

THE MUGGERS

by Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. CRIME ON THE RUN

LAMONT CRANSTON stumbled as he groped his way toward the faint lights that represented the Cobalt Club. It was difficult, negotiating Manhattan streets under dimout conditions; difficult at least for the average man, so Cranston had to pretend that the same applied in his case. For Lamont Cranston was meticulous about behaving as a normal person would, under undue circumstances.

In brief, Cranston was playing a part. Actually, he was someone other than Lamont Cranston, though he fulfilled his present character to perfection. In his other self, he was The Shadow, master hunter who tracked down men of crime through the jungles of Manhattan. Between times, it was expedient to pose as Cranston, particularly in the neighborhood of the swank Cobalt Club; where Cranston was listed as a member.

So though the eyes of The Shadow saw the huddled figure of the beggar who was perched on a low, wheeled board, the feet of Cranston made a deliberate move as if to trip across the fellow. Then, catching himself, Cranston acted as though taken aback. He dodged, as a man would to avoid a pointed gun, when the beggar pushed a rounded object up from the sidewalk's gloom and whined plaintively:

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"Buy a pencil, mister?"

There was a basso laugh almost at Cranston's elbow. Recognizing the tone, Cranston could afford to identify the man who delivered it, even though his face was obscured in the dimness. "Oh, it's you, Harland."

"That's right, Cranston." Again, Harland chuckled, with a heavy tone of satisfaction. "Rather startled you, didn't it, tripping over this beggar? That's one of the things I've complained about to our friend Commissioner Weston. Too many beggars in New York, along with more dangerous undesirables."

"This fellow looks harmless enough." Taking the pencil with one hand, Cranston used the other to plunk a quarter in the beggar's tin cup. "I think you'd do better, Harland, to keep concentrating on the mugger situation."

"Maybe the two things fit," snapped Harland. "Encouraging beggars is bad business. When you pay a quarter for a five-cent lead pencil —"

A clatter interrupted. It came from the roller skates under the beggar's wheeled board. Deftly slithering his curious vehicle around the corner, the beggar yelled back across his shoulder, in words meant for Harland:

"You're wrong, mister. At the five-and-dime you can buy them pencils three for a nickel."

It was Cranston who was chuckling when he and Harland entered the lighted foyer of the Cobalt Club. Cranston's nonchalance had returned and, in contrast, Harland's indignation was at a fever heat. Big, broad-shouldered and with a face so bluff that it was almost savage, Harland began to harangue the first man they met, who happened to be Police Commissioner Ralph Weston.

Brusque and military in bearing, Weston twitched to the points of his short-clipped mustache during Harland's tirade. Equally annoyed by Harland's manner was a swarthy, poker-faced man who stood in the background. He was Inspector Joe Cardona, the ace of Weston's staff, and Joe found it difficult to maintain his dead-pan attitude while Harland shouted the beggar nuisance as though the thing were an absolute menace. All the while, Cranston's masklike face retained its calm immobility. When he had fixed a cigarette in a long holder and applied a flame from a platinum lighter, Cranston intervened:

"You are employing the wrong nomenclature, Harland. These men that you term beggars are actually peddlers. The commissioner will tell you that they all carry licenses."

"Licenses for what?" sneered Harland. "To charge outrageous prices for the petty goods they pretend to peddle?"

"They have no fixed fees," returned Cranston, "any more than you do, Harland. The reformers that you represent tell me that they pay you whatever sums you demand, without further question." Pausing, Cranston met Harland's glare with a puff of smoke from the cigarette holder, then added, impassively: "Do you have a license, Harland?"

A smile twitched along with Weston's mustache and Cardona suppressed a grin. To Harland's credit, he was either willing to acknowledge himself outmatched, or was smart enough to recognize the disadvantage that further argument would bring him. Abruptly, Harland boomed:

"You are right, Cranston. The Citizens' Reform League has employed me for more important duties. About this mugging question, commissioner"—Harland wheeled to Weston—"have you quarantined those districts where thugs and bandits, styled muggers, have been committing assault and robbery?"

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"Technically, yes," replied Weston. "But before making the order final, we would like to give you a demonstration of our methods. My official car is outside. Suppose we drive to one of the notorious areas under discussion."

FIFTEEN minutes later, Weston's big car came to an inconspicuous halt on a side street in the Hundreds. From the window, Cranston saw the white top of a patrol car across the way. There were other things his keen eyes noted, points that Harland did not observe. As if by prearrangement, figures began to emerge from doorways and fall in line as they moved along the street.

The procession was paced by a squatty man, who kept glancing nervously across his shoulder. To all appearances he was an ordinary wayfarer, navigating this neighborhood. After he had passed, three others pushed themselves into sight. They had the manner of lurkers transforming themselves into beasts of prey.

A hollow whisper came from Harland:

"Muggers."

"Sit tight, Harland," insisted Weston. "Everything is quite under control. Observe the precision with which we operate."

The squatty man turned the corner and the stalkers did the same. Immediately the police car nosed into life and took up the trail at a snail's pace, without using lights. As soon as the white-topped vehicle turned the corner, Weston's chauffeur put the big official car in motion and it brought up the rear of the procession.

There was a lighted store window halfway down the next block, so conveniently placed that Cranston's lips relaxed into a smile. He had begun to understand what Weston meant by a "demonstration," though the fact had apparently escaped Harland. Keeping his eyes on the patch of light, Cranston was all set to witness what promptly happened.

As the squatty wayfarer reached the glow, two stalkers overtook him. From each side one grabbed an arm of the victim and bent him backward. The third stalker moved forward as the prey was wheeled around, whisked out a small knife, flipped open its blade and pressed the point to the victim's throat. It was a silent but telling threat of death, should the victim resist while the footpads robbed him.

A terrified gargle caught itself in Harland's throat as though his own Adam's apple felt the pressure of a knife point. He lurched forward to spring from the security of Weston's car and dash to the aid of the victim. Cardona hauled Harland back and gruffly told him to watch. This mugging wasn't going to be completed.

The white-topped patrol car was at the scene. From it sprang a pair of uniformed police. One of the muggers must have seen them, for instantly the trio shoved their victim at the cops and made a dash for a handy alleyway. Unfortunately the rescued man blundered against his friends who represented the law. They had to shove him aside to reach the alley, where they fired shots into the darkness. At the gunfire, the squatty victim took alarm and fled in another direction.

Clambering from his big car, Weston reached the officers as they returned. They saluted apologetically, regretting that they had failed to overtake the muggers. Usually critical on such occasions, Weston reversed his usual self and commended the officers highly. Turning to Harland, the commissioner queried:

"How did the demonstration impress you?"

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"It was excellent!" boomed Harland. "The Citizens' Reform League will be elated. The apprehension of culprits is not the major issue; the discouragement of crime is what we desire. You have performed that service adequately, commissioner."

WHILE riding from the scene in the commissioner's car, Harland discoursed further on the subject of quarantining districts like those where the mugging incident had just occurred. Weston assured him that the ruling was practically in effect; that police cars were in abundance in every area where muggers had instituted a campaign of terrorism. It would take a considerable percentage of the available patrol cars, but the result would be worth it.

Quite pleased, Harland was expressing further congratulations when the car stopped at the apartment house where the reformer lived. Alighting, Harland boomed "good-night" and the official car swung back toward the Cobalt Club. It was during that last stage of the ride that Cranston made his first comment.

"Let me add my congratulations," said Cranston. "It was a nice show, commissioner."

"A nice show!" blustered Weston. "What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that you planted everything," remarked Cranston. "The victim was obviously one of your headquarters men. The fake muggers disguised themselves a little better, but that business in the light was certainly a fixed job. The most ludicrous part was the way the two patrolmen fell over each other to let the muggers get away."

Weston would have blustered it out, if Cardona hadn't intervened. Knowing Cranston to be a close friend of the commissioner, Cardona decided to admit the truth.

"We had to satisfy Harland," explained the inspector. "The demonstration was my idea. You'll remember, Mr. Cranston, that we didn't call it by any other name."

"I remember."

"Harland has become a nuisance," put in Weston. "We wanted to prove to him that the crime quarantine could operate. I think the method was legitimate."

"Quite," agreed Cranston.

"Harland is convinced," emphasized Weston, "and everybody is happy. Tomorrow the newspapers will admit that we've done something about the mugging question."

The car was stopping in front of the Cobalt Club as Cranston spoke in a warning tone.

"You have done a great deal," he declared. "By choosing those areas and quarantining them, so that no suspicious characters can enter, you're laying the rest of the city wide open. This is one time, commissioner, when a quarantine will result in an epidemic. I should advise you to change your policy."

Stepping from the car, Cranston turned away, leaving Weston fuming in a style that would have better befitted Harland. In Weston's opinion, Cranston's notions were absurd and the commissioner wanted Cardona to agree. But the ace inspector remained silent, unwilling to commit himself. Just as he knew that Weston would not change his policy, so was Cardona beginning to believe that Cranston was right.

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Joe Cardona would have been thoroughly convinced had his eyes been able to penetrate the darkness across the street.

There, the strolling figure of Lamont Cranston had merged with a blackness that represented substance. Beside the open door of a parked and darkened cab, Cranston was producing garments that he kept handy in this cab which was at his beck and call. Those garments consisted of a black cloak and a slouch hat. Garbed in them, Cranston became practically invisible against the darkness of the dimout; that is, if he still could be termed Lamont Cranston.

Rather, he had become The Shadow, that master who used paths of darkness to further ways of justice. Mysterious, silent and untraceable was the course that the cloaked figure took as it went along the street. Then, from a corner, came the only trace of this mighty presence who stood for right.

Back from the thickening darkness floated a weird laugh, toned with a whisper that awoke responsive echoes. Strange, creepy, that mirth was unreal, the sort that would make listeners wonder if they heard it. As those echoes faded, The Shadow was gone.

His mission was to protect the public in a case where the police were bound to fail because of their acceptance of the policy that Harland's reform group had thrust upon them.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER II. THE WAYS OF THE SHADOW

IN a room that he called his sanctum, The Shadow was studying an immense map of Manhattan that hung in the glare of a blue lamp, trained upon a black-curtained wall. There was such a map at police headquarters and like The Shadow's, it was blocked off into sectors; but with that the resemblance ceased.

The Shadow's map bore marks that represented the results of his own unique investigation, consisting of personal trips to certain districts to check upon reports furnished by skilled agents. Having first marked off the sections where the presence of police would automatically discourage muggers, The Shadow had tabbed three other sectors, all fairly close together. These, in The Shadow's opinion, were the spots where muggers would flock to find new happy hunting grounds, now that a closed season was declared on their old preserves.

There was a whispered laugh as The Shadow turned the blue light on a polished table. The cause of his grim mirth was a pile of clippings that lay in view. During the past twenty-four hours, the newspapers had been shouting the death of the mugging menace, commending the law on the demonstration of the night before and feeding the public with promises of future safety.

Harland had fed the press with last night's story, through a bulletin issued by his reform committee. Since Harland termed the mugging incident as genuine, Weston had seen no reason to declare otherwise. Instead, the commissioner had announced the beginning of the quarantine and stated that the public could end its self-imposed curfew in areas where until last night, it had been unsafe for wayfarers to wander. The muggers, not the respectable citizenry, were the persons who could no longer consider themselves safe, according to Commissioner Weston.

Oddly, among those recent clippings was an old one that bore the yellow marks of time. It was from a newspaper a hundred years old, a clipping that The Shadow had dug from his copious archives. It told of daring footpads called "muggers" who had molested Manhattan in the 1840s. These muggers patronized grog

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shops where they drank from big mugs that they carried away with them. On the street, they would clout passers-by with the mugs and rob them of all their valuables. When reported in one area, the muggers would merely move to another and renew their operations.

A century had changed the favored weapons from mugs to knives, though the modern muggers were unquestionably the successors of the older clan. The nub of the old clipping was the fact that the muggers were smart enough to change territory when occasion required. The present-day breed would certainly be clever enough to use the same stratagem, as The Shadow had already warned the police.

From across the table came the glimmer of a tiny light. The Shadow reached for earphones and spoke in a whispered tone. At his word "Report" a methodical voice came over the wire. It was Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, giving reports from agents in the sectors marked as new danger spots on The Shadow's city map.

They were all on the job tonight, those agents, working in pairs. They were checking on special spots that The Shadow himself had picked as likely gathering places for muggers. Analyzing these reports, The Shadow not only saw the symptoms he expected; reaching up to the map, he laid a gloved finger on the three areas in turn, while he spoke to Burbank.

The Shadow was predicting the time element, based on the number of suspicious characters reported in each of these districts that the police ignored.

He was telling Burbank what his own route would be; how the agents were to post themselves in helping him meet the menace in one-two-three order. Finishing his instructions, The Shadow whispered a laugh as he turned off the blue light. When echoes faded, the cloaked avenger was gone from his mysterious sanctum.

THERE was one proof that Commissioner Weston had given some heed to his friend Cranston's advice. Through the dimmed thoroughfares of Manhattan, police cars were on the prowl. In clamping down on the neighborhoods known to be the resorts of muggers, Weston had done so thorough a job that extra police cars were unnecessary there, so they had been assigned to more mobile duty. They were plentiful enough to be mistaken for taxicabs, but there was no method in their patrol. They were simply seeking places where they might be needed, with no idea where those places would be. Such was The Shadow's analysis as he observed them from the window of his limousine.

The limousine was Cranston's and except for its chauffeur, it looked empty, the reason being that its only passenger was The Shadow, fully cloaked. The big car continued a northward course, then veered west until the calm voice of Cranston announced through the speaking tube:

"Stop here, Stanley."

The chauffeur complied. He wasn't one of The Shadow's agents, but he was used to the eccentric ways of Mr. Cranston, who had a habit of bobbing in and out of the limousine at the most unexpected places. The present locale was a fairly respectable section of the West Side; still, Stanley couldn't recall that his employer had any friends hereabout. Nevertheless the trip was over, so Stanley relaxed behind the wheel, without even glancing back into the rear seat to look for a passenger who was no longer there.

Why The Shadow had picked this area became apparent as he glided along a silent street. Though the buildings were still presentable, most of their basements had been converted into business places including barber shops, pool parlors, laundries and small lunchrooms. Others, with blackout curtains constantly drawn, were more questionable establishments where doubtful characters could easily arrange a rendezvous. It was all made to order for mobs of muggers.

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TAKING a short cut through an alley, The Shadow blinked signal flashes with a tiny light that flickered red and green. His blinks were answered from two spots along the street. One represented Cliff Marsland, the toughest fighter in The Shadow's corps; the other was Hawkeye, Cliff's side-kick, one of the best spotters who ever roved the badlands. The Shadow had assigned that pair to this sector, first choice on the list of new mugging territory.

The quick, somewhat nervous response of Hawkeye's flashlight, ending with sharp red blinks, indicated that the spotter had observed something. Moving rapidly and invisibly along the house fronts, The Shadow drew an automatic in readiness. While still on the way, he heard quick footsteps that weren't Hawkeye's. They signified a man who had personally scented trouble and was anxious to get out of it.

As the fellow came in sight, The Shadow's keen eyes sighted three others in the background, moving faster and more stealthily than their prospective prey. The quick man wasn't acting in the routine fashion that Weston's stooge had demonstrated the night before. This chap was really scared to the point of panic. He suddenly quickened his pace to a half run, which practically served to beckon his enemies.

They swooped, those vicious birds of prey, to put the clamps on a helpless victim. Things happened in a manner more sudden than even muggers could expect. With a dart, a little wizened man tackled the nearest mugger. The arrival was Hawkeye and he spilled his antagonist in expert style.

Caught by the other arm, the victim wrenched free and tried to spring across the street. The second mugger bounded after him only to be overtaken with a sledge-hammer blow delivered by a husky who drove in from the other direction. Cliff Marsland was on the job, displaying the old team work that he and Hawkeye had long practiced. Clubbing one enemy, Cliff wheeled to down the first man who was climbing to his feet from the spill that Hawkeye had given him.

It was nice work, but it didn't save the victim. He was stopping short with a frightened cry as he reached the opposite curb. The third mugger was intercepting him and there was enough light for the unfortunate to see a knife blade snapping toward his throat. A snarl from the mugger told that a quick slash was intended, but the intention ended with the snarl.

Pressing the back of the mugger's neck was a weapon more potent than a button-bladed clasp knife. The muzzle of an automatic was declaring its presence with a coldness that resembled white heat. Any doubt that the mugger might have felt regarding the efficiency of that weapon was dispelled by the sinister whisper that accompanied the automatic. The clasp knife dropped from the mugger's hand as his gulping lips made motions to phrase the dread name that his voice could not articulate:

"The Shadow!"

Issuing from solid darkness, The Shadow's whisper was enough to frighten friend as well as foe. As the mugger stood petrified, the rescued man took to his heels. He was spurred on by two shots that reverberated along the street to the accompaniment of an eerie laugh. Those shots were The Shadow's way of bringing the nearest patrol car. They were fired in the air, not into the hapless mugger's neck, but when the disarmed brute decided to run, he found that The Shadow was still at hand. Plucking the mugger's arm, The Shadow gave it a complete twist that spun its owner in a sidewise somersault ending with a headlong jounce upon the asphalt. The Shadow didn't have to slug this foeman; he simply helped the mugger knock himself out.

CLIFF and Hawkeye were dragging their trophies across the sidewalk when The Shadow flung them his addition to the collection of exhibits. Hearing their chief's instructions, the agents produced handcuffs from their pockets and set to work. Meanwhile, a car came racing swiftly from the corner to be received by colored blinks from The Shadow's flashlight. It wasn't a patrol car, for the nearest of those was betokened by an

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approaching siren attracted by the shots. This was a taxicab, The Shadow's own, driven by Moe Shrevnitz, the speediest cabby in Manhattan.

The Shadow was climbing into the cab as the searchlight of a patrol car defied dimout regulations from the corner. At the same time, the scurry of feet told that Cliff and Hawkeye were dashing off through the alley, their work completed. The cab sputtered away as the police car roared up to the scene of The Shadow's recent triumph. There was a screech of brakes as the white-top halted, its driver quite convinced that he did not have to follow the taxicab that was veering the next corner.

For the glare of the patrol car's searchlight showed that crime had been frustrated. Slumped with their backs against an iron picket fence that had survived the junk metal collections, were the three unhappy muggers, unable to flee even if they had been less groggy. They were linked together by two pairs of handcuffs which in turn were interlaced between the pickets. The cuffs were of the standard pattern carried by the police, inviting them to unlock the prisoners and take them away.

Back from the corner trailed a weird triumphant laugh, marking the disappearance of the taxicab. That peal betokened that The Shadow and his agents had settled the mugging question in this neighborhood and were leaving further operations to the police. But there was still another message in The Shadow's laugh.

His first score settled, the master of darkness was bound for the next area marked upon his infallible map; there to prove that his calculations were still defeating crime!

CHAPTER III. TWO MODES OF RESCUE

FULLY a mile from the scene of The Shadow's first quick triumph, another stalking party was in progress. It was happening in a vicinity where mugging seemed less likely to anyone except The Shadow, but a man of hurried manner was beginning to worry about his immediate future. He was a well-dressed man, this victim marked for trouble, and he was realizing that his attire might have something to do with the way three loungers had shifted from a very dark doorway and started on his trail.

Like a moth lured by the flame, this victim turned toward the only lighted store window that he could see. It was nearly half a block away and his chances of reaching it unmolested were absolutely nil. Professional muggers didn't loiter in the absurd fashion of Weston's stooges. Changing their own pace to a lope, the three ghouls showed a speed their prey did not expect. One passed him, while a second came up behind, the third taking a detour across the street, to be in a strategic position for the climax.

It was deftly planned, this business of two muggers boxing their victim like an insect in a funnel-shaped trap. The point of that funnel was to be the knife-man, key member of the group. They had even picked the spot for the robbery that they intended to back with the threat of death—a basement entry a few steps down, where if need be, they could dump the body should it prove necessary to slit the man's throat. No muggers ever hesitated at delivering swift death when a victim showed fight.

Another factor spurred the closing of the trap. Across the street a taxicab was pulling to a stop. Its dimmed headlights failed to show the mugging that was in progress and the frightened victim wasn't aware of the cab's arrival. Therefore it behooved the muggers to have their prey clutched and threatened with the knife point before he could realize that a quick yell might bring help.

A call for aid was not needed.

From that halting cab the keenest of eyes had already spied the evil deed in progress.

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The eyes of The Shadow!

Like a human avalanche, a mass of living darkness surged from the cab, clearing half the street at a single leap. Hurling onward The Shadow reached the victim just as two converging muggers caught his arms and twisted him around so his back was toward the blackened basement steps. Hooking the terrified man with one long cloaked arm, The Shadow spun him from the clutching hands and precipitated him to the other side of the street. Completing his whirl, The Shadow met the pair of muggers as they lunged at the living blackness that they so far had not identified in the gloom.

The Shadow's other hand was in action. It was tightened in a fist that contained an automatic. To the left, then to the right, that fist swung in battering style. It actually bounced from the jaw of one mugger to the chin of the other, reeling the pair back. Immediately The Shadow reversed his spin, knowing that he would find a third enemy with whom he must deal. The surmise was correct; the knifeman was already on the lunge, jabbing his blade ahead of him, aiming for The Shadow's throat.

IT was the reverse twist that fooled the mugger. The blackness that represented The Shadow unclouded from the fellow's beady gaze. In jerky fashion, the assassin changed the knife's course, probing for the figure that had seemingly vanished. The delay was all to the mugger's disadvantage, for The Shadow's shift had totally outsmarted him. The Shadow had not thinned to nothingness; he was still a mass of fighting blackness, thrusting from another angle. A gloved hand plucked the mugger's wrist, gave it a sharp wrench that forced the fellow's fingers to drop the knife. Then, instead of somersaulting his foe, The Shadow shoved him straight back between the other two, who were recuperating to resume their attack.

With his thrust, The Shadow hissed an order that brought remarkable results.

Neither of the flanking muggers moved another inch forward. They couldn't because something gigantic had risen from the depressed entry behind them. It was the figure of Jericho Drake, mightiest of The Shadow's agents. Jericho was a huge African who could do the work of two men or more, hence he had been assigned to watch this district alone. Along with his great bulk, Jericho owned proportionate hands the size of hams that could singly wrap themselves around the average neck. That was exactly what Jericho's hands were doing at present.

Each was gripping the neck of an unruly thug. Half choked into submission, the two muggers were frozen in their tracks when The Shadow twisted the third in between. As the mugger's head bobbed into position, Jericho clapped his hands without relaxing his grip. The action swung two heads together like a pair of cymbals, banging the third that had come between. Jericho could do large things in a deft way, as he demonstrated on this occasion. All The Shadow had to do was set up the third head where Jericho could perform the skull-clapping trick.

Two muggers stayed erect because Jericho still gripped them. The third sagged at the giant's feet, only to be scooped up by The Shadow. As Jericho stepped aside, carrying his human burdens with him, The Shadow descended into the basement entry and flung the third mugger into a space beneath a high flight of brownstone steps. At a whispered command from The Shadow, Jericho added the other two to the collection, whereupon The Shadow clanged a grilled gate that turned the space beneath the steps into an improvised prison cell.

This cell lacked one qualification; it had no lock. So The Shadow used Jericho as an instrument to remedy the deficiency. At another summons from his chief, Jericho stepped over, gripped the latch of the gate and twisted it halfway to a pretzel shape.

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Nothing less than a crowbar could pry the latch loose, hence the stunned prisoners would certainly remain there until the police arrived.

Across the street, the man rescued by The Shadow was hurrying toward Moe's cab. Just as he reached it, the cab started the other way, for Moe had caught a signal from The Shadow. Again two gun stabs sounded in the night, a summons for police to come to a scene where crime had been conquered and its participants left helpless on the battle ground where they had fared so ill against The Shadow!

WELL away before police cars appeared, Moe's cab was soon traversing new territory where crime had not yet reared its head. The Shadow was the only passenger, having dropped Jericho on the fringe of the previous district to intercept any additional muggers who might have fled at sound of The Shadow's gun. Here in an area where there were several small hotels along with private residences and warehouses, it would seem most unlikely that muggers would abound.

The Shadow never went by general appearances. He had studied this portion of the city in relation to those adjacent to it. All around were little pockets that formed perfect lurking places from which malefactors could emerge. Like the hub of a wheel, this section offered many spokes, giving muggers opportunity to leave by a different route. Nevertheless they would be cautious when testing such a crossroad, which was why The Shadow had marked it third and last on tonight's list.

Two of The Shadow's agents were keeping a constant patrol until their chief arrived. One was Harry Vincent, the most experienced of The Shadow's aids; the other was Clyde Burke, who doubled as a newspaper reporter. Both were specially suited to their present assignment, which was to draw muggers on their trail, should the lurkers come into the open. According to the time sheet, The Shadow was nearly due, so Harry and Clyde were beginning to stage a well-rehearsed act.

