred tone had something of a chuckle in its greeting. The Blur was always pleased when the blinker startled people. It took a lot of doses to get used to it. Therefore the Blur made due allowance for Terry

"You did a good job Radnor," the Blur commended. "Tell me more about the girl. Why do you think she was out at Carstair's?"

Terry hesitated. If only he knew how The Shadow had fared on his visit to Margo! Then a sudden comparison struck him; one that gave him a sure index to his proper course. Remembering The Shadow, Terry compared him with the Blur.

The Shadow hadn't needed tricky lights to hide his identity and cover his arrival. Recollection of the blackish cloud that had materialized into a living form – seen yet still unknown – was proof enough. Added to that, The Shadow hadn't occupied himself by asking questions. He had taken over the burden of conversation on his own.

THE BLUR

The Blur used the blinker. He sneaked into rooms when people were out and waited for them. He wanted to know what their opinions were instead of probing their minds for them. The Blur didn't rate in the same class as The Shadow.

IF The Shadow had a plan, he wasn't likely to change it. He did have a plan and Terry had a part in it. The thing to do was play the part without delay.

Terry turned his hesitation to advantage. He spoke as though he had just given the Blur's question deep consideration and wanted to be sure that the opinion was well-weighed before expressing it.

"I'd say she was working with The Shadow," asserted Terry. "She certainly handled that car as though she'd played cops and robbers before."

"Do you know who she is?" inquired the Blur.

"She called herself Margo Lane," Terry replied. "I don't see why she'd cover up her right name. I told her mine."

The Blur gave an oily laugh.

"I've had some word on Margo Lane," he told Terry. "She is quite a friend of a clubman named Lamont Cranston, who, in turn, happens to be a friend of the police commissioner."

It shot to Terry's mind that Lamont Cranston might be The Shadow. Then, viewing it the other way about, he decided just the opposite.

Merely as the commissioner's friend, a man such as Cranston might have decided to play amateur sleuth. Possibly the commissioner had sent him out to Carstair's, just to check on a scene where crime might threaten. Had the Carstair set-up loomed as an immediate menace, the commissioner would probably have gone in person.

The Blur disturbed Terry's reflections by reverting to the subject of Margo.

"The Lane girl will be missed," the master crook declared. "You were right in suggesting that we keep the police guessing. But the policy won't work very long."

THE suggestion mentioned by the Blur was one that Terry had made to Marne and Callew. Did this mean that one or the other was the Blur?

Staring at the man before him, Terry tried to trace the features of Roy Marne on the countenance that the swift-changing light rendered faceless. He thought in terms of Marne, because the fellow was something of a society man and therefore would have known much about such persons as Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane.

Failing to identify the Blur as Marne, Terry tried picturing him as Marty Callew, on the chance that the gambler would also know some inside facts. That failed, too. The drab visage of the Blur, so rendered by the blinding light, would probably do better for Hector Dunvin, who could have heard from either Marne or Callew.

Still, Terry wasn't satisfied. In this light, the Blur's identity remained a mystery.

THE BLUR

"If we release the girl," declared the Blur, in his always evasive tone "she will tell all she knows, including your name. On the contrary, if we hold her prisoner, a huge search will begin. One that may hamper future plans. I can take measures for either eventuality, but I would prefer a little more time."

He was practically asking for another suggestion from Terry, who had proven himself quite capable in that line. Terry took him up.

This was the chance to pave the path for The Shadow!

"Why not work on The Shadow?" he queried. "Instead of the police? That ought to give us time."

"Just how?" the Blur asked. "And why?"

"I guess there's no way to reach The Shadow," admitted Terry, glumly. Then, eagerly: "Yes, there may be! Through this man Cranston!"

"Do you think he is The Shadow?"

"I suppose he could be," returned Terry, "but it makes no difference. Whatever Cranston learns, The Shadow can probably find out. We know, for certain, that The Shadow was out at Carstair's."

Terry paused, only to warm up the better to his subject. The Shadow would certainly find out whatever happened in this case, because Terry could personally tell him.

"If Cranston hears from Margo," assured Terry, "he'll try a rescue on his own. If he does, you'll have another prisoner. Or, if The Shadow shows up before or after Cranston you can turn the place into a trap for him!"

The Blur arose, clapped an approving hand on Terry's shoulder.

"I can handle The Shadow personally," he purred. "Nevertheless your idea is a good one. It will, as you say, give us more time. We need until tomorrow night, and then" – he was ending with a satisfied laugh – "we shall use your scheme as a decoy, rather than a trap. It will keep The Shadow absent while we stage another major crime."

From the tone, Terry presumed that the crime in question would be a final one. But there was no chance to inquire. The Blur was at the door; opening it, he stepped into the hall, turning as he did, so that Terry couldn't see his face against the outer light. Shoulders oddly hunched, the Blur swung the door shut and was gone.

Terry started to his feet, then stopped. No use to pursue the Blur. Like as not, he would have a gun ready if Terry did. It was better to make the most of the foundation already laid. The Blur had spoken of tomorrow night. That would be the time to properly snare him. The Shadow would find a way to do it.

Annoyed by the blinking lamp Terry turned on the other lights to see if they flickered, too. They didn't, but the lamp kept on, though its flickers now looked feeble.

Terry unscrewed the lamp bulb and gave the lamp a tip. A disk of metal dropped from the inverted socket. It was nothing but a simple contraption that the Blur had inserted while waiting for Terry's return.

Terry put the bulb back into its socket. It had just begun to glow, when someone pressed the switch to the other lights. Turning quickly, Terry felt the grip of The Shadow, who had just arrived.

THE BLUR

PICKING up the cheap blinker gadget, Terry showed it to his new chief and ruefully recounted the details of the Blur's visit. When Terry finished, The Shadow supplied a strangely whispered laugh.

From that tone, Terry knew that all was to The Shadow's liking. This talk of crime tomorrow night was perfect. Since Terry had gained the Blur's full trust, he would certainly be used in connection with the crime, and therefore could supply The Shadow with important information.

Things were working toward the real goal that The Shadow sought – an opportunity to trap the Blur in actual crime and reveal him, red-handed and red-faced, as the criminal he was.

Things were working well.

Margo Lane could so have testified. In her prison room, she heard a key turn in the lock. Gripping the fold of her dress where she had stowed the little automatic, Margo waited to view her visitor. It might be Marne or Callew; possibly, another man named Dunvin, mentioned by The Shadow when he made his visit.

As the door swung inward, Margo was startled by a sudden blink of the lights. It continued intermittently, the rapid flickers producing a grayish haze. The man who entered the room seemed crouched, and his face was indistinguishable. He was the Blur!

His tone smoothly persuasive, the Blur extended a sheet of paper and suggested that Margo write a note to her friend Cranston, telling him that she was in safe hands, following her automobile accident in Long Island.

