

THE HYDRA

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE HYDRA</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. MONSTER OF CRIME</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. ENTER THE SHADOW</u>	6
<u>CHAPTER III. MASTER OF FLAME</u>	9
<u>CHAPTER IV. CRANSTON AND CRANSTON</u>	12
<u>CHAPTER V. DOUBLE DEATH</u>	15
<u>CHAPTER VI. THE LONE TRAIL</u>	18
<u>CHAPTER VII. CRIME'S STRANGE LAIR</u>	22
<u>CHAPTER VIII. MACHINES GONE MAD</u>	25
<u>CHAPTER IX. CRIME WITHOUT CRIME</u>	30
<u>CHAPTER X. DOOM'S INVITATION</u>	34
<u>CHAPTER XI. THE SHOW GOES ON</u>	37
<u>CHAPTER XII. INTO THE BASKET</u>	41
<u>CHAPTER XIII. HEAD NO. 10</u>	45
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE CHANGED TRAIL</u>	49
<u>CHAPTER XV. WHEELS OF CRIME</u>	53
<u>CHAPTER XVI. WEALTH REGAINED</u>	57
<u>CHAPTER XVII. CRIME COMES C.O.D.</u>	61
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. HEADS OFF AND ON</u>	65
<u>CHAPTER XIX. CRIME TRIES TWICE</u>	69
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE STROKE SUPREME</u>	73
<u>CHAPTER XXI. TOO MANY SHADOWS</u>	76

THE HYDRA

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- [CHAPTER I. MONSTER OF CRIME](#)
 - [CHAPTER II. ENTER THE SHADOW](#)
 - [CHAPTER III. MASTER OF FLAME](#)
 - [CHAPTER IV. CRANSTON AND CRANSTON](#)
 - [CHAPTER V. DOUBLE DEATH](#)
 - [CHAPTER VI. THE LONE TRAIL](#)
 - [CHAPTER VII. CRIME'S STRANGE LAIR](#)
 - [CHAPTER VIII. MACHINES GONE MAD](#)
 - [CHAPTER IX. CRIME WITHOUT CRIME](#)
 - [CHAPTER X. DOOM'S INVITATION](#)
 - [CHAPTER XI. THE SHOW GOES ON](#)
 - [CHAPTER XII. INTO THE BASKET](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIII. HEAD NO. 10](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIV. THE CHANGED TRAIL](#)
 - [CHAPTER XV. WHEELS OF CRIME](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVI. WEALTH REGAINED](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVII. CRIME COMES C.O.D.](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVIII. HEADS OFF AND ON](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIX. CRIME TRIES TWICE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XX. THE STROKE SUPREME](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXI. TOO MANY SHADOWS](#)
-

CHAPTER I. MONSTER OF CRIME

GUESTS were arriving at the home of Edmund Glencoe. They came in clusters from taxicabs and limousines that rolled along the curved driveway leading up from the great gates. Dozens of guests were absorbed by the huge mansion, as though it patiently awaited more.

When Edmund Glencoe gave parties, he gave them in a very large way, which was logical enough, considering the enormous size of his Long Island home. As for the expense of such entertainments, Glencoe could well afford it, for he was a millionaire.

Within the house, staid servants were ushering the guests into reception rooms, where the arrivals met other friends who attended Glencoe's parties. Those most familiar with the place became an overflow that trickled into a glass-enclosed conservatory at one side of the mansion, the usual place where the regulars gathered.

Conviviality filled the air. Everybody was happy to be at this party – except Edmund Glencoe.

Not that Glencoe showed it openly. On the contrary, he was all smiles and handshakes as he received the

THE HYDRA

guests and sent them on their way. But when he found his chance for a break, he took it.

Timed to a lull among the arriving guests, Glencoe stepped through a curtained doorway to a hall, plucked the arm of a passing servant, and ordered: "Find Mr. Mance. Tell him I must see him in my study; privately, and at once.

Reaching his lavishly furnished study, Edmund Glencoe sat behind a desk and waited. Alone, he was able to show the worry that he felt, and the effect was very marked. A huddled figure, with drawn face the color of his thin gray hair, Glencoe appeared more than worried. He looked frightened.

The door opened to admit Willard Mance.

At sight of his friend, Glencoe brightened somewhat. Mance was the sort of person who inspired confidence. He was tall, broad of build, a figure of latent strength. His face was tawny, of a chiseled type, the sort that went with a man of iron. His grizzled hair did not detract from his youthful vigor; rather, it marked him as a man who possessed experience, along with force.

Mance's dark eyes flashed a look of understanding at Glencoe.

"I could tell that you were worried, Edmund," spoke Mance in a deep tone. "But don't tell me that it's about those robberies that happened recently. No harm could reach you here."

"That's what the police commissioner says," returned Glencoe nervously. "But those crimes weren't just robberies. Certain wealthy people disappeared."

"Probably as a mere precaution." Mance inserted a cigarette in a holder and reached in his pocket for a lighter. "Very foolish of them to run away from imaginary danger." He paused, about to flick the lighter, and asked sharply: "Are you intending to do the same?"

Glencoe shook his head emphatically. Leaning across the desk, he tapped it rapidly.

"No, Willard, I'm not," declared Glencoe. "I'll tell you why. There's a rumor around that those persons disappeared not because they feared crime, but because they had a part in it."

Mance furnished an incredulous stare.

"That's what the police commissioner thinks," insisted Glencoe. "He's holding a conference with prominent citizens tonight. Men like Dustin Bardell –"

"An old fogey, if ever there was one!" interrupted Mance. "Come, Edmund, be sensible. There can't be an epidemic of hit-and-run crime staged by reputable people. Granted that a criminal organization exists, it must have a brain."

"There is a brain," declared Glencoe solemnly. "It is called by a very appropriate title: the Hydra."

Mance's eyes took on a puzzled look.

"The Hydra was a fabulous monster," explained Glencoe. "According to legend, it had several heads, with its brains divided among them. If anything happened to any of those heads, the others continued to function. What is more –"

THE HYDRA

Glencoe was up from the desk, wagging his hand excitedly, when Mance clapped him on the back and laughed in interruption:

"I suppose the Hydra grew new heads?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Glencoe. "And that is what we fear this modern Hydra is doing. It is a monster of crime that must be stamped out!"

Mance laughed again, said, "Come along, Edmund. Your guests are waiting to have you show them around the house. They want to see what new curios you have collected."

Glencoe gave an obedient nod, but at the door he spoke an earnest request:

"Will you do one thing for me, Willard?"

"Of course.

"Keep an eye on the servants." Glencoe gestured before Mance could interrupt. "I know they're all reliable, but I'm afraid to trust anyone. So please watch all of them."

"Including Selbert?"

"All except Selbert" corrected Glencoe. "After all, he is my confidential secretary. I'd have asked him to perform this duty, but I was afraid it would worry him. He's a nervous chap."

THEY went out to a reception room, where Glencoe summoned the guests to begin a tour of the mansion.

Selbert immediately appeared; he was a dapper little man, who carried a big book under his arm, the volume being a catalogue of Glencoe's curios, antiques, and art treasures.

The first stop was at the music room, which Glencoe unlocked and invited the guests to enter. They thronged after Glencoe and Selbert, because all were anxious to view Glencoe's collection of rare violins and original folios of music compiled by famous composers.

Looking past the crowd, Glencoe noted that Mance was by the door, near enough to catch any conversation between two livened servants who were standing there.

Quite pleased, Glencoe left Mance to his task and devoted his own efforts to displaying musical rarities. Nevertheless, when Mance spoke to the two servants, he was careful to do so in an undertone, hiding his mouth under cover of the hand with which he removed his cigarette holder from his lips.

What Willard Mance said was:

"Head No. 4."

"Eye 4C," responded a servant. "The opening beyond the second piano is ready."

"You made it large enough to remove the Borgian harp?"

"Six inches clearance, tested."

THE HYDRA

At that moment, Glencoe was pointing guests to the Borgian harp that Mance mentioned. The gold decorations of the priceless instrument were alone worth a small fortune, its many jewels another sizable item. Mance turned to the second servant.

"Ear 4K," the fellow said. "Formerly 2B. The trucks have arrived behind the tennis courts."

"Are any of the guest cars there?" queried Mance.

"None," replied 4K. "All were diverted to parking spaces on the other side of the house."

The guests came from the music room, shepherded by Glencoe, with Selbert following patiently behind his employer, still carrying the bulky catalogue. The next stop was Glencoe's art gallery, which formed a special wing of the house.

While the guests admired a long row of valuable paintings, Mance strolled about looking over other servants.

Near a door, Mance turned his back and identified himself as Head Four to a servant who proved to be Eye 4D. This Hydra spy informed him that the selected paintings were already cut from their frames, but held invisibly in place by tape that would give way at a single tug. Quite intrigued, Mance strolled along the gallery and checked the work himself. It was perfect.

On the way from the art gallery to Glencoe's antique room, Mance paused to contact another of Glencoe's reliable servants. To Head No. 4, the servant identified himself as Tooth 4B. When Mance asked him if he'd done the picture job, the Tooth nodded, then beamed with pleasure when the Head complimented him on such clean work.

So it went throughout the tour, from Glencoe's antique room to the heavily locked wing on the second floor where the millionaire kept his main curio collection, valued at a hundred thousand dollars.

By then, Mance had finished his survey of the servants, and Glencoe was pleased to see his friend looking over some of the doubtful guests, even sounding them out through casual conversation.

Doubtful, indeed, those guests!

Each one was an Eye, Ear or Tooth, all answering to letters prefaced by the number four, which symbolized the Head they secretly served. Not once did Mance nor any of his helpers overdo the countersign by which they introduced themselves. It consisted merely in spreading a loose-clenched fist into an open hand, the fingers standing for the Heads of the Hydra.

At the finish of the insidious parade, Glencoe bowed his guests into reception rooms, remarking that servants were busy setting supper tables in the conservatory. Plucking Mance's arm, Glencoe drew his friend aside for a few words.

"You did nobly, Willard," complimented Glencoe. "All my qualms are ended. Wait – here comes Selbert. We can discuss the Hydra matter later."

GLENCOE turned one way, Mance the other, but after a few paces, the latter paused. Mance's loose fist opened as Selbert approached; the dapper secretary gave a similar gesture with a hand that clutched Glencoe's private catalogue.

Mance's undertone was a quick statement of identity.

THE HYDRA

"Head No. 4."

"Tooth 4A," whispered Selbert. He opened the catalogue showing where he had torn pages from it. "I marked the wanted items, and left the sheets in their proper rooms for the Eyes, Ears, and Teeth to find."

"All are Teeth from now on," declared Mance. "And you, Selbert – are you ready?"

"I have the combination to Glencoe's safe," replied Selbert. "Ear 4B reports that the light switch in the study is properly connected to the oil tank."

Mance frowned, whereupon Selbert quickly informed him that the light switch was seldom used, Glencoe preferring his desk lamp. When Selbert added that he could rifle Glencoe's safe within the next ten minutes, Head No. 4 nodded his complete approval. Selbert continued to the study, while Mance strolled off to find Glencoe.

The trouble was, Mance didn't find Glencoe. The host wasn't with his guests. Mance's emotionless face began to show worry of its own, as he detached himself from friends and made a side trip to the study. The door was ajar, so Mance pushed it open. By the glow of the big desk lamp, Head No. 4 saw all that he expected.

Glencoe's safe was open. In front of it stood Selbert, his hands raised. The desk was strewn with the contents of the safe – cash, stocks, and bonds already stacked in separate piles. In front of all was Glencoe, nervous no longer.

The gray-haired man was covering his treacherous secretary with a revolver. Hearing Mance enter, Glencoe sped a quick look across his shoulder.

"I'm glad you're here, Willard!" exclaimed Glencoe. "Look what I found! Selbert, the man I trusted most, robbing my safe! I'll hold him while you summon the servants – or, better still, call the police."

"A little more light would help," spoke Mance coolly. "Where is the light switch?"

"Right by the door," began Glencoe. Impatiently, he added: "No, never mind the switch. It isn't important."

"I think it is," argued Mance, "and so is this!"

With a darted glance, Glencoe saw what Mance meant by "this." It was a revolver that Mance himself had drawn and was aiming straight at Glencoe. With a fierce gasp, old Glencoe swung about to meet his false friend's aim.

There wasn't a chance for Edmund Glencoe.

Mance's trigger finger tugged, while the thumb of his other hand pressed the light switch that he had found.

The gun burst that dispatched a bullet straight to Glencoe's heart was drowned by an exploding roar that shook the very foundations of the massive mansion. The floor of the study was shuddering when it received Glencoe's sprawling body.

Crime had struck in a titanic way, as planned by Willard Mance, Head No. 4 of evil's manifold monster: the Hydra!

CHAPTER II. ENTER THE SHADOW

SELBERT was right. The light switch on the study wall was connected to the tremendous fuel tank supplying the furnace of the great mansion. A big furnace like Glencoe's took a lot of oil, a liquid that could explode with wrecking power when pepped up with high-test stuff, as Glencoe's fuel happened to be.

Teeth of the Hydra had seen to that, along with other important details. In fact, the full preparations for this tremendous crime hadn't more than begun to show themselves. The explosion from the cellar merely primed the holocaust to come.

Glencoe's mansion was built of stone, its walls as thick as bastions. If it hadn't been of such strong construction, Mance and his Hydra helpers wouldn't have risked a heavy explosion while they were still in the place. Thus, though the building shuddered, it did not cave in. However, floors heaved when timbers buckled; partitions split asunder, while cracking ceilings delivered deluges of plaster.

Every light in the house was extinguished, but darkness did not take over. Up through rifts in the floor, writhing in from broken partitions, came great licks of livid flame like the tongues of Gargantuan gas jets. Guests shrieked at sight of the searing fire which should have subsided, but didn't.

It wasn't just oil that fed the flames. Those hungry tongues found much to gobble. In one reception room, a whole stretch of paneling spurted into blaze. Recently varnished by one of Glencoe's servants, the woodwork had been treated with pure collodion, which ignited like a mammoth sheet of celluloid.

As guests fled to another reception room, the conflagration pursued them. They fled from its hellish midst through the only remaining route, a wide doorway to Glencoe's great front hall.

There the fugitives found that a mass of flame had cut off all exit except through the front door and a few adjacent windows. They saw a grand staircase transformed to a huge torch, the reason being that combustibles had been stored in a closet beneath it. Most of the fugitives didn't worry over that. With door and windows available, they took those routes to safety.

Some, however, remained to battle the holocaust. What happened to those few was tragic. Two guests grabbed buckets of sand that they happened to see in a vestibule. Sand buckets had been ordered months ago by Glencoe as a precaution against air raids, and sand could prove a big help in ease of fire.

This sand was a big help – to the fire.

As each man chucked a load of sand into the flames by the staircase, there was a brilliant puff, like a bursting skyrocket. That sand was stuff of which fireworks were composed. It obliterated itself and the hapless men with it, at the same time spreading the flame to new portions of the hall.

Similar was the experience of loyal servants who tried to use fire extinguishers on the flames. The extinguishers were loaded with explosive mixtures that blasted the moment that they sprayed. Other victims vanished with the fiery torrent that was now engulfing the great mansion with volcanic fury.

Yet amid that sea of blaze were paths that the roaring flames had not reached. Byways through a literal hell, free for travel by a host of lesser demons who knew their pattern. Demons who in their human form had announced themselves as servers of The Hydra.

FROM the door of Glencoe's study, Willard Mance, Head No. 4, was shouting orders to those workers between the crackles of the flames, while behind him stood Selbert, top man of the Teeth. Their stretch of

THE HYDRA

hallway was free from the seething fire, and they knew the routes to safety.

For along those routes Mance's workers were carrying the most valued of Glencoe's treasures. Folios, violins, the great Borgian harp, were coming through the rear gap of the music room. Two men with packs of rolled paintings were leaving by one door of Glencoe's art gallery, while the fire swept in from the other direction to gorge itself on carved wainscoting and empty frames.

The best of Glencoe's antiques were being removed bodily, the rest remaining as added fuel for the mighty fire; while from the second floor, servants laden with the finest curios were coming down a rear stairway which the flames hadn't quite surrounded.

All these routes were converging to one goal – a side door that opened behind the conservatory and afforded a direct route to the trucks beyond the tennis courts.

This explained why Mance, the Hydra Head, had ordered the holocaust so arranged that fugitives would be cut off from all exits except the front. He didn't want them to go through the conservatory, from which they could view the looting of Glencoe's treasures. Fire, a mighty mass of it, lifted to staggering proportions, was to be the cover-up for murder and robbery.

As yet, the conservatory was unscathed, but the time had come to add it to the pyre. Like a satanic majesty in the midst of his favorite element, Mance ordered Selbert to that task, while the Hydra Head personally stepped into Glencoe's study, where flames were beginning to appear, and gathered up the accumulated wealth that strewed the desk.

Viewed from the front driveway, Glencoe's burning mansion was a most horrendous sight. It formed a great pyramid of tapering flame, the fire streaming up from the sides into long tongues that were lashing through the roof, giving the effect that the whole interior was ablaze, though such was not the case.

At the right of the building was the only untouched portion – the glass-enclosed conservatory, two stories high, filled with grass rugs and wall hangings, wicker furniture and potted plants, the exterior adorned with pillars of dry, clinging vines.

The lurid glare revealed a garage to the right of the house; near it were parked a few of the guest cars. But the glow did not show the parking space beyond the tennis courts, for that area, the courts included, was directly behind the great conservatory.

All over the front lawn were scattered guests. Some of them were burned or injured, and these were being helped off to the left of the house by chauffeurs who had come running from the dozen limousines parked there. One more car was coming in the driveway, bringing a belated guest to Glencoe's ill-fated party.

The arriving car was a limousine, its passenger a gentleman named Lamont Cranston.

A world traveler of repute, Cranston was a man who had seen many things and always took them calmly. He instantly sized Glencoe's mansion as a total loss, but at the same time recognized that it might still have occupants in need of aid. There was just one way to reach such persons – through the conservatory, which, so far, was undamaged. Since the driveway skirted in by the conservatory, Cranston spoke to his chauffeur:

"Stop here, Stanley."

The voice was calm, and so was Cranston's face. Reflected firelight showed a visage that was serious and masklike, carrying a hawkish profile that fitted a man who could combine action with reserve.

THE HYDRA

The door of the limousine opened and Cranston stepped out. His calculating survey of the situation offset the fact that he wasn't attired in fire-fighting garb. Lamont Cranston was immaculately clad in evening clothes.

The car had stopped just past a line of very bushy shrubs that skirted the driveway. It was only a few dozen yards to the conservatory, but the windows there were fairly high above the ground.

WHILE Cranston was taking a quick look for something that resembled a door, only to see none, an odd thing happened at the corner windows of the inclosure.

A man arrived within those windows and began to hammer frantically against the panes. The fellow was Selbert, and Cranston recognized the secretary from a previous trip to Glencoe's.

Apparently, Selbert was trapped; but if so, he wasn't using his head about it. All he had to do was yank a window open and jump out. If he happened to be worrying about someone else inside the house, Selbert should by rights be opening the window anyway, so that his shouts could be heard.

At least, someone did see Selbert's actions. A stocky chauffeur was hurrying over from a car parked near the garage. Why that chauffeur should be staying there, while all others were on the front lawn helping the guests, was only a short-lived mystery. As he reached the corner wall, the chauffeur stooped and grabbed up the nozzle of a big hose. In heroic style, he smashed the corner window with the nozzle.

Then came a shout from Selbert, words which Cranston could hear beside his car, though he was the only person close enough to catch the call that Selbert addressed to the stocky chauffeur.

"Turn it on, Kirthle!" ordered Selbert. "Make it quick! I'm going back through!"

With that, Selbert turned about and picked a path through a flame-bordered doorway that led from the conservatory into the mansion. At the same time, Kirthle beckoned and a pair of servants sprang into sight from the outer corner of the conservatory. Kirthle handed them the nozzle, while he dived to a water spigot where the hose was already attached!

In through the conservatory window went a long stream that reached the outward-lashing flames. Instead of subduing the blaze, the stream fed it. The spurt from that hose wasn't water; it was gasoline, piped from an underground tank near the garage!

It seemed that half the fire in the mansion came out to engulf the conservatory. New fuel for the holocaust, delivered by design! The servants knew that it was coming, for they fled around the house, leaving the hose thrust through the broken window to continue its devastating work.

About to follow, Kirthle saw Cranston. Realizing that this lone witness could testify to the incendiary origin of the giant conflagration, Kirthle yanked a revolver. He was aiming the gun at Cranston when the latter turned, saw the menacing weapon, and made a quick dart toward the open door of the limousine as though to seek the shelter of the car.

Before Kirthle could follow with his aim, a strange thing happened; something all the more amazing because the sweep of flame through the conservatory was adding a tremendous burst of light. Amid all that glow, Cranston was swallowed by blackness before he reached the car door.

Blackness that seemed to swoop at Cranston's beck, envelop him and take him off to nowhere! As blackness whirled, the door of the limousine slammed, but the inky mass remained outside the car. Living blackness of human size, that issued a weird, challenging laugh which Kirthle knew was meant not alone for him, but for

the Hydra.

For that blotting shape had turned itself into a cloaked figure, whose eyes, beneath the brim of a slouch hat, caught the glow from the fire-swept mansion and transformed it into a burning gaze that promised ill to crime.

In a manner so swift that the transformation seemed under way before it happened, Lamont Cranston had completely vanished, to be replaced by that superfoe feared by all men of evil:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER III. MASTER OF FLAME

THE SHADOW was surging forward, intent upon taking Kirthle alive, to make the fellow talk about the Hydra. Kirthle fired one frantic shot, missing The Shadow by three feet. The bullet didn't even wing the limousine, for it was gone from behind the path that The Shadow had retaken.

Kirthle wasn't the only smart chauffeur on hand. Stanley, Cranston's man, was trained to pull away when he heard shooting start. Though Stanley regarded it odd that a complacent gentleman like Cranston should be in the vicinity of gunfire so often, the chauffeur never questioned his master's orders, nor did he link Cranston with The Shadow. Among other elements in Stanley's training, he'd learned to mind his own business thoroughly.

As for Kirthle, he was thinking only of The Shadow. Under the muzzle of an automatic that the cloaked fighter aimed, Kirthle tried another gun stab, that didn't deliver. The first shot from The Shadow's gun preceded Kirthle's tug of the trigger.

The leaden slug found Kirthle's forearm, just above his gun hand. Jounced by the impact, Kirthle staggered around, his arm flinging wide, while his loosened hand let his revolver scale against the wall below the conservatory windows. Wounded and unarmed, Kirthle turned to run; then, seeing The Shadow looming hard upon him, the stocky man turned back.

Diving for the wall, Kirthle grabbed up his gun with his left hand and swung triumphantly, hoping to cripple The Shadow in turn. Within reach, The Shadow made a swoop to grab Kirthle's arm, but the fellow made a successful dodge along the wall, escaping the cloaked fighter's clutch.

It was death for Kirthle.

Down came a great chunk of the conservatory wall, a mass of molten metal and white-hot glass. Kirthle hadn't realized how quickly the conservatory had become a furnace under the feeding spray of gasoline which he himself had started. Probably Kirthle never realized it, for he was buried out of sight in an avalanche as deadly as a flow of volcanic lava.

Only by a long, swift dive did The Shadow escape the fiery debris. Wheeling from the scorching flames that now were climbing the vine pillars, The Shadow made a wider circuit toward the rear of the mansion, hoping to overtake the two treacherous servants who had helped Kirthle with the hose.

They were beyond the tennis courts, those crooks and others. The Shadow couldn't see the trucks because of an intervening wall, but he did spy the last of the men who were bringing burdens from Glencoe's side door.

THE HYDRA

The Shadow gave them a weird laugh that made them falter; then, in response to the mirth, came a deluge of gunfire from beyond the tennis courts.

That barrage was meant for The Shadow. Though it didn't reach him, it allowed the burden carriers to escape. Attacked by the whole Hydra tribe, The Shadow needed shelter of his own in order to fight back. He took the only spot he saw, which happened to be the best, the very door from which the Hydra's men had brought the last of Glencoe's curios!

Once within that shelter, The Shadow jabbed a few shots toward the distant marksmen. Dropping deeper to let them spot themselves with unwary shots, The Shadow suddenly lost interest in such random battle. Here within the fire-gorged mansion, The Shadow was viewing the pathways through which The Hydra's workers had maneuvered their departure with a vast supply of loot.

It wasn't a question now of rescuing helpless persons who weren't even likely to be around. Here was The Shadow's chance to trap some of the Hydra's clan in the very pitfall which they had designed as coverage for crime!

ONE candidate was already in sight. Turning a corner toward The Shadow was the very man who had signaled the destruction of the conservatory – Glencoe's false secretary, Selbert!

Mere chance warned Selbert of danger ahead. Dropping back as a stretch of floor gave underfoot, Selbert looked up and saw The Shadow bearing straight toward him. With a wild look, the dapper man turned and dashed back around the corner.

With a leap, The Shadow was across the cavity. Around the corner he side-stepped as Selbert peppered frantic shots in return. Scrambling for Glencoe's study, Selbert stumbled on the threshold. He was up again, clutching his gun and a precious bundle, when The Shadow overtook him. With a wild wrench, Selbert went through the doorway, right into the arms of Willard Mance.

The Hydra Head was perfect in his pretext. He didn't waste half a second asking any questions. One look told him that Selbert had met with something supernormal, and Mance acted just as though he expected someone like The Shadow. He pinned Selbert against the only stretch of wall that the flames hadn't reached, grabbed the man's gun, and tried to get the bundle.

"I've got him!" bellowed Mance. "The traitor who murdered Glencoe and robbed him! Help me... somebody!"

It wasn't just anybody who appeared. Staring across Selbert's shoulder, Mance looked amazed when he saw The Shadow enter.

It looked like Selbert's crime, even though he hadn't done it. To all appearances, Mance had reached the study too late to aid Glencoe and was now demanding vengeance for his murdered friend.

That fact, plus The Shadow's own wish to check on Glencoe's death, worked in favor of the Hydra's cause. The Shadow turned toward Glencoe's body and saw the desk beyond it, strewn with papers that the flames had just begun to devour. Mance had stayed to see that Selbert had missed nothing of value and that sudden doubt flashed to The Shadow. He wheeled, automatic ready in his fist.

