

THE CREEPER

Maxwell Grant

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THE CREEPER

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CHAPTER I. CRIME'S GOAL

DUSK had dulled Manhattan. Shaded skyscrapers stood bleak against the darkening sky. Where lights appeared in windows, they were scarcely noticeable, for daylight had not fully faded. Most windows, though, were dark; it was after five o'clock and many offices had closed for the day.

Street lamps shone from the ground below the buildings; blinking electric signs were flashing early messages to homeward-wending workers. Darkness, however, had not yet gained full reign; man-made lights lacked the setting that they required as background for their nightly brilliance.

It was that hour of transition that comes daily to New York—when sunlight no longer shimmers on reflecting spires; yet the sky is still too clear to reflect the feeble, budding glow of the metropolis. Soon observers from high towers would watch the growing sparkle of increasing light; for the present, Manhattan lay beneath a pall.

Near the window of a fortieth-story office, a typist was busy at her desk. The machine was clicking steadily;

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the girl had no interest in watching the outdoor scene. Finishing a long day's work, she was looking forward to a speedy subway ride at the end of the traffic rush.

The office lights were on; the typist was attentive to her work. So engrossed was she that the opening of the door from the corridor did not disturb her. It was not until a man's voice spoke that the girl realized that some one had entered. She swung about with a startled gasp; then smiled sheepishly as she recognized her employer.

"Working late, Miss Chapwell?" came the pleasant query.

"Yes, Mr. Parrin," replied the typist. "The other girls left at five; I told them that I would remain until you came in."

"In case of important messages?"

"Yes, sir. There are also some letters for you to sign."

The girl finished the last few lines of the sheet that she was typing and placed it with others in a basket on the desk. Parrin glanced rapidly over the letters, signing each in turn. The girl sealed them in stamped envelopes, ready for the mail.

"A telephone call at five-twenty," stated Miss Chapwell. "The speaker refused to give his name. Simply hung up when he learned that you were not here, Mr. Parrin."

"Was it a long-distance call?"

"I don't think so. More like a local call."

Parrin shrugged his shoulders, as though the matter were one of little consequence. The typist had gathered up hat and coat; she was starting for the door with the letters. Suddenly she stopped.

"I almost forgot about Mr. Carning," she stated. "He is here, sir. He came in at half-past five. I told him to wait in your office."

"Very well. Good night, Miss Chapwell."

The girl went out through the door to the hall. The glass panel showed its lettered statement; then, as the door closed behind the departing typist, those words appeared in dull reverse. They were still legible to Parrin, however. He chuckled as he noted them:

INTERSTATE SALES CORPORATION

Rickard Parrin

Manager

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SWINGING about, Parrin crossed the outer office and entered a door marked "Private." The office within was lighted; a man seated by the window waved a hand in silent greeting. It was Carning, the arrival whom the typist had mentioned.

Parrin seemed to take the visitor's presence as something he had expected, for he seated himself at the desk and lighted a cigar while he surveyed Carning without comment.

Rickard Parrin looked the part of a sales executive. He was deliberate in manner, yet possessed of forceful expression. His build was bulky; his face long-jawed and firm-set. Hook-nosed, with an outthrust lower lip, Parrin looked like a challenger. He formed a contrast to his visitor.

For Carning was a dry, dull-faced fellow whose whole manner denoted laziness. The cigarette that he was smoking hung loose from his pasty lips. His expression was one of weariness, accentuated by half-closed eyelids. But Carning was not so indolent as he appeared. From between his slitted eyelids, he peered shrewdly; this fact indicated that his indolence was purely a pose.

"I didn't expect you, Carning," stated Parrin, abruptly. "Still, it's all right, since you're here. Nothing suspicious about members of my sales force blowing in after five o'clock."

"You told me you wanted to talk to me, Rick," returned Carning. "When I didn't hear from you over at the room, I thought maybe you'd forgotten me. That's why I came over here."

"I don't forget anything, Carning. I was detained at an advertising office. I have to deal with those fellows to keep up a front; and they're tough to get away from. But I should have been back here at five. A call came in."

"Not since I've been here, Rick."

"It was before you came in; and I ought to have been on hand to answer it."

"It was from —"

"From The Creeper." Rick spoke in a low tone, following Carning's pause. "That's his way—he always hangs up if I'm not on hand to answer."

"He'll call again, won't he?"

"Sure. That is, maybe. On the other hand, he may come here."

Carning's eyes opened wide. Rick grinned as he saw the fellow shift uneasily. With a shake of his head, the hook-nosed man gestured with one hand. His motion indicated that Carning was to remain where he sat.

"Don't worry," assured Rick. "The Creeper won't mind you being here. He knows you're on the pay roll."

"But if he wants to talk to you —"

"He won't. He'll leave a message. I have a hunch that telephone call was just to tell me that I'd better stay around. He probably has a lot to say to-day. Something big is coming, Carning."

THE man by the window nodded. Rick Parrin noticed the pasty face against the darkened pane. Outside, dusk had deepened. Sparkles of light were plainly evident from distant buildings. The very atmosphere had

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become foreboding.

"I picked an office here in the Dolban Building," remarked Rick, "just because they don't bother you with red tape until after nine o'clock. That gives The Creeper a chance to come in and out when I'm here late. Some things can't be told over the telephone, Carning.

"Particularly what's coming to-night. I think we're about due for the pay-off. Not all at once; there'll be a build-up to it, like there always is. But this is the date that The Creeper's been waiting for. He slipped me that news not so long ago."

"He lets you in on a lot, Rick?"

"No. That's the funny part about it, Carning. Figure it for yourself and you'll see that I'm only one card in his hand. What have I got? A front, to make me look like a big sales executive. Half a dozen salesmen—like you—on the road, working for me. Sure, we get wind of soft pickings; and we do some heavy work, too, when The Creeper needs us. But we're just one of his bets, Carning. That's all."

"It sounds likely, Rick. I guess there's no racket The Creeper will pass up. Not if there's dough in it."

"Big dough! Con games, blackmail, robbery—they're all the same to The Creeper. Say—remember that time Gus was out at the millionaire's home in Cleveland? Gus was just a visiting advertising delegate, who heard a few things said there, along with others. He slipped the word to me; it was meat for The Creeper. Blackmail that trip."

"And burglary down in Miami, Rick. The time that Tyler sold the carload of metalware. He spotted the layout of the jewelry department in the store, didn't he?"

"Yeah. But none of us had anything to do with the job that came afterward. The Creeper put somebody else on it. That's his way, Carning. But it's not wise to talk too much about —"

RICK broke off. His face became tense as he held up his hand for silence. Carning strained forward in his chair. The lull of outside blackness seemed a gripping force about this room.

Carning was looking beyond Parrin, toward a door that opened into a side corridor. Rick swung in his swivel chair, to stare at the same spot.

Both had heard a strange sound. The noise was coming from the hall. It signified the approach of some one; yet neither listener could have made a guess as to the appearance of the person whose footfalls they so dimly heard. The sound was a creeping; slow, yet unhesitating. It was like an audible mask, a mode of progress that made its author unrecognizable.

Moreover, the exact location of the sound was a mystery. It might have been coming from far down the corridor; it might almost have been outside the door. Though it continued, indicating steady motion, its intensity remained the same. It was not until the scuffled sound suddenly ceased that Rick and Carning realized that The Creeper had reached his goal.

Instinctively, the two rogues knew that their expected visitor was directly outside the glass-paneled door that led from this office into the side corridor. They waited tensely, listening for some new token. Then a white hand appeared against the darkness of the panel.

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Carning repressed a gasp as he saw a tight fist, doubled like a claw. A hand that held the fate of henchmen in the balance, it remained there through long moments. Then fingers moved; like a thing detached, the claw crept up the panel; its clicking nails reproduced in miniature that same creeping sound that had been heard before.

Rick Parrin leaned back. He placed his own fist upon the glass top of his mahogany desk. As the hand on the door stopped its motion, Rick performed a crawling action with his own fingers. His scratching was an answer to "The Creeper's" signal. The white fist moved from view beyond the glass panel.

The flap of a brass letter chute clicked inward. An envelope swished through the air and slid along the floor, to wind up with a lazy flutter at Rick Parrin's feet.

The hook-nosed man did not pick it up at once; instead, he sat listening, and Carning copied his example. From outside the door they heard new sounds of disguised footsteps. The Creeper was departing.

Oddly, the sound again retained its same intensity. When close, The Creeper moved more softly; when far away, he made his motion create a louder noise. The illusion was perfect; Rick and Carning could not even guess which direction The Creeper had taken. Suddenly the baffling sound faded.

Had The Creeper gone? Or had he faked a departure, to remain outside the door of this private office? Two minds asked the same question as Rick turned about and met Carning's puzzled stare. The insidious influence of The Creeper seemed strangely present. Neither man dared speak.

Mechanically, Rick picked up the envelope. He opened it and withdrew a typewritten message. He scanned the lines; then tore the paper into shreds. He burned the pieces in an ash tray; then picked up an evening newspaper that was lying on the desk.

Carning watched him turn to a page. Rick read; then spoke in a harsh whisper.

"THE job is for you, Carning," he informed. "To-night, at eight o'clock. Call at the home of Tobias Clavelock, the lawyer." Rick paused to write an address. "Tell him you've come in place of Richard Batesly."

"Who is Richard Batesly?" inquired Carning.

"A court stenographer," replied Rick. "Fellow who does work for old Clavelock. Batesly likes the races; he went there to-day and won't be back. You're to tell Clavelock that he was taken ill and that you came in his place."

"What about afterward? When Batesly sees Clavelock?"

"Don't worry. Batesly will have the same excuse for himself. Clavelock would fire him if he knew the fellow played the ponies. I guess Batesly picked some winners to-day; and he's met some friends who have detained him. Celebrating—that's something else Clavelock wouldn't like."

Rick chuckled. His tone was significant. Carning recognized that other agents of The Creeper must have been at work—men whom even Rick did not know. Their job had been to see that Batesly forgot his appointment to work for Clavelock this evening. Then Carning ceased speculation as Rick handed the newspaper to him.

"Read that, Carning."

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"Say!" The pasty-faced man's eyes popped. "Clavelock's the lawyer for the Doyd heirs! The bunch that's supposed to be coming into millions when the estate is settled!"

"That's right," nodded Rick. "The get-together is to-night; that's when the lucky relations learn the news about the dough. Clavelock will have a lot to say. Some one will have to take it down in shorthand."

"Meaning me, Rick?"

"Meaning you, Carning."

Rick chuckled as he rose. He led Carning to the door into the side hall. He opened the barrier almost gingerly and peered out. No one was there.

Rick turned off the light switch; the room darkened, save for a mellow glow at the window. Night had gained its grip; Manhattan's lights were at last a sparkling galaxy.

"Scram, Carning," whispered Rick. "I'll follow later. Remember: bring your notes along with you. You're good enough at shorthand to pinch hit for this fellow Batesly. Don't slip on a detail."

Carning nodded and departed. Rick Parrin returned and sat in the darkened office, to wait five minutes before making his own departure. The window chair was the post that Rick had taken. Surveying the brilliance of the city, the fake sales executive chuckled.

Millions of lights—millions of dollars. Such was the connection of Rick Parrin's thoughts. For he knew the game that lay at stake. Lucky heirs were to share a vast fortune, as legatees of Bigelow Doyd, the soap king, recently deceased.

They would be lucky if they held the wealth that would be their gain. For some one else was planning to gain his share of the spoils. The goal would be a big one, for it was sought by a man of supercrime: the evil chief whom Rick Parrin knew only as The Creeper.

CHAPTER II. THE SHADOW OBSERVES

EVENING had deepened. It was eight o'clock, the time when Carning, as Rick Parrin's tool, was due at the home of Tobias Clavelock. In obedience to The Creeper's order, Carning would soon be engaged in his temporary task as secretary to the old lawyer who represented the estate of Bigelow Doyd.

Traffic-thronged streets were blaring with the sounds of raucous horns. The approach of the theater hour had brought jammed confusion to Manhattan. There were spots, however, that the noise of tumult did not reach. One such place was the reading room of the exclusive Cobalt Club.

Within that room, sour-faced old gentlemen were reading copies of Punch and the London Graphic, amid silence that was tomblike. Noise was forbidden in the reading room of the Cobalt Club. None defied that order; not even the one individual who seemed out of place with such elderly companions. He was a hawk-nosed personage, whose age—though difficult to guess—must have been many years less than that of the fossil-faced habitues about him.

This member of the Cobalt Club was known as Lamont Cranston; he was a millionaire globe-trotter who frequented the Cobalt Club whenever he was in New York.

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To-night, Cranston was seated beneath the glare of a reading lamp. The rays of the light showed his countenance to be chiseled and inflexible of expression—almost masklike. A curious study, that firmly molded visage, had any chosen to observe it. But the members of the Cobalt Club were too concerned with their own reading to pay attention to the presence of others.

Keen eyes peered from the visage of Lamont Cranston. They were centered upon a newspaper, held between long-fingered hands. Those eyes were reading a brief news report; a statement that a meeting would be held this very evening, at the home of Bigelow Doyd, deceased. The heirs of the Doyd estate were to learn of the various legacies which the dead millionaire had left.

An attendant entered the reading room. He approached the seated figure of Lamont Cranston; that worthy laid aside his newspaper. The attendant spoke in a whisper: Mr. Cranston was wanted on the telephone.

With a nod, the hawk-faced personage arose and strolled from the reading room. He arrived at a telephone booth where a receiver was off the hook. Entering, he closed the door of the booth and spoke a calm hello. A quiet voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

The tone was no longer Cranston's. It was a strange, eerie whisper that carried a strong command. It was the voice of The Shadow, master of mystery, who used the disguise of Lamont Cranston as a cover for his true identity. Foe of crime, The Shadow was gaining word from his contact agent, Burbank.

"Report from Burke," came Burbank's methodical statement. "He is leaving for the Doyd mansion. Clavelock finally agreed to make an exception in Burke's case. His story to be subject to Clavelock's approval."

"Report received."

REVERTING to the languid manner of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow hung up and strolled from the telephone booth. He did not return to the reading room; instead, he stopped at the cloakroom, where he donned a hat and tossed a coat over his arm.

After that, he strolled from the club and nodded to the doorman who stood beneath the outside canopy.

The doorman signaled. A big limousine wheeled from across the street. The Shadow stepped aboard and spoke an order through the speaking tube. The car rolled away with its passenger; the chauffeur headed cross-town to a broad avenue, then drove northward.

While the limousine was traveling, The Shadow opened a suitcase that lay on the back seat. Discarding his hat and overcoat, he donned black garments from the bag. His tall figure faded into obscurity, just as the limousine turned right into a one-way street and came to a stop in a chance parking space by the curb.

The rear door opened. From it emerged a blackened form. Silently, the door closed. Unseen by the chauffeur, The Shadow reached the sidewalk and traced a path back toward the avenue.

A street lamp glimmered momentarily upon his passing figure; it showed a shrouded shape, cloaked in black. Face and eyes were hidden beneath the broad brim of a slouch hat. Then the fleeting image had passed. Again obscured by darkness, The Shadow reached the avenue.

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Buildings on the near side were dark. Silently, The Shadow discovered a gloomy doorway. His shape edged into blackness. His keen eyes gazed streetward. Across the avenue, The Shadow saw the front of a huge mansion. A relic of the nineteenth century, that building was the pretentious home that had once been the residence of Bigelow Doyd.

The Doyd mansion was already occupied. Lights from the interior proved that fact. As The Shadow watched, new arrivals appeared. First came an old-fashioned automobile, a landaulet. An old lady stepped from the car; the chauffeur helped her up the steps. She was admitted to the house; the chauffeur returned to the car and parked further down the street.

A coupe arrived a few minutes later. From it stepped a young man, who wore a tuxedo and carried a coat over one arm, walking stick in the other hand. He nodded to the driver; the coupe rolled away. The young man entered the house.

Almost immediately, a taxicab pulled into the emptied space. Two men alighted. One was an old fellow, stooped and dry-faced. A light above the front steps revealed him as plainly as it had the others. The Shadow knew that this must be Tobias Clavelock, the lawyer. Clavelock's companion was evidently the lawyer's secretary, for he was carrying a large briefcase under his arm. The Shadow did not glimpse this man's face, for the fellow merely followed the lawyer up the steps.

Three minutes passed after this pair had been admitted. Then another taxicab arrived; a young man jumped out and hurriedly paid the driver.

The Shadow caught sight of a keen, wise face above a wiry body. He watched the new arrival ascend the steps of the house. Like the others, the wiry man was admitted by a liveried servant. The Shadow waited; minutes passed. The young man did not reappear.

SOFTLY, The Shadow whispered a laugh. That last arrival was Clyde Burke, reporter of the New York Classic.

Secretly, Clyde was an agent of The Shadow. Keenly interested in the affairs of the Doyd estate, The Shadow had himself planned to witness to-night's meeting if other alternatives failed. Clyde Burke, however, had managed to arrange matters with Tobias Clavelock.

Arriving later than Clavelock, Clyde had gained admittance through the lawyer's intercession. The taboo against reporters had been lifted in his case. The fact that Clyde had not reappeared was proof that he was going to stay. As an agent of The Shadow, Clyde would bring back a report of all that happened within the portals of that ancient residence.

There was a lull in traffic on the avenue. Ghostlike, The Shadow moved from his hiding spot and glided across the broad thoroughfare. He edged away from the lighted front of the Doyd house, found a passage at the side of the building and entered it. He passed beneath the gloom of dully-lighted windows.

Near the back of the house, The Shadow paused; he noted a side door that led into the old mansion.

Satisfied with his survey, The Shadow retraced his course. He clung to the darkness at the front of the passage until there was another break in the intermittent traffic of the avenue. Then The Shadow crossed, picked the darkness of building fronts and made his way back to the limousine.

The chauffeur, dozing at the wheel, did not sense his return until The Shadow used the speaking tube to give instructions in the quiet tone of Cranston.

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"New Jersey, Stanley."

The chauffeur nodded. That was the order to return home, via the Holland Tube, for Lamont Cranston maintained a pretentious residence in New Jersey.

The car pulled away; Stanley did not even speculate on why his master had ordered this brief stop on a side street of New York. Stanley had long since ceased to wonder about the eccentricities of his millionaire master.

A soft laugh crept through the interior of the big limousine as the car rolled southward. That whispered mirth denoted The Shadow's satisfaction. He knew that certain heirs were already present; two had arrived while he was watching. Then Clavelock, with his secretary; after that, Clyde Burke. With the reporter there, The Shadow had decided that no preliminary survey of his own would be necessary. He could rely on Clyde Burke.

For once The Shadow was mistaken. Strange facts were due to break to-night. Clyde was to learn of surface troubles and bring back his version of them. But already, events were brewing beneath the surface, events which only The Shadow himself could have discerned.

A dilemma was due to perplex the heirs of Bigelow Doyd. The simple settlement of an estate was destined to become a troublesome problem. So Clyde Burke would learn; and through him, The Shadow would gain important facts with which to begin a campaign of adventure. The Shadow had foreseen that the affairs of the Doyd estate might lead to cross-purposes; he had been wise in his decision to gain firsthand facts.

But just as Carning, posing as Clavelock's secretary, had managed to slip The Shadow's notice, so would The Creeper, hidden master of crime, keep his devices under cover, so far as Clyde Burke was concerned. Already the menace of that supercrook hovered above the affairs of the Doyd heirs.

The Shadow had foreseen complications that were actually due. To The Shadow, those complexities would offer opportunity for keen solution, a work that intrigued The Shadow always. But those same complications would give The Creeper opportunity also. The eventual result would be a conflict of two mighty brains. The Shadow versus The Creeper!

CHAPTER III. LOST LEGACIES

HAD Clyde Burke gained immediate recognition upon his entry to the Doyd mansion, he might have gleaned some interesting facts prior to the meeting of the heirs. As it was, the liveried servant who admitted him showed suspicion the moment that he learned Clyde was a reporter.

Clyde mentioned Tobias Clavelock by name; that introduction enabled him to stay. But the servant, instead of taking Clyde to the family reception room, decided to put the reporter in an obscure parlor. There Clyde was forced to sit in solitary state until the servant spoke to Tobias Clavelock.

From the parlor, Clyde could see across a hallway. Beyond, at an angle, were closed doors. They indicated the reception room; and Clyde speculated on what might lie beyond. After a few minutes of wondering, the reporter decided to wait patiently. He felt sure that Clavelock would keep his promise and admit him to the meeting. There was nothing to gain by impatience.

Meanwhile, another man was waiting alone. This was the tuxedoed chap whom The Shadow had seen enter the house. Light-haired, somewhat curious in expression, this visitor was in the reception room, beyond

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those very doors that Clyde had observed.

He was strolling about, gazing at various objects: an ancient grandfather's clock had finally intrigued him. He was facing the corner where the clock stood when a rear door of the room opened suddenly. The young man swung about to face a dark-haired girl whose black mourning attire gave her a singular beauty.

"THERESA!" exclaimed the light-haired man. "Theresa Doyd! I never would have known you!"

The girl advanced with outstretched hand; the young man received her clasp. The girl smiled.

"You have not changed much, Mr. Shiloh," she remarked. Then, with a winsome smile: "I suppose, now that I am grown up, I can call you Donald?"

"That's right," recalled the man, with a pleasant laugh. "I'd forgotten all about that problem of ten years ago. Let me see: you were about twelve years old, weren't you? And I was twenty-five."

"Which made you Mr. Shiloh," smiled the girl. "Because you were grown up and I was not; and since you belonged to another branch of the family, I could not call you Cousin Donald."

"I remember it. Your grandmother was a stickler for form, wasn't she?"

"Just like grandfather. Well, Donald, ever since I've grown up, I have wanted to meet you again. More than any other member of the family."

"More than any other?"

"Of course. But that is no compliment, Donald. Wait until you see the other members of the clan who are here already."

"Some have arrived, Theresa?"

"Yes. Three. Aunt Mehitabel Doyd—grandfather's sister—arrived just a little while ago. Then there is Uncle Egbert Doyd, who has been living here a month. He is about sixty years old—my father's brother, you know."

"You said there were three, Theresa."

"Yes." The girl's face looked troubled. "The other is a second cousin of mine. His name is Mark Lundig. He arrived two days ago."

"Mark Lundig," mused Shiloh. "I recall him. An odd sort, Mark. About forty-five, isn't he? Lundig was living in California, the last I knew."

"He says he is from Chicago," remarked Theresa. "But every statement he makes has a note of suspicion to it. Mark Lundig arrived here two days ago, Donald. He claims to have taken a room at some hotel; but he has stayed here for two nights."

"What is his business, Theresa?"

"He did not say. But his presence has worried me, Donald. That is one reason why I am glad that you have arrived. You will stay here, won't you?"

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"Hardly, Theresa. I have an apartment of my own, you know, here in New York, although I am in town but seldom. I have money of my own; I live in Miami most of the winter, and go north in the summer. But since I have the apartment, and my valet Jeffrey, who drove the car here to-night, I naturally expect to use my own residence. But tell me more about Lundig. Has the fellow acted oddly?"

The girl looked about before replying, apparently to make sure that no one was eavesdropping. Then, in a tense whisper, she spoke.

"LAST night," she confided, "I heard footsteps. Strange footsteps, Donald—creeping footsteps—that seemed remote. I stole about, trying to locate them. It was impossible. First they seemed to be downstairs; then they were on the second floor—"

"At what hour was this, Theresa?"

"Shortly after midnight. Finally I was sure the footsteps were on the ground floor. I came down here just as they ceased. Then I saw a light in the library. I entered and found Mark Lundig there."

"Did your arrival surprise him?"

"Yes. Particularly because he was looking through the drawers of the old corner desk. I wondered to find him here in the house; he had spoken about going back to his hotel."

"What excuse did he offer?"

"He said that he had decided to stay. He had spoken to Wilfred—our one servant—and Wilfred had made up a room for him. So I said nothing, except to bid him good-night."

"Too bad that I was not here, Theresa. I should have liked to give challenge to the bounder. Unfortunately, Jeffrey and I did not arrive in New York until this morning. But tell me more: did you hear the footsteps later?"

"No. Mark Lundig decided to go upstairs; he walked along with me and went to his room. I listened for a while, but he did not leave."

"Where was your Uncle Egbert?"

"Asleep, I suppose. He always retires early. Of course, the footsteps could have been his; but Uncle Egbert has been here a long while, and I never heard him prowling about. There was something terrible about those footsteps, Donald! They were creaky, almost ghostly—"

The girl stopped abruptly. The sliding doors from the hallway were coming open. Theresa and Shiloh looked about to see Wilfred bowing from the doorway. The servant's face was solemn.

"Mr. Clavelock awaits you," announced Wilfred. "He is in the library, with the others."

THERESA and Shiloh followed Wilfred through the hall. The servant ushered them into a large rear room, which was lined with books. Then he went back through the hall and brought Clyde Burke from the parlor.

The reporter entered after Theresa Doyd and Donald Shiloh had seated themselves. He was just in time to see Shiloh acknowledging the greetings of others who were present.

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Tobias Clavelock, stoop-shouldered and dry-faced, was seated behind a large table. Beside him was a weary, dull-faced fellow—Carning—whom Clyde dismissed at a glance. He knew that this individual was merely some secretary of the lawyer's. Moreover, Clyde was immediately occupied; for Clavelock was waving a hand in introduction.

"This is Mr. Burke," announced the old lawyer. "He is a reporter, here by my special permission. These, Mr. Burke, are the Doyd heirs. First, Mr. Egbert Doyd."

Clyde bowed to a hunched-shouldered, sickly-faced man who was huddled in a large chair. Egbert Doyd looked more than sixty. Illness had apparently sapped his strength, for Clyde gained the impression that the man was an invalid.

"Miss Mehitabel Doyd, sister of the deceased Bigelow Doyd –"

At Clavelock's words, Clyde bowed to an old lady who was in her eighties. Then he turned to meet two others.

"Miss Theresa Doyd; and Mr. Donald Shiloh –"

Clavelock paused. Theresa had arisen to shake hands with the reporter. Clyde bowed, impressed by the girl's beauty and her gracious manner. Shiloh had risen also; he followed with a handshake. Clyde was about to sit down when Clavelock added another introduction:

"This is Mr. Mark Lundig, another heir."

Clyde turned to face a shrewd, sharp-faced man who was sitting on the edge of a chair. He detected a foxlike expression beneath a shock of gray-streaked hair.

Mark Lundig peered through large spectacles, to give the reporter a curt nod. There was suspicion in the man's gaze. Clyde returned the nod and sat down.

"Ahem!" Clavelock cleared his throat and turned to Carning. "Let me have that sealed envelope from the briefcase. Come, my man, cease fumbling. Find it!"

Carning produced the envelope. Clavelock adjusted a pair of pince-nez spectacles; then spoke again.

"The lists," he ordered. "Those typewritten lists. There are several copies of them."

Carning found the lists and laid them on the table. Meanwhile, Clavelock was holding up the envelope. He waited until Carning produced a shorthand notebook; then, with a grumble at his substitute stenographer's slowness, the lawyer began to speak.

"ACCORDING to the terms of Bigelow Doyd's last testament," announced the old attorney, "the bulk of his estate is to be divided equally among all eligible heirs. This refers to every one present— with the possible exception of Mr. Donald Shiloh, who is a relative of Bigelow Doyd's first wife. A descendant, you understand, of another branch of the family.

"Nevertheless, I requested Mr. Shiloh to be present. His status is that of a possible heir; he may be awarded a share of the estate. That can be decided later. Our present business is to determine the extent of the estate itself. A matter, I may say, of considerable importance.

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"Much of Bigelow Doyd's wealth lay in his collections of valuable gems and art treasures; together with certain assets which he had stored in some place of safety. Only Bigelow Doyd knew the place where these valuables were stored. Only he knew the extent of his own wealth."

The lawyer paused, shaking the sealed envelope with his right hand. The observers could see a huge dab of red sealing wax that kept the envelope intact. With his left hand, the lawyer picked up the lists that Carning had given him. There were five of these; Clavelock passed them about the group.

"My word!" exclaimed Egbert Doyd, straightening up to hold a list under a lamp light. "What does this mean, Mr. Clavelock? A whole procession of Latin words, with English words following them."

"But they are not translations," put in Mark Lundig, in a sharp tone. "Look: here is the word *adsum*; after it, the English word 'jewels.' Here is *bellum*; it is followed by the English word 'inspect.' And here –"

"That is enough," interposed Clavelock. "These lists serve as a code book. Bigelow Doyd prepared a Latin inscription; then he formed a statement in English, using exactly the same number of words. He prepared this code for translation of that inscription; but he added a great many words that have no bearing on the matter."

"His purpose was to make the coded lists useless, without the inscription. That is why I am allowing you to examine the lists. They are valueless in themselves; Bigelow Doyd explained that fact when he placed them in my keeping."

"But what of the Latin inscription?" inquired Theresa. "Is it in the envelope, Mr. Clavelock?"

"We shall see," returned the lawyer, with a dry smile. "At this meeting, I am privileged to open the envelope and read its contents. Only two men knew that this envelope existed: one was Bigelow Doyd, the other myself. But Bigelow Doyd alone knew its contents."

Solemnly, Clavelock tore open the envelope. Carning had been taking notes; now the fake secretary leaned over to peer past Clavelock's shoulder. Seeing that the lawyer was adjusting his glasses, Carning realized that he intended to read the statement from the envelope.

Quickly, Carning shifted back, so artfully that Clyde Burke did not notice his move. That was a point on which Clyde failed; had he been as keen as The Shadow, the reporter would have noticed Carning's move.

"Humph!" Clavelock's tone denoted surprise, as his eyes viewed the unfolded paper. "This is no Latin inscription. It gives us information, however. It states that we shall find the scroll within the bottom of the ebony casket. That indicates a search of some sort. Bigelow Doyd said nothing at all to me concerning an ebony casket –"

"I know what it means!" interrupted Theresa, excitedly. "The ebony casket is in grandfather's old room. Locked in there with other of his personal possessions. I have seen it often; it is a black box, flat, and about one foot square. With the initials 'B. D.,' set in silver –"

"You have the key to your grandfather's room?" inquired Clavelock, with hasty interruption. "So that we can obtain the casket at once?"

"Certainly," replied Theresa. "The key is in my purse, up in my own room. Shall I bring it here, Mr. Clavelock?"

"Bring it to your grandfather's room," decided the lawyer. "We shall complete our meeting there."

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THERESA had risen. She was starting from the room. The others followed, forgetting Clyde Burke. The reporter took up the trail of the procession. He reached the long hallway and saw the group ascending the stairs. He followed, to find himself beside Wilfred. The liveried servant had decided to join the throng. Wilfred made no comment when he saw Clyde.

The course led to a front room on the second floor. A dim hallway light showed the group waiting for Theresa. The girl appeared a few moments later, carrying a key. She gave it to Clavelock; the lawyer unlocked the closed door of the front room.

Musty blackness was the greeting when the door swung inward. Clavelock grumbled; Theresa found a light switch and pressed it.

Lights blinked on to reveal a huge, old-fashioned room. A massive four-poster bed was the chief item of furniture; opposite it stood an antique table, with a heavy center drawer. Theresa pointed to the table.

"The casket is in the drawer," announced the girl. "That is where grandfather always kept it. Perhaps you had better open it, Mr. Clavelock."

The lawyer nodded. He motioned back the persons who were crowding forward, chief among them Mark Lundig, whose long chin was thrust against Clavelock's shoulder.

Striding to the table, Clavelock tugged at the drawer. It failed to open. As the lawyer looked about, annoyed, a quaver came from old Mehitabel Doyd. The elderly lady had hobbled upstairs, aided by Donald Shiloh.

"There is a hidden spring, Mr. Clavelock," informed the old lady. "Underneath the table, at the left side. My brother Bigelow once showed me how to operate it."

Clavelock found the spring and pressed it. The drawer jolted open, halfway. The lawyer seized it and pulled it fully open; then uttered a harsh gasp, that was echoed by those who peered forward with him.

The drawer in the table was entirely empty! There was no sign of the ebony casket mentioned in Bigelow Doyd's message, the box that Theresa had so carefully described. A gloomy hush followed those startled exclamations as the truth of the loss dawned upon all concerned.