Margo wasn't surprised that the Blur knew of Cranston. Crooks had found her automobile licenses, and once knowing who she was, could easily have learned who her acquaintances were.

"You might say that you are recuperating," suggested the Blur. "That by tomorrow night you will be ready to leave, and will have someone call Mr. Cranston at his club, telling him where to come and get you."

Margo wrote the note, smiling grimly as she did. She was thinking in terms of a trap, one that would be set for The Shadow, but which he could reverse with Margo's aid. The Blur couldn't see her smile in the twinkly gloom. Then the Blur was bowing, as he left bearing the folded note. The moment that the door closed, the lights ceased their blinks.

A long wait for Margo Lane, but she felt it would be worth it, considering that it would mean the trapping of the Blur. Had Margo been able to see the true face of her latest visitor, the smile that it wore all during the conversation, her opinion would have changed.

The Blur had already made his plans for the morrow; plans of a sort that he was sure would frustrate all endeavors of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S HOUR

THERE was a note in Cranston's box at the Cobalt Club, one that had been lying there all day, much to the annoyance of Commissioner Weston, who recognized it as a token that Cranston wasn't around the club. Weston wanted to chat with his old friend; for a good reason.

The law had reached its limit, which, in this case, was the lengthy list of prominent names that Marvin Kelford had provided. Not one of the persons listed could be picked out as the Blur, from a mere preliminary investigation. Kelford had promised a new list, of less important persons that he had met abroad, but Weston felt that it would be hit or miss.

THE BLUR

The commissioner wanted to give the original list a better raking over, and felt that Cranston was the one man who could help. He knew many prominent people personally, and could approach them without arousing their suspicions; something which would be difficult for Kelford, because, in most cases, he was merely an acquaintance of those individuals that he had named.

Since Cranston hadn't come in, Weston decided to go out and do a few errands. As luck had it, Cranston came into the club immediately afterward. He picked the note from the box, and was told that the commissioner was looking for him. Not seeing Weston around, The Shadow went downstairs to the billiard room.

He found Kelford there, and the billiard fiend proposed that they resume the interrupted game of the night before. Cranston was reading his note, as he nodded. He started to put it in his pocket, then studied it again.

"Something worrying you, Cranston?" inquired Kelford sympathetically. "If you'd rather postpone the game —"

Cranston interrupted with a head-shake.

"A note from a friend," he said, "who wants a reply, but didn't have sense enough to include a return address. I suppose I'll get a phone call later. I'd better send word up to the desk. Where's the boy?"

Kelford hammered the floor with the butt of his billiard cue. Persistent pounding brought a sleepy-faced lad from another room. Kelford sent him upstairs with word that Mr. Cranston expected a telephone call.

"There's the Cobalt Club for you," grunted Kelford sourly. "When I took over this forgotten billiard room, I didn't know there was a boy working in it. I found him asleep one day, and he was more surprised than I was. He thought the billiard table was an antique exhibit. He'd never seen anyone use it before.

"So I let him go back to sleep. I have to wake him every now and then, to tell him how many hours I've used the table, so he can have the steward put it on my bill."

They started the billiard game.

The boy returned and went back to sleep in the other room. He had, at least, reported to the desk, because, ten minutes later, an attendant appeared to announce a telephone call; but it happened to be for Kelford not for Cranston.

THE SHADOW was practicing some special shots when Kelford returned. Kelford was rubbing his grayish hair, and his strong-jawed face looked troubled. He gestured for The Shadow to keep on practicing.

"I've something to think over, Cranston," said Kelford. "A larger problem, I suppose, than that note you received from a forgetful friend. It's a confidential matter, one that I shouldn't mention. Wait, though" — his eyes steadied across the billiard table — "I think you're just the man that I can confide in."

Cranston's eyes became quizzical. Kelford explained.

"It's something like the Wellwood situation," he said. "You remember how Wellwood asked your advice regarding the meeting out at Carstair's, and wondered if he should tell the police commissioner?"

The Shadow nodded.

"Well, I'm in the same boat," continued Kelford. "My banker, Custis Norridge, is going over trust funds with his directors, and is afraid the Blur has learned about it."

"How could the Blur know?"

"Norridge and a few others have heard about those lists of names I gave to Weston. It happens that Norridge's bank, the Northside Trust Co., handles a great many prominent accounts. Naturally, if one such person should be the Blur –"

Kelford shrugged, to indicate the rest.

"Why should this occasion be so important?" came Cranston's query. "Bank presidents often meet with their directors."

"They're going over the trust funds," responded Kelford. "They keep them in a huge vault, along with the safe-deposit boxes. I have a box there, myself" – he lifted the end of his watch chain and dangled a key – "and this is the key to it. I also have a small trust fund there."

"Is your account one of those under advisement, at the present meeting?"

Kelford gave a self-disparaging laugh to Cranston's question.

"I'm just small fry," said Kelford. "My fund is only five figures, not six. The large ones are under advisement tonight, and it means large transfers of cash and negotiable securities. That's why they're worried."

"Why don't you tell the commissioner?"

Kelford set his elbows on the billiard table and thrust his strong jaw forward.

"For the same reason that you didn't tell him about Wellwood," Kelford declared. "He isn't around, and I'm afraid that if he was, he wouldn't take the proper course. He'd go over to the Northside Trust with a lot of fanfare, which is just what they don't want."

"Can't you see, Cranston, that such protection would mark the place in the future? I wouldn't be thanked for it. No, sir!" Swinging about, Kelford reached for his billiard cue, adding emphatically: "I'm tired of seeing Weston muddle everything I tell him!"

During Kelford's outburst, The Shadow had been conscious of footfalls in the adjoining room that terminated with the opening of the door just as Kelford turned to get the billiard cue. A brusque voice interjected:

"So I muddle everything, do I?"

KELFORD turned, his face reddening, as he saw Commissioner Weston. Then, catching a flare of Weston's own indignation, Kelford blurted:

"Yes, commissioner, you do! I'll be frank about it. I haven't liked the way you handled those names I gave you. Somewhere in the list is the one you want, and you've missed it like a lawn mower skipping over a grasshopper!"

"Why... why" – Weston's purpling face made Kelford's redness pale in comparison – "why, this is outrageous, Kelford! When did I ever ask you for direct advice?"

THE BLUR

"The time you went to Dawson's," countered Kelford. "I said it was a hoax, and so did Cranston, I'm glad you brought that up, commissioner, because Cranston is right here to support me." He swung to The Shadow. "Didn't we both give the commissioner the same opinion?"

The Shadow nodded. Weston started a stream of excuses, claiming that the Dawson episode had been more of a hoax; but that only put him in deeper. He had finally to admit that the trip had been a serious mistake, since it had nearly cost his own life, along with that of Inspector Cardona.

"I'll be reasonable, Kelford," declared the commissioner, in a modified tone. "Suppose I put it this way. I'll use discretion whenever you advise, provided that Cranston agrees."

