

THE PYTHON

Maxwell Grant

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THE PYTHON

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CHAPTER I. THE PYTHON'S PRISONER

A SALLOW, leering face gloated as it studied the prone, limp figure stretched upon a rickety cot. Ratlike features surveyed the closed eyes of a drawn, bloodstained countenance. Such was the scene that showed beneath the glare of a single electric-light bulb, which provided the sole illumination of a windowless, stone-walled room.

The leering man was short and stocky. The malicious ugliness of his thick lips and pudgy profile was increased by a scar that crossed his sloping forehead.

His clothes, though new, were cheap and ill-fitting. In every point of appearance, he was inferior to his unconscious victim.

The prisoner on the cot was clad in evening clothes of faultless fashion. His face, despite its gashes, was one that betokened dignity. His features were of even mold; calm, even in this temporary state of oblivion.

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The rat-faced man turned from the cot. He thrust a cigarette between his puffed lips and scratched a match upon the surface of a metal-sheeted door. As he lighted his cigarette, he stopped abruptly; then wheeled about to face another door on the opposite side of the room.

Tap-tap. Tap-tap.

The sallow-faced man recognized the knock. With a clumpy stride, he crossed the room and drew a bolt. His stocky figure backed away. A tall, stoop-shouldered man entered the room and gave an ugly grin of greeting. The newcomer, too, was a sallow, hard-faced ruffian. The pockmarks on his long-jawed countenance were a match for the stocky man's unsightly scar.

"Hello, Bevo," growled the stocky man. "I've been waiting for you. Thought you'd be here soon. Doc said he knew where he could get hold of you."

"Doc called me," returned the stoop-shouldered rowdy. "Told me to chase up here in a hurry, Chuck. Said you was –"

Bevo paused. Looking past "Chuck," he had seen the figure on the cot. His glary eyes widened as they noted the unconscious man's fastidious attire.

"Say!" exclaimed Bevo. "Doc told me you was watching some bloke; but I figured it was some stoolie you'd grabbed. Pipe the soup and fish this bird's wearing!"

"Class, ain't it?" queried Chuck, his thick lips leering. "Ritzy-looking, ain't he?"

"Sure is. Say – who is this mug?"

"The Shadow!"

CHUCK gaped. For a moment, his features froze as he heard Bevo's statement. Then, with a forced laugh, the stooped-shouldered rogue faced his companion.

"Lay off the hooley, Bevo," insisted Chuck. "It ain't good business, talking about The Shadow. Even when you're kidding."

"I'm not kidding," retorted Chuck. "Say – do you think Doc would want two of us to watch a guy that's lying here cold? A guy that Doc's loaded up with dope, to keep him that way? He wouldn't – not unless it was The Shadow."

Bevo pondered, still doubting. Chuck delivered an ugly laugh; then reached underneath the cot and dragged forth a dress-suitcase. He yanked the top upward and pulled out a mass of cloth. Bevo stared, almost aghast, as he saw a black cloak with crimson lining.

"Lamp this," snorted Chuck. "And take a look at that slouch hat laying there. Get an eyeful of them smoke-wagons. Four of 'em there in the suitcase. Heft 'em."

"Whew! What gats!" Bevo, stooping, was hoisting two huge automatics from the suitcase. He replaced the guns to examine a second brace of similar weapons.

"Say – there is only one guy who'd want to handle these rods. Boy! A .45 like this baby" – he paused to test a single weapon – "a gat like this could blow a hole through a stone wall!"

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"Maybe," corrected Chuck. "Maybe not. Anyway, this mug's The Shadow. Lamp this ring he's wearing, Bevo."

Chuck raised a limp arm from the prisoner's side. Bevo stared warily at a resplendent gem that shimmered in the light, its colors changing from deep to lighter hues.

The stone was a rare girasol, the only jewel that The Shadow wore. It shone from the long third finger of the limp left hand.

"Doc says it's a kind of fire opal," informed Chuck. "Worth plenty of jack, maybe. Kind of a ring The Shadow might be wearing. We got to leave it on him, though." Chuck flung the arm against The Shadow's body. "We're not doing nothing to the guy until The Python sees him."

"The Python?" inquired Bevo, breathlessly. "He's coming here?"

"So Doc says. He put the call through and got the flash-back. But we won't be seeing him, nor Doc either. The Python will come in through the other way."

"Through the middle room?"

"Yeah. That's where we'll leave The Shadow for him. But not until Doc gives us the word."

BRIEF silence followed. Bevo was staring at the wan face on the cot. The lips of Bevo's pock-marked face were twitching; a fact that brought a grin to Chuck's ugly face.

Chuck, too, had been leery when he had learned that the man was The Shadow; but Chuck had gotten over it. He waited for Bevo's next question. It came.

"How did you bag him?"

Chuck laughed, his tone half a snort.

"We didn't," he admitted. "It was a lucky break, Bevo; that was all. It came when we was up by the Hotel Bragelonne, Doc and I, this evening."

"Watching for Jurrice?"

"Yeah. Like you was this afternoon. Doc and I had the sedan. We was half a block away from the Bragelonne, ready to tail Jurrice if he took a cab. Just to be sure he wasn't clearing town."

"I know why you was there. But what about The Shadow?"

"I'm coming to that. While we was sitting there in the car, a big, swell looking limousine comes across the avenue, going toward the hotel. Just then a truck kites around the corner, making a left turn. The truck rams the limousine and sends it up on the sidewalk. It hits a brick wall – the limousine does – and the door opens.

"This guy comes diving out – bag and all – and hits the sidewalk. A chauffeur climbs out of the front seat, kind of dizzylike. We was right there – Doc and me – and it would've looked phony if we hadn't jumped out to lend a hand. So we did."

"But how –"

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"How'd we know who The Shadow was? Luck, I told you. First thing we see as we come up to him was this bag. It had cracked open; the cloak and hat was half out of it. We saw the gats. I was dumb, Bevo; but Doc wasn't. He got the idea quick."

Chuck paused to snap his fingers as an indication of the rapidity with which Doc experienced mental impulses.

"Doc slams the stuff into the bag," he resumed. "Closes it and hands it to me. A copper comes up; Doc stoops over the unconscious guy and tells the flatfoot to help him get the mug into our car."

"'I'm a physician, officer,' says Doc. He used to be a croaker – you know that, Bevo – and he tells it to the copper like he meant it. 'I'm a physician. My car is available and I shall hurry this man to the nearest hospital. You look to the chauffeur, officer' – that's what Doc said, Bevo."

"But you brought him here instead?"

"Sure. We started in a hurry so's the flatfoot wouldn't see that Doc didn't have no green cross on his car. The Shadow took a jolt, falling out of that limousine. But he wasn't hurt so bad, Doc told me. Doc brought out that kit he carries under the rear seat. I stopped while he jabbed a needle full of hop into The Shadow's arm. Just so's he wouldn't come to."

"Then we stopped again, while Doc went into a place to telephone. The word must have gone through in a hurry. Them blue lights was blinking when we got here. Doc says the signal was his. Orders from The Python to hold The Shadow here. After we'd lugged him in, Doc went out to call you, Bevo."

Bevo nodded; then inquired:

"Why ain't Doc back here himself?"

"He will be," replied Chuck. "But he's got something to do meanwhile. He frisked The Shadow before making that call. Found a wallet on him; what was in it, I don't know. But Doc does; and he's using what he learned to frame things so's nobody'll know The Shadow's missing."

"Then when The Python gets here he'll –"

Bevo stopped short. A signal tap was coming at the outer door. Chuck nodded. Bevo, opened the barrier.

A BLOCKY, square-faced man entered. He was wearing an expensive overcoat, with kid gloves and a derby hat. His face, though hardened, had a professional look, which was accentuated by a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Hello, Doc," greeted Chuck. "Ready for us to move this guy?"

Doc shook his head. He went over to the cot, raised a limp arm and felt the pulse. Drawing a leather case from his pocket, he extracted a hypodermic needle and made an injection. A sour smile showed on his lips.

"That'll hold him," chuckled Doc. "For an hour more, anyway. He won't need more than one of us to watch him. You stay here, Bevo. Chuck, you come along with me."

"Going back to watch for Jurrice?"

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"No. He's gone out by this time. We'll have to trust to more luck – take a chance that Jurrice hasn't become jittery enough to leave town. The Shadow was more important. Much more important." Doc paused significantly. "That is something which I learned since his capture."

"Where are we going then, Doc?"

"To grab a hamburger and a cup of Java. Neither of us have eaten yet, Chuck. Don't worry about our leaving, Bevo. There's no chance of The Shadow waking up while we're gone."

Doc motioned for departure. Chuck followed him. Bevo remained alone. He looked toward The Shadow. A confident gloat had come over Bevo's pockmarked features. He, too, shared the elation that the others felt.

For Bevo and Chuck, as aids to Doc, were henchmen of The Python, an insidious master whose ways were those of evil. Yet in such service, these underlings had held one fear. Men of crime, they dreaded a foe whose name had long compelled the awe of crookdom.

That foe was The Shadow, the only being who could thwart The Python. His probable entry into the affairs of the supercrook had been the doubtful element; the event that minions felt inevitable; and toward which they had shared a secret fear.

Tonight, haphazard fate had brought an unexpected triumph to the cause of crime. For The Shadow, helpless, was to be delivered to the Python. And that delivery would mean The Shadow's final doom. The Python, as his chosen name implied, was a personage who would show no mercy to a captured foe.

CHAPTER II. THE PYTHON'S WILES

CHUCK, in his chat with Bevo, had used some specific terms. He had spoken of a "flash-back" in response to a call that Doc had made. He had later referred to "blue lights blinking"; as if the two references had signified the same occurrence.

They did. In fact, while Bevo remained on lone guard over The Shadow, blue lights were blinking another flash-back. A man was watching them.

Stationed at a window of a darkened apartment in the Fifties, this individual was staring across a low sweep of buildings toward a loft building that stood near the East River.

A corner of the loft building was visible from the apartment window; and that was the spot that the watcher noted. As he kept observation, corner lights blinked slightly. Their signals came in quick succession. They paused, then blinked again.

Then the blinks had ceased. A satisfied chuckle sounded in the gloom of the apartment. Footsteps moved toward the door; a hand turned the knob. The apartment occupant stepped out into the hall and closed the door behind him.

Standing in the light, the man from the apartment appeared youthful and immaculate of attire. Though the assurance of his face indicated his correct age as nearly forty, most persons would have considered him as being much younger. He was sleek, well-groomed; his tuxedo fitted him to perfection.

There was poise in this man's manner as his lips formed a calculated smile. His face, white-complexioned beneath his light-brown hair, was one that pretended frankness. His actions gave the semblance of a dress rehearsal as he nonchalantly adjusted a cigarette in its holder, applied a flame from a sterling-silver lighter.

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This man's name was Albert Thurney, a fact which he revealed as he stepped away from the apartment door. For the action removed his figure from a name plate which contained a cut-out center of one of Thurney's calling cards.

Donning a Derby hat that he carried with him, Thurney went to the elevator.

WHEN he reached the street, Thurney stepped into a cab that the doorman hailed for him. Giving the driver an address near the East River, Thurney settled back to puff his cigarette.

As the cab rolled along an avenue, he looked out and upward – toward a window on the fourteenth floor of the apartment building. That window, on the topmost story, represented Thurney's own apartment.

He had chosen it because it afforded a view of the distant building with the blue lights. Riding in the cab, Thurney could gain no immediate glimpse of that glare. But as the taxi continued eastward, he sighted it three or four times, thanks to partially open spaces. The lights were no longer blinking.

The cab reached a wide, secluded avenue, the last thoroughfare before the river. It stopped a few doors above a large apartment house, on the west side of the street.

Thurney alighted, paid the driver and strolled toward the house where they had stopped. As the cab pulled away, he changed his course. Crossing the avenue, he picked a three-story building on the corner. Ascending the steps, Thurney rang the doorbell.

The visitor knew this neighborhood. It was an exclusive section, newly developed and named Versailles Place. Several large apartment buildings had sprouted up from a dingy setting of abandoned tenement houses. The tenements, in turn, had been reconstructed into swanky apartments that commanded fabulous rentals.

The house which Thurney now stood before was the home of Danton Califax, a retired manufacturer who had foreseen the development of Versailles Place and had bought this property before values had jumped.

THE front door opened and a suspicious-eyed flunky surveyed Albert Thurney. The servant had seen the visitor before; and Thurney addressed him by name.

"Hello, Sykes," greeted Thurney, in a suave manner. "Is Miss Califax at home this evening?"

"No, sir," returned Sykes, gruffly. "Miss Califax has gone to the theater."

"By the way, Sykes. Was it you who answered the telephone this afternoon? When I called Miss Califax?"

"Yes, Mr. Thurney."

"Ah, yes. I thought I recognized your inimitable voice. So you were the fellow who informed me that Miss Califax did not wish to speak with me?"

"I obeyed the instructions that Miss Califax gave me. Moreover, Mr. Thurney, she told me to repeat another message should you chance to call here. Miss Califax does not care to see you in the future."

Thurney's smile retained its suavity. He eyed Sykes; and the fellow waited for him to speak. The door was half open. Looking beyond, Thurney could see a lighted hallway. At the rear was a peering face, that of another servant. Thurney caught a nod from the man whom Sykes did not see.

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"Very well," decided Thurney, in a nonchalant tone. "You may tell Miss Califax that I hope she will reverse her decision."

Sykes nodded. Thurney turned about and strolled down the steps. Sykes watched him walk toward the avenue; then closed the door with a slam. Thurney looked about as he heard the bang. He sidled to the house wall, returned toward the steps, where he waited.

Soon the door opened. A stooped figure appeared there. It was the servant whom Thurney had seen at the rear of the hall. The man beckoned. Thurney entered.

The servant – a middle-aged man with a hard, wise face – was careful in his silent closing of the door. With a whisper he led Thurney through the hall. Together the pair ascended a flight of stairs.

THURNEY and his guide had reached the third floor. They stepped into a tiny corner room which had two windows. The hard-faced servant pointed to one window which faced the avenue. From there it was possible to see the loft building. Lights were no longer blinking.

Thurney smiled, a smile of gloating approval.

"You've done well, Warthrope," stated the visitor. "And to think that I thought you timid! Of course I had to threaten you with some petty thievery that I knew about when you worked for your previous employer!"

"I never could guess that, Mr. Thurney. The Python must be –"

"Never mind the rest, Warthrope. The Python knew all. You have been honored, and I as his Coilmaster can state that you have done good work."

Thurney paused, then continued suavely, "You are one of my men, Warthrope, and so is my valet, Warring. Both of you work under me. We all have our own special codes by which we know when to act. You are the only supporting Coil to a Coilmaster, Warthrope, who has a code list. The future speaks well for you."

Warthrope swelled. "You mean, sir, that I could be a –"

"A Coilmaster? Yes. You have proven your usefulness. And now, is everything ready? The microphone?"

"It is," acknowledged Warthrope. "The wires run in back of Mr. Califax's filing cabinet and we will catch every word that will be said."

"Good. And I understand that Jurrice will be here shortly."

"Yes, very shortly."

Warthrope stole over across the room and locked the door. Together they went toward a small radio set. There Warthrope unscrewed the cover and listened as he turned a dial. Faintly sounds came from below.

"Jurrice!" whispered Warthrope. "And Bornick!"

Thurney nodded. Together these aids listened for the words that were to come from the room below.

CHAPTER III. WEALTH RECLAIMED

IN the room below, three men were gathered at a large oak desk that matched the deep, rich polish of the paneling. One, who sat alone, was Danton Califax, a man of fifty. Shoulders slightly stooped, his face tired and hollow-cheeked, Califax possessed a weariness that explained his early retirement from active business.

His smile, however, showed that Califax was making an effort to receive his guests. While he used one hand to stroke the front of his baldish head, Califax employed the other as a means of introducing his visitors to each other.

"This is Lester Bornick," stated Califax. He pointed across the desk to a rangy, firm-jawed man whose face was of a rugged mold. "He is my attorney."

Bornick thrust out his hand to the other man, a pale-faced, nervous fellow of medium height. At the same time, Califax indicated the pale man with a pointing finger.

"This is Craig Jurrice," said the manufacturer. He lowered his left hand from his brow. "You know about Jurrice, Bornick. Come. Let us begin our discussion."

Califax extended a box of cigars. Both visitors accepted. Jurrice, more nervous than before, was still wincing from the pressure of the handclasp that he had received from Bornick. He gazed askance at the lawyer; then looked to Califax.

"You – you have told Mr. Bornick?" questioned Jurrice.

"About your offer?" said Califax, with a smile. "I have told him everything, Jurrice. Right from the start. I talked with him after the night of your first visit."

"But – but I – I had hoped that nothing would be said –"

"I am Mr. Califax's counsellor," interrupted Bornick, his gaze firm on Jurrice. "He seeks my advice on many matters, Jurrice. To talk to me was no indiscretion on his part."

"I – I understand." Jurrice managed a smile. "I see – you are Mr. Califax's lawyer? Not just someone whom he called in on this matter?"

"Mr. Bornick has represented me for years." It was Califax who made the reply. "Set your mind at rest, Jurrice. Among his clients, Bornick numbers many who are far wealthier than myself."

Jurrice nodded, relieved.

"Suppose we recapitulate," suggested Bornick. "Start with the beginning and sum up the entire matter. It will help us, Jurrice."

"Very well." Jurrice spoke untroubled. His nervousness had lessened. "I shall do so, gentlemen."

He paused long enough to take a few puffs at his cigar; then began to speak in a slow, careful tone.

"I have a friend," declared Jurrice, "whose name is Revoort. Louis Revoort. Some years ago, Revoort traveled extensively in the West Indies. In the course of his journeys he met many wealthy Cuban planters. Some of his Cuban friends became closely identified with the affairs of the Machado administration. When that

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government was overthrown, they deemed it wise to flee.

"Not long ago, Revoort met a Cuban whom he knew. The Cuban's name is unknown to me. I merely have the assurance that the man really exists. This Cuban told Revoort that he had left a fortune in his native land. Wealth, in gold, valuable securities and precious gems. The last named constitutes the greatest part of the fortune.

"The Cuban had not been a party to the misdeeds of the former administration; but certain high officials were his friends. Personal enemies have believed ill of him. The Cuban dares not set foot in his country. So he requested Revoort to go there and bring away the treasure."

JURRICE paused; he leaned forward on the desk. His voice became a deep-drawn tone.

"It means a fortune for Revoort!" he exclaimed. "One third of the total amount, with a commission on the sale of the jewels. That part is most important. For both the Cuban and Revoort want an immediate conversion into cash.

"Revoort required funds. He called upon me, not only as a friend, but as one who has dealt in precious stones. It will be my task to find a single buyer for those jewels; to offer them as an unusually fine bargain for one who can buy them outright."

Jurrice sat back in his chair. Bornick rubbed his chin; then put a question.

"Just how," asked the lawyer, "did you happen to come to Mr. Califax?"

"I talked to people," replied Jurrice, soberly. "To persons at my club; to some among the trade. I spoke quite cautiously; but mentioned that I might have access to a valuable collection of gems.

"Various persons told me names of those who might be interested. Several collectors were mentioned; among them, Mr. Califax."

"Who mentioned me?" inquired Califax. "Do you remember?"

"No," replied Jurrice. "I don't recall just who. I heard your name mentioned somewhere; then made inquiries about you. I learned that you were a collector."

"Hardly a real one, Jurrice." Califax motioned over his shoulder, toward a safe at the back of the study. "I have some gems in there; but their total value is not great. True, gems have been a hobby with me, since my retirement, but –"

"That's just it, Mr. Califax!" exclaimed Jurrice. "Don't you see? I wanted to meet someone who was just beginning as a collector. One who did not have too much money tied up in precious stones. One who could buy if he would."

"So you told me, Jurrice. I must confess that your judgement appears sound."

THE windows of Califax's study had raised window shades. Bornick, seated in front of the desk, could see straight past Califax, out toward the avenue. The lawyer's view was an angled one that Jurrice could not gain. Nor could Califax observe what Bornick saw, for Califax had his back toward the window.

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Bornick was watching blue lights that blinked from the corner of a distant loft building. His lips moved – almost imperceptibly – as he marked off dots and dashes. Lights ended their blinking.

Bornick continued to watch as they resumed again. He heard a question from Califax. Lips tight, Bornick stared straight at the manufacturer, yet kept watching the lights while he did so.

"What do you think, Bornick?" Califax was quizzing. "Would I be making an illegal step if I should purchase these gems from Jurrice?"

"I think you would be," returned Bornick, steadily. Lights had blinked and finished. The lawyer's eyes eased slightly, but neither witness noted their change. "Not so far as any Cuban complications are concerned. Provided, of course, that this Cuban friend of Revoort's actually has title to the gems.

"But if the jewels are smuggled into the United States – and I understand that they are coming here by such method – any purchase of them would be a defiance of the customs law. You could be held responsible, Califax."

Jurrice raised his hand in protest.

"There is no intent to break the law," he declared. "Revoort already has the treasure. He came from Cuba by a small boat and landed in Florida, unchallenged by coast guards or customs officers.

"He does not want to escape paying duty. The gems can be declared after they reach New York. Any payment to the government will be deducted from the purchase price. That is why it has become imperative for me to plan a sale. So there will be funds available for customs charges."

"What of the gold and the securities?" questioned Bornick. "Why not use them to pay the customs charges?"

"Revoort's Cuban friend needs cash at once," explained Jurrice. "Whatever remains may not be sufficient. The gems must be sold."

"I explained this to you, Bornick," reminded Califax, mildly. "Jurrice told me these facts several days ago. I repeated them to you the next night."

"So you did," agreed the attorney. "I wanted to hear Jurrice acknowledge them."

"Did – did Mr. Califax mention what Revoort has done?" questioned Jurrice, nervously, as he faced Bornick. "About – about his planning to take passage on the steamship Tropical, at Savannah?"

"I did," replied Califax, speaking for Bornick. "Mr. Bornick knows of Revoort's plans. The Tropical, however, is a coastwise vessel. It comes from no foreign port; therefore, it will run into no difficulty with the customs authorities."

"My advice, Califax," stated Bornick, carefully, "is for you to avoid this purchase. If you decide to go ahead – in spite of my advice – make no transaction whatever except in the presence of an attorney."

"Do you mean," inquired Califax, "that you will not give me further counsel?"

"I mean exactly that. You understand, of course, that as my client you have absolute assurance that this entire subject has been and will be kept a secret. But I can not place myself in the position of becoming party to a technical conspiracy."

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CALIFAX looked troubled. It was Jurrice who showed a sudden gleam.

"Suppose the matter be forgotten," he suggested, speaking to the lawyer. "For the present, you understand. Then suppose I should approach Mr. Califax. No – better not for me. Suppose a stranger such as Revoort should come here, with certain gems, ready to declare them before a sale –"

"Under those circumstances," decided Bornick, interrupting, "it would be difficult to class the transaction as a conspiracy. Mr. Califax could summon an attorney and ask his advice in the unusual matter."

With that, Bornick arose and extended his hand; first to Califax, then to Jurrice. Blue lights had begun anew. Unnoticed, Bornick was making a mental record of their blinks.

"I have an important appointment," recalled the lawyer. "One that I postponed on account of this visit. I believe that I am needed here no longer. Good night, gentlemen."

Bornick lingered while the blue lights finished their blinking. The slight delay allowed Jurrice opportunity for another statement.

"I talked too much at first," declared the pale-faced man. "I even made the mistake of mentioning to certain persons that Revoort was in Florida. That was unwise, I know, for there have been some startling robberies lately. The Hildebrand collection of gems was stolen. A shipment of uncut diamonds was taken from a transatlantic liner. There have been other thefts as well.

"But I have preserved silence recently. Even when persons have tried to make appointments with me. There was one man who called me today – a gem collector named Lamont Cranston. I knew of him, however. He is a millionaire. He was coming to my apartment; but he did not arrive there.

"I left without waiting for him. Hence I can assure you, Mr. Califax, that I shall come to you first. Once the gems are in New York, you understand. Either I or Revoort –"

Bornick had nodded his departure. He was passing out through the door when Jurrice paused. The pale-faced man chewed his lips; then spoke to Califax again.

"Perhaps it would be best," he decided, "for us to drop any further discussion. Particularly in view of what Mr. Bornick told us."

"I think that is wise, Jurrice," agreed Califax. "Let us do as Mr. Bornick suggested. Forget the matter for the present. Come; let us go downstairs and have some refreshments before you leave."

IN the room above, Warthrope whispered to Thurney as conversation ceased across the wire.

"Did you see the lights blinking?" questioned the servant. "Maybe they were for you?"

"No." Thurney shook his head. "I saw them. Probably some Coilmasters reporting in."

"What if The Python didn't see them?"

"If he doesn't acknowledge the lights within half an hour, they'll come through again. Just as with us, Warthrope."

"What about these things we heard? Shall I report them?"

THE PYTHON

"There was nothing new. Nothing of great consequence. Leave the report to me, Warthroe."

A buzzer sounded. Warthroe whispered that it was his summons. Thurney nodded and followed the servant from the room. They descended by the rear stairs. There Warthroe pointed the way to a back door. As soon as Thurney was gone, the servant went into the living room. He found Califax there with Jurrice.

"What kept you, Warthroe?" queried Califax. "Didn't you hear my summons?"

"I – I was dozing," stammered the servant, "Yes – that was it, sir. I was dozing."

"Do less napping in the future," reprimanded Califax. "You may leave, Warthroe." The stooped manufacturer held up a glass as he spoke. "Sykes has served us our refreshments."

Warthroe looked toward Sykes, who was present. He saw suspicion in the other servant's eye. Warthroe was worried as he went upstairs. He mistrusted Sykes because the man was honest.

In his room, Warthroe covered over the dictograph set; something that he had previously forgotten to do. Warthroe then closed the door of his room and sidled over to the corner by the fake radio.

Neon lights were quivering again, blue in the blackness of night. Warthroe guessed that The Python still planned moves tonight. In that conjecture, the underling was correct. For the hour was approaching when The Python, master mind of crime, intended to interview his prisoner, The Shadow.

CHAPTER IV. THE PYTHON'S TERMS

EYES opened wearily. Dully, they looked about. In slow, vague fashion, The Shadow resumed a mental process that had ceased when he had pitched headlong from his wrecked limousine. Weakly, he tried to account for his present surroundings.

He was a prisoner. His arms and legs were securely bound, and he was sitting upright in a rickety chair. Before him was a table; beyond that a single door. That barrier was the only entrance to this stone-walled, windowless room, where the atmosphere was dank and cobwebbed corners shimmered in the glow of a single light.

The door of the underground room suddenly swung outward. Hazily, a figure stepped into view. Doubled almost to the floor, it approached like a human crab until it reached a chair on the near side of the table. Huddled, with clawlike, twitching hands, the arrival leered across the table.

The Shadow saw a brownish, senile face beneath a mass of snow-white hair. He heard a hoarse gloat. He caught the sharp glint of harsh eyes between narrowed lids. His own vision clearing, The Shadow began to study this odd creature who had become his captor.

"So!" The word was an evil hiss from twisted lips. "At last, I have met you. I have discovered The Shadow. We meet: you, The Shadow; and I, The Python."

The statement was followed by a cackling chuckle which proved all that The Shadow needed to establish conclusions regarding this insidious foe.

Whatever The Python's true appearance, he had covered it before coming on this visit. Whatever The Python's game might be, one point was already definite. He was a master at the art of make-up.

THE PYTHON

His only fault was that he had overdone the job on this occasion. The Python – so The Shadow discerned – had gone to every length to disguise his true identity.

The brownish face was stained to its present complexion. The senile grin was a pose; so were the half-closed eyelids. The moppish, white hair was a perfect-fitting wig. Even the clawlike fingers were faked for this occasion.

The cackling laugh, an afterthought, was proof that The Python never used such a chuckle in real life. Though he could not penetrate the disguise, The Shadow recognized its falsity; and he added another point to his opinion: namely, The Python's crouch, a device which the rogue was using to completely hide his actual height.