The casket that contained the secret of Bigelow Doyd's wealth had disappeared. Hidden, stolen, vanished—whatever the case might be, the box which contained the Latin scroll was gone!

CHAPTER IV. THE SEARCH BEGINS

HALF an hour had passed. Old Tobias Clavelock, solemn and keen-eyed, was seated behind the big table in the downstairs library. Acting as presiding officer of a new meeting, he had threshed out details concerning the missing ebony casket.

"We have heard two theories," announced the lawyer, while Carning, seated beside him, proceeded to take down notes in shorthand. "The first, advanced by Miss Mehitabel Doyd, concerns a man named Montague Rayne. As I understand it, Montague Rayne was once the friend and confidant of Bigelow Doyd."

"He was," quavered old Miss Mehitabel. "Montague and Bigelow were great friends in their younger days. Dashing young rascals they were, fifty years ago. But Montague was a scoundrel—a deceiver. I learned that to my sorrow, after he jilted me and left me broken-hearted, only a week before the day we were to be

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married."

"Fifty years ago," remarked Clavelock. "That is a long while. Where has Montague Rayne been since then?"

"He went abroad," explained Egbert Doyd, in a tired tone. "He and Bigelow corresponded for some time. I believe that Bigelow received a letter from Rayne as recently as ten years ago. Or maybe fifteen."

"What do you think, then, Egbert?" demanded Clavelock. "Could Montague Rayne have known of this box? Could he have come here to steal it?"

"Hardly," returned Egbert, wearily. "My word! The old codger should have been dead by this time! Still, he may be alive, and spry enough to be plotting mischief —"

"He was a rogue," put in old Miss Mehitabel. "Mark my words! The man was a deceiving Lothario. Very cunning, very crafty. He knew too much of Bigelow's business."

"But that was years ago," reminded Clavelock. "Ah, what is this?" He received a picture that the old lady passed to him; then smiled and passed it around the group. "Here is the rogue himself—Montague Rayne, in his prime."

The old-fashioned portrait reached Clyde Burke. It showed a long-faced man of distinguished appearance, with prominent, beakish nose and outthrust lower lip. Shocky hair and long sideburns completed the picture.

"Montague gained a post with a foreign legation," remarked old Miss Mehitabel. "That was why he journeyed abroad. Later, he married a prominent Englishwoman. She died afterward; Montague went to India and —"

Clavelock was gesturing for silence. Clyde passed the photograph to the old lady; as he did so, he was making note of what she had said. It would be possible, Clyde knew, to dig up some other photograph of Montague Rayne. One that would probably be of much later date than the one which Mehitabel Doyd still cherished.

"OUR other theory," declared Clavelock, "concerns a servant who was dismissed from this household shortly after the death of Bigelow Doyd. I refer to Myram, the butler. You mentioned his name, Theresa. Do you believe that Myram could have been the thief?"

"I do," replied the girl. "Absolutely, Mr. Clavelock! I know that grandfather missed many articles that he had about the house—pieces of odd jewelry and souvenirs that he had put away. But grandfather was too ill to search for them. I suspected Myram, and after grandfather's death I was sure that the man was guilty. So did Wilfred."

The servant nodded solemnly from the corner. Clavelock paused; then pushed the quiz:

"You questioned Myram?"

"I discharged him," replied Theresa. "After all grandfather had no rare possessions here in the house. Once he was dead, those trifling curios of his seemed of but little value. Myram had been in grandfather's service for nearly twenty years. He had been faithful once."

"I understand," nodded Clavelock. "Apparently, then, Myram stole the ebony casket along with other trinkets. He must have known the secret of the table drawer; it is unlikely, though, that he knew that the casket contained a hidden scroll. What has become of Myram? Do you know, Theresa?"

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"I have no idea."

As Theresa shook her head. Miss Mehitabel began a protest, again asserting that Montague Rayne must be the thief. This time it was Egbert who interrupted. The sickly faced man spoke in an annoyed tone.

"Come, come, Mehitabel!" he interjected. "Your statement is preposterous! I am inclined to agree with Theresa. Myram is the man who probably stole the ebony casket. Dash it! I never did like that sly-faced butler."

"We shall find Myram," decided Clavelock. "I shall inform the police that we want the man for theft. I shall also start a careful quest for the ebony casket, in case Myram has disposed of it."

"Why employ the police?" The querulous question came from Mark Lundig, who was glaring through his spectacles. "This is a matter for private investigation. We should employ detectives of our own."

"I prefer the police," returned Clavelock. "My decision is final."

"Not so far as I am concerned," insisted Lundig. "I shall hire detectives myself. Competent operatives. What is more"—he rose and wagged his finger, a gleam on his foxlike face—"what is more, I shall also consider Montague Rayne as a possible factor in this case. Perhaps Rayne visited here within the past dozen years. Perhaps he knew Myram and conspired with the fellow."

"One moment, Mark." Donald Shiloh had arisen. "Do you realize that you may be interfering with Mr. Clavelock's plans? That it is not your part to handle this affair?"

"Who are you to object?" sneered Lundig. "Bah! You are not even a legal heir. Your status is still doubtful, Shiloh. You are an upstart —"

SHILOH'S fists clenched instinctively. Theresa gripped his arm; Shiloh subsided. Dropping back into his chair, he watched Lundig leave the room.

"Never mind him, Donald," whispered Theresa. "He always was a trouble-maker. Mr. Clavelock can handle him."

Clavelock was smiling dryly as Theresa and Shiloh turned to view him. Carning had jotted down Lundig's words along with his other notes. Clavelock nodded approvingly.

"Let Mark Lundig do as he pleases," decided the lawyer. "He has probably gone to telephone some detective agency. If he wants to waste money on such incompetent investigators, he is welcome to do so."

"I shall employ the law to locate Myram. If we find the fellow, he will willingly part with the casket—or tell us what has become of it — if we agree to drop the charges against him. Come, Carning, gather us those five lists and let me have them."

Carning finished notations and picked up the lists, which people had dropped on the table. He began to count them, while Clavelock watched. Carning looked puzzled.

"There are only four lists here, sir," he informed. "Are you sure that there were five?"

"I thought there were five." Clavelock looked around as he replied. Then, with a shake of his head, he added: "Perhaps I was wrong. If Batesly were here, he would know; for he copied them. But it does not matter. The

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lists are useless without the scroll. Come, Carning, put away the four lists. We are going to my home; you can type your notes on the machine that I have there."

While Carning was packing up, Clavelock turned to Clyde Burke and nodded that he wanted the reporter to come with him. A few minutes later, the trio departed, leaving Egbert Doyd and Miss Mehitabel drowsing in their chairs. Mark Lundig had not returned. Donald Shiloh and Theresa Doyd accompanied Clavelock to the door; there, Shiloh bade the girl good-night.

Clyde Burke overheard their brief conversation. It was terse—a question from Shiloh regarding Lundig; Theresa's response that she did not mind the man being in the house, as long as Wilfred was there.

Clyde followed Clavelock and Carning down the steps. Shiloh joined them, chatted for a moment, then hailed a cab and departed. He had not kept his coupe waiting while he had been at the meeting in the old mansion.

Clavelock ordered Carning to hail a cab. While Carning was doing so, the lawyer spoke to Clyde Burke. He offered to take the reporter in the taxi as far as Times Square; then he added an admonition:

"No word about this in the newspapers, Burke. Remember, I allowed you to be present on condition that you would print only whatever I permit —"

"I understand," interposed Clyde. "All I ask is that you keep me posted about the casket. It will be a fine story when you find it."

"Keep in touch with me, Burke. You will be the only reporter to know of this matter."

Clyde nodded his thanks. A cab was arriving; he boarded it with Clavelock and Carning. At Times Square, the reporter dropped off. Instead of heading for the Classic office, he made for his own lodgings. For Clyde Burke had work to do to-night—a long report to prepare for *The Shadow*. To-morrow, he would have some early business looking through old files at the Classic.

It was nine o'clock the next morning when Rick Parrin looked up from his desk to greet a visitor. The man who had entered the private office was Carning. Rick motioned for the fellow to close the door; that done, he motioned Carning to the seat by the window.

Carning handed Rick a sheaf of typewritten papers. The fake sales manager began to read them in detail, chewing at the end of a cigar that he was smoking. It was a full fifteen minutes before he finished his perusal. Then he made comment.

"Looks like you've bagged something, Carning!" chuckled Rick. "This will suit *The Creeper* great. I've got a hunch that he was hoping for something like this. With that estate tied up because of old Bigelow Doyd's foolishness, *The Creeper* will have a chance to beat the heirs to the swag."

"Sure thing," agreed Carning. "But the trouble will be finding that bloke Myram. How's *The Creeper* going to do it, Rick?"

"He'll manage. Give him time. Just one guy to look for; it won't take long."

"What about this bird Montague Rayne?"

Rick snorted.

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"Eighty years plus," he remarked. "That's how old the guy would be if he's still alive. Say, that old lady Mehitabel probably thinks they're still building the Brooklyn Bridge. She and Uncle Egbert."

"He's not such an old fossil, Rick. Kind of a sappy bird, though. Looked sort of sick last night. But listen, Rick, there's one thing bothering me; I put it in my notes—didn't you see it?"

"What was that?"

"About those lists. There were five of them to begin with. But only four at the finish. Clavelock forgot about it; but I didn't. Somebody snagged one of them."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. It might have been anybody, except this young fellow Shiloh. He was with the girl, Theresa, and he wouldn't have had a chance. Of course, old Mehitabel is out—and Egbert, too, I guess, because he looked half asleep."

"Then that leaves only Lundig?"

"Lundig and the servant—the flunky they called Wilfred. But he wasn't around when Clavelock passed out the lists. Lundig was looking at one of them; he could have smouched it."

"A wise guy, maybe. With his talk about detectives. Yeah, Carning, I guess Lundig snatched that list. Unless the reporter took it."

Carning shook his head slowly.

"I don't think Burke would have taken the chance," he decided. "He didn't want to run any risk of getting in bad with Clavelock. Say—I'd have yanked one of those lists myself, if I hadn't been worried about Clavelock wising up."

"The Creeper could use one of the lists," mused Rick. "Well, he'll get one when he wants it. Out of Clavelock's safe."

"It looks like a tough box to crack, that safe. I took a good look at it, Rick. When I was typing those shorthand notes —"

"Don't worry. When The Creeper has a job, he gets the right guy to do it. It's just as well the lists are where they are. How long would it take to copy one?"

"An hour, maybe, in longhand. Less on a typewriter."

"Well, that means one can be taken out and put back afterward. Without Clavelock ever getting wise. All right, Carning—time for you to scram. I don't spend too long in my sales conferences."

Rick chuckled as he made the statement. Carning arose while Rick tucked the typewritten sheets into a desk drawer. The two walked out through the outer office; they were chatting about sales promotion when they passed the typists who were working there.

LESS than an hour after Carning's visit to Rick Parrin, an event occurred elsewhere in Manhattan. A click sounded in a darkened room. A blue light glimmered upon a polished table. White hands came beneath a

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shaded glow. The Shadow was in his sanctum, the secluded room that he kept as his own headquarters.

A sheaf of papers came from an envelope. The Shadow began to read Clyde Burke's report. Detail for detail, it corresponded with that which Carning had delivered to Rick Parrin. It told of the vanished ebony casket; it added the factor of the missing list.

Clyde, in his speculation on who might have the list, eliminated Carning, just as Carning had eliminated Clyde. The reporter had taken Carning for a genuine secretary who had come with Tobias Clavelock; and his added point was that Carning had been the one to mention that a list was missing.

Along with Clyde's report was a photograph which the reporter had found in the newspaper "morgue" at the Classic. It was a picture of Montague Rayne, taken at the time of the consul's wedding, some forty years ago. The photograph had come from London; with it, Clyde had gleaned brief facts regarding the career of Montague Rayne. Nothing had been heard of Rayne during the past ten years. He had come back from India; reentered the consular service, then retired. His last residence had been a town in Spain.

The Shadow studied the photograph of the high-nosed, long-lipped face; then placed it aside. He began to make notations on a sheet of paper—his written comments concerned the missing butler, Myram. Finally, The Shadow inked coded notes that he sealed in envelopes: instructions to be forwarded to various agents, Clyde Burke included.

Envelopes sealed, The Shadow delivered a whispered laugh of prophecy. His hand clicked off the light.

The Shadow, not yet knowing of The Creeper's entry into the game, had followed the course of picking Myram as the first man to find. Similarly, The Creeper, ignorant of The Shadow's quest, was to learn facts by calling Rick Parrin; and those facts would start The Creeper on the same trail.

While the law was being informed of Myram's petty thievery, these powerful antagonists would both be moving independently. Their quarry would be a petty thief, Myram, who had unquestionably stolen the ebony casket without realizing its true value.

But where The Creeper would employ many workers in the hunt, The Shadow would use but few. Despite that fact, The Shadow would hold the advantage. His laugh had betokened that important point. For The Shadow had analyzed the mental caliber of the sneak-thief Myram, who had posed as an honest servant.

Already The Shadow had devised a plan. He was confident that his method; his instructions to his agents, would enable him to trace the missing Myram before this day had ended.

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S TRAIL

AT half-past four that afternoon, a young man entered an old office building on Forty-ninth Street. He noted the names on the index boards and checked one that bore the legend: "Triborough Employment Agency."

That done, the visitor ascended by elevator to the fourth floor; he found Room 408, office of the employment agency, and entered.

A man swiveled from his desk to greet the newcomer. The visitor nodded, introduced himself as Mr. Vincent and sat down at the side of the desk. With a quiet smile, he stated his purpose.

"I am looking for a butler named Myram," he stated. "He applied for a position with me; but I did not require

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his services at the time. Afterward, he wrote me, stating that he was registered with this agency –"

The man at the desk nodded. This was not an unusual request. He opened the drawer of a filing cabinet and looked through the letter "M." He gave his head a negative shake.

"Not listed," he stated. "Wait a minute, though; I have some old cards in another drawer. His may be there, Mr. Vincent."

After a short search, the employment man uttered a pleased exclamation. He brought out a card and showed it to his visitor. Mr. Vincent read the name Jonathan Myram, with the address 813 Roscoe Boulevard.

"Myram lives in the Bronx," explained the employment man. "He placed his name with us several months ago; then canceled it. Fortunately, I happened to have his old card. He is off our register, Mr. Vincent; therefore, you can communicate with him directly, if you wish. But if you prefer –"

"Thank you," interposed the visitor, rising. "I have the address. I shall write to Myram and see if he still wishes employment."

Leaving the Triborough Agency, the young man headed southward. His gait was brisk; his clean-cut face wore a pleased smile. For to Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow, this visit to the employment agency had marked the end of a day's quest. Harry had gained the result that he wanted.

SHORTLY before five o'clock, Harry Vincent entered an office high in the towering Badger Building, near Times Square. This was the office of Rutledge Mann, an investment broker.

The girl at the desk recognized Harry Vincent and ushered him into Mann's private office. There Harry found a pleasant, chubby-faced individual, who was seated at a mahogany desk.

"Any luck?" inquired Mann, eagerly, as soon as Harry had closed the door. "I guess that was a foolish question, Vincent. You certainly look as though you had brought some news."

"I have," acknowledged Harry. "But I went to twelve places before I landed it. Myram was registered; but later withdrew his card. His address is 813 Roscoe Boulevard, in the Bronx."

Mann picked up the telephone and put in a call to Burbank. Harry heard him give the information. Mann hung up and swung about in his chair. His face showed a broad grin.

"Wait for instructions," he stated. "The others will be reporting soon, since it is after five o'clock."

The telephone bell rang almost while Mann was speaking. The investment broker answered; Harry heard him talk to Clyde Burke, stating that the work was done and adding that Clyde was to call Burbank for new instructions. That call ended, Mann smiled again.

"When I called you this morning, Vincent," he stated, "the only instructions that I had received were simply that you should look for a man named Myram, formerly a butler."

Harry nodded. He remembered the terse orders.

"Since then," continued Mann, "I have learned more about the fellow. Myram had been employed in one place for about twenty years. During the last months of his service, he had become addicted to petty thievery. Naturally, Myram realized that he was in a tough spot."

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"And wanted a good out," smiled Harry.

"Exactly," resumed Mann. "So his logical course was to register himself with an employment bureau. If a new opportunity offered, he could take it, with a recommendation from his old employers. Such a course would have covered his thievery."

"But his new job failed to materialize?"

"Precisely. Myram was discharged on suspicion. He promptly canceled his registration."

"Because he could no longer hope for a recommendation?"

Mann nodded, smiling. To Harry, the explanation was illuminating. He knew who had guessed the course that Myram had followed. It sounded simple, once Mann had stated the facts; but the original analysis have been a matter of keen reasoning.

The Shadow, knowing of Myram's dismissal, had figured out the picayune mental process which the ex-butler had used. Harry, like other agents, had been deputed to visit employment bureaus, inquiring for Myram. Harry had at last found one that still had the fellow's name in its old files.

The telephone bell was ringing. Again, Mann answered. Harry could tell that he was talking to Burbank. Like Burbank, Mann was a contact agent; occasionally, as to-day, their duties overlapped. His call ended, Mann swung about and spoke.

"Cover the Bronx address," he stated. "Wait for an opportunity to inquire. Then ask concerning Myram; also"—Mann's tone became emphatic—"ask concerning any other persons who may have asked about the fellow."

Harry nodded. He left the office and descended to the street. The quickest way to reach the Bronx was by subway. Harry chose that method, estimating that it would take him fully forty minutes to arrive at the address on Roscoe Boulevard.

THIRTY minutes later, a tall, stoop-shouldered man stepped from a taxicab on Roscoe Boulevard. His face was old and wizened; a shaggy mop of white hair edged from beneath his gray felt hat. Spry, despite the fact that he hobbled with a large, thick cane, this old codger took up a quick course to a house that bore the number 813. With spectacles poised on high-bridged nose, with outthrust lower lip, the arrival showed odd eagerness as he hastened toward his chosen destination.

Ascending stone steps, the old visitor pressed the doorbell at 813. Half a minute later, the door opened; a fat-faced woman appeared to stare at the odd visitor. The old man grimaced; then spoke in a high-pitched tone.

"Does Mr. Myram live here?" he questioned.

"He used to," returned the fat woman. "But he don't no longer. What did you want to see him about? Employment?"

The old man nodded. The woman shook her head.

"He don't want none," she stated. "He's got a job, Myram has. Nothin' doin', mister. I don't know where he's gone to —"

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A withered hand extended. Trembling fingers exhibited a ten-dollar bill. The woman paused, shaking her head; then finally she took the money.

"If you don't mean Myram no harm," she confided, "I guess I can tell you where he's livin' at. You're a friend of his?"

The old man nodded.

"He's gone out of here," said the woman. "Paid me extra not to tell nobody where he's at. Guess I oughtn't to tell you, mister. Maybe if I knowed more about you –"

"My name is Montague Rayne," crackled the old visitor. "I knew Myram long ago. I wish to do him a real service. It would be wise for you to tell me where he lives at present."

Convinced, the woman whispered an address. The old man nodded as he heard it. The location was in Manhattan, on the East Side.

With a courteous bow, Montague Rayne hobbled down the steps. The fat landlady watched his departure; then closed the front door.

That doubled form was not inconspicuous. Hardly had Montague Rayne reached the sidewalk before another person spied him. Harry Vincent, approaching afoot, stopped short to watch the visitor who was leaving 813. Lamplight showed the high-nosed, sharp-lipped face of the old man. Harry gained as clear an impression as had Clyde Burke, when the reporter had seen the photograph of Rayne in his palmy days.

Harry waited until Rayne reached the corner. Then he crossed the street and ascended the steps.

HARRY had taken it for granted that Montague Rayne had gone on his way; but Harry was wrong. Stopped just past the corner, the old man was peering back along the street. A cackled laugh came from his withered lips as he saw Harry go up to the door of 813.

Leaning on his cane, the keen-eyed hobbler started on his way. He stopped again as a taxicab whisked past. He noted the face of the driver, a shrewd-visaged fellow who appeared to have some purpose in coming to this district. Watching, crouched above his cane, the observer saw the cab pull up across the street from the house that bore the number 813.

Again, keen eyes had spied an agent of The Shadow. The driver of that taxi was Moe Shrevnitz, a hackie who worked in The Shadow's service. Moe's independent cab was actually owned by The Shadow; like Harry Vincent, Moe had been ordered to cover this location. Harry had thought that Montague Rayne was gone; Moe had not even seen the stooped form of the old man. Both agents had given themselves away.

Hobbling rapidly, the wizened-faced observer was making for the subway. Harry Vincent had chosen that mode of transportation to beat Moe Shrevnitz to Roscoe Boulevard. Soon Montague Rayne would be aboard an express, speeding southward, to reach the East Side minutes ahead of these men who had arrived at Myram's old abode.

BUT meanwhile, Harry Vincent had rung the doorbell of the house. The fat-faced woman opened the barrier, to stare suspiciously at this new visitor. Harry doffed his hat and delivered a pleasant smile.

"Does Mr. Myram live here?" he inquired.

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"Don't know nothin' about him," retorted the woman. "The name don't sound familiar, mister."

"That's odd," remarked Harry. "The employment agency told me that —"

"Myram don't want no employment," interrupted the landlady. "He's gotten a job, he has."

"Then he did live here?"

"Yes. But he don't no longer. I ain't tellin' nobody nothin' about him."

"I see. The old gentleman paid you not to talk."

The shot hit home. The woman became confused. Harry calmly drew a wallet from his pocket.

"How much did he give you?" inquired The Shadow's agent.

"He give me ten bucks," admitted the landlady. "But that ain't the whole of it, mister —"

"Here's another ten spot," interposed Harry. "I'm covering his bet. Who was he? What did you tell him?"

The woman pondered; then accepted the money with a shrug of her shoulders. Her attitude indicated that she thought Harry as reliable as the visitor who had preceded him. Mechanically, she gave Myram's new address; then added further information.

"The old gent told me his name," she stated. "Said it was Montague Rayne. Said he used to know Myram; that's why I talked to him. You look honest, young man; that's why I'm tellin' you the same."

"Thanks."

HARRY smiled and descended the steps. Again the door closed.

Harry signaled to Moe; then strolled down the street and put in a call to Burbank. He explained all that had happened; Burbank gave prompt instructions. Harry was to remain on duty, watching for any further visitors; Moe was to drive back to Manhattan and cover the East Side address.

Harry left the store. He reached Moe's cab. He gave the taximan the news; Moe shoved the cab into gear and sped away. Harry found a secluded spot across the street from 813 and went on watch.

He felt keen disappointment because he had not arrived ahead of Montague Rayne; at the same time, Harry was convinced that he had done the most that he could under the circumstances.

He was positive, for one thing, that no one had come here ahead of the elderly visitor. Whoever else might be in the game, that person had not gained the trail. Harry had never heard of The Creeper; nevertheless, his guess was correct. Only The Shadow had used the proper method of tracing Myram through a consultation of employment agencies.

The sudden advent of Montague Rayne had been produced by other circumstances. Harry recognized that much, even though he could not guess the causes that had led to the old visitor's arrival. To offset that, however, Harry was sure that his own prompt report would serve The Shadow. Even if Montague Rayne had chosen to visit Myram's new abode, The Shadow—if contacted immediately by Burbank—could be there as soon.

THE CREEPER

So Harry reasoned; and with that thought, he gained ease of mind as he settled for his lonely vigil. To Harry, a quick quest had brought prompt solution. Whatever The Shadow's purpose in seeking Myram, the result would soon be gained. So Harry believed; and with good cause.

To-day, however, Harry's guess was wrong. Not through poor reasoning, for The Shadow had actually gained the results he wanted, despite the surprising entry of Montague Rayne. The Shadow's only dangerous adversary was The Creeper; and, for the present, The Shadow was far ahead of his unsuspected foe.

Chance, alone, was to balk The Shadow. Chance that was already in the making; chance that was due to move with surprising swiftness, to change the trail before the cloaked master could gain success. That chance which was to stay The Shadow would work double harm. For where The Shadow lost, The Creeper would gain!

CHAPTER VI. DEATH INTERRUPTS

IT was after six o'clock when Harry Vincent began his lonely vigil on Roscoe Boulevard. A clouded day had brought early dusk. The Bronx streets had darkened to such extent that Harry had needed the aid of the street light to fully note the features of Montague Rayne.

In Manhattan, the gloom was even thicker, particularly upon an East Side avenue where the high steel structure of an elevated railway obscured the last glow of the darkening sky. Grimy street lamps were feeble in the increasing haze of blackness. All seemed dismal on this squalid thoroughfare.

A pale-faced man was walking down the street, his eyes furtive as he looked about him. He stopped at the entrance of a dilapidated pawnshop. There he paused to stare at a darkened doorway a dozen yards below. His cautious glance ended, the pale-faced man entered the hockshop.

Hardly had he done so before a grimy, sweated figure shifted from the near-by doorway. A pasty-faced, evil-eyed rogue came shambling up to the pawnshop window. Pausing there, the fellow peered around the edge of the opened door to see the pale-faced man engaged in conversation with the proprietor of the pawnshop.

A transaction was completed; the pale-faced man came out. Again he failed to see the sweated figure, for the evil-eyed observer had shifted back into the doorway. It was not until the furtive man turned a corner that the ugly spy decided to enter the pawnshop himself. He shambled through the doorway and nodded to the sallow man behind the counter.

"Hello, Soaker," greeted the sweated man, with an unpleasant grin. "Old paleface was in to see you again, eh? What did he soak this time?"

The man behind the counter blinked uneasily; then he held up a gold signet ring that glittered in the light.

"This is all, Dopey," he replied. "Ten bucks is all I gave him for it."

"Yeah? Looks like you skun the guy." "Dopey" leaned over the counter. "Listen, Soaker. You been stallin' me too much. This bird is unloadin' hot stuff, ain't he?"

"What if he is?"

"Well, you're takin' chances when you freeze it. Why be a sap? If you want to fence stuff, take it from guys

THE CREEPER

that you know. Like me."

"I do that, don't I?"

"Sure. But you don't give no breaks in return. Listen—that mug's been in here half a dozen times, always soakin' somethin' new. Why wait until the bulls grab him? Why not give me the lay? Who is the mug? Where does he bunk?"

"Soaker" rubbed his chin meditatively; then nodded. He had caught Dopey's drift. He was deciding that it was policy to play in with this small-fry crook who knew too much.

"All right, Dopey," informed Soaker, coming from behind the counter. "I'm closing up to-night. Go ahead; do your dirty work while I'm not around. The stuff's hot, all right. You might as well have it as the guy that's got it. He's a sap, anyway. Too dumb even to keep his trap shut."

"Talked to you, did he?"

"Sure. His name's Myram. He lives around the corner, third floor back, in the first house past the butcher shop. He used to be a butler for some millionaire."

"That's who he lifted the stuff from?"

"Yeah. But he don't admit it's hot. Says his old master gave him a lot of jewels and other junk before he died. Says he's afraid the family wouldn't believe it. That's why he's got to hock the stuff quietlike."

Dopey snarled a contemptuous laugh. Soaker motioned him to the door; the sweated crook sidled out and watched the pawnshop proprietor lock up.

"This guy Myram," confided Soaker, "is living off of what he grabbed. How much more of it he's got, I don't know. That ain't my business, Dopey."

"I'll make it mine, Soaker. An' don't worry about no squawk if I bring it here. From what you say about this guy Myram, he ain't nobody that's goin' to squeal to the bulls."

SOAKER shrugged his shoulders and sauntered down the street. Dopey shifted off in the opposite direction. He reached the corner and stopped there. A passing rowdy paused to jab him in the ribs.

"Hello, Dopey," grinned the tough. "Still stickin' around here, ain't you? Well, I don't blame you. The harness bull on this beat don't bother nobody much."

"Hello, Buck," returned Dopey, grinning sourly. "Ain't seen you in a long time. Yeah, you're right about the flatfoot. He's not such a dumb copper, though. I just keep out of sight when he goes by. I know when he's due."

"Buck" moved away. Dopey shifted past the corner; then sneaked toward the butcher shop. The place was closed; but through the window Dopey could see a dim clock face that registered half-past six.

Dopey went up the steps of the house next door; he found the front door open and entered a gloomy, gas-lit hall.

THE CREEPER

No one was about; Dopey saw opportunity. He snaked up the stairs, passed the gloomy second floor and went up to the third. He found the room that he supposed was Myram's. Light showed through the keyhole and beneath the door.

Dopey tried the knob. The door opened.

Swinging into the lighted room, the pasty-faced crook yanked a revolver from his pocket. His face was as evil as a rat's as he shot a quick glance toward the far side of the room, where a tall man was closing a bureau drawer.

The fellow turned with a startled cry; then his gasp faded. Dopey grinned and closed the door behind him. He had found the man he wanted: the pale-faced individual who had visited Soaker's pawnshop.

"YOUR name's Myram?" quizzed Dopey.

The pale man nodded as he raised his hands. Dopey saw him tremble and decided that his prey was an easy mark. With an evil grin, the pasty-faced crook flourished his revolver as he advanced. Myram backed against the wall, near the half-opened door of a closet.

"I'm a dick," announced Dopey. "Sent here to pinch you, Myram. You got hot stuff; been freezin' it aroun' the corner at the hockshop, ain't you? Come on— don't lie about it. I've been watchin' you."

Dopey's bluff was ludicrous; but it passed with Myram. The former butler was frightened enough to believe that this fatty intruder was actually from headquarters. Myram began to beg.

"I—I didn't really steal anything," he declared. "Really, it was — it was the old master who gave me the trinkets that I have been pawning. I—I am no thief."

"Can the stall," snarled Dopey. "Listen, mug, I'm here to get the goods! That's all. I'm goin' to let you off, just because I'm kind of soft at times. You keep quiet about it. Savvy? An' to-morrow you duck out of here. Because there ain't many dicks as easy on a guy as I am. Where's the swag? In this drawer?"

Dopey opened the drawer with one hand, as he spoke. The glitter of gold and silver caught his eye. Still covering Myram, he used his left hand to pocket the objects that lay in view. He took a pair of huge gold cuff links, each studded with a small diamond. Next, a silver statuette, part of an ornamental desk set.

Myram watched him pocket a heavy gold watch chain, an antique bracelet of the same metal; then a golden scarab that Bigelow Doyd had once brought back from Egypt. Trinkets followed; these spoils had all been clustered in a corner of the drawer. Then, fishing beneath a shirt, Dopey brought out a square, flat box of ebony.

For a moment, he was about to replace the casket, particularly because it did not rattle when he shook it. Then the silver initials on the cover caught his eye. Dopey decided to keep the box.

"No, no!" gasped Myram. "Don't—don't take the casket! I—I want to keep it. Really, it is worth nothing."

"What do you want it for then?" demanded Dopey. "It don't belong to you, does it?"

"The old master valued it. Most highly —"

Myram paused abruptly as Dopey grinned. The pale-faced butler had realized his mistake. So had Dopey.

THE CREEPER

"Thought you'd slip one past me, eh?" sneered the crook. His rat face was vicious. "Well, if your boss thought it was worth more than this joolry, you ought to have thought the same. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir. I must admit that such was my impression. The casket is made of ebony. A highly prized wood, sir. But I thought —"

"Quit thinkin'. I'm here to grab this swag, without no squawk from you."

MYRAM'S eyes narrowed. This time it was Dopey who had made the slip. His flimsy bluff had failed; for the first time, Myram realized that this intruder was a crook. Sharply, the former servant put a question.

"Do you have a badge?"

"A what?"

"A badge. All detectives wear them."

Dopey delivered a snarled chuckle. He had not believed that his bluff had continued to pass. He thought Myram's question a huge joke; it increased his contempt for a man whom he regarded as easy prey.

Dopey's guffaw, however, had an unexpected effect upon Myram. The servant straightened suddenly; then, with a hiss of anger, hurled himself upon the man with the gun.

The attack caught the crook flatfooted. For a moment, Dopey crumpled beneath the onslaught. The ebony box clattered to the carpet; Dopey tried vainly to grapple with the victim who had so suddenly become a formidable foe. He was afraid to fire, for the revolver shot might be heard below; but he did have the sudden impulse to wrest away and jab the muzzle of his gun against Myram's ribs.

The move made Myram wilt. Feeling the gun point, Myram uttered a tightened gasp and ceased his resistance. Dopey straightened and pressed the pale-faced fellow back toward the wall; then edged him into the closet.