First Harry appeared from the front door of an apartment house. He made a clean-cut figure as he strolled along the sidewalk. Next, Clyde came from a hotel across the way and started walking in the same direction. Both turned a corner and continued around the block, always keeping on opposite sides of the street. They were working the old system of watching the man ahead, alternating in that duty by frequently changing pace or taking short cuts so that they preceded each other in turn.

This mutual course brought them back into the original block, but through zigzag tactics they were coming from the opposite direction. Moreover the pair had changed their technique. Harry was well ahead of Clyde, so far ahead that most of the block intervened. Practically out of contact with each other, they were laying themselves open to attack, which happened to be part of the scheme. Nearing a corner, Harry turned suddenly beside a warehouse and started back toward Clyde, who at that moment was passing a similar spot on the same side of the street.

It was a neat device, suggested by The Shadow. If muggers were about to pick up Harry's trail, Clyde would spot them and come to aid. On the other hand, if they had let Harry pass along in order to get at Clyde, Harry's sudden return would enable him to stage the rescue act.

At that moment Clyde spotted danger that neither had foreseen. From beside the warehouse where Harry turned, three men were lunging out to the sidewalk. They had hesitated when Harry first passed them; now they were taking advantage of his chance return. Knowing that the trio must be muggers, Clyde gave a warning yell.

THAT shout was misunderstood by another mob of muggers who happened to be stationed beside the warehouse that Clyde himself was passing. Thinking that they were spotted, this second trio made a rapid drive. Luckily Harry understood what Clyde's yell meant and therefore knew that Clyde was not aware of his

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own danger. Starting on the run, Harry gave Clyde a call of warning that gave the reporter an equal urge for speed.

A moment later, both The Shadow's agents were dashing full tilt toward each other, each trying to outrace a tribe of muggers close at his heels!

Once together they'd have a better chance, though neither Harry nor Clyde had bargained upon meeting a double mob. The two bands of muggers weren't working as a single crew; it was merely chance that had brought them to the same vicinity. But it was a sure conclusion that they would gang up on two victims under circumstances such as these.

Brief though the dash was, it proved maddening. All the way, both Harry and Clyde were counting on something better than battling back to back against these human wolves. Each agent remembered one outlet in this block, a narrow parking lot across the way. The lot was deserted except for a few cars, but those would help as temporary shelter while Harry and Clyde hauled out guns to meet the ready knives that muggers had already drawn. Though too breathless to give further shouts, the speeding agents veered by mutual consent and raced for the parking lot. The blackness offered them a welcome refuge until from its midst sprang three men as savage as the other six pursuers.

Harry and Clyde were rushing squarely into the arms of another batch of muggers whose gleeful jeers and drawn knives announced that they expected a share in the profits of the coming robbery that would include a double murder!

Stopping in their tracks, the agents threw all caution to the winds. They swung about with flaying fists that punched the first faces that glared into theirs. It was only a momentary respite, for sheer force of numbers soon would tell against the two men who were struggling to beat off nine.

At least they would go down fighting, these agents of The Shadow, though it seemed too late for Harry and Clyde to hope for rescue. Often in tight places they had heard the weird laugh that meant their chief's arrival, so they were battling on the slim chance that it would come again. Perhaps they could meet death imagining that they heard The Shadow's laugh; such a thought was helpful against the threat of the ugly knives that were already stabbing toward the doomed men.

That last wish was realized. As they swung their arms to brush off the first blades, both Harry and Clyde were gripped with the same illusion, that of a sudden, shivery mockery rising in their very midst. A moment later, reality took the place of imagination.

The strident peal was actual! Only The Shadow himself could voice that fierce war cry that spelled disaster, not to his helpless agents, but to the vicious muggers who were about to murder them. As they heard that challenge, murderous men forgot their victims and turned to give battle to The Shadow, that dread avenger arrived from nowhere!

CHAPTER IV. WAYS OF DARKNESS

THE only key to The Shadow's strange arrival was the direction from which his whirling drive began. Harry and Clyde had been surrounded by a triangle of muggers, representing the three groups that trapped them. There was a gap in the middle of one group, namely the crew that had surged from the parking lot. Silently, invisibly, The Shadow had slugged down the central man of that tribe. Therefore he must have been right behind them when they launched forth at sight of prey.

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Other details were unimportant for the moment. Of real consequence was The Shadow's mode of battle. He didn't just fling fists, he hurled himself into a fray that was startlingly one-sided in The Shadow's favor. There were times when odds worked against the men who had them, and this was just such an occasion. With Harry and Clyde forced down to their knees, The Shadow could swing his heavy guns at face level, knowing that every man around him was an enemy. In contrast, the muggers were afraid to jab their knives blindly, for the chances were nearly eight to one that they would stab one of their own men rather than The Shadow.

Furthermore, this crowd did not constitute an organized mob. Used to operating in independent groups of three, they were totally unable to cope with their present problem. Following the line of least resistance, they found themselves spreading apart under the battering swings of The Shadow's gun fists.

Rats to the core, the disorganized muggers scattered, taking the course of every man for himself. Then, free of the melee, they turned in vicious style, each hoping to spot The Shadow and come jabbing back at crime land's greatest foe. Quick though they were to try such tactics, their effort came too late. Having cleared a space about him, The Shadow was voicing a new challenge, not with a laugh, but with the chatter of his deadly automatics.

Each .45 jabbed tongues of flame that stabbed the darkness with an accuracy no mugger's knife could hope to match. From hands and knees, Harry and Clyde joined the barrage with their guns, picking off spinning figures that became conspicuous each time The Shadow clipped one. The street seemed to reel with muggers who jounced to the tune of the spurting guns. The way this fray had developed made it seem a certainty that the police would find nine cripples on the scene.

Suddenly, in the midst of dealing with this outlaw tribe, The Shadow hooked his arms around the men beside him. With the speed and strength that only he could display, the cloaked fighter took Harry and Clyde in a headlong dash that ended with a dive into a deep doorway. It wasn't until they landed that the agents saw the new menace from which they had been saved.

A huge truck was slithering from a warehouse across the way. It was showing no lights and it was bearing down full tilt upon The Shadow when he caught the tumult of its motor above the bark of his own guns. Only by a few scant feet did The Shadow escape the lumbering juggernaut as he carried his agents with him. Even then, the truck would have swerved to bash them against the building wall, if its driver hadn't seen the diving figures fling into the narrow doorway. He saw two figures, those of Harry and Clyde.

The Shadow went with them, but he was practically invisible in the gloom. Perhaps that was why the truck veered toward the parking lot. The driver was sure The Shadow must be somewhere around and was hoping to crush the cloaked fighter before he could escape. At any rate, the truck's new course took it beyond the angle of The Shadow's aim.

SCATTERED muggers saw the rear of the truck fly open as the big wheels jounced over the rise to the parking lot. The few who had so far escaped The Shadow's gunfire needed no further invitation. They sprang for the truck, dragging some wounded comrades with them and were hauled on board by helpful hands that stretched out to receive them.

The Shadow's cab was in the parking lot with sharp-eyed Shrevvy at the wheel. To all appearances it was just another car among those parked there for the night. From the time when Shrevvy had eased in with his mysterious passenger, The Shadow, he had been waiting eagerly, knowing that his chief might soon need him. Hardly had the truck lurched past, when Moe had the cab in motion. He was darting quick looks for The Shadow when the door was opened by an unseen hand. Then Harry and Clyde sprang into sight at The Shadow's call. Their chief shoved them into the cab and Shrevvy heard a slamming door, denoting that The Shadow had joined them. The cab took a rapid spurt after the big truck which by then had crossed the parking

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lot and was making a sharp turn into the next street.

Though the truck was setting a breakneck pace, it could never have outdistanced Moe's cab if a combination of circumstances had not intervened. To begin with, The Shadow jabbed two shots from the cab window as the truck was turning from sight. He wanted to hold the edge should a duel of guns develop, but his calculations proved ahead of schedule. As the cab came from the parking lot it was sighted by a patrol car at the next corner.

The arriving police took it that the truck was running from a mob attack inspired by the occupants of the cab. Letting the truck swing the corner, the patrol car bucked the one-way traffic and headed along the street to meet the cab. Police guns were answering The Shadow's fire when Moe performed gyrations with the wheel and spun the cab in the other direction. Whipping into high speed, he not only outdistanced the patrol car, but cleared the range of its gunfire.

Ordinarily, Moe could have rounded the block and picked up the truck's trail anew, but the repeated gunfire was bringing more patrol cars to the scene. Moe ran into a regular tangle of them that forced him to zigzag the cab from one sidewalk to another. Bouncing in the rear seat, Harry and Clyde thought surely that the trap would close on them, but The Shadow's whispered laugh told differently. He had confidence in Shrevvy and it proved well founded. Like a jackrabbit scooting from a field of greyhounds, the cab suddenly found an opening and whipped along a side street. From then on there was no question but that Moe would outdistance all pursuit; in fact, the patrol cars were blocking one another in their individual hurry. The one trouble was that Moe's outlet had taken him the wrong direction; any chance of finding the truck and its load of rescued muggers was completely gone.

From the lips of The Shadow came a singularly cryptic laugh, a grim tone that he always uttered when the unexpected brought new factors into his schemes of thwarting crime. That business of the truck was totally at variance with circumstances. Footpads of the mugger category would never have shown the foresight to have a truck in readiness for a getaway, particularly when they represented three separate groups of marauders who had not shown any real co-operation.

What it all signified was still a mystery and such problems intrigued The Shadow, even when they disturbed his well-laid plans. The Shadow's laugh carried a note of prophecy, signifying that his next effort would be to track down this particular mystery.

IF the intervention of the truck was something of a puzzle to The Shadow, it was a complete riddle to the muggers who had profited by it. They were huddled in the very truck that had rescued them, staring at gun muzzles in the hands of masked men. As the truck took a tortuous course away from the region where police sirens wailed, the muggers began to think that they had been tricked into a new type of trap that represented a theatrical demonstration on the part of Commissioner Weston.

This impression was furthered when the truck rolled into a blind alley and the masked men growled for the muggers to hop out. Pointing guns indicated basement steps that looked like an entrance to a dungeon. When the muggers hesitated, the masked men urged them to "get going" in tones that put an end to all uncertainty. In shambling fashion, the dejected footpads obeyed the orders of their captors.

The basement proved to be a long, dismal passage, through which the muggers were herded by the prod of guns. They went up another flight of steps and across a street to an alley on the other side. Next, they were shoved down a ladder below an opened grating, which in turn led to another underground route. Their trip finally ended in a basement room that looked like an empty pool parlor, except for a few cots that stood along the walls.

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Pushed toward the cots, the muggers seated themselves in uncomfortable rows and watched the masked men move to the corners where they still kept fingering their guns. A door opened and with its creak the muggers turned to see a stocky figure emerging from a flight of stairs. Moving into the light, this arrival showed an ugly, darkish face marked with a livid scar that formed a white belt from his chin to the point of the sideways-tilted cap that covered a patch over the man's right eye.

Whatever the darkish man's right eye lacked, his left eye supplied. The glare he gave was sharp and thorough, quite suited to the leer of his thick lips. There was a twist to the man's lips that was accentuated by the jut of his irregular teeth. If his purpose was to prove himself uglier than any of the muggers, he was succeeding, though the order was a difficult one, considering the faces that were on display.

Pasty faces as well as sallow; eyes that were shifty, yet vicious; lips that had the quiver of a snarling dog—such were commonplace among the visitors that the masked men had rounded up and brought to this den where their one-eyed chief held rule.

"So you are these muggers." The darkish man spat the words in a peculiarly foreign accent. "Bah! It is foolish that the police should fear you. I have heard so much about you that I thought you would be brave, because I knew you were not clever."

The muggers shifted uneasily as the scoffing man strode close to them. One sallow visitor gave a sudden snarl and whipped a clasp knife from his pocket, pressing the button that controlled the blade. Before he could even point the knife at the darkish man, the mugger decided to let it drop.

The darkish man was more than a jump ahead. From his hip, he had snapped a knife three times the size of the mugger's puny weapon. The big knife was flying open as it came and its blade was as large as a dagger. All in one motion, the man with the ugly eye was drawing his knife across the mugger's throat. He laughed as the fellow recoiled with a howl.

"This is the way of Alban Leroc," announced the darkish man. "This time I use the back of my knife, that is all. If you try more funny business it will be the sharp side next time. You understand, eh?"

The crouching mugger gave a ginger nod as though to learn whether his head still happened to be on his shoulders.

"You have heard of Alban Leroc, non?"

The mugger's response was a slow headshake. Having found that his head still operated on the vertical, he was beginning to worry about the horizontal.

The darkish man displayed an expression of contempt. He flung aside his cap and the eye patch went with it, revealing an eye that had a drooping lid, marked by the end of the scar that decorated the man's face. Long, sleek hair fell forward over the man's forehead, making a singular contrast to his tough face. Smoothing back his hair, he announced proudly:

"I am Alban Leroc!"

THE name still meant nothing to the listening muggers. Tilting his head to favor his droopy eye, Leroc proceeded to further identify himself in harsh-toned style.

"Alban Leroc, the Apache," he continued. "You have heard of us, non, the Apaches of Paris? Of course not, or you would be more clever. You would use blades like this surin"—Leroc flourished his long knife—"and

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you would play le coup du Pere Francois and other tricks that we Apaches have invented. I could teach you all those as I learned them in L'ecole des Apaches, our own training school in Paris.

"But why waste time?" Leroc gave an exaggerated shrug. "Your methods are good enough, here in New York, where there are many of you and the police are so stupid. Good enough, except that you do not understand le pas du transfuge, which in your language means the way of the rat. We Apaches know how to vanish after we have done our work. In Paris, we have the advantage of the sewers, where we know all the underground routes; but here in New York, with the dimout, I can arrange ways of escape that will be easy for you."

There were eager glances from the muggers as they realized that Leroc had already displayed his ability when he rescued them with the truck from the warehouse. Leroc understood their faces.

"Bah! Tonight was crude!" voiced Alban Leroc. "In the future, my methods shall be better, because you will await my orders before we move. I shall send you places where even The Shadow will not expect you and you will be gone before he arrives. Is it understood?"

The muggers nodded more eagerly than before. Leroc gave a gesture of dismissal and the marked men ushered out the muggers by an underground route, at the same time arranging where and how to reach them, when Leroc would be ready to start them on the move.

Alone, Leroc reached for a telephone that was in a corner of his lair. It began to ring as he picked it up and Leroc recognized the voice that answered his own. Questions came from the other end and Leroc responded in simple monosyllables. The last word that he said before hanging up the telephone was, "Bon!"

In the dull light, Leroc's nasty scar seemed to widen, along with his equally ugly lips. His droopy eyelid quivered as though it were laughing too. From Leroc's smiling lips came a snarly, satisfied laugh, his contempt for all persons who stood for right.

To Alban Leroc, all such contempt was heaped upon a single individual of justice:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. THE LAW'S DILEMMA

COMMISSIONER RALPH WESTON owed a great debt to The Shadow, along with many previous favors that had never been repaid. If Weston had deliberately planned a campaign of gaining popular acclaim he could not have fared better than he had, through the aid The Shadow had furnished unrequested. According to New York newspapers and radio news flashes, the police had cracked the mugger problem in thorough style. The escape of a few malefactors was not only discounted; it was almost overlooked. Nobody had checked the total number of muggers on the final battleground—that was, nobody except The Shadow—and therefore it was fair to assume that none had actually escaped.

In fact, Commissioner Weston was personally ready to believe that the roundup stood complete. The thing that bothered Weston was something else entirely. Privately, he knew that the police would not have gathered in a single mugger, except for the service rendered by The Shadow.

Perhaps the same thought was in the mind of Howard Harland as the bombastic reformer wagged a heavy finger across Weston's desk.

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"You were lucky, commissioner," Harland argued. "You quarantined some districts, so the muggers went to others. Your roving patrols merely happened to pick those new neighborhoods as likely places where muggers would appear."

Weston shifted uneasily, knowing that his patrols hadn't thought along those lines at all.

"Tonight, the muggers will pick new neighborhoods," predicted Harland, "because there still must be hundreds of those malefactors at large. The task will prove more difficult for your patrols; therefore, you must strengthen your campaign."

"Just what would you advise?" queried Weston, testily.

"A complete roundup of all beggars," argued Harland. "I am still convinced that they work hand in glove with the muggers."

The old argument had begun again and Weston went at it in brusque style. He pointed out that no beggars had been reported in the mugging areas the night before, but that fact did not impress Harland, who retorted that the beggars had doubtless picked the spots and left as soon as they had passed the word along to the muggers. When Weston claimed that Harland's theory was entirely unsupported, the reformer invited the commissioner to put it to the test. Harland declared bluntly that if Weston took all the beggars out of circulation, he would soon learn who was right; that if mugging ended therewith, Harland's claim of a link would be proven.

Weston's answer to that argument was a despairing shrug, directed toward Cranston and Cardona, who were present in the office.

"All right," decided Weston. "We'll consider your suggestion, Harland—after we've seen King Franzel."

"King Franzel?" queried Harland. "Who might he be?"

"The big boss of the beggars," put in Cardona. "Whatever he says goes with them. If King calls all peddlers off the street, we won't have to round them up."

"A beggar king," scoffed Harland. "What do we have to do? Put on old rags to meet him?"

"On the contrary," returned Weston, "Tuxedoes will be in form. We shall find King Franzel at Club 88, the most exclusive cafe in New York, where only visitors in evening clothes are admitted. Suppose we meet there for dinner, Harland. I should like you to be with us, Cranston."

HARLAND went from the conference muttering to himself. The new angle of a beggar king was something almost beyond his comprehension. As he and Cranston parted, Harland remarked that if beggars owed loyalty to an overlord, perhaps muggers were similarly organized. Cranston made no comment, but while riding away in his limousine, he weighed Harland's statement. It fitted closely with Cranston's own conclusions, gained the night before while he was garbed in black and fighting as The Shadow. The timely truck that had rescued a crop of muggers was certainly an indication of a hand that worked from higher up, yet The Shadow was inclined to regard an association of muggers as something in the making rather than an accomplished fact.

Whatever the varied opinions of those present at the commissioner's conference, they were quite in harmony when they met at Club 88 a few hours later. All four, Weston, Cranston, Harland and Cardona were conforming to the conventions of the fastidious night club, and Cranston was meeting further requirements. In keeping with the traditions of cafe society, he was bringing a lady to the party, in the person of Miss

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Margo Lane.

An attractive brunette who looked well in a minimum of evening gown, Margo Lane added a distinct charm to the group, though Commissioner Weston did not appreciate the favor. It was Weston's opinion that Cranston wasted too much time taking Margo to night clubs; time that could be better spent if Cranston held conferences on crime with Weston. Often, the commissioner had claimed that his friend Cranston had the making of a remarkable criminologist if he would only cease giving his attention to unimportant matters, in which category Margo was included.

Though Margo was quite aware of the commissioner's animosity, she greeted him with a cordial smile. When introduced to Harland, the brunette retained her smile, but the cordiality was gone. Despite his pomposity, Harland had too much of the wolf-look to be encouraged. As for Cardona, he simply received a nod from Margo. Smiles were wasted on the poker-faced police inspector.

Inside the glittery night club, a request to meet King Franzel brought the visitors to a ringside table, where a thick-set man wallowed to his feet to shake hands with the commissioner. This was King Franzel, and at first sight he looked like a giant turtle, from the way his head poked between his broad, hunched shoulders. But there was nothing slow about Franzel's eyes, nor the expression of his face. He gave his visitors a quick round of glances, as sharp as his high-bridged nose and as direct as the straight lips that crossed his broad visage.

When Franzel politely invited Margo to a chair beside him, the girl made no objection. King had given her the same glance that he extended the others and his gaze lacked the wander of appraisal in which Harland specialized. Indeed, Margo was a trifle piqued by King's lack of notice, a fact that Cranston observed and liked. Whenever Margo became puzzled or annoyed by trifles, she was apt to remain alert until she explained them to her satisfaction. Having brought Margo on an expedition where he expected her to be alert, Cranston was naturally pleased.

Though Harland, a man who represented wealth and affluence, was at first impressed by King Franzel, it wasn't long before he came to the purpose of the interview. A beggar lacking rags was something of a paradox, but since Franzel chose to class himself a mendicant, Harland resolved to treat him as such.

"THE commissioner tells me that you represent beggars, Franzel," began Harland abruptly. "Therefore I have asked him to remove your followers from the streets, since they in their turn represent a menace."

"A menace?" King Franzel raised his broad eyebrows. "That is putting it rather strongly, Mr. Harland."

"Not strongly enough," corrected Harland. "We see your beggars as spies, working with the thugs called muggers."

King Franzel tilted back his head and laughed. Then:

"Has it occurred to you," he asked, "that licensed peddlers—in your parlance beggars—stand more to lose than anyone else while muggers are abroad? That where another man's money is in his pocket, the coins collected by my followers are on view in tin cups, where they are a sight for hungry eyes? Have you considered that while the average pedestrian is strong and able to run, many of these beggars are frail, helpless and frequently lame?"

Driving those points home, Franzel's eyes took on a fanatical glare from which Harland was inclined to shrink. Then, with a side gesture of his heavy paw, Franzel added:

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"Ask the commissioner. He will tell you that I appealed to him to do something about the mugger question long before your so-called reform committee was even organized!"

Turning a questioning eye at Weston; Harland received a slow nod from the commissioner.

"I suppose Franzel is right," conceded Weston. "He did call at my office several times, to complain that the streets were not safe for beggars –"

"Not safe for beggars!" broke in Harland, in an outraged tone. "Since when have beggars been recognized as privileged persons?"

"The streets are either safe for none or all," argued Franzel. "I suppose, Mr. Harland, that by your logic, muggers should be allowed to prey upon certain classes of society, but not others."

"According to you, Franzel," retorted Harland, "beggars serve as an inducement for muggers who are at large. The more beggars, the more easy prey –"

"And therefore the more chance of trapping the criminals," completed Franzel, with a heavy-toned interruption. "Protect my followers and you will catch the muggers. Or better still, let these much despised beggars do their share toward restoring law and order."

The final comment caught Weston's interest. Brushing off Harland's next speech with a gesture, the commissioner concentrated upon Franzel.

"Just what do you propose?" queried Weston.

"Simply this," returned Franzel. "I shall instruct my followers to be on the lookout for suspicious characters. In their legitimate occupation as licensed peddlers, my beggars—as Harland calls them—cover nearly every portion of the city. They will be more than glad to report groups of muggers, should they see them. Shall I give the order?"

It was a telling stroke on King Franzel's part, as Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, could well understand. At a total loss on the mugger problem, Weston was only too glad to accept the widespread aid that Franzel offered. As for The Shadow, his own investigations would be furthered, rather than retarded, by Franzel's suggestion. So it behooved The Shadow, as Cranston, to support Franzel's offer if Weston hesitated.

WESTON did not hesitate. Abruptly, he accepted the proposal, stating that it bore some promise of results, as opposed to Harland's plan of clearing all beggars from the streets. With a nod of appreciation, King Franzel turned his back upon his visitors as though ending the interview.

It was Margo who saw the real reason for Franzel's curt dismissal of the question. Even though he had received police approval for his plan, it wasn't good policy for him to behave so rudely. In a sense, Franzel wasn't being rude; he was simply remembering what might be termed another appointment.

The floor show was beginning and, from a doorway, a gorgeous blonde was strutting into view in a costume which was a singular combination of poverty and riches. Though formed of ragged silk, the costume was so adorned with jewels that but for its brevity it would have weighted down its wearer. In a soulful contralto voice, the blonde began a song about having "nothing to wear but jewels" and when the spotlight struck her, the words seemed accurate, for the gems gave such a glitter that the rest of the costume seemed to fade.

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The others were leaving and Margo found herself going along, Cranston's hand guiding her elbow as she looked back at the floor show. One glance at King Franzel enabled Margo to observe his fascinated stare. She knew then why Franzel was not interested in brunettes. His eyes were glued to the rhythmic blonde, whose arrival on the floor was his reason for patronizing the Club 88.

At the door, Margo heard Cranston's calm tone, saying:

"Rather dazzling, wasn't she, Margo?"

"Yes," conceded Margo, fighting down her natural antipathy toward blondes. "But who is she?"

"There's her name in lights," replied Cranston. "Lorraine Rue, the girl with the jeweled voice. But they have another name for her. They call her the Beggar Princess."

"Because of King Franzel?"

"Yes. There is an interesting story of how he helped her rise to fame. Consult your favorite columnist for further details. I'll see you later, Margo."