"You meddler!" ejaculated The Python, harshly. "I expected your attempt to nullify my game. At first I moved too quickly for you." A pause, punctuated by a cackle. "My robberies were timed. They struck at unsuspected weaknesses. The Hildebrand collection; the uncut diamonds from the liner; three other jobs of lesser magnitude – I did them all.

"I covered my crimes" – lips were twisted in their gloat – "covered them so all that you could do was to watch for new attempts. When Craig Jurrice talked too much regarding a Cuban treasure, certain of his statements reached my ears. You heard them also. Both of us entered: I, to intercept Louis Revoort and wrest the treasure from him. You, to continue your meddling policy of thwarting well-planned schemes."

THE PYTHON stopped. His eyes were studying The Shadow's half-twisted form. From beside The Shadow's body extended his bound left hand. The Python saw the gleaming girasol and chuckled. Then he eyed The Shadow's impassive, masklike countenance.

"Chance made our paths cross," jeered The Python, "to your misfortune. Through it I learned the masquerade that you have been making. How you have passed yourself off as a man named Lamont Cranston. You were in his limousine when it crashed. My men were prompt enough to snare you.

"The contents of your wallet have been examined. I have found your airplane ticket to Savannah. I know that you intended to fly there tonight, after a visit to Craig Jurrice. You intended to warn him to be careful. Then you planned to reach Louis Revoort before his ship – the Tropical – left that city tomorrow."

The Shadow offered no rebuttal to these challenging statements. Instead, he surveyed The Python calmly, as if expecting to hear more.

A change came over the leering figure. Though he did not change his posture, The Python subsided. The glimmer faded from his evil eyes; his lips, though twisted, were soft in their speech.

"You are The Shadow," declared The Python, "and you claim to have no fear. Such a boast, however, came before you ever heard of me, The Python. So to you, I shall show certain indulgence. I shall allow you the right to live.

"Not through mercy. I have none of that peculiarly insane madness which fools consider a virtue. I shall offer you terms that include your prospect for a continued life. Like myself, you have men who aid you. They, like my own agents, have surely been watching for Louis Revoort.

"He is a watched man, Revoort. When he goes aboard the steamship Tropical, his doom will be sealed, at my order. Unless, by some misadventure, those who serve you are also capable. Because of that, I give you terms. Name those in your service who will be aboard the steamship.

THE PYTHON

"I shall hold you, alive, until your men have been eliminated. You will remain a prisoner thereafter, until my plans have reached a culmination. Then, when I need crime no longer, you will be released. For The Python's work will have been accomplished. You will be a menace to me no longer."

The Python paused, glaring through his slitted lids. The fierceness of his eyes had returned; his expression showed that he expected an answer.

Instead, a thin smile appeared upon the firm lips of The Shadow's molded face. Through that expression, The Shadow evidenced his contempt, in spite of the masked guise which he wore.

"Your life for theirs!" snarled The Python. "Remember, the odds are hopelessly against them at the start. Your silence may not serve to save them."

THE SHADOW'S lips straightened. His answer had been given. He was willing to face immediate death rather than to give an inkling toward the identity of his agents. Time and again, those faithful workers had preserved silence rather than to betray him.

"Hold no hope," added The Python. "Word has been sent to the hospital where your chauffeur – or Cranston's – was taken. He has been informed that you received first-aid treatment and have gone on your journey. None will know when or where you – as Cranston – actually disappeared to.

"Your one chance for life is to tell me what I wish to know. You have heard my terms. The time has come for your decision. Come! Let me hear you speak."

THE SHADOW'S eyes were burning. Fierce through their masklike visage, they told The Python that The Shadow's decision was made. Scowling, the disguised scoundrel arose from his chair.

"Perhaps you may still have the opportunity to live." Again The Python cackled. "Remember it, when the urge comes to your lips. Our interview is ended."

Crablike, The Python sidled to the hall. He gave a cackly call. Doc appeared in the gloom outside of the room. The Python, because of his disguise, apparently had no reluctance in holding conference with one of his Coilmasters.

Conversation buzzed; then ended in The Python's evil gloat. The chief and his lieutenant separated. The Python went out by one direction; Doc went in the other. Soon the man who had captured The Shadow returned. This time, Doc strode into the room, followed by Chuck and Bevo.

The subordinates gagged The Shadow and hoisted his bound form between them. Still too weak to battle against his bonds, The Shadow was carried helpless from the room, through the darkness of the hall, into the outer cell. There Doc decided to give him another injection; one that would produce a short interval of oblivion.

The hypodermic used, Doc waited until The Shadow had sunk beneath the opiate's spell. With a wave to his helpers, he led the way out; up through a stone-stepped passage, to a narrow, deserted street.

There The Shadow was pitched aboard the sedan. Chuck climbed in beside his motionless body. Bevo boarded the front seat with Doc.

The car rolled eastward. Aides of The Python were on their way to obey the mandates of their chief. They were prepared to deliver that torture which would end in death; that crushing violence that The Python had

predicted would make the prisoner talk.

CHAPTER V. BENEATH THE RIVER

Doc's sedan came to a stop at a spot on the lower East Side, not far from the river. Doc parked it at the end of an unused street, where torn-up pavings and boarded fences prevented further driving. Stepping from the car, he ordered Chuck and Bevo to bring the prisoner.

It was after midnight. Traffic had been light on the last stage of the journey. Here, in this barred street, there were no cars. No one saw the scene of two men who carried a limp body between them, while they followed the path set by a man ahead.

"You know where we are, Chuck?" growled Bevo, as they picked a rough path through the dark. "This is where they're digging that new tunnel under the river. Say – ain't there liable to be a watchman around here?"

"He's been attended to," returned Chuck. "Doc told me what might be coming. He spilled it while me and him was grabbing some grub at the beanery."

"Who's fixed the watchman?"

"Tony and Butch. They're working with us. Lay off the chatter; and keep clear of them lights. Follow Doc; that's the idea."

The pair arrived at a darkened shack, set close to a half-demolished building. Doc had stopped ahead. He was talking to men in the darkness. His palaver finished, he urged Chuck and Bevo farther along. They entered what Bevo thought was an elevator, and placed The Shadow on the floor.

"Say – what's the lay?" queried Bevo. "This thing ain't moving. Getting kind of tough in here, too. Hard on your ears."

Doc had turned on a light. He was standing by a closed metal door. He grinned as he heard Bevo's statement.

"This is a compression chamber," he remarked. "What you're feeling is air pressure. Get ready for more of it before we start down."

"We're going under the river, Bevo," added Chuck. "That's where we're going to leave this mug."

He indicated The Shadow; then nudged Doc. The prisoner's eyes had opened. Doc nodded and made a comment.

"That's the way The Python wanted it," he said. "It's why I didn't make the last shot too strong."

AIR pressure had increased. The elevator was moving downward. Bevo was clapping both hands to his ears. Doc told him to swallow. When the elevator reached the bottom of its shaft, the Coilmaster opened the door and produced a flashlight. He told his subordinates to pick up the prisoner.

"Whoosh!" ejaculated Bevo, as he and Chuck lugged The Shadow into cavernous darkness. "Hold it, Chuck. Ease up a minute."

Doc flicked the flashlight toward Bevo's pock-marked face. He saw the stoop-shouldered rowdy sag.

THE PYTHON

"Getting the 'bends,' I guess," he remarked. "That's what knocks the fellows in these caissons. Steady him, Chuck."

The Shadow's bound figure rolled in the mud as Chuck released his burden. Bevo steadied under the flashlight and announced his willingness to go on. Doc made a decision.

"Cut him loose," he ordered, turning his torch toward The Shadow's blood-streaked face. "We don't want the gag on him, either. Lug him along between you. I'll follow, with a gat in my fist."

Chuck released The Shadow, who stirred weakly. Bevo joined him, and the two raised the prisoner between them. Doc held the flashlight high, pointing out the way along a huge tunnel. In his other hand, he held a revolver, jabbing its muzzle close to The Shadow's ribs.

"Keep him moving," was Doc's order. "We've got a way to go yet; then we'll hop back to that elevator. Butch is handling the controls; he'll bring us up."

"The mug's sagging, Doc," reported Chuck. "He's passed out again. That last jab you gave him must have been too heavy."

"He'll come to in a little while," observed Doc, with a growled laugh. "How are you making out, Bevo?"

"O.K., Doc. This ain't so tough when you get used to it."

Chuck was right when he stated that The Shadow had suffered a relapse. His recovery of consciousness had been spasmodic. During the interval, he had caught but snatches of the conversation that passed between his captors. A dozen minutes went by before The Shadow again sensed his surroundings.

He was in silent blackness; cramped in space that seemed unusually confining because of the pressure on his eardrums. His arms and legs were loose; the gag was gone from between his teeth. Yet he could scarcely stir at first. It was with difficulty that he rose.

The Shadow's outstretched hand contacted slimy ooze; above his head, he heard a peculiar bubbling. Backing, he struck against the moistened surface of a huge steel barrier. Rubbing his forehead, The Shadow began to understand where he had finally been placed.

A NEW tube was in construction beneath the East River. The work had progressed past the water's edge. The tunnel was being burrowed with the aid of a huge shield. Compressed air, driven through that barrier, was sufficient to prevent any inward surge of water.

Workmen had been employed beyond the shield, digging away, sending earth and chunky stones back through the shield. When they had ceased for the day, the shield had been left in its present position.

The Python had ordered Doc to push The Shadow through the barrier, to leave him in the tiny compressed-air chamber next to the river bed.

The bubbling noise that The Shadow heard was the escape of compressed air, upward through the river bed. More air was coming through, to keep up the pressure. This was common in such operations. Flaws in the rock of the river bed were apt to be encountered.

Those oozing jets of air were forcing their way through mud and water, clear to the surface of the river, where they formed bubbling outlets.

THE PYTHON

The Shadow was in for an ordeal. Workers beyond the shield seldom stayed there more than a short while. Shifts were frequent in this type of job.

The Shadow could not guess how long The Python might intend to keep him here. His measurement of time had failed since the limousine crash.

More minutes passed. The Shadow heard a clicking sound. It came from a spot near his feet. On the ground, he found a telephone, its receiver off the hook. A voice was coming across the wire, delivering a harsh question. The Shadow responded; his tone was a challenging laugh. A growl sounded from the receiver. It was followed by a hiss within The Shadow's cramped quarters.

Air pressure was increasing. The force against The Shadow's eardrums became more apparent. Again, the harsh voice sounded. Once more, The Shadow laughed in answer. His mockery sounded hollow in the strange prison, where steel and muddy rock formed a submarine arch.

The Shadow had learned The Python's game. That voice over the line was demanding that he speak; that he tell the facts The Python wanted. In return for The Shadow's refusal, more air was being injected into the vault. This was the crushing torture that The Python had promised!

ABOVE ground, Doc was seated at a table in a wooden-walled control room. Tony and "Butch" had bagged another watchman; that pair was outside. Chuck and Bevo were with Doc. They were staring at an illuminated control board, close by the telephone that Doc was holding.

"Are you squawking?" Doc quizzed. "How about it? Want me to ease it for you down there? If you do, you'd better blab those names in a hurry –"

The clicking tones of a laugh came mockingly from the receiver. It was The Shadow's laugh, still challenging despite the threat. Doc snarled an oath.

Reaching with his right hand, he pressed a lever by the control board. Chuck and Bevo watched the dial register increased pressure.

Doc had been holding his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone. He started to raise it; then paused long enough to deliver a final statement to his pals.

"It will be curtains after this," he informed. "Whether the guy decides to squawk or not. But he'll squawk this time – unless he's already out."

Doc spoke into the telephone. His demand was harsh; but it was coupled with the promise of less pressure if The Shadow named his agents. Doc followed with the threat of more compression if The Shadow refused to answer. A laugh – feeble, yet final – was the sole response from the receiver.

Doc jammed the receiver on the hook. He reached for the compression lever. Savagely, he shoved it to its full extent. Curtains for The Shadow – every ounce of air pressure, all at once. Doc was carrying out The Python's final command. Chuck and Bevo grinned their approval.

DOWN in that chamber past the shield, The Shadow heard the hissing surge of the incoming air. He had caught the sound of Doc's clicking receiver; he knew that this was the final stroke. Yet The Shadow laughed as he rose within the cavern. Weak though his mirth sounded, it carried a prophetic tone.

THE PYTHON

Grasping toward the ceiling, The Shadow dug his fingers into slimy ooze. He could feel the rush of escaping air, sweeping his hands as it fizzed up through the cracked rock. His head was roaring with tumultuous sounds. The pressure of the new air was crushing.

Its increase might mean death within a minute. Yet that very threat afforded The Shadow one bare hope of safety. The Shadow had taunted Doc, to drive The Python's lieutenant to this very measure.

Suddenly, the action came. Its swiftness was so stunning that The Shadow did not sense it. He was already sagging, about to cave under the advanced pressure that no living person could long stand.

His ears, bursting inward, heard nothing; nor did he feel the terrific, puffy blast that loosed itself from within the cavern.

The terrific pressure had proven too great for the flawed rock above. With a mighty blast, the pent air ripped earth and stone asunder.

Like the contents of a burst balloon, it tore a wide opening through the ceiling, at the very spot where The Shadow stood. With the blast, The Shadow's sagging form was rocketed straight upward through the river bed.

Foaming bubbles were all about. Pressure relieved, the air from the tunnel was sizzling through from the opening that it had cut. The Shadow had reached the surface in safety. He was uninjured by the terrific trip.

His feebleness, however, had not ended. Even the reviving coolness of the water was not sufficient to offset the effects that he had felt within the shielded cavern.

Struggling weakly, he managed to keep afloat; that was all. His ears could vaguely hear the sound of steam-boat whistles. They seemed far away, like noises from another world. The Shadow could see lights; but they were dim and distant.

BACK in the control room, Doc drew back the lever. He stopped it before he had gone far. He had gained no indication of what had happened below. He thought The Shadow still a prisoner; and he decided to play sure.

"He's finished," Doc told his men. "I gave him six minutes; I'm leaving the pressure tough enough even if he did survive. But don't worry about that. No human could have stood that dose."

Doc was right; but he might have added that earth and rock had failed before The Shadow. Doc's word would be that The Shadow had died. The Python, like Doc, would believe it, when he heard the details. Neither would even begin to guess that The Shadow still lived while they gloated.

There was still a chance, however, that The Python's machinations would succeed, even though The Shadow had escaped the pit in which he had been placed.

The accident, the dope, the air pressure – all had preceded his rapid journey through the river bed. They had left The Shadow deprived of nearly all his strength.

Upon the wavy blackness of the lower East River, a feebly moving form was drifting with the tide. Weakened arms were failing in their efforts to strike out; tired legs were doing no more than to aid in the mere task of holding a limp form afloat.

Minutes only; at the end of a brief interval, The Shadow would succumb. Oddly, his surge to safety had left him in a plight that soon would bring him to the doom that The Python had forecast. Death was hovering close above those darkened waters that held the wearied body of The Shadow.

CHAPTER VI. OUTWARD BOUND

"THAT'S the flash-back, Jake."

"What's the orders? To clear the harbor?"

"Yeah. As soon as Tanker and Pete come aboard."

"They'll be here any minute, Lem."

The speakers were peering from the side window of a tiny pilot house, aboard a seagoing tug. They were watching the flicker of those bluish lights atop the loft building. The glare was easily discernible from this spot on the East River.

The man called Lem was standing with one hand on the wheel. The dim light of the pilot house showed a hardened, flattish face beneath a stiff-visored cap. Lem was the captain of the tugboat. His pal Jake, a scowly, long-jawed ruffian, was the ship's first mate.

"Remember, Jake," confided Lem in a low-pitched tone, "I'm Mr. Hurdy, on board this packet; and you're Mr. Baliss. We're using our right names; and we're sticking to them."

"I've told that to the crew, Lem."

"Good. Make sure that nobody forgets it. I'm the captain of the tug Colonia; you're the first mate; nobody else counts. We've got to act like we were somebody, in case we talk to coast guards. This Lem and Jake stuff don't sound right from a disciplined crew."

"I get it, Lem."

Hurdy was looking through the front window of the pilot house. He spied a light twinkling halfway from the shore. He signaled for more steam.

Jake Baliss caught the idea. The light indicated that the little boat manned by "Tanker" and Pete; Lem intended to steam ahead and meet them.

WHILE Lem was talking thus to Jake, another man was also conversing with a lone companion. Seated in the stern of a rowboat, the underling called Tanker was speaking to his pal Pete, who plied the oars.

"Here comes the Colonia, Pete," Tanker was saying. "Let her drift; the tide's moving us upstream. They'll take us aboard. Lem Hurdy must have spotted my flashlight."

Pete complied. The rowboat swished around in the lapping tide. Tanker used the flashlight. The Colonia swung shoreward. Tanker dropped his right arm to the side of the seat. An instant later, he delivered a hoarse outcry.

Pete swung about from gazing at the tug. He dropped his oars as he felt the rowboat tip to one side. Yanking a flashlight of his own, he turned its beam on Tanker. Instantly, Pete saw the reason for his pal's shout.

THE PYTHON

Hands from the water had gripped the side of the boat, close to the stern. Clawing for a better hold, they had found Tanker's arm. Fingers had gained a viselike clutch, the grip of a drowning man. One grappling arm was around Tanker's shoulder, fighting to retain its hold.

Tanker was trying to wrest away; but could not. Out of the river had come a dripping shape. Grim eyes were staring from a pale, water-soaked face.

Fighting desperately for life, this unexpected passenger had tipped the boat so that it was shipping water. Pete was forced to trim ship by clambering to the upper side.

"Haul him in!" he ordered, to Tanker. "Haul him in – before he drags you out! Get him aboard, Tanker, or you'll be a goner! He's got a drowning man's grip!"

TANKER clutched the figure that had gripped him. As he wrested, he tugged, pulling toward the uptilted side. The lower gunwale raised. Pete reached for Tanker as the fellow twisted toward the bow. Both men jerked to haul their burden aboard.

"He's over the gunnels," coughed Tanker. "Ease up, Pete. Let him flop. He had his talons in my neck; but he's loosened 'em at last."

Pete had dropped his flashlight; but he and Tanker could hear and feel the slosh that came when their struggling visitor sank gasping into the bottom of the boat. Tanker found his flashlight and turned it on the dripping figure.

Squarely in the center of the rowboat lay a form attired in black trousers and a bedraggled white shirt.

Most of The Shadow's make-up had survived; but his features were no longer a close resemblance of Lamont Cranston's. He was still disguised; but only in a fashion. A grotesque hollowness had come upon his hawklike countenance. To Tanker and Pete, however, The Shadow was no more than a chance swimmer exhausted in the river.

"Ahoy, there!"

The tug was alongside the rowboat. A gangway opened; crew members gripped the little craft. Tanker and Pete stumbled to the tug's deck while the others hauled the rowboat over the side.

Pete was starting an explanation; in the midst of it, The Shadow's prone figure rolled from the inward tilting rowboat and sprawled upon the deck.

Jake Baliss had arrived; he started as he saw the living derelict. Tanker was too choked to talk; Pete acted as the spokesman.

"Guess the guy was trying suicide," he stated. "Must have lost his nerve; for he grabbed Tanker, over the side of the rowboat. Only thing to do was haul him aboard."

"How about pitchin' the mug overboard right now?" came a growl from another crew member. "How about it, Mr. Baliss?"

"The guy's out; he won't make trouble," Jake decided. He glanced toward The Shadow. "We'll lay him in the fo'c's'le. Lug him down there, Pete – you and Tanker; you fellows brought him aboard."

THE PYTHON

THE men from the rowboat hoisted the limp body and carried their burden forward. Jake mumbled to himself; then went up to the pilot house, to report to Lem.

The hard-faced captain must have promptly turned the wheel over to his equally tough mate; for it was Lem himself who showed up in the forecabin soon after Tanker and Pete had arrived there with The Shadow.

"What was the idea, you boobs?" demanded Lem, as he surveyed The Shadow lying wan-faced in a bunk. "Trying to make a bid for a Carnegie Medal? I didn't hire you to be a couple of life savers."

"There wasn't no way out," returned Tanker, who had found his voice. "This egg was yanking me overboard, Lem."

"Someone said something about heaving the guy overboard," remarked Pete. "It don't seem right, though, skipper, when you figure he ain't done no harm, and our job –"

"Your jobs will be whatever I order!" rasped Lem. "When I'm ready to get rid of this bird, I'll call on you two for it. Anybody that begins to act soft don't belong with my crew. That goes for both of you!"

Scowling, Lem Hurdy looked toward The Shadow. He saw eyelids flicker weakly; they opened to reveal straight-staring optics. Then the eyelids closed; The Shadow's head wavered from side to side.

The tugboat captain attributed this condition to the shock of nearly drowning; but Lem's surmise was wrong. The Shadow was actually suffering from an attack of the "bends," produced by the sudden decompression from his quick trip to the outer air.

"Keep an eye on him," decided Lem, turning to Tanker and Pete. "I'm holding the two of you responsible. Take turns staying here; and when you get the word from me, tie the guy up. If he begins to kick up trouble in the mean time, sock him."

Lem went up to the deck. He noted that the tug was passing Governor's Island. The lights of moored ships were twinkling in the harbor. Growling to himself, this skipper who served The Python stamped toward the pilot house.

"How about it?" queried Jake, when Lem entered. "Want me to get rid of the fellow now that we're past the island?"

LEM shook his head.

"There's ships moored all along here," stated Lem. "Then comes the Narrows; after that the Lower Bay, where there's likely to be some coast-guard cutters. We don't want to heave that guy overboard where he may be picked up. Whether he's alive or dead, he might be traced back to us."

"You'll hold him until tomorrow night?" inquired Jake. "Is that the idea, Lem?"

"You've guessed it, Jake. This gazebo will be just one more floating corpse after that party's finished."

"Smart stuff, Lem."

The tug steamed onward toward the Narrows. Outward bound, it carried The Shadow, still a prisoner. Escaping from one of the Python's many Coils, he had fallen into the grip of another evil crew that served the same insidious master.

Yet The Shadow did not recognize his plight; nor had he learned the mission upon which this tug was bound. The tug Colonia was outward bound to aid in crime; to play its part in a fierce scheme of evil that The Python had prepared.

CHAPTER VII. ABOARD THE "TROPICAL"

DAWN showed the tug Colonia cleared from New York, plodding slowly northward at a reduced speed. On that same morning, the steamship Tropical sailed for Savannah, southward bound.

To Tanker and Pete, The Shadow was a charge. Less cruel than the other members, they could see no reason for neglecting the prisoner. Thus when the news was given that the passenger was less feverish, orders were given to truss The Shadow up should his recovery continue.

Meanwhile, aboard the steamship Tropical, a dance was in progress. Some passengers were busy dancing, some smoking in the smoking room. Others, however, were in their staterooms.

In Room 313, its occupant was a keen-eyed, nervous man of bronzed complexion, who paced back and forth across the room while he puffed at or around his twentieth cigarette.

A rap sounded on the door of the cabin. The nervous man opened the door and peered through a narrow slit. With a relieved smile he drew the barrier wide and allowed a uniformed man to enter. After that, he closed the door and locked it.

The nervous man, tall, thin and wiry, was Louis Revoort. His visitor, squatty and bluff-faced, and dressed in a tightfitting uniform, was the purser of the steamship Tropical.

"You wished to see me, Mr. Revoort?" inquired the purser, quietly. "Was it about the coffer that you placed in my care? Perhaps the contents of the coffer –"

"Shh! Don't talk about it, purser. You are the only one who knows that the coffer holds great wealth. That is why I sent for you. I believed that you would understand my fears."

"The coffer is safe, Mr. Revoort. I placed it in the strong box in my office. I alone have the keys; the office itself is locked. No one could break in there."

"Someone may try. I am warning you of it, purser. Please take my advice; have your office watched – by reliable persons. If dangerous persons try to enter, they will make themselves known by their act. Then they can be apprehended –"

"You told me this before, Mr. Revoort," interposed the purser, wearily. "You are repeating yourself."

"Yes; but you have failed to follow my advice."

"Perhaps, although I have been watchful. Frankly, Mr. Revoort, I have seen nothing to make me share your apprehensions. However, I shall post men on duty before I retire."

Revoort nodded eagerly. The purser smiled and stepped toward the door. He unlocked it; then made a suggestion.

"The air will be clearer in the smoking room," he stated. "Why don't you go there, Mr. Revoort? Get yourself out of this cloud."

THE PYTHON

"All right." Revoort smiled a weary agreement. "You're taking my advice, purser. I'll follow yours."

ACROSS the short side corridor, the door of Cabin 309 was slightly open when the purser appeared from Revoort's room. It closed, without an audible jar. A hand pressed a light switch; side brackets revealed two men. One, a quiet, clean-cut chap, had been listening at the door. The other, huskier and of chiseled countenance, was seated in a chair.

These men were The Shadow's agents, Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland. They were the pair whose names The Python had not learned. Aboard the Tropical, they had gained a stateroom that gave them close watch on Louis Revoort.

"The purser has gone, Cliff," whispered Harry, from close behind the door. "But Revoort is still in his cabin."

"Worried, all right," Cliff acknowledged. "Maybe we ought to be watching the purser's office. Then there's that fellow you're suspicious of –"

"Luke Duronne, the card sharp?"

"Yeah."

"We'll keep an eye on him, too."

"Right enough, Harry. We'll stick close by, to protect Revoort when trouble comes."

Cliff's words were prophetic. They reminded Harry of a present duty. Extinguishing the light, Harry opened the door; then gave a whisper to Cliff, who came over beside him. Revoort was coming out of his cabin. Harry had heard the unlocking of the catch from the inside.

ONCE in the corridor, Revoort closed the door of Room 313. He pulled a key from his pocket and inserted it into the keyhole. He twisted; but the lock failed to act.

The observers watched Revoort give a grimace. The fellow reached into his pocket and produced another key; like the first, it was the key to a ship's cabin.

Revoort pocketed the first key and used the second. This time the door locked. As Revoort placed the keys in separate pockets, Harry eased his own door shut. He heard Revoort pass through the corridor; then he turned on the light and looked at Cliff.

"What do you make of it?" inquired Harry. "What was the idea of two keys?"

"Maybe one was a pass-key," responded Cliff. "Revoort may have brought along a supply like we did, and found that one could be fixed."

"Then why did one fail to lock the door? If one was a pass-key – and the other belonged to 313 –"

Harry paused; then snapped his fingers.

"I've got it, Cliff!" he exclaimed. "Let's see that copy you made of the passenger list. The one we've both been checking over."

Cliff produced the list. Its margins bore notations. Harry passed a string of names; then indicated one.

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"J.F. Jenks," he read. "He's the fellow whom we haven't seen. Never been in the dining saloon for meals. Nobody else has noticed it; but we have."

"Cabin 222," remarked Cliff. "A good place to stay away from, if Jenks is always in it."

"Let me have the pass-key, Cliff. While you're out keeping an eye on Revoort, I'll make a trip to Cabin 222."

"But I just said that –"

"I heard you. Don't worry, Cliff. My hunch is a sweet one. There'll be no trouble. I'll look you up later."

The two went from their cabin, Harry smiling; Cliff, half puzzled. There was no chance for Cliff to question Harry in a corridor; so they parted after they had passed a bulkhead. Once Harry had left him, Cliff gained a hunch of his own. He decided that Revoort had gone to the smoking room.

Not much of a deduction, Cliff admitted to himself; nevertheless, he was pleased when he reached the smoking room and found Revoort there. Twenty minutes passed; from a corner, Cliff saw Revoort rise and depart.

CLIFF left the smoking room half a minute later. He took a circuitous route toward the state room that he shared with Harry, but he made rapid speed. When he reached the end of a long corridor, he was just in time to catch a glimpse of Revoort. The man was going back to 313.

Cliff reached 309. He paced about for several minutes; then heard a key click in the lock. Harry entered. His smile was broader than before.

"I've narrowed it, Cliff," stated Harry. "Is Revoort back in his cabin?"

Cliff nodded.

"Then we've nothing to do but watch him," decided Harry. "The purser's office doesn't matter. The ship's officers can worry about it."

"What about this fellow Jenks? Wasn't he in 222?"

"No. My hunch was proven, Cliff. There is no one named Jenks aboard."

Cliff pondered.