A sudden fright seized Myram. He thrust his hands for Dopey's throat. This time, the crook was too quick.

Lurching forward, Dopey hurled Myram into the closet and pulled the door behind him. In total darkness, he pressed the trigger of his revolver, shifting the muzzle viciously, back and forth against his victim's body. Myram slumped with a final gasp.

The reek of powder became stifling. Dopey emerged coughing; he closed the door to hide the body of his victim. Snatching up the ebony box, he closed the bureau drawer; then darted toward the door of the room. He juggled a small table as he passed; a key fell to the floor. Dopey stopped to pick it up; a grin showed on his rattish countenance.

Gaining false nerve, the crook moved more slowly. He realized at last that the muffled shots could not have been heard. The closet door had fully covered the sharp sounds. Sneaking out into the hall, Dopey closed the door behind him and tried the key. It fitted.

Dopey locked the door and pocketed the key. He sneaked down the stairs and reached the street, unnoticed. He glanced through the butcher shop window as he passed. The clock showed fifteen minutes of seven.

THE CREEPER

Pockets filled with swag, the ebony box buried beneath his coat, Dopey had accomplished theft and murder within the span of fifteen minutes. Crime committed, he went slinking off beyond the shelter of the elevated structure.

FIVE minutes went by. A taxicab halted on the avenue, near the corner. A tall, stooped figure alighted; a cane clicked on the sidewalk. A corner light showed the hobbling form of Montague Rayne. Traveling by subway; then by cab, this searcher had arrived near his new destination.

Rayne followed the side street; his keen eyes sighted the number above the door of the lodging house wherein Myram had been murdered.

Montague Rayne approached and rang the doorbell. There was no response; he rang again and waited. After a third attempt, he was rewarded by an answer. A sallow man in shirtsleeves opened the door and stared at the withered face of the visitor.

"Who do you want?" quizzed the lodger. "This ain't no private home. There's roomers here."

"So I understand," crackled Rayne. "I wish to see a gentleman named Myram. Where can I find him?"

"Third floor, back." The sallow-faced man noted the visitor's cane. "Maybe it would be tough for you, going up them steep stairs. If it's worth two bits, I'll roust the guy out for you."

"Two bits?"

"Yeah. A quarter. To go up and tell Myram you're here."

"Here is one dollar. But I shall come up also. You may summon Myram while I am on the way."

The sallow lodger took the dollar bill eagerly. He hurried up the stairs and reached the third floor. He was rapping at Myram's door when he heard Rayne's cane clicking on the stairs. The old man had made good progress following.

"Myram don't answer," informed the lodger. "Guess you was just too late to catch him. His light's still burning. He must have just went out."

"Yet he left the light on," quavered Rayne. "That should mean that he is in."

"Maybe he's used up pretty near two-bits' worth of gas. Sometimes fellows leave it burning when it's about through. Then they sock another quarter in the meter when they come back. Say—do you want me to tell Myram you were here?"

"No. That is unnecessary. I shall return to-morrow morning."

Rayne descended, with the lodger following. The old man hobbled from the house, back toward the avenue, apparently on his way to an elevated station. The lodger lounged back into the house; it was another man who noticed Rayne upon the street.

MOE SHREVNITZ had arrived at the corner of the avenue. Driving at swift speed, the hackie had made a record trip from the Bronx. Leaning into the back of his cab, Moe spoke to a hunched passenger who was seated on the floor.

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"There goes Rayne," informed the cab driver. "Slide after him, Hawkeye. I'll stick here."

A crafty-faced little man sidled from the cab. He was "Hawkeye," another of The Shadow's agents, who had met Moe at this spot. A clever trailer, Hawkeye had few equals at the art of sticking to a trail, once given.

He spotted Montague Rayne halfway down the block. With a grin, he decided to give the old fellow more leeway.

When Hawkeye finally slid off in pursuit, he spotted Rayne ascending the steps of an elevated station on the downtown side. Looking over his shoulder, the little spotter spied the lights of a train a few blocks back. An approaching rumble warned him that Rayne would be in time to catch the arriving local.

Hawkeye jogged swiftly on his way. He dashed up the steps, reached the upstairs station as the train was coming in and shoved a nickel in the turnstile. He reached the platform and took a quick look for Rayne. The old man was nowhere in sight.

As the train pulled out, an uptown local stopped on the other track. A sudden light dawned on Hawkeye. He hurried out through the station and down a dozen steps, to arrive at a low bridge that crossed the street just beneath the tracks. He realized then that the old man must have been going uptown; he had come up the steps, crossed the bridge and reached the opposite platform in time to catch the other train.

Chagrined, Hawkeye hunched his shoulder and started back toward Moe's corner.

BEFORE Hawkeye reached the parked cab, another figure had arrived there. From darkness, Moe had heard a whispered voice: the tone of The Shadow, requesting a report. Though he could not see his questioner in the gloom beside the cab, Moe spoke, knowing positively that it was his chief. He told of seeing Rayne; and added that Hawkeye was on the trail. The Shadow moved away.

There was an alleyway in back of the old lodging house. Several minutes later, a motion occurred in the darkness of that narrow passage. Keen eyes looked upward from the depths. They spied a light burning in the rear room of the third floor. The Shadow paused to study that unceasing glow.

Then he began an upward course. His task was not difficult, for the rear wall of the crumbling building offered easy holds. Past darkened windows, gripping projecting ledges, The Shadow neared his goal. At last he arrived at Myram's window. The sash was loose; easing it upward, The Shadow swung into the lighted room.

Tall, spectral in his cloak, the weird arrival moved to the corner near the closet. His keen gaze told him that there had been commotion here. The bed pushed back—the table askew—the bureau drawer jammed shut at an angle—these were the only indications that The Shadow needed.

He spied the closet door, approached and opened it. The glow of the gaslight showed a huddled form within.

Stepping back, The Shadow stooped and studied the face of the murdered man. He recognized that the victim must be Myram. The Shadow studied the bloodstained, bullet-riddled vest. He saw a thin bit of green cardboard projecting from the dead man's pocket.

Drawing the card into view, The Shadow found it to be a pawn ticket, bearing the address of the place around the corner.

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Further inspection gained nothing. Myram had eleven dollars in his pocket; money that Dopey had been too excited to think about. The Shadow looked elsewhere for evidence of robbery: namely, in the bureau drawer. He saw the vacant corner, the rumpled shirt. Examining the shirt beneath, he saw a square mark on its surface.

The Shadow had found where Myram had hidden the ebony box. That casket gone, he had no reason to linger further. Moving to the door of the room, he unlocked it softly with a pick; then stepped out into the hall and locked the door behind him.

Gliding down the stairs, The Shadow reached the front door and went out to the darkened street. With him, he had brought one clue: that pawn ticket that he had found in Myram's pocket. There had been no others; evidently Myram had destroyed all that he had gained in the past. Any valuables with which that servant had parted would surely have been goods that he did not care to reclaim.

Reaching Moe's cab, The Shadow gave a whispered order. The taxi pulled away, with Hawkeye again huddled in the back seat. He had already reported his failure to Burbank. The Shadow had ordered Moe to move at once; Hawkeye had gained no chance to tell of his lost trail.

DOUBLING to the street in back of the lodging house, The Shadow reached Lamont Cranston's parked limousine. The big car had been parked there since quarter past six; for Stanley had received a call to come there. It was shortly after six when Stanley had gained the order; he had come promptly, and had been waiting patiently for his master to arrive.

Stanley had fancied that his master had approached the car a dozen minutes ago; but he had waited vainly for an order to leave, hence he had imagined that his guess was incorrect. This time, however, Stanley's sudden hunch that the car had an occupant proved true. The voice of Lamont Cranston came through the speaking tube, giving the chauffeur an order to depart.

The big car rolled away; it turned up the avenue and passed the darkened pawnshop. A whispered laugh sounded within the rear of the car. Again that repressed mirth carried prophecy. The Shadow had been balked to-night, thwarted—he knew—by chance crime. But he had gained a clue that would lead him to Myram's murderer.

Keen in intuition, The Shadow had guessed the truth; that the stolen casket had reached the hands of another who did not know its secret. A new trail had opened; one that The Shadow would follow on the morrow.

CHAPTER VII. THE CREEPER MOVES

NOON the next day. Two men were standing in the city morgue. One was Tobias Clavelock, dry-faced and solemn; the other a stocky, swarthy-faced man from headquarters. This was Acting Inspector Joe Cardona, long recognized as the ace of New York detectives.

The two were viewing the dead body of Myram, stretched on a sliding slab. Clavelock was nodding as he studied the rigid face, distorted from the pangs of sudden death. The lawyer was sure of the murdered man's identity.

"That is Myram," he announced. "He was the servant who was dismissed from the Doyd household. I should like to know who murdered him, inspector."

"So would I," grunted Cardona. "We'll get a trail on the killer, now that you've assured us that robbery was

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the motive. It didn't look like robbery when we found the body this morning. Money in the dead man's pocket—a cheap, poorly furnished room —"

"But no sign of the ebony casket."

"None. Of course, there's still a chance that Myram may have gotten rid of it some time ago; or even a chance that he never did have it. Just the same, the odds are that robbery was the game. Myram may have sold some stuff he stole from old Mr. Doyd. Anybody seeing it might have thought he had more. Maybe he was flush with dough at times. If you could describe any of the missing articles, outside of that casket, it would help us."

"Perhaps I shall be able to do so, inspector. I shall talk to Miss Theresa Doyd, when I visit the house this afternoon. You may expect a telephone call from me later."

IT was after three o'clock when Clavelock arrived at the Doyd mansion. The day was cloudy and dull; the front of the old building looked like the bulwarks of a gloomy fortress. Wilfred admitted the lawyer; Clavelock stepped into a hallway that was already lighted, so somber was the interior of the mansion. Architects had been stingy with windows during the decade when this house had been built.

Clavelock asked for Theresa. Wilfred ushered the lawyer into the reception room; then departed. Some minutes later, Theresa entered to greet the visitor. Clavelock came abruptly to the business that had brought him here.

"Myram is dead," he announced. "Found, murdered, on the third floor of a cheap rooming house on the East Side. I have seen the body; no one else will be required to identify it."

The girl stared aghast. The thought of Myram's death made her pity the dishonest servant. She made no comment; it was Clavelock who brought up the subject of the ebony casket.

"There was nothing of value found in Myram's room," stated the lawyer. "No sign of the ebony casket. I talked with a police inspector; he wants a description of any other articles Myram may have stolen. Can you recall any of them, Theresa?"

The girl shook her head.

"No," she replied, slowly. "Grandfather kept most of those trifling curios locked away in his room. I seldom saw them; I merely knew that he owned them. Odd cuff links, antique bracelets—other trinkets of that sort. I believe he had some silver statuettes; but I do not know what they represented."

"Would Wilfred know about those objects?"

"No. I asked him. Like myself, he seldom saw them. Myram must have found the key to grandfather's closet; and also learned how to open the drawer of the large table."

"Too bad, Theresa, that we can give the police no further information. However, they intend to search for Myram's murderer; and they may be successful in finding him. I am going out of town this afternoon, so I called that reporter chap, Burke. He has promised to write a story about Myram's death; of course, it will be mentioned that the fellow was once a servant here, but Burke will see to it that Myram's thefts are not mentioned in the newspapers."

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Clavelock bowed himself from the room. Theresa followed to the front door. As Clavelock started down the steps a coupe pulled up to the curb. A horn honked; the lawyer looked about to see Donald Shiloh alighting from the car.

The two men joined Theresa at the front door. After brief greetings, Clavelock told Shiloh the facts that he had mentioned to Theresa. The lawyer went his way; Shiloh and Theresa entered the house and went into the reception room. The girl stared about as she entered; then pressed her finger to her lips and motioned for Shiloh to close the sliding doors. That done, Theresa pointed to the door at the back of the room. It was ajar. Shiloh closed it.

"YOU were in here with Clavelock?" he questioned, in a whisper. "Do you think that some one could have been eavesdropping?"

The girl nodded.

"Yes," she said. "I do not recollect that door being partly open. Some one could have been listening, Donald. I may be mistaken; but— but —"

She buried her face in her hands and tried to restrain convulsive sobs. It was plain that Theresa's nerves were on edge. Shiloh approached and spoke quietly, his tone comforting.

"You heard the footsteps again?" he inquired softly.

"Last night," nodded Theresa. "Creeping, all about the house. They stopped abruptly, Donald. After that, I did not hear them again."

"Mark Lundig was here?"

"Yes, but he retired early. Uncle Egbert was asleep, also. That is, both of them may have been asleep; on the contrary, either one may have been awake."

"Where was Wilfred?"

"On the third floor."

"Has he heard the footsteps?"

"I have not asked him. I think he would have mentioned the creeping to me, though, if he had heard it. But Wilfred is somewhat deaf."

"Yet you depend upon him? With his deafness?"

"Of course. Wilfred hears loud sounds quite easily. He always answers the doorbell promptly; and I can summon him at any time by pressing any of the bell-buttons that connect with his room. There are several of them, you know."

"Where is Lundig, at present?"

"He went out somewhere. Probably to meet those detectives whom he has hired. He has been very mysterious lately; acting wisely, as if he thought himself to be a sleuth."

THE CREEPER

"And Uncle Egbert?"

"He is somewhere about the house."

Shiloh paused, just as he was about to make another statement. He raised his hand for silence. Theresa listened. To their ears came a creaking sound, from somewhere in the hallway.

"Is that the creeping?" whispered Shiloh.

Theresa was intent; for a moment she hesitated. Then she shook her head as the sound came closer.

"I—I don't know," she gasped. "No—it sounds different from the creeping that I heard last night. This noise is coming closer. Listen, Donald! It sounds as though it is on the stairs!"

Shiloh sprang to the sliding doors and shoved one open. He stepped out into the lighted hall, to see a figure on the stairway. It was Egbert Doyd; the sickly-looking uncle turned about and stared at Shiloh.

"HELLO, Egbert," greeted Shiloh. "We thought we heard you going by. Just wanted to tell you that Clavelock had been here. With news about Myram. The fellow was murdered."

"Has the ebony casket been found?" inquired Egbert, sharply.

"No sign of it, uncle," replied Theresa, coming from the reception room. "I am sorry you were not about when Mr. Clavelock was here."

"I was asleep in the library," snapped Egbert. "You should have called me. Bah! No one thinks of me about this house."

With that, Egbert turned and made his way upstairs. His gait was fairly rapid; if he had been responsible for those slower footsteps, it must have been a sign that he had moved slowly past the reception room door, perhaps to listen there.

As Egbert Doyd reached the top steps, he passed Wilfred. The servant had been standing there unnoticed. Both men disappeared from sight. Theresa spoke to Shiloh; the young man followed her back into the library.

"Those were not the footsteps," assured Theresa. "But I feel sure, Donald, that the creeping is deliberate. The same person could easily make shuffling sounds instead. But there is something else that I must tell you. Come—look here in this tiny desk drawer."

The girl went to an old-fashioned secretary desk and opened a drawer. She brought out folded sheets of paper. Shiloh stared as he saw the typewritten lines.

"The missing code list!" he exclaimed. "The one that Clavelock could not find! Who put it here, Theresa? How did you discover it?"

"Yesterday evening," explained the girl, "Mark Lundig was in here alone when I entered. I saw him hastily close this drawer. He did not realize that I had seen him. After he had gone upstairs, I investigated. I found the list."

"So Lundig filched it. Hm—m—m. Look, Theresa. He has marked it. Evidently trying to figure out some answer for himself."

THE CREEPER

"What shall I do about it?"

"Say nothing. Leave the list here. If you have any trouble with Lundig, call my apartment. If I am not there, Jeffrey will be. One or the other of us will come at once."

Theresa replaced the list. She and Shiloh went out into the hall. They passed the reception room and arrived at the front parlor. Suddenly Theresa stopped short and stared into the front room. A man was seated there, reading. It was Mark Lundig.

THE fellow looked up, pretending surprise; but it was evident from the suspicious look in his eyes that he had heard the two approaching.

He laid the book aside and nodded to Theresa as he arose. Then he shook hands affably with Shiloh.

"I just came in," remarked Lundig. "Wilfred admitted me, and I stopped in here to look through this old art portfolio. A most interesting volume. Most interesting! Well, Theresa, I shall see you later. I am going into the library."

Lundig went back through the hall. Shiloh opened the front door. Theresa followed him to the steps; there, the girl expressed new suspicions.

"He has gone to the library," she whispered, "to make sure that his precious list is still there. What is more, Donald, I do not believe that Wilfred admitted Mark. We would have heard the ring of the doorbell."

"Then how did Lundig get into the house?"

"Through the side door, in back of the hall. It leads off beyond the library."

"Is it unlocked?"

"No. But there are several keys to it. What is more, the lock is an old-fashioned one. There used to be a bolt; but it became so rusty that Wilfred removed it. The bolt has never been replaced."

Shiloh pondered. Theresa looked quizzical. Seeing the girl's expression, the man smiled.

"I was wondering," he stated, "just when Lundig did come in. It was probably while Uncle Egbert was still in the library. That is why Lundig went toward the parlor."

"Then it was he whom we heard passing?"

"Perhaps. Or he may have passed too softly for us to hear his footsteps. He must have watched from the parlor."

"To see us go into the library?"

"Yes. That is why he waited longer in the front room."

The matter settled, at least to partial satisfaction, Shiloh went his way. Before departing, he again assured Theresa that he would be ready in time of need. The girl watched the coupe roll from the curb; then went back into the house.

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She went first to the library. Mark Lundig was no longer there; the girl decided that he must have gone to his room. Theresa went to her own room on the second floor, found a book and began to read.

Two hours passed. It was nearly six o'clock and the cloudy afternoon had darkened into dusk. The girl heard some one coming down the stairs from the third floor. She looked out of her room to see Wilfred passing. The servant was going to the kitchen to prepare dinner, for Wilfred was a competent chef, as well as a capable serving man.

Wilfred did not see Theresa. The girl watched him descend to the ground floor. She heard his footsteps fade. A somber silence pervaded the old house; then, from below, the girl detected a new sound. It was the creeping again, faint, almost inaudible; impossible to locate.

Theresa shuddered. The creeping ended abruptly. The girl listened tensely for a full five minutes; then went back into her room, closed the door and tried to resume her reading.

But she could not forget the ominous sound that she had heard. Through her mind kept flashing a name—the only title by which she could identify the person with those strange footsteps. The Creeper. Theresa repeated the name aloud. Her own voice made her shudder as she said the name:

"The Creeper!"

At last, Theresa settled down to read her book. She became engrossed; she forgot the passage of time, until the closing of a door on the second floor suddenly aroused her. The girl glanced at a clock on the bureau. It was nearly seven. That was the dinner hour.

Leaving her room, Theresa went to the stairway. Halfway down, she paused. Again she heard the creeping, more distinctly than before. An hour had lapsed since she had heard the sound before. The Creeper had moved about; then stopped somewhere. Again, he was prowling below.

Where was he? Theresa could not guess. The uncanny footsteps might have been anywhere on the ground floor—anywhere except near the parlor, for the girl could see the entrance to that room. She decided that the sound must be in the library, or in the hall that led beyond it. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the creeping ended.

Gathering nerve, Theresa went downstairs. She passed the doors of the reception room. They were shut tight. She went on through the rear hall; she reached the side door and tried it, to find the barrier locked. Oppressed by the gloom, Theresa hurried back and entered the library. The room was lighted; it was also empty.

A sound made Theresa turn. The girl repressed a gasp as she saw Mark Lundig standing in the doorway of the library. The fox-faced man smiled. His expression indicated that he had not noticed the girl's surprise.

"Dinner nearly ready?" inquired Lundig.

"I—I guess so," stammered Theresa. "When did—I mean, did you just come downstairs?"

"Just this minute. My watch said seven, so I left my room. Ah! There is the dinner gong."

Melodious chimes were sounding from across the hall. Theresa and Lundig left the library, to enter the dining room, which was the room located directly in back of the reception room. As they crossed the hall, Theresa stopped, noting that one of the reception room doors was slightly opened. Lundig saw the direction of the girl's gaze and spoke promptly.

THE CREEPER

"I looked in there for Egbert," he remarked. "Sometimes the old chap drops in there for a doze. I noticed that the door was slightly open; but I did not see Egbert."

Footsteps came from the stairway. Egbert appeared; the old uncle smiled as he saw Theresa. His sickly face looked less yellow than usual; in fact, it was tinted with a slight flush.

"My nap did me good," chuckled Egbert. "But I was sleeping like a cat all the while. The dinner gong awakened me. Well, well! For once I really feel like eating."

They entered the dining room. Wilfred appeared as soon as they sat down and solemnly began to serve them. Both Mark Lundig and Egbert Doyd ate with relish; but Theresa had little taste for food. She was troubled, wondering about the insidious mystery that dominated this old house.

The Creeper!

AGAIN the name flashed through Theresa's brain. The girl glanced toward Mark Lundig. He could be The Creeper. He could have visited the library an hour ago, worked on his stolen list, then started back upstairs. Hearing Theresa coming down, he could have gone into the reception room and waited there until she had passed; then come to join her after she had entered the library.

Theresa gazed at her Uncle Egbert. He was oddly active to-night, more so than Theresa had ever believed he could be. He could be The Creeper. He might have come down; gone into the reception room; then returned upstairs—silently—before Lundig had come down.

Theresa realized suddenly that she might not have heard new footsteps had they occurred while she was in the rear hall.

Wilfred was moving noiselessly about. He was a well-trained serving man, always quiet when occasion demanded. A new suspicion startled Theresa. Had Wilfred been The Creeper?

He had gone downstairs at six. He could have prowled then; and later, shortly before seven, when Theresa had heard the strange footsteps for the second time. Wilfred could have gone through the dining room to the kitchen. That would account for the sudden finish of The Creeper's footsteps.

Baffled, the girl felt troubled. One lone determination gripped her. The next time she heard The Creeper's footsteps, she would call for promised aid. From the telephone in her own room, Theresa would summon Donald Shiloh, bringing him here at once to help her solve the weird and terrifying mystery.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW MOVES

THE CREEPER had moved. Not unheard—but unseen, as was his chosen way. The Creeper—whoever he might be—was a master of peculiar craft. He knew the illusion that sound created; the difficulty that listening ears would find in locating it. By magnifying or decreasing the shuffle of his footsteps, he baffled listeners and carried them from his actual trail. Such tactics made The Creeper more ominous than if he had been totally unheard.

Six o'clock had been the time when Theresa Doyd had first heard The Creeper in the old mansion, on this particular evening. The girl had not guessed the purpose of his prowling, although she suspected that he might be searching the house in hope that the black ebony casket had not been taken by Myram.

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For Theresa was sure that The Creeper knew the value of that casket; and by that time—six o'clock—the news of Myram's death was known to all New York. Clyde Burke had followed Tobias Clavelock's tip. He had told reporters on the evening newspapers that they would find a story at the morgue.

Down in the vicinity where Myram had lived, murder talk was rife. Neighbors were discussing the former butler's death; the sallow lodger at the rooming house had mentioned the visit of an old man with a cane. His description of Montague Rayne had been a poor one, however. The elderly stranger had been standing in the darkness when the sallow lodger had first viewed him; and the light in the third floor hall had been too dim for close scrutiny.

Since the old man had given no name; since his identity remained unguessed, the police had not profited greatly by his description. Joe Cardona, in his hunt for Myram's murderer, was depending upon stoolies for information. Detectives and policemen had been hereabout all day; but with the arrival of evening, none remained.

It was eight o'clock, by the timepiece in the window of the meat store on the side street. Around the corner, the lights of the little pawnshop glimmered beneath the gloomy bulk of the elevated.

The man behind the counter, however, was not Soaker. The proprietor had not been here to-day. A substitute had opened the shop; he was a lanky, gum-chewing youth who sat on a high stool and stared out toward the gloom of the avenue.

A man came into the pawnshop, moving quickly. The substitute bobbed from his stool as he recognized the sallow, nervous face of Soaker. The proprietor swung around the counter and put a quick question.

"Been trouble around the neighborhood, Bill?"

"Sure," responded the youth. "Some dub was bumped off. He lived in a rooming house around the corner."

"Any coppers been in here?"

The youth shook his head.

"All right, Bill," decided Soaker. "Here's your pay. Slide along; I'll run the place this evening."

The substitute departed. As soon as he was gone, Soaker began preparations to close for the night. He intended to close the pawnshop in a hurry; he had kept it open during the day only to avoid suspicion.

WHILE Soaker was engaged behind the counter, he heard some one enter. He turned quickly, then expressed relief as he saw a furtive-looking customer, a little man with a wise face above sweated shoulders.

This was Hawkeye. The Shadow's spotter had been on watch outside the pawnshop, waiting for Soaker's return. Hawkeye had put in a prompt call to Burbank; at present, he was following further instructions. From beneath his sweater, he pulled out a green card and passed it across the counter.

"How much is owin' on this?" inquired Hawkeye, eyeing Soaker sharply.

The proprietor looked at the card. His lips twitched. It was the ticket that he had given Myram last night. Hawkeye grinned wisely. He had expected this effect, ever since he had received the card from The Shadow.

"Where—where'd you get this?" demanded Soaker.

THE CREEPER

"From a pal of mine," responded Hawkeye. "He told me to bring it around here. Said you'd know about it."

Soaker shoved the card back across the counter, getting rid of it as he would a burning object.

"I don't know nothing about it –"

"It's the McCoy, ain't it?" grimaced Hawkeye, picking up the card. "One of your hock tickets, with the name of this joint on it?"

Soaker nodded reluctantly; then, rubbing his chin, he asked:

"Did Dopey send you here?"

"Sure," returned Hawkeye. "Who else would have?"

"Going back to see him?"

"Maybe. Got anything you want me to tell him?"

"Only to stay away. I don't want to see him. That's all."

Hawkeye had shifted to an inner corner of the pawnshop. Soaker was watching him; hence the proprietor did not see the opening door. A new figure was entering; one cloaked in black.

Silently, The Shadow edged toward the side wall, away from outside observation. The door closed behind him.

"Dopey wants to talk with you," Hawkeye was telling Soaker. "If you don't want him to come here, maybe he can –"

He broke off suddenly and turned in feigned alarm. Soaker followed suit; but his fright was real. Both men stared into the muzzle of an automatic, held in a gloved fist. Burning eyes were fixed upon the pair.

"The Shadow!"

It was Soaker who blurted recognition. He had heard of The Shadow; he knew the dread that the cloaked master inspired throughout the underworld. Grim fear gripped Soaker, for he had dealt with crooks, even though he was not actually one of their number. He believed Hawkeye to be a friend of Dopey's; that was sufficient to make Soaker sure that he had incurred The Shadow's wrath.

SILENTLY, the black-garbed intruder stepped forward. A gloved left hand stretched forth and plucked the incriminating pawn ticket from Hawkeye's hand. The little spotter winced; he spoke in hoarse protest.

"It ain't mine!" he exclaimed. "Honest! It ain't my ticket. It belongs to Dopey –"

Hawkeye broke off, almost defiantly. Soaker, trembling, saw the fierce blaze of The Shadow's eyes. He was quick to add statements of his own, hoping to gain mercy for himself.

"That's right," he quavered. "It—it was Dopey who stole the ticket. Dopey Delvin; he took it off of a guy he bumped. It was Myram who soaked the signet ring. Dopey seen him here and went around to bump him."

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Fumbling, Soaker yanked open a drawer and tossed the signet on the table. He followed with odd pieces of jewelry: a scarfpin with a small emerald, a heavy antique bracelet of beaten gold.

"That's all that's here," he explained. "It was Myram brought them. Dopey's the guy who bumped him. Dopey Delvin—he lives down near the Bowery, somewhere around the Mukden Cafe—the old Chinese restaurant —"

The Shadow had plucked up the items on the counter. Soaker's gasping tones ended; the fellow was stifled with fear. Then came a whispered laugh from hidden lips; a burst of suppressed mockery that brought new shudders to the cowering proprietor of the pawnshop.

The Shadow wheeled; with swift stride, he left by the front door.

Soaker sagged to the stool behind the counter. He stared at Hawkeye; the little spotter was crouching in the corner.

A full minute passed; then Hawkeye cringed forward. Without a word to Soaker, he sneaked toward the door and peered out. Seeing no one, he shambled out to the avenue.

Still trembling, Soaker finished closing up the shop. With lips tightly compressed, he went out and locked the door behind him. Shaky as he looked about him, he started away from his darkened shop for the corner.

He passed a parked taxi; from its front seat, Moe Shrevnitz eyed Soaker and grinned. That fellow would do no talking; of that fact, Moe was sure.

Using Hawkeye as a foil, The Shadow had worked a quick confession from Soaker's quivering lips. A new name had been learned. Dopey Delvin was marked as the murderer of Myram. Soaker had told of the locality where Dopey lived. The Shadow had gained a new trail.

Moe, watching as a final cover-up man, had seen Soaker leave. The taxi driver jerked his cab into gear.

As he pulled into traffic, Moe no longer watched the sidewalk. Hence, as he neared the corner, he did not see a figure that had arrived there. Leaning upon his heavy cane was old Montague Rayne. His keen eyes were gleaming from his withered face. Those optics recognized the taxi driver whom they had noted in the Bronx, the day before.

Chortling to himself, Rayne hobbled away toward the elevated station. He used his cane with his right hand while his left clutched a long cardboard box, bound with heavy cord. It was plain from Rayne's manner that his keen eyes had seen more than Moe's cab. How much else he knew, he alone could have told.

TWENTY minutes later, agents of The Shadow were assembling for new vigil. Their location was near the Bowery, in the vicinity of the old Mukden Cafe. Hawkeye, ever alert, was on the watch for Dopey Delvin; for Hawkeye knew the sweated crook by sight. Moe Shrevnitz had arrived near by; his cab was parked just away from the corner of the Bowery.

A third agent was present—a squarefaced, husky fellow who kept up solitary patrol. This was Cliff Marsland, one of The Shadow's most capable workers. Cliff knew the badlands as well as Hawkeye. A cool fighter, he could serve The Shadow well, when the pinch arrived.

As yet, none of these agents had gained a tracer. They were waiting, ready to pass the word should they spot Dopey. Such had been The Shadow's order; for he knew that the crook would be too restless to remain

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perpetually in his hide-out. Sooner or later, Dopey would show his nose. Meanwhile, The Shadow had another task to perform.

Clyde Burke had reported to Burbank. He had passed the word that Tobias Clavelock was going out of town—a fact that the old lawyer had mentioned over the telephone. Clavelock lived in an old house in the Seventies; The Shadow had posted Harry Vincent there to watch for the lawyer's departure. Harry had reported that Clavelock had left.

At precisely nine o'clock, a figure appeared near the front of Clavelock's house. Harry, stationed across the street, was not keen enough to spy that shape; for it was the cloaked form of The Shadow.

Edging into a darkened space that led halfway to the back of the house, The Shadow raised himself to the level of a bay window. There he wedged a thin piece of steel between the portions of the sash.

The lock yielded. The window opened. The Shadow eased into a stuffy room, a first-floor parlor. Blinking a tiny flashlight, he made his way through a hall and up a flight of stairs. He stopped on a landing; the second-floor hall was lighted and The Shadow could hear the heavy footsteps of some approaching person.

A stocky, broad-shouldered man paced by, then went into a room at the rear of the floor. Evidently the fellow was some servant whom Clavelock had left on duty, to act as watchman during his absence.

The Shadow heard a door close; he moved upward from the landing and headed forward to the front room that the man had just left.

Another glimmer of the flashlight. This room looked like an office. There was a bulky safe at the far wall. The Shadow approached it and glimmered his light on the dial. Peeling away a black glove, he used his left hand to manipulate the dial. A fire opal gleamed as The Shadow worked; that stone—a precious girasol—was The Shadow's talisman.

Tumblers dropped. The Shadow's sensitive touch was winning. Three minutes after he had begun his task, the door of the safe swung open.

The contents of the interior consisted of small bundles of legal envelopes. The Shadow found one that bore the name "Doyd." He opened it to discover the lists, with their code of Latin words.

