

THE GOLDEN PAGODA
by Maxwell Grant

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From out of China comes the master of all brigands - Li Hoang - to battle,
in New York's Chinatown, the Master of Darkness - The Shadow!

CHAPTER I

THE VANISHED CLUE

MOTT STREET formed a line of alluring glitter, when the cumbersome Chinatown bus disgorged its crowd of passengers. Ahead lay brilliant lights flanked by an array of Oriental signs and banners, that brought eager gasps from sight-seers.

They had reached New York's Chinatown, these visitors from the hinterlands. It looked like the strange, exotic place that they had expected to see. Most of them were gullible, ready to believe anything that their guide might tell them.

Passers-by grinned as the group moved along Mott Street. Just another crop of tourists, swallowing the old hokum. Helped by the guide's spiel, their imaginations might weave a spell of mysterious intrigue about the Chinese district. But to those in the know, Chinatown was just a part of Manhattan where a lot of Chinese happened to live.

Tonight, those in the know were wrong.

Something sinister lurked in Chinatown; and there was one man who realized it. That was why he had come here, in a manner that would least be suspected: as a member of the party aboard the Chinatown bus.

To all appearances, he was just another of the sight-seers - a clean-cut young chap, who looked like an out-of-towner. Actually, he was thoroughly familiar with Manhattan; his gawky gaze, his expressions of surprise, were shams.

That young man's name was Harry Vincent. He was an agent of The Shadow.

For years, Harry Vincent had served a mysterious, invisible chief, whose word was law. There was nothing secret, however, about The Shadow's purpose. The Shadow had one sole aim; that was to break up crime. In his campaigns against master-plotters of evil, The Shadow was frequently aided by trusted agents.

Chinatown's present menace was insidious. Grave danger threatened any wayfarer who might be suspected as an agent of The Shadow. Spies might be anywhere - everywhere - watching for such persons. The sight-seeing bus had provided the surest way for Harry to pass through the secret cordon.

This was Harry's third visit in as many nights. Though his expression did not show it, he was tense when the guide conducted the party up a flight of narrow stairs, to show the visitors the interior of a Chinese joss house.

Harry was in the background when the crowd shoved into a squarish room, where a solemn Buddha sat as ruler of a shoddy temple.

A squatly Chinaman, dressed in Oriental robes, spoke choppy English as he displayed wishing sticks, prayer papers, and other objects that went with Chinese rites. Two girls, also Chinese, passed wishing sticks among the visitors. There was another Chinaman, standing in the corner; but he was dull of eye, wrinkled of face. He wasn't the extra man that Harry had expected to

see.

Harry was looking for a snake-eyed Celestial who had been here the night before. Harry knew the fellow's name - Chun Laro - and he had some information regarding the snake-eyed Chinaman.

Chun Laro was from San Francisco; he had a bad reputation among the Chinese of that city. Hundreds of prayer papers had been burned, with the wish that Chun Laro would leave Frisco. The hope had been fulfilled, but the prayer papers were not the cause.

Some purpose requiring ugly services had brought Chun Laro to New York. Here, he might soon be a thorn to local Chinese, even though he had the ability to avoid trouble with the law.

The absence of Chun Laro was no surprise to Harry. Two nights ago, the snakish rogue had been lounging near the doorway of a Chinese restaurant. Last night, this joss house had been his habitat. Evidently, he had chosen a new lurking spot for the present evening.

WHILE lingering, Harry glanced about the little temple. He was thinking of Chun Laro; perhaps that was why his train of impressions ran to other things that were absent. Harry saw a shelf, topped by a row of incense burners. His eye stopped upon a vacant space.

Instantly, Harry remembered an object that had been there the night before. The missing item was a ten-inch miniature of a Chinese pagoda, that Harry had especially noticed, because it was made of gold.

At the time, Harry had supposed that the pagoda was merely gold-plated. His present idea was different. That pagoda might be made of actual gold; a rare and valuable token that could not easily be imitated.

"The Golden Pagoda!"

Harry spoke the words, half aloud. Another thought had flashed; for the first time, he recalled why he had noticed that pagoda, last night. Two nights ago, the same pagoda - or its exact duplicate - had been in the window of the restaurant where Harry had observed Chun Laro!

Tourists were filing from the joss house. Harry went with them. On the street, they passed the restaurant. There was no sign of Chun Laro, nor was the Golden Pagoda in the window. All along the route, Harry kept watching for both; but he saw neither.

The group turned right on Pell Street. They came to Doyers; headed toward the Bowery Mission, which had once been an old Chinese theater. The trip would end with Doyers Street. Harry saw blank results, if he remained with the sight-seeing throng. His only bet was to stay in Chinatown, once here.

Edging away from the entrance to the old theater, Harry turned back along Doyers Street. A hunch-shouldered bum blocked him, made a whiny request for a match to light the stump of a cigarette. Harry thought for a moment that the fellow was a panhandler, beginning a build-up. Then he spotted the wizened face beneath the bum's tilted cap visor.

The pretended panhandler was "Hawkeye," a crafty agent who prowled the underworld seeking information for The Shadow.

Harry handed Hawkeye a half-filled pack of paper matches. In an undertone,

he voiced the same words that he had muttered in the joss house:

"The Golden Pagoda -"

There was no chance for more. Two Chinese were shuffling along the street; they were the sort who might be hooked up with Chun Laro. Hawkeye spotted them,

whined to Harry:

"Only a dime, mister -"

Harry gave an annoyed head shake. He thrust away from Hawkeye. With a disappointed grimace, the wizened-faced man shuffled along to join a line of bums who were awaiting admittance into the basement bunk rooms of the mission.

Strolling toward Chinatown's center, Harry covered an area that he had missed during the sight-seeing tour. He saw a small curio shop; paused outside to light a cigarette. While looking at the curios stacked in the window, Harry received a sudden thrill.

There, at the end of a shelf, stood the Golden Pagoda!

SAUNTERING past the doorway, Harry casually looked inside. There was only one man in the place - a bland Chinese merchant, seated in a rear alcove behind a pair of raised curtains.

Harry turned about, took in the street at a quick glance. Spying no Chinese close at hand, he entered the curio shop.

The bland merchant received him without stirring from the alcove. He seemed to be expecting a visitor like Harry. Playing the part of a chance customer, Harry inquired the price of the Golden Pagoda.

The merchant slowly shook his head.

"Not for sale," he declared, in smooth English. "Moreover, sir, you would not wish to buy it."

"Why not?" questioned Harry.

"It is not gold," returned the merchant. "It is brass. Wait! I shall prove so!"

He waddled to the window, brought the pagoda from its niche. Beckoning Harry into the little alcove, the Chinaman put the pagoda on one side of a set of scales resting on a table. On the other, he piled weights, until both balanced.

"You see?" The merchant was steadying the scales as he spoke. "It does not weigh enough to be gold!"

Harry's eyes were on the side of the scales that bore the weights. He saw the merchant's fingers resting on the edge. Their pressure was adding to the balance, to make the tiny pagoda seem less than its actual weight.

Harry's hand sped for the merchant's wrist. The move accomplished its purpose. The bland Chinaman whipped his hand away; the pagoda side of the scales thumped heavily against the table top. But that was not all that happened.

With a sudden snarl, the merchant reached for a cord. He yanked it; the curtains dropped between the alcove and the shop. Harry, behind the table, was out of sight from any persons who might chance to pass the shop. The Chinaman's snarl also had a purpose.

As he faced the fellow, Harry heard a sharp click beside him. It was an answer to the snarled signal. Wheeling, Harry saw a panel pivot about in the side wall of the alcove.

There, with twisty lips as snakish as his ugly eyes, stood the renegade Chinaman whom Harry had connected with the Golden Pagoda. There was no more doubt about the link that Harry had guessed. The man beyond the panel was Chun Laro!

IN one long-clawed hand, Chun Laro clasped a knife. His arm was drawn back, ready to deliver a thrust. Harry didn't give him time for that stroke. Employing sudden tactics of his own, The Shadow's agent showed his own ability.

Spinning back from the table, Harry twisted toward the opposite side of the alcove; as he wheeled, he pulled an automatic from his hip pocket. The finish of his move seemed perfect; all Harry had to do was plank his shoulders against the opposite wall. With that sudden stop, he would hold Chun Laro covered.

It was the wall itself that spoiled Harry's halt. The instant that his shoulders struck, the wall gave. It was fitted with a revolving panel, like the one from which Chun Laro had appeared.

The whole alcove seemed to whirl at that moment. Harry's own impetus carried him into the trap, so rapidly that he had no time to fire a shot. Flung roundabout, he caught a last flash of leering faces - Chun Laro's and the merchant's - then came pitch-darkness; the sharp click of the locking panel.

Harry hurtled headlong into the blackness. An instant later, the space beneath his feet was empty. A gasp on his lips, Harry took a crazy plunge, striking a stony wall as he went downward. That blow dizzied him; a half second later, there was another.

Sprawling upon a cement passage, Harry received a thump on the head that left him senseless.

Up in the alcove, Chun Laro put away his knife. Moving sneakily to the panel where Harry had disappeared, the serpent-eyed Chinaman unlocked it. He opened the panel slightly. He listened; then closed the barrier.

Chun Laro moved to the table. He took the Golden Pagoda from the scales, forced it beneath the front of his robe. He spoke sing-song language to the merchant; then went through his own panel, which offered an untrapped path.

The panel locked. The merchant took the weights from the scales, stacked them where they belonged. He peered between the curtains. Satisfied, he drew them open, to resume his seat in the alcove.

From the street, the curio shop looked undisturbed, its proprietor as calm and bland as ever. Nothing remained to show that Harry Vincent had entered here, to fall helpless into the hands of enemies. The lone clue had gone with Chun Laro.

That clue was the Golden Pagoda!

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER VISITOR

THOUGH Chinatown's surface was calm, news of restless undercurrents had traveled from that district. One hour after the disappearance of Harry Vincent, Chinese affairs were being discussed in another quarter.

Three men were present in an office-like room. One, who sat behind a mahogany desk, was a man of military appearance, with short-clipped mustache. Full of face, brisk of manner, he had an air that suited his important position. He was Ralph Weston, commissioner of New York City police.

Opposite Weston sat a man of different bearing.

The second individual was Inspector Joe Cardona, ace of the New York force. Cardona was stocky of build, swarthy of complexion, and decidedly poker-faced. When he was irked, he seldom showed it; but tonight, Cardona almost gave himself away.

Commissioner Weston didn't notice it; but the third person in the room was keen enough to understand Cardona's expression.

That third person was a friend of Weston's, a chance visitor who had

stopped in at the commissioner's apartment. Tall, with an immobile, hawkish face, he was leisurely smoking a thin cigar, seemingly disinterested in the conversation. That was the way with Lamont Cranston, the millionaire globetrotter.

Behind that mask of indifference lay a keen discernment, which, if noticed, might have given a clue to the visitor's real identity.

This personage who posed as Lamont Cranston, was actually The Shadow.

"All right, commissioner." It was Cardona who spoke; his bluntness covered the bite of his tone. "Maybe you've sized it properly, but I still know the symptoms. Things aren't right in Chinatown!"

"Are they ever right?" queried Weston.

The question brought a smile from Cranston. Cardona saw it; gave a wry grin of his own.

"There's something to that, commissioner," admitted the inspector, deciding that it was best to keep his chief in good humor. "It's always tricky business, handling the Chinese. There's a lot goes on, under the surface, all the time. But when it comes to the top, it's time to be ready!"

Weston smiled indulgently. Cardona decided to continue.

"There are new faces in Chinatown," he insisted. "Mugs that don't look right. Others that we know - fellows who have been out of sight - that look like hatchet men. That covers the Chinese; but they aren't all.

"The Chinatown squad has spotted plenty of hoodlums, moving in and out. Those gorillas don't belong there. They're either going to bust loose with something, or they're covering up some game that's deeper. That's it in a nutshell!"

Weston shook his head; the gesture was a weary one.

"You've told me all this before," said the commissioner. "Therefore, I repeat my former statement: Show me some purpose behind the factors that you mention; then we can decide upon the remedy."

Cardona had no answer.

"TONG wars are a thing of the past," added Weston. "That disposes of one possibility of trouble. Sometimes, there are fanatical outbreaks among joss cults; but there have been no recent indications of such. That eliminates another source.

"Only one other remains: Dope! It can also be forgotten. No large shipments of narcotics have been smuggled recently. We invariably receive tips when dope peddlers are active. There have been no such reports."

Cardona remained glumly silent. Weston reached for a sheaf of papers; scanning them, he remarked:

"Why not investigate other matters, Cardona? Here are two complaints regarding racketeers. One from the Compometal Corporation; the other from the Federal Export Company."

A gleam of satisfaction came to Cardona's eyes.

"I looked into those," snapped the ace. "Both are the bunk! I talked with the president of Compometal. His plant is running top speed, turning out aluminum alloys for aircraft. The general manager of Federal Export says they had some trouble getting shipments under way, but that it's all been straightened out."

Weston looked doubtful. "The complaints came from those very officials you mention -"

"And they've withdrawn them!" inserted Cardona. "Those cases are closed. I've been sticking close to my job, commissioner. I settled those matters before I began to bother about this Chinatown business."

"Very well," decided Weston, folding the report sheets. "What do you propose to do regarding the Chinese question?"

"I want to make the rounds with the Chinatown squad," replied Cardona.

"That's not asking much, commissioner."

Weston agreed that the request was reasonable. He gave Cardona permission to take over that temporary duty. The ace inspector expressed his thanks, then left before the commissioner had a chance to change his mind.

Alone with Cranston, Weston chuckled.

"Cardona has a leaning for hunches," the commissioner told the millionaire. "Once in a dozen times, his hunches have merit. Therefore, it is best to let him follow them, when they can cause no complications. But Cardona will find nothing in Chinatown; for there is nothing there."

Apparently, Cranston was satisfied to accept Weston's opinion. Actually, he agreed with it but partially.

The Shadow was willing to admit that Cardona might find nothing in Chinatown; but that did not prove that trouble was absent in the Oriental district. On the contrary, The Shadow's own observations had brought him to the

very conclusion that Cardona had later reached.

From somewhere in Chinatown's depths, a menace had arisen. Outward indications were but the ripples from that stir. Sooner or later, a surge would follow; that tidal wave might sweep far beyond the limits of Chinatown itself.

Among The Shadow's campaigns against crime, some of the most desperate had been those with a Chinese background. The symptoms of trouble that Cardona had reported, were real ones. The Shadow was soon to have new proof of it.

For the present, The Shadow was willing to let Weston talk, hoping that the commissioner might supply some further information. It came.

"CARDONA'S quest will get him nothing," confided Weston, "although it was useless to tell him so. The government has already looked into these Chinese matters."

"With what result?" was Cranston's quiet query.

"None," returned Weston. "The F.B.I. has assigned an undercover agent to the job. Reports have been negative. The investigator has contacted certain Chinese, but has gained no evidence of any criminal activities."

Rising from his desk, the commissioner clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Come, Cranston," he suggested. "We must be on our way. The most important item on our calendar is that banquet at the Cobalt Club. Jove! I hope that Kent

Allard can manage to be there. I am anxious for you to meet the fellow."

Weston did not see the thin smile that rested momentarily upon the lips of Cranston. The commissioner's wish could not be realized, for a very definite reason.

The Shadow's real identity, when he dropped the guise of Lamont Cranston, was that of Kent Allard, aviator and explorer. That was why the two had never met during functions at the Cobalt Club. One always happened to be absent when the other was on hand.

Just as Weston was opening the door of his little office, a buzzer announced a telephone call. Weston answered it; turned to his companion:

"It's for you, Cranston."

Across the wire, The Shadow heard the methodical tone of Burbank, the contact man who communicated directly with The Shadow's active agents. Burbank had double news concerning Harry Vincent: first, that the agent had not reported; second, that he had passed a message to Hawkeye.

Burbank summarized it by repeating the words that Hawkeye had relayed. The Shadow heard them:

"The Golden Pagoda -"

Turned half away from Weston, The Shadow let his fingers press the hook of the desk telephone. A twice repeated click told Burbank that the report was received. With the line closed, The Shadow spoke in Cranston's tone.

"All right, Richards" - there was a trace of impatience in Cranston's drawl - "tell them to expect me in half an hour... No, call it an hour. That's it - traffic may be heavy." Hanging up, Cranston faced Weston.

"I shall have to miss the banquet," he told the commissioner. "Richards, my valet, tells me that unexpected guests have arrived at my New Jersey home. I must go there at once!"

Weston suggested that the guests could wait a while. Cranston did not agree. They were friends from the Middle West, who had long promised to make a visit. He would have to go home and meet them.

That was why Weston and his friend parted, outside the apartment house. The commissioner entered an official car. Cranston stepped into a limousine. Weston heard him order the chauffeur to drive to New Jersey.

THE order was changed, after a few blocks. The limousine headed for a side street near Times Square. There, Cranston transferred to a taxicab; spoke a whispered command to the driver. Soon, that cab was speeding southward.

The lone passenger was crouched low in the rear seat. In the mirror of a make-up kit, he was changing his facial appearance; building up the features of Cranston with a puttyish substance. Soon, the face showed no more than a faint resemblance to The Shadow's former guise.

The make-up box went into a drawer beneath the rear seat. From that space, The Shadow removed a cloak and slouch hat. Those jet-black garments hid him, when he donned them. A grim laugh whispered in the confines of the speeding cab.

Clad in this attire, The Shadow would need no passport into Chinatown. He would invade that sector silently, invisible, his arrival unguessed. Once there, he might reveal himself; but it would be in a guise that no one would suspect.

The Shadow was seeking the trail of the Golden Pagoda - the lure which he knew had drawn Harry Vincent into deep disaster.

CHAPTER III

THE CHINESE TEA SHOP

SOME distance from the trapped curio shop where Harry Vincent had disappeared, stood a tiny tea shop owned by a Chinaman named Wan Kew. Its location marked the fringe of Chinatown; but beyond the tea shop lay a stretch of narrow street that was very poorly lighted.

In a sense, that street was a borderland. Most of its ancient houses had been deserted by their tenants, in the belief that Chinatown would soon swallow it. But the growth of the Chinese district had slowed. The street remained obscure.

It was the sort of street where one would expect murders to be perpetrated; but none had ever occurred there. That, possibly, was because wise

wayfarers avoided the old street at night. That applied to Wan Kew, himself.

The proprietor of the tea shop was a cautious old Chinese, who had chosen

his location because the rental was low. Most of Wan Kew's customers bought tea in wholesale lots. He always advised them to go back toward the lighted center of Chinatown, when they left his shop. Wan Kew always followed that direction himself.

Wan Kew was thrifty, rather than rich. He had no helpers in his tea shop, although he kept the place open from twelve to fifteen hours a day. Wan Kew was like a lonely sentinel, guarding Chinatown's last outpost. He could always be seen from the doorway of his little shop, seated like a stuffed owl in front of shelves that were laden with chests of tea.

In all the years that he had been there, Wan Kew had never experienced anything strikingly unusual, until tonight. He had not anticipated that his placid existence was to undergo a sudden change. Indeed, Wan Kew suspected nothing, when a messenger boy delivered a small, square-shaped package that was marked with Chinese characters.

Alone, Wan Kew placed the package on his counter. He peered through his round-rimmed glasses, while his trembling old fingers carefully untied the knots. Wan Kew always saved the strings from packages. He didn't change that policy, even though he expected to find some special brand of tea inside. Other

merchants frequently sent samples of such products for Wan Kew to pass upon.

The package did not contain tea. Wan Kew was surprised to find a stout cardboard box, instead. He lifted the lid; his old eyes blinked. Complete surprise showed on his wrinkled, saffron face.

In the box was a miniature pagoda, that had the deep rich hue of solid gold.

It was gold! Wan Kew knew that, the moment he tested its weight. The pagoda tilted in his hands, he saw its hollow interior, which proved the heaviness of the metal. The space within the pagoda wasn't empty; but the object that Wan Kew saw there, added nothing to its weight.

It was simply a sheet of rice paper, folded, like a note.

Wan Kew opened the message. The saffron color went from his wrinkled face.

He was pale, almost to whiteness. The tremble of his hands seized his entire body.

There was no threat mentioned in the note. It merely specified that Wan Kew was to place the pagoda in the window of his tea shop; after that, to ignore any questions that any one might ask concerning it.

The signature beneath the note was the cause of Wan Kew's fear. It was in Chinese characters that the old tea merchant recognized. The name impressed him

so hugely, that he gasped it, half aloud:

"Li Hoang!"

THE rice paper fluttered to the counter. Wan Kew gripped the woodwork. Steadying himself, he finally managed strength enough to lift the Golden Pagoda. Waddling to the front of the shop, he perched the rare object upon a tea chest on the middle shelf.

Returning to his counter, Wan Kew plucked up the note. In the low light of the tea shop, its red-inked characters had the crimson hue of blood. That thought brought new shivers to Wan Kew, particularly when he viewed the thick signature of Li Hoang.

Sheer fear made Wan Kew scan the message again, to make sure that he had missed no detail.

There was one added instruction: Wan Kew was to destroy the message, thus

leaving no evidence that he had heard from Li Hoang. The tea shop proprietor was quite eager to obey that order.

Nevertheless, Wan Kew was wary.

Crumpling the sheet of rice paper, he stole to the door of the tea shop, peered out along the darkened street. He saw no lurkers in the blackness that lay away from Chinatown.

Staring in the opposite direction, Wan Kew spied only three persons. Two were Chinese, walking toward a lighted street. The third was an American, who was lighting a cigarette as he gazed into the window of a chop suey house.

Wan Kew went to the interior of his shop. He laid his hand upon a doorknob in back of the counter. He waited a moment; then twisted the door open and sidled into a rear room.

There, at a battered desk that was flanked by old tea chests, Wan Kew lighted a long wax taper. The wick sputtered; the flame wavered, casting long, grotesque streaks of blackness. The gloom of the walls formed a frame for the Chinaman's withery face. The light, burning upward, showed the twitch of Wan Kew's lips and the fearful blinks of his owlish eyes.

Again, a tremor seized the Chinaman. He tiptoed into the darkness; reached the wall that backed the shelves behind his counter. Sliding a portion of the wall, Wan Kew peered between tea chests, to make sure that no one had entered his shop.

He saw a figure saunter past the outer doorway. It was the American who had been at the chop suey house window. Satisfied that the stroller had continued on his way, Wan Kew returned to the desk. The taper was burning steadily. Wan Kew twisted the rice-paper note, started to insert it in the flame.

A sound stopped him. Wan Kew was sure that he had heard a creak from the door that connected with the front of the shop. He blinked in that direction; saw a tall streak of blackness against the wall.

Wan Kew shivered, then decided that the patch was his own silhouette.

With an eager hiss, the old tea dealer let the flame lick the twisted message. His lips formed a relieved sigh, as the fire took hold.

Wan Kew did not see the living blackness that swooped suddenly from gloom.

A gloved hand gripped his wrist, hauled his arm away from the candlelight. Before Wan Kew could twist free, he saw the muzzle of an automatic thrust between his eyes. The hand left his wrist, to pluck the paper. Gloved fingers extinguished the flame.

The candle glow showed the glint of burning eyes, beneath the brim of a slouch hat. Wan Kew recognized the intruder; he gulped the name:

"Ying Ko!"

THAT title was the Chinese equivalent for The Shadow. It brought a response from hidden lips. A grim laugh, whispered in the darkness, told Wan Kew that he was not mistaken.

There was a tightness to Wan Kew's lips. He would not talk - not even to The Shadow. Powerful though Ying Ko might be, Wan Kew feared Li Hoang more.

The logic was simple. Wan Kew, the innocent proprietor of an obscure tea shop, had nothing to fear from The Shadow, who stood for right.

The name of Li Hoang, a synonym of evil, was one that could excite dread from an honest man like Wan Kew.

The Shadow divined the thoughts that gripped Wan Kew. He could see the pallor of the Chinaman's face, above the yellow robe that the fellow wore. He knew that Wan Kew was acting under threat. Compressed lips were proof that the Chinaman would not talk. But The Shadow knew that words would not be needed from Wan Kew.