"Revoort had two keys," reminded Harry. "Since one failed to lock his door, I figured that it belonged to another cabin – an empty one."

"But in order for Revoort to have the key –"

"He would have to have engaged the cabin, under another name."

"Jenks! You means that Revoort is J.F. Jenks?"

"There is no J.F. Jenks. Moreover, Revoort is wise enough to stay away from that cabin, which he knows no one will visit. For Cabin 222 contains luggage, although it has no occupant. I found a trunk in there, Cliff; it was so heavy that I could not lift it."

"You mean that Revoort has put the treasure in Cabin 222?"

"Exactly. The coffer that the purser has in the strong room is nothing but a bluff."

"Nobody would ever guess about that other cabin, Harry."

"Not unless they should see Revoort's two keys and dope it out as I did."

"And unless someone grabs the coffer and cracks it open, nobody will know that the real swag might be elsewhere."

HARRY nodded his approval of Cliff's statement.

"If there is a gang aboard," concluded Harry, "they'll raid the purser's office first. Once that has been discovered, the crowd will have to dig for cover."

"They'd come for Revoort, though," decided Cliff, "unless they already know – as is likely – that there is nothing of value in his own cabin. Maybe some bribed steward has made a search there for them."

"That's probable," agreed Harry, "and it's likely that Revoort has paid a steward to stay out of 222. Two could handle that game, Cliff. But if a raid is made on the purser's office, with success, they'll come for Revoort anyway."

"To make him blab?"

"Yes. That's why we'll stay here. To be ready for the sequel, should the first attack succeed."

That matter settled, The Shadow's agents began their vigil, as self-appointed guardians of Louis Revoort. Trouble was brewing, they were sure. Both Harry and Cliff felt themselves prepared for it.

These aids of The Shadow were right in their surmise. Evil purposes were already in action aboard the steamship Tropical. Coming events, however, were to be of a magnitude that neither man expected!

CHAPTER VIII. CRIME'S ZERO HOUR

IT was close to midnight when Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland began their vigil in Cabin 309. They had concentrated their efforts upon the guarding of Louis Revoort, in Room 313. They had ceased to worry – for the present – regarding others aboard the Tropical.

They had discussed a passenger named Luke Duronne, the man who looked like a card shark. Cliff had seen the fellow while in the smoking room. Duronne had been playing poker with a crowd and had seemed quite disinterested in the temporary presence of Louis Revoort.

While The Shadow's agents watched below, Duronne was still in the smoking room. Sallow and quick-eyed, he was tugging at the pointed ends of a dark mustache while he played a two-handed pinochle game with a bulky, dull-faced passenger. The poker game had ended. Duronne had apparently picked up an acquaintance with this lone passenger.

As they played their cards, however, Duronne was speaking in an undertone. Looking past the bulky man's shoulder, he noted the purser talking with a ship's officer.

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Duronne was catching some of the words that lips were forming; he was repeating his observations to his bulky acquaintance.

"They're talking about the strong room, Hank," Duronne was saying. "The purser's seen Revoort; that's a cinch. They're liable to be watching the strong room later on."

"How soon, Luke?" whispered Hank.

"I don't know." Duronne watched the speakers. "Psst! They're coming this way, Hank!"

The purser and his companion walked past the card table, while Duronne and Hank busied themselves with their game. Both heard the officer say:

"All right, Mr. Lycher. From one o'clock on. Good night, sir."

The purser left the smoking room; the other man strolled away. Hank whispered to Duronne.

"Did you get that, Luke?"

"Sure," returned Duronne. "It means that guards will be posted around the strong room. But they won't put them on until after most of the passengers have retired."

"At one o'clock."

"Yes. That gives us a good part of an hour. The purser's gone below. Eddie will fix him and tip off Gouger. We'll get the word. Stick to pinochle for a while, Hank."

Hank grinned. He admired Duronne's sang-froid; and with good reason. For, among the Coilmasters of The Python, Luke Duronne was one of the most capable when it came to handling deliberate crime.

THE purser, Mr. Lycher, went directly to his own cabin after leaving the smoking room. There he removed the coat of his tight-fitting uniform and stretched his portly body.

He brought a bottle of large pills from a bureau drawer and dropped three of the tablets into a drinking glass. He added water from a decanter and stirred the liquid with a spoon. When the pills had dissolved, the purser swallowed the medicine.

This was Lycher's regular dosage; he used these pills in connection with a restricted diet. Overweight, the purser had long been trying to reduce. He followed the medicine with some calisthenics; after a few minutes of these exercises, he sat down on the edge of his bed.

Black spots were showing before Lycher's eyes. A sudden nausea had gripped him. He began to waver; then caught himself with an effort. Faltering toward the door, he pressed a button; then staggered back across the cabin and slumped upon the bed.

Someone knocked at the door. The purser answered feebly. He lacked the strength to rise. A pass-key clicked in the lock; a peak-faced steward entered and stared at the prone figure on the bed.

"Is that you, Eddie?" queried Lycher, his eyes closed. "Give me a drink of water, will you?"

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"Certainly, sir," responded Eddie. He poured some water into the glass that had contained the medicine. "What is wrong, Mr. Lycher?"

"I'm sick." The purser managed to rise and sip from the glass while Eddie held it. "I'm – feeling – feeling quite ill. You'd better – better summon the ship's doctor."

"Very well, sir."

Eddie replaced the glass on the bureau. With his other hand, he produced a small bottle of pills and laid it beside the glass. He quickly pocketed the duplicate bottle from which the purser had taken the tablets. That done, Eddie looked over his shoulder and saw that Lycher's eyes were still closed.

Quickly, the furtive-faced steward reached into the pocket of the purser's coat. He gripped a bunch of keys, tightly, so they would not clink. They were hooked to the lining of the pocket; Eddie tore the cloth as he tugged the keys away. Lycher heard nothing; his lips were moving feebly.

EDDIE made a quick departure. He closed the door behind him, followed a long corridor and ascended a flight of stairs. He paused near a small foyer, while a few belated passengers entered an elevator. As soon as the lift had descended, the steward edged forward and wigwagged a signal toward a door that led to the deck.

A lurking man caught the signal. This fellow was a deck hand. Scurrying along a deck, he came to a hatchway and ascended the steps, which brought him to a deck outside the glass-enclosed smoking room.

He paused there, shifting close to the window; then moved away. He was seen by watchful eyes within. Luke Duronne spoke to his fellow pinochle player.

"It's Gouger," whispered Duronne. "The tip-off from Eddie. Come along, Hank."

They ascended the near-by stairs to find Eddie awaiting them. The steward pointed across the foyer, toward a bulky door that was marked "Purser's Office."

He handed the key ring to Duronne.

"Lycher took the knock-out drops," whispered Eddie. "From the bottle that I left for him. I switched the bottles; he was too groggy to see me do it. He didn't see me grab the keys, either. I've unlocked the office door –"

"Come along then," cut in Duronne. "Let's get at that coffer."

They entered the purser's office. With the door closed, Duronne approached a safe-like strong box. He found the right key and opened the bulky door. The light showed a metal coffer, bound with iron bands; and equipped with stout locks. The chest was not much larger than a steamer trunk. But when Duronne tried to move it, the coffer failed to budge.

"Get Gouger," he ordered.

Eddie fetched the deck hand, who was lurking outside the office. The four men managed to raise the heavy coffer. Trusting to chance, they lugged it from the office and followed the passage to the deck.

"Get the other fellows," ordered Duronne, in a quick whisper to Gouger. "Stick with Gouger, Hank, to keep watch. It's going to be a job taking this chest up the companionways. Remember: it goes in lifeboat number

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six."

"Maybe we ought to crack the box," suggested Gouger. "It would be easy to handle the swag if we did."

"Yeah?" queried Duronne, savagely. "Do you think everybody's deaf on board? Get along, you two. Come with me, Eddie."

DURONNE and the steward made a quick return to the purser's office, where they locked the strong box and extinguished the light. They then locked the door behind them; and sidled down the steps.

"Get back to Lycher's cabin," ordered Duronne, as he and Eddie neared the bottom of the stairway. "Put these keys back in his pocket. I'll be in my cabin."

"What about the doctor?" queried Eddie. "I'm supposed to get hold of him."

"Tell Lycher you couldn't locate him."

The pair separated. Luck had been with Luke Duronne; it was not quite one o'clock; yet the Coilmaster had gained Revoort's coffer before a watch had been instituted. But luck was due to change. Eddie found that out when he reached the purser's cabin.

Lycher was sitting up; beside him stood the ship's physician. The purser glowered as he saw Eddie. Although still weak, Lycher had recovered sufficiently to be angry.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "I managed to call Doctor Reed's cabin and found that he was there. Why didn't you do that, Eddie?"

"I – I was looking other places," returned the steward. "Sorry, Mr. Lycher. Are – are you feeling better, sir?"

"Yes. Doctor Reed gave me a restorative. I think I'll be all right, doctor."

"If you experience another spell of dizziness, call me at once."

With this statement, the physician left the cabin. Lycher rubbed his forehead and looked at Eddie.

"I wonder if it could have been my pills," he remarked. "Funny thing – they were absolutely tasteless tonight. Whew! That bowled me over. Pour me another glass of water, Eddie."

The steward complied. As he approached Lycher with the glass, the purser arose. Somewhat unsteadily, he started toward the wall, to reach for his hanging coat.

"I – I wouldn't try too much, sir," stammered Eddie. "I – I would relax if I were you, sir."

"I want my keys," retorted Lycher. "They're in my coat pocket."

"I can get them for you, sir –"

"You wouldn't know how to unfasten the hook that holds them."

LYCHER had reached the wall. He lurched, although the ship was not rolling. His back was turned toward Eddie; and the steward knew that inside another minute, the purser would be reaching to find the missing

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keys.

Eddie thrust his left hand into the pocket of his jacket. Frantically, he twisted away the cap of the bottle that held the knock-out drops. Bringing out the bottle, he let a flock of pills glide into the glass of water. Quaking, he watched them dissolve – seven in all.

It was a race; the melting of those pills against the purser's present recovery. Eddie's game won; the tablets were dissolved before the purser had decided to resume his look for the keys.

Eddie dropped the little bottle into his pocket; he stepped forward with the glass just as Lycher's hand went toward the hanging coat.

"Drink this water, sir," suggested Eddie. "All of it. You will feel better, Mr. Lycher."

The purser nodded. He took the glass and gulped its entire contents. Passing the glass back to Eddie, he reached into the coat pocket. His eyes bulged as his hand found emptiness. Lycher wheeled suddenly; he saw Eddie's staring gaze.

"You – you thief!" accused the purser. He saw Eddie's expression, and it was a give away! "You – you stole my keys. So you're in the game! I might have –"

Lycher's voice failed as he lumbered forward, seeking to clutch the steward's throat. The new dose of knock-out tablets was beginning its effect.

Lycher swayed across the cabin; slumping to the bed, he clutched the telephone, while Eddie stared, too frightened to make a move.

The purser had raised the receiver. He was calling the doctor's cabin. Eddie could hear a voice responding to the purser's hello. Wildly, the steward surged forward as Lycher started to speak. His attack, however, proved unnecessary.

That was all that Lycher managed. The telephone fell from his hands; he sprawled to the bed, then rolled to the cabin floor. Eddie scooped-up the telephone; nervously, he finished the call.

"It's Mr. Lycher, sir," panted the steward. "He – he has had another dizzy spell, doctor. Shall – shall I give him water? Or – or –"

The receiver clicked at the other end, announcing that the doctor was on his way. Eddie stumbled over and replaced the keys in the purser's pocket; he fastened the catch to another portion of the lining. Opening the porthole, he hurled his bottle of knock-out tablets into the watery depths.

Returning to Lycher, Eddie stooped beside the purser's body. Lycher had fallen heavily. His head had thumped the end of the bed. Blood was clotting his hair; his eyes were glassy when the steward raised their lids. Eddie propped a pillow beneath the man's wobbly head.

Some minutes passed before the ship's physician arrived from his distant cabin. He found Eddie anxious-eyed, beside the body. The doctor attempted to restore the stricken purser; but a half hour of effort failed. He was solemn when he declared his final verdict:

"Dead."

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TWO–THIRTY found a solemn group assembled in the captain's cabin. The doctor was talking to the skipper, while other officers listened.

"I was slow responding," admitted the physician, "because I supposed the trouble to be nothing but a mild relapse. Eddie, the steward, was there to look out for Lycher. Unfortunately, the purser was dead when I arrived."

"What about Lycher's fall?"

"It may have been responsible for his death, Captain Henderly. Lycher was a heavy man; he received a severe blow."

"What about your talk with Lycher?" inquired the captain, turning to the officer who had been with the purser in the smoking room. "You say he apprehended trouble? That was at midnight, Mr. Rodney?"

"Yes," replied Rodney. "Lycher wanted men to watch his office. But he did not seem greatly apprehensive, sir. He seemed merely to have some reason for thinking that precaution might be wise."

"Hmm. Was everything all right in Lycher's cabin?"

"Yes, sir. I have just come from there. Here are his keys; I had to rip them loose from his pocket."

The captain pondered.

"What about the steward, doctor?" he queried. "Did he act suspiciously?"

"No," returned the doctor. "On the contrary, he was very helpful. Nervous, of course, but that was natural. He bemoaned the fact that he reached Lycher too late to prevent the man's fall."

The captain arose. He shook his head.

"I don't like it," he declared. "Place two men on watch in Lycher's cabin. Have others stay outside the strong room. We shall order an autopsy on Lycher's body when we reach New York."

The doctor nodded his agreement.

"What about Eddie?" queried Rodney.

"Let him go about his duty," ordered Captain Henderly. "Doctor Reed's statement clears him. Lycher's pills, we know, are harmless. If there was foul play, it occurred before Lycher went to his cabin. Say nothing that may alarm the passengers or cause too much talk among the crew."

THE captain went to the bridge. The others also left the cabin. Mr. Rodney posted the required men. Half an hour after the conference, all was quiet aboard the onward steaming Tropical.

But it was at that hour – three o'clock – that Eddie, the treacherous steward, appeared outside of Duronne's cabin and tapped cautiously at the door. Duronne admitted him.

"Word from Gouger?" queried the Coilmaster.

Eddie nodded, his peaked face leering.

"Good work, Eddie," approved Duronne. "That overdose you handed Lycher has fixed things doubly well. The crew members on duty are staying put, so Hank tells me. Some around the purser's office; others in Lycher's cabin."

"Which leaves nobody to spot Gouger's pals."

"Exactly. They'll start operations in the lounge and the ballroom, and work out from those points. What's more, one of Gouger's bunch is lucky enough to be on duty in Lycher's cabin."

"You mean Slug Cladder?"

"Yes. He'll sock the guy that's in there with him and do some dirty work of his own. You be ready to go with Hank and myself, Eddie."

"To get Revoort?"

"Yes. We won't have long to wait. The ship's position will be just about right inside another hour."

"It's three o'clock now."

"Three o'clock," Duronne chuckled. "The zero hour."

Duronne was right when he stated that there would not be long to wait. Quiet followed after Eddie departed from the Coilmaster's cabin; and that silence persisted for a brief half hour. Then came a sudden change aboard the Tropical. Wildly clanging bells began a bedlam.

Harry and Cliff, awake in 309, were among the first to hear that clamorous alarm. They stared at each other for one brief moment; then Harry leaped across the cabin and yanked open the door. He sniffed smoke as he reached the corridor.

Then, before either he or Cliff could decide on the right move, their ears caught the sound of a bellowing voice that delivered one tragic announcement amid the echo of the jangling alarm bells:

"Fire! All hands on deck!"

CHAPTER IX. THE DISTANT WATCH

HALF past three.

A battered, loudly ticking alarm clock registered that time as it hung from a wooden post in the forecastle of the tugboat *Colonia*. Close to the clock was a single lantern that revealed the dial of the timepiece. Just within range of the glow was a figure stretched upon a lower bunk.

The Shadow's eyes were peering upward. His face had lost its strain. The glint in his eyes showed that he had recuperated; but the lantern light showed that his recovery had brought him new misfortune.

The Shadow's arms were beneath his back; his body and his legs were girded with taut ropes. Such had been his plight for hours; ever since Pete had reported the improvement in the prisoner's condition.

The Shadow's face was impassive, despite the streaked, uncouth condition of its make-up. His eyes were untroubled. On the contrary, they seemed alert and challenging. His ears were quick to detect sounds that

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they heard from above deck. When a footfall sounded from the ladder into the forecabin, The Shadow's eyes were prompt to turn in that direction.

Tanker appeared within the lantern's range. Swaying with the roll of the tug, the seaman approached the bunk. He surveyed the prisoner seriously; then spoke.

"Too bad, matey," declared Tanker. "We got to haul you up on deck, me and Pete, when he gets here. What's coming to you, I ain't sure; but I don't advise you to count on no good luck to –"

Tanker stopped abruptly; he had faced about to reach for the lantern and a clutching hand had stopped him. As on that night in the East River, gripping fingers had seized Tanker's arm. Another hand came up as Tanker swung; it caught his shoulder and the first free hand went for his throat.

TANKER gurgled and tried to wrest away. He was too late. The Shadow, his body and legs encased in ropes, was plying two free arms to down the seaman in a swift and effective struggle. Tanker fought back; despite his friendliness toward the doomed prisoner, he still considered himself as one of Lem Hurdy's crew.

During lone hours, The Shadow had managed to slip his wrists from a rope that lashed them. His body had remained wound about with hemp; but he had worked slack in the upper coils by tightening those below.

He had feigned complete bondage until he was sure that Tanker had come here alone. Then, when opportunity chanced, he had slipped his arms free from the slack.

In his battle, he was gripping Tanker fiercely. Should the man shake him loose, The Shadow would sprawl helpless, because of his bound ankles. That was one reason why The Shadow had caught Tanker's throat; to choke his foe into submission. The other reason was also important: choking stifled Tanker's outcry.

A grim scene beneath the lantern. Tanker, writhing, lashing furiously to fling off his antagonist. The Shadow, his bound legs whipped about, was struggling to retain his hold on the big fellow's neck.

As they swung against a bunk, The Shadow's shoulders jounced. For an instant, his fingers slipped. Then, as Tanker managed a gasp and wrenched The Shadow's wrists, a roll of the tug sent the pair wavering across the forecabin.

Feet on the bunk's edge, The Shadow straightened his body with a tremendous spring. He sent Tanker reeling backward, straight for the post that held the swinging lantern. Tanker's head cracked the pillar as The Shadow guided it with relentless hands.

Then the roll of the tug, the impetus of The Shadow's plunge – combined forces gained what Tanker had sought and failed. The Shadow's grip was lost; his half-bound body floundered to the floor.

VICTORY was Tanker's; but the fellow could not take it. As The Shadow rolled over and tried to rise, he saw Tanker's body slithering downward. It sprawled by The Shadow's side. That whack against the post had knocked the seaman groggy. Tanker, not The Shadow, had become the vanquished.

The last stroke had succeeded; and The Shadow was quick to take advantage of it.

He was a bit unsteady, this self-rescued prisoner, when he crawled toward Tanker's shifting form after putting off his bonds. The Shadow felt in the seaman's pockets, seeking a knife for which he would have previously looked had the knots proven too tight.

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He found no knife; but he discovered an object that he needed more – a fully loaded .32 revolver. Tanker's pockets, however, carried no extra ammunition.

Being coatless, The Shadow thrust the weapon into his hip pocket. He hoisted Tanker to a bunk and proceeded to tie him up with the loose ropes.

Tanker's eyes were opening. The Shadow gagged him with a bandanna that he took from the man's own pocket. The lantern's glow showed Tanker recovering from his thump, but no longer capable of struggle.

The Shadow moved toward the steps to the deck. He stopped suddenly and retreated to the front of the forecastle. Someone was coming down the ladder-like stairs.

Pete stepped into the glow. He looked about for Tanker; then stared at the bound form in the bunk. Pete could not see the features of the gagged face; but he realized that this was not the prisoner. A sudden hiss made him swing toward the lantern. Pete stopped; his hands came up as he faced the muzzle of Tanker's gun, leveled by the hand of The Shadow.

Pete saw the glimmer of The Shadow's revolver. He knew that any resistance would be useless. He lay quietly while The Shadow strapped his ankles with a belt; then found another handkerchief and used it as a gag. Finally, The Shadow fished a second revolver from Pete's pocket. This one, a .38, was more to The Shadow's liking.

The Shadow had expected to find both these men armed. The guns that he had gained were proof that all others aboard the tug would also have ready weapons.

The crew, he decided, must number at least a dozen. The place to deal with them would be on deck; not in this forecastle, which could easily prove to be a trap.

CAUTIOUSLY, The Shadow ascended the steps. He reached the top and gained a view astern. The low roof of the forecastle prevented him from seeing toward the bow. The deck of the tug was pitch dark. For some reason, all lights had been extinguished. Until he could locate members of the crew, The Shadow's best course was to lurk in darkness.

Easing himself to the deck, The Shadow stared toward the starboard rail. A glow showed against the distant sky. To discern its cause, The Shadow raised his head above the level of the forecastle roof. The new position afforded him a startling view.

A few miles distant lay a blazing ship; a liner revealed by the very flames that were sweeping its high superstructure. Volumes of smoke were rising from the vessel's bow, pouring back to engulf the ship's twin funnels.

The tug was lying beyond the broad range of glare; waiting within thick darkness, like an expectant vulture watching some dying prey.

To The Shadow dawned the strange truth of his rescue; that the *Colonia* was manned by another band of The Python's; that its skipper must be a Coilmaster who served the supercreek.

For The Shadow had recognized that distant, flame-framed liner. It was the steamship *Tropical*, the very boat that he had expected to board at Savannah. On it were other of The Python's minions; opposing them, two of The Shadow's own aids.

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For the present, all were concentrated upon the Tropical. All eyes aboard the Colonia were focused on the flaming decks of the distressed steamship.

Similarly, Lem Hurdy and his crew had no suspicion that The Shadow was within their circle. They had forgotten Tanker and Pete – the prisoner as well – in the tense task of watching the conflagration aboard the approaching liner.

The Shadow, like foemen who did not know of his self-gained freedom, was also keeping distant watch upon the steamship's glare. Doubly armed, he was biding his time for the proper moment. When it arrived, The Shadow would strike for victory.

CHAPTER X. CROOKS CHOOSE TO FIGHT

ABOARD the Tropical, chaos had come with flames. The very swiftness of the fire had produced commotion. When officers hastened to give commands, they found themselves confronted by an inferno.

Gouger and his pals had passed up no evil opportunity. A few of them had shipped aboard as new members of the crew; they had lined up some malcontents with promises of big pay. Nearly a dozen in all, they had saturated the woodwork and upholstery with kerosene. Flames, once begun, had spurted like mammoth torches.

Roaring from the spots where they had started, the blazes were sweeping sternward. They had made short work of the lounge and the ballroom; all that the loyal crew could do was hope to halt the fire's progress. Fire hoses were unlimbered; chemicals came into play. There again, proof was given of dastardly preparations.

The Python's henchmen had cut off the water line. Trickle, not streams, were all that the hoses produced. The crooks had substituted gasoline for chemicals. The use of this equipment proved disastrous.

Flames tongued viciously at the startled men who spurted the supposed chemicals upon the fire. Officers and crew retreated from the fury of the spreading conflagration.

There were cool heads aboard the liner. The officers had guessed that the fire was no accident. They were sending men to repair the tampered equipment; to bring up chemicals and fire apparatus from the stern. Loyal hands were working with a will.

Passengers had reached the blistering decks. They were being ordered to the stern. Flame-fighting crew members were doing their utmost to prevent the fire from reaching that last refuge.

Engines had been halted; but the liner was drifting onward. The fate of the ship lay in the balance. Every effort was being made to save it, but the start that the fire had gained made the fight a difficult one.

AMONG the passengers who had reached the A deck were three who formed a cluster. One was Louis Revoort; the others were Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland. The Shadow's agents had aroused Revoort and had come with him from below.

Cliff saw a chance to aid with a fire hose. Before Harry and Revoort could do likewise, an officer ordered them astern. They were forced to back away to the rear of the A deck, where other passengers were scurrying down steps to gain the open, sternward space of the B deck below.

Revoort seemed to recognize Harry as a friend. The two remained at the companionway, watching the crew battle the fire. Gouger and some of his pals were there. To cover their crime, they were aiding in the fight

against the flames.

Duronne came rushing out on deck, Hank close behind him. Harry saw the pair speak to crew members and gain nods in reply.

Duronne had contacted Gouger. That done, Duronne and Hank came sternward. They arrived at the very spot where Harry and Revoort were standing. The glare of the flames showed a gleam upon Duronne's crafty, mustached face.

In that instant, Harry knew the fellow for an enemy. Grimly, Harry stayed with Revoort. Hand in his pocket, The Shadow's agent clutched an automatic.

Gouger had dropped a fire hose to spring toward a lifeboat. He and two others were snatching away the tarpaulin. They flung it in the bow of the boat, where it covered an object already there.

This was boat number six; the crooks had loaded the coffer aboard it and were keeping that heavy chest hidden by the loose canvas.

Davits creaked as the boat began to lower. Gouger bellowed; crew members deserted their posts and dashed over to lower a boat that bore the number eight.

Passengers, coming from sternward, began a rush up the companionway where Harry and the others stood. The sight of boats being lowered had started a panic. Duronne's new scheme was working.

The Coilmaster's purpose was a double one. He wanted to get the coffer away from the Tropical before its theft was discovered. He desired also to throw the loyal crew into tumult; to start them into a flight that would end resistance against the fire. Duronne had hoped to panic the passengers; his expectation had been realized.

As the surge came toward the boats, many of the loyal crew members lost their heads. Boat six was already over the side; five of Gouger's pals were aboard, swinging oars to prevent others from coming with them. Crew members and passengers seized boat eight, which Gouger had started as bait for them. More went after other boats.

IT was then that Duronne and Hank started an attack of their own. It came so suddenly that Harry Vincent could not stop it.

Harry was watching both Duronne and Hank; they looked ready to join in the rush toward the boats. Some signal must have passed between them; instead of starting toward the bow, they wheeled about. Duronne sprang for Harry's throat; Hank leaped upon Revoort.

Harry whipped out his gun, too late. Duronne drove him backward, hard against a post beside the companionway. Harry's head took the jolt; half staggering, he managed groggily to aim for Duronne. But before he could fire, the crook drove a swift punch to his chin.

The Coilmaster was lucky with that blow. Harry sprawled to the deck, but came up on one elbow. He had Duronne covered for a moment; then came a surge of passengers that trampled him flat.

Sprawled out beneath the rush, Harry could only protect his head from stamping feet. When the sweep ended, Harry came dizzily to his hands and knees.

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Harry looked for Revoort and did not see him on the deck. Staring downward, he caught sight of him below. Revoort and Hank had tumbled down the companionway; in the fall, Revoort had gained the edge. Though slight of build compared with Hank, he was pommeling the big man into grogginess.

A shout made Harry turn toward the bow. Someone was shouting through a megaphone; it was Captain Henderly. The skipper had braved sizzling flames and roasting decks to get here from the bridge. In a booming voice, he was ordering the crew members back to their posts.

Some were responding; others wavered, while a score of passengers clutched the rail, wearied by futile fray. Duronne's boat had reached the water. Gouger had joined his pals in the second boat. He was snarling at crew members on the deck, telling them to lower the lifeboat in defiance of the captain's order.

SENSING a conflict, Harry came to his feet and started forward, still gripping his automatic. He saw Cliff turn about from a fire hose. His face black-streaked, his coat and shirt gone, Cliff was reaching for his hip. He, too, saw trouble from boat eight.

It came. Captain Henderly, the megaphone in his left hand, used his right to produce a big service revolver. Another officer copied his example. Budding mutiny ended among the loyal crew.

Men went piling back toward the fire hoses. The captain watched them scurry along the deck. He had not yet turned to face boat eight. He did not know the fiendish caliber of the men aboard it.

Gouger was snarling to his pals. Revolvers flashed from their pockets. Six against two, they were aiming for the captain and the officer with him. Neither Henderly nor his companion saw the coming menace. Harry and Cliff were the ones who spotted it.