Mance and Selbert were already gone, the Hydra Head showing the Tooth through the doorway to the hall, their departure drowned by a sudden crackle of flames that poured through the study walls. If Selbert had paused long enough to fire, he might have clipped The Shadow; but the secretary was too fearful, too amazed by Mance's sudden shift.

THE HYDRA

As for Mance, his gun was out, but he didn't have it aimed when he fired. His shot was wide, and he was smart enough to duck through the door ahead of The Shadow's reply. Then Selbert was dashing for the corner with Mance behind him, but all the while, the rugged Hydra Head was shooting back, hoping to nail The Shadow in the doorway.

From that shelter, The Shadow fired as Mance turned the corner. Again, flames rallied to a criminal's aid. These were the flames that roared through the study walls, flaring up from the supporting beams. Literally that fiery mass swallowed the floor of the entire room, and The Shadow plunged as the whole room caved into a flaming pit.

CLUTCHING the doorway as he went, The Shadow clung there watching the collapse. Glencoe's body, the desk beyond it, finally the big safe, went splashing into a sea of red fire that spouted like a mighty geyser, seeking another victim in the person of The Shadow.

One heave and The Shadow was clear of the lashing flame, safe in the hallway that formed a last oasis amid disaster.

The Shadow reached the corner of the passage, only to find it transformed to another pit of flame that Mance and Selbert had just managed to bridge. The route to the conservatory was cut off; it was from that direction that new waves of fire had reached the doomed study. One path alone remained: the back staircase to the second floor.

It led up and down; nevertheless, The Shadow took the stairs ahead of a rising wall of fire. On the floor above, he saw the outline of a window through a raging torrent of smoke—clouded red. Floor boards cracked and fell as The Shadow drove across them, but his lunging arms reached the window and drove through the space from which glass had already cracked and fallen.

Again, The Shadow's hauling hands made up for lack of footing. Over the sill, he struck headlong on a small, sloping roof of slate that held the temperature of a griddle. That ordeal was short, for the roof gave as The Shadow struck it and he scaled off to the ground, landing clear of burning porch posts and a shower of loosened slates that seemed to hiss their heat as they knifed into the turf and stopped there, upright, like Druid monuments in miniature.

Cars were spurting away through a back driveway, off to the left of the house. Seeing an abandoned sedan, The Shadow reached it, found the keys that the frightened owner had left, and started the blistered car away from the tremendous mountain of flame and smoke that now entirely obscured the whole of Glencoe's home.

The chase, however, was short-lived. It ended at the emergency entrance of a hospital two miles from Glencoe's. The vehicles ahead weren't trucks, nor even the sort of getaway cars that crooks might use. They were limousines piloted by faithful chauffeurs, who had brought the burned and injured guests from Glencoe's fiery party.

Mance and his Hydra followers had gone the other direction. With many roads to choose, their four-mile start would be sufficient. Dealing with them would be a matter of the future. Such was The Shadow's verdict as he turned the borrowed car about and started back toward the mighty beacon that had once been Glencoe's home.

Great flames lashing to the sky, billows of smoke that rose to heights of clouds, were symbols of the wrath that the Hydra, vast organization of evil Heads, could wreak upon whatever men of wealth it chose to devour as its victims. Never in the history of modern crime had there existed so terrible a menace as the Hydra.

But there was something that all Hydra Heads, Mance included, could remember, along with those workers who termed themselves Eyes, Ears, and Teeth. With all their individual effort, plus the fury of the holocaust they had created, these men who formed the Hydra had failed to obliterate a lone foe who tonight had challenged them with single-handed might.

He could still rise to challenge them, should the Hydra foment new crime.

He was crime's nemesis: The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV. CRANSTON AND CRANSTON

LAMONT CRANSTON woke up and wondered why his head still whirled. It took him about half a minute to learn that the motion came from the fact he was riding in his limousine. Which didn't make sense at first, because the last thing Cranston remembered, he'd been out of his car watching Glencoe's mansion go up in one great blanket of flame.

Slowly, reflectively, Cranston nodded. Someone must have put him back in the limousine and Stanley was driving him home. He didn't have to guess who had helped him on his way, for at that moment Cranston heard a low-toned laugh beside him. He turned to see the black-cloaked figure of The Shadow.

"What did you hit me with?" asked Cranston. "All four of your automatics?"

"I'm only carrying a pair tonight," replied The Shadow, "and they were inside my cloak when I tossed you in the car. Your head must have struck the opposite door."

"A bit overzealous, weren't you?"

"Hardly. A chap was aiming at you with a revolver. I had to send you away fast, which I did. So rapidly, that he thought you turned into me."

Cranston chuckled at The Shadow's statement.

"That's quite all right," declared Cranston. "A lot of people think they've seen me become The Shadow."

"And others," added The Shadow, "are quite sure that I have become Lamont Cranston."

"But no one knows that there are two of us."

"No one except the two of us."

The big car was rolling along a country road. Cranston was surprised to note that it was the highway leading to his New Jersey estate. Calculating the distance from Glencoe's, Cranston realized he'd been out of circulation quite a while.

"That fellow who was taking a shot at me," inquired Cranston, reminiscently. "Who was he?"

"His name was Kirthle," replied The Shadow. "He worked for the Hydra. I was trailing him from the last case, the only lead I had. I didn't know that crime was due at Glencoe's; otherwise, I'd have gone there in place of you. The Hydra is assuming larger proportions than I expected."

THE HYDRA

"You mean this Hydra business is on the level?" demanded Cranston. "Why, I thought it was just another of Commissioner Weston's pipe dreams!"

It was The Shadow's turn to laugh, which he did, though his low-throbbled tone lacked mirth.

"Frankly, Cranston," stated The Shadow, "I classed those recent crimes as individual cases. One night when I was you, I told Weston that they seemed the work of a group with multiple heads, like a Hydra. I simply wanted to stir our friend, the commissioner, to furnish more cooperation from the law.

"But I struck the thing right on the head – or Heads. There is a Hydra, and tonight its work was managed by a head named Willard Mance. That fire was of incendiary origin, intended to cover a big robbery. It finished by masking murder as well. Edmund Glencoe is dead, slain by the man he called his best friend, Willard Mance."

For the rest of the ride, Cranston sat in stupefied silence. Knowing both Mance and Glencoe, he wouldn't have deemed the thing possible but for the fact of his own narrow escape from death at the hands of Kirthle. Cranston was still pondering deeply when the car pulled up in front of his own sizable residence.

"After you, Cranston," undertoned The Shadow. "Only one of us can go in the house openly. I shall meet you in the trophy room."

Going up the front steps of his house, Cranston looked over his shoulder, hoping to catch some token of The Shadow's exit from the limousine. All that Cranston saw was blackness, thick within the car, and likewise on the ground where the car had been after Stanley swung the limousine around the corner of the garage.

Meeting servants inside the house, Cranston was detained a few minutes before he went upstairs, as he had to inquire about phone calls during his absence, particularly because some might be of importance to his friend, The Shadow. At last, Cranston reached the second floor and opened the door of the trophy room.

There Lamont Cranston found himself.

Seated in a comfortable armchair, languidly smoking one of Cranston's favorite cigars, was his double. Feature for feature, pose for pose, the man in the chair was Lamont Cranston. Actually, he was The Shadow, who through perfect make-up and long practice had become as much Cranston as himself.

This had been going on for years, so it should have been perfect. But when Cranston thought back to the time when he had first met The Shadow as himself, he remembered that the impersonation had been flawless, even then.

"I SUPPOSE I owe you an apology, Cranston," declared The Shadow in his friend's own calm tone. "When I first decided to supplant you, it was purely because you were away from home for such long periods. It was very convenient to be someone who wouldn't show up for a year or more."

"No fault of mine that I came back to stay," returned Cranston. "Globe-trotting is an obsolete sport nowadays, with world conditions as they are. However, I still enjoy our little game. I've made a lot of real friends through you."

"And enemies, perhaps?"

"Plenty of enemies," laughed Cranston, "but they haven't been permanent! You seem to have the habit of writing them off."

THE HYDRA

The Shadow joined in Cranston's laugh. It was singular, how their tones blended into a single voice. When the mutual mirth ended, it was The Shadow who remarked:

"Speaking of friends, Cranston, you have made a few for me. One in particular –"

"Margo Lane," interrupted Cranston. "I knew we'd get around to her. But how did I know that I was going to meet her on that Caribbean cruise I took? How could I guess that she would run into you at a night club two days after we landed? Naturally, she mistook you for me. I even would myself if I could forget who I am. Anyway, you've found Margo useful."

"Very useful," agreed The Shadow. "Whenever trouble is coming up, I know it from the way Margo gets into it. It's a wonder she didn't get tangled in this Hydra business."

The Shadow had risen from his chair. He was strolling the room in slow, easy fashion. Watching his double, Cranston caught the mood and began a stroll of his own. He came face to face with The Shadow in a doorway and waited for his impersonator to speak. When The Shadow did, his voice came from behind Cranston's shoulder.

"When did you install that door mirror?" asked The Shadow. "You should have told me that you were having the trophy room remodeled."

Cranston spun away from his own reflection. His face showed blank surprise as it met The Shadow's, who copied the expression to show Cranston what he'd missed by not continuing to watch the mirror. Finding his wits again, Cranston gestured about the room.

"I had the place repapered," he explained. "I'd forgotten about the mirror. It was fitted only a few days ago."

"Where have you put your rifles?" asked The Shadow, studying the blank wall. "In the gun room?"

Cranston nodded.

"I think I'll leave them there," he said. "There isn't room for them when the trophies are hung. Of course, I'll keep the cup cabinet here."

He pointed to a corner where a huge cabinet showed shelves that were laden with dozens of cups, all tributes to Cranston's skill as a sportsman. The Shadow smiled when he noted that one shelf was devoted to the trophies that he, The Shadow, had personally won during times when Cranston was away. Nice of Cranston to arrange a special Shadow shelf.

"Keep me posted on all changes," suggested The Shadow. "I might come home while you are out and find myself a trifle confused. By the way, you hired a new house man lately. What is his name?"

"Kendrick," replied Cranston. "He always answers the door, so you'll probably meet him if you forget your pass-key. A rather stolid chap, but capable –"

The Shadow raised his hand in interruption. He could hear slow footsteps coming up the front stairs. Plucking his hat and cloak from a chair, The Shadow passed them to Cranston and gestured toward the door with the mirror.

"Step in the closet a minute," suggested The Shadow. "That must be Kendrick coming upstairs, because the footsteps are new to me. I might as well get acquainted with him while I'm here."

A big surprise was due.

What caused it was the fact that The Shadow was totally off guard. He had to be so because he was posing as Cranston. There wasn't any reason for Cranston to be alert, or even abrupt, when opening the door of the trophy room to admit an arriving servant. Since The Shadow was playing the part of Cranston, he opened the door in most deliberate style.

Then The Shadow's hands were rising, shoulder high. The back steps that he took were forced upon him by the pressure of a revolver muzzle planted squarely in his chest. And the stare that The Shadow gave was Cranston's blank one, that he had imitated only a few minutes earlier.

The man behind the gun was the murderer who had tricked The Shadow at Glencoe's. Not satisfied with that exploit, Willard Mance had sprung another clever stroke. Linking The Shadow with Lamont Cranston, the belated guest who had come to Glencoe's home, the Hydra Head was here for a final showdown!

CHAPTER V. DOUBLE DEATH

HIS eyes fixed on The Shadow's, Mance gave an ugly laugh. Not for an instant did the killer relax his gun hand, even when he reached behind him to close the door. There was murder in Mance's glare. It stood for the future as well as the past.

"I'm going to kill you, Cranston," informed Mance in a deep undertone. "You crossed my path at Glencoe's, and that was once too often!"

"Too bad what happened at Glencoe's," parried The Shadow calmly. "I suppose you escaped with the other guests. But your attitude puzzles me, Mance. Did the heat of the fire affect you?"

"Now, I know you're bluffing, Shadow," sneered Mance. "But you don't do it well without your cloak and hat."

In a bland fashion that suited his impersonation of Cranston, The Shadow stepped back so that Mance could have a better look at him.

Like Cranston, The Shadow was attired in evening clothes. Protected by the cloak, the full-dress suit hadn't suffered during the episode at Glencoe's. If Mance sought evidence to prove his claim that Cranston and The Shadow were identical, he wasn't getting it.

"Naturally, you've hung your hat and cloak somewhere," Mance told The Shadow. "What is more important, you had them with you when you came to Glencoe's. Selbert told me that he saw your limousine arrive out front. You're the only person who could have spotted Kirthle's work.

"First Cranston, then The Shadow. Quite a coincidence. Kirthle must have seen you switch from one into the other. It meant nothing to the rest, except possibly Selbert, but it meant enough to me. So much, that I decided to settle the problem quite on my own"

"You need a drink, Mance," suggested The Shadow indulgently. "Unless you've already had too many –"

By interruption, Mance pushed his gun forward, thrusting The Shadow hard against a chair. Whipping his free hand beneath The Shadow's evening coat, Mance hauled out an automatic from its holster and sent it thudding to the floor. In the same quick sweep, he reached across The Shadow's body and pulled out the other .45. The second weapon hit the floor just as The Shadow regained his balance.

THE HYDRA

As he drew back, Mance gave a triumphant sniff. He'd caught the trifling odor of smoke from The Shadow's evening coat. It was helpful, though, that discovery, for it caused Mance to pause and gloat.

"That covers your case, Shadow," was Mance's verdict. "I'm going to kill you, like I did Glencoe! Not that you matter, because you never could defeat the Hydra. You've heard of the original Hydra, with its many heads – and more."

The Shadow acted as though he hadn't, so Mance explained what he meant by "more."

"Every time you lop off a Hydra head," gloated Mance, "two others grow in its place. That was the legend of the original creature called the Hydra, and our system is the same. If you'd killed me tonight, Shadow, the other Heads would have elected two more of their kind.

"It happens that I'm going to kill you. When the police commissioner finds his friend Cranston murdered, he will never blame me for it. I happen to be a man who has a perfect alibi. That is, I'm sure to have one when you're no longer alive to dispute it.

"But you can die with the satisfaction that, sooner or later, the Hydra would have finished you. It was just a question of time, Shadow, and that time is now!"

THE word "now" was The Shadow's cue. Expecting it, he knew the gesture that would follow it – a forward thrust of Mance's gun, even though the muzzle was less than a foot from The Shadow's chest. Likewise, The Shadow foresaw that Mance would withhold his trigger tug just long enough to see if his victim yielded to the emotion of horror.

Had the Shadow lowered his hands or made any more other than a slight waver, Mance would have fired instantly. So all The Shadow did was waver, and it proved quite enough. He faltered sideward, then forward with a trifling twist. Mance's gun was closer to his tight-drawn arm than to his chest, when The Shadow suddenly clamped biceps against forearm.

Right in the groove about his elbow, The Shadow caught the barrel of Mance's revolver. Not once did his hand signal what was coming, nor did that hand stir after The Shadow gave the arm clutch. It couldn't, for The Shadow's arm stayed rigid like a gripping vise.

What The Shadow did was spin full about, packing all the weight of his body into the leverage that whipped the revolver from Mance's clutch and scaled it into the corner by the trophy case!

Finishing his twirl, The Shadow lunged for Mance. Though tricked, the killer was already on the move. Stooped to the floor, Mance was snatching up one of The Shadow's automatics. As Mance swung the gun toward its rightful owner, The Shadow sped a hand for the killer's wrist. Life or death were hinging on a split-second, the question being whether The Shadow could stop Mance's gun hand before it completed its aim.

A split-second with inches at stake! Inches that might spell the end of The Shadow's duel with the Hydra! The Shadow's fate depending on the first spurt of his own gun, now in the grip of an enemy's hand!

The automatic tongued flame, but its burst was unheard. Just as with Mance's earlier shot at Glencoe, so was this report drowned out by a much greater roar. The whole room shuddered, its very walls seemed to split. The Shadow reeled from the concussion almost at his elbow. He didn't feel the bullet that seared his shoulder when it passed – proof that Mance's shot had missed.

THE HYDRA

Staggered by something really tremendous, The Shadow grabbed for Mance, only to find that his foe was gone. The murderer was gone with the blast, and the discordant clatter of metal that followed was something that The Shadow couldn't connect with the killer's disappearance.

Then, across the room, The Shadow saw Cranston rising from the floor beside the open door of the closet. Cranston looked dazed, too, for he'd taken a kick as hard as the toss that The Shadow had given him earlier. From the floor, Cranston picked up a mammoth weapon, more sizable than a one-man burden. The thing was an old-fashioned elephant gun.

"I found it in the closet," explained Cranston. "It was the only gun left here. The cartridges were on the shelf. So I let Mance have one. He went over there while I was coming here."

"Over there" was beside the trophy cabinet. The charge from the elephant gun had given Mance a permanent wallop, along with the temporary kick it handed Cranston. Folded right in half, Mance had hit the cabinet and overturned it. His crumpled body was covered with a blanket of cups, which accounted for the clatter that followed the gun blast.

Mance hadn't heard that belated crash. He was dead when his body started it.

RELIEVING Cranston of the elephant gun, The Shadow steered his friend into the closet. Hauling the big weapon with him, The Shadow opened the door to meet arriving servants who had dashed upstairs when they felt the house quake.

In Cranston's calm style, The Shadow inquired who had left the elephant gun loaded. The servants looked at one another as they shook their heads, so The Shadow coolly dismissed them, saying that he would take up the matter later.

"Whenever I see this gun," began Cranston, coming from the closet, "I'll remember what I did with it –"

"Quite right," interposed The Shadow approvingly. "What you did to Mance will make amends for any elephants you may have killed. Too bad Mance didn't bring along a few more Hydra Heads. At that close range, you could have bagged a batch with one shot."

Slowly, understanding dawned on Cranston. He'd never compared his big-game hunts with The Shadow's quests for men of crime. He felt that The Shadow's cause was justified, but it had seemed outside the field of sport. It still was, but Cranston, now that he had dealt with a murderer who deserved to die, was realizing that his game hunts were more deserving of rebuke.

Bringing his cloak and hat from the closet, The Shadow put them on. Gazing at Mance's body, he spoke in the whispered tone that suited his black garb:

"Mance mentioned an alibi. He said he could kill me and never be called to account –"

There was a radio in another corner. The Shadow tuned in for a news report and waited silently until it came. The first flash was a summary of the fire at Glencoe's, listing the victims who had perished there. Heading the list, next to the name of Edmund Glencoe, was that of Willard Mance. More names followed, among them Selbert's.

No wonder Mance had come to Cranston's bent on murder! Already marked as dead, Mance would never have become a murder suspect. Clear of blame in Glencoe's death, he could have killed at leisure, beginning with The Shadow.

THE HYDRA

Though Mance hadn't known it, he would have needed to do a double murder to dispose of both The Shadow and Lamont Cranston, the two that he believed were one. Justly enough, the matter of double death had boomeranged on Mance. Already counted dead, the Hydra Head had met with actual doom.

"This solves our present problem," The Shadow told Cranston. "Since Mance is already dead, there is no need to report what happened here. It is better to let the other Hydra Heads believe that Mance is still at large, rather than have them elect two more to replace him. Be ready later to admit my agents. They will remove the body after your servants have retired."

While The Shadow was descending by the window route, Cranston went downstairs inside the house and informed his servants that he would need them no more this evening. Outside, Cranston walked along the driveway toward the gates, listening for other crunches on the gravel. None came; instead, Cranston heard a whispered voice beside him. The Shadow had arrived silently, an invisible companion in the darkness.

"I've been thinking over what you told me," Cranston confided. "It's given me a new definition of sport, though I always did argue that it wasn't the kill that counted. Hunting big game seems small compared to tracking down criminals."

The Shadow's responding laugh told that he had found it that way for a very long while.

"I seem to have moved in on this hunt," added Cranston, "so I feel entitled to see it through. Whenever you sight the other Hydra Heads, give me a tallyho. Meanwhile –"

"Meanwhile, you can still be yourself," inserted The Shadow. "As such you may be the first to meet another Hydra Head. I often find a trail when I am you, Cranston."

They were at the gate. Turning, Cranston started to ask another question, only to learn that The Shadow was no longer beside him. The proof was a whispered laugh that floated back from the night.

Encouraging, that laugh. More than a token of departure, it carried The Shadow's full approval of Cranston's offer to continue in the quest against the multiple monster of crime that called itself the Hydra!

CHAPTER VI. THE LONE TRAIL

TWO evenings later, Lamont Cranston learned what it could mean to be himself. In response to a phone call from The Shadow, Cranston went to the Cobalt Club to meet his friend, Police Commissioner Ralph Weston. It was a long while since Cranston had seen the commissioner, because The Shadow had monopolized those meetings.

From the moment he reached the club, Cranston realized that Weston hadn't asked him to a social session. Crime was on the board, and the commissioner was actually asking Cranston's advice. Moreover, there were two others present who seemed to value it.

One, of course, was Inspector Joe Cardona, a swarthy man of poker-faced expression. Though Joe said little, he was always interested when Cranston spoke. Cranston knew that The Shadow had often sided with Cardona when the commissioner disputed his ace inspector's judgment.

The other man was Dustin Bardell, chairman of a citizen's committee that had convened with Commissioner Weston on the evening of the Glencoe tragedy. He was a serious man, Bardell, past middle age but very active, and at times dynamic. He seemed as determined to ferret out the Hydra business as was Weston.

THE HYDRA

Square of face, sharp of eye, Bardell did more than come bluntly to the issue. In slam-bang style, he thwacked his hand upon the table and fairly rumbled at Cranston:

"Come! You were at Glencoe's. You can tell us if incendiaries started that fire!"

"I wasn't there when it began," pleaded Cranston. "They say there was an explosion that caused it."

"If so, the explosion was arranged," argued Bardell. "Glencoe isn't the first wealthy man who has been subjected to attack. There was something wrong about that whole business. You must find more evidence, commissioner." Bardell paused, about to bang the table again, then held his hand poised. "Ah! Here is the man who can help us!"

The man in question was a tall, sharp-faced individual who entered the scene with a long, brisk stride, opening a brief case as he arrived. He spread a batch of papers on the table between Weston and Bardell, then turned from one to the other, giving each a decisive gaze.

Cranston recognized the newcomer as Charles Medor, head of the United Insurance Bureau, which made a business of investigating claims against large insurance companies. Impartial in its decisions, the United Bureau was never questioned in its verdicts. Noted for his thorough work, paid highly for his services, Medor was the final authority on insurance claims.

Medor's report was a bombshell that turned out to be a dud when he delivered it.

"The explosion was an accident at Glencoe's," asserted Medor, referring to the report sheets that he brought. "A faulty valve in the oil pipe to the furnace, slow seepage from the storage tank were the contributory causes.

"The quick spread of the fire was not surprising, considering that hundreds of gallons of oil were in the tank. All testimony proves that the flames spread too rapidly for any of Glencoe's furnishings to be saved.

"Since the insurance companies have a full inventory of Glencoe's treasures and their value, I have recommended that all claims be paid, particularly as the guests at Glencoe's home have stated that every item named was in the house when the fire started."

Bardell came to his feet angrily.

"You can't do this!" he stormed. "Why, suppose that fire was meant to ruin Glencoe! Enemies might even have wanted him to perish, along with poor Mance! Suppose, for example, that Glencoe had been blackmailed, but had refused to pay –"

"I do not deal in suppositions," inserted Medor icily. His eyes were very cold under his bristly brows. "I go by facts, and in this case they are plain. Any delay in settlement of Glencoe's just claims would injure the reputation of the insurance companies that I represent."

"But who could object, now that Glencoe is dead?"

"Certain new corporations in which Glencoe had an interest," returned Medor. "Glencoe had agreed to finance several budding industries. He had even given his notes, pending the issue of stock in those companies."

Bardell nodded slowly.

THE HYDRA

"I know about those companies," he admitted. "I'd hoped to buy into some of them myself. Still, Medor, if this could only wait!"

"It can't," emphasized Medor. "The law has provided no evidence of crime directed at either Glencoe or Mance."

Commissioner Weston sat as though handcuffed. Medor was right; too right. Even the bodies of Glencoe and Mance had not been recovered from the heaped ashes and cinders that represented all that was left of Glencoe's mansion and its treasures. Even to suggest that the pair had been murdered, would be preposterous, if voiced publicly.

As for Lamont Cranston, he sat back wishing that he really were The Shadow. He was sure that his un-cloaked double could have found some way to change Medor's set opinion in a case where The Shadow knew that crime had been committed on three counts: arson, robbery, and murder!

PERHAPS if Cranston had reasoned a bit further, he'd have realized why The Shadow hadn't chosen to come here in his place. Actually, The Shadow was taking the best of steps to unveil the true facts of crime at Glencoe's. He was using the same system as before – that of trailing a worker of the Hydra, as in the case of Kirthle.

This time, however, The Shadow was doing more than haunt the footsteps of a mere tool.

He was trailing Selbert, Glencoe's "dead" secretary!

Only a few nights ago, Willard Mance, a supposed dead man, had tried to trick The Shadow. The result had proven disastrous for Mance, establishing him as really dead; still, Mance had won a point. He'd shown, for instance, that a man supposed to be dead would not have to worry over alibis for murder.

The same applied to Selbert. Like Mance, he could feel secure, except for one proviso.

If publicly recognized by anyone, Selbert would be in serious plight. The fact made him an outcast with the rest of the Hydra's tribe. He couldn't go around with them in the mobile fashion that they preferred, because if marked, he'd make trouble for the rest.

There was another interesting slant in Selbert's case.

Unquestionably the Hydra, through its various Heads, owned hide-aways of the deepest sort. Pooled wealth could give the lesser workers benefit of many advantages that ordinary criminals did not possess.

But it would be folly for the Hydra to waste any such assets on Selbert. The dead man wasn't hunted, not to the Hydra's knowledge. All Selbert had to do was stay some place where he wouldn't be recognized. In brief, Selbert was on his own for the present.

For two days, The Shadow had been working on that theory. From his sanctum, a black-walled room deep in the heart of Manhattan, the cloaked investigator was keeping contact with many secret agents skilled in locating men that their chief wanted found.