The Chinaman's terrified stare was directed toward the crinkled paper

that

The Shadow had captured, almost intact. That gaze told The Shadow that the riddle could be solved by the paper itself.

Cloaking his automatic, The Shadow coolly unfolded the message. He read the Chinese characters easily, much to the amazement of Wan Kew. When he saw the name Li Hoang, The Shadow delivered an understanding whisper.

Since The Shadow had gained the truth, Wan Kew became voluble.

"Li Hoang is here!" Wan Kew was chattering in Chinese. "No one else would dare use the name of Li Hoang! He is the master of all Chinese brigands. The terrible Li Hoang!"

"You have seen Li Hoang?" The Shadow's question was in Wan Kew's own dialect. "He has been here?"

"No. The message came within the pagoda, which I had never seen before. I know nothing of Li Hoang!"

"Nor of those who serve him?"

A head shake from Wan Kew. Watching the tea dealer closely, The Shadow inquired if he had ever heard of Chun Laro. The name was familiar to Wan Kew; he admitted it, but added that he had never met Chun Laro.

Though Wan Kew did not realize it, he was revealing facts that he, himself, did not know.

For the first time, The Shadow had uncovered a clue to a hidden crime-master, who lurked deep in Chinatown. He knew the name of Li Hoang, most celebrated of all Chinese bandits.

For years, Li Hoang had terrorized remote provinces of China; had demanded tribute from wealthy Chinese, and even officials. With the strengthening of the central government in China, Li Hoang's power had dwindled. Many had wondered what had become of Li Hoang.

Here was evidence that China's public enemy had arrived secretly in America. Such news accounted for the recent stir in Chinatown. Gifted with subtle skill that no American racketeers possessed, Li Hoang was capable of employing new and astonishing tactics, in this territory where his methods were unknown.

Such rogues as Chun Laro were the very sort that Li Hoang would require as lieutenants. Already, the evil influence of Li Hoang had crept far. Many Chinese of doubtful repute could already be in the service of Li Hoang.

THE SHADOW linked those possibilities with the Golden Pagoda. He could see the purpose of that symbol.

Planted in Chinatown, its location changed from time to time, the Golden Pagoda could signify the meeting place where outside crooks were to make contact. Wherever the pagoda was displayed, evil workers could leave messages, perhaps booty, that were intended for Li Hoang.

Harry Vincent had learned that much tonight. He must have entered the place where he saw the Golden Pagoda. That was why Harry had disappeared.

The delivery of the pagoda to Wan Kew was proof of Li Hoang's clever tactics. Once captured, Harry had been classed as an agent of The Shadow. Hence, Li Hoang had foreseen that The Shadow would search for the Golden Pagoda.

To mislead The Shadow, Li Hoang had placed the golden object with a man who knew nothing about the existing situation.

The choice of Wan Kew had been too strong a one. Of all Chinese merchants,

Wan Kew was the last who would be sworn in as a member of a crooked

organization. In concealing his own followers, Li Hoang had given his game away.

That obvious move might be the blind for a more crafty one. Thrusting the rice-paper note beneath his cloak, The Shadow stepped to the connecting door. Opening it the fraction of an inch, he peered into the tea shop.

The place was vacant; but The Shadow could see streaky blackness, across the outer threshold. Lurkers had arrived to wait outside the front door.

Closing the connecting door, The Shadow stepped back to the desk. Wan Kew saw the burn of keen eyes; heard the sinister whisper that crept from The Shadow's lips. From those tokens, Wan Kew understood the final fact that The Shadow had learned.

Not content with merely drawing The Shadow along a false trail, Li Hoang had turned this tea shop into a trap. Here, upon these premises, the Chinese crime-master intended to end the long career of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV

CHINATOWN BATTLE

THOUGH The Shadow's laugh was confined within that small rear room, it carried challenge. The confidence of his tone won him a useful ally. Wan Kew, though a man of peace, was ready to fight on The Shadow's side.

Self-preservation was the reason. Wan Kew realized that if The Shadow perished, he, also, would die.

Guessing that The Shadow had spotted lurkers at the front, Wan Kew pointed

across the gloomy room and whispered in babbly Chinese:

"The side door! It gives a way to the next street!"

The Shadow reached the door mentioned. It was heavy, and strongly bolted. He did not draw the bolts, as Wan Kew expected. Instead, The Shadow listened. His head was pressed close to the woodwork. He could detect sounds outside.

Wan Kew saw The Shadow return to the desk. The Chinaman realized that the side exit must be blocked. This room had no other outlet. Wan Kew shook his head, despairingly; but some thought was in his mind. He heard The Shadow's whisper; met the gaze of those burning eyes.

"The wall to the front room," explained Wan Kew. "It has a small opening -
so I can look through, between the shelves. But it could be of no use."

"Show it to me!"

The Shadow's tone betokened a plan. Wan Kew hurried to the front wall, slid back the shutter that he had used before. With The Shadow, Wan Kew peered between the tea chests. The Chinaman could see the streaks upon the outer threshold. They were closer; darker; more ominous.

But neither The Shadow nor Wan Kew could be seen by those outside. Their bodies blocked the faint glimmer of the candlelight.

The Shadow slid the small barrier shut, drawing it from Wan Kew's hand. Stepping toward the candle glow, he removed his hat, peeled his cloak from his shoulders and bundled it.

Wan Kew saw a face that he knew must be disguised, though he would never have detected the fact. He saw that The Shadow was attired in street clothes; he was the same American that Wan Kew had observed outside the shop.

PEELING away his gloves, The Shadow pointed to Wan Kew's yellow robe. The gesture of his hand indicated that the Chinaman was to remove it. Wondering, Wan Kew did so. The Shadow held out his arms; still puzzled, Wan Kew helped him put on the robe.

"They saw me enter," whispered The Shadow. "They will believe that I am

in

here. Since I am the one they fear, they will choose me first."

Wan Kew began to understand.

Stepping to the panel, The Shadow opened it; he pushed the cloak and hat through. The garments slid between two tea chests; being black, they could not be seen in the depths of the shelf. Closing the wall, The Shadow drew Wan Kew to the desk, placed him in a chair.

"Wait here until I return!"

Leaving Wan Kew in pantaloons and Chinese vest, The Shadow moved toward the door that connected with the tea shop. His yellow-robed figure was conspicuous, even in the gloom. The Shadow made no attempt to conceal it, as he opened the door.

He was turned about, however, so that he faced in Wan Kew's direction.

The

Chinaman saw him wedge warily through to the tea shop.

Once in that front shop, The Shadow's pretense was perfection. His back was toward the outer door; his shoulders were stooped low. He paused as he closed the door, as though speaking to some one in the rear room.

He shifted behind the counter, his back still toward the outer door. His hands were close against his body, but there was a quiver to his robed shoulder. That was a well-done imitation of the palsy that characterized Wan Kew.

To all appearances, the tea merchant had come out to his shop, instead of The Shadow.

Despite his shaky motion, The Shadow showed hurry. He seemed to be seeking something; that explained why he did not face the outer door. He reached a middle shelf, poked his hands between two tea chests. He fumbled there, in an excited fashion that suited Wan Kew.

The bluff was one of the boldest that The Shadow had ever made. He had deliberately turned his back to menacing foemen, relying entirely upon his coming ruse.

Stealthy footfalls told the reality of the danger. A pair of ugly faced Chinese crept in through the front doorway, followed by an American of the hoodlum class.

One Chinese assassin produced a long-bladed knife; the other drew a murderous hatchet. Their thuggish companion held a .38 revolver.

The man with the knife stole toward the door to the rear room; the trigger-man followed close behind him. The hatchet man shifted his path. Gloatingly, he moved toward the robed figure beyond the little counter. He gave

a wise grimace, to indicate that he would settle Wan Kew.

The Shadow's fate hung by a single link. He was still faking his part as Wan Kew.

IT turned out as The Shadow expected. The gunner saw the hatchet man's move and gave a hurried beckon. Reluctantly, the hatchet man joined the pair that were moving toward the rear room. The thug muttered:

"It'll take all of us to get Ying Ko!"

Since the Chinaman with the knife showed agreement, the hatchet man stayed

with the others. Wan Kew was unimportant, compared with The Shadow. They could settle the tea merchant, as a side issue. Crouching half below the end of the counter, the trio prepared to rush the connecting door.

It was then that the false Wan Kew found what he wanted on the shelf.

His head and hands thrust inward, The Shadow drew his cloak downward.

With

one sweep, he pulled the back garment clear over his shoulders. As it slipped

downward, he gave a back fling to the yellow robe. It dropped to the floor beneath the descending cloak.

With a quick sweep of his left hand, The Shadow whipped the slouch hat to his head. He made a spin; clamped his right hand on the counter. From his lips pealed a challenge that made three killers spring about.

Gawking, they saw The Shadow, where Wan Kew had been. To their astonished eyes, the transformation was instantaneous.

The first Chinaman slung his knife. His throw was belated. His weight upon his right hand, The Shadow was vaulting clear across the counter. The knife skimmed past his shoulder, glanced from a tea chest and clattered to the floor.

The Shadow took a half turn as he vaulted. He was over the counter when the trigger-man started fire. Bullets whistled above the slouch hat. With the third bark of the revolver, a gun replied from the counter level.

The Shadow's left hand had been on the draw, during his vaulting leap. The burst from his automatic was straight-aimed. The trigger man sagged.

A figure hurtled over the end of the counter. It was the hatchet man, driving in from a new angle - but not an unexpected one. The Shadow dropped; he

stabbed a bullet upward at an angle. That slug took the hatchet man in midair.

The blast from the .45 jolted the Chinese killer. His arm took a long forward jerk. The hatchet cleaved downward - but not from the swing of a guiding hand. It was scaling from loosening fingers. The razor-sharp hatchet slapped The Shadow's shoulder broadside. It rattled against the counter front.

It was the weight of the foiled killer's body that sprawled The Shadow.

The Chinaman who had used the knife grabbed up the gun that the trigger man had dropped. Hopping past the end of the counter, the Mongol saw The Shadow

tangled with the dying hatchet man. The Chinaman fired two quick shots.

One bullet was deflected by the body of the hatchet man; the other went wide of The Shadow. The cloaked fighter had counted on the knifer's aim being bad. If the Chinaman had been good with a gun, he would have brought one instead of his dirk.

There was one more cartridge in the revolver. The Mongol never used it.

The Shadow's automatic spoke instead. Again, he supplied a direct shot. He

couldn't leave these killers loose to deal with Wan Kew. The bound that the Chinese assassin took was a big one, ending with a crazy twisting flounder.

COMING to his feet, The Shadow drew a second automatic. He headed for the outer door, took a long leap through it. He started long strides toward the darkened end of the street.

That dash was a bluff; The Shadow ended it with a complete turnabout.

The ruse worked. Guns began to pop from darkness. Thugs were aiming for The Shadow, expecting him to run into their gunfire. Instead, The Shadow was wheeling in the opposite-direction, toward the center of Chinatown.

Only some crafty superfoe would have expected such a daring move. Li Hoang

was an enemy of that caliber. He had provided against The Shadow's course.

Before The Shadow had zigzagged half a dozen steps, the lighted end of the

street was alive with new antagonists, who bounded from every cranny. These foemen weren't thugs from the underworld; they were Chinese gunners, who had stalked in from their own baliwick

Here, on Chinatown's fringe, The Shadow was between two hordes, who blocked both paths! Into Chinatown, or out of it - either direction would mean death!

CHAPTER V

THE DOUBLE MESSAGE

STRIDENT was The Shadow's challenge - a mocking laugh that he delivered, as he halted between two groups of foemen. His guns shoved toward the darkened sector, he followed his taunt with a sudden burst of fire.

That accomplished what The Shadow wanted. It sent the outside thugs scurrying for cover. They weren't risking their necks in the open, when they had The Shadow boxed. They were counting on the Chinese to shoot him in the back.

The Shadow, too, was counting upon the Chinese, but in a different way. He

knew their practice of carrying revolvers with an empty chamber under the hammer. They needed two tugs of a trigger, before their guns would talk.

Revolvers were clicking as The Shadow wheeled about. He gave another volley toward the lighted section of the street. Guns answered, as The Shadow shifted; but the Chinese, too, were wild in fire. They scrambled for cover, to give the thugs a turn.

Whichever The Shadow faced next, that crowd would cripple him. His own hurried shots seemed a useless barrage. Those volleys, however, had given him a temporary break. He needed a scant two seconds to get out of danger.

With a long, swift lope, The Shadow cleared the sidewalk and sped back into Wan Kew's tea shop!

There were shouts all along the street; some in English, others in Chinese. Revolvers barked too late; savagely, the men who fired them drove in pursuit. They thought that they had driven The Shadow into the original trap, which, in a sense, they had. But time had elapsed since battle had begun; moreover, The Shadow had drawn his enemies into the open.

The Shadow was depending upon those factors, for a reason that he had not forgotten.

The Shadow was through the tea shop when the mingling gunners arrived there. He reached the rear room, to find Wan Kew huddled at the desk. Fierce pounds were coming from the side door. The small crew posted there by Li Hoang, was still striving to break through.

Grabbing Wan Kew, The Shadow shoved him to the wall beside the side door. With a sweep of one hand, he snuffed the candle; used his automatic muzzle to thrust open one bolt, then the other. Shouting men were already in the front of the tea shop, when The Shadow suddenly nudged the knob of the side door.

The barrier whammed inward; with it came a surge of attackers. An instant later, The Shadow was among them, sledging with his guns. Flashlights went clattering, along with sprawling men. Twisting from the melee, The Shadow grabbed Wan Kew, shoved him out into the alley.

Instead of taking the rear route that Wan Kew had mentioned, The Shadow backed the old tea merchant away from danger. Coolly, he stabbed spasmodic shots back through the doorway from which they had come. Those bullets from blackness forced foemen to seek new cover. Temporarily, at least, The Shadow held the hordes at bay.

Wan Kew wondered how long it could last. He marveled at The Shadow's slow, deliberate tactics; but although The Shadow was sparing with his shots, there couldn't be many minutes more. Each time an automatic spoke, Wan Kew thought that The Shadow had discharged his last bullet.

At last, a lull. Killers thrust for the opened door. The Shadow fired a single shot. Foemen dropped back. Two seconds later, there was muffled gunfire

from the front street. The Shadow heard that outburst; from his ambush, he voiced a long, gibing laugh that chilled his enemies.

Wan Kew heard a clatter, as killers forgot The Shadow and drove out to battle with fresh fighters.

Joe Cardona had arrived with the Chinatown squad!

THAT was the point that The Shadow had not forgotten. In fact, he had dodged the squad himself, when looking for the Golden Pagoda. It explained why The Shadow had driven out to the street, although he knew that foemen surely lurked there.

By bringing new chaos into the tea shop, The Shadow had placed two groups of enemies into the very trap that they had designed for The Shadow's own destruction!

Though all news of Chinatown eventually reached Li Hoang, The Shadow had gained information ahead of that superfoe, tonight. Coming direct from the police commissioner's apartment, The Shadow had known that the Chinatown squad would have an able leader when trouble broke. More than that, familiar with Cardona's methods, The Shadow had been sure that the ace inspector would bring along an extra quota of plain-clothes men.

Cardona had done exactly that. Li Hoang's hordes were finding it out.

Deep beneath his cloak, The Shadow carried another brace of automatics.

He

had kept those reserve weapons for this crisis, when enemies would be forced to

rush his position, to evade the pressure of the law's forces. His fresh guns were out and in his fists, when a clatter from the rear of the tea shop announced the coming rush.

The Shadow's guns pumped a rapid, alternating fire. The surge wavered, broke. Crooks were scrambling away, squarely into the guns of the Chinatown squad. Shouldering into the abandoned doorway, The Shadow saw officers and detectives depriving Chinese and hoodlums of their weapons.

The stocky figure of Joe Cardona was conspicuous. The ace inspector had gained full control. There was no need for The Shadow to remain. The capture of

Li Hoang's gunners was sure.

Out in the narrow alleyway, The Shadow guided Wan Kew through the darkness. The tea merchant had shown a spell of nerve; but he was shaky again. He was gulping fearfully, telling The Shadow that he dreaded the future.

"Li Hoang will know!" panted Wan Kew. "Li Hoang will remember! He will seek me out! Even the police will be unable to protect me!"

The Shadow hissed for silence.

They were near a little gate that blocked the route to the next street. Easing open the gate so its hinges did not groan, The Shadow thrust the muzzle of an automatic through a narrow space. He delivered three staccato shots, turning the muzzle as he fired.

There was a howl beyond the gate; the scurry of footsteps. The Shadow had routed a nest of ambushed lurkers. That incident supported Wan Kew's statements

regarding Li Hoang. The fighters captured in the tea shop were but a portion of

the many who served the Chinese crime-master.

HEADING through the vacated outlet, The Shadow drew Wan Kew along. The frightened Chinaman feared the lights of the next street; but they did not travel that far. The Shadow found a doorway; wedged it open. He drew Wan Kew into a tiny courtyard. The tea merchant was amazed.

In all the years that Wan Kew had occupied his shop on the front street, he had never known of this hidden cul-de-sac. Moreover, the courtyard was but

the beginning of his journey. The Shadow opened another door; guided Wan Kew down stone steps, into an underground passage.

There came a series of twists and turns; at last, the passage divided. The Shadow pointed Wan Kew along one route, where a light glowed from a low stone ceiling. He spoke whispered words that brought a grateful response from the tea merchant.

The Shadow was sending Wan Kew to friendly Chinese, who would keep him out of sight as long as needed. Wan Kew would not have to fear the menace of Li Hoang.

The Shadow took another route, alone. When he emerged from underground, he was on another fringe of Chinatown. From the darkness of a side street, he could hear the last bursts of distant gunfire; the whine of sirens announced that patrol wagons were coming to receive the prisoners.

Elusive, a shade in the night, The Shadow took a roundabout circuit. Gliding from one stretch of darkness to another, he was constantly on the lookout for prowlers, who might be followers of Li Hoang.

The Shadow arrived back near the tea shop. The street was almost cleared; police were dragging along the last of the captives. Approaching from the darkened end of the street, The Shadow stopped close to Wan Kew's window. The Golden Pagoda still glistened from its shelf.

Easing through the doorway, The Shadow stood among the outstretched, silent figures of thugs who had fought their last fight against the law. Reaching into the window, he removed the Golden Pagoda. Carrying it as his prize, he took the passage to the rear street.

A few minutes later, The Shadow was gliding away from Chinatown. He had only one last stretch to go - a short half block, through a narrow alley. That space was wedged between rows of old two-story houses. There was only one lighted space. It lay past a short, battered fence that marked the entrance to a side alley.

The Shadow swung wide to avoid the glare of the street lamp. Close to the building opposite, he sensed a stir about him. Groping figures were in the darkness, blocking the narrow path that The Shadow needed. The pagoda wrapped beneath his cloak, The Shadow was ready for combat. He leaped upon the thugs.

THE scuffle was quick; the odds were with The Shadow. Curiously, his opponents did not try to use guns; instead, they grappled wildly. Clutching furiously, they managed to drag The Shadow over into the light, before they gave way to the hard swings from his guns.

Once in the glow, the hoodlums broke free; went staggering away. Three in number; two were groggy, the third was eager only to escape.

It was that sudden change of tactics that warned The Shadow. Alone beside the corner of the tiny fence, his cloaked form was conspicuous. Forgetting the fleeing footpads, The Shadow made a rapid whirl, twisting away from his present position.

There wasn't a lost instant in the move, even though The Shadow chose no cover. He sensed that a thrust was due; the vital step was to avoid it.

Something whirred down through the darkness. The Shadow heard the cleaving of air past his ear. There was a thud from the end of the fence. A knife quivered there, buried half to the hilt.

The Shadow saw the glistening blade; he took a twist past the end of the fence. As he swung about, he laid his knuckles squarely beside the knife and tilted his automatic along the line of the handle. The Shadow's finger pressed

the trigger -

With the boom of the automatic came a cry from a rooftop opposite. That was the exact direction of The Shadow's aim, guided back along the knife's own path. A hunchy figure straightened on the roof edge, then did a sudden downward plunge to the sidewalk.

The Shadow viewed the sprawled, squatly figure of a Chinese knife thrower.

Another of Li Hoang's trained assassins had missed his thrust. Crippled by the bullet, the thwarted killer had met death when he struck the cement. There would be no further trouble from that rogue. The Shadow turned to view the knife.

Pinned by the blade, The Shadow saw a rice-paper note. The Chinaman had slid it on the blade, before he made the throw. The paper bore two messages; both had the same import, but one was in English, the other in Chinese.

Those messages carried an order for the finder to carry away the body in which the knife was fixed; to deliver it to Li Hoang. That knife had been intended for The Shadow's heart. Li Hoang had expected some of his own followers to find The Shadow dead, and act according to instructions.

The Shadow plucked the note away, letting the knife blade slice it clear. This token of Li Hoang's thoroughness was one that The Shadow did not want the law to find. For the present, it was imperative that the authorities know nothing of Li Hoang's existence.

If Harry Vincent still lived, The Shadow's only chance of rescuing his agent lay through a secret search for Li Hoang. With Harry safe, the law could harass the Chinese supercrook; but not before. With Harry's life in the balance, The Shadow's only course was to remove this tracer to Li Hoang, before the police could find it.

The note crinkled beneath The Shadow's cloak. The black-clad figure merged with the darkness of the side alley. The Shadow was leaving Chinatown - but only until excitement subsided there.

Later, The Shadow would return, to ferret his way to the hidden, unknown abode of Li Hoang!

CHAPTER VI

CRIME'S PURPOSE

IT was morning. From an office high in a downtown skyscraper, a man was staring at the distant low-lying buildings that represented Chinatown. He was haggard, that man. His eyes were sharp, but restless. The expression of his pointed features was that of a person lost in a jungle and fearing the coils of a deadly python.

He was viewing the spot where he knew that such a serpentine creature dwelt, in human form. That spot was Chinatown.

There was a newspaper on a glass-topped desk. It had an account of last night's raid in Chinatown. It did not mention the name of Li Hoang. That gave the haggard man some relief, particularly because his own name was also absent.

After all, it was a far stretch from a Chinatown raid to Lucius Zallock, president of Continental Airways.

A buzzer sounded. Then came the announcement: "Mr. Kevin is here."

Zallock gave orders to admit Kevin. A thin, wise-faced man strolled into the office. By that time, Zallock had gained some composure. Seated behind his desk, he waved Kevin to a chair and then queried:

"What have you learned?"

"I saw the Golden Pagoda," replied Kevin, "in the window of a curio shop. A fellow went in there; but he looked presentable. Not the sort who would be working for Li Hoang. Today, though, the pagoda is gone from the window. The curio shop is closed."

Zallock looked irked.

"I expected more," he snapped. "This report, Kevin, does no justice to your reputation as a private investigator!"

Kevin helped himself to a cigar from a box on Zallock's desk. He smiled wisely as he lighted the perfecto.

"I had to stay out of sight," he reminded. "I couldn't walk into that curio shop and hand them my card! Don't worry, Mr. Zallock. Give me time; I'll locate this Li Hoang guy."

Zallock shoved an envelope across the desk. Inside it, Kevin found a rice-paper note inscribed with Chinese characters.

"What does it say?" he queried.

"New demands," returned Zallock. "In addition to his toll from Compometal and Federal Export, Li Hoang wants tribute from Ozone Oil."

Kevin gave a soft whistle. Zallock controlled all three corporations, and Ozone Oil was the largest.

"American racketeers are children," declared Zallock, "compared to Li Hoang. Soon, he will be into every enterprise that I control, grasping every dollar of profit!"

Kevin knew how that could hurt. Money was Zallock's life blood. The magnate had the faculty for acquiring dollars by the millions. Li Hoang it seemed, had the strength to wrest away that wealth.

"I spent some years in China," stated Zallock. "I know what the name and threats of Li Hoang can mean. He always strikes at the highest man. My life would go like that" - Zallock snapped his fingers - "if I ignored these demands!"

"That is why I ordered all complaints withdrawn. The president of Compometal can't understand it. Neither can the general manager of Federal Export.