Taking the papers of one list, The Shadow carefully separated them and set them upright along a ledge at the back of the safe. There were several papers in the list; to copy them word for word would have been a long task—one that would have meant taking a list away and returning it later. For The Shadow did not intend to keep one of the lists. Clavelock had, by now, assured himself of the exact number. A missing list would tell the lawyer that some one had opened the safe.

From beneath his cloak, The Shadow produced a long, flat object, which proved to be a camera. He propped it just within the door; then brought out a coil of wire with a switch at its center. He plugged one end of the coil into a floor plug; into the socket at the other end, he screwed a flash bulb, of the sort used by photographers. He placed this end of the coil inside the safe; then pressed the lever of the camera.

The Shadow's tiny flashlight was out. The camera was ready for the exposure. The Shadow closed the door of the safe; only the insulated wire prevented it from shutting tightly. He clicked the wire switch; the bulb flashed inside the safe; only a momentary glimmer showed at the edge of the metal door.

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Opening the safe, The Shadow again clicked the camera. Using his flashlight, he gathered the sheets that formed the code list and replaced them where they belonged. Gathering camera, coil and bulb, he placed them beneath his cloak and locked the safe. Emerging from the room, he reached the stairway.

WITHIN three minutes after he had opened the safe, The Shadow had gained his copy of the list. He had used the camera for the purpose. The plate, when developed, would give him all the prints that he required. Through this photostatic process, The Shadow had found a prompt and rapid system of gaining the code list without leaving any clue to his brief visit.

Nor had The Shadow's speed been unnecessary. Scarcely had he reached the bottom of the stairs when Clavelock's servant came from the rear room, to again prowl about the second floor.

The Shadow, already below, gained the window in the parlor. He left as he had arrived, remaining long enough to lock the catch with the same steel instrument that had served him in opening it.

Leaving Harry Vincent at his post, The Shadow moved away. He had assigned Harry to this new duty in case others might choose to visit Clavelock's. For although The Shadow had not yet encountered The Creeper, he had decided to take no chances while Myram's murderer was still at large.

It was possible—The Shadow knew—that Dopey Delvin might be the tool of some bigger crook. Often, in the past, the deeds of small-fry had been indications of bigger hands behind the game.

Like The Creeper, The Shadow had moved. Once again, he had gained valuable results. He owned a copy of the Latin code; could he acquire the ebony casket and its hidden scroll, he would have the secret of Bigelow Doyd's hidden wealth. As representative of right, The Shadow could gain the heritage for those to whom it belonged.

The Shadow's net was out for Dopey Delvin, the killer who in all probability still held the missing casket. Heading for his sanctum, The Shadow would await word from his agents. Once Dopey was spotted, success would be at hand. Luck had tricked The Shadow in the case of Myram; he was ready to offset chance, so far as Dopey was concerned.

Once again, however, The Shadow was due for complications. This time, more than luck was conspiring against him. For already The Creeper, hidden master of crime, was moving anew. Before this night was ended, The Shadow would have full-knowledge of The Creeper's existence. A simple game was destined to develop into a formidable fray.

Master of right and master of crime: The Shadow and The Creeper. Soon those giants of hidden craft would be matching wits in fierce, unyielding strife!

CHAPTER IX. AIDS OF EVIL

WHILE The Shadow was engaged at Clavelock's, a group of men were holding conference in Rick Parrin's private office. Carning and five other listeners were intent as they heard the words of the fake sales promoter. Elbow on his glass-topped desk, Rick was handing out cold details.

"It's the biggest job yet," he announced. "A clean-up, if we spring it! That's why I've yanked all of you in from the road. You're all there but Gus and Eddie; they'll be in to-morrow. The Creeper may need the lot of us before he's through."

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Rick paused. Carning leaned forward to interject a comment.

"Clavelock's gone out of town, Rick," he volunteered. "I called him to-day—to ask if he'd need me again—and he said that he was going away. Now would be the time to nail one of those lists that he's got in his safe."

"Don't worry about that," chuckled Rick. "The Creeper's got one of those lists already—or a copy of it, anyway. He told me that when he called up this evening, when I asked him about it."

"You mean he sent somebody into Clavelock's? While the old guy was there?"

"I guess that was his stunt. Clavelock doesn't sit up all night, does he? I've told you that we're just one part of The Creeper's outfit. We're salesmen." Rick chuckled. "Salesmen who learn plenty; and who can pull strong-arm stuff, if needed. When you fellows go on the road, you look for chances that offer easy dough. But you're supposed to be ready for the heavy work, if you're needed."

"Well, that's the situation right now. The Creeper doesn't need any new opportunities. He landed one that may mean millions. It's been tough, though, and it may get tougher. The police are looking for a fellow who bumped off a dub named Myram. We want to find the murderer ahead of the cops—that is, The Creeper does."

"He's put men on the job, trying to guess who the murderer is. There's no telling what may happen later. That's why we're being held in reserve. All right; that's the finish for to-night. It's after nine o'clock, so we'll all go out together. I'll tell the watchmen that you are all my salesmen. Late conference up here."

The fake salesmen followed Rick from the office. They formed an assorted group; some keen and active, others more leisurely, like Carning. All, however, had been impressed by Rick's words. His reference to other squadrons under The Creeper's command had given them something to think about.

IN fact, while these henchmen of The Creeper were departing from their conference, another council was getting under way. This meeting was taking place in a large, three-room suite of an apartment hotel, the Parkview.

A hard-jawed, dark-faced man was the central figure; he was glowering from beneath bushy eyebrows that were topped by a bulging forehead. Many persons knew that countenance; this man was Zimmer Funson, a well-known figure among race-track bookmakers.

Zimmer was seated in a big chair, eyeing half a dozen flashily dressed loungers who stood about the room. Some were holding half-emptied glasses; others were helping themselves to sandwiches and other food that stood upon a buffet table. All, however, seemed uneasy as they listened to Zimmer's tirade.

"Palookas, all of you!" sneered the dark-faced man. "Pass you a big job, you fall flat. Sure—you're good around a race track, picking suckers with bank rolls and lining them up for trimmings. You've done a lot of that in the past. But what does that make you? Nothing but a crew of touts!"

"Don't go too heavy on us, Zimmer," protested a tall listener, whose lips showed a wry twist. "How about the other day, when Wally and I pulled that slick job you wanted? Keeping that fellow Batesly out at the track when he was supposed to be back at Clavelock's?"

"Sure," agreed a stocky man by the buffet table, evidently Wally. "Steve's right, Zimmer. He and I had Batesly playing the ponies until he was goofy. Then we gave him a bum plug for a finish. He played the old nag on the nose and it ran fifth. Remember that, Steve?"

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Wally paused to jab a teaspoon into a huge jar of caviar. He spread himself a sandwich and stared at Zimmer.

"I don't see where you've got a squawk coming, boss," added Wally. "We do what you tell us to. That's enough, isn't it? After all, I'm not making any fortune working for you. Nobody has seen me driving a big twin-six."

"You're stuffing yourself with fish eggs, aren't you?" growled Zimmer, as Wally devoured a huge mouthful of caviar. "You have it soft, Wally, just like the rest of the bunch. You would be broke, if you weren't working for me. Listen—all of you; you heard that crack Wally just made about not driving a twin-six. Well, I'll tell you something.

"Find the fellow who bumped off Myram and you'll all be riding in limousines with chauffeurs. That's what The Creeper told me. Do you know what it will mean if we find that bird ahead of the cops? About five million bucks, or upward—maybe as high as ten million!"

FACES became eager. Conversation buzzed. Wally, chewing mechanically, looked dazed as he stared at Steve. The latter was staring at Zimmer, hardly believing the words that he had heard.

"Some cheap small-fry murdered Myram," declared Zimmer. "Just the kind of a sneaky worker that you fellows ought to get a line on, around the pool rooms and the gambling joints on the East Side. Yet the lot of you have breezed in here to bum, all reporting nothing. That's why I'm sore."

Steve nodded to the others. They came to life; glasses were laid aside as the touts decided to fare forth on a new search.

Just as Steve reached the door, some one rapped on the other side. Steve opened the door to admit a sleek, black-haired fellow whose gold teeth glistened as he delivered a wide grin toward Zimmer.

"Hello, Hal," greeted Steve. "We're just breaking up—going out again —"

Hal brushed Steve aside. The tall fellow closed the door and watched the new arrival stride up to Zimmer Funson, who had risen from his chair.

"I got it, Zimmer!" announced Hal. "A line on the guy who bumped Myram! Landed it straight from a guy named Buck Sangree. He slipped me the inside news. Get a load of this, Zimmer."

Hal paused triumphantly, while the others gathered around. With another grin, the gold-toothed tout delivered his story.

"Buck was going past the corner of the avenue," he stated, "near where Myram lives. See? Well, he sees a guy he knows—a heel named Dopey Delvin. Buck wises that Dopey's out to stage something, so he decides to watch, just wondering what the racket is.

"Dopey goes in the rooming house just past the butcher shop. Buck sees him, mind you, and waits. Pretty soon he sees Dopey come out again, hugging something beneath his coat. Dopey does a sneak in a hurry, looking around plenty. Buck knows he's pulled something.

"To-day, Buck reads the newspapers. He doesn't need to be a lightning calculator to figure who finished Myram. It was Dopey Delvin who staged the rubout. What's more, Buck mentions to me where Dopey flops. He's got a room in the second floor back of a tenement five doors west of the Mukden Cafe, that old Chinese hash-house near the Bowery. Lives there alone—using the place as a hide-out—with a soft set-up for

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anybody who wants to go after him. There's a rear door from the alley into the place, and –"

HAL paused. The telephone bell was ringing. Zimmer was picking up the instrument; the others were crowding about to clap Hal on the back.

The informant looked puzzled; he had not yet learned how much lay at stake. Then came Zimmer's growl, ordering silence.

The touts quieted. They listened while Zimmer spoke across the wire, repeating almost word for word what Hal had told him. They knew who was on the telephone: The Creeper. Anxiously they awaited the conclusion of Zimmer's call. They saw their chief hang up.

"Who's going on the job?" inquired Wally, eagerly. "How about me and Steve, boss? We can bump that mug Dopey and bring back whatever you want."

"Sure, Zimmer," agreed Steve. "With all that kale waiting, we'd take a chance on anything –"

"Never mind," growled Zimmer. "None of you are going. The Creeper's taking care of it. When I need any of you to start some rough stuff, I'll call on you."

"But what about the cut?" queried Wally. "We'll come in on it, won't we?"

"Everybody gets his cut," assured Zimmer. "That's the way The Creeper works. But he puts the right man on the right job. That's always his system. Our part is finished; maybe there'll be more to do later. Right now, the thing to do is keep mum. Leave it to The Creeper."

Zimmer Funson had spoken wisely. Like Rick Parrin, the bookie knew that he was but one of The Creeper's lieutenants. Zimmer knew that this band of his could be tough if occasion warranted; but their regular jobs were to act as come-on men. Others, more competent, would be used for such practices as murder.

SEVEN blocks from the Parkview Hotel was a low, squatty building only three stories high. The blue glare of sun-ray lamps shone from the windows of the third floor. The place was a gymnasium, favored as a training headquarters for free-lance boxers and wrestlers.

On this night, a dozen such were present. A few were skipping rope; others were watching two huskies who were sparring in a corner ring.

Within a little office, Nick Curlin, the proprietor of the gymnasium, was talking to a well-dressed visitor. Nick, fat-faced and greasy-haired, formed a contrast to his aristocratic guest. The man on the other side of the desk was none other than Reggie Spaylor, prominent amateur sportsman, well-known as a polo player.

A man of thirty-five, Reggie had the physique of an athlete; and his rugged face was a handsome one, marred only by a sharp down turn of his lips and deep wrinkles in his forehead.

It was not surprising that a man of Spaylor's standing should frequent this gymnasium. The place was conveniently located; it served as a good spot for the amateur sportsman to limber up when engagements kept him in this part of the city. But it was evident, from conversation between Spaylor and Curlin, that this gymnasium had a special purpose other than that of training quarters.

"How about starting a stable?" Nick was inquiring. "That ought to make a better blind, Spaylor, than just having a gym. There'd be more pugs around, to cover-up the ones that are working for us."

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"It wouldn't do," decided Reggie. "We don't want too many palookas hanging around. A stable would attract too much attention; and we'd have to promote some fights. The Creeper wouldn't want it. Not at present, anyway.

"Something big is due, Nick. A clean-up. We'll all be in the money if The Creeper manages it. It may come to-night; that is why I intend to stay here until I hear from The Creeper. If he —"

A ring of the telephone. Nick answered; then handed the instrument to Reggie. Nick listened keenly; he knew who was on the wire. The Creeper, himself, with the news that Reggie Spaylor wanted.

Finished with his call—in which he did little more than acknowledge instructions—Reggie hung up and turned to Nick.

"GO out and get Slugger Haskew," he told Nick. "Bring him in here. The Creeper has a job that Slugger can handle."

Nick arose and waddled from the office. Reggie watched him head for the corner where the sparring men were resting. With an evil grin upon his sour lips, the sportsman moved out of sight within the office. He lighted a cork-tipped cigarette and sat down to await "Slugger's" arrival.

Soon Nick returned with the huskier of the two boxers. Slugger Haskew, huge and vicious-looking, was attired in shoes and boxing trunks. He was drawing off his gloves as he entered the office; he showed a grin on his sweaty face when he spied Reggie Spaylor seated there.

"Hello, Slugger," greeted the sour-lipped sportsman. "I want to talk to you. Close the door, Nick. Listen carefully, Slugger. There's a job on for you to-night. You know the old Mukden Cafe, near the Bowery?"

Slugger nodded.

"Five doors west," stated Reggie, "is an old tenement. The place has a rear entrance, from an alley. That's the way you are to enter. Go to the room on the second floor back. You will find a man there named Dopey Delvin."

"How'll I know him?" queried Slugger. "Is he workin' wid us?"

"Not a chance," sneered Reggie. "He is the man you are to get! Hand him a haymaker as soon as you see him."

"Wot if he ain't the right gazebo?"

"You can think about that later. Look through the room. Find a flat black box, made of wood, with the initials 'B. D.,' in silver. Crack it open; take what you find in the bottom."

"Dough?"

"No. A scroll—a piece of paper. Hand it to The Creeper."

"He'll be dere?"

"Yes. Outside the door. He will reach in for it. After The Creeper is gone, finish Dopey. You'll know who he is, right enough, after you have found the black box."

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Slugger nodded. He was about to start for the door when Reggie stopped him. There were further instructions.

"If anything goes wrong," stated Reggie, "hang on to the scroll. Go to the old Alcadia Hotel near the Bowery and take a room there. Call here and tell Nick that you are there. I'll come myself, to get the scroll from you.

"But nothing is likely to go wrong. Not with The Creeper on hand. If you give him the scroll, keep right on going. Take it on the lam, Slugger; don't stop until you reach Louisville. You have friends there; stick with them."

"I'll hear from youse after I get dere?"

"Absolutely! This will mean a nice piece of jack for you, Slugger. Ten grand, anyway—maybe a lot more. You have done jobs like this before you joined up with me. It will be just one more rub-out, so far as you are concerned."

"Sure t'ing."

SLUGGER left the office; Nick followed and began to chat with the men in the gym. Reggie Spaylor flattened his cigarette in an ash tray on the desk; donning a pair of gloves and picking up a cane, he strolled from the office and went through an outer door.

When he arrived on the street, he entered a cab and ordered the driver to take him to a fashionable hotel near Central Park. That address was where Reggie Spaylor lived.

Aids of The Creeper had played their part. The stage was set for coming crime, waiting only for Slugger Haskew to dress and travel to the tenement where Dopey Delvin, present possessor of the ebony casket, was in hiding.

Rick Parrin and his force of fake salesmen; Zimmer Funson, the bookie with his coterie of touts; Reggie Spaylor, silent partner in the gymnasium where boxers and wrestlers were on hand to serve as thugs—such were the lieutenants of The Creeper. A supercrook who dealt in smooth, camouflaged crime, that hidden menace had made his plans to gain the ebony casket and its precious contents.

But The Creeper did not depend entirely upon his three lieutenants, who—unknown to each other—were ever ready to pick out henchmen who would serve their evil chief. To-night, The Creeper himself intended to be present at the scene of crime, ready to grasp the telltale scroll the moment that Slugger Haskew had gained it.

CHAPTER X. FOES IN THE DARK

AGENTS of The Shadow were on patrol. Cliff and Hawkeye, circuiting the block that housed the Mukden Cafe, were keeping up the search for Dopey; while Moe, posted near the Bowery, was the lookout at the front. The taxi driver had watched half a dozen persons who had at first struck him as suspicious; but he had decided that none could be Dopey.

The tenement building, five doors below the Chinese restaurant, was under Moe's surveillance. To the lookout, however, that decrepit structure was simply one of a dozen that needed watching.

Several people entered or left it while Moe was watching. One was a limping peddler; another, a

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flannel-shirted laborer. Besides these, Moe had observed a hunched fellow who looked like a cripple; an organ grinder with a monkey; and finally an over-size newsboy, with a bagful of newspapers under his arm.

Faces had been too distant to observe. Moe had studied the gaits of these people, instead. He saw none who moved with the shuffling pace that Hawkeye had said was typical of Dopey Delvin.

Around the corner, Hawkeye had passed a battered lunch wagon. He was beyond it when he heard the door slide open; turning to look over his shoulder, the little spotter spied a slinking form that dodged into view. He watched the man shamle across the street and head for an alleyway. A street lamp showed a pasty face.

Dopey Delvin's. Promptly, Hawkeye took up the trail. He followed into the alley. Dopey turned into the rear of the tenement house. Close behind, Hawkeye heard him shuffling up the back stairs. Still following, the spotter caught the gleam from a gas jet as some one lighted it. A door closed; a bolt creaked rustily.

Hawkeye reached the threshold of the closed door, just at the top of the stairs on the second floor. This was the room where Dopey had gone.

Darkened stairs led upward. An unlighted corridor formed a passage to the front. Hawkeye followed it, reached other stairs where one glimmering gas jet furnished illumination. He descended and went out by the front door. Peering toward the Bowery, Hawkeye saw Moe's cab; then spied Cliff near the corner.

Moving quickly, Hawkeye met Cliff at a secluded spot. He whispered the news of his discovery. Cliff started off to call Burbank, while Hawkeye rounded the block and continued until he reached the alley. Sliding into darkness, he chose a spot from which he could watch the lighted window that showed on the second floor. Dopey had drawn a tattered blind; Hawkeye could note nothing but the gleam of the gas light.

Ten minutes passed. Hawkeye edged back as he heard some one coming into the alley. Some big fellow, Hawkeye judged, from the sound of the man's cumbersome footsteps.

The arrival paused near the rear of the tenement house; then entered. Hawkeye listened; he could hear footsteps on the rear stairs.

About to follow, Hawkeye was restrained by a whisper that came from several feet away. Some one else had arrived in the alley; just too late to spy the big man who had entered the building. It was The Shadow; despite the darkness, he had sensed Hawkeye's presence.

In response to The Shadow's sinister whisper, Hawkeye gave a quick report. He heard a slight swish in the gloom. The Shadow was entering the tenement house.

ON the second floor, Slugger Haskew was standing outside Dopey's door. He had cautiously tried the knob, only to find that the door was bolted. Slugger was deciding the best way to deal with the barrier. He required only a few seconds to make his choice. Backing against the far wall, the big bruiser drove forward in the darkness.

The flimsy door gave way like cardboard. Slugger's powerful shoulder ripped bolt from door frame; the hinges held and the door swung inward. Slugger floundered half across the room; he drew up to find himself face to face with Dopey. The pasty-faced crook had popped up from a rickety couch in the corner.

Dopey's hand shot to his pocket. Before he could pull his revolver, Slugger swung a hard punch up from the floor. His big fist caught Dopey's chin. The pasty-faced crook jolted upward; then flopped on his back, out cold.

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Slugger swung the door shut. He drew a big revolver from the pocket of his own coat. He looked about the room; saw nothing but the bed and the chair. He yanked away the mattress. Beneath it lay the prize he wanted.

With a gloating chuckle, the mauler snatched the ebony casket from its resting place. He flung it to the floor and shattered it with one terrific impact of his huge, heavy-soled foot. Breaking the box apart, he drew forth a flattened sheet of parchment, a scroll that bore an inscription that he could not read. With a grunt, Slugger thrust the prize beneath his coat.

The whole process had required less than a minute and a half; yet before Slugger had completed his work, a new arrival had reached the darkened hall at the head of the stairs. Obscured by darkness, The Shadow had stopped; he had heard the splintering of the ebony casket.

Automatic in his right hand, his left hand reaching for the door, The Shadow was moving forward. He stopped with suddenness as his ears detected a new sound. It was coming from the stairway above, descending from the third floor. An odd sound, surely descending, yet not increasing in its loudness. No footsteps—only a ghostly creeping.

THAT sound which had terrified other listeners was not impressive to The Shadow. For the first time, this cloaked master had heard The Creeper; but The Shadow's reaction was to analyze the strange tread of that hidden approacher. He knew at once that the man in the dark must be a foe; he reasoned also that the odd illusion of the creeping was a subterfuge to puzzle listeners.

The big man who had cracked into Dopey's room was an underling, working for this watchful chief who had chosen to wait above. The Shadow was in darkness, between the two; yet his position was the best for the moment. The Shadow knew that his own presence was unknown by either the creeping man or the husky who had smashed into Dopey's hide-out.

The Shadow waited silently; his chance would soon be due.

It was then that a freak of circumstance intervened. Within the lighted room, Slugger was also listening to that cautious, creeping sound. He was gazing toward the door, his ugly head cocked to one side. He had no thought for Dopey; he believed that the fellow had been knocked out to stay. But Slugger was wrong in that guess.

Dopey had come to life. Blinking from the wall, he saw the mattress that Slugger had yanked from the cot. He spied the shattered box; looking up, he saw Slugger gazing at the door.

A venomous expression came over Dopey's groggy features. Reaching in his pocket, the man who had murdered Myram drew his revolver and came unsteadily to his knees, ready to aim for the big pug who had dealt him the haymaker.

Dopey wavered. Slugger heard him shift. Turning about, the big man saw the pointing gun shaking in Dopey's fist. Slugger hissed a snarl; he aimed his .38 and fired four quick shots, straight for Dopey's body.

The pasty-faced killer sprawled face forward. Slugger grabbed the knob of the door and yanked the barrier inward. He sprang out into the hall.

The light from the room revealed The Shadow. In an instant, the odds had changed—even while Slugger's shots were still echoing, while smoke still coiled from the revolver in his fist. But the glare did not pierce the darkness of the stairs.

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The Shadow was still between two foes; and both were aware of his presence: Slugger, visible to The Shadow; The Creeper, still safe in darkness!

Had The Shadow hesitated for one instant, he would have been an open target for The Creeper. It was a situation that would have been hopeless for any but that cloaked avenger. Well had The Shadow guessed that the man on the stairs would prove a formidable enemy.

In this emergency, The Shadow acted with incredible speed. He chose the man whom he knew must be the less brainy of his two antagonists; the one, also, whom he could see. Springing forward, The Shadowy grappled with Slugger Haskew.

SHOTS ripped from the darkness of the stairs. The Creeper had opened fire; but his bullets were too late. The Shadow, flinging his arms about Slugger, had yanked the big bruiser sidewise. With a twist, he had turned the mauler's bulk to serve him as a shield.

The Creeper's fire ceased; he could not afford to shoot down Slugger, his only aid on this field of battle.

Slugger fought wildly. His swinging arms were seeking to batter down The Shadow's clutching arms. But Slugger, despite his bulk, was staggering willy-nilly. The Shadow, fierce in combat, was heaving him backward toward the rear stairway.

The grapplers tumbled over the top step. Whirling downward together, they rolled fighting to the bottom, out of that glare wherein The Shadow might again have become The Creeper's target!

The Shadow had taken a long chance. Even as he spun downward, still grappling, he knew that misfortune might arrive at the bottom of the fall. Twisting with a final effort, he tried to break his plunge, just as the crash arrived.

He was partially successful. Though the impact was terrific, The Shadow still retained his senses as he rolled from Slugger's grip. Though half dazed, he realized what was going on about him. A fierce snarl in the darkness told him that Slugger had survived the fall.

A thrusting revolver muzzle jabbed The Shadow's ribs. Mechanically, The Shadow responded. His automatic was still in his grasp; he swung it hard against the pressing arm and fired. While Slugger had momentarily hesitated; The Shadow had gained the drop. A vicious cry sounded in the blackness as Slugger rolled away.

The Shadow fired again—blindly; but his shot alarmed his wounded foe. Slugger was on his feet, diving for the rear door of the tenement house. A figure leaped in to meet him. It was Hawkeye.

Encountering the spotter, Slugger delivered a swing with one good arm and sent the little man sprawling. When Hawkeye came to his feet, he heard Slugger clambering down the alley.

Hawkeye's thought was of The Shadow. Dashing into the building, the spotter stumbled over the figure of his chief. Hawkeye had drawn a gun; it was good that he had done so. A flashlight gleamed from the top of the stairs. The Creeper was using it to locate his tumbled foe.

Quickly, Hawkeye opened fire. The flashlight disappeared. Bullets, whistling up from below, were something for which The Creeper had not bargained.

He was off along the second floor corridor, that foe in the dark. Off to safety, once he had descended the front stairs; for neither Cliff nor Moe was there to intercept him. As Hawkeye aided The Shadow to the alley,

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Moe's cab drew up beyond it, and Cliff came hurrying from it. He and Moe had heard the muffled shots that had sounded within the building.

Cliff heard Hawkeye's call and joined the little spotter. Then both heard a whispered order. The Shadow had steadied; drawing away from Hawkeye's supporting grasp, he was delivering quick instructions. Cliff hurried back to the taxi; Hawkeye sped into the tenement building and dashed up to the second floor.

Three minutes later, both agents arrived near the entrance of the alley. Moe's cab had circuted the block, with Cliff aboard; Hawkeye had entered Dopey's room, made a quick inspection and returned.

Reports were given; Cliff told that patrolmen were entering the front of the tenement house. Hawkeye stated that Dopey was dead, the ebony box shattered and devoid of contents.

Wailing sirens from the Bowery were proof that more police were arriving. The alarm had been sounded. The Creeper, like Slugger, had left this terrain. It was unwise for The Shadow's agents to remain. Speaking from darkness, he ordered them to travel away in Moe's cab. Cliff and Hawkeye obeyed, knowing that their chief had revived.

JUST within the alleyway, pressed close against the darkened wall, The Shadow watched the taxi leave. He heard shouts from within the tenement building; he knew that the law had arrived. The side street was devoid of traffic; it offered a way of departure for The Shadow himself. But there was a reason why he had remained.

His keen eyes were focused upon the sidewalk just outside the alley. There, The Shadow had spied a blob upon the paving—a mark that showed dark-red beneath the street light.

Moving forward, The Shadow looked beyond. Just past the curb was another crimson blot, obscure against the asphalt. Across the street, past the lunch wagon, was the entrance of another alleyway. Gliding swiftly, The Shadow headed for that goal.

He reached the alley; his tiny flashlight glimmered upon cobblestones. The searching gleam revealed another moist spot of crimson.

It was blood—life blood, shed by a departing murderer. It showed the course that Slugger Haskew had taken. Though The Shadow did not know the identity of the big-fisted killer, he was certain that Slugger must be the one who had gained the scroll from within the ebony casket.

The flashlight's glimmer moved ahead—through the alleyway, to an obscure street beyond. New blobs of blood showed beneath the blinking gleam. The Shadow turned left, still on the track of the wounded killer. He had passed the closing cordon of the law. His way was clear to follow Slugger Haskew.

For The Shadow had found a trail of blood; one that would show more vividly, the further he progressed. The Creeper did not matter; he had eluded The Shadow's toils for the present, and could wait until later. For the present, The Shadow had a more important quest. Slugger Haskew, the murderous henchman, was the quarry that he wanted.

For Slugger held what men of crime needed—that missing scroll that told the secret of Bigelow Doyd's wealth. Could The Shadow gain it, the purposes of evil workers would be balked. Wherever Slugger Haskew might be, there would The Shadow find him. That blobby trail of dripped blood had become a guiding line to serve the cloaked avenger of the night!

CHAPTER XI. THE NEXT LINK

SEVEN blocks from The Bowery stood an old house that had once been a pretentious residence. This building had been converted into a second-rate apartment house. The first floor consisted of tiny suites that had been fashioned from larger rooms.

In one of these tiny apartments a weary-faced man was sitting at a plain table, picking out the keys on a tiny, old-style portable typewriter.

Several pages of finished manuscript lay at one side of the typewriter; on the other, a sheaf of blank sheets. Except for chair and table, the room was devoid of furnishings. There were a few dishes stacked in the corner kitchenette; beside them, a box of crackers and a few opened sardine cans. Within the adjoining bedroom was a ramshackle couch, topped by a ragged overcoat and flabby felt hat.

Apparently, the occupant of this apartment lived in extreme simplicity; but his surroundings did not seem to trouble him. He was fully concentrated upon his work at the typewriter. If he held any contact with the outside world, it could only have been by means of a telephone which was perched upon a stack of directories in the corner.

A bell buzzed. Not the telephone; this signal indicated some one at the front door. The weary-faced man looked up, his face alarmed. He hesitated; the buzz was repeated.

Going to the door, he pressed a button to admit the visitor through the front door. Then he opened the door of the apartment and peered out into the hall.

An angle of the wall blocked the weary man's view. But he could hear some one approaching. Clumsy, faltering footsteps were punctuated by heavy groans. Wondering, the weary man waited.

A huge, bulky figure bulged into view. The man at the apartment door saw an ugly face that showed distorted agony; he observed that the arrival was pressing his left hand against a spot below his right shoulder. Big, grimy fingers were stained with blood that dripped with every ooze.

"Slugger!" gasped the weary-faced man. "Slugger Haskew!"

"You—you're Jerry Kobal." Slugger stared groggily as he spoke. "Jerry Kobal. Thought—thought I'd find you here. Lemme in, Jerry. I got somethin' dat I got to tell youse."

Jerry hesitated. His lips twitched; then, pitiful of the big mauler's plight, he decided to let Slugger enter. He stepped aside; Slugger staggered through the doorway.

Jerry closed the door and tried to guide the crippled killer to the couch in the bedroom. Slugger pushed him aside with his free right hand. He chose the chair instead. Jerry produced a glass of water from the kitchenette. Slugger gulped the liquid. It revived him for the moment.

"Listen, Jerry," he growled, "I'm t'trough! I got mine! I'm t'trough! Youse was de only guy I could get to, see? Beef told me onct dat you was livin' here —widout no name on de door—just dat you was livin' in dis apartment —"

SLUGGER sank wearily; then, with an ugly snarl, he straightened up and glared toward Jerry. Shoving his big right hand beneath his coat, the mauler pulled out a crumpled parchment. It was the Latin scroll. One

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corner of the document was smeared with blood; but none of the wording had been obliterated.

"You gotta take dis, see?" Slugger was harsh as he spoke. "Scram outta here. I'm gonna croak, so dat don't matter. Don't leave nothin' dat will put de cops wise. Dey'll t'ink dis is my hide-out. Get it?"

Jerry began to shake his head.

"Can't do it, Slugger," he stated. "I've gone straight. No more dirty work for me. Right now, I'm writing out my own story. I've got enough cash to see me through until I sell it. All about the rackets that I'm through with—what I went through while I was in the Big House —"

"Can dat mush!" growled Slugger. "Youse is wid me. Savvy? If you t'ink you ain't —"

The big man came half up from the chair. He still had stamina for combat. Jerry winced as he saw the mauled raise a bludgeonlike fist. Even though wounded, Slugger would be a formidable antagonist.

"I'll get you to a sawbones, Slugger," pleaded Jerry. "This telephone is still connected, even though it isn't mine. I'm through with crooked stuff; but I'm willing to call a doc who isn't too particular about his patients. If —"

"Lay off," growled Slugger. "I don't want to see no croaker. I'm t'rough, I tell you! Kickin' in! You're doin' what I tell you, Jerry." With a thrust, Slugger shoved his right hand in his pocket and yanked out his .38, to aim the weapon at his companion.

"You're doin' what I tell you—an' if you ain't, dis gat goes off! Dat will bring de cops here"—Slugger's distorted grin was vicious— "bring de cops here, dat's what it'll do."