It wasn't like looking for a needle in a haystack, not the way The Shadow handled it. On the table beneath the bluish light that formed the only illumination in his sanctum, The Shadow had spread a large map of Manhattan, divided into many squares, most of which were shaded. The rest were the ones that counted.

THE HYDRA

This was a map that covered cases like Selbert's. A man in his situation would stay in Manhattan rather than go to one of the other boroughs. He would avoid Chinatown and the other numerous foreign quarters where he would be too conspicuous, so those were shaded off.

Naturally, business areas were out. So were hotel sections, amusement centers, even big apartment sectors, where people often had chance meetings with acquaintances.

Conversely, Selbert wouldn't be around old-fashioned neighborhoods or in the realm of cheap rooming houses where strangers attracted attention. He'd probably picked an apartment larger than a converted house, yet one that didn't have an attendant on duty. Preferably a furnished place on a month-to-month basis, which narrowed the field even more.

Such were shown in the comparatively few squares that remained unshaded on The Shadow's map. There, his agents were scouting for someone who looked like Selbert. And now, even while The Shadow was tapping new squares with his finger, a tiny light glowed on the wall.

Reaching for earphones, The Shadow heard from his contact man, Burbank.

Selbert was found. Clyde Burke, an agent who worked as a newspaper reporter, had spotted the former secretary leaving a delicatessen with a three days supply of food. He'd watched the small apartment house where Selbert went, and had seen lights come on. Selbert was living in Apartment 3D of a side-street apartment house known as the Monolith Arms.

The bluish light clicked off. There was a crinkle as the map was folded in the darkness. A whispered laugh stirred the sanctum, its tone so shivery that echoes answered in repeated sibilance, only to fade into a silence as solid as the blackness, a double proof that The Shadow, master of night, had left his hidden domain.

AT the same time, Lamont Cranston was dropping Charles Medor at the office of the United Insurance Bureau. Alighting from the limousine, Medor smiled as he thanked Cranston for the lift.

It happened that Cranston had left the Cobalt Club at the same time as Medor. The reason was that Cranston had received a telephone call from a very insistent young lady named Margo Lane.

Commissioner Weston had griped about the way Cranston's girl-friend so often talked him out of conferences, but it had done no good. For a week, Cranston had been promising to take Margo to a night club, and always something had postponed it. He'd said that if he didn't keep the date tonight, Margo would be through with him.

That had brought a grunt of "Good riddance" from Weston, but Cranston hadn't seen it that way. Medor's office being on the way to the place where Cranston was to meet the Lane girl, the insurance man had gotten a ride.

Though Cranston had said little during the trip, Medor watched the car until it was out of sight. Then, striding into his office, the rangy man nodded to his night clerk and went on through.

Reaching his private office, Medor locked the door behind him and sat down in front of a square-shaped instrument that looked like the microphone of an interoffice communication system.

First, Medor pressed a button. A curious whir came from the device. Medor spoke aloud, and waited. A garbled voice responded, its words chopped to nonsense by the whir. Medor turned a dial until the voice was clear.

THE HYDRA

This instrument was a short-wave radio set, fitted with a mixer; only the two persons who held a conversation could shift the whirring sound so that they would hear their statements ungarbled.

Interrupting the other voice, Medor spoke again, his sharp face pressing close to the microphone, until its flat top was on direct level with his bushy eyebrows. The words that Medor uttered were:

"This is Head No. 7."

CHAPTER VII. CRIME'S STRANGE LAIR

FROM the vestibule of the Monolith Arms, Selbert poked his pale face and gave a wary look both ways along the street. Two nights ago, Selbert's manner had been dapper; this evening, he looked scared. Maybe his fright at his first meeting with The Shadow was the reason, for Selbert's glances were the utmost in suspicion each time he studied a darkened patch of street.

Any of those blotted-out segments might be The Shadow. So thought Selbert, until he counted so many splotches that he suddenly changed his mind. Quite sure that The Shadow couldn't be around, Selbert stole from the doorway and off along the street. His anxious eyes were set straight ahead, as if his fear had become a matter of the future.

It would have made no difference if Selbert had looked back. The particular clump of darkness that moved did so in a style that no one would have noticed. The solid gloom of a basement doorway seemed simply to surge forward, then spread; not for an instant did it reveal itself as a figure cloaked in black. Rather, it drifted into the surrounding gloom, to be absorbed like a cloud of dispelling smoke.

Selbert's hurry, his anxiety, both made it easier for The Shadow to stalk him. Turning a corner, Selbert threw a furtive glance at a subway entrance in the next block, then decided that he couldn't afford the benefit of a nickel fare. His picture had appeared in the newspapers as one of the victims at Glencoe's house. Though small and a poor photograph, the resemblance might strike some subway rider.

A cab was the only vehicle that Selbert could safely use, so he took one. Which suited The Shadow, because he had stationed that cab for Selbert to find.

The cab belonged to The Shadow and its driver was Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's capable secret agents. Accepting Selbert as a passenger, Shrevvy stalled a bit while starting his motor, which gave The Shadow time to enter a cab across the street.

The driver of the other cab was quite astonished by the whispered voice that told him to follow the cab ahead, because he'd seen no one enter from the darkness.

But the tone wasn't the sort to brook an argument, so The Shadow won his point, while Moe, up ahead, saw that the trailing cab didn't lose him.

Maybe Selbert suspected something, for after a dozen blocks he paid Moe off and transferred to another cab. That old trick didn't help him. The Shadow paid off his cabby and shifted to Moe's waiting cab. From then on, Selbert couldn't know that he was trailed, for The Shadow had trained Moe to such business.

Moe ducked around through other streets and picked up the trail on another avenue. Sometimes he would get ahead of Selbert and let The Shadow check on the other cab. On avenues, Moe would lose his cab from sight behind trucks and busses, like a porpoise playing amid a school of whales.

THE HYDRA

Thus when Selbert reached his goal, The Shadow still was right behind him. On foot, the cloaked trailer merged with a building wall until Selbert entered the side door of a large building. After a brief pause, The Shadow took the same route.

SINGULAR was Selbert's choice of destination. He had picked the promenade of a huge office building that was much like an arcade, with rows of shops on each side. Few of the shops were open in the evening, but there was an arrow ahead that pointed to a door with the sign:

MUSEUM OF MECHANICAL SCIENCE

The museum was due to close within an hour, hence it was almost deserted. Selbert paid fifty-five cents, for admittance and tax, to a uniformed gatekeeper, who watched him go through a railed entrance fitted with a photoelectric beam. A recording device gave a sharp click, then another, which caused the gateman to turn in sudden surprise.

For the first time in its history the beam had worked twice when only one person went through, and the keeper couldn't understand it. He looked toward the beam, then shot a long glance after Selbert. Finally, he gazed in other directions, but by then it was too late.

As he had boldly stepped from darkness, so had The Shadow returned to it. Openly visible only when the gateman's attention was diverted, The Shadow had promptly veered to a space behind a huge exhibit case that showed an enlarged mechanism of an automatic lock. Selbert having gone the other way, the puzzled man at the gate took his first look in the wrong direction, and that was enough for The Shadow to complete a glide to cover.

Shifting to a deeper corner next to a big case that inclosed a large model of an ocean liner, The Shadow watched Selbert move around the wall and stop at exhibits whenever other customers came by.

At one case, Selbert dropped a nickel in a slot to watch a model locomotive run on treadmill tracks. While that was going on, The Shadow saw an attendant pause and take a steady look at the drab secretary.

Similarly, another attendant checked Selbert when he was going into an adjacent room, where The Shadow followed as soon as the way was clear. Whisking into a farther room, The Shadow looked back from the doorway to see Selbert finishing a quick round of exhibits under the scrutinizing eye of a third attendant.

The far room was empty of people, but it lacked suitable cover for The Shadow. At one side were a few steps leading down to a door that bore the sign:

CHAMBER OF MARVELS

Reaching the door, The Shadow was opening it and shifting though when Selbert came in sight. Fortunately, the fellow stopped to play with a hand-crank movie machine, otherwise he might have caught his first glimpse of The Shadow entering the marvel room.

In fact, The Shadow was just working the door shut to the slightest crack, when Selbert left the movie machine and came directly to the Chamber of Marvels itself.

Completely closing the door, The Shadow turned about. The first thing he saw was a robot standing on a platform against the far wall. It was a large, cumbersome thing, its limbs, body and head nothing but cylinders of considerably more than human proportions. Hung from its neckless head was a placard, reading:

THE HYDRA

OUT OF ORDER

Gripping the robot, The Shadow found that it came apart. Evidently its machinery had been sent away for repair, for the interior was quite empty. So the Shadow stepped into the robot's legs and eased the lightweight body and head down over him.

From within the thin-shelled contraption, he peered out through tiny holes that were drilled to make an ornamental pattern.

When Selbert entered, The Shadow was able to take stock of the room as well as the man, for Selbert began a tour of the chamber. It didn't take him long, for the square room was quite small, but its exhibits were highly interesting, all being of a freakish sort.

ONE corner formed a railed square, wherein a huge metal rim was slowly spinning in a mysterious fashion, covering a circle about equal to its own five-foot diameter. It was obviously controlled by an electromagnet that revolved beneath the floor, but the effect was surprising, nevertheless. Selbert stared, quite fascinated, at this marvel, then moved along.

Next was an exhibit case containing a model stratosphere balloon. Selbert pressed a button and the balloon inflated with gas, to rise to the top of the high case. There a valve was released and the balloon came down again.

Another corner contained a combination dredger and sifter. It was much like a full-sized scoop seen on a steam shovel, but its edges were like teeth. The thing was used for dredging coal from river beds, since the fine particles of coal would sift out through the teeth.

This device was in operation. Each minute it would open its great steel jaws like Jonah's whale, and clamp them shut again.

Leaving that corner, Selbert passed the robot, giving it a mere glance as he went by. He came to another case, containing poison gases and their various reagents. Here were half a dozen slots, each calling for a nickel for the privilege of seeing gases travel through spiral tubes and produce bubbles or color changes in glass jars containing liquids of proper chemical content.

Selbert didn't waste any nickels. He was turning to the final corner to look at an automatic metal crusher, when the door of the marvel chamber opened and three attendants filed into the room. They were the same trio who had eyed Selbert during his earlier tour. Each man had a fist slightly clenched, and all let their hands come open.

In response, Selbert spread his fingers to give the Hydra signal.

"Tooth 4A," spoke Selbert, as soon as the door was closed. "Awaiting new assignment."

"Ear 7C," replied one of the attendants. "We have heard from Head No. 7, telling us to expect you, but not so soon as this. We understood you were on vacation."

Selbert nodded. Then:

"I guess you know all about me," he said. "I'm supposed to be dead, so I have to stay out of sight. But my former Head, No. 4, told me if I didn't hear from him, I'd be transferred to Seven. I was to make contact here."

THE HYDRA

The Ear knew that such were Selbert's orders. He said that he had heard from Head No. 7 only a short while ago and that Tooth 7A had been mentioned. Proper arrangements had been made on Selbert's account.

"We're pulling out of here tonight," explained the Ear. "Our Head has rigged a job for us. We're going to clean out the Paragon Trust Co. some time tomorrow."

"You'll come back here then?" inquired Selbert.

"No," replied the Ear. "The museum won't be staying open evenings, so we're no longer needed. The Head was just waiting until we could quit. Working here was soft for us, and saved expenses. Besides, we were ready to help anybody in a pinch, like you."

With that, the Ear gestured to the robot that formed The Shadow's hiding place.

"We took the guts out of old Roger," continued the Ear, "so we could use him to hold a stowaway. That "out-of-order" sign is so people won't bother him. If you'd come racing in here, we'd have piled you in Roger, clamped the catches tight and chucked away the sign. A guy inside can do the robot act as good as any machinery. You tell Roger to raise his right hand, he does it. Simple stuff like that."

The Shadow resisted the impulse to prove that Roger was an obedient robot. Selbert gave the metal man a stare, as though glad he hadn't been called upon for robot duty. Then the Ear was plucking Selbert's arm, gesturing to a device that stood on a table between the gas case and the crusher.

The thing looked like an ordinary radio set, but it was labeled:

RADIO MIXER

Hands Off

"You'd better talk with Head Seven direct," the Ear told Selbert. "Make it short, though. We're closing the dump soon."

Selbert began to thumb the dials of the mixer. One of the attendants showed him a hidden switch that started the whirl. Another turned to the Ear and asked him if he wanted to turn off the perpetual lamp, which was an object like a gas jet, burning in a glass cylinder on a shelf above the radio mixer.

The Ear shook his head. He said the perpetual lamp could burn out for all he cared, since this was their last night on duty. With that, the Ear gestured his companions out through the door behind them, leaving Selbert to hold a private interview with his new Head.

An interview that would be overheard by Roger the Robot, in the person of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII. MACHINES GONE MAD

IT took Selbert several minutes to get the hang of the radio mixer. He kept talking to it while he played with the dials, but everything sounded garbled. At last, a voice spoke in response to Selbert's efforts. It said:

"This is Head No. 7."

As occupant of the robot, The Shadow could hear as well as see, but he wasn't able to identify the voice of Head Seven. The whirl from the mixer disguised the tone, making it quite crackly. That didn't matter to

THE HYDRA

Selbert. Knowing that he'd opened conversation with a new chief, Selbert began to talk.

First, he expressed loyalty to the Hydra and all its heads. That seemed to impress Head Seven, who announced that he could use the services of a capable Tooth. Then the voice that really belonged to Charles Medor put an important question.

"Why have you not heard from Head No. 4?" was the query. "We who form the Hydra expected more from him."

"So did I," returned Selbert. "Something must have happened –"

"Because Head Four met The Shadow?"

"That might be it," replied Selbert. Then, a bit puzzled, he added: "How did you know about The Shadow?"

Head No. 7 gave a cryptic chuckle. It didn't perplex The Shadow, because he knew that others of Mance's followers had seen him around Glencoe's, something that Selbert probably had not learned before Mance sent him away alone.

"The Hydra is everywhere," spoke Head No. 7. "His Heads are many, his Eyes numberless, like his Ears and Teeth. The Hydra cares for all who obey his mandates."

"I know," said Selbert gratefully. "I could have hidden here, had I been in danger. No one would have found me."

"No one could have found you," stressed the whirring voice of Medor. "Turn to the robot that was to be your hiding place."

Selbert turned to face Roger.

"Beside the robot is a lever," continued Head Seven. "Take hold of it and draw it toward you, hard."

As Selbert gripped the lever that projected from the robot's platform, The Shadow not only voiced a warning hiss, but he raised the shell arms in hope of stopping Selbert.

The Shadow's intuitive brain had grasped a thing that hadn't struck Selbert. A menace was at hand, and though The Shadow held no regrets for Selbert, he didn't want to share the consequences. The crackly laugh of Head Seven's voice was a giveaway to The Shadow, though not to Selbert.

Unfortunately, The Shadow's hiss and the sudden movement of the robot's arms failed utterly to halt Selbert. The dupe simply thought that the robot's machinery was in action, for Selbert's own problems had caused him to pay little attention to the things that the Ear mentioned. This lapse on Selbert's part was fatal.

Selbert pulled the lever. It came loose in his hand the moment it released a mechanism beneath the floor.

With that, the room went mad.

All the machinery cut loose at once. The huge revolving hoop began to spin at stepped-up speed. The stratosphere balloon puffed, shot upward, deflated, and filled again, within its tall glass case. The toothed scoop clapped open, clanged shut, and began to jab forward on a long rod, like a crane in action.

THE HYDRA

Poison gases were seething in their ease. A heavy crusher in the last corner banged down, popped up, banged down again in tremendous fashion. Fully five feet square, that crusher was horrendous when it began to act that way.

The perpetual lamp did nothing; it simply continued to flicker in the glass case on the shelf above the radio mixer. The fact that the robot hurled itself apart and clattered in sections on the platform, was simply part of the chaos, so far as Selbert was concerned.

The dazed man didn't see The Shadow come from the robot's interior, for Selbert had swung back to the mixer, shrieking that the lever had broken loose and hell along with it.

To which came Medor's response, the triumphant crackle of Head No. 7, delivering words that were wrong in every fact until the final statement.

"You tricked us, Selbert!" accused Head Seven. "We know you for who you were, The Shadow in disguise! Clever of you to play the part of a simple secretary. Things went further than you thought they would, but you did manage to finish Mance afterward, otherwise we would have heard from Head No. 4.

"Now you are back again, trying to trick the Hydra. We were waiting for you, to make this effort the last. It is death for you, Selbert! Things have gone too far again. This time, they are designed for doom – to The Shadow!"

DOOM to The Shadow!

The whole mistaken motion of the Hydra was bearing fruit, for The Shadow himself was in the very trap designed for Selbert, the man the Hydra Heads had marked as the black-cloaked warrior in disguise!

Terrible, indeed, was that trap! Famous waxwork museums of the past had held their so-called Chamber of Horrors. This modern museum of mechanical science had a Chamber of Marvels that inventive genius had transformed to one of real horrors. It didn't take the statement of a Hydra Head to prove it.

Mere delivery of high speed did the trick.

Spearhead of the mechanical attack was the great rim that normally kept spinning in its corner. The huge hoop weighed at least a quarter of a ton, and the hidden electromagnet that controlled it was on a greater eccentric than the corner confines. It was geared to cover the whole room when the power was on in full.

Smashing through the wooden rail that hemmed it in, the mighty hoop cut a swath across the room. Its spin was still moderate, but its force was terrific. It simply chopped down anything it struck. The Shadow dodged it, as did Selbert, and the hoop struck the table that held the radio mixer. Medor's whirry voice chopped off as table and cabinet went to tinder.

Grabbing Selbert, The Shadow flung him sideways. The massive hoop, slashing past the platform, crunched the shell of the robot into a flattened mess of metal. But in flinging Selbert, The Shadow saved him from a menace equal to the whirling hoop.

The toothed scoop was shoving forward with its hungry jaws, hoping to gobble a human victim. All that it gained was The Shadow's cloak, as he dived along with Selbert. The massive teeth chewed the cloak into shreds.

THE HYDRA

Up again, The Shadow hauled Selbert away from the hoop's path. The smashing rim took the stratosphere cabinet instead and broke it all apart. A fierce hiss told that hydrogen was coming in quantity from the crushed tank. Still, there wasn't a chance for The Shadow and Selbert to reach the door. The hoop was after them, forcing them to another dodge.

As the two figures rolled in the center of the room, the hoop went past and smashed the cabinet of poison gases, releasing them as another surety of doom. The Shadow tried to haul Selbert toward the door, only to be blocked by the rim in its next circuit.

This time, The Shadow barely saved Selbert from the crusher in the other corner. All that the crusher caught was the brim of The Shadow's hat. Flipping beneath the crusher, the slouch headpiece became the replica of a pancake.

Grabbing the lever that Selbert had wrenched and dropped, The Shadow took a slash at the revolving rim. Playing hoop with that thing didn't work. The lever flew away like a feather and landed on the platform belonging to the ruined robot.

Away again went The Shadow, dragging Selbert with him. It was lucky they didn't head toward the platform, for the rim cut through it like a buzz saw hitting a pine board.

All the while, the toothed scoop was clamping, the crusher bashing, ready for their deadly work if the mighty rim failed.

How long those menaces could be dodged was something that hardly mattered, for the gases would bring death within a few more minutes. The Shadow reached the door and tried to open it, only to find it bolted on the other side. He dodged back to avoid the metal rim's gyration and came into Selbert's clutch in the middle of the floor.

Having realized that his companion was The Shadow, Selbert had gone as mad as the machines. The crazed man still had faith in the Hydra, and seemed to think that by fighting the uncloaked Shadow he could win favor with the multiple master who had disowned him.

Not to be bothered with Selbert, The Shadow hurled him over by the demolished platform. Grabbing the discarded lever, Selbert drove for his human foe.

With mere minutes to live, it was a question of one life or the other. Selbert, accomplice in murder, deserved to die. Still, The Shadow was ready to go the limit to keep the dupe alive. He grabbed at the lever when Selbert swung it, locked with the madman and reeled him away from the approaching hoop.

Selbert wouldn't have it that way. He fought back, and thereby finished himself. The hoop glanced him, sent him against the scoop, which chopped him hard. Mangled, Selbert went shrieking forward, to meet the hoop again. This time it threw him to the crusher, which sprawled him, and more.

What was left of Selbert rolled, or rather slid, away dead. The hoop came slashing around again to make worse pulp of the victim's body. The Shadow had scarcely any time to glance at Selbert during those devastating stages. Still carrying the lever, The Shadow was dodging the hoop and its allies: the long-necked scoop and the hammering crusher.

PRECIOUS minutes were gone. The Shadow couldn't survive another in the gas-filled room. His own brain was whirling madly, but one thing stuck. That lamp on the shelf, the only thing undamaged! The Hydra's men had mentioned it, but hadn't thought it important.

THE HYDRA

It could be important to The Shadow. Among the deadly gases that were filling the room was an oversupply of inflammable hydrogen!

Finding himself near the remnants of the platform, The Shadow turned and flung the lever at the glass cylinder on the shell. Even before the iron rod reached its mark, The Shadow saw the great hoop on a new eccentric, coming straight at him across the room, to block the one place that he must reach, the door.

The rim was endwise. Instinctively, The Shadow took a dive straight at it. He was arrowing one way, while the hoop revolved, coming the opposite direction. Straight through the great rim went The Shadow. His feet were grazed by the edge as it finished the turn, but they came clear. In the midst of that long slide toward the door, The Shadow heard the iron lever crash the glass cylinder that housed the perpetual lamp.

When the glass shattered, the flame was bare. The flame spoke with a mighty puff as it ignited the gas that filled the room. The gas produced a terrific blast that packed more wallop than all the mechanical contrivances put together.

The room didn't blow apart. Instead, its weak spot gave, and that weak spot was the door. It burst like a safety valve, and with the flame that hurtled through went The Shadow!

So swift was the explosion, so complete its result, that The Shadow wasn't scorched by the vanishing flame. He landed clear across the outer exhibit room, and came groggily to his feet while men were dashing in from the other door. They didn't even see the rising shape that looked like Cranston. They were on their way to stop the mechanical madness in the Chamber of Marvels.

When the current was turned off, the arrivals found Selbert's body, or what was left of it. Certain men, workers for the Hydra, also discovered tiny shreds of black cloth and a flattened piece of felt. That settled them in their opinion regarding Selbert.

The Hydra had eliminated The Shadow.

A certain cab driver named Moe Shrevnitz would have disagreed. At that very moment, he was carrying a very groggy passenger to the hospital. Having had both Selbert and The Shadow as passengers earlier in the evening, Moe knew which was which.

This person who had stumbled out of the building and collapsed in the waiting cab was certainly The Shadow. Moe's chief had taken a terrific beating, but he would come through. Moe knew it from experience. Whenever The Shadow muttered, he was all right. He had a way of pushing every ounce of strength into words that were important.

Moe caught those words. It was his business to catch them at a crucial time like this.

"Paragon Trust," came The Shadow's mutter. "Robbery tomorrow. The Hydra –"

That was all, and it was enough. Loyal agents would pick up where The Shadow had left off. Wheeling the cab in through the hospital gates, Moe was grimly sure that crime would be stopped cold when the time came.

Tonight's events should have told Moe that he was being overhopeful. One thing had been proven very definitely by The Shadow's masterful escape from the lair of murderous machines.

The logic was this: the Hydra hadn't managed to stop The Shadow.

Therefore, only The Shadow could stop the Hydra!

CHAPTER IX. CRIME WITHOUT CRIME

IT was noon when Dr. Rupert Sayre told the nurse to remove the oxygen tent. That done, Sayre had a look at his patient, Lamont Cranston. The oxygen had proved efficacious, the best of treatments, considering that Cranston had been treated to about every other kind of gas, the night before.

Of course, the hospital reports did not indicate it. Only Dr. Sayre knew what The Shadow had gone through. Sayre had heard the true facts from Burbank, as relayed by Moe, who had learned something of what was happening inside the scientific museum, while waiting for The Shadow to rejoin him.

Burbank had stressed one point. If possible, Sayre was to suppress the fact that Cranston was hospitalized. Sayre managed to do this because he was Cranston's private physician. Moreover, Sayre knew that his present patient was The Shadow, to whom he owed a great debt. Not only had The Shadow once rescued Sayre from death, he had set up the young physician in a Park Avenue practice.

Thus Sayre would go to any limits for The Shadow, and in this instance the doctor was keeping to himself a thing that he had long suspected: namely, that there were two Cranstons – a real one, and another who used Cranston's personality when occasion required. Sayre also was convinced that none of The Shadow's other agents, with the possible exception of Burbank, knew that there were two Cranstons.

To preserve The Shadow's all-essential secret, Dr. Sayre announced that the patient could be discharged from the hospital. He said he'd call for Cranston personally, but that until he returned, the oxygen treatment could be continued.

Sayre gave the impression that he would be back very shortly, but when he left, it was with the actual intention not to return until late in the afternoon. Knowing the whole story of this case, Sayre felt that the more oxygen his patient received, the better.

Thanks to Sayre's system, it was quite all right for the real Lamont Cranston to keep a one-o'clock luncheon appointment with Commissioner Weston. Should the matter ever be uncovered in the future, Weston might be surprised to learn that Cranston had come straight from a hospital cot to lunch with him. But there would be no question of an overlap. The hospital records would show that Cranston had been discharged in time to keep his appointment.

During lunch, Weston spoke briefly of a strange accident that had occurred the night before. He told how the mechanical marvels at the scientific museum had gone berserk and killed an unidentified visitor who had been in the place.

Mangled beyond recognition, the victim had paid a ghastly penalty for toying with a power lever that shouldn't have been touched. The attendants had done their best to save the fellow, but without avail.

Next, Weston shifted to a far more important subject, a tip-off that the police had received.

"It may have been a crank call," declared the commissioner, "but we didn't ignore it. Our informant claims that criminals intend to stage a robbery at the Paragon Trust Co. sometime today."

Cranston looked interested as he inquired:

"More of the Hydra's work?"

THE HYDRA

"Very probably," returned Weston, "unless the whole thing is a hoax. But I can assure you that robbery will be impossible. Inspector Cardona is watching the bank building with a dozen plain-clothes men. He has two armored cars bristling with machine guns. They look like bank cars, nothing more. Crooks will be due for a real surprise if they start anything."

