



VOICE OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. PATH TO CRIME

The man in the phone booth was talking very earnestly, and in emphatic fashion. He was a young man, handsome in a rough-molded way, with his blunt profile and bulldog jaw. A fighter, too, of the hot-tempered variety, as evidenced by the stretch of reddish hair at the side of his tilted hat.

His words passed unheard by persons who were waiting impatiently outside the drugstore telephone booth, but they were witnesses to the young man's change of manner. As his conversation became more abrupt, his lips took on a savage look, his eyes displayed a glare.

Concluding his talk, he slammed the receiver on its hook, slashed open the door of the booth, and shouldered out so angrily that everyone sprang away to give him room.

Stopping at the cigar counter, the red-haired chap thwacked down a half dollar and demanded two packs of cigarettes. The clerk didn't ask the brand; he knew them. Providing the cigarettes, the clerk tried to make conversation along with the change:

"It's a nice day, Mr. Lycombe."

"Yeah?" Lycombe's fist came up as it scooped the change. "What's nice about it?"

"Nothing - nothing!"

The clerk was shrinking away as he made the apology; he seemed to fear that the fist was meant for his jaw. But Lycombe simply pocketed the change, turned on his heel and strode from the store.

"Nice fellow," observed another customer, to the clerk. "Does he get that way often?"

The clerk nodded. Leaning across the counter, he said in a confidential tone:

"Ever hear of Ted Lycombe? The big-time polo player? That's him. You wouldn't think he was a society guy, though. The way he's been acting lately" - the clerk shook his head - "you'd think he was out to murder somebody!"

Outside the store, Ted Lycombe had cooled a bit. It wasn't that his angry mood had changed; he was merely taking pains to suppress the visible signs. This street was close to the financial district, where Ted had many friends. He was deciding that it would be good policy to behave affably, should he meet up with acquaintances.

Ted wasn't anxious for such meetings, however. Pausing to light a cigarette, he glanced in both directions, to make sure that no one noticed him when he stepped into a parked coupe. Once in the car, Ted sidelonged a look at the driver and said:

"All right, Griff. Let's go."

There was a contrast between Ted and the driver; yet, in a sense, they matched each other. Griff was sallow, crafty of eye, straight of lip. He had a smooth surface quite the opposite of Ted's irked expression. But in actual hardness, Griff was Ted's equal. As fighters, they were two of a kind, from opposite walks of life.

Ted Lycombe was known for his two-fisted tactics among society's upper crust. Griff Conlad bore a similar reputation in the underworld. Where Ted had gained fame by throwing punches against aristocratic jaws, Griff was noted for his skill at tossing slugs from a .38 revolver at persons who lacked refinement.

Just how much each admired the other's tactics was a question that only time would prove. It was apparent, however, that in their brief acquaintance the two had come to see many things from a very similar viewpoint.

IT was Griff who opened conversation, as he piloted the coupe into traffic and chose an uptown direction.

"How did you make out with Gern?" queried Griff. "Did he hand you the same stall?"

"Just about," growled Ted. "Except that he promises the money within a week."

"Did you tell him" - Griff's tone was hardening - "that it would be too late, then?"

"No. I'm going to talk to Barstead first."

Griff noted that Ted's tone had eased. But a side glance showed that his companion's chiseled face had lost none of its firmness.

"In my opinion," affirmed Ted, bluntly, "Sherwood Gern is a first-rate swindler. The mining stock that I

bought from him was too sure a bet not to come through. The only answer is that Gern is holding back on the profits."

Griff gave a knowing grunt.

"Twenty-five grand is a lot of potatoes," he said. "Plenty of guys have lammed for that much dough."

"I'm counting on you to see that Gern stays in town," reminded Ted. "But I'll give him the week he says he needs."

"And then put the heap on him?"

Ted nodded. There was a merciless expression on his lips, the sort of smile that Griff liked to see. In Griff's opinion, Ted had the making of a big shot in the realm of crime. He was willing, too, to bet that Ted Lycombe would acquire such a reputation on very little provocation.

All he needed was the first step; with that red-hot disposition of his, Ted would go a long way. Griff was counting on it, for he could foresee great profits to himself, through his acquaintance with Ted, should the society man desert the stuffed-shirt class and wear the brand of a public enemy.

Such a decision wasn't likely with a man like Ted, if he had a lot to lose. But matters were shaping definitely in the direction that Griff wanted.

"I've got to have money," insisted Ted, abruptly, "to pay off Frank Barstead. There's a chap who would take a blue ribbon at a rat show! I've found out why he loaned me the five thousand that I needed to carry me over."

"On account of the dame?" inquired Griff.

"That's it," nodded Ted. "As soon as he had my signed note, he let me know that he was interested in Marian Farris."

"Why didn't you clip him one? That's your specialty, ain't it?"

"Barstead is due for a haymaker, all right. But I'd rather give it to him after I pay up. Unless -"

A sharp glint came to Ted's eyes; his lips showed more than contempt for Barstead. Then, in his blunt manner, he spoke an order to Griff.

"Let me out of here at the corner. I'll walk over to Barstead's place. You drive to the bookie's and find out how we did on the fifth race at Santa Anita. I'll call you there."

"You want me to case Gern's joint?"

"Yes. But not until after dark. He never leaves his place before then."

WALKING a few twisted blocks, Ted Lycombe came to an old house that had been converted into an apartment building. It was a relic of Manhattan common to this section of Greenwich Village.

High steps ran above the entrance to a tea room. The steps ended in a vestibule, where four push buttons had name plates attached.

Two of those, the first-floor apartments, were blank. They had been occupied by artists, whose ideas of back-rent payments had not satisfied new owners of the building. The buttons that signified the second-floor apartments bore two names:

FRANK BARSTEAD

GUY WINROW

Pressing both buttons, Ted waited. He knew that the automatic door was probably out of order. His assumption proved correct, when the door was opened by a frail young man with tired face, who gave a nervous smile, then said:

"Oh, hello, Lycombe!"

Ted returned the smile. The fellow was Archie Freer, one of Barstead's set. Ted had once threatened Archie with a needed poke on the chin, which had worried the chap ever since. Inquiring if Barstead happened to be at home, Ted received a reluctant nod from Archie.

"Yes," admitted Archie. "Frank's upstairs in Winrow's apartment. But -"

"But he doesn't want to see me?" interrupted Ted. "Come along, Archie, and see the fun."

They reached Winrow's apartment, the rear one at the end of a long hallway on the second floor. Frank Barstead, swarthy and dark-haired, met Ted with a scowl that turned into a rather nasty smile. He swung to a pale man, who wore glasses.

"Go right ahead, Winrow," ordered Barstead. "I'd like to see the pictures, with the sound effects. I'll be through with this business in a few minutes."

Guy Winrow went ahead. His apartment was something of a studio, cluttered with movie projectors, phonographs and radio cabinets, along with filing cabinets, boxes, and a variety of junk. It resembled a broadcasting studio more than anything else, inasmuch as Winrow was a radio technician.

"Well, how about it, Ted?" queried Barstead, coldly. "That note is due tomorrow. Are you prepared to lift it?"

"I need a week more," returned Ted, holding his temper. "Gern has promised me -"

"I've had enough of Gern's promises," broke in Barstead, angrily. "I'm giving you a last chance! I want my money!"

"Or you'll talk to Marian!" snapped Ted. "If you do, I'll give you this!"

He shoved a fist in front of Barstead's face. Winrow, turning from a recording machine, saw the gesture and sprang in between. Ted thrust him aside, spilling an armful of records that the fellow carried. Barstead interjected an excited plea.

"No, no, Ted! Leave Winrow out of this. He doesn't figure in the thing at all."

"No?" queried Ted, "I happen to know more than you think. Marian says that you're backing Winrow in some crackpot radio deal. She thinks you're big-hearted. Just part of the build-up, I suppose, so you can blast me as a chap who doesn't pay his debts."

"Leave Marian out of this!"

"You brought her into it. On a cash basis. You were willing to take a chance on five thousand dollars, if you could shake her belief in me!"

FISTS clenched, Barstead heard the accusation; then he strode from the room. Archie hurried out ahead

of him; the door was suddenly slammed in Ted's face.

His own fists tightening, Ted gave an ugly laugh; then relaxed. Cooling, he helped Winrow gather up the big disk records.

"Sorry, Guy," said Ted. "I guess you're tired of hearing all these arguments."

"I'm sorry, too," assured Winrow, "if I've made trouble for you. When Frank offered me financial aid, I didn't know that he would have to press you for money owing him."

"He doesn't. Frank's got cash to burn. Say, Winrow" - he slapped the pale man on the back - "mind if I use your telephone?"

Winrow had no objections. Ted called Marian, arranged to meet her at eight o'clock that evening. While Ted was talking, Winrow left and went to Barstead's apartment.

Coming out through the long hall, Ted stopped; looking through the open door, he faced Barstead, who rewarded him with a scowl.

"I'll see you later, Frank," suggested Ted. "When we're both in a better mood, we can talk this over."

"Only money talks," retorted Barstead. "Bring the cash, and I'll return your note. I'll be here until eight thirty this evening. If you don't show up, I'll give you till noon tomorrow."

Leaving Archie and Winrow as a background, Barstead stepped forward and slammed the door in Ted's face. Angrily, Ted grabbed for the knob, only to hear a well-oiled latch click shut.

Dusk was gathering when Ted reached the street. His face was wrinkled in thought.

Ted Lycombe liked risks. He was considering a path to crime, but in a light that made it a game.

Crime, Ted Lycombe was to learn, could prove a far greater problem than his present one, when it was pinned upon a person. Before this night was ended, he would find that such a path promised a one-way journey, without a return trail!

CHAPTER II. FROM THE DARK

AT a quarter of eight, a cab swung into a side street in the Seventies and stopped at a secluded hotel called the Wessex. The man who alighted was tall, of imposing build and manner. His face was broad and florid, a countenance that added to his self-importance.

Along with dignity, however, he possessed shrewdness, evidenced by the way he glanced along the street as he paid the cab driver. The florid man was noting a low-built sedan, that had pulled into the same street and parked across the way. It was odd that such a car should be haunting this secluded neighborhood.

A cab came into sight, stopped in the hack stand that fronted the Wessex. Its driver lolled back, to await a customer. The florid man eyed the cab suspiciously, as he had the sedan; then, satisfied that it was empty, he went into the Wessex.

Men were crouched in the sedan across the way. The one behind the wheel was Griff Conlad. His reason for being in this vicinity was simple. The man who had gone into the Hotel Wessex was Sherwood Gern. Griff and his crew were tailing the promoter.

"Slide out, Peeper," undertoned Griff, to a little man beside him. "Get across and take a gander into the lobby. Spot Gern, and watch where he goes. And steer wide of that hack that just pulled in. Don't let the jockey lamp you."

Like Gern, Griff took it for granted that the cab was empty. He was wrong. It contained a passenger that even the sharp-eyed Peeper could not detect; a strange figure clad entirely in black.

The cab's passenger was The Shadow.

Mysterious fighter who battled crime, The Shadow was always on the lookout for undercover evil. He had agents who patrolled the underworld; they brought him facts that never reached the grapevine, that word-of-mouth telegraph system that carried news through the badlands.

So well did The Shadow keep tabs on such developments that crooks seldom realized how early he had learned their game. They usually took it that The Shadow's arrival on scenes of crime was a matter of sheer luck.

Such circumstance applied to Griff Conlad.

Recently, Griff had begun to assemble a small, hand-picked mob. The men he selected were taciturn, like himself. With connections of their own, they formed a nucleus that could be built into a powerful organization.

Learning of the mob's existence, The Shadow had undertaken to observe its development. This evening, he had followed the crooks, and had already learned their present motive. Griff and his mob were trailing a man that The Shadow recognized: Sherwood Gern.

When it came to such tactics, The Shadow was far ahead of specialists like Peeper. While the little man was giving the cab a wide berth, a door opened on the curb side. Into a stretch of darkness, just short of the lights from the lobby, glided a black-cloaked shape that seemed immediately swallowed by the dingy walls of the old hotel.

Gliding under the grimy shelter, The Shadow followed the wall as effectually as a creeping cloud of smoke. Like a puff dispersed by a gust of wind, he was gone when the lights of a passing car happened to sweep along the sidewalk. The Shadow had picked a darkened passage beyond the side wall of the Wessex.

Surprisingly soon, the cloaked investigator was entering a little-used doorway on the rear street. From an alcove past the elevators, he was surveying the lobby of the Wessex from a far better viewpoint than any that Peeper could gain outside the front door.

The lobby was gloomy, almost deserted. Gern was seated in a corner, unobtrusively smoking a cigar; a clerk was drowsing behind the desk. An operator was standing patiently in the elevator.

The Shadow noticed that Gern glanced occasionally in that direction. There were intervals, though, when the florid man looked toward an obscure stairway in another corner.

OBVIOUSLY, Gern was waiting for someone to come down to the lobby. His surprise was apparent, when he heard the clatter of high heels coming in from the front entrance and turned to see a very attractive girl approach the desk.

She was slim and shapely; a pert brunette, whose sparkling blue eyes and serious lips told that she had self-possession, along with looks.

The girl stopped at the desk, asked for the key to 816. The sleepy clerk was giving her the key, when Gern approached.

"Good evening, Miss Farris," said the promoter. "You may not remember me. My name is Sherwood Gern."

Turning at the first words, Marian Farris was forming a winsome smile of greeting, when she heard Gern's name and recognized him. Instantly, her lips straightened. Her eyes were as cold as her tone.

"Yes," she said. "I remember you, Mr. Gern."

"I should like to talk with you," insisted Gern, in an earnest voice, as he drew a bundle of papers from his pockets. "It is about the investment made by your friend, Ted Lycombe."

"If you have business with Mr. Lycombe," returned Marian, "I suggest that you discuss it with him."

"But you know how Ted is," argued Gern. "He will never listen to reason, when he telephones me. I cannot invite him to my office, for fear he will break up the furniture. He wants money -"

"I can hardly blame him," put in Marian, icily. "I understand, Mr. Gern, that many persons have lost money through your promotion schemes."

Gern shook his head, as he followed Marian toward the elevator. He began a most persuasive speech.

"Some customers lose on speculations, yes," he declared, "but the stock that Ted bought is good. If you will only wait, Miss Farris, while I go over the full details and all the correspondence, you can convince Ted for me that his money is quite safe."

"How long will our talk take?"

"Not more than thirty minutes."

Marian shook her head.

"I've given you thirty seconds," she declared. "That's all the time I can spare. I'm to meet Ted for dinner, and I'm likely to be late, since I still have to dress. I shall tell him that I met you. Good evening, Mr. Gern."

The girl entered the elevator; the operator closed the door. Gern gave a shrug; glanced hopelessly at the grinning clerk. Then, noting that he was near an exit to the rear street, Gern's cautious look returned. Remembering the suspicious sedan that he had seen out front, he left by the rear way.

Gern didn't see the blackness that glided to the street ahead of him. Reversing his course through the passage, The Shadow reached the cab in the front street. No one saw him enter, but the driver heard his whisper and came slowly from a pretended doze.

The driver was Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's secret agents. The cab belonged to The Shadow, and was always at his service. With the cloaked passenger on board, Moe acted as though tired of waiting for fares that did not come. Abandoning the Hotel Wessex as a parking place, he started away.

From the cab window, The Shadow saw Peeper sneak back across the street to tell Griff that Gern had left the lobby. The sedan was in motion when the cab swung the next corner.

THE SHADOW was prepared to drop from Moe's cab and let it pick up Gern, when the florid man came into sight. With Moe at the wheel, The Shadow could not only learn exactly where Gern went; he

was confident that Moe could dodge Griff's mob, if they tried to overtake their prey.

But Gern had already found a cab; he had stopped one at the corner of the rear street as it came along the avenue.

Remaining in Moe's cab, The Shadow told his speedy driver to follow. After a dozen blocks, it became apparent that Griff had lost the trail, for his sedan did not appear. The Shadow decided to learn Gern's destination.

In her room back at the Wessex, Marian was hastening to keep her date with Ted. Laying fresh clothes upon the bed, she undressed rapidly and took a hurried shower. Returning, wrapped in a large bath towel, Marian put on her wrist watch, gave a surprised gasp when she noticed it was almost eight o'clock.

Ted liked her to be punctual; she had been late too often recently. Putting on stockings and shoes, she slid gracefully into pinkish step-ins. She was adjusting flimsy shoulder straps of a long slip, when she heard a click from the door.

Before Marian could think about screaming, a man was inside the room. He had spotted the girl instantly, was covering her with a revolver. His eyes were hard, his sallow lips snarly, as he gave a command for silence.

This was Marian's first meeting with Griff Conlad. She started to raise her hands, then clutched at the silken slip that began to slide from her shoulders.

Griff relieved the embarrassing situation. He had turned to peer around the room, as if looking for another doorway. Chancing to notice the girl's dilemma, Griff growled:

"Never mind hoisting the mitts. Just stay as you are, and answer questions. Where did that guy Gern go, after he came upstairs?"

"Why... why" - Marian was stammering - "he didn't come up at all!"

"He was talking to you down in the lobby."

"Yes. But I left him when I entered the elevator."

Griff paused beside the window, glanced downward, to make sure there was no roof below. Realizing that Griff might actually be looking for Gern, Marian put a question:

"Who... who sent you here?"

Turning, Griff lowered his gun, grinned wisely.

"Since you want to know," he said, "I'll tell you. The guy that sent me was your boy friend, Ted Lycombe!"