Harry aimed with his automatic. Simultaneously, Cliff yanked a similar weapon from his hip pocket. Their guns spoke together. Bullets ripped the gunwales of the lifeboat; one of Gouger's men collapsed.

Gouger and the others whirled about to meet this unexpected fire. Their revolvers barked quick answers. The captain, startled at first by the shots on deck, saw instantly where the real menace lay. He and the officer aimed for the lifeboat and poured in a rapid fire.

Harry clipped Gouger as the fellow aimed for Cliff. Bullets whistled and ricocheted from flame-wrecked walls. But the shots aimed for the lifeboat were directed toward one concentrated target. The Python's men went sprawling before they could pick out their well-spread attackers.

The captain bellowed an order. Loyal crew members, armed with axes and belaying pins, took up the charge. They reached the lifeboat and surged over the side like infantry taking an entrenchment.

Gouger and his wounded tribe still had fight. They asked no quarter as they blazed away at the twenty men who overwhelmed them. Nor did they receive quarter from those nerve-strained men whose ranks they tried to thin. When the quick fight ended, the minions of The Python lay annihilated. His automatic emptied, Harry Vincent had pocketed the weapon and was dashing toward the companionway at the back of the deck. He wanted no credit for his part in the fray; he was anxious to find Revoort. When he reached the B deck, Harry saw no sign of the man; nor was Hank in view.

Had Revoort gone back to his cabin? Harry chose a course along the side deck, heading forward. He plunged into a mass of smoke that was pouring from stateroom windows.

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He stumbled squarely into a struggling trio. One was Revoort, still pounding Hank; the other was Eddie, the steward. This fellow was trying to drag Revoort away.

HARRY pitched into the fight and flayed out with his fists. Revoort staggered away while his rescuer dealt with the pair. Then came a cry; Harry sprawled Hank and punched Eddie's jaw.

He wheeled about to see Revoort in the clutch of a bulky, leering fighter. It was "Slug" Cladder, the rogue who had started the fire in the purser's cabin.

A big fist crashed against Revoort's face. As the man's body slumped, Slug hoisted it and gave a heave across the rail.

Harry sprang in just as Revoort's body balanced on the rail. Slug turned upon him savagely. As they grappled, Revoort delivered a sighing gasp and slid helplessly beyond the rail.

Harry delivered an ankle kick that sent Slug sprawling. He had heard the splash of Revoort's body. Forgetting Slug, Harry dashed through the smoke to grab a hanging life preserver. Gaining it, he hurled the circular buoy into the ocean, hoping that Revoort might see it bobbing close at hand.

From the smoke came Slug. On his feet again, the vicious fighter encountered Harry before The Shadow's aid had time to swing and meet him.

Gaining a hold upon Harry's throat, Slug proceeded to hammer his adversary into complete submission. They sprawled to the deck, Slug on top. Half a minute of hard pounding left Harry limp and unconscious.

Slug arose, to find Hank and Eddie clutching the rail beside him. He heard a voice calling from the smoke; he caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

Yanking a revolver, Slug snarled to Hank and Eddie, telling them to pitch Harry's helpless form overboard. The pair started to obey.

A puff of breeze thinned the smoke. An approaching man appeared a dozen feet from Slug's gaze. The arrival was Cliff Marsland. He had left his firefighting to look for Harry Vincent. Cliff, like Slug, could see plainly when the smoke cleared.

He saw Hank and Eddie, struggling to lift Harry Vincent. He saw the glint of Slug's revolver in the glare of the ship's flames.

Slug was shoving his fist forward in quick aim; Cliff jogged his reloaded automatic upward from his hip. His finger was quick on the hair trigger. The automatic spoke.

Slug wavered, snarling. Staggering to the rail, he fired two quick, wide shots. Cliff could take no more chances. Dropping back, he pumped three bullets straight into the would-be killer's body. Slug pitched head foremost to the deck. Cliff swung to deal with Hank and Eddie.

Petty workers in Duronne's Coil, those two crooks had no nerve for gunplay. They had dropped Harry when they heard the shots; they were pulling out revolvers as they scrambled inward from the rail.

Slug's fall, however, gave them panic. Eddie dived through an opening into the smoke-filled ship. Hank hurried after him as Cliff delivered a quick shot.

CLIFF chased the pair, stabbing more bullets through smoke and flame. He stopped short as he heard a scream that was followed by a hideous bellow.

He had not even spotted his quarry; he had fired only to drive the two men onward. Cliff moved forward cautiously through the increasing heat. He stopped again as his foot struck a tippy floorplate.

Eddie and Hank had dropped through a fire-gutted opening into flames below. They had fallen into the cornered remnant of the inferno that Slug had started in the purser's cabin. They had perished in their own trap.

Cliff went back to the deck. Hoisting Harry on his shoulder, he carried his comrade toward the stern. The engines of the Tropical had begun a slow throb.

Excited passengers were reporting that the crew had gained control of the fire. The ship was being headed shoreward; but it would not be beached if the fire could be completely extinguished.

Harry was still unconscious. Cliff's efforts to revive him failed. A physician among the passengers gave help; he decided that Harry was suffering from a slight brain concussion. He predicted that a few hours of careful treatment would restore him.

Relieved regarding Harry, Cliff wondered what had happened to Revoort. Perhaps the man was safe among the huddled passengers. Cliff planned to look for him later; for if Revoort had escaped harm amid the turmoil, he would be in no present danger.

Should Revoort be missing, there would be a later task in which Cliff would need Harry's aid. That would be to go to Cabin 222; to lug the heavy trunk from there to 309.

It would not be a great problem; when all was quiet aboard the Tropical, many passengers would be moving to new quarters. Cliff foresaw that he and Harry would be able to get unsuspecting stewards to help them with the treasure trunk.

Such a move, of course, depended on Revoort. Cliff still hoped to find the man aboard the forward-forging Tropical. He did not know that somewhere, far astern, Louis Revoort was floating, forgotten – his only hope the life buoy that Harry Vincent had cast into the waves.

CHAPTER XI. ODDS PREVAIL

A DYING flambeau etched against the sky. Such was the steamship Tropical as it floated northward, still within sight of those aboard the tug Colonia. The liner had passed to leeward of the lurking tug; its course had carried the big ship a few miles ahead.

Darkness still persisted aboard the Colonia. From the heaving tugboat, The Shadow had watched the progress of the fire. He had seen the glare subside. He knew that the stout crew had won their battle with the devastating flames.

The only clue to the tragic happenings aboard the Tropical had been the sight of a single lifeboat, pulling away within the circle of the firelight.

Crouched by the forecastle of the Colonia, The Shadow had guessed the lifeboat's purpose. It was coming seaward instead of heading for the shore. That fact betokened one logical answer. Those in the lifeboat knew of the tug's presence. They intended to contact the Colonia.

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THE SHADOW shifted away from the forecastle entrance. He crossed the brine-soaked deck and reached the windward side of the pilot house. He sensed that men were absent here; they were all to leeward, watching.

The Shadow found an iron ladder in the darkness. He moved upward, silently, on the side of the pilot house opposite the door. He reached the broad, flat roof above and crouched there, just in front of the tug's single funnel.

A flare squigged from the darkness – the lifeboat's first cautious signal. The Shadow heard a growl from the deck below; an answering flare fizzed to indicate the tug's position. Minutes passed; the creak of oarlocks reached the ears of listeners. A flashlight blinked from near the tugboat's stern.

There was no need of further caution. The Tropical was far away; those aboard it would not recognize the significance of distant lights. A small searchlight came into play, its beams directed toward the water. It picked out the lifeboat; soon the bobbing craft hung almost at the tug's side.

Lanterns glimmered. The Shadow could count the crew members. He saw boathooks grip the lifeboat; a gangway swung open and half a dozen men clambered forward from the lifeboat. They stopped at Duronne's order, long enough to raise a heavy coffer from beneath a canvas covering. The treasure chest came aboard.

The Shadow had gained and lost by waiting. He saw booty, ready to be regained – for like Duronne, he believed that the chest must contain Revoort's Cuban wealth. But now the number of his enemies had been increased. There were half a dozen more with whom The Shadow must deal.

One procedure alone was possible. The Shadow knew that he must eliminate more foemen.

Furthermore, The Shadow needed a vantage spot; and he had picked one. His design was to capture the pilot house, directly beneath the roof whereon he lay. One man – Jake Baliss – was alone in the pilot house.

The first task was to capture him; then wait for others to arrive. There was a great chance for The Shadow to repeat the mode of operation that he had employed within the forecastle.

EIGHT men were hoisting the near gunwale of the lifeboat that had brought Duronne with the metal coffer. Heaving together, they overturned the craft and let it pitch away from the tug. Satisfied growls followed.

That lifeboat would be found later. The verdict would be that it had capsized in the rising swells. The deserters from the Tropical would be listed as lost.

"Good stuff," Lem Hurdy was growling to Luke Duronne. These Coilmasters were planning their next moves together. "We'll get under steam and reach Norfolk first thing in the morning. We'll get rid of this tub as soon as we arrive."

The door of the pilot house had opened. Jake Baliss was on the platform at the top of the steps, waiting for orders from the captain.

"Just one thing, though," added Lem, harshly. "There's a mug we've got to get rid of; a dope that a couple of the crew pulled out of the East River. They've got him in the fo'c's'le; we'll heave him over alongside that capsized lifeboat. If his body drifts ashore, they'll think he was from the Tropical.

"Better see to it that he's done for," suggested Duronne. "Might just as well load him with some bullets. My outfit will be listed as mutineers. If one body is found full of lead, the coast guards will think we had a

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battle."

"That's the right idea," agreed Lem. "Say – what's been keeping Tanker and Pete?"

"Guess they thought you wanted 'em to stick in the fo'c's'le," put in Jake from above. "Send one of the crew down to get 'em."

"I'm going there myself," returned Lem. "There's no time for any more fooling."

Lem Hurdy started for the forecandle, while Luke Baliss remained outside the pilot house. The Shadow's need for action was urgent.

Drawing his larger revolver – Pete's .38 – he edged over the roof and raised one white-shirted hand to deliver a downward stroke upon Jake's skull.

One more man out – another gun – the pilot house as a fighting turret – these were The Shadow's hopes. But into his plan came a freak of chance that nipped his first intended stroke. One of the crew had turned the small searchlight on the capsized lifeboat, which was drifting away from the tugboat's side.

Satisfied that the boat would fool those who found it, the man swung the searchlight inward. It tilted upward. The beam swept full upon Jake Baliss, beside the pilot house.

"Douse that glim!" howled the mate. "Say, you dub –"

Luke Duronne had looked up with the glare. He saw more than Jake Baliss. He spied The Shadow, head and shoulders over the roof edge, beginning his downward gun swing. Luke yanked a revolver, shouting an order.

"Hold that light!" cried. Duronne. "The man on the roof! Get him!"

JAKE BALISS recoiled as The Shadow's arm came down. The driving revolver glanced from the mate's skull. The blow felled Jake and he sprawled backward through the open door of the pilot house.

Other guns barked. Vicious crew members were joining in the fire. Swaying on hands and knees, The Shadow returned it with volleys from his guns. He did not aim for the searchlight. That would have been useless; for his cramped quarters offered a definite target, even in darkness.

Moreover, the outspread beam showed scurrying figures along the deck. The Shadow was dispatching swift, crippling shots. Rats were sprawling while their pals dived for cover.

Duronne, his revolver emptied all too hastily, went bounding down into the engine room. Unscathed by the wild shots aimed for him, The Shadow had used his own barrage to lay five men writhing on the deck; and drive the rest to cover.

Twelve shots had rifled from his revolvers. His ammunition gone, he was rising, ready to spring from the roof and enter the pilot house to grab Jake's gun.

But before The Shadow could make the move, a bellow sounded from the forecandle. Lem Hurdy had found Tanker and Pete; hearing shots on deck, he had dashed up to spy the escaped prisoner atop the pilot house.

Lem opened fire, savagely. His bullets tore the ornamental "gingerbread" that fronted the pilot house roof. Other revolvers joined in long-range fire. Crew members who had dived beyond the forecandle entrance were

rising to follow their captain.

Lem must have guessed that The Shadow's guns were empty. He was driving forward as he fired; half a dozen howling men were bounding close behind the Coilmaster.

For an instant, The Shadow stood outlined on the roof. Then a wild cry sounded from his lips. His body spun about; his arms swung wide and his hands launched the useless guns.

To the edge of the roof he twisted; there he went whirling in one long writhing dive. Clearing the narrow deck below, he shot beyond the tugboat's side and plunged into the trough of a long swell.

LUKE DURONNE saw the splash. He leaped out to the deck and called for the searchlight. Lem Hurdy arrived; they sent the gleam along the blackened water. Minutes passed while they explored the depths. There was no sign of a body.

"I clipped him clean," growled Lem. "Saw him spin around; the tug was rolling and he took a nose dive. He won't be up again – not for a while. Well – it's the way you wanted it. A body loaded with lead.

"We're getting under way. I'll take the helm. Stow that chest in the rear cabin. We'll take a look at the swag when we're heading past the capes."

Crew members were lugging Jake's slugged form from the pilot house. Others were carrying the coffer at Duronne's bidding. The searchlight was playing its final gleams out across the waves, where nothing showed except the drifting hulk of the overturned lifeboat.

Lem Hurdy took his station at the wheel and clanged the bells. Chugs came from the tug's engine. The Colonia steamed southward, gaining speed as it rolled through the swells. Once more The Python's men had triumphed. The Shadow, like Louis Revoort, had been consigned to the blackened sea.

CHAPTER XII. THE CASTAWAYS

DAWN had streaked the ocean's horizon. A new day showed heavier swells than those of night. Amid that area where the Tropical had blazed while the Colonia lurked, one craft alone was visible. That was the overturned lifeboat that had left the liner.

A figure was perched upon the sheltered side of the shoreward drifting lifeboat. A bedraggled shape in black trousers and white shirt, this was the same form that had fought from above the tugboat's pilot house. The Shadow had survived that short-lived battle. He was drifting toward the final safety of the coast.

The lifeboat still retained some buoyancy; that fact gave the explanation of The Shadow's remarkable escape. He had recognized the futility of further fight when Lem Hurdy had come into the fray.

He had acted with quick inspiration. His dive had been made with purpose; his wild cry faked to deceive the men who sought his life.

The Shadow, too, had noted the lifeboat's drift, no more than fifty feet off the tug's side. It had been his goal, that lifeboat; and he had neared it, swimming swiftly, before the searchlight's gleam had swept the sea. Diving under, The Shadow had come up beneath the lifeboat.

He had stayed within that air pocket for half an hour. Then, confident that the Colonia must be gone, he had swum out and reached the surface. Though it was not the summer season, the ocean lacked the killing chill of

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winter. A long float with the lifeboat promised an eventual landing on the coast.

Rising winds, in from the sea, had propelled the lifeboat onward. With dawn, The Shadow could see breakers, beyond them a low, sandy shore. Low houses told of a deserted summer colony; the location – The Shadow estimated it roughly – was somewhere along the peninsular coast of Maryland.

Testing the buoyancy of the lifeboat's air chambers, The Shadow worked upward on the bottom. His long stay in the ocean had not sapped his strength; rather, it had revived him.

He was anxious to reach the shore, somewhere near those houses; and the lifeboat's course was taking him too far below. Moreover, a near line of breakers indicated a reeflike bar, where the boat might strand too soon.

A HIGH, half-breaking swell arrived while The Shadow was gazing northward. His keen eyes spied an object, bobbing from a wave less than a mile away. The Shadow sighted it again; it looked like a man clinging to a life preserver. The object was floating straight for the houses on the shore.

The Shadow slid from the lifeboat. His arms began long strokes. He had long since kicked off his troublesome shoes; the very vigor needed in this swim was the test that he had needed. Unhampered, The Shadow lengthened his strokes toward that floating goal that he had taken.

As he neared the object, he saw that his surmise had been correct. A man was clinging to the life buoy, paddling weakly at intervals. Unlike The Shadow's boat, the buoy had afforded no shield against the white-capped swells. The floater had probably spent much effort in keeping his head above water.

With overarm strokes, The Shadow reached the buoy and gripped the nearer side. A pale face turned in his direction; eyes opened and lips smiled feebly.

The Shadow shifted his position to aid the wearied man. Though he had not yet learned the fact, The Shadow had found Louis Revoort.

Fellow castaways, they were drifting shoreward and the remaining journey was not far. Already each wave seemed ready to break about them. The last stretch was coming, and it would be grueling for Revoort. It was well that The Shadow had arrived to aid the exhausted man through the surf.

Revoort was sagging when they reached the breakers. The Shadow gripped him, to keep his head above the surging foam. With the life buoy, they bobbed wildly; then, as a big wave passed, The Shadow's feet struck the sand.

Dragging Revoort's sagging form from the life buoy, The Shadow worked against a heavy undertow, pulling his companion toward the shallow water of a shelving beach. Revoort's body was a burden by the time they reached dry land. The Shadow rested him upon the sand.

Revoort needed no resuscitation; but he was too weary to move. The Shadow rose unsteadily and looked along a line of cottages that fronted on the beach. He saw one with curtained windows.

Helping Revoort to his feet, he urged the man to walk. Revoort managed it though he nearly collapsed with every dozen steps.

The Shadow forced a cottage window. He entered and unlocked the front door. He had left Revoort sprawled on the porch; he helped the fellow up again and dragged him into a living room, to place him on a couch.

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This cottage was well furnished. Evidently, its owners visited it some times during the off season. The Shadow found coffee and canned goods in the kitchen; and the gas and the electricity were still connected. All that the cottage lacked was a telephone.

WHEN Revoort opened his eyes from the couch, a hot cup of coffee was awaiting him. He gulped the liquid and felt better. Knowing that this new friend had rescued him, he tried to talk.

"My name," he gasped. "My name – is Revoort. Louis Revoort. I – I was aboard the steamship Tropical –"

The effort was too much. Revoort sagged back upon the couch. The Shadow laid aside the empty cup; then went upstairs in the cottage. He found some khaki trousers and shirts, with a pair of sneakers.

He donned these in place of his water-soaked garb. He also discovered an old but serviceable beach robe in a closet with bathing suits.

He took the robe downstairs, shook Revoort and helped the cutaway out of his wet clothes. He aided Revoort into the beach robe and placed him on the couch.

Revoort mumbled wearily; The Shadow left him lying half asleep. He locked the door of the little cottage and went out by the window.

It was noon when Louis Revoort was again aroused. Refreshed by sleep, he was gladdened by the sight of food and coffee. He sat down at a table to eat and to talk with his rescuer. The Shadow completed the introduction that Revoort had begun earlier.

"My name," he stated, "is Lamont Cranston. I had friends board the Tropical; but I was not on the liner. I came ashore from a tug called the Colonia."

Revoort's eyes opened in amazement.

"The Colonia," continued The Shadow, "was the boat to which a crew of deserters took your iron-bound chest. I suppose they must have stolen it from the purser's office, aboard the Tropical."

Revoort gasped at this news. He wondered how his new friend could have learned about the false treasure chest. Revoort, however, was to gain new surprises.

"The Tropical," resumed The Shadow, "is safe. She is steaming into New York under her own power and will arrive there late this afternoon. My friends dispatched a coded radiogram to New York. They have found your trunk – with the real treasure – and they will land it, with their own luggage."

REVOORT dropped his knife and fork. This was uncanny! Had he talked too much while unconscious? A smile appeared upon The Shadow's oddly streaked face.

"A few miles up the beach," explained The Shadow, "I finally discovered a cottage with a connected telephone. I called New York and I reversed the charges. I learned these meager details. I shall know everything, however, after the Tropical docks. My friends will have a full report."

"But – but who did they send word to in New York?"

"A mutual friend." The Shadow smiled, thinking of Rutledge Mann, an investment broker, who acted as contact between himself and active agents. "Do not worry, Revoort; your secret is safe. The radiogram was

coded; it was a long one pertaining to stock sales, and no one will suspect its real purpose.

"For the present, you can aid matters by giving me the details which I shall surely learn later. I know about your connection with Jurrice; I have also heard of your unknown Cuban friend. The more information you give me, the better I can aid you."

Revoort nodded. He was convinced.

"My Cuban friend," he said, slowly, "is named Carl Ramorez. He is somewhere in New York; he is to communicate with me when I arrive."

"Where?" inquired The Shadow.

"I was to register at the Hotel Legrand," explained Revoort. "Ramorez is to call me there and arrange a meeting. Craig Jurrice does not know that fact; we intended to get together with him later."

"You do not know where Ramorez is at present?"

"No. I can do nothing but register at the Legrand and wait to hear from him."

The Shadow's eyes were keen, almost questioning. Revoort spoke as though impelled by them.

"To protect the treasure," he stated, "I put it in Cabin 222 under the name of a non-existent passenger, J.F. Jenks. I intended to have it claimed later. I had signed as Jenks and could, of course, duplicate the signature that I used.

"I feared trouble. That is why I loaded the original treasure coffer with old metal and put the wealth in the trunk instead. I made the coffer heavy, to give thieves trouble if they tried to filch it."

REVOORT paused to swallow some coffee. He noted that The Shadow was eyeing him closely, studying each gesture that he made. The searching gaze made Revoort twitch nervously. The Shadow smiled.

"Since you played the part of Jenks," he decided, "I shall don the guise of Revoort. There is danger in New York; yet your appointment with Ramorez must be kept."

"You mean," inquired Revoort, puzzled, "that it would be unsafe for me to register at the Hotel Legrand?"

"I do. Therefore, I shall go there in your place. I shall keep the appointment with Ramorez."

"But he will know that you are someone other than myself –"

"He will not. I shall use a disguise that will amaze you, Revoort. When I have completed it, I shall be your double."

"But what – how –"

Revoort stammered helplessly.

"My part," explained The Shadow, "is to offset crime. An evil enemy has backed the game to gain your treasure. He will learn that he has been thwarted. He is in New York; he is my foe as well as yours.

"Who I really am is something that we can discuss later. It is sufficient for you to know that I shall protect both you and your wealth. When we reach New York, I shall be Louis Revoort. You will remain in seclusion, at my home in New Jersey. Your treasure will be safe there with you, until after I – as you – have arranged matters with Carl Ramorez."

"What of Jurrice?"

"Precautions have already been arranged for his safety. At present, however, he is in no danger. You will see Craig Jurrice later."

Louis Revoort sank back with a sigh. He believed in this new friend. Facts had amazed him; he was willing to rely on these astounding promises and to obey all orders. One last iota of doubt still gripped him, however.

"If the Tropical reaches New York this evening," declared Revoort, "I should be there – that is, you should be there – at about the same time. Yet we are hundreds of miles south; both of us, I suppose are penniless –"

"Within three hours," interposed The Shadow, "an autogyro will land outside this cottage. We shall both go aboard; the return trip will enable us to reach Newark airport by early evening. You will go from there to my home; I shall go to the Hotel Legrand. I arranged for the plane when I made my long–distance call.

"Here, in this cottage, before we start our trip, we shall become doubles. New clothes and my required make–up will arrive aboard the autogyro. In the meantime, I should like to view your signature. I shall have to copy it when I register at the Hotel Legrand."

LOUIS REVOORT was nodding in final bewilderment. He had learned the strength of hidden foes; now he had gained knowledge of a friend whose might seemed greater.

Confidence gripped Revoort as he visioned the immediate future. He realized that his rescuer was one who handled every detail; whose plans could not be balked by either time or space.

Revoort's nod was his agreement. His trust was complete. In giving full privilege to The Shadow, he had chosen the one wise course. Beset by many enemies, Revoort had placed his cause in The Shadow's hands. His secret would be kept while he and his treasure gained protection.

The Shadow, too, had attained a mighty purpose. Back from the dead, he was free for his new struggle. Master of vengeance, The Shadow was returning to deal – at equal odds – with his hidden foe, The Python!

CHAPTER XIII. MOVES AT DUSK

THAT same afternoon found Albert Thurney standing at the window of his fourteenth–floor apartment. It was after five o'clock; a clouded, sultry day had brought haziness to Manhattan. Through the gloom of approaching dusk, Thurney could see the glow of blue lights in the distant loft building.

Neon bulbs were wavering. Straining, Thurney caught the signal. A smile showed on his light–complexioned face. So intent was Thurney that he did not hear the approach of footsteps from an inner room of his apartment. He started suddenly when a voice spoke beside him.

"Pardon, Mr. Thurney." The speaker was a droop–faced man who walked with a catlike tread. "I did not wish to disturb you while you watched the lights."

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"It's all right, Warring," approved Thurney, stepping back from the window. "The signals are working now that darkness has arrived. It's time they were moving."

"Quite so, Mr. Thurney. If I might venture to say so, sir, I would suggest that the one weakness in the system is the signal method. Contact is limited only to nighttime –"

"The Python has no weakness, Warring," interrupted Thurney, his tone disapproving. "Moreover, it is not your business, as my valet, to criticize or make undue comment."

"Pardon again," bowed Warring. "I was worried, sir, because of the telegram that you received from Norfolk."

"Duronne's wire?" laughed Thurney. "The one that passed me the news about the phony swag? Well, Warring, the very fact that Duronne communicated with me is proof that contacts can be made without the lights. Moreover, I made a telephoned report regarding the telegram. The flash-backs from the signal tower have begun. The Python knows everything, Warring."

"I do believe he does, sir."

There was profound admiration in Warring's tone as the valet eyed his master. Thurney, apparently, did not notice it. He was placing a cigarette in its holder.

"Work for me, Warring," he remarked. "You stay here while I am out. There may be other telegrams – perhaps a call from Warthrope. You see, Warring" – Thurney nudged his thumb toward the window – "those signals were for me. They mean a job that can't wait too long."

LEAVING his apartment, Thurney hailed a taxi and gave an address on Sixth Avenue, not many squares north of Forty-second Street. He alighted at the entrance of a towering skyscraper and rode by an express elevator to the fortieth floor. He walked to a corner office and read the elaborate legend on the door:

FROTHINGHAM, SYBOLD,

BORNICK AND HAVELDORN

COUNSELORS-AT-LAW

Entering the outer office, Thurney found a lone stenographer. He asked the girl if Mr. Bornick happened to be in his office. The stenographer nodded. Thurney took a chair while the girl went along an inner corridor.

Only one of several small offices was lighted; its door was ajar. The stenographer rapped and entered. Lester Bornick was seated at a huge mahogany desk, staring from the window, which had an eastern exposure.

In his hand, the lawyer held a pad. On it, he was jotting dots and dashes while he watched the slight flicker of distant blue lights.

Suddenly sensing the girl's arrival, Bornick swung quickly in his swivel chair. For a moment, his lips seemed about to deliver an angry outburst; then Bornick quickly regained his calm. He tossed the pad into an open drawer of the desk.

"Mr. Thurney is here, sir," stated the stenographer. "Does he have an appointment with you?"

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"Thurney?" queried Bornick. "Albert Thurney? Ah, yes – I recall him. Young chap, isn't he? Light-complexioned?"

The girl nodded.

"Humph." Bornick stroked his chin. "I promised to see him at his apartment again; I suppose he was tired of waiting to hear from me. Very well – show him in."

The stenographer went out and told Thurney he could enter Bornick's office. Alone at her desk, she pondered over the notes that Bornick had been making. This was the second time that she had surprised the lawyer in such an action. Although she had not noticed the blue lights, the stenographer felt sure that Bornick must have been watching something from the window.

Moreover, the girl wondered why Bornick had been remaining so late in his office. Her duty ended at six o'clock; for the past week, Bornick had stayed after she had gone.

The girl was new to the late shift; nevertheless she had noticed the lawyer's habits and considered it odd because Bornick's daily business affairs were invariably completed before five o'clock.

WHILE the stenographer was still puzzling over the matter, the outer door opened and a weary, hollow-cheeked man entered. He removed his hat to reveal a shining bald pate. He bowed and introduced himself as Danton Califax.

"Mr. Bornick is expecting you," acknowledged the stenographer. "Have a chair, Mr. Califax, while I tell him that you are here."

She went to Bornick's office. This time her rap was answered by a sharp command to enter. Opening the door, the girl found Thurney in conference with Bornick.

"Mr. Califax is here."