"But, Lamont –"

Before Margo could say more, she realized she was talking to thin air. Even as Cranston, The Shadow had ways of stepping off in an unexpected direction, leaving persons wondering where he had gone. In this instance, Margo had reason to be further irked because she was wondering who was going to take her to dinner, now that Lamont had so suddenly disappeared.

Then, as memories of the chat with King Franzel flooded back to Margo's mind, she was willing to forgive her neglectful escort. Even if King Franzel should forget a blonde named Lorraine Rue just long enough to order his beggars to be on the alert, The Shadow could not afford to lessen his own efforts at forcibly settling the mugger question.

Dusk was already deepening over Manhattan. It was time for The Shadow and his agents to resume their secret patrol against coming crime!

CHAPTER VI. THE THIRD ELEMENT

THE SHADOW was studying his wall map of Manhattan, in terms of the present evening. The map had undergone pronounced changes since the night before; then, only a few squares had been marked with yellow, now there were three more. The yellow stood for quarantine and The Shadow had added the districts where he had operated, because the police had taken over in conformity with Weston's plan of putting headquarters men in every area where muggers were known to have appeared.

In brief, Commissioner Weston was following the old mistake of locking the barn after the horse was stolen, but The Shadow was hardly in a position to criticize. Modernizing the "barn and horse" adage, he regretted that he hadn't locked the garage of a certain warehouse before an unexpected truck had been stolen from it. Still, the mystery of the rescue truck was leading to muggers and more.

The Shadow was actually considering the case of Alban Leroc, though as yet The Shadow had no evidence that the notorious Apache had come to America. What The Shadow did know was that some clever hand was at work, organizing the muggers to an extent that later events might fully reveal.

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There were reports from agents on The Shadow's table. From Hawkeye had come word of an underground lair, now deserted, that could have been the haven that the muggers reached after abandoning the borrowed truck. Who had occupied those temporary premises was still a mystery, but it formed a part in The Shadow's calculations.

Instead of following his former rule of marking specific squares upon the map, The Shadow had listed a dozen probable areas. He was positive that whoever was banding the local muggers would try to outguess all comers, which included The Shadow most specifically. Therefore, The Shadow had placed his own agents on a roving basis, with arrangements for rapid contact through Burbank, should they find traces not merely of muggers, but of other doubtful characters.

Tapping one square, then another, The Shadow traced a zigzag pattern that was to be his own itinerary. He wasn't taking various districts in a regular rotation; instead, he was gauging his own trip to a time schedule marked in the squares themselves. There he would contact agents, obtain their last-minute reports, and send them along their own routes, which were designed to interweave his own.

When it came to designing such a system, The Shadow was a past master.

Again, the bluish light clicked off and Stygian darkness caught the departing mirth of The Shadow. Tonight his whispered laugh carried a speculative note, which stood as his acceptance of a stronger, deeper challenge from unknown men of crime.

HOW well The Shadow had gauged the situation could be judged from a conference in progress elsewhere. In a basement room that had once been the kitchen of a now defunct restaurant, Alban Leroc was seated beside a telephone, addressing a group of men who stood around the walls. These were the same masked henchmen who had formed the truck crew, the night before, but they were no longer wearing their bandanna disguises. Their faces revealed, they formed an unusual group; unusual at least in terms of Leroc.

These men were not Apaches that Leroc had imported with him, nor were they the slinky type that characterized all muggers. They were men of good appearance, well dressed and confident of manner. In a word, they represented a class that anyone would brand as likely victims of the mugger clan!

With the twisted smile that skewed his livid scar, Leroc surveyed these members of his inner circle.

"Tonight we are ready," announced Leroc. "For weeks I have taught you the tricks of the Apaches. Remember: each of you will have his turn, so do not become impatient. You shall draw lots from this bag and the red ball wins!"

Producing a small bag, Leroc shook it with a clatter. The men approached and dipped their hands into the bag, each removing a tightly closed fist. When the hands were opened, one hand showed a red ball the size of a marble, while the rest were all blue. Leroc gestured to the man who held the red.

"Rouge!" exclaimed Leroc. "He is the lucky one. Tomorrow the rest of you will draw. Now, Monsieur Rouge, spread out the map, while I dial the telephone."

The man termed Monsieur Rouge spread a large city map upon the table. Oddly, it was marked with squares quite similar to The Shadow's map and Leroc chuckled when he saw it. There was a guttural tone to Leroc's laugh that marked him as an adopted member of the Paris underworld rather than a native, but the listeners did not note it. They were not interested either in Leroc's real name or his actual nationality; rather, they were keyed to the business that concerned Monsieur Rouge.

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All the while Leroc was dialing his number. Soon someone responded, though the group could not hear the voice across the wire. Leroc talked in terms of "oui" and "non" until he hung up with another chuckle.

"The police have obtained new allies," informed Leroc. "The beggars of the city have been enlisted to watch for muggers. Bah! It is an old trick, used often by the French Surete. It will not annoy us in the least."

Turning to the map, Leroc placed his forefinger on the exact spot where the present headquarters was located. From there he traced a course to a fairly distant street corner, which was away from any of the districts where muggers might be expected.

"Your appointment is there, Monsieur Rouge," declared Leroc. "It will be in approximately one hour. You will recognize the man by his gray hat, light checkered suit, and a black brief case which he always carries. The brief case is important. You understand?"

Monsieur Rouge gave a nonchalant nod.

"Immediately afterward," continued Leroc, "you will leave by this route." Leroc drew a course in pencil on the enlarged map. "Others will be on hand to help close the path after you have gone by. And now"—Leroc turned to the rest of the group—"it is time to call our friends, the muggers, at the numbers which they gave me and send them to the same place at the appointed time. Since they will be needed again, give them these additional instructions covering their departure."

Leroc handed around a set of typewritten slips which his chosen underlings read carefully and placed in their pockets. As a final point, Leroc verbally gave them the address of the next headquarters. True to the Apache traditions, Leroc preferred to be always on the move.

DURING the ensuing hour, strange things took place in the Manhattan dimout. An almost invisible figure was weaving through the streets, pausing at spots where his presence was indicated only by the men who approached in answer to the colored signal blinks from a tiny flashlight. The Shadow was contacting his agents, checking their reports and moving along to other fields.

All during his ramble, The Shadow was passing patrol cars that were keeping regular routes between the quarantined areas. It was Weston's theory, substantiated by Cardona's opinion, that muggers would prove themselves creatures of habit. In seeking new hunting grounds the footpads would probably approach the old and shy away only if they saw men who looked like detectives. Perhaps on the outskirts of the old districts, muggers would run afoul of the patrol cars. At least the idea was hopeful from the police standpoint and since patrol cars were available, it was a good way to use them.

Far better was The Shadow's plan of playing the game ahead, that of being places where muggers were actually likely to arrive, yet he—like the police—had so far discounted the third element: King Franzel's beggars.

The beggars were everywhere, though not in great abundance. The Shadow spotted them in doorways that he passed, though they failed to observe his passage. The beggars were quite aware of the roving police cars, but gave them only scant attention. Pursuant to the order of King Franzel, the mendicants of New York's sidewalks were on the lookout for muggers alone.

How well this third element was operating, was proven just before the hour's end, and the man who received the evidence was Commissioner Weston. Since it was after office hours, Weston had told King Franzel that he would be at the Cobalt Club, so the beggar king had instructed his cohorts to make all calls direct to that number.

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The call that came was plaintive, so much a whine that Weston expected the caller to ask for a dime as replacement for the nickel spent in the telephone booth.

"Muggers, commissioner," the voice said. "I seen them along Bracken Street heading for the corner of West Side Avenue. I'm phoning, like King Franzel told me —"

The rest of the call was lost. Weston bolted from the lobby booth of the Cobalt Club and dashed for the door, waving for Cardona to follow. The corner named was well off the routes of the patrol cars; it belonged in a neighborhood where muggers would be least expected, yet the corner was close enough for Weston to handle this assignment in person.

There was a siren on Weston's official car and the commissioner told the chauffeur to use it amply when cutting through the dimout. With a wail that predicted disaster to all muggers, the big car started on its way, carrying Weston, Cardona, and a third man as a trouble-shooting crew.

"Harland will be pleased when he hears of this," assured Weston. "It will change his attitude toward Franzel and give him confidence in us. That about covers it, inspector."

Cardona responded with a noncommittal grunt. The ace inspector was not too sure that his superior had covered everything. As often, Joe Cardona was thinking in terms of an unpredictable factor known as The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII. DEATH BY NIGHT

THE man with the gray hat and the black brief case was crossing the intersection of Bracken Street and West Side Avenue. He was swinging his cane carelessly, indicating that he was quite unperturbed. This happened to be a very respectable neighborhood, dominated by tall apartment buildings that in themselves denoted security. About the only thing to fear was traffic on the dimmed-out streets and the man with the gray hat had studied it carefully before crossing.

The faint glare from a partly-covered traffic light showed the initials J. A. on the black brief case. The gold letters stood for James Anstead, a name that was to appear in headlines the next day. For the trustful Mr. Anstead felt doubly secure because another pedestrian, as well-dressed as himself, was also crossing the same street intersection. Muggers, if there were any in this neighborhood, would never attack men who walked in pairs. So Anstead fell in step with the other pedestrian, never suspecting that his traveling companion owned the doubtful title of Monsieur Rouge, so designated by an Apache named Alban Leroc.

It happened only a few yards from the corner. By seeming accident, the other man fell a pace behind Anstead. At that specific moment, Monsieur Rouge was toying with a large and fancy scarf that he wore around his collar, a proper item of apparel for this chilly weather.

What Monsieur Rouge did with the scarf was known in Apache parlance as *le coup du Pere Francois*.

Taking the scarf by its corners, the assassin swung it over his own head with a long, looping throw that cleared Anstead's head as well. All Anstead saw was a blur of silk, obscurely visible in the dimout; then, before he could halt his pace, he had walked neck first into the noose. By then, Monsieur Rouge was crossing his wrists and with a sudden turnabout, he stooped. Choked by the twisted scarf, Anstead came backward against the assassin's shoulders, hosted like a potato sack. [For the inexperienced to attempt anything of this sort is dangerous business, for serious injury may result if something goes wrong. Unless you are acquainted with this method of fighting, do not attempt to duplicate any of these feats.]

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The struggle was brief and all one-sided. Carrying his burden toward a basement railing, Monsieur Rouge let Anstead struggle it out alone. The victim thrashed the air with his cane and flapped the brief case wildly until his despairing hands lost both of them. From then on, Anstead clutched at nothing, his efforts becoming increasingly feeble. When they had ceased entirely, Monsieur Rouge gave a forward heave that flung Anstead across the railing to a skull-cracking landing in the space outside the basement door. Picking up the cane, the killer tossed it after the victim, then snatched up the initialed brief case and hurried along the street. He disappeared into a basement doorway, which formed the beginning of the route marked by Leroc.

Around the corner, all was silent, with no sign of loiterers along the street, not even any of the beggars who obeyed King Franzel's rule. It was a quiet street, which seemed secure despite its gloom, yet there was something in the silence that resembled a lull before a coming storm. Perhaps the death agonies of James Anstead had electrified the atmosphere with some peculiar influence as substitute for the screams that the strangling victim would have given if he could. Yet for the present, all was quiet.

So far there was no sign of Commissioner Weston, racing hither in his official car. The murder assigned to Monsieur Rouge had been completed during the minutes immediately following the tip-off that Weston received at the Cobalt Club.

NOW, briefly, the side street showed traces of shadowy forms, moving in from the flanks of large apartment houses. It was curious the way those lurking shapes emerged and dwindled, yet if anything, the technique was poor. On a street as dim as this, cautious prowlers could easily have stayed completely out of sight. In a setting so lulling, even muggers were casting aside discretion.

There was an explanation for the sudden way in which the lurkers shifted back to cover. A clatter of heels was coming from the next corner, accompanied by a whistled tune. A pedestrian was walking along Bracken Street toward West Side Avenue. There was nothing forced about the tune he whistled; even less than Anstead did this new wayfarer sense danger in this neighborhood. Perhaps that was because he was approaching home ground, as indicated by an apartment key that he drew from his pocket. When the man hesitated, it was not because of anything he heard close by; the sound that made him halt was that of a police siren, with an increasing trill that announced an approaching car. The man shrugged; he had heard other sirens during his evening's stroll. To him, the sound simply meant that the police were vigilant.

The muggers heard the note of the siren and identified it in their own terms. To them it signified a patrol car off its course, since this section of the city was not under close surveillance. It could be meant for them, though they definitely doubted it. Their cue was to act swiftly, before the car arrived in the immediate vicinity. Instantly, the street became alive with darting forms, making for a single focal point, the man who was pausing near an apartment house door, quite close to the street corner.

As muggers converged, they realized instantly that they represented at least three bands. They weren't at all surprised, because they knew that Leroc had organized them on a wide scale. Under their new regulations, the muggers had intended to take turns with victims, hence they showed brief hesitation in their dash across the street. By then, the victim caught signs of their approach and turned in frantic haste toward the doorway.

That alone was enough to produce concert among the muggers. There was another factor that likewise spurred them to combined endeavor. The siren wailed anew, much closer. There was time only for a single job and the more the hands, the quicker it could be accomplished. Like a living deluge, the ruffraff flung themselves upon their prey.

Only by inches did the frightened man reach the doorway ahead of the converging mob. That scant interval saved him, for before the muggers could follow him inside, big headlights burned from the corner. Those lights belonged to Weston's official car, which was violating all speed regulations that applied to normal

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patrol. The glow revealed the muggers as a living mass that broke apart as if the light itself had dissolved it.

Those lean, scattering figures in modified zoot suits spelled "muggers" at first sight. The big car jarred to a stop almost at the doorway where the victim was safe at last. The door that clattered open belonged to the car itself and it disgorged three men in the order named: Cardona, Weston and the accompanying detective. They were hopping out on the street side, those three, all with drawn revolvers, intent upon personally depleting the ranks of Manhattan's muggers.

HAD Weston and Cardona been with The Shadow on the evening previous, they would have realized the folly of their present tactics. Though the New York muggers knew none of the tricks of Parisian Apaches, they could boast a fighting instinct that even Alban Leroc would have admired. In dealing with ordinary victims, muggers operated on a three-to-one ratio. Sight of a weapon, even a gun, simply spurred them to more daring tactics.

As a combined group, they still had the usual ratio in their favor, something that Weston and Cardona overlooked. They classed muggers as human rats, who would scurry away at almost any provocation; but they forgot that rats would fight when cornered, a rule that applied at present. For these muggers were literally pocketed in this section of the street and lacked time to regain cover before the shooting started.

That was why the muggers acted as they did. Hardly had the car door opened before the darting figures were returning with a surge. So rapidly did they arrive that none of the men from the car were able to open fire, before their hands were shoved straight upward, aiming guns in a direction where bullets would not count. Twisted in the grip of savage muggers, Weston, Cardona and the detective could feel the needle points of sharp knives at their throats, the whole action occurring with a breathless rapidity.

The law's whole campaign was in the balance, ready to topple in the wrong direction. This act of assassination, if completed, would leave the police force minus its most important members. There was no reluctance on the part of the muggers regarding such a heinous deed; the pause they made was merely a gloating period. They wanted their victims to feel the full horror of their helpless plight.

When that idea had jelled, it would be death for the two men most hated by the muggers—except for The Shadow. In this moment of evil's triumph, thoughts of The Shadow were in every mugger's mind. They were considering this a prologue to the time when they would hold the cloaked avenger in a similar plight.

Only a chance to settle scores with The Shadow could have induced these murderers to forget their present prey. That was the reason why the opportunity arrived.

From somewhere very close at hand came a strident laugh, a challenge that pierced the night air with an increasing power denoting rapid approach. Fierce, dooming in its tone, the taunt invited men of crime to deal with its author now or never. Time taken for murder would be to The Shadow's advantage; such was the message that the pealing mirth carried.

Death to the others could wait, otherwise The Shadow would wreak swift vengeance. With that unspoken message, The Shadow drew upon himself the burden of a single-handed battle with a criminal horde!

CHAPTER VIII. TRAILS OF MYSTERY

THE stir produced by The Shadow's laugh gave Weston and Cardona an immediate respite. They could feel the knife points leave their throats; they found that gripping hands had relaxed. They began a new struggle that would have been short-lived, but for the fact that The Shadow's mocking challenge was still on the rise.

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As Weston twisted free, the muggers shoved him instead of trying to regain their grip. As the commissioner sprawled, he was flattened under Cardona's tumbling figure. A moment later, the detective was slung upon the pair of them.

All three were gunless, having lost their revolvers immediately after the muggers attacked them. Those guns were now in enemy hands and the muggers were using them with full force. Stabs of flame were punching the darkness, but they weren't stopping The Shadow's laugh. His taunts continued to the tune of his own guns, big automatics that were changing position so rapidly that they gave the impression of half a dozen marksmen working at once.

More than a fray of guns, this was a battle of wits. The Shadow's main purpose was to outguess his opponents.

By moving back and forth across the street, The Shadow was always ahead of the enemy's fire. Muggers were seldom good marksmen and they hadn't a chance of clipping a target they could not even see. The Shadow was gone each time they aimed and his jabbing return fire was driving the murderous tribe farther from the car where Commissioner Weston was crawling into safety and urging his companions to do the same.

The Shadow was demonstrating his full ability to take care of himself. The best way for the threatened men to help, was to remove themselves from any danger zone.

There was an explanation for The Shadow's timely arrival. Down the street stood a cab from which he had sprung while voicing his fierce challenge. In picking his own route through the city, The Shadow had picked up the trail of Weston's car. In following, the cab had chosen a parallel avenue, so it had swung into Bracken Street from the far corner, just when the muggers were taking control. Having left the cab, The Shadow was attempting to herd the muggers back toward West Side Avenue, the thoroughfare from which Weston's car had originally turned.

All of a sudden, the muggers broke. The Shadow's shots had clipped a few, but none were seriously wounded. However, they were the first who preferred flight and their howls, along with their panic, inspired the rest to the same idea. But in taking flight, the disappointed assassins did a most curious thing. Instead of spreading back to the corner of the avenue, they went in the opposite direction. Forming a single file, they raced past The Shadow, along the opposite side of the street, protected only by a wild barrage supplied by the three muggers who had grabbed the police revolvers.

To The Shadow, they were ducks in a shooting gallery, though they were difficult to pick off in the dark. Big guns delivered alternate jabs while the fleeing men went by; then, with a mocking laugh, The Shadow took up the chase. Weston recognized that The Shadow was in pursuit, by the way his laugh trailed; Cardona, meanwhile, was counting muggers as they dashed by the dim lights of the halted cab, and Joe saw that there were less than formerly. Since The Shadow was setting the pace, Cardona decided to follow and help round up the remnants.

In less than a block, Cardona was treated to a disappearing act.

IT wasn't astonishing for The Shadow to vanish; in fact, in his black cloak and hat, and the darkness of the dimout, he had scarcely been visible at all. What nonplused Cardona was the way the muggers evaporated. They were gone, all of them, from in front of an apartment house where there was neither door nor side passage to admit them. Hurrying on to the corner, Cardona gawked in all directions, but saw no traces of the vanished mob.

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Where Cardona should have looked was back at the spot where he had last seen the scudding file. Joe's oversight did not apply to The Shadow; he had already reached the spot in question. The wall was very dark, composed of grimy bricks, so it wasn't surprising that the muggers should have slipped from sight, but their complete evaporation was something else again. The Shadow gained the answer when he heard the muffled clang of metal, underfoot.

In the sidewalk, close to the apartment house wall, was the flat door of an elevator. It was one of those sidewalk contrivances used to take freight to and from the cellar. Quite obviously that trapdoor had been open when the fugitives reached it, though the elevator must have still been downstairs. The muggers had dropped through the trap like sailors diving into a hatchway and the last man had pulled the metal door shut.

Most sidewalk elevators had automatic doors, so this particular trap must have been fixed beforehand. What was more, it didn't yield when The Shadow tugged it, so he suspected that it had an automatic latch. What The Shadow needed was another entrance to the cellar, so he hurried back along the front of the building, turned into a narrow blind alley and found a cellar window which he rammed open with the butt of an automatic. A few seconds later, The Shadow was in the cellar.

From somewhere in the distant darkness came the echoes of hoarse but muffled voices that ended in a clang. Taking that direction, The Shadow came to a barred door near the rear of the cellar, the outlet that the muggers had used. It took him nearly a minute to pry it open; beyond the door, The Shadow found a ladder leading to the top of a ventilating shaft. Soon The Shadow emerged upon a roof, two stories above the street.

There were no muggers anywhere in sight. Apparently they had retraced their course up to a higher roof that could be reached by the grille of a barred rear window. But on the higher roof, The Shadow discovered nothing but a sheer wall, that extended several stories upward. This would have been a baffling problem for anyone but The Shadow. His verdict was that since muggers couldn't fly, they might have tried the next best thing. On the roof was an ornamental cornice. Attached to the cornice were two heavy guy cables that formed the equivalent of metal loops between the cornice and the roof proper.

Behind the cornice, The Shadow found a board with cleats on the under side of each end. The length of the board, less the cleats, measured the same as the distance between the guy cables. Across the street was the dim hulk of an old garage, its roof a story lower than where The Shadow stood. From there on, The Shadow could picture the rest.

Between the cables there had been a loop of strong wire, forming a double track across to the roof of the garage. Unquestionably there had been a pile of cleated boards, awaiting the fugitives. By simply slapping the board across the wires, anyone could hang on and perform a rapid slide down across the street, the cleats preventing the improvised trolley from jumping its double track. The extra board that The Shadow found had been intended for a fugitive who didn't come along.

The wire was gone, which furnished another reason why a double track had been preferred. With all the fugitives across, someone had cut the wire and hauled it to the other roof. This has been accomplished while The Shadow was on his way up, and by now the muggers and any of their friends were probably several blocks away. It was neat business, getting from one block to another by an overhead route invisible in the dimout, the sort of thing that would have left the police searching until doomsday on the theory that by surrounding the apartment house and its adjacent buildings, all escape would be cut off.

Low, significant was The Shadow's laugh, as he retraced his own route. Though the muggers were adopting new methods, The Shadow had learned those ways for future reference. Also, his discovery was a clue that might lead him to the man who had sold the muggers on such new ideas.

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BACK by the official car, Inspector Cardona was reporting the disappearance of the muggers. Nodding as he listened, Commissioner Weston was gloomily surveying two muggers who still remained upon the scene. Both were dead and beside them lay revolvers belonging to Weston and Cardona. These were two of the marksmen who had tried to clip The Shadow while running the gantlet of his fire. They had missed, but he had scored direct hits in return.

"Those two won't talk," said Weston, glumly. "I've sent Jackson around the block to see if any others dropped along the way. I prefer dead muggers, but I'd like them to live long enough to tell us what they know. Perhaps Jackson has found a wounded specimen. Here he comes now."

Jackson was the detective who had accompanied the commissioner. He was arriving on the run and as soon as he found his breath, he told of a new discovery.

"Around on West Side Avenue!" panted Jackson. "Over on the other side. A dead man, lying in front of a basement door. The muggers must have got him before we came along."

Weston and Cardona went with Jackson to view his discovery. Behind them stalked a figure that might have been a part of night itself. The Shadow, returned from his own investigation, had arrived in time to hear the news that Jackson brought. When they reached the basement on the avenue, Cardona stooped to study Anstead's body.

"A victim all right," declared Joe. "He wouldn't be a mugger, not dressed like this. Besides they all ran the other way. Maybe he has cards on him, telling who he is."

There was motion amid darkness as The Shadow, unseen member of the group, moved farther along the avenue. Finding an empty basement, The Shadow tried the door. It was locked, but by probing with a special pick, The Shadow soon opened it and glided through. At the rear of the basement, he emerged into a blind alley leading to another street. Across that street was a vacant house that offered a further basement route.

Whoever had slain the victim on the avenue, would have used this path more readily than any other. The question was: Why hadn't the muggers chosen the same course, rather than run the gamut of The Shadow's gunfire?

The question had a simple answer. The muggers hadn't known of this route. Whoever was guiding the destinies of the muggers was delivering only a partial service; he had told them too little and had let them arrive too late.

The whispered laugh that sounded in the darkness was proof that The Shadow was divining a deeper game behind the mugging racket. He had pegged another clue to his credit in his effort to uncover the hidden hand of Alban Leroc!

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW'S POLICY

KING FRANZEL was holding court at Club 88. His friends were congratulating him on his part in curbing the mugger menace, for the news of last night's tip-off had been made public by the police. Nevertheless, King Franzel was quite loath to receive personal congratulations.

"I don't deserve the credit," said Franzel, modestly. "I simply gave the order for my followers to watch for muggers. One of them spotted some and phoned the commissioner. My part was trifling. In fact I didn't leave this night club during the evening."