Weston was adding that they'd start down to the Paragon Trust after they finished lunch, when Cranston was informed that he had a phone call. Answering it in a booth, he was a bit startled to hear his own voice over the wire. Then, realizing that it must be The Shadow, he relaxed.

"Hello, Cranston," said The Shadow. "Where do you suppose I just woke up? In an oxygen tent, of all places!"

"I envy you," replied Cranston. "You must be far more comfortable than I am in this phone booth."

"I won't keep you long," The Shadow promised. "All I want you to do is give our friend, the commissioner, the slip after you finish lunch."

"So that you can take my place?"

"Exactly! I'll show up outside the club after he begins to get tired waiting for you."

"Very good," agreed Cranston. "Anything else?"

"One more thing," stated The Shadow. "Insist upon an extra cup of coffee, and make sure it disagrees with you."

"But coffee never disagrees with me –"

"A bit of spoof, old man," The Shadow interrupted. "I'm likely to have a dizzy spell in the commissioner's car. I'd rather he attributed it to an overdose of caffeine, instead of too much oxygen. I'll see you later, Cranston – much later."

DOWN at the Paragon Trust Co., the tellers were returning from lunch, one by one. They worked in relays early in the day, but all were in their respective cages during the final hour from two o'clock to three. They had to be, for the Paragon Trust was always flooded with customers near closing time.

Stolid fellows, these tellers. They didn't even nod to one another as they took their places. Each simply opened his window, hung his nameplate on the bars, and went to work taking in deposits and paying out checks.

The tellers hadn't been informed of the robbery rumor. It wasn't necessary to bother them. Each had a revolver within reach of his hand, an alarm treadle where his foot could press it. Two watchmen were on duty, ready with guns and tear gas at instant call. The bank was set to stave off any average robbery.

As for the sort of crime that the Hydra might order, the police could take care of that. As Weston had told Cranston, they were all about the place. Certain plain-clothes men took their places in the long lines of customers leading to the tellers' windows, then stepped out again and reported to Inspector Cardona across the street.

It was business as usual at the Paragon Trust Co. Others besides Cardona's men could so testify. The others were The Shadow's agents. Three were on the job. One was Rutledge Mann, an investment broker; another, a

THE HYDRA

friend of his named Harry Vincent. They had business in the bank, arranging a loan through the cashier.

The third was Clyde Burke, present as a reporter at Cardona's invitation, since Clyde had somehow learned about the threatened robbery.

Going in and out, Clyde not only caught nods from the other agents; he checked on Cardona's men and carried messages from them to the inspector.

There were some odd-looking characters in the lines outside the windows, but that was to be expected, since this was a wholesale district representing a cross section of Manhattan life. None of those customers ventured a false move. They were here only to deposit cash or withdraw it.

Some of the deposits were very large; so were the withdrawals. Many of the customers had bags into which they dumped big bundles of bank notes and rolled-up stacks of change. Clyde didn't bother to count those sums. The mere fact that a customer's check was accepted by a teller marked the man as honest.

Such was Clyde's estimate of the customers. As for the tellers, he didn't give them a second look, nor did the headquarters men bother to watch them. The tellers were just so many human machines, going through the same old routine. They all looked alike, except for the nameplates on their windows. Skilled men who could count out money, so trained in the work that they lost all individuality.

Even when they went out to lunch and came back, they followed an identical routine. True, one wore tortoise-shell glasses, another was rather baldish, while a third had hunched shoulders with a broad chin squatting between. You could tell them apart when you studied their features closely, but no one ever did.

Through the barred windows, their faces weren't easy to discern, while the sides of their cages were so heavily grilled that each teller had but little chance of recognizing the man next door to him, except by voice. Occasionally, one needed more money and asked his neighbor for it, whereupon a wicket opened and bundles of cash were pushed through from one cage to the next.

From the customers, the tellers received only glances, along with an occasional nod. During this rush hour there wasn't time to chat with the men in gray teller's jackets. They were too busy, and other customers became annoyed if persons ahead of them held up the line. Yes, the men in gray were very busy.

And their business was the Hydra's!

THE three tellers in the middle were the Teeth. All servers of the Head who styled himself No. 7. They weren't the men whose names were on the windows, though they were made up to resemble them. Nor were certain customers who thronged those windows regular depositors in the Paragon Trust.

Checks were coming through those center windows made out for sums like fifty thousand dollars, bearing such signatures as John Doe and Mary Lamb. Some checks were even inscribed in jestful fashion, saying "Diller Dollars and Nonsense," or anything else that pleased the Eyes or Ears who presented them.

To every one of these fake customers, the false tellers shoved big bundles of currency wherein large bills were hidden by small ones that were on the top and bottom of the packets. Rolls of coin went along, just to make it look as though the customers were bona fide wholesale merchants.

An apt term, for the Paragon Trust Co. was being robbed wholesale under the eyes of its guards, the surrounding police, and the watchful agents of The Shadow!

THE HYDRA

Robbed in a fashion as simple as it was unique, through the process of pushing all the available cash right through the tellers' windows into the hands of ready takers who had come here by design. The Paragon Trust was paying through the nose and under it!

Occasionally, the middle teller left his window and went to the vault, to come back with more bundles of money for the bags, brief cases, and wallets of the pretended customers. Usually that central man supplied the tellers on each side of him, though they were also drawing heavily on the bona fide tellers who flanked them.

So heavily, that the men on the flanks had to go to the vaults themselves; but by then it was closing time and the lines of customers were thinning. First, the central teller slapped the front of his window, gesturing customers to the others. Before the lines could shift, two more windows were shut.

That sent the customers to the extreme flanks, to stand in front of the vacant windows, for both genuine tellers had gone to the vault. They hadn't returned because they couldn't find any funds, which was why the middle three, the Hydra's men, had decided to close shop so suddenly.

They didn't even stop at lockers to change from their gray linen cloaks. Coming out through a door near the cashier's office, the three fake tellers filed right past the watchmen and Cardona's detectives, and went out to the street.

Simultaneously, several customers with empty bags decided that they didn't need any money after all and headed for that same side door. They had a right to leave if they wanted, so no one tried to stop them until Clyde Burke, who had a reporter's eagle eye, realized that what looked usual was producing the unusual.

Clyde gave a signal. Up from beside the cashier's desk swung Harry Vincent, leaving Rutledge Mann to talk of loans. The Shadow's two agents could have stopped the sudden exit of tellers and customers, if they'd only been able to draw guns. But that mere action would have brought the guards their way, instead of sending them after the departing crooks.

Reaching the door together, Harry and Clyde sprang to the sidewalk, their hands going for their pockets. There they were caught flat-footed, too late to drop back.

Flanked by the bag-carrying customers, three crooks in gray were displaying revolvers borrowed from the bank itself. Sensing trailers from the bank, the fake tellers had their guns close to their hips. Their faces were no longer placid in expression. The need for disguise was over; these men could show the savage looks that went along with murder.

Murder it would have been, but for a rapid intervention – a startling episode in full daylight. A door flipped open from a big, official car that was stopping near the corner. From it lunged a man who looked like Lamont Cranston, but wasn't.

The arrival was The Shadow. He wasn't clad in black, nor did he grip an automatic. The gun in his fist was a stubby Police Positive that he had snatched from the handy pocket of the police commissioner in the car beside him. Nor did the quick-flinging attacker deliver The Shadow's famous laugh.

All that this rescuer did was open fire, and it was enough. As the gun barked their direction, murderous crooks forgot the helpless men beside the bank door and swung to do battle with The Shadow!

CHAPTER X. DOOM'S INVITATION

THE moment that strife began, Commissioner Weston was quite sure that his friend Cranston had gone mad. Even the fact that The Shadow's fire was returned was not enough to convince Weston that crime was on the loose.

How could there be crime where there was no crime? Such was the commissioner's logic, based on the fact that all was serene around the Paragon Trust Co. until his mad friend flung himself into a self-made fray.

Weston made two very bad guesses.

First, he thought that the shots directed toward The Shadow were being fired by some of Cardona's men, it being natural enough that they should mistake the berserk fighter for a trouble-maker. Second, Weston thought that his friend Cranston had been clipped by the gunfire that he drew, for The Shadow took a long sprawl when he reached the curb. Frantically, the commissioner hopped from the official car and bellowed for the shooting to stop.

Weston's shouts were drowned by new volleys.

Not only were The Shadow's agents shooting at the fake tellers and their companions; Cardona and his squad were really in it, piling from across the street, loosing long-range fire at the men in gray. Amid the mixed barrage, the excited commissioner thought that he heard a peal of challenging laughter, incongruous in daylight. That weird sound belonged to darkness, for it was the mirth of The Shadow!

Whence it came, Weston couldn't guess. He wrote it off as something inspired by imagination, for his nerves had been on edge over the Hydra business. Weston felt that something superhuman was needed to counteract the Hydra, so maybe he had The Shadow on his mind.

Shaking off such thoughts, Weston looked for Cranston, never suspecting that the man he saw was The Shadow. The commissioner's friend was still in the thick of things, using Weston's gun from a propped-up hand and elbow. It struck Weston then that the sprawl had been caused by a stumble across the curb, which was true, though it was only part of the answer.

The Shadow was really dizzy in the open air. He'd jumped from a moving car and he had felt his legs going from under him. So he'd purposely hooked the curb when he reached it, knowing that a fall would make crooks change their aim.

It had, with double results. Not only did The Shadow's enemies miss their mark; his quick subterfuge gave others time to join combat.

With it, The Shadow turned police guns in the right direction. He knew the rule that cops invariably applied. In a gun duel between unidentified parties, police always went after those who felled their rivals. By playing the part of victim, The Shadow put Cardona's men straight.

Crooks took the hint immediately. Turning, they ducked through an alley just below the bank. They were away before anyone could clip them. Even The Shadow's shots were belated. After all, he'd stumbled, and in recovering he had to remember that he was Cranston. Using a strange gun, particularly a type that wasn't suited to long range, he couldn't be expected to do miracles of gunnery.

There were plenty of other persons handy to round up the fugitives, and besides, The Shadow had visions of reserve crooks who might pop out and need attention.

THE HYDRA

Among the men with the fake tellers, The Shadow recognized one of the ex–attendants from the scientific museum, who had been posing as a bank customer. Knowing the brutal way of those fellows, The Shadow wanted to be ready for any others who might be around.

None was around. The rest who served Hydra Head Seven were gone with the loot that they had rifled from the trust company – a thing that The Shadow had not yet learned. But when he saw the size of Cardona's squad, with the armored trucks serving as mechanized units, The Shadow no longer worried over a counterattack. The thing to do was scour for the fugitives, three men in gray who looked like bank tellers being the ones most easily marked.

ON his feet, The Shadow found himself gripped by Commissioner Weston, who wanted his gun back.

Rutledge Mann came dashing from the bank, accompanied by the cashier, and together they began to pour out their story, which made Weston forget the gun.

The cashier, though quite bewildered, was stating that everything had been all right when the tellers returned from lunch, though they might have hatched up something at the little cafe around the corner of the next street.

When Weston turned to ask Cranston's opinion, his friend was gone, gun and all. Such was The Shadow's way, even when he posed as Cranston, though in such guise he didn't fade from sight, but merely moved away when he found an opportune moment.

Having heard what the cashier said, Cranston had started for the corner. Around it, he saw the cafe in question, a neat though unpretentious eating place. The personnel, consisting of proprietor and waiter, were outside, wondering about the shooting. They didn't notice the calm–faced customer who went past them, through the door, much faster than his strolling gait indicated.

Noting that the cafe had an upstairs room, The Shadow ascended the steps that led to it. Arrived there, he saw a door, opened it and entered a storeroom. A low laugh issued from the lips that resembled Cranston's when eyes that carried The Shadow's gleam saw the sight that they expected.

Three men wearing gray linen coats were lying bound and gagged upon the floor. They were the real tellers, waylaid in their favorite eating place, that crooked substitutes might take their place after lunch. But The Shadow didn't release them. He preferred not to spoil their alibi.

Footsteps were coming up from below. The Shadow slipped behind a door as two men entered. The Shadow recognized them as a pair who had been finishing lunch down in the cafe. One was for unbinding the prisoners, on the chance that it would hurt their story. The other was more concerned about a stranger who had just come upstairs.

"He was a tall guy," the fellow said. "Kind of important–looking; at least, as if he thought he was. Suppose he came in here –"

"Why should he?" demanded the other. "How could he know about these dopes?"

"Where is he, then? Answer me that!"

The Shadow wasn't waiting for one man to answer the other. Out from behind the door, he was poising Weston's gun to land it on one crook's skull as a starter. It would take a deft swing to score a sure knockout with Weston's stubby revolver.

THE HYDRA

The poise lasted too long.

A window shot open from the rear of the storeroom, revealing two men, a gray-clad crook and an ordinary companion, both fugitives from the police chase. They had guns, and they were entering this room from a low roof. They saw The Shadow about to make his swing. They yelled.

Immediately, The Shadow was mingling in new battle. He swung for one man, gave him a glancing blow as he turned, then dodged as the other made a grab. Quickly, The Shadow blasted the last few of Weston's cartridges, aiming at the window, but his shots were spoiled when his adversary jugged his arm.

Odd, that jog! The Shadow didn't realize that his own waver had allowed it. Sayre was right; his patient had needed a further dose of oxygen. Then men were piling through the window and The Shadow was a lone fighter in the midst of four. It was only fair to count the fellow that The Shadow had partly slugged, for groggy though he was, the crook didn't stagger much more than the uncloaked fighter.

LUCKY these thugs didn't know they were tackling The Shadow – or was it?

If cloaked, The Shadow could have given them a laugh. With a brace of automatics, his glancing strokes might have counted when they landed, thanks to the weight. Crooks would have mistaken his reeling strides for clever tactics. But in Cranston's guise, The Shadow was just a meddler who needed attention of a permanent sort.

One to another, The Shadow's adversaries were snarling to "give it." They weren't limiting the idea to their lone foe. They meant to give it to the tellers, too. Men of the Hydra were in a mood for murder, now that their work was uncovered.

With a wild lurch, The Shadow carried grapplers with him. He took them in the one direction that counted, toward the bound men on the floor. Those chaps could help, though they didn't know it. In fact, they were better bound than loose.

Headlong, The Shadow and his foemen went tripping across the prisoners. It was enough of a surprise for the crooks. Though his knees buckled in keeping with his swimming head, The Shadow still had strength enough and wits to roll from the pile-up that he caused. Then, with his head half buried in his arm, The Shadow did deliver his famous laugh.

Low, sibilant, it rose with sinister quiver, its effect increased by the surrounding gloom. The muffling arm gave it a peculiar effect, that of a voice rising from a tomb. There being no tomb in this vicinity, the mirth could only have come from beyond the half-opened door, which was where crooks faced as they scrambled to their feet.

Just as Weston had rejected Cranston as a giver of that laugh, so did the Hydra's men. To them, The Shadow was an approaching menace, not one in their very midst.

They shifted to take aim through the doorway. As they did, The Shadow's hand pushed beyond the feet of a bound teller. Fingers stretching to their limit reached the door and pressed hard against its lower corner. The door creaked shut, exactly as if someone on the other side had chosen to draw it as a shield.

Again the laugh, muffled more deeply in a coat sleeve. It was enough for men of crime. They dived for the window, shooting back at the closing door, jabbing bullets through the woodwork to prevent The Shadow's entry. Headlong across the roof, down to a courtyard in back, went those enemies who had actually trapped The Shadow, only to believe him still at large!

THE HYDRA

Footsteps were pounding on the stairs. The door flung wide to admit Inspector Cardona, followed by members of his squad. They sprang to the window and took a few shots at the disappearing fugitives. Cardona growled when he realized that his men had overrun the chase, giving mobsters a chance to cut back into safety.

Then Joe took a look at the men on the floor. He was surprised to find Cranston among the bound tellers. But the very plight of the commissioner's friend, the fact that he'd blundered into trouble, was quite enough to divert any thoughts that he could be The Shadow. To add to that much-desired impression, The Shadow thanked Cardona in a manner befitting Cranston.

When Cardona's men helped The Shadow downstairs, along with the released tellers, Weston met them and began to chide his friend. In Weston's opinion, Cranston's whole behavior had been an invitation to doom. The commissioner suggested that his friend return to the car and wait there until he felt better – and more sensible.

Actually, The Shadow did need a rest, and it was policy to follow Weston's orders. Cranston would have done it under circumstances like this. So The Shadow was piloted to the car, and once there, he settled gratefully in the rear seat, letting his eyes go half shut. He watched until the door closed, and he saw that he was alone.

Then came an undertoned laugh, a mere echo of The Shadow's former mirth. He was thinking of Weston's term, an invitation to doom. Sometimes the commissioner could produce very apt expressions. This was one of them.

An invitation to doom was exactly what The Shadow wanted, and he intended to get one – from the Hydra!

CHAPTER XI. THE SHOW GOES ON

AFTER ten minutes' rest, The Shadow felt rested enough to emerge from Weston's car, under the watchful eye of detectives posted to see that Cranston didn't get himself into more trouble. All he wanted to do was make a telephone call, so the detectives steered him to a booth in a corner drugstore.

Returning, The Shadow stated that he'd called for his own car. It would be here soon, so the detectives wouldn't have to wait. Cranston was going to sit down in the drugstore to drink a bromide that the druggist was mixing for him. So the detectives went over by the bank, but they kept a watchful eye on the drugstore.

When Cranston's car arrived, it stopped just around the corner. Soon The Shadow came from the drugstore and entered it, first noting that Stanley, the chauffeur, was looking over toward the bank.

The Shadow didn't want to give Stanley too much of a shock, which the chauffeur, a very sober man, might have received if he'd found himself seeing double.

Lamont Cranston was seated in the limousine.

Briefly, The Shadow told his replica what had happened at the bank. Next, he asked Cranston what had come of last night's conference. Thereupon Cranston unburdened completely, telling how his hopes had risen only to dwindle.

"Dustin Bardell was really getting somewhere," declared Cranston. "He was urging Commissioner Weston to open Glencoe's case. He classed the fire as the work of the Hydra, even though he couldn't offer any proof. Bardell was guessing at what we know was fact.

THE HYDRA

"Then Charles Medor arrived with his report. You know how exacting Medor is when working for insurance companies. His bureau never misses a chance to dispute a claim. Of course, it would happen that Medor was on the job in one case where crime was really covered.

"Medor said the fire was an accident, and that settled it. After all, he can't be blamed, for the facts were quite positive – unless you want to call them negative. Either way, it's just the same. Poor Medor! He couldn't have covered crime any better if he'd been working for the Hydra!"

For once, Cranston saw himself in a most singular mood. As he turned toward The Shadow, Cranston was met by a burning gaze that he never could have duplicated. He saw his own face as a mask rather than an image. Something was striking home to The Shadow's keen mind.

"So you dropped Medor at his office," remarked The Shadow. "I hope he appreciated the ride."

"He did," assured Cranston. "He invited me to a theater party this evening. Margo Lane was delighted when I told her that I had two tickets to Medor's private box."

"Medor's private box?"

"Yes. He's interested in the Stage Group. You know, those amateur players who have come up so rapidly."

The Shadow remembered the Stage Group. He asked what play they were producing this evening.

"I don't know," replied Cranston, "but it's probably a costume piece. They go in for that sort of stuff. It's apt to prove rather boring."

"Quite," agreed The Shadow. "Why don't you pass it up?"

"I can't very well," said Cranston ruefully, "because Margo wants to go. Personally, I'd rather go over to New Jersey and finish arrangements in the trophy room. By the way, I want to thank you for the prompt disposal of the debris."

"I take it you mean Mance," remarked The Shadow, with one of Cranston's smiles. "The thanks still are mine, on that score. Suppose I sub for you at the theater party. That will help even things."

"But I'm to take Margo to dinner –"

"I'll relieve you of that burden, too. Still, Cranston" – The Shadow's tone was whimsical – "that would put you under obligation to me. Suppose you make it really even by spending the rest of the afternoon with Commissioner Weston, while he checks over the list of depositors at the Paragon Trust, in case they start to raise a fuss. I'll have to spend a few more hours sulking in my oxygen tent, or I won't be able to survive this evening's ordeal."

DUSK was clouding the hospital windows when The Shadow finished a delightful whiff of oxygen and reached for the ringing telephone. Cranston was on the wire, ready to call off the list of depositors. The Shadow told him to go ahead, but to limit himself to those he thought the most important.

After about twenty names, Cranston stressed one.

"Here's a coincidence," he said. "The Stage Group was a depositor at the Paragon Trust Co."

THE HYDRA

"Too bad," returned The Shadow dryly. "I hate to see a struggling young organization suffer a financial loss."

"They won't lose anything," informed Cranston. "All depositors were insured up to five thousand dollars. They didn't have that much in the bank. Each day, somebody deposited the receipts of the previous night, and they used the account to pay current expenses."

The Shadow seemed pleased that the Group was not in financial jeopardy. But it struck him that such a worthy organization ought to be farther ahead than it was.

"Do me a favor, Cranston," he suggested. "Send Stanley to some of the ticket agencies and have him buy about fifty seats for tonight's Group show."

"Fifty tickets!" echoed Cranston. "Why –"

"They will cost a lot," interposed The Shadow, "but I'll send you a check from the special account that I carry in your name. Now about those tickets, Cranston, and what I want you to do with them. On your way home –"

The rest of The Shadow's statement was audible only to Cranston. Someone was stopping at the door of the hospital room, so The Shadow lowered his tone to a whisper and confined it to the mouthpiece.

Cutting off Cranston's good-bye, The Shadow settled the telephone on its stand and rolled back beneath the oxygen tent just as Dr. Sayre entered.

Finding his patient much recuperated, Sayre took him to the Cobalt Club on the promise that he'd return home shortly. After that, Sayre made a few late calls. He was swinging into Park Avenue in his coupe, when he saw Cranston's limousine stopped by a corner curb.

The big car was New Jersey bound, but Stanley must have violated some traffic rule, for Sayre saw Cranston leaning from the window trying to square things with a cop. It made Sayre smile to think of The Shadow disputing such a trifling matter as a traffic ticket.

Apparently he was making out all right, for the traffic cop was beginning to nod. So Sayre continued on his way, glad that his patient had taken his advice about going home.

This simply proved that Sayre was forgetting his own theory regarding two Cranstons. Otherwise, he might have realized that his ex-patient wasn't the man in the limousine. The real Cranston was homeward bound, but the double who had done a stint in the oxygen tent was elsewhere.

The Shadow was dining with Margo Lane under the lights of a sidewalk cafe, where he could sniff the pleasing aroma of exhaust fumes from passing cars and reiterate how much he enjoyed fresh air.

Margo didn't share his opinion regarding the atmosphere, but she naturally wouldn't appreciate it, not having occupied an oxygen tent that afternoon.

Besides, Margo had other things to think about. Most important was Lamont Cranston himself.

Margo Lane allowed for people's moods, since her own were inclined to vary. Indeed, it was Margo's ability as a listener that made her popular in cafe society. Physically, Margo was a very attractive brunette, with a photogenic face that required only a minimum of make-up to show it at its best.

THE HYDRA

Usually, conviviality formed a portion of her charm, but she could go soulful quite as readily, and her serious manner generally brought a response when she turned it on. Sometimes it worked with Cranston, but that was the odd part. Just when Mango was most sure that she really understood Lamont, she'd find out that she didn't.

LAST night, Margo had learned that her complacent friend didn't care for old-style theatrical performances. He'd termed them "too artificial." This evening, his opinion was changed. Lamont was actually showing enthusiasm over the current production of the Stage Group, which was a drama of the French Revolution.

Thus Margo's eyes were tending toward perplexity when The Shadow, sensing the reason, supplied a simple answer.

"I've been reading up on Carlyle," he remarked. "Spent half the morning – the half I was awake – digging through his 'French Revolution.' The title of tonight's show, 'Robespierre,' began to intrigue me. I wouldn't want to miss it."

Margo's perplexity changed to understanding.

"So that's it!" the brunette laughed. "I'd been wondering how to account for your sudden Parisian tastes, Lamont."

The Shadow's eyebrows gave a Cranston query.

"Your picking this sidewalk cafe for dinner," explained Margo, with a gesture. "Last night you insisted that such places were abominable, with the noise from automobile horns and the stares of passers-by."

"So I did," remarked The Shadow in a recollective tone. "Do you know, Mango, sometimes I feel that I'm a split personality. I really should discuss matters more fully with my other self."

Margo smiled. She thought her friend meant The Shadow, not the actual Lamont Cranston. For Margo Lane had long identified the black-cloaked fighter and the leisurely clubman as one and the same. A situation which was so intriguing in itself that Margo never dreamed that there could be a further riddle within the enigma.

Why should she even imagine that there could be two Cranstons, when one was so amazing?

The answer was, Margo didn't imagine it – which suited The Shadow perfectly. Nevertheless, it wasn't good policy to get out of character while playing the part of Cranston. So The Shadow emphasized his new interest in historical dramas by glancing at his watch and remarking that it was time to start to the theater.

There was a good crowd at the Victoria Garden, the playhouse used by the Stage Group. The theater was so named from a courtyard entrance that lay between two streets. Something of a garden, the courtyard not only gave access to the main entrance, but to a short inner alley that led to the stage door.

Charles Medor was waiting for the members of his box party. Hardly had The Shadow arrived with Margo, before Commissioner Weston appeared, bringing Dustin Bardell with him. Weston was in one of his most impatient moods, stating bluntly that he wished the show was over, an opinion in which Bardell solemnly concurred.

"Well have to hold another conference," ordained Weston. "I want you there, Cranston, and you too, Bardell. This robbery today – a hundred thousand dollars rifled from the Paragon Trust – it was outrageous!"

THE HYDRA

"Particularly since we were there to see it happen," put in The Shadow. "That made it worse, commissioner."

"We didn't arrive soon enough," argued Weston. "I'd have identified those tellers as criminals. I can tell a crook at a glance!"

Only Margo saw the slight smile that appeared on the lips of the man she thought was Cranston. Then they were entering the theater and being ushered to their box, while Weston was remembering that he'd brought along Cranston's brief case from the Cobalt Club. Handing the bag to The Shadow, the commissioner said:

"It's lucky your broker phoned me. Careless of you, Cranston, to leave a brief case lying about, filled with valuable stocks and bonds. But they're all there. I checked them over the phone with Mann."