Jerry's eyes gleamed suddenly. The fellow nodded and motioned for Slugger to lower the revolver.

"I'm with you, Slugger," announced Jerry, his face betraying a wise look that the dying mauled did not notice. "Give me that paper. While I'm packing up, you tell me what I'm to do."

He clutched the scroll, rolled it and thrust it in his pocket. He hurriedly shoved the typewriter in its case and began to gather up the pages of his manuscript, with the blank sheets as well. He rolled them, bound them with a rubber band and thrust them in his other pocket.

Slugger was speaking, his eyes half closed, his voice almost a groan. His words, however, were plain.

"Go to dat old hotel—you know de joint—de place dey call de Alcadia. Stick dere, Jerry. Wait until some guy comes to see you. A guy called De Creeper —"

"The Creeper?"

"Dat's it. Give him de paper dat I handed you."

"How will he know I'm there, Slugger?"

"Don't worry about dat. Leave dat to me. Scram outta here, in a hurry. Got dat paper, Jerry?"

"I've got it." Jerry was in the bedroom, donning hat and overcoat. "Hotel Alcadia. Wait there for The Creeper. How'll I know him, though, Slugger?"

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"When youse hear him," replied Slugger, groaning. "You'll know it's him. De way he walks—wid a creep—dat's why dey call him De Creeper. He's a big shot—dat's what he is —"

JERRY KOBAL had gathered his few belongings. With a sad shake of his head, he clapped Slugger on the back. Pockets bulging, typewriter case in hand, he hurried from the apartment. In his haste to reach the front door, he did not notice the trail of bloodstains on the floor of the dim hall.

Outside, Jerry hastened to the nearest corner. Turning it, he kept on, getting away from this dangerous vicinity. His weary face was serious as he headed for the subway. For Jerry had gained sudden fear of the consequences that might follow, had he remained with Slugger Haskew. He was confident that the big mauler had been engaged in murderous activities.

One minute after Jerry Kobal had turned the corner, a form appeared beneath the lamplight of the street above. The glow showed a fleeting trace of a cloaked figure. Keen eyes spied another blood mark on the sidewalk. The Shadow was closing in on Slugger's trail.

Blending with darkness, he crossed the street. His flashlight glimmered to locate a dull red spot near the front of the old building that was now an apartment house.

In Jerry Kobal's untidy apartment, Slugger Haskew was still seated in the chair. His breathing, coming in long heaves, stopped tensely. His eyes opened; the murderer looked about. He saw that Jerry was gone.

Half snarling, half groaning, Slugger twisted himself from the chair. He staggered to the corner, slumped to the floor; then grasped the telephone with his right fist. He withdrew his left hand from his wound, changed his grip on the telephone and clumsily dialed a number with his right forefinger.

A voice responded over the wire. It was Nick Curlin. Groggily, Slugger spoke, coughing his harsh words into the mouthpiece of the telephone.

"Dis is Slugger," he informed. "I—I got clipped! I'm t'rough, Nicky... Yeah. T'rough... Sure, I got de paper. Off of Dopey... Yeah, I bumped de mug... No, I ain't got de paper here..."

"I slipped it to anodder guy... Wot's his name? Is he wise? Sure dis guy is. Jerry Kobal. Dat's who I slipped de paper to... Yeah, Jerry Kobal... Yeah, I told him to be at de Alcadia. To wait for De Creeper..."

"You better close dat gym of yours, Nick... Better take it on de lam... De Shadow's in dis. He's de guy dat plugged me..."

The receiver clicked at the other end of the wire. Slugger did not hear it. His eyes were glazed and staring. He had slumped back against the wall, still gripping the telephone. Talking, he managed to make his voice coherent as he numbly repeated details.

As Slugger gasped, the door of the apartment opened. A blackened form appeared upon the threshold. The Shadow had reached the end of the trail that Slugger's blood had left for him.

"I RUBBED out Dopey," Slugger was repeating. "Rubbed out de guy. But De Shadow got me—got me before I could slip de paper to De Creeper. Yeah. You hear me? It was De Shadow —"

Slugger paused, apparently expecting a reply through the receiver. Then, with none coming, he resumed his final repetition.

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"I slipped de paper to Jerry. Yeah, to Jerry Kobal. He—he's holdin' it for De Creeper. Dat's wot Jerry's doin'—like I told him. He—he'll be dere at de hotel—dat's where he'll be. I told Jerry to go dere —"

Slugger's voice ended with a hoarse sigh. His head sank back against the wall with a thud. The telephone fell from his clutch and tumbled to the floor.

The Shadow swished forward and plucked up the rolling instrument. He spoke, his voice a simulation of Slugger's gasp. There was no response; the line was dead.

Gasping, Slugger had opened his eyes at the sound of a voice that seemed to be his own. His glazed optics spied The Shadow; his bloated lips spat a snarl as he tried to raise his body. Fists clenching, Slugger wanted to begin a new fray. His effort was tremendous; but it carried him no distance. Slugger's head rose a dozen inches from the wall; then thudded back.

Blood gushed from the killer's wound. The snarling murderer rolled sidewise, his hoarse challenge ending. Big arms sprawled helplessly. The bruiser's form became motionless. Slugger Haskew was dead. A murderer had paid the penalty for crime.

THE SHADOW studied the dead form. Calmly, he hung up the receiver of the telephone; then made a brief search of Slugger's body, to make certain that the killer had actually passed along the scroll, as he had orated in those final, maudlin words. That done, The Shadow left the apartment and headed out into the night.

A whispered laugh sounded in outer darkness. It carried no mirth; but again its tone was prophetic. A new trail led ahead; one that would be beset with the presence of an insidious foe, bound for the same goal—an enemy whose title The Shadow had heard from Slugger's dying lips.

The Creeper, worker of evil; he was the antagonist with whom The Shadow must deal. His hand, The Shadow realized, had come early into the game. The Creeper had sought the same spoils: that scroll within the ebony casket, the precious document that had created a chain of violent death.

Myram first; then Dopey. Both murdered. Both had been thieves; but Dopey had proven vicious enough to kill, as well as steal. Next, Slugger, a murderer. He had killed Dopey; he had sought to slay The Shadow; instead he had received a crippling wound. Slugger's subsequent efforts to evade pursuit had cost him his life. He, too, was dead.

Three trails, all ended. Again, a hunt must be begun. A fourth man had gained the lost scroll—an ex-crook named Jerry Kobal. His was the trail that The Shadow must next gain. Somewhere in Manhattan—at some hotel, the name not mentioned in Slugger's repeated statements over the dead wire—there Jerry Kobal might be found.

New moves for The Shadow and his agents. A scouring search for Jerry Kobal, in hope that he could be discovered before The Creeper found him. Well did The Shadow know that Slugger must have passed his message through before the line went dead. The killer had been talking to some one who had hung up, once he had gained the facts he needed.

The Creeper would know where to look for Jerry Kobal. This time the odds were with the master of crime. Yet The Shadow would search, unceasingly. Sometimes circumstances changed the odds, as they had to—night, when the cloaked fighter had been trapped between Slugger and The Creeper.

Such was The Shadow's hope; and it had chance for realization. For Jerry Kobal, the new factor in the chase, was to have his say before this game was through.

CHAPTER XII. THE SHADOW'S VISIT

IT was early the next evening. Donald Shiloh was seated by the window of a small but sumptuous apartment, overlooking Central Park. On the table beside him lay a newspaper; its scareheads told of murder in a tenement house near the Bowery, with added details of a dead slayer, found in a deserted apartment, seven blocks from the scene of crime.

The police had linked the death of Dopey Delvin with the dead killer, Slugger Haskew. They had examined Slugger's revolver; the bullets in Dopey's body matched those of the .38 in the murderer's pocket. But the newspaper accounts carried no mention of the shattered ebony casket. That explained why Shiloh had tossed the paper aside after glancing through the columns that told of crime.

Twinkling lights of the park did not attract Shiloh's meditative gaze. He was staring beyond them; the direction of his vision was toward the region where the Doyd mansion was located. Shiloh was thinking of Theresa, wondering whether he should call and learn if new developments had occurred within the ancient mansion.

The telephone bell rang. Jeffrey, a solemn valet with fishlike face, came into the room to answer the call. He spoke in solemn tones; then held the telephone toward Shiloh, with the low-toned statement:

"It is Miss Theresa Doyd, sir."

Shiloh sprang from his chair and seized the telephone. He talked in brief, serious tones:

"Hello, Theresa... Yes, I can come to the house... Certainly, at once... Yes, my coupe is out front. It will take me less than twenty minutes."

Jeffrey brought hat and coat. Briskly, Shiloh left the sumptuous apartment. His time estimate had been correct. Just twenty minutes later, his svelte, dark-green coupe rolled to a stop in front of the gloomy Doyd residence.

Wilfred admitted Shiloh and showed him to the library, where Theresa awaited. The girl closed the door; it was evident that she had something important to say and wanted to be sure that no listeners were about. Tensely, almost terrified, she waited before speaking.

Shiloh guessed that she was listening in dread of creeping footsteps. With a smile at the girl's alarm, Shiloh opened the door and peered out into the hallway. He returned.

"No one about," he informed.

SHILOH was wrong. Although he had gazed straight toward the blackness of the rear hall and had seen nothing, a living form was there. This house had gained a silent, unseen listener, almost at the moment when Wilfred had admitted Shiloh.

When the living room door closed for the second time, a shape moved forward. Dim light from the front hall furnished a hazy, almost indistinguishable outline of The Shadow.

While his agents still searched for Jerry Kobal, The Shadow had decided to visit this old mansion, to discover if news of the shattered ebony casket had reached the Doyd heirs. The Shadow had remembered the door at the side of the house. He had chosen it as a means of entry. Obscured by the blackness of the rear hall, he had

THE CREEPER

seen Wilfred announce Shiloh.

The servant had lingered a few moments; then had gone upstairs. The Shadow, coming from gloom, had dropped back when Shiloh reopened the door. This time, however, he did not stay his advance. He reached the library door, turned the knob and pressed the barrier inward, just the fraction of an inch.

The sound of voices came to his ears; he pressed the door no further. He preferred to listen only, rather than run chances of attracting attention should he push the door far enough open to peer within the room.

"What is the trouble, Theresa?" Shiloh was inquiring. "More footsteps? Creeping about to frighten you?"

"No," replied Theresa. "That is, I have not heard the sounds to-day. Other things have happened, though, Donald. First, I must tell you about Mr. Clavelock's telephone call."

"Clavelock is back in town?"

"Yes. Apparently his trip was a brief one. To-day, he heard from the police. He talked with an inspector named Cardona."

"Have they traced the casket that Myram stole?"

"Yes. But the scroll is missing. Did you read to-day's newspapers, with their account of a murder in a tenement near the Bowery?"

"I noticed the story. Do you mean that the casket was concerned in that affair?"

"Yes. So Mr. Clavelock was told by the inspector. The casket was found, smashed open, in the room with the murdered man. It showed traces of a hidden compartment in a thin double-bottom; but the scroll is missing."

Shiloh whistled. His trill carried a serious note. The girl continued with further details.

"The police have identified both the dead man and his slayer," she explained. "The murderer was a pugilist, I understand, who used to train in a downtown gymnasium; but the place is closed."

"Don't they know any of the fellow's friends?"

"Mr. Clavelock thinks that they may; but apparently the police have not made much progress in their investigation. We can only hope that they may be lucky enough to find the person who has the scroll."

SHILOH had no comment. He was thinking over what Theresa had said. A minute passed; then the girl spoke again; this time she delivered other information.

"Mark Lundig went out an hour ago," stated Theresa. "He said that he was going to his hotel; that he might stay there to-night. We are not to expect him back."

"Did he mention the name of his hotel?" inquired Shiloh.

"No," returned the girl. "But I am sure that he took the code list with him. It is no longer in the drawer of the old desk."

"Was it there earlier?"

THE CREEPER

"Yes—this morning. I looked, to make sure. Before Mark was up. He stayed here last night. He came down at ten o'clock this morning, made some telephone calls and went out."

"Just when did he return?"

"Before dinner. Meanwhile, a messenger boy had arrived. He had an envelope addressed to Mark Lundig; Wilfred gave the message to Mark when he entered."

"Did Mark read it?"

"He must have. After he had gone, Donald, I came in here and found the note in the wastebasket. It is very brief, and was written on a typewriter."

"You read it, Theresa?"

"It simply said: 'Still watching hotels. No luck yet'—and it bore no signature. Simply the initial 'N,' typed in a capital letter."

"What did you do with the note?"

"I put it back in the wastebasket."

The Shadow heard Shiloh step across the room. There was a rustling of paper; then the man slowly repeated the message aloud, obviously reading it from the original.

"Who do you think N could be?" asked Theresa. "A detective? Mark mentioned that he had hired some private operatives."

"You can't trust anything Lundig says," replied Shiloh. "The chap looks like a fox. Perhaps he is one. I'll remember this message, Theresa. Here it goes, back in the wastebasket in case Lundig returns to look for it. If any others come, try to see them; and if Lundig makes phone calls while he's here, listen in on them if you can."

"It may seem cheap, this eavesdropping. But remember: Lundig would stoop to such a practice; and one has to use similar tactics in dealing with such a fellow. Whoever these persons are, you may be sure they're working for Lundig—not for us."

"You mean, Donald, that Lundig would not tell us about the scroll if he should find it?"

"Exactly that, Theresa. Don't forget: he has a copy of the list and could make a translation of his own."

"Should we tell Mr. Clavelock?"

"I think so. Not yet, though. If the list were still here, it would be all right to inform Clavelock and let him demand an explanation from Lundig. But without the list as evidence, Lundig would merely deny our charge; and we would have no proof."

"Try to learn the name of the hotel where he is stopping on those nights that he is away from here. When we know that, it will be time to talk to Clavelock."

THE discussion ended. Theresa and Shiloh came toward the library door.

THE CREEPER

Coolly, The Shadow eased it shut and let the knob twist into place. He had reached the back of the hall when the two arrived at the door. The Shadow saw them walk toward the front door, where Shiloh bade Theresa good-night.

The Shadow saw some one else, as well. A face peeked from the sliding doors of the reception room. The Shadow sighted the sickly features of Egbert Doyd.

Seeing that Theresa's back was turned, the elderly uncle sauntered out into the hall. He was standing by the foot of the stairway when Theresa turned about and returned. The girl thought that he had just come down from the second floor.

"Going out again, to-night, Uncle Egbert?" she inquired with a smile.

"Perhaps, perhaps." Egbert chuckled as he made repetition. "Yes, I may go for another stroll. It did me good—the walk I had last night. I came in early, though, last night. Earlier than Mark Lundig."

"Did he go out, uncle? I thought he was in the library all evening."

"No. He came and rang the doorbell while I was retiring. So he must have been out a while. I came downstairs and admitted him."

"Where was Wilfred? Why didn't he answer?"

"I don't know, Theresa. Perhaps he went out also."

Chuckling to himself, Egbert ascended the stairs. Other footsteps sounded downward. Wilfred arrived in the hall. Theresa questioned the servant; solemnly, Wilfred replied that he had been in his room the night before.

"I must have been sleeping heavily, Miss Theresa," he insisted. "I seldom fail to hear the doorbell ring. Probably if Mr. Egbert had not answered it, I would have heard it later. I am sorry, Miss Theresa —"

"That's all right, Wilfred. Forget the matter."

THE girl went upstairs. Wilfred continued through the hall; then into the dining room.

The Shadow emerged from the dark recess. He glided to the library and entered. The room was still lighted; The Shadow's cloaked form made a grotesque silhouette against the wall. Reaching the wastebasket, The Shadow found the crumpled note.

He scanned its poorly typed lines. Evidently the man who had pounded out the brief message was no typist. Some letters were heavy; others light. There was no space between two of the words; but at another spot, the machine had skipped. The note was no more than a torn strip of paper.

Tossing the crumpled message back into the wastebasket, The Shadow started his departure. He paused within the library door, edging partially behind the barrier as Wilfred walked through the hall, going upstairs again.

As soon as the servant's footsteps creaked on the stairway, The Shadow went out into the hall and moved to the rear passage. He left by the obscure side door that he had entered.

THE CREEPER

He had not seen Mark Lundig on this visit; nor had he heard manifestations of The Creeper, whose sinister footfalls Theresa had mentioned to Donald Shiloh. But The Shadow had profited by this visit; apparently he had guessed something regarding that note that bore the typed signature N.

SOON afterward, a light clicked in The Shadow's sanctum. A white hand came beneath the glare. With a pen, it inscribed that short message which The Shadow, like Shiloh, had memorized. A weird laugh rippled in the darkness: a token of The Shadow's understanding. The mirth was one of whispered mockery, that carried satisfaction rather than foreboding. It ended abruptly as a tiny light glowed from the wall beyond the light.

The Shadow reached for earphones. Gaining them, he whispered. A voice answered:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Report from Marsland. Man answering description of Jerry Kobal is registered at the Hotel Santiago, just off the Bowery. Under the name of John Kane. Marsland covering."

"The report received. Instructions. Other available agents to cover and await further orders."

"Instructions received."

Earphones clicked in the darkness. Again came The Shadow's mirth, this time with a different tone. The new trail had opened; soon, perhaps, The Shadow would be close upon the man who had gained the missing scroll.

The light clicked off; the black walls of the sanctum throbbed with the fading echoes of The Shadow's departing laugh.

CHAPTER XIII. A CASH DEAL

FIFTEEN minutes after The Shadow had given orders to Burbank, a taxi pulled up across the street from the old Hotel Santiago. The driver of the cab was Moe Shrevnitz. Called from his usual uptown stand, the hackie had been ordered here by Burbank. Moe had made the trip in ten minutes of swift travel.

His arrival was expected. A man stepped around from the curb. It was Cliff Marsland; in terse tones, Cliff gave information while Moe listened.

"Hawkeye's not here yet," he said, "but he's due. When he arrives, tell him to cover the back of this old joint. There's a way in from the back."

While Cliff was speaking, another cab stopped a short distance behind Moe's. From it stepped a stooped figure; that of a man with a cane, who carried a fat portfolio beneath his arm.

The keen eyes of Montague Rayne glistened as they spied Moe's cab. Paying his own driver, Rayne hobbled forward with remarkable spryness. He reached the side of Moe's cab and listened.

Neither Cliff nor Moe saw the intruder. Cliff was on the street side of the taxi; Moe's attention was directed to that point. Though The Shadow's agents were speaking in guarded tones, their words were overheard.

THE CREEPER

"It's Jerry Kobal, all right," Cliff was saying. "He's in Room 508, registered as John Kane. I'll mosey around the lobby a while, to give Hawkeye time to get here."

"I'll be watching for him," returned Moe. "I'll send him to cover the back door."

Cliff strolled away; Moe settled back behind the wheel. At the same moment, Montague Rayne swung away from view. Muffling the clicks of his cane, he headed for the Bowery. Looking off to the right he could see the front of the old hotel, with its grimy lights interspersed with burned-out bulbs. A pleased cackle came to Rayne's withered lips.

Though Moe Shrevnitz did not know it, his cab had been spied quite often lately by those same sharp eyes. Moe had a regular parking place near Times Square; any one who had seen his cab elsewhere might easily have had the luck to spot it at its usual stand.

Moe had figured in the quest for Myram; a proof that he was connected with the search for the scroll. Moreover, Moe was sometimes lax in watching backward to see if his cab happened to have another on its trail. On this quick trip, he had not once glanced behind to look for followers.

Montague Rayne was hobbling to the rear of the old Hotel Santiago. Once there, he found an obscure entrance. He used it and came to the rear of the lobby.

Cliff Marsland was strolling about, killing time. While Rayne waited, Cliff went on. Rayne hobbled into the lobby, passed a sleepy clerk behind the desk and continued, unnoticed, up a stairway.

IN Room 508, Jerry Kobal was seated at a table, his typewriter set before him. The weary-faced man was working on his story; but the twitching of his face showed that he could not keep his mind to the task. Jerry was troubled, nervous; when a rap sounded at the door, he sprang about with a jolt.

"Who's there?"

A quavering tone responded to Jerry's sharp question. It was a kindly, friendly voice, that formed a query.

"Mr. Kane? Could I see you for a few minutes?"

"All right."

Jerry went over and unlocked the door. He saw the bent form of Montague Rayne; he stared, puzzled, as he viewed the withered face. Then the old visitor hobbled forward. Smiling, he delivered a tired smile as he sat down in a chair and laid his portfolio on the floor beside him.

"Sorry, sir," remarked Jerry. "I guess I'm not the Mr. Kane you came to see."

"No?" Rayne chortled the question. "Did I say that I had come here to see Mr. Kane?"

"That's what you said, sir."

"I was wrong. I came to find Mr. Kobal. Jerry Kobal."

At mention of his own name, Jerry twitched nervously. A hunted expression showed on his face; then faded as he heard another senile cackle come from the lips of his doddering visitor. This fellow could offer no trouble, Jerry decided. The ex-crook closed the door and locked it.

THE CREEPER

"All right," he acknowledged gruffly. "I'm Jerry Kobal. What's on your mind, grandpop?"

"Sit down." Rayne's tone, though high-pitched, showed firmness. "I have a proposition that may interest you, Kobal. Tell me: what about the parchment scroll you have in your possession? How did you acquire it?"

Jerry stared, startled; then shook his head.

"You're not a dick," he decided, "and you don't look like a crook. An old chap like you ought to be on the level. Say—who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Rayne. Montague Rayne. I have only recently arrived in New York. Come, come, Kobal; tell me about the scroll. Be honest with me."

"You want the whole story?"

"From the beginning."

"All right." Jerry's face showed determination. "I'll come clean. I've been wishing that I could find somebody who might believe what I've got to say; and you look like you might be the man, Mr. Rayne."

"I shall believe you, Kobal. I can always tell when a man speaks the truth."

Jerry paced the room. He paused and faced his visitor; then spoke frankly.

"I WAS a crook once," he said. "I was in stir; now that I'm clear of the Big House, I don't want to go back. I was living in a little apartment, Mr. Rayne, writing out some of my experiences. I felt my own story might do good work—might steer other fellows away from crime—help them to keep straight."

Rayne nodded. His face showed a beaming smile. Jerry felt more at ease. He resumed.

"Last night," he detailed, "who barged in on me but Slugger Haskew, a crook I used to know. He was wounded—almost dying—and he told me if I didn't work with him, he'd bring the cops in on us. That would have implicated me in whatever job Slugger had been doing."

"I pretended that I'd work with him. He gave me the scroll. It's in Latin—I could recognize some of the words, even though I couldn't translate them—and it must be important. Because Slugger wanted me to pass it on to a crook called The Creeper."

"He told me to head for a hotel called the Alcadia, an old joint north of here. He said I'd know The Creeper when I heard him—by the fellow's footsteps. Slugger was to call, after I'd gone, and put The Creeper wise to where I was."

Jerry stopped. For a moment, he eyed Rayne suspiciously, wondering if this visitor might be The Creeper, despite the fact that he had come without making that strange tread of which Slugger had spoken. Then, disarmed by Rayne's friendliness, Jerry continued.

"I didn't go to the Alcadia," he affirmed. "I didn't want anything to do with murderers. I've gone straight, Mr. Rayne, and I'm going to stay straight. I came here instead—here to the Santiago. I've been wondering what to do ever since—whether I should call the police or not. Honestly, I've been in a stew! I don't think the cops would believe me, even if I did hand over the scroll. If I could only —"

THE CREEPER

"Let me see the scroll," crackled the seated visitor. "I should like to examine it."

Jerry nodded. He produced the bloodstained document from his typewriter case. Rayne received it and studied the inscription closely. His smile betokened satisfaction; then his eyes narrowed as he asked:

"Did you make a copy of this?"

Jerry produced a typewritten sheet and gave it promptly to his visitor. His voice was frank as he explained:

"That's the only copy, Mr. Rayne. I simply made it for my own protection, in case of emergency. I hit it off on the machine to-day; but I made no carbon. What's more, I don't remember half of it. Just a lot of Latin to me."

RAYNE reached for his portfolio. Opening it, he dipped his hand inside and produced an envelope. From this, he removed a stack of bank notes. Jerry stared, goggle-eyed, at sight of the currency. Rayne counted off a sheaf of notes and held them in his right hand.

"Here is five thousand dollars," he declared. "My price for the purchase of the scroll. Will you accept it?"

Jerry reached for the money; then stopped.

"Only if you're on the level," he decided, grasping the scroll that Rayne had placed on the arm of the chair. "No crooked business for me, Mr. Rayne, no matter how much jack you're willing to ante."

"You are honest," commended Rayne, with a satisfied nod. "Very well, Kobal; I can assure you that this is honest money. This scroll belonged to a friend of mine"—quietly, Rayne reached out and took the parchment from Jerry's hand—"to an old friend, who trusted me. He is dead, poor Bigelow." Sadly, Rayne's head shook, while his mild quaver softened. "He is dead; and the scroll was stolen from him."

"Gladly would he have placed it in my hands. You have done a noble service, Kobal, in reclaiming the scroll from thieves. I am wealthy; it is as a reward for your honesty that I am offering you this money."

The hand with the bills stretched forward, trembling. Jerry Kobal was impressed with the belief that Rayne's offer was genuine. The ex-crook's hesitation ended. He clutched the money gladly.

"Five thousand bucks!" he exclaimed. "Say—this gives me a swell break, Mr. Rayne! I appreciate your generosity; and if there's anything else —"

"There is," crackled the visitor, with a smile. "One important condition, Kobal. You are to leave town to-night. Travel far—so far that none of your old associates will find you. Moreover, you are to say nothing about this transaction. It must remain an absolute secret!"

"Trust me," grinned Jerry. "I'll be out of here in fifteen minutes. Now that you've staked me, I can get somewhere. It's a tough uphill grind for a fellow after he's been in stir. But with cash—honest cash—for a start, I've got the chance I've wanted."

Montague Rayne was rising. Jerry helped him to his feet. The wrinkled-faced visitor thrust the scroll into his portfolio. He started toward the door; Jerry hurried ahead and unlocked it. Rayne offered a trembling hand in parting; Jerry received it and returned the visitor's clasp.

THE CREEPER

Pocketing his money—cash which he felt was fairly earned—Jerry Kobal watched the huddled figure of Montague Rayne go hobbling down the hall. He heard a last cackle of pleased satisfaction. Closing the door, the ex-crook began to pack his few effects, in preparation for the distant trip that his benefactor had ordered.

A quick transaction had been accomplished. The missing scroll had been bought, paid for and delivered; again it had changed hands, this time without violence. All within a brief span of time while agents of The Shadow, stationed outside the Hotel Santiago, were still awaiting the arrival of their cloaked chief!

CHAPTER XIV. THE CREEPER'S THRUST

AT the very time when Jerry Kobal was congratulating himself upon the acquisition of five thousand dollars, his name was being discussed by two members of The Creeper's clan. One was Zimmer Funson; the other, his right bower, Hal. The two were seated in the bookie's living room at the Hotel Parkview.

"No line yet on Jerry Kobal?" was Zimmer's query. "Say, Hal, I thought you could come through with something. You did a good job locating Dopey Delvin."

"That was luck, Zimmer," returned Hal, with a shake of his head. "It's tougher, finding Jerry. You're sure you've got the right dope about him?"

"Straight from The Creeper. This guy Slugger knew him and slipped him the scroll. Jerry was supposed to have headed for the Hotel Alcadia; but he didn't. He's pulled some double cross."

"Sure he's not at the Alcadia?"

"It's been covered. Not by us; but by some other bunch. Well, we've got the only lead; we know that Jerry Kobal used to play the races once in a while, after he came out of stir. We'd know him if we saw him."

"That's enough, isn't it, Zimmer? Give the guy time; he'll bob up. That's why I left Wally and Steve down at Townley's."

"You told me that Jerry Kobal owes Townley some dough."

"Sure! Fifty bucks."

"So you left Wally and Steve there. That's a hot one. The guy won't blow into a joint where he owes dough."

"You're wrong, Zimmer. This guy Kobal pays his debts. Townley told Wally that he always shows up when he's flush."

"Maybe it's a good hunch, Hal. Say—Townley doesn't know that you fellows are hooked up with me, does he?"

"Not a chance of it."

"All right. Slide on down there and stick with the others."

SO far, the henchmen of The Creeper had made no guess as to Jerry Kobal's whereabouts. It had taken agents of The Shadow to track the crook who had gone straight. They were still arrayed about the Hotel Santiago. Hawkeye had just arrived; he was covering the alley at the back.

THE CREEPER

Hawkeye's lateness, however, had produced a doublefold result. Not only had Montague Rayne gained a chance to enter; the old hobbler had also found opportunity to leave by that unwatched rear exit. Cliff, occasionally entering the lobby, had not spied Rayne either coming or going; nor had the clerk, still dozing behind his desk.

Hawkeye was close beside the rear door when he heard a whisper in the darkness. It was The Shadow, again arrived upon the field which his aids were guarding. Hawkeye slid aside; The Shadow moved inward toward the lobby. He stopped to watch, as a man came down the stairs and walked over to the desk.

"Checking out, Mr. Kane?" came the voice of the awakened clerk.

A nod from Jerry Kobal, as the ex-crook placed his typewriter on the floor. The Shadow moved back to the exit. His whisper to Hawkeye was a sharp one. The little spotter skidded away, heading around the block to contact Moe Shrevnitz in the cab.

The Shadow waited. From the outer exit, he caught a glimpse of Jerry Kobal, strolling toward the front door of the hotel. Jerry's bill was paid; he was on his way. The Shadow swiftly took the course that Hawkeye had followed.

Arriving out front, Jerry looked about, intending to start toward the elevated. At that moment, Moe's cab wheeled up; the driver delivered a friendly grin at the man who had come from the hotel.

"Taxi?"

Jerry nodded. He entered the cab. He ordered Moe to take him to the Pennsylvania Station. The cab pulled away. At the same moment, Cliff Marsland hailed a chance cab that had swung in from the Bowery. Climbing aboard, he spoke to the driver.

"See that hack?" queried Cliff, pointing out Moe's cab. "Tail it, bud. I want to talk to the guy that's riding in it. It means a fin for you, if you don't lose the guy."

"All right by me," laughed the driver.

At that moment, another figure swung aboard the cab. The door closed almost automatically. Cliff looked up to see a blotting shape that settled down beside him. A low whisper followed. The Shadow was riding along with Cliff. Hawkeye had passed The Shadow's order along to the others. No longer needed for the present expedition, the little spotter had been left behind.

MOE'S cab proved easy to follow. Small wonder; for he was obeying The Shadow's order. Hawkeye had given Moe the tip to pick up Jerry; then to make it easy for Cliff to trail him in another cab. Usually, The Shadow used Moe's taxi as a trailer; to-night he had reversed the procedure. As a passenger in Moe's cab, Jerry was under complete surveillance.

Up ahead, Moe had reached an avenue. He was driving at comfortable speed, eyeing his passenger through the mirror. He saw Jerry staring at the fronts of some dilapidated buildings. Suddenly, as they neared a lighted cigar store, the passenger gave an order.

"Stop here a minute."

Moe applied the brakes. He thought that Jerry was going in for cigarettes; for the fellow, alighting, told him to wait. But as Moe watched the front of the cigar store, he saw Jerry go through to a door at the rear.

THE CREEPER

Looking up, Moe saw lighted windows with drawn blinds on the second floor. He knew the place.

The second cab had arrived. The Shadow emerged while Cliff was passing the driver the promised five spot. The second taxi sped away. Cliff came up to Moe's cab; he could hear the hackie reporting to The Shadow in the darkness.

"He went through the cigar store," Moe informed. "He must be going upstairs, to a joint run by a bookie named Townley. The saps place bets there; Townley has some slot machines —"

The Shadow's hissed whisper ended Moe's wandering report. It was Cliff who promptly added more important details.

"I know the place," said Cliff. "Maybe I can crash the gate. There's another way out, though, from the house next door, in case the cops stage a raid."

Whispered orders in the dark. Both Cliff and Moe caught a glimpse of The Shadow's weaving cloak; then their chief was lost in the darkness of darkened store-fronts as he headed swiftly toward the corner, to round it and reach the rear of the row of buildings.

Cliff gave obedience to an order just received; he sauntered into the cigar store. Moe, in turn, pulled his cab ahead and swung around the corner to park on the side street.