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There were reporters present, among them Clyde Burke. Two of the news hawks put a question to King Franzel. Both of them wanted to know the name of the beggar who phoned the tip-off. Sagely, Franzel shook his head.

"It wouldn't do to name him," he said. "The chap would be marked for death by all muggers who could find him." He turned to the patrons of the night club, who had congregated about him. "If you want to do the right thing," Franzel added blandly, "just think of all my followers. Remember them when they try to sell you pencils or shoelaces. The more you encourage them, the more they will try to track down the muggers."

Commissioner Weston was approaching the ringside table while King Franzel was delivering that final proclamation. With the commissioner was Howard Harland and the reformer was close enough to overhear what Franzel said. It seemed to impress others, but not Harland.

"A noble sentiment, Franzel," observed Harland, bluntly, "but it has a commercial taint. The more money your beggars receive, the bigger your profits to throw away at places like this. In my opinion, Franzel, you are running a very nasty racket."

"Maybe you are thinking of your own," snapped Franzel, in prompt retaliation. "There's nothing phony about my business. If I can increase the receipts of street venders, I am entitled to a reasonable percentage. But as far as I can see, you are giving the Citizens' Reform League a lot of unpaid bills, with nothing to show except a barrel of hot air."

For a moment the two big men appeared ready to go at each other, fists first. Then Weston stepped between them and motioned them to chairs. Gesturing for others to leave, the commissioner turned to Cranston and Cardona, asking them to join the group at the table. Franzel threw a glance around the circle to make sure that his unexpected guests were wearing evening clothes. He looked disappointed when he saw that Harland was clad in a Tuxedo; then, in an indulgent tone, Franzel inquired:

"You are dining with me, gentlemen?"

"Not I," boomed Harland. "Why should I dine on pennies donated by poor beggars?"

"You shouldn't mind," retorted Franzel. "You wouldn't be using any of your own money. I can't picture you donating any pennies to charity."

"So you admit that your beggars are charity cases!"

"I admit nothing, Harland. If you are squeamish about who pays the dinner check, why not take it yourself, and charge it to the Citizens' Reform League?"

Before Harland could answer, Weston closed the issue by declaring that he and Harland were dining elsewhere. Weston had stopped by to express official approval of the cooperation supplied by King Franzel. While Harland glowered, Weston put his sentiments into words.

"Last night's work was excellent," said Weston. "Your followers are certainly alert, Franzel. We could not have hoped for a more timely tip-off."

"You are forgetting one thing, commissioner," put in Harland. "Though you arrived soon enough to rout the muggers, you were not in time to save Anstead's life."

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"Anstead was probably ambushed," argued Weston. "The surgeon's report shows that he was choked to death. By flinging him out of sight, his murderers escaped detection. I am not surprised that such a crime was not reported."

"It doesn't speak well for the beggars," persisted Harland. "If they saw one thing, they should have seen another. I still claim that they are a public nuisance."

"Like reform committees," suggested Franzel. "I tell you what, commissioner. I'll be glad to call my followers off the streets at night, just to learn if Harland is right—or wrong."

"No, no," expressed Weston. "We need them, after what they did last night. I regard their work as efficient, even though Harland doesn't."

King Franzel gave a nod of appreciation. At that moment the orchestra started and Franzel turned to watch for the floor show. The others did not remain to witness the entrance of the ravishing blonde who appeared under the name of Loraine Rue. They had other appointments, particularly Lamont Cranston.

LEAVING Club 88, Cranston went directly to an investment office in a towering office building, where he found a chubby-faced man who was working after hours. The chubby chap was named Rutledge Mann and he interspersed his working hours as an investment broker with special duties for The Shadow. Like Burbank, Mann was a contact agent; though most of his work was office duty, he was an important cog in The Shadow's machinery of agents.

Today, Mann had been compiling reports on James Anstead, last night's solitary victim of the mugging epidemic. Though Mann's findings were quite sketchy, they were more than the law had uncovered. Classing Anstead as a typical mugging victim, the police had not bothered to theorize regarding his case.

"Anstead was an inventor," stated Mann, in a methodical tone. "Something of a crackpot, according to my accumulated information, but there were several investors ready to buy his inventions, if they worked. The trouble with Anstead was that he always held back, fearing that he would not receive his proper share."

Cranston reached for the papers from which Mann's information had come. None of the informants knew of anyone that Anstead would be likely to visit in the vicinity of West Side Avenue. They did admit, however, that Anstead was always bobbing up with new clients, most of whom he eventually mistrusted.

While Cranston pondered, Mann waited, knowing that he would soon hear The Shadow's analysis of the case.

"Let us assume one thing, Mann," declared Cranston, in his even tone. "Whoever Anstead was visiting, he was probably carrying important documents covering his latest inventions."

"Very probably," agreed Mann. "One of the men I phoned told me that Anstead usually carried a black brief case."

"In that same brief case," continued Cranston, "Anstead could have had the correspondence from the man who summoned him where he was going last night. Thus the thief who took the brief case gained not only Anstead's plans for new inventions, but closed the trail to Anstead's client."

Mann's eyes opened wider. Then, in his cautious fashion he furnished an objection.

"It was a long risk —"

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"Not exactly," interposed Cranston. "Perhaps Anstead was on his way to a fictitious address to meet an imaginary person. If so, any correspondence would have proven troublesome if found, but it would not have revealed Anstead's murderer."

"You believe that Anstead was decoyed to West Side Avenue?"

"Precisely. It was the last spot where any of us expected muggers to appear, and therefore an ideal place for murder. Besides, Anstead's death was not a mugging case, even though the police believe so. It reminds me of the sort of thing that used to happen in Paris, when the Apache were at their worst."

"Then other deaths may be expected!"

"They may be attempted, but I think we can forestall them, with so many beggars working with us. By this time, the man behind the mugging racket should be suspicious of all beggars and that lessens our task. We shall avoid beggars too."

Mann didn't quite understand what Cranston meant. With a slight smile, Cranston put it in the form of an order.

"Instructions to agents," he announced. "They are to make a general survey of all sections where beggars are absent and confine their watch to those districts. Between the police, the beggars—and ourselves—we may gain a jump on the next crime."

Glancing from Mann's window, Cranston saw the Manhattan skyline blurring into dusk. It was time for him to resume the regalia of The Shadow and join in the new campaign. As the door closed behind Cranston, Mann reached for the telephone to contact the active agents and assign them to their new duty.

MATTERS were already shaping up somewhat as The Shadow supposed. In a new headquarters, Alban Leroc was discussing this night's business with the members of his chosen circle. This headquarters was shabbier than those that Leroc used previously, which was an indication that the Apache was burrowing deeper after every crime. His surroundings, however, had no effect on Leroc's mood. He seemed more cocksure than ever.

The bag was passing among Leroc's followers. A stolid man who looked like a storekeeper was the one who drew the red ball. The man's smooth face showed a flicker of satisfaction which greatly pleased Leroc. He clapped a hand on the man's stooped shoulder.

"Ah, tonight you are Monsieur Rouge, since you have drawn the red ball," commended Leroc. "Tonight you shall have grand opportunity. Be careful, though, that you do not let beggars see you. Bah! Ces gueux, they have caused us too much trouble. So we shall make it easier for you, our new Monsieur Rouge!"

Turning to a man who held a blue marble, the only one of its kind in the bag, Leroc drew the fellow forward.

"This is Monsieur Bleu," explained Leroc. "He has drawn the blue ball. He will accompany Monsieur Rouge and be ready to assist him. Already I have received our orders for tonight. Your work lies here, Messieurs Rouge and Bleu. There will be others close at hand to help your rapid escape. Ah, tonight we shall really show them les pas du transfuge. We shall be rats, all of us, but especially you, Monsieur Rouge."

Drawing the chosen assassin forward, Leroc suddenly flipped a long-bladed knife close to the fellow's throat. The man did not wince; apparently he was accustomed to Leroc's playful tricks. His own hand flipped forward, producing a knife that matched Leroc's both in size and maneuver. Leroc grinned as he felt a sharp

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blade graze his own neck.

"You have learned well," commended Leroc. "Le coup de la petite guillotine, we call this trick in Paris." Leroc stepped back, folding his knife as it went to his pocket. "But remember, Monsieur Rouge, you must be swift, so swift that the victim cannot turn and tilt his head.

"When I first came to Paris, they tried la petite guillotine on me. But I was too quick for them and this was all that happened." His eyes gloating with the recollection, Leroc drew his finger along the ugly scar that streaked the side of his face, dismissing it as one would a scratch. "So I am still alive," he continued, "but the Apache whose knife missed is dead. I saw to that. So take my advice, Monsieur Rouge, and do not miss tonight."

The gloat in Leroc's eyes was reflected by the gaze of the man who had been elected to the office of Monsieur Rouge. Having finished his pep talk, Leroc became more confidential.

"It will be easy," he assured. "Your victim is a man named Wilbur Pell. He will wear a black hat, the kind you call a derby, and he will also carry a small satchel, as doctors do. It is likely that Pell will also have a revolver, but what is that to you, Monsieur Rouge? Those who are treated to la petite guillotine waste time if they think of their guns!"

A muffled phone bell was ringing from a corner of the underground room. With a pleased leer, Alban Leroc turned to answer the call that would give him final details regarding the proposed assassination of one Wilbur Pell.

CHAPTER X. COUP FOR COUP

IT was very dark along the dead-end street. So dark that The Shadow could have readily tossed hat and cloak aside, to fare about as Cranston, and yet remain unseen. That he insisted on retaining the personality of The Shadow was proof that he sensed trouble brewing in this East Side neighborhood.

The district itself was a paradox.

All around stood old houses that had been remodeled into small apartment houses that commanded high rentals. This was distinctly an "address" street, namely, one where a resident gained prestige by having so fashionable an address. Quiet, secluded, with the river furnishing both breeze and view, the apartments in this neighborhood were preferred by persons of wealth and discrimination.

Such residences occupied several blocks along the river front. The southern boundary of the area was marked by the looming hulk of an abandoned brewery, while the northern barrier was the huge approach to a great suspension bridge that crossed the river. To the police of the precinct, this was regarded as the best beat in the city. Instead of calling it by its advertised title of Surrey Place, they termed it Barney's Sidepocket in honor of the cop who originally patrolled it.

Blocked at both ends, with the river terminating the dead-end streets, the "sidepocket" could be covered from the avenue that ran parallel to the river. It was the last place in Manhattan where crooks of any description would care to find themselves boxed. That was one reason why The Shadow had chosen it for his own patrol, for he was playing hunches somewhat in reverse tonight.

There were no beggars hereabout, for they weren't popular with the janitors of the apartment buildings. Nor were there any signs of muggers, which was likewise true to form. However, The Shadow's theory was that

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wherever beggars were absent, muggers were likely to appear, and there was no better bet than Surrey Place.

Crime's problem was The Shadow's too. Unless this dead-end district revealed an unsuspected exit, nothing would happen here. In that case, The Shadow could write off Surrey Place, and resume his investigations elsewhere. On that account, The Shadow was spending valuable time feeling his way about the sidepocket, in the hope that he had actually found the scene that fitted with his theory of hidden crime-to-be.

It was near the water front that The Shadow made his important discovery. Along a cement walk that flanked a building and ended in a high iron fence, The Shadow felt a slight quiver of the stone beneath his foot. Stooping, he probed the spot with a tiny flashlight that cast a gleam no larger than a silver dollar. The ray of light trickled along a crack in the cement, at first sight seemingly a mere division between two blocks. But when The Shadow dug a gloved forefinger into the crack and brushed away the dust, he saw that the cut went deep.

This was a loose block, like a trapdoor in the paving. Close against the fence, it was in a place where people seldom went and therefore quite unlikely to be detected.

It would prove difficult to raise the block except from below, a point that gave The Shadow a further notion. Extinguishing the flashlight, he placed his ear close to the block and listened. At first, he heard only the muffled swash of the river, which had apparently oozed in beneath the sidewalk. Then there came dull sounds, much like footbeats, that ended with a slight tremble of the stone.

Drawing away, The Shadow took an angled position that enabled him to use a concrete wall as a background beyond the cement trap. As he watched, he heard the slab grind upward; then from the hole emerged a stoop-shouldered figure that was visible, though only vaguely, against the concrete wall.

This was The Shadow's first meeting with the man that Leroc had designated as Monsieur Rouge for this night's ugly work.

CLEAR of the slab, Monsieur Rouge let it settle back in place. He was so meticulous about that detail, that it would seem he had used this route merely to reach Surrey Place and was intending to leave by a different outlet. Since The Shadow was seeking every possible fact concerning these New York Apaches whose activities he had suspected, he moved aside and let the crouched man pass, so as to carry the trail still farther.

Apparently Monsieur Rouge had been delayed along the way, for he moved with the hurry of a man keeping an appointment. Turning away from the water front, he started toward the avenue, making little effort to deaden his footfalls. The Shadow marked that point as further evidence that if muggers appeared upon the scene, they would be serving as a blind for the undercover work of the Apaches. Thus in the ordinary course of things, The Shadow was gaining a better picture of a hidden factor named Alban Leroc.

At the avenue, Monsieur Rouge paused to watch. He had chosen a poor corner, simply because it was on his own side of the street. That was quite to The Shadow's advantage, because it gave him the other corner, where a convenient doorway at the top of some steps allowed a better range of view. From his vantage spot, The Shadow could see a head poke out and in from beside the opposite corner, though at no time was it possible to distinguish the features of the lurking assassin.

The Shadow's plan was fixed.

Unquestionably the assassin expected a victim of the Anstead type. Swift work in the dark, all would be over, and the assassin on his way. Such, at least, was the crime schedule.

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That routine did not include The Shadow. He, too, could work quickly in the dark.

An automatic drawn in readiness, The Shadow was prepared to gear this affair in reverse. There would be a dead assassin, a rescued victim, and The Shadow would be free to clamp the muggers who arrived to cover up the Apache's unfinished work.

All the scene needed was a victim, and he was approaching at this moment. Across the street, Monsieur Rouge was craning from his corner to look for a man whose footsteps could already be heard. The Shadow, more alert than the assassin, not only heard the footsteps; he made out the figure of the man meant for murder.

The man was coming down the avenue. He looked thin and frail as he nervously stepped away from a dim-lit doorway, and he failed to obscure his outline. The man was wearing a derby hat and carrying a small black satchel. Those features identified him as Wilbur Pell, whose name was known to Alban Leroc but not to The Shadow.

It was curious that Pell should be behaving so suspiciously, since this neighborhood seemed so unlikely as a mugging ground. It might be that he had read of Anstead's death and therefore considered no place safe. However, The Shadow interpreted Pell's actions differently. From the way Pell paused at the far corner and stared toward the dead-end street, it appeared that he was looking for some person rather than an address.

This linked with the Anstead case.

Unquestionably Pell had come to Surrey Place on some unusual business that smacked of a lure which Pell himself did not suspect. He was making it very simple for the assassin, whom he could easily mistake for the man he expected to meet. Monsieur Rouge was behaving in itchy fashion, as though anxious to hop across the avenue and meet Pell halfway. Finally curbing that desire, the lurking assassin shifted back into the dark.

Pell was already making up his mind, and quite abruptly. He was starting from the curb to cross the avenue at a brisk, determined pace, and he was heading for The Shadow's corner. At the same moment, the assassin began a slink across the darkened side street, to reach the same focal point.

Victim and killer were about to place themselves within reach of The Shadow, that master hand at cheating murder!

THERE wasn't one chance in a hundred thousand that Leroc's hireling could deliver death under these conditions. Yet it was not The Shadow who forestalled the coming crime. Another chance was on its way.

From his doorway, The Shadow could hear the approach of a lumbering truck. Such vehicles were not uncommon on this avenue, which formed a short route for travel to Long Island. The truck was coming from below The Shadow's corner and apparently Pell heard it too, for he was quickening his pace. But Pell wasn't even noticing the truck's approach.

All Pell was thinking about was the darkness of the sidepocket. He couldn't see The Shadow, blended in the darkness upon the house steps, nor did he spy the assassin who was sneaking toward the same objective. Pell simply remembered that it was good policy to be cautious where darkness was concerned and he forgot that the same rule applied to traffic. Unexpectedly, Pell stopped short before he reached the curb.

Before The Shadow could spring out to seize him, the truck reached Pell. There was a shriek of brakes and with it, a wild, terrified yell from Pell. The man was jolted by the truck front and hurled like a straw figure, halfway across the street, where he struck the paving headfirst with a sickening crack. That explosive sound

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denoted a smashed skull. Death was instantaneous for Wilbur Pell. An accident, not The Shadow, was the thing that intercepted murder.

Pell's satchel sailed from his hands clear to a house wall opposite. Striking there, it bounced back to the street, where Monsieur Rouge, watching the satchel's flight, turned and scooped it up as his prize. Momentarily, Monsieur Rouge hesitated, looking from Pell's still body to the truck that was stopping farther up the avenue. Then deciding that luck had saved him trouble, he started down the dead-end street, back toward the rat hole from which he had originally emerged.

Quicker of decision was The Shadow. Leaving his doorway, he was already on his way to cut off the escape of the man who had dropped the role of assassin to play the thief. Swift in the darkness, The Shadow was first to reach the little promenade by the water front. Wheeling into that cul-de-sac, The Shadow halted just short of the cement trap and turned to await Monsieur Rouge.

Hurried footsteps slowed as the man with the satchel turned the final corner. Feeling himself safely out of sight, the fellow began a cautious creep. His breathing became tense, heavy, louder than the river's swash. Then into that sinister setting came another sound, the creak of yielding stone. It was well under way before The Shadow sensed it; when he turned to look behind him, he saw the outline of a head and shoulders coming from the cement trap.

This was Monsieur Bleu, the man assigned to aid the departure of his teammate, Monsieur Rouge!

A snarl came from Monsieur Rouge, bringing The Shadow full about. The tone was answered by a sharp response from Monsieur Bleu as he lunged upward from the rat hole. Like The Shadow, these de luxe Apaches had trained themselves to see in gloom and though they lacked unsurpassed sight, they had spied enough.

Between the raised slab and the building wall, both white backgrounds, they distinguished a blurred shape that they knew must be The Shadow. With one accord, these bold and deadly killers were springing upon The Shadow, hoping to deliver quick-death tricks, the coups taught by Alban Leroc!

Unless The Shadow could retaliate with coup for coup, this spot beside the water front would be remembered as the last stand of the cloaked avenger known as crimedom's greatest foe!

CHAPTER XI. TWO WAYS OUT

ALREADY, Monsieur Rouge was on the lunge. In his hand he wielded the razor-edged knife, for the stroke that Leroc termed *la petite guillotine*. Sighting the arm poised for its swing, The Shadow had only one course, a quick, backward shift that meant momentary safety, even though it threw him to the mercies of Monsieur Bleu. At least the latter wouldn't be trying a knife slash from behind.

The Shadow's guess was right. Monsieur Bleu preferred the coup attributed to Pere Francois. Out from the hole, Monsieur Bleu was already flinging a long silk scarf in a loop that cleared The Shadow's head. Since The Shadow was coming toward him, Monsieur Bleu couldn't trust the victim to lunge into the noose, so the assassin furnished a sideways twist that served the same purpose. Snared by the tightening scarf, The Shadow made a sudden stagger in the same direction. As he went off balance, his hat flew from his head. Momentarily, Monsieur Rouge, ready with his knife, saw a blur that represented The Shadow's face.

That pale target was enough for the knife specialist. Remembering the orders of Leroc, the killer made his stroke, aiming for a spot just below The Shadow's chin. That slash seemed certain to arrive and it would have

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with any victim other than The Shadow. Looped by the choking scarf, The Shadow should have been struggling forward, as victims always did. Therefore his very efforts should have aided the collaboration of the assassins labeled Rouge and Bleu.

Instead, The Shadow was staging a trick of his own. He was yielding to the tug of the noose, letting himself go with it. He even added an exaggerated spin to the twist that Monsieur Bleu was giving him. This happened as the knife was slashing home, and the knife of Monsieur Rouge missed The Shadow's throat by the scant fraction of an inch.

A close miss could be as good as a long one. This time a close miss was much better.

Grazing The Shadow's turning face, the slashing knife came down past it and met the looped scarf that gripped the victim's neck!

The blade cut the silk as cleanly as it had cleaved thin air. It missed The Shadow's shoulder because he was free the moment that the scarf was chopped. His spin flung him into an immediate sprawl, clear away from the murderous knife. The stroke of Monsieur Rouge had not only failed; The Shadow had turned it into a coup of his own that released him from the toils of Monsieur Bleu!

The man with the knife flung aside the satchel that he was carrying in his other hand. Savagely, he tried a long-range slash at The Shadow. It was a futile attempt, for Monsieur Rouge was chopping at blackness that might have been vapor, though he guessed that The Shadow was part of the gloom along the darkened edge of the paving. The Shadow was there, as his attacker guessed, but he was finishing a roll that brought him face upward. Spotting the gleam of the knife, The Shadow stopped its backhand slash with trip-hammer speed by snagging the wrist that accompanied it.

Under the clutch of The Shadow's gloved hand, Monsieur Rouge performed a long somersault, such as The Shadow's iron grip had often applied to foemen. The knife scaled into the river as its owner slid clear from the cul-de-sac, out toward the street.

COMING to hands and knees, The Shadow produced an automatic in the same action and looked for Monsieur Bleu. That rat was behaving true to form. He saw a way out and took it, the hole through the cement walk. He was jumping down into the gap before The Shadow could take aim, but in making his departure, Monsieur Bleu felt it necessary to justify his desertion of Monsieur Rouge. His excuse was the satchel; it was lying where he could grab it as he dived, so Monsieur Bleu took it with him.

The Shadow's gunshot bashed against the cement slab as it was dropping into place, released by the diving Apache. With a leap, The Shadow stopped the slab before it slammed, by poking his gun into the closing crevice. He fired another shot that brought muffled echoes from below, in the hope that a ricocheting bullet would clip the fugitive. Then, prying the slab open, The Shadow dropped through, letting the trap fall in place above him, thus cutting off this route for Monsieur Rouge.

The Shadow's flashlight revealed an underground passage connecting with the river. It was a drainage pipe that took the surplus of a long-buried brook. There was a grating, blocking the outlet to the river, so The Shadow went in the opposite direction, hoping to overtake the man with the satchel. The fugitive was no longer in sight but his whereabouts were disclosed by a clang that came from a smaller tunnel leading into this large one. Reaching the turn The Shadow encountered a vertical grating that had locked automatically after Monsieur Bleu slammed it behind him.

That passage led up a flight of crude steps down which water trickled. Another clash of a closing grating told that a second barrier had been slung across the way. The Shadow could hear voices accompanying the scurry

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of feet, proving that more Apaches were in reserve. To force the barriers and engage in underground battle would be folly. Probably the crooks would decide not to wait. To The Shadow it seemed that there might be better opportunities above ground than below, so he retraced his way back to the cement trapdoor.

Opportunity was already at hand above ground.

Up by the corner of the avenue, a glum-faced truck driver was staring at Pell's body. He was wondering if the police would believe his account of the accident and while he was debating how to reach them, the police came in evidence. Sounds of patrol-car sirens whined from side streets, apparently coming toward the river.

As the truck driver looked around, he saw huddled figures moving from those very streets and instantly linked them with the sirens. Those figures were muggers, operating in this neighborhood, and the police must have received a tip-off telling where they would be found. So far the muggers had found no prey, though they might be considering the truck driver eligible, but the approach of sirens made them hesitate and they showed symptoms that indicated they would scatter. Then, one pointed suddenly across the avenue.

A chance victim had unfortunately thrust himself in sight. He'd seen the muggers, heard the sirens, and he was undergoing a mental stampede. If he had only shown sense enough to dodge into a doorway and wait until the muggers ran away, things would have gone quite well. Instead, the man gave a sudden call for help; turning in one direction, he dodged back, as though scared by his own imagination. Next, in his frantic efforts to escape, he was doing the worst thing possible. He was running right into a vortex formed by muggers who immediately converged at sight of such easy prey.

THE startled truck driver saw the victim receive the clutch of hands that bent his arms behind him. A sallow mugger produced a button knife and flipped a blade point to the man's throat. A pleading voice changed to the chatter of teeth, when the victim heard his captors say to shut his mouth unless he wanted his throat open. With practiced skill, the muggers went through the man's pockets, taking everything of value, while the truck driver did not dare to stir.

Having caused Pell's death, the truckman didn't want to add another tragedy. He was sure that if he tried to chase the muggers, they would slay their victim before turning to a new attack.

All the while, those sirens were getting closer!