"But I could afford no other course. Li Hoang has told me so, in his correspondence. One word to the law - my fate is settled! It will be death; probably of a most unpleasant sort!"

KEVIN nodded. He knew the whole story. Small fry racketeers had gone to the offices of Compometal and Federal Export, demanding payments for what they termed "protection." The men in charge of those companies had almost laughed when they notified the police.

The racketeers hadn't seemed tough enough to bother them; but Zallock, who pulled the strings of both corporations, had deemed otherwise. He had told the officials to pay, without stating his reason.

Behind it lay the fact revealed direct to Zallock. Those small-fry racketeers were merely collectors in the service of Li Hoang.

Since then, Zallock had been delivering tribute. He had been afraid to notify the police or the government authorities. He knew that before Li Hoang could be found, the death threat would be made good, with Zallock, himself, the one to receive the thrust.

Such was the way of Li Hoang.

The most that Zallock had dared to do was hire Kevin. He was playing a long-shot game, hoping that the private investigator could secretly trace Li Hoang. Once the Chinese crime-master was located, Zallock could risk exposing matters to the law.

Kevin let a smoke ring circle from his lips.

"I know how you feel, Mr. Zallock," he said, in sympathetic tone.

"Believe me, I'll find Li Hoang! But it's to your own advantage if I play the game close.

Li Hoang is spreading out. Maybe that's just the break we need. Every new collector he uses is another guy to trace."

"You have already tried to trace several," retorted Zallock, caustically. "Every time, the trail has come to a dead end, in Chinatown. Meanwhile, two of my enterprises have been paying tribute of twenty-five hundred dollars a week, each."

"How much is Ozone Oil supposed to cough over?"

"Six thousand a week!" Zallock referred to Li Hoang's latest note.

"Collections will start next Friday."

The demand staggered Kevin. He sat blowing smoke rings, while he watched Zallock burn the rice-paper note. The multimillionaire was taking no chances that any spies of Li Hoang might find such messages intact.

With all his qualms, however, Zallock had confidence in Kevin. The private

investigator was the one man he fully trusted. That fact was proven by Kevin's presence here. Zallock had not even breathed the name of Li Hoang to any one else.

"Keep up the work, Kevin," decided Zallock, rising from his desk. "But press the trail harder. My payments to Li Hoang have totaled thousands! Eventually" - Zallock was grim - "he intends to run it into millions!"

ZALLOCK walked to an outer office with Kevin. It was safe to be seen with the private detective, for Kevin was presumably conducting special investigations for Continental Airways, covering matters that had nothing to do with Li Hoang.

Zallock made a minor mistake, however, by that trip to the outer office. When he and Kevin arrived there, a polite secretary was talking with a tall, narrow-faced man, whose eyes had a wild gleam beneath their bushy brows. The fellow's face was grayish, like his shaggy hair. He was in an argumentative mood, as he leaned heavily upon a stout cane.

"I tell you, I must see Mr. Zallock!" The man's cackle was excited. "This is the fifth time -"

"Mr. Zallock is out of town. We do not expect him back until next week."

The secretary's lie was shattered by Zallock's own arrival. It happened that the secretary had his back toward the door of the private office. The visitor, however, was staring straight in that direction. With a cry of glee, he thrust the secretary aside with his cane and came bounding straight for Zallock.

Kevin thought that the man intended an assault, and started to thrust in between. Zallock pressed him aside.

A moment later, Zallock was shaking hands with the shaggy-haired visitor, greeting him like an old friend.

"Eric Bardsley!" exclaimed Zallock. "It's marvelous to see you! My door is

always open to you! It is outrageous that you should be denied admittance. Jarvis" - this was to the secretary - "consider yourself reprimanded! Hence forth, you must admit Mr. Bardsley, whenever I am here."

The secretary gaped; but, gradually, understanding dawned on his face. Zallock shot a shrewd look toward Kevin; the investigator responded with a wise smile.

It was plain that Zallock didn't want to talk to Bardsley; that he had given strict orders for the fellow to be kept outside. Rather than have Bardsley realize that, Zallock was putting up the bluff that the man was welcome.

When Zallock had conducted Bardsley into the private office, Kevin started out. He paused long enough to ask Jarvis about the visitor. Kevin's query was brief:

"Who's the crackbrain?"

"A crazy inventor," returned the secretary. "He had some good ideas, about ten years ago. The automatic piloting device was one of them. But he keeps coming around with a lot of hair-brained gadgets that aren't worth a nickel!"

"Is he broke?"

"Not a chance! He draws twenty thousand dollars a year in royalties from that piloting device. It's the money, probably, that goes to his head."

THAT settled the matter for Kevin. He decided that the secretary had the right slant on Bardsley. Kevin might have altered his opinion, had he gone back to Zallock's office.

There, Bardsley was facing Zallock across the big desk. The inventor's lips were as scoffing as his eyes.

"You are worth millions," cackled Bardsley. "Compared with your wealth, my royalties are a mere pittance."

"I am a good promoter," responded Zallock. "You are not."

The answer didn't satisfy Bardsley. He raised his head, hunching himself up from the cane.

"Why use such talk?" he demanded. "You've done well with Continental Airways, and all your success is due to my invention of the automatic pilot. Every one of your ships is equipped with it."

"True," agreed Zallock, smoothly. "And for each one, you have received your proper royalty, plus a bonus."

"Of course! The contract calls for such payments. But don't forget, Zallock, you used the automatic pilot as the means to acquire Continental Airways. What have I gained from that?"

"A larger sale of your invention, with the resulting profits."

Bardsley came to his feet, waved his big cane violently.

"My profits?" he screeched. "Pennies, mere pennies compared with the dollars that you have accumulated! And that is not all! They say that you are worth millions." Bardsley's wild eyes became canny. "Perhaps you have used Continental Airways as a wedge to control other large concerns."

Bardsley had struck the very truth that Zallock did not want him to know. In fact, Bardsley was one reason why Zallock concealed the fact that he owned Compometal, Federal Export, Ozone Oil, and half a dozen other paying enterprises. Zallock decided to soothe the inventor.

"If you want more money," purred Zallock, "I can show you how to gain it, Bardsley."

"I want what should be mine!" stormed Bardsley. "A fair return from the profits that my brain has made possible!"

"Of course!" soothed Zallock. "But if we are to operate on a mutual basis, we must include all departments."

"Just what do you mean?"

"You have other inventions" - Zallock's eyes were shrewd - "that may have great possibilities. When you have completed them, we can include them in a blanket contract. That will mean new terms; a more suitable division of the profits."

A CHANGE came into Bardsley's manner. It pleased Zallock. He had struck the one subject that was paramount with Bardsley: the man's inventions. There

was still some insistence in Bardsley's tone, however, when the inventor queried:

"Will you agree to declare your total profits, over the past eight years, as a basis for our new arrangement?"

"I will," replied Zallock. "But I cannot do it here. My private records are at my home."

"And if I come there -"

"I shall show you everything."

"How soon?"

"Any time you wish. Tonight, or any other night. I am usually at home."

Bardsley nodded; mumbled that he would keep the appointment. Zallock strolled with him to the door; on the way, he reminded:

"Be sure to bring a model of your latest invention."

Bardsley nodded. The gleam in his eyes told his pleasure.

While Jarvis gawked, Bardsley hobbled through the outer office with the demeanor of a lamb. Zallock watched him go; then told the secretary:

"Don't worry about that chap, Jarvis. He won't be here again. I know how to handle him."

Back in his own office, Zallock stared from the window. The sharp smile that framed his lips began to fade. His recent handling of Eric Bardsley seemed

but a hollow triumph. Zallock's eyes were toward Chinatown, where Li Hoang dwelt.

Lucius Zallock spoke half aloud. His lips expressed the wish that he could outmatch Li Hoang as easily as he had Eric Bardsley. Those two men were the only

problems that interfered with the smoothness of Zallock's life.

Li Hoang, however, was as difficult as Eric Bardsley was easy. The Chinaman was dangerous; the inventor harmless. The pair were as far apart as the poles. Those two problems, at least, could never overlap.

In that surmise, Lucius Zallock was wrong. Very soon, those problems would mingle, with unpleasant consequences for Zallock, the man who faced them.

CHAPTER VII

THE ABODE OF LI HOANG

NEW night had come to Chinatown. Deep in the catacombs of that district, Harry Vincent was awake, dimly conscious of the fact that many hours must have passed since his capture.

Harry was in a darkened room, stretched upon a couch that crinkled in silky fashion when he stirred. The atmosphere was stuffy, laden with a heavy smoky odor.

It was plain that he had been drugged. The air reminded Harry of the thickness that he had encountered in certain opium dens, while engaged in previous service for The Shadow.

From somewhere came a distant gong, its tone muffled, yet penetrating. Curiously, the sound reverberated, as though the darkness of the room retained it. Through Harry's brain throbbed the thought that those echoes might be an illusion, forced upon him by his doped condition.

It did not occur to Harry that the gong announced an hour. The twenty-fourth, to be exact, since Harry had been brought to this underground lair.

A key rattled in a lock. Its slither was prolonged, torturing; it seemed hours before the door finally opened. His head turning slowly, Harry saw a leering man in Chinese costume, outlined against the light of a corridor.

The arrival was Chun Laro. He was backed by two servants - huge,

villainous Mongols. They awaited the bidding of Chun Laro.

Slowly, the snakish Chinaman let a grin twist across his lips. He spoke rapid words in Chinese. The guards advanced into the room. Harry was too weak to resist, as they lifted him from the couch. Carried by the husky Mongols, the prisoner was taken through the corridor.

The slow-motion effect of the drug enabled Harry to observe the entire route. Stone walls were etched before his gaze; at irregular intervals he noted iron doors, set beside the corridors that they passed.

The course was neither straight nor level. Passages formed a maze, more crooked than the streets of Chinatown. There were steps, down and up, where the tunnels avoided gas mains and water conduits. Apparently, these were forgotten passages that had served their purpose during tong wars of years ago.

At one spot, Chun Laro ordered a pause. They had come up a flight of steep stone steps. On the left was a passage that led downward at a slant; straight ahead, a level corridor. But it was to the right that Chun Laro pointed reptilian eyes.

The Shadow's agent, following his captor's gaze, saw a short passage that ended with a glistening steel door, set tight in the masonry. Above that door was an hourglass, set upon a stone shelf. The hourglass was huge, red sand was trickling from the upper cone into the lower.

Chun Laro snarled words in English. Their import was that the steel door marked the way through which Harry had arrived here; that he would never use that route again.

They moved along the central passage, past another succession of rooms. A turn of the corridor brought them to a bronze door. There, Chun Laro lifted a copper hammer that hung by a silver chain. He struck the door a sharp blow.

From within came the clang of the gong that Harry had heard before; but its tone was choppy, short-clipped.

The bronze door slid open. Harry's carriers shoved him through, into a lighted room.

THE scene outmatched all fantasy. It was so strange, so grotesque, that Harry believed himself gripped by an aftereffect of the drug. The floor was overlaid with rugs as deep as moss; their thick pile almost tripped Harry as he stumbled forward.

There were statuettes about the room - grotesque replicas of seated dragons, that looked like squatly watchdogs, so realistic that their fangs seemed ready to tear into all intruders. Mounted on the heads of these carved creatures were live torches, that illuminated the room with brilliant, but wavering, flame.

The walls were adorned with carvings. Some represented ferocious dragons; others, weird devil gods. Only one spot lacked such hideous figures. It was the center of the rear wall, above the level of Harry's eyes. There, in grim irony,

was carved a small pagoda, its surface coated with some gilded substance.

That sight caused Harry to remember the Golden Pagoda - the symbol that had brought him to his present plight.

Harry's eyes traveled downward. They saw a gilded throne, formed from the twisted figure of a dragon. A Chinaman was in that seat. Harry heard Chun Laro utter the name, "Li Hoang."

The man in the throne bowed. His gesture was merely a recognition that he gave to his subordinates.

Harry Vincent was before the throne of Li Hoang, China's mastermind of

evil.

LI HOANG was clad in purple robes. Upon the center of his tunic appeared a pagoda, woven in cloth of gold. His head wore a mandarin's rounded hat, also of purple and with a golden plume. All these were details, though, that Harry scarcely noticed.

Harry's eyes were riveted upon the face of Li Hoang.

That face was a deep yellow; high-cheeked and smooth. The nose was wide, but well-shaped. From each side, eyes slanted up at a grotesque angle. Black eyebrows arched high above the eyes, and the lids beneath those brows remained half closed.

Li Hoang evidently had a faculty for rolling his eyes without a motion of the lids, for, at times, all Harry could see was whiteness, as he met the purple-clad Chinaman's gaze.

There was another remarkable feature of Li Hoang's visage; that was his mustache. It was black, curling downward from his upper lip to form two curved streaks, one on each side of his mouth. The tips of the mustache, carefully twisted, hung below the level of Li Hoang's chin.

So motionless was Li Hoang's expression, that Harry wondered if the Chinaman's face could be a mask. That impression gripped him, until Li Hoang spoke. After that, Harry had no doubt that he was viewing the actual countenance of Li Hoang.

Thin lips twisted beneath the curled mustache. The chin thrust forward; teeth glistened, as Li Hoang, with a gesture, dismissed the Mongol guards.

Chun Laro stepped to the side of the throne.

Li Hoang turned whitish eyes toward Harry; they darkened suddenly between their slanted slits.

"You are one who serves The Shadow," spoke Li Hoang, in English. "To such as you, our penalty is death! There is a way, however" - the thin lips had straightened - "whereby you may find a death that is pleasant."

Harry remained silent.

"There are facts that we seek," resumed Li Hoang, "concerning the one who calls himself The Shadow."

The Chinaman paused. Harry's face was set, his lips tight. Li Hoang knew that questioning was useless.

"Fool!" Li Hoang spat the epithet. "You cannot help but speak! There are ways, that we of China know, whereby tongues may be loosened! If you force me to such a course, your speech - when it comes - will entitle you to no mercy!

"You will perish by a horrible death, taunted with the thought that you have spoken all that we wished to know! I give you one opportunity, only that time may be saved."

DESPITE his dopiness, Harry managed a calculation. He did not intend to reveal a single fact that concerned The Shadow. Harry wanted Li Hoang to know that; and stubborn silence was the surest way to drive the idea home.

Moreover, Harry was anxious to keep Li Hoang from guessing certain factors that went with such silence.

There was comparatively little that Harry could tell. Even The Shadow's own agents did not know their chief's identity, or the spot where his secret headquarters lay. That was part of The Shadow's policy - to protect them, when they met with situations such as the one that Harry faced.

Furthermore, Harry was confident that sooner or later The Shadow would bring rescue. By silence, he could stay his own execution; for it was evident, from Li Hoang's own words, that death would be Harry's fate, after he had served his usefulness.

There was one other point that Harry intended to fling at Li Hoang, if forced to it: namely, that he could not depend upon Li Hoang's promise of merciful death, as a reward for speech. That, as Harry considered it, would make an excellent argument in a pinch.

As events had it, Harry had no need for such tactics. Li Hoang tired of the prisoner's stubborn attitude. He spoke a sharp order, in English, to Chun Laro. The lieutenant slid back the bronze door, snarled for the Mongols.

Two minutes later, the husky servitors were dragging Harry from the throne room. Chun Laro followed. Harry heard the bronze door slam shut.

Hauled through the bare stone corridors, Harry saw the steel door that was topped by the hourglass. The Mongols took him along the passage that slanted in the opposite direction. The passage turned downward like a curve in a ramp; brought them to corridors burrowed deep beneath. Next came a flight of steps, into dingy blackness.

At the bottom, the guards gripped their captive, while Chun Laro stooped to raise a round slab of metal that looked like the cover of a manhole.

A few moments later, Harry was using what little strength he had to fight against his captors. They were determined to shove him into that blackened hole; and they succeeded, despite Harry's struggles.

Sagging through, Harry grabbed for the edges of the rounded opening and clung there. He saw Chun Laro's foot rise; the snaky lieutenant intended to drive his hard-heeled boot upon Harry's gripping hands.

There was only one sane course: to let go. Harry did so, an instant before

the boot heel landed. He heard Chun Laro's ugly, disappointed snarl. With the sound still in his ears, Harry struck upon a stone floor below.

The blow jarred him, but not so badly as the fall the night before. Sprawled upon slimy stone, Harry managed to come to hands and knees, thankful, at least, that his fingers had escaped the punishment that Chun Laro wanted to give them.

Something clamped above. It was the roundish cover. The last spot of light was gone from Harry's dungeon. On his feet, Harry could not reach the opening. It was a full three feet above his hands.

A hiss seemed to taunt him, from the gloom; for the moment, Harry thought that some hidden beast might be lurking there.

Then came a dizziness, that Harry understood. The hiss was gas, fizzing through the walls of the dungeon. He remembered Li Hoang's promise - that later

he would talk. Harry understood the arch-villain's method.

That gas would make Harry even groggier than before. It would - as Li Hoang had expressed - loosen his tongue. When captors again brought him to Li Hoang, Harry's game would be through.

Swaying in the center of his slime-floored dungeon, Harry felt his knees give way. He had lost his sense of balance in the darkness. The slump that he took brought a thump against his head. There was a flash of starry light; then blankness.

Again, Harry Vincent lay helpless, his span of life dependent upon the whim of Li Hoang.

CHAPTER VIII

CROSSED RESCUE

THE hourly gong chimed through the depths of Li Hoang's maze-like abode. That tone penetrated even to the depths where Harry Vincent lay. It marked

only

a single hour, but it brought Harry from a fantasy of nightmares that seemed limitless.

Harry's brain whirled with recollections of writhing dragons; venomous tongues had hissed at him with vivid realism. He realized suddenly that all was

black and still about him; that there were no dragons.

Even the hisses had stopped. It meant that the gas was no longer issuing into the cell.

It seemed to Harry, however, that he was held by a multitude of invisible strands, that kept him tight upon the floor. Though his mind was clear, he lacked the will to lift himself.

There was a scraping sound above. Dim light, as the cover slid away. A body worked through, dropped to the floor beside the prisoner. A figure crept close; hands pressed a flask to Harry's lips. Water reached his throat.

The effect was instantaneous. Half rising, Harry began a hoarse whisper. Words sprang to his lips; he was telling who he was, stating that he served The

Shadow, when a hand clapped suddenly across his mouth.

A flashlight shone. In its glare, Harry saw the face of the person who had

dropped into his cell. Again, he viewed a Chinese countenance - but it was that

of a girl!

The flask again reached Harry's lips. He took slow gulps, following the orders of a soft voice that whispered in his ear. Gradually, his strength returned. The girl turned the flashlight across the cell. Harry saw a tumble-down cot, furnished with rough blankets and a grimy pillow.

The girl pressed the flashlight into Harry's hand, told him to keep it focused on the cot. As he obeyed, Harry questioned:

"But who - what is your name?"

"They call me Ming Dwan," replied the girl. "But you must ask no more questions. Time is short!"

While Harry held the flashlight, he saw Ming Dwan arrange the cot to give the illusion that a figure lay there. She did the job well, using the pillow as

a dummy. She added a useful article - a shoe that she had brought with her - poking the tip of it from beneath the blanket. That gave a final touch.

Harry stared admiringly at Ming Dwan.

She had beauty such as he had rarely seen. Her face was alluring; her slanted eyes, like her eyebrows, were marvelous in their blackness. Her lips looked pursed; their ruddiness was an attractive contrast to the smooth yellow of her skin.

Ming Dwan's attire was black. She wore crepe slippers; a black silk skirt.

Above, she had an embroidered jacket, with high collar close about her neck. The

jacket had long bell-sleeves; as she moved her hands, Harry noted a large jade ring upon one finger.

HOW and why this girl was at Li Hoang's, was a mystery to Harry. It was partly explained, when he saw Ming Dwan's expression change. Her eyes showed a sudden cunning as a bitter smile crept to her lips. Her features took on a cruel malice that matched the snakiness of Chun Laro, the cold, merciless glare of Li Hoang.

Had Harry seen that expression first, he would have mistrusted Ming Dwan. She had revealed herself, however, in a kindlier fashion. Harry realized that her new expression was a pose; one that she habitually adopted while in this

lair. By passing as a creature of evil, Ming Dwan would be welcomed by Li Hoang.

Forgetfulness - or habit - had accounted for Ming Dwan's lapse. When she turned toward Harry, her face regained its kindness. The girl pointed to the opening above their heads, ordered Harry to help her reach it. Ming Dwan's nerve inspired Harry to strength. He lifted her; managed to thrust her to the opening.

With remarkable agility, Ming Dwan reached the floor above; stretching through, she thrust her hands toward Harry. He gripped them; with surprising strength, the girl braced herself and hauled upward, until Harry was clear of the floor. He managed to grip the edges of the hole.

While Harry clung there, Ming Dwan seized his shoulders and helped him roll through. As Harry rested on the floor beside the steps, Ming Dwan replaced the cover.

Soon they were retracing the course by which the Mongols had brought Harry to the dungeon. They were alone in a maze of passages, moving stealthily toward

some goal. It proved to be the spot where four corridors joined. Ming Dwan pointed to the steel door with the hourglass above it.

Before Harry could move in that direction, Ming Dwan suddenly pushed him toward a room that opened from another corridor. Harry was out of sight, behind

a half-closed door, when Ming Dwan, still in view, turned to greet some one who was coming from Li Hoang's door.

The arrival proved to be Chun Laro. Harry could see the twisty smile of approval that Chun Laro gave. There was good reason for that expression. Ming Dwan had adopted her own crafty pose. The beadiness of her eyes was the sort that Chun Laro admired greatly.

The two held a conversation in Chinese. Chun Laro continued on his way. Ming Dwan waited, tense. The moment the man's footsteps had died, she was at Harry's door, bringing him out with one word:

"Hurry!"

They reached the passage to the steel door. There, Ming Dwan stabbed a stifled, disappointed cry. Her fingers, pressing hard, caught Harry's sleeve and held him back.

The hourglass had dropped its final grains of sand. A change occurred as Harry stared. Some automatic device inverted the hourglass; simultaneously, the

steel door made a half revolution to the right, working on a central pivot. The

barrier was open only for a half second.

"Too late," breathed Ming Dwan. "You must wait a quarter hour longer. It takes fifteen minutes for the sands to drop."

"I must wait?" Harry was puzzled.

"Yes." Ming Dwan pointed toward the closed door. "You saw the way it acted. To go through, one must be pressed squarely against it. There is only space for one."

"But if you remain here -"

"There will be no danger. I shall pass through the door on its next turn."

HARRY calculated. In fifteen minutes, his turn would come. A half hour would bring Ming Dwan's opportunity. Of course, there was the chance that Harry's escape might be discovered; but it seemed logical that the guards, not Ming Dwan, would be the ones to suffer.

Moreover, Harry realized that Ming Dwan could use the revolving door

quite

easily, if alone. Only a few minutes ago, she might have risked it; for Chun Laro thought her loyal to Li Hoang. Ming Dwan's chief handicap to her own escape was the problem of Harry's departure. It would be best for him to go first, as Ming Dwan suggested.

They moved back into the room where Harry had hidden. Minutes passed; Ming

Dwan seemed to count them, though she did not consult a watch. At last, she beckoned; they went toward the steel door.

Harry saw the hourglass; again, the upper sands were low, but there were enough to last a few minutes longer.

Ming Dwan nodded. Harry edged toward the right side of the door. As he neared it, a light suddenly glowed from a bulb above. Hastily, Ming Dwan again drew Harry back.

"Some one is coming from the other side!" she whispered. "The light is the signal! We cannot risk it yet!"

"But that means fifteen minutes to wait," reminded Harry. "If they find that I am gone -"

Ming Dwan interrupted with a head-shake.

"It is better to wait," she insisted. "It is seldom that persons come from

beyond that barrier. Your next opportunity should be a sure one. This attempt would mean discovery, perhaps disaster."

They went back into the room; this time, Ming Dwan closed the door completely, telling Harry that it would serve them nothing if they watched to see who entered.

With that, Harry agreed; he was banking on the hope that the next attempt would not be interrupted. He was trusting, too, that Ming Dwan would be able to make her own escape when her turn came.