CHAPTER III. CRIME'S HALF-HOUR

THE smoothness of Griff's tone made Marian half believe him. She knew Ted's mistrust of Gern; moreover, she wasn't surprised that Ted should have a friend like Griff. Ted judged men by their brawn and nerve; whatever his shortcomings, Griff possessed both those qualifications.

To clinch his argument, Griff introduced himself.

"My name is Griff Conlad," he told Marian, in the frankest tone that he could summon. "You ask Ted about me; he'll tell you I'm a right guy. He put me on the job, to make sure that Gern don't clear town."

"Then why not look for Gern?" queried Marian, her calm restored. "If you're supposed to watch him -"

She broke off. The door was opening again; Peeper's leering face came through the opening. Seeing Marian, the lookout widened his grin and peered toward Griff, who stepped promptly to the door.

"Outside, Peeper," Griff ordered, "and douse those lights in the hall. Keep the other guys out of sight, until I call you."

While Griff was closing the door, Marian slid her arms into the shoulder straps. She was reaching for other clothes, when Griff turned about. The crook gave a prompt gesture with his gun.

"Sorry, lady," he said, "but there's no use of getting dressed up, until I find out where you're going."

Marian's eyes showed an indignant flash.

"Why, I'm having dinner with Ted!"

"He didn't tell me so," returned Griff, pocketing the revolver and lighting a cigarette. "That's why you're going to wait."

"But I'll be late!"

"Good enough," inserted Griff. "Then Ted will call up and find out what's keeping you. I'll help you explain things, when he does."

Deciding that it was best to humor Griff, Marian coiled herself in an armchair and lighted a cigarette of her own. Seating himself on the window ledge, Griff began some pointed comments.

"Ted and I see things alike," he said. "We don't like two-timers. Peeper says you weren't talking to Gern long; maybe you told the guy off, like you ought to. But there's a chance that Gern is the guy you made the date with. If he is" - Griff's tone hardened - "you'll be hearing from him instead of Ted."

Marian began to understand. She eyed Griff rather sympathetically. In his crude way, he had merit; stubbornly, he was protecting Ted's interest.

Lighting another cigarette, Marian glanced at her watch, saw that it was nearing quarter past eight. She could picture Ted pacing near the subway entrance, where she was to meet him.

The telephone bell rang. Griff tilted his revolver from his pocket, pointed across the room.

"Answer it."

Gladly, Marian obeyed; but she had hardly spoken a hello into the telephone, before her face reddened. Firming her lips, she tried to brave out the unexpected situation that confronted her.

The voice on the wire belonged neither to Ted Lycombe nor Gern. The speaker was Frank Barstead!

IN a half-drunken, but persuasive, tone, Barstead was suggesting that he and Marian go out together. He was tired waiting for some friends, he said, and he could call for Marian in about fifteen minutes. As Barstead paused to insert a hiccup, Marian broke into his harangue.

"Sorry, Frank," she said coldly, "but I have a date tonight... Yes, with Ted, of course... That's quite

enough, Frank. I want you to understand that Ted and I are friends..."

Marian cut off the rest of Frank's epithets by slamming down the receiver. Then, close to her ear, came another voice, harder than Barstead's. Griff was putting in his say, his gun raised from his hip.

"Did I call you a two-timer?" queried Griff. "I ought to have said triple-timer! Knowing Gern is bad enough, but Barstead is even worse. I ought to pump you full of lead, and tell Ted about it afterward."

For a moment, Marian shrank from the cold steel of the gun muzzle that pressed against her midriff. Then, with a sneer, Griff whipped away the gun and swung about to thrust his free hand forward. Clamping fingers found Marian's bare left arm.

With a quick wrench, the girl wheeled away, swung her right hand forcibly at Griff's head and launched the telephone for his skull.

Griff saw the missile coming and dived in the opposite direction. It wasn't his own quickness that saved him; it was the telephone cord. The wire stopped the heavy instrument, inches short of its mark.

Coming to hands and knees, Griff aimed savagely, as Marian scrambled across the room, giving her first shriek. Griff fired a shot, wide.

Then, hard upon both shriek and shot, came the inswinging clatter of the door, accompanied by a sound that made all others seem puny. It was a laugh, mocking, challenging, that came from the open doorway. Fierce mirth meant for Griff Conlad.

Only Griff's lips managed to move, as his eyes saw the figure in the doorway - a tall intruder cloaked in black, whose burning eyes, peering from beneath a slouch hat brim, had the same glint as his leveled automatic.

Griff's moving lips gulped the name: "The Shadow!"

Slowly, steadily, the tall rescuer advanced. With each pace that The Shadow made, Griff's smoking gun jogged downward. Angling across the room as though pivoting on the gun that he kept aimed toward Griff, The Shadow was coming between the crook and the girl, when Marian gave another scream.

It wasn't a frightened shriek; it was a warning. Unnecessary, for already The Shadow had turned. Still keeping his gun toward Griff, he had produced another, aiming it toward the doorway. A finger pressed its trigger, as a surge of mobbies came through the portal.

The foremost attacker sprawled, his gun leaving his hand as he tried to fire. Others, spreading inward, would have met the same disaster, if Peeper, in the midst of the throng, hadn't pressed the light switch.

As sudden darkness filled the room, there was the clatter of furniture, the blasting of guns.

Marian could hear The Shadow's laugh, triumphant in the blackness. Darkness made the type of battleground that The Shadow relished. With Marian's life at stake, the cloaked fighter was using close-up tactics, to keep the fire from the girl's side of the room.

Not realizing that The Shadow was trying to clear the room and send the crooks along their way, Marian followed a bold inspiration of her own.

Knowing that she could be of no assistance while in the room, the girl came up beside the bed, gathered up her laid-out clothes in one quick swoop, and dashed for the door.

Marian took the stairway downward. The gunshots had not been heard in the lobby; the hotel employees gained their first inkling of trouble when Marian arrived.

They gawked as the girl streaked across the lobby, her dress under her arm. But Marian did not stop to tell them the trouble; nor did she realize the actual scantiness of her costume, until she had reached the front street.

MARIAN was a half block from the hotel when she halted helplessly, staring at the dress she carried, wondering where she could find a place to put it on.

At that moment, Moe's cab pulled up beside her; its door swung open. Hearing the matter-of-fact question: "Taxi, lady?" Marian sprang into the cab.

Naming the corner where she was to meet Ted, Marian stammered that she didn't have her purse with her, but that the fare would be paid when the cab reached its destination. Moe's nonchalant nod indicated that he took all that for granted, for by that time the cab was on the move

With the cab as a dressing room, Marian realized that she could be fully attired by the time she met Ted; yet she felt a pang of regret before the cab reached the corner.

Marian was thinking of The Shadow; her flight, perhaps, had helped his battle, but to desert him utterly was out of the question. As the cab swerved the corner, Marian was leaning forward to tell Moe to halt, when she happened to look back along the street.

She saw Griff Conlad bolting from the hotel, carrying a useless gun, with Peeper close at his heels. Behind them came a staggering pair of thugs, all making for a car across the way.

The Shadow had routed them; they had left a pair of their tribe upon the field of fray. Moreover the victorious fighter was unscathed.

For Marian, craning from the cab, could see a black-cloaked figure at a window on the third floor of the hotel. Though the shape was vague against the background of Manhattan's glowing sky, there was nothing faint about The Shadow's laugh.

It was a taunt that spurred crooks on their way; a virile mockery that warned them against taxing The Shadow's wrath again.

Somehow, the girl felt that she was still under the protection of her black-cloaked rescuer; which, in fact, she was, since this swift cab was in The Shadow's service.

Glancing at her wrist watch, Marian saw that it was half past eight. Crime's half-hour was over, so far as she was concerned. Twenty minutes more, she would be meeting Ted at the usual corner, telling him the story of her delay, giving him the full details of the ugly part that Griff had played.

Marian was beginning to wonder just how and why Ted and Griff had come to strike up such a fast acquaintance. Perhaps she wouldn't have wondered, had she known the real motive behind the friendship. It didn't occur to Marian that her half-hour delay could have helped crime elsewhere.

Nor did the fact strike Moe. The cabby was glad that The Shadow had doubled back to the Wessex, after convoying Gern to a night spot called the Orchid Club.

But Moe had never heard of Ted Lycombe, the man who had set Griff to follow Gern, nor of Frank Barstead, the only person that Ted detested more than he did Gern.

Newly upon the trail, The Shadow had still to learn those names, and others; until he did, he could merely challenge crime when he encountered it. But behind the parting laugh that Marian had heard were thoughts far deeper than any that the girl detected.

Only The Shadow could have divined that he had taken the trail too late to prevent some heinous deed, already in the making!

CHAPTER IV. HALF PAST EIGHT

WHILE Marian Farris was beginning her cab trip from the Seventies, another cab was stopping in the vicinity of Eighth Street, not many blocks from the corner where Marian usually met Ted Lycombe.

The cab contained Archie Freer and two friends, who were calling for Frank Barstead at his Greenwich Village apartment.

Winrow answered the downstairs door; for Barstead had made a stooge of Winrow, and usually assigned him to such duty.

But Guy Winrow was in a nervous state that actually alarmed Archie. The pale man was trembling like a leaf; he grabbed Archie's arm as he would a last straw.

"I'm thankful you're here!" he gasped. "Your friends as well as you, Archie. You may all be needed. Come up, right away!"

"What's the trouble?" Archie demanded, as they ascended.

"Ted Lycombe came here," replied Winrow. "Maybe he's sober, but Frank is drunk. They're at it so hot and heavy that I could hear them clear into my studio. Listen!"

Already savage voices could be heard, coming through Barstead's open transom. Ted had finished some violent statement and was giving Frank the floor. Barstead's words were loud, but maudlin and incoherent, as both Archie and Winrow had often heard him.

Nerved by the presence of others, Winrow rapped cautiously at the door of Barstead's apartment. Archie's friends didn't think he was knocking loud enough, but Archie waved them back when they objected.

"It's the only way to handle Frank," informed Archie. "He gets mad and won't open the door at all, if you hammer too loud."

Winrow was pounding harder; he paused, rubbing his knuckles, as the listeners heard the argument reach a sudden finish.

First, Barstead's voice, sobered but jerky in its half-cold, half-angry pitch:

"How about that note, Ted? I want no promises. I want my money -"

"Or you'll blast me to Marian," came Ted's sharp interruption. "If you suppose she -"

"I'd like to see Marian."

"If you do, I'll give you more than you think. I'll give you - this!"

Ted's pause was accompanied by the scraping of a chair. Hard upon his final word came Barstead's drunken protest; then the excited cry:

"No, no, Ted!"

It was too late; a chair tumbled; then, amid a scuffle, came the stab of two shots, muffled, as if fired from a gun held close against a man's body.

There was the thudding of a body; with it a half-shrieked groan that might have come from any dying man's lips. At that moment, no one could have sworn which was the victim: Ted Lycombe or Frank Barstead.

Pounding violently at a door that he couldn't break, Archie heard a mad scramble in the room. There was a rattle from a bolt, the slash of a door ripping open.

"He's going out by the balcony!" yelled Archie. "Help me, you fellows! We've got to stop him!"

It was Winrow who yanked a big fire extinguisher from the wall. Archie and another drove all their weight behind the extinguisher, bludgeoning a hole through the door.

Staggering into the room, Archie nearly tripped over Barstead's body, which lay between an overturned chair and a radio cabinet in the corner.

Across the room wore the wide-open French windows. Outside was the rail of an iron balcony, with only a short drop to the courtyard below. The murderer's route was obvious; as apparent as the fact that Ted Lycombe was the killer and Frank Barstead the victim.

FOR Barstead was definitely dead, as Archie learned when he stooped above the body. Two bullets had pierced his chest at close range, accounting for his instant death. Blood stained the victim's shirt front - a jagged crimson blot that was creeping wider as Archie watched it.

Guy Winrow was still standing in the hallway, paler than ever as he gazed at Barstead's body. He was moaning that he ought to have called the police when he heard Lycombe and Barstead begin their argument. Cooler than Winrow, Archie suggested that calling the police would still be a good idea.

"Better phone them from your studio," said Archie. "The less we do around here, the better. Don't touch anything, boys, until the police arrive."

Winrow hurried away to make the phone call. Archie approached the balcony. Suddenly, he spied something. It was a cigarette case, tilted between two uprights of the balcony. It glimmered silver against the light from Barstead's living room, and it had initials on it, though Archie did not stoop close enough to identify them.

"It's Ted's, all right," decided Archie, grimly. "He must have lost it when he cleared the railing. Too bad he didn't drop the gun, too. But I don't suppose it will matter. We have enough proof against him."

His companions agreed. Their arrival, though too late to save Barstead's life, had at least been timely enough to place the blame of murder.

Ted Lycombe had not known that they were due; nor that Guy Winrow had overheard the earlier portion of the dispute. Archie's smashing tactics at the door had been loud enough to alarm anyone, which accounted logically enough for the murderer's quick departure.

By now, Winrow was back from the rear studio. He had called the police and given them the address. There was nothing to do but wait; the law would take over shortly. Archie suggested that they all join Winrow in the hall, but watch the room while they waited.

He left the room exactly as it was, except for a drink of liquor that he poured from Barstead's bottle into a fresh glass. Archie gave the drink to Winrow, the man who needed it most.

Then, glum and silent, the four men waited for the arrival of the law.

The only man who spoke at all was Archie Freer; he gave brief, disjointed sentences, describing Ted's altercation with Barstead earlier in the afternoon; statements that Guy Winrow corroborated with weak nods.

Barstead's death was a case of cold-blooded murder, delivered swiftly and impulsively. Whether or not the killer believed his crime unwitnessed, was another question. Certain it was that Ted Lycombe, if apprehended, would deny the deed; for he had no way of knowing that his voice had been recognized through Barstead's open transom.

But crime, unbeknown to Archie and others, went far deeper than the murder of Barstead indicated. Ted Lycombe had plans that he had stated to no one but his associate, Griff Conlad.

Actually, Frank Barstead had been slain as the result of a premeditated scheme, which paved the way to newer and bigger crime. Of all who might investigate this murder, only one could pierce the surrounding facts, to discover the evil core.

That investigator was The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. THE LAW'S TRAIL

THOUGH minutes dragged before the law arrived, the waiting period was actually quite short. First on the scene were members of a radio patrol; they had scarcely taken over before a more important official appeared.

He was Inspector Joe Cardona, ace of the Manhattan force. A stocky, swarthy man, Cardona looked efficient, and was. His steady eyes took in every detail; his poker face betrayed nothing that was in his mind.

Cardona heard the testimony of the witnesses, while a police surgeon was examining Barstead's body. Facts in the case fitted like tongues and grooves. Among them, the witnesses remembered everything that they had heard: Barstead's demand for his money, the mention of Marian, the threat that Lycombe had given and made good with gunshots.

Sending the witnesses into Winrow's studio, where they remained under the surveillance of patrolmen, Cardona waited stolidly until the examining surgeon had completed his report.

One bullet, the doctor stated, had drilled Barstead's heart; the other had been close enough to the vital organ to also prove mortal, had it been fired alone.

With the physician gone, Cardona checked on every detail. He began with the hallway door; found that it could be locked only from the inside.

The door was shattered, but the lock was in good enough condition. It had a little knob that threw a well-oiled bolt within the door itself. Slight pressure of Cardona's fingers sent the catch to its place in a socket set in the door frame.

Whether Lycombe or Barstead had locked the door was a question, but immaterial. Neither had made any effort to go out through the hall. The important point was that the locked door had kept Archie and the rest from entering in time to prevent murder.

Next, the positions of the two men.

The chairs told it. One chair was skewed back at an angle toward the center of the room. It must have been Ted's chair, the one that witnesses had heard scrape. The other chair - Barstead's - was overturned, and therefore fitted with the testimony.

From the position of the body, it was evident that the murderer must have sprung forward and blasted the victim as the latter rose. Barstead's backward stagger had bowled over the chair, before the gunshots, according to the testimony.

The shots, muffled in sound, were in keeping with the surgeon's examination. According to the doctor, the gun muzzle must have been shoved right against the victim's body.

Cardona noticed the radio cabinet and shrugged. It could scarcely matter if Barstead had been listening to some program when Ted arrived. Nonetheless, Cardona checked the matter, found that the radio wasn't working.

Pacing across the room, Joe studied the French windows. They had evidently been closed for a long time, for the bolt was rusted and the curtains dusty. The balcony rail showed no traces of Ted's hop across it, nor did the courtyard give evidence of a landing, when Cardona studied the smooth cement with a flashlight.

But there was evidence between the rail posts: the cigarette case that Archie had seen but had forgotten to mention. Picking it up with a pencil that he inserted between its partly opened halves, Cardona studied the cigarette case in the light.

The case contained some cigarettes, of a brand called Queens, but it showed no fingerprints. Cardona didn't expect them. He knew that when a cigarette case was put back into a pocket, fingerprints were invariably smudged or wiped clean. But the initials on this silver case were as good as any prints.

Those initials were "E.J.L."; they stood for Edward Jennings Lycombe, which, Cardona had learned, was Ted's full name.

Cardona had already noticed smoked cigarettes in ash trays. The stubs in Ted's tray were Queens; those near Barstead's chair, a brand called Turkish Harems. Wrapping the cigarette case carefully in a handkerchief, Cardona walked from Barstead's apartment back to Winrow's studio.

JOE found the witnesses perched among the junk. The place was certainly a mess, with its old radios and studio equipment. Winrow also went in for photography, as a motion-picture projector and a hanging screen testified.