House lights were darkening as they reached the curtained box. Casually, The Shadow glanced over the audience and saw that the seats were well filled. Buzzing conversation ceased as the curtain rose upon a scene that was a mass of blackness.

There was something prophetic about the blacked-out set. It seemed to welcome more than mere actors. Blackness was The Shadow's favored habitat. This was the sort of stage that he might choose for action. For the present, however, The Shadow retained his Cranston pose.

The Shadow was letting the show go on. He wanted to be sure of certain things before he projected himself into a play that had been advertised as a drama of death. An apt term, that: one that promised The Shadow another meeting with the master mob that operated as the Hydra!

CHAPTER XII. INTO THE BASKET

A SPOT of light picked out a figure on the left side of the stage, an actor attired in royal regalia of the Seventeenth Century. He represented King Louis of France, complete to ruffles and ornamental wig. In stentorian tone, King Louis announced his identity and proceeded to recount what he had done for France.

At the finish, the actor solemnly declared:

"These were my crimes –"

A great crash sounded from the rear of the stage. Its clangor was unmistakable. It was the dropping of a guillotine ax, its echoes chilling as they rang through the startled audience.

Then the spotlight was picking up another man, to the right of the stage. He, too, was made up in Seventeenth Century style, though his garb was simpler than court dress. He was the famous Danton, great sponsor of revolution. He declaimed upon his deeds, and finished:

"These were my crimes –"

Again the smash of the unseen ax, bringing new shudders to the audience. Each fall of the hidden chopper seemed to be wrenching a human life. Whoever designed this prologue knew his stagecraft.

The lighted circle reached the center of the stage. There stood Robespierre, a hunched man with his chin buried in the ruffle of a more fastidious garb than Danton's. A good touch, this, for Robespierre was usually portrayed as chinless, and the neckpiece was a token of his vanity.

A man of oratory, this Robespierre. He told his tale as had the others, and finished with the guillotine cue:

THE HYDRA

"These were my crimes –"

The third whack of the ax brought more than clatter. It produced light that flooded the entire stage. A grim scene, this, with an actual guillotine its back drop. A huge frame more than twenty feet in height, with a broad, sharp blade climbing slowly up the vertical tracks, to preen itself for a swoop upon another victim!

Onto the stage stepped other actors, one by one. Characters male and female, all from the pages of horrible history. Silent, these, which made their appearance all the more impressive, now that the guillotine had been unveiled. For each newcomer was hardly posted before the ax descended with its furious slash, to cut off any words that might have been said.

The allegory was excellent. These characters were to appear in the ensuing acts of "Robespierre," and their fate was predetermined. The audience was to remember throughout the play that over each person in the drama loomed the hideous specter of the guillotine. They would disappear from the cast one by one, always to the tune of an off-stage crash of the mammoth chopper.

In front of the guillotine, and below its pedestal, lay a shallow basket, the common receptacle for the heads of the doomed. Somehow, that wicker container was more terrible than the mighty cleaver – at least to Margo Lane, who was staring, transfixed, like the rest of the audience. Even Weston and Bardell were impressed, forgetful of the things that they had intended to discuss during the prologue.

One person in the box was speaking, now that the heavier dramatics were through. In an undertone, Charles Medor was excusing himself, stating that he'd be needed in the office for a short while. Then he was stepping out through the box curtains, not bothering to count the heads of his companions.

They were one head short, as surprisingly as if the guillotine had reached out to the box and claimed a victim.

The Shadow had opened his brief case, not at the top but underneath, to reveal a section shaped like an inverted V between the normal compartments that were filled with stocks and other papers.

From that hidden section, he had produced a thin black cloak and a slouch hat. Those garments were already obscuring the figure of Cranston when Medor turned away.

Laying the brief case aside, The Shadow followed Medor. He already had his guns; they were in well-fitted holsters beneath the evening jacket that The Shadow wore when doubling as Cranston. They'd be needed, those automatics, because Medor wasn't going to the office as he claimed. The man that The Shadow suspected as a Hydra Head was taking a passage that led backstage.

The curtain was falling on the prologue when Medor reached the wing. The play called for a five-minute intermission after the prologue, to allow the audience to catch its breath and the stage crew to rig another set.

The last part was simple, for all the stage hands had to do was lower a back drop that showed the fountains of Versailles, where the first act was laid.

But no one was bothering about the curtain that was to hide the guillotine. Like the actors, the stage hands were crowding about Medor, who, with a cunning smile upon his overhandsome face, was producing a suitcase from a locked closet near the wing.

Opening the bag, Medor began to count out sheaves of bank notes, the loot from the Paragon Trust Co.!

THE HYDRA

THREE actors edged forward to assist. King Louis, Danton and Robespierre forgot their historical animosities, while their deft hands thumbed through money the way they had that afternoon. Three of a kind, these thieves. In order from left to right, they were the fake bank tellers who had swindled the Paragon Trust. And of them, the middle man was Robespierre, hunched exactly as he had been in the central teller's cage!

A repressed laugh trickled from The Shadow's hidden lips as he moved forward from darkness. He was timing his personal appearance until the payoff. He wanted all hands to be present, which they were. Even the stage hands!

They were three, those stage hands, the former attendants at the scientific museum. Along with a dozen actors, they were getting their cut of two thousand dollars each, the rest to be retained by Medor, the Hydra Head, for benefit of himself and the other leaders of the sinister organization.

Forward moved The Shadow. His laugh grew as he came. Plotters heard it when he was almost among them. Like Medor, the rest wheeled to find themselves under the muzzles of two moving automatics that threatened all with the doom that they thought they had already delivered to The Shadow!

By then, The Shadow's laugh was striking a strong pitch. Strident, it hurled its sinister mirth for the audience to hear. Beyond the curtain were people who should be told what the real crimes of the actors were. Not fanciful exaggerations of French Revolutionary lore, but modern, streamlined villainy done by criminals who used a theater as their hideout and fancy costumes as their disguises!

Fiercer, more chill-inspiring than the crash of the guillotine was that accusation of The Shadow, a mocking laugh for the world to hear. Persons out front didn't have to see what was happening backstage to know that crime was uncovered. With one mighty taunt, The Shadow was shattering the Hydra's latest game, throwing Head Seven and his followers into complete panic.

They did just what a disorganized group would do: some lunged forward independently, others dodged for shelter, while a few actually fled. Some let their money flutter in their excitement; the rest clung to their share of the stolen funds, tightly and grimly. All, however, were yanking weapons of their own. Nobody who served the Hydra ever went unarmed.

The Shadow's guns blasted first. Tongues of fire stabbed the nearest foemen before they could jab their own revolvers in return. Tongues of flame with bullets of metal that cut a swath through the ranks of murderers. Asking for such treatment, they were allowing The Shadow no choice but to give it.

The principal members of the cast were the ones who took the brunt. Across the sprawling forms of King Louis, Danton, and Robespierre sprang The Shadow, wheeling to a better vantage point where he could deal with the rest. In particular, he wanted Medor, but it wasn't judgment to forget the others.

Guns were popping from all about the stage; even those who had started to flee were rallying for the fray. And Medor wasn't where he could be touched.

Clutching the great bulk of the bank swag, the Hydra Head was keeping behind his followers as he shouted for them to flank The Shadow and thus dispose of their mutual menace. Time was short, and Medor wanted to keep it that way for The Shadow.

Wheeling toward the center of the stage, The Shadow was revolving like a human gun turret, but there was still a chance to trap him. Keeping behind a screen of charging followers, Medor continued his urging shouts.

THE HYDRA

Bullets were chopping hard into the stage. They were coming from many angles, including balconies that led to the dressing rooms. Scattered, The Shadow's enemies were dangerous, a thing he had foreseen. But he was keeping them here on this battleground until aid arrived. Still, with metal slugs whistling through the folds of his cloak and slicing his hat brim, mere dodging wouldn't be enough.

THE SHADOW saw a vantage point: the rear of the stage beyond the hovering guillotine. He feinted toward the footlights, then reversed while gunners were peppering along the lowered curtain. He'd fooled the Hydra's crew that time – with one exception.

Namely, Medor.

Head No. 7 made a perfect guess. His hunch was that The Shadow wouldn't go stage front; otherwise, stray bullets would cleave the curtain after missing him and produce casualties in the audience. Hence Medor, playing still farther ahead, swung about and barked an order to a henchman near the rear corner of the stage.

"Pull it!" called Medor, with an appropriate gesture. "The guillotine release!"

The fellow paused only for a quick glance at The Shadow, now in his rearward whirl. At another gesture from Medor, the fake stage hand tugged the cord. There was a tremble from the guillotine frame as the great ax wavered for its downward journey.

At that moment, The Shadow was right beside the wicker basket. Guns were swinging in his direction, more of them than he could put out of combat with a single volley. To The Shadow, the drop of the chopper could prove fatal, because the broad ax, once down, would block off passage to shelter beyond it.

Again The Shadow did the unexpected, this time with a risk so great that aiming foemen stopped with staring eyes, their guns idle in their fists. Finishing his whirl with a dive, The Shadow cleared the basket and shot headlong between the uprights of the guillotine while the mighty ax was sizzling down those very rods!

A thing amazing, that mass of human blackness arrowing beneath a dropping juggernaut of sharp-edged steel. Head, shoulders, body, feet – all were vulnerable to the murderous blade. It was a matter of split-seconds, sliced to the fraction of an inch. A frequent hazard with The Shadow, but never on such a gruesome scale as this.

Blackness disappeared as though banished, as it was cut off by the scintillating chopper. But it was cut off intact, that blackness. Smash!

Foemen were staring at a three-foot expanse of glittering steel, with no fragment of The Shadow in sight. Unless they chose to count the mere patch of black cloth, a bit of sweeping cloak fold that the knife edge clipped and let flutter as testimony that The Shadow had split his escape to the thinness of a hair.

Then guns talked, too late. Bullets were flattening against steel from beyond which came The Shadow's laugh. He'd turned the menace into a bulwark, and from near one post, his gloved hand poked a gun to jab responding shots across the top of his steel barricade.

Medor was hopping over to haul up the guillotine blade. He took that duty for himself, because the man in the corner had ventured too far out and was staggering from a bullet that The Shadow gave him.

Medor was too late with his haul. His horde had begun to scatter under The Shadow's fire. The cloaked fighter could afford to let them flee, for aid was arriving in plenty.

THE HYDRA

In from both wings of the stage, from the alley door that afforded the only exit, came brawny men by dozens, most of them with guns. Thanks to Cranston, The Shadow had stocked the house with them. They were the recipients of the fifty theater tickets, friendly traffic cops that Cranston had contacted all along the avenue, inviting them to a show after they finished duty!

The chopper was up again, with Medor clinging to its rope. Shoving the cord into the hands of the wounded man beside him, Medor ordered him to hang on. Savagely, Medor dashed across the stage, to meet The Shadow coming through the guillotine posts.

They met gun for gun, but The Shadow's trigger finger had already begun its squeeze. Medor staggered sideward, clutching his mass of currency beneath a wounded shoulder, while his other hand kept stabbing with its gun.

Fading from Medor's fire, The Shadow supplied a return jab just as Medor sprang between the posts to gain a deeper shelter. Money fluttered from Medor's clutch as he clamped his hand painfully to his side. He was spinning like a faltering top, weakening beyond the guillotine. His turn finished with a forward sprawl, as his gun dropped from his slipping fingers.

Another hand was failing, that of the man who held the release rope. Fingers gave and the mighty chopper was again on its way.

Medor heard the horrendous rattle from above him and voiced a terrified scream, but he couldn't pull himself forward when he tried. Small wonder, for Medor's head was coming over the baseboard of the guillotine's base and his shoulders wouldn't follow. Medor started to raise his neck too late.

The great blade found its mark. It didn't even quiver as it made the slice. Something plopped and landed in the basket. It was a Hydra Head, chopped off literally. The slice not only ended Medor's shriek; it left stout cops and their prisoners staring at a thing that gave them a deadly leer from a blood-bathed wicker basket.

From the stage door came a strange grim laugh, The Shadow's. It wasn't just a knell to mark the passing of Charles Medor, man of murder. That tone marked The Shadow's recollection of the Hydra's ways. For every head chopped off, two others would arise!

The Hydra would avenge its seventh Head with a new and wider campaign of relentless crime, with every stroke an effort to dispose of the perpetual monster's one invulnerable foe:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. HEAD NO. 10

CRIME was striking everywhere at once.

For a week, such crime had seethed, hissing like the tongues of a dozen snakish heads about to rear themselves. There had been run-ins between The Shadow's agents and workers of the Hydra, but with no avail. Eyes and Ears had always been backed by Teeth who maneuvered their escape before The Shadow arrived upon the scene.

Then the strokes.

Sudden attempts at robbery, efforts at murder, always directed against wealthy men. All the more insidious, those crime strokes, because the hidden brains behind them were of the same class – men of substance and

standing.

So greatly did the Hydra admire and seek wealth, that it enlisted money-minded men as Heads. That went without saying; the thing to prove was who these men might be. They were the sort who had always upheld the law because it protected their property.

Finding something bigger than the law – the Hydra – they embraced it and became its Heads because it also promised to protect their wealth and gain for them that of others.

Separating the good from the bad was the peculiar province of Commissioner Weston, and he was at a total loss. At a secret conference in the Cobalt Club, he expressed his opinions to The Shadow, who had come there as Lamont Cranston.

Present also was Dustin Bardell, the one man of affluence that Weston could trust, because Bardell had been suspicious of Medor. Even though Glencoe's case was written off and its claims paid, Bardell was to be praised. If Medor hadn't been wrong on the Glencoe matter, he had been plotting against the Paragon Trust Co.

Thus Bardell was the nucleus of a group that Weston wanted to organize into a civic committee to help against the Hydra. So far, except for Cranston, who belonged without question, there had been only one safe candidate. He was present tonight, a man named Lloyd Casler, who couldn't be under the Hydra's influence, because he was bringing data that might ruin the insidious organization.

A broad-built man with an austere countenance, Casler looked both blunt and honest. Further, he preferred to sit back and listen to what others said, before pressing his own opinions.

"So far, we've blocked everything since the Paragon Trust robbery," affirmed Weston. "We stopped a penthouse robbery, a Wall Street holdup, and stalled three attempted murders. But we answered a thousand crank calls managing it. The trouble is, the crimes we did stop looked like feelers. The Hydra is too smart to let a whole crew be annihilated again. Lately, they've pulled out when things didn't seem too pleasant."

The Shadow could have corroborated that statement. The crimes mentioned, and several others, had been forestalled largely through his vigilance. But they weren't just feelers, as Weston chose to term them.

"Big crime needs opportunity," remarked The Shadow. "As soon as the right time arrives, you'll be in for it, commissioner."

"I know we will," groused Weston. "Gad! If we could only think ahead of these chaps. Remember, Cranston, how they tricked us at the Paragon Trust?"

"But The Shadow settled that one, commissioner. The crooks are dead or captured and the funds were regained."

"Yes, The Shadow did well," conceded Weston. "He used the facts that we overlooked. He realized that only clever actors could have impersonated those bank tellers; more than that, they would have had to visit the bank often, to study the men whose places they were to take.

"Somehow The Shadow learned that the Stage Group made steady deposits at the Paragon Trust. That was the vital link he needed. He did a fine job at the theater, while I was sitting in the box looking right at the criminals we wanted!"

THE HYDRA

The Shadow smiled.

"Remember what you said beforehand, commissioner?" he asked. "How you could tell a crook when you saw one? You saw three, but you didn't tell them anything."

"You wouldn't have known if I had," snapped Weston. "Why, the first shots from backstage must have blown you right out of the box! You were gone when I started to find what the trouble was. The next place I saw you was in the front courtyard!"

The Shadow acknowledged Weston's skill at repartee, whereupon the commissioner returned to business.

"SOMETHING may happen tonight," predicted Weston. "It's the opening of the jewelry show at the International Antique Gallery. The display of European crown gems alone would satisfy the Hydra."

"What precautions are you taking?" inquired Bardell.

"Every precaution," returned Weston. "Detectives inside and outside; armored cars like we had at the bank; patrol cars and motorcycles. Every visitor has to show a special pass, and they've all been warned that if the alarms go off, they'll have to take their dose of tear gas. It may cut down the attendance, but it certainly will prevent crime."

Bardell agreed that it would. Whereupon, Weston added that Inspector Cardona was in personal charge of the jewel show. If no one had any better suggestion to offer, the commissioner thought it would be a good plan to go over and view the arrangements he had mentioned, though everything was under complete control.

Commissioner Weston had just about forgotten that Lloyd Casler was present. The blunt man reminded him of it.

"I have something better," insisted Casler. "That is why I asked Mr. Bardell to bring me here. I think we should attend the meeting of the World Wide Friendship Society."

That brought an indulgent smile from Weston.

"It is more important than you think," continued Casler. "The society is composed of very wealthy people, and tonight they are subscribing to an international aviation fund for men in the services of all United Nations. Hart Ribold is the sponsor."

Weston recalled the name of Hart Ribold as that of a well-known society man. He couldn't see anything wrong about Ribold leading a drive for funds. Casler didn't agree.

"Ribold wants a quarter million," he declared. "The whole amount is to be placed in his hands in the form of certified checks. So far, there have been no objections. Now suppose that Ribold happened to be a Hydra Head –"

"He'd clear out with the entire fund!" interrupted Weston. "You've made your point plain, Casler. It's just the subtle sort of crime that the Hydra would try, and with the organization behind him, Ribold would vanish completely."

"You're right, Casler: we must go to that meeting. At a time when men of reputed character may all be criminals, we can't afford to overlook a case like this!"

THE HYDRA

LEAVING the club in Weston's car, they drove past the International Antique Gallery, where the famous display of crown jewels was to be held. Fronting on an open square where Broadway crossed an avenue, the Antique Gallery occupied the ground floor of an early-modern office building.

Its location was convenient, for there were several subway entrances nearby, and from them branched numerous underground concourses to other lines. This was a spot where visitors could converge from all sections of the city.

An excellent place, likewise, for police precautions. From side streets as well as locations in the parklike square, detectives could command the Antique Gallery to the extent of setting up machine guns, had they so chosen. Indeed, the area was already an armed camp, the best feature being that the fact wasn't visible.

So many parking spaces were handy that patrol cars and armored trucks looked few and far apart. Uniformed police, though numerous, were too scattered to attract more than passing attention. As for the detectives, they couldn't be spotted at all. They were everywhere, by newsstands, in doorways, near subway entrances. It was a perfect setup, not for crime but against it.

The jewelry show was to open this evening, and it was already dusk. The last exhibits were arriving, but they were chiefly antiques, loaned by the directors of the gallery. Some large objects were needed to trim the exhibit room, which would look too monotonous if nothing but jewel cases were about the place.

Weston ordered his chauffeur to stop behind the gallery. There, Inspector Cardona was supervising the unloading of crates and boxes, checking on their contents. Four truck-men appeared carrying a box that measured about six by ten feet.

They paused with their burden on their shoulders, while Cardona checked the bill of lading.

The item in the packing box was an antique spinet. Looking through an antique catalogue, Cardona found the number of the exhibit and learned that a spinet was an early form of piano. So he waved the truckers through, and was examining a marble statue in an open crate when Weston's car pulled up beside him.

Briefly, Cardona reported that all was quite in order. Unless the Hydra had subsidized half of the headquarters force, there wouldn't be a chance for crime tonight.

After that quip, Joe added emphatically that there wasn't a disloyal man in all the force. He'd picked men who had already tangled with the Hydra's followers, and Cardona's present contingent included a batch of the traffic squad who had mopped up at the theater following The Shadow's single-handed rout of Medor and his henchmen.

So the commissioner's car rolled along, with The Shadow peering from a window to catch signals from certain men he passed. They were his secret agents, on duty like Cardona's squad. They, too, were reporting all well to their chief.

There was only one thing unusual in the whole vicinity of the Antique Gallery. The Shadow didn't notice it, because the commissioner's car arrived by another street. Neither did Cardona nor the agents report it, because it could hardly be classed as important.

Two blocks away from the Antique Gallery were a pair of subway entrances, of the old kiosk type that looked like little houses set up on the sidewalk. These old structures were quite close together, because one was used only during the rush hours when the crowds were heavy. At present, some workmen were busy in the extra entrance. They were about to paint the interior, now that the rush hour was past. They were laying boards

THE HYDRA

down the steps to the landing and beyond. While some began to prime their paint brushes, others put up a wooden barrier at the top of the steps and stenciled the word "Closed" upon it.

That done, the workmen suddenly lost interest in their job. They drifted away one by one, a fact which wasn't noticed because the barrier hid the steps where they had been. A few blocks distant and completely away from the Broadway square, the workers assembled anew, entered a truck containing more supplies, and drove off to complete another job.

They had a new trick, these. In identifying one another, they used the clenched-fist system, but each man opened his hand twice and stressed the fact that all fingers were extended. Anyone could count those fingers, thumbs included, at a glance.

The sign of the Hydra, with the number of fingers shown announcing the Head for whom this crew worked. Twice five told the fact that tonight Head No. 10 would strike.

How Head No. 10 expected to succeed in impossible crime was something that would be learned only when it happened. A crime was planned that was calculated to produce double surprise – this time to The Shadow as well as the law!

CHAPTER XIV. THE CHANGED TRAIL

THE World Wide Friendship Society was throwing quite a dinner, to welcome new guests. Impounded under that clause, Commissioner Weston and his companions joined the banquet table. Over glasses of rare champagne supplied by one of their group, the members of the society heard Hart Ribold deliver his impassioned plea for funds.

He was a convincing speaker, this Ribold. His tone was a persuasive basso that he modulated to a musical pitch. Handsome in a virile way, Ribold had a bronzed complexion topped by light-blond hair, giving him the appearance of a Viking back from an adventurous voyage in tropic seas.

In dress, Ribold was different. Where others wore conventional evening clothes, he sported a plum-colored uniform jacket shaped to a Tuxedo cut, with a single epaulette upon its right shoulder. Below his other shoulder were ribbons and medals tastefully arranged upon his manly chest.

From what he knew about Ribold, The Shadow assumed that the sun tan was a product of Palm Beach rather than Equatorial Africa. The uniform was that of a foreign air force that had been very free with honorary commissions. The medals were the sort that could be obtained through certain channels for a price.

Men like Ribold weren't uncommon among Manhattan's social set. As Cranston, the Shadow had met many of them and found them generally harmless. But the people present were taking this comic-opera character seriously. Precisely as claimed by Lloyd Casler, the self-flattering Mr. Ribold was seeking funds and getting them.

This affair was being held in a private dining room of the Hotel Metrolite. A connecting office had been hired for the occasion, and from it secretaries were bring sheaves of letters and impressive documents as fast as Ribold called for them.

Correspondence from high officials of exiled governments gave indorsement to Ribold's work. They backed his claim that if funds were available at the right time and place, much could be done to aid a united cause. It wasn't just a case of aiding the morale of airmen fighting in the forces of other nations.

THE HYDRA

Captain Ribold, as some of the letters addressed him, was planning the organization of new corps everywhere. He believed that he could reach men who were immobilized in occupied countries, smuggle them out and place them where they would count. Such an effort would require three things. All three were money.

Of the thirty-odd people present, all were willing to subscribe. Many had brought along certified checks and were tendering them to Ribold. The Shadow saw the look that Casler gave Weston, along with the nod that the commissioner returned. Then Weston came to his feet and asked just how Ribold intended to safeguard those funds.

It was a neat point. Subtly, Weston was expressing concern for Ribold, whereas he actually felt it toward the subscribers. The commissioner was handling that angle quite well, so The Shadow arose and strolled away among the guests who were crowding around Weston and Ribold.

Stepping into the little office, The Shadow found that the secretaries had gone, taking along Ribold's records.

Picking up a telephone, The Shadow made a call. There was something that he wanted, and when he learned that it could be delivered within ten minutes, he gave a satisfied laugh, then sat down to have a smoke while he waited.

DURING those ten minutes, Weston was making out well with Ribold, who was quite willing to accept suggestions. Ribold agreed that the funds should be safeguarded and offered to place them in the hands of certain persons present. When Weston insisted upon choosing the people in question, Ribold shrugged his epaulette and gave Weston the privilege.

Thereupon, Weston chose a retired jurist, Judge Kerland, who was the very symbol of integrity; a lawyer named Hubert Luhrig; and finally a prominent banker, James Aldan. Having thus combined honesty, legal skill and finance, Weston announced himself as an ex-officio member of the fund committee.

This was all accomplished when The Shadow reappeared. When he gave an inquiring look that suited Cranston, he was drawn aside by Bardell and Casler, who told him privately how his friend the commissioner had managed matters.

Lloyd Casler was particularly elated.

"Look at Ribold," he undertoned. "See the way he frowns. No wonder, with a fortune going right out of his clutch!"

At that moment, Ribold explained his frown. He was thinking of future problems, so he said. Ways in which to disburse the fund that he had raised, so that there would be no question about its proper use and that every dollar of the hundred and fifty thousand would be spent to best advantage.

He would report on these problems when he solved them. Meanwhile, he hoped that the fund would continue to accumulate. Ribold said he'd like to see it reach a quarter million.

"No wonder!" whispered Casler caustically. "The bigger it gets, the more for Ribold when he completes the flimflam. But the only future problem that really worries him is how he can manage that grab. I'd say that Captain Ribold is due for some headaches."

Judge, lawyer and banker were about to leave with the cash and certified checks. While shaking hands with them, Ribald took a few looks toward the connecting office. Weston noticed it when he joined Bardell and

THE HYDRA

Casler. It was Casler who commented:

"That chap is plotting something."

Noting the glances he received, Ribold came over. In his smooth style, he suggested that the men with the funds might need protection on the way to the bank, that he'd thought of sending his secretaries along with them. The secretaries had left, but Ribold was sure he could reach them if he phoned to the hotel lobby.

"I'll do better than that," rejoined Weston. "Tell the committee to wait, Bardell. I want to talk to you, Ribold, and meanwhile, Cranston can phone headquarters to say that I want two men for special detail."