Oddly, Ming Dwan and Harry were making their lone mistake, when they failed to wait and see the door turn.

The last grains of sand slipped lingeringly through the neck of the hourglass. The mechanism acted; as the hourglass tilted for a new run, the signal light blinked off above the door.

Instantly, the sheet of metal twirled. With it came a swift-moving figure that blotted the steel shimmer of the door. With the closing of the portal, the

new arrival straightened. Motionless, he revealed himself as a figure clad in black, a slouch hat upon his head.

The Shadow had arrived in Li Hoang's underground realm!

AS he reached the spot where passages joined, The Shadow studied every nook. He saw no one, for Ming Dwan and Harry had closed their own door. That deed prevented them, in their turn, from seeing and recognizing The Shadow, the very ally whom they needed!

Nor did The Shadow linger at the junction point, where he might eventually have been observed by those who required aid. Noting a long slope straight in front of him, he chose it as the logical route to a place where prisoners could

be confined. With swift stride, The Shadow glided along that corridor.

Two minutes later, Ming Dwan stole forth to the spot where passages crossed. She looked in every direction; saw no one. Ming Dwan smiled; her expression, unforced, was a pleasant one. Whoever had entered, had gone this way. Of that, Ming Dwan was sure. She went back to tell the good news to Harry.

Again, there would be a wait; after that, escape seemed sure. Ill chance, however, had entered to play a fateful hand. The paths of rescuers had crossed.

The Shadow - not the Mongols - would be the first to visit the cell that Harry had left.

That twist of the game would bring new knowledge to Li Hoang. Here, in his own realm, the master of evil soon would be presented with the opportunity he wanted: a meeting with The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX

LOST BATTLE

THOUGH The Shadow rapidly reached the passages on the lower floor, he did not immediately find Harry's vacated cell. A chance occurrence delayed that discovery for several minutes.

In a lower corridor, The Shadow heard the muffled stride of approaching men. He took a side passage; blended with its depths, to watch Chun Laro march past with a small squad of Mongols.

That incident told The Shadow that these preserves were well guarded. It also brought him other information. About to retrace his way along the passage, he heard a bubbling sound from another direction. He made a detour to investigate it.

A short passage ended in a square stone-walled room. In the very center of the floor was a tank that seethed with boiling oil. The heat from the pool was constant; it gave due proof of the fate that awaited any one who plunged into that bubbling bath.

The boiling oil represented one of the unpleasant deaths that Li Hoang had advised Harry to avoid.

Above the seething oil stretched a wire mesh that resembled a huge spider's web. If Li Hoang chose to preface a victim's death with agony, the web would serve that purpose.

The Shadow observed that the corners of the mesh were provided with sharp cutters. Any wild struggle in the web would merely snarl the victim. Once the corners were severed, he would fall, mesh and all, into the oil.

Looking above, The Shadow saw a high ceiling. In it was a square-cut section that looked like a trapdoor. Through that device, a person could be dropped from the room above. A rapid fall would result in almost instant death; for the web could not stand the hurtling plunge of a body, if it dropped uninterrupted.

The Shadow whispered a grim laugh, as he surveyed the vat of death.

There was a chance - so The Shadow still supposed - that Harry Vincent had already met a doom as terrible as this. The Shadow's laugh betokened vengeance upon Li Hoang, if such were true.

Moving back along the passage, The Shadow checked distances, for future reference. He paused again, as he neared a side corridor. He heard Chun Laro, speaking to a Mongol guard.

The conversation was in Chinese. That language was quite intelligible to The Shadow. It chanced that Chun Laro was mentioning certain facts that The Shadow wanted to know. The squinty lieutenant was telling the Mongol that Li Hoang would soon require the prisoner who lay in the Black Cell.

The two separated. The Shadow followed the guard, instead of Chun Laro.

The Mongol paced to the top of a flight of steps; paused there, then continued on his way.

Reaching the steps, The Shadow peered downward. In the gloom, the rounded opening was barely discernible; but it did not escape The Shadow's keen gaze.

Silently, The Shadow eased downward; his gloved hands raised the metal cover. A tiny flashlight glimmered.

THE SHADOW was playing against freak luck, this night. His tiny light showed the cot that Ming Dwan had faked with a dummy figure; Harry's rescuer had done the job neatly; and the cot was none too clear in the beam of The Shadow's light. Yet The Shadow might have guessed the trick, had he been allowed a few seconds more.

Footsteps halted The Shadow's survey. The Mongol was returning to the stone steps. Convinced, so far, that Harry lay on the cot, The Shadow dropped through the opening. His fingers drew the cover into place; gripping tiny air holes in the center, they fitted the metal disk down snug. Almost with the same move, The Shadow took his drop.

He had counted upon doing exactly as Ming Dwan had done: rousing Harry, and thus managing a double departure. But when he reached the cot, The Shadow found that he was alone in the cell.

So far as The Shadow knew, there was but one unguarded route from Li Hoang's catacombs. That was the path by which The Shadow had come. He had found it after hours of diligent search through every lair in Chinatown. The Shadow doubted that Harry could have made an earlier escape. It was therefore likely that Harry - and some rescuer - were still in Li Hoang's domain.

The existence of a rescuer was proven by The Shadow's own inability to climb alone from this cell. He thought of the cot as a method, but found that it was clamped tight to the floor. Nevertheless, The Shadow did not mind his own predicament.

When Mongols came, they would find a prisoner; but one far different from Harry Vincent. Instead of an unarmed captive, those vassals of Li Hoang would meet The Shadow.

That was why The Shadow, at first, resolved to wait. It was the atmosphere of the room that made him change that plan. The cell contained traces of the gas that Harry had encountered. It took The Shadow only a few minutes to notice the creeping effect of that vapor.

Biding his time would be a good enough policy, unless captors guessed that they had a very live prisoner below. In that case, The Shadow would need to be out of the cell before the gas treatment was repeated.

While The Shadow calculated, he heard the metal cover being dragged loose above him. Quickly, he bounded past the cot; dropping beyond it, he waited to see what developed. The cover lifted; a face peered through. The Shadow saw the glow of an electric lantern close beside it.

The arrival was the Mongol who had met Chun Laro in the passage near the steps.

The guard saw the dummy figure and was impressed by it; but there was something in the fellow's gloat that did not suit The Shadow. Perhaps other guards were coming soon, to bring Harry from his cell. That would force The Shadow's hand too early in this dangerous game.

It was better to act even earlier. Here was real opportunity, while only one guard was on the ground.

Carefully, The Shadow crept past the end of the cot; he skirted the glow

of the suspended lantern.

The Mongol did not see the moving form. The Shadow was nebulous in that gloom. The guard's first inkling of trouble arrived when he heard a hiss from the cell floor, below and behind the lantern. Craning, puzzled, the Mongol was treated to a new sound: a whispered laugh that throbbled a sinister challenge.

Into the lantern light shoved the muzzle of an automatic. It pointed squarely between the guard's eyes. Words came, in Chinese. The Mongol's teeth chattered, as he gulped the dread name of The Shadow:

"Ying Ko!"

Gloved hands came upward, one holding its gun. Fearfully, the guard obeyed

instructions. He let the lantern slide into The Shadow's empty hand. With his own hands, the Mongol gripped The Shadow's wrists and drew the cloaked prisoner upward.

There wasn't a chance for a false move during that trip. The Shadow's gun muzzle was placed along the Mongol's arm, pressed straight for the fellow's heart. Trickery by the Mongol would mean a mere drop for The Shadow; but it would bring death to the man who tried it.

The situation changed when The Shadow was almost through to the floor. There, he scaled the lantern to one side; used his hand to gain a grip. Whispering another warning to the guard, The Shadow lowered his gun.

In an instant, the villainous guard whipped out a knife, started a downward thrust for the back of The Shadow's neck.

That was the longest knife jab that the Mongol had ever tried. It traveled

a dozen feet. As the blade started its downward swoop, The Shadow gave a powerful arm swing along the floor. With his automatic, he fairly swept the Mongol's feet from under him.

Literally, the yellow man was chopped into a headlong dive that carried him clear over The Shadow's shoulders, straight into the blackened cell. The guard had no chance to yell, before he hit the bottom. Shoulder first, he took a jar that stunned him, while his knife rattled a tattoo across the floor.

The Shadow arose, clamped the metal cover into place. He had given the guard a fair test, for he had warned him not to make trouble and the guard had agreed. If the Mongol survived that plunge, he would never again fail in a promise to Ying Ko.

The Shadow reached the top of the stone steps. He was hoping that the lone

guard's visit had been a premature one; but that was not the case. The tramp of other Mongols sounded from a corridor.

Battle here was useless. It would only spread the alarm; produce a trap for Harry and the person who had rescued him. Hurriedly, The Shadow headed for the upper level. He was in time to reach the last stretch unobserved. There, he

saw Harry and Ming Dwan approaching the rotary door.

The sand level in the hourglass showed less than a minute more. Even that period was too long. From below, The Shadow could hear excited shouts in babbling Chinese. The men sent to bring Harry to Li Hoang, had found the changed condition of the cell!

THE SHADOW'S laugh sounded along the corridor. Harry and Ming Dwan turned;

they saw The Shadow. The girl gave a grateful gasp, as The Shadow joined them. Harry heard his chief speak a name:

"Myra Reldon."

The girl nodded. The whole truth dawned on Harry. He had heard of Myra Reldon; she was a government operative, who investigated Chinese matters. But

Harry had never realized that Myra could be Ming Dwan!

He had only the recollection that Myra had once worked with The Shadow, when their paths had crossed. (Note: See "Teeth of the Dragon," Vol. XXIII, No.

6.) But Harry had not seen Myra in her Chinese make-up. He understood at last why this girl, presumably a tool of Li Hoang, had come to his rescue.

There was bedlam from the lower corridor. A horde of foemen was coming, headed by Chun Laro. The Shadow was putting quick questions to Myra; getting prompt answers that decided his policy. He took a quick look toward the hourglass; then planted Harry against the steel door, with orders to go through.

Then, just as Chun Laro heaved in sight, The Shadow gripped Myra and flung her across the corridor!

Chun Laro saw what happened to the supposed Ming Dwan. He gained the very impression that The Shadow wanted. He thought that The Shadow was Harry's rescuer; that Ming Dwan was trying to prevent the get-away.

Chun Laro aimed his revolver, pressed the trigger. Like other Chinese, he had that habit of carrying a dead chamber under the hammer. Before he could press the trigger a second time, his shot was frustrated. It was Myra's turn to spring a timely move.

Coming to her feet, the pretended Ming Dwan sprang for The Shadow. Grabbing fiercely at his cloak, she cut off Chun Laro's aim. Together, they formed a shield for Harry's body.

Chun Laro and a dozen others hurtled forward, hoping for a fight at close quarters, since they could not fire without dropping Ming Dwan.

A last grain of sand dripped from the hourglass. The steel door whipped about, plunging Harry through. The Shadow was relieved from the burden of protecting his groggy agent. Harry's rescue was completed; he had a clear path to carry word to others who served The Shadow.

WITH Ming Dwan still as his shield, The Shadow looked capable of battle. Chun Laro and those others did not guess that their cloaked foe, more than themselves, was anxious to preserve the girl's life. Chun Laro, himself, was rooted at sight of an automatic that The Shadow had drawn. The snaky Chinaman was glad when he heard Ming Dwan cry, in Chinese:

"Offer him life! Promise Ying Ko a hearing before Li Hoang!"

Chun Laro put the proposition in English. There was a tense pause; then The Shadow's laugh, lacking its usual mockery. Calmly, The Shadow cloaked his automatics; he nudged Ming Dwan away. Standing with upraised arms, he faced the Chinese horde.

Chun Laro and his crew moved forward. Bringing ropes that they had intended for Harry, they gleefully bound The Shadow in those coils. Led by Ming

Dwan, they started a march with their tight-bound prisoner.

They were carrying The Shadow, helpless, to the throne room of Li Hoang!

CHAPTER X

LI HOANG LEARNS

SUPREME upon his dragon throne, Li Hoang surveyed the new prisoner that his henchmen had brought him. Like Harry, The Shadow met the glare of eyes that

gazed from strange, angled slits, sometimes showing their peculiar whiteness.

Though Li Hoang had controlled his expression when he studied Harry, he

could do so only partially, when he faced The Shadow. With all his solemnity, Li Hoang felt glee. His eyes did not show it; but the lips beneath that long-hanging mustache revealed a smile of pleasure.

Mongols had thrust The Shadow into a teakwood chair, opposite the throne. Chun Laro was talking volubly in Chinese, giving the details of The Shadow's capture. Myra Reldon, as Ming Dwan, was standing at one side, an ardent listener.

Li Hoang set his lips. His face became inscrutable. He leaned from his throne to study The Shadow's countenance. He could see a face - probably disguised - beneath the upturned brim of the slouch hat. It had a hawkish trace, that seemed suitable to The Shadow. But in The Shadow's eyes, glistening in the wavering light of the dragon torches, Li Hoang saw a trace of perplexity.

Li Hoang raised one yellowed hand.

"Speak in English," he told Chun Laro. "So that he - Ying Ko - can understand."

Chun Laro repeated his account. His version credited The Shadow with Harry's rescue; Ming Dwan with a valiant effort to prevent Harry's escape. Li Hoang accepted the story.

"I understand your surrender, Ying Ko," he announced, in precise English. "You have managed, at least, to free a man who can bring others to my abode. Because of that, you suppose that I shall prefer to keep you alive, rather than dead.

"Your conjecture is correct. Knowing your methods as I do" - Li Hoang's tone was dry - "I presume that your own aids will use subtle tactics to redeem you, rather than attempt an open attack. Therefore, I shall hold you as a hostage."

The decision was the sort that The Shadow expected. Whatever Li Hoang's game, The Shadow knew that it was not complete. The Chinese crime wizard would prefer to continue his schemes, unmolested.

That might be possible, if he could stave off The Shadow's agents with proof that their chief still lived. But that would not be for long. The Shadow could foresee that Li Hoang would lose little time gathering loose threads, so that he could establish himself elsewhere.

After that, The Shadow's life would no longer be useful to him.

How long Li Hoang would allow, was a matter that did not perturb The Shadow. With Myra Reldon on hand as Ming Dwan, The Shadow's own escape would be

as simple a matter as Harry's; and it would probably lack complications.

With it all, The Shadow was prepared for emergency.

Deftly, he had worked against the hurried bonds with which the Mongols had

tied him. In using their long rope, they had required many coils. The more such

twists, the better the chance for slack. The Shadow's present predicament was much less than even Li Hoang supposed.

"PERHAPS" - Li Hoang's eyes were dark and steady through their slits - "we should discuss our terms alone, Ying Ko."

The Shadow's answer was an expressive laugh - one that Li Hoang took for a challenge. With a wave, Li Hoang dismissed his servitors, Chun Laro and Ming Dwan among them.

The Shadow inched within his bonds, but made no sudden move. His action looked like a mere shift of position, as though the ropes were too tight for him. Li Hoang delivered a merciless smile.

"Perhaps you may prove highly useful, Ying Ko," he announced. "We have ways, in China, of acquiring services that we need. We do not offer rewards. Instead" - Li Hoang's eyes were glaring hard - "we have tortures for those who do not obey."

The Shadow's gaze was unconcerned. Settling back on the throne, Li Hoang reached for the gong; gave it a savage stroke. Chun Laro appeared promptly.

"Bring the guard," ordered Li Hoang in English. "The one who was in the cell when you found the prisoner gone."

Chun Laro bowed and left. Li Hoang stared expectantly toward the floor. Again, The Shadow shifted; this time, grimly. He could see trouble when that Mongol came. Until this moment, The Shadow had supposed the man still to be unconscious.

If the guard blabbed that he had found The Shadow alone in the cell, Li Hoang might begin to wonder about Harry's escape. Through wondering, he could suspect Ming Dwan. That would not only deprive The Shadow of his sole ally in this den; it would produce Myra's immediate death.

Ropes slackened, but not enough. The Shadow turned his head toward the door. He relaxed, when he saw Chun Laro and others bringing in the Mongol. The fellow was stumbling, barely able to walk.

Chun Laro deposited the guard at the foot of the throne. He and the others

left. Again The Shadow was alone with Li Hoang, save for that pitiful guard. Feebly, the man had recognized Li Hoang and was striving to arouse himself.

Li Hoang said nothing. His eyes lowered; his lips hardened. He watched the

Mongol; thereby, he unwittingly gave The Shadow a chance for freer motion. With

a shift, The Shadow tightened one coil of rope. The move slackened another.

Almost before Li Hoang's eyes, The Shadow was sliding the loose stretches,

depriving the coils of their holding power. All the while, he was watching Li Hoang, ready to desist the moment the crime-master raised his gaze.

The crippled Mongol showed a sudden burst of strength. He clutched the dragon head of Li Hoang's throne; came to his knees. In stammered sing-song tone, he began to gasp words that The Shadow caught. Those first phrases, though incomplete in themselves, were almost telltale.

"It was Ying Ko!" the wretch panted, in his native tongue. "I saw Ying Ko!

He made me do his bidding! If I had known - that the prisoner -"

Fiercely, The Shadow was wrenching with the coils. His arms were almost free. He needed one of those automatics that the Mongols had left beneath his cloak, deeming him helpless. A few words more - the guard's story would be told.

It was Li Hoang who supplied the interruption.

THRUSTING his left hand forward, the purple-robed Chinaman clutched the Mongol's neck, cutting off further words. With his right hand, Li Hoang drew a knife from beneath his kingly tunic.

His hands worked together; the left thrust back the unresisting head, his right drove the knife deep to the Mongol's heart. With a twisty shove, Li Hoang sent the body rolling beside the throne.

The Shadow's activity ended instantly. He slumped back in his chair, feigning horror, as Li Hoang gazed in his direction.

"That is how I deal with those who plead for mercy," sneered Li Hoang. "That man deserved death, because he failed me! Sometimes, those who deserve death become most useful servants; but not when they whine their desire to live!"

A keen glint showed in The Shadow's eyes. In searching fashion, they were

studying Li Hoang. The laugh that came from The Shadow's lips was low, significant. But Li Hoang did not understand the significance of the tone.

Purposely, The Shadow was veiling his real thoughts. His observation of Li Hoang's method with the Mongol had given him an important link of information; one that could prove vital, after he had gained freedom from his present predicament.

Li Hoang leered. He took The Shadow's laugh for mere bravado. He wanted witnesses who would appreciate his deed. He pounded the gong; when Chun Laro appeared, Li Hoang ordered him to admit Ming Dwan and a picked group of Mongols.

Chun Laro looked quizzically at the body of the man whom Li Hoang had murdered. Li Hoang gave a nod.

When the Mongols arrived, it was Chun Laro who babbled the worth of Li Hoang's deed. He told them that they saw the fate of those who failed Li Hoang.

All the while that The Shadow listened to Chun Laro, he kept his keen eyes on Li Hoang.

The throned Chinaman was paying no attention. His slanted eyes were roving elsewhere. They fixed upon Ming Dwan.

In the fraction of a second, The Shadow's own attitude changed, as a terrific realization seized him.

The news that Li Hoang had failed to obtain from the blabbing Mongol, had suddenly been furnished from another source. Myra Reldon, despite her clever acting in the part of Ming Dwan, had unwittingly given the game away.

Li Hoang knew that Ming Dwan owed no loyalty to crime. The sudden thrust of his chin was the give-away!

Death threatened Myra; with it, The Shadow, too, was doomed. This emergency demanded a desperate move.

With a terrific wrench, The Shadow writhed free from the loosened cords; he thrust the coils down to his feet. An instant later even before Li Hoang could shout a command - The Shadow was coming up from his chair, tugging for an automatic.

STRAIGHT in front of The Shadow was a squarish rug, set at a slight angle.

He could understand its purpose. It covered the trap above the boiling vat on the floor below.

Li Hoang had that snare in readiness, to plunge any wild attackers through the floor, into a web that would break if a hurtling body struck it.

But The Shadow had to reach Li Hoang. Chun Laro and the Mongols had spotted The Shadow's rise. They would be upon him, unless he could gain his goal. That objective was Li Hoang. With the crime ruler as a shield, The Shadow could start battle.

Moreover, The Shadow wanted to stifle Li Hoang before the villainous Chinese could proclaim the treachery of Ming Dwan. If that succeeded, The Shadow would have Myra as his ally in the coming fray.

Li Hoang grabbed for a golden cord beside the dragon throne. He fumbled it momentarily; The Shadow's laugh taunted him. That was the only break The Shadow needed. The slip that Li Hoang made gave time to cross the trap and reach the throne.

A monster seemed doomed, when The Shadow lunged. An instant later, the

scene was changed. The Shadow's cloaked figure took a crazy headlong heave.

A last coil of rope had caught The Shadow's foot. As the black-cloaked fighter took a half sprawl on the rug, Li Hoang found the golden cord and jerked it.

The Shadow was on his feet as the floor slid open. He gave a tremendous lurch; it did not save him. The whole trap shot away into the floor; the sizzle of the boiling vat hissed weirdly. The Shadow lost his automatic; it dropped into the spidery web below. Only a titanic effort saved The Shadow, temporarily.

He managed to grip the far side of the trap with his finger tips. His body dropped downward; gone from view, he swung in pendulum fashion, depending solely upon that precarious grip.

Myra's gasp was audible. She could see those gloved fingers, retaining their iron clutch. She was seized by a wild hope that The Shadow might haul himself from the snare. But Li Hoang was prepared to settle that. With a high-pitched shout, the Chinese crime-devil gave the cord another tug.

The trapdoor slithered into view, coming with the speed of a cleaver. Its power was sufficient to mash The Shadow's fingers, had he awaited it; but the coming rumble gave him a split-second's notice. He loosened his grip, just as the trapdoor hammered into place.

Myra caught a last glimpse of The Shadow's body, headed downward for that slender web, with the doom of burning oil beneath it. An instant later, the floor was closed, its thick-piled rug in place.

The floor itself seemed like a deadly monster, that had yawned, to swallow The Shadow into certain doom!

CHAPTER XI

STRIFE UNDERGROUND

WHILE Myra Reldon gazed in consternation at the spot where The Shadow had dropped from sight, Li Hoang bounded from his throne. He sprang straight for the girl. To the astonishment of his followers, he gripped the supposed Ming Dwan in a ferocious clutch. Myra felt vicious claws grip her collar.

This was no mock battle, like the one that she had fought with The Shadow.

That struggle had seemed real enough; to give it effect, The Shadow had given a sharp rip to Myra's sleeve. When she saw that very sleeve, Myra realized why Li Hoang's stroke had come.

The seam of the sleeve had left a gap beside the girl's arm. Through that space, Li Hoang had spotted white skin. The Shadow, too, had noticed the telltale clue; but not until he had noticed Li Hoang's fixed gaze.

The wrench that Li Hoang gave to Myra's collar tore away the whole side of her dress. Her sleeve fell loose; that did not matter, for she had stained her arms and shoulders with a yellow dye. The ripping of her dress did the real damage. It exposed Myra's side, almost to her hip. Chun Laro and his crew saw instantly that she was white.

With a fierce cackle, Li Hoang flung Myra toward the door. She sank there, clutching her torn dress too late. Chun Laro, anxious to copy his master's deeds of murder, whipped out a knife. He was ready to finish Ming Dwan, as Li Hoang

had settled with the Mongol guard.

Before Chun Laro could drive forward, a muffled tumult stopped all motion in the throne room. The sounds came from below, beneath the thick-rugged floor.

There was the quiver of an unearthly laugh, mocking and triumphant. Guns delivered a muffled roar from the depths. Again, The Shadow's laugh throbbed sinister mirth!

Li Hoang made a leap for the wall behind the throne. He swung open the space that was adorned with a gilded pagoda, to reveal a spiral staircase. Followed by a crowd of Mongols, Li Hoang dashed downward.

Chun Laro hesitated. That was a bad mistake. Myra was drawing a .32 revolver. It was too late for the snaky lieutenant to make his knife-thrust. He dived beyond the dragon throne, shouting for aid. Discarding his knife, he drew a gun of his own.