Passing the cigar counter, Cliff went to the door at the rear of the store. He stepped into a back room; a sallow-faced lookout challenged him and asked his name. Cliff gave it.

"I better see Townley," the watcher said. "Stick here until I come back."

He opened a doorway and clattered up a flight of stairs. Cliff waited, deciding it was best to play safe. He had met Townley in the past; the bookie would probably grant him prompt admittance. So Townley would have—but for events that were breaking at that very moment.

JERRY KOBAL had reached the upstairs joint. He had found Townley behind a counter and was talking to the bookie. Townley was a wise-faced fellow; coatless, he was sporting vest and derby hat, while he chewed the end of a black stogy.

"I owe you fifty, Townley," reminded Jerry, in a confidential tone. "Sorry I couldn't dig it up before. Here it is, old sock. Thanks for allowing me credit."

He pulled out a fifty-dollar bill and thrust it across the counter. Townley nodded his thanks; he said something that Jerry could not catch because of the clatter of slot machines. There were a dozen of these along the wall; all were in use, with other players waiting for their turn.

Jerry leaned forward. As he did, something poked his ribs. Wheeling, startled, he saw himself surrounded by a trio. They were Zimmer's touts: Wally, looming lanky; Steve, squatty and sneering; Hal, his gold teeth glistening as he delivered an ugly leer. It was Hal who formed the center of the three. His fist held the gun that was jabbed against Jerry's side.

"We got something to talk about," informed Hal. "Outside. Open that other door for us, Townley. We'll take care of this rat!"

THE CREEPER

Jerry's face had begun a twitching; suddenly the motion stopped. He knew that these fellows, despite their toughness, were not experienced gunmen. They might be quick on the trigger; but they lacked the technique of those who were accustomed to inviting a victim for a one-way ride.

"Why don't you talk here?" queried Jerry. "Nobody's going to hear us, with all that clatter."

"All right," snarled Hal, "have it that way. What did you do with that paper Slugger slipped you? Got it on you?"

"Easy, boys," cautioned Townley, from behind the counter. "I don't want this joint shot up. You didn't tell me you was going to hand a guy the works. Talk to 'em, Tom."

The last remark was addressed to the lookout who had come up to inform Townley that Cliff wanted admittance. But before Tom could join in the protest, Hal snarled an order. Wally and Steve hoisted bulging guns within their pockets. Townley and his lookout stood rigid.

"Slip me the paper," ordered Hal, his tone venomous. "This rod's got a hair trigger. I'm yanking it, if you don't come across! I'm giving you five seconds!"

JERRY realized instantly that the tout meant business. In one quick flash, he pictured himself on the floor, his body riddled with bullets from an emptied gun. When fellows like Hal started shooting, they kept on until the hammer clicked. Such was the way with inexperienced killers. Jerry had to talk—and talk fast.

"The scroll," he said, quickly, "I haven't got it. I sold it to a fellow to-night."

"Sold it?" snarled Hal.

"Yes," returned Jerry. "For five grand. I steered away from the Hotel Alcadia, figuring the bulls might be there. Slugger looked like he'd been in a bad jam. So I went to the Santiago instead. Slugger was supposed to pass that along. Guess he croaked before he had a chance."

The quick bluff had momentary effect. Jerry followed it up rapidly.

"The guy that came was an old gent," he stated. "I thought he must be the fellow Slugger told to meet me. He put up the dough; I slipped him the scroll —"

"Yeah?" inserted Hal. "And what was his name?"

"Montague Rayne."

Jerry gave the name involuntarily. He had time to think of no other. Under stress, he had realized that a moment's hesitation would mean instant death. He realized, also, that Hal might know something about that old fellow who had brought the cash. To give the right name seemed the only out.

"Montague Rayne," repeated Hal, with a sneer. "I'll remember it; but you won't. It's curtains for you, now that you've spilled what you know. If —"

Twisting away from the revolver muzzle, Jerry made a dive for Hal's gun arm. As he did, he was conscious of a fierce, terrifying sound that suddenly filled the room. It was a mighty laugh, a vivid crescendo of mockery that came from a far door beyond the counter.

THE CREEPER

It was that weird mockery, not Jerry's twist, that threw Hal off balance. The would-be murderer swung toward the direction of the sound. So did Steve and Wally as they heard the fierce challenge that rang out above the hubbub of the room.

Townley and Tom stared rigid; at the same instant, the slot machine players stopped their clatter and swung about in wild astonishment.

Before them stood The Shadow. He had uncovered the emergency exit; he had arrived to encounter men of crime. His timely appearance had saved Jerry Kobal; but it had placed The Shadow himself in a position of instant danger. The habitués of Townley's dive—many of them—were hardened ruffians. Denizens of the badlands, these rogues were sworn enemies of The Shadow.

Zimmer Funson's three touts were not all with whom The Shadow had to deal. Of two dozen players gathered about the slot machines, fully half were thugs who had chanced to choose this hangout. Lined along the inner wall of the big room, they raised a huge cry as they dropped for cover, yanking revolvers as they dived.

Massed strength had offset the surprise of The Shadow's entry. Snarling thugs were ready to give battle, glad of the chance that had brought their arch-enemy into their temporary domain.

CHAPTER XV. THE SHADOW'S RESCUE

FACED with immediate fray, The Shadow had sized the situation. Across the room was chaos; at that spot, men were spreading with varied purposes.

Some, mere patrons of the place, were dashing toward a doorway, anxious to get clear of a space that would soon be a battlefield. Others—those drawing guns—were vicious scoundrels who knew how to handle their gats. A round dozen, they were the enemies whom The Shadow soon must meet.

For the present instant, he had others with whom to deal: three who were apprentices at hand-to-hand conflict, but murderous, nevertheless. Hal, Wally and Steve—the three had come here keyed to kill. In the excitement, they were at fever pitch, strained to a point where they would face any foe.

They were ready with revolvers. They saw the cloaked battler, ready with his bulging automatics. They caught the blaze of burning eyes. The three touts opened combat. Steve and Wally fired first; their hasty shots sizzled wide of The Shadow. Hal, alone, gained an instant bead; but he found no chance to fire. Before he could press the hair trigger of his gat, Jerry Kobal sprang forward and hurled him to the floor.

The Shadow's automatics boomed simultaneously. Wally and Steve were his targets. Both staggered, their gun arms dropping. The Shadow whirled. The room roared with a cannonade. Thugs were opening fire from behind slot machines. The Shadow was answering with booming, wide-sprayed shots.

Crook-dispatched bullets whistled wide. A few of The Shadow's slugs found human targets; but others bashed against the steel posts of the slot machines. These vicious fighters had overturned the gambling devices, to use them as entrenchments. They had cut off The Shadow from the further door; they were firing to block his exit by the other direction.

Only by a sudden reversal of his course did The Shadow trick the frenzied marksmen who sought his life.

Then, before the thugs could concentrate their aim, new shots ripped inward from the entrance at the stairway. Cliff Marsland had dashed up from below. Reaching the room, he found himself on a line with the

THE CREEPER

bulwarked sharpshooters who were aiming for The Shadow.

Cliff's shots roared down the alley behind the overturned slot machines. One aiming thug sprawled; his fall cleared the way for Cliff to clip another. This enfilading fire was too much. Wildly, The Shadow's enemies leaped from their improvised trench and went diving for a doorway that led to Townley's office. Noncombatants had already sought that shelter.

Half of The Shadow's foemen remained sprawled on the floor. Between them, The Shadow and Cliff had accounted for that number. Final blasts from The Shadow's automatics spurred on the ones who fled, urging them to greater hurry. Only two remained: Townley, down behind his counter; Tom, cowering with upraised arms.

Neither had seen Cliff; nor would they believe—later—that he had figured in the fray. Fearfully, they had been watching The Shadow, hoping only that they would be spared from his barrage.

BUT all the while, another conflict had been raging on the floor. A struggle between Jerry and Hal, the two flattened below the line of zipping bullets that had whistled across the room. Jerry had fought to gain Hal's gun; he had been succeeding until the very moment of The Shadow's victory.

In that instant, Hal had twisted upward. Freeing his gun arm, he had driven it downward to deliver a stunning crash against Jerry's skull. Catching the ex-crook's limp body, Hal swung it as a shield in front of him. With surprising skill, the tout thrust his revolver beneath Jerry's arm and aimed point-blank for The Shadow.

An automatic roared. It found the only vulnerable point—the edge of Hal's left shoulder. The tout jolted sidewise as he received the searing flesh wound; but he did not lose his aim. His finger, though, faltered for a full second. It was in that interval that Cliff jabbed an angled shot from the doorway. Hal's turn had given Cliff an opening which The Shadow had not gained.

The tout slumped. Jerry, limp and stunned, pitched forward on the floor. The Shadow swept in from the far doorway, while Cliff dived for the wall near the head of the stairs. There he found light switches and clicked them. The dive was plunged into darkness.

Automatics tongued long flashes through the smoky blackness. They were warning shots, those last stabs from the mighty guns. Warnings to the crooks in Townley's office to stay where they were.

As echoes died, Cliff heard a hissed command. He joined The Shadow; together they hoisted Jerry Kobal's form and headed through the door that led to the adjoining house.

Descending stairs, they reached a rear passage that led to the street. Jerry's limp body went aboard Moe's cab. Cliff followed; the taxi sped away. The Shadow was sending the hunted man to a place of safety, where he would have a physician's care. Then The Shadow, himself, strode swiftly on his way. His move was timely.

Clubs were pounding sidewalks on the avenue: patrolmen, signaling for aid. Radio patrol cars were roaring into view. Officers headed into the cigar store; others, guessing at a rear exit, were heading to the side street. New battle followed. It began when three policemen reached Townley's upstairs joint.

Tom had crept over to turn on the lights. Thugs and scared-faced slot machine players had surged from the office. Seeing the police, they made for the same exit that The Shadow had chosen. The officers were met by only two resisters: Wally and Steve, who had been crippled by The Shadow's first shots.

THE CREEPER

Huddled in front of the counter, the wounded touts went mad. They had been sent here to kill; kill they would, now that their first agonies were ended. The Shadow had left them wounded, for the law to capture. They, themselves, were the ones who changed the decision. Gripping their revolvers, both Wally and Steve began to fire at the police.

THE bluecoats responded. Weakened, Wally and Steve fired wildly. Quick shots from police revolvers mowed them to the floor. Keeping on, the officers took up the chase of the men who had gone out through the emergency exit.

Gunfire from below. The fleeing customers had been trapped between two bands of police. They would surrender; soon the officers would be back.

Townley and Tom were scrambling about, unlocking slot machines. They were hastily unloading quarter dollars to hide the silver before the law took charge. They had no time to notice a huddled man who crawled up from the floor.

It was Hal, the last of the three touts; the one man who formed a link back to Zimmer Funson, the only one who could send word to The Creeper. Cliff had dropped the would-be murderer; but only with a hasty bullet. Though wounded, Hal was in no serious plight. Gaining his feet, he steadied and made his way to Townley's deserted office.

Sinking into a chair, Hal picked up a telephone from the desk. He put in a call to Zimmer. Coolly, the tout stated the facts as he remembered them. His tone was steady, although he clipped his statements short.

"I got Jerry Kobal," declared Hal. "Yeah. He's through... Maybe they lugged him away; but not till after I'd crowned him... Who? The Shadow... Yeah, The Shadow... Sure, he was here; but he didn't keep Kobal from blabbing..."

"He got rid of the scroll... Yeah, Kobal did... To-night. That's when... Handed it to an old geezer who gave him five grand... Sure. I remember the name: Montague Rayne... That's right. Montague Rayne. I said Rayne—not Wayne... Begins with an R; that's right..."

"The cops? Yeah, they're here. They finished Wally and Steve... Yeah, both of them; but they won't get me... What's that? Not a chance. I'll shoot my way out of here if I have to... Don't worry; nobody will be wise. They won't know you were in it, Zimmer..."

Hal hung up. Steadily he arose, and drew a revolver from his pocket. His gold teeth glittered as he formed an ugly grin. He walked to the door and opened it. He stopped short at sight of a stocky, swarthy-faced man who was standing in the center of the room, holding a gun while he ordered Townley and Tom to cease their scrambling for quarters.

Hal snarled; he knew the arrival's face: Detective Joe Cardona, acting inspector at present. Even a race-track tout would know Joe Cardona.

JOE heard the snarl; he straightened on the instant, aiming his revolver instinctively as he saw Hal draw a bead on him. The tout's finger was on the hair trigger when Joe Cardona fired. The quick shot that jabbed from Joe's stubby gun was the only move that could have stayed Hal's murderous purpose.

Like Wally and Steve, Hal had come here to kill. He had been stopped before; he was stopped again. He wavered; his trembling finger lacked even the trifling strength that was necessary to yank the hair trigger. Knees gave way; the boastful tout floundered and sprawled upon the floor.

THE CREEPER

There were other bodies about. Those of thugs; of Wally and Steve. But this final addition brought a last hush to the fray. Townley and Tom stared with drawn faces. Joe Cardona turned to them, after a look at Hal's dead face. The ace detective spoke soberly.

"He's no gorilla, that fellow." Cardona shook his head. "If he had been, he'd have quit. This was his first try at murder. It's the new ones who are the toughest sometimes. They're after blood; they don't calculate. Too bad I had to shoot him; I wouldn't have had a chance, if I hadn't."

As Cardona said, it was "too bad." Not that Hal had died; for the tout had deserved his fate. But in dropping him, Joe Cardona had unwittingly performed a service for The Creeper, arch-foe of the law. He had cut off the last link between to-night's attempted crime and Zimmer Funson.

Had Hal—or his pals—remained alive to blab Zimmer's name, one of The Creeper's chief lieutenants would have been put in a bad spot. The Shadow had left those possible informants alive; policemen and Joe Cardona, to save their own lives, had been forced to finish the careers of all three.

Moreover, Hal had passed the word to Zimmer. The news would reach The Creeper. That supercrook would gain the name of Montague Rayne; thus he would know the person to whom Jerry Kobal had passed the precious scroll of parchment.

The Creeper's thrust had succeeded, despite the loss of three henchmen. The Creeper would regard it as a real success; he cared nothing for a trio of Zimmer's touts.

New opportunity for The Creeper. A new quest—the search for Montague Rayne, the unexpected factor who had entered the game. Yet The Creeper's path would not be smooth. There was still a power with whom he must contend. The Shadow had rescued Jerry Kobal, despite Hal's belief to the contrary. Whatever The Creeper had learned, The Shadow would know also.

Keen, crafty, his very identity unknown, The Creeper remained formidable. But there was one who moved as cunningly as he; one whose love of justice was greater even than The Creeper's urge for evil; one whose ways were also hidden beneath the cloak of darkness.

That one was The Shadow, whose might had prevailed to-night; that super being whose prowess could conquer all odds.

CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW KNOWS

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed. Dinner had ended at the Doyd mansion. Only Theresa and her Uncle Egbert had been present while Wilfred had served the meal. Theresa had conversed but little; after dinner, the girl had gone upstairs to her own room. Egbert had merely stated that he might go out for a short walk.

Silence was heavy in the old house; so heavy that it seemed appalling. Theresa had fancied that she had heard a ring of the front doorbell. Wondering, she had opened the door of her room and left it a trifle ajar. Perhaps that was why she had sensed the thick silence of the mansion. The hush was ominous.

With foreboding, Theresa went to her door and listened. As she waited, dreading what might come, she heard the sound that she had almost expected. It was a creeping that occurred suddenly below; that same, uncanny noise that she had heard before.

The Creeper!

THE CREEPER

Again, he was moving about in eerie fashion, his very location impossible to guess. Trembling, Theresa stole along the second-floor hall, to listen at the top of the stairs. The creeping continued; yet its intensity never changed. Front hall—rear hall—library—dining room—even the reception room: any one of those spots could have harbored the terrifying creep of unfaltering footsteps.

The creeping ended. It stopped as suddenly as it had begun, leaving Theresa in a total quandary. She knew that The Creeper was below; but where he had gone, what he was about—these were factors that she could not even guess. Theresa knew only that she needed help. The upstairs telephone offered that opportunity.

Stealing back to her own room, Theresa softly closed the door and picked up the telephone. Before she could speak, she heard two voices talking. One was Mark Lundig's; the other a gruff tone that Theresa had never heard before.

But the girl knew at once that Lundig must be in the house. The other extension of the telephone was in the library. Lundig was using that line to make an outside call.

The conversation had just commenced; Theresa was sure of that because she first heard Mark Lundig saying:

"Yes—this is Mr. Lundig."

Then the gruff response:

"I thought it was you, Mr. Lundig. I've got some good news for you. We located Montague Rayne."

"What?" came Lundig's quick reply. "Have you seen him?"

"No," responded the gruff voice, almost sourly. "He was staying at the Torrington; but he checked out. We'll trace him, though, unless you want to do it —"

Lundig interrupted sharply.

"Is some one on this line?" he inquired. "It sounds that way to me."

"Maybe it's just a poor connection," suggested the gruff voice. "Wait while I signal the operator."

THERESA heard a receiver hook click violently. Quickly, she hung up while the noise was still in progress, knowing that the sound of her dropping receiver would not be heard during the clatter on the wire.

She waited tensely; then decided to go out into the hall again. She reached the top of the stairs and listened for a full two minutes. All was stillness during that interval.

Then came the creeping again—slow, steady, terrifying. Theresa was sure that it must be at the back of the hall; for the first time, she gained an actual impression of its location. The creeping was coming from the direction of the library; its destination, however, was impossible to guess. Particularly because it stopped abruptly.

The Creeper was below. Lurking somewhere in the rear hall. Waiting there, listening perhaps.

Theresa trembled; almost mechanically she tiptoed back to her own room. Again she closed the door; this time she locked it. In desperation, she again picked up the telephone. This time she heard nothing but the zing of the dial tone. Mark Lundig had ended his conversation with the gruff-voiced man.

THE CREEPER

Nervously, Theresa dialed Donald Shiloh's number. She could hear the ringing of the bell; then a receiver was raised. The solemn voice of Jeffrey answered. Theresa knew the valet's tone; she spoke quickly.

"Is Mr. Shiloh there?" she queried. "This is Miss Doyd calling. Miss Theresa Doyd."

"He is right here, miss," responded Jeffrey. "Hold the wire, please."

Theresa could barely hear the valet speak other words, away from the mouthpiece of the telephone. Jeffrey was addressing Shiloh, stating that Miss Doyd was on the wire. Then, before Shiloh could have possibly reached the telephone, Theresa heard a click, followed by the clatter of a dial.

"Hello," she called, anxiously. "Hello..."

The dialing stopped short; again a receiver hook clicked. The dial tone zipped its monotonous sound. Theresa's call had been cut off. For a moment, Theresa stood bewildered; then a sudden explanation flashed through her mind.

Mark Lundig must have started another call from downstairs. Probably Lundig—though it might have been some other, for Theresa had heard no voice. She decided, however, that her own voice must have been heard; that was why the dialing had ended so abruptly. The result, whatever the cause, had been unfortunate. Her call to Shiloh had been cut off.

Straining, Theresa listened as she hung up the receiver. She expected to hear new creeping from below; but the locked door of her room prevented any sound from reaching her. Half a minute passed; Theresa gained boldness. Raising the receiver, she heard the dial tone still zinging; she decided that her own using of the telephone must have been a disconcerting factor. Chances were that The Creeper had gone.

Steeling herself, the girl unlocked the door, deliberately walked through the upstairs hall and descended to the floor below.

Theresa's courage increased. She heard no new creeping; the hall, though gloomy, was not too foreboding. Theresa passed the closed doors of the reception room. She continued on and came to the door of the library. The barrier was half open; the room was lighted. Theresa entered, to find the library empty.

THE girl suddenly sensed some one in the hall. She turned nervously, to see Wilfred approaching from the dining room. She called the servant and spoke loudly.

"When did Mr. Lundig arrive?" she inquired. "Did you admit him, Wilfred?"

"Certainly, miss," returned the servant. "I admitted Mr. Lundig about fifteen minutes ago."

"Did he come in here?"

"Perhaps so, Miss Theresa. But I could not say positively. He stopped in the front parlor—to look through the music portfolio, I presume. I had been occupied in the kitchen, so I went directly back there."

"Where is Mr. Lundig at present?"

"Perhaps he is still in the front parlor, Miss Theresa. Shall I see?"

"Yes. Go there at once, Wilfred."

THE CREEPER

As the servant turned about, the telephone began to ring. Wilfred hesitated; Theresa waved him on. She answered the telephone herself. A sigh of relief came from her lips as she heard Shiloh's voice.

"Theresa?" came the anxious query. "Is everything all right?"

"Of course." The girl laughed nervously; then looked about to make sure that Wilfred was gone. "Can you come over, Donald? Right away?"

"Certainly, Theresa. But tell me what it is –"

"Everything is all right. I can say no more at present. Come as soon as you can, Donald."

Ending the call, the girl went out into the hall. She encountered Wilfred coming back from the front parlor. The servant shook his head.

"Mr. Lundig is not about," he stated. "I believe that he must have gone out again, Miss Theresa."

"Very well, Wilfred. You may go back to the kitchen. If the doorbell rings, I shall answer it."

Theresa went into the parlor, to find it empty, as Wilfred had stated. She picked up the music portfolio and tried to study it; but could not keep her eyes from the slowly-ticking clock. Minutes were long intervals to the troubled girl. A dozen passed with increasing slowness. Then came a ring of the front doorbell.

Theresa answered it immediately, to find Shiloh on the doorstep; beyond, at the curb, was the glistening green coupe.

Theresa closed the door behind her, pressing the latch as she did so. She spoke to Shiloh cautiously; he listened intently, as he noted the girl's worried look.

"Don't come in," said Theresa. "I want to talk to you out here. I don't know who may be listening inside."

"You heard the creeping again?" questioned Shiloh.

Theresa nodded. Both she and Shiloh were intent. Neither had thought of the blackness about them, the nightly gloom that always clung to the front of the old looming mansion. Hence they did not see the shape that glided suddenly across a blotchy stretch of sidewalk.

The figure merged with the darkness. Shadowy in motion, it stopped near the steps. A listener had arrived to hear this conference. It was The Shadow. Obscure in darkness, he had come here only a few minutes before; just in time to see Shiloh's car drive up.

"I THOUGHT it must be the creeping," declared Shiloh. "Jeffrey answered the telephone when you called; but before I could get on the wire, some one must have cut you off. As soon as I realized what had happened, I tried to call you back. All I could get was a 'busy' signal."

"I think some one was dialing from the library," explained Theresa. "Mark Lundig, probably. He was here."

"I tried to get the number twice," added Shiloh. "Then I decided to wait for a few minutes. That seemed the best plan, despite my impatience. My third call went through; if it hadn't, I would have dashed over here anyway."

THE CREEPER

"You came very promptly, Donald," smiled Theresa. "You must have driven rapidly."

"Like blazes! But tell me, Theresa: What about the creeping?"

"I heard it from upstairs. It was in the lower hall. So I decided to call you. When I picked up the telephone I heard Mark Lundig speaking to a man with a gruff voice."

"Lundig was talking from the library?"

"He must have been. I learned afterward, from Wilfred, that Mark had come in while I was upstairs. The man with the gruff voice mentioned something quite odd, Donald. He said that Montague Rayne had been staying at the Torrington Hotel —"

"Montague Rayne? Wasn't he the old codger who jilted your Aunt Mehitabel, some fifty years ago?"

"Yes. Don't you remember that Mark said Rayne might be important? He must have hired detectives to find out if Rayne happened to be in New York."

Shiloh chuckled.

"What a fool Mark is," he stated. "Worrying about Montague Rayne. Why— the old fossil must be at least eighty years old! Most of us decided that he was dead by this time."

"Apparently he is still alive, Donald. Do you think he could have a purpose in being here in New York?"

"Only to see some bright lights before he dies. I cannot attach much significance, so far as we are concerned."

"Shouldn't we inform Mr. Clavelock?"

"That would be a good idea. Find out what he thinks about it. Was that all you heard, Theresa?"

"Over the telephone, yes. I hung up when Mark and the other man talked about some one being on the wire. Then I heard the creeping again. From the hall upstairs, I went back to the telephone. Mark was no longer on the wire. I called you, only to be interrupted."

"Lundig again, all right. He must have gone back to the library. Was there any more creeping, Theresa?"

"I don't know. I waited in my room with the door locked. Then I went downstairs. A creeping could have occurred during that interval. It never lasts long, Donald."

"Is Lundig still in the house, Theresa?"

"I am not sure. He may have gone out. But perhaps The Creeper is still there."

"The Creeper?"

The girl laughed at Shiloh's question.

"I mean the person who has made those footsteps. The name occurred to me the other night. I think of him as The Creeper."

THE CREEPER

"Go back in the house, Theresa." Shiloh spoke slowly. "Make sure about Lundig. If he has gone out, I don't think that you will hear the creeping again."

"You think Mark Lundig is The Creeper?"

"Frankly, I don't know. But I can't figure who else could be—that is, among persons who openly enter this house. Uncle Egbert is rather sickly; Wilfred is an old and trusted servant. No one else ever comes here except myself and Clavelock."

"Mr. Clavelock has not been here since he made his trip, Donald. He has called from his home, that is all."

Shiloh nodded seriously.

"I'm thinking of two things, Theresa," he stated. "Lundig's way of acting, and that side door. If I could only hear the creeping for myself, I might make a better guess; as it is, I can settle on one point. The creeping has happened when Lundig has been about; or when he could have been about. Still, any one could use that side door."

"Mark could use it. Keys are available."

"I know. But we must not talk too long, Theresa. Go back in the house, while I stay in my car. If all is well, signal from your upstairs window. Turn the lights off; then on. If I don't see the signal within ten minutes, I shall come banging at the front door."

THERESA laughed, and went back into the house. Shiloh descended the steps and entered his coupe.

While both were turned, The Shadow glided along the front of the house; he turned into the side passage and moved swiftly to the obscure side door. He unlocked it in less than a dozen seconds. Entering, he reached the black gloom of the hall.

Theresa was opening the sliding doors of the reception room, the only place on the ground floor where Mark Lundig might have gone, if he had not left the house. A querulous voice came from the darkened room. Theresa stepped back, startled; then showed relief as old Egbert Doyd came stalking out into the hall.

"I was dozing," quibbled Egbert, sourly. "Why did you disturb my nap?"

"Sorry, Uncle Egbert," returned Theresa. "I was looking for Mark Lundig. Is he about?"

"Why question me?" demanded Egbert. "I have been asleep. I know nothing about Lundig. Look for him yourself!"

Egbert started toward the stairway. Theresa came toward the library. The Shadow saw the uncle turn about and stare after the girl. Stretching his chin, Egbert decided to go in that direction also. He reached the library door and stopped. He had heard Theresa talking from within the room; the girl was making a telephone call.

Egbert opened the door; evidently Theresa did not hear him. Her voice sounded louder; The Shadow could catch its words.

"At the Torrington," Theresa was saying. "Yes, Mr. Clavelock, that is where Montague Rayne is staying... I have written the address, from the telephone book... What is that? You don't intend to go and see him? I understand... Of course. He and my grandfather probably had not seen each other for years..."

THE CREEPER

Egbert Doyd was strolling away. The Shadow saw him reach the stairs. Moving forward, the cloaked watcher discovered that Egbert had left the library door ajar. Peering, The Shadow saw Theresa tearing up a slip of paper. Hearing the swing of a door, The Shadow moved back into the darkness at the rear of the hall.

Wilfred came from the dining room and walked directly to the library. The Shadow saw the servant pause; then enter. Apparently, Wilfred had seen Theresa tearing up the paper slip and tossing it into the wastebasket. A well-trained servant, he would naturally not have intruded at that moment.

Wilfred rapped on the library door. Theresa appeared and smiled as she went by, assuming that the servant had seen nothing. The girl went upstairs; Wilfred went into the library. Soon he returned, carrying the wastebasket; he went into the reception room and reappeared with another trash container. The Shadow watched Wilfred go through the library, back toward the kitchen.

THE SHADOW glided to the side door. He opened it, stepped to the outer darkness and locked the door behind him. Noiselessly, he reached the front of the house; stopping at the exit of the passage, he looked up keenly, to see a light blink from the side windows of the front room on the second floor.

Donald Shiloh had also caught Theresa's signal that all was well. A motor throbbed; The Shadow watched the coupe slide away from the curb. After a few moments, The Shadow moved out to the sidewalk and glided away under the shelter of darkened building fronts.

A whispered laugh in the darkness. A knowing laugh that faded echoless. The Shadow had gained much, though his visit had been belated. His investigation at the old mansion had given him the chance to make a final check-up. The Shadow learned all he required.

He had heard talk of The Creeper. He had certified his own conjecture as to the mysterious foeman's true identity. More than that, he had discovered that The Creeper had gained information concerning the recent whereabouts of Montague Rayne.

The Shadow could guess the next move that would be made. He would prepare to check it by means which he had already considered, through measures that would lead to an effective counterstroke. There was work ahead, however, for The Shadow and his agents. The groundwork had been laid; the rest would depend upon clockwork action.

With Jerry Kobal safe, recovering from his ordeal, The Shadow had won one victory of consequence. New combats were in the making; The Shadow would seek to shape them to his own approval. Leeway to The Creeper; such was the present step. Once given, that easy path would lead to a desired climax in which The Shadow could deal not only with The Creeper, but with the supercrook's fully assembled hordes.

The future offered promise of new triumph, with a climax on the side of justice. Agents must accomplish their appointed tasks; The Shadow must himself be timely in all actions. Such was all that was required. The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER XVII. THE CREEPER'S TRAIL

IT was three o'clock the next afternoon when Harry Vincent walked into the lobby of the Torrington, the old but well-kept hotel where Montague Rayne had been registered as a guest. Harry had spent yesterday evening in this lobby; but he had not come back this morning. Instead, Cliff Marsland had been deputed to cover the Torrington.

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Harry was relieving Cliff; and in so doing, he was acquainted with certain facts that Cliff had forwarded through Burbank. Cliff had inquired for Montague Rayne, to learn that the man had checked out a few days ago. There was a possibility that he might be back.

Cliff had also noticed a hanger-on who had stayed about the lobby all day. Harry was posted to watch the fellow; he spied him the moment that he entered. The man in question was a bulky, dark-faced individual who wore a derby hat cocked over one eye. He was lounging about when Harry entered; apparently the man was watching for some one whom he expected at the Torrington.

Broad but slouchy shoulders; out-thrust chin; lips that held the end of a dead cigar; eyes that were deep-sunk and suspicious—such was the impression that Harry gained of the man with the derby.

The fellow was to be watched until further order. So Harry unfolded a newspaper and sat down in a comfortable chair. He began to read, at the same time keeping an artful eye on the chap with the plug hat.

AT the very time when Harry had entered the lobby of the Torrington, a man was making his arrival in Zimmer Funson's suite at the Hotel Parkview. Serious and wise-faced, this fellow was one of Zimmer's surviving touts, an ace upon whom he was relying since the recent death of Hal. Zimmer greeted the newcomer with a growl.

"Hello, Jocko," he said. "You look like you'd wised up to something. Spill it!"

"Jocko" grinned at the bookie. From his pocket he produced a newspaper clipping. He handed it to Zimmer, who noted that it had been torn from the real estate ads. One paragraph had been circled with a pencil. It stated:

FOR RENT: 14 room mansion. Ridley, L. I. Month to month; reasonable rental to right party. J-683.

"What's this about?" queried Zimmer. "Doesn't look like it had anything to do with the guy we're looking for."

"Hasn't it, though?" Jocko chuckled wisely. "Well, wait until I spill the dope, Zimmer. You told me to use my noodle when I snooped around the Torrington. Well, that's what I've been doing. No lobby-watching for me. We knew Rayne was gone from the place. Kerry found that out when he called by telephone."

"I know all that. Go ahead."

"All right," Jocko became graphic. "I'm on my way to the Torrington, see? But instead of going in the lobby, I takes to the back street. I spots a beanery where a bell hop was coming out. I figured the joint is going to be my ticket, maybe.

"In about an hour, out comes a guy from the back door of the Torrington. Looking sore, he was, like he'd been given the bounce. He goes into the beanery and sits at the counter. I ankles in and gets along side of him. It wasn't long before we was talking. He hands out a squawk. He'd been a bell hop in the Torrington; they'd just handed him his walking papers.