Stumbling over wires that ran along the floor, Cardona reached the other side of the room and faced the assembled witnesses.

The inspector put a question: "What brand of cigarettes did Lycombe smoke?"

Archie began to say something about a cigarette case that he had noticed on the balcony. Cardona silenced him and repeated the question. It brought head-shakes; no one recalled Ted's favorite brand.

"How about Barstead?" queried Joe. "What kind did he smoke?"

Everyone answered. Barstead's brand was Turkish Harems. That, of course, identified Queens as Ted's. But Cardona was thoroughgoing. Unwrapping the cigarette case, he asked if anyone could identify it. Joe didn't show the initialed side.

Winrow remembered that Ted carried a cigarette case. Archie Freer thought he did, but wasn't sure. But when Cardona let them see the initials, both assumed that the case was Ted's. It was Archie who declared that Marian Farris would surely know, and that she could also name the brand that Ted smoked.

Cardona stepped to Winrow's telephone, paused there, to look from Archie to Winrow.

"You two said something about an argument this afternoon," recalled Joe. "One between Lycombe and Barstead. Was the trouble this evening a continuation of it?"

They agreed that it was. Prompting each other, Winrow and Archie managed to give enough details of the afternoon dispute. It was Winrow who said ruefully:

"Ted had it in for me, but I didn't wholly blame him. He knew that Frank was spending money on my synchronized projector, and therefore was dunning him for the note. But he got over that idea."

"How come?"

"Because of Marian. Frank wanted to put Ted in a spot where Marian would give Ted the go-by and take up with Frank, instead."

Cardona began to mutter, as he always did when a woman became a paramount issue in any murder case. Among his mumbles, he used the French phrase "Cherchez la femme," mispronouncing it so badly that Winrow thought Joe was talking about the synchronized projector.

"I haven't gotten far with it," said Winrow, ruefully. "What I'm trying to do is gear up miniature motion pictures with recorded radio programs, to make them suitable for television broadcasts. Small studios could buy such programs cheaply -"

"Never mind," interrupted Cardona. "What I want to talk about is this Farris girl. Do you know where she lives?"

Dejectedly removing a record that he had placed on a phonograph, Winrow put it back in its box and nodded.

"She lives at the Hotel Wessex," he said.

Cardona picked up a telephone book. He didn't need it, for Winrow, removing a film from the movie projector, gave the Wessex number.

"Ted always called Miss Farris from here," he said. "He called her this afternoon and made a date for eight o'clock this evening."

"Where was he to meet her?" demanded Joe.

"At the usual meeting place," replied Winrow, "but I don't know where it is."

Cardona decided to call the Wessex on the chance that Marian still was there. She wasn't, but when Cardona announced who he was, people at the other end gave him plenty of surprising details. Slamming down the telephone, Cardona turned to the group.

"There was a lot of shooting up at the Wessex!" exclaimed Joe, "The Farris girl was mixed in it. She beat it out of the hotel wearing half her clothes, or less, and carrying the rest. We've got to find her. If only -"

BLACKNESS streaked the floor, creeping in beneath the light. Cardona turned suddenly to the

doorway; then lost his challenging pose. It was only a shadow; the man who cast it was standing in the doorway.

Cardona recognized him as Lamont Cranston, close friend of the police commissioner.

Tall, leisurely of manner, Cranston had calm, masklike features, that formed a hawkish silhouette when viewed in profile. He had a habit, too, of strolling in upon scenes like this, although his arrivals usually seemed accidental.

"Hello, Mr. Cranston," greeted Cardona. "You're looking for Commissioner Weston?"

Cranston nodded.

"I was to meet the commissioner at the Cobalt Club," he said in even-toned fashion, "but a message arrived requesting him to come here, so I supposed that word might have reached him elsewhere."

"I sent the message," explained Cardona. "But I haven't been able to reach the commissioner anywhere."

Then, partly to impress Cranston, Cardona swung to the witnesses and began a summary of the case. He read off testimony from his notes, covering the argument of the afternoon, then came to the more detailed matter of the murder.

Cranston, listening idly, heard four witnesses corroborate the statements that they had already given. He heard Cardona's own check-up of the murder scene; saw the cigarette case when Joe again displayed it. By the time Cardona was through, Cranston had a thorough knowledge of the known facts.

Indeed, he could have added some details of his own, when Cardona came to the matter of the gun fray at the Hotel Wessex. But Cranston seemed very much bored by the whole account.

"We've got to find that girl," insisted Cardona, "because she is our one lead to Ted Lycombe. If you don't know where they were going to meet" - Joe was speaking to Winrow - "maybe you can tell me where they were going afterward."

"Probably to dinner somewhere," returned Winrow, brightly. "Yes, I think that Ted said something about dinner."

"Where would they eat?"

"Somewhere in the Village, I guess. At one of the places where I used to go with Frank and Ted, when the two were friends."

Cardona came to an immediate decision.

"You know the places, Winrow," he said, "so you're elected to go with me. I'll leave Sergeant Markham in charge here, while you and I make the rounds."

Cardona looked toward the doorway, to see how Cranston had accepted this simple, but efficient, plan. But Cranston, to Joe's chagrin, was no longer there. He had spoken to Archie before leaving. He had told Archie that he was going back to the club, to await his friend, the commissioner, there.

Though he had left a minute previously, Cranston wasn't out of earshot. He had paused in the hallway, lighting a cigarette, while he overheard Cardona's decision to make the rounds with Winrow.

Joe's words caused Cranston to drop his leisurely manner. His stride was almost swift, as he headed along the hall and down the stairs to the front door.

Only once did he slow his gait; that was when he paused to nod to Detective Sergeant Markham, who was on duty at the door.

Outside, Cranston stepped into a waiting limousine. The big car started slowly away. A whispered laugh sounded from the interior; the repressed mirth denoted the true identity of Lamont Cranston.

He was The Shadow.

As the big car rolled along, The Shadow slid out a secret drawer beneath the rear seat; but he did not produce garments of black. Instead, he pulled out a flat make-up kit; a tiny light glittered when he lifted the box lid, showing a mirror within.

Prepared to remold the features that at present were Cranston's, The Shadow paused to reach for the speaking tube. In Cranston's even tone, he spoke to the chauffeur.

"Drive through the Village, Stanley," he ordered. "I'm looking for a place to dine. I'll tell you where to drop me after I see the restaurant that suits me."

Again, a whispered laugh sounded, unheard by Stanley. The laugh of The Shadow, from lips that no longer resembled those of Cranston!

CHAPTER VI. CRIME'S SNARE

MUROTTI'S RESTAURANT was noted for its spaghetti; the excellence of that dish made up for the dingy surroundings of the place, which was located in a basement near the heart of Greenwich Village.

Though Winrow hadn't recalled it, Ted had mentioned Murotti's when talking to Marina by telephone, that afternoon.

The two were dining in a little booth, and Ted was indulging in some caustic comments that annoyed Marian, particularly because they were loud enough for other customers to hear.

"I said eight o'clock!" declared Ted, angrily. "But when do you show up? Not until quarter of nine!"

"But, Ted -"

"Don't tell me that you stopped to dress," interrupted Ted. "That rumpled frock of yours looks as if you'd been wearing it for a week! I thought we'd agreed, Marian, that we'd always meet on time."

Marian smiled, quite tartly.

"You weren't at the corner, Ted," she reminded, "when I arrived there in the cab. I had to wait quite a while."

"About two minutes," snapped Ted. "I could tell by the cab meter, while we were riding over here. I'd only gone down the street to telephone you. Say" - he had a sudden reminder - "what's gone haywire up at the Wessex? The fellow on the telephone sounded like a police sergeant handing out a third degree. I had to hang up on him."

Again Marian smiled; this time, very sweetly. She had found the rift she wanted. At last, Ted might be willing to listen to her story.

"I suppose that the police are at the Wessex," said the girl, reflectively. "They are probably looking for a friend of yours."

Ted stared; his expression was somewhat puzzled.

"I talked with several of your friends tonight," remarked Marian. "First, there was Sherwood Gern -"

"Where did you see him?"

"He met me in the Wessex lobby. He wanted to explain why your mining investment was quite safe. I told him he would have to see you about it. Then -"

Ted snapped an interruption.

"Was Frank Barstead another of my friends, as you term them? Did he stop in at the Wessex, too?"

"No," replied Marian. "Frank telephoned a little while before I left. But regarding your choice of friends -"

"Those two aren't friends of mine!"

"Perhaps not," agreed Marian, icily, "but you could make a worse choice, Ted. I suppose you call Griff Conlad a friend."

Ted's stare went hard. He reached across the table, gripped Marian's arm in a tight clutch.

"Did Griff walk in on you?"

"He did," returned Marian, "and if he'd come a few minutes sooner, he would have found me in the shower bath. Griff has an informal way of opening doors with skeleton keys and walking right in on people."

There was a quick snap of Ted's fingers.

"On account of Gern!" he exclaimed. "Was that why Griff wanted to talk to you?"

Marian nodded. She related the details of Griff's visit, flushing angrily as she proceeded. But as Marian's ire increased, Ted's own face relaxed. He was smiling, chuckling, before the girl had completed her story. Witnessing Ted's humorous mood, Marian halted, sputtering for words.

"Griff is all right," assured Ted. "Rough and ready, but a good sort. From what you've told me, he proved it. Didn't he?"

Biting her lips, Marian managed to stifle her rising temper. Fully calmed, she nodded.

"Yes, he proved it," the girl conceded, "up until Frank's phone call came. After that - well, you can judge for yourself."

TED listened while Marian related the details of the battle. He accepted her story sympathetically; still, it did not shake his trust in Griff. Ted felt that both should share the blame for the fray. When Marian expressed sharp indignation, Ted modified his judgment.

"Blame Frank Barstead, then," he decided. "Trust that rat to do the wrong thing at the right time. His call made it look bad for you, so Griff acted tough and overdid it. You got excited and threw the telephone. He had to shoot when you started to yell, just to scare you. Griff probably didn't aim anywhere near you."

When Ted was in a calm mood, he was always logical; convincingly so. If anything, he was apt to be

overly fair in his judgment. Loyalty was his fault; he made such fast friendships that he was naturally ardent in his enmities toward any persons who proved themselves untrustworthy.

Ted's dislike for such men as Gern and Barstead had always seemed logical to Marion; hence she was willing to follow the opposite track and see the good points in Griff when Ted depicted them. Thinking it over, she could justify Griff's behavior when she viewed it as Ted did.

To cap the situation, Ted told Marian some facts about The Shadow - facts that he had gleaned from Griff and other racy companions.

The Shadow, it seemed, was death on crooks; a good enough way to be, except that The Shadow, despite his supernatural pose, was as human as anyone else and therefore apt to make mistakes.

Ted doubted that The Shadow had any quarrel with Griff; he had simply been checking up because Griff and some pals were moving around town. Like Marian, The Shadow had misunderstood the motive behind Griff's shot and had therefore thrust himself into the picture.

"Nobody can argue with The Shadow," explained Ted, "except with bullets. Griff and his bunch were on the spot, and took the only way out. From what I've heard, The Shadow is a lot tougher than the police -"

An interruption came from the front of the restaurant. The two waiters who worked in Murotti's were arguing with some men who had entered. They were gesticulating, shouting in Italian; they looked surprised when they were answered in the same tongue by a swarthy man of stocky build.

The fellow flashed a police badge as he shouldered forward. Beyond him, Ted saw a pallid, excited face, and came to his feet with the exclamation:

"It's Winrow!"

At the same time, Winrow shouted Ted's name, then grabbed the stocky man and pointed.

"There he is, inspector!"

Adroitly, Joe Cardona collared Ted and slashed a handcuff on his wrist. Coming to his feet, Ted struggled valiantly to escape; but Joe shouldered him against the side of the booth and managed to land the other half of the handcuffs on Ted's free wrist.

"You're under arrest, Lycombe," informed Cardona, gruffly. "You'd better come along."

Ted gave a surprised glance at Marian, then faced Cardona angrily.

"Under arrest?" he queried savagely. "For what?"

"For murder!" returned Cardona. "We know you killed Frank Barstead."

THE word "murder" had an electric effect. The two waiters shrank toward the kitchen, hoping to get out before they were arrested, too. A few diners reached for their hats and went out to the street.

Only one customer remained; he was a gloomy-looking sort, and was leaning on a table in the opposite booth, his arms folded in front of him. His eyes were sharp as they peered from his broad, sallow face.

In a position where he couldn't well leave, he took an interest in what was going on.

Except for that observer, Ted Lycombe became the coolest person in the place. But there was something

in his manner that frightened Marian. Ted's coldness was actually a white heat. She had seen him stifle his rage in that fashion, once before.

"From what you say," spoke Ted, steadily, "I take it that Barstead is dead."

"I guess you've got a right to inquire," returned Cardona. "You didn't wait long enough to make sure. But from the way you put two slugs in his heart, you didn't take much chance."

Ted turned to Marian; his steady eyes seemed to flash a message. Speaking to Cardona, Ted asked:

"When was Barstead murdered?"

"At half past eight," returned Joe.

"Tell the inspector where I met you," said Ted, to Marian, "and at what time."

"On Thirteenth Street," replied Marian. "We were supposed to meet there at eight o'clock. I was a trifle late -"

"At half past eight," inserted Cardona, "you were doing a marathon through the lobby of the Wessex Hotel! From all descriptions, you were dressed for speed, but you needed to travel faster than a subway express, to get to Thirteenth Street in the time you claim!"

He reached for Ted, yanked the prisoner from the booth, to start him toward the door. Marian's lips were set; she realized that she should have reserved her alibi until sure that it could stand the test. She was loyal to Ted, however, and she tried to tell him so with her eyes.

One thing was certain: if questioned regarding the fray at the Wessex, Marian would never admit that Griff Conlad had begun it. Not while Ted still considered Griff to be a friend.

She was wondering, though, why Ted's friend had deserted him. She scarcely noticed that the white-aproned waiters had come in from the kitchen and were drawing close. Then, from the corner of her eye, she caught a flash of metal; an instant later, the foremost waiter was prodding Cardona with a gun.

Marian recognized the hard-set face above that weapon; the smooth tone that went with it.

Both belonged to Griff Conlad!

"Up with the mitts, copper!" Griff told Cardona. "You can't grab a pal of mine and expect to get away with it! Not unless -"

Griff paused; he nudged Ted toward the rear of the restaurant. Then, in the same oily tone, Griff completed:

"- not unless you want another murder, with a guy named Joe Cardona for the victim!"

CHAPTER VII. TRAILS IN THE NIGHT

TAKING Griff's hint, Cardona let his arms rise. Joe had been in tight spots before; he had a professional way of handling them. Talking to Ted, who was sidling away, Cardona tried to use persuasion that would save the situation.

"You can't get away with it, Lycombe" - Cardona was ignoring Griff - "because those handcuffs have you tagged. You'll stand a chance in court, though, on the self-defense angle. If Barstead started that trouble

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"Nix, copper," interrupted Griff. "One more peep, I'll drill you! Kind of funny, ain't it, pulling that self-defense line. You weren't talking that way until I moved in. Sounds to me" - Griff turned his head toward Ted - "like somebody was pulling a phony dodge. Maybe it's a frame, Ted."

Cardona gave an appealing look toward Marian. The girl stretched her hands toward Ted, who jostled them aside with his elbow. From his action, his expression, Marian feared a hotheaded outburst.

The thug with Griff had shifted forward, to plant a gun against Guy Winrow, who was trembling, begging plaintively. The fellow with the gun gave a grin.

"How about this squealer, Griff?" he queried. "Want me to give it to him?"

"Lay off, Chuck," ordered Griff. "Back up along with me, so we can take Ted with us. He won't have to worry about the bracelets. I'll get them off of him."

They were drawing back, their eyes fixed on Cardona and Winrow. With every back step, the range was increasing, giving leeway to the helpless men, if they wanted to try a break. Ted was behind his protectors; as the three retreated, they uncovered the booth across the way.

The booth looked empty, but it wasn't. From below the table came a form that lunged suddenly toward the crooks: the figure of the broad-faced diner who had remained in the cafe.

As he came, his hands whipped out his big guns. The size of those automatics should have identified him, but the intruder left nothing to doubt. From his disguised lips came the same challenge that Griff and his mobbies had heard before.

The laugh of The Shadow!

In flinging that mirth before he fired, The Shadow acted with design. He wanted to draw opposing guns his way, to insure the safety of helpless, unarmed men. His method worked; both Griff and Chuck aimed for him. But they were late with their trigger pulls.

Timed to the fraction of a second, The Shadow delivered a double blast before the swinging revolvers were full upon him. The other guns answered; their shots were wide. The Shadow had beaten both crooks to the thrust. Yet, surprisingly, he only obtained fifty-percent results.

Chuck went down before a gun blast, but Griff did not. Instead, The Shadow reeled as though a shot had clipped him. Then, suddenly, the witnesses saw the reason. Ted Lycombe had supplied it.

Launching between Griff and Chuck, Ted had met The Shadow head-on within the angles of the guns. Slashing with his upraised handcuffs, Ted had jugged the .45 that aimed toward Griff. Ted's attack produced The Shadow's backward reel, while Griff, diving as he fired, was clear.

Cardona was in it an instant later, his own gun drawn. But Joe was hurtled from the fray into the booth that Marian occupied. It was The Shadow who shoved Cardona; recoiling, the uncloaked fighter grabbed Winrow and hauled him into the opposite booth.