"Tell him to come in," ordered Bornick.

As soon as the door closed behind the girl, Bornick arose and strode to the side of the room. He opened another door and pointed to a hallway that joined the main corridor. Thurney arose, nodding, and made his exit. Bornick closed the door and went back to his desk. He was seated there when Califax entered.

"Sorry to have kept you here late, Bornick," began Califax. "But I am troubled about this matter of Revoort. That catastrophe aboard the steamship Tropical may have concerned him."

"Perhaps it did," agreed Bornick, "but why should it concern you, Califax? I thought you had decided to wait until Revoort called to see you; and to let the matter pass if he did not arrive."

"So I did decide. But Jurrice called me today and he seemed quite alarmed. He received a report at noon; apparently Revoort is missing. Jurrice thinks the man met with foul play."

"Not at all an unlikely theory. Again, I ask you, why do you feel concerned?"

"Because," declared Califax, deliberately, "I believe that we should inform the police – or the port authorities – regarding what we know of Revoort. I am convinced, Bornick, that the fire aboard the Tropical was of incendiary origin, started by rascals who sought Revoort's wealth."

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"I see." Bornick smiled. "Jurrice, however, does not want you to inform the law."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he called me also. He was disturbed by your statement that you believed all should be made public. I told him that I would talk to you this afternoon."

"You mean that you agreed with Jurrice?"

"Absolutely. For the present, Califax, no one should make a statement. Give the authorities time to start their investigation. Let them seek facts. If mystery clouds the issue, then make your statement. In spite of Jurrice.

"Right now, however, you would be taking a most unwise course. You are not involved in any manner. You merely chanced to know that one passenger aboard the Tropical was supposed to have a fortune with him.

"Perhaps Revoort is safe. His wealth may be on board, secure from harm. You were never in his confidence; it was Jurrice – not Revoort – who talked to you. I am still your counselor, Califax. I advise no hasty step."

THE convincing words brought a slow nod from Califax. Bornick perched his elbow on the desk and wagged a heavy finger.

"If Jurrice calls you again," he stated, "state that you have given me full discretion in this matter. Let me handle Jurrice, while I watch the reports concerning Revoort. Should the time come to speak, the duty will be mine."

"I suppose you are right, Bornick," decided Califax. "After all, the whole thing lies between Jurrice and Revoort. Yet if robbery is uncovered, I shall be ill at ease. There have been many jewel thefts lately. I have gems of my own; and they may be sought."

"Don't worry." Bornick shook his head. "Certain of those past robberies concerned my own clients; and I know for a fact that the crooks were after large hauls. They knew the extent of the valuables before they went after them."

"Some persons have seen my gems," reminded Califax. "One man in particular, whom I did not like. A young upstart, who still persists in calling upon my niece, Patricia. I believe you met him, Califax – the fellow's name was Thurney. Albert Thurney."

"I know him," nodded Bornick. "I called at his apartment a few times, to look over some plans for a stock company which he wants to promote. Mining enterprises, that look quite substantial; but I think his game may be to have me recommend him to my friends.

"Should I do so, I would have difficulty in checking on his later activities. He might offer bad stocks along with the good. He might have various swindles up his sleeve."

"Could he be looking for opportunities to rob?"

"I don't think so, Califax. No, this chap Thurney doesn't strike me as bad as all that. Forget the fellow; I'm keeping an eye on him."

Bornick arose, shook hands with his visitor and ushered Califax to the door. Returning to his desk, the lawyer took the swivel chair and turned to the window. He sat with one hand on the telephone, delaying some

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intended call while he watched to see if blue lights blinked again.

MEANWHILE, Albert Thurney had reached a new destination. This was a crowded office in Manhattan's downtown section. Close to Wall Street, with broad windows fronting on a thoroughfare, this office had become a thronging point for anxious-eyed persons who were watched by curious crowds outside the door. It was the headquarters of the Coastal Mercantile Marine, owners of the steamship Tropical.

Thurney gained admittance because of his businesslike manner. Strolling to a quiet corner, he watched men behind the counter as they talked to worried persons who had friends and relatives aboard the steamship. The employees were assuring everyone that the Tropical would arrive within a few hours.

A list of passengers had been posted; most of these names were checked as those of persons who were safe. The captain of the Tropical had radioed all obtainable information; it was possible, however, that some passengers had been absent from the roll calls.

AMONG the group about the board was a tall man with heavy mustache, whose face was dark-complexioned. He was not conspicuous, for several South Americans were present and he looked like one of their number. In fact, Thurney did not notice him as he walked over to the counter and spoke confidentially to a clerk.

"My name," informed the dark man in an undertone, "is Carl Ramorez. I am concerned about a passenger named Louis Revoort, who may be missing from the Tropical."

He ceased his smoothly purred English to give the clerk a card. "Here is my address. Kindly notify me at once if you receive definite word of Mr. Revoort."

The clerk nodded and pocketed the card. Ramorez went back to study the board. A wiry young man arrived at the counter and introduced himself as Clyde Burke of the Classic. The clerk asked him to wait and see the office manager.

"Here he comes now," concluded the clerk, pointing to a door marked "Private," which had opened. "Stay right here, Mr. Burke. I shall introduce you to Mr. Roquil."

The manager was coming from his office; with him was a talkative, pale-faced man. Sounds of the fellow's speech reached three listeners: Thurney, Ramorez and Burke.

"There must be some way of learning!" was the pale-faced man's protest. "I must know about my friend, Louis Revoort! At once, I tell you! It is vital!"

"Be calm, Mr. Jurrice," insisted the manager. "The Tropical will arrive within a few hours. I can give you a pass to visit the pier."

"That won't do!" returned Jurrice. "You must radio the ship and get word back to me. At once!"

"Very well. I shall do so. Do you wish to remain in my office?"

"No. I shall be at my apartment. You have the name – the Bragelonne – and the number of my suite is 602."

"All right, Mr. Jurrice."

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Feverishly, Jurrice pushed his way toward the door. Clyde Burke turned promptly, about to follow him; but the clerk gripped Clyde's arm and began to introduce the reporter to the manager. Clyde could do nothing but remain, to gain a statement for the Classic.

"That fellow Jurrice has been in my office for hours," explained Roquil. "That is why I could not see you before, Mr. Burke. Here – I have prepared a typewritten statement from the company. Let us go over it together."

CARL RAMOREZ had heard Craig Jurrice state his name and address. A gleam had come upon the Cuban's dark, mustached face. The crowd had closed after Jurrice's departure.

Ramirez suddenly began to fight his way through. This action was observed by Thurney. The Coilmaster's lips tightened, in expression of a sudden guess.

Again the throng had jammed; it was as futile for Thurney to pursue Ramirez as for the Cuban to overtake Jurrice. However, Thurney lost no time in forcing his way to the street.

Once there, he hurried to a corner drug store and found a telephone booth. He dialed a number. The response was an odd croak from the receiver.

"Four," spoke Thurney, by way of identification. "Jurrice returning to his apartment. Half an hour needed for trip. Observed by man who may be the Cuban. Observer also left steamship office. All."

Again the croak. This time it was an acknowledgment. Thurney hung up and left the cigar store. He returned to the steamship office, where Clyde Burke was still engaged with Roquil. Thurney waited a few minutes; then saw the reporter leave.

Cornering the manager, Thurney asked for a pass to the pier. His tone was anxious; Roquil supposed him to be one who had friends aboard the Tropical. Thurney received the pass without question. Smiling his satisfaction, The Python's Coilmaster strolled from the office.

Warring, the valet, had mentioned a weak point when he had spoken of the weakness in The Python's contact system. That blue-lighted signal tower, the strongest weapon in The Python's arsenal, was useless during daylight hours. Thurney had recognized the fact, despite his statement that The Python had no weaknesses.

The Python's time of strength was night; and early darkness had brought his period of power. Many hours had been lost; but the set-back had been regained.

Albert Thurney had taken on the task of watching Craig Jurrice, to learn if the man had contacted Revoort's unknown Cuban friend.

Luck had favored Thurney. He had heard Jurrice talk; he had spotted a man who might be the Cuban. Contact, perhaps, was coming soon. Thurney had reported the fact to the croaking man across the wire. The Python had gained news which might well prove useful in his insidious schemes.

CHAPTER XIV. THE BROKEN INTERVIEW

IT took Craig Jurrice nearly fifty minutes to reach the Hotel Bragelonne. He had chosen to make the trip by cab. Traffic was heavy at this hour and the taxi was stalled frequently on its trip.

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Hence Jurrice, when he reached the apartment hotel, was both impatient and annoyed. He strode into an elevator and was taken promptly to the sixth floor.

Clyde Burke arrived five minutes later. He entered the lobby and approached the desk. He arrived just in time to hear an argument between two clerks. One was rising from the telephone switchboard, where he was on temporary duty.

"You gave Mr. Jurrice the message then?" inquired the one behind the desk. "When was that?"

"When he stopped for his key," replied the man from the switchboard. "See? It's gone from the box."

"Where's the other one then?"

"There was only one message, that told him to wait for a second call."

"I know there was only one message. I mean, where's the other key?"

"That's right – there should be two. Doesn't Jurrice usually carry one, though?"

"Yes. That's why there should be one here in the box. Unless, like most everybody, he forgets it occasionally and leaves it in his room when he locks the automatic door."

"Then why worry about it? Jurrice has his key. I gave him the message. His call has come and he's answering it from his apartment."

Laughing, the clerk went back to the switchboard. His companion nodded, apparently realizing his own dumbness. He saw Clyde and waited for the reporter's question.

"I should like to speak to Mr. Jurrice," stated Clyde. "His apartment is 602, I believe?"

"Yes," replied the clerk, "but his line's busy. We'll ring him later."

Clyde took a chair. He felt relieved; for he had made speed in coming here. Clyde had haunted the steamship office all during the afternoon, keeping tabs on Jurrice's stay in Roquill's office. For this was actually Clyde's day off at the Classic; and he was keeping to the special task of watching Jurrice.

Jurrice's nervous behavior at the steamship office; his open speech in front of witnesses – these combined elements had made Clyde decide that the emergency had come.

If Jurrice intended to keep talking about Revoort, Clyde knew of a place where he could chatter in security. The game was to get Jurrice there.

The fact that Jurrice was talking on the telephone gave Clyde the assurance that all was well for the present. He did not see how Jurrice could be complicating matters by a telephone call. Had Clyde been able to listen in on that busy wire, his opinion might have changed.

IN the little living room of Suite 602, Craig Jurrice was making statements that concerned his connection with Louis Revoort. Moreover, he was repeating words that came across the wire, thus giving an indication of what was being said at the other end. For Jurrice, hard upon his return to the Bragelonne, had received a call from Revoort's Cuban friend, Ramorez.

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"You saw me at the steamship office?" Jurrice was saying. "Yes. I was there... Yes, inquiring for Revoort... I see; you decided not to speak to me there... Very wise... I said very wise, Senor Ramorez..."

"Yes. I feel confident that you are Revoort's friend... Yes, he told me that he would visit the mountain slopes of Vuelta Abajo... Also that he would have to go by boat upon the Cauto River... That is correct; he first went to the Isle of Pines... Positively, senor. You do not need to convince me any further..."

"Ah! So you were to communicate with Revoort? I see... At the Legrand Hotel?... This is real news. I should like to know more about it... What's that? You're only a few blocks from here? Good... Certainly; it would be wiser for me to come and see you..."

"Yes. I have pencil and paper... Carl Ramorez... The address? Yes... Yes... I have jotted it down... I know the place... You may expect me quite soon, senor..."

Jurrice completed the jotting with his pencil. He concluded his call and placed the French telephone upon its stand. His nervousness had eased; his pale face showed color. Though still worried about Revoort, Jurrice felt more confidence since hearing directly from this man Ramorez.

Jurrice had believed Revoort's story of a rich Cuban who sought the reclaimed treasure. All along, Jurrice had wanted to know the man's identity. Today – had he been able – he would have contacted Ramorez; but had not known who the man might be or where he was. To hear from Ramorez at this hour had been more than Jurrice had hoped.

Taking off his brown coat and vest, Jurrice hung the garments over his arm and started toward the door of his bedroom. He stopped long enough to pick up the sheet of paper on which he had written the Cuban's name and address.

Passing through the open doorway, he turned on the bedroom light and closed the door behind him. He was whistling softly as he performed these actions; his closing of the door cut off the sound of the melody.

DOWNSTAIRS, Clyde Burke was becoming impatient. The clerk at the switchboard had found some other business; and had left his chair. When he returned, Clyde saw him pull out some plugs. Clyde wondered if Jurrice's call had been concluded; but the clerk gave no such indication.

The man at the desk had strolled away when the other returned. Three or four minutes passed. Clyde decided to make another inquiry. He went over to the switchboard.

"What about Mr. Jurrice?" he questioned. "I thought you were going to tell him I was here."

"Did you want to see Mr. Jurrice?"

"Certainly. Didn't you hear me speak to the man at the desk?"

"No. What's more, he didn't tell me. Wait. I'll ring Mr. Jurrice for you."

The clerk plugged in and moved the switch. There was no response. The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess he's on his way downstairs," he declared. "Probably going out to dinner. He was talking on the telephone seven or eight minutes ago; but he doesn't answer now."

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Clyde loitered in the lobby two minutes longer. Then, impatient when Jurrice did not appear, he entered an elevator and rode up to the sixth. Clyde found the door marked 602. He rang a bell. At first there was no response; but after a second attempt, Clyde heard a cheery response through the transom.

"Wait a minute!" It was Jurrice's voice. "I'll be there."

One minute proved to be three. Finally the door opened; Jurrice appeared, attired in a blue-*serge* suit, carrying an overcoat and derby upon one arm. He clicked the light switch as he opened the door; then stepped out into the corridor to face his visitor.

Clyde saw a nervous twitch of Jurrice's lips; he noted a strained face in the pale light. Jurrice, evidently, had not expected to encounter an unknown visitor.

"My name is Burke," informed Clyde. "I'm from the New York Classic."

"A reporter?" queried the man from 602, his voice a bit suspicious. "To see me?"

"Yes." Clyde spoke confidentially and motioned toward the elevator. "We have just received an unconfirmed report that a friend of yours is safe. I refer to Louis Revoort."

JURRICE'S eyes were sharp in the subdued light. They had reached the elevators; Clyde was ringing for a car.

"This is confidential," added Clyde, "and the only way to gain further news is to go to the Classic office. Apparently, Revoort has not told the officers on the Tropical that he is still on board. He spoke only to a friend – evidently someone on the ship –"

"Is the Tropical in port?"

"Not yet. Moreover, Revoort may not land with the other passengers. Suppose you accompany me to the newspaper office."

Jurrice was nodding as the elevator arrived. They descended in silence. In the lobby, Jurrice approached the desk and tossed a key toward the clerk behind the switchboard.

"You have the other key, Mr. Jurrice?" questioned the clerk.

"Certainly." Jurrice drew the key from his pocket. "I had forgotten it the last time I went out. I have it now."

Jurrice accompanied Clyde to the street. The reporter hailed a ready cab. They stepped aboard and Clyde gave the driver the address of the Classic. He began to talk to Jurrice as they rolled along.

"About Revoort," stated Clyde. "This word from him was somewhat mysterious. Apparently a radiogram was sent from the ship to some friend who had been calling our office for news. When we –"

"Stop a moment," interposed Jurrice. "I must make a telephone call. That corner drug store will do. Wait for me here; I won't be long."

The driver heard the statement. He pulled to the curb. Revoort alighted and entered the drug store. Clyde waited for five minutes; then became impatient. He leaned to the driver's seat.

"What do you make of it, Moe?" inquired Clyde.

"Looks like a run-out," returned the hackie, who was a sharp-faced fellow. "Better take a look in the drug store."

Clyde followed the advice. He returned in a few minutes and spoke again to the driver.

"Jurrice pulled a fast one," declared Clyde. "There's a side door to that drug store. He must have ducked out. Let's get back to the Bragelonne."

The driver wheeled his cab. His face was as serious as Clyde's. For Moe Shrevnitz, the hackie, was also in The Shadow's service. His taxi had been waiting to give Jurrice further surety of safety. Moe was wondering why Jurrice had given them the slip.

At the Bragelonne, Clyde entered and inquired if Jurrice had returned. Both clerks were on duty; they said that they had not seen him. It was possible, though, that the man had gone past them.

The fellow at the switchboard rang the room, without an answer. Clyde remembered that he had done that once before, while Jurrice had been in the room; hence this was no proof that Jurrice had not returned.

Both clerks looked suspiciously at Clyde. The reporter decided that a trip upstairs would be unwise. He went out to the street, told Moe to remain in the vicinity, and chose the subway as his own route to the Classic office.

On the way, Clyde decided that Jurrice must have been suspicious of him; or else the man must have had some appointment which he had to keep. Either answer would do as an explanation of Craig Jurrice's odd behavior.

There was another answer which never occurred to Clyde Burke. That answer happened to be the true one concerning Craig Jurrice. For the present – and for hours to come – that answer would remain unguessed.

CHAPTER XV. THE MIDNIGHT MEETING

THE flame-scarred Tropical did not dock until after ten o'clock. The stout ship had encountered heavy weather outside New York harbor; yet it had managed to limp safely into port without the aid of attendant coast guard cutters.

Coming through the upper bay, the liner was greeted by saluting whistles; when the ship docked, a rousing cheer was raised by those who thronged the pier.

Captain Henderly and his crew were heroes; the slightly listing Tropical was a ship that would long be remembered. Those aboard the liner had fought through the greatest of all ocean hazards – fire at sea. They had won their struggle without casualties, except those among mutinous crew members.

One dying crook had blabbed names – among them those of two passengers: Luke Duronne and Hank Slyder. Both were missing; and they were listed as with the mutinous group, for it was apparent that they, too, were crooks.

Yet Captain Henderly was not content. Two other passengers had failed to answer roll call. Though they could not be marked as dead, the skipper doubted that they ever would be found; and that fact made him glum amid the welcome. The two unfortunates whose fate burdened Henderly's mind were Louis Revoort and J.F.

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Jenks.

During the landing of passengers and luggage, there were spying eyes upon the pier. Albert Thurney was on hand; and so were others, members of a different Coil. Doc, the Coilmaster, and a crew of henchmen were present, disguised as longshoremen. They were watching all baggage from the boat.

Among those who came ashore were Harry Vincent and Cliff Marsland. With them, they had a battered, fire-scorched trunk, once the property of the mythical J.F. Jenks.

The trunk went by The Python's watchers. It was taken by a transfer truck for baggage shipment to New Jersey; and its new owners followed it to the ferry in a taxi.

ONE hour after the Tropical had docked, a new guest entered the Legrand Hotel. He signed the register with the name "Louis Revoort," eyeing the clerk as he did so. The man at the desk did not connect the name with the list of passengers aboard the Tropical. He assigned the new guest to Room 810.

Tall, thin and wiry, this newcomer lighted a cigarette as soon as he had entered his room. He puffed his smoke in short, nervous fashion, a simulation of Revoort's own action. In every detail – including the bronzed color of his face – this was Louis Revoort. Actually, however, the new guest was The Shadow.

A telephone bell rang. The Shadow answered it and spoke in Revoort's tone. A quiet voice responded:

"Burbank speaking."

Revoort's tone vanished; it was replaced by a commanding whisper:

"Report."

From Burbank, The Shadow's contact agent, came brief reports. Harry and Cliff had reached a little station in New Jersey; Stanley had met them there, to get the trunk belonging to Mr. J.F. Jenks, who had just arrived as a guest of Lamont Cranston. Cliff, as a friend of Jenks, was going to Cranston's. Harry intended to return to New York.

The Shadow ordered Burbank to have Harry call the Legrand Hotel after his arrival. That done, he heard Burbank's report from Clyde Burke. It told of Jurrice's sudden disappearance. Moe Shrevnitz, Burbank reported, was still outside the Hotel Bragelonne and had not seen Jurrice return.

Had Burbank's report included mention of Carl Ramorez, it might have signified deep doings. Clyde, however, had not noticed Ramorez at the steamship office. So The Shadow acknowledged the report and hung up. In the guise of Louis Revoort, he lounged in an easy-chair while he considered matters for himself.

The Shadow could guess that Jurrice had heard from Ramorez. That would explain why he had slipped away from Clyde. Jurrice would certainly trust Revoort's Cuban friend in preference to an unknown newspaper reporter.

Moreover, he might have made an appointment with Ramorez. While The Shadow speculated thus, the telephone rang again.

A purring voice was on the wire. It inquired for Louis Revoort; The Shadow acknowledged in Revoort's tone. A joyous sigh of real relief was audible on the wire. Then the speaker announced himself as Ramorez.

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"I found your good friend Jurrice," came Ramorez's tone, in smooth English. "He was very unwise, at the steamship office. Fortunately, no harm was done. He is with me at the present. We must all speak together.

"It would be well for you to come to the hotel that I have chosen. It is a very obscure place, where I have kept close hidden. It is called the Cambia; and is much less conspicuous than the hotel where you are staying. Shall we expect you, Senor Revoort?"

"Very soon," returned The Shadow.

"The room," purred the Cuban's voice, "is number 820."

THE SHADOW donned outer garments, adjusting his overcoat to conform to automatics already hidden beneath his suit. He left the Legrand, summoned a cab and drove to the vicinity of the Cambia. The hotel was a second-rate one, located on a side street some distance north and east of Times Square. It fronted on an elevated line.

The lobby which The Shadow entered was uninviting. Dingy and dim, it was occupied only by the clerk behind the desk. The Shadow inquired for Senor Ramorez.

The husky clerk motioned to an elevator, manned by an operator who looked like a bouncer. The Shadow ascended in the clattering lift and stepped off at the eighth floor, which proved to be the top story.

Behind the feigned nervousness of Revoort, The Shadow had been vigilant during the entire trip. He knew that The Python might have been watching Jurrice.

It was also possible that the supercroc had been clever enough to learn something about Ramorez or Revoort's scheduled arrival at the Legrand Hotel, although these possibilities were less likely.

Keeping a constant look-out, The Shadow had spied no signs of lurkers. This proved that The Python's henchmen were not about; for such underlings could not have dodged The Shadow's observation. This eighth floor of the Cambia Hotel was utterly deserted; that was an additional good omen.

Carl Ramorez had chosen poor quarters; but that did not surprise The Shadow. He knew that the Cuban was low in funds and practically in hiding. Moreover, Ramorez was a foreigner and in a district such as this would be less conspicuous. There was quite a difference between the Cambia and Jurrice's hotel, the Bragelonne, which was many blocks distant and in a much better neighborhood.

Knocking at the door of Room 820, The Shadow was admitted by a tall, dark-skinned man with a heavy mustache, who answered the description of Carl Ramorez. Passing a narrow entrance by a closet door, The Shadow reached the main portion of a plainly furnished room.

Chairs were drawn up beside a half-opened window, for the night had proven warm. Ramorez purred a greeting and indicated one chair. As The Shadow took it, he noted a closed door beyond; and surmised that it led into an adjoining room.

Apparently, the Cambia, despite its dinginess, had been recently made fireproof. Doors were of metal; so were the small-paned sashes of the window. The bed and the desk, though plain, were also of metal construction. The chairs were simple, but of heavy wood, stained to resemble mahogany. The carpet, though plain, was new.

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"Ah, señor," remarked Ramorez, who had closed the outer door, "You have been surprised at this fine room in such an old hotel. It is one of very few; they have not completed the making over of this place. I was lucky to obtain it.

"But tell me, señor" – the Cuban's tone showed anxiety – "how was it that you were safe upon the steamship Tropical? Our friend Jurrice has spoken with a reporter, who told him that you might be safe. I was lucky to guess who Jurrice was; he has been here to speak with me."

"Where is he at present?"

"Senor Jurrice? Where he should have gone before. To the newspaper office – or to the dock – I do not know which. He was not certain when he went from here. But it was best, so we thought, that you and I should first talk alone. The treasure, señor. Come – tell me – is it safe?"

"Quite safe."

THE SHADOW had noted Ramorez's eyes. They had looked him over shrewdly, as if the Cuban sought to make sure that this visitor was really his old friend Revoort. To the average person in disguise, the action would have indicated that Ramorez had discerned some flaw in the make-up. The Shadow's thoughts, however, were quite different.

He knew that his guise of Revoort was perfect in every detail; that Carl Ramorez – or Craig Jurrice – could not have told him from Louis Revoort had both doubles come here together. With Revoort standing before him in that Maryland cottage, The Shadow had made himself into the man's mirrored reflection.

There was a different reason for Carl Ramorez's doubt. The Cuban had some cause – one that he could not manage to conceal – for believing that Louis Revoort could not be here in person. Even his greeting had shown it. Instead of asking breathlessly about the treasure, he had first talked of the room; then given an excuse for the absence of Craig Jurrice.

These facts had made The Shadow glimpse Ramorez keenly; and he had gained further knowledge by his glance. He had discerned about the Cuban certain points of facial contour that did not tally with Revoort's description of Ramorez.

Unfortunately, The Shadow had not gained his full conclusion until the door was locked and he found himself seated opposite the man who had received him. It was then, when the dark man smiled, that The Shadow knew the entire truth.

This smooth-voiced caller who had summoned The Shadow to a midnight meeting was also in disguise. He had donned a deceptive make-up; but it had not baffled the keen-eyed visitor. This man who called himself Carl Ramorez was none other than The Python!

This room that the supercrook had chosen for his present abode was a specially fitted chamber. Those metal doors were the fronts of pill boxes, wherein henchmen lurked. The room was a death trap; any attempt to reach the outer door would mean the instant roar of doom-dealing guns.

ONCE more The Shadow was within The Python's power; and to add to his dilemma, The Shadow had gained further understanding. He knew that The Python must have had aids on watch at the pier; that the master crook was positive that Louis Revoort had not come ashore from the steamship Tropical.

Acquainted with The Shadow's prowess, The Python must surely have guessed of that escape from beneath the East River. Contrarily, The Python had probably not heard of the episode aboard the *Colonia*, for those on the tug had been out of touch with their evil chief – too much so to have bothered with details of a chance supercargo whom they had pitched overboard.

As Carl Ramorez, The Python had called the Legrand Hotel. Answered by Louis Revoort, he had made a cunning guess; he had decided that it would be easier for The Shadow to be there as Revoort than for Revoort to be at the Legrand in person.

Thus did The Shadow reason; and the correctness of his deductions proved the direness of his present situation. For his one slight advantage – his recognition of The Python – was counterbalanced by circumstance. The Python, in turn, had guessed that his visitor was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. SMOOTH STRATEGY

ONCE as Cranston; now as Revoort. For the second time, The Shadow faced The Python. His adversary, too, had assumed a double guise. No longer a stooped, bewigged old man, The Python had taken on the identity of Carl Ramorez. But though the parts they played were different, in each instance, circumstances stood the same. The Shadow was in The Python's power.

Grueling had been The Shadow's adventures since he had last seen The Python. He had been consigned to one of the master villain's merciless Coils; he had escaped that band only to encounter another crew, equally as vicious. Finally free, The Shadow had fared forth on a new mission, only to find himself once more beneath the domination of the most formidable foe who had ever opposed him.

Struggles for self-preservation. Such had been The Shadow's conflicts with The Python. Again, the odds were turned against The Shadow. His role of Louis Revoort was known by that foe who had assumed the mask of Carl Ramorez.

Still holding the smooth purring tone of Ramorez, The Python was talking of the reclaimed treasure. He was pouring forth deep thanks to his friend Louis Revoort, commending him for his efforts, for the hardships that he had undergone to aid a poor refugee. With such words did The Python camouflage the gloating which he felt. He was hiding a double victory: a chance to gain a vast fortune; and an opportunity to finally destroy The Shadow.

Nervously, The Shadow lighted a cigarette. His action was still a simulation of Revoort's usual manner. At heart, The Shadow felt no fear. The helplessness of his position was actually inspiring him to swift deduction. As he listened to The Python's pretended gratitude – Ramorez to Revoort – The Shadow was visualizing his enemy's own schemes.

Since The Python had guessed that The Shadow would come here as Revoort, why had The Python not taken even more precaution? In a sense, this trap could be made a double one. Though covered by hidden gunners, The Shadow, by superspeed, could manage to whip out an automatic and drill The Python before the marksmen fired.