Turning as he gestured, Weston stared blankly when he found that Cranston was no longer present. Casler stated that the commissioner's friend had just remembered an important date and had left to keep it. Weston gave a deprecating grunt.

Those sudden dates that so often spirited Lamont Cranston away could all be blamed on a nuisance named Margo Lane. Without inquiring why Weston was so annoyed, Casler volunteered to make the call in Cranston's place.

From the moment that Lloyd Casler entered the adjoining office, his actions became peculiar. A gleam on his broad, blunt face, Casler took a quick look at his watch, then locked the door behind him. Crossing the office, he opened another door and found that it led to a back stairway.

Locking that door, Casler tried a third. It showed a closet where several coats and hats were hanging. Closing the closet, Casler went to the desk and picked up the telephone. Its cord was hooked in the crack of a top drawer, so Casler wrenched it loose, then dialed a number. When a voice responded, Casler spoke:

"This is Head No. 10 –"

An amazing statement! Given in as insidious tone as Casler could command, it revealed him as a master of subterfuge. As a Hydra Head, Casler was planning crime tonight, a thrust wherein his Teeth would act upon information supplied by Eyes and Ears, who could also have had much to do with the preliminary arrangements.

To cover his identity as a Hydra Head, Casler had picked a perfect alibi. He had arranged a side issue under the auspices of Commissioner Weston, in whose company Casler would be when crime struck elsewhere!

WHILE plotting his own crime, Casler had been looking for a man toward whom he could divert attention, and he had found one: Hart Ribold. Whatever the shortcomings of the pretentious captain, they could be no worse than Casler's own.

What Casler was now saying to the Ear at the other end of the wire proved that Head No. 10 considered his own future as assured.

"I've steered the commissioner the way I wanted," spoke Casler. "I'll hold him here so he can't make trouble. He's leaving the jewelry show to Cardona. We've fixed that angle."

There was a pause as Casler listened to something from the other end. Then:

"Well, what about The Shadow?" demanded Casler. "He hasn't shown up so far, has he? I tell you, he's an unknown element that has to be handled when and where he enters. I'd be willing to take my chances with

THE HYDRA

The Shadow right now!"

That settled the Ear. He must have reverted to the matter of scheduled crime, for when Casler spoke again, the Head used a confirming tone.

"Correct," declared Casler, glancing at his watch. "The zero hour is nine o'clock. No change."

It was just ten minutes of nine. Replacing the phone with one hand, Casler was putting his watch away, when its dial seemed to cloud. Odd, the lighting in this office to dim itself so suddenly. While Casler puzzled, the phenomenon was explained.

Close to the Head's ear came a whispered laugh. Looking up, Casler saw why the light had faded. Between him and the wall bracket had stepped a figure cloaked in black, whose eyes bored from beneath the brim of a slouch hat.

The Shadow!

Mere moments ago, Casler had said that he'd like to meet this personage in black. Here was his chance to test the unknown element. As proof that The Shadow wasn't supernatural, Casler saw the open door of the closet and realized that the weird visitor had simply been in hiding behind the hanging coats.

If so, The Shadow had heard everything.

That alone was enough to make Casler turn murderer. If he could kill The Shadow, the Head would be clear. Casler could call it a mistake, claiming that he'd thought the cloaked master was a criminal teamed with Ribold. After all, Casler was supposed to be calling headquarters for the police commissioner. He'd naturally think that anyone who interfered must be tied up with crime.

Those were reasons why Casler boldly whipped a revolver from his pocket and aimed it at The Shadow. But the final and most important reason was The Shadow's pose. Arms folded calmly, the cloaked accuser didn't look prepared for the surprise attack that Casler gave.

The surprise proved Casler's.

Up came The Shadow's hand, gunless and ungloved. Thumb and second finger snapped together, straight toward Casler's face. The result was a sharp explosion that sounded like a cannon shot. Two chemical pastes, meeting in the friction of thumb and finger, produced a burst of flame along with the huge report. (Note: Because The Shadow's explosive powder used in this instance is too dangerous for any but the most experienced to use, we do not reveal the nature of its formula, so that the inexperienced might not attempt this experiment and thereby suffer harm. – Maxwell Grant.)

The blast staggered Lloyd Casler.

Shaken, dazzled, the Hydra Head nearly lost his grip on the revolver while he tried vainly to glimpse The Shadow anew. All that Casler saw was blackness, enveloping himself and the desk against which he leaned. Living blackness that gripped Casler and delivered another of those weird laughs that came as a whisper of doom.

Blindly, Casler was reeling toward the door, the gun plucked from his hand. He thought he was getting clear of The Shadow, not realizing that he was actually being guided to further disaster.

THE HYDRA

For when Casler managed to unbolt the door, The Shadow gripped him again, sending him into a whirl that carried the Head away from the door, then back to it, into the clutch of Commissioner Weston and a pair of husky hotel detectives who had started for the office when they heard The Shadow's blast.

Before Casler could even begin to alibi himself, full attention was captured by The Shadow's laugh. The cloaked master was opening the top drawer of the desk to display a flat recording machine, which was the thing that The Shadow had ordered earlier.

Beside the device was a broken thread, which The Shadow had attached to the telephone cord. In jerking the cord from the edge of the drawer, Casler had broken the thread and started the recorder!

Now the machine was speaking back in Casler's own voice, disclosing him as the tenth Head of the Hydra and revealing that the zero hour was at hand for his thrust at the Antique Gallery. As that criminal confession ended, the laugh of The Shadow came anew.

Weston and his companions looked for the master in black. He was gone, through the outer door, which he had opened while their attention was on Casler's recorded statement. This laugh that they heard was the one that The Shadow had first given Casler. The recorder had picked up that sinister mirth.

The Shadow had left on a rapid trip to the Antique Gallery, a race against time, wherein he hoped to conquer crime at its own zero hour!

CHAPTER XV. WHEELS OF CRIME

ALREADY wheels of crime were on the move. Lloyd Casler, the tenth Hydra Head, had started them – human cogwheels, deft in evil. But they weren't the only wheels that were to produce results.

One wheel had already done its stint. It was the circular turntable of the recording device in the desk drawer. That wheel provided an odd aftermath, hard upon the mechanical laugh that symbolized The Shadow's recent departure.

The recorder issued a terrific bang! – a replica of the explosion with which The Shadow had startled Casler. This time the sound marked Casler's recuperation. He sprang away from the desk, shaking off the grip of the hotel detectives. Punching his way past Bardell in the doorway, Casler raced across the banquet room.

Ribold was too far away to block him. The fancy-dressed captain began barking orders, but no hands could stop Casler's frenzied surge.

Out through another door, down a stairway to the lobby, the frantic Head was off to safety.

Spurring Casler, came a mocking laugh. It was the final taunt that The Shadow had given during the office scene. Casler snarled happily as he heard it. This time, The Shadow wasn't here to back his powerful mirth. Yet the laugh still had merit.

Though Lloyd Casler didn't realize it, The Shadow was no longer lopping Hydra heads, unless dire circumstances should compel him. Instead, he was seeking to ensnare the various leaders while breaking up their crimes. For the way in which the Hydra branched was its most insidious feature.

Wheels were whirling The Shadow to his appointment with crime – the swift wheels of Moe's cab, which had been waiting outside the Hotel Metrolite ever since The Shadow went there. But with all Moe's efforts, the cab was some blocks short of its goal when the zero hour struck.

THE HYDRA

Visitors at the jewelry show heard the nine–o'clock clang of a great clock in a tower across the square. They were giving the time little heed, for the famed crown jewels were on display.

Beside the exhibit stood Inspector Joe Cardona, somewhat annoyed by the way some people mistook him for a guide. Joe kept gesturing to a withery old gentleman who was describing the various gems.

These were the crown jewels of many countries, brought to America for safety, placed on display that the proceeds from their show might go to the aid of refugees from those lands. Crowns, tiaras, scepters, rings, and even sword hilts, provided a glittering array of color from the closely guarded stand on which they reposed.

Diamonds were, of course, the main attraction, though rubies, emeralds, sapphires and some rare specimens of topaz were in abundance. The lecturer was finished with the diamonds and was pointing out the rubies.

Close to the display, Clyde Burke and Harry Vincent were noting the faces around them and finding none that was suspicious. As visitors to the show, these agents of the Shadow had so far failed to scent a trace of budding crime. Nor, for that matter, had Inspector Cardona.

"This immense gem," declared the lecturer, pointing to a great red stone that studded a sword hilt, "was long regarded as the world's largest ruby. A misnomer, because in the actual sense there is no true ruby. Garnets, carbuncles, other ruddy stones, were all termed rubies by the ancients.

"The Oriental ruby, most precious of the entire category, is properly a red variety of sapphire. Being the most valued of ruddy gems, it has claimed the title of ruby. If this great stone" – he gestured to the sword hilt – "were of Oriental origin, its value would be fabulous.

"Unfortunately, it is only a spinel, identified as such in recent years. A spinel is a gem stone found in various color varieties, among them red. So you are viewing not the world's largest ruby, but a fine specimen of spinel."

The repeated term was striking home to Cardona. Half aloud, Joe muttered:

"A spinel. Where did I hear that before? Spinel... spinet! One looks like a ruby and the other a piano. Spinet –"

With that, Cardona turned to look at the antiques, hoping he'd see the spinet. But there wasn't anything resembling a piano among the ancient furniture that was ranged to cover barren spots amid the showcases. Behind the exhibit of crown jewels, Joe saw a fancy, gold–decorated screen. Past the screen, he spied a corner of the six–by–ten packing box that contained the spinet.

Before more than a flicker of suspicion could cross Joe's mind, crime crashed through.

THERE was a roar from behind the screen, muffled only for a few seconds. Then, with a splintering smash, the front of the box ripped wide. Something avalanched forth, flattening the screen, and hurtled like a miniature juggernaut toward the display of crown jewels.

All the visitors dodged, with men's shouts and women's shrieks punctuating the process. The withery lecturer went away in a hurried dive. Harry and Clyde were among those who cleared a path as they would have for a raging bull. For the thing that was hurtling at them meant business.

THE HYDRA

It was a bantam automobile, spurting with a power that threatened mayhem to anyone who blocked its course!

This was the thing that truckers had brought into the Antique Gallery. Light in weight, four men could easily carry it on their shoulders. Instead of an old-fashioned piano, Cardona was seeing the latest type of midget car, a two-passenger coupe occupied by its advertised human quota.

Two Teeth of the Hydra!

The driver of the bantam car could have cut a vicious swath right through the witnesses, but he didn't. Instead, he jammed the brakes and the midget menace shrieked to a halt beside the display of crown gems. The door on the right flipped open and the man beside the driver scooped the plush drape that covered the jewel stand.

Bundling a vast fortune of gems as a waiter would gather up silverware when removing a tablecloth, the daring thief hauled his wholesale prize into the tiny car and slammed the door.

Only Cardona could have stopped it. He'd been standing at one side of the display, hence hadn't needed to dodge along with The Shadow's agents and detectives who were in the car's path. But Joe was handicapped very unfortunately. He was on the wrong side of the car. Before he could get around to the right, the door had banged shut.

The way ahead was clear. The midget machine had transformed itself from a mechanized menace into a getaway car. Two men made a valiant effort to stop it when they grabbed for its rear bumper. Those two were Harry and Clyde. If they'd gotten their grip, they could have lifted the rear wheels of the undersized car and kept them whirling uselessly.

But the car spurted off too soon. It was roaring down an aisle between showcases, ducking antique couches and other furniture while Cardona tried to stop it in his own way, with gunfire. Other detectives joined in with their revolvers, but no shots counted.

You could armor-plate a midget ear and supply it with bulletproof glass and tires, just as with a full-sized vehicle.

The Hydra had.

Deluged by bashing slugs, the peewee vehicle reached the street door, dented by impact. Like a hummingbird buzzing out through a window, it hopped the curb and spurted across the square. Mere sight of the tiny car was enough for Cardona's outside squad. All the machinery of the law went into motion to make the escape short-lived.

Patrol cars were wheeling in from side streets. Big armored trucks were heaving up to throw a blockade. But the midget car was as difficult to catch as a greased pig. It could take to sidewalks and it did, as soon as traffic snarled about it. Cut off from a corner, it wheeled through the park, trimming benches so closely that a group of bums went diving over the bench backs to escape the half-pint menace.

What it lacked in size, the bantam made up for in speed and maneuverability. All the while, its occupants were safe from the steady hail of lead that flew about it. One car alone, of all in the vicinity, could have given the midget a hard run. That was Moe's cab, arriving with The Shadow.

THE HYDRA

Moe would have found a way to cut off the thing's escape, for he could handle his hack like a stunt driver. But there were places where the cab couldn't go, and one of them was through the mess of traffic that cluttered the avenue from curb to curb. The sidewalks, wide enough for the midget auto, were just too narrow for the cab.

Still, crooks didn't seem to have a chance. Streets were blocked, and the sirens of motorcycles told that a new class of vehicles were in the chase. The trouble was that the cycle cops were vulnerable, which the men in the bantam weren't. A gun was chattering from the top of the small car's window when it neared the subway kiosk where workmen had begun a paint job.

With a rip like its departure from the crate, the tiny car carved through the flimsy barrier and zoomed down the steps into the subway, using lengthwise boards for a roadway, the very boards that the fake painters placed there beforehand!

MOTORCYCLES rallied to the chase. From side streets where they had dodged, they converged upon the kiosk, racing to see who could reach it first.

The cop who won wasn't happy over it. His motorcycle took a jolt and he disappeared down the opening, while others pulled up their two-wheeled steeds and tumbled to the street, in preference to a longer fall.

The men in the midget car had stopped at the bottom of the subway steps just long enough to grab the lower ends of the boards and haul them to the bottom. That done, they were on their way again, traveling underground.

Officers and plain-clothes men were dashing for the various subway entrances all around the square. They still thought they had a chance to trap the midget car where it was. Sooner or later, they would hound it to a subway platform. Police were getting to those platforms to make sure the crooks didn't hop from the car and run along the tracks or board a train.

Meanwhile, The Shadow's cab was gone.

To Moe's amazement, his black-cloaked chief ordered him to wheel from the beleaguered square and drive across to the other side of town. It wasn't until the trip was under way that Moe realized what it might produce.

Never calculating that the subway could have played the part it did, the police had treated the situation as a local one. They knew that two subways crossed at the square and that both were express stops. That meant several platforms on two levels would have to be covered. But the police had just about forgotten that those subways linked to a concourse that led to another subway on the opposite side of town!

When they remembered, it would be too late. On foot, they couldn't hope to overtake the tiny automobile. By the time they hauled motorcycles down the steps, a mechanized pursuit would be useless. Of all the trickery that the Hydra's men had shown, their final stroke was best – that of leading the police underground, only to learn that they should have stayed on the street and sent cars everywhere to cut off the crooks wherever they might reappear.

That was exactly what The Shadow planned, and he wasn't trusting to mere chance. The Hydra had gauged this thing so well that there was a chance it could have been handled too well. On the barren cross street, The Shadow's cab was making as good time as the midget car in the underground concourse. Therein lay his hope that the Hydra had itself provided a clue.

The Shadow's hunch proved justified.

Reaching the far side of town, Moe was up against a tough proposition. There were subway exits here in plenty, a dozen of them, some several blocks apart. How to find the right one, was the question; but it answered itself, thanks to the Hydra.

As Moe cruised rapidly in and about this sector, still following The Shadow's order, a closed exit came in sight. The Hydra had overdone its trick, by providing the tiny getaway car with a quick way out when it finished its underground trip. The painters had come here after finishing their first job, and in preparing the last lap for the getaway they had planted a marker for The Shadow!

From within the cab, Moe heard a whispered laugh. Needing no further order from The Shadow, Moe plunged the brake pedal and brought the cab to the spot where the crooks would soon emerge.

Wheels of crime were still in motion, rolling perpetrators to a new meeting with The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. WEALTH REGAINED

LIGHTS out, Moe's cab was a lurking thing in darkness, while his chief, The Shadow, waited. The cab had come by a straight route, whereas its midget prey had veered considerably. This accounted for the difference, but during the wait it was quite evident that the Hydra's strategy had completely baffled the law.

Sounds of sirens were so distant as to be practically negligible. Only The Shadow had guessed where the trail would lead. This time, The Shadow was ahead of crime!

To Moe, the game seemed as good as won, until he heard a singular whisper close behind him. It was The Shadow's warning tone, ordering Moe to keep low, which often meant that Moe would have to claw the floor boards. Such a warning promised shooting, which made Moe think that The Shadow's keen ear had heard the underground approach of the midget getaway car.

As Moe slid down into the seat, his last glance in the mirror showed him another cab pulling up behind his own. He realized then that The Shadow had looked even farther ahead. The arriving cab belonged to the Hydra. It was here for transfer purpose when the midget car arrived.

Almost inaudible was the soft thud of the rear door in Moe's cab. Absolutely invisible was the cloaked shape that slid to the darkened sidewalk and glided under the shelter of one cab back to the other. Mobsters had extinguished their lights while coasting up to Moe's cab. Now men were creeping out to slug the unfortunate hackie who had accidentally – so they thought – chosen their rendezvous as a parking spot.

Those Teeth of the Hydra never reached Moe's cab.

Blackness whirled literally among them. It was as if night itself had solidified to strike like an invisible thunderbolt. The guns that slugged were The Shadow's. They found targets with every stroke. Three thugs literally melted with hardly an outcry. Not one even found a gun trigger, for they hadn't intended to start shooting this soon.

In the cab up front, Moe heard The Shadow's low, triumphant laugh and popped up behind the wheel. No need laying low any longer, Moe knew.

Another cabby heard that strange mirth from the darkness where figures were mysteriously thudding the curb. He reached for a gun and thrust it through the window, this man in the Hydra's cab. A Tooth like the rest, he

THE HYDRA

was ready to do his bit for Head No. 10.

His bit was simply proving that he couldn't take it. In from the opposite window came a gloved hand that pressed a cold gun muzzle against the driver's neck. Wilting, the crook let his own gun clatter outside his cab. His hands were rising, when The Shadow ordered them down again.

Then, with harder pressure of his gun, The Shadow was ordering the fellow to get going, which the cabby did. How his hands managed to grip the steering wheel, was something quite remarkable; but the speed with which the cab shot away was to be expected. The driver simply let his foot jam to the floor and stay there.

Back at his own cab, The Shadow found Moe climbing anxiously out. Hearing his chief's whisper, Moe subsided, to learn why The Shadow had sent the other cab away. The Shadow simply stated that since only one cab was supposed to be waiting here, he'd sent the other away. Moe began to understand.

"And say, chief," declared Moe, "can those Blue Spots travel! They're a new job, those hacks. How they'll make dough, I don't know, with so many companies already in the business. I'll bet that guy you just chased still doesn't know how lucky –"

Moe broke off at a whisper from The Shadow, who was now inside the cab. There was a muffled roar below ground, a hard rising spurt, the clatter of boards that served as tracks. Then, like a jack-in-the-box, out popped the midget car that was bringing the crown gems!

SMASHING through the thin boards of the subway exit, the mechanical jackrabbit took a bounce across the sidewalk and stopped by the curb. Its doors popped open and out sprang its two-man crew, one carrying a large suitcase in which he had packed the royal jewels.

While he was dashing to the cab with it, the other crook shoved the front of the stalled bantam and sent the tiny car backward down the subway steps.

At that moment, the cab door was opening. The crook who shoved the bag inside let go of it and snatched for a gun. He didn't reach the weapon, nor did his lips finish the savage oath they started. An interruption came in the shape of an automatic, landing hard against the skull of the astonished jewel thief.

The other thug heard nothing because of the clatter that the bantam car was making as it zigzagged, unguided, down the subway steps. When the fellow turned, he saw the cab pulling away; at the same time, the chug of a motorcycle joined the wail of a patrol-car siren from a few blocks away.

This Hydra Tooth didn't realize that he was being given a chance for short-lived flight on foot, with peaceable surrender to the law. He thought he was being double-crossed by pals, who preferred not to wait for him, now that the police were coming to this side of town. Angrily, the crook pulled a gun and opened fire at the departing cab.

An automatic answered with a single stab. The Tooth reeled, wounded. The Shadow's shot was necessary, for with a few bullets more, his frantic foe would have found the window of the cab. Looking back, The Shadow saw his adversary sag beside the huddled figures who had been lying behind Moe's cab. The other man from the midget car was caved in the gutter.

This concluding episode had proven very rapid. The last shots came amid the echoes of the final crash from the midget car when it reached the subway platform. The wail of the approaching siren had halted just before the gunfire, hence the shots were heard.

THE HYDRA

As ill luck had it, a patrol car zoomed down the very street that Moe intended to take. When the cab veered to take a new route, the men in the patrol car saw it and the chase was on. Dodging one patrol car was a simple task for Moe, but by the time he did it, motorcycles were in the chase.

They were everywhere, those pests, passing word to each other that crooks had transferred to a cab, which didn't make it pleasant for The Shadow, considering that he didn't care to throw away a suitcase full of rare crown jewels. So he kept them, but with the knowledge that he would take the blame for the crime if found with such baubles in his possession.

Calmly, The Shadow guided Moe through devious routes that promised safety. Strange, how this cloaked fugitive could tell the exact locations of the pursuing vehicles. Time and again, Moe cut across a street thinking he was going right into a snare, only to see a motorcycle going the other way.

Usually, the cops spotted the cab, but they had to turn around to go after it, and by then, Moe was elsewhere. Cops were constantly overhauling the wrong cabs and stopping them, which helped a great deal; but there were still too many in motorcycles.

In fact, Moe felt that, for once, the game was through when The Shadow ordered him to wheel through a side street near the Times Square area. Even worse, The Shadow called for a stop midway through the block.

As Moe pressed down on the brake pedal, the cab slewed beside a limousine that was parked in front of a night club. Moe didn't hear what happened, nor did the drowsy chauffeur in the limousine. Out one window, in through another went a heavy suitcase of untold value. With that transfer of the crown gems from cab to limousine, The Shadow gave Moe the order for another spurt.

The motorcycle cops proved too pesky. Twenty blocks to the south, one of them overhauled the cab and inquired about its hurry. A second cop arrived and each yanked open a door. Moe gave an anxious look in back, then opened his eyes wide when he saw that his passenger was no longer The Shadow. Nor was there any suitcase.

In Cranston's guise, The Shadow was leaning back in the seat smoking a thin cigar. His cloak and hat were tucked away in a special drawer beneath the rear seat. He'd put his guns there, too, in case the cops decided to frisk him. But they weren't in a frisky mood.

"Say!" exclaimed one. "Here's the pal who handed us those tickets to the theater!"

"We want to thank you, mister," expressed the other. "What a party that turned out to be!"

The Shadow was shaking hands with both the cops. When they got around to the present question, he told them that he hadn't seen any cab that appeared to have crooks in it; at least, no such cab in flight. He'd noted a parked cab that looked suspicious, but the cops told him the one they wanted wouldn't be stopping anywhere.

"When you see the police commissioner," remarked The Shadow, "give him my regards. We're old friends, you know. In fact, I think I'll pick up my car and stop around to see him shortly. Maybe this very evening."

As the cab pulled away, the motorcycle cops went to a phone and called headquarters. They were told to report to Inspector Cardona at the Cobalt Club, where he had gone to see Commissioner Weston.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow was putting in a call around the corner. It was another of those Cranston to Cranston conversations that brought prompt results. Called to a phone booth in a night club, the real Cranston caught the drift of things. Margo Lane was finishing a dance with another partner when Cranston joined her

THE HYDRA

and suggested that they leave.

In the limousine, Margo almost stumbled over a suitcase, which Cranston promptly lifted to the seat beside him. He was smiling somewhat cryptically when Margo asked where they were going. She learned the answer after a northward trip, when the cab pulled up in front of the Cobalt Club.

Some motorcycle cops were coming out, and others were arriving on the street. They nodded to Cranston as he went by carrying the suitcase. Inside the club, Cranston and Margo reached the grillroom which Weston had turned into his headquarters. Interrupting a report by Inspector Cardona, Cranston planked the suitcase on the table and opened it.

Margo gasped at sight of the fabulous crown jewels, but her surprise was mild. Weston and Cardona were pawing through the gems, totally confounded, while motorcycle cops came flocking back at Weston's bellow. Then Cranston was explaining how he'd found the suitcase in his limousine, entirely by accident – a thing to which Margo could testify, and did.

There were two things that still puzzled Margo.

She couldn't understand how Lamont had turned himself into The Shadow, recovered the jewels for which the whole police force were searching, and still stayed around the night club as much as he had. Margo was sure she hadn't been absent from Lamont for more than a single dance. Whatever miracles he'd performed as The Shadow, he must have managed them in something less than ten minutes at a stretch.

Which would have caused Margo to decide that someone other than The Shadow had stifled crime tonight, except for the second fact that puzzled her.

That was: when Cranston found the suitcase in the limousine, he didn't open it. So how could he have known the gems were in it unless he had personally reclaimed them as The Shadow?

Again, Margo's case was mild.

As she and Lamont left the Cobalt Club to the congratulations of Cranston's friends, the traffic cops, two new officers arrived on motorcycles and alighted to learn the news. They happened to be the pair who had overhauled The Shadow's cab twenty blocks the other side of the street where the night club was.

They stared very hard at Lamont Cranston.

"So the guy did have the jewels!" exclaimed one. "And he brought them here!"

"That's what he meant when he said he was going to see the commissioner," put in the other. "It shows he was right all the time."

"But how did he get here ahead of us?"

"Say... now you're asking something! Don't that beat all?"

The two cops stared at the departing limousine as though they expected it to sprout wings and take off over the Empire State Building. The more they tried to explain the thing, the more it bothered them, considering that they'd lost but little time in coming to the Cobalt Club.

To those two cops, The Shadow's latest victory over the Hydra was dropping right out of mind. They knew that The Shadow could work wonders. But if they'd been asked to name the champion at such business, they'd have voiced their candidate as Lamont Cranston!

CHAPTER XVII. CRIME COMES C.O.D.

THE blue light glimmered in The Shadow's sanctum. Long, deft fingers were sorting through reports from agents. From one of those fingers gleamed a rare gem, a fire opal that changed from hue to hue. This stone, known as a girasol, wasn't a souvenir from the crown jewels that The Shadow had reclaimed.