Their prey properly plucked, the muggers kicked his feet from under him and left him floundering in the street. Murder wasn't part of their line, when a victim didn't fight. Stuffing the man's money in their pockets, they started running northward up the avenue, passing the truck where the driver huddled, clutching a big monkey wrench.

That was when the driver yelled, hoping his shout would be heard by the cars that were almost at hand. The muggers turned, intending to gang the trucker, when they heard a sound that gave them chills of their own.

The laugh of The Shadow, coming from the darkened street that led to the river!

With mad accord, the muggers dashed along the avenue, spurred by the laugh that still pursued them. They were sighted by police cars swinging a corner and the vehicles took up the chase, with one exception. The last of three cars halted, signaled by the truck driver, who was over beside the mugging victim, helping the bewildered man to his feet.

Three streets farther up the avenue, the muggers were turning toward the river. Police cars roared after them, thinking the fugitives could be boxed at that dead end. But when the first car halted at the river bank, there

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wasn't a sign of any muggers. Three in number, they had timed their dash to a perfect getaway.

How long that perfection could have lasted was a question. The cops kept flickering flashlights toward the river, thinking the muggers might have jumped there. But the mucky waters showed no trace of swimming forms, nor did doorways reveal any signs of lurkers. Perhaps the police might have begun to look in the right direction, before it was too late, but that was rather doubtful; nevertheless they became alert enough when all was pointed out to them.

First came a weird laugh, from somewhere back along the water's edge. It was The Shadow's mirth, for he had gone back by his street and had climbed the high fence just past the cement trapdoor. Suspecting that muggers, like Apaches, would have a way out, The Shadow wanted a preview of it and had gained one.

Following the laugh, The Shadow delivered a pistol shot. Police not only heard, but saw it, for they had turned at The Shadow's call. The gunshot arched upward, like a pointer in the night, and when the officers instinctively looked in the indicated direction, they observed what The Shadow wanted them to see.

LIKE ancient warriors making a surprise attack upon a battlement, a file of muggers were scaling the buttress of the great river bridge that marked the northern boundary of Surrey Place. They were weaving like flies upon a window curtain, stirred by a breeze. The reason, though not visible, was quite apparent. Hanging from the rail above that buttress was a rope ladder with wooden rungs that had been specially dropped for the benefit of these departing criminals!

Only one trio of muggers had accepted tonight's opportunity, but so far they were getting service, as rendered by Alban Leroc. They were almost at the end of their rope, the end that they wanted. If The Shadow hadn't spotted them, they could easily have reached the rail and lost themselves along the blacked-out bridge, where the police would never have thought to look for them.

Now, all that was altered. Police guns began booming with a vengeance. The fire was wild at this long range, but it sufficed. The Shadow, who could have clipped the figures that had halted at his discovering shot, was willing to leave the rest to the law. The bullets that were peppering the buttress were actually beating out a message that the muggers could understand. They were being told to come down from their ladder and surrender.

Instead, they showed signs of continuing upward. It was their own choice, so they deserved the consequences. Abetted by new arrivals, the police increased their gunfire, with better accuracy, since they were getting the range. One bullet winged a mugger and the man let go the ladder with a shriek that carried all the way during his eighty-foot plunge to the paving below the bridge approach. Another crook began a mad scramble upward and received a deluge of fire that brought him to earth in headlong style.

The third was hesitant, almost willing to give up, but when he started to come down the ladder, he turned to wave a signal of surrender. The crackle of bullets must have unnerved him, along with sight of the depths below. The ladder was swinging precariously, wavered by the forms that had left it. The third man lost his grip, pitched headlong with a mad but futile grab, and furnished the third wail that ended in a bone-crushing crash.

Grim was The Shadow's laugh, a mirthless tone of retribution. The officers who heard it took it for approval of their work, but it meant more than that. It told of The Shadow's own purpose.

The police could deal with muggers who were the "front" for deeper crime. The Shadow's campaign would concern the Apaches, those hidden criminals whose ways went deeper. No matter what that depth, those undercover actors would experience an avenger's wrath.

Such was the edict of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. THE HUMAN CLUE

COMMISSIONER WESTON was holding session at the precinct station near Surrey Place. Weston was grilling a very unhappy truck driver who kept telling the same story over and over, with no variation whatever. In an effort to end the mugging racket, Weston was accusing the trucker of many things that didn't hold, just in the hope that the man might turn out to be a lead.

It was Weston's argument that the truck driver could have brought a load of muggers to Surrey Place. In that case he would have run down one victim deliberately and let the muggers handle another. The truck driver continued to protest his innocence, so Weston finally dropped the quiz and decided to hold him only on the accident charge.

As soon as the truck driver had gone to a cell, Weston sought an opinion from Cardona.

"What do you think, inspector?"

"The story stands up," replied Cardona. "The truck was coming along the avenue and Wilbur Pell stepped in front of it. That happens a lot in these dimouts. Besides, Pell wasn't robbed. His wallet, his money, everything else was on him. That's how we identified him."

Nodding slowly, Weston didn't see his friend Cranston who had just entered the station. In time to hear what Cardona said, Cranston noted that there was no mention of Pell's satchel. From his own observations while cloaked as The Shadow, Cranston did not feel that the omission could be charged against the truck driver. It simply proved that the driver hadn't seen the flying satchel that bounced off a house wall while the truck was halting farther along.

More important was the fact that the police had learned nothing of Pell's satchel from papers or other data in the dead man's pocket. They had missed badly in the matter of Anstead's brief case; they were doing worse with Pell's satchel. To The Shadow, those were vital clues with human angles; namely, Anstead and Pell themselves.

However, from the human standpoint, there was a clue that could count for more than either of those dead men.

With accustomed nonchalance, Cranston inquired about this evening's events. He had stopped at the Cobalt Club, so he said, and had learned that Weston had sallied forth quite suddenly. Cranston was anxious to know the reason.

"It was another tip-off," explained Weston. "The same as before, from one of King Franzel's beggars. The fellow didn't give his name, but he said he'd seen muggers hanging around Surrey Place. So we radioed the patrol cars to go there and made for the spot ourselves."

"With what luck, commissioner?"

"Good luck. A man named Pell was killed, but his death was an accident. Maybe muggers were responsible, because Pell might have been dodging them. But we rescued another victim, a chap named Waverly."

"Lee Waverly," stated Cardona. "Only we didn't exactly rescue him. The muggers let him go after they

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robbed him, because he didn't holler. We settled the muggers; picked them off when they were climbing a bridge approach. Here's Waverly's money and his wallet"— Cardona produced the items—"whenever he wants to claim them."

Cranston gazed casually about the police station as though expecting to see Waverly. Cardona understood the glance.

"Waverly went back to his hotel," explained the inspector. "I told him to phone after he got there, in case we had anything to tell him. He's stopping at the Everglade." Cardona plucked a cardboard from among Waverly's reclaimed belongings. "Here's his credit card."

FROM Cranston's manner, he was no longer interested in the subject of Lee Waverly. The precinct phone was ringing and Cardona suggested that it might be Waverly, but it proved to be Harland. The reformer had heard about the happenings in Surrey Place and wanted to talk to the commissioner. After a brief conversation, Weston announced that they would meet Harland at Club 88.

"I suppose Harland intends to apologize to Franzel," declared Weston. "I am glad that he has come around at last. Summon my car, inspector, while I have a brief talk with that truck driver and relieve his mind of too much worry."

Temporarily alone, Cranston used the opportunity to call Burbank. In a low tone, very much The Shadow's whisper, Cranston gave important instructions to be relayed to his agents. During that conversation, Cranston specified one name.

The name was Lee Waverly.

When Weston's car arrived, Cranston was gone. The desk sergeant told the commissioner that his friend would meet him later at Club 88. Weston's response was a disapproving grunt. He was sure that Lamont Cranston had gone somewhere to find Margo Lane and bring her along to the night club for purely decorative purposes.

On one count, Weston was correct. Cranston had stopped by for Margo, but his reason was more important than the commissioner supposed. As they rode along in Cranston's limousine, the gentleman who doubled as The Shadow was entertaining his girl friend with an account of his recent adventures. In a sense, "entertained" was not the word, for the little gasps that Margo gave were proof that she was experiencing horror rather than enjoyment.

"Those hidden assassins!" exclaimed Margo. "Apaches, or whatever they are! You mean they are the real menace in all these crimes?"

"Exactly," replied Cranston, "and they are working with deep purpose. Whoever trained them and gave them immediate orders, is merely a lieutenant in the game. The muggers are being bluffed into acting as a front and behind it all is a brain, much higher up."

"But who could the man be, Lamont?"

"Someone with an eye for big business. A man crafty enough to coax Anstead into town with a brief case filled with plans for salable inventions."

"And Pell's satchel?"

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"The same applies. I shall have Mann track down its specific contents. Unquestionably Pell was also lured to New York. It would be helpful to have him still alive so we could hear his story."

Margo brightened with a sudden idea.

"Why there is a victim who might tell you something!" the girl exclaimed. "This man Lee Waverly looks like a victim too. No"— Margo's forehead wrinkled with a frown—"that won't do. Waverly only ran into muggers, not Apaches."

"A good thought, Margo," approved Cranston, calmly. "Waverly did run into muggers, purposely."

Margo's frown increased its puzzlement.

"I spoke of two Apaches at the water front," reminded Cranston. "After encountering them, I followed one along an underground route that I closed for the other. When I returned, the police were already closing in around Surrey Place. By the time their blockade ended, I had searched the entire sidepocket, but there was no trace of the missing Apache."

"Then where did he go?" queried Margo. "If he eluded you, why didn't the police find him?"

"I believe they did," replied Cranston. "I think that he accompanied them to the local precinct, but left before I arrived there."

The riddle suddenly broke apart for Margo, as she exclaimed:

"Lee Waverly!"

"Most probably the man we want," nodded Cranston, "which would indicate that these Apaches are Americans, trained here in New York, and not an imported breed. That takes us a few more steps along the trail."

HOWEVER important the trail, it had an immediate interlude. The limousine had reached Club 88, where Cranston and Margo entered, to find Weston and Harland at Franzel's table, telling him about the latest mugger depredations. Learning that a beggar had again phoned a timely tip-off, Franzel leaned back in his chair and swelled his chest with satisfaction.

"In face of proof like this," he boasted, "I think that everyone should be satisfied, including Harland."

"Why should I be satisfied?" boomed Harland, taking immediate exception. "Mugging is trifling, compared to murder. Two violent deaths have occurred on two successive nights."

"Anstead may have been murdered," admitted Weston, "but Pell's death was accidental —"

"By whose testimony?" broke in Harland. "Only that of a truck driver who admits he didn't see what was happening, otherwise he wouldn't have struck Pell. The victim was probably running from muggers, the way Waverly was."

Weston didn't correct Harland on the Waverly statement. Instead, he argued that it couldn't have been a double job, since there was only one batch of muggers on the scene. That called for another boast from Franzel.

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"Hear that?" inquired Franzel. "The mugging menace is as good as finished. They are afraid to move in throngs, now that my followers are on the job. They go everywhere that muggers do."

"Agreed," said Harland, suddenly, as he drew an envelope from his pocket. "Franzel has said precisely what I wished to hear. Look at this list, commissioner. The reform league went at great pains to compile it; a list of beggars who are outright fakes, pretended cripples, fake blind men —"

"I know about that list," interrupted Franzel. "You can disregard it, commissioner. Besides, what could it prove?"

"I can tell you," retorted Harland. "It proves that your beggars are double-dealers. These pitiable figures who rove the streets so freely could quite easily be the very muggers that the police seek. As long as they are at large and paying tribute to Franzel, he is responsible for their frauds."

There was an indulgent laugh from Franzel.

"I should instruct my followers to betray one another?" he scoffed. "Your idea is preposterous, Harland."

"Not in the least," Harland argued. "To keep your fake beggars in circulation, so they could double as muggers, you had to promise to aid the law. So you told your honest followers to watch for muggers and they did better than you wanted. If you think that this is mere theory, commissioner"—Harland swung to Weston—"order Franzel to take his beggars from the street. The mugging outrages will cease like that."

Hardly had Harland snapped his fingers, before Franzel came through with a stormy assertion.

"Do it, commissioner," he said. "Make a general roundup between now and tomorrow night. I shall give you my complete lists, to check with Harland's. The public may suffer, but my followers will be exonerated, and with me, they come first."

Under such double pressure, Weston could do nothing but agree, even though his manner was reluctant. The glares that passed between Harland and Franzel were evidences of a mental duel in which both seemed confident of the outcome. Weston threw an appealing gaze at Cranston, but found his friend's face immobile. Cranston knew the chaos in Weston's mind, how the commissioner, despite Harland's arguments, still felt that Franzel's beggars were essential in tabbing the mugger question. Then the cloud faded from Weston's face, as though in answer to Cranston's unspoken suggestion.

Commissioner Weston was thinking in terms of another ally, whose ability at spotting crime had proven its full worth tonight. Weston's mind was concentrated upon The Shadow.

"Very well," agreed Weston, addressing both Harland and Franzel. "You have settled one question, by being in accord. The beggars will be rounded up tomorrow."

As though approving Weston's decision, the orchestra burst loose, announcing the late floor show. King Franzel swung in his chair to watch the sparkling entrance of glorious Loraine Rue. Margo gave a disappointed shrug, thinking that she was again to miss the blond contralto's act. Then, before she could rise from the table, Margo felt Cranston's hand on her arm.

Cranston had just come back to the table, though Margo hadn't realized he was absent.

"Stay here, Margo," Cranston said. "I'll join you before the show is over. I've just received a report on Waverly. They've located him at his hotel."

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Cranston's hand relaxed and Margo turned about with a slight shiver. Somehow, she felt that Cranston was undertaking an expedition that promised more than usual danger, even to The Shadow. Margo couldn't restrain her worry.

"Be careful, Lamont —"

A blare from the orchestra drowned Margo's useless words. All that she saw were the patrons who thronged the ringside tables and Cranston wasn't among them. He had been swallowed by that sea of faces and was gone into the maw of blackness beyond them.

Cranston was gone, like The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. DEATH'S TRAIL

LEE WAVERLY was nervous. His smooth face was twitchy, like his hands. Bad signs, both, for Waverly was usually poker-faced and his hands, trained to slash with the knife, were usually quite steady. But Waverly had lost the sangfroid that he had shown while filling the capacity of Monsieur Rouge.

There was one fault in Leroc's training. He could never teach his students to forget failure. It did not go with the bravado that was the first essential of the capable Apache.

Waverly was through and knew it. Much though he blamed his teammate who had served as Monsieur Bleu, his nerve was completely gone. To his credit was the clever way in which he had bluffed the police, by making himself a mugging victim. In a sense, that had taken nerve, for the muggers would have murdered Waverly upon the instant, had they known that they were stooges for the game he played. But it wasn't the sort of nerve that went with the Apache.

Often, Leroc had demonstrated the Apache swagger and boasted how the denizens of the Parisian underworld had carried it from police courts through higher tribunals and under the blade of the great guillotine itself. There were two things for an Apache to do when trapped: say nothing and take anything. Instead, Waverly had reverted to his very canny self, as he had been before he entered Leroc's school and therewith he had lost the benefits of all that he had learned.

Twitching for the telephone, Waverly's hands stopped short. He wanted to call the precinct station and learn if any of his belongings had been reclaimed. But the mere thought of his wallet, with its business cards and the roll of money that accompanied it, was enough to give Waverly a new chill.

How could he explain the cards that identified him as a wholesale drug salesman with an upstate concern that he had left months ago? As for the money, how did it fit with the fact that he hadn't done a stroke of work during that same period? On the contrary, if Waverly didn't phone the precinct, they might call him. The longer he waited, the more certain Waverly became that his name was at present undergoing rapid investigation.

The Hotel Everglade was small and rather shabby. Everything about it, even the neighborhood, began to impress Waverly as the sort that would excite suspicion. This fourth floor corner room was the best the place could boast, but it wasn't good enough. From its windows, Waverly looked at shoddy buildings that appeared dilapidated even in the dimout.

As for the people that Waverly noticed on the street, they bothered him. They were all types, from shamblers up to respectable-looking folk. One species was as bad as the other, for Waverly could imagine headquarters

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dicks in almost any guise. Though it was hard to distinguish individuals in the dimness below, Waverly felt that he was seeing the same persons over and over, as though they were keeping a vigilant patrol around the block where the hotel stood.

THE only light in Waverly's room came from a desk lamp between the corner windows. At present that light was playing curious tricks that Waverly didn't notice. Its glow had a flicker that carried across the floor, to the dimness of the door, giving a curious impression of motion that applied to the door itself. At moments, Waverly turned to look from the rear window, which bothered him worse than the one at the side. In back of the hotel was an empty brownstone house that seemed to bulge its bay windows in Waverly's direction. After a suspicious glance at the slate roof topping the brownstone, Waverly went back to his former post.

In passing fashion, Waverly noticed the door, and stiffened, his fingers numbing as they reached to his hip pocket. The chill of a gun butt sent its freeze into the laugh that grated between Waverly's clenched teeth and his shoulders relaxed to their accustomed stoop. The door wasn't opening as Waverly thought; it couldn't be, or he would hear its hinges creak. Besides, the door was locked and the key was in plain sight. It was just Waverly's imagination that seemed to make the door move; that and the poor light which Waverly didn't care to increase.

Looking at the key, Waverly gave another nervous laugh. Funny, the way the light glittered from the key. It made it look as though the key were turning, which couldn't be, because it was on the inside of the door and Waverly didn't believe that there was a ghost here in the room with him. So Waverly forgot the key and took another look from his side window.

The key continued its slow turn.

There was a way to make a key turn from the other side of the lock, though Waverly didn't know it. A thin, elongated pick, shaped something like a pair of tweezers, could do the trick to perfection. Furthermore, the action was entirely silent, when a skilled hand performed it. Such arts were not part of the Apache's training, hence Waverly wouldn't understand it.

This business of operating keys through their own locks was a specialty practiced by The Shadow.

When the key finished its turn, the door inched open. Its hinges lacked the creak that Waverly thought was certain; for The Shadow knew that secret too. Firm pressure with one shoulder was a way in which the creaks of an average door could be cured and the rule applied in this case. In opening, the door merely exaggerated the common illusion given by the wavering desk lamp and when it closed again, the door was only briefly blurred by the solid blackness that had entered.

Blackness that blended with the floor, approaching with a creeping silhouette that was oddly hawklike, particularly when its profile reached Waverly and began to climb the stooped man's back.

It was the shadow before The Shadow!

A slight shift of Waverly's shoulders sent that silhouette against the window frame. There for the first time Waverly noticed it and as the blackness grew before his staring eyes, the amateur Apache gave a startled gurgle. Spinning about with the speed that he had cultivated, Waverly might have shown fight if he'd still had his knife. But he wasn't accustomed to the clumsy revolver that he had taken from his suitcase and pocketed, as soon as he returned to the hotel.

Burning eyes were close to Waverly's, beneath them loomed the business section of an automatic. The muzzle of that .45 reminded Waverly of the tunnel that he had traveled while he was still Monsieur Rouge.

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The hand that stopped at Waverly's pocket began rising with the other while the forceful argument of The Shadow's gun backed Waverly toward the corner of the room.

There, the light was cut off partly by Waverly's own shoulders, while The Shadow's cloaked form smothered it still further. Still, those avenging eyes burned from the artificial gloom, with a piercing force that seemingly probed Waverly's thoughts. The whispered words that The Shadow spoke with unseen lips, prompted Waverly to answer. Not that they were questions, those words put by The Shadow; rather, they were revelations that demanded a response.

THE SHADOW was reminding Waverly of Anstead's death. Without accusing Waverly of that particular crime, The Shadow recounted the essential details, along with the reason why Anstead had been slain. The fact that plans of valuable inventions had been gained with Anstead's brief case was something that Waverly had learned and found himself admitting.

Then came The Shadow's accusation:

"You were to murder Pell —"

"No, no!" protested Waverly, hoarsely. "I wouldn't have had to kill him. All I wanted was the satchel —"

"With its contexts," added The Shadow. "Money that Pell would not have yielded without a struggle. Ill-gotten money."

Waverly's eyes were goggly. From Leroc he had learned something of Pell's case, since one of Leroc's rules was to tell much about a victim, on the basis that men acted according to their characters. Despite himself, Waverly began to corroborate The Shadow's statements.

"It was money Pell embezzled," stammered Waverly. "He was supposed to meet somebody who was to help him cover up. All part of the deal— that's what I was told."

There was a low laugh from The Shadow. His own observations of Pell had given him the theory which he had just tested. A fat satchel such as Pell carried was a likely moneybag. The fact that the man had walked to his destination instead of taking a cab was proof of a secret meeting, even though such had not materialized.

"You were told too much," declared The Shadow, "and yet too little. You have never met the man who originated this game of murder. All your information comes secondhand from a man who is double-crossing you, the way he has tricked the muggers."

There was a certain harshness in the tone that rendered Waverly savage. Only briefly did the assassin gain some vestige of his former nerve, but he didn't realize that The Shadow was deliberately inspiring it.

"You lie!" snarled Waverly. "Leroc wouldn't double-cross any of us —"

The whispered laugh that interrupted was enough to douse Waverly's short-lived flare. The Shadow had tricked the man into revealing a much-needed fact, the name of the only leader that Waverly acknowledged. That laugh began as the name "Leroc" slipped from Waverly's lips and it rose as Waverly caught himself. All that it did for Waverly was prove one thing: namely, that The Shadow did not know all the facts, or he would not have chosen to coax them out.

Fear, anger, plus a dash of his regained savagery, spurred Waverly to action. There were things in Leroc's brutal training that a pupil could retain, even when he had lost the full Apache spirit. In Waverly's case, there

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was a curious factor, the thought of his previous failure to show the spirit that he had never really gained. To a degree his mind was maudlin, working in fits and staggers, for Waverly exhibited both.

A fit of rage caused him to fling himself upon The Shadow despite the latter's looming gun. Staggered by fear, Waverly reeled away without receiving a stroke, for The Shadow had simply melted with a fading twist, to turn the attack into a travesty. Instead of blundering against the opposite wall where his surge should have carried him, Waverly was headed toward the rear window, his flight so cowering that he seemed about to pitch himself through, rather than again face The Shadow.

With a quick sweep, The Shadow overtook the man who had failed as an Apache and brought him around by doubling his arm in back of him. Waverly shrank cowering, the direct antithesis of his bolder self, quailing as The Shadow's hand descended to pluck him by the collar and bring him up again. There was just one thing that Waverly's huddle accomplished, though it was not intended. Dropping completely below the window level, Waverly for the first time failed to block off the figure of The Shadow as seen within the lighted room.

THE SHADOW saw the knife blade coming.

Not from Waverly's fist, for he had no knife. This weapon fairly zinged from the eaves above the bay window of the brownstone house. It was flung with a venom that spelled action from the moment of its start, yet there was one mistake in its delivery. The flinger forgot the light from Waverly's window, a glow that showed the blade's glitter before it left the hand that hurled it.

There was a whirl of blackness that carried The Shadow to the corner of the room and in the same trice, Waverly again reversed his form. He came up with a madman's spring and in the midst of it started to turn the course of the lunge that he was not to finish. The knife did the rest.

Jolting upright, Waverly went stiff. Pivoting like a toy top, he performed a double twirl that brought him face foremost upon the floor. He hit with the impact of dead weight and between the shoulders that he had so convulsively narrowed was the answer to his sprawl. It was a knife handle that went with a long Apache blade, driven as deep as it could possibly go. That coup was one that Alban Leroc had not yet taught his henchmen. He had meant it for The Shadow and found Waverly instead.

With a long dive that brought him below the sill of the rear window, The Shadow propped his automatic across and began to flay the slate shingles from the house out back. Despite the darkness, The Shadow was tracing the course that Leroc must take up from the bay window to the roof ridge above. The distance was short and therefore to Leroc's advantage. The Shadow caught one glimpse of a vaulting figure that went over the ridge ahead of a ricochet shot. With that Apache leap, Leroc was gone.

Men were in motion on the street below, the same men that Waverly had eyed suspiciously not long before. Like the police who had followed the direction of The Shadow's shots against the river bridge, these men were taking their cue from his latest gunnery. With a grim laugh that could have been a knell for Waverly, The Shadow opened the door and merged with the darkened hallway.

THE floor show was ending at Club 88, its climax a gypsy dance in which Loraine Rue was the star performer. Margo was giving the blonde the benefit of some applause when a familiar hand rested on her arm. Turning, Margo displayed her delight at Cranston's return.

Nonchalantly, Cranston eyed the departing performers with jeweled Loraine in their midst. Perhaps he was referring to the entertainment at Club 88, but he could have been speaking for The Shadow, when he said:

"It was a good show, Margo, but it ended too soon."