Surely The Python knew of The Shadow's speed with guns; moreover, The Python had seen proof of The Shadow's disdain for death. With escape blocked, The Shadow could seek solace in double doom, eliminating The Python with himself. The Python certainly must have taken that possibility under consideration.

One answer flashed through The Shadow's brain. The Python, with the egotism of all supercrooks, had prided himself on greater keenness than The Shadow. Though he had guessed that Louis Revoort might prove to be

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The Shadow, The Python had been confident that The Shadow would not see through the guise of Carl Ramorez.

The supercrook thought that his own game was a complete deception. He did not know that The Shadow had recognized him as The Python. Such was The Shadow's realization; and with it, he gained his plan of strategy. The Shadow must continue to act the role of Louis Revoort; and with it, accept The Python as his friend, Carl Ramorez.

"I have given you thanks," purred on The Python, "knowing that you, my friend, must have brought my lost wealth safely ashore. Tell me, Revoort: did you have trouble when that terrible fire burst loose aboard the steamship?"

"I did," replied The Shadow, in Revoort's tone. "Trouble then and before. Ramorez, crooks were after your fortune. They were on my trail even before I boarded the Tropical."

"Yet you outmanaged them?"

"YES." The Shadow laid the cigarette aside. He knew that The Python must have heard from the Colonia, enough to have learned that the stolen coffer held no swag. "You see, I brought your treasure in its original chest. But before I went aboard the Tropical, I transferred it to an ordinary trunk."

"Which you kept in your own stateroom?"

"No. That would have been unwise. I hired another cabin under the name of J.F. Jenks. I placed the trunk in that room. The coffer went in the purser's strong box."

"Did your enemies start the fire?"

"I believe so. The purser, I hear, died before the blaze began. A lifeboat left the liner, manned by supposed deserters. I believe that they may have taken the coffer. I do not know; because I did not inquire."

"Why not?"

"Because my life was in danger. I was attacked and almost thrown overboard." Speaking casually, The Shadow knew that The Python could not have learned of Revoort's trip ashore on the life buoy. Those who had attacked Revoort were dead.

"Yet you were rescued," purred The Python, in the tone of Ramorez. "Come, my friend, tell me who gave you aid."

"Two men," stated The Shadow. "One was named Vincent; but he did not tell me the name of his companion. Both were passengers; some unknown friend had delegated them to protect me. They kept me hidden in their cabin. They brought my trunk ashore."

"But how did you –"

"How did I come ashore?" The Shadow smiled in Revoort's fashion. "In a larger trunk, which had previously held the luggage of my rescuers. They saw to it that both trunks were carefully handled."

"And they brought you and the treasure to the Legrand Hotel?"

THE PYTHON

"No. I came there alone. Vincent and his friend are holding the treasure."

A feigned look of alarm appeared upon The Python's darkly disguised visage. The Shadow raised one hand.

"Do not worry," he assured. "I am confident of the loyalty shown by those two men. I told Vincent to call me at the Legrand Hotel. He is to deliver the trunk there when we are ready."

"To deliver it to you, Revoort?"

"Or to you, Ramorez."

"You told him of me?"

"Certainly."

The Python considered. The Shadow watched him quietly; than spoke a suggestion. His tone was troubled.

"It might be wise for me to remain here," he said. "I do not like to be seen about New York, for I am listed as missing from the Tropical. If you go alone, you will have no difficulty."

"Would it be possible?" queried The Python, smoothly, "to have the trunk delivered here?"

"Very difficult," returned The Shadow. "Vincent may already have it close to the Legrand Hotel. We arranged absolutely for it to be brought to my own room there. Possibly he has already telephoned and is puzzled because I am not back. Suppose I call the Legrand Hotel from here?"

THE SHADOW'S tone was still deceiving. To The Python, it meant that he still thought he was talking to Carl Ramorez. It was clever strategy by The Shadow, this present simulation of Louis Revoort. It threw the burden of a false move on The Python, who was anxious to preserve the deception that he thought existed.

"Very well."

The Python picked up a telephone and handed it to The Shadow, who called the Legrand Hotel. He stated that he was Louis Revoort, and would like to talk to Mr. Vincent. There was a pause while Harry Vincent was being paged. Finally came the announcement that Mr. Vincent was in the lobby, and would soon be on the wire. The Shadow gave this information to The Python.

"Hello..." The Shadow was speaking to Harry Vincent. "Hello... Yes, this is Revoort. I have instructions for you, regarding the trunk... Yes. Here they are. I'll repeat them..."

The Shadow looked over the top of the telephone, toward The Python. He spoke slowly, so the pretended Ramorez would hear his exact statements, as he talked to Harry Vincent.

"Do not inform anyone of my arrival... The police must not know that Louis Revoort is in town... Bring the trunk to my room at the Legrand... You can have the truckmen help you. Pay them and get the money from me tomorrow..."

"Whoever you meet tonight is to be there by my order... Do not wait for me to come... Call me yourself tomorrow... I can announce myself then because there will be no need of any great secrecy... There will be no danger to my plans after tomorrow..."

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A brief acknowledgment came over the wire. The Shadow hung up the receiver, placed the telephone on the table and resumed his chair. His glance at The Python told him that the disguised crook had not caught slight emphasis on certain words. Harry Vincent alone had noted their import.

Those stressed words had borne this message:

"Inform the police Louis Revoort is at the Legrand. Have them get whoever is there. Do not come yourself because of great danger."

The emphasized words nullified all else. Harry Vincent would stay away; the Cuban treasure would not be delivered. Instead, the law would appear to investigate Louis Revoort's odd reappearance. Not finding Revoort, the police would hold and question whoever might be in his place, providing that Harry Vincent made the situation seem strong enough.

"Whoever is there –"

So had The Shadow ordered; and by "whoever," he had meant The Python. Already, the pretended Ramorez was donning hat and coat, ready to fare forth in quest of the missing wealth.

"Make yourself comfortable, Revoort," he was purring. "Sit right where you are, in that chair by the window. Good–by, my friend. When you hear the ring of the telephone, be sure to answer. It will be myself, telling you that the work is finished!"

WITH this assurance, The Python swung to the door and went out into the corridor. The Shadow leaned back in his chair. He had caught the double significance of The Python's words. The crook had addressed his hidden Coil members, telling them that when the telephone rang, they were to eliminate The Shadow.

Though The Python had not suspected The Shadow's clever ruse, he wanted to be sure of holding the treasure before he ordered the doom of the person who controlled it. The Shadow had foreseen that The Python would act in such fashion.

The Shadow's part was to keep on with his pretence. He had taken off his hat and coat; rising from his chair, he lighted a cigarette and strolled over by the window. The farther he kept away from the outer door, the more would the waiting assassins be lulled in their vigil. Without The Python to combat him, The Shadow might find some chance for a break. He wanted time to consider opportunities.

Meanwhile, he had given The Python some coming troubles of his own. Leaving The Shadow in an air–tight trap, the master crook was faring forth on a quest that would result in his own ensnarement. This was better than a stalemate.

The Shadow, however, was not thinking further of The Python. He was watching his own actions, avoiding any false step that might start lurking hair–triggers into a barrage from under cover.

While minutes passed, The Shadow lingered, smoking by the window. Across low, squalid buildings, he saw a blackened structure where blue lights shone from one high upper story. As he watched, The Shadow saw those neon bulbs quiver. They blinked from corners; paused; then wavered anew.

No change came on The Shadow's disguised countenance. Yet in those flashes, six minutes after The Python's departure, he saw significant meaning. The Shadow, though still a prisoner hoping for escape, had spied The Python's signal room and had guessed the purpose which it served.

CHAPTER XVII. DEATH UNCOVERED

THOSE blue lights of The Python's secret tower were visible in many portions of Manhattan. Yet the luminous quiver passed, unnoticed even by persons who would have reason to investigate the mysterious flickers.

The lights were visible, for instance, to the two occupants of a small police car, speeding northward. Neither man, however, chanced to glance in the direction of the tremulous glare.

Perhaps this pair could not be blamed for their lack of observation. They were concerned with their own business; and it promised odd developments. For one occupant of the red roadster was a police sergeant named Markham; while the other was Clyde Burke. Markham was grunting in noncommittal fashion while the reporter quizzed him.

"Why all the mystery, Markham?" questioned Clyde, as the car lost its view of the unnoticed blue light. "Frankly, I don't get it. You flag me when I'm coming out of the Classic office and tell me to hop aboard. Then you start driving places, without telling me where or why."

"Joe Cardona will talk to you," returned Markham, gruffly. "He's acting inspector in charge of this case."

"That's something to know, Markham," commented Clyde. "So I'm going to have the inside track on a story Joe dug up for me. That's good for a starter."

"Maybe not so good," remarked Markham, cryptically. "Maybe you'll be due to do some talking of your own, Burke. Wait and see."

The car swung left. It rolled along a secluded street, made another series of turns and finally pulled up in front of a large building. For the first time, Clyde recognized the exact neighborhood.

"Get out," ordered Markham. "This is where Cardona is waiting."

"It – it's the Hotel Bragelonne," stammered Clyde. "Say, Markham – I know a fellow who lives here. I – I came up here this evening –"

"We know all that, Burke. Come along with me; we're going in."

Uniformed officers were in the lobby, a policeman was in the elevator. Clyde wondered as he saw these changes. He entered the lift with Markham; the car stopped at the sixth floor. Even then, Clyde was still bewildered.

Markham urged him to the open door of Suite 602. They entered Jurrice's living room. Joe Cardona, stocky, swarthy detective, was waiting to receive them. Ace of New York sleuths, Cardona had been appointed as acting inspector.

"Hello, Burke," greeted Cardona. "Come on in the next room. Something there I want you to see."

THEY entered the bedroom. Clyde stopped short. Across the room, near the opened door of a closet, lay an outstretched body. Beside the corpse stood a police surgeon. Clyde, however, was scarcely conscious of the physician's presence. His eyes were focused on the body; and as he gazed, Clyde gasped.

"Jurrice!" was the reporter's ejaculation. "Craig Jurrice! Murdered! Who – who did it, Joe?"

THE PYTHON

"That's what we're trying to find out," retorted the ace, "and you're here to help us, Burke. As far as we know, you were the last person to talk with him. Is that right?"

Clyde nodded.

"I met Jurrice shortly before seven o'clock," stated the reporter. "We went out together and took a cab. He was coming with me to the Classic office; but he must have changed his mind. He left the cab to make a telephone call and did not return."

"Where did he leave the cab?"

"At a drug store three or four blocks from here."

"What did you do then?"

"I came back here, thinking that Jurrice might have returned. I called his room from the lobby. He did not answer."

Clyde's answers were direct; they impressed Cardona. After a short pause, the ace detective put another question.

"Where did you first meet Jurrice, Burke? Tonight, I mean. Was it in the lobby, or up here?"

"Up here, Joe. In the corridor, outside this suite."

"Jurrice was in the corridor when you arrived?"

"No. I had to ring the bell for him. He came out and locked the door behind him. He had his hat and coat on when I introduced myself."

"Just why did you come to see Jurrice?"

"Because he had a friend who was reported missing from the steamship Tropical. I learned of Jurrice's anxiety, when I was at the steamship office this afternoon. I wanted Jurrice to come with me to the Classic office, to tell the city editor about his missing friend. Revoort was the name of the missing man."

"What was the idea? A scoop for the Classic?"

"Yes. I had a hunch there might be a mystery in Revoort's disappearance. If I could coax a story from Jurrice, it might have been a big one."

"Why didn't you interview him here?"

"I wanted witnesses, in case he gave a yarn that he would later deny. It looked hot, Joe; I couldn't take chances."

Cardona stalked over toward Jurrice's body; Clyde followed him and stood beside the ace detective.

"Strangled," was Cardona's verdict. "Look at those bulging eyes, Burke. Choked to death by some killer who never gave him a chance. The murderer was probably hiding in the closet, to snag Jurrice when he came there. We found the body in the closet."

THE PYTHON

"How did you learn of the murder?" inquired Clyde.

"The valet was working late," replied Cardona. "He came up with a suit for Jurrice. When he found the door locked, he had the elevator man admit him with a pass-key. The valet went to hang the suit in the closet. The body tumbled out when he opened the door.

"I've quizzed the night clerks, Burke; and the elevator men, too. They remember Jurrice going out with you; and you coming back alone. None of them are sure just when Jurrice came in himself. He seldom stopped at the desk; the elevator man had so many people going up and down that he couldn't tell just who was in or out."

"Why did you send Markham for me?"

"Because I didn't want the story to leak out until I'd heard your statement. You're a witness, not a reporter, in this case. You're the last man who can swear that he saw Jurrice alive."

"You mean that he was murdered hours ago?"

Cardona nodded toward the police surgeon, who spoke, in turn, to Clyde.

"CRAIG JURRICE died at approximately seven o'clock," informed the physician. "His death was due to strangulation. My examination proves that he has been dead for at least five hours. It is now after midnight."

"It was pretty close to seven when Jurrice and I went out together," mused Clyde. "If he came back here in a hurry, he would have arrived by five minutes past seven – maybe earlier. But he didn't answer when we rang for him."

"That doesn't help," grunted Cardona. "Maybe he didn't come in until right after you left. On the contrary, he might already have been dead – or being murdered at the very time you called."

"When I was first in the lobby," recalled Clyde, "Jurrice didn't answer when I rang him. That's why I came up here. What's more, he was slow in answering my ring at the door. Maybe he was in this bedroom, getting dressed; but it seems odd that he didn't –"

The telephone bell interrupted. Joe Cardona answered; then put his hand over the mouthpiece.

"It's headquarters, Burke," Cardona told Clyde. "Some call from the Classic. They must have seen you meet up with Markham and figured you'd gone there. Shall I tell them you'll call the office?"

Clyde nodded. Joe gave the information. He hung up and handed the telephone to Clyde, who put in a call to the Classic. Clyde's talk was brief.

"I'll be in later," he stated. "What's that? No... Nothing important... Well – have him call me here... Hotel Bragelonne, Room 602... Just here with some friends. I can't get away from here for a while..."

Hanging up, Clyde turned to Cardona with a grin. He knew that the ace would be pleased by the bluff.

"I'm working with you, Joe," informed Clyde. "You heard what I told them. Nothing important."

"But you told them where you were located –"

THE PYTHON

"I had to. The fellow who answered said the Old Man wanted to talk to me. That's why I said for him to call me here. He probably won't, because he'll think I'm coming back to the office. But if he does, Joe, I'll bluff him, too."

Clyde was pulling another bluff as he spoke. The speaker from the Classic office had said nothing whatever about a talk with the city editor. He had told Clyde that a friend had called and was quite anxious to speak to him. Clyde had paved the way for prompt communication, once the friend had made a repeat call to the Classic to learn Clyde's whereabouts.

"We can't learn anything about this fellow Jurrice," began Cardona. "You've brought us the only dope, Burke. We have no line on any friends; but this fellow Revoort may turn out to be somebody of importance.

"But you say Revoort was missing from the Tropical. That hits me odd, because practically all of the passengers were saved. I haven't seen the final list of those aboard the Tropical; but I'll check up on it mighty quick.

"One man missing from the steamship. Another found strangled in his apartment. It doesn't sound healthy to me. Particularly since there's been talk of sabotage aboard the Tropical. Some torch may have started that blaze."

CARDONA paused to ponder; then added:

"There may have been murder on the steamship, too. The port authorities are ready to investigate the death of the purser, which occurred the night the fire started. If they find out –"

Cardona broke off. The telephone had again sounded its interruption. Clyde reached for the instrument and answered. He gave a nod to Cardona and whispered:

"It's the Old Man. I'll stall him."

Actually, Clyde had recognized the voice of Burbank. Quiet, steady-toned, the contact man was relaying word from The Shadow, received through Harry Vincent. Clyde's responses were terse and cagy.

"Yes... I see... Certainly. I'll tell the police... Best for me to do it... Sure, I know right where Joe Cardona can be reached... Yes. Louis Revoort... Legrand Hotel... Whoever is there... I get it. Yes. It is important... Count on me to have it handled..."

Clyde was thinking quickly as he hung up. He had not been able to tell Burbank of Jurrice's death. He had merely been able to receive the order which insisted that the law be stirred to immediate action against an unknown foe. But Clyde had realized instantly that Jurrice's death could be used as a wedge to rouse Cardona into drastic action.

Clyde knew that he must keep up the bluff by pretending that the call came from the Classic office. He also saw that he could use his own imagination to weave a plausible story that would impress the acting inspector. Finished with the telephone, Clyde wheeled to Cardona and began an excited fabrication.

"They've located Louis Revoort!" exclaimed the reporter. "The fellow who is supposed to be missing from the Tropical! He's at the Legrand Hotel, registered under his own name. But they didn't want to chance calling him. This looks like a police case, Joe."

"How do you make that out?"

THE PYTHON

"Revoort hasn't reported to anybody. That's bad business, isn't it? Maybe he didn't come in on the Tropical. Maybe –"

"Maybe he was the fellow who got Jurrice!" exclaimed Cardona. "I get it now, Burke. Revoort could have told Jurrice that he was on the steamship. That would have given him a chance to alibi himself."

"THERE'S another possibility, Joe," put in Clyde, wisely. "From the way Jurrice talked, I'd have sworn that he and Revoort were real friends. Revoort being under cover doesn't mean that he's a crook. The fact that he registered under his own name is something in his favor. What if Jurrice and Revoort were both in the same mess?"

"That is a hunch," acknowledged Cardona. "A good one, Burke. The two of them may have had an enemy. When Jurrice heard that Revoort was missing, he may have thought his friend had met with foul play."

"And Jurrice was pretty nearly ready to do some talking, Joe. That would account for him being bumped. Tell me – what's going to happen now that Revoort's still alive? When he finds out that Jurrice has been murdered?"

"If Revoort is on the level, he will talk."

"Yes. If he has a chance, Joe. Suppose the murderer learns that Revoort is safe and finds him at the Legrand Hotel –"

The suggestion brought a quick interruption. It was all that Cardona had needed for prompt action. The ace was calling to Markham and to other members of his investigating squad.

"We're going to the Legrand Hotel," Cardona told Clyde. "If we find Revoort there, we'll get him to talk. We'll learn how much he knows about Jurrice and that trouble on the Tropical."

"Suppose, Joe, that you don't find Revoort. Suppose that someone else is there instead of him."

"Then we'll act different. We'll grab whoever is there; and hold him as a suspect. Some stranger, eh? If that's who we find, we'll grab him as the murderer of Craig Jurrice!"

Clyde Burke was elated as he followed Cardona and the squad. Bound for the Legrand Hotel, the law was going in the service of The Shadow. Harry – Burbank – Clyde – all had done their part. The Shadow had ordered a trap for some unsuspecting foe. The law, represented by Joe Cardona, would be there to spring the snare!

CHAPTER XVIII. AT THE LEGRAND HOTEL

IN his trip to the Legrand Hotel, The Python had paused only once. Outside the Cambia, he had stopped long enough to put in a telephone call that would be relayed to some Coilmaster. Such was the explanation of the blinking blue lights that The Shadow had seen from the eighth-floor trap.

Reaching the Legrand, The Python had gone directly to the room that The Shadow had taken under the name of Louis Revoort. He had found the door unlocked; still in the guise of Carl Ramorez, The Python had entered to begin his wait.

Upon one point, The Python had complete confidence. He was positive that he had deceived The Shadow; that the pretended Louis Revoort had not suspected that the mask of Carl Ramorez hid The Python. Had the

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real Revoort visited the Cambia, The Python would have felt the same confidence. For the supercrook prided himself on being a man with many faces.

The Python's weakness lay in his very strength. So sure was he of his schemes that he minimized minor failings. His blue lights, visible from all his outposts, were so useful by night that The Python did not worry because they could not serve during daylight hours.

Similarly, the necessity for an ironbound trap had caused him to outdo himself in the equipment of that eighth-floor room in the old Cambia Hotel. The Python thought that his glib explanation of the hotel's reconstruction had been sufficient to cover the case. Perhaps those statements might have fooled the real Louis Revoort; but they had not deceived his double.

So far as smooth strategy was concerned, The Shadow had surpassed The Python. Though The Shadow still was trapped, he knew it; The Python, on the contrary, had walked into a web unwittingly.

Seated in the comfortable room at the Legrand Hotel, the master crook was positive that he would soon gain the treasure that his Coilmaster Duronne had failed to snatch from the burning Tropical.

The smile beneath the mustache of Carl Ramorez was proof of The Python's contempt for The Shadow. Belittling his adversary, The Python was sure that Harry Vincent would be here.

Vincent! The name was one of those for which The Python had previously offered life, had The Shadow chosen to give it. The fact that The Shadow – as Revoort – had openly declared the name was proof conclusive – so The Python thought – that The Shadow had not guessed the true identity of the man who had received him in the guise of Carl Ramorez.

MANY minutes passed; yet The Python was not perturbed. He had expected that Vincent would be slow in delivering the trunk. It would have to be brought here cautiously. Moreover, The Python was pleased because of the delay. He had plans for dealing with Vincent when the fellow came. Those plans required an interval for preparation.

It was just when The Python first began to show impatience that footsteps sounded in the corridor outside. A smile of greeting was forming on the dark face of Carl Ramorez. Sharp eyes glittered toward the doorway, as the pretended Cuban waited, openhanded, for his visitor.

Then, following a slow turn of the knob, the door was suddenly swung inward. A stocky man bounded across the sill; with quick move, he covered The Python with a stubby revolver.

The Python's eyelids narrowed as his hands came upward. More men were entering. They formed a squad of plain-clothes men. The Python needed no further guesswork; he knew the identity of that stocky man who led the lot. As Carl Ramorez, The Python was faced by Joe Cardona.

Realizing that he was trapped, The Python smiled evasively. He managed to feign surprise at the intrusion. He looked questioningly at Joe Cardona. Still holding his revolver, the ace introduced himself.

"I'm acting Inspector Cardona," announced Joe, gruffly. "From headquarters. Looking for Louis Revoort. Are you Revoort?"

Politely, The Python shook his head. His lips still held their smile.

"Who are you then?"

THE PYTHON

"I am a friend of Mr. Revoort," he replied, in perfect English. "My name, senor, is Ramorez. Carlos Ramorez; but I am known as Carl Ramorez to my friends in America. Permit me, senor."

With two fingers, The Python reached into a vest pocket and produced a calling card, which he tendered to Cardona. The sleuth read the name Carl Ramorez, with the address: Balboa Apartments.

"The Balboa Apartments," repeated Cardona, aloud; then, with a sharp gaze at the mustached man: "That's only a few blocks from the Hotel Bragelonne. Do you know the place?"

"The Bragelonne? I have seen it, yes. It was too expensive, senor inspector for one who has so little money as I. There were friends of mine – other Cubans – at the Balboa. That is why I took an apartment there. The price is not too high."

"Do you know of a man named Jurrice? Craig Jurrice, who lives at the Bragelonne?"

The Python shook his head.

"A friend of Revoort's?" prompted Cardona. "Didn't you hear the name before? Jurrice?"

"No," replied The Python, "It is this way, senor. My friend Revoort was one whom I had known in Cuba. Some time ago, he told me that he was going to visit my home country. He promised to seek friends of mine; to learn from them if it would be wise for me to return.

"Today, I have learned that my friend Revoort was missing from the steamship Tropical. I was sad, until tonight; he called me at my apartment. He said that he had news for me; that I was to come here to meet him. The door was to be unlocked.

"That is why I am here. I was surprised to see you instead of my friend Revoort. Tell me – has he done something that the law does not like? I can not think that my friend Revoort would do any such thing, senor."

THE purring tone was convincing. So much so, that it threw Cardona on guard. Joe was a veteran sleuth; he could recognize when a game was being overplayed.

He glanced toward Clyde Burke, who had come in with the raiders. The reporter shook his head; indicating his own disbelief in the story. That settled Cardona's decision.

"Sorry, Mr. Ramorez," he told The Python. "You'll have to come along with us to headquarters and stay there until your friend Revoort is located.

"You stick here, Markham, with half the squad. If Revoort comes in, grab him. Get anybody else who may breeze in. I'll call you from headquarters."

Though Cardona had doubted The Python's story, he did not think this one man could prove formidable. There was a mildness in the bearing of Carl Ramorez, that indicated he would not make trouble.

Cardona frisked the prisoner, but found no gun on him. The Python retained his smile. He had reasons for not needing weapons.

Pocketing his own revolver, Joe gripped The Python's arm and urged him through the doorway. They started for the elevator, followed by two plain-clothes men. A second pair had remained with Markham. Clyde Burke was following the group as they went toward the elevator.

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"I'll keep the bracelets off you," Cardona told The Python. "But remember, there's three of us. Don't try to give us the slip, or you'll regret it."

"Ah, señor!" The Python was smiling as Cardona pressed the elevator button. "It is not my part to make trouble. I have told you truth; I am only too glad to go with you to headquarters. I hope only that my friend Revoort has done nothing wrong."

The elevator door was opening. Cardona felt an elbow slide from his grip. He swung about; as he did, he heard a fierce hiss. Joe's eyes saw the face of Carl Ramirez, distorted into a fiendish scowl. That loud, startling hiss was coming from The Python's lips.

JOE shot a hand to his pocket for his gun. As he did, The Python launched a swift, wide-swinging punch. The blow caught the side of Cardona's face; it came just as the elevator door slid wide. The ace staggered sidewise and sprawled into the elevator. Women passengers screamed as Cardona landed on the floor, among them.

The Python's venomous hiss had never halted. He was springing away, while Clyde Burke sought to stop him. The Python hurled the reporter aside and dashed toward a side corridor that led to a fire tower.

Cardona's men yanked their revolvers and started in pursuit; close after them came Joe, recovered from his sprawl.

As they reached the corridor, shots broke loose. Bullets ricocheted from the walls. One detective staggered, clipped by a glancing slug. The Python had reached the fire tower; it was from there that guns were blazing. Men were loping forward. They had heard The Python's call!

Grabbing the one man who remained with him, Cardona began a retreat, firing as he retired. Shouts issued from The Python's crew; those henchmen dashed forward in pursuit. Backed past the corner, Cardona halted. Markham and two dicks had arrived; Joe signalled for the charge.

They swung suddenly into the side corridor, their revolvers snorting fire. Crooks returned the volley, then broke and scurried back toward the fire tower. Five in number, they had charged too far. Surprised by Cardona's counter-charge, the thugs were no longer a match for a band of equal size.

Two crooks sprawled, dropped by the police fire. The others kept on, down the fire tower, with the detectives in hot pursuit. It was a running fight, with revolvers echoing down flights of gloomy steps. The retreat of The Python's troop became a rout.

Reaching the ground pellmell, the surviving trio dashed for a sedan that was parked behind the hotel. A bluecoat came running up to halt them; but as he neared the front of the car, a stooped figure sprang forward and sprawled him in the alleyway. It was The Python, here ahead of his fighters.

Grabbing the officer's gun, the disguised supercrook delivered a vicious barrage toward the bottom of the fire tower. The quick shots stopped Cardona and his fellow pursuers long enough for The Python's henchmen to gain the car.

The sedan jolted forward; The Python leaped aboard, beside the driver. Cardona came from the fire tower, to deliver belated shots. The car was whizzing off to safety when Joe fired.

FIVE minutes later, sirens whined to the ears of those in the fleeting sedan. The man at the wheel was Doc, the Coilmaster; he was speaking tensely to The Python.

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"They got Chuck and Tony, chief," informed Doc. "That only leaves me, Bevo and Butch. We'd better ditch this car; I'll let them scam and I'll go my own way. Where'll you drop off?"

"At the nearest elevated," returned The Python, still using the voice of Ramorez. "I shall soon be where I can abolish my present disguise; but it will not be wise for me to tarry on the way.

"I shall let you report to Laxley at the signal tower. Tell him that I was with you. Order him to pass the word to Coilmaster Five. Do that promptly: Laxley will understand."