Kelford promptly extended his hand.

"Shake on it, commissioner," he said. "It's what I wanted to hear. As Cranston will tell you, I'm in something of a dilemma, trying to please a batch of bank directors and you, at the same time."

In detail, he summed up the situation at the Northside Trust, and repeated the request of the bank president, Custis Norridge, for "discreet and intelligent protection," which, Kelford said, was the exact phrase Norridge used.

Weston began to understand Kelford's position. It was quite obvious that any chaos, like that at the Century Casino, Carstair's, or Dawson's, wouldn't please Norridge and his associates.

"I think we can handle this tactfully," declared Weston. "I shall go with you to the meeting, where you would naturally be admitted, since you have a trust fund at the Northside Trust. I believe that you can introduce me without alarming anyone."

"They have invited you, anyway," reminded Kelford. "We ought to be able to take others along with us. Inspector Cardona, for one, and Cranston for another."

"Sorry Kelford," The Shadow inserted. "I'm expecting that telephone call."

"Of course. I had forgotten." Kelford turned to Weston. "I'm sure, commissioner, that no one will be annoyed if you bring a squad of detectives, providing they don't come barging in as though they were going to arrest the bank directors and the trust-fund holders."

"We'll take the squad," assured Weston, "but I shall have Cardona post the men outside. It seems that we are in full accord after all, Kelford. I only hope that the Blur does decide to raid the Northside Trust Co. If he does, we'll turn this into a trap for him!"

WESTON and Kelford went out, the commissioner stating that he would call Cardona from upstairs. Returning to the billiard room, The Shadow was just settling down to a one-man game, when he heard Kelford at the doorway of the grill room.

Kelford had come back to get Weston's alpaca coat.

"He forgot it again," Kelford chuckled. "I'll take it out to his car while he's calling Cardona. If that call comes in soon, Cranston, you'll have time to drop over at the bank and join us."

The Shadow was thinking along that very line after Kelford left, but he hoped, first, to hear from Terry Radnor. After several minutes at the billiard table, The Shadow was rewarded. An attendant appeared,

announcing a telephone call.

It proved to be from Burbank. The contact man reported that Terry had heard from the Blur.

"At eight o'clock," stated Burbank, "Radnor is to be outside the Northside Trust Co. with a car, ready for a getaway. He is waiting now, outside the Metrolite."

The clock on the wall of the foyer showed twenty minutes of eight. Ample time for The Shadow to join Terry and reach the bank at the hour set for crime.

The qualms of Norridge and the bank directors were justified. The Shadow had believed they would be, from the time when Kelford had mentioned that they wanted him to arrange a conference with Commissioner Weston. A chance to rob The Northside Trust was too large an exploit for the Blur to either overlook or miss.

But there was something else that hinged upon crime's hour: the rescue of Margo Lane. The Shadow had to provide for it, too. The Blur had also told Terry to call Cranston, at the Cobalt Club, and name the address where Margo was a prisoner. Terry had left that detail to Burbank, at the latter's suggestion.

"Instructions –"

The Shadow's whispered word followed his acknowledgment of Burbank's report. The orders were brief. They ended in a low-toned laugh that Burbank understood. It meant that when crime's hour came, The Shadow would be visibly engaged in two missions, at widely separated places.

Those tasks were the rescue of Margo Lane and the trapping of a criminal called the Blur!

CHAPTER XVII. OUT OF THE TRAP

A FEW minutes before eight o'clock, a cloaked figure sidled across the street behind the house where Margo Lane was a prisoner. A man who was stooped between two parked cars near the corner, saw the moving form and raised a revolver. Posted by the Blur, the marksman had been watching for The Shadow.

Though the Blur preferred crime to the trapping of The Shadow, he had at least made some provision for his enemy's arrival. First, the Blur wanted to be sure that The Shadow came to the old house. Since that required a lookout, the Blur had decided that the man could serve as sharpshooter, too.

The huddled marksman did not fire. The Blur had cautioned him on one point: not to miss. Though he hadn't expected such a full glimpse of The Shadow, this watcher foresaw a better opportunity. If he bided his time briefly, his cloaked target would be a sure one, for The Shadow's course was straight toward one of the heavily barred cellar windows.

As the cloaked shape stooped the marksman tightened his finger for a trigger squeeze, then relaxed it in amazement. Incredibly, The Shadow had gone right through the window and only the dull glitter of steel bars remained where blackness had momentarily prevailed!

It didn't occur to the marksman that such swift mode of entry had been prearranged. He thought that he had seen a living figure melt from sight.

Ducking away, the lookout made for the corner and hurried for his own car. At least, his main job was accomplished. He had seen The Shadow. He wouldn't have to flag his chief, the Blur, by a telephone call to the place where he still could be reached.

THE BLUR

The Blur had ordered one, if The Shadow didn't appear at the house. Tonight's crime was the sort that could better be postponed, unless it was known that The Shadow was too far away to disappear.

Upstairs in the house, Margo Lane was ending a long vigil, waiting with the automatic tightly clutched in her hand. She was aiming the gun toward the door, for she heard the sounds of an approach beyond it. This time, Margo wasn't going to wait if crooks appeared, not even if the lights blinked to announce a personal visit from the Blur.

She had overheard mumbled talk through the transom – enough for her to guess that crooks were planning a new stroke of crime. Voices – Marne's, Callew's, and another, that probably belonged to Dunvin. After that, silence, except for departing footfalls, indicating that they had started on their way. Should one be returning, Margo was ready to surprise him.

A key was turning in the lock in rather probing style, which indicated that the visitor might be The Shadow, except that he took too long. Then, as the door opened Margo saw the familiar cloaked figure. She supposed that The Shadow had deliberately let her hear his arrival, after learning that there were no guards around.

Forgetting that her friend Cranston never admitted the double identity that she was sure existed, Margo gave a glad blurt:

"Lamont! You're here at –"

Breaking the sentence, Margo recoiled. This wasn't The Shadow, the way he caught his cloak collar as it started to fall, the short step he took across the threshold, and the quickness of his beckon, weren't typical of the black-clad fighter.

This was a trick on the part of the Blur! The master crook had sent an impostor to spring a fake rescue and make Margo give away what she knew about The Shadow, which, in her eagerness, she had done. But she could see that word of it didn't get back to the Blur!

Thrusting the gun toward the doorway, Margo grimly pulled the trigger. The invader, however moved more swiftly. His spring lacked the lithe certainty that was The Shadow's, but it still had agility. Instead of grabbing for Margo's gun hand, he struck her wrist aside with a sharp, stinging blow.

The shot went wide, and before Margo could insert another, the invader not only had the gun, but was spilling Margo in the corner.

She landed with a somersault, and came up breathless, to see the false Shadow removing his hat and dropping his cloak collar.

Margo was right: he wasn't Cranston. Nor was he a man who represented the Blur. Margo recognized the rather handsome face of Harry Vincent, a fellow agent in The Shadow's service!