There was method in The Shadow's action. The door from the kitchen was swinging wide. Peeper and a batch of sharpshooters were beginning a rapid fire. Cover was needed, in order to compete with them. In saving himself and Cardona, along with Marian and Winrow, The Shadow happened to provide a break for Ted and Griff.

As spreading shots whizzed past the self-styled pals, Griff grabbed Ted and started him out through the rear exit, with mobbies opening to allow a path.

Cardona had been wise enough to bring a plain-clothes man with him. The fellow was stationed outside Murotti's; when he heard the shooting, he popped into sight and opened fire down the middle of the restaurant.

By rights, that officer should have become an easy target for the crooks who opposed him. Instead, his shots seemed to wither them.

The reason was that crooks were surging forward to get an angle from which they could fire into the booths. But The Shadow was using a quicker process.

His booth wasn't bulletproof, though the mobbies treated it as such. It was made of flimsy plywood. Gun muzzles pressed against the back of the booth: The Shadow was blasting bullets through, spraying his fire like a low barrage.

Under that hail, the sharpshooters were falling; four of them - reliable torpedoes that Peeper had assembled after leaving the Wessex. They were going down like tenpins, in the improvised alley formed by the restaurant's center aisle. Only Peeper escaped those clipping shots.

Screened by the flopping gunners, the little man made a face-about and dived through the kitchen doorway after Ted and Griff. Mockery followed him - a laugh that did not fade. For The Shadow, out from the booth, was beginning a pursuit, with Cardona in his wake.

Over the writhing bodies of wounded thugs, through the doorway past waiters who lay bound and gagged, out to the rear street beyond - such was The Shadow's trail.

Cars were pulling away when he reached the curb; guns were ripping from the windows of those automobiles. Dropping back to shelter, The Shadow elbowed Cardona into cover and answered the leaden deluge.

Luck seemed to serve The Shadow when a taxicab swung in from the corner. Like much of The Shadow's "luck," this was prearranged. The cab was Moe Shrevnitz's; it had been stationed near Murotti's ever since Moe had reported the name of the restaurant to which he had taken Ted and Marian.

In fact, if The Shadow had not expected the cab, he could never have performed his next feat. Wheeling suddenly from cover, he jabbed direct hits that reached gunners in a fleeing car. As revolvers blasted to cut him off from the shelter of the building wall, he gained a new fortress, this time a moving one.

The cab swerved in as if by clockwork. Its speed cut down as its door swung open. With a hooking sweep of his free arm, The Shadow caught the post between the front door and the rear, spun himself about and landed in the cab.

Moe's sharp jab against the brake pedal slapped the door shut automatically; then pressure of the accelerator spurted the cab forward. The Shadow's guns blasted from a window at a crook-manned car ahead.

Coming up from the doorway where The Shadow had shoved him, Joe Cardona was left bewildered by the swiftness of the thing.

The cruising cab had gulped The Shadow like the whale that swallowed Jonah. The comparison wasn't a bad one. The term "Jonah" meant ill fortune to any crew that was traveling through a storm, and The

Shadow was just such poison to the crew of crooks that rode ahead. They were riding a storm - of bullets!

AROUND the corner, The Shadow put one car out of commission. Crooks dived as their vehicle hit the curb; they were staggering for cover, all that were able. The Shadow left them to Cardona's mercies. With the cab as a motorized fort, he sped after other cars ahead.

Griff's mob was greatly amplified. In coming to snatch Ted from the clutches of the law, Griff had foreseen trouble, with the prospect of The Shadow being in it. He had three cars, altogether; The Shadow had disposed of one and was worrying the next.

Driving the first car, with Ted in the seat beside him, Griff was snarling orders to the men in back, telling them to hold their fire until The Shadow disposed of the car between. Griff was hoping that the gunners in the middle car might eliminate The Shadow, instead.

Meanwhile, Griff was making the chase a zigzag one. His method brought him good luck that he did not expect. Police cars came into the chase from an avenue, whining sirens announcing their identity. Not only did they cut off The Shadow's cab; they actually went after it.

Cardona had spread the word that there were three cars in the caravan, before he learned that The Shadow had wrecked one around the corner. The officers thought that the cab was part of the fleeing procession. In their ardor to settle part of Griff's mob, they were putting The Shadow on the spot.

With the first spurt of police guns, The Shadow took a quick look from a window, gave a sharp order to Moe. The capable cabby threw his whole weight on the brake pedal; the cab gyrated in the center of the one-way street, skidded from the blast of guns and leaped across the sidewalk.

The officers thought it was bound for a brick wall, but they hadn't seen the opening that The Shadow pointed out to Moe. The cab roared through the doorway of a public garage, where surprised attendants dived from its path.

A closed door blocked a route to the next street, but The Shadow sized the weakness of the barrier in a single glance and gave the calm-toned order:

"Straight through."

Moe went straight through. The sturdy cab tore the flimsy door to shreds. As Moe swung against traffic on a one-way street, The Shadow saw what was left of the garage door. It looked like a paper hoop after a circus dog had jumped through it.

Again, The Shadow was on the trail, but the delay had ended the chances of immediate success. Mobsters were outdistancing the police; it took Moe's cleverest driving to pick up the route when the law lost it. Even then, the fleeing cars held the edge.

They were speeding along an East Side avenue beneath the shelter of an elevated railway, where steel posts ranged between them and The Shadow's path of fire.

Holding his aim until he could get a closer range, The Shadow saw the cars dart into a side street. Moe was about to make the same turn, when glints from basement doorways told The Shadow that the side street was an ambush.

A prompt order from his chief caused Moe to make a semicircle around an "el" pillar and keep along the avenue. Guns barked from the doorways, but the bullets missed. Snipers, stationed to cover Griff's flight, were aiming in front of the swinging cab, expecting it to come right into their barrage.

Instead, the cab was on its way again, and the only shots that took effect were those that a super-marksman delivered from the cab window, accompanying the fire with a burst of chilling mockery.

The Shadow's aim nicked the foremost of his foemen; his mirth caused the rest to drop away to deeper shelter.

They lost their chance to blast the cab. Instead of running the gantlet of their fire, it reached the next street. There, encountering a dead end, The Shadow told Moe to reverse his course, keeping wide of the ambush. More blind alleys were the result.

By then, The Shadow had garbed himself in black, taking cloak and hat from a drawer beneath the rear seat of the cab, a duplicate of the secret shelf in the limousine. On foot, The Shadow fared in among the pitch-black alleyways, seeking lurking crooks.

He was scaling the wall of a little cul-de-sac, when he heard the roar of motors. Two cars spurted out from an alleyway into a street. Griff was at the wheel of one, another crook driving the other.

Otherwise, the cars were empty, for they were plainly visible as they wheeled beneath a street lamp; but Griff's beckoning hand was bringing followers from lurking spots along the street.

The Shadow staid his finger against the trigger of an aiming gun. Chances of clipping Griff with a single shot were slight, for the headman of the mob was on the far side of the car. One bullet would bring battle, and though The Shadow might dispose of minor foemen, Griff would surely get clear.

It was preferable to let him go - for a most important reason. Ted Lycombe wasn't with the throng of departing crooks. Somewhere among this maze of streets must be a hideaway where Griff had stowed his pal. It suited The Shadow that Ted Lycombe, wanted for murder, should be out of circulation, in a place that he thought was safe. It was wise, too, to let Griff Conlad believe that the existence of such a hideout was unknown.

Returning to the cab, The Shadow gave a sibilant order to Moe. Carrying the cloaked passenger, the cabby threaded a skillful course through gloomy streets, heading westward, away from the vicinity of the hideout.

A whispered laugh throbbed from The Shadow's lips, as the cab veered toward the outskirts of Greenwich Village.

Ted Lycombe and his hide-away could wait for future investigation by The Shadow. There were other things that demanded immediate attention.

In his quest for facts concerning crime, The Shadow was moving along a different trail.

CHAPTER VIII. CRIME'S RETURN

A TINY light was probing between cramping walls of brick, its concentrated ray focused on a level of cracked cement. Squatty buildings with old-fashioned roofs blocked off the city's glow, as well as the muffled roar of distant traffic.

It seemed forgotten, as much as deserted, this route The Shadow was tracing; but only recently it had echoed to the pounding footbeats of searching headquarters men.

The Shadow was probing the passageway behind the old house in Greenwich Village in which Frank Barstead had been slain, a few hours before.

There was a chance that the murderer's trail might disclose some clues leading to Ted Lycombe; evidence that the law had overlooked. The search had not been overly thorough, for the law had already completed its case.

At spots, mud stained the concrete; but footprints were lacking. Ted must have avoided those oozy puddles, which, while they were not pitfalls, would at least have troubled him. Near Barstead's place, the path was blocked by a rusted iron gate bound with an ancient chain and padlock.

The gate, however, was low and offered no real obstacle, despite the pickets that topped it. Carefully picking a space between the spikes, The Shadow vaulted the little gate and came beneath the iron extension of Barstead's balcony.

There, while his twinkling flashlight uncovered no marks upon the dry cement, The Shadow heard sounds above. Flashlight promptly extinguished, he listened.

The Shadow heard the grumbling tone of Detective Sergeant Markham, talking to one of his men.

"Looks like we're due for an all-night trick," declared Markham. "Tough, ain't it, Casey?"

"You heard from the inspector?"

"Yeah," gruffed Markham. "He's not coming back. Neither is that guy Winrow, who belongs in the back apartment. The inspector don't think he would be safe here. A mob nearly rubbed out Winrow, over at Murotti's."

The news surprised Casey, so Markham related what details he had heard. Winrow not only was scared, and justly so, but the fellow was important as a witness. Quite as important as Archie Freer, according to Markham. So Guy Winrow was staying at Archie's apartment, which was under guard.

"They're both safe there," explained Markham. "In a few days, the inspector won't have to worry about them. By then, Ted Lycombe will know that it won't do no good to bump them, like he did with Barstead. The evidence against him is clinched."

Jangling some keys, Markham added that he had locked up Winrow's studio for the night.

Moving from beneath the balcony, The Shadow rounded the rear of the building. Finding crevices in the brick, he worked his way up to a second-floor window. It gave easily under pressure, and The Shadow dropped into Winrow's studio.

With his flashlight, he picked his way among devices used for sound effects in recording radio scripts. Reaching a phonograph, The Shadow gave a whispered laugh. He wanted to get through to Barstead's apartment; the best system was to draw Markham in this direction.

Picking up some loose disk records, The Shadow tested them under a needle. Those that gave dialogue, he laid aside. Finding one with music, he played it.

The sound became loader; The Shadow cut it off. Getting no results, he tried a record with spoken voices, lifting the needle at intervals, so that the conversation came in garbled snatches. Pausing, with the needle raised, The Shadow heard footsteps in the hall.

Markham had heard the sounds and was coming back to find what they were about. As a key scraped in the lock, The Shadow gathered loose records; instead of moving toward the box where they belonged, he swung in the direction of the door, sliding the disks beneath his cloak.

ENTERING, Markham fumbled for the light switch and found it. Casey was behind him; the two began to look about. With a quick glide, The Shadow eased out from behind a miniature door set in a frame, a device used in sound effects. He was only a few feet from the real doorway; he gained the exit without detection.

Following the gloomy hallway, The Shadow reached the front and entered Barstead's deserted apartment. There, he began to reconstruct the details of the murder, very much as Cardona had.

First, The Shadow closed the heavy door, which still swung on its hinges, despite its shattered condition. Thin-gloved fingers were touching the latch knob, as The Shadow's other hand stopped the door just short of a slam. The bolt of the latch clicked into place.

Next, The Shadow viewed the positions of the chairs. He crossed to the balcony, studied the rail and examined the spot where Cardona had found the wedged cigarette case.

Returning, The Shadow noted chalk marks on the floor: Cardona had made them to indicate the exact position of Barstead's body, which had been removed.

Satisfied with his brief survey, The Shadow turned to Barstead's radio cabinet and thumbed the dials. Had music started, The Shadow could have used it to draw Markham back to the front apartment. But the radio didn't respond. It was out of order.

Opening the back of the cabinet, The Shadow saw the glowing tubes. Since they weren't burned out, the trouble with the radio was, so far, unexplained. Stepping across the thick extension cord that connected the radio with a floor plug, The Shadow unlocked the broken door and opened it.

He wanted to examine the wiring of the radio, yet be ready for a prompt departure, should Markham return.

But The Shadow did not come back from the doorway. His keen ears caught the sounds of voices coming from Winrow's premises. One voice was an oily tone that couldn't belong to Markham or Casey.

Moving along the hallway, The Shadow peered through Winrow's door from an angle. The scene in the studio had changed. Markham and Casey were still there, but they were standing with lifted hands, covered by bristling guns.

An invading mob had trapped the officers. The leader of the gang was Griff Conlad. Behind him stood leering thugs; in the background, The Shadow saw the top of a ladder at the open window.

"Just a couple of flatfeet," sneered Griff. "What were you doing around those boxes - looking for mice?"

Markham stared stolidly, but glumly. Casey copied the sergeant's expression.

"So this is Winrow's joint," continued Griff, "Well, we're going to wreck it for him, the squealer - just to show him what he'll get when we catch up with him!"

With that, Griff stepped toward the door, turning back to speak to his crew.

"I'm going into Barstead's apartment," he said. "Maybe I'll find what I want; maybe not. Anyway, I'll smash the joint. When you hear me begin, get busy on this dump, too."

Stepping out into the hall, Griff turned in the direction of Barstead's apartment. In that motion, he failed to see The Shadow. The cloaked watcher was on the side of the doorway that lay opposite to the direction

of Griff's turn.

Two of Griff's mobbies gestured Markham and Casey to a corner. The others pocketed their revolvers and looked about. One picked up a croquet mallet and a thick cardboard carton that were used for sound effects. The other opened a box of records. They were getting ready to ruin the premises when Griff's signal came.

None noticed the shadowy blackness that crept across the floor, followed by a solid figure that was visible but briefly. Just inside the doorway, The Shadow made a sideward glide; his tall form dwindled immediately, and was out of sight when one of the crooks turned in that direction.

THE men with the guns decided that they could help in the wrecking process, when the time came. One reached for Winrow's movie projector; the other took a fistful of records from a box.

They were keeping their prisoners covered, but rather carelessly. Well enough for ordinary circumstances, but not for the thing that happened.

From the doorway came a whisper - a challenging evasive tone that carried a touch of sinister mirth. Its pitch, though low, was quivering with the very mockery that crooks had heard less than an hour before.

Swinging, they saw patchy blackness on the threshold, an inky blot that swirled beneath the dim glow of a floor lamp.

Wildly, the crooks blasted with their guns, hoping to riddle a figure that they fancied was beyond the open doorway.

A door clattered open. Not the door of the room, but the little one that Winrow used for sound effects. Launching through the gaping frame came a figure in black, rising to tall proportions. Guns thrust ahead of him, The Shadow was ready for his outspread foemen.

In a trice, the place was a scene of chaos.

Stabbing automatics beat wild-aiming thugs to the opening shots. With The Shadow's stabs, the gunners sprawled, their coughing revolvers jouncing from their hands. Markham and Casey were in action, leaping for the other thugs.

The movie projector was smashed, records were broken. One crook was slashing at Markham with a croquet mallet; the other hurled a box at Casey. Had the situation remained otherwise unchanged, The Shadow could have aided the battling officers; but things happened to occupy him elsewhere.

Things in the shape of reserve mobbies, coming from the open window. One man, Peeper, launched in like a rubber ball. Another popped to the top of the ladder, to take his place. Both had guns and were ready for The Shadow. But he had picked the window as a possible source of new attack and was on his way to greet them.

Side-stepping, The Shadow clipped the thug on the ladder with one gun, aimed for Peeper with the other. There was a shriek outside, as the man on the ladder went thudding to the cement below. But Peeper, rolling for the shelter of a big box, managed to reach cover as The Shadow fired.

Markham and a grappling thug overturned the floor lamp; its fall brought darkness to the room, except for the slight light of the hallway and the spurts of flame that guns produced.

In the melee, crooks were at least accomplishing one intention: they were wrecking Winrow's studio as they flung things about. Then The Shadow was in the middle of it, sledging blows with his automatics,

reserving occasional shots for the window, in case more crooks arrived there.

He fired twice at the door, as Griff came momentarily into sight; but the mob leader was able to duck away. Reeling figures intervened to alter The Shadow's aim. In the darkness, they might have been the forms of Markham and Casey.

Fighters grappled with The Shadow; there was a crackle beneath his cloak. Not The Shadow's ribs, but the disk records that he had stowed there earlier.

From near the window, Peeper saw The Shadow wheel across the dim-lit doorway and yelled to the others. They lunged for The Shadow, bringing Markham and Casey with them.

Planting one gun beneath his other elbow, The Shadow grabbed a microphone stand with his free hand. With it came a wire that tripped one reeling pair. Shoving the mike beneath the feet of the others, The Shadow sent them sprawling, also.

They were below the level of Peeper's quick shots, and The Shadow, away from the brawl, was clear of those bullets also. His answering stabs were wide, because his elbow, clamping one gun, disturbed the aim of the hand that held another.

But the shots were enough for Peeper. The little man went headlong through the window, using the ladder as a sliding board.

FROM his inner corner, The Shadow could distinguish friend from foe against the dim doorway. Driving toward the hall, he settled matters in favor of Markham and Casey, by slugging down the thugs who grappled with them. Keeping on, The Shadow went through the hallway to Barstead's apartment.