The sedan jammed to a stop. The Python alighted; with long strides, he made for the steps of an elevated line. Doc watched the figure of his chief; he knew that The Python was again disguised. Doc had seen The Python in the guise of an old man; this time, he was viewing him as Ramorez. Never, however, had he viewed The Python's true visage. That, at least, was Doc's belief.

Doc had come to the Legrand with his men, to be ready for the removal of the swag. He had answered that call that The Shadow had seen the blue lights issue. Treasure had not been gained; but Doc had effected The Python's rescue from the hands of the law.

Starting the sedan forward, Doc followed the elevated for two more blocks; then veered right, into a side street. Sirens were closer; but Doc gained the obscurity of a small, deserted parking place. He ordered Bevo and Butch to scam. As they piled from the rear seat and chose one direction, Doc took the other.

His own appearance presentable, Doc felt no qualms when he reached a corner by the elevated. He entered a small drug store, went to a telephone booth and dialed the same number that Albert Thurney had called that afternoon. In response to a croaking answer, Doc told briefly of The Python's flight; then added:

"Pass the word to Five."

Little did Doc realize the importance of that message; for he did not know that The Python had been tricked. It was The Python, alone, who had guessed the true details of The Shadow's ruse, after the law had struck.

Coilmaster Five was the one in charge at the old Cambia Hotel, where The Shadow still remained within The Python's trap. That order to Laxley, the signalmaster, was The Python's death warrant for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. ORDERS FOR MURDER

No sounds of wailing sirens had reached the eighth-floor room of the old Cambia Hotel. That spot was too far east of the paths that police cars had taken in chase of the fleeing Python. Silence persisted in the trap that held The Shadow.

During the time since The Python's departure, The Shadow had persisted in his part of Louis Revoort. Any impatience that he had exhibited was of a natural sort. Louis Revoort, anxious for Carl Ramorez to return, would have logically paced about the room. Hence The Shadow, at intervals, began a nervous pace within the confining walls.

Glimpses of the closet door had shown him that its free edge was in his direction. The door was not quite shut; a proof that eyes were watching. It would take but a moment for revolvers to bristle through a widening space. The closet was large – overlarge – and could comfortably contain three men.

As for the door into the next room, that, too, was ready to swing open. Any number of The Python's tribesmen could be located behind it. When The Shadow strolled half way between the main door and the

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window, he was directly between the swinging edges of the barriers that hid The Python's minions.

A clever trap! Like pill boxes, both doors were ready. Men in the closet prepared to stop flight in their direction; others in the next room, eager to mow down a fleeing foe by riddling his back.

Even to The Shadow, an attack against these strongholds would be futile. He would have to fight both ambushes at once, with nothing but the cracks of doors as targets.

At intervals, The Shadow strolled toward the half-opened window; and during those excursions, he realized that he had found the one place of temporary security. The window was covered only by those in the closet. It formed a blind spot so far as the connecting door was concerned.

Moreover, it was the portion of the room most distant from the closet door. Shots from that further room might lack immediate accuracy. Nevertheless, The Shadow did not intend to test The Python's strength with any foolish opening.

He suspected that the adjoining room might be equipped with a machine gun. Such a weapon, used from behind a shield, could be brought to bear in less time than The Shadow would need to reach the outer door. Furthermore, the hallway itself could be another trap.

The window, open and unprotected, offered the sole way of exit; its disadvantage lay in the fact that it was eight floors above the ground. Nevertheless, The Shadow found it worthy of consideration.

Finishing his cigarette, he tossed the stump out into the darkness. In a natural fashion, he leaned forward to note the fall of the cigarette.

WITH a shrug that typified Revoort, The Shadow turned inward from the window; but in that glance, his head had gone just past the lower edge of the sash. The move had given him the glimpse that he wanted. He had seen an opened window on the floor below this one.

Seating himself in one chair, The Shadow studied the chair opposite. He was comparing the length of its legs with the space of the opened window. He estimated that the opening was less than the length of the chair legs.

Lighting another cigarette, The Shadow arose impatiently and stared from the window; at the same time, his left hand casually drew the chair around so it faced toward the window.

He puffed nervously at the cigarette. The Shadow seemed annoyed because The Python did not return. He was leaning against the high window sill, looking in toward the room. At last he sat down in the chair that he had turned. With folded arms, he stared out through the window.

By this time, The Shadow knew, The Python must have stayed long at the Legrand Hotel. It was quite possible that the police had already arrived there; that, however, was a doubtful factor. It depended entirely upon how well Harry Vincent and others had managed to stimulate the closing of a trap.

If The Python had been captured, The Shadow could afford to wait here as long as he chose. If, however, the supercrook had eluded his enemies, anything might happen. Particularly the ringing of the telephone bell – a signal for which The Shadow was prepared.

There was also the chance of blue light flashing; for they would be visible both from the closet door of this room and the windows of the room adjoining.

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That was why The Shadow had seated himself in the chair toward the window. Though watchers might suspect nothing from this casual move by the pretended Revoort, it served The Shadow well. While he puffed at his new cigarette, The Shadow was watching the distant signal tower.

A waver. Neon lights were quivering. A signal – perhaps to those on watch here. For a moment, The Shadow made no move. The blinks were slow, evidently spelling a message in their flicker. The Shadow, keenly tense, was sure that The Python had chosen this method to send the warrant of doom.

STILL maintaining his indifferent attitude, The Shadow arose and stared at the remainder of his cigarette. He leaned forward to toss it from the window; as he did so, he rested his left hand upon the back of the chair. Fingers tightened; then came a startling move.

While blue lights quivered their order for murder, The Shadow made a vaulting twist that swung his lithe form squarely along the wide window sill. Face downward, he performed a backward roll, as part of his original motion. One acrobatic move – his figure was gone, out over the window ledge!

Those left fingers had retained their grip. With the left hand went the chair, yanked up from the floor, like the tail of a diving kite. The back of the chair sped through the window. The seat struck the high sill and stopped there. The rear legs of the chair caromed upward. Too long for the space, they jammed tight when their tips struck the lower edge of the metal window sash.

With split-second speed, The Shadow had left The Python's trap. The chair was inverted on the window sill, its seat forming a base. The back legs were pointed slightly inward, wedged tightly against the sash.

The counterbalance was The Shadow: still gripping the back of the chair, he was hanging against the wall outside the window, two feet below the opening through which he had so quickly rolled.

He was completely gone, The Shadow – not even his hands remained on the level of the sill. No portion of him served as target for those hidden gunners whose sight he had so speedily left.

With both hands clinging to the chair, The Shadow was swinging seventy feet above a concrete paving, trusting to strength of the stout chair. His feet, on a level with the window below, were kicking at the raised sashes, smashing panes of glass, to find a toehold.

IN the room, men hidden in the closet had seen The Shadow's leap. Their door came swinging open; a trio of gat-wielding ruffians, they shouted the news to those behind the adjoining door. That barrier swung inward; others with guns poured into sight. Already, revolvers were spurting, aimed at the only target that remained – the bottom half of the inverted chair.

Bullets shattered windowpanes. They thudded and dented the steel sash. Other slugs splintered the wedged chair legs. The chair began to loosen; with howls of triumph, The Python's men riddled the wood to cut it completely free. Their object was to drop The Shadow from his dangerous perch.

Too late, this plan. With the chair's first quiver, The Shadow had let his legs drive downward. His feet were lowering both small-paned sashes of the seventh-floor window. He dropped his hands from the chair and let the weight of his body carry downward.

Body outward, he would have hurtled backward had the ride been a long one; but the distance was less than a half dozen feet.

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Outstretched arms thrust gripping hands against the brick sides of the lower window. Forward to full length, those hands found holds while firm feet still pressed the crossbars of the window sashes.

That lower window was made of wood; but it did not splinter until The Shadow's arms thrust inward, to grab the tops of the sashes. As the threatening break began, The Shadow caught the inside wall, to roll through the top half of the window and reach the room within.

Blue lights had flickered all the while; their completed message was forgotten. Ripping shots had supplanted them; The Python's henchmen no longer needing their chief's orders to kill.

The splintered chair dropped from the eighth-floor window; it sped downward just as The Shadow rolled in through the seventh-story opening. By the time the elusive prisoner had dived sprawling to the floor, a crash from the concrete paving told that the chair had reached the ground.

Rising within the darkened lower room, The Shadow swung toward the hallway door. He had gained escape; he knew that battle would follow. His firm hands were whipping out those concealed automatics. Reaching the corridor, The Shadow sped in the direction of a stairway.

He reached his goal just as footsteps pounded downward from the eighth-floor level. The Python's men had reached their upper windows to view the scene below. They were coming to halt the fugitive. A vicious pair of leaders had arrived with ready guns; but they found more than a mere traveler from danger.

THE SHADOW swung as his adversaries aimed. His heavy guns tongued instant flame. Each .45 boomed a message, a warning to others of The Python's horde. Snarling foemen toppled; one sprawled upon a landing, the other pitched forward and somersaulted almost to The Shadow's feet.

With the echoes of the automatics came a weird defiant laugh, The Shadow's challenge to all comers. Again, his guns delivered blasts as uncautious enemies appeared upon the stairs.

One thug dived back to cover; another emitted a howl as a slug clipped his shoulder. Pursuers halted, The Shadow continued his passage down from the seventh floor.

More opposition came when he reached the lobby. Word had been telephoned below. The clerk and two elevator men were ready with their revolvers. They, too, were hirelings of The Python.

But they showed poor judgment in being away from cover. Aiming as they saw the figure of Louis Revoort, they were met by a strident laugh, its crescendo punctuated with roaring stabs from huge automatics. One fake elevator man floundered; then the other. The clerk cleared the desk, with a headlong dive. A clipping shot winged him in mid-air.

With smoking automatics, The Shadow swept unhindered to the street. He heard distant shouts; indications that the gunfire had alarmed the neighborhood. The Shadow had no time to linger. He was on his way to other missions. Word to Harry to join Cliff; word to Cliff to take Revoort and the treasure clear away from Cranston's.

No trails must remain for The Python, supercrook, who still remained at large. Though The Shadow and the law had thinned the ranks of The Python's henchmen, the supercrook still had hordes upon which he could call.

Counterstrokes would be forthcoming. The Shadow's course was to nip them early. Balked, The Python would be forced to the defensive. Then could The Shadow seek The Python's lair.

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S SEQUENCE

TWENTY minutes after The Shadow's departure from the Cambia Hotel, Joe Cardona arrived at that bullet-riddled establishment. Reports of a new conflict had brought the ace detective from his hunt for Carl Ramorez. Joe had come to learn of this later conflict; and he had brought Clyde Burke along.

A square-faced patrolman gave Joe a brief report; and in it were facts that pleased the acting inspector. The bluecoat had arrived promptly on the scene; he had found the moaning hotel clerk and had made him talk before the ambulance had come.

"He blabbed," asserted the officer. "Told what he knew, inspector, although it wasn't much. He said he was working for a fellow called The Python."

"The Python!" Cardona swung to Clyde. "Say – remember what Markham just told us? About that fellow we plugged at the Legrand? The one called Tony? Just before he cashed in, he mumbled that same name – The Python.

"There's a big-shot in back of this business, Burke. A big-shot called The Python. He was the one who pulled that funny business down at the new East River tunnel, too. How do I know? Because that fellow Tony was one of the bunch that tied up the watchmen there. He fits the description; we've been looking for him.

"What's more, Burke, it fits in with this dirty work on board the Tropical. There was a torch in back of that blaze; and like as not he was working for The Python. And when we add it all up, we've got more. Those jewel robberies that left us groggy; we figured they were all staged by one big brain.

"The Python. That's the name the big-shot goes under, so far as his crew is concerned. But we know more about him, maybe, than they do. We know who he is. Carl Ramorez."

That decision rendered, Cardona finished a brief inspection and left the Cambia Hotel with Clyde in his wake. They entered a police car; Cardona instructed the driver to take them to the Balboa Apartments. While they rode, Joe talked.

"The Balboa Apartments," he stated, "are only about three blocks from the Bragelonne. So here's the way I figure it. Ramorez was on the watch of Jurrice. He saw him go out; so he went up there to Jurrice's room. As luck had it, Jurrice came back. Ramorez strangled him.

"Then he went out to look for Revoort. He was waiting for him when we walked in. It was a nice surprise for Senor Ramorez; but he made a getaway. Anyhow, he didn't find a chance to strangle Revoort.

"You know, Burke, I've got an idea why this crook calls himself The Python. That's a big snake – a python – that can strangle anything up to the size of a tiger. Say – he's got crust, this fellow, calling himself The Python!"

FIVE minutes later they arrived at the Balboa Apartments. When they had alighted, Clyde pointed to the nearest corner, where large, darkened windows indicated a drug store that had probably closed at midnight.

"That's the place where Jurrice went in to telephone," exclaimed. Clyde. "Say, that's odd, isn't it? Jurrice stopping off here so close to Ramorez's apartment. There were other funny things about Jurrice. His keys, for instance: it seems he asked for one while he was carrying another –"

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"Forget Jurrice," interposed Cardona. "We're going to take a look in on Ramorez's apartment. I've got a man here; but he's been waiting until I showed up. Well, look who's here" – Joe paused as they were entering a quietly furnished lobby – "What are you doing up here, doctor?"

The man whom Cardona addressed was the police surgeon who had been on the Jurrice case. The doctor was rather testy when he answered Joe.

"I've been waiting at the Hotel Bragelonne," he declared. "Expecting you to come back there. You walked out in such a hurry, I didn't have time to check up my report."

"I thought you had finished, doctor," said Cardona.

"I had, practically," quibbled the surgeon, "but how did I know that you were through with me? I called headquarters; they told me I could find you here."

"Well, here I am. Sorry, doctor, to have kept you waiting. Come along with us while I look over an apartment. You can check up the Jurrice report while we're there."

Stepping from an automatic elevator on the third floor, Cardona and his companions found a detective waiting for them. The fellow produced a key that he had obtained from the janitor.

"Been here about fifteen minutes," informed the dick. "This is Ramorez's apartment – 3 H – but I haven't gone into it yet. Haven't seen anyone around."

Joe took the key and unlocked the door. He stepped into a room that was pitch-black, because of lowered shades. Fumbling, Cardona found the light switch and pressed it. He looked about a tidy living room; then gazed suddenly toward the floor by an opened door.

"Look – look there!" exclaimed Cardona. "See it – that hand on the floor?"

DRAWING a revolver, Cardona bounded forward to the doorway, where only a human hand was visible, projecting from the next room. The light showed a sprawled body, when Cardona reached the edge of the doorway. A head was turned face down. Cardona stooped and tilted the face into the light.

"It's Ramorez!" exclaimed the ace. "Carl Ramorez! Dead!"

"Strangled like Jurrice," decided the police surgeon, methodically. "Hm–m–m. Step back, please, while I examine the body. Unless you want to go in and search the other room."

"We'll search the whole place," affirmed Cardona.

They made the search while the doctor was examining the body of Ramorez. Finding no one, they returned and looked at the body. Cardona brought out his watch, noted the time and spoke to Clyde.

"It was twelve-fifty when we arrived at the Legrand," stated Joe. "It's one-fifty now. Exactly one hour. In that time, Ramorez not only made his getaway; but he came back here. Somebody was laying for him; and got him, like they did Jurrice.

"Yet who could have pulled it? We figure The Python; but Ramorez is the one we took for The Python. Remember that hiss of his, Burke? And a crew coming in when they heard it? I can't figure it as it stands now. Ramorez coming back here –"

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"You know this man?" The police surgeon interrupted with his query. He had risen from beside the body. "Tell me then, inspector, when did you last see him?"

"Just an hour ago," replied Cardona. "I had him under arrest, down at the Legrand Hotel."

"Very interesting, inspector." The surgeon was studying his watch. "Let me see – it's nearly two o'clock. That makes seven hours since Craig Jurrice was strangled. And one hour –"

"One hour ago, I saw this man, Ramorez –"

"Let me finish my statement, inspector. One hour after Jurrice was strangled, this man – whom you say is Ramorez – was murdered in a similar fashion."

Cardona stared; then spoke.

"But we saw this dead man, doctor! Both Burke and myself. Shortly before one o'clock –"

"Then you saw a dead man walking," retorted the police surgeon dryly.

"This man has been dead for six hours at least." He pointed, wagging his finger toward the body of Carl Ramorez. "He was murdered before eight o'clock. Within one hour after the death of Craig Jurrice!"

The startling truth began to dawn on Joe Cardona. The intruder at the Legrand Hotel must have been The Python; that much was certain. But he had not been Carl Ramorez, much though he had resembled the dead Cuban. The Python had murdered Ramorez hours ago and had taken the dead man's place.

"The Python," mused Cardona, solemnly. "A double murderer – a master of disguise – the man in back of the fire and bloody mutiny on the Steamship Tropical –"

"A story, Joe?" queried Clyde, eagerly.

"Yes," nodded Cardona. "Let it ride, Burke. Go after it strong. We'll keep this crook on the run – this big-shot who calls himself The Python."

LATER, reports came to The Shadow, in his sanctum. Harry and Cliff had left New Jersey, accompanied by Louis Revoort; and the treasure had gone with them. That point was settled; what now concerned The Shadow was the report from Clyde Burke.

Details regarding the deaths of Craig Jurrice and Carl Ramorez. To The Shadow, these told more than Joe Cardona had guessed. The strange behavior of Jurrice was explained. So was the trap which The Python had set at the old Cambia Hotel.

Beneath the glow of a shaded lamp, The Shadow inscribed three names:

Louis Revoort

Craig Jurrice

Carl Ramorez

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His hand drew a line through the topmost name. Revoort – so The Python thought – had been eliminated, aboard the Tropical. That belief had caused The Python to concentrate upon Jurrice. He had watched Jurrice; when the fellow became too conspicuous at the steamship company's office, The Python had decided that it might be well to deal with him.

Yet the treasure had been missing; and Jurrice was the only link. The Python must have learned that Jurrice was going back to the Bragelonne; thus informed, the crook had gone in there ahead of him. How? The Shadow's whispered laugh told the answer.

The Python had entered the Bragelonne made up as Jurrice. It was he who had obtained the extra key. He had been lurking in Jurrice's bedroom when the man entered the suite. The Python had hoped for a break, probably because one of his watchers had spotted Ramorez at the steamship office. The break had come – a call to Jurrice from Ramorez.

The Python must have learned Ramorez's true address, the Balboa Apartments. He must have heard Jurrice say that he would go there. That would have been sufficient cause for The Python to strangle Jurrice. It was The Python – not the real Jurrice – whom Clyde Burke had met in the hotel corridor.

As Jurrice, The Python had slipped Clyde Burke and had visited Ramorez. He had learned the Cuban's plans for communication with Revoort. He had strangled Ramorez; then, still using his ability as a make-up artist, he had disguised himself as the dead Cuban. Believing Revoort dead, The Python had guessed that the only person capable of taking the treasure hunter's place would be The Shadow.

The pill-boxed room at the Cambia Hotel must long have been a ready trap; one that The Python had prepared for the reception of an unsuspecting foe. Having learned that Revoort did not know Ramorez's actual address, The Python – as Ramorez – had made the Cambia his new abode. He had kept calling the Legrand, in case The Shadow came there.

THE SHADOW, in this reconstruction, had crossed out the names of Jurrice and Ramorez with heavier lines than he had used on Revoort's name. The Python's past actions were plain to The Shadow. The future had become The Shadow's new concern. Slowly, his long, pointed finger tapped the blotted name of Craig Jurrice.

Jurrice was the man who had dickered, in hope of selling the regained treasure. The law would unearth facts concerning Jurrice. Through such discoveries, The Python could be traced. The Python, himself, must know that fact; having played for wealth and lost it, to The Shadow, The Python would also know that his only present game should be a cover-up of his activities.

The Shadow had won a victory; but his foe, The Python, had managed to retreat. The Shadow's present strategy must be to harry his balked foe; to force The Python to the limit. Action would be necessary on The Python's part, even when seeking cover, if the issue could be forcibly pressed by The Shadow.

There was a way to do it. The law could be stirred, through a prompt newspaper campaign. By rousing the press, The Shadow could bring facts to light concerning Craig Jurrice. The more the law gained, the worse would be The Python's situation. The supercrook, driven to hiding, would have to order his remaining henchmen to cover of their own.

The Shadow had already planned a way to intercept new messages between The Python and his Coilmasters. Prepared for strike, unseen and unsuspected, The Shadow needed only to deliver the preliminary blow; that campaign of notoriety that would bring The Python into the limelight.

CHAPTER XXI. THE DOUBLE STROKE

IT was late the next afternoon. Lester Bornick was seated in his private office, his desk stacked with newspapers. Opposite the lawyer was Danton Califax. The wealthy client had just arrived; but he was already speaking volubly.

"You have read the newspapers, Bornick!" Califax was exclaiming. "Look at those headlines! The Python! Master mind uncovered by the law! Murderer of Craig Jurrice!

"Why hasn't such talk stirred you? I have called you five times during the day; all you have said is 'Wait' – and I have waited. All the while, I have realized that I am shirking a duty – at your order.

"Can't you see that Jurrice is the key to this man they call The Python? That the law should be informed of all we know about him? You, yourself, have told me that my dealings with Jurrice did not reach a state of conspiracy; yet you say to wait –"

"Calm yourself, Califax," remarked Bornick. "So long as you act upon my advice, you will be doing well. I have said to wait until the proper time –"

"And the proper time is now."

"Or very soon. What concerns me is the finding of the proper person."

"The proper person?"

"Yes. The right one to hear your story."

"And who is he?"

"Ralph Weston. The police commissioner."

A LOOK of relief appeared on Califax's face. The baldish man sank back in his chair. Bornick smiled and folded his rugged arms.

"I have called Commissioner Weston," stated the lawyer, "and have arranged an appointment. I shall call him again, to name the time and place. So far, I have not mentioned your name; that is why I wanted you to come here.

"I would suggest that the meeting be held in your home – in your study – at a fairly late hour. Let us say ten o'clock. By that time, the police commissioner would be through with any extra duties; and I shall have finished with some appointments that I previously scheduled for this evening."

Bornick paused for Califax to answer. The client gave a slow nod.

"Very well," he decided. "I would prefer an earlier hour; but I shall be guided by your opinion, Bornick. So long as the appointment is assured, I am satisfied. One point only: would it not be best for me to have policemen on guard at my home, between now and ten o'clock? I have gems of my own, you know, and since The Python sought Revoort's treasure, he might be seeking mine."

"Not tonight," assured Bornick. "There has been too much hue and cry about him. No, Califax, it would be unnecessary. Moreover, it would force too early a revelation of your name. I would prefer to withhold your

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identity until I join the police commissioner, to bring him to your home."

Before Bornick could begin another statement, the door opened and the stenographer appeared. The girl had forgotten to knock.

"There is a gentleman here, Mr. Bornick," she said. "His name –"

"Why didn't you knock?" demanded Bornick, angrily, pounding the desk as he rose from his chair. "You know my rule! Why did you forget?"

"I – I don't know, sir –"

"Remember it next time. Go back and tell the visitor to wait. Show him in at the end of five minutes."

The girl made a hurried departure. Bornick shook his head as he turned to Califax.

"Persistently dumb," he declared. "That's the way with all stenographers. Humph. As if I didn't know who would be out there. I'm expecting a pest named Rollings, who has a patent case. He's one man who's always ahead of time."

"About tonight," remarked Califax. "When the commissioner arrives –"

"We can talk then," interposed Bornick. "At ten o'clock. Come, Califax. You must leave. Out by this door." The lawyer opened the exit to the corridor. "The sooner I finish with my appointments, the better."

With Califax gone, Bornick swung toward the window. Darkness had settled; far off, he could see the top story of the distant loft building. Neon lights were glimmering from that floor; as yet, they had not begun to flicker.

Bornick smiled as he turned back to his chair. He opened his desk drawer and glanced at papers that bore dots and dashes. A rap at the door caused him to cover the sheets and close the drawer. Bornick called "Come in."

The visitor who entered the private office was not a man named Rollings. The arrival was Albert Thurney. With a friendly smile, Bornick motioned the suave man to a chair.

OFF in the loft building where blue lights gleamed, men had begun work on the illuminated room. The place was an engraving plant that employed a regular night shift; but to those at work, no flicker of the blue lights could be apparent.

The reason was that the corners were blocked off with large, permanent cabinets. The only tricky lights were those that were almost obscured by those large objects.

A visitor had arrived at the engraving plant. He had entered from the elevator and was standing, unnoticed, in the gloomy hallway entrance. Tall, silent and keen-eyed, he looked about and spied a single window in the tiny hall itself. This opening was located beside the small elevator shaft.

Unobserved, the stranger stepped to the window and opened it. Clinging to a broad sill, he edged outward and closed the window behind him. High up, against the only blackened portion of the entire wall, this mysterious visitor gazed skyward. Above him was a cornice; an ornamental block above the window afforded a stepping stone to that higher roof edge.

THE PYTHON

Like a human fly, this visitant gripped the block and raised his body upward. His arm stretched high and reached backward. It caught the cornice. A lithe figure swung outward, dangling precariously in space; then wriggled upward and gained the roof edge. A soft laugh sounded in the darkness.

The Shadow had reached the roof above The Python's signal lights. He was close beside a structure that topped the loft building. It looked like a tiny penthouse, except for the fact that it was windowless. The Shadow had chosen an inner wall, and had scaled the eight feet of this structure.

He found a darkened skylight. From a short leather bag, The Shadow produced a portable jimmy and set to work. His scrapings were barely audible; yet they succeeded. The framework of the skylight opened. The Shadow dropped into a darkened room.

A tiny flashlight glimmered. It showed a door. Extinguishing his light, The Shadow approached the barrier and opened it. He stared into a lighted room that had no opening in walls or ceiling. There he observed a singular sight.

A stoop-shouldered man was seated at a table whereon were stacked black-covered books. In front of the fellow was a device that looked like a microphone. On a block beside him was an electric switch.

A slight turn of the man's head revealed his profile. The fellow looked like a hermit, heavily bearded and with sunken eyes. Looking beyond, The Shadow saw cabinets stacked with canned goods; and an open door that led into a small kitchen. The Shadow knew that the room he had first entered must be the man's living quarters; that this odd recluse remained here day and night.

The Shadow had discovered Laxley, The Python's signalmaster. That switch controlled the blue lights of the corner windows in the floor below. What The Shadow still needed was some token of Laxley's procedure before messages were dispatched. Because of that, The Shadow waited.

FIVE minutes passed. Laxley, bent over at the table, did not sense that eyes were watching him. Then came a buzz from the bottom of the microphone. It corresponded, in duration, to the rings of a telephone bell. Laxley turned a knob that served as a receiver hook.

From bearded lips came a grotesque croak. That was Laxley's sole acknowledgment. It produced a toned-down voice directly from the microphone. The Shadow heard the words; he recognized the gruff voice of Lem Hurdy.

"Two. Reporting crew on new tug, the Corsair. Waiting in East River. Signals visible. Will wait for orders."

A pause. Laxley acknowledged with his croak. He turned the knob back to its original position. Then he rummaged among the black-covered books and chose one. The Shadow watched him press the switch; then pause and press again. Laxley was flashing blue lights to The Python.

A few minutes passed. Evidently, The Python had not received the signal, for Laxley flashed it again; but this time, he used another page of his code book. It was the duration of the message that made The Shadow decide that it had been repeated.

Another minute passed. A buzz from the microphone. Laxley acknowledged with his croak. A hiss came from the mike; it formed a message:

"Signal Two. Stand by for instructions."

THE PYTHON

Laxley found a code book and gave a few clicks to the switch. He had evidently sent a conventional signal that Lem would understand. The Shadow crept forward. In dark clothes, with a facial guise that was hawkish, he was less sinister than when cloaked in black. Nevertheless, his approach was ominous.

Laxley chanced to turn just before The Shadow reached him. With a fierce croak, the bearded signalmaster leaped to meet his foe. An instant later he and The Shadow had locked. They wrestled back and forth across the room.

One minute of ferocious struggling proved that The Shadow had struck upon a foeman of unusual stubbornness. Laxley's strength was surprising; he matched every hold that The Shadow used against him. Then came a token that inspired both fighters to harder action. It was a repeated buzz from the microphone.