"THAT was a close one, Margo." Harry shook his head to rid himself of the recollection. "If I hadn't known that you might have a gun handy, you'd have nipped me sure."

"Sorry, Harry," pleaded Margo. "My nerves were on edge." Then realizing that apologies were only wasting time: "We've got to reach The Shadow! Some crime is under way tonight. This was a decoy to take The Shadow off the trail!"

THE BLUR

"The Shadow knows," returned Harry, with a smile. "That's why he sent me, instead of coming himself. Your friend Terry was a find. He tipped The Shadow off to nearly everything. So come along and let's celebrate your rescue, if you can call it such. We're out of the trap – and out of tonight's game, for that matter."

Harry adjusted the cloak and put on the hat, giving a better imitation of The Shadow than he previously had. He also drew a sizable automatic.

"We'll go out by a door," he told Margo, "and keep up the act, in case the Blur put anyone on the watch. I had a sneaky feeling that someone had a bead on me while I was sliding in through the cellar window. But this time, it will be the other way about. As for the Blur's own plans, don't worry. The Shadow has started out to smear them – with Terry."

Correctly spoken were those words of Harry Vincent, because he had used the term "started out."

At that moment, The Shadow was riding in a car, with Terry at the wheel, but they hadn't quite reached the Northside Trust Building. It was a speedy car, one that the Blur had supplied for Terry, and it had an accurate clock on the dashboard. The time was exactly eight o'clock.

"Only a few blocks more," spoke Terry. "We'll be in time –"

"For the getaway," inserted The Shadow. "Those were the instructions the Blur gave you."

Terry tightened his grip on the wheel and jabbed the accelerator harder. He had overlooked that point; minutes were precious, if he expected to get The Shadow to the bank before crime began. It struck him suddenly that The Shadow wanted crime to begin, so as to make the trapping of the Blur a solid one, with proof of the master crook's misdeeds, as well as his identity.

Nevertheless, Terry correctly took The Shadow's words as a command to make the arrival as prompt as possible. This was a case where minutes that counted might chop down to seconds that would matter even more.

In the president's office at the Northside Trust Co., Commissioner Weston was having his own worries at the time when Terry was making the final spurt. Arriving with Kelford, Weston had been introduced to Custis Norridge and half a dozen bank officials. Others were present, trust–fund holders like Kelford. All seemed happy when the commissioner appeared.

Weston wasn't happy. With his arrival, Norridge adjusted glasses that he wore on a ribbon and pompously opened a large vault. In it, Weston saw the tiers of safe–deposit boxes that Kelford had mentioned all properly locked. But when Norridge opened another compartment and brought out a thick sheaf of important–looking envelopes, Weston felt alarmed.

Opened, those envelopes disclosed sheaves of thousand–dollar bills and stocks of high denominations.

These were the disbursements that the trust–fund holders were to receive. With Weston on hand, Norridge felt no qualms at displaying such solid wealth, even though it mounted to half a million dollars.

It was Weston who didn't feel at all secure. In his hurry to get to the bank with Kelford, the commissioner had outraced Inspector Cardona and the detective squad.

They were due almost any minute; but meanwhile, the sole protector of the bank was a rather fossilized watchman, who had admitted Weston and Kelford through the main banking room. It was too late, now, to

THE BLUR

suggest that Norridge stow the funds away again, for ten minutes or more, because such a request might cause alarm among the bank directors and the trust–fund holders.

Weston restrained himself, arguing inwardly that the rickety watchman could easily bridge the short time gap that remained. But his mental arguments weren't convincing.

Commissioner Weston hated hunches, because too many people, particularly Inspector Cardona, were always playing them. At this moment, Weston was having a hunch, but wouldn't admit it.

It was the reason, that hunch, for the persistence of Weston's qualms, but the commissioner wouldn't even recognize the dread that lay beneath it, until the thing he feared suddenly began to happen.

Without warning, the lights in the bank president's office began a rapid blink.

"The Blur!"

THE name sprang spontaneously from half a dozen lips. Wheeling, Weston saw the lights in the banking room, and they were flickering too. He heard a man's alarmed shout, that was broken by a thud. It was the watchman. Someone had slugged the fellow.

Bawling that all would be well, Weston tugged a revolver from his pocket. Then he sank back, with the Police Positive dangling by its trigger guard from his nerveless fingers.

Out of the misty gray had come not one invader, but half a dozen. Under the spell of the panting lights, their faces had the look of living skulls. Sketchily lined figures, they were spreading in from the doorway, and each grayish hand showed the glimmer of a gun. All weapons were pointed at Weston, because his hand, too, gave itself away by the glitter it contained.

Weston managed to shake his revolver loose from his fingers. It put a dent in the tiled floor. Spreading crooks concentrated upon the horrified bank directors and their clients. From somewhere in the gloom, a purred voice spoke.

"That was wise of you, commissioner," it said. "I assure you there will be no murder this evening. I am quite sure" – the tone had an icy touch – "that it will not be necessary. But if anyone makes a false move –"

The Blur paused in his threat. By then, he was in the open, moving forward with a crouch, wagging a gun in one hand, extending the other toward the desk. His stoop wasn't just a pose. He was reaching for the stock of envelopes and the wealth that they contained.

Before the Blur could clamp his hand upon those trophies, a frantic man sprang for him.

It was Norridge, coming from the other side of the desk. The glint of his glasses identified him, and his hand, too, was sparkling, as it came out of a desk drawer from which he had grabbed a gun.

Two of the Blur's aids lunged for him, from either side. One was aiming a revolver, the other using a like weapon to slug for Norridge's head.

The Blur saw the shine of all three weapons. With his own gun, he slashed his own follower's aiming fist. The Blur, it seemed, was charitable tonight; he was willing to let Norridge live. He certainly calculated the time element neatly. The slugging gun swung by the second crook, glanced from Norridge's head sprawling the bank president before he could fire.

THE BLUR

Slumping across the desk, Norridge let his revolver skid to the floor beyond. Norridge's glasses struck the desk; and broke, while his sharp cry, scarcely begun, changed to a moan. His gun away, the Blur stacked the envelopes and threw a faceless glance around the room.

"Leave this fellow as he is," he told his comrades, indicating Norridge. "If anyone else starts trouble, put him in the vault and slam the door. That goes for all!"

The Blur uttered the final word in a tone that brooked no challenge. Nevertheless, the challenge came. Its tone mocked the threat that the Blur had given – and more. For the author of the sinister mirth could not be seen!

His laugh arrived from somewhere near the door, away from the cowed men who were under the control of guns. But when the Blur wheeled, neither he, nor any of his men, could spot the exact location of the taunt.