Along the way, he heard smashing sounds. At the doorway, Barstead's radio cabinet blocked his path. Griff had flung it there, hoping that The Shadow would trip over it. Instead, The Shadow used it as a bulwark, and opened fire on Griff, who was shooting from the balcony rail.

Griff's shots splintered the woodwork of the cabinet, but the interior mechanism stopped the bullets. Dropping from the balcony, the crook dashed along the outlet to the rear street.

Reaching the balcony, The Shadow heard Griff stumbling over the gate and sloshing through mud puddles. A roar of a motor told that the mobster was away, taking Peeper and other remnants of the defeated mob.

A rope-like object hung from the balcony rail. Examining it, The Shadow found that it was the extension cord from Barstead's radio. Griff had used it to cling to the outside of the rail, while waiting for The Shadow.

Leaving the cord and its twisted strands of wire as evidence of Griff's flight, The Shadow took his own path through the night.

In place of Ted Lycombe, wanted for murder, Griff Conlad had returned to the scene of crime, to dispose of clues that the law might add to those already obtained. But Griff's plan of letting mobbies show their spite by wrecking everything in Winrow's studio had proved a boomerang.

It had given The Shadow more than another victory. It had put him on the trail of further crime. The Shadow was confident that Ted Lycombe, safe in hiding, would be linked with more deeds than Barstead's murder, before this campaign was ended.

While the law was gathering threads of the past, The Shadow would be looking to the future, making

every effort to frustrate crime before it could be perpetrated!

CHAPTER IX. THE LAW DECIDES

IT was late afternoon. Police Commissioner Ralph Weston sat in his spacious office surveying a group of silent persons, who were listening while Joe Cardona summarized the facts in the murder of Frank Barstead.

Except for Lamont Cranston, who had dropped by to meet the commissioner, the visitors were persons that Weston had never met before. They were witnesses who would prove useful in the law's case against Ted Lycombe.

One member of the group was hostile: Marian Farris. The girl's eyes flashed angrily, whenever Cardona referred to Ted as the murderer. When Joe's summary was finished, Marian blurted:

"But no one saw Ted kill Frank. They can't prove that it was anything but self-defense."

Cardona met the girl with a cold gaze.

"We are dealing with reliable witnesses, Miss Farris," he said. "Naturally, you wouldn't understand, because you are not in that class."

"Just because of the fact I didn't recognize -"

"Griff Conlad," inserted Cardona, when Marian paused. "You had a good look at him down at Murotti's. You should have known if he was the same man who showed up at the Hotel Wessex."

"It might have been Griff," admitted Marian reluctantly. "Still, when I realize how testimony has been used against Ted, it wouldn't be fair for me to state anything without being quite positive. Surely you must understand, inspector."

"I understand, all right," returned Joe. "Your boy friend, Ted Lycombe, wanted you to alibi him. If you'd reached Thirteenth Street as early as eight thirty, you wouldn't have found him there. So he sent Griff to the Wessex to delay you."

Sherwood Gern was present. The florid man inserted a plea in Marian's behalf.

"I feel quite certain, inspector," announced Gern, "that Griff Conlad was on my trail. I saw suspicious-looking characters around the Wessex when I stopped there to talk with Miss Farris."

"But they didn't tail you to the Orchid Club?"

"No," admitted Gern, "they did not. At least, not to my knowledge."

Marian bit her lips. She couldn't repeat Griff's statements that he had been looking for Gern, because that would conflict with her previous testimony. Out of loyalty to Ted, she had resolved to keep right on denying any recognition of Griff.

Inwardly, the girl felt qualms. She realized, too well, how Cardona's facts fitted. To make sure that Marian would give Ted a needed alibi, Griff would naturally have concocted another reason for his invasion. Gern was the logical excuse.

Marian's brain was drumming to the ceaseless tune: "Ted killed Frank. Ted killed Frank -" but she couldn't believe that it had been premeditated murder.

Ted hadn't wanted her to know that he was going to see Frank for fear that she might interfere. Such was the mental argument that Marian applied to preserve her loyalty.

Cardona was questioning Gern, asking him about his own transactions with Ted. Gern repeated what he had told Marian the night before - that the mining stock was good.

"Ted should have given it to Barstead as security," argued Gern. "I can't see why he didn't."

"I'll tell you why!" It was Guy Winrow who spoke. "Frank classed you as a swindler, Gern. You tried to sell him on some pretty punk propositions; only he didn't fall."

Gern shook his head sadly.

"If I wanted suckers," he said, "Frank Barstead would have been the top man on my list, even if all the rest of the names began with A. Any man who would back your crazy inventions, Winrow, ought to be your roommate in the nut house!"

WINROW jumped to his feet, showing the same spunk as when he had intervened between Ted and Barstead at the time of their first argument.

Cardona shoved Winrow back in his chair, told him to stay there. To equalize things, he reproved Gern.

"No more of that, Gern," warned Cardona. Then, turning to Winrow, the inspector queried: "Barstead was backing you on a fifty-fifty arrangement, wasn't he?"

Winrow started to nod; then looked surprised.

"You must have found the agreement!" he exclaimed. "Was it in Frank's strong box?"

"Yes," replied Cardona. "How did you know that Barstead had a strong box?"

"Because I arranged it," returned Winrow. "I was fixing his radio one day, and it struck me that there was room in the cabinet for a hidden compartment. Frank liked the idea."

Cardona produced a square tin box which Winrow identified as the one in question. From it Joe took a signed agreement, which he returned to Winrow.

"Griff Conlad would have given plenty for that information," declared Cardona. "He smashed half of Barstead's apartment looking for this box. He even chucked the radio cabinet in front of the door without guessing that the strong box was in it."

"Here's Lycombe's note for five thousand dollars" - Joe displayed the slip of paper as he spoke - "and it's what Griff was after. They knew it was damaging evidence; that's why Lycombe sent Griff to get it. What's more" - Cardona drew bundles of bills from the box - "here's seven thousand dollars that those crooks didn't get."

Marian was on her feet, glaring at the money. Fists clenched tightly, the girl gave her head a defiant toss.

"Since Frank had all that money," announced Marian, "and still wouldn't give Ted another week to pay his debts, it's my opinion that Frank deserved whatever happened to him. There, commissioner" - she turned to Weston - "I've said it! I suppose you'll arrest me for the murder of Frank Barstead!"

There were times when Commissioner Weston was quite tactful; this was one of them.

"Speaking unofficially," he said dryly, "I am inclined to agree with you, Miss Farris."

Then, before the astonished girl could recover her breath, Weston arose from his desk and bowed the visitors from the office. Cranston went along, stating that he would wait for the commissioner outside.

Guy Winrow left with Archie Freer; the two were accompanied by a plain-clothes man, who was serving as their bodyguard. Marian paused, looked back. Gern stopped beside her and asked:

"Are you going uptown, Miss Farris?"

Marian nodded.

"I thought I ought to wait a few minutes," she said, "so I can apologize to the commissioner and thank him for not arresting me."

"The commissioner understands," assured Gern. "As for myself, I am sorry that all this happened. I said last night that Frank would get his money, and I meant it."

"If I had only listened!"

"I may have been to blame. I insisted on too much time to explain the matter. But I have the mining correspondence with me" - he produced the papers as he mentioned them - "and if you will ride with me in a cab we could go over them."

Marian hesitated; her face was bitter.

"What good would the money do?" she asked. "It's too late - with Ted wanted for murder."

"He may need a lawyer later on," insisted Gern. "With the proper attorney, Ted's plea of self-defense might stand."

GRIPPED with a surge of enthusiasm, Marian nodded. She left with Gern, and their departure was observed by The Shadow, who was standing by in Cranston's idle fashion.

Knowing Gern's reputation, or lack of it, The Shadow doubted the man's claim that Ted's money was coming through. Gern's business deals were shady, though he operated within the law. If the mining stock was like the other investments that the fellow peddled, there would be a catch in it somewhere.

Naturally, Gern would talk in optimistic fashion; he did that with everyone. In this case, where facts indicated that one of his swindling schemes had driven a client to commit murder, Gern might actually produce the cash that he had promised Ted Lycombe. It might cause Gern pain, but he could afford it. He had made plenty, trimming suckers.

When the commissioner joined him, The Shadow mentioned the matter of Gern while they were riding uptown to the Cobalt Club.

"You can take my word for it, Cranston," assured the commissioner, "the stock is good. I went over all the correspondence myself before you arrived."

"Odd that Gern should be selling good stocks for a change."

"I can't understand it myself," admitted Weston with a smile, "unless Gern is worried about his own alibi last night. He says he went right to the Orchid Club after he left the Wessex. We checked on the matter and found that he actually was there from about eight fifteen until midnight, but we decided to let Gern worry."

Gern's whereabouts the night before had not disturbed The Shadow. He had personally trailed the fellow

to the Orchid Club and had summoned one of his agents, Harry Vincent, to come there and keep further track. Harry had reached the club while The Shadow was riding back to the Wessex, and had located Gern immediately.

But Weston's argument covering the bona-fide stock was not a logical one. Gern had sold the stock to Ted long before last night, and could not have turned a crooked transaction into a legitimate one to square himself in an emergency. Sometimes, however, an illogical situation might prove a logical one, if analyzed.

In this case The Shadow could see a logical answer, since it fitted with other circumstances. More facts, however, would be needed to support it. Meanwhile, Weston was doing his best to interrupt The Shadow's train of thought.

"Griff Conlad failed utterly last night," chuckled the commissioner. "Even his bluff didn't work."

"His bluff?"

"Yes," nodded Weston. "First he pried open Winrow's desk, pretending he was looking for something. After that, Markham reports, he decided to wreck the studio. Such a decision naturally gave him an excuse to wreck Barstead's apartment, also.

"Griff wanted to cover the fact that he was going to search for Barstead's strong box. He wanted us to find the apartment wrecked, without letting us realize that anything was missing. But Griff didn't find the strong box; so we know what he was after."

There was a pause, then Cranston's question: "Just what have you decided to do yourself, commissioner?"

LEANING back, Weston outlined the law's plan. Guy Winrow, of course, would be protected, along with Archie Freer. It would not be necessary to worry over Sherwood Gern; he wasn't a witness to Ted's murder of Frank Barstead.

It was highly unlikely that Ted would let Griff trail Gern any longer; last night had ended that policy. Besides, there was no chance of Gern leaving town at present, which was the thing that Ted had feared.

As for starting an intensive search for Ted Lycombe, the commissioner was against it. He argued that Griff Conlad would learn of any dragnet methods and get the news to Ted. Nor was a hunt for Griff the answer. If captured, Griff would claim ignorance of Ted's whereabouts. Hearing nothing more from Griff, Ted would then clear town.

"Marian Farris is our answer," chuckled Weston in conclusion. "You heard what I said to her, Cranston."

"Yes," replied The Shadow. "She appreciated it. In fact" - his tone was the level voice of Cranston - "she even wanted to come back and thank you."

"Did she?" Weston thwacked a broad hand on his friend's shoulder. "It's working wonderfully, Cranston!"

"I don't quite understand, commissioner."

Weston did not catch the real significance of that even tone. It meant that Cranston did understand, but had very little sympathy toward the commissioner's plan.

"We've won the girl's confidence," boasted Weston. "She will never suspect that I have told Inspector Cardona to watch every move she makes. When she hears from Ted Lycombe" - Weston was wagging a wise finger - "as she surely will, she will think it is safe to meet him. With the girl as bait, we shall trap our murderer!"

They rode the rest of the way in silence. Weston was thoughtless enough to believe that Cranston approved the unsavory scheme. Actually, The Shadow might have voiced some uncomplimentary comments that would have terminated the friendship between Lamont Cranston and Commissioner Ralph Weston.

But The Shadow renounced that pleasure. He had learned the course that the law had decided to take; much though he disliked it, he foresaw its advantage. By all the laws of averages, there would be an interval before Marian Farris heard from Ted Lycombe.

Such a period would serve The Shadow well. It would give him opportunity to trace crime's trail to a finish as startling as any that he had ever produced!

CHAPTER X. THE HIDE-AWAY

FROM a tiny diamond-shaped window in the wall of a cramped room, Ted Lycombe was watching darkness settle over Manhattan.

This wasn't the Manhattan as he had known it - with tumultuous traffic, brilliant lights, and gay night spots. Nor did it resemble the Greenwich Village section, where one sensed life amid the quiet.

Ted's present residence might have been on a rock in the East River, judging by the bleakness of the outdoor scene. A drizzle was slapping across old roofs, which all looked alike, low-built and dilapidated.

Nevertheless, Ted appreciated his abode. As a snag hide-away, it was well located. The squarish room that Ted occupied was in an old house on the East Side; a building that had been chopped up into little apartments, most of which were vacant.

Once a mansion, the house had boasted a wide stairway that was no longer used. Ted's room was between floors; it had been the landing of the stairway.

The room had steps leading up and down to blank walls that were not as solid as they looked. Either direction offered an exit - which made the hideout perfect, according to Griff Conlad, who termed it a "two-way set-up."

At least, the place was better than a prison cell - which would be Ted's next residence, according to the newspapers that were stacked beside the cot on which the hunted man slept.

It wasn't the length of the jail term that bothered Ted; he wouldn't be in prison more than a few months. He was thinking of the electric chair looming at the end of that short stretch.

Ted's hand tightened on a gun butt in his hip pocket. His face seemed to darken grimly with the fading light. The newspapers could talk about the Big House and the hot seat all they wanted. Ted wasn't going to sample either. He'd shoot his way through any squad of police that tried to take him. If they loaded him with bullets it would be good riddance.

Except for Marian. Thoughts of the girl brought a change to Ted's expression. Letting the gun slip back into his pocket, he clamped his hand upon a telephone that Griff had provided. Then, remembering that

Griff had warned him not to use the phone except in an emergency, Ted pushed the instrument aside.

This was to be his third night in the hide-away. It would be a long night, like the others. At least, it would bring a visit from Griff to break the monotony. Griff had promised to arrive soon after dark set in.

A flashlight twinkled from the shelter of a roof. Ted counted the blinks, knew that it was Griff's signal. He answered with a flashlight of his own, signifying that all was clear. Then, fixing a square of black cloth across the tiny window, Ted turned on a light.

There was a creak from an opening door below. Creeping footsteps on the old stairs. Griff emerged from the semi-darkness, a roll of damp newspapers under his arm; he tossed them on the cot. He shook his head when Ted snatched at them.

"Nothing new," undertoned Griff. "Don't get the jitters, Ted. They've got to put the pinch on you first. Even then, a clever mouthpiece can fix it so you'll beat the rap."

"Just how?" demanded Ted. "With four guys to testify that they heard me plug Frank Barstead, what chance have I got?"

"Plenty of chance, Ted. Only, I've got to admit you'd be better off if I hadn't run into The Shadow up at the Wessex. That girl friend of yours would have given you a swell alibi if she'd had the chance."

"I'm just as glad she didn't. I don't want Marian to suffer on my account. I'd like to see her and tell her so."

Griff stroked his chin. His back was toward the lower stairway, blocking off the light. The stairs looked pitch-black, yet Ted fancied that he could see the darkness stir. Staring hard, he decided that his imagination was at fault.

"Maybe I could fix it," suggested Griff. "I could get word to her easy enough."

"It wouldn't be safe, Griff -"

"I wouldn't go myself," interrupted Griff. "I'd send Peeper. He can slide in and out of anywhere. Besides, he could trail along and see if any dicks were following her."

"You mean they're watching Marian?"

"It's likely. That guy Cardona wouldn't miss a trick! But if Peeper spotted any of those headquarters mugs, he could hop ahead and tip you off."

THE idea suited Ted. The next problem was the time and place. Griff said he would talk it over with Peeper and give Ted a call later.

"What about Gern?" queried Griff. "Are you still game to go after him?"

"Why not?" Ted's growl was deep-throated. "Only, what's the use, unless he's got the cash?"

Griff nodded thoughtfully.

"How about something else?" he queried. "One of those jobs I talked about. The kind I said that you were one guy who could stage. A job that would take brains."

"I'm game for anything," returned Ted steadily. "I've got nothing to lose. But when you mentioned brains, Griff, I intend to use them. Any job I do will have to be worth while."

Griff leaned forward, as if he expected the walls to hear what was said.

"I've got a line on something," he whispered. "A honey, if it comes through. Other guys are after it, but I think we can get in first. I'll let you know when the time's right. It might be tonight; maybe next week; maybe next month. Just so you're ready -"

"I'll be ready."

Griff turned suddenly about. As he did, there was an actual stir in the darkness below. Griff might have detected it, for his eyes were quick; but he remembered something else that made him turn back to Ted.

"Here's the rest of that dough," said Griff. "I won't need it, Ted. Keep it along with the mazuma that I gave you last night."

Ted received the bills that Griff proffered, remarking that he had no special need for cash. But Griff insisted that he take the money, which amounted to a few hundred dollars.

"If you find you've got to lam," reminded Griff, "you won't have time to stop and cash a check. Guys usually lam after banking hours" - Griff chuckled at his own jest - "so it's good stuff to have a bundle of do-re-mi in the old sock."

When Griff descended the steps the darkness was vacant. The sallow crook stepped into a gloomy hall, looked about, and decided that the way was clear. Moving out through an obscure doorway, Griff was joined by skulkers who awaited him. Griff never traveled anywhere without a few picked mobbies during times when he was wanted by the law.

Another figure was coming out by the same door. Near the sliding wall that formed an entrance to Ted's hide-away, the intruder was briefly visible. Cloaked in black, he became part of the outside darkness when he reached it.