Fierce gurgles came from Laxley's throat, evidences that the man had no power of speech, although his hearing must be sound. Wildly, the signalmaster tried to wrench his hands free, so that they might grip The Shadow's neck. For a moment, The Shadow's grip relaxed. Laxley twisted away; croaking fiendishly, he bounded in to a new attack.

THE SHADOW'S action was a ruse. Instead of trying to ward off Laxley's clutch, he jabbed a swift punch between those clawing hands. A tight fist drove against the chin beneath the matted beard. Laxley's head jounced back; his body flattened inert upon the floor.

The Shadow reached the buzzing microphone and turned the knob. He gave a croak that was a perfect replica of Laxley's. A suave voice sounded on the wire:

"Four. Have reached the apartment. Call there from One. He will join me later."

The Shadow acknowledged with a croak and turned back the knob. He picked up the code books and found them marked with names as well as numbers, except for one, which bore the title "Chief." This was the book that Laxley had used when he flashed The Python. The book contained a dozen codes, each marked with an identifying signal.

The Shadow had caught the idea from Laxley. He started with one code, first announcing it; then paused, in the middle of a word. He gave another identifying signal; then finished the short message with the second code.

Laxley was still slumped when The Shadow had finished flickering the lights. Knowing that microphone buzzes would announce new messages, The Shadow took time out to bind the bearded signalmaster. For this purpose he used a coil of stout insulated wire that he found in Laxley's table drawer.

No response had come from The Python. Obviously, he had seen no reason to acknowledge the report of Number Four. The Shadow began a quick survey of order sheets on Laxley's table. The Python, to avoid all mix-ups, had furnished his signalmaster with complete instructions. From these, The Shadow learned that when The Python acknowledged one signal, he would be ready for all others, until he came to the state where he was no longer able to watch the tower.

Much information lay available. The Shadow checked the numbers of the Coilmasters. Duronne was One; Hurdy, Two; Doc, Three; Thurney, Four. Number Five was listed under the name of Gunner. The title led The Shadow to believe that he was the Coilmaster who had commanded the ambushes at the Cambia Hotel.

Each had his own book, with varied codes. There was an extra book – a small one – that bore the figure zero. It had the name of Warthrope upon it. This fellow, apparently, did not yet rate as a Coilmaster.

THE PYTHON

Looking about the room, The Shadow found a knobless door in one corner. The door had a keyhole; searching the pockets of the groggy Laxley, The Shadow found a bunch of keys. He picked the right one and used it to unlock the corner door. The barrier slid sidewise, to reveal a tiny elevator. A careful examination showed that the unlocking of the door controlled the switch that would bring the elevator up or down.

Returning to the table, The Shadow pressed the knob below the microphone.

He knew that the loud-speaker must be located in the base; that the microphone itself received Laxley's croak. As The Shadow waited, a woman's voice came from the device:

"Number please."

The Shadow had guessed correctly. This mechanism had replaced a telephone of the non-dial type. Outgoing calls could be made upon it; a privilege which Laxley could not abuse, for he had no power of speech. In a quiet tone, The Shadow called Burbank's number and gained the connection.

Briefly, The Shadow stated his present location; and gave the probable location of the lower entrance to the elevator shaft. Holding Laxley's key while he spoke, The Shadow ordered Burbank to bring keys H, I, and J of series seventeen. One of these, The Shadow had decided, would prove a close mate of Laxley's.

One minute after The Shadow ended the call, the signal buzz sounded. Coilmaster Five was reporting. The Shadow gave the necessary croaks; then flashed a message to The Python. This time, a buzz responded. Hissed words came in answer to The Shadow's perfect semblance of Laxley's croak.

FOR the next half hour, The Shadow was busy with intermittent calls. Hardly had a new lull begun before a slight rumble from the wall told him that the elevator was descending. A pause; the lift came up again. Burbank had arrived.

The final touch came later, when this high room showed a strange scene. Laxley bound in a corner, with a gag to stop his croaks, was glaring at the back of a man who was seated at his table. That man was Burbank; he was emitting croaks that matched The Shadow's duplications of Laxley's guttural tone.

Beyond was The Shadow, his disguised face no longer visible. He had donned cloak and hat, from a bag brought here by Burbank. From his lips came a whispered approval of Burbank's imitation of Laxley.

Burbank ended his vocal practice to make a final study of the code books and the orders. He nodded to signify that he was ready for lone duty.

The Shadow swept across the room and reached the elevator shaft. He entered; as he closed the door, he delivered a whispered, parting laugh. That tone gave final confidence to Burbank; it brought a glower from Laxley as the prisoner writhed helplessly in his bonds.

The Shadow, replacing Laxley, had gained many inklings of The Python's coming moves. Burbank, substituting for The Shadow, had full benefit of that knowledge and would learn more. Meanwhile, The Shadow's quest lay elsewhere.

CHAPTER XXII. MOVES BY NIGHT

"NINE-FIFTEEN, inspector. Time you were leaving, isn't it?"

"I'm waiting for a call from the commissioner, Markham. He's going to tell me where to meet him."

THE PYTHON

"There's the telephone bell now."

"You don't have to tell me. I hear it."

Joe Cardona swung about at his desk. He picked up the telephone and spoke promptly.

"Detective headquarters. Acting Inspector Cardona speaking... Oh, yes... Hello, commissioner. You're ready for me to start? What's that?..."

Looking from the other side of the desk, Detective Sergeant Markham saw a rigid expression grip the usually steady features of Joe Cardona. The acting inspector's eyes took on a bulging stare.

Markham saw Joe try to speak and falter. For the moment, it seemed as if Cardona were due for an epileptic stroke. Markham gazed astounded; he had never seen Joe exhibit such symptoms before.

Then the spasm ended. Though still tense, Cardona managed to control himself and regain his voice. In a hoarse tone, Joe stated:

"Yes, commissioner... Go ahead... I'm waiting for instructions..."

After that, Cardona listened. He was hearing a weird voice, a sinister whisper that had supplanted Weston's precise tones. That was why Cardona had stared and faltered. He knew that whisper for the voice of The Shadow. The mysterious caller had first given a perfect imitation of the police commissioner's voice; then, with Cardona's attention captured, The Shadow had swung to his own inimitable tones.

"Yes... Yes..." With intervals between his affirmatives, Joe Cardona was punctuating The Shadow's statements. "I understand... Yes... My cooperation? Absolutely... But if I am questioned later... Yes, that's right. I won't need to explain anything... Yes..."

A click had ended the call. Cardona sat holding the receiver to his ear. Staring across the desk, he saw Markham still watching him. Joe managed a smile and added:

"Yes, commissioner."

With that, he hung up the dead receiver. He motioned Markham toward the door with one hand while he reached for pad and pencil with the other.

"Call the car for me, Markham," ordered Cardona.

AS soon as the detective sergeant was gone, Cardona began to mumble almost incoherent phrases. Mechanically, he was writing down notations.

"Danton Califax – so that's the fellow we're going to see, whoever Danton Califax is. This lawyer – the commissioner spoke about one – his name is Bornick. Lester Bornick. The Python – he knows about it – and he's getting set for us –"

The telephone bell rang while Cardona was muttering. Picking up the receiver, Joe responded. Again, he heard the voice of Commissioner Weston; this time, however, the tones did not change.

"You're ready, commissioner?" queried Joe. "All right, sir... Meet you, shall I? Very well... At the residence of Danton Califax... Versailles Place... By the East River..."

THE PYTHON

"By the way, commissioner. What was the name of that lawyer? Yes... The man who's taking you there... I see. Lester Bornick... I just wanted to know who he was, since you're all ready to start out with him..."

Hanging up, Cardona stared at the wall. His head was nodding mechanically as he mumbled once more.

"It was The Shadow," affirmed Joe, aloud. "The Shadow, right enough. He had it all straight. Califax – Bornick – the place. Since he's right on that, there's something to the rest –"

Cardona's speculation ended. With the pencil he began to write out instructions on the paper; orders that were indelibly pressed upon his mind. Cardona had received The Shadow's aid before; and less than ten minutes ago, he had made a promise to his mysterious caller. Convinced after Weston's call, Cardona was going through with the duty that The Shadow had commanded.

"Car's ready, inspector."

It was Markham, at the door. Cardona kept on writing, giving an order as he worked.

"Call Inspectors Lavin and Bray," he told Markham. "You come in with them. I want all three of you to hear what I have to say."

Markham went to deliver the order. Cardona kept on writing, murmuring to himself:

"Ten–thirty – East River – empty tenements – side lawn – back door – The Python –"

Lavin and Bray arrived, Markham with them. Cardona showed them his penciled papers.

"Read these over," he ordered. "Instructions from the commissioner. Follow them to the letter. Not one slip–up. Understand?"

The men nodded their heads. Cardona strode from the office, his swarthy face grim. He had taken chances, giving those orders as if they had been the commissioner's. The instructions were not even Cardona's own. They were The Shadow's.

Yet Cardona realized that if the future proved the worth of those instructions, no explanations would be needed. If, on the contrary, expected trouble did not come, he could merely claim later that he had taken certain precautions.

WHILE Cardona was realizing thus, two men were holding conversation elsewhere. The gist of their remarks was proof that The Shadow's message carried import. The two men were Coilmasters of The Python. Luke Duronne and Albert Thurney, standing by the window of the latter's apartment.

"Half past nine," Duronne was saying. He looked across the city. "The flash–backs quit more than half an hour ago. Well – everyone must have gotten his orders."

"Everyone has," assured Thurney.

The suavity of the one made Duronne stare. Tugging at his mustache, the crook who had escaped the Tropical made a significant remark.

"You seem to know a lot about it, Thurney."

THE PYTHON

"I do," agreed Thurney. "What's more, Duronne, I have a few things to tell you. My instructions, that I received tonight, were very illuminating."

"Did The Python tell you who he is?"

"No. I wouldn't know him if I saw him."

"That wouldn't be good policy."

"Quite true. But let us be serious, Duronne. The Python has lost out on that treasure that Revoort was bringing to Ramorez. What's more, all this newspaper howl has placed him in a tight spot. The Python – murderer of Jurrice and Ramorez – maybe he's killed Revoort, too.

"We both know the trouble, Duronne. The Shadow managed to keep in the game. He has the swag. All that The Python can do is close out – for the present, anyway. So he's doing it in a big way."

"By going after Califax's gems?" queried Duronne. "Say – they're not worth more than fifty grand!"

"That isn't what counts," declared Thurney. "The Python already has more than a million in swag that he took from those last jobs. He can afford to close up shop for a while. He wants to scatter his outfits, making it look like he pulled a last stab and is through."

"That's logical, Thurney. Well – the get-away on tonight's job will be a cinch. The whole thing is made to order. We'll all duck under cover. The only trouble is, we won't be bringing the Califax swag back to New York, so The Python can get it. Of course, it's small change to him."

"He wants it kept intact, Duronne. You received that order yourself. You and I are the ones to keep it. You were told that, too. There's a chance, though, that I won't be with you. In that case, you're to hold the swag alone."

DURONNE looked puzzled.

"Here's the low-down," stated Thurney. "I'm the man who tipped off The Python to the fact that Califax had gems. One of my Coils – fellow named Warthrope – is a servant at Califax's. He listens in on conferences."

"He does, eh? Say – Warthrope must be the fellow who learned that the commissioner would be at Califax's tonight?"

"Probably he was," replied Thurney. "Warthrope, however, makes contact direct through Laxley; he was lucky enough to get a room that opens toward the tower. But here's the rub, Duronne. Califax knows me, because I used to call on his niece. Califax's lawyer – Bornick – knows me, too, because I had him up here to talk about some stocks; and I've been to his office since then."

"You think they may name you to the police?"

"One of them may. It's obvious that someone must have been watching Jurrice. Califax – or Bornick for that matter – may think it's me."

"Well, what if –"

THE PYTHON

"What if I'm named?" Thurney chuckled. "Warthrope will tip me off, if I am. He and Warring will clear out; and I'll go my own way. Which won't be the direction that the police will trail. That's all fixed."

"Say – that means –"

"That I'll be listed as The Python. Which is exactly what The Python wants. He's playing for that bet tonight. That's why I may not join you, Duronne."

"That's a sweet stunt, Thurney. They trail you; they can't find you. You're The Python – so they'll think – and even The Shadow won't get wise. I get my part in the play. Leave it to me to wait for word from The Python. But say – shouldn't you be getting a head start?"

"I don't need one. What's more, I'd be a sap to blow if my name's not mentioned. Don't worry about me. I'll get the low-down from Warthrope."

Duronne nodded; his gesture was commendation of The Python's craftiness. Warring came in from the other room and announced:

"Nearly ten o'clock, sir."

"Time for me to be joining up," decided Duronne. "So long, Thurney."

Albert Thurney remained by the window. Staring eastward, he watched unblinking lights of blue; then spoke to his valet.

"Nearly ten o'clock, Warring," remarked Thurney. "I can picture Warthrope, sneaking upstairs to that room of his. With the back door open, ready to scam if the game gets hot."

THURNEY'S visualization was a bit belated. Warthrope had already reached his third-floor room in Danton Califax's home. He was stooping in the corner, lifting the false radio cover from his dictograph receiver. Voices came to the servant's ears. The conference had begun in the study below.

"We are most interested in The Python," Commissioner Weston was saying. "If either of you gentlemen have any idea who he may be, tell us that fact before you state others."

"I believe I know who he is." Warthrope recognized Bornick's tone. "I think that Mr. Califax will agree with me. I refer to a young man named Albert Thurney. Remember, Califax? You asked me about him."

"I did." Califax was replying. "But you doubted my suspicion, Bornick."

"I have changed my opinion. I have seen Thurney since. I strongly suspect him as the criminal, for reasons which I shall state later."

"You have Thurney's address?" inquired Weston. Apparently, Bornick must have nodded a reply, for the commissioner added: "Write it down, Cardona. Then call headquarters and tell them to arrest Albert Thurney."

Darkness was creeping in upon Warthrope. The servant did not realize it as he stooped above the dictograph receiver in the dimly lighted corner. Warthrope had heard news that he knew might come.

THE PYTHON

It was his cue to take to flight; to pass the word along to Thurney and Warring, before the police could reach the apartment. Warthrope arose and started to replace the cover of his fake radio.

It was then that approaching darkness took living form. From the blackness that edged the room, a cloaked figure swooped forward upon the spy. Warthrope heard a swish; he tried to blurt a cry as he wheeled around to encounter an attacker who had come upon him like a shrouded ghost.

"The Shadow!"

WARTHROPE could only gurgle his recognition of this formidable antagonist. The cloaked attacker clutched his throat with choking hands and pinned the treacherous underling to the floor. As Warthrope lay gasping, gloved hands bound his wrists with thongs; then tied his ankles. A gag was jammed between Warthrope's lips.

The Shadow lifted the shell from the listening apparatus. He clicked a button; again voices came from the room below. Stooped by the floor The Shadow had become the silent listener to the conference in Danton Califax's study.

While he heard, The Shadow watched. From Warthrope's window, he could see that signal tower where Burbank still held control, to relay any of The Python's messages. No longer did blue light flicker. The Shadow knew that The Python's plans remained unchanged.

Moving in from darkness, The Shadow had first captured the signal room, the heart of The Python's insidious system. His present step had been to gain Warthrope's listening post, a spot that might later prove of vital import.

Meanwhile, between those strokes, The Shadow had thrust plans upon Joe Cardona – orders which the ace sleuth had accepted. And as a final touch, by his elimination of Warthrope, he had prevented the flight of Albert Thurney, who – uninformed of happenings – would remain at his apartment, to be captured by the law.

The Python's Coils were tightening; but no victory lay within their grasp. Soon they would be writhing, gripped within the power of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXIII. HALF PAST TEN

WITHIN Danton Califax's study, three men were listening to one. Danton Califax himself was the speaker. Stooped wearily behind his desk, he had finished his account of his dealings with Craig Jurrice. While others eyed him, Califax drew a silk handkerchief and mopped his bald brow.

"I knew of Revoort through Jurrice," summarized Califax. "I knew also of a Cuban – a friend of Revoort's – but I had never heard the name Ramorez. I realize, commissioner, that I should have spoken sooner. I wanted to speak, immediately after the news about the Tropical; but Jurrice protested. Moreover, Mr. Bornick advised me not to do so."

"Rather poor advice, Mr. Bornick," remarked Weston, testily. "Rather poor advice."

"I don't agree with you, commissioner," retorted Bornick. "My advice was entirely justified, from the legal standpoint. My connection with Califax was that of counselor."

THE PYTHON

Joe Cardona was listening mechanically to the dispute. Joe was tense. Through his brain were flashing recollections of those imprinted orders from The Shadow.

"Half past ten – the blue light signal –"

The second reference had puzzled Cardona. The Shadow had spoken of blue lights in a loft building; lights that would be visible from the river and also from a parking space near empty tenement buildings behind the Califax home. Those lights – so Cardona had promised – would not be molested by the law. Their flash would, in fact, be the final order for police to move.

Staring beyond Danton Califax, Cardona could see blue lights through the window. A clock on the mantel gave the time as half past ten. Small wonder that Joe Cardona had become tense. Time had been moving at tortoise speed during the past dozen minutes.

"Very well, commissioner," Bornick, his long arms folded, was speaking again. "I shall accept your criticism. In return, you must commend me for naming Albert Thurney as The Python. Any moment now, you will probably receive a telephone call, telling of his capture.

"My client, Mr. Califax, has unburdened his troubled mind. I am glad of that; for he has lived in fear of robbery. With The Python trapped, he need have no further dread. Cardona's call to headquarters settled that matter.

"While we wait to hear of Thurney's capture, I shall tell you how I came to suspect the fellow. When and how he arrived in New York, I do not know. I first received a call from him, asking me to call at his apartment. I went there one evening to discuss the matter of some stock certificates. While I was there –"

Bornick paused abruptly. He was staring past Califax; he, like Cardona, could see blue lights begin to flicker. Weston and Califax showed puzzled expressions when Bornick stopped speaking; but Joe Cardona did not. Instead, the detective tugged his right hand from his pocket and flashed a revolver into view.

"While I was at Thurney's," added Bornick, quickly, "I saw –"

He stopped again at sight of Cardona's gun. The detective had arisen to jab the weapon squarely in front of Bornick's face, cutting off the lawyer's view of the blue lights. Weston, amazed, leaped to his feet, while Califax sat limply.

"Joe Cardona!" ejaculated Weston. "What does this mean? Why have you done –"

"It means," chortled Joe, "that I have trapped The Python. Look him over, commissioner."

UPSTAIRS, The Shadow had heard Cardona's statement; the proof that the ace had acted when the blue lights flickered. There were sounds, however, that brought immediate interruption. The rattle of gunfire was breaking loose outside of Califax's house. The Shadow sprang to the rear window and hurled it open.

His angled view of the river showed a tugboat nosing in against the river bank, toward an old pier at the rear of Califax's house. From the tug's deck, guns were spurting, opening fire on another craft that was speeding inward.

A siren swelled. A searchlight swept the tugboat, to show Lem Hurdy and a gun-shooting crew. Then came answering shots; the rattle of machine guns. The craft with the searchlight was a police boat, speeding in to doom Lem and his crime crew.

THE PYTHON

From the rear tenement house, a flood of skulkers were springing into view, headed for the back door of Califax's home. Guns ripped from across the avenue; crooks stopped to answer another fire. Bluecoats and plain-clothesmen came driving forward in a sudden surge.

Some of Lem's men had leaped ashore. They dashed to aid those who were battling the land force of the law. Guns were barking, to stop the police in their too impetuous charge. It was then that The Shadow entered. Leaning from his window, he thundered blasts with automatics.

Officers from the police boat were trying to board the tug. Those from the avenue were dropping back to cover. Both groups were halted; crooks swung their flashlights upward to reveal the cloaked avenger who had opened the surprise bombardment from above. Wild shots peppered all about the window.

The Shadow's laugh returned its challenge. Eyes and guns; those were all that he kept above the sill while bullets whistled close above his black slouch hat. Stabs from his guns marked new sprawlers on the turf of Califax's lawn.

Then came a rally of the law: shouts of triumph told that the tug was taken; a surge from the avenue marked a new charge by the police. Still The Shadow's guns pumped on; each .45 a menace to every venomous sniper on the ground below.

IN the study below, Cardona was talking above the muffled rattle of outside guns. Still covering Bornick, Joe was explaining everything to the commissioner. His voice, however, could not reach The Shadow, whose own guns drowned all words from the low-tuned dictograph.

"Orders from you, commissioner," grinned Joe. "At least I thought they were, at first; but after I got here, I realized they must have come from The Shadow. He had your voice down perfect, commissioner.

"I couldn't change things then; it was too late. I couldn't tell you, either. The works were due to pop at half past ten; when blue lights flashed from a loft building. The Python's signal, I guess, but The Shadow was wise to it. Our men, posted on shore and in boats, are smashing up The Python's crew right now.

"Some on a tugboat; some in a tenement house. That's where the crooks are being nabbed. But that's not all. The Shadow told me that The Python would be here in this room; that I could nab him when he gave himself away. He's done it, Bornick has. He was watching those blue lights. I saw him."

Cardona paused. Weston stared squarely at Bornick. The lawyer tilted his head back and delivered a harsh laugh.

"You're a fool, Cardona!" he exclaimed. "Of course I was watching those blue lights. I've been watching them for days; ever since I first saw them from Thurney's window and noticed him observing them. I could see them from my office – because it happens to be high up – and I've seen them from here as well.

"I have a pocketful of notes, ready to give you. All dots and dashes, that I've tried to decode. That's why I was sure Thurney was The Python. But it wasn't until after the murders of Jurrice and Ramorez that I realized I should have broken his game earlier. I still persisted in trying to decode –"

Bornick broke off. Footsteps were pounding toward this room. Weston wheeled toward the door; pulling a gun, the commissioner was in time to cover an armed man who came staggering into view. It was Duronne; alone of those in the tenement, he had managed to make this house. Half dazed, he had blundered into this room.

THE PYTHON

"Over here," snapped Cardona, as Duronne let his revolver fall to the floor. "Stand beside your chief, The Python. We'll quiz the two of you. Go ahead, Bornick. Talk some more."

"That won't be necessary," scoffed a harsh voice from behind the desk. "Drop those revolvers, both of you!"

The order was followed by a fierce, snakelike hiss. Weston and Cardona wheeled to find themselves covered by two revolvers, one in each of Danton Califax's bony hands. The bald-headed man had drawn himself erect; his face was gloating as he delivered the venomous sound that betokened The Python.

REVOLVERS clanked to the floor. Weston and Cardona stood helpless. Duronne sprang over and grabbed up his revolver, ready to aid his chief.

Bornick was standing stupefied. The outside gunfire had become spasmodic; The Python's hordes were curbed. Their revealed chief, however, stood unhindered.

"You were my dupe, Bornick," sneered Califax. "I kept ordering Thurney to see you, hoping that you would suspect him. He was but one of my lieutenants; the one whom I appointed to make a false trail for the law to follow.

"I am The Python. I staged those first robberies. I went after the treasure that Revoort was bringing to Ramorez. My men fired the Tropical, but failed to get the swag. I, myself, murdered Jurrice and Ramorez, because they might have told too much if they had gotten together.

"Bah! What need of other explanations to fools like you? Suffice it to say that I arranged this raid tonight, to unload all the early swag, which is in my safe with my own gems. It was to have been a quiet raid; all of us tied up and left here. Should it fail, through some misadventure, nothing would have mattered. The law would still have gone after Thurney, thinking him The Python. The law would still have regarded me as one whom The Python had sought to rob."

Though his guns were covering Weston and Cardona, Califax was glaring at Bornick, who stood between him and the door. Narrowed, beady eyes; the evil, hissing voice – these were tokens of The Python's merciless hate.

"Your meddling means your death, Bornick!" spat The Python. "Weston and Cardona shall die with you. I shall say that the three of you were slain by raiders. Death! To all of you, because you have guessed my most important secret – the existence of that signal tower – the center of my strength and –"

The Python's narrowed eyes became fixed, as his ears were the first to hear a shuddering mockery from the study door. Past Bornick, Califax saw a shrouding figure. The Shadow had heard The Python's gloating voice, across the very dictograph that Califax had planted here through Thurney.

The use of Warthrope had been a master stroke by The Python. It had enabled him to preserve his identity from his own followers. He had avoided calls from this room to the signal tower whenever he knew Warthrope had been listening.

A proof of the innocence of Danton Califax, that dictograph hook-up. Such would it have been when a show-down came. Its discovery would have made Califax appear as a man spied upon by traitors. Its use, moreover, had fooled Albert Thurney, the man who – in a pinch – would have been unable to point out the man who really was The Python.

THE PYTHON

But now The Python's own device had been used against him. The Shadow had captured Warthrope without The Python's knowledge. He had listened in on the beginning of The Python's own declaration of identity; while the supercrook had continued his gloating statements, The Shadow had been on his way, down from the room above.

Joe Cardona had bungled, picking Bornick instead of Califax. That had been excusable, for not even The Shadow had known of Bornick's observation of the lights. Cardona, however, was out to make amends.

As his ears picked up The Shadow's laugh, Joe lost no opportunity. Away from the line of The Python's sudden stare, the ace sleuth bounded forward, defiant of the fiend's leveled gun.

COMMISSIONER WESTON sprang an instant later, in copy of Cardona's example. He, too, was quick of action. So also was Lester Bornick; but the lawyer instinctively chose the foe who had him covered: Luke Duronne.

Three men had acted against individual dangers. Cardona and Weston were plunging forward, while Bornick wheeled; but each was after the nearest gun. By the very naturalness of their response, they served The Shadow. Bornick, in particular, for his twist about cleared the way for The Shadow's aim.

Swift though The Shadow was where his own life lay in danger, he was even speedier when the fate of others stood at stake. He boomed both automatics straight for The Python. Tongues of flame zipped like arrow points, indicating a double line between the converging figures of Weston and Cardona.

The Shadow's bullets sped before two desperate men had blocked the way with their own bodies. The Shadow's quick shots were also launched before The Python could jab the triggers of his pointed revolvers. A snarl coming from his lips, the master crook capsized with guns unfired. His hands were clawing, loosened as they lost their weapons, when Weston and Cardona pitched upon him.

The Shadow wheeled as a revolver barked. It was Duronne's gun; the groggy Coilmaster had managed to fire a shot at Bornick's shoulder. The lawyer was wavering, wounded. Duronne, his daze ended, was wheeling toward The Shadow. The crook's revolver barked again; its report was simultaneous with the blast of a swinging automatic.

One bullet whizzed close as it passed The Shadow's ear. The other, traveling in the opposite direction, found a living target in Duronne. The Coilmaster rolled groaning to the floor, whereon his chief, The Python, already lay dead.

To save Weston and Cardona, The Shadow had driven two bullets straight through the evil heart of Danton Califax. Death had been delivered to The Python. Life remained to The Shadow. A mirthless laugh, reechoing through the room where guns had talked: such was the departing triumph of the master fighter, who, with justice, had gained the final victory.

WHILE The Shadow had dealt with The Python, the law had finished the supercrook's lieutenants and their followers. Luke Duronne, wounded, was one of few survivors; as was Albert Thurney, already captured by Markham and a squad of detectives. These prisoners belonged to the law; so did a few others, such as Warthrope, bound in his room; and Warring, nabbed with Thurney.

Laxley, also. Burbank had finished with the blue lights, after sending that last signal ordered by The Python. A signal with a double meaning; for it had brought the law upon attacking crooks. Burbank had gone from the signal tower; but Laxley still lay there, to be found by investigating police. Burbank had left the lower door open, as a sure clue to the law.

THE PYTHON

Louis Revoort was safe, with his treasure. All spoils of Danton Califax – erstwhile The Python – had been reclaimed by the law. The Python had paid full penalty for his self–confessed robberies and murders.

Three valiant men had gained rescue through The Shadow. Weston and Cardona, unscathed; Bornick, with but a minor wound – they could well testify to the prowess of The Shadow. But only The Shadow, in his own archives, could record the full tale of his desperate, uphill conflicts with that superfoe, The Python.

From those annals has this chronicle come; this story of The Python, the master rogue who failed, when confronted by The Shadow's might!

THE END