As before, they were confronted by an elusive fighter who had learned to use the blurry light to better advantage than they themselves.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. TWO FROM THREE

AN imitation Shadow had escaped the Blur's false trap while performing a pretended rescue of Margo Lane. It was now the Blur's task to get out of a real trap set by The Shadow in person. This was a genuine predicament for the master crook and his crew; but even in such stress, the Blur was cool.

The Shadow had arrived late, and the Blur knew it. His raised tone didn't lose its forced purr, as he gave rapid orders to his men, commands which they heard amid the shivers of The Shadow's laugh.

They were to close in upon the sinister mirth itself, and plug The Shadow the moment he gave himself away with gun stabs. But they weren't to forget the prisoners and the orders that concerned them.

There was a brief spell of confusion. Some men were starting forward, others were shifting back, to huddle the prisoners en masse near the door of the vault. The Blur's tone came anew, as hard to trace as The Shadow's, for the master crook was copying those tactics of rapid motion that produced invisibility in the strange light.

He was grabbing his men and nudging them, starting some on their way, holding others back. He was going to show The Shadow that he, the Blur, was the real master in this artificial twilight, invented to aid crime, not to defeat it.

Out of the chaos came sudden action. The Blur had actually thrust his nearest men straight for The Shadow.

It was sheer guesswork, for the Blur couldn't see The Shadow, nor even the gun that the cloaked fighter carried, for the .45 automatic had a dull finish. But the guess worked and had The Shadow responded as the Blur hoped, the men who found him would have blasted him. But The Shadow did not fire telltale shots.

He became a living whirlwind snatching at revolvers with one free hand, delivering hard sledges with his heavy automatic. Thuds told that he was finding heads and meeting them with blows that no human skull could stand.

THE BLUR

As crooks, grotesque in the hazy light, went sprawling in a curious slow-twisting fashion, their comrades fired above them, hoping to clip The Shadow. But he was weaving through the half darkness faster than his foemen could fall. Always, his laugh was echoing from the walls of the room, more elusive with every peal.

From somewhere, the Blur responded, his tone more of a snarl than a purr. It didn't concern The Shadow. The Blur was warning reserves to watch the prisoners. Crooks swung; as they did, a man detached himself from the huddled group and flung himself upon them. Remembering the Blur's injunction, they hooked him hard and flung him into the vault.

The Shadow reached them and slugged down with his guns as they started the big door shut upon the captive. Crooks sagged, but in falling forward they clanged the door shut by their own sheer weight.

By then, another voice was bawling orders. Commissioner Weston was back into the game. Only three reserves had been watching the prisoners, and two of them were gone. Thanks to the man who had defied the Blur's threat, Weston and the others were as good as free.

They smothered the lone guard who held them, but when the fellow hit the floor, he managed to jab his gun hand upward at his attackers.

The Shadow saw the gleam of the gun and dived for it. A long reach with his automatic sufficed to smash the weapon from its owner's grasp. Then The Shadow, too, was struggling from the clutch of Weston and the excited men, who were ready to grab anyone, including each other. Wrestling from the wrangle, he came to his feet and spied hazy figures dashing through the door. Two, perhaps three, it was impossible even for The Shadow to be sure, in the crazy light. But one of them, gun in one hand, was clutching a sheaf of envelopes with the other!

OUTSIDE, Terry was waiting in the car. He'd found it hard to stay there, with all the excitement inside the bank, but he was acting on The Shadow's strictest order. To add to Terry's problem, he could hear shouts from along the street, followed by the wail of approaching sirens.

Cardona was arriving with the belated police squad, and it looked as though Terry was to be gathered in the mesh.

Then figures came lunging from the bank. How many, Terry couldn't tell, for one, coming straight his way, blocked off his view. The man sprang into the car, clutching a stack of envelopes in one hand and a gun with the other, he planted the revolver against Terry's ribs, waved the envelopes, and snarled:

"Get going!"

Terry didn't stop to guess which of three acquaintances this was. He shot the car for the corner, and made it ahead of the police. With a quick side glance, he saw why he was making the getaway. Another car was starting in the opposite direction, and it had attracted greater attention.

From the door of the bank, The Shadow spotted Terry's departure and saw that the police were after the other car. He spied the man beside Terry and caught the wave of the stacked envelopes.

Cutting across the street, The Shadow skimmed the glaring headlights of approaching squad cars, cut through an alleyway and boarded a waiting cab.

Darting in and out of streets, Terry slackened speed, to receive another snarl from the man beside him. He still wasn't sure who his companion was. It was very dark in the confines of the car.

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"We're clearing out of town," the man told him. "The chief's orders. We scatter, and go our own way. We'll all get our cut."

"I'd like mine right now!" said Terry, suddenly applying the brakes. "Why not – since you are the Blur!"

He grabbed for the gun that the man had lowered and made a side feint for the envelopes, thinking the man would try to keep them and therefore be less ready with the gun. It was a bad guess.

Terry's companion let the envelopes drop and fought to get the gun free. Rolling with him, Terry hit the handle of the door on the right. It gave, and they both went tumbling to the curb.

Terry came up quickly and dived anew for his foe. Their fall had carried them apart, and the distance was too far. Only half a dozen feet, but enough for Terry's rising opponent to bring the gun up, point-blank, before Terry could reach him. A blast came before Terry could divert his dive.

Odd that the gun burst should have seemed so distant; curious, too, that Terry felt no sensation from the bullet. Maybe both things happened when someone fired right at you. But that didn't account for the way that Terry's foe collapsed in the gutter. It happened so suddenly, that Terry sprawled right across him.

A cab jolted to a stop behind Terry's car. From it came a cloaked figure with a smoking automatic. A gloved hand with a grip like steel hauled Terry to his feet. For the first time, Terry realized that the shot hadn't been delivered by the man who was lying by the curb. The Shadow had supplied the shot that Terry heard – supplied it with deadly effect, from long range.

Terry looked at the face beside the sidewalk. He recognized the man and identified him for The Shadow.

"Marty Callew," said Terry. "He was the Blur."

Shakily, Terry opened the door of his car and indicated the stack of envelopes. Steadying Terry first, The Shadow reached for the loot that Marty had brought along. Opening the envelopes, The Shadow brought their contents into sight, and gave a low, reflective laugh.

Instead of thousand-dollar bills, and securities of equal value, the envelopes were stuffed with newspaper clippings, all of which bore headlines concerning a notorious, unidentified criminal known only as the Blur!

So Marty Callew wasn't the Blur!

He was just another decoy. This getaway was just a cover-up.

Terry wanted to sit down and think it over, right there on the curb, but The Shadow pushed him into the cab instead, and they rode away together, turning the corner just as police sirens told that officers were coming up to take a look at Terry's abandoned car and the dead man who had been a passenger in it.

A FEW blocks from the bank, they saw a throng gathering around a wrecked car. The cab stopped at The Shadow's order. Quietly, The Shadow told Terry to alight and join the group of onlookers.