The Shadow had found the exact location of Ted's hide-away. Waiting there, he had trailed Griff into the place. Crouched on the stairs, he had overheard the entire conversation between the pair. Since Ted was fixed in a known spot, The Shadow decided to follow Griff.

Within a half hour, The Shadow had gained an insight into Griff's own method of avoiding the law. Having given Ted the use of his hideaway, Griff was keeping on the move. This evening, he stopped at a place where he hadn't been seen before, an East Side dive known as Red Mike's.

Apparently, the proprietor had given Griff sole access to some empty rooms over the basement grogshop. Griff reached his temporary headquarters by unlocking a little-used door in back of the place. He and his few bodyguards went inside, bolting the door behind them.

Gliding away, The Shadow entered the rear of a pool parlor; used a telephone in the darkened back room. He called his contact man, Burbank, and instructed him to relay orders to certain agents. Confident that Griff would stay put for a while, The Shadow started a return trip to the hide-away.

The Shadow's agents moved promptly into Red Mike's. One of those agents, Cliff Marsland, was as thuggish-looking as any of Griff's motley mob. Another, a wizened little man named Hawkeye, could make Peeper look like an amateur, when it came to slinking through side streets and back alleys.

Almost as soon as they arrived, these observers noticed that some of Red Mike's customers were easing out through a rear room, where a stairway led to the floor above. Cliff stayed on watch, while Hawkeye went out by the front, to telephone Burbank that Griff Conlad was assembling a mob.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow had reached Ted's hide-away. He was sliding back the panel at the bottom of the lower stairs, when he heard the buzz of a telephone above.

Instantly, Ted turned off the light; then The Shadow heard him gruff a laugh. Ted, it seemed, was trying to treat his nervousness with contempt.

Listening through the crack that he had opened, The Shadow heard Ted's end of the conversation.

"Hello, Griff..." Ted's tone showed relief. "I sort of figured it was you... You've got everything fixed already? Good!... Yes. I'll be there... Don't worry. Nobody will spot me..."

There was a pause, while Ted listened to details that Griff gave him.

"That covers it, Griff," spoke Ted. "Leave the rest to me... Coppers? It will be tough for anybody that tries to lay a hand on me. That goes for The Shadow, too..."

As Ted dropped the receiver on the hook, The Shadow worked past the edge of the partly opened panel. His tall form obscured the trifling light from the dim hall. Then, with the panel shut behind him, he was moving soundlessly up the half flight of stairs.

The Shadow could hear Ted above. He intended to trap the fellow, to learn just what Ted would do when he encountered The Shadow.

Ready to go the limit, Ted would be quick with the trigger; but not quick enough. Meeting The Shadow in the hide-away was certainly something that Ted Lycombe had not anticipated.

Silence filled the squarish room when The Shadow reached it. After a few moments, the black-cloaked invader produced his flashlight and focused it for a spreading beam. Gun in one hand, flashlight in the other, he pushed the button of the torch and swept the squarish room with light.

The place was empty. Shoving his hand past a corner, The Shadow illuminated the upper half of the stairway, which left the old landing at a different angle than the steps below. The slanted space was empty.

A whispered laugh filled the deserted hide-away. Ted Lycombe was gone; by some quirk, he had chosen the upper exit, while The Shadow was ascending from the floor below. Past the turn, Ted's creeping progress had escaped detection.

Finding the telephone, The Shadow extinguished his light. He put in a call to Burbank; received Hawkeye's relayed report. Like Ted Lycombe, Griff Conlad would soon be on the move, with an accompanying mob. New crime was due tonight, as Griff had promised that it might be.

Silence filled the darkened hideaway as The Shadow made his departure, Ted's path did not matter. The Shadow was returning to Red Mike's, to take up Griff's trail, instead.

Whatever Ted's part in tonight's scheme, Griff would be on hand to cover up crime, as he had tried to do at Barstead's. On this occasion, Griff would find it better policy to be there earlier.

It was The Shadow's plan to do more than follow Griff. Once at the scene, he intended to move in ahead and block off crime itself!

CHAPTER XI. HANDS IN THE DARK

THE Drober Building was a narrow, eight-story structure that looked like an architectural antique. In its

day, however, it had been regarded as a monument to its builder, Thomas Drober, founder of the Drober Chain Stores, which had spread from coast to coast.

Though the Drober Chain Stores had floors of offices in a modern uptown skyscraper, the Drober Corporation still occupied the top floor of the antiquated building. Needing only a few offices, the Drober Corporation seemed quite unimportant; but such was not the case.

Actually, the Drober Corporation was the holding company that controlled the Drober stores and half a dozen other chains that operated under various names. Such things as antitrust laws, interstate regulations, taxes restricting the growth of chain organizations, had led to the present arrangement.

A dozen men were gathered in an oak-paneled room, where the smell of varnish told that decorations had recently been made. Seated at the head of the table was a dry-faced, elderly man who dominated the meeting. He was Howard Burman, president of the Drober Corporation.

Important though he was, Burman seemed secondary to another presence. Set in the wall behind the president's chair was a life-sized portrait of old Thomas Drober, founder of the massive enterprise that bore his name. Painted eyes seemed to scan the group benignly, from a face adorned with bushy brows and ample side whiskers.

Indirect lights threw a glow upon the picture. Whenever the board of directors were confronted by a problem, they could look at it and wonder what the founder would advise. To them, the portrait was an inspiration; it made Burman, the president, seem like Drober's spokesman.

This evening marked a monthly meeting of the directors, and Burman was enjoying it. He liked to show big sheets of figures, with graphs that illustrated the progress of the corporation in terms of profit. But he relished it more when visible assets were on hand.

The president was stacking bundles of currency; each pile of cash was encircled by a printed band telling the amount that it contained. The total came to exactly one hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

"Tomorrow morning, gentlemen," announced Burman, dryly,. "I plan to buy Criterion Stores and merge them with one of our New England chains. The price they ask is two hundred thousand dollars, payable in ten-percent installments.

"Experience has shown me that money talks for itself. I am quite sure" - his tone was humorous- "that the owners of Criterion will be impressed when I offer them one hundred and sixty thousand dollars in cash."

By way of demonstration, Burman gathered the bundles of money and thumped them on the table. As if facing the Criterion group, instead of his own directors, the dry-faced man made a pompous gesture, that seemed to say: "Take it or leave it!"

Then, as if his imaginary visitors were shaking their heads, Burman lifted his thin eyebrows and gave a shrug. Gathering up the bundles of money, he tucked them under one arm, stepped to a safe set in the side wall.

Opening the safe door, he made a half turn, just as he started to put the cash away. The questioning lift of Burman's brows was artfully expressive.

The directors actually applauded, and started an enthusiastic conversation. It was their unanimous opinion that Burman's tactics would clinch the sale. Big business needed more men like Howard Burman, who applied the human element. Burman was right; money would talk with the Criterion people, whose stores dealt in a cash-and-carry business.

CLOSING the safe door, Burman glanced over his shoulder and smiled at the portrait of Thomas Drober. The painted eyes of the founder had watched the entire transaction; they had seen Burman open the safe, take out the money, count the cash and put it away again.

Canny when he dealt with living men, Burman never kept any secrets from the portrait of the departed founder.

The meeting was over. Burman took a satisfied look at the locked safe. It was a formidable contrivance, of the latest design. Fixed in the wall like a vault, it was absolutely crookproof. Likewise, foolproof, for any crook would be a fool who tried to crack it.

Last to leave the meeting room, Burman looked back at the portrait and set his lips in a firm line that matched the expression of the side-whiskered founder. He pressed two switches; one extinguished the lights surrounding Drober's picture, the other darkened the room itself.

Ringing the elevator bell, the directors waited until the car was brought up by a solemn-looking watchman. Descending to the ground floor, they waited again, while the watchman unbarred a gate and let them out to the street.

Two private detectives were outside. Burman always hired them for meeting nights. This neighborhood was no longer as prosperous as it had been when Thomas Drober erected the building that bore his name. Sneak thieves were apt to steal anything out of fancy automobiles that parked in this vicinity.

Looking along the street, Burman noticed no more than the usual quota of shamblers. As soon as he and the directors were in their cars, he beckoned to the detectives and told them they would no longer be needed.

Burman would have regretted that decision, had he remained in the vicinity a short while longer.

As soon as the cars had rolled from sight, lurkers appeared. They stationed themselves at convenient posts in and around the Drober Building. Chief among those arrivals was Griff Conlad, who moved to an alley straight opposite the building entrance.

"Ten fifteen," undertoned Griff smoothly, to two men beside him. "Ted should have been inside two hours ago."

"Ahead of them stuffed shirts?" came a query.

"Yeah, and before the watchman locked the gate," added Griff. "He didn't close up until after the directors got here, at half past eight."

"How's Lycombe coming out?"

"Right through that gate, when the watchman makes his rounds."

"Ain't there an alarm on it?"

"Yeah, and a good one," returned Griff. "That's one reason why we're here, to take out the watchman and any harness bulls that show up while Ted is making his getaway."

Eyes on the darkened doorway, Griff wasn't watching the corner of the Drober Building. He didn't see the blackened shape that glided in from nowhere and melted against the darkness of the wall. Just past the corner of the building, The Shadow began an upward climb, finding finger grips and toe holds.

His ascent was safe as far as the second floor. Above that, he would be visible, for the next-door roof was low and the city's glow made a background beyond it. But second floor suited The Shadow, for the present. Clinging to a window ledge, he jimmied the sash in silent fashion and slid into a darkened office.

From then on, The Shadow took a stairway to the top floor, passing many offices, some of them vacant, for few people rented space in the ancient Drober Building.

On the top floor, The Shadow reached the entrance to the offices of the Drober Corporation. With a guarded flashlight, he studied the glass-paneled door.

Scratches showed that the frame surrounding the glass pane had been pried loose. Extinguishing the light, The Shadow pressed the frame; it gave, just far enough for him to press his hand through and reach the latch within.

Entering, The Shadow closed the door as silently as he had opened it. He didn't need his light to continue on his course. Sounds guided him; they came from an inner office. An intruder was moving about, working in pitch darkness.

THROUGH the doorway, The Shadow groped ahead; his fingertips contacted a chair, then a long table. The Shadow's probe was noiseless; nevertheless, a flashlight suddenly moved in his direction. Before its owner could spy the cloaked invader, The Shadow crouched between the chair and table.

The light swung to the side wall, brought an ebony glister from the black front of the big safe. Then the glow centered on the chromium-plated dial.

There was cool calculation in that survey; the sort of deliberate procedure that characterized Ted Lycombe, when he wasn't in a headstrong mood. Remembering Ted's statement that he was "ready for anything," The Shadow did not find it difficult to visualize Ted as the man behind that light.

But guesswork was not proof. The Shadow wanted visual evidence, of an absolute sort, before identifying any criminal.

The light turned downward. It showed a battered felt hat, inverted on the floor. In the hat lay a handkerchief, knotted to form a mask. A hand plucked the handkerchief from the hat; the light remained steady for a scant second longer.

In that brief interval, The Shadow saw something that the sharp glare revealed; a detail that would not have been noticeable in ordinary light.

The hat had once contained initials, pasted inside the top. Those letters had been removed. but their outline still remained, in light-brown against dark. In his brief glimpse, The Shadow saw the traces of the letters "E.J.L." As with the cigarette case dropped at Barstead's, they identified Ted Lycombe as the owner of the hat.

Then the light was gone. A crinkly sound came from the darkness, caused by something other than the soft handkerchief mask. The thing was explained when the light appeared again; this time, the flash propped against the hat, so that the rays were directed up to the safe front.

Into the glowing circle came hands that were fully visible, yet clouded by a thin, filmy substance that gave them a yellowed hue. As he watched deft fingers turn the combination, The Shadow heard a repetition of the crinkle.

Whatever evidence the law might gain to pin this present crime upon Ted Lycombe, The Shadow knew that no fingerprints would be found upon the safe dial.

The hands from the dark were wearing cellophane gloves!

CHAPTER XII. CASH IN ADVANCE

SELDOM did The Shadow witness robberies. He usually ended them before they were complete. But this particular crime was well worth watching because of its smoothness.

Crinkly fingers did not hesitate with the combination. They turned with a swiftness that would have surprised Howard Burman, the only man supposed to know the combination.

In fact, had Burman been there to watch the moving hand, he would have been dumfounded. He might even have believed that the painted lips of old Thomas Drober had whispered the combination to the marauder; for only the eyes of the portrait had seen Burman turn the safe dial.

Knowing something of the Drober Corporation and the men who formed its directors, The Shadow, himself, was very much intrigued, particularly when the safe came open after the crinkling fingers had made their first try.

There had been no guesswork on the burglar's part, nor was he in any doubt as to the swag he wanted. Pushing aside boxes and papers that might have interested the average thief, the masked marauder came out with bundles of currency, that he counted rapidly in the light, then stacked into four even piles.

A hand picked up the light, swung it from the safe. The glow fixed on a stack of packages in a corner. With stealthy stride, the crook obtained a package, unwrapped it, and flung a batch of printed business reports upon the floor. Returning to the safe, he used the wrapping paper to inclose the stacks of currency.

Again, the light was propped against the hat, so that the hands could tie a string around the bundle, which they did quite easily, despite the handicap of the cellophane gloves.

Sensing that the light would be coming in his own direction, The Shadow made a careful trip around the long table, to the corner that the crook had left. From that position, he watched further operations.

At odd moments, The Shadow glimpsed the masked face, along with the hands; saw eyes glisten through slits in the mask. But there wasn't a trace of other features; the mask came too low.

Remembering that Ted Lycombe had a broad, strong jaw, The Shadow wasn't surprised that the crook was using a mask that covered his entire face.

Twice, the light swung toward the directors' table. On the first trip, a hand lifted the package of money and placed it on the table. The next time, it brought a heavy satchel and laid it beside the package.

The satchel interested The Shadow.

Since the bag was large enough to take the money, it was obvious that it must have other contents; items necessary to this crime. Yet the outer door had been opened very easily, needing no instrument larger than a jackknife; and the safe had been handled by knowledge of the combination.

While the mobster was turning back to close the safe, The Shadow moved from the corner and reached the table. He heard the safe thump shut, caught the crinkle of cellophane as the crook removed his gloves. The Shadow slid back to the corner just as the light began to swing his way.

Through the slits of the mask, keen eyes studied the package and the satchel on the table, noted that their angles were slightly changed. Ted Lycombe had boasted that he could be cool in a pinch; this was a test

of the very sort that Ted had meant. The Shadow watched to see how the masked marauder handled it.

AN instant later, the light was sweeping toward The Shadow's corner. Into its path came a revolver, ready to bark the instant the glow showed a living target.

Without waiting to draw an automatic, The Shadow drove into the light, hurling a missile ahead of him: one of the heavy bundles from the corner.

The Shadow wanted to take this lone adversary alive and unhurt, a living trophy for the law. He had flung the package toward the crook's gun hand; ducking it, the masked foe fired wide. An instant later, The Shadow was grappling with his enemy.

They reeled across the room, and sprawled when they struck the wall. Hearing the revolver clatter away, The Shadow relaxed his grip, to pull an automatic and press it against his adversary. He was drawing the gun, coming to his feet, when something swished down and struck him.

It was a hard, bashing blow, that drove The Shadow's slouch hat down over his eyes. He heard a splitting sound about his ears, felt something encase his shoulders. Reeling away, he managed to get his gun around a blocky thing that caught his arm; but when he fired, his aim was wide.

A revolver was answering with hurried shots. The crook had found his lost gun and was making for the door, carrying his bundle and satchel with him. The door slammed as The Shadow reached it; with a black-gloved hand, the cloaked fighter found the light switches and pressed them.

The thing that girded The Shadow was the portrait of old Thomas Drober. High in the wall was the deep-set, oblong niche from which the safe-cracker had taken it. Evidently he had left the painting on the floor, intending to replace it. He had used it as a weapon instead.

Meeting The Shadow's head, the thin canvas had punctured, the frame had gone down over the cloaked fighter's shoulders.

Yanking the ruined portrait over his head, The Shadow flung it aside. Picking up the bundle that he had thrown from the corner, he shoved it beneath his cloak.

He expected more battle when he reached the ground floor; chances were that the combat would begin in full light. No better shield could be had than a bundle of wrapped paper sheets, if bullets came The Shadow's way.

As he neared the floor below, The Shadow heard a door slam with a force that broke its glass panel. The masked crook had stopped at an office, losing some of the ground that he had gained. But he was still far enough ahead to be safe from The Shadow's gunfire.

On the ground floor, the watchman heard the noise of the descent, the shots that accompanied it. Drawing a gun, he started toward the stairs. He saw a masked man reach the second floor, carrying a satchel in his left hand, a large, wrapped bundle under his right arm. Before the watchman could fire, the crook began to shoot with his right hand.

The watchman ducked out toward the gate. Handicapped by the bundle, the crook hadn't been able to clip him. Shots came from the gate itself; the watchman made a frantic dive into an office doorway. But the bullets weren't aimed at him.

Griff was shooting the lock from the gate. Shoving the jointed barrier to one side, he yelled:

"C'mon, Ted!"

The gritty watchman leaped out to block the crook with the mask. The satchel swung in his direction; he ducked as he fired. Then guns were blasting in earnest from the open gate. It would have been sure death for the unlucky watchman, if rescue had not come.

A WEIRD laugh issued from the stairs. With it, a cloaked form lunged forward, bounding from the bottom steps in one tremendous leap.