CHAPTER XIV. CRANSTON'S CLINIC

RUTLEDGE MANN was quite surprised.

He had expected it to be the other way about, when Lamont Cranston called at noon. Phone calls, wires, confidential reports were stacked on Mann's desk, disclosing a lot of facts about Wilbur Pell that the police didn't know, purely because they hadn't investigated. People didn't like to say unkind things about a man who had become a mugging victim, but Mann had learned, through devious sources, that Pell was guilty of embezzlement in the town from which he hailed.

"They found his private account books." Such was Mann's statement. "Pell lost thirty of the fifty thousand on the races; he squandered another fifteen thousand; to make himself look honest he paid off debts with the remainder —"

"And kept the whole," was Cranston's interruption. "All in a little black satchel, plus any returns he may have made on his secret investments. That private account was just part of the cover-up, Mann."

No wonder Mann was surprised, hearing that Cranston already knew that Pell was a crook, which Mann thought was his exclusive information. Mann didn't know that Cranston had checked his own theories with Waverly, corroborated certain facts and pieced new ones to fit with them.

"Pell wanted to disappear," added Cranston. "He had a deal with somebody who could help him. The man in question was a much bigger crook than Pell, so he ordered an Apache named Alban Leroc to eliminate Wilbur Pell and bring in the booty. But from our standpoint, Pell was another victim like James Anstead, who happened to be honest. We are tracking down murderers, beginning with Lee Waverly. We can afford to treat their victims impartially."

While Mann stared open-mouthed, Cranston handed him his hat and opened the office door. Downstairs a cab wheeled up and they were halfway to their destination before Mann inquired where they were going. He received another surprise when Cranston told him:

"The Jonas office."

Located in the vicinity of Twenty-third Street, the Jonas office was still a mystery to Mann. He had often visited it, but had never entered its door. In fact, Mann doubted that anyone had opened that door in the last fifteen years. Its cobwebs alone looked at least that old.

When they reached the decrepit building that housed the office, the cabby followed them upstairs, which wasn't surprising because he happened to be Moe Shrevnitz. The office with the name "B. JONAS" bore its usual wealth of cobwebs and Shrevvy grinned at Mann's expense, while Cranston inserted a key. Moe knew what was coming, though Mann didn't.

As the door creaked inward, the cobwebs stretched. Walking under them, Mann stared upward, unbelieving. Cranston held the door open long enough for Mann to study the cobwebs thoroughly; they contracted when the door went shut.

"Artificial spider's webs," explained Cranston, tersely. "Their principal constituent is rubber cement. When it comes back in circulation, we can manufacture more of them."

The office was filled with The Shadow's active agents, all smiling like Moe. For quite a while they had been

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using the Jonas office as an assembly room and all the while Mann had considered it to be nothing more than a collection box where he dropped reports into the mail chute for The Shadow to pick them up. Mann had always supposed that The Shadow reached this office by a secret door, which he did when occasion required, but that didn't mean the front door was as impassable as it appeared.

"I call this place the crime clinic," Cranston told Mann. "A convenient place where we can gather to make a thorough diagnosis of certain crimes. We vary our methods according to occasion and at this time it will be appropriate to use a device much favored by the French Surete of Police."

There was a large upright frame at one side of the wall; it measured about three feet square and beside it was a table holding a flat box. From this box, The Shadow's agents began to pick three-inch squares like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, except that all were shaped alike. The men thus engaged included Cliff and Hawkeye, who were most active in choosing the wooden blocks. Harry and Clyde made occasional additions, while Moe stepped up to pick a few small blocks. All these were placed in the large upright frame.

The agents were piecing a large-sized human face, filling in the gaps from individual recollections. Their work was much like Mann's daily task with newspaper clippings and other data that he fitted for The Shadow's information.

"They were all around the Hotel Everglade last night," Cranston told Mann. "You didn't know about it because the orders went through Burbank. They caught various glimpses of the killer who escaped over the roof of the house in back, after he reached the next street."

Mann showed new perplexity.

"But I thought —"

"You thought the police really figured that one," interposed Cranston. "They believe that assassins sneaked up to Waverly's room and murdered him there. Odd how the police develop facts according to new suggestions that are fed them."

There was a nod from Mann. Back on the desk in his office were clippings that represented the "last word" in the Waverly case. The police had tagged it vengeance on the part of muggers. But there had been no muggers around the Hotel Everglade, though beggars were common in that vicinity. It was easy to place the man who had inspired that suggestion: Howard Harland. Probably Commissioner Weston had appreciated it as an excuse for the general roundup that he had ordered for today.

THE picture in the wall frame was shaping well. There were a few differences of opinion among the agents, particularly regarding a disfigurement on one side of the face. They had to pick out special slabs from among the hundreds of blocks that were arranged in proper groups for each segment. When the agents finally concurred on such matters as width of forehead, contour of chin, and whether eyes were wide or narrow, the picture was almost complete. It only remained to drop in blocks that filled the few remaining spaces and were therefore obvious.

It was Harry who performed that final task, while Cranston was focusing a movie projector on the wall beside the frame. He pushed in a slide and a face appeared upon the wall, matching the framed patchwork portrait in size. That however was not the only point of likeness.

Detail for detail, the pieced-together face was identical with the picture on the slide, which The Shadow had found among his European files.

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Both were Alban Leroc.

It was an interesting check-up because it proved that if The Shadow had not heard Leroc named, he could have identified the man through the fleeting descriptions gathered by his agents. However, the matched portraits proved definitely that Leroc had personally murdered Waverly instead of delegating that job to an underling. This was a further lead for Cranston.

"Leroc is beginning to mistrust his men," Cranston declared. "Waverly proved a disappointment, as did his teammate, who thought it more important to carry off the satchel than to stand by a fellow Apache. Furthermore, there is an opening in Leroc's organization."

With this reference to Waverly's death, Cranston surveyed his companions. Until yesterday, Harry Vincent would have been the ideal man to make the acquaintance of Leroc, whose American Apaches had to pass as straightforward citizens. But from now on, Leroc would want them tougher. Clyde Burke, the reporter, was wiry and wise, but those weren't the best requisites.

Cranston's gaze rested on Cliff Marsland. Here was a man who purposely looked tough, because his business was to hobnob with the hardest characters in New York while gathering information for The Shadow. However, when Cliff was away from the underworld, his hard-boiled manner dwindled; with enough inducement, he could entirely discard it. Summed up, Cliff could appear quite as presentable as men of Waverly's type, thus filling the old qualification.

As for the new, Cliff would certainly meet Leroc's needs. Not only did he have a reputation in crimedom, he was recognized as a lone wolf. Leroc himself was something of the same and he would therefore appreciate Cliff as a recruit. What Cliff might lack in Apache training, he could supply from his own experience. Such a member would be a stiffening influence upon Leroc's whole band.

Drawing the slide from the projector, Cranston replaced Leroc's photo with a colored map showing a sector of Manhattan. Enlarged upon the wall, the map gave a detailed version of the area to which The Shadow's agents had trailed Leroc after he fled the vicinity of the Hotel Everglade. Hawkeye was the man who had kept the trail the longest and The Shadow was choosing him to team with Cliff.

"Contact Leroc," came Cranston's calm tone. "Probably you can manage it only by proxy, but in any case it will be your job, Marsland, to join with the band. Hawkeye can help in the preliminaries, afterward he will remain in the offing, to carry any word that you may gain."

The clinic was over. While Cranston dismantled the projector, the others scattered the slabs that formed Leroc's pieced portrait. They still had The Shadow's imported photograph to go by, but they would not need it. Etched in the memory of every agent, was the ugly image of Alban Leroc, complete to the scar that accompanied the Apache's leer. He was the murderer that they must find.

At that, the game would not be over. There was still the master brain behind it, the man who had already gained large profits through the deaths of Anstead and Pell. He would be hungry for more such gains, this crafty schemer who was cloaking the activities of Apaches under the surface of muggery. How The Shadow intended to reach that master schemer, whether through Leroc or other channels, was still a mystery.

A mystery at least to all except The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV. A QUESTION OF BEGGARS

ALL that afternoon the roundup of beggars continued until the precinct stations were filled with the most motley tribe of men that they had ever held. Since there were no charges against King Franzel's followers, arrangements were being made to keep them as guests. Some were housed in cells with unlocked doors, others were installed in cheap hotels and flop houses.

Technically they were under custody, but it was on a basis of keeping all present and accounted for, rather than actually imprisoning them. The beggars themselves were rather pleased to have free lodging for a change, but they regretted loss of the evening's receipts. However, as luck would have it, the weather softened the ordeal. A chilly drizzle settled in, threatening to coat the sidewalks with a thin layer of ice. This promised the sort of night when beggars would have to keep to doorways, lessening their profits.

Shortly before dusk, Cranston completed a tour with Weston. The commissioner was going the rounds of the precincts to check the lists of guests and see that all were satisfied. During that tour they crossed two other trails.

The first belonged to Howard Harland. Its prelude was a great chorus of boos and catcalls that issued from a precinct station before Cranston and Weston entered. Inside, they found Harland trying to retain his pompous air while the outburst of Bronx cheers arose from benches and cells where beggars were in abundance. The tumult lessened when Weston appeared and Harland was able to voice a protest.

"Hear that, commissioner?" he demanded. "What motley rascals these beggars are! The moment they saw me, they began their hubbub. I am sure that Franzel put them up to it!"

Barks came from the beggars. Such terms as "chiseler," "stuffed-shirt" and "weasel" were among the milder epithets, all directed at Harland.

"I have assured them that the Citizens' Reform League has their welfare in mind," declared Harland, importantly. "My present tour is all on their account, conducted at considerable expense –"

Harland was drowned with a burst of shouted queries. Beggars wanted to know where the money came from, how Harland made new donors fork over, and the size of the cut he took for himself. All these shouts merged into a chant:

"Five Grand Harland—Five Grand Harland –"

"They've heard about the contribution that the C.R.L. received today," explained Harland in an annoyed tone. "Five thousand dollars in cash came from an anonymous contributor, who apparently believes that we are rendering a service to the community. Our policy regarding such donations –"

"Doughnuts to you, Harland," interrupted a scrawny pencil peddler from his bench. "What did you do, fork back some of your cut?"

"Yeah!" shouted another. "Maybe you drew the dough and tossed it back into the kitty just to encourage other suckers."

Harland turned on his heel and marched haughtily from the station house while Weston and Cranston continued their rounds. Farther along they heard loud cheers coming from a station and they met King Franzel making his departure.

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"Apparently I'm still popular," said Franzel, with a broad smile. "I thought the boys would be sore about this roundup, but they aren't. By the way, they have a new nickname for Harland. They call him Five Grand, but I haven't learned why."

Weston explained about the donation that the reform league had received from an unknown source which the beggars claimed was Harland himself. Franzel's eyebrows lifted in perplexed style, then narrowed again. Something was going through his mind, though he decided not to state it. Instead, he simply remarked that he was going back to Club 88, though he would probably be late for the first show. He added that he could be reached there later, if Weston wanted him.

All the while, Cranston maintained silence. He didn't mention that he intended to visit Club 88 after he finished his tour of the precincts. It happened that Cranston had already posted an observer there, in the person of Margo Lane, who tonight could be regarded as a most important agent.

JUST how she could prove important was a puzzle to Margo as she finished her solitary dinner at the de luxe night club. The cafe was quite crowded and Margo was so far back that she could scarcely see the floor show, but she knew from the music that it was going into the finale, the gypsy dance in which Loraine Rue starred.

That music was a cue for Margo. Cranston had told her to slip back to the dressing rooms as soon as the entire cast was on the floor, and the finale was her only opportunity. So Margo left her table, circled the dark wall of the night club and reached the screen that flanked the exit to the dressing rooms. A few seconds later, she was in a deserted corridor, flanked by the open doors of empty rooms.

One such door showed a star and Margo knew it must belong to Loraine. Stepping inside, Margo changed the position of a screen so that it almost touched the edge of the door, which opened inward. Clutching her handbag tightly, Margo wormed behind the door intending to shift from there to the screen when occasion so demanded.

There was a muffled chord from the night-club orchestra, followed by distant applause. Then came the click of high heels, the chatter of voices as the performers arrived back at their dressing rooms. Doors slammed one by one and when Loraine entered, Margo had an idea that she would swing her door shut too. About to shift behind the screen, Margo paused, watching between its edge and that of the door.

Instead of closing the door, Loraine sank to a chair in front of the dressing table and gave a tired sigh. In the brilliant light above the mirror, Margo gained a revealing view of Loraine's face and became both surprised and envious. Hitherto, she had supposed that much of Loraine's floor-show beauty was due to make-up, but the case was otherwise. The blonde's features were really lovely, as gorgeous as the shapely figure that she displayed in considerable detail.

Margo gave a sudden start as a knock sounded at her elbow. It was only someone rapping Loraine's door, but Margo was so close to the door that she could touch it, hence the sound was sharp. In the mirror, Loraine's face brightened; reaching for a dressing gown she slid it over her shoulders, then turned around.

"Come in, King," she said, in her most soulful contralto. "Leave the door open; the others are all closed. What is it, something important?"

"Very important." King Franzel's tone had a low, confidential roll. "This is going to be a bad night, Loraine."

"I'd say it was a bad night," laughed the blonde, shuddering slightly as she looked at the window, where the rain was beating hard. "It's just as well they had that roundup. The poor peddlers are better off in the police stations."

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"Other people are apt to suffer," declared Franzel, solemnly. "It's a great night for muggers, Loraine, now that they know my followers are not watching for them."

"Maybe you shouldn't have let Harland have his way."

"I couldn't help it. When he cast suspicion on us, I had no other choice. Tonight we are proving that peddlers are not muggers and the public can take the consequences."

THERE was an odd rumble to Franzel's tone that Loraine seemed to understand. Turning in her chair, the blonde spoke in a sympathetic undertone:

"Out with it, King. You have something in mind, something that will give you the edge on Harland. What is it?"

King Franzel delivered a basso laugh.

"I knew you'd guess it," he said. "I played into Harland's hands because he asked for it, but I wasn't forgetful of the public duty that he talks about so much, but doesn't mean. There are still plenty of peddlers available tonight and you know the ones I mean."

"The women?" echoed Loraine.

"Of course," replied Franzel. "They weren't included in the roundup, because they couldn't be muggers. I've given them the order to be on the lookout and call me if they spot anything wrong."

"What a grand idea, King!"

"There's one drawback, Loraine. I'll be tied up with all sorts of calls from precincts and hotels if any of the crowd become unruly. I can't waste time getting word through to the commissioner."

"Why not have the tip-offs go direct?"

"You can't depend on the women," returned Franzel. "Some of those old crones would be scared to call the commissioner and others can't, because he wouldn't understand their cackle. There's only one person who can handle it. That's you, Loraine."

Margo saw Loraine's face flinch. Evidently Franzel was proposing something that rather horrified her. A few moments later, the blonde shook off her mood.

"I owe you a great deal, King," said Loraine seriously. "Those years were miserable, when I was a little girl, peddling matches, gardenias, or whatever I was told. When I grew up it was the only thing I knew and it became impossible. How I came to have good looks, I don't know, but I attracted too much attention."

"I know," nodded King Franzel. "That's why you became Old Gert."

"It was something of an inspiration," Loraine admitted, "to make up as a hag and live in a basement hovel. People were sorry for me, the way I shambled around, wrapped in an old shawl. I hated that life, King, trying to look old before my time."

"But you learned one thing, Loraine. You became an actress and a good one. When I became king of the beggars, I learned your game and it amazed me. When I found that you could sing and dance, as you did

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when you were a child, I saw that you had a future."

"Don't talk of the future, King. It might mean that I would some day grow to look like the Old Gert that everybody thought I was. And now tonight you want me to play Old Gert again."

Franzel gave a slow nod as he leaned forward and patted Loraine on the shoulder.

"You'll have to do it," he insisted. "It will really pep up the women peddlers to see Old Gert in circulation again. If she can go out tonight, they'll be willing to do the same. Once you have them on the move, you can get back to the old basement, because that's where they're supposed to phone. When the call comes—if one does come—you can relay it to the commissioner. Your voice will really impress him."

"You mean Old Gert's voice?"

"That's right. It has the eager whine. Get started now, Loraine, and you'll be back in time for the late show. Nobody will ever learn that Loraine Rue and Old Gert are the same."

"But those old clothes of mine, where are they?"

"Still in the same basement," said King with a smile. "I've been paying the rent there ever since you left. After all, I talked you into becoming Loraine Rue, so I thought I ought to leave the door to Old Gert open, in case your memories haunted you. So get started, while I go and call the commissioner and ask how his guests are enjoying themselves."

King Franzel had risen and was turning toward the door. Loraine overtook him and laid her hand upon his arm. Through the door crack, Margo heard the blonde say softly:

"You're the only man I've ever trusted, King. I owe you plenty and I won't forget it. We'll see this through until we've proved who's right."

THIS time, Loraine closed the door, but Margo had slipped behind the screen while the blonde was still following King Franzel with admiring eyes as he walked along the corridor. Once the door was shut, Margo found new worries, for Loraine's street clothes were parked behind the screen and she would have to come there to get them. Fortunately, Loraine decided not to waste time in a double change of costume, here and at the place where she had once lived as Old Gert.

Not bothering to remove her jeweled costume, Loraine calmly slid her arms into a mink coat that she wrapped tightly about her. With short kicks, she disposed of her dancing slippers and stepped into another pair which were suitable for street wear. Leaving the dressing room, the blonde made a hurried exit through a door to the stage alley. As soon as the quick footsteps faded, Margo followed.

It couldn't be far to the old basement, or Loraine would have dressed more elaborately before venturing through the city streets. Margo could see the mink coat, bobbing vaguely through the drizzle, so she decided to trail it to the destination. Now that Margo realized the important part that Loraine could play in matters pertaining to crime, she understood why Cranston had regarded Club 88 as an essential place to watch.

Again, The Shadow's foresight was in evidence. He had solved the question of beggars beforehand and left it to Margo to find out the rest!

CHAPTER XVI. ROUTE TO CRIME

SUAVE despite his sneer, Alban Leroc was addressing his crew of amateur Apaches, showing slight traces of sarcasm in his tone, yet driving home his words with the same skill that he could give a knife thrust. It was important, this conference, because true to tradition Leroc intended to have his followers draw for the privilege of being Monsieur Rouge, and therefore he could risk no shaky hands among them.

"I shall use you all tonight," assured Leroc, "but there is one who will be lucky." As he spoke, Leroc rattled the bag that contained the colored balls. "Before we draw, let me show you where we intend to go."

Leroc turned to a map that was a patchwork of yellow squares, representing the total districts that the police had placed under strict surveillance. Those quarantined areas were so numerous that it was taking most of the available police to cover them and the latest addition to the lot was Surrey Place.

"Separately, we could go wherever we pleased," assured Leroc, with a glance at the respectable faces of his crew, "but it is better that we should travel somewhat together. Therefore we shall take a roundabout way." On the map, Leroc traced a course that threaded among the yellow squares. "That will bring us here, not far from the Yorkshire Village, the apartment house where our friend Harland lives."

The listeners began to exchange knowing looks at Leroc's mention of Harland. Catching them with his quick eye, Leroc smoothly amended his statement.

"Yes, Harland is our friend," affirmed Leroc, "but he would be the first to deny it. In suspecting the beggars, he aids us, because with the beggars gone, the muggers will be on the streets, and without the muggers, we could not pursue our own profession. It is on this corner" – Leroc tapped the map—"that a gentleman named Morton Joyce will meet our Monsieur Rouge."

Leroc continued with a brief description of Joyce, who proved to be a gentleman of middle age, quite burly, but deliberate of pace. Unlike Anstead and Pell, Joyce would be carrying nothing resembling a brief case or a satchel, but there would be valuables upon his person which would make a search of his pockets a matter of course. Discouraging thus, Leroc shook the bag and passed it around the circle.

At one point Leroc hesitated, then went along without extending the bag. The man he passed was a new member of the band, a poker-faced individual whose square jaw spoke the same determination as his steady eyes. That description exactly fitted Cliff Marsland.

"You are new among us." Leroc purred the reminder. "I could not assign you to the work of the usual Apache. I have a special ball reserved for you." From his pocket, Leroc produced the pellet and dropped it in Cliff's hand. "I shall tell you its purpose later."

The red ball showed in the hands of a drab-faced man, whose thin lips tightened in a smile that pleased Leroc, who clapped the winner on the back.

"Ah, Trevol, we are both lucky," expressed Leroc. "You, to become Monsieur Rouge; I to have you as such. You are good both with the noose and the knife, so you may use either as you choose. Should anything go wrong, call at once upon Monsieur Bleu."

Leroc gestured toward Cliff who opened his hand and found a blue marble lying there. In recognition of the honor, Cliff slipped his hand to his pocket, where the bulge of a gun butt showed. The action brought a further smile from the man addressed as Trevol, who was still worrying about the Waverly affair. Leroc's

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face grew hard and keen, both signs that he was highly pleased.

He had shown judgment, Leroc, in accepting Marsland on sight. He had anticipated that tonight's Monsieur Rouge would be worried about Monsieur Bleu. So alike had the Apaches become under Leroc's training that they shared each other's apprehensions. As an individual murderer, each was competent; their weakness lay in team play. They still thought of guns, despite the drills Leroc had given them with knife and noose.

So Leroc was introducing what they wanted, a man with a gun. If the novelty proved successful, Cliff would have a permanent job as Monsieur Bleu.

APPARENTLY Leroc had timed proceedings to an incoming telephone call, which arrived soon after the drawing. From Leroc's manner, Cliff knew that he was chatting with the chief who really ruled the Apaches. That call finished, Leroc made a few calls of his own, to hangouts favored by muggers. In purring style, he assured them that tonight's forays would offer no obstacles, since spying beggars were off the streets. Setting the time and place, Leroc finished with the muggers and gave a contemptuous laugh.

"One thing I did not mention," remarked Leroc as he and his men started from their underground lair. "They will not be far from Club 88, where King Franzel is so often found. They would like nothing better than to meet the man they blame for their recent troubles."

The Apaches weren't quite convinced that Leroc was right. They felt that The Shadow was a stronger factor in stopping crime than King Franzel could ever be. Certainly he was the chief foe of the Apaches themselves and with that thought, they grouped closer as they left this headquarters.

So compact was the crew that Cliff was unable to draw away and contact a lurking figure that followed close behind the group. But Cliff felt his opportunity would come soon enough to forewarn The Shadow. Hawkeye was not only persistent, but crafty; he would tag along without giving himself away.

The Apaches were nearing the block of apartment buildings known as Yorkshire Village, when Leroc gave a warning hiss that caused some quick slides along the slippery sidewalk. They were out of sight when Leroc pointed to a shambling figure across the street; that of a hobbling old woman, whose head and shoulders were covered by a shawl. A basket that the woman carried, marked her as a peddler.

"Franzel still gives us trouble," snarled Leroc. "We have forgotten that there are women beggars too. Follow her, two of you, and rejoin us later. The rest of us can separate and stroll through the courtyard of the apartment building. We are respectable enough to belong there."

Despite the term "we," Leroc did not include himself. He became a skulker, going around the block, while two others trailed the old woman with the shawl. Already assigned to the part of Monsieur Bleu, Cliff went through the courtyard, but on the way he paused to light a cigarette. The weather being damp, Cliff chose a darkened doorway for that purpose; as he expected, Hawkeye soon sidled up beside him. Briefly, Cliff undertoned the details of tonight's expedition and Hawkeye shifted away as neatly as he had arrived.

FOUR blocks from Yorkshire Village, the old lady with the shawl turned into a squalid street that was a misfit in this neighborhood. The street lay between the well-populated thoroughfares that were lined with ritzy cafes like Club 88 and the pretentious squares surrounding Yorkshire Village. The police deemed it unnecessary to watch either of those sectors and this intervening street was regarded purely as a dividing line, quite too limited to attract muggers. Reaching the steps beside a battered basement door, the old woman descended, not even bothering to use a key to enter what must be a hovel too poor for thieves to bother about. Across the street, a girl was standing in a doorway, shielding her face against the drizzle. She appeared merely to be someone who had stepped out of the rain, but her purpose was more subtle.

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Margo Lane was watching the return of Loraine Rue, alias Old Gert, to the basement from which the night-club star had set forth to contact members in the sorority of beggars.

About to step from the doorway, Margo waited while a man walked along the street. He was well dressed and was glancing at the houses as though looking for an address number. Along the street came another man of equally respectable appearance. The first stopped the second and made some inquiry, after which they continued onward in opposite directions.

What Margo took for a chance meeting, happened to be a double check by two of Leroc's gentlemen Apaches, who were now on their way to rejoin their ugly leader. Rather than attract any attention, Margo waited until both had turned their corners; then hurriedly, she crossed the street to Old Gert's hovel.