Myra found refuge behind one of the torch-topped statues. In the light from burning flame, she and Chun Laro exchanged quick shots, without effect. Both had gained too good a refuge.

Meanwhile, Li Hoang had reached the room below. Coming from the far side of the boiling vat, he gaped at the scene before him

Poised in the metal-stranded web, The Shadow lay ready for all comers. In each fist, he held an automatic; on the other side of the vat, crippled guards lay helpless from bullets that he had delivered.

Li Hoang's snare had failed, because The Shadow had previously inspected it. For the first time, Li Hoang realized the faults of that ingenious web.

The Shadow, thanks to his brief clutch at the trap, had dropped - not plunged - into the mesh. His body, stretched downward almost to the level of the web, had given the snare no jar. Instead of wildly struggling to leave the web, The Shadow was resting there serenely, avoiding the tangle that would result if he acted in frantic fashion.

EVEN as Li Hoang stared, The Shadow made a leisurely turn in the master-crook's direction. Li Hoang sprang back to the spiral steps; but his followers were not so wise. They shouldered forward, aiming as they came. The Shadow's automatics spoke.

Mongols sprawled. The web swayed in hammock-fashion, from the recoil of The Shadow's guns. There was a scream as one stumbling guard slipped over the edge and splashed into the seething oil. That was enough for the rest of them. They followed Li Hoang in maddened, upward flight.

Almost lazily, The Shadow let his body turn. His roll was slow, too delayed to tangle him in the mesh. He made no sudden effort until he was at the inner edge. There, he jolted his body sidelong. A corner of the mesh split loose.

With a heave, The Shadow slid downward; cleared the edge of the vat. Catching his footing, he drove for the spiral stairs. He fired upward as he began his pursuit. Those shots, and the laugh that accompanied them, spurred the frenzied crew that followed Li Hoang.

Once in the throne room, The Shadow saw a mad rush for the outer door. Chun Laro had joined it; he was running side by side with Li Hoang, while Myra blasted shots from her spot of safety. Unfortunately, the girl clipped neither the Chinese's leader nor his lieutenant. Intervening Mongols took the bullets that she meant for the fleeing pair.

When The Shadow crossed the throne room, Myra followed. Foemen were on the run; the chase had become a rout. It was not until they reached the crossing of the passages that they met with opposition. There, The Shadow pulled Myra

back,
as bullets whizzed from doorways along the walls.

Shoving suddenly into the passage with the revolving steel door, the Shadow blasted a quick shot at a squatly enemy. The man sagged against the right side of the barrier, his eyes fixed toward the hourglass above.

Again, the sands had almost trickled through. The Shadow's quick shot was a timely one. As he drew back into safety, others saw the steel door turn. The body of the squatty Mongol rolled into the breach, jamming the door and holding it half open.

Again, The Shadow jabbed his taunting mirth. He followed with a quick barrage of shots along the sloping corridor. Those bullets brought back futile answers, despite the angry cackle of Li Hoang, and the babbled shouts of Chun Laro.

They knew The Shadow's purpose.

With the outside route opened, gunfire could be heard. If Harry or others were about, they would know that the road to battle was clear.

Gathering henchmen of Li Hoang prepared for a bigger battle. It came with a suddenness and size that they did not expect. A group of men appeared beyond the opened portal; they were headed by a stocky leader, whose swarthy face meant business.

Harry had done better than bring a few of The Shadow's agents. He had heard the gunfire; had passed the word along to Joe Cardona and the Chinatown squad!

LIKE human rats, the Mongols took for the depths; and with them went Li Hoang and Chun Laro. Cardona saw The Shadow start pursuit; following that lead,

Joe beckoned the squad through. This was a chase that gave no chance for cover, and The Shadow knew the routes through the passages below.

Myra let the rush pass her by. Gratefully, the girl waited, hoping that The Shadow would return, but knowing that, in any case, she could declare her identity to Cardona.

The squad was almost out of sight, when another man came through - an arrival scarcely noticed by Myra, who took him for a plain-clothes man. The fellow was Kevin, the wise-faced private investigator hired by Lucius Zallock. Though the last to enter, Kevin was to play a part more important than Myra supposed.

Kevin's chance came, when he saw The Shadow working at a black door that was marked with a golden pagoda. The Chinatown squad had taken other routes, rounding up the remnants of Li Hoang's band. Only The Shadow had noted the importance of the black door.

The door gave suddenly. As Kevin gawked, he saw The Shadow pile into a room where two men were crouched above a desk. With a wild yell, the pair heaved the desk straight for the cloaked invader, then dived for a little alcove. They pressed past a curtain; their footsteps pounded on a stairway.

One fleeing man was clad in purple; the other had a snakish face. Like The Shadow, Kevin had seen Li Hoang and Chun Laro take off in new flight.

The Shadow pursued. He was gone when Kevin came into the room. Listening, the dick heard The Shadow's laugh, far above. There was the roar of guns; the clatter of a heavy foot. Li Hoang and his chief lieutenant had managed a lucky escape.

Kevin decided to clear out. He shoved the overturned desk from his path. He glared sourly, when he saw that the drawers had been ripped from it; that all were empty. Savagely, Kevin kicked a drawer away. His disappointed look turned to a pleased one.

On the floor lay a large square envelope. It was unsealed; projecting

from

its interior was a sheaf of thin papers. With a quick grab, Kevin pocketed the envelope and hurried from the battered office.

The lucky investigator was out of sight when The Shadow returned. Having learned of one new exit, The Shadow was confident that there would be others. He paused long enough to scour the office; finding no clues there, he headed off through remote passages.

Kevin, meanwhile, reached the only exit that he cared to use: the revolving hourglass door where the bulleted Mongol lay. Peering along a side passage, he saw a plain-clothes man talking with a girl whom Kevin took for a Chinese. Hurrying past, the private dick stepped over the body of the dead Mongol.

The rest of Kevin's route brought him eventually to the abandoned curio shop where Harry Vincent had met with capture. There, Kevin met a headquarters man who eyed him suspiciously. Kevin showed a badge and credentials.

"I was supposed to join up with Inspector Cardona," he explained glibly. "I had some dope about a case he's working on. Just when I got here, the rumpus

started. So I was going down to see what it was all about. Tell the inspector I'll be seeing him later."

The headquarters man let Kevin through. Outside, the wise-faced investigator shoved his hand deep into his pocket, crinkled the envelope that he had pilfered. That was a prize that Kevin had long wanted, proof for Lucius Zallock that he was on the job.

Maybe the papers meant nothing; perhaps they meant a lot. That was something Kevin could find out later. His guess, though, was that he had made an excellent find.

In a sense, Kevin was right. Later, though, he was to regret that he had not left that packet for the person who rightfully deserved it: The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAY OF LI HOANG

IT was a far stretch from Chinatown's tumult to the quiet suburban district where Lucius Zallock lived. Anyone could make it in a forty-minute trip by car; but it was more than mere distance that separated the two points.

Chinatown was like a patch of the Orient, filled with danger and intrigue.

Zallock's suburb was a highly civilized spot, where law and order seemed to dominate.

An hour had passed since battle had struck in Chinatown; but news of that strife had not yet trickled to Zallock's haven. There was nothing surprising in

that fact. Neither The Shadow nor the law had linked the affairs of Li Hoang with those of Lucius Zallock.

Spacious grounds surrounded Zallock's mansion. Broad lawns were quiet, streaked with darkness. The house itself was serene; its lighted windows, widely spaced, spoke of calm. Despite those outward signs, the mansion was actually a citadel.

Clumps of shrubbery hid watchful men: Zallock's own trusted servants. Other guards were posted in the recesses of the porch. No one could approach that house without observation, except by utilizing the utmost stealth. Lucius Zallock was taking no chances; he feared a thrust from Li Hoang.

A caravan of cars came rolling into the big drive. There were three in all: a limousine between two light coupes. The automobiles were recognized. Men

rose from the shrubbery to signal that all was well.

Lucius Zallock stepped from the limousine. The coupes, chauffeured by

picked men, continued to the garage. The limousine followed them. Zallock always traveled in this fashion when he went to visit friends in Manhattan. He felt that his limousine was safe, when it was protected by a convoy.

Inside the mansion, other servants stood on watch, while Zallock met a slender, wan-faced man who served as his confidential secretary.

"What news, Shamp?" demanded the business magnate. Then, in an undertone: "Has Kevin called up?"

"He did a while ago, sir," replied Shamp. "He said he would come out here later."

"Something important?"

"I think so."

Zallock started upstairs; Shamp followed. They entered a little study at the rear of a second floor hall. Zallock was about to close the door, when he raised his hand in nervous fashion, spoke the one word:

"Listen!"

Shamp listened. Like Zallock, he heard the unmistakable rumble of a car coming into the front driveway. Shamp analyzed the sound.

"It's probably a taxi," he said. "Shall I go downstairs and meet the visitor?"

Zallock nodded. Shamp went downstairs, arriving there just as the doorbell

rang. A servant opened the door; a stooped man entered. With one hand, he was leaning on a cane; in the other, he carried a large oblong box with a leather handle.

Shamp received the visitor mildly. Through the open front door the secretary could see men risen from the bushes, ready to spring to aid if Shamp signaled.

THE visitor announced himself as Eric Bardsley. Hearing the name, Shamp recognized the inventor from Zallock's descriptions. Politely, he invited Bardsley to wait downstairs.

Zallock was waiting at the door of the study. He gave a smile that was both relieved and pleased.

"Bring Bardsley up," Zallock told Shamp. "Take him into the little parlor at the second floor front. While I am talking with him, bring the papers that you will find in File B."

"But - but," Shamp was stammering nervously - "I thought you said that those papers -"

"Were useless?" queried Zallock, dryly. "Yes, Shamp, they were useless - for the purpose which I originally intended. I doubt that government experts would have allowed the so-called business losses that those documents declare.

"That was why I used other records, when I reported my income. It was better to declare my actual profits, and avoid any charges of evasion.

However,

the figures in File B should satisfy our friend Bardsley."

Soon afterward, Zallock and Bardsley were seated in the small but elaborately furnished room that the magnate had termed the "parlor." Shamp brought in the required file. Zallock spread papers on a table.

Eagerly, Bardsley studied the documents. They were certified by accountants who had gone over Zallock's books; but the aviation magnate did not

explain that his ledgers could be interpreted in various ways. Presumably, these

records were complete. They showed huge losses charged to experiments in air navigation; to sums spent in establishing new aviation routes.

Moreover, the records established heavy expenses in purchases from Compometal; insurance payments for goods shipped by Federal Export; large costs

in fuel purchased from Ozone Oil. There was nothing to indicate that Zallock

controlled those companies and others mentioned; that their profits through Continental Airways had returned to his own pockets.

That was the feature that Zallock had feared would be discovered. These records were a snarl of loose threads, all accounted for, when considered alone; but quite different when traced from the other ends.

"Our business has been large," mourned Zallock, "but you can see for yourself, Bardsley, that my net profits for the last business year were less than fifty thousand dollars.

"That is greater than your royalty of twenty thousand; but when you consider the tremendous amount of promotion work that I must handle, your position is preferable to mine."

Bardsley seemed satisfied by Zallock's smooth explanation. The inventor was nodding, his face displayed only the faintest marks of doubt. Coolly, Zallock suggested:

"Show me your new invention, Eric. Perhaps it can produce new profits for both of us."

BARDSLEY'S face gleamed with a smile. He opened the oblong box; brought out a tube that stood on a pedestal. At each end was a small propeller. Bardsley set the appliance on the table. He opened a shallow compartment in the deep bottom of the oblong box; from it, he produced a length of insulated wire, with plugs on the ends.

A few minutes later, the inventor had the wire running from a floor plug to the propeller tube. He pressed a switch; the blades began to spin.

"Observe all that happens!" he shrilled, excitedly. Bardsley's grayish face had brightened; he was running his fingers through his shaggy hair. "Only one propeller is taking the current, but it produces the revolutions of the other!"

"Because it drives air through the tube," commented Zallock. "That is quite obvious, Eric."

"Watch this!"

Bardsley threw a switch. The free propeller halted; its blades flicked. Gaining impetus, it began to speed in the reverse direction.

"Double action!" chuckled Bardsley. "In one direction, the second propeller supplies additional power, thus increasing the speed of a plane to which the device is attached.

"In the other direction" - the inventor had raised his hands excitedly - "the propellers nullify. That will enable the ship to remain almost stationary in mid-air!"

Zallock stepped close to Shamp, gave an undertone that Bardsley could not hear.

"Say nothing, Shamp," warned the magnate. "The man is crazy! Lost in this dream, he has forgotten that wings are required in a plane's flight. We must humor him -"

Zallock cut short. Bardsley had stopped the tiny motor in the base of the propeller tube. Since the hum had ceased, he could hear anything that was said.

"An excellent idea!" approved Zallock. "It should be tested, on a larger scale. The strain of higher speed -"

"Means nothing!" interrupted Bardsley. "I can gear this device to double the number of revolutions. I shall prove it!"

He disconnected the cord; began to dismantle the propeller tube. While Zallock watched patiently, the sound of another approaching car came from out front. Zallock nudged Shamp, telling him to go downstairs.

A few minutes later, the secretary returned. He saw Bardsley busy with the invention. Shamp spoke two words to Zallock:

"Kevin. Important!"

Placidly, Zallock turned to Bardsley. He spoke a question; Bardsley was too engrossed to catch it. Zallock put the query louder:

"How long will this require, Eric?"

"Only fifteen minutes," promised the inventor. "I am to blame; I should have geared it properly beforehand. But please don't bother me while I work. Haste makes me nervous."

"We shall leave you alone," purred Zallock. "Shamp, bring those records to my study."

ZALLOCK wore a pleased smile when he and Shamp stepped into the hallway. Carefully, he closed the door of the parlor, so as not to disturb Bardsley.

Kevin was waiting on the stairs; Zallock beckoned him into the rear hall.

They reached the study. Kevin slipped into a chair; wiped a streak of sweat from his forehead. He began to pour the news of strife in Chinatown. Zallock listened, worried. Shamp showed the jitters, also.

"I grabbed an envelope at Li Hoang's," informed Kevin, "and maybe it's important. I stuck around Chinatown though, because there were plenty of cops there. For a while, it was the safest place to be.

"That was when I phoned here. After that, I pulled out, while they were hauling away a lot of crippled chinks in some ambulances. There were a couple of things I heard, though, in Chinatown."

Pausing, Kevin turned to stare toward the door. His eyes were nervous, rather than wise.

"Can anybody hear what we're saying here?" he demanded. "Maybe it might go to Li Hoang -"

"The room is soundproof," inserted Zallock. "My servants are trustworthy; in addition, they work in pairs, so a traitor would be suspected."

"But if I was followed here -"

"You are safe."

"Maybe not from Li Hoang -"

"From Li Hoang as well as from all others," assured Zallock. "The house is guarded, Kevin, though you probably did not observe it. I am positive that no one - not even Li Hoang - could enter here undiscovered!"

Kevin leaned back in his chair. His settled position blocked Zallock's view of the doorknob. Neither Zallock nor Shamp spotted the slow turn that the knob received from some outside source.

Though Lucius Zallock did not know it, Li Hoang had found a way to enter this mansion undetected by the outside guards. To one who had burrowed deep below the streets of Chinatown, such measures were far simpler than Zallock supposed.

Those three men in that study were due for a bad surprise. Soon - before Kevin could reveal all vital facts - they were to learn the sinister ways of Li Hoang.

CHAPTER XIII

COVERED DEATH

SATISFIED that all was safe, Kevin licked his dryish lips. Resuming his wise-faced expression, the investigator reached into his pocket, brought out the envelope that he had carried from the room with the black door.

"There's a couple of dozen sheets in here," he told Zallock, "and they're all alike. I can tell that much, even though they're written in Chinese.

"They've got Li Hoang's signature on them. I'm wise to that much, because I cornered a sappy-looking chink and showed him one. He started to read it. He said it began with the words: 'In the Golden Pagoda' and after that, he shut up like a clam."

Zallock seemed to understand.

"The fellow must have seen Li Hoang's signature," he remarked. "That would account for his sudden silence."

"You've guessed it," admitted Kevin. "You should have seen the dive he made! Anyway, there I was, stuck with a batch of hand-bills that look like laundry tickets!"

Zallock reached for the envelope. Kevin handed it over with a sour grin.

"These sheets won't help us much," declared the private dick, "unless we can find somebody who can read Chinese - and isn't scared to buck Li Hoang."

Zallock's face became firm, as his fingers reached into the envelope. His eyes were fixed on Kevin.

"I told you previously," declared Zallock, "that I spent some years in the Orient. It was in China that I once met Li Hoang, in person. At that time, fortunately, he did not regard me as an enemy.

"On that occasion, I acted as an interpreter, while Li Hoang conducted negotiations with a group of Englishmen. My knowledge of the Chinese language is quite large. Whatever the import of these messages, I shall learn it."

Zallock drew the papers into view. Shamp saw that Kevin's statement was correct; all the sheets were alike, closely inscribed with finely penned Chinese characters. Shamp noted the signature; he knew that it was the mark of Li Hoang.

But Shamp, like Kevin, was unable to decipher anything else; a fact which was to prove unfortunate.

"My glasses, Shamp," ordered Zallock, squinting at the sheets which he had fanned between his hands. "I've misplaced them. I can't read a thing without them."

Shamp found the reading glasses on the desk. He picked them up by the long ribbon attached to them. Zallock laid the papers and envelope on the desk, while he adjusted the glasses to his nose. Still facing Shamp, Zallock saw a look of dismay spread over the secretary's features.

Shamp was staring straight toward the door; his expression became fearful.

Zallock turned; as he did, he saw Kevin bound to his feet and wheel about.

The door of the room had opened, unnoticed. It was closing behind the back

of the insidious person who had entered. The intruder was a living demon of the Orient, whose purple attire symbolized his evil power.

Three men saw a lemon-hued face, above a purple robe which had a golden pagoda woven in its silken front. A gold-plumed purple headpiece topped that malicious countenance whereon slanted eyes gleamed their malice, writhing lips formed a threatening smile.

Lucius Zallock recognized that cold-set face. The magnate's own lips gulped the name:

"Li Hoang!"

THE arch-crook's presence was not the only menace that he produced. In a tight-clenched fist, gold-gloved from knuckles to wrist, Li Hoang held a revolver. His position was craftily chosen; a mere sidestep had placed him so

that he could cover all who faced him.

 Eyeballs showed whitish; then came the glisten of a darkish gaze. Li Hoang had turned his head to spy the papers on the desk. He gave a savage hiss; sprang straight across to pluck the precious documents, envelope and all.

 Before the others could make a move, Li Hoang was away again. He was threatening, wagging his revolver from a corner of the room, while his free hand crinkled the papers into a pocket of his robe.

 "Too late," croaked Li Hoang. "Or too soon - whichever you prefer. These orders, to my faithful helpers, were not meant for your eyes, Zallock.

 "All that was meant for you were the instructions that I gave direct. You have violated my terms! There shall be a penalty!"

 Zallock quavered. His lips gasped protests in Chinese. Li Hoang's lips showed scorn.

 "Speak English," sneered the purple-clad Oriental menace. "Let the others hear what you have to say. The stupid one" - he nudged his gun toward Shamp - "and the wise one!"

 Li Hoang finished with a gun flourish in Kevin's direction. The investigator started to sneak behind his chair; halted when Li Hoang's eyes glistened.

 "I know nothing!" panted Zallock. "I have obeyed your terms, Li Hoang -"

 "By hiring this man?" interjected Li Hoang, with another nudge toward Kevin. "You have lied, Zallock! It merely happens that you are too useful to die, at present."

 Li Hoang's remark gave Kevin an idea - one that was based upon poor judgment. Kevin knew what Li Hoang meant. He wanted Zallock to live, so that he

could pillage him. On that basis, Kevin thought that he could bluff Li Hoang.

 "You can't get away with this!" asserted Kevin. His gruff tone showed that

he had recovered from his first alarm. "What Mr. Zallock says is right! He knows

nothing - yet. But I know plenty; too much for your good! Suppose I told you something that begins like this."

 Half leaning on his chair, Kevin stroked his chin; he began in slow fashion to declaim:

 "In the Golden Pagoda -"

 A sharp report interrupted the investigator's sentence. The blast was accompanied by a tongue of flame from Li Hoang's gun. While smoke wreathed lazily from the revolver muzzle, Kevin crumpled to the floor. His legs and arms

writhed momentarily; then stilled.

 "Perhaps he, also, lied," spoke Li Hoang, facing Zallock and Shamp. "He may have known more of that message; perhaps not. His death suits me. I have disposed of a man who meddled into my affairs!"

 "Remember this, Zallock." Li Hoang sidled to the door, paused there, still

aiming his smoke-tainted gun. "You, also, shall die if you speak one word against me! This little matter" - he motioned toward Kevin's body - "is one that I advise you to hush.

 "Otherwise, doom! Less pleasant than the sort that you have seen. And whether you live or die" - the firm chin thrust forward between the droopy points of the long mustache - "your wealth shall become mine!"

 CONTEMPTUOUSLY, Li Hoang thrust away his revolver as he opened the door. Zallock and Shamp had a last impression of that devilish face, with its fixed eyes, jet-black mustache and hard-set lips. The door closed to blot their view of Li Hoang.

There was a little clock on Zallock's desk. Its ticks became audible in the stillness that followed, while Zallock and Shamp kept a horror-struck gaze upon Kevin's body. A minute passed before either man moved. It was Shamp who suddenly started an excited spring toward the door.

Zallock came to life. He clutched the secretary's arm with both hands.

"Not yet!" blurted Zallock. "Li Hoang may still be close!"

"But if we give the alarm, the servants may capture him!"

"They can do nothing. Li Hoang came here unchallenged. He can depart as easily. If Kevin's death is known, Li Hoang will murder me - and he may kill you, also, Shamp!"

Shamp shivered. The final argument hit home. At Zallock's bidding, Shamp helped push away a large filing cabinet that blocked the door of an unused closet. They dragged Kevin's body into that cubbyhole.

One of the study rugs bore bloodstains. Shamp put it in the closet; Zallock rearranged the remaining rugs. They shoved the filing cabinet back into

position. Zallock opened the study door; whispered that they would go downstairs

and talk to the servants.

At the stairway, both men noted a humming sound from the front of the second floor. Zallock remembered Bardsley. Sending Shamp ahead, Zallock went into the little parlor. He found Bardsley stooped in fascinated attention, watching the propellers revolve at top speed.

Zallock clapped the inventor on the shoulder.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the magnate. "Eric, the test exceeds my expectations! I want the rights to this invention!"

Bardsley turned off the motor. Zallock told him to pack the apparatus; that no further demonstration was needed. While Bardsley dismantled the machine, Zallock talked terms.

"Patent it in your own name, Eric," he said, "if you have not already done so. Talk with your own attorneys; have them draw up whatever contract you wish."

Zallock was wiping his spectacles; they were moistened with perspiration from his forehead. He kept a sidelong gaze toward Bardsley; noted a peculiar gleam in the inventor's eyes.

Although Bardsley had shown irrational ideas when he discussed his invention, he still might show some common sense in business matters. It wouldn't do to act overgenerous. Bardsley might dally, and Zallock was anxious to get him out of the house.

"Any contract," modified Zallock, "that is fair to me, also. A blanket contract, if you wish, covering your former inventions as well as this one. I am willing to consider any reasonable arrangements."

Bardsley shut the oblong box. Purring congratulations, Zallock steered him through the hall and down the front stairs. Servants were standing near the outer door; Zallock gave a gesture that they understood. They passed the word along.

Ordering his own car, Zallock took Bardsley out to the front steps. The big limousine arrived. With a proud, self-satisfied look, Bardsley boarded it. He looked over the car, as though he expected to have one of the same sort himself.

HARDLY had the limousine gone down the driveway before Shamp and a group of guards came from cover, to cluster around Zallock. In low tone, Zallock asked them if they had seen any trace of Li Hoang. Shamp had already put the same question. The guards repeated their head-shakes.

"I feared that the Chinaman was here," purred Zallock, not mentioning Li Hoang by name. "I was probably mistaken. However, I want you all to scour the

grounds. Shamp and I shall remain here, on watch.