Terry did so, and as he looked back he saw the cab wheel away. He thought The Shadow had gone with it, hence he paid no attention to a man in evening clothes who also joined the curious throng. Terry Radnor had never yet been introduced to Lamont Cranston.

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Police were pushing the crowd back. At the wheel of the car, Terry saw a slumped figure. The car was riddled with bullets, and so was the man in it. Terry recognized the dead man. He was Roy Marne. That meant Marne was the Blur.

Or did it?

"Move along, all of you," a cop was ordering. "This guy didn't get anything. He was just driving the car. We're looking for some other fellow, who must have beat it. Stick around, if you want. We're going to be arresting suspects, maybe!"

So Roy Marne wasn't the Blur.

Rather than be classed as a suspect, Terry moved away with the scattering throng. He found a cab and rode back to the hotel, having nowhere else to go. On the way, Terry performed some simple arithmetic.

Two from three left one. Callew and Marne were two. That left only one, Hector Dunvin, in the little game of guess—who. Terry hoped that The Shadow would catch up with Dunvin and prove him to be the Blur.

The Shadow, at that moment, was entering the Northside Trust Building in the guise of Lamont Cranston. Recognized by Joe Cardona, he was passed through to the president's office. There, he saw Commissioner Weston making a frantic search through the drawers of Norridge's desk.

"I've found them!"

Eagerly, Weston produced an old pair of tortoise-shell glasses and handed them to the bank president.

Norridge put them on and turned to the vault, where he began to turn the combination dials with meticulous care, while Weston was motioning other persons back. Seeing Cranston for the first time, the commissioner confided:

"We may be too late, Cranston. Poor Kelford —"

At that moment, Norridge opened the door of the vault. A man lay there, gasping for air. Eager hands drew him out and started to revive him. Taking a long breath, Kelford looked about, and inquired pantingly:

"Did you... get the Blur?"

"No," Weston told him. "But the Blur nearly got you. Fortunately, Norridge wasn't badly hurt; otherwise, we'd have had a difficult time opening the vault. Only Norridge knows the combination."

The case explained itself. Kelford was the man who had defied the Blur's injunction to the prisoners. Having started an attack upon the reserves, they had shoved him in the vault in keeping with the Blur's order. But the action rated Kelford as something of a hero. His bold break had enabled Weston and the rest to join forces with The Shadow.

Yet, even The Shadow had been unable to thwart the robbery. Another big bundle of boodle had gone with the Blur, marking this occasion as the greatest of the master criminal's achievement, from a financial standpoint.

They rode back to the Cobalt Club in the commissioner's car: Weston, Cranston and Kelford. The commissioner was wearing his alpaca overcoat, because Kelford had brought it from the rack in Norridge's

office. Weston and Kelford were discussing recent crime, but Cranston did not join in the gloomy chat.

The Shadow was thinking along the lines that Terry had considered earlier; how the hunt was narrowing down to a quest for the Blur alone. But The Shadow's arithmetic did not require subtraction. From crime's outset, The Shadow had thought, and still was thinking, in the terms of a single human unit.

That unit was the Blur.

CHAPTER XIX. THE FINAL CHALLENGE

COMMISSIONER WESTON strode into the Cobalt Club, with his ace inspector, Joe Cardona, tagging close behind him. Weston took a look at newspapers that the members were reading and kept straight toward the grill room. Weston didn't like the headlines, even at a distance.

The newspapers were still hammering at the question of the Blur. The fact that half of the Blur's tribe had been wiped out, with two of its lieutenants, and the rest captured, was very insignificant, considering that the chief offender was still at large, and unknown.

Criticism of Commissioner Weston was especially violent at the Cobalt Club, whose members had suffered badly from the Blur's activities. Roger Doone was dead. James Carstair and Thomas Wellwood had been robbed. Marvin Kelford had undergone imprisonment in a bank vault.

It was fortunate for Weston that he wasn't back in his dues. If his name had been posted, the members of the Cobalt Club would have used it as an excuse to oust him from their select company, permanently.

Not being a member of the club, Inspector Cardona could afford to look around and meet the frigid stares that were meant for the commissioner. In looking around, Joe saw an envelope poking from Weston's mail box, and stopped to get it.

He overtook Weston at the grill room, which was strictly deserted, for the club members had agreed to abandon it to Weston as a gentle hint that his resignation would be agreeable.

Tearing open the envelope, Weston glanced at the note it contained. From the way the commissioner stiffened, Cardona was sure that he must have been given his walking papers from the club. But such wasn't the case.

Hearing the clatter of billiard balls, Weston hurried into the adjoining room to interrupt those experts Cranston and Kelford, in the middle of a match. He waved the note in front of them, shouting:

"Look at this!"

They spread the note on the table and read it. Cranston was the first to shrug.

"Another hoax," he said coolly. "That is my opinion, commissioner, given on the assumption that you are requesting it."

"Absolutely!" agreed Kelford, dryly. "You've dropped to a new low, commissioner, paying attention to anonymous communications."

Weston grabbed up the note.

"Why, that note was signed by The Shadow!"

The commissioner stared as he finished the exclamation. He had used the word "was" quite properly. The space where Weston had seen the signature had gone entirely blank.

Kelford completed a neat three-cushion shot. He looked up.

"And who, may I inquire, is The Shadow?"

"One of the commissioner's friends," explained Cranston. "He's always dropping in and out. Where he comes, and where he goes, only he – The Shadow – knows."

"Listen to this," Weston argued. "In the note, The Shadow states that for the sum of fifty thousand dollars in cash, he will reveal the identity of the Blur and turn said malefactor over to the law. Both the money and the wanted man are to be delivered in the grill room of the Cobalt Club at midnight."

Cranston and Kelford exchanged indulgent smiles and resumed their billiard game.

"I'll learn if this is a hoax!" stormed Weston. "I'll have that cash at the time The Shadow wants it. Why, it's only about five percent of the total the Blur has stolen. I can raise it from the insurance company that has the Northside Trust account."

Wearily, Cranston replaced his cue in the rack, and Kelford decided to do the same. Both could foresee that their game would no longer be free from disturbance, with Weston on the warpath. The evening had just begun, and it was a sure fact that the commissioner would be roaring in and out until midnight.

HALF an hour later, Lamont Cranston met Terry Radnor for the first time officially. Margo Lane introduced them, and the three had dinner together. Terry heard Cranston's story of the note that Weston had received, and on this occasion, Cranston spoke in serious tone.

"Do you think The Shadow means it?" Terry inquired. Then, glumly: "But if he does, what can come as a result?"

"The Blur might," replied Cranston evenly. "News that reaches The Shadow is often learned by the Blur."

"But with all the money he has grabbed, fifty thousand will be small change to The Blur!"

"He may regard this as his chance to meet The Shadow."

Cranston's statement impressed Terry. Soon after Margo's friend had left, Terry decided that he ought to be going back to his hotel. He had an idea that he would find The Shadow there. He did.