The Shadow's form was like a living arrow, his out-thrust gun the metal tip. The big .45 was streaking deadly flame from its ample muzzle, tonguing shots for the murderous mobbies who had opened fire on the watchman.

Insurgng crooks sprawled. The masked fugitive dived between them, to reach the sidewalk. He lost his hat as he went, and was lucky that his head did not stay in it. The Shadow's next shot nipped the hat, flipped it to a corner of the lobby.

Griff had gone, too. He and his masked pal were in a car when The Shadow reached the sidewalk. The arrival of The Shadow was a signal for shots from various spots across the street. Even with the shielding bundle beneath his cloak, The Shadow could not risk a fray in the open against ambushed crooks.

Dropping back into shelter, he poked his gun past the gate edge and picked off gunmen who were rising for better aim, thinking that they had The Shadow on the run. A few such incidents were enough for the remaining snipers.

Griff had told them to cover the getaway. The car was gone. Ducking from their doorways, the sharpshooters made for alleys, to reach their cars. Their flight was none too soon. Police cars were quick to cover any trouble in this district. The law was already closing in.

When the rescued watchman crawled out to greet arriving officers, he told a story that they wouldn't have believed, except for the evidence in the form of outstretched, groaning crooks.

The watchman kept confusing them with his tale of a masked fighter and a cloaked one. It took them a while to understand that he was talking about separate persons.

"The fellow in the cloak was after the guy with the mask," explained the watchman, finally, "and it was the masked guy that got away with the bundle and the suitcase. Only, he pretty near didn't get away!"

Stepping to the corner of the lobby, the watchman picked up a brown hat, that had a bullet hole through it.

"The guy with the mask was wearing this," affirmed the watchman. "You see how close the other fellow came to getting him."

Since the masked crook had gotten clear, the officers looked for the "other fellow" instead. He was gone, too. In fact, by that time The Shadow was a few miles away, riding in Moe's cab. Moe had been waiting in another street; but on this occasion, he had been parked around the wrong corner.

Moe hadn't been able to risk running the crossfire, while The Shadow was shooting it out with Griff's trigger men. By the time the enemy had been routed, Moe was too late to carry The Shadow along Griff's trail.

The cabby expected The Shadow to start for the neighborhood of Ted's hideout; instead, his chief ordered him to drive uptown. The thing puzzled Moe, because he could not remember any time when The Shadow had let crooks get scot-free with their loot.

Maybe The Shadow had some reason behind it. There were times, Moe knew, when he let fellows like Ted Lycombe dwell in what they thought was security, so that he could surprise them later. But this case was different.

Crooks had done a job, and had departed with a first-class haul. So, at least, Moe thought, for he had seen a masked man reach a car carrying a bundle of boodle.

It happened that Moe had not seen the package that The Shadow carried beneath his cloak. It was resting on the rear seat beside the cloaked passenger. The Shadow was bending over it; still wearing his thin gloves, he was carefully addressing the package to Howard Burman, president of the Drober Corporation.

The package, itself, was the reason for the soft laugh that The Shadow uttered. It was a tight package, but its wrinkles told that it was a trifle smaller than the others in the corner of the Drober office. They merely contained printed statement sheets.

This package held one hundred and sixty thousand dollars in cash!

THE SHADOW'S ruse had worked. In moving from the corner of the office, he had brought an ordinary bundle and switched it for the one on the table. He had turned the satchel at an angle, so that the masked crook would notice the bag rather than the package, if he observed anything.

When they came to divide the profits, partners in crime would find themselves losers. Through battle and flight, they had saved their hides, and nothing more. Crime had been nullified before the fray began.

The Shadow required suitable guarantees before he allowed crooks leeway. In this case, he had taken cash in advance.

CHAPTER XIII. THE DOUBLE RIDDLE

THE morning newspapers carried extensive accounts of robbery and battle, which did not please the directors of the Drober Corporation. They liked their holding company to stay out of the limelight; they didn't like to admit that the stolen funds were for the purchase of another group of chain stores.

By afternoon, however, the directors were smiling again. Howard Burman was particularly pleased, when he arrived at the office of Police Commissioner Weston.

Inspector Cardona was holding a conference with the commissioner, and another man was present. Weston started to introduce him to Burman; ordinarily, the name of Lamont Cranston would have impressed the president of the Drober Corporation.

But Burman had no time for introductions. He thudded a suitcase on the desk; opened it, to dump the contents of a broken package. A flood of currency poured upon the desk.

"The stolen funds!" exclaimed Burman. "They came back to us this afternoon, by parcel post!"

Both Weston and Cardona stared with incredible eyes. Then, while the commissioner was pawing the money, the ace inspector studied the wrapper.

Burman's name and address were inscribed in scrawling letters; it would be difficult to identify the sender of the package. There was a humorous touch in the words "Printed Matter," which appeared in a corner of the wrapper; but Cardona did not appreciate it.

Joe was puzzling over a real riddle.

From all reports, crooks had made away with the money, blocking off The Shadow's pursuit. Cardona couldn't figure any way in which The Shadow could have recovered the swag; it seemed, therefore, that Ted Lycombe must have returned it.

Commissioner Weston thought the same.

"Lycombe is new to crime," observed Weston. "He must have become soft-hearted."

"Or soft-headed," corrected Cardona. "Still, it doesn't make sense, commissioner. "Griff Conlad surely wouldn't have let him send this dough back."

Theories didn't interest Burman; nor was he in a merciful mood. Putting his case bluntly, he was willing that the law should take credit for the recovery of the funds, but in return for that favor, he expected the prompt arrest of the crooks concerned.

"We know the man we want," assured Weston. "He already has a murder charge against him, and we are taking the proper methods to apprehend him. I can assure you that we will apprehend Ted Lycombe very shortly. Meanwhile, Mr. Burman, I recommend that you place these funds in a safe-deposit vault."

Only Cranston noticed Cardona's wince, when Weston mentioned Ted. Joe didn't like the plan of reaching Ted through Marian. So far, it hadn't brought results, but the commissioner had insisted that Cardona keep on with it.

To convince Burman that the law was on the job, Weston called for Cardona to summarize the evidence.

"We've traced Lycombe's part pretty clearly," declared Cardona. "He got into an office on the floor below yours, Mr. Burman; that's where he waited, until you and the directors left. He was careful when he broke into your premises, and he did a neat job opening the safe. He didn't leave a single fingerprint.

"But he made a slip when he took the money. He dropped this" - Cardona displayed a band that had come from a stack of money - "and we found it on the floor outside the safe. You don't need a microscope to see the fingerprints. They stand right out."

Burman saw the fingerprints, and smiled. "Lycombe's prints, of course -"

"They've got to be," interposed Cardona, grimly. "Frankly, Mr. Burman, we don't have Lycombe's prints. He is new to crime, and they hadn't been recorded. But when we get Ted Lycombe, we'll print him and compare with these. I'm having photostats made of them."

Shrugging, Burman remarked that the prints might not be Lycombe's at all.

"I said they had to be," insisted Cardona. "We picked up Lycombe's hat, and identified it by traces of initials that showed up plainly under the ultraviolet test. Since Lycombe was the masked man, these fingerprints must be his.

"What's more, the watchman heard someone yell the name 'Ted,' and we're pretty sure that it was Griff who hollered. The crooks that we captured won't talk, but they were all fellows who know Griff Conlad."

CARDONA did not add that nearly every crook in town knew Griff. It was ticklish business, dealing with a chap like Burman, who had his money back and wanted the law to show results.

Cardona was examining the package that had contained the money, hoping that it would show prints,

too. But even under the portable violet-ray projector that Weston kept in the office, the paper showed an absolute blank.

"I shall leave the riddle of the money to you, commissioner," declared Burman, in a pompous tone. "And let me remind you of another. We still have to learn how Ted Lycombe discovered the combination of the safe, when I was the only person who knew it."

"We shall look into that," promised Weston. "Our methods are thorough, Mr. Burman -"

"Not as thorough as they might be," inserted Burman, as he rose from his chair. "I consider it an oversight that you do not have fingerprints of Ted Lycombe. Any man who might possibly be concerned in crime should be fingerprinted."

Commissioner Weston suppressed his indignation. He didn't want trouble from an important man like Burman. While Weston was thinking of some way to deflate Burman's haughty attitude, Cranston came to the rescue with the calm query:

"Have you ever been fingerprinted, Mr. Burman?"

"Why... why" - Burman was purpling - "why, of course not! What right have you to ask?"

The Shadow ignored Weston's gestures for caution.

"You said that you alone knew the combination of the safe," he told Burman. "I should think that you would be quite grateful to Commissioner Weston, because he has placed the burden on Ted Lycombe. Otherwise, Mr. Burman, you would be the logical suspect."

Burman's purple turned to pallor. He was really scared, as he insisted that he had been with some of the other directors for a full hour after the meeting. He wanted his listeners to believe his alibi, and he thrust his hands forward plaintively.

"They're clean!" he insisted in a quavering tone. "I assure you of it. Take my fingerprints, commissioner -"

Catching a nod from Cranston, Weston beckoned to Cardona, who gravely took impressions of Burman's fingers and compared the prints with those on the money band that had been found near the safe.

Burman gave a sigh of huge relief when Cardona announced that the prints did not match. He was still shaking when he left the office.

"Many thanks, Cranston," chuckled Weston. "You took the wind out of that bag in fine style! We can go about our business with no further argument from Burman. But speaking of business, let's get down to it."

By business, Weston meant the two riddles that perplexed them. He and Cardona thrashed out the matter of the money. They could not find a satisfactory explanation covering its return. All the while, The Shadow listened silently; the masklike face of Cranston showed no change of expression.

The Shadow could have answered the first riddle, had he chosen. But he saw no reason to do so. Only one point was important. The money had been returned and, therefore, crime was nullified.

But the second riddle was a different matter. The Shadow could vouch that it was a real one. Burman had put the question very plainly: how had the crooks learned the combination of the safe? Only Burman knew it; he had divulged it to no one.

AS Weston and Cardona debated the problem, The Shadow's eyes took on a distant gaze. He was picturing a scene that he had not witnessed, but one that he could properly visualize, for he knew well the place in question.

He was thinking of the office where the directors had met, with its long table, flanked by men on either side, Burman seated at the head. Above Burman, The Shadow visualized the portrait of old Thomas Drober, benignly gazing its approval.

The Shadow remembered that portrait well. He could recall the crackle of its canvas when it had smashed him in the darkness. Odd that The Shadow's foe had used the painting as a weapon; yet not odd, considering that the masked burglar had previously removed the picture from the wall.

The real question was: Why had the painting been removed at all? The answer, once obtained, would explain the riddle of the discovered combination; of that, The Shadow was quite sure.

Had Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona been less ardent in their discussion of the riddle, they might have heard the faint whisper of a laugh that came from the lips of Lamont Cranston.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. TRAILS CONVERGE

MARIAN FARRIS stood by the window of her hotel room, watching the twinkle of lights as they appeared in the gathering dusk. The thing seemed magical, as if some invisible hand had begun to dot the skyscape with luminous pencil point.

Usually, the scene intrigued Marian; but this evening, she ignored the lights and studied the darkness below.

Last night, outside the hotel, she had met Peeper. Posing as a furtive panhandler, the little man had told her how and where she could meet Ted Lycombe. But detectives had been about; they hadn't recognized Peeper when he sidled away, but they had kept close tabs on Marian.

Tonight, the girl intended to dodge them. It was dark enough to start. Marian stepped to the door and opened it. Instantly, she heard creaky footsteps sneaking down the hall. No wonder they called detectives "gumshoes"!

But ridicule didn't help Marian's cause; she realized, quite hopelessly, that she would be trailed from the very minute that she left the room.

Very well, she wouldn't leave. It was only seven o'clock, but she'd go to bed and stay there. Cardona's bloodhound could pace the hall all night. Slamming the door to tell the detective that she knew he was about, Marian undressed, flinging her clothes everywhere as she stamped about the room.

When she came to her shoes, she kicked them against the door as an added token of defiance. In looking for a nightgown, she yanked open all the bureau drawers and slashed them shut again, making all the noise she could. By then, she felt like breaking up the furniture, but managed to desist.

Instead, she put on the nightie and hurled herself into bed, so violently that a couple of bed slats rattled to the floor, adding a final chord to the symphony of din.

The only sounds that Marian stifled were her sobs. She was crying, from anger as much as disappointment, when the telephone bell began to ring. Popping her head up from the pillows, she sat

rigid, almost afraid to answer the ring.

It might be Ted!

If so, the call would surely be overheard, for Marian knew that there was another detective in the lobby, watching the switchboard. Yet there was nothing to do but answer the telephone, so Marian picked up the receiver and gave a choked: "Hello."

It was Archie Freer. He and Guy Winrow were having dinner at the Mayberry Grill and hoped that Marian could join them. At first, the girl declined, but Archie, as usual, was insistent. Finally struck with an idea, Marian agreed to come.

Gathering together her scattered clothes, Marian dressed rapidly. She left the hotel and took a cab, which was promptly trailed by another one, that had a detective as a passenger. But Marian did not care. She felt that sooner or later she could shake clear. Her dinner date promised an opportunity.

At the Mayberry Grill, Marian found a glum-faced man dining with Archie and Winrow. They introduced him as Terry, their bodyguard from headquarters. Marian gave Terry a pleasant smile; then, glancing toward the window, she gasped in pretended alarm.

Archie saw Marian's expression, and seemed puzzled. Winrow shrank back in his chair, ready to dive under the table. Terry gave a gruff laugh, as he saw a blocky man outside the window. He recognized the fellow's glum face.

"It's only Saunders."

"A friend of yours?" queried Marian. Then, brightly: "Another detective?"

Terry nodded.

"He's looking out for you, Miss Farris," explained Terry, tactfully. "Inspector Cardona decided that you needed a bodyguard, too."

"Why, how exciting!" exclaimed Marian. "Why don't you invite him in to dine with us, Mr. Terry?"

When Saunders drifted past again, Terry beckoned. He received negative head-shakes at first, but finally Saunders entered and was introduced. He caught on to the "bodyguard" business as soon as Terry repeated the bluff. From then on, the dinner became convivial.

MARIAN was the life of the party. She encouraged the headquarters men to tell of their experiences in upholding law and order; they responded so fluently that Marian had finished her dessert while they were still busy with their steaks.

Archie and Winrow were listening, too, but the detectives were matching yarns to win the favor of the brown-haired girl whose wide blue eyes and lovely lips seemed to be drinking in everything they said.

Neither Terry nor Saunders realized the real thoughts behind the baby-doll expression that Marian was faking for their benefit.

Marian knew that she had won the confidence of the two detectives; that they would trust her within reason, despite Cardona's orders. Her present problem was to find a satisfactory excuse that would enable her to leave the restaurant.

Opportunity came suddenly. A surprised voice spoke from beside the table; Marian turned to see

Sherwood Gern. Attired in evening clothes, the florid promoter was smoothing his hair, as he chortled a greeting.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Gern "Fancy meeting all of you here! Sort of an old-home day, isn't it? Why don't we celebrate and go to a night club?"

The idea suited Archie, but Winrow began a protest. He didn't like night clubs; his face paled at the very mention. They were places where mobsters went, he argued, and maybe it wouldn't be safe. But Archie smothered the arguments.

"We'll have Terry with us," he reminded, "and Saunders, too. You can get back to your gadgets later, Winrow. I'm tired of watching you fool with them. I've got an extra tux over at the apartment; one that would fit you. Let's go."

Mention of the tuxedos fitted with the plan that Marian was rapidly forming. Glancing at her dark-gray dress, she remarked a bit ruefully:

"I'll have to go back to the hotel and change to an evening gown. But it won't take me very long." She turned to Gern and asked, hopefully: "Are you going uptown, to your apartment, Mr. Gern?"

"Why, yes, since there will be some time to spare."

"Then you can drop me off at the Wessex," decided Marian. "I'll wait there for all of you. I hope the night club won't be too noisy, because" - she was looking at Terry and Saunders - "I want to hear more of your marvelous experiences."

As Marian was leaving with Gern, the two detectives exchanged under-toned comments. It was Saunders who spoke first.

"D'you think I need to trail her? Morgan is stationed outside the Wessex. He'll see her sure, when she gets there."

"Give him a call while she's on the way," advised Terry. "That ought to cover it."

"The inspector said not to leave her out of sight."

"She isn't out of sight. Gern's with her."

Saunders nodded. "This bodyguard bluff is a good dodge," he said. "It makes it a cinch for me. It would be too bad to queer it, after the dame fell for it so easy. I'll call Morgan."

RIDING in the cab with Gern, Marian kept looking out through the rear window, to see if another car was following. Gern noticed the action; his face showed concern when Marian turned to gaze at him. In her most serious tone, the girl asked:

"Tell me, Mr. Gern, do you still feel as you did the other day? About Ted?"

"I do," returned Gern. "This new crime of his has made me even more regretful. If he had only told me how badly he needed the money, I could have given him part of it."

"You still think that you would pay him the full amount? As soon as the money comes through?"

"Of course! It is Ted's money. What he has done cannot alter my own obligation. What is more, I shall have the money tomorrow afternoon. I wish I knew how to send it to Ted."

Marian gripped Gern's arm, took another look back through the window. Then, in a low tone, she confided:

"I can reach Ted. I am going to see him tonight, and I can arrange to meet him again. If you will have the money -"

"It will be ready, in cash, at my apartment. I can give it to you tomorrow night, or any time after that."