Margo's greeting was the ringing of a phone bell, from deep in the basement. Creeping through the darkness, Margo listened for Loraine's voice but did not hear it, until she reached another door. She caught the words "good-by" in Loraine's tone and peered through the slightly opened door. There, she saw Loraine hang up the telephone, lift the receiver again, and begin to dial a number.

The room was dim, yet its light showed Loraine's face, or rather, the visage of Old Gert. Margo was amazed that make-up could produce such a change. The face of Old Gert was gray, lined with wrinkles that looked real; her hair, well sprinkled with powder, was almost white. Though the effect looked genuine, Margo suspected the powder because of the way Loraine kept the shawl around her head.

As she watched, Margo began to doubt that the crone with the crabapple countenance could really be Loraine Rue.

Then, as the stoopish creature finished dialing and sat down in a creaky chair, Margo saw the evidence that proved the double role. Loraine's mink coat was hanging on a nail in the corner; tucked in its pockets were the slippers that she had also worn from Club 88.

A sharp cackle interrupted Margo's thoughts. More clever acting on Loraine's part, for the voice of Old Gert was an utter contrast to the golden tone of the popular night-club vocalist. But the cracked words were plain enough to Margo as they doubtless were to the person who received the phone call.

"Commissioner Weston?" queried the forced voice. "This is Old Gert... Ask Inspector Cardona who I am. He used to buy my gardenias... Yes, I'm a beggar and it's lucky we aren't all in jail... I know, you wonder if I've seen any muggers and I have—

"Lots of muggers, commissioner"—the voice became a confidential whine—"over near Yorkshire Village... Better hurry, commissioner, if you want to catch them. I'll be around to point out any that try to get away... Hurry, commissioner!"

Reverting to her crackly tone, Old Gert hung up the receiver and came toward Margo's door. Stepping away into the darkened room, Margo again doubted that this creature in petticoats and shawl could be Loraine, until she noted a passing trace of the singer's favorite perfume. When the front door closed behind Old Gert, Margo hurried to the telephone and called the Cobalt Club.

Margo didn't ask for Commissioner Weston. She wanted to know if Lamont Cranston was there. A polite attendant stated that Mr. Cranston had left and when Margo asked if he had gone with Commissioner Weston, her informant replied in the negative. Mr. Cranston had left the Cobalt Club at least ten minutes before the commissioner.

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Sinking to Loraine's chair, Margo Lane gave a gratified sigh. Rapid though the law's response might be, it had a habit of proving just too late. Tonight, The Shadow's agents must have beaten the tip-off that Loraine had relayed as Old Gert.

Again, The Shadow was traveling ahead of crime!

CHAPTER XVII. VICTIMS IN REVERSE

CRIME'S schedule was behind time. Close by a designated corner, a man named Trevol was waiting impatiently, his fingers twitching the corners of his scarf. As Monsieur Rouge, he should have gained his opportunity, but Joyce, the victim, had not arrived. The slippery sidewalks were the reason; they were beginning to get icy.

Across the street, Cliff Marsland was crouched in the alleyway that marked the first stage in a getaway route all planned for Trevol. As Monsieur Bleu, Cliff was calculating differently than Monsieur Rouge, or rather he was carrying his speculations further. The same causes that delayed Joyce would apply to others. Muggers would be slower reaching the scene; so would the police, if a tip-off reached them.

Likewise, delay could bother The Shadow.

A figure appeared near the dim corner. Cliff distinguished a burly man, whose pace was very slow, even allowing for the slippery going. The man was Joyce and he was moving straight toward Trevol. It wouldn't do for Cliff to dash across the street just yet, because Apaches down the alley were watching and would wonder at his premature surge. Gauging the distance to Trevol, Cliff coolly figured the required time and waited for his moment.

With a plod, Joyce reached the spot assigned for assassination. Trevol lunged from hiding, flaunting his scarf as a dacoit would fling a strangling cord. Cliff made a long leap toward the curb, struck a glazed patch of sidewalk and skidded headlong to the street. He had calculated everything except hazards that applied to himself.

Had all depended upon Cliff, murder would have been under way before he again reached his feet. But there was an element in this affair that even Cliff had been unable to observe. Before Trevol's noose could produce le coup du Pere Francois, Joyce took an unexpected twirl away from the descending scarf.

From a core of blackness, a living figure had materialized, to spin the victim from the threat of doom.

The Shadow!

Things happened crazily along the sidewalk. On its slippery surface, The Shadow took an unexpected whirl while Trevol, recoiling from the cloaked menace, was sliding clear across the curb. By chance, the two figures arrived in the exact position from which Trevol could deliver the Francois coup, with The Shadow as its target. Here, Trevol's footing was firm against the curb as he flung the scarf over The Shadow's slouch hat, down to the cloaked shoulders below.

One Apache could prove better than two. This time there was no other to spoil one's work with a knife slash. Though Cliff was on his feet, he was distant, and his faulty drive was bringing other Apaches from the alley. If Cliff tried to aid The Shadow, he would be smothered by an avalanche of killers.

The situation was totally reversed. Trevol's noose had tightened and the Apache was turning to apply the fatal

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haul that would hoist The Shadow to a helpless position. Only the unexpected could save the cloaked victim and he was the person who supplied the needed element. What The Shadow did was provide an antidote for the Francois coup that was not in Leroc's instruction book.

THE SHADOW simply pancaked forward into a wide-armed dive, kicking his feet up in back of him. Nobody had ever before applied that system, because it had never been thought out. Apaches who used the scarf trick brought the victim's weight straight back, whereas The Shadow was throwing his whole poundage forward. The slithery condition of the sidewalk, previously a disadvantage, now served to speed The Shadow's process.

It was Trevol who came flying upward. His legs received a kick that knocked them from under him; his body flipped across The Shadow's shoulders to be grabbed by hands that now could reach it, since they were working from propped elbows. The fling that The Shadow applied sent Trevol somersaulting clear across the sidewalk, down into the very basement where the assassin had originally intended to dump Joyce.

Rolling over, The Shadow saw Joyce almost beside him and applied a scissors clip with his legs, to spill the burly man beside the curb. Joyce was not a foe, but that was the more reason to eliminate him from the coming fray. In dumping Joyce, The Shadow finished with a twist that brought him to his own feet. Out to the center of the street, he purposely met Cliff Marsland and hissed a swift command into his agent's ear.

Guns began to talk. Their shots sizzled toward the alley from which Leroc and his Apaches issued. They laid those shots to The Shadow and assumed that Cliff was grappling to stop them. Cliff's gun was pumping too, in the same direction as The Shadow's, but that wasn't apparent to the men who hastily dived back to cover.

Under gunfire, Leroc could play the rat as quickly as his subordinates. They were away, full tilt, and Cliff found himself skidding after them, under The Shadow's urgent shove. Close on the heels of the fugitive crew, Cliff kept shouting for them to come back and help him fight The Shadow, but none heeded the request. For The Shadow, Cliff's shouts were a helpful guide, but he had work to do before he followed.

Moe's cab was wheeling the corner. Pulling Joyce to his feet, The Shadow propelled the burly man in through the opening door. As the cab sped off, The Shadow turned to look for the inevitable stooges who were sure to arrive when the Apaches left. He saw them sneaking in from nearby corners, groups of muggers, out in full force, lured by the word that Leroc had passed them.

Neatly, The Shadow began to stab shots with his guns. Those reports drowned the approach of cars that tonight were wisely keeping their sirens silent. The Shadow saw the arriving lights just as the dodging muggers became suddenly bold, through numbers, and began to converge upon him with a massed drive.

With a taunting laugh, The Shadow vanished.

That, at least, was the effect produced by his rapid whirl toward the narrow passage reserved for the Apaches. Hearing a steely clang, the muggers veered in that direction only to encounter a metal gate that the Apaches had forgotten to close in their haste. Frantically, the disorganized thugs reversed their direction toward a basement across the street, a route Leroc had promised them. As they went, they met a lunging figure that they mistook for one of The Shadow's agents, trying to follow his cloaked chief.

With happy snarls, the muggers prodded their prey with knives and flung him lifeless in the path of an arriving patrol car. Their swift, savage work saved The Shadow the trouble of later vengeance, for the muggers were disposing of Leroc's abandoned follower, Trevol, the unfortunate Monsieur Rouge in this night's tragedy of errors.

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The scene was set for a clean-up by the law, since police were arriving in sufficient force to overwhelm the muggers who had delayed too long. But the drivers of the patrol cars were too quick with their brakes, considering the freezing street. Cars twirled like scooters at an amusement park, banging each other half across the sidewalk. Leaping from them, the officers only added to their troubles, for they lost their footing on the icy paving.

The street was filled with skidding cops, shooting wildly from all postures at a flock of human jackrabbits who took long, sliding dives down into a basement where an open door gave them safe conduct through a cellar where the cement floor was dry and therefore helpful. The police had completely lost their opportunity for a mop-up.

A FEW blocks away, a woman who posed as Old Gert was waiting on a corner hoping that muggers would appear, but all had gone another direction. All Loraine saw were running men who looked like victims who had managed to escape. Not knowing that they were Leroc's Apaches, of whom she had never heard, the girl in the shawl decided that her chance to aid the law was over. In hobbly style, Loraine began her trundle back to the basement, glad that her job as Old Gert was finished.

The term "finished" threatened to apply in permanent style, though Loraine did not realize it. The person who recognized such a prospect was Margo, who had returned to her lookout post across the way. Hardly had the shawled figure of Old Gert descended the basement steps, before Margo observed newcomers in the street. At first, Margo mistook them for respectable wayfarers, until she realized why.

They were the same two men who had passed along this street before. A chance stroll wouldn't be repeated, except by design. Furthermore the men were pausing and now, as Margo eyed them with suspicion, it became apparent that they were beckoning to others, pointing out the basement where Old Gert lived. Abandoning their more gentlemanly style, the group became skulkers, who withdrew to house walls.

Apaches!

The word shouted through Margo's brain when a lone man came creeping toward the center of the block. There was so much of the snake about his stealthy movement that Margo realized he must be the notorious Alban Leroc whose name Lamont had mentioned. It would be like Leroc to leave his more polished but less skilled followers in the background while he personally handled the murder of a helpless victim. But the very fact that the others had moved from sight meant opportunity for Margo.

Nerving herself, the brunette crept from her doorway just as Leroc's form dipped into the basement opposite. From her handbag, Margo produced a little automatic, hoping her nerve would back it, if the time came to use it. She kept her footing as she crossed the slippery street and made a grab for the iron railing by the basement entry. In turning down the steps, Margo didn't realize that a crouched man was encroaching into the darkness right beside her, the first of Leroc's followers to move up behind the leader.

As Margo released the rail, she stumbled. Her arm was caught with a sudden clamp that frightened her. Though she tried to repress a startled cry, Margo couldn't entirely halt it and it was helpful that she didn't, for the sharp gasp was natural enough to identify her. A cool voice responded:

"Steady, Margo. We'll see this through together."

It wasn't The Shadow's whisper, but it was the next best tone that Margo could have heard. The man who had overtaken her was Cliff Marsland, purported follower of Alban Leroc, actual agent of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. COVER OF DARKNESS

LORAINIE RUE hadn't lost a moment in abandoning the part of Old Gert. Her first action was to mop her face with a cloth that bore cold cream, eliminating her wrinkled make-up in one sweep. Her ragged attire followed next and as she shed Old Gert's regalia, Loraine flung the detested garments into the old box that had held them. Out of those rags she emerged a lithe, sleek creature, with only her scant dancing costume, who seemed an impossible occupant of the shawl and petticoats that signified Old Gert.

Giving her head a forward fling, Loraine flounced her hair with both hands, producing a powdery white cloud that almost obscured her. Like a Naiad fading into the mist of a waterfall, Loraine reached the closet where hung the mink coat with the pocketed slippers. As the white dust settled, the girl reappeared, wrapped in mink. She was stooping as she turned, sliding her bare feet into the slippers.

Loraine was glad that she'd decided on a costume suited to such rapid change. The hours spent as Old Gert had cut deeply into the time before the next show at Club 88, so she'd have to be back there soon. Besides, Loraine could picture this neighborhood soon filling with police, who might be questioning everyone they met. Rather than lose more time, Loraine started toward the door, but before she reached it, she was riveted to the spot.

A man with a very ugly leer had stepped into the room, closing the door partway behind him. He was toying with a knife of such long-bladed pattern that Loraine's mink coat wavered from the chills that shivered her spine. If there was any doubt that this man knew what such knives could accomplish, one look at his face dispelled that doubt. From chin, past ear, terminating on his very eyelid, the man wore a livid scar that only a knife slash could have produced.

The man centered the gaze of his wide-open eye upon Loraine, but his droopy optic also caught the glitter from the oil lamp burning on the soap box that had served as Old Gert's table. In that upright box, Alban Leroc saw a telephone, quite unusual for so squalid a setting.

Glancing from the telephone to Loraine and back again, Leroc included Old Gert's clothes box in his survey. Linking all three, he gave a knowing laugh that carried a wolfish snarl. As if in response, the phone bell jangled.

It was Leroc who answered the call. Loraine couldn't budge a step in her petrified condition. Recognizing the caller, the Apache held a brief conversation, then turned to Loraine as he hung up. In the polite manner that he could often display, Leroc folded his clasp knife and dropped it in his pocket endwise, the only way that it would fit.

Beyond the door that stood ajar, Margo repressed a sigh as relieved as Loraine's. But Leroc's manner didn't fool Cliff Marsland. His hand clutching an automatic, Cliff gave brief orders to Margo.

"When I shove the door, get to that lamp and smash it. I'll handle Leroc. Right now he's more dangerous than ever. Watch!"

Leroc was bowing as he reached Loraine. One hand behind her, the blonde was groping for the knob of a battered door in the rear corner of the room. Apologetically, Leroc extended his open hands and for a moment, Loraine's fear-stricken face relaxed.

To Margo, Cliff said: "Now!"

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As Cliff kicked the door inward, Margo dashed for the lamp. At that moment, she heard a scream from Loraine. Margo didn't stop to see what caused it; instead, she sent the lamp flying from its improvised table. Leroc's action, that Margo didn't see, was done with the speed of a whippet and the slither of a snake.

Leroc simply plucked the collar of Loraine's fur coat and gave it a quick haul across her head. As the girl flung herself about, with the scream that Margo heard, Leroc pirouetted in the style of an Apache dancer and twisted the coat around Loraine's head, muffling her shriek with mink. It was the coup d'etouffement, or smothering trick used by the Apaches to produce suffocation after a few minutes of useless struggle by the victim.

All went black for Loraine under the hooded folds of her cloak, but the darkness wasn't limited to that small degree. As Loraine's scream stifled, the lamp crashed and the whole room went dark. Leroc, turning while he twisted the coat collar, was too late to see Cliff's coming charge. In the blackness, Cliff arrived with a slugging gun stroke that reeled Leroc around the other way, the twist of the coat unwinding.

The battered door slammed behind Loraine, who went scudding through without her cherished mink. She'd whipped her arms from the sleeves when the coat uncoiled, and Leroc was just as pleased. He was using the heavy garment against Cliff, flipping it over his attacker's head. Slugging upward, Cliff hooked the coat from Leroc's clutch and dropped away to aim at the Apache.

Landing in Old Gert's clothes box, the lamp produced a sudden flare from its dying flame. In the flicker from the igniting rags, Margo saw the glitter of Leroc's knife, about to flip at Cliff, whose head was still half buried in the mink. As Margo shrieked a warning, knowing that Cliff's aim was late, Leroc made another pivot and sped his knife hand in her direction.

Cliff's shot, wild and belated, couldn't have changed Leroc's hurl. What did deviate the Apache's knife hand was a fierce challenge that rang through the confines of the room. It was a laugh that belonged to blackness and actually seemed to produce it, for at that instant, the flame from the clothes box died.

The laugh of The Shadow!

It came from the front doorway of the room, but Leroc didn't guess it, for the laugh seemed everywhere. Thinking Cliff must be The Shadow, Leroc did not pause his twirl as he let the knife fly. Carried just too far before the Apache's fingers loosened, the knife whizzed a few inches to Margo's left and buried itself in the wall behind her.

Meeting Cliff with a quick grapple, Leroc flung him full about, showing a strength that was surprising. Cliff spun farther than The Shadow expected, so far that he came headlong against his cloaked chief. Amid the darkness, Leroc took a long, kicking leap out through the doorway at the front of the room. The Shadow's gun spoke after him, but Leroc was away.

Ordering Cliff to join him in the pursuit, The Shadow told Margo to look after Loraine. Making for the rear door, Margo stumbled across the mink coat and gathered it up. Through the door, she came upon some cellar steps and heard a bleat from Loraine, who had halted close against the cellar door, afraid to risk a dash outdoors, since she was attired not as Old Gert, but in her bejeweled dancing costume.

Taking greater fright at Margo's approach, Loraine threw aside discretion and began to thrust out through the door. Margo overtook her with the coat and flung it around Loraine's shoulders with the encouraging words:

"There's your mink and don't hurry. Everyone has gone the other way, so we're safe. But it won't do to attract too much attention."

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Hearing a girl's tone, Loraine calmed. Wrapped in her coat, she guided Margo through a rear alley, but drew back suddenly when they reached the next street. A cab with dim lights was coming down the block and Loraine was afraid it contained Apaches. Margo had an idea that it was Shrevvy's cab, the one most likely to be nearby when The Shadow roved, so she stepped into sight and hailed it.

AS the cab stopped, Margo saw her hunch was right. Moe opened the door and the two girls stepped into the cab. Settling back, Loraine nonchalantly gave the address of the stage door of Club 88. Loraine was hoping that the driver would not connect herself and Margo with any excitement in a neighboring street. She didn't realize that this cab was another arrangement in connection with the rescue service supplied by The Shadow.

Around the block, the cab was halted by police, who were arriving in large numbers. The officers insisted upon looking into the cab, but seeing only two girls, one wearing a fur-trimmed cape, the other a mink coat, they waved the taxi along. Margo took it that the police had appeared just when The Shadow began his pursuit of the Apaches, which probably meant that Leroc had escaped along with his tricky followers.

That supposition was substantiated after Margo delivered Loraine in back of Club 88. Leaving the grateful blonde, Margo entered the front door in ample time to view the floor show. She found Cranston there, extending a surprised greeting to Commissioner Weston who had just arrived. As they approached the table where King Franzel was settling down to await the floor show, Howard Harland stormed into the night club.

The big-voiced reformer was angry. The mugging outrages had gone too far, invading such exclusive districts as the area around Yorkshire Village. Stormily he demanded that Weston put the whole city under surveillance until the menace could be eradicated. When Harland included Franzel in his general glare, King Franzel offered a deep-toned reminder.

"You asked for it, Harland," said Franzel. "It was your idea to take the peddlers off the street and advertise it in the newspapers. Fortunately you forgot that there are women peddlers too. I had them on the watch tonight."

"That's right," corroborated Weston. "One of them phoned me the tip-off. Her name was Old Gert."

Harland didn't reply, for the orchestra blared loudly as Weston finished speaking. From Harland's glower, it appeared that he would like to meet Old Gert, the lady who had justified King Franzel's status with the law. Then Harland's features lost their angry look, as his eyes began to beam upon a jeweled beauty that was scintillating into the spotlight.

The attraction was Loraine Rue, in the gem-studded trappings that added to her natural glamor. Turning toward Cranston, Margo saw the slight smile that was forming on his lips, and understood it. Though he didn't know it, Harland was looking at Old Gert.

That was certainly worth a whimsical smile from the lips of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. CRANSTON PROPOSES

THREE days had passed, along with nights that were free of further muggings, only because the police had taken on the large-scale project that Harland had demanded. In effect, Manhattan had become an armed camp, its police force increased to an unparalleled state.

To patrol widespread areas, Commissioner Weston had recruited thousands of auxiliary police, putting them into a department that already existed for emergency. These auxiliaries, identified by white arm bands, were

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assigned solely to mugging patrol, which covered all but the very center of the city, Times Square, where the streets already teemed with throngs and therefore weren't the sort of territory that skulking muggers would choose.

Half of the cabs in town had been detailed to the auxiliary police. This was a good move, since it meant that every cab would frighten away muggers. There was just one flaw in all the ointment; it couldn't last forever. As one newspaper put it, the police were using pile drivers to hunt rats and the expense could not long continue. Nobody realized that fact better than Commissioner Weston.

Naturally, the muggers were lying low. So, for that matter, were the Apaches. Cliff had escaped recognition by Leroc and was still in the latter's good graces, but he had received no word to report at a new headquarters. Everything was in a static condition that boded future ill, for it was obvious that when the police would be forced to gradually relax their vigilance, crime would resume its operations.

On the third day, Cranston brought a gentleman to see Weston. The visitor's name was Morton Joyce and Cranston introduced him as a mining engineer from Nevada. Remarking casually that Joyce had been in the vicinity of Yorkshire Village on the night when muggers had marauded that terrain, Cranston let the visitor tell his own story.

For a start, Joyce produced a batch of documents.

"It's this way, commissioner," Joyce declared. "I've an idea those muggers were set to trap me."

Weston showed a sudden interest, only to have it fade.

"They took a victim," he reminded, "a man named George Trevol, who had just sold out his restaurant in Chicago."

Joyce didn't change a flicker of expression. He knew that Trevol belonged to the Apaches, because Cranston had so informed him, but they had agreed to ignore that point where Weston was concerned, on the assumption that the commissioner would probably not believe it.

"That supports my theory," asserted Joyce, catching a prompting glance from Cranston. "Maybe they were set for Trevol too, but only managed to get one of us. You see, commissioner, I had these in my pocket."

From the documents, Joyce brought a batch of mining stock totaling better than one hundred thousand dollars. After examining the stock, Weston realized that it was of the type that anyone could sell, with no questions asked, a thing that Joyce corroborated.

"This letter will interest you, commissioner."

The letter did. It was addressed to Joyce and signed by a man named Clement Cranshaw, who gave his residence as Apartment 15-K in Yorkshire Village.

"No one named Cranshaw lives in those apartments," remarked Cranston, "and there is no Apartment 15-K. The numbers indicate floors and the buildings are only twelve stories high."

IMMEDIATELY alert, Weston began to pound his office desk. That duty finished, he reached for the phone and summoned Inspector Cardona. When Joe arrived, Weston showed him the data and promptly announced:

"Harland lives in Yorkshire Village! He ought to know about this!"

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"I wouldn't tell Harland," observed Cranston. "It might strike too close to home. Besides, I've already told him about something else that might interest him more."

The first part of Cranston's statement impressed Weston. Tilting his head, the commissioner asked sharply:

"Do I infer that you believe Harland is behind this mugging racket, bringing dupes to town and having muggers rob them? Men like Anstead and Pell? Or Waverly and Trevol?"

In replying, Cranston ignored the last two names that Weston mentioned, but did not specify the fact. He simply stated:

"It could be, commissioner."

"I'll say it could be," broke in Cardona, playing one of his famous hunches. "What a cover-up! First, Harland raises a howl about muggers, which seemed sensible enough, with him a reformer. We started quarantining districts and of course that made the muggers hop around. They wanted to be organized so Harland fixed it for them and fixed them too, though they didn't know it."

Pausing, Cardona looked for commendation and received it in Cranston's glance. Thus supported, the inspector warmed further to his theme.

"Franzel's beggars nearly queered it," summarized Cardona. "Only they didn't quite, and that was enough for Harland to argue us into taking them off the streets. The muggers were losing heart, that night when only one batch showed up at Surrey Place. Something had to be done to keep the racket going and that something was to call off the beggars. You've hit it, Mr. Cranston. Harland is the big shot behind the mugging racket, using his reform league and those phony contributions it receives, to make the dough he gets look honest!"

Triumphantly, Cardona stared at Weston and found that for once the commissioner was accepting a hunch. Privately, however, Cardona was forced to modify his triumph when he remembered that he had simply detailed the subtle points that Cranston had already suggested.

"And now, commissioner," asked Cranston, "would you like to know what I did tell Harland when I saw him at noon today?"

Weston was all interest, so Cranston continued.

"I mentioned that I'm leaving for Washington this afternoon," Cranston said, "to pick up government reports on the local black market, for my friend Senator Releston. I said I would be glad to turn over those confidential lists to Harland, for the Citizens' Reform League."

"A good idea," commended Weston. "Harland will have to make his league do something honest, once he has those lists. If he destroys them, he will prove himself a crook."

Cranston shook his head.

"Harland will never receive them," he declared. "They will be intercepted on the way. Think how well they would serve the head of the mugging ring! Persons named on those lists could be blackmailed, induced to bring money to a given place, and on the way –"

"They would be mugged," broke in Cardona. "But if you're bringing those lists, Mr. Cranston, you'll be the first to suffer. That is, if we let you."