"Meanwhile, Kevin will leave. And by the way" - he called that louder, as the men were starting - "no one is to know that Kevin came here at all. You understand? No one!"

Nods from the servants. Waiting, Zallock and Shamp talked in low tones, speculating on how Li Hoang had managed to pass the guards. They decided that he had used a remote cellar window. Both agreed that darkness could afford a helpful cover to any skillful prowler who might approach the mansion.

That final theory was proven while they spoke.

Unnoticed by either Zallock or Shamp, a blackened shape drew close; invisible against the darkness of the wall, a shrouded figure listened to the last remarks. When flashlights from the lawn bobbed close, Zallock and Shamp stepped inside.

There was a faint swish in the darkness. Unseen, the black-clad arrival moved upward, finding finger grips and toeholds in the ivied wall. All trace of

the new visitant was gone when the guards reached the house.

Li Hoang had come and gone. In his stay at Zallock's, the insidious crook had done new murder. Even the fact of death was being hidden, thanks to the threats of Li Hoang.

Despite all that, murder would soon be known. The Shadow had arrived, seeking the serpentine trail of Li Hoang.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LOOSE THREAD

THOUGH The Shadow was seeking Li Hoang, one name was uppermost in his mind, as he glided through the hallway on the second floor of Zallock's mansion. That name was Kevin.

After leaving Chinatown, The Shadow had received reports from agents. He had promptly searched for clues; he had found one in the mass of hastily gathered data.

Clyde Burke, a newspaper reporter who secretly served The Shadow, had covered the finish of the Chinatown raid. He had been with Joe Cardona when the police inspector had learned of Kevin's presence near Li Hoang's underground lair.

That news had impressed Cardona.

The ace inspector jumped to the thought that Kevin might know something regarding the Chinatown mess. Cardona had made a note to look up Kevin, as soon

as more important details were cleared. The Shadow, however, had regarded Kevin of prime importance. He had gained time on Cardona by following that clue immediately.

Kevin's name was listed with those of other private investigators in The Shadow's files. It was a public fact that Kevin was employed by Continental Airways. Since Lucius Zallock headed that concern, The Shadow had made a prompt

trip to the aviation magnate's home.

Outside the front door, The Shadow had caught mention of Kevin's name, undertoned between Zallock and Shamp. He knew at once that Kevin was still here; that Zallock was hiding the fact from his own servants. Yet Zallock trusted those very servants, for he had started them on some search.

That paradox, plus the fact that Zallock's own retainers formed a little army in themselves, told The Shadow that Zallock must be faced by some formidable opposition.

The whole situation pointed to Li Hoang.

Passing through the second floor, The Shadow came to Zallock's study. The room was still lighted; once inside, The Shadow recognized definite features. The room was soundproof, as Zallock had said. If anything had happened here, the outside guards would not have known it.

There were traces that something had happened.

Chairs were placed in odd positions. The rugs - all small ones - were irregularly arranged. At one spot, the floor showed a smooth stretch of varnish, that ended abruptly in a rougher space.

Obviously, a rug had been moved. Not only that; it had been taken away entirely. Studying the floor closely, The Shadow could not picture the present supply of rugs as sufficient for so well-furnished a room.

With that much learned, The Shadow quickly solved the rest. The filing cabinet and the door behind it were giveaways. A deep scrape in the floor showed that the cabinet had been hurriedly moved; and the door offered the most

likely answer to a quickly chosen hiding place.

Noiselessly, The Shadow opened drawers of the steel cabinet; used them as a flight of steps to the top. He listened at the door; hearing nothing, he reached down behind the cabinet.

The door had a simple lock. The Shadow opened it with a skeleton key. He brought the door toward him, the few inches that the filing cabinet allowed.

Through the crack The Shadow saw the huddled body of Kevin.

Closing the door, The Shadow dropped to the study floor. He rearranged the

drawers of the filing cabinet; stole out into the hall. He heard footsteps on the stairs; moved quickly into darkness, deeper in the hallway.

Lucius Zallock had arrived, with Shamp accompanying him.

WATCHING from the hallway, The Shadow was treated to a demonstration of Zallock's foresight. Calmer since the departure of Li Hoang, the airways magnate had thought of the very weaknesses that The Shadow had detected in the arrangement of the study.

He ordered Shamp to move the chairs aside. Zallock adjusted the rugs; finding them insufficient, he went to another room, brought in a spare rug to fill the empty space. Chairs were placed carefully.

Zallock did not neglect the scrapes beside the filing cabinet. He sent Shamp for some floor polish and had the secretary obliterate most of the marks.

After that, Zallock placed a wastebasket over one noticeable spot.

Zallock's final touch came when he produced a huge picture of an air liner from behind a corner table. He and Shamp hung the picture so that it entirely covered the portion of the closet door that projected above the filing cabinet.

The preparations were completed none too soon. As he stood studying the airplane picture from the open hallway door, Zallock took on a listening attitude. He was hearing the arrival of another motor car.

Zallock sent Shamp downstairs to meet the new visitors. A few minutes later, Shamp returned to the study with Inspector Cardona and a pair of headquarters detectives.

Surprise was written upon Zallock's haggard face, as he inquired the purpose of the visit.

"We're checking on a chap named Kevin," proclaimed Cardona. "We want to know if he was out here tonight."

Calmly, Zallock shook his head. The Shadow saw the gesture from a new vantage spot in the hallway. Zallock looked keen enough to bluff Cardona.

True, there were still clues that would have led The Shadow to a search of

the room. That wastebasket was in a bad spot. The big picture didn't belong

over
the filing cabinet; its conspicuous position was almost as suspicious an item
as
the doorway that it covered.

Those features, however, were missed by Cardona. Zallock's position
looked
safe. The Shadow preferred to let it remain so, until later.

Zallock didn't fit in as a murderer; at least, not with Shamp as an
accomplice. The hand of Li Hoang was evident, particularly since Zallock had
ordered a search of the grounds around his mansion. Evidently, Zallock was
protecting himself; it was best to let him do so, for the present.

By remaining here after Cardona's departure, The Shadow could learn what
disposal Zallock intended to make of Kevin's body. The law could be led along
the trail of this murder, any time The Shadow chose.

Moreover, The Shadow could himself confront Zallock, thereby learning
vital facts. If Zallock proved as innocent as The Shadow supposed him to be,
he

would reveal everything to gain a powerful ally and preserve his secret.

At that moment, The Shadow expected Cardona to ask a few more questions,
then bow himself out. On the face of things, Cardona had no other course. It
chanced, however, that Cardona wasn't through. He had a trump card and he
played it.

"KEVIN came out here," snapped Cardona. "Why deny it, Mr. Zallock?"

Zallock's expression became pained. He was almost saddened by Cardona's
expression of disbelief. Turning to Shamp, Zallock coolly questioned:

"Did you see Kevin tonight?"

With all his nervousness, Shamp showed himself as good a bluffer as his
employer.

"Kevin wasn't here," he said to Zallock. Then, facing Cardona: "We didn't
even hear from him by telephone."

Cardona paced the room, pausing to eye each man in turn. He motioned to
the detectives.

"Bring up a few of those flunkies," ordered the ace. "We'll hear what
they've got to say."

The Shadow was deep in a far doorway when three of Zallock's servants
filed into the study. Cardona gruffly questioned them. All stood by Zallock.
They swore they hadn't seen Kevin.

Zallock expected Cardona to quit after that testimony. Instead, Joe
played
his trump.

"I don't believe any of you," he told Zallock, "for the reason that we've
just come from the hotel where Kevin lived! We talked to a cab driver who
makes

that hotel stand his base.

"He'd just come back from a trip, and Kevin was his fare. What's more, he
told us where he took Kevin. That place" - Cardona ramm'd his fist on
Zallock's

desk - "was this very house!"

Zallock didn't flinch. He merely shrugged; looked toward Shamp and the
servants. They shook their heads negatively. Cardona couldn't pick a weak link
in the group. Zallock became spokesman for all.

"The cab driver was probably mistaken," he remarked. "That is the only
possible conclusion, inspector!"

Cardona was stumped; but not for long.

"Mistaken on what?" he demanded. "Didn't he know where he went? Or didn't
he know who his passenger was?"

"Probably both," returned Zallock, coolly.

Cardona grunted. He wheeled to Shamp: "What do you think?"

"I agree with Mr. Zallock," replied the secretary. "Of course" - he hesitated - "well, Kevin wasn't here -"

"But maybe a cab was?" demanded Cardona. "Is that it?"

"Why, yes" - Shamp saw a good way out - "a cab did come here."

"And it brought Kevin?"

"No, no!" Shamp smiled. He couldn't be tricked that easily. "Kevin wasn't here."

"Then who was?"

Shamp licked his lips. He didn't dare look at Zallock. He was worried about more questions, and saw a way to sidetrack them. One wedge of truth, thought Shamp, would bring solid ground.

"Eric Bardsley came here," stated the secretary. "He's an inventor who knows Mr. Zallock. Maybe it was Bardsley that the cab driver brought here." Shamp brightened. "Yes, he could have mistaken Bardsley for Kevin."

Cardona pounced for the telephone book. Shamp shot a look to Zallock, hoping for his employer's approval. Instead, he saw Zallock half slumped behind

his desk. It was then that Shamp remembered.

Bardsley had heard Shamp announce Kevin's arrival!

Joe Cardona had found the loose thread in the skein. Lucius Zallock knew it; so did The Shadow, as he viewed Zallock from the hallway. Within the next few minutes, the truth of Kevin's murder would be out.

There was one redeeming phase to that situation. With the revelation of murder would come important facts concerning Li Hoang.

CHAPTER XV

THE DOUBLED TRAIL

IT was several minutes before Cardona managed to get Bardsley on the wire.

From the opening conversation, listeners learned that the inventor had just reached his apartment in Manhattan. After Cardona introduced himself, results were rapid.

"Some questions, Mr. Bardsley." Cardona's end of the conversation was brisk. "Did you visit Mr. Lucius Zallock tonight?... You did? Good! Did you hear mention of a man named Kevin?... You say he was here? You're sure of it?..."

"Yes, that's all I wanted to know... One other thing, though. I'd like you to come out here, Mr. Bardsley... No, not alone. I'll have a man call for you..."

Yes, wait for Detective Sergeant Markham. He'll bring you here, by cab..."

Hanging up, Cardona merely glowered at Zallock. The ace put in a call to headquarters, ordered Markham to contact Bardsley at the inventor's apartment. Joe was smiling grimly to himself. He had the goods on Zallock; the longer he let the fellow stew, the better.

The punch came when Cardona completed his call to Markham. Turning from the telephone, he asked Zallock bluntly:

"Where's Kevin?"

Zallock motioned to the filing cabinet. Cardona's men hauled it away. Seeing the bottom of the door, they ripped down the picture. Cardona gave the door a yank; Kevin's body rolled from the closet.

Astoundment showed on the faces of Zallock's servants. Their nerve was gone; they began to plead their innocence. Cardona ordered the two detectives to herd them downstairs, then round up the rest.

There were police reserves outside, a second car. Cardona wasn't worried about the servants attempting a break. Their protests had been too genuine.

Zallock and Shamp were the pair that could talk. Cardona was capable of

handling them alone. His back toward the open hallway door, Joe held a leveled gun. When the others were gone, the ace said to Zallock:

"I'll hear your story!"

Zallock's haggard face came upward from his hunched arms. His expression was an amazed one.

"You - you don't think I murdered Kevin?"

"I'm holding my opinion," returned Cardona. "For your benefit, Mr. Zallock, let's put it that I go on hunches. There's a lot behind this that I want to know."

Zallock sighed his relief. One strain, at least, was ended. He had been holding back a story that he had wanted to deliver to the law, but had refrained from fear of consequences. This was the time to tell it.

IN steady monotone, Zallock detailed his experiences with Li Hoang. When he mentioned two companies Compometal and Federal Export - the light dawned on Cardona. Zallock's admission that he owned those corporations explained their withdrawal of complaints.

"Then came the demands on Ozone Oil," stated Zallock, bitterly. "I've nothing to show for it, inspector. I burned the messages that Li Hoang sent. There's the one man" - he pointed to Kevin's body - "who could corroborate all I have said. But Li Hoang murdered him tonight."

Cardona looked to Shamp. "How much do you know about it?"

"I saw Kevin murdered." Shamp was earnest. "I heard the threats that Li Hoang made. I, too, feared his vengeance, inspector."

Cardona gave a call from the door. Two detectives showed up from downstairs

"I'm holding both of you," Cardona told Zallock and Shamp, "until I've talked to Bardsley. Maybe his testimony will help."

The detectives were producing handcuffs. Cardona shook his head.

"No need for bracelets," he said. "Just keep them here. I think we're getting to the bottom of something deep. This Li Hoang stuff is no bunk! I heard plenty of talk tonight, in Chinatown."

"Nobody wants to say who Li Hoang is, or where he is; but I learned enough

to know that he fits the story I've just heard. I'm going to quiz the servants,

while Bardsley's on his way here. I'll be downstairs when he comes."

Cardona left. While he was on the front stairs, The Shadow found a rear flight and descended to the ground floor. He went out by a side door and circled the mansion, to reach a clump of shrubs where Zallock's servants had formerly been on guard duty.

Like Cardona, The Shadow was looking forward to hearing Bardsley's testimony. He knew where the interview would take place: on the front porch. With the servants gathered in a ground-floor room, Cardona would want privacy with Bardsley. Moreover, in his present mood, Cardona would waste no time in beginning his quiz.

While he waited, The Shadow considered the present status of Li Hoang.

Zallock had left nothing untold. He had mentioned Kevin's grab of the papers from the black-celled room, exactly as the dead investigator had described it. That had gone over with Cardona, who had seen the room itself, after the chaos there.

Also, Zallock had repeated the only words that Kevin had gleaned from the batch of duplicate papers: the statement, "In the Golden Pagoda -" Zallock had specified that there was a Golden Pagoda; that Kevin had seen it in the window of a Chinatown curio shop.

Those revelations promised future trouble for Lucius Zallock. The man knew

it; and he had shown it. But Zallock was banking on one hope.

Li Hoang had left the mansion, apparently confident that Zallock would

conceal the death of Kevin. Himself in flight, the Chinese villain would have no way of knowing, as yet, that Zallock had divulged the truth.

If the law moved swiftly; if it provided protection, Zallock might override the threats of Li Hoang. At least - so Zallock himself had declared - there could be no immediate danger. If the police called in the aid of government agents, Li Hoang might be kept on the run.

Cardona had come to the front porch. He was discussing that very prospect with a detective.

"WE'VE flooded Chinatown," The Shadow heard Cardona say. "The Feds are there, plenty of them, working with that girl who did the undercover job. There are plenty of Chinese clearing out and we're letting them go, after they've been looked over.

"The idea was to bag Li Hoang. He's slipped us; but there's still Chun Laro. Anybody could spot that snake-eyed chink! So we'd just as soon let those Chinese through - the ones that say they're scared of Li Hoang.

"Chun Laro may try a sneak along with them. The more that get out, the less we've got to weed through when we pull a round-up, tomorrow. What's more, every Chinaman that goes his own way is one less we've got to protect from Li Hoang."

The detective agreed with all that Cardona said. He was starting to ask a question, when Cardona suddenly snapped:

"Here's Markham, bringing Bardsley."

A taxi was swinging up the driveway. By the time it came to a stop, Cardona was beside it. The cabby stretched his arm, gave a deft turn to the handle of the rear door. As the door swung open, Cardona blurted a sudden exclamation.

The door was propelled by a falling figure, that came out bound and gagged. Cardona caught the man before he hit the gravel. In the light from the cab, The Shadow recognized the face of Detective Sergeant Markham!

Otherwise, the cab was empty!

Things happened in a hurry. With one wrench, Cardona had the gag off Markham. The bound man gulped his story in a dozen words:

"Outside Bardsley's they grabbed me - Chun Laro and a crowd of Chinese!"

Detectives were arriving from Zallock's house. They relieved Cardona of the task of releasing Markham, while the stupefied taxi driver showed by his gawky look that he hadn't known of his passenger's plight.

To The Shadow, there was something more sinister than Markham's helpless condition. He was concerned with the absence of Eric Bardsley. That, coupled with the fact that Markham was still alive, meant more than Cardona supposed.

It was more than a challenge from Li Hoang, who never dealt in useless measures.

Bardsley's absence was the forerunner of another thrust, due here! Li Hoang could travel as fast as Markham's cab. Moreover, Markham's predicament was the telltale factor.

The captured detective sergeant had been sent along, so that Cardona would

do exactly what Li Hoang wanted. While Cardona was concerning himself with Markham's story, Li Hoang was busy behind Cardona's very back.

That was why the Shadow sprang suddenly from shelter, prepared to reverse his course around the house. An instant later, he would have been off around the mansion, seeking those rear stairs to Zallock's study. It was Cardona's chance move that changed The Shadow's course.

For some reason, Cardona turned toward the front door of the mansion. On the threshold, he saw the pair of detectives who had been upstairs with Zallock and Shamp. With an angry shout, Cardona sprang toward them.

"What are you here for?"

"Somebody passed in the word you wanted us," responded one of the dicks.
"We heard the call from the hall."

BEFORE The Shadow could dive in to halt him, Cardona was across the threshold. He beckoned as he went; the detectives beside the taxicab forgot Markham and followed. They went through the doorway in a cluster; five men in all, including the dicks from upstairs.

The Shadow waited at the edge of the front porch. The silence that followed was more ominous than any sound of battle. It fulfilled The Shadow's worst expectations. Li Hoang had sprung an absolute trap.

No time remained for The Shadow to circuit the mansion. That lull was the sort that could allow no delay. With one bound, The Shadow cleared the porch rail; landed lightly, almost at the edge of the open front door. An automatic in his fist, he peered from darkness.

Cardona and his squad were halted in the hallway, their arms upstretched. On each side stood grinning Mongols, vengeful survivors of those who had served

Li Hoang in his underground lair. Those marksmen held the bulge, with their big revolvers.

In the shelter of the stairway, Chun Laro leered above an out-thrust gun. On the steps were two more Mongols, armed like the others. Just above was a landing where the stairs turned. It formed a dais for the purple-clad commander who ruled the evil throng.

Resplendent in his embroidered robe, lips smiling subtly between his long-drooped mustache, Li Hoang surveyed the prisoners through those slanted slits that were his eyes. His right hand, clenched, was raised to the level of his plumed cap.

That fist glittered in the light, for it was encased in a fingerless glove of golden weave. Its downward sweep was the sole command that murderous Mongols awaited.

The hand of Li Hoang was ready. Only The Shadow could halt that signal for massacre!

CHAPTER XVI

VANISHED VICTIMS

THE SHADOW edged his automatic three inches to the right. Unseen, that black-muzzled weapon aimed for Li Hoang, pointed between Cardona and a powerless detective. If the gilded fist moved downward, Li Hoang would come with it.

Nevertheless, The Shadow wanted to delay that consequence. Chun Laro was too competent to stand dismayed if Li Hoang fell. His shots would follow, accompanied by Mongol guns. The death of Li Hoang would sacrifice Cardona and the helpless squad.

Trickily, Li Hoang had doubled his trail; but in so doing, he thought he had outrun The Shadow. Thinking himself complete master of the present scene, Li Hoang was in no hurry to begin the massacre. The Shadow was depending on that fact.

Li Hoang spoke dryly, as he slanted a look toward the side room where Zallock's disarmed servants were clustered.

"Some of you may survive," announced the purple-clad Chinaman. "You can

tell the law that I trailed Bardsley when he left here; that I overheard his telephone talk with Inspector Cardona.

"Bardsley is a prisoner in a car beyond the rear hedge. Two of my men have taken Zallock, to place him there also. Shamp is upstairs, bound. I do not need him as a hostage. He may help, when I demand ransom for my captives.

"Such ransom" - the speaker's lips curled insidiously - "will be paid! There can be no alternative with Li Hoang!"

The Shadow was no longer in the doorway. Through it, he stooped forward, to join Cardona's helpless outspread squad!

A whisper announced The Shadow's advance. Scarcely audible, it was caught by two men only: Cardona and the detective on his right. It called for the two to shift closer together. Cardona gathered the idea promptly; since the detective was too stupefied to budge, Joe closed the gap himself.

The side shift was too apparent. It brought a sudden focus of Li Hoang's eyes. By that time, however, The Shadow was in position. He had drawn a second gun.

His fists were on the shoulders of two men that he had chosen for cover. His pressure brought their hands lower, almost to shoulder level. The big automatics that poked into view, seemed to project from the loose hands of Cardona and the detective.

Li Hoang saw those guns at last. So did Chun Laro. But they had no doubt regarding who held them.

The Shadow's laugh throbbled chill and sinister, to break the stillness of the hallway. That mockery, the tilt of the guns, told the sudden advantage that

The Shadow had obtained. Edged in from darkness, he had picked Li Hoang and Chun

Laro as his targets!

Two - the leader and his lieutenant - would die with the signal for gunfire. If Mongol marksmen went berserk, they still could not clip The Shadow before he damaged them; for Cardona and the rooted dick were living shields that would take the first barrage.

At that juncture, The Shadow held control that was practically complete. Instead of having a chance to down one enemy - Li Hoang - with a sacrifice of five, he could wipe out all his foemen with the loss of only two friends.

JOE CARDONA saw how matters stood. Gamely, the ace inspector gritted: "Shoot! We'll take our chances!"

That was not The Shadow's plan. He did not intend that Cardona should die, even though such sacrifice would mean the doom of the monstrous Li Hoang.

Burning eyes met the cold, slitted stare of Li Hoang. The Shadow's lips spoke a command, in English:

"Withdraw your men!"

A slow smile fastened upon Li Hoang's lips. His chin showed its canny thrust. He still kept up his pose of mastery. Turning his head to the right, he spoke across the landing banister to Chun Laro, below.

"Give the order, Chun Laro," he commanded, in English. "The men are to retire, by the stairway."

Chun Laro babbled orders in Chinese. Two Mongols on the stairway began an upward retreat. The others, from the flanks, were converging toward the stairs.

The Shadow, in turn, spoke to the detectives who were taking his commands.

They, too, retreated; but they closed in as they backed. They were protecting The Shadow from the flank; a wise move, in case any of Li Hoang's gunners should try to sneak around behind The Shadow.

Moreover, those retreating dicks were nearing a direct line on the front door. They would be ready for a scramble to safety, if things went wrong.

Though Cardona and the man beside him remained to take the brunt, The Shadow was ready to withdraw them with him.

Li Hoang foresaw that result. He edged downward from the landing. His stooping motion was a copy of The Shadow's strategy. Li Hoang wanted human shields of his own: those Mongols who were backing up the stairway.

The Shadow stopped that shift with a fierce, commanding whisper. Chun Laro, managing a darting gaze, saw what Li Hoang had tried. The lieutenant ventured a quick order of his own. The Mongols in the lower hallway veered as they backed. Passing the stairway, they half shielded Chun Laro.

The Shadow had calculated that such a move might come. He was prepared for it, but the need for action arrived with startling suddenness.

Li Hoang acted. He gave a huddled, downward twist to reach shelter behind the stairway men. His voice produced a shrill shout; with it, his golden-gloved fist descended!

CHUN LARO added a babbly cry, leaped behind his own barrier of protecting gunners. Timed with those shouts came The Shadow's own order, a rasped tone that put Cardona's squad into motion.

Sheltered detectives dived for the outer door. The Shadow took care of Cardona and the remaining man.

With a hard clamp, The Shadow planked his left-hand gun into Cardona's right fist. He shouldered Joe leftward, to a front corner of the hall. Spinning

to the right, The Shadow heaved the detective into the room with Zallock's servants.

As Chinese revolvers clicked and boomed, The Shadow was whirling to the right, away from aiming guns. First bullets went wide. Amid the hurried barrage, The Shadow dived to the stairway.

He reached that vantage point in one swoop. An instant later, he was stretched there, at an upward angle, his gun hand thrust ahead of him.