Seated just away from the glow of the lamplight, The Shadow explained exactly what he wanted done. On Terry's part, it involved a trip to the Cobalt Club. It had only one obstacle: the chance of a meeting with Commissioner Weston.

"I shall handle that," The Shadow told Terry. "I can check on Weston, and send due warning if he starts back to the club too soon. But be careful that no one else sees you. You are supposed to have cleared town."

As Cranston, The Shadow caught up with Weston at Norridge's apartment. Kelford was with the commissioner. Weston had persuaded him to come along and help persuade the bank president to arrange for

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the funds The Shadow wanted. Norridge finally agreed to call the insurance company. The call produced results.

"They're interested," declared Norridge, as he hung up the telephone. "The money will arrive at the club, in an armored truck, within an hour. It's getting late, gentlemen. I propose that we start over to the club."

By that time, Terry was leaving the Cobalt Club. He came out through a service entrance and found Margo waiting in her coupe, which had undergone a very fine repair job.

"It was easy," Terry told her. "That chap Burbank really did most of the work. Did you ever meet him?"

Margo shook her head.

"There comes Burbank now," remarked Terry, pointing to the door that he had recently left. "No. That chap is going into the club! Burbank should be coming out."

"Someone did come out –"

"That man isn't Burbank!" Terry made a grab for the car door. "It's Hector Dunvin, and he's going in! I'd know his face anywhere, except when he's passing himself as the Blur! Wait here and –"

"We'll both wait," Margo interrupted. "The Shadow is the one who wants to meet the Blur. You've already done your part, Terry – until later."

Terry settled back into the car. Margo decided that a drive around the adjoining blocks would be advisable. It wouldn't be long until midnight, the time when The Shadow expected the Blur to accept his challenge to a final duel, with fifty thousand dollars as a trivial stake.

THE armored truck was waiting when the commissioner's car arrived in front of the Cobalt Club. Staid club members stared when they saw Weston stride by, huddling a wrapped package under the fancy alpaca coat that he was wearing. Since Cranston and Kelford were among those who accompanied the commissioner, the club members eased back in their chairs.

As before, the grill room was deserted. Weston plunked the cash on a table and looked about. He posted Cardona at the entrance to the kitchen, and asked Cranston to cover the stairs. Kelford was delegated to watch the door of the billiard room. As for Norridge, who had insisted upon coming along, Weston decided that he could also sit by the table and help guard the money that the commissioner intended to keep under his personal and constant eye.

While Weston was studying the lights in the grill room, Cranston took the alpaca coat and hung it on the rack in a dark corner. All the corners of the grill room were dark, but Weston had expressed a preference for floor lamps only. There were side brackets in the grill room, but they were very seldom used.

Since The Shadow was expected, it was proper to keep the setting normal, particularly since The Shadow was credited with liking subdued light whenever he made one of his rare public appearances.

The wait began. Weston showed traces of annoyance when Cranston lighted a cigarette and Kelford did the same. Looking toward Cardona, the commissioner was glad to see that his star inspector was taking the occasion quite seriously.

If Weston had known what was going on behind Joe's poker face, he would have changed that opinion. Outside of Weston, himself, the one man who was really tense was Norridge.

With only half a minute to go, Weston solemnly opened the package and spread its contents well across the table. He wanted the money where it could be seen, and the bundle was too compact to make a proper show. This was a rare occasion, The Shadow coming in person to deliver up the Blur.

Eyes on the watch, Weston saw all three hands point straight upward. Hour, minute, and second – all meant midnight.

At that instant, the floor lamps in the grill room of the Cobalt Club began to blink!

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S REWARD

THE phenomenon stunned Commissioner Weston. He couldn't believe it possible, at first. Then, amid those quick-blinking lights, he saw the whole thing clearly. The Blur had tricked him! It was the master crook who had sent the note calling for the reward, and added a signature that Weston had attributed to The Shadow!

How had the Blur guessed that The Shadow frequently signed notes with a special disappearing ink? Weston had recalled that fact after the signature on the present note had vanished. Ruefully, he realized that any fact that he might know could also be known to the Blur.

There was still a way to thwart the Blur. He hadn't yet arrived, nor would he, if the guarding men stayed at their posts. Gazing from door to door, the commissioner tried to make out the figures beside them, but they were too distant to be seen in the rapid blend of black and light.

"Stay where you are, men!" Weston ordered. "Be ready for the Blur! You'll see him as soon as he sees you!"

Despite his bluff tone, Weston doubted his own words. The Blur was used to this light, and would profit by it. Weston regretted that he had stationed Cranston and Kelford at posts of danger. Such work belonged to others, like Cardona. Cranston's case worried him even more than Kelford's. Weston esteemed Cranston as one of his oldest friends.

Concern for Cranston was wasted. He had already left his post. Back turned, The Shadow was sidling through the weird haze to the corner where Weston's alpaca coat was hanging. From beneath the commissioner's overcoat, The Shadow brought out a slouch hat and a black cloak, which Burbank had placed there for him.

Whipping into those garments, he moved from the corner. Fully attired as The Shadow, he was, in effect, invisible. But by getting his black garb, The Shadow had deserted the stairway door, leaving that route wide open.

Weston had risen beside his table. He and Norridge were holding revolvers, with their other hands clamped on the outspread money, as though they were playing a game.

It was a game of blind-man's bluff. That was proven when a voice spoke at their very shoulders. Both had heard that purr before. It was the tone of the Blur.

"I must relieve you of that cash," the Blur told them. "Hands off, or I may have to dispense with your lives, as well. Sorry that I must trouble you for so trifling a sum. We might term it a mere wager between myself and The Shadow."

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Hands moved away. The money crinkled as the Blur gathered it. He was moving his gun from side to side as a threat to the two men at the table. Slowly retiring, he added:

"The lights will continue their flashes long after I have gone. They are blinking all through the club. The device that regulates them has been placed where it will take a long time to find. So do not expect any assistance, even from your friend, The Shadow."

The purr carried a taunt as biting as The Shadow's own sinister whisper. It was the Blur's request for The Shadow to show himself, if he so chose.

In a sense, the duel had begun, for there were two figures moving in the maddening gloom. If The Shadow happened to be stalking the Blur, his foe was returning the favor.

To offset The Shadow's prowling skill, the Blur was adopting a simple, but effective, system. Stooping low, he was picking a course among the tables, which made it impossible even for The Shadow to locate him in the spotty light.

This duel was The Shadow's own invitation, and the Blur had already gathered in the money that The Shadow had defined as a reward. Unless The Shadow produced the Blur, his reputation as a crime smasher would, in its turn, be smashed.

THERE was a scrape from a table that brought a sudden shift from another corner. The scrape was The Shadow's; the shift, the Blur's. Neither profiting sufficiently, The Shadow gave a whispered laugh that might have come from any spot in the room. The Blur's tigerish snarl was a response that proved equally elusive.