Rather, this girasol that The Shadow had worn for years was the magnet that had attracted the other gems into his hands. For never did The Shadow fare forth without this strange talisman, which had carried him through threats of death that had seemingly required more than mortal effort to survive.

First of the reports were from Rutledge Mann. They went back to the death of Edmund Glencoe, a Hydra case that still was unidentified as such by the law. Mann was seeking data that would prove murder and robbery in that instance.

The evidence looked negative. The funds paid to Glencoe's estate had been used to purchase stocks in legitimate companies, as he provided. All the companies were doing well, their shares selling at a premium. Bardell and others were buying into them, and Mann's advice, as a broker, was that either The Shadow or Cranston should do the same.

Passing from that routine report, The Shadow found one from Moe. The cab had been in an accident and would need a few weeks for repairs. Substitute cabs were hard to find, so Moe was taking a job with a company for a while. He'd still be available when The Shadow needed him, but fares would count when ran up on the meter.

The Shadow's low laugh was whimsical as he finished that brief report.

Clippings on The Shadow's table told of his victory over the Hydra, and described the widespread hunt that the police were making for Lloyd Casler. The Shadow had already read those, and they didn't matter much. He preferred that Casler should be alive and at large, rather than have new Hydra Heads appear.

Hunted by the law, with most of his crew eradicated, Head No. 10 was Eyeless and Toothless. At most, he could still have only a few Ears left.

One more report was needed, from Clyde Burke. It hadn't arrived, so The Shadow reached for the earphones. Before he grasped them, a tiny light blinked, announcing a call from Burbank.

The contact man stated that Lamont Cranston was on the wire. The Shadow said to put the call through.

Phoning from his home in New Jersey, Cranston begged to be excused that evening. He felt his present popularity would handicap The Shadow. With the Hydra still a pressing menace, every motorcycle cop in Manhattan felt it a duty to convoy Cranston's limousine each time it appeared in town.

"I'm too much of a hero," complained Cranston. "I hope you settle this Hydra business promptly, so I'll be forgotten. What's more, I can't see Margo because she asks too many questions, and if I don't see her, she'll cook up more.

THE HYDRA

"I wish you'd take over a while, old man. It would be to our mutual interest. You can get around places in that cloak of yours without being recognized as me. So you won't be bothered by the motorcycle squad, and when you meet Margo you can give her a few answers which I can't."

Granting Cranston a deserved leave of absence, The Shadow resumed his chat with Burbank and inquired about Burke's report. He learned that Clyde was still at the commissioner's office and would probably be heard from shortly.

INTERWOVEN through all The Shadow's campaigns were many important twists. Clyde Burke's visit to the commissioner was one of them.

Clyde's effort to halt crime at its source during the jewel robbery had not escaped Cardona's notice. In return for services rendered, the inspector had promised Clyde an inside track on future stories.

Cardona was making good his promise, by inviting Clyde to a conference where he had a reasonable right to be, anyway, since he'd figured in one Hydra case. At Weston's office, Clyde had met Dustin Bardell, who was still at loss regarding members for his civic committee.

"It's impossible to trust anyone!" Bardell was declaiming, with one of those hand thwacks that struck the desk resoundingly. "When Lloyd Casler turned out to be a Hydra Head, my faith in friends was utterly destroyed!"

"Why not look elsewhere than among your friends?" queried Weston. "What about Hart Ribold?"

Bardell's eyes narrowed sharply. "Can you be serious, commissioner?"

"Certainly," returned Weston. "It was Casler who threw suspicion on Ribold. That ought to prove Ribold's integrity."

"It doesn't follow, commissioner," argued Bardell. "I still don't trust Ribold. He might have made away with that fund, if you hadn't appointed trustworthy men to keep it."

"If he had," declared Weston brusquely, "he'd have done crime his own way, not the Hydra's. We are sure that Ribold isn't a Hydra Head. Mark that to his credit."

Bardell wrote Ribold's name on a sheet of paper. Weston then told him to begin another list, headed by the names of Kerland, Luhrig and Aldan – judge, lawyer, and banker who were holding the World Wide Friendship Society fund.

"There are three good men," asserted Weston, "but we can keep them for the future. This evening, I shall confer with them regarding the fund. After that, they may be candidates for the civic committee. And now –"

The commissioner paused in a manner so impressive that Clyde knew his story was coming up. Taking some report sheets that Cardona handed him, Weston glanced from Bardell to Clyde and asked:

"Did either of you ever hear of Ira Ilchester?"

"Why, certainly," returned Bardell promptly. "Ilchester is noted for his philanthropic achievements."

"His latest being the gift of his very valuable library," added Clyde. "He turned it over to an upstate university. Before that –"

THE HYDRA

Bardell broke in with a recitation of Ilchester's earlier endowments, since they had begun years ago, at a time that Bardell remembered but Clyde didn't. However, the reporter was able to correct Bardell as he went along. Bardell had lost track of Ilchester's later philanthropies.

"That's all I need to bear," declared Weston. "It proves that Ilchester is more interested in humanity than in wealth. Therefore, we can accept whatever he says as valid."

Thinking that he was going to obtain a committee member, Bardell started to put Ilchester's name on paper, when Weston stopped him.

"Ilchester is no longer active," stated Weston. "We can not ask him to help us uncover Hydra Heads. We must do that for him. We must find at least one Head on his account. Ilchester has been threatened by The Hydra."

From Cardona's reports, Weston laid bare the Ilchester situation. The philanthropist had been hearing from a mysterious extortionist who liked to deal in the number twelve. Phone calls had come at noon and midnight, all bearing the same demand: that Ilchester pay the sum of fifty thousand dollars, or take unstated consequences.

True to the number twelve, the unknown persecutor had sent messages in packages delivered to Ilchester's home. Every dozen eggs included an extortion note. When Ilchester ordered new silverware, there had been a message with each twelve-piece batch. An encyclopedia which happened to come in twelve volumes contained a loose threat note in each book.

"What Ilchester fears is abduction," stated Weston. "He's been living in a bomb shelter that was dug in his cellar some months ago. He went so deep with the shelter that he struck an old water main and had to have it cemented over.

"He decided that was deep enough for a bomb shelter." With a slight smile, Weston produced a picture of the cellar. "But it wouldn't do against this terrorist whom Ilchester terms 'No. 12.' That title that Ilchester chose at random should suggest something to you."

"Another Hydra Head!" exclaimed Clyde.

"Head No. 12!" added Bardell. "The Heads have probably reached that total, since Casler's number was Ten!"

"That is my opinion," agreed Weston. "And Head Twelve has informed Ilchester that the deadline will be twelve o'clock the night of the twelfth. Which means" – the commissioner gestured to his calendar – "that Ilchester's limit will be midnight this very evening!"

CLYDE couldn't hold back his enthusiasm over such a story. Telling him he'd have to hold it for tomorrow's newspaper, Weston assigned Clyde to a meeting with Ilchester this evening.

Clyde went out to call his newspaper, the Classic. In the meantime Weston phoned the club to see if Cranston happened to be there.

Cranston wasn't, but before Weston could put in a call to New Jersey, his friend rang up. Needless to say, it was The Shadow, phoning after receiving a rapid report from Clyde. Repeating the details of the Ilchester case, Weston asked Cranston to visit the threatened man that evening.

THE HYDRA

The idea was this: Ilchester simply would not trust the police inside the house, fearing that No. 12 would notice their arrival and use extreme measures in retaliation. Between them, Weston and Cardona had wheedled him into inviting other guests. With people present, Ilchester's abduction would prove difficult.

Naturally, police would be on hand outdoors. Inspector Cardona was taking the assignment, with a few hand-picked men, the sort who could stay under cover. As for the party, if Cranston could suggest suitable persons to attend it, Weston would be grateful.

Stating first that he'd reach Ilchester's before midnight, The Shadow suggested that Harry Vincent be invited. Weston approved the choice, since Harry rated well with Clyde Burke, the two having teamed against crime at the jewelry show.

Adding that if Vincent had a girlfriend for the evening, her presence should be suitable, too, The Shadow hung up. The conclusion of his call irked Weston immensely.

"Cranston and that Lane girl again!" snapped Weston. "She's dated him this evening, so he wants other guests to bring their girlfriends, or he won't show up at Ilchester's."

"That Lane dame!" gruffed Cardona. "She's getting to be a milestone around Cranston's neck!"

"You mean millstone," corrected Weston. "Still, it doesn't matter. Both are heavy enough. Nevertheless" – an idea struck Weston – "some feminine charm would help the occasion. It would look like a genuine party to the Hydra's spies, if ladies were present. Call up Vincent, inspector, and ask him to bring a girl along."

LEAVING the sanctum, The Shadow was enjoying a laugh at Weston's partial expense. The Shadow's suggestion had solved a pressing problem. He'd decided how to postpone Margo's questions, perhaps to sidetrack them permanently. Through Burbank, The Shadow was instructing Harry to invite Margo to Ilchester's party.

Thus Margo wouldn't meet The Shadow until nearly midnight, by which time the situation would be tense. If the Hydra should take over the party in the shape of Head No. 12, enough things would happen to make Margo forget the previous episode involving Cranston.

Darkness had already settled, hence The Shadow found his cloaked garb to his liking. Contacting Moe, The Shadow found him driving a Blue Spot cab. As they cruised along, with the meter ticking very slowly, Moe talked about the taxicab company that was employing him.

"It's like you thought, chief," informed Moe. "There's a bunch of deadpans working for this outfit. A couple of dozen hacks on the street, with a zombie back of every wheel."

"Do they know your lingo?" queried The Shadow.

"How can I tell?" demanded Moe. "They don't open their faces except to eat. Take tonight, for instance. I never saw so many rush jobs. While we were in the one-arm lunch joint across from the garage, the checker pops in and orders five guys onto the street all at once. I was the only Blue Spot driver left in the hash house."

The Shadow was keeping a strict lookout for other Blue Spot cabs. He noted one parked in front of a pretentious apartment house on the avenue that Moe was following. Telling Moe to pull up beside the company cab, The Shadow added a question for his own driver to ask.

Moe piped it from alongside.

THE HYDRA

"Hey, Blue Boy! Seen any coolie cabs around?"

"How would I know?" retorted the deadpan in the other Blue Spot. "I ain't been down to Chinatown!"

Wheeling along, Moe spoke eagerly to The Shadow.

"That did it, chief!" declaimed Moe. "One crack at your suggestion and I found out what I couldn't get for three days! That guy isn't even imitation McCoy! If he was –"

"He wouldn't have confused a coolie cab with Chinatown," put in The Shadow. "He would have found out that the coolies are the drivers who are stationed at the ferries, so called because they work long shifts."

Moe nodded. He was particularly pleased when The Shadow told him to keep cruising this area. Moe sensed from his chief's tone that The Shadow's keen brain was thinking in terms of crime. Oddly, though, the evening was yet young, and this wasn't Ilchester's neighborhood.

Therefore, other crime must be brewing, though The Shadow had sound reasons for linking it with the Hydra. Considering the unique methods used by Hydra Heads, as displayed by Mance, Medor and Casler, The Shadow was again expecting something startling or novel.

Nor would The Shadow be disappointed on that score, should he manage to witness the scheduled events of evil. Tonight, crime was operating on a sound merchandising system. It was coming C.O.D.

Cash on delivery to the Hydra!

CHAPTER XVIII. HEADS OFF AND ON

A CAB was rolling slowly along a side street, its driver acting as if he'd lost his way. An impatient man in cape and high silk hat wagged a cane through the window to the driver's seat and snapped testily:

"Come, my man! Make up your mind, or I'll be late to the opera!"

The cab stopped under a light, while the driver thumbed a street guide. The blue spot on the door was quite conspicuous. At last the driver started again, remarking to his passenger:

"I'm headed the wrong way. I'll cut through this alley to the next street. That will fix us."

It fixed them, right enough. The alley widened into a courtyard, where lights were glowing. A man stepped up and opened the door, to press a gun against the passenger's chest. Coming out with raised hands, the man with the high hat gave a hopeful look back to the street from which they had come.

Therewith, the victim's hope became despair. There wasn't any street, nothing but a solid wall of brick! Then, still gasping with amazement, the silk-hatted man was piloted around the corner of the courtyard, to find other rueful prisoners like himself.

They were seated under a low roof fitted with large panes of frosted glass that covered the entire courtyard. All had come in Blue Spot cabs, for others of these vehicles were parked across the court. The cab drivers, men with hardened faces, were keeping guard with guns.

Tables were spread for a buffet supper, with thuggish waiters presiding, but none of the guests were inclined to eat. They knew one another, for they were all members of the World Wide Friendship Society. As for their

THE HYDRA

host, he was the fanciful Captain Ribold, wearing his honorary uniform with its customary display of medals.

"Relax, everybody," suggested Ribold, in his eager tone. "You are all worth more alive than dead. I am not treating you like goods delivered C.O.D., though in fact you are. I hired this forgotten dining garden for your benefit, so you may as well enjoy it."

A buzzer sounded and Ribold stepped to a deep wall to press a switch. Those near enough to the corner saw an amazing happening in the alley. The front wall rose inward on hinges to admit a Blue Spot cab. Once the vehicle was past, the baffler dropped again. Another piece of human baggage was delivered when the cab stopped.

Another cab was approaching along the street out front. This one contained a very observant passenger in the person of Hubert Luhrig.

The lawyer was shrewd enough to suspect that something was wrong. His driver had been acting queerly ever since leaving Luhrig's apartment house for the Cobalt Club.

Temporarily ignoring the driver, Luhrig reached for a revolver that he carried under special permit, and looked to see who might be lurking on the street. All appeared serene, particularly in front of a two-story brick house that was wedged between two other buildings. The only peculiar thing about the house was its lack of front steps. Its closed door was on the sidewalk level; the windows above showed drawn shades.

Just when Luhrig was beginning to relax, he saw the house front rising inward. A dummy house front, its wall of canvas painted to resemble brick, with door and windows!

Before Luhrig could shake off his surprise, the cab was wheeling into the alley that the dummy front had hidden. By the time the lawyer could haul his gun from his pocket, he had no chance to use it.

His cab was in a courtyard, where someone opening the door was displaying a gun of his own. Letting his revolver slide back in his pocket, Luhrig came out with hands raised. He was marched to the group over which Ribold presided.

"The visitor we have awaited," announced Ribold with a smile. "If others come, they will be welcome, but we can now proceed with business. My terms are simple. I want a ransom for your persons, in the form of funds already paid. I refer to the subscriptions that you so obligingly raised at my behest."

Ribold was speaking chiefly to Luhrig, who met him with an angry glare. To which Ribold responded:

"It may help matters if I introduce myself as Hydra Head Twelve. Our organization owns the Blue Spot Cab Co., whose drivers were assigned to pick you up and bring you here. My lookout is admitting only those cabs, so you have no chance of rescue.

"In fact, the police have no idea that this could even happen. I decoyed them to the home of a gentleman named Ira Ilchester. I threatened him with death at midnight unless he paid over a given sum. Whether I choose to collect from Ilchester has nothing to do with yourselves."

STEPPING to a table, Ribold picked up a telephone and handed it to Luhrig.

"Call Commissioner Weston," ordered Ribold, in a grating tone. "Tell him that you want to talk with Judge Kerland and James Aldan, the banker. State that you have checked my last report concerning disbursement of the fund; that you have contacted a majority of the society and that they agree I should receive the fund

THE HYDRA

tonight. Make it impressive, Luhrig, for yours is only one of the lives at stake, should you fail!"

Luhrig made the call, while mopping perspiration from his high forehead. The lawyer had a determined jaw and he kept thrusting it as he talked. Finished, Luhrig sat down heavily, too weak to glare.

"I settled it," he declared. "Kerland and Aldan took me at my word. The commissioner would have been easy, too, if he hadn't kept talking to that fool Bardell, who shouldn't have been there anyway. Bardell kept telling him that he shouldn't accept one man's say—so, not even mine.

The Teeth who served Hydra Head Twelve were moving forward with their guns. Ribold waved them back, then stepped to the wall to press the switch in answer to another buzz from the lookout. While a gun-laden Tooth was bringing in another prisoner, Ribold demanded:

"So how did you settle it, Luhrig?"

"The commissioner asked if others would call him," replied Luhrig. "I said they would. That satisfied him, or at least it will after he hears from enough of them."

Prisoners were crowding forward frantically, each anxious to make the first call. Using a gun as a pointer, Ribold picked the ones he thought could tell the most convincing tale. He gestured his first choice to the telephone, then stepped back to press the wall switch, for the buzzer had given another summons.

"When this red tape has been unwound," stated Ribold, "I shall leave you here while I collect the fund. How long you will all remain depends on circumstance. I am sure that Aldan will give me cash for those certified checks, so I can start for Lisbon at once. Perhaps by morning, you can be released. Possibly I may demand a longer wait —"

Ribold's speculations ceased. At that moment, the last cab had stopped. Something was happening to the Tooth who opened the door.

A chunk of blackness swooped like a living arm, drove the fellow's gun straight upward, and descended with a hard thud to his skull.

As the thug collapsed, blackness materialized into a cloaked fighter who sprang from the cab and whirled like a human gun turret, blasting the fake cab drivers who served the Hydra. The Shadow was in action at his mightiest, losing no time in withering that horde of foemen.

They were far too many for any single fighter to handle, but The Shadow had a capable ally. As a whole crew of gunners swept across the courtyard to gain a sure angle of fire against The Shadow, Moe spurted his cab into their midst. Thugs went flying right and left, save for a hapless few who were bashed against the wall. With a spin of the wheel, Moe was around again, looking for more human marks.

These Blue Spot taxis were good jobs, Moe learned. They could turn on a dime, and people simply couldn't dodge them. With The Shadow knocking off Hydra followers like clay pigeons, Moe was turning the remainder into sheep, literally herding them with his cab into the hands of prisoners, who were now on the loose and showing their mettle.

Ribold was wrenching himself from half a dozen hands. The Shadow, so far, hadn't time to deal with him. It was all the better, for The Shadow wanted to keep Head Twelve alive, rather than have the Hydra sprout two others like him.

THE HYDRA

But Ribold was loose, aiming at his cloaked foe. As the Head fired, The Shadow faded, half faking a fall to make Ribold forget other foemen in his overzeal.

Luhrig saw The Shadow's falter and misunderstood it. Whipping out the gun that Ribold didn't know he had, Luhrig poured close-range shots into the murderous Head.

As Ribold struck the cement court, riddled with bullets, Luhrig gave a grateful cry to see The Shadow rising. By then, battle was ended. Dead, wounded, captured, the Hydra's men had met with complete disaster.

THE SHADOW gestured Luhrig to the phone. Pocketing his gun, the grim-jawed man put in a prompt call to the commissioner and told him the truth about Ribold, adding that Head Twelve was dead.

By then, The Shadow was placing the Hydra's followers in batches and pointing the members of the World Wide Friendship Society to their cabs.

With former passengers as drivers, the Blue Spots wheeled out to the street, The Shadow standing with one hand on the switch, the other keeping a gun turned toward the line of huddled prisoners, whose own guns were heaped on the other side of the court.

"The commissioner is coming right over," announced Luhrig. "I told him he would find an open alley when he arrived. He is bringing men to take away the prisoners. Kerland and Aldan are coming with him."

With a low laugh of approval, The Shadow moved away, leaving the switch to Luhrig, whose eyes followed the mysterious cloaked being with an expression of full admiration. The last of the cabs was gone, with the exception of Moe's. The Shadow's driver followed his chief along the row of prisoners, awaiting new orders from him.

The telephone bell began to ring. Turning, The Shadow saw Luhrig leave the switch to answer it. Finishing his patrol, The Shadow returned to the near end of the row. Luhrig was putting down the telephone as The Shadow gave the prisoners another glance.

And then – close by The Shadow's ear came a voice, a low harsh tone that carried strange foreboding. It said:

"You did me a good turn, Shadow. I appreciated it when it happened, but matters are different now. The Hydra is too big for you to ever squelch. We both know its way: how its remaining Heads appoint new ones whenever such a member dies."

A revolver was pressing between The Shadow's shoulders to emphasize the words to come.

"I have just heard from the Hydra," the harsh voice continued. "I have been offered the post of Head Fourteen. Any man would be a fool to refuse such a proposition, especially when he is in a position to immediately dispose of the Hydra's only menace. I am no fool, Shadow!"

The speaker was Hubert Luhrig! Loyal through it all, Luhrig had accepted the insidious offer of the Hydra to become one of the replacements for the very Head that he himself had killed, Hart Ribold!

Only the Hydra could have inspired such double-dyed treachery in any human. Ready to serve his manifold master, Luhrig meant his threat of death.

Hard upon his victory over Ribold, The Shadow was on the verge of defeat and doom, both to be delivered by Hubert Luhrig, Hydra Head Fourteen!

CHAPTER XIX. CRIME TRIES TWICE

ONE question was pounding through The Shadow's brain: why didn't Luhrig deliver the death shot?

It was a question that must be answered instantly; yet, for once, The Shadow groped. The Hydra menace had multiplied to so incredible a degree that answers simply wouldn't seem to come. Then, like a flash, The Shadow saw the answer.

It was pacing the courtyard in the person of Moe.

Luhrig was holding The Shadow's fate in abeyance until he'd be sure of getting Shrevvy, too. As a Hydra Head, Luhrig wanted a profitable future, not quick death as vengeance for The Shadow's. Moe's handling of the juggernaut cab had given Luhrig respect for the cabby's ingenuity. He was waiting for Moe to pace to the proper angle and the right range, where a quick shot would get him after The Shadow was finished.

And Moe was on his way to the fatal spot, at this moment only a few paces short of it!

If The Shadow had whirled, he'd have done something Luhrig wanted. Cleverly, the newly appointed Head had let his gun recede, so The Shadow couldn't catch it with his shoulder blade while starting a spin.

There was only one other course. The Shadow took it on the instant, though it was something that Luhrig preferred. With a long fling, The Shadow dived to the cement courtyard ahead of Luhrig's gunshots.

Perfect for Luhrig. With three shots from his reloaded gun, he'd surely bag The Shadow and have a clear aim at Moe. The courtyard was wide open. It didn't have a single spot of shelter. At least, so Luhrig thought. In becoming an inhuman Hydra Head, he had forgotten the human element, if it could be termed such.

As Luhrig's first shot whined above The Shadow's head, the black-cloaked diver veered into the ranks of the nearest prisoners, those fake cab drivers who had served as Hydra Teeth. He was clutching two of them as Luhrig's next bullet chipped the cement, this shot grazing The Shadow's leg.

Then the cloaked fighter was up and around, two struggling men between himself and Luhrig before the Head could fire the third and fatal shot!

The Shadow didn't keep these men as human shields. They were still too active. Instead, he used them as missiles, heaving them hard at Luhrig. Then The Shadow was wheeling away, bringing his own guns into action, while Luhrig, half dragging the men who had encountered him, was making for the pile of discarded guns.

Half a dozen hitherto helpless Teeth were piling for The Shadow, clutching him frantically to destroy his aim. As The Shadow flung them off, they dived for the gun heap to become Teeth again. Servers of a man they recognized as a new Hydra Head, Hubert Luhrig!

It was battle all over again, this time with no aid for The Shadow. Whipping loose, the cloaked fighter thrust Moe into the cab, but his aid was helpless, for the vehicle was pointed out into the alley. Moe heard The Shadow's quick command, "Get started!" but he was loath to obey.

Then The Shadow was doing the amazing. He was among the tables, jabbing shots from behind them. As Luhrig dodged behind a screen of followers, The Shadow planked one table on another and sprang on both, carrying a chair to top the pyramid. He was short on bullets and men were almost at the tables, pointing guns upward to clip their black-clad foe, when The Shadow delivered a single, timely shot.

THE HYDRA

He aimed it for one of the big glass roof panes. His shot cracked the square just above the heads of aiming foemen. Down came the shattered mass of heavy frosting, its chunks felling the men who didn't dive away. Even Lührig was forced to dodge from the spot that he had reached.

That was their last chance at The Shadow. A spring from upper table to chair; then, like a trick balancer, The Shadow was tumbling the pyramid forward. Down came the furniture at other aiming men, while The Shadow's hands, swooping upward at a forward angle, caught the edge of the empty frame from which he had shot the glass and took himself up through, and out, with a strong lift of his forearms!

A dozen feet to that roof, which seemingly could give no exit. The Shadow had cut three fourths of the distance with his improvised pyramid, and chopped an outlet which he first used as a missile. His final launch was simplicity itself. He was gone while enemies were still taking the brunt of the final missiles, in the form of tables and chairs that he had toppled at them!

And Moe was gone, too, spurting his car through the alley. There was a note close to accusation in The Shadow's parting laugh, which Moe took as a personal rebuke for not obeying orders. Straight through the wall that looked like brick but wasn't, Moe hurled his car, to learn why The Shadow had wanted him to go.

Weston and the police cars had arrived. The barrier being shut, the fake house front had fooled them. They didn't know how to reach the source of gunfire. Sight of Moe's cab ripping out through brick-painted canvas told the police the proper place to go.

The patrols wheeled into the courtyard. There, frantic crooks were bringing more than panic on themselves. They were shooting at the glass roof, hoping to clip The Shadow, but they were only bringing frosted glass down upon one another.

They couldn't find The Shadow, because he was using the simple system of moving to the squares that were broken by gunfire. Trying new panes all the while, crooks were forgetting the blackened blocks that were perfect blending spots for The Shadow.

Of those who wheeled to meet the arriving police, only one man was dangerous. He was Lührig, the new Hydra Head. Spotting Weston, Lührig aimed point-blank, but never fired. From an empty space above, The Shadow staggered Lührig with the last shot from his otherwise empty guns. As Lührig reeled, policemen flattened him among his sagging followers.

Better to have left him wounded from The Shadow's bullet. Two new Hydra Heads would crop up to replace dead No. 14!

DURING the progress of this second garden party, the siege had lifted at Ilchester's. Guests, among whom were Clyde Burke, Harry Vincent and Margo Lane, had been humoring old Ira Ilchester and finding him a responsive but wheedly old gentleman.

The party was being held in Ilchester's first-floor parlor when Inspector Cardona shouldered into the house. At first, Ilchester had shown panic, but when he learned that Hydra Head Twelve was dead, he became elated.