"He pans the hired help, so I asks him about the guests. He begins to pan them, too. Says the crabby old gents always was the worst. I keep pumping him; he remembers some names. One of them, he says, was named Rayne, an old geezer with a cane. Eighty years old."

Jocko paused. Zimmer growled impatiently. He wanted the rest of the story. Jocko resumed:

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"The bell hop says he'd like to have looked in Room 620—that was Rayne's room—and some other rooms besides. Old guys, he says, was always leaving things after they'd checked out. This bell hop shows me a pass-key, see? But he's scared to use it. So I slips him ten bucks; he takes it and gives me about a dozen room numbers.

"I put them all down, to cover the one that counted. That was Room 620. The bell hop slides along to look for another job; I go around front and head through the lobby. Up to Rayne's room, to take a look around. I see this clipping, sticking out of the telephone book. You get it now, Zimmer? Maybe Rayne's rented that house —"

Zimmer grabbed up the telephone. He dialed a number that escaped Jocko's notice. The tout heard the bookie talk. He read the clipping aloud over the wire. His call finished, Zimmer spoke to Jocko.

"That's all you were needed for," he told the tout. "But I want the bunch of you on tap to-night. Round up the other fellows and have them up here. I may need a couple of you."

SHORTLY after Zimmer had made his call to The Creeper, Rick Parrin answered the telephone in his private office. The fake sales promoter listened, and acknowledged his understanding. He hung up and turned to a tall, gloomy-faced man who was seated by the window.

"It was The Creeper, Gus," confided Rick. "I'm putting you on the job. Get up to the Elite Garage and take out that cigar salesman's car. You know the one I mean—it has a big box on the back."

"Where'll I take it, Rick?" queried Gus.

"To Ridley, Long Island. It's only a dozen miles out, near the Sound. Fake that you're on a cigar-selling route; but while you're there, get a line on a fourteen-room mansion that's just been rented cheap. Spot the place; bring me back the layout."

"And learn who's living there?"

"If you can, without getting anybody suspicious."

Gus departed. Rick settled back behind his mahogany desk, smiling as his fingers thrummed the glass-topped table.

IT was after four o'clock when Rick received a call from Gus. Rick grunted answers, jotting down facts upon a pad. He concluded by giving brief instructions; his tone was commending.

"Come on in, Gus... Yeah, a swell job! I'll talk to you when you get here... Sure. Leave the old bus at the Elite Garage. It belongs there."

Rick hung up. He dialed a number; this telephone was not connected with the office switchboard. A response came. Rick gave the information that he had received from Gus.

"Rayne's living there, all right... No, nobody with him. Gus heard some people talking in a cigar store... Yeah, they're wondering about the funny old duck. Saw him go out this morning; he hasn't been back since... The house? It's a cinch to find. On Locust Avenue, last corner before Long Island Sound... Yes, the house sits by itself...

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"Sure. Gus drove past it twice and studied it carefully. A house with gables... Yes. Two gables, and the one on the right is where Rayne hangs out... That's what the fellows in the cigar store were wondering about. Why the old gent picked the third floor to live in alone... That's right. The lights gave them the idea. No lights except in that gable..."

Rick paused. He listened carefully, jotting down new notations, orders direct from The Creeper. When he had finished, Rick delivered a final acknowledgment.

"I get it," he said. "Leave it to me, chief... Yes, I'll be there to pick up after the grab... The regular countersign... Yes, I'll have some fellows there to back me... I see. Good. The follow-up will come later... Great stuff, Chief..."

Rick hung up. He went to the outer office and spoke to one of the regular typists.

"See if you can locate two or three of the salesmen," he instructed. "Carning first; then two others. Tell them I want to see them."

His order given, Rick strolled back into the inner office, wearing a wise grin. He was looking forward to a pay-off. Well did he know the speed with which The Creeper could follow up an advantage once it had been gained.

In the seclusion of a hotel room, another man was at that moment receiving an important call. It was Reggie Spaylor, the amateur sportsman. He had taken residence—for the time being—at an expensive hostelry near Grand Central Station.

"It will be easy, chief," Reggie was saying over the telephone. His sophisticated smile was proof that he was talking with The Creeper. "You are right. Absolutely! That seems the best way to do it... Yes, I have the cash. Plenty left from that last bundle you sent me... Nick's telephone number? I have it right here. The new one..."

"Dalmatia 4-8673. Yes, that's his old hide-out... Yes, he can get in touch with those gymnasts of his... It was all attended to, long ago; but I left it to Nick... Quite right; it would not be wise for me to associate with those fellows..."

"I understand. The lights will be the zero hour... Persuasion is a good word. It is the exact method that I shall use... I understand. Two gables; the right one will be lighted..."

That call ended. Another of The Creeper's henchmen had received his instructions. Between the hours of three and five, The Creeper had located Montague Rayne, learned the details of the old man's new habitat and had arranged a definite campaign for the acquisition of the Latin scroll.

ALL that time, Harry Vincent had been lounging in the lobby of the Torrington. He had seen no one worth watching, except the man with the derby hat; and that fellow had become more and more lethargic. Five o'clock arrived; it was time for Harry to make a report to Burbank.

Leaving the lobby, Harry entered a near-by cigar store. He put in his call. Burbank, always methodical, showed no expression of disappointment at Harry's fruitless vigil. The contact man gave instructions, in quiet, steady words.

"Instructions," he informed. "Return to the Torrington. Go to Room 620. Use key in envelope. Make thorough search. Note everything; but disturb nothing. Then report."

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Leaving the telephone booth, Harry dipped his hand in his pocket, to withdraw an envelope that he had received that morning from Rutledge Mann. Opening the envelope, he found a flat key. He crumpled the envelope, threw it away and pocketed the key.

Still wondering at these unexpected instructions, Harry strolled into the lobby of the Torrington. The derby-hatted man was still about, staring glumly; but he paid no attention to Harry. The Shadow's agent took an elevator to the sixth floor.

Reaching Room 620, Harry found that his key worked the lock. He entered and closed the door behind him. He made a complete, though rapid search, of every bureau drawer. He raised the mattress and looked beneath. He searched table and closet; he found the telephone book and thumbed through all its pages, standing near the window for more light. His survey produced nothing.

Harry departed. Back at the cigar store, he put in a call to Burbank and detailed his complete procedure. Burbank ordered him to end his watch at the Torrington, and to call within an hour for new instructions.

Keen disappointment gripped Harry Vincent as he went on his way. Somehow, he knew, The Shadow must have gained that key to Room 620; probably that room was the one that Montague Rayne had formerly occupied. But Harry was troubled because the search had brought nothing. Apparently, it had been a last resort to gain some trace of Montague Rayne. As such a move, it had failed.

SHORTLY after six o'clock, a messenger boy arrived at the old Doyd mansion, to leave an envelope for Mark Lundig. Hardly had the messenger departed before a taxi pulled up in front of the house and Lundig himself stepped out. A wise-faced driver watched his passenger ascend the steps.

Entering the house, Lundig spied Theresa at the foot of the stairs. Lundig had been admitted by Wilfred; but he scarcely noted the servant. All he saw was the envelope that Theresa was holding. He made sharp inquiry:

"Is that for me?"

Theresa nodded.

"Wilfred just received it," she explained. "He gave it to me; I intended to lay it on your plate at the dinner table."

"I am not staying for dinner," snapped Lundig. "I am going back to my hotel. Let me have the envelope."

The girl gave him the message. Lundig ripped open the envelope; holding a strip of paper so that neither Theresa nor Wilfred could observe it, he read these roughly typewritten words:

See you Room 404 Daxler Bldg. Important.—N.

Lundig crumpled the strip of paper. He hurried from the house. The cab was still there; Lundig barked an order to the shrewd-faced driver and climbed aboard.

Theresa, back in the mansion, went to the library. Seeing Egbert there, she retraced her course and went up to her own room. She called Donald Shiloh's apartment. Jeffrey answered. Half a minute later, Shiloh was on the wire.

"Mark Lundig came in hurriedly," explained the girl. "He snatched a message that a boy had just delivered. He read it and went out. It may have been from N."

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"Probably unimportant," returned Shiloh. "Was that the only time he was at the house to-day?"

"No," answered Theresa. "He was here this morning for a short while. But I heard no creeping footsteps."

"Don't worry then," laughed Shiloh. "Suppose I drop over and have dinner with you. Will there be a place for me?"

"Surely," returned the girl. "You will be most welcome, Donald."

SEVEN o'clock. A light was burning in The Shadow's sanctum. Beneath it lay the photostatic copies of the code list that The Shadow had obtained at Clavelock's. A bulb glimmered on the wall. The Shadow picked up the earphones.

Reports from Burbank. Moe Shrevnitz had picked up Mark Lundig as a fare that morning and had taken him to the Soulette Hotel, near Seventy-second Street. Hawkeye had spotted Lundig leaving there at five-thirty; he had immediately followed prearranged instructions. Moe, in turn, had gained Lundig as a passenger and had taken him to the Doyd mansion; after that, to the Daxler Building, on Thirtieth Street.

Harry Vincent had joined Cliff Marsland. Both had reported that they were following instructions to the letter. Further reports would be forthcoming later. That announcement brought an end to Burbank's statements.

The Shadow delivered brief instructions. Those finished, he clicked off the bluish light. His laugh was sinister within the sanctum; when its echoes died, naught but silence remained. The Shadow had departed.

The Creeper's moves had been completed. So had The Shadow's. Though circumstances might not have indicated it, The Shadow's purposes were progressing. The master of justice was tightening the net in which he hoped to enmesh the superman of crime.

CHAPTER XVIII. DOLLARS AND DEATH

NINE o'clock. Far from Manhattan, the little town of Ridley lay blanketed beneath sodden night. Except for its main cross streets, this tiny Long Island hamlet was clothed in complete darkness. The cloaking blackness was particularly thick along the portion of the town that fringed Long Island Sound. Mist, rising from the water, added its soupy denseness to the gloom.

It seemed astounding that this secluded place could be no further than a dozen miles from Manhattan. To Reggie Spaylor, seated behind the wheel of an open roadster, the silence betokened absolute isolation. The only sounds that Spaylor could hear were the occasional rumbles of steamboat whistles, plying through misty waters. Those evidences of human presence came from far out upon the Sound; a fact which brought malicious pleasure to the crooked athlete.

For Reggie Spaylor wanted no interference on to-night's mission. He was the ace in The Creeper's hand; a clever card deputed to play a winning game. Blackness and isolation were to his liking as he stared through the night, keeping his eyes in the direction of the house with the gables.

Reggie could not see that lonely building; but he was positive of its location. He had driven by the odd old house before he picked this waiting spot, half a block away.

A sudden glimmer attracted Spaylor's attention. It came like a flaring beacon from a lighthouse; a glow high

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up, made flickering by the swirl of fog. It was the token that Spaylor had been awaiting. He knew the location of that light. It came from the second gable of the house that was now the residence of Montague Rayne.

Alighting from his roadster, Reggie strolled through darkness. He was pulling on his gloves; he swung his cane jauntily, purely from habit. His feet picked out the cracked cement sidewalk; his eyes chose their direction by watching the light from the gable. It was shining through a pale green windowshade, that light, and its rays were easy to discern.

Reaching the front of the old house the husky athlete tried the door. He found it locked; that did not matter. This house had many windows on the ground floor. Edging along the side, Reggie came to one and worked upon the sash. It was locked; but the wooden frame proved flimsy. One upward jolt brought a dull splintering. The lower half of the window raised. Reggie Spaylor climbed over the sill.

Pitch—darkness was within. Reggie's footsteps sounded hollow amid unfurnished rooms. He was muffling his tread, searching for a stairway. He found it when he stumbled. Pausing, the highbrow crook listened. No sound from above; his blundering had not been heard.

Taking no further chances, Reggie used a flashlight upon the stairs. With its aid, he reached the second floor and picked out a flight of stairs that led to the third. Halfway up those steps, he extinguished his torch. He needed it no longer; for he could see a streak of light shining from beneath a door. He had located the room in the gable.

CAUTIOUSLY arriving at the door, Spaylor tried the knob; the barrier yielded. With a quick thrust, he pushed the door inward and stepped into the lighted room.

He arrived just in time to see a stooped figure spring upward from a table in the far corner. A chair clattered to the floor; Spaylor smiled as he saw a trembling old man, whose withered face showed fear.

On the table lay a flat sheet of parchment; beside it, pages of penciled notes. The old man, recovered from his first surprise, was quick to turn the parchment downward. Then, with fists clenched but quivering, he cackled a challenge at the intruder:

"Who are you?"

Reggie Spaylor smiled.

"Just a friend," he replied. "My name is Spaylor. Reggie Spaylor. Sorry that I had to intrude so unexpectedly; I suppose you did not hear my knocking at the lower door."

The old man's eyes were blinking. Spaylor parked his cane in a corner and drew off his gloves. Seating himself, he motioned the old man to do the same. Then, calmly, Spaylor put a question:

"You are Montague Rayne?"

The old man hesitated; then nodded, as he took his chair. Reggie's gentlemanly manner had lulled him. With a repetition of his friendly smile, Reggie came to business.

"I am here," he stated, "in reference to a certain object which you recently purchased. I refer, Mr. Rayne, to a parchment scroll for which you paid five thousand dollars."

Rayne stirred nervously. He watched Reggie's hands. Both were in sight, like Rayne's. The old man parried.

THE CREEPER

"A scroll?" he questioned. "A Latin scroll?"

"Yes," returned Reggie. "One which formerly belonged to your friend, Bigelow Doyd. You paid a high price for it, Mr. Rayne. I am prepared to offer you a greater profit."

Eyes gleamed sharply from the face of Montague Rayne. Withered features showed an avaricious look. Then, suppressing his eagerness, the old man shook his head.

"The scroll is too valuable," he declared. "I shall not sell it. I admit that I possess it; in fact, it is here upon this desk: but —"

"But you cannot decipher it," smiled Reggie. "Is that the trouble, Mr. Rayne?"

"Exactly! Its wording is simple, Mr. Spaylor. It means—well, never mind the translation; it is simply a portion of a Latin fable. That is what perplexes me."

"I learned about it by accident," remarked Spaylor. "I was told that it cost you five thousand dollars. Suppose, Mr. Rayne, that I should offer you twice that sum."

Montague Rayne's head shook emphatically.

"Three times —"

Another headshake, more slowly. "Four times —"

Reggie paused; his tone a final one. Montague Rayne pursed his lips.

"Twenty thousand dollars," decided Reggie Spaylor, rising. He reached in his pocket and drew forth a fat wallet. "Here you are, Mr. Rayne. The full amount—in bills of large denomination. Take it and keep the wallet as a souvenir. But first"—he paused, as Rayne was reaching forward—"first I must have the scroll."

RAYNE nodded. He picked up the parchment and turned it over. The gas lamp on the table—the only light in the room—was brilliant as it shone upon the script. Reggie could see that the scroll had been carefully embossed in jet-black ink. What pleased him more, however, was the smudge of dried blood on the edge of the parchment.

That proved the genuineness of the scroll. It was Slugger Haskew's blood. Reggie received the scroll, and handed the wallet to Rayne. The old man stopped and pointed to the words upon the parchment. Slowly, he read them aloud, chopping his pronunciation of the Latin words:

"Homine autem spiritum continente, ursus ratus cadaver esse, discedit."

"You have translated the passage?" inquired Spaylor.

"Yes," crackled Rayne. "It is part of a fable which concerns two men—one of whom was seized by a bear, but saved himself by pretending to be dead."

"Translated freely, this passage means: 'But when the man held his breath, the bear, thinking him to be a corpse, departed.' Only that one brief sentence, Mr. Spaylor; the rest of the scroll is no more than an embellished border. Curious, is it not, that my friend Bigelow Doyd should have chosen to value such a simple sentence?"

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"Quite true," agreed Reggie; then, eyeing the old man's downturned face, he added: "Suppose you count the money, Mr. Rayne. Make sure that the entire sum is there."

With trembling, eager hands, Rayne began to open the wallet. Spaylor rolled the large-lettered scroll and pocketed it. He picked up his cane with one hand; he turned his body as he did so; then, with a sudden twist, he swung about, yanking a revolver from his pocket. His finger was already on the trigger of his gun; his purpose was to shoot down Rayne in cold blood.

Rayne had heard him turn. As Reggie swung, the old man dropped the wallet, the bills half out of it, and uttered a maddened gasp as he leaped forward. His frantic speed was surprising; his clawing hands caught Reggie's arm before the assassin could fire.

"No!" cracked Rayne. "No –"

Furiously, Spaylor hurled the old man back toward the table. Rayne's doubled body straightened as he staggered. Hissing furiously, he still kept his clutch on Spaylor's arm. They bowled against the table; it overturned, breaking the hose between the glass lamp and the wall. The light went out as it crashed upon the floor. The hiss of gas continued from the jet.

Spaylor had wrenched his gun hand free. He was trying to drive his revolver against Rayne's head; the old man's arms were flailing in the darkness, trying to stop the blow.

The strugglers locked; they rolled upon the floor. There the combat ended as suddenly as it had begun. Of these two battlers, one was skilled to perfection. The other, though he had shown strength, could not hope to compete long with so capable a foe.

Thudding bodies rolled; then jolted upward. A head cracked hard against the floor; a gasp betokened final effort as a clutching hand tried to tug away the gun. Then a dulled revolver shot sounded in the gloom. Muffled echoes died; only the hiss of the gas jet continued.

Reggie Spaylor's harsh chuckle sounded as the victor arose from the floor and stooped above the body that still lay there. The single shot had delivered death. Still chuckling, the victor clicked his flashlight and found the wallet; then the scroll. That rolled-up document had slipped from Spaylor's pocket during the fight.

Two canes showed in the flashlight's glare. One was Rayne's; the other Reggie's. Carefully choosing the latter, the present owner of the scroll made his way from the gable room, letting the gas jet continue its melancholy hiss.

He descended through total darkness; found the front door and turned a massive key that his fingers discovered in the lock.

OUTSIDE, a man had approached the front of the old house. Standing beside the decayed wooden steps, he was waiting for Reggie Spaylor's exit. That waiting man was Rick Parrin; his hand was resting against the wooden wall of the house. As the door opened, Rick ran his fingers in crawling fashion, clicking a sinister signal against the house front.

Footsteps paused in the darkness of the porch. Rick repeated the signal. A cane clicked against the flooring; then a freed hand made a creeping answer against one of the porch posts. The countersign had been answered. Rick whispered hoarsely.

"Did you get the scroll?"

THE CREEPER

"Yes," came Spaylor's tone, calm but guarded. "I experienced difficulty, however. Did you hear the shot I fired?"

"No. I saw the light go out, though. Did you have to bump the old gent?"

"Yes. Here is the scroll. It would be best for you to deliver it. I can take no chances."

Parchment crinkled as Rick received the scroll in the darkness. It was followed by a statement, that came a bit shakily.

"I'll have to keep going." Reggie's tone was troubled. "Tell The Creeper why I left. I'll communicate with him later. Maybe the old man's friends will wonder who killed him."

"That'll be taken care of," returned Rick. "Slide on down to your car and get going. I've got a couple of men watching; they'll see that you get away. You pulled your job; I've got mine; and then there's others besides us."

Rick waited in the darkness, listening to hurried departing footsteps that were punctuated by the occasional clicks of Reggie Spaylor's cane. A hush followed; after a short interval, the motor of the roadster started. The car slid away; its lights did not come on until it had neared the next corner.

Rick was already on his way, hurrying past the side of the house, down toward the Sound, where he gained a parked coupe. The scroll came into the glare of the dashlight; like Reggie, Rick grinned when he saw the bloodstain. Then Rick, too, was on the move. He drove toward the center of town; then skirted the lighted district to reach a through road.

Rick stopped near a driveway. A man came up to his car. The fellow was Carning. He was with Gus; the two had been in a parked sedan. Carning gave the information that he wanted.

"The roadster went by," he stated. "Gus and I spotted the license number. It's all jake."

"Good," decided Rick. "Listen: Before you and Gus pull out, blink your rear light three times. Before you start. Get it?"

"Blink the rear light?"

"You heard me."

"All right, Rick."

The coupe drove away. Carning returned to the sedan and told Gus what to do. Though the driver was puzzled, he followed the order, blinking the lights thrice. The sedan rolled from the drive toward Manhattan.

A FEW moments later, lights blinked from the innermost recess of that deserted drive beside the road. Another car had been parked there; neither Gus nor Carning had known of its presence. It moved forward—a rakish touring car—and swung toward the hamlet of Ridley.

Five minutes later, the touring car stopped near the old house with the gables. The man at the wheel growled an order. The driver of the touring car was Zimmer Funson. At his command, three touts dropped to the ground. Carrying cans that gurgled with liquid contents, they approached the gabled house and entered.

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Five minutes was all they needed. They returned, climbed aboard with the empty cans, and huddled low while Zimmer started the car. Soon this crew was speeding along the road. One of the touts—Jocko— was telling of their procedure.

"Poured out all the kerosene, Zimmer," stated Jocko. "In every room – up the stairs. Found plenty of newspapers besides the ones we carried. Soaked all of them. Boy, will that joint blaze!"

BACK near Long Island Sound, a crackling roar was rising from within the house with the gables. Huge flames were sweeping the ground floor; catching the tinderlike walls, they consumed the frame building like dried kindling. Shouts were coming from about the town. People were racing out into the night to see the conflagration.

A puny fire engine came clanging from an old fire house. By the time it reached the corner, the flames were past control. No one dared enter the gabled house to see if any person needed rescue. Watchers saw the licking fire tongue to the third floor; then came a burst that formed the climax of the holocaust.

A puffing explosion ripped the gable on the right. Fire had reached the gas-filled room; the blast shattered beams and walls. The summit of the gable quivered; then, as the lower floors gave way, the roofed peak tumbled pell-mell into the roaring furnace beneath.

With it went the dead body that had lain upon the floor of the third-story room. Should any traces of it remain after the fire had subsided, investigators would decide that Montague Rayne had died amid the conflagration. But they would never guess that the victim in that house had first received a bullet through his heart.

That death had been covered, by order of The Creeper. Never would Reggie Spaylor be charged with the murder of Montague Rayne. The Creeper had prepared to protect the lieutenant whom he had sent forth to deliver murder. Death was the price that The Creeper had deliberately planned to pay for Bigelow Doyd's great secret.

CHAPTER XIX. THE CREEPER'S GOAL

STREWN papers were lying beneath the light of a table lamp. These were pages of a copied code list, checked with pencil marks. Upon one sheet were the top words that began the special vocabulary needed for the decoding of the Latin scroll. The first column read:

acerbus-house

adhuc-wealth

adsum-jewels

autem-address

bellum-inspect

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bonum—lock

The column could be read no further. The rest of that code list was covered by a sheet of parchment, the Latin scroll itself. Upon the parchment lay a piece of paper which bore written words, selected— with their English equivalents—from the code list. Nine words formed the group:

autem—address

cadaver—avenue

continente—to

discedit—vault

esse—bank

homine—use

ratus—old

spiritum—number

ursus—open

Old Bigelow Doyd had been crafty. In preparing his secret message, he had not trusted to an ordinary code. Such, had it been prematurely discovered, would have encouraged persons to decipher it. To guard his secret, the old man had simply taken a random sentence from a Latin textbook. He had given nine words arbitrary meanings in English— meanings that corresponded with a short sentence of his own formation.

From a Latin vocabulary, he had prepared a list of a few hundred words; many of them with significant meanings, such as acerbus for house; adhuc for wealth; adsum for jewels. Interspersed through the long list were his nine important words, each in its proper place alphabetically.

A finder of the scroll could learn nothing from that sentence taken out of a chance proverb. Reggie Spaylor had heard Montague Rayne pronounce the usual translation, from Latin into English. The sentence had lacked significance.

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Nor could a holder of the code lists gain results by trying to shift words about. From hundreds of words that served as blinds, no one could have hoped to pick out the ones that were needed to make an actual message. No one, not even the keenest of cryptographers. Only by holding both the scroll and a copy of the code list could any one gain the message.

HERE lay scroll and code list; one upon the other. They were in the light of The Creeper's lair. The nine important words had been checked into a list of their own. Upon another sheet of paper were inscribed both sentences, formed in The Creeper's own handwriting. The ciphered message stated:

Homine autem spiritum

USE ADDRESS NUMBER

continente ursus ratus cadaver

TO OPEN OLD AVENUE

esse discedit

BANK VAULT

Many hands had held that valued scroll; some without knowledge of its existence; others without realization of its high value. Myram had possessed the casket with the scroll still hidden; so had Dopey. Slugger had gained the scroll itself. All three of those possessors were dead.

Then Jerry Kopal's hands had held the scroll; next, it had been gripped by the long, clutching fingers of Montague Rayne; after that, it had come into the grasp of Reggie Spaylor. Of those three, two had been slated to die; but only one of the trio had met with doom.

Rick Parrin had served merely as a carrier, to bring the scroll to The Creeper. As Rick had been previously informed, The Creeper had gained a copy of the code list. Possessed of the scroll, the message deciphered, The Creeper was making prompt plans to follow up his gain.

ONE conference was under way in Rick Parrin's office. The fake sales promoter had deliberately called his pretended salesmen together for an eleven o'clock conference; he had signed for all of them when they had come into the lobby of the Dolban Building. To-morrow, Rick intended to send these fellows on the road; there would be no more conferences. Hence he felt safe in bringing them past the gate for this last meeting. Late visitors to the Dolban Building were not infrequent. Rick felt that he had aroused no suspicion.

"I've heard from The Creeper," announced Rick. "The swag is in the old avenue bank. That could mean only one place—the old Criterion Trust company building. It's on Sixth Avenue; and it was sold about two years ago, when the Criterion Trust moved.

"The entrances are boarded up. They will be open, though, when we get there. The Creeper has fixed that; and he has left the rest to me. One entrance is on a side street; that's the spot we'll pick.

"Carning, you go to the Elite Garage and get that truck I've stored there—the one that's supposed to belong to the Acme Food Products Corporation. It has their name on it; but we have the licenses and the keys.

"I'd send you, Gus, but you were up there to-day, getting that car with the salesman's box on the back. You go along with Carning, though, and wait outside the garage until he comes out with the big truck. Drive to the

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side door of the old bank building and wait there for the swag. I'm taking the rest of the fellows in with me."

"How about the swag?" inquired one of the salesmen. "Are there enough of us to move it?"

"There'll be others there," assured Rick. "But we're not going in until after midnight. Half-past twelve is the zero hour. Remember that, Carning—and you, Gus. Don't show up before twelve thirty."

AT the very time of Rick's conference, another meeting was taking place in Zimmer Funson's headquarters. Five ravenous touts—Zimmer's total outfit—were consuming the remains of a sumptuous spread that the bookie had provided. They were grinning as they enjoyed the buffet banquet, for Zimmer seemed pleased with them to-night.

"We finished one good job," announced Zimmer. "That was quick work out on Long Island. So we're going in for another. We'll cover things again. All we've got to do is look out for a truck-load of swag. We'll follow it with two cars."

MEANWHILE, two men were alighting from an old roadster, under the shelter of the Sixth Avenue elevated. One was Nick Curlin, short-set and waddy. The other was a beefy-faced husky, the fellow who had been Slugger Haskew's sparring partner, the night that Reggie Spaylor had been at the old gym.

Nick and his husky companion took to the sidewalk while an elevated train roared above them. They passed the front entrance of a grimy, granite-fronted building. Nick paused long enough to note the name of the Criterion Trust Company, carved above the door. Beneath it, in small figures, was the street number. That, however, meant nothing to Nick Curlin.

The walkers turned the corner and arrived at a set-in space where the side of the old bank joined the back wall. Using a flashlight cautiously, Nick pointed out a boarded entrance. He chuckled.

"That will be easy, Kayo," he told his companion. "When we bring the rest of the boys here, we'll ease that boarding off without making a rip."

"It'll be a pipe," agreed "Kayo." "Chee! I could yank dat junk off'n dere myself, widout nobody to help me. Gimme de word, Nick, an' I'll —"

"Not now, Kayo. We're not due here until twelve-fifteen. What's more, we're all in on the deal."

"You're de boss, Nick. Just de same, dat door looks so soft, I'm wonderin' if maybe some bozos haven't been in de joint already. Dem nails don't look like much."

"Who'd be cracking an empty bank, Kayo?" Nick laughed as he spoke. "Let me tell you something; the guy who stowed his swag here was smart. A joint like this is the last place anybody would bust into."

A sudden growl from Kayo. A warning.

"Douse de glim, Nick. Quick!"

Nick complied. Kayo moved around the darkened cul-de-sac; stabbing the walls with his fists. He came back toward Nick, still growling.

"What's the matter, Kayo? Did you hear something?"

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"T'ought I did, Nick. But if dere was a guy here, he's gone. Say— do you t'ink —"

"The Creeper?" Nick chuckled as he edged Kayo out toward the sidewalk. "It's likely. He's smart enough to look over the lay himself. Forget it, Kayo; let's scram back to the car and round up the rest of the bunch. We're not due back here for an hour yet."

DOWN at headquarters, Clyde Burke strolled in to find Acting Inspector Cardona at his desk. The ace studied the reporter rather sourly; then rubbed his chin when Clyde asked him what he was doing here so late.

"I guess I don't mind telling you, Burke," decided Cardona, at last. "It was a crank call that I got, an hour ago. The fellow said he'd call me later."

"Did he call?"

"Yeah; just now. Another stall. Told me to wait until after midnight. He'll be calling any time between twelve and one."

"And you're waiting?"

"Why not? Sometimes those crank calls mean something. They're worth a bet."

"You're a sucker, Joe."

Laughing, Clyde Burke strolled out, apparently highly amused. But his chuckles ended as soon as he was out of Cardona's earshot. Soon after that, Clyde put in a call to Burbank. As an agent of The Shadow, he was reporting that Cardona had fallen in with plans.

What was up, Clyde could not guess. His recent duties had been special ones; he had not been called upon to work with other agents. Usually, the whereabouts of The Shadow was a mystery to Clyde Burke. To-night, the location of Harry Vincent, Cliff Marsland and the others was quite as great a puzzle.

Somehow, The Shadow expected to use Joe Cardona. That much, Clyde had guessed. But how—where—or why—those points were complete perplexities. Clyde knew that The Shadow was seeking combat with a supercrook known as The Creeper; but it seemed impossible that such an issue could be forced within the near future.

Clyde Burke, though he did not know it, was echoing the very thoughts that were in the mind of The Creeper. That hidden criminal knew that The Shadow was his foe; but The Creeper, despite his precautions, did not think that combat could possibly be due to-night.

The Creeper's belief was well-founded. Success had marked his recent endeavors. He had gained the Latin scroll intact and had learned its riddle. Success seemed due to his plans of evil—success that would bring The Creeper millions in illicit gain!

The Creeper, master of murder, had found his goal. The Shadow, his one antagonist, had not moved to prevent the fiend from reaching it.

CHAPTER XX. AFTER MIDNIGHT

IT was nearly midnight. Donald Shiloh was standing in the front hall of the Doyd mansion. He had dropped

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in for a late visit; he and Theresa had held a short chat in the library. They were concluding their talk near the front door.

"Don't worry about Lundig," Shiloh remarked. "It's good riddance that he did not come back this evening. The longer he stays away, the better."

"Perhaps you are right, Donald," said Theresa, with a smile. "At least, there has been no creeping about the house during Mark's absence. At the same time, I cannot help wondering where he has gone. He is not at his hotel."

"His hotel? You found out the name of it?"

"Yes, this evening. Wilfred found a hotel bill in the library; it was in Mark's name. He is stopping at the Soulette Hotel, on Seventy-second Street."

"A terrible old barn. I stopped there once. No wonder Lundig prefers to stay here over night."

"I called the hotel, Donald; but he was not there. They say he is still registered there, however."

"He will be back, Theresa."

Shiloh left the house and drove away in his coupe. Theresa returned indoors. Before she reached the stairway, the doorbell rang. The girl stared in astonishment when Mark Lundig entered.

"Mark!" she exclaimed. "What became of you? Where –"

"I have to make a telephone call," interrupted Lundig, brusquely. "I have no time to talk, Theresa."