Again, The Shadow moved. This time, a patch of blackness flitted across a blinking lamp. The Blur made another shift, below the light level, but he didn't fire. He'd located The Shadow well enough to make the stalking the other way about. He was creeping closer to the place where he was sure he would find his cloaked foe.

Slight though the sounds the Blur made, The Shadow heard him. His laugh came suddenly, in strident tone, so close that it made the Blur spin full about. There was more to that laugh than a challenge. It was followed by a sudden click from darkness. The Shadow had pressed a switch somewhere along the door.

A dazzle filled the room. The light had come back to normal, so sharply that it startled all who saw it, except one. He was The Shadow. His laugh, this time, came from an absolute location, the door of the billiard room.

Half huddled beside the table, Weston saw The Shadow. So did Norridge, while the commissioner was dragging him down to safety. From the rear doorway that he guarded, Cardona looked in the same direction. The eyes of all three followed the pointing barrel of the Shadow's gun.

It was straight across the room, toward the stairway door where Cranston should have been. But instead of Cranston, the viewers saw Kelford, turning with gun in hand, an evil snarl trickling from his lips.

Mingling anger with surprise, Kelford's savage features proved the guilt that his action indicated. He was trapped in the one element he feared – that of full light.

Not even The Shadow's laugh was needed to back this proof that Marvin Kelford was the Blur!

Nevertheless, the laugh came, and the witnesses saw why. Kelford was staring stupidly at the lights. He couldn't understand them. The lamps were still blinking, yet the light remained constant. Kelford's eyes went

to the wall brackets. They were flickering, too, in reverse tune to the flashing lamps!

Those alternating blinks produced a normalcy, offsetting the Blur's pet gadget. It seemed that The Shadow had his share of gadgets, too.

"A SIMPLE device," declared The Shadow. "A photoelectric control, which was installed while your man was meddling with the other circuit. It works perfectly, Kelford, because the blinks of your lights operate it automatically."

The Shadow made a gesture with his gun, to remind Kelford that the term "automatic" had more than one meaning. Kelford's own hand kept lowering, as though the weight of its revolver drew it down.

"Your murder of Tex Winthorp was obvious," declared The Shadow, "because your name was on his list of preferential guests, and you were at the casino that night. He would have remembered you, when the police talked to him. Since silence was your motive for one murder, I considered it in regard to another.

"You killed Roger Doone, because he, too, would have spoken your name. It was a subtler case, but a parallel explained it. The fact that Wellwood mentioned Carstair's money to Cranston, was the clue. Doone was here, earlier. Knowing that you were in the commissioner's confidence, he spoke to you, as Wellwood did to Cranston, afterward."

Commissioner Weston came up from behind the table and stood with arms akimbo, forgetting that he had a gun. He was staring straight at Kelford and saw the effect of The Shadow's accusation. The logic was the sort that no one could dispute, not even the man of murder who had called himself the Blur.

"Subtle of you, Kelford," taunted The Shadow, "to insist that someone from abroad had taken to crime upon his return. Your name should have headed the list of suspects; but you wisely left it off entirely and its absence passed unnoticed. As for your billiard-table alibi, it is worthless.

"Cranston had a similar alibi, which he will testify was a false one, which you had to support to hide the falsity of your own. You will observe that Cranston is absent. I deemed it best that he should leave his post. You would be glad to get rid of Cranston – as glad as you would be to get rid of me."

Only Kelford caught the subtlety of that statement. He began a snarl that ended with the pressure of a gun muzzle against his neck. Terry Radnor had stepped in from the stairway, to supply that cold touch. This was to be part of Terry's vindication.

"Dunvin is waiting outside, Kelford," said Terry. "All bound and gagged, in the commissioner's car. The Shadow's men took him, after he had rigged the blinker, and put him away to cool. You let two of your stooges die, but there's still one to testify against you."

The Shadow put away his automatic, but his hand remained beneath the edge of his cloak. He was still watching Kelford, though he had turned to face Weston and Norridge.

"Last night explains itself," declared The Shadow. "The robbery at the Northside Trust began as an inside job. Kelford was himself at the start. He became the Blur, and then reverted to himself again. He wanted to go into that vault, so he could plant the stolen funds in his own safe-deposit box, where he probably put the cash that he took from Tex and Carstair –"

Kelford, himself, gave interruption. He was away from Terry's gun, shouting defiance as he drove for The Shadow. He still had his own revolver and was raising it wildly, as The Shadow wheeled away.

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But those first shots of Kelford's were as wild as his action, and amid them, The Shadow kicked the floor switch that Terry and Burbank had placed for the photoelectric control.

The bracket bulbs vanished. Blurring light was back, supplied by flickering limps. The Shadow was obscured by the blinking twilight that Kelford had devised.

But Kelford, though again the Blur, was marked by the heedless spurts that his trigger finger dispatched from the muzzle of his gun. His futile effort to reach The Shadow with bullets was the source of the Blur's own doom.

Terry fired for those spurts. Cardona added a solid bombardment.

Weston and Norridge supplied effective fire from close range. The Shadow didn't have to draw his .45 from his cloak.

Flayed by bullets, Kelford's lunge turned into his familiar billiard table crouch, as he spiraled to the floor to the accompaniment of the flickering lights.

It was Terry who pressed the wall switch, to restore the photoelectric control. In full light, four marksmen saw how effective their combined fire had been. Marvin Kelford had paid a murderer's penalty. Death had come to him as crime's reward.

THE SHADOW had departed during the brief period that the blinking lights persisted. Soon afterward, Cranston reappeared, and heard Weston's version of The Shadow's triumph.

They waited around until Norridge called up from the bank, where he had gone with Kelford's safe-deposit-box key. The bank president reported finding all the stolen funds in the place where The Shadow had predicted.

"All except the fifty thousand that was here tonight," said Weston. "Kelford had it, but it wasn't on him when we searched his pockets. I suppose The Shadow took it, as a proper reward. I'd almost forgotten that he asked for it "

"You've forgotten something else," smiled Cranston. "Your alpaca coat."

He helped Weston with the overcoat. From habit, the commissioner thrust his hands deep in the pockets. One hand came out, as if something had bitten it. Weston's fist was crinkly with currency, to the tote of fifty thousand dollars.

"From The Shadow!" exclaimed Weston. "But when did he put it there?"

"He probably didn't," returned Cranston. "I'd say the Blur did. I suppose he intended to become Marvin Kelford all over again, after finishing his duel with The Shadow. But he didn't care to have the money on him, so he put it in your coat."

"To pick it up later!"

"Of course! You always forgot the coat, commissioner, but Kelford never did."

Weston nodded his approval of Cranston's insight. He had observed it other times, usually after The Shadow had provided some startling stroke against crime.

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Oddly, The Shadow's example had an inspiring effect upon Lamont Cranston.

Commissioner Ralph Weston wondered why.

THE END