A keen old man with sharp face and bright, beady eyes, Ilchester had craned his neck forward, one hand to his ear, while Cardona related the facts concerning Hart Ribold.

Knowing nothing about the prompt way in which Hubert Lührig had accepted appointment as another Hydra Head, Cardona bluntly announced that the menace was permanently ended. Which, in Ilchester's language,

THE HYDRA

called for a celebration. He sent his butler down to the cellar for some of his best wine.

The wine had just arrived when Ilchester received a phone call. He answered it and chortled happily. Laying the phone aside, he said he'd received new word from Commissioner Weston, corroborating Cardona's tidings. But Ilchester's glee soured when he saw the bottles that the butler had brought.

"Bah! These are not the best!" snapped Ilchester. "We can choose better for ourselves. To the cellar, everyone, to take your choice of the best that we can find!"

When they reached the cellar, Ilchester smiled. He pointed to a flight of narrow steps and beckoned. They followed the sharp-faced man down into the bomb shelter that he had built. It was a square room, supplied with all the comforts for a long stay. Gesturing his guests to chairs, Ilchester paced over to the far wall.

With a smile at his own expense, Ilchester faced a square of cement which looked quite new. It was where his diggers had struck the old water main, he said. Though no longer in use, the pipe was still city property, hence it had to be covered again.

"And to think," declared Ilchester, "that I intended to stay cooped up in this horrible hole! Why, I even had these!" From a rack on the wall, he produced a pair of long-barreled revolvers. "I kept them here thinking I would need them for my self-defense.

"But that time is over. Really over." Ilchester chortled as he cocked the loaded guns. "Because now I am the hunter, not the hunted. More than that" – the old man's eyes were narrow slits, his tone a ferocious gloat – "I have already trapped my prey. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Hydra Head Fifteen!"

LISTENERS didn't believe it until they made slight motions. Then Ilchester became so threatening with the guns that they subsided.

Ilchester laughed in gritty style as he looked over his human prizes. There were four who counted: Inspector Cardona first; next Burke, the troublesome reporter; third, the chap Vincent, who had meddled with the Hydra's business, too.

Finally, Ilchester's cunning eyes settled on Margo Lane. She was a close friend of Lamont Cranston, reputed millionaire. For Margo alone, Ilchester could demand a sizable ransom. The look that he gave the others so belittled them that they felt themselves slated for death, rather than belonging in Margo's category.

Back and forth, with short paces, Ilchester's feet clicked on the cement, but always his thin hands were steady with their guns, while he declaimed more for his own amusement than the information of his prisoners:

"I was wealthy once. Very wealthy." Ilchester's features mingled smiles and frowns. "So wealthy that I became a philanthropist. A bad mistake, for it made me a forgotten man. I might as well have been dead, with my name engraved on a tombstone, as to have it placed on buildings which my money had endowed.

"My fortune dwindled from many causes. Where, then, was my share of wealth? Gone into things for which I had no use. My last endowment, that library of mine! Bah! I would have sold it, but the prices offered were insults. I had no room for it, having been forced to sell my country mansion. So I gave my books away."

The guns were quivering in Ilchester's hands, but not because his grip had weakened. Weapons seemed eager of their own accord, like deadly fangs of snakes about to strike.

THE HYDRA

Harry and Clyde were exchanging looks with Cardona. They were ready to rush those guns, though chances were that two men would be doomed. The third might make it before Ilchester could again cock one of the old-fashioned weapons.

"Then came the Hydra," spoke Ilchester, "as personified by Head No. 12. The Hydra, hungrily demanding what money I had left. I feared... and I admired. The Hydra was honest in its way. It didn't wheedle for funds and then forget me. It asked for them outright.

"The Hydra must have known my thoughts. When the twelfth Head was lopped tonight, the others got together. They needed new Heads and they considered me, because as a threatened man I was in the very position to turn the game about. I could turn guests into prisoners and demand a ransom by merely cocking these guns.

"That phone call I answered wasn't from Commissioner Weston. It was from the Hydra, offering me the chance that I accepted. I shall have wealth equal to my former dreams! Crime – even murder – why should I forego it? I have experienced everything else. With the Hydra there can be no penalty. Because by now the Hydra's only dangerous enemy is dead. I mean The Shadow!"

That was enough for the trapped men. Their glances said one word:

"Now." Leaving Margo by the steps, the three men charged. Clyde and Harry were ahead of Cardona, but not because Joe wanted it that way. They were simply quicker on the take-off, that was all.

A take-off to doom!

For with the moment of their lunge, Ilchester thrust his guns at Harry and Clyde respectively. Before they'd covered three paces, the new Hydra Head fired both weapons point-blank at his victims!

TREMENDOUS was the blast, far greater than a double discharge of revolvers could produce. Like the explosion at Glencoe's, this one rocked the premises. Only stone walls could have stood its force, which they did. But cement gave, the thin layer beneath Ilchester's feet. It sprouted upward like the mushroom puff of a fired oil well, and Ilchester went with it.

The man of intended murder seemed to fly apart. His guns were scaling to the ceiling as they flashed. Harry and Clyde were hurled to the wall, not by the impact of bullets but by the concussion from the floor. They found themselves on the floor beside Margo and Cardona, staring at the whitish smoke that issued in grotesque shape from the great gap in the cement.

The white cloud cleared. Blackness replaced it in the shape of a rising form. There stood The Shadow, up through the hole that he had blasted with a well-placed charge of explosive. He'd come to Ilchester's after his fray with Luhrig, knowing quite well what he might find there.

Instead of wasting effort upon the cellar door that Ilchester had barred above the stairs, The Shadow had remembered the old water main. He'd crawled through it, and listened to Ilchester's threats and paces while setting the charge that could alone effect the rescue of four helpless prisoners.

The way above was open, for the upper door was bolted from this side. The Shadow gestured his friends along that route, while he returned to the underground tunnel from which he had arrived. As the four ascended the steps to freedom, they heard the strains of a hollow, deep-toned laugh.

Regretful mirth, The Shadow's. Not so much for Ira Ilchester, who had voluntarily accepted his course of evil, as for Hydra Head Fifteen, which the dead man represented. For Ilchester's death would bring another duo to the many-brained monster of crime.

Tonight, in winning three triumphs over the Hydra, The Shadow had actually added four future tasks to the already formidable campaign that he had undertaken.

Without a doubt, the greatest foe that The Shadow had ever met was that one composed of many: the Hydra.

CHAPTER XX. THE STROKE SUPREME

LAMONT CRANSTON was reading up on mythology. He already knew that the Hydra was a many-headed monster, but he wanted to know what was done about it in ancient times. Cranston learned that a gentleman named Hercules had strangled the creature, more or less.

So Cranston went to the telephone and called Burbank, who connected him with The Shadow. In identical voices they discussed the Hydra, and Cranston learned a few things about the modern model. He had a chat on the subject later, with Richards, his valet.

"About the Hydra, Richards –"

"A horrible creature, Mr. Cranston," agreed Richards. "Such a plethora of information that one hears on the radio. Yet no one seems to know what to do about it."

"I do," asserted Cranston. "It must be strangled."

"But how, sir, with so many Heads?"

"That's just it, Richards. Those Heads have been deprived of Eyes, Ears and Teeth. Now is the time to defeat them."

"Very good, sir," Richards acknowledged. "I trust that you will voice your opinion to the civic committee."

Something other than the civic committee was at that moment busy on the Hydra situation. The Shadow was in his sanctum, studying reports from agents. To those from Clyde and Harry, The Shadow added another, the mutual report of Cliff Marsland and his side-kick, Hawkeye, who covered the underworld.

What The Shadow had told Cranston seemed definitely true. Shorn of lesser workers, the Hydra was dependent solely on its Heads. They would soon grow the needed members with which they saw, heard, and bit their way to supercrime. The time to stop the Hydra was now.

Rutledge Mann had submitted his usual report. Recommended investments were doing better than before. New stocks were being issued in all the companies that Glencoe liked. But The Shadow was interested in all reports only so far as they pertained directly to crime.

Leaving the sanctum, The Shadow paid a Cranston visit to Weston's office. Bardell was there with a list of names for his committee. He'd just about given up after Luhrig and Ilchester had swung over to the Hydra. Then, on the basis that no men were perfect, Bardell had formed his committee anyway.

"Nothing can be lost," declared Bardell, "and much can be gained. Our only danger is that the Hydra may threaten us. On that account, we have not yet decided upon a meeting place."

THE HYDRA

The Shadow pondered over that one; then, in Cranston's casual style, he stated that he could find one. Indeed, he could think of one already, the roof garden of the old Hotel Marmora. It was being remodeled into a private dining room and would probably be available whenever the committee required it.

When Weston suggested tomorrow evening, The Shadow called the Marmora and found that it could be arranged. The rest of that day he spent with his agents. There were four that he could use: Harry, Clyde, Cliff and Hawkeye.

Burbank and Moe being required for their present duties, The Shadow wanted another, because for his particular purpose he required five. So he sent for Miles Crofton, an aviator who had served him on other important occasions.

That done, The Shadow made provision for a sixth man, one whose special abilities would prove very useful.

LATE the next afternoon, The Shadow entered Moe's cab. Not the Blue Spot, but the old reliable, again in service. A week had passed since the Ribold–Luhrig fray, and out of that entire period Moe had but one thing to report to his cloaked chief. The incident had occurred today.

"Got rid of the Blue Spot this afternoon," said Moe. "Took it out for another cruise and picked up a fare who steered me to a repair shop. They were buying cabs. Paid me cash on the line, no questions asked."

Moe exhibited the cash in question, a fistful of it. Quite interesting, since Moe hadn't owned the Blue Spot cab. The Shadow's laugh anticipated further facts from Moe. They came.

"They had some other hacks there," continued Moe. "All new paint jobs. Looks like they've been calling in all that were left. They thought I was another guy named Joe who didn't get around to that big brawl where you staged the cleanup."

Modest of Moe to overlook the helpful part that he had played in the courtyard fight. But The Shadow was more interested in what had happened today. Questioning Moe, he learned that the repair shop where the Blue Spot cabs were being camouflaged occupied a portion of a warehouse belonging to the Diana Storage Co. Apparently the repair shop had served previously as a garage for the trucks that served the storage company.

But there were no trucks there any longer. Nothing but the cabs that were undergoing transformation. Again The Shadow laughed. He could deal in camouflage, too, as he intended to prove before this night was over.

Becoming Cranston, The Shadow stopped at the Cobalt Club, to find Commissioner Weston all enthused about tonight's committee meeting. When The Shadow casually stated that he wouldn't be there, Weston glared indignantly, then changed his expression when he thought he understood.

"I know you're not on the committee, Cranston," declared the commissioner. "But you will have to help me explain matters to the members. Bardell has chosen a dozen men of repute, who have heard only vaguely of the Hydra menace. Your recovery of the crown gems is something they would like to hear about, firsthand.

"Similarly, I think Miss Lane's testimony would help, since she was the target of crime in the Ilchester episode. And so" – Weston's eyes showed a twinkle – "I would appreciate it if you would bring Miss Lane to the meeting. It wouldn't chance that you have a date with her this evening?"

It chanced that Cranston had. That was all arranged, with The Shadow fishing for the very invitation that Weston extended. But it wasn't The Shadow who would take Margo to the Hotel Marmora. The assignment belonged to the real Lamont Cranston.

THE HYDRA

The Shadow notified his double in a most unusual way.

When the phone rang at Cranston's, both Richards and his master answered it, one downstairs, the other on the second floor. When he heard Richards speak, Cranston hung up, as he left most of his calls to the valet.

Strolling to the top of the stairs, Cranston saw Richards coming from the telephone. Looking upstairs, the valet inquired:

"Were you jesting, sir?"

"About what, Richards?"

"That phone call," explained Richards. "There was no one on the wire. Except you, sir, using the extension phone. I distinctly heard you say 'tallyho' before you hung up."

For a moment, Cranston's eyebrows raised. Then:

"An odd habit of mine," he said. "Acquired from my fox-hunting friends in England. Curious how it cropped up on me. By the way, Richards, tell Stanley to bring the car. I am going into town at once."

Tallyho!

The token that The Shadow had promised. The word that would bring Cranston to the kill of some thing more than a mere fox. In this case, it could apply to one creature only: the Hydra!

WHEN the commissioner's official car arrived at the old Hotel Marmora, it was accompanied by a flock of motorcycles, whose riders were again conveying their friend and hero, Lamont Cranston, along with the police commissioner. Margo Lane also alighted, and the trio entered the hotel.

Again, Weston thanked Cranston for selecting this meeting place. By stationing detectives in the lobby, Weston was protecting the upper floors, including the roof dining room.

Inspector Cardona joined the group and went up in the elevator, since he was to testify before the civic committee, too. At the top floor, the arrivals were received by an African attendant in a resplendent uniform. Hired specially for this occasion, he bowed them to the remodeled dining room, where Dustin Bardell and the rest of the committee awaited.

Placed beside Cranston, Margo glanced about at the decorations of the new dining room. It bore no resemblance to an old-fashioned roof garden, the sort of place that would have full-length windows opening outdoors. Instead, it was like a modern night club, sleek and streamlined.

An oblong room, with smooth, unbroken walls done in tasteful style, a compromise between plain papering and mural paintings. A plain pattern would have made the place boxlike, whereas murals would be too garish. So the decorator had chosen an ornamental wallpaper bearing pictures of old-time ships in New York harbor.

The same motif was repeated all about the room, there being just enough variety in the design to make it interesting. Margo was counting the masts on an old frigate, when Cranston quietly informed her that the meeting had been called to order.

Amid the dozen committee members, one man had risen: Dustin Bardell. Bluntly, he was voicing the sentiments of his companions, who listened approvingly, their faces firm with dignity. What Bardell had to

say was very pointed.

"Crime has gone beyond all bounds," declared Bardell. "We concur in the opinion that the law is unable to cope with the monster known as the Hydra. For example" – he swung to Weston – "can you tell me, commissioner, how many Hydra Heads are still active?"

Weston shook his head.

"You are admitting negligence," snapped Bardell. "I have been able to compute the number. My records show that Heads Two, Three, Five and Six are men who have purposely disappeared from sight. Heads Four, Seven, Ten, Twelve, Fourteen and Fifteen have been eliminated, not by you, commissioner, but by The Shadow.

"Allowing for five Heads with numbers lower than Fourteen, six new appointments after Ribold's death; eliminating two, namely Luhrig and Ilchester, the Hydra should by now have four more. Five and four are nine in all – do you follow me, commissioner?"

Weston was using his fingers on which to count, and Joe Cardona was trying to help him, which mixed them both. Bardell gave a pleased chuckle.

"I know more about the Hydra than you do, commissioner," declared Bardell. "For instance, it has occurred to me that Head No. 1, the original Hydra, is still at large and active."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Weston. "Why, then the Hydra would actually be embodied in a single man, the rest of the so-called Heads being his lieutenants. I couldn't believe that, Bardell, not without proof!"

Hands in his pockets, Bardell bowed. As his face came up, it displayed a vicious glare, as fiendish a gloat as any that Weston and his companions had ever seen. Bardell's eyes glinted like steel, as did the object that his hand whipped from his pocket. For the object in question was steel. It was a revolver.

The gun's sparkle flashed a signal for others. The rest of the committee men were on their feet, producing guns. Those prominent persons chosen by Bardell to aid in a campaign against crime were showing their preference for evil.

Bardell was Head No. 1, the real Hydra! These others were the remaining Heads that he had appointed to replace those lopped by The Shadow. An organization by one superbrain, the Hydra, with lieutenants to whom that leader had granted title equal to his own.

Such was the Hydra, personified by Dustin Bardell Co. Deprived of lesser workers, the Heads were taking over on their own. This was crime's stroke supreme!

CHAPTER XXI. TOO MANY SHADOWS

WHILE the many Hydra Heads held their prisoners helpless, Dustin Bardell explained the reason for his supreme stroke. He began with a few preliminary remarks, delivered in caustic style.

"New York needs a new police commissioner," decided Bardell. "You have been very inefficient, Weston, as we, the Hydra, are qualified to judge. As for your ace inspector, we have found Cardona stupid but troublesome. So we shall dispose of you both."

THE HYDRA

Looming gun muzzles backed the Hydra's threat, but Bardell did not give the order for slaughter. He preferred more subtle methods of delivering death to helpless victims. Besides, he had more to say.

"However, commissioner," the chief Head gloated, "you must not flatter yourself with thoughts of importance. We could put up with you and Cardona, if we chose. We staged this stroke for the prime purpose of trapping our only dangerous enemy, The Shadow!"

With that, Bardell turned his eyes directly upon Lamont Cranston!

The way Cranston took it was remarkable. Glancing toward her companion, Margo was amazed at his calmness. She'd always thought that in a pinch like this, Cranston would galvanize into The Shadow in a trice. Instead, he was blandly returning Bardell's gaze.

"Come, Cranston!" sneered Bardell. "You know that Willard Mance was Head No. 4. We finally learned that he went to your home after he had murdered Edmund Glencoe. Which proves that Mance had marked you as The Shadow!"

"So that was it!" remarked Cranston. "I wondered why Mance talked about a showdown over something that I couldn't understand."

"Therefore, you killed Mance –"

"Because I had no other choice. The elephant gun went off and that was the end of him. When I learned he was already supposed to be dead, I hushed up the matter."

Cranston's reference to an elephant gun left Bardell somewhat puzzled. Thinking in terms of .45 automatics, Bardell was finding it hard to visualize Cranston as The Shadow. Then:

"You can't deny your identity," asserted Bardell. "Your recovery of those jewels was another give-away."

"A mere accident," insisted Cranston. "You see –"

"Your broker kept snooping into my investments," interrupted Bardell. "You should have learned enough to know that I controlled the companies in which Glencoe had promised to buy stock. I was getting mine from Glencoe while Mance was getting his!"

Cranston simply sat speechless. He hadn't an idea that any such thing was going on. The Shadow should have told him.

"I covered my trail well," continued Bardell, "until the night when Ribold died. Knowing that you were The Shadow, I tried to finish you, Cranston. I was with the commissioner when he heard of Ribold's death, and I stayed at the club when he left.

"From there I phoned Luhrig and Ilchester, appointing them Hydra Heads. One was to kill you, Cranston, the other to trap the Lane girl, in case the first missed out. You finished them both, and from that time on, you should have marked me as the Hydra. Furthermore, there are many other heads working for me, that you do not know about!"

The fact was self-evident. Only Bardell could have signed up Luhrig and Ilchester so promptly after Ribold's death. What amazed the listeners, Cranston included, was that The Shadow hadn't divined those facts himself. True, no one else had grasped them, but analyzing such matters was The Shadow's specialty.

THE HYDRA

Perhaps The Shadow did know!

If so, he had been letting Bardell live on sufferance until the present. Worried by the thought, Bardell had staged his present trick of forming a committee all of Hydra Heads. If only The Shadow could have foreseen that prospect, too!

Apparently The Shadow hadn't. There was no place for him to be concealed in this room of barren walls, with its heavy, bolted door. Hence Bardell, confident that The Shadow would not miss this meeting, was more than positive that Cranston was The Shadow.

Venom flashing from his eyes, the Hydra could wait no longer to dispose of his arch-foe. With a snarl that promised death, Bardell thrust his gun toward Cranston.

FIERCE, challenging was the mighty laugh that interrupted, a mirth so unmistakable that Bardell forgot his prey for the moment. A dozen Hydra Heads were turning, all with guns, hoping to deal with a lone foe. Bardell's theory regarding Cranston was therewith rejected. The Shadow's laugh hadn't come from Cranston's lips.

A laugh from nowhere!

Such was the effect, until Bardell broke the spell by snarling across his shoulder to Cranston:

"Another trick of yours, Shadow! You can't be nowhere any more than you can hope to be everywhere."

Bardell was wrong. Amid the snarled statement, The Shadow arrived from nowhere and appeared everywhere. The echoes of his laugh were drowned by surrounding crashes as the side walls of the room broke open, delivering six fighters cloaked in black.

Six Shadows, three to a wall, each with a brace of automatics. Twelve guns in all, to match the weapons of the Hydra. Those guns talked ahead of their rivals. Automatics were jabbing deadly tongues of flame, while revolvers were merely glinting in the light, as their owners swung them to aim.

This was The Shadow's way of strangling the Hydra. Bringing its Heads together, he was smothering them en masse with a blanket of gunfire. If the Hydra could have twelve Heads, The Shadow could supply six Selves. It stood proven.

Every revolver had been beaten to the shot. Each of six Shadows had picked a pair of Hydra Heads. Only Bardell remained unscathed, for he had dodged instead of trying to shoot. Now, Bardell was springing to the door, unbolting it under a shield of crippled lieutenants, those who had managed to detach themselves from their more seriously wounded companions.

Weston and Cardona were after the remnants of the villainous tribe. Cranston remained calmly at the table, restraining Margo. Quite foolish, Cranston thought it, to block off six avenging Shadows from their prey. Weston and Cardona were too impetuous.

Yanking the door wide, Bardell dashed through. Six other Heads were behind him, but their dash didn't last. They wagged guns back at Weston and Cardona, who ducked for cover; but the delay suited the giant African who was standing outside the door.

His name was Jericho and he worked for The Shadow. Plucking the crippled Hydra Heads in pairs, Jericho clapped their skulls together and tossed them aside, using each pair as a shield, until he thrust his massive

THE HYDRA

hands for the next two comers.

The last pair offered trouble. They were aiming their guns when Jericho reached them. But by then, a flood of Shadows was upon them from the rear, snatching their weapons away from them while Jericho took the necks of his foemen and showed what should be done to Hydra Heads.

Only one Head had escaped, the one who was truly the Hydra, Dustin Bardell. He was in an elevator, going down; but in a second car, The Shadow followed. Five other Shadows were taking to a stairway, removing their cloaks and hats. They weren't the one and only Shadow; he had taken the Hydra's trail. These were The Shadow's secret agents, the five that he had chosen to aid him in a multiple appearance.

Back in the dining room, Lamont Cranston was pointing to the gaping walls. There, Margo Lane saw six deep, full-length windows, a feature of the old Marmora roof garden in the days when a sixteen-story hotel offered a good view of Manhattan.

Those deep-set spaces had been papered over. Six Shadows had reached the windows along the narrow promenade outside the garden. Screened only by wallpaper, they were ready to rip through from the moment the meeting began. They had waited only for Dustin Bardell to declare himself the supreme Hydra.

It happened that The Shadow, as Cranston, had suggested this meeting place, knowing how effective its arrangements could be. Conversely Bardell, the Hydra, had totally overlooked the purpose behind the suggestion.

RACING from the Hotel Marmora, Bardell was on his way to the Diana Storage Co. Gesturing his revolver, Bardell frightened away the cabby who had brought him and dashed into the repair shop that had once been a garage.

In answer to Bardell's bellows, men hurried down from storage rooms on the floor above.

They were the Heads that Bardell had written off. Foremost of these men who had disappeared was Lloyd Casler. Bardell had mentioned him along with lopped Heads, purely because Casler had been trapped in crime by The Shadow.

Bardell gestured his living associates to the repainted cabs. When they hesitated, the chief Hydra roared:

"Forget Glencoe's treasures stored upstairs! Let the police recover them, as they did the bank money and the crown jewels. The Hydra still lives and it yet possesses Heads! We are stronger now than when we first encountered The Shadow! But time is short and we cannot afford to waste it!"

Time was too short. As taxicabs wheeled from the garage, the whines of sirens came from all around. Scattering, the Heads drove their vehicles savagely, but to no avail. Tuned to the shrieking sirens was the laugh of the fighter who had purposely brought police cars along this trail.

Again The Shadow seemed to be nowhere, yet everywhere. He was shifting rapidly as he spurted his guns at the tires of the fugitive cabs. They weren't armored like the bantam car that had once served the Hydra. These cabs were vulnerable.

So were their occupants. Some were clipped by The Shadow's gunfire. Others wrecked their cabs when his bullets burst their tires. As they clambered out with guns, the Heads were confronted by arriving police, who gave them short shrift. The desperate criminals wanted to fight to the finish.

THE HYDRA

So they did – to their own finish.

One alone managed to offset the odds of many police guns. Out of his wrecked cab, Dustin Bardell flung himself across the hood to reach the sidewalk side. Turning spryly about, he juttied his gun across the hood, hoping to riddle three motorcycle cops who were already shooting after him.

From behind Bardell came a sinister laugh, the final warning of The Shadow. Swinging about, Bardell jabbed shots at blackness, probing for a foeman that he couldn't find. Blackness was thick and plentiful, too great an expanse for Bardell's frantic shots to cover. Besides, it was filled with shelters – doorways, house steps, and other objects that he couldn't see.

One shot answered the Hydra's frenzied volley. Clipped by The Shadow's unerring aim, Bardell jolted high, twisting half across the hood of the cab, his gun hand going ahead of him. A hand with an empty gun that it couldn't aim; but that was something the motorcycle cops didn't know.

Three police guns spoke, completing The Shadow's work. Slumping to the gutter, Dustin Bardell emitted a rattling snarl, his last. That dying gasp had a peculiar likeness to the gargle of a strangling creature.

It represented such. With the death of Dustin Bardell, the Hydra was gone forever, strangled by that modern Hercules, The Shadow. Instead of lopping off Heads, The Shadow had choked them all at once, the final member of that cluster being the one Head that contained the real brain of the Hydra.

Strange was the laugh that faded into night, trailing into echoes that still persisted in this battle area where crime had been totally conquered.

The triumph laugh of The Shadow!

ELSEWHERE, Margo Lane was frowning in perplexity as she stared at Lamont Cranston, riding beside her in Weston's official car. Until tonight, Margo was sure that Lamont must be The Shadow.

And now –

Cranston couldn't be The Shadow, because he'd been himself when the cloaked avalanche smothered the Heads of the Hydra.

And yet –

There could only be one Shadow.

With six on the scene, five must have been mere masqueraders, enlisted to confuse the Hydra Heads. If five were spurious, why not six?

In that case, Lamont Cranston still could be The Shadow. Yes, it would be his way to guise six men in black and let them deliver an attack from ambush under conditions where they couldn't lose.

Still, the laugh that produced six Shadows couldn't possibly have come from Cranston's immobile lips. Or could it?

Strange, this riddle of The Shadow!

THE END