PUSHING past the girl, Lundig went through to the library. He swung the door behind him; but it did not close. Theresa followed to the back of the hall. She could hear Lundig dialing at the telephone; apparently some one answered, for Lundig began to speak.

"Shiloh's just left," he stated. "You left the message for him? Good... Then he won't go up to his apartment... Yes, that's right; you left the correct address. 414 Judson Place... No, we won't go there for an hour yet. I'll meet you first... Sure. Let Shiloh be there before us. We'll hand him a surprise when we come in..."

Lundig ended the call abruptly. Theresa hurried away from the door and reached the front stairway just as Lundig emerged from the living room. She waited there, hoping that the man would not see her when he went out.

Lundig came through the hall, glancing in both directions; but apparently the girl escaped his observation, for he continued on, slamming the door behind him.

Theresa hurried to the library. She took the telephone and dialed Shiloh's apartment, hoping that Jeffrey would be there. She received no answer. Realizing that Shiloh would probably be given the message in the lobby of the apartment house, the girl was in a quandary. She decided to call information; that connection made, she asked for the number of the telephone at 414 Judson Place. She was informed that there was no telephone at that address.

Some one had arrived at the door of the library while Theresa was calling. It was Egbert Doyd; the sickly uncle had come downstairs, aroused by the noise of Lundig's conversation. From the doorway, Egbert heard

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the address that Theresa mentioned.

Seeing that the girl was ending the call, Egbert moved toward the closed doors of the reception room. Opening one, he entered the room; then slid the door almost shut, to peer through the chink.

Theresa came from the library. The girl stopped in the hallway only long enough to don her hat and coat. She hurried out into the night, slamming the door behind her. Egbert Doyd emerged from the reception room. Chuckling, he went into the library. There, he dialed a number himself.

"Hello... Hello..." Egbert cackled, as he heard a voice responding. "Yes, this is Egbert Doyd... Surprised, eh, to have a call from me at this hour? Well, I have another surprise for you... Remember that old house on Judson Place? Heh? I thought you would... Well, there's going to be some excitement there... No, no. I'll tell you later... What's that? Coming right over? Good... Suppose I meet you at the corner. Have the taxi stop there... Yes, you'll see me..."

Another listener had come into the picture. Wilfred, stepping from the dining room, had stopped at sight of the opened library door. Perhaps Wilfred was not as deaf as Theresa had supposed; possibly the sharpness of Egbert Doyd's voice had enabled it to reach the servant's ears.

Whichever the case, Wilfred caught the reference to the house in Judson Place. The servant's face took on a fixed expression as Wilfred drew away from the door and stepped to the darkness at the back of the hall.

He was watching keenly when Egbert Doyd came out of the living room. Egbert did not see Wilfred; he was too occupied in making speed to gain his hat and coat, which were on the rack near the front door. Like Lundig and Theresa, Egbert hurried out into the night, slamming the door behind him. Wilfred remained alone.

It was twenty minutes after twelve when a cab stopped in front of 414 Judson Place. Theresa Doyd alighted; she had made the trip in very few minutes, for Judson Place was not far from her own home.

No. 414 was a two-story house, with shuttered windows—a plain-looking building in a gloomy row. Theresa rang the doorbell. A bulky, dark-faced man opened the door; Theresa noted his outthrust chin and deep-set eyes. The man was chewing an unlighted cigar, and his head was topped by a derby hat.

"Has Mr. Shiloh arrived?" inquired Theresa.

"Certainly, miss." The man nodded pleasantly as he removed his derby. "Step right in, if you want to see him. He's waiting here for a friend. Guess you're the person he's expecting."

Theresa followed a pointing finger. She crossed the hall and entered a lighted room. She stopped short, her eyes wide with wonderment. She had stepped into a glittering blaze of luxury. The place was a veritable Ali Baba's cave of treasure.

Walls were adorned with thick, gold-woven tapestries. Jeweled statues shone from their pedestals. The mantelpiece was a galaxy of gems, displayed upon velvet backgrounds.

In contrast to this exotic splendor was wealth of a more common sort. A table was standing in the center of the room; upon it were bundles of engraved securities—stacks of bank notes—heaps of gold coins.

A corner table shone with the dull, milky color of pearls. Beside the priceless beads were chunky, glimmering objects that Theresa recognized as uncut diamonds. Gasping in the midst of all this treasure, the girl could

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hardly find her breath. She did not gain her senses until a chuckle sounded close behind her. Turning quickly, Theresa faced Mark Lundig.

"Good evening, Theresa," greeted Lundig, with a shrewd smile. "I thought that I would find you here. My pretext about Shiloh worked well, I see."

Theresa was too startled to reply.

"I knew that he was calling on you," chuckled Lundig, "so I waited outside until he was gone. I wanted to bring you here; to see your grandfather's treasure, which I acquired quite recently and have just placed on display."

"You—you thief!" cried Theresa. "I know your game, Mark. You—you were seeking the secret of the scroll. You are the one who wanted it. You are The Creeper!"

"The Creeper?" Mark's query was almost savage. "What do you mean, Theresa?"

"You will learn," stormed the girl. "You pretended you were bringing Donald Shiloh here. Very well; he will come here —"

Theresa started for the door. Lundig shouted a hoarse command. The bulky man appeared to block Theresa's path; with him was a tall, wise-faced fellow in a light-gray suit. The pair grabbed the girl and managed to stifle her screams while they stopped her struggles.

"Gag her!" ordered Lundig. "Keep her quiet; tie her up; hold her so she can't make trouble! I was a fool to bring her here; but I can settle it. Carry her upstairs, while I go out and make a telephone call."

The two men followed instructions; they lugged Theresa, gasping and fighting, up the stairs. Lundig went out the front door; a few minutes later he returned, to find the two men coming down from the second floor.

"No luck," stated Lundig. "It doesn't matter though, now that you've silenced the girl. I'll try another call later, from that drug store at the corner. Anyway, everything's all right outside. Nobody heard anything. I explained what happened. We'll keep the girl here, since I was fool enough to bring her."

A CLOCK from a tower near Judson Place was chiming the half hour. At that same minute, Rick Parrin was sauntering past the front of the old Criterion Trust building. Looking up, Rick made mental note of the number over the door. He continued around the corner; when he reached the inset side door, he found his men awaiting him.

The wooden blockade had been removed; it was merely leaning in position. Rick and another fellow pulled it aside; the group entered. Rick used a flashlight to pick out a stairway that led to the vault room below.

"Want to look around up here?" came a query from a subordinate. "It's a big enough place—used to be the main room of the bank—and maybe somebody might be around."

"Not a chance," laughed Rick. "We're going downstairs, to find the fellows who got here ahead of us."

"The Creeper?"

"No. He won't be here. That is, I don't think he will. You never can tell about The Creeper, though. But he gave me the order to get the swag, and told me how. That's why I figured he's not coming."

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Rick's underling threw a flashlight's gleam about the main room; the passing glare showed nothing but darkened, splotchy corners of ragged walls that had once had marble facings. Clicking out the light, the fellow followed Rick and the others downstairs. He felt sure that the big room was empty.

Outside, on the street, a big truck was coming from Sixth Avenue. It stopped near the back door of the old bank. Its lights went out; as soon as they did, a huddled figure sneaked away from a door on the other side of the thoroughfare.

Moving rapidly, this hunched watcher kept on, past a darkened touring car wherein watching men were mumbling among themselves. The hunched man gained the corner without being seen.

Another touring car was parked up at the corner of the avenue. Gus and Carning had arrived in their truck; Zimmer and his divided band of touts were covering from both directions. The Creeper's outside men were set.

So were those inside. Rick and his companions had reached the lower floor. They entered a lighted room with roughened walls that had also been deprived of marble fronts. Nick Curlin was waiting with half a dozen hard-faced followers. Former habitués of his gymnasium, these rowdies looked like a group of sweated thugs.

Rick Parrin ran his hand along the wall beside the stairway, giving a visible representation of a creeping claw. Nick Curlin responded by pushing his fat fist up along the door of a vault, at the far corner where he was standing. The Creeper's countersign had been exchanged. The fake salesmen fraternized with the phony pugs.

RICK had approached the door of the vault. It was a formidable device, that door, the only piece of valuable equipment which had been left in this deserted bank building. No cracksman would have attempted to smash that massive metal barrier, here in a deserted bank. It would have been too great a task at best; to try to open an empty vault would have been the extreme of folly.

Rick chuckled at the thought. Bigelow Doyd had been a smart one, using this vault as a hiding place for his treasure. The empty building must be part of the deceased millionaire's property; hence he had owned the vault and could have used it as he chose.

Clever, too, thought Rick, taking the street number of the bank for the combination of the vault. Something that no one would have ever guessed.

Left—right—left—right—there were four figures in the number; Rick was using them in rotation, figuring that they would probably be alternated left and right. The natural manner, since instructions were lacking on that point. Rick, after delivering the scroll to The Creeper, had received full news concerning the all-important translation.

Click! Rick had unlocked the vault. The door swung outward. Other men crowded up behind their leader. They stared into the vault, expecting to see stacks of treasure chests and boxes. The interior of the vault was large; but the light from the room filled every space; and the entering glare brought growls of anger from The Creeper's henchmen.

The interior of the vault was empty. Nothing—not even a trace to prove that swag had ever been there. Whether they had been beaten to the goal, or whether they had been sent upon a hoax, these minions of The Creeper could not guess.

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AS harsh snarls subsided, a sudden sound came to the ears of the dozen men in that lower room. All looked toward the bottom of the stairway; for it was from there that the startling noise came. The steps turned at the bottom; hence they could not see who was descending.

The sound, however, was recognized instantly by Rick Parrin. He knew that strange, crawling tread, that must surely be coming closer, even though its intensity remained the same.

"The Creeper!" rasped Rick. "Stay quiet, everybody! Maybe he's got some new dope for us; maybe that's why he's here. We –"

Rick paused. The sound had stopped. Eyes were straining toward the bottom of the stairs, where deep blackness reigned. They expected to see the advent of The Creeper. Instead, they witnessed the unexpected.

Blackness rose suddenly; it swept forward into the light, like gloom that had materialized. A strident, sardonic burst of mockery swept echoing through that underground room. A cloaked shape towered before the goggling eyes of Rick and his companions. Gloved fists thrust huge automatics forward; above the guns, peering from beneath a hat brim, were eyes that fairly flashed their fire.

Astonished crooks stood helpless and dumfounded, their arms rising mechanically. Not a gun was ready; for these rogues had expected The Creeper. Instead, they saw a being who had simulated the elusive creeping of their evil chief, to arrive upon them unawares.

The Shadow, arch-enemy of crime, stood in view of The Creeper's cowering henchmen. With ready guns he held them all at bay; for not one of the dozen crooks dared yank a weapon while covered by those looming muzzles!

Well had The Shadow planned his arrival; well had he guessed what its result would be. He had trapped a clustered group of foemen, so suddenly that they could find no chance to fight.

CHAPTER XXI. SPOILS OF THE CREEPER

TENSE seconds ticked while covered crooks glared helpless. These henchmen of The Creeper were not products of the underworld; their crafty chief had been too wise to recruit his followers from among men who were wanted by the law. But they had turned to crime, these cowering scoundrels, and they had learned to know the menace of The Shadow.

They had come, to-night, prepared to fight if battle should be required. All, however, had counted upon working with the pack. Among them, there was not one who dared to start combat with The Shadow. Such course would have meant instant destruction to the rogue who tried it.

Seconds became minutes. Steadily, The Shadow held the quailing men at bay. They wondered at his purpose; then, from a distance came the answer. From far out on the street, muffled gunfire began a sudden rattle. It was a signal to The Shadow; again, his hidden lips delivered a weird taunt.

Rick Parrin understood. Somehow, The Shadow had learned of this expedition. He had entered the old bank building; he had lurked upstairs, allowing crooks to come in and descend. He must have left another watcher outside. That aid had gone to tip off the police.

Those shots outside were from the guns of detectives, closing in upon the old bank building, trapping Gus and Carning; fighting with Zimmer Funson's covering touts.

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Rick had guessed right. The Shadow had been here; he had heard Nick Curlin talk with Kayo. He had departed, only to return before the zero hour. He had left Hawkeye across the street, to call Burbank when the stage was set.

It was Burbank who had made those anonymous calls that had kept Joe Cardona on duty. Burbank's methodical voice had impressed Cardona with the fact that these were no ordinary crank calls.

Muffled shots still sounded when The Shadow's taunt subsided. Rick Parrin, half obscured behind a group of henchmen, was quick to dart a glance at Nick Curlin. Rick caught a glare of understanding from the squatty man. Nick, too, was partly from The Shadow's sight.

With one accord, both lieutenants snatched forth revolvers. Springing forward, they aimed point-blank at The Shadow, jostling others aside in hope of getting the bead on their cloaked foe. Desperation had caused the move; once it had begun, The Shadow had but one way to stop it.

Automatics blazed. Amid their thunder in this low-roofed room, two figures sprawled. Rick Parrin went down shooting; but his fire was wide. Nick Curlin didn't loose a shot.

There were others, however, who were on the draw. Spreading, dropping, the aroused minions were zealous now that the battle had begun.

Clipping, withering shots spat from The Shadow's automatics. Each .45 was pumping well-timed bullets. Crooks sprawled; some dropped their guns and howled as they raised their arms for mercy; others dived for the shelter of the open vault, yanking the door halfway shut.

The Shadow's barrage ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He had stopped the wild attack.

A GIBING laugh sounded as the cloaked figure whirled and faded with the darkness of the stairs. Startled crooks stared unbelieving. Those wounded on the floor were helpless; but the ones with upraised arms were quick to snatch up their weapons. With a shout, they started forward, followed by those who had huddled in the vault.

They reached the stairs, that throng, and galloped upward. The way was clear until they reached the top; there they learned why The Shadow had so suddenly desisted. The dashing crooks came squarely into the glare of flashlights, flourished by police who had entered the side door. The Shadow had correctly gauged the arrival of the law.

Venomously, The Creeper's horde opened fire. Police revolvers replied; then, into the fray, came zipping shots from the darkness near the front of the big banking room. The Shadow was there; stopping these lawless fighters with an enfilading fire.

Screaming crooks went sprawling headlong down the stairs. The others dropped for shelter; then turning about, dashed below, with officers in prompt pursuit.

The side door cleared. Sweeping from darkness, The Shadow gained the street. Combat there had ended. Patrol cars had crippled fleeing touring cars. A quartet of detectives had captured Gus and Carning aboard their truck.

Nearing the corner, The Shadow paused at a darkened spot to see three bluecoats gathered about prone figures on the sidewalk. Zimmer Funson had put up a fight; the crooked bookmaker had been shot dead. Jocko and another tout had been wounded; they were to be sent off in an ambulance, already on its way here.

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The rest of Zimmer's touts had been taken prisoners.

The Shadow glided away from this scene.

DOWN in the vault room of the old bank, Joe Cardona, leader of the invading crowd, was standing above the form of Rick Parrin. The man who had tried to slay The Shadow was coughing badly; his wounds were mortal.

Nick Curlin was dead; wounded by The Shadow, he had tried to shoot down entering police, who had gotten him instead. Of the dozen underlings, a few were dead; but the majority were wounded prisoners.

Cardona knew that these rogues would talk. But the question was how much they knew. Rick Parrin was the man to cough out news. Cardona wanted to hear it. Rick, glaring upward, was managing fierce snarls. Wild thoughts had gathered in the lieutenant's delirious brain.

"The Creeper!" gasped Rick. "He—he must have double-crossed us! We were—we were held back—I thought it was to make a sure job of it. An hour—an hour and a half—that's what The Creeper had. To come here—to get the swag himself—to leave us for The Shadow."

"The Creeper," prompted Cardona. "Spill it. Who is he?"

"A double-crosser," coughed Rick. "A dirty double-crosser! Through with us—that's what he was. Didn't want us to have our cut. I'll—I'll tell you who—who he is. I saw him—talked with him—to-night. His name —"

Rick paused to groan as he came up from the floor, leaning on one elbow. He stared straight at Joe Cardona and tried to speak; this time, words refused to reach his lips. A gurgle sounded in Rick Parrin's throat. The Creeper's lieutenant sank to the floor and flattened there, dead.

FAR from that scene of battle, Mark Lundig was pacing the hallway of the little house in Judson Place. His forehead was furrowed; the fox-faced man was pushing his fingers through his gray-streaked hair. He was blinking through rimmed spectacles as he chewed his lips. Suddenly he wheeled to the two men who were standing near.

"I'm going out again," snapped Lundig. "To make another call. If I don't come back —"

He stopped as the doorbell began to ring. He nudged his thumb toward the treasure room.

"Get in there, Woodling," he told the man in the gray suit. Then, to the fellow in the derby hat: "You answer the door, Norris."

Chewing his cigar, Norris complied. Two persons entered: one was Egbert Doyd; the other, Tobias Clavelock.

Lundig smiled as he saw them. Passing the pair, he stood at the open door and waved his arm up and down, in signal. Closing the door, he joined the arrivals.

"What is this, Lundig?" queried Clavelock, sharply. "Egbert told me that something must be doing here in this old house. Since it belongs to the Doyd estate, I was naturally concerned."

"Especially about Theresa," added Egbert, shrewdly. "Where is she, Mark?"

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"Get the girl," said Lundig to Norris. Then, to the others: "Come in here. I want to show you something of importance."

He indicated the treasure room. Clavelock and Egbert advanced; they stopped on the threshold. Egbert gaped, blinking, as he saw the glittering galaxy of wealth. Clavelock stared steadily, making no comment, until he had viewed the entire display; then he turned sharply to Lundig.

"You found Bigelow Doyd's treasures," asserted the lawyer. "But tell me, Lundig: how did you happen to discover them here?"

"You will learn in a few minutes," returned Lundig, shrewdly. "But, wait: Here is Theresa."

Norris had brought the girl downstairs. Theresa had arrived just in time to hear Mark Lundig's statement. Bounding forward, she shouted her accusation.

"I'll tell you about Mark Lundig!" Seeing Clavelock and Egbert, the girl was aroused to new protest, since potential rescuers were at hand. "He is a thief—a rogue—he is The Creeper! He tricked me into coming here. He —"

Lundig was barking a protest. Egbert, nodding at Theresa's words, showed sudden activity as he sprang to seize the fellow. Lundig struggled; Clavelock joined in. Lundig shouted to Norris in the hall; to Woodling, who was across the room. Both men sprang forward, rasping warnings.

Egbert Doyd and Tobias Clavelock dropped back as the two men drew revolvers. Theresa did the same, staring at the stubby weapons. Mark Lundig's face was furious; but his momentary rage abated. He chuckled in elation.

"So I'm a crook, eh?" he questioned, looking at Theresa. "You call me The Creeper," Lundig chuckled. "Well, you'll learn more than you even guessed when you've heard what I have to say. When I'm through, you'll —"

A voice interrupted from the hall. Lundig turned; so did the two men with him. Norris and Woodling dropped their guns and raised their arms. They had reason; they were staring straight into the muzzle of a .38, held by a stolid-faced man who had entered.

It was Donald Shiloh; behind him, his solemn-faced valet, Jeffrey. The latter stooped to pick up the revolvers that Lundig's men had dropped.

Theresa Doyd smiled as she gave a happy gasp. This time, the girl was sure, rescue would prove complete.

CHAPTER XXII. AN OLD FRIEND

"BEFORE you talk further, Lundig," remarked Shiloh, with a confident smile, "I shall detail the circumstances that brought about my fortunate arrival. That's right, Jeffrey"—he nodded approvingly, as the valet covered Norris and Woodling with their own guns—"keep those scoundrels where they belong.

"As I was saying, good fortune favored me. Good fortune and Wilfred. It appears, Theresa, that after I left the house, Mark Lundig arrived and left; then you started out."

The girl nodded.

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"Next," laughed Shiloh, "Egbert left quite suddenly. Wilfred happened to hear him talking over the telephone. He heard Egbert mention this address. Wilfred knew that this house belonged to the estate, so he called Mr. Clavelock. Receiving no answer, he called me. He tried three times before I arrived home; when I heard what had happened, I came here at once, bringing Jeffrey."

"Egbert called me," put in Clavelock. "We both wondered what had happened, so we came here together."

"And found the treasure." Shiloh nodded approvingly, as he looked in from the doorway. "Apparently, you were a bit put out over the fact, Lundig."

Mark Lundig glowered as he met Shiloh's stare. Then, in an argumentative tone, he inquired:

"Do you mind hearing what I know about it?"

"We should be glad to hear your story," returned Shiloh. "First, however, you might introduce these playmates of yours who like to handle revolvers. What are they? Thugs?"

"They're detectives," answered Lundig. "Norris and Woodling. I hired them to search for the missing scroll. I used to call them from the house; once in a while, Norris sent me messages there."

"Signed with the letter N?" queried Shiloh.

"Yes," returned Lundig. "They were trying to locate Montague Rayne. I thought he might be in the game. They found that he had been in New York—that he had been living at the Torrington. But that was all they learned."

Lundig paused. He licked his lips and looked about at the others. Then he spoke again; it was apparent that he hoped to make his statement convincing.

"SOMETHING odd occurred a few days ago," Lundig stated. "I left my hotel, the Soulette, and came to your house, Egbert. A message was there for me—Theresa had it in an envelope—and it appeared to be from Norris. He wanted to see me in an office at the Daxler Building. I went there.

"Instead of Norris, I found two men—young men whose names I cannot divulge; but they spoke of a personage called The Shadow. Some one whom they served. They told me that they knew where the Doyd treasures were located; but they wanted some place to which the wealth could be transferred. I thought of this house; I remembered that it was empty and belonged to the Doyd estate.

"They took me to the old Criterion Trust building. We went downstairs and opened the vault. These men knew the combination. Inside were boxes and chests, some quite heavy. We brought them to the street and loaded them on a truck that these men had provided. The treasure was unloaded here; we placed it as you now see it."

"The old Criterion Trust building," ejaculated Clavelock. "Certainly! That building belongs to the Doyd estate. It was to be kept as it was until after all legacies were settled. That was mentioned in Bigelow Doyd's instructions concerning real estate holdings."

"I asked if I could bring Norris and Woodling here," resumed Lundig. "Both were trustworthy. The men agreed. They kept guard outside, while I stationed my detectives in here. I was to wait until later, before I revealed where the treasure lay; but, foolishly, I disobeyed instructions."

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Lundig turned solemnly to Theresa.

"You doubted my honesty," he told the girl. "I wanted you to know that I was straight. I wanted to bring you here to let you see the treasure in advance, and I unwisely used a subterfuge to get you here. I knew you would come, if you thought Shiloh would be here. That is why I made my pretext.

"I was glad when Egbert and Mr. Clavelock arrived. I waved the outside watchers away, thinking that all was well. But when my purposes were misunderstood, Norris and Woodling naturally supported me. That is my whole story."

"A poor one," gibed Shiloh, still covering Lundig with the revolver. "A weak alibi, Lundig; all this hokum about The Shadow. Who is he? Where is he?"

"That's not fair, Donald!" exclaimed Theresa, suddenly. "Mark has not said anything that sounds untrue. Only—only —"

She looked about. Clavelock and Egbert were commending Lundig. They believed his story. The girl saw the smile of friendliness that had come on Lundig's face. She turned to Shiloh.

"What about The Creeper?" she demanded. "Mark could not have been The Creeper —"

"Lundig stole one of your code lists, Clavelock," accused Shiloh, suddenly.

"I am admitting it," returned Lundig. "Another piece of folly. I thought I might decipher something from it. To help every one concerned —"

Lundig was producing the list; Clavelock was nodding as he received it. Theresa stared suddenly as she saw a venomous glare appear on Shiloh's face. Intuitively, the girl cried out:

"Donald! You—you were The Creeper! You were the one who wanted to betray us —"

A FIERCE snarl was Shiloh's interruption. Furiously, the revealed crook brandished his revolver. Jeffrey leveled the guns that he held; from the valet's pocket, Shiloh produced a second gun, using his free hand.

Lawyer—heirs—detectives; all were covered as Shiloh growled threats from the doorway. Jeffrey was within the room, ready to support his evil master. Shiloh mouthed epithets; then became coherent.

"The Creeper!" he sneered. "You guessed it at last! I tricked all of you! I came to the old house the night before the first meeting. Theresa heard me creeping about—that is the ruse I have used to hide my exact position—and she thought that it was Mark Lundig. That was a good beginning.

"Like a fool, Theresa, you helped me all along; whenever I used that side door to enter and leave, you told me afterward that you had heard The Creeper. That was not all. You knew that Lundig had taken a code list. You told me about it; I crept in one time and stayed long enough to copy it."

Theresa remembered that day when she had heard the footsteps creep at six o'clock; again at seven. Mark Lundig had stated later that he had been in his room. He had spoken the truth. That was when Shiloh had copied the list while it was still in the library.

"You showed me Lundig's message from Norris," resumed Shiloh. "I guessed that the boob was hunting for Rayne. I told you to watch him; but I did the same myself. That evening when Lundig came to call Norris, I

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was outside the house. I entered the side door and listened to his telephone call.

"He left, and so did I. You called me, and Jeffrey answered. Jeffrey was smart enough to pretend that I was at the apartment. He clicked his dial and cut off the call. I was smart, too; I called Jeffrey from a pay station; learned that you had phoned and called you back."

THERESA gasped. She remembered that interrupted call; she had thought it was Lundig, dialing again from below. She recalled also that she had not heard creeping follow the interruption.

What was more—after Shiloh had called her, he had come over to the house in only a dozen minutes, while it had taken him twenty the time before. He had slipped on that point, Shiloh had, but Theresa had never realized it.

Donald Shiloh—The Creeper. Theresa could hardly have believed it, as she studied the light-haired man's handsome countenance. But the look of evil that appeared upon that visage changed all the girl's former admiration to utter contempt for this man who was openly bragging of his crime.

"I didn't finish Myram," sneered Shiloh. "But I landed others. Dopey got his. Jerry probably did, too, after Slugger was bumped. Those names don't mean much to you; but here's one that does. Montague Rayne! I located the old bird, thanks to you, Theresa. I didn't hear all of Lundig's call that day I listened; it was you who told me that Rayne was at the Torrington.

"Reggie Spaylor bumped Rayne for me; out at Ridley, Long Island. I gained the scroll; I deciphered it to—night. I sent my men to the old bank. They won't find the swag there—because I've got it here. And there's a rub-out due here; Jeffrey and I will take care of it. There's not much chance of the shots being heard when we chop down the pack of you.

"Fools, the whole lot! If you had put facts together, you might have guessed I was The Creeper. But no one guessed that; not even The —"

Shiloh stopped. His head swung toward the front door, which he alone could see. He had heard a startling sound; seeing what followed it, he retreated instinctively across the hall, toward the stairs. His hands sank as if carried down by heavy weights; although he still gripped his revolvers, he could not use them. He was covered by a brace of automatics.

Involuntarily, Shiloh's lips phrased the name that he had interrupted; but his tone was no longer one of derision. The Creeper's gasp showed awe as he pronounced:

"The Shadow!"

A CLOAKED figure had swished inward, clear to the wide-arched doorway. The Shadow, weird in his flowing cloak, was covering Shiloh with one .45; his second weapon swung suddenly toward Jeffrey, just within the library door.

The Creeper's servant stared; then let his revolvers clatter when his arms came up.

"I knew the part that you were playing, Shiloh." The Shadow's sinister tone held mockery. "I, too, was present in the mansion. The choice was between you and Lundig. He proved that he could not have been The Creeper. No criminal would have tossed a crumpled message in a wastebasket, or conversed over an extension telephone.

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"I heard you talk, Shiloh. I saw through your excuse for the cut-off telephone call; your rapid drive. I heard your artful effort to pin blame on Mark Lundig. I noted your careful questioning concerning The Creeper's visits."

The Shadow's stature suddenly lessened. A toss of his head sent the slouch hat back toward the door; a shake of his shoulders dropped the inky cloak to the floor. His dwindling figure had doubled. In place of the cloaked intruder was a bent old man, his face a mass of withered wrinkles whereon dried lips were forming a cackly chortle. Donald Shiloh gasped new recognition of identity:

"Montague Rayne!"

The transformation was complete, save for those gloved hands which still gripped leveled automatics. Except for that feature, The Shadow – in feature, expression and pose—had become Montague Rayne.

Tobias Clavelock and Egbert Doyd stared in bewilderment, wondering if this could actually be the old friend of Bigelow Doyd.

"Montague Rayne is absent," cackled The Shadow. "Still abroad— deceased, perhaps—but I have passed for him. Through this guise, I attracted the notice of Lundig's detectives. I left evidence, Shiloh, that I knew would reach you— The Creeper."

AMAZEMENT reigned. Had agents of The Shadow been present, they, too, would have been astounded. It was plain, at last, how Montague Rayne had slipped in and out their cordon; how he had so easily tabbed Moe Shrevnitz's cab. This, too, explained how The Shadow had gained a key to Rayne's old room at the Torrington.

It told why Zimmer Funson's tout had so easily gained news of Rayne's new location. The Shadow had left the want-ad clipping where it would be found. He had ordered Harry Vincent into the old room to learn if the important bait had been swallowed.

"I bought the scroll from Jerry Kobal," croaked The Shadow, with an oldish laugh. "I rescued Kobal from your murderers, Shiloh. I deciphered the scroll with ease; for I had a code list of my own. I sold the scroll—when I needed it no longer—to your tool, Reggie Spaylor.

"He tried to kill me. We fought in darkness; I gained his gun; it was he who was shot dead in the struggle. I came from the house with the gables, bearing scroll and money. In the darkness, I talked as Reggie Spaylor. I guessed your countersign when I heard it; I responded and passed along the scroll. I departed as Spaylor, in his car.

"Earlier, I had sent a fake note to Lundig, signed with the typewritten letter N. He met my agents, the treasure was brought here, leaving an empty vault—a trap—wherein your full hordes of henchmen were enmeshed to-night –"

A form hurtled forward. Donald Shiloh might have hesitated to spring upon The Shadow. Like Reggie Spaylor, he had gained confidence through continued sight of Montague Rayne's stooped, shaking form. With one bounding dive, Shiloh swung past The Shadow's pointing gun; roaring viciously, he drove his own weapons upward as he came.

The Shadow straightened, whirling—an amazing sight in his character of Montague Rayne. Shiloh twisted; guns roared with spurts of flame. The Shadow had spun away from the wide door. Shiloh's bullets, whistling wide, ricocheted from the hallway wall. But the jabs of The Shadow's weapons were thrusts toward The

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Creeper's heart.

As with Reggie Spaylor, The Shadow had no other choice. A foe had charged him bent on murder; that foe was a killer who must be stopped. Donald Shiloh, who had threatened the massacre of six helpless victims, ended his rush by sprawling prone upon the threshold of the treasure room.

NORRIS and Woodling had pounced upon Jeffrey, pummeling the valet to the floor. Grabbing the rogue's own guns, they covered him.

The Shadow, seeing their prompt action, swung toward the front hall. His quavering lips were chuckling a solemn knell in the tone of Montague Rayne. Automatics rested on the floor; gloved hands swept up crimson-lined cloak and dark slouch hat. The black exterior of the cloak enveloped The Shadow's rising form. His hands had regained their guns.

The tremulous mirth changed with the visible transformation. Hidden lips awoke resounding echoes with the weird crescendo of a mirthless laugh. The cloaked figure faded beyond the corner of the doorway. A puff of breeze came from the opening front door; then silence followed echoes.

Rescued heirs stood amid the treasure that was their legacy. Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland had done well in their handling of Mark Lundig; his error, not theirs, had brought Donald Shiloh here. But The Shadow had changed that unfortunate event into a final triumph.

Wealth had been restored to its proper owners. Upon the threshold of success lay The Creeper, dead within view of that treasure which his eyes could no longer see.

Donald Shiloh's run of crime had ended. Self-revealed as The Creeper, he, like his overwhelmed henchmen, had fallen before the prowess of The Shadow.

The law would learn the true facts of crime. Jeffrey, the tool who knew his master's wiles, would talk. He would tell of the scroll still resting on the writing table in Donald Shiloh's apartment—that final piece of evidence that all would like to see.

Those who had deserved good fortune had gained it—those heirs of Bigelow Doyd, forever freed from the menace of The Creeper.

Right had won—through The Shadow!

THE END