The Shadow was aiming straight for the men who shielded Li Hoang. His gun and theirs spoke together. The Shadow had the odds. He was a flattened target; they were not. His fist had thudded a step edge to take instant aim, while their guns were on the move. The Shadow triggered a bullet straight to the heart of one enemy. He aimed for the other, just as the fellow fired. The Shadow felt a sear along his left shoulder blade. The Mongol had scored a hit.

So had The Shadow. His second shot was as accurate as his first. One gunner was already toppling down the stairs; the other took a high jolt from the impact of The Shadow's bullet, then pitched headlong.

Despite the pain of his own wound, The Shadow wanted a shot at Li Hoang. Those tumbling figures prevented it. In death, as well as life, henchmen served

their evil master. As the sprawling forms flattened beside The Shadow, he saw a mere flash of purple from the landing.

Li Hoang was in flight, off for the rear stairway on the second floor.

In his swift battle, The Shadow had outwitted Chun Laro and the men with the lieutenant. By picking the stairs as vantage point, he was away from their angle of range. Chun Laro rectified that. His shouts sent his gunners to the banisters. Poking revolvers between the posts, they tried to spot The Shadow.

Again, they were outguessed. The Shadow had done more than deprive Li Hoang of shielding men. He had brought down that pair from the stairway, to a place where he could use them. All that the bulge-eyed Mongols saw between the banister posts were those two sprawled bodies.

The Shadow was out of sight; but his gun was not. It thrust between those

dead forms that had become his bulwark. The Shadow opened fire. His first bullet splintered a banister post; found an enemy beyond it. The others scrambled.

Chun Laro hadn't gone after The Shadow. The snaky lieutenant heard the boom of another big gun; with a screech, he turned toward a front corner of the hall. Joe Cardona, forgotten in the drive against The Shadow, was coming into action.

JOE was amazed by the dynamite packed in the big .45 that The Shadow had given him. Used to a .38, the ace couldn't handle the gun with the same speed and ease that he had with his own Police Positive. But the range was close; the Mongols were cooped up.

With each press that Cardona gave the trigger, a slant-eyed foemen took a dive. The ace was merely clipping them, but the wallops were bowling them over like tenpins. A .38 could drill; but sometimes it allowed a chance for an enemy to fire back. This big gun didn't. One of its bullets was like a sock on the jaw.

Only Chun Laro was in the clear. He didn't wait to fire a sure shot at Cardona. There was a fierce laugh from the stairs; propping on his right elbow, The Shadow was aiming through the banister. Past Cardona, Chun Laro could see the outer door. Detectives had rallied; were rushing in with guns.

Chun Laro took a lope into a little corner room, glad that its door was open. A barrage followed him, but he was away. There was a crash of a window, marking his departure.

Followed by his reclaimed squad, Cardona took that same route as the best means of pursuit. Leaping from the stairs, The Shadow steadied. He hurried through a door to the right of the stairway, to find the back door of the house. He was even with the headquarters squad when he arrived outside.

There were shouts beyond a rear hedge; the throb of motors mingled with those cries. Chun Laro had gone through, the same way that Li Hoang had traveled. The Shadow heard Cardona's shout:

"We've got to get them! They've grabbed Bardsley and Zallock! Don't let Li Hoang make his get-away!"

It was too late. Cars were on the move when the squad crashed the hedge. A street lamp showed Chun Laro leaping aboard the first machine in the procession.

"Stop the front car!" bawled Cardona. "That's where Li Hoang is, with the prisoners! Drill the tires - the gas tank!"

Police guns were barking; but a second car intervened. It took any bullets that might have stopped the first. Shots were coming from the second car - and from a third. His own gun in his fist, Cardona led a charge.

Shots started from across the street, where hidden Mongols were in ambush. Cardona and the detectives dived for cover, amid the whistle of bullets. The cars were away; the chase was hopeless. A quarter minute more, those snipers left by Li Hoang would be picking off Cardona's squad, which had no shelter other than the hedge.

There came a laugh, challenging despite its waver, from the corner of Zallock's garage, which backed into the hedge. Crouched there, to ease his crippled shoulder, The Shadow spotted the opening fire of the snipers. His laugh was for their benefit; to draw their next barrage in his direction.

It came, that volley, bringing bullets that bit off rock chips from the

garage wall. Low, in a depression of the ground, The Shadow inserted his own shots, picking revolver spurts as targets. There were howls from across the way. The sniping fire ceased.

The lull gave sounds of scrambling marksmen, dashing off past houses opposite. Cardona raised a shout; he and his squad started pursuit, to round up the routed snipers. The Shadow toned a final laugh, shaky in its mockery, as he rose painfully beside the wall.

Sounds of fleeing motors could be heard no longer. Li Hoang was clear, Chun Laro with him. Two men had vanished with that departure: Lucius Zallock and Eric Bardsley. They would be heard from, only when Li Hoang chose.

The Shadow had won a victory; but it brought no final conquest. Again, He would have to seek the trail of Li Hoang; this time, with vanished victims as an added quest.

CHAPTER XVII

GATHERED LINKS

"IN the Golden Pagoda -"

Those words, the last that Kevin had uttered, were a link to Li Hoang.

The

law knew of a Golden Pagoda - this one that Kevin had reported seeing in the window of a Chinese shop.

So did The Shadow. The pagoda, itself, was glittering on the polished table in his sanctum; but it did not provide the clue that The Shadow wanted.

Though hollow, the pagoda contained nothing in its interior.

Twenty-four hours had passed since the double abduction of Eric Bardsley and Lucius Zallock. With his shoulder wound, The Shadow had been unable to investigate at Bardsley's apartment. Clyde Burke had gone there, however, and the reporter had supplied detailed information.

Evidently Bardsley had put up a resistance against his abductors. The apartment was in disarray; many objects had been smashed, among them an oblong box that contained one of Bardsley's inventions.

That particular item had been delivered to Police Commissioner Weston, since it was obviously something that Bardsley valued. The Shadow expected to view it, later; for he intended a visit to the police commissioner's tonight.

The Golden Pagoda!

There was a link more important than the law supposed. The Shadow saw a deeper meaning to the term. He knew the ways of the Chinese; their use of symbols to represent hidden secrets. In the present case, The Shadow saw a logical answer, and a direct one.

The Golden Pagoda on The Shadow's table was not the one meant in those duplicate messages that Li Hoang had reclaimed at Zallock's. The real Golden Pagoda was a place - the new headquarters where Li Hoang lurked!

That did not solve the problem. Like The Shadow, the law knew that Li Hoang had gone somewhere. It was his present location - not the name of it - that mattered. But there was another link: the matter of the messages themselves.

Somehow, during the time that Li Hoang had first left Zallock's, the Chinese crime wizard had dispatched those duplicate messages to Chinatown, where they had been distributed among Chinese who were members of his secret clique.

The Chinese who had left their own district were not merely those who feared Li Hoang. Members of the inner circle had gone, as well. It was apparent, to The Shadow, that they had joined Li Hoang at the Golden Pagoda.

Where was the secret headquarters?

The law was looking for one, in Chinatown, in the belief that Li Hoang

owned deeper, more secret burrows than the lair which the police had raided. If

so, Li Hoang's friends had doubled their own trails, like their chief.

That theory did not suit The Shadow. He knew that Li Hoang had merely taken over a collection of forgotten catacombs for his original hide-away. There were no others that could prove suitable. Furthermore, Li Hoang had needed to be in Chinatown while working his racketeer methods on Zallock. In his new game, that of holding Zallock for ransom, Li Hoang would prefer to be elsewhere.

Those missing Chinese were important. The law was trying to trace them, but did not even know which were friends of Li Hoang. That, however, was one point on which The Shadow had progressed. He, too, had friends in Chinatown, of

a different sort than Li Hoang's.

A list lay on The Shadow's table. It had been compiled by Yat Soon, the Chinese arbiter, who worked for peace in that district. It told the names of the men to seek.

The Shadow put away that list as he clicked off the sanctum light.

LESS than an hour later, Commissioner Weston was interrupted in a conference by the chance visit of his friend Kent Allard. Two persons were with

Weston; both recognized the name of Allard as that of a famous aviator. One, Joe

Cardona, had met Kent Allard; the other, Myra Reldon, had not.

Allard entered. He was tall of build; his long features carried a hawklike

expression that suited a master of the skies. His eyes had an interested gleam,

when he was introduced to Myra Reldon. Allard had heard of the game girl who worked with the F.B.I.

In her own guise, Myra was quite different from the supposed Ming Dwan. She had the light complexion of a blonde, although her large eyes were definitely brown. Her thin eyebrows were light in color; the fluff of her hair was almost auburn in the glow of the floor lamp.

Myra, in turn, noted that Kent Allard had a slight limp, that he carried as the result of an airplane crash. She did not realize that the limp was faked. Nor did she suspect the reason why Allard hunched himself to the right, as he sat down. His right elbow took his weight, as it rested on the chair arm.

Kent Allard was favoring a wounded left shoulder, that he had received in battle one night ago.

The shift also passed Cardona's notice. The ace inspector, with all his hunches, had never guessed that Kent Allard was The Shadow.

"This conference will interest you, Allard," announced Weston, "because it

concerns Lucius Zallock, the airline owner. A ransom note was received today from Li Hoang. He asks five million dollars for the release of Zallock and Bardsley!"

Allard's eyes showed interest.

"The note was mailed to Zallock's secretary, Shamp," explained Weston. "Apparently, Shamp is to be used in some way as an intermediary. Government investigators are holding the message; but it gives no clue to Li Hoang's whereabouts."

"It was mailed from here in New York," put in Cardona, "but that doesn't mean anything. Li Hoang didn't only use Chinese; he had a lot of small-fry racketeers working for him. One of them could have mailed it. Still, Li Hoang may be in Chinatown."

Allard displayed mild surprise.

"I thought there was quite an exodus from Chinatown," he remarked. "In fact, I supposed that most of Li Hoang's friends had left there."

Cardona produced a seven-page list of typewritten names. He passed it to the visitor.

"Look that over," suggested Joe. "F.B.I. check-ups on Chinese who left New York. There's a hundred and twenty of them. I'll bet that not a dozen of the lot belong to Li Hoang."

CARDONA'S estimate was rather close, although the ace had merely hazarded it. Allard studied the list, as if merely skimming it. He smiled as he repeated some of the curious names aloud. There were times, though, when his gaze actually paused.

Those pauses came when he saw names included on the list from Yat Soon.

"If we'd only gotten hold of one of those messages!" growled Cardona. "We figure Li Hoang sent a bunch of hoodlums into Chinatown, to distribute them right under our noses. I cornered one fellow who had one; that was Loo Look, the Chinese silk merchant."

"Tell Allard what Loo Look did with the message," suggested Weston.

"Loo Look ate it!" declared Cardona. "Chewed it up and swallowed it, while we were trying to grab him! After that, he made a break for it."

"He was still in Chinatown, half an hour after that. We trapped him in a phone booth and he tried to use it for a barricade. He made a fight, all right;

we had to shoot that booth to chunks, with Loo Look inside it!

"He was dead when we dragged him out. So he never talked; and there wasn't

anything on him. All that we found in the booth was sixty cents - two quarters and a dime - that must have dropped out of his pocket during the fight."

Allard was folding the list. His eyes were down-turned; no one saw their sudden sparkle. Weston reached into a desk drawer, produced a sheet of paper with Chinese characters.

"Here is a sample of Li Hoang's nerve," announced the commissioner. "A threat, directed against Miss Reldon. This sheet was actually posted in Chinatown this afternoon! Miss Reldon can interpret it."

Myra took the paper placard.

"It is a reward for my capture," she said, seriously, "or, rather" - her lips managed a wan smile - "for the capture of Ming Dwan. Li Hoang offers fifty

thousand dollars if I am delivered to him alive. Half that sum, if I am brought in dead."

"That's a funny one," observed Cardona. "I'd think it would say the same, dead or alive."

"You don't know the tortures that Li Hoang uses," explained Myra, "or the evil delight that he obtains from giving them. It is fortunate that I am a government agent; otherwise, there are persons who might actually try to collect."

"But how could any one deliver a prisoner to Li Hoang?" questioned Weston.

"No one knows where he has gone."

"Mere whispers in Chinatown would do it," replied Myra. "Those who knew much about Li Hoang have left; but there are others, who know small bits concerning him. The grapevine telegraph of the underworld is nothing, compared to the secret communication system devised by Li Hoang."

"I could not fathom it, even in his own headquarters. Therefore, I am

confident that anything that happens in Chinatown will still reach Li Hoang, provided that it is sufficiently important to be passed along."

ALLARD'S right hand pressed the chair arm. He arose; politely excused himself for interrupting the conference. He had an engagement elsewhere; he had merely dropped in to see Weston, so he said.

Once outside, Allard stepped into a waiting taxicab. He was whisked away; when that trip ended it was in a darkened neighborhood. The figure that left the cab was cloaked; invisible in the blackness.

Returned to his sanctum, The Shadow consulted a large map beneath the bluish light. Studying an area far northwest of New York City, The Shadow placed colored pins into the map. Those pins represented the Chinese who were linked with Li Hoang. The Shadow was marking the places where they had last been traced.

The pins were badly scattered. Roughly, there were a dozen areas on the map that might have been a central area. The Shadow's hand used a colored pencil to trace rough circles. Those spheres were widely separated.

But The Shadow's finger did not drop the task. It centered upon one circle of the dozen; rested there, while his other hand reached for a set of earphones.

A voice came over the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Consult long-distance rates," ordered The Shadow. "Night rates, to the following towns."

After that, The Shadow spoke three names; all were towns in the limited circle that his finger touched. There was a pause; Burbank's voice replied:

"Night rates the same to all: Sixty cents."

The Shadow's laugh came in whispered tone, as he replaced the earphones upon the wall. He had joined another link; based upon the loose change that Cardona had found in Loo Look's telephone booth.

That money hadn't dropped from the battling Chinaman's pocket. Loo Look had been ready with those coins, to put in a long-distance call. He had wanted to reach the vicinity where Li Hoang had established new headquarters, to pass some message while he still had opportunity.

That one circle represented the only sixty-cent zone among the dozen areas that The Shadow had marked. Somewhere within that limited sphere, The Shadow would find the Golden Pagoda.

The Shadow reached for the earphones. He spoke new instructions across the wire; word that Burbank was to pass to trusted agents, who could make a competent search of the right terrain.

The Shadow had found a new trail to Li Hoang.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FINAL NIGHT

COMMISSIONER WESTON had been rather disappointed by Kent Allard's lack of interest in the case of Li Hoang. Weston regarded Allard as a man of intellect, whose flashes of inspiration might prove valuable, if he concentrated them upon the solution of crime.

Weston was therefore pleased, the next day, when Allard dropped in at his office, particularly when Allard brought up the names of Zallock and Bardsley.

It turned out, though, that Allard was concerned with something other than their abduction.

He wanted to see the double-action propeller tube that the police had found in Bardsley's apartment.

Obligingly, Weston produced the shattered invention. He watched Allard study the broken parts that he took from the smashed oblong box.

"Whatever it was once, Allard," declared Weston, "it became a Chinese puzzle after Li Hoang finished with it. We haven't bothered to put it together,

because of what Shamp said."

Allard's gaze denoted inquiry.

"Shamp said it was twin brother to a perpetual-motion machine," explained the commissioner. "Bardsley may have been a genius once, but his present inventions are impractical."

Allard fitted the box together. A slab fitted over an empty space in the bottom; then came the top of a tray-like drawer. Above that were clamps to hold

the propeller tube. He had the whole in place, was ready to close the box lid, when the entire structure collapsed. Weston smiled, as bits of metal rattled on

the table.

"Make anything of it, Allard?"

"Yes." The reply was a calm-toned one. "This invention explains the circumstances surrounding Bardsley."

"You mean it proves that he was crazy?"

"Not that. It reveals why he disappeared along with Zallock."

Weston shook his head.

"Poor theory, Allard," he declared. "I see what you are driving at. You think that Li Hoang kidnapped Bardsley in the hope that the inventor's ideas were worth money.

"That wasn't it at all." Impatiently, Weston allowed Allard no chance for further comment. "The real answer is here: These photostatic copies of letters that arrived today, along with another demand from Li Hoang."

Allard received the photostats. They were letters from Bardsley and Zallock, both pleading that the ransom money be raised without delay. Weston explained that the originals were in the hands of government agents.

"Li Hoang intends to get that five million," declared Weston. "He knows that it can be raised, from Zallock's enterprises. He has therefore furnished a

new threat.

"Unless his terms are met by tomorrow night, one of his two prisoners will

die. He will continue his same demand of five million dollars ransom for the survivor.

"Since Zallock is the money man, and his associates are willing to pay, it

is easy to see that the death threat is meant for Bardsley. That explains why he

was abducted along with Zallock."

Allard's lips suppressed a smile. Weston's statements fitted with the very

fact that he had mentioned; namely, that Bardsley's shattered invention held the

key to the inventor's disappearance. Since Weston did not care to hear Allard's

reasons, the visitor said no more.

THAT evening, Kent Allard went to Chinatown, but not as himself. He was in

the guise of The Shadow, when he visited Yat Soon, the arbiter. In a secluded room, The Shadow showed Yat Soon a map, supplemented by report sheets.

Yat Soon listened, while The Shadow spoke in Chinese. The arbiter nodded solemnly.

"It can be done, Ying Ko," declared Yat Soon. "I shall supply the man you need. His name is Quong Yang. He is good; but he can pose as one of evil. The word will be given tonight."

IT was late the next afternoon when Kent Allard chanced upon Commissioner Weston at the Cobalt Club. In a quiet corner of the grill room, the police commissioner confessed his worryment.

"A final threat came from Li Hoang," said Weston. "It was posted in New York, like the previous letters. He means his threat of death."

"Then why ignore it?" questioned Allard. "Why not meet his terms?"

"It is out of my hands," replied Weston. "The F.B.I. has charge. They still hope to crack the case, before midnight, which is the time limit."

"What gives them that hope?"

"They think that Li Hoang will make another move. He has been totally ignored, and that may bother him. I fear, though, that he means his threat."

Weston lapsed into silence. Meditative, he did not hear Allard's next query, until his friend repeated it:

"What of the girl - Miss Reldon? Has Li Hoang made any attempt against her?"

Weston shook his head.

"That was merely a theatrical gesture by Li Hoang," opined the commissioner. "Myra Reldon is too well guarded to be captured. She is staying at the Hotel Cosmopole, with fellow operatives guarding her."

DUSK had settled when Kent Allard arrived at the Hotel Cosmopole. He asked

to see Miss Reldon, and came under the immediate surveillance of a watcher, stationed near the hotel desk. The clerk, after calling Myra's suite, announced

that Allard could go upstairs.

Outside the suite, another Fed halted the visitor. Myra opened the door; recognizing Allard, she gave a nod. Allard was admitted, alone.

"You have come from the police commissioner, I suppose," said Myra, bitterly. "I know that he agrees with me. Something must be done tonight. But my chief thinks different. No argument will change him."

Allard's expression showed indifference. He drew an envelope from his pocket.

"This was given to me," he remarked, quietly, "with the request that I deliver it to you."

Myra opened the envelope. Allard had strolled to the window, but he was watching her reflection in the pane. An amazed look swept the girl's face as she read blue-inked lines, that faded as she finished them.

That note was a message from The Shadow!

Myra went into another room, hurriedly packed a bag. Allard looked frankly puzzled when she returned; but since she was going out, he obligingly carried her bag.

Myra spoke to the man on duty in the hall. She did the same with the operative who stalked the lobby.

"I shall be quite safe," she explained. "This is the famous Kent Allard. Tell the chief that he came for me."

Outside, Myra beckoned Allard into a taxi. She told the driver to start for Times Square. As they rode, Myra said tersely:

"You can help me, Mr. Allard!"

"Help you?" Allard's tone suddenly took on sternness. "To go against orders?"

"Not at all," replied Myra, with a firm smile. "I shall not be interfering

with the case by being abducted. That, technically, is an involuntary act."

Allard looked perplexed. His expression convinced Myra that he knew nothing of the note's contents. The girl simplified matters.

"I have brought my Chinese attire," she explained, motioning to the bag. "I want some place where I can change into it."

Allard leaned forward, gave an order to the taxi driver. He produced a key and handed it to Myra.

"The key to my hotel suite," he said. "You are welcome to it. If you wish to communicate with me later, call the Cobalt Club. After all" - Allard smiled slightly, as he rested his right shoulder against the taxi window - "I have always enjoyed adventure. It is not my duty to interfere with your desire for it."

THE hotel suite where Allard lived was a pretentious one. Myra found it deserted, as she walked through the large rooms. She came to a small dressing room, where lights were set beside a table with a mirror. It was perfect for her purpose.

Speedily, Myra divested herself of American attire. From the opened suitcase, she took a sponge and a bottle of yellowish fluid. Seated before the mirror, she spread the liquid over her hands and face and along her light-hued arms and shoulders.

Myra had not forgotten the incident of the torn dress. She turned her back

to the mirror and looked over her shoulder, while she applied the dye to her back. That awkward task finished, Myra began to dress in Chinese clothes.

Few of her garments were ones that she had used before. Her shoes and stockings were dark-green instead of black. So were her skirt and jacket; their

silver embroidery was tasteful, against the deep-olive cloth.

Myra adjusted her loose sleeves, but left the silvery collar unbuckled while she applied her Chinese make-up.

That was an art in itself. Myra rapidly combed her hair straight, pressed it tightly above her head. The fluffs gone, that hair seemed blackish, like the

short hidden locks that she formed into a bang across her forehead.

Myra penciled her eyebrows; rouged her face to produce a high-cheeked appearance. With lipstick, she changed the contour of her mouth. She applied tiny strips of transparent mending tape to the outer corners of her eyes. Drawing the strips upward, she pressed them against her flesh, then creased them.

From roundish shape, those eyes had become slanted in almond fashion. With

mascara, Myra blackened her lashes to match the eyebrows above them. Her own face no longer viewed her from the mirror. It was the countenance of Ming Dwan that craftily watched Myra Reldon buckle the silver-embroidered collar.

There was an excellent route outside Allard's suite. It led down by a fire

tower to a side street, where waiting taxicabs occupied a line. With quick paces, Myra reached the first cab; entered it before the driver noticed her. Inside, she spoke an address in English.

That driver gawked when he saw his passenger step from the cab, outside an

antique shop not far from Chinatown. Myra paid her fare without a word.

Hurrying

into the darkened shop, she watched the cab roll away.

When it was gone, Myra knocked at an inner door. A hoarse, whispered voice ordered her to enter.

A shrewd-faced Chinaman was waiting in the gloomy inner room. Myra recognized him as Quong Yang. She had seen him before, with Chun Laro; but never with Li Hoang. Quong Yang had not belonged to the secret inner circle; but, evidently, he had been regarded as a candidate.

With Quong Yang was a tall, husky hoodlum who wore a thick oversize sweater. His cap was pulled down across one eye; it partly shaded a livid scar that formed a welt upon his roughened cheek. Quong Yang introduced the tough as

"Spike" Calloy. Then, in his native tongue, the Chinaman questioned, shrewdly:

"You are ready, Ming Dwan?"

"I am ready."

Quong Yang unbolted a rear door, motioned the others into an alley. He helped Myra into the back seat of an old sedan that was parked outside. Spike clambered in the front and took the wheel.

They rode westward, skirting Chinatown, to the entrance of the Holland Tunnel. While the car was shooting through the tube beneath the Hudson River, Myra asked their next destination.

In English, Quong Yang replied:

"Newark Airport."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MIDNIGHT STROKE

AN autogiro was thrumming through the moonlit sky. Myra Reldon was a silent passenger, calm in her guise of Ming Dwan. Earlier, she had suffered qualms; but now they were ended.

Instructions from The Shadow had told her merely to meet Quong Yang; to trust him and any persons that were with him. Despite that assurance, Myra had been mistrustful of Quong Yang; and his American pal, Spike Calloy, was not the sort to lessen her apprehensions.

That had changed when they reached Newark Airport. Sight of the autogiro seemed proof of The Shadow's preparations, for Myra knew that the giro was the type of craft he used. The stolid pilot, too, was a factor. He was a steady-going sort, who looked like one of The Shadow's agents.