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"Which you won't," said Cranston, with a smile. "Look, commissioner"—he turned to a map on Weston's wall—"suppose when I return from the airport, I stop at the Metrolite Hotel, then walk from there to Harland's. Here is the route that I should normally follow for a dozen blocks, until I cross Times Square —"

"And by then," interrupted Weston, "the muggers would be right behind you —if you told all this to Harland."

"I did tell him," nodded Cranston. "I further encouraged him by saying that the black marketeers are checking to see who brings those lists. That leaves plenty of loopholes in the proposition, because a dozen people could be blamed for what might happen to me. But it will be your job to pick off those muggers before I reach the safety of Times Square."

WHILE Weston hesitated, Cardona voiced grim assurance that regular police as well as auxiliaries would be on the job. However, when it came to risking Cranston's life, the commissioner wasn't willing to be sure of anything. It was Cranston himself who offered the next suggestion:

"What about asking King Franzel to lend you some of his sharp-eyed beggars?"

Weston was reaching for the telephone, before Cranston finished the question. He called Franzel and asked him to come to the office. That done, Weston began a study of the map, to pick out Cranston's route beyond Times Square in case the muggers would be gathered on the other side of that neutral section. Weston was still working on the proposition when King Franzel arrived.

With a gesture, Weston let Cranston do the talking.

Detail for detail, Cranston gave his theory and explained how Harland fitted in the scheme of things. He mentioned that he had told Harland of the trip to Washington and pointed out the loopholes that would cover any individual's connection with the mugging racket. Franzel listened; then shook his head.

"I don't like Harland," he asserted, "but I can't believe he's that bad. Still, your plan would be to his benefit if he is on the level, because if nothing happens he will be exonerated. But I can't supply my followers to help you, for two reasons."

He gave the reasons. One was that muggers would spot beggars as their logical enemies and might withdraw to avoid the trap. The other was that Harland would blame any attack on the beggars, should Cranston actually become a victim. That made it Weston's party and after due consideration, the commissioner decided to undertake the job, since Cranston was willing to accept the risk.

The conference ended when Cranston glanced at his watch and found he had just time enough to catch the Washington plane. He stated that he would reach the Hotel Metrolite at half past eleven and begin the march that would prove a lure to crime.

Shaking hands all around, Cranston left the commissioner's office, smiling as he went. Deeper by far than the plan that he had expressed as Cranston, was the master stroke intended by his other self, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. THE STROKE AT MIDNIGHT

SOON after dark, the hidden wheels were turning in anticipation of tonight's event. The machinery of the law was secretly at work, but it represented a mere third of the total in progress. The second element in the case was that of the mugging ring, which was stirring to new life, along with its inner circle of Apaches.

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Cliff had received his summons from Leroc. He found the Apache leader in the deepest and most commodious of hide-outs, the forgotten cellar of a building that flanked Times Square. A few years ago, the original building had been torn down and replaced by a smaller structure called a "taxpayer" which was to stand until real-estate values rose. The deep cellar of the former building had been blocked off, but the ingenious Leroc had found a way inside, through a boarded passage connecting with the subway.

To his followers, Leroc was explaining the night's job in terms of Cranston, whose picture, clipped from a newspaper, was passed from hand to hand. Having thus identified the coming victim, Leroc named the time and place.

"The police are fools!" scoffed Leroc, "They think that muggers will venture in the open. They would even suppose that we would do the same. All the while, they have provided the perfect spot for our work. It will happen at midnight—here!"

Laying his finger on the wall map, Leroc pointed to the only black spot that remained amid a spread of yellow. That spot was Times Square!

The third element was The Shadow's. Already, his active agents, except for Cliff, were assembled on the verge of Times Square, where thousands of people were jostling in throngs through what was actually the darkest portion of Manhattan. Though dimout regulations applied to all the city, Times Square was the place that received the strictest surveillance. For nearly two years, it had stood as an absolute blotch in the vague lines of faint light that represented Manhattan Island at night.

The Shadow had called the turn to perfection. He knew exactly how much crooks would—or would not—risk. The papers that he, as Cranston, was supposed to bring from Washington were too great a prize for crime's master schemer to ignore. The Shadow was therefore crediting that brain with a calculative ability somewhat on a par with his own.

The answer was Times Square—or would be, when the final report came through.

That report was already on its way, along with the tribe of shiftless Apaches who were leaving Leroc's handy headquarters. As they straightened into respectable citizens, the Apaches became strollers going toward a subway exit, forming a screen for Leroc, who was too ugly to escape attention. One of those Apaches paused to light a cigarette, the simplest of signals.

The flicker of the match was noted by Hawkeye, who was out of sight behind a newsstand that had closed for the night. Cliff's flash meant that Leroc had given the expected word. The time was midnight; the place Times Square. Scudding up another entrance, Hawkeye forked his way through the crowds coming from the theaters and reached a drugstore that boasted a line of telephone booths.

Those booths were filled, as usual, and this was a moment when delay could prove serious. There was, however, an empty in the line, the last booth on the end, because its telephone bore a placard stating: "Out of Order." Hawkeye entered the booth, removed the dummy card that he had planted hours before and put in a quick call to Burbank.

THERE was one spot in Times Square that should have had a big white X painted on it. This was a traffic island, formed where a cross street sliced the prolonged intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue, which by their extensive merger form the sizable area generally known as Times Square.

A little triangle of cement, bounded by a high curb, this spot could be considered one of the real sights of Manhattan. Though located where real estate is valued by the square inch, the tiny island stands completely

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bare, being too small to accommodate a structure. In years gone by it was a sight by night as well as day, this almost-forgotten blank that people overlooked, but under dimout conditions it had become no more than a stumbling spot.

No longer did the three-sided isle bask in the brilliance of the great advertising signs that gave Times Square a greater brilliance by night than by day. Those flashing lights were suppressed for the duration. Times Square had become a gloomy "ghost walk" where visitors found sport in blundering through the gloom. Comparatively few crossed at the tiny traffic island, never enough to make it teem with people, as it commonly had during the period when it afforded the perfect central spot to admire the sights of Times Square, now taboo for the duration.

The forgotten island was exactly on the route that Lamont Cranston was to take when strolling from the Hotel Metrolite to Yorkshire Village!

Commissioner Weston had overlooked the island's existence. Indeed, Weston was completely discounting Times Square itself, so far as crime might be concerned. As he sat in the Cobalt Club, studying the latest police map, he decided that the Square had value only as a base. Weston expressed his thought to King Franzel and Inspector Cardona who were seated at the table with him.

"We'll ride in my car to Times Square," decided Weston. "We can park near the middle of the Square and pick up the short-wave reports. If Cranston runs into trouble before he reaches the Square, we can speed over to meet him. If he is not molested coming there, we can be ready to pick up his trail after he emerges from the other side."

The plan pleased Franzel, but Cardona wasn't too convinced. He reminded Weston that Harland might be stopping at the Cobalt Club and would wonder why the commissioner wasn't there. Before Weston could decide on that problem, Harland himself settled it by arriving in person. Immediately, Weston became very affable.

"Hello, Harland," said the commissioner. "We're glad you joined us. We were just about to start out in my official car and see how the auxiliaries are doing. It's almost midnight, when they change shift, so we thought we'd travel here and there --"

"And hit or miss," interposed Harland. "That's the way you're doing things, commissioner. I have a better plan than all this auxiliary patrol, though I had to contact Albany to arrange it."

Weston gave Harland a cold stare. He didn't like this business of the reformer going over his head and arranging things at the State capital. Still, it fitted with Harland's smart methods. As secret head of the mugging ring, Harland would naturally find it policy to keep going higher up. Thanks to Cranston, Weston had outdone that game. Cranston's contact was with Washington, a great jump higher than Albany.

"Gun permits are the answer," assured Harland, bluntly. "I want you to issue them to the right people, commissioner."

"I already have," reminded Weston. "You happen to be carrying one, Harland, and so are many of your friends."

"But not enough! If every respectable citizen had a gun, how could muggers ply their evil trade?"

Cardona wanted to answer that one. He was going to suggest that muggers might borrow or steal such guns, permits and all, and go back to the days of gang law. The present prevalence of knives was merely a way of

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getting around the Sullivan Act that made it a criminal offense to carry a gun. In substance, Harland was seeking to nullify that law. As a man engaged in true reform, his idea could be honest enough; but tagged as head of the mugging racket—as the law now listed him—he could be voicing his plan to aid crime rather than destroy it.

THAT could all be settled later. At present it was close to midnight, and muggers were due for a jolt that might set Harland on his heels as well. So Weston nodded as though he approved Harland's plan as something for the future. Rising, the commissioner remarked that his car was waiting and as they walked through the foyer, Weston added quite casually:

"I wonder where Cranston is. I haven't heard from him all day. Have you, Harland?"

"I couldn't have," rejoined Harland, promptly. "I took the nine o'clock train to Albany and Cranston never gets up that early in the morning. I intended to be back sooner, but the legislators and State department heads seemed to delight in keeping me waiting for appointments."

Weston flashed a knowing glance at Cardona, who met it in poker-faced style. Only King Franzel showed traces of a disdainful smile which he kept away from Harland. Since Cranston had personally seen Harland at noon, according to his own testimony, it stood to reason that Harland was cooking up some sort of alibi, whatever his ultimate purpose. Once the group was in the car Weston told the chauffeur he would guide him, which meant that, through seeming chance, they would eventually reach Times Square.

ALREADY, the death trail had begun. True to his promise, Lamont Cranston was strolling from the Hotel Metrolite, carrying a brief case that shouted its contents to anyone who knew about them. Important lists from Washington, naming the principal operators in the black market, documents that any men whose names were listed therein would pay a fortune to suppress!

So, at least, had Cranston described those papers to Commissioner Weston and King Franzel. Inspector Cardona had been present at the time, so he was in on the secret too. Otherwise, no one in New York could know of the papers except Howard Harland, since Cranston had declared that he mentioned them to Harland only. If word had leaked, Cranston's own testimony would be used against Harland. If Cranston lived, he could repeat that testimony personally; should he die, reliable witnesses would declare it for him.

During the several blocks to Times Square, nothing sinister shrouded Cranston's stroll. The only men who watched him pass, or took up his pace for a block or so, were representatives of the law, headquarters detectives or hand-picked auxiliaries. These trusted men knew nothing of what was inside Cranston's brief case. Their job was simply to see that nothing happened to the commissioner's friend, before he reached Times Square.

From a side street, Cranston entered the massive gloom that represented the heart of Manhattan.

Human bloodhounds dropped from the trail. Cranston would be safe until he reached the other side, where a new group of trained protectors would take up convoy duty.

So far the law was clicking perfectly.

Or was it?

KEEN eyes had spotted Cranston. From the throngs of Times Square, silent men detached themselves and moved close behind him. From the concrete triangle, a stooped figure saw the approaching group and beckoned the other way. The man who beckoned was Leroc and he promptly edged away while others of his

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Apaches were approaching from the far side of the broad intersection to box Cranston in a trap.

Though traffic wasn't moving, Cranston suddenly quickened his pace. As he reached the darkened curb of the island, he stumbled purposely, his hands opening the brief case. No papers rustled from the interior; instead, Cranston whipped out a black cloak that he flung around his shoulders, along with a slouch hat that he clapped upon his head.

It was as if Cranston had disappeared into the darkness itself, unless it could be believed that solid concrete had swallowed him. It was a perfect setting for him to become The Shadow!

Scant seconds had done the trick, but in those seconds men were lunging, Leroc among them. Men with vicious knives and strangling scarfs, as eager as the performers in a Spanish bull ring. As they charged from every side, they heard a challenge from their hidden opponent. Above the thrum of Times Square traffic came the weird, fierce laugh of The Shadow!

Then did Apaches realize that they had been tricked, but the knowledge did not stop them. The Shadow was somewhere in that darkness and now was the time to settle him forever. What they didn't expect was the solid swirl that met them, with wide sweeping guns, plucked from the handy brief case. In a setting to his choice, The Shadow was sprawling Apaches all about him, before a single knife could be driven home, or a scarf flung for its victim.

Through every mind, Leroc's included, came a frantic madness for escape. The Shadow's laugh rang louder, for at its first call other sounds had ceased, traffic stopping, pedestrians halting, startled by the eerie mirth. Something new was in the air, something as unexpected as it was tremendous.

It came, a blaze of light that staggered everyone with its terrific dazzle. In one flash, the blackness of Times Square was gone, and the old scene had been restored, that of night brightness surpassing daylight. Great electric signs flared in myriad colors, spreading their neon glare into a multitude of other lights, all awakened from months of slumber.

Some of the largest ones had been dismantled for the duration, but to make up for their lack of brilliance, special floodlights had been set up on different vantage spots to add to the brilliance. Times Square had sprung up from its darkness of the dimout into greater brilliance than it ever had before!

On the central island people saw a tribe of half-sprawled Apaches all dazed by the brilliance, among them a cloaked avenger, whose laugh was reaching a triumphant crescendo. Having scattered his foemen in darkness, The Shadow was prepared to mop them up in light.

Never before had men of evil been so suddenly and completely revealed in the very midst of an attempted crime.

This was the master stroke of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. DEATH'S TRIANGLE

THIS was the arrangement that The Shadow, as Cranston, had made through Washington to end crime in New York. He had done it secretly, instead of working on black-market lists, which were only a hoax to draw crooks into crime.

All had been fixed for Burbank to pull a master switch in a building overlooking the concrete triangle. As a

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result, The Shadow commanded the center of a massive stage, where he was rounding up a horde of renegades in no uncertain style. Aiming his guns at the pavement, The Shadow fired bullets that ricocheted among the stupefied Apaches and sent them scattering farther into the light that blinded them.

From side streets, men surged in to trap the fugitives. The arrivals were the detectives and their auxiliaries, assigned to protect Cranston. What had become of their ward, they didn't know, but they saw the killers who had been sent to assassinate him. So the police and their reserves went after the enemies in question.

That was just part of the mighty roundup.

Among the lights that came to new life was the news sign on the Times Building at the lower end of the Square. Within a few moments, people were pointing out the message that ran in moving letters across the surface of that sign.

The message said, in huge capitals:

MUGGERS ARE AMONG YOU... LOOK FOR THEM AND WEED THEM OUT... TURN THEM OVER TO THE POLICE... MUGGERS ARE AMONG YOU...

The sign told the truth. Muggers were everywhere as The Shadow knew they would certainly be, as a cover-up for Leroc's attempted exploit. This was more than conjecture on The Shadow's part; a report from Cliff had substantiated everything. It was the old game with a new twist.

Leroc had convinced the muggers that Times Square would be a perfect hunting ground, where people could be snatched from throngs and easily handled in doorways or vacated movie lobbies. Even taxicabs were good spots, since those frequenting Times Square had not been commandeered by the police. Of course it was the intention to have Leroc's crime get lost amid the excitement that would follow the mugging activities. But Leroc's attempt to assassinate Cranston had failed.

And now the muggers were meeting the same fate.

The one thing muggers feared was light and they were getting the largest amount of it that had ever been assembled in an individual locality. So far the muggers were simply lurking in clustered batches, about to pluck their victims at the zero hour of midnight. When voices, inspired by the news flash, raised the one cry: "Muggers!" the skulkers gave themselves away.

Trios began to scatter, their members flinging away the folded knives that would incriminate them. Immediately they were smothered by swarms of solid citizens who overwhelmed the rats and gathered up the evidence that they had flung away. All the muggers in New York were here in Times Square, and though there were scores of them, they were far outnumbered by the thousands who formed the usual midnight throng. In a space of mere minutes, a general roundup was completed.

IN those same minutes, The Shadow was staging a personal duel. Only one Apache remained on the island where crime had been so thoroughly spoiled. That man was Alban Leroc and he was determined to settle his long score with The Shadow. Since Cliff had purposely lingered behind the Apaches rather than be rated one of them, The Shadow was entirely alone when Leroc sprang from the curb and pitched himself for the cloaked victor.

Ahead of Leroc came his Apache knife, but he was not letting the surin skim from his tight fingers. A fling might miss so elusive a foe as The Shadow, despite the way his form was etched amid the brilliant light. Besides, Leroc was eager to feel the crunch of ribs when the knife drove home. Seeing The Shadow turning,

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Leroc veered his savage thrust.

It was a neat ruse by The Shadow. He heard the clatter of Leroc's feet and purposely feinted one way, only to spin the other. Stabbing empty air, Leroc snarled as his passing wrist was grabbed by a gloved hand that had the power of metal, coated with velvet. Leroc went into a whirl that only the skill of an Apache dancer could nullify. Finding his feet after a crazy somersault, Leroc looked again for The Shadow.

Leroc's view was blocked by a big car that had wheeled up to the island. From it were coming two bulky men, King Franzel and Howard Harland; behind them Inspector Cardona. On the wrong side of the car, Commissioner Weston was shouting for his companions to grab the ringleader, forgetful in the excitement that he should be mistrusting one of them; namely, Harland.

The Shadow was gone, apparently merged with the black-painted side of Weston's official car.

First to grab Leroc was Franzel. He gripped the Apache from behind and swung him around. Leroc's knife, wagging in the air, was pointing toward Harland and Cardona when an automatic jabbed from behind Weston's car. The shot cracked Leroc's wrist and spoiled the thrust he might have given.

Still, the knife was flipping forward when Leroc's fingers loosened. As Cardona made a snatch for the weapon, the bursts of a revolver accompanied him. Harland was using the gun that his police permit allowed him to carry, and his bullets were meeting Leroc point-blank. With an ugly snarl, the scarred assassin coiled to the concrete, a fitting victim for the triangle of death.

The car door opened on Weston's side. In stepped Cranston, carrying his bulging brief case, which again contained the regalia of The Shadow. Hugely relieved to see his friend alive, Weston was about to blurt out statements when Cranston's gesture halted him. In an undertone, Cranston said:

"Leave it to King Franzel. He is the man who has the most to settle with Harland. Let's hear what he suggests."

King was clapping Harland on the back as they stepped into the car. Behind them, Cardona was tossing a glance at Leroc's body as police arrived around it. From Cardona's glance, it was plain that he was working on a hunch.

So was King Franzel.

"Suppose we drive over to Club 88," suggested Franzel. "My followers may have phoned some facts to help us with this riddle. That man on the island certainly wasn't a mugger. He looked like a different sort of villain."

THEY reached the cafe and took their places around Franzel's favorite table, the management overlooking the fact that these distinguished patrons were not wearing evening clothes. Noting that Harland was properly flanked by Weston and Cardona, Franzel responded to the commissioner's nod.

"All right, Harland," said Franzel, coolly. "The jig is up."

Harland began a startled sputter.

"You gave it away," continued Franzel, "the way you killed that fellow on the triangle."

"He was trying to knife me!" argued Harland. "If you'd grabbed his hand, I wouldn't have had to fire."

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"I let you have that chance," smiled Franzel, "to see if you would get rid of the one man who could squeal about your racket."

Before Harland could bluster, Franzel laid home the theories as worked out by the law. There wasn't a flaw in any of his statements and to conclude the case, he gestured to Cranston.

"You fell into the trap, Harland," declared Franzel, as Weston nodded approval, "when Cranston met you at noon today and told you about his coming trip to Washington and its purpose."

"But I didn't meet Cranston!" stormed Harland. "I told you I went to Albany in the morning!"

There were smiles of doubt upon the faces of men who had already heard Harland's alibi. The only person who didn't smile was Cranston. Instead, he spoke quite solemnly.

"I owe you an apology, commissioner," said Cranston. "You see, I was so anxious to have my plan go through that I told you I had already mentioned facts to Harland. I would have held that interview after I left your office, but I found that Harland had gone to Albany."

Totally disregarding the astonished looks about him, Cranston settled back in his chair and continued to speak calmly.

"I went through with the plan," said Cranston, "because I figured it would work either way. If someone tried to kill me, we would know that our theories about Harland were wrong, because knowing nothing, he could not arrange the crime."

"But Harland could have found out!" broke in Franzel. "Maybe he had informants down in Washington. Perhaps he heard from some of the men whose names were on that black-market list!"

"There was no list," declared Cranston, "nor did I go to Washington. It was all a hoax, to serve as bait for crime. You swallowed it, Franzel!"

CRANSTON didn't have to speak another word. The whole game was plain, with King Franzel as its head.

He, like Harland, had every opportunity to use Leroc as a lieutenant in the Apache raids that were accomplished under cover of the mugging jobs also arranged by Leroc at Franzel's behest.

The beggars who had worked for Franzel were just part of the blind. Indeed, their operations, when analyzed, showed that Franzel had a stronger opportunity than Harland. Always, their tip-offs were accurate but late; a point which Cranston had not failed to notice, and which now was clear to all.

"You were the better bet, Franzel," stated Cranston. "As for taking your beggars off the streets, you practically prodded Harland into demanding that it should be done. Your game was slipping because the beggars worried the muggers."

"Odd about those tip-offs, always naming places where beggars weren't around. You must have phoned them yourself, Franzel, right from here. Of course the last one was different, when you counted on the women peddlers. Or should I say, you counted on one!"

There was a crash of music from the orchestra, announcing the floor show. Coming to his feet, Weston shouted for the orchestra to cease, which it did. Loraine Rue halted as she made her entrance, then seeing a stir at Franzel's table, she walked in that direction, slowly, steadily, her wide eyes staring straight ahead.

THE MUGGERS

King Franzel tried to smile at the girl in the costume of rags and jewels, but Loraine stiffened. Looking at the other faces, she saw Cranston's, and relaxed when he smiled. Cranston knew quite well that Loraine must have received a recent visit from Margo, who had specific facts to tell her.

"You couldn't phone the night of the roundup," Cranston told Franzel, "because it had to be a woman's voice. Joyce, near Yorkshire Village, which you had framed an excellent trap for, would point to Harland. But you needed someone to stooge for you, so you told Loraine Rue to double as Old Gert."

Joe Cardona blinked. He'd never realized that the trappings of Old Gert, the gardenia seller, had packed anything resembling the lithe figure of Loraine Rue.

"Tell us the rest, Loraine," suggested Cranston.

"It was King who phoned me," said Loraine, solemnly. "I hadn't seen a sign of any muggers. How King knew where they were going to be, I don't know, but I trusted him, so I relayed the call to Commissioner Weston."

"What else?" inquired Cranston.

"King told me to look for more muggers," responded Loraine, "so I did. When I came back, I found I had been spotted by an Apache named Leroc. Someone called up on the telephone and ordered Leroc to murder me."

Cranston wheeled to King Franzel.

"You installed that telephone," accused Cranston. "It was you who wanted Loraine murdered after she had served her part as Old Gert. You thought that no one would believe it possible that you ordered the death of a girl who fascinated you. Just more of your pretense, Franzel, this business of sitting here night after night, lost in admiration for a girl whose career has been bringing you profit, and nothing else."

FRANZEL reeled to his feet, his face going purple as hands clamped his arms. Cranston's words were still driving home.

"It was a death triangle, Franzel, and the points were you, Leroc, and Harland. One point had to be eliminated and it was. I worked to prove Harland's innocence, not his guilt, and I succeeded."

The table crashed under a violent kick from Franzel. In the confusion he wrenched from the gripping hands. As Franzel lunged past the table, he met Harland, trying to stop him. Franzel's hand was flourishing a quickly drawn gun, but Harland was producing the same revolver that he had used to stop Leroc.

Slashing at Harland's hand, Franzel knocked the gun away. Savagely, he wheeled to aim, and went sprawling headfirst, clear across the table. What Franzel had met was Cranston's foot, casually stretched across his path. His chance to murder Harland was gone.

Coming out from a mass of smashed dishes, Franzel still had his gun, while Harland's was lying on the floor. Loraine scooped up the loose weapon and turned to meet Franzel's aim. A gun roared and Franzel's hand dropped; a moment later, Loraine's revolver spoke. More shots were drowning it and the girl stood horrified, thinking that she was somehow responsible for the entire outburst.

Lorraine wasn't.

THE MUGGERS

Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, had left the final job to Inspector Cardona, whose revolver had come to hand during that brief encounter between Franzel and Harland. Joe's first shot had snagged Franzel and the rest of the bullets had finished the master crook. Loraine's one delivery had hardly counted, for Franzel was sprawling, his own gun useless, when the blonde fired.

From the lips of Lamont Cranston came a faintly whispered laugh as he viewed the dead form of King Franzel, despoiler of beggars, overlord of muggers, and secret chieftain of a now defunct band of Apaches organized by Alban Leroc.

That whispered laugh was like an echo of the mirth that had risen strident in the brilliance of Times Square, where The Shadow's might had cracked crime's regime, as a prelude to the exposure of evil's hidden master, King Franzel!

THE END