Myra was seated beside Quong Yang. Spike was behind them. The scar-faced American leaned forward, grunted, and nudged his thumb toward the window on Myra's side.

The girl peered below, while Quong Yang craned across to get the same view.

Below, the moonlight showed wooded hillsides, with smooth cleared patches.

Myra saw one stretch, where an old hotel was situated on the slope. Near it were

other buildings; then a stretch of woods. Spike was pointing farther.

Myra observed a structure that looked like an observation tower, placed on

the brow of a hill. An instant later, she made out its shape more clearly. That

tower was roofed in slanted fashion; and edges of under-roofs projected at lower levels. The topmost surface caught the moonlight's glint; gleamed with a gilded hue.

The tower was a pagoda; its roof was of gold!

The Golden Pagoda!

Myra thought of Li Hoang. This fitted his subtle ways. Li Hoang combined the obvious with the incredible. No one would ever have believed that his Golden Pagoda actually existed, within a hundred-odd miles of New York.

No one, except The Shadow.

Here, in America, Li Hoang had found an old hotel - once popular, now forgotten. Some former proprietor had used his imagination, when that hotel was in its heyday. He had built an annex of an unusual sort: a building shaped like a pagoda.

Li Hoang had purchased the whole property. Letting the hotel remain neglected, he had remodeled the pagoda. Roofed with gold, he had kept the structure for his future abode, during his reign in Chinatown.

In a sense, Li Hoang had transplanted a bit of China in a different land. That pagoda had become the new domain where the Oriental crime-master dwelt with those whom he had chosen for his inner circle.

THE autogiro had ceased its thrumm. Its pilot had picked a patch of clear land in a woods, not far from the pagoda. Descending silently, the ship followed the stream of moonlight, to make a perfect landing in the isolated clearing.

The passengers disembarked. The motor throbbed anew. Taking a short forward roll, the autogiro started a steep climb, to wing its way above the trees.

Quong Yang let Spike lead the way with a flashlight. After a half mile along a path through the woods, a clearing showed ahead. Then:

"Your hands behind you," said Quong Yang. "You must come as a prisoner, Ming Dwan."

Myra complied. Quong Yang bound her wrists. He drew a silk handkerchief between her teeth and knotted it into a tight gag. Roughly, he pushed Myra forward. Spike produced a revolver, jabbed it hard against the girl's back. Quong Yang led the way.

Ahead loomed the pagoda; its five-storied bulk looked huge. It was dark, gloomy, its golden roof hidden when viewed from the ground. A door showed in the near side of the four-walled structure.

Quong Yang approached. He did not need to knock. The door opened; two brawny Mongols glared from a dimly lighted passage. They recognized Ming Dwan.

"I have come to see Chun Laro," spoke Quong Yang, in Chinese. "Tell him that Quong Yang is here, to claim the reward that his master, Li Hoang, has offered."

A third Mongol appeared; he took the message and departed. Soon, there were other footsteps. The snaky-eyed face of Chun Laro peered from an inner doorway. Recognizing Quong Yang, the lieutenant beckoned.

Mongols stepped out to surround the arrivals. In order, Quong Yang, Myra, finally Spike, went filing through the doorway. Spike put his gun away. Quong Yang introduced him to Chun Laro.

Myra heard a voluble explanation in Chinese. Spike Calloy, it appeared, had tricked her, by promising news of Li Hoang. Lured to a trap, Ming Dwan had encountered Quong Yang. Aided by Spike, the Chinaman had completed the capture.

Chun Laro heard all that, without objection. He put a question of a different sort; one that gave Myra momentary worry. Chun Laro wanted to know how Quong Yang had found the Golden Pagoda.

Quong Yang had the best of answers.

He produced a note, inscribed in Chinese, with the signature of Loo Look. That note was forged, but Chun Laro did not guess it.

"Loo Look received his message," confided Quong Yang, "and destroyed it. He came to me, his friend, hoping that I could reach here, if he failed. Shortly afterward, Loo Look was slain."

Chun Laro nodded. It was evident that the news of Loo Look's death had been grapevined to the pagoda. There was an odd glitter, though, to Chun Laro's snaky eyes. Quong Yang saw it; he furnished an answer before Chun Laro put the question.

"Loo Look had a message," stated Quong Yang. "One of great importance to Li Hoang."

THAT satisfied Chun Laro. He led the way through the inner doorway, to a steep flight of stairs. The group ascended, story after story.

The stairs narrowed with each flight; but always they angled around a square central wall, that was like a four-sided chimney, in the middle of the pagoda. Each floor produced level passages around that center block. On the outer side, closed doors marked the entrances to rooms.

On the fourth floor, Chun Laro halted before the final stairway that led to the fifth floor. He told Quong Yang to wait. Armed guards stood by, while Chun Laro ascended the last flight. He was carrying a report to Li Hoang.

That wait carried oppressive chills for Myra. They had penetrated far; too far, perhaps. She wondered how much she could depend upon Quong Yang. So far, he

had done all The Shadow wanted; with Ming Dwan as the bait, he had actually reached Li Hoang's headquarters.

But had the web closed too tight?

Quong Yang seemed to be considering that, for his shrewd face was very solemn. Myra saw him glance at Spike Calloy; he was apparently calculating how much Spike could aid him.

Perhaps Quong Yang was thinking other things. He might be counting the profit that would be his, if he betrayed The Shadow's trust and let Li Hoang keep Ming Dwan.

Such doubt horrified Myra. With all her grit, she could not conceal the dread that she felt. Quong Yang saw her face quiver; his smile was narrow. Spike added a chuckle of ugly pleasure. There were grins from the Mongol guards.

Ming Dwan was showing fear - real fear.

That state of fright helped, and Myra suddenly realized it. It could be a part of The Shadow's game to deceive Li Hoang.

But where was The Shadow?

Myra stared at Quong Yang, as she asked herself that question. She tried to picture him as The Shadow, cleverly disguised, like herself. Inwardly, the possibility gave her courage; she strived to increase that belief.

Chun Laro returned. He placed a message in the hand of Quong Yang. The note was in Chinese characters; it bore the signature of Li Hoang. Cagily, Quong Yang read it. His eyes became shrewd.

"Tell Li Hoang that I shall talk of other matters later," declared Quong Yang, in Chinese. "The message that Loo Look gave me, can wait. First, I must receive the reward for bringing Ming Dwan here."

IT was a clever statement by Quong Yang. It smacked of The Shadow's method. But Myra was not sure whether the answer was the Chinaman's own invention, or merely one with which The Shadow had provided him.

Emergencies were usually foreseen by The Shadow.

An evil flash was present in Chun Laro's eyes. He was snakier than ever, and did not conceal it. Turning to the central wall, Chun Laro pressed both hands there. As he drew his arms apart, his finger slid back narrow panels, to reveal panes of thick glass.

Chun Laro pointed; the others stared.

Each pane was the window of a tiny cell, each room no more than three

feet

square. Dim lights showed a prisoner in each cell. Lucius Zallock was huddled in one; Eric Bardsley in the other. Both looked doped.

As Chun Laro pressed the panels shut, Myra could see that the cell lights snapped off.

"You have seen," warned Chun Laro, in Chinese. "That is where Li Hoang places those who displease him. Remember that, Quong Yang!"

Quong Yang nodded. Chun Laro turned to Spike Calloy, to repeat the comment in English. Spike's thick lips delivered a grin, as ugly as the scar upon his cheek.

"Good stuff!" he approved. "Only why tell us? We figure Li Hoang is a right guy. We're with him!"

Chun Laro turned to Quong Yang, announced abruptly:

"I shall take your message to Li Hoang."

Long minutes dragged while Chun Laro was gone. Myra sensed that it must be close to midnight, the hour when one prisoner was to die. Myra shuddered, as she gazed at the closed panels.

Footsteps from the stairs. Chun Laro appeared; beckoned the group upward. Hemmed by yellow-faced guards, they ascended the last flight. At the top, a hanging curtain stopped their progress.

Chun Laro motioned Quong Yang aside, so that Myra could pass through; then

ordered Quong Yang to follow. He stretched his arm, to bar Spike Calloy.

"Only those of China may enter," stated Chun Laro, "unless they come as prisoners. You can watch from the curtain; that is all."

Chun Laro entered the room, leaving Spike huddled between a trio of watchful guards. Through the half-drawn curtains, Spike could view the scene within. Quong Yang and the captive Ming Dwan were already motionless.

This was a throne room more splendid than the one in Chinatown. Tufted rugs were thick. Tapestries of crimson, silver and gold, bedecked the walls. A dragon throne rested upon a low platform; with its bejeweled eyes, it seemed a golden monster.

Li Hoang was seated on that throne. He was resplendent in his purple robe;

his mustached face was evil in the wavery light of flaming lamp-like torches.

Li Hoang beckoned to Chun Laro. The snakish lieutenant picked up a metal sledge, drove the hammer against a mammoth gong of brass. The clang produced a deafening tone, that carried to the lower floors of the Golden Pagoda.

Reverberating echoes brought back the sound in diminishing waves. It was the stroke of midnight - the time that Li Hoang had chosen as an hour of doom!

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST DECREE

SLITTED eyes were fixed, as Li Hoang spoke. His cold, terse tone carried words that Spike could understand, for Li Hoang spoke in English, though he faced Quong Yang.

"You have brought another prisoner," approved Li Hoang. "That is excellent! I need one, in place of a captive who shall die tonight!"

Unblinking eyes glistened as they fixed upon Ming Dwan. The girl felt the scrutiny of that evil gaze. Li Hoang was surveying her Chinese garb; studying her made-up face.

"Eric Bardsley shall perish!" pronounced Li Hoang. "You will occupy his cell. Deprived of your false trappings, with that yellow stain washed clear,

you will be Ming Dwan no longer!

"My new prisoner" - Li Hoang's lips were venomous - "will be Myra Reldon

-
a better hostage than Eric Bardsley! When I announce the tortures that you are to suffer here, my threats will no longer be ignored!"

From beside him, Li Hoang drew a heavy bag; he flung it to the floor, where it clinked with the sound of gold.

"Your reward, Quong Yang."

Eagerly, Quong Yang pounced upon the bag. Myra's lips tightened. She could not tell whether Quong Yang's elation was real, or merely pretended.

Li Hoang pointed across the throne room. The bag clutched in his arms, Quong Yang turned, Myra with him. Chun Laro advanced to the indicated wall, laid his hands upon two levers, that were located side by side.

"On the left is Zallock's cell," spoke Li Hoang. "Bardsley's on the right.

Be ready, Chun Laro -"

It came with dramatic swiftness - a sweep of Li Hoang's right hand, in that downward gesture that meant doom. Chun Laro pulled the lever on the right.

Myra shivered, as she saw the deed. Chun Laro stooped to the floor; raised trapdoors that were fashioned in the designs of the rugs. Myra saw glass planes in the floor. They showed the cells, from above.

In the cell on the left, Lucius Zallock still huddled in stupor.

The cell on the right was empty. Its floor was a blackened void. The tug of the lever had released that floor, leaving no space for any occupant to cling.

In keeping with his pronouncement, Li Hoang had disposed of Eric Bardsley.

A SURGE of madness swept Myra. The Shadow had sent her here to forestall doom; instead, it had been delivered. The fault lay with Quong Yang. His eagerness for gold had made him forget his purpose.

Myra chewed at the silken gag between her teeth. She could not loosen it; but her expression was denunciation of Quong Yang. In her fury, Myra forgot that Li Hoang was watching, master of this scene.

A chortle from the throne.

Quong Yang turned. Li Hoang's finger pointed its accusation, while his hard lips smiled beneath his unyielding eyes. Chun Laro, pouncing forward, thrust a gun against Quong Yang's ribs.

"The game is ended, Ying Ko," sneered Li Hoang. "I foresaw that none but you - The Shadow - would venture here."

Evil eyes turned toward the doorway. To the outside guards, Li Hoang said:

"Bring in the other!"

The "other" was Spike Calloy. Mongols turned to prod the scar-faced fellow

with their guns. Those muzzles never pressed. With a swift twist, Spike opened an amazing combat.

His tough fist pounded the jaw of the nearest guard. His free hand whipped

the curtain from the doorway, flung the drape across the head and shoulders of a

second foeman. As a third tried to fire his revolver, Spike bowled him over with

a head thrust.

There was a cry as the Mongol went backward down the steep stairs. Amid

the thumps of that falling body came the fierce mirth of a strident, challenging laugh - from the lips of Spike Calloy!

The supposed thug was The Shadow!

He had chosen that guise because he knew that Li Hoang, like Myra, would pick Quong Yang as The Shadow. As Spike, The Shadow had been an almost-forgotten onlooker. With sudden battle, he had eliminated Li Hoang's cordon of protecting Mongols.

ON the top step, past the doorway, The Shadow was losing his disguise of Spike Calloy. With a quick motion, he peeled the heavy sweater from his head and shoulders. The folds of a black cloak dropped loose, to shroud its owner. As he sprang forward into the throne room, The Shadow tugged a slouch hat from beneath the back of his cloak collar.

As he planted that hat upon his head, his other hand whipped from the cloak front, bringing an automatic. The Shadow aimed that gun for Li Hoang.

The Shadow ignored Chun Laro. He had left the lieutenant to Quong Yang. Chun Laro had turned about at the sound of battle in the hall. Quong Yang had taken that opportunity to pounce upon the snaky fellow. He had wrested away Chun Laro's gun.

But Chun Laro was not through.

Just as The Shadow aimed for Li Hoang, Chun Laro, diving low and hard, caught The Shadow's ankle and tripped the cloaked fighter. The Shadow stumbled toward the throne.

Quong Yang fired. His bullets found Chun Laro, but they did not seem to drop him. Chun Laro was on his feet again, grappling with Quong Yang. The Shadow's friend was fully occupied, trying to beat down his writhing opponent.

Myra, helpless in her bonds, had taken to a corner. She saw The Shadow rally from his stagger, almost at the dragon throne. Li Hoang was up from that high seat, a long knife drawn from the folds of his purple robe. His fist slithered the blade straight toward The Shadow's heart.

A warding hand jabbed upward. The Shadow's gun clanged the knife. The thrust went wide; but Li Hoang's fingers were rapid in their clutch for The Shadow's throat.

Two fighters were locked. Black cloak and purple robe were a twisted mass, as The Shadow worked to shake off Li Hoang's hold. They occupied the center of the throne room, for Quong Yang and Chun Laro had rolled to a spot beyond the dragon seat.

The central fighters became rigid. Slowly, The Shadow was offsetting the tenacity of Li Hoang. One minute longer, victory would be The Shadow's.

Then, from the stairway, Myra heard a clatter that seemed to end all hope.

Men were coming, a pack of them; their voices could be heard in wild babble.

Li

Hoang made a last, fierce effort to restrain The Shadow. It sufficed.

In from the door came a dozen men in Chinese robes; some with revolvers, others with knives, a few unarmed. They were the Chinamen who formed Li Hoang's inner circle; wanted by the law, they lived here, in the refuge of the Golden Pagoda.

Behind them were supporters - downstairs guards who had followed them up from apartments on the lower floors. Here were odds that even The Shadow could not offset.

Weapons were ready in eager hands, for the finish of The Shadow's struggle

with Li Hoang. The Shadow could no longer afford to slay his formidable foe. Alive, Li Hoang was a shield; dead, he would be disregarded by vengeful Chinese.

RECOGNIZING The Shadow's dilemma, Li Hoang tried to wrench himself away. Myra's breath came hard, through the silk gag. Seconds more, and Li Hoang would

be free, leaving The Shadow an open target against the dragon throne.

His throat no longer gripped, The Shadow uttered a defiant laugh. Li Hoang was in front of him, straining to get loose. The Shadow's right hand lost its clutch; as Li Hoang bobbed forward, The Shadow grabbed for the only hold that remained; the plume of the roundish cap.

The headgear came away. Released, Li Hoang lurched toward his own followers. Myra's eyes went shut; she did not want to see the death that seemed

certain for The Shadow. Her ears expected the roar of gunfire.

That devastating sound did not come. Instead, Myra heard The Shadow's laugh again. Its tone echoed with sardonic mockery. Myra's eyes came open.

There stood The Shadow. His left hand held a lowered automatic; his right hand was extended. In that right fist, he clutched Li Hoang's round hat.

A yellow object dangled from the hat, turned so that newcomers could view it.

That object was the face of Li Hoang!

Remembering those slitted eyes that never blinked, Myra could partly understand that Li Hoang's face had been a false one. But there was one feature that made that seem impossible. Li Hoang's lips, his chin, were never fixed. Always, they had shown expression, to offset the immobile look of his upper face.

The mask that The Shadow held explained that one perplexing fact.

The bottom of the mask was cut away at the center, as if a portion had been bitten from it. The space had let the wearer's own lips show, with the chin beneath them; so that he could speak with the same freedom as when unmasked.

Such a mask, if ordinary, would have shown its edges beside the wearer's lips. But the mask of Li Hoang was not ordinary. Fixed to it was that long, down-curving mustache, that had done more than give Li Hoang an insidious expression.

The black mustache had hidden the curving stretches where the mask ended!

Li Hoang was no longer Li Hoang. Myra saw the half-huddled figure in purple; she observed a grayish face, narrow, topped by shaggy hair. Only the chin and lower lip were stained with yellow. Myra knew that face from photographs.

The face of a man that the law sought to aid; a person whose death had supposedly occurred in this very pagoda, only a few minutes before.

That man in purple - the false Li Hoang - was the inventor, Eric Bardsley!

Li Hoang had decreed the death of The Shadow; but that verdict had been reversed. Li Hoang's decree was nil.

Instead, The Shadow had ended the masquerade of Eric Bardsley, alias Li Hoang.

CHAPTER XXI

CRIME'S CLIMAX

MYRA RELDON understood the game. Eric Bardsley, considering himself responsible for the wealth gained by Lucius Zallock, had chosen this means to acquire millions.

He had revived the legend of Li Hoang, superman of crime in China. The real Li Hoang was probably dead; but Bardsley had brought him back to life. He

had passed himself as Li Hoang, using the lavish measures for which the latter was famed.

Chun Laro, alone, had known Bardsley's secret. He had aided in the deluding of other followers, who would never have leagued themselves with an impostor, had they known it.

The Shadow had seen the clue to the imposition; although Myra had missed it.

The false Li Hoang always spoke in English.

That was no mere quirk. Bardsley lacked one ability. He could not speak nor understand Chinese. That was why Chun Laro had usually been on hand, to give orders and make comments. The pretended Li Hoang had needed the lieutenant as an interpreter.

Myra remembered Li Hoang's murder of the Mongol guard who had been found in Harry's pit. That event had substantiated The Shadow's impression that Li Hoang was no Chinaman.

The guard had tried to tell facts. Li Hoang had mistaken his words for pleas. Li Hoang had slain the man before The Shadow's eyes. Unwittingly, Li Hoang had betrayed his part as an impostor. The Shadow, knowing the Chinese tongue, had understood the statements that Li Hoang had so unwisely cut short.

Myra realized more. Knowing Li Hoang to be no Chinaman, The Shadow had later placed him as Bardsley, through the visit of Li Hoang to Zallock's mansion. It had been mysterious, the way Li Hoang had slipped through Zallock's cordon of servants. It was puzzling no longer.

Bardsley, already admitted to the house, had been left alone in a front room on the second floor. He had put on the robe and mask of Li Hoang, to murder Kevin. While Zallock and Shamp stayed rooted in the study, Bardsley had put away his Chinese outfit. He had left, later, still as Bardsley.

Myra didn't understand how Bardsley had smuggled mask and attire in and out of Zallock's home. She supposed, though, that The Shadow had the answer; and she was right.

This very afternoon, The Shadow had studied the smashed box that contained the remains of Bardsley's freak invention. He had noted its deep bottom, with a slab above. That hollow space had carried the mask and robe of Li Hoang.

WORKING on the theory that Bardsley had faked his own abduction; The Shadow had scheduled this bold trip to the Golden Pagoda. As Spike, The Shadow had seen Bardsley in a cell. Finding Li Hoang in the throne room later, he knew that the master-crook had merely come up through the floor.

The Shadow had let the pretended Li Hoang go through with the travesty of Bardsley's death. That finished, he had been ready for his own move, when Myra had forced the action by her angry gestures to Quong Yang.

All through his struggle with Bardsley, The Shadow had been depending upon this climax: when the false Li Hoang would no longer rule his followers. That was accomplished; The Shadow had merely to clinch the issue.

"You may choose," The Shadow told the robed onlookers, "between the false and real! Serve which you will: Li Hoang, the impostor; or Ying Ko, The Shadow!"

The Shadow's speech was in Chinese. Bardsley could not even understand the words. He was powerless to offer persuasion of his own. There was a man, though, who could still speak for him.

Chun Laro, sprawled dying on the floor, raised his livid face. In

Chinese,
he mouthed a wild cry for action.

"Fight for Li Hoang!" spat Chun Laro. "He can still be your leader,
against Ying Ko -"

The shout ended with a spasm. Chun Laro was dead. The Shadow's laugh
toned
a fierce challenge. His left hand raised its gun; his right produced a second
weapon. The Shadow wheeled in one direction, Bardsley sprang in another, as
the
attack came.

Robed Chinese and Mongol followers had chosen. Some raised the shout of
Li
Hoang; others declared for Ying Ko; Myra saw the spurts of guns, the flash of
whizzing knives, as she rolled to safety behind the dragon throne.

The Shadow was in the center of the fray, his guns sledging hard, when a
purple-robed fighter writhed free and reached the front wall. It was Bardsley;
his upper face his own, but his lips the evil features of Li Hoang.

Bardsley saw The Shadow warding off two foemen. With his right hand,
Bardsley aimed a revolver; his left gripped the second lever on the wall. He
was intent upon double murder: to drill The Shadow with a bullet, while he
pulled the trap that would drop Lucius Zallock to doom.

Either deed was possible at that moment. The accomplishment of both was
not. His efforts divided, Bardsley lost one valuable second. The Shadow's eyes
were turning toward him; a gun followed the eye turn.

The automatic spoke. Bardsley fired; but his hand was dropping. The
Shadow
had jolted him with a bullet in the arm. The twist that Bardsley took carried
him from the wall. The impact from the slug had jerked his left hand free of
the lever.

The Shadow did not fire again. With Bardsley's stagger, fighters who had
joined The Shadow's cause pounced for the faltering form of the false Li
Hoang.

Revolvers spouted; a knife blade flashed.

Eric Bardsley was smothered by an avalanche of robes. He was dead when he
struck the floor.

CRIES of "Ying Ko!" resounded; those who had shouted for Li Hoang were
stilled. Voices ended, though, when The Shadow spoke. He had a mandate for
these former followers of Li Hoang. They had dealt in evil; they must
surrender
to the law.

There were mutters that rose to open mutiny. Fronting Li Hoang's throne,
The Shadow stood with leveled guns. Whether or not he would have quelled that
rebellion without the need of gunfire, Myra never learned.

Before a single Chinaman could nerve himself to attack Ying Ko, there was
commotion at the doorway. The Chinese turned to face a bristle of guns. Agents
of The Shadow had forced their way into the Golden Pagoda, to aid their chief.

Disarmed Chinese went filing down the stairs. The Shadow released Myra's
bound wrists; removed the gag that she still wore. He gave instructions; Myra
nodded. When she left, Quong Yang went with her.

They found the door to Zallock's cell; released the helpless prisoner.
With Quong Yang supporting, Myra guided Zallock down the stairs. From the
bottom doorway, Myra saw marching Chinese in the moonlight. The Shadow's
agents
were taking them to the nearest town.

There, F.B.I. operatives were waiting, on a tip supposedly received from
Myra. After they had disposed of the prisoners, it would be Myra's duty to
lead
the F.B.I. squad to the Golden Pagoda.

When they returned, The Shadow would be gone. Myra heard the laugh that toned from the stairway behind her; she knew that it betokened The Shadow's coming departure. It was weird, that mirth; chilling, lingering in its echoes.

Whispering walls held the laugh, repeated it, more vividly than they had echoed the clang of the brazen gong.

The might of The Shadow stood triumphant; it had replaced the power of Li Hoang.

THE END