They were approaching a corner, where Marian saw another cab parked in front of a small night club. She told the driver to stop; then, turning to Gern, she said that she would be at the Hotel Wessex, later. With that, the girl stepped to the street.

The cabby in front of the night club argued that he was expecting other passengers, but when Marian flaunted a five-dollar bill he decided to take her as a fare. Soon, Marian was on her way again, bound to a different destination than the Wessex.

She was confident that no one was on the trail, but she was wrong.

Up ahead, keen eyes were peering from the rear window of a cab that had paced Marian all the way from the Mayberry Grill, and had waited around the next corner while she made her transfer.

The Shadow liked that system of following trails. With Moe Shrevnitz as his driver, he could always depend upon quick trips around a block when the car that he was watching turned off from a street. Picking up the trail again, Moe would stay in back awhile; then pass the other car and use the original system.

Meanwhile, Sherwood Gern continued his own trip home. He lived in an apartment house, where he had an office on the ground floor and a penthouse on the roof.

Reaching the penthouse, Gern poured himself a drink and lighted a cigar. His eyes narrowed as he gazed out into the darkness. Gern was thinking over the possible consequences of Marian's meeting with Ted.

He was wondering, too, how soon he ought to start over to the Wessex, when a knock at the door announced a visitor.

Opening the door, Gern blinked as he faced Inspector Joe Cardona. The case was the reverse of the time when Griff Conlad had called on Marian, demanding to know where Gern was. Cardona was here to ask Gern concerning Marian.

"IS Miss Farris here?" demanded Joe. "Or did she stop off somewhere along the line? Don't tell me you left her at the Wessex. I've just heard that she didn't show up there."

"She left my cab," admitted Gern, "outside a little night club called the Place Elite. I think she intended to take another cab."

"To meet Ted Lycombe?"

"I believe so. I thought it would be well to do so, inspector, because -"

"What you think," snapped Cardona, "is your business - and your business seems to be minding other people's! It didn't occur to you, did it, that we might be watching the Farris girl, so as to get a lead on Lycombe?"

Gern stared, open-mouthed; then, rallying, he became insistent.

"But I was trying to help you, inspector!" he declared. "I told Marian that I'll have money for Ted tomorrow night. She said she would arrange to take it to him. I pretended I that I felt friendly toward Ted, but that was only to arrange a trail for you."

It was Cardona's turn to stare. He wound up with a grin, and clamped his hand on Gern's shoulder.

"Good enough," decided Cardona. "I'll see you later, Gern. Only, I've got to make a stab at finding the girl right now. It's only one chance in a million, but I'll have to go through with it, to square things when I report to the commissioner."

Leaving Gern's, Cardona made a speedy trip to the Place Elite. Inside the club, he found a stiff-faced bouncer, who didn't remember any brown-haired girl who looked like Marian.

"Maybe she took Schuley's hack," volunteered the bouncer. "He always hangs around here, because he knows a lot of the customers. Maybe" - the bouncer peered from the door - "maybe that's Schuley coming back now."

The cab was Schuley's. Sight of Cardona's badge awoke the cabby's recollections. Schuley not only nodded, when Cardona described Marian; he remembered exactly where he had taken her. Throwing a suspicious glance at the stiff-faced bouncer, Cardona cut the conversation short.

"Never mind telling me where you took her," he snapped. "Get me there, and make it swift."

While the cab was cavorting around a corner, Joe Cardona grabbed the hand strap and settled back with a satisfied grin. He had played the chance in a million and had picked a winner. He was confident that the reunion between Ted and Marian would be a prolonged one; that he would be clamping handcuffs on a murderer within the quarter-hour.

Two trails had met - those of Ted and Marian. Cardona was adding a third: his own. He didn't stop to figure that there might be a fourth: The Shadow's. Often, in the past, Joe Cardona had learned how important The Shadow's presence could prove.

He should have recognized that he would need the cloaked fighter's aid upon the present expedition.

CHAPTER XV. DIVIDED BATTLE

THE Five Spot Cafe was an enigma. Whether it had a good reputation or a bad one was an unanswered question. Located near the East Side, it drew considerable trade from the business area around it; but there were times when noisy and unruly patrons drifted in from the borders of the underworld. Often there was trouble when the factions mixed.

Underlying the trouble was a game called Cheerio. It was played with dice, at eating tables, and was regarded as an innocent pastime, until the stakes became too high. Then the participants were ushered to a back room, where they would be out of sight.

When that occurred, the tougher element muscled in. With proper persuasion, Cheerio was forgotten, and a crap game reigned instead.

Recently, the Five Spot had been running on good behavior. The stolid barkeeper shook his head whenever respectable customers asked about the rear room. Meanwhile, thuggish patrons sat glumly by, warming their crooked dice in anticipation of the time when the ban would be lifted.

Only a few really knew why the rear room was closed tonight. It had been reserved for a very special customer, whose presence, if known, would have caused a rapid exodus among the patrons. The man in

the rear room was Ted Lycombe; this was the place where Griff Conlad had arranged the meeting with Marian Farris.

Ted wasn't eating tonight. He was drinking, pouring his liquor straight, from a half-emptied bottle. He was surly, argumentative, as he faced Marian across a table. When the girl rose as if to leave, Ted gave a contemptuous snarl.

"Going, huh?" he demanded. "Well, don't forget to use the back door. Unless you prefer the window" - he gestured over his shoulder - "which is the route I'll have to take, if any coppers show up."

"I'm sorry, Ted," pleaded Marian, bravely. "But you aren't yourself tonight."

"Whoever said I was myself?"

Marian shook her head, as if she didn't understand. Thickly, Ted tried to explain.

"They call me a murderer," he argued. "because a bunch of heels like Freer, Winrow and those other guys gave a garbled story about what happened to Frank Barstead."

"I understand, Ted. I know you didn't intend to kill Frank."

"Intend to kill him?" Ted's attempt at a smile was more like a leer. "Say - how are they going to prove I did kill him? What've they got for evidence? Only a cigarette case."

"It was your cigarette case, Ted."

"I'll tell 'em I sold it to Frank," retorted Ted. "One night when I needed five bucks bad."

He poured himself another drink. Tilting his gaze, he saw Marian shake her head. Before she could speak, Ted interjected:

"Don't talk about that Drober job. They can't pin it on me. Do they think I'd be sap enough to leave my fingerprints around, and send back dough after I'd gotten hold of it?"

Shoving his glass aside, Ted rose. His anger seemed to lift with him. He shoved his brawny hands forward, clutching them as if reaching for an imaginary neck.

"Dough!" he repeated. "If I could get hold of Sherwood Gern, I'd wring my money out of him! If I'd been able to pay off Frank, I'd have been clear before this all began!"

"So Gern thinks," assured Marian. "He has promised me the money, Ted, so I can bring it to you."

"The twenty-five thousand?"

"In cash, Ted," the girl replied. "He will have it at his apartment from tomorrow afternoon on."

"Then Griff and I can lam!" In his enthusiasm, Ted seemed quite sober. "He's a real pal, Griff is. They've got him all wrong, like they have me. You get the money, Marian. Griff will send Peeper to tell you where to bring it."

STARING steadily as he spoke, Ted looked beyond the girl. The door of the room was opening, so cautiously that Ted thought it was a friend.

Then, as the door took an inward jolt, Ted sprang to his feet. Whipping a gun from his pocket, he shifted, to place Marian between himself and the man who shoved into the room.

Ted, in his turn, was covered by a revolver - a Police Positive, gripped by Joe Cardona. The inspector's swarthy features were poker-faced, as he met the gaze of the square-jawed man that he had come to get. Hearing Cardona's tone, Marian sat petrified.

"Take it easy, Lycombe," advised Cardona. "We don't want Miss Farris to get hurt. Why don't you do like she says: give yourself up and face things out in court?"

Cardona was playing a hunch, calculating that Marian had made such suggestions, which, in fact, she had, early in her talk with Ted. But Joe's words produced a curious effect upon Ted's drink-befuddled brain. Ted let his gaze fix on Marian.

"So you're playing stoolie," Ted snarled. "Just a sweet little pigeon, doing the decoy act! Your friend the copper doesn't want you to get hurt. Good enough!"

With a quick grab, Ted caught Marian's gray dress, yanked her straight toward him. Her mad wrench ripped the dress from neck to waist: but Ted's swift hand clamped her shoulder. With the girl as a helpless shield, Ted aimed for Cardona. Already through the doorway, Joe was diving for a corner.

Ted's gun was spitting leaden hail that would have reached Cardona, except for Marian's valiant struggle. Two shots were all that the girl could manage to divert; her face tilted up, she saw the gun poke just above her eyes, aim straight toward the corner.

Ted had clamped her arms behind her; the girl could only shut her eyes and groan.

Before Ted could press the trigger, Marian was jolted half across the room. She heard the gun blast; Ted's snarl accompanied the report.

Eyes opened, Marian saw that he was sprawling, too. Springing toward Ted was the figure that had bowled him from the center of the room, knocking his aiming gun aside.

Marian recognized the black-cloaked fighter who had launched in from the open window to save Cardona's life.

The Shadow!

Half on his feet, Ted was making a frenzied grapple against the formidable foe. The Shadow shoved Ted toward the open door; as they thumped the wall, both their hands seemed to claw the light switch. The room was plunged into darkness as they reeled into the passage beyond.

Marian managed to block Cardona when he drove for the door. She was helped by the fact that Joe missed the opening by a few feet. Stopped by the wall, he heard her pleas. She was begging him to let The Shadow capture Ted alive.

Answering that he'd do his best, Cardona pulled a flashlight and pointed it toward the passage. Rising, Marion stumbled in the tangle of her ruined dress; kicking away the torn garment, she followed Cardona's path. As they came to a cross passage, Joe thrust out a blocking arm.

Ted had broken free of The Shadow and was diving out into the rear alley, spurred by the fierce mockery of the cloaked avenger's laugh. Hard upon the mirth came gun stabs that Marian thought meant death for Ted, until she realized that the spurts were directed toward the front of the passage.

Guns answered, interspersed with howls. The Shadow was shooting toward the front room of the cafe, where mobbies, mixing with the regular customers, had sprung up to battle their archfoe, The Shadow. But they had framed themselves as targets, in the light, the moment that they yanked open the door to the

rear passage.

UNSCATHED, The Shadow was driving forward to settle that nest of dangerous foemen. His only course against such numbers was to carry the attack into their midst and rout them.

Cardona made for the rear exit; moving a few steps forward, Marian gazed in utter fascination at the fight in the front room.

Men with guns were sprawling across tables; one was rolling over the bar, writhing as he went. Others didn't stop to use the front door, which was already crowded; they smashed the plate-glass windows with their guns and crashed right through the cracking glass.

The door was clear when The Shadow reached it, for he dropped one gunner who had wheeled to fire back at him. Clearing the toppling thug, The Shadow reached the sidewalk. Two guns were spurting; both were The Shadow's.

Then the cloaked fighter was gone in pursuit of fleeing stragglers. The echoes of his gunshots faded; the only sound that followed was the trailing echo of a weird laugh, its taunt triumphant.

Marian realized, then, that she had heard shots from out back, as well. Though puny in comparison with The Shadow's gunnery, they could have been important. Turning, Marian shrank suddenly away from a flashlight's glow.

It was Joe Cardona. Reaching Marian, he spoke gruffly, but his hand was gentle as he touched the girl's huddled shoulder, which bore deep scratches from the clutch of Ted's clawing fingers. Cardona's sympathy was rough, but sincere.

"Ted got away," he told Marian. "Griff was waiting for him, in a car. Maybe you're glad; maybe you aren't. Anyway, kid, I don't blame you for coming here. I should have shown up sooner. Go get your dress, and I'll send you to the Wessex in a cab."

No one was waiting at the hotel. Cardona had phoned ahead to cancel Gern's party. Reaching her room, Marian was genuinely glad to see her bed, for she was very bedraggled and unhappy. Undressing wearily in the darkness near the window, she stared at distant lights; they blurred before her tear-filled gaze.

For long minutes Marian stood there, her hand pressed to an aching shoulder that carried pangs which seemed to reach her heart. She was thinking of Ted, the true Ted that she had formerly known, wishing that he could be present to comfort her. But such a Ted Lycombe no longer existed.

Off amid the distant lights, the man of Marian's wish was showing himself in his new form, as he paced the confines of his tiny hide-away. Ted Lycombe was talking to an audience of one: Griff Conlad.

"I told you I'd shoot my way out if they tried to take me," declared Ted. "They've branded me a murderer, so I'll live up to my reputation. It took two of them to save Cardona. I'd have gotten him if it hadn't been for Marian and The Shadow."

"Cardona doesn't count," returned Griff. "It's tough you didn't croak The Shadow."

Pacing past the cot, Ted slashed his hand at a stack of newspapers, scattering them across the floor. Griff heard him mutter Marian's name and inserted a fitting comment.

"I never trust dames," spoke Griff. "I got it out of my system. But every guy has to wise up to himself."

"I'm not sure that Marian double-crossed me," retorted Ted, hotly. "She stood by both of us before."

Maybe she meant what she said tonight, about the dough."

"What dough?"

"The money that Gern owes me. He'll have it up at his place tomorrow, so she can bring it to me."

"Twenty-five G's!" exclaimed Griff. "Say - we can pay off Peeper and the rest of 'em, and still lam with a mittful of real mazuma. Unless it's another double cross."

TED started another argument in Marian's behalf.

Griff ended it by retorting that while Marian might be trusted, Gern certainly couldn't be. In his opinion, the money was bait and nothing more. Gern wasn't a big-hearted guy who could hand over cash that he had a chance to keep. Out of such logic, Griff had a sudden idea.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "That dough is yours, Ted. You know the lay of Gern's joint, so you're the guy to go after it!"

"Before he hands it to Marian," agreed Ted, with a prompt nod. "It will be a cinch, Griff! A sweet idea, unless The Shadow gets in ahead of us."

"Don't worry about The Shadow. I'll cover with the mob. It will be easier, though, if Gern is down in his office."

"He's likely to be, if we move early. Put Peeper on the job, Griff, to tip us off."

Below, a sliding door was moving shut. It closed tight, noiselessly, under the pressure of black-gloved fingers. Outside the entrance to the hide-away, a black-cloaked figure moved stealthily from the dim light.

Long on the trail, The Shadow had gained the thing he sought; a clue to coming crime!

CHAPTER XVI. THE SHADOW'S VISIT

SHERWOOD GERN kept regular office hours, from nine until five. It gave his business tone, which helped considerably in the sort of transactions that he handled. He liked to create a good impression upon the persons that he termed "clients," though they were commonly labeled "suckers," in the trade.

His office was in the apartment building where he lived, for two reasons: first, because the address was a good one; again, he was able to take special visitors up to his apartment and dazzle them with its splendor.

Gern often chuckled over that one. Impressed by the lavish style in which Gern lived, the customers thought that by dealing with him, they would make money, too. Whereas, common sense should have told them that Gern's living expenses were too great for him to share his profits with anyone else.

But common sense seemed something that nobody wanted; probably because it was too cheap.

Near closing time on this particular afternoon, Gern came from his inner office to meet an unexpected visitor. The caller was Lamont Cranston, and Gern greeted him cordially, yet with marked reserve.

Cranston's name was one that Gern had carefully eliminated from all sucker lists. Though wealthy enough to be a prospect, Cranston was a friend of the police commissioner.

Rather than have Cranston discuss business matters, Gern invited the visitor up to the penthouse. They

rode twelve stories in an elevator, and when they reached Gern's living room, the promoter promptly suggested cigars and drinks. Cranston being favorably inclined, Gern felt that he had cleared one hurdle.

"A nice place, Gern," said Cranston, at length. "How many rooms do you have?"

"I'll show you," suggested Gern, glad of the break. "Let's take a look around."

First, Gern opened wide doors, to show a square terrace that offered a three-sided promenade. The fourth side was blocked by the wall of a higher apartment building next door.

Returning through the living room, Gern led the way along a hallway, with rooms on both sides. They came to a room that was furnished with desk and filing cabinet, along with a couch and chairs. The room had barred windows.

"Your study?" inquired Cranston.

"I call it the strong room," laughed Gern. "The previous tenant put the bars in. But I keep no valuables here."

"What do you keep here?"

"Some of my stocks -"

Gern stopped; his teeth made a biting motion against his tongue. Then, angry because he had made the slip, he said very bluntly:

"I happen to have twenty-five thousand dollars here, at present. It is money belonging to Ted Lycombe. I can't send it to his former address, so I am keeping it until he has a future one: the death house at Sing Sing."

Cranston's lips showed a flickering smile, that was reflected in a mirror hanging above the couch. They walked back to the living room; all the way, Gern's eyes were narrow-slitted. He was trying to analyze the purpose behind Cranston's visit.

"I'm glad that Lycombe's money came through," declared Cranston, when they were seated in the living room. "Glad for your sake, Gern."

"Just why?"

"Because it impressed Commissioner Weston," answered The Shadow, retaining his even tone. "He had the erroneous idea that you never sold stocks that brought a profit to the buyer."

Gern leaned forward in his chair.

"Frankly, Mr. Cranston," he stated, "I deal in speculative investments. The commissioner may not like it; neither may you. But I find it a pleasant business, and a legitimate one. If my clients want to take long chances, that is their privilege."

"Quite true, Mr. Gern." Cranston's lips wreathed a smoke ring toward the ceiling. "But I am interested in Lycombe's case. How did you happen to meet the chap?"

"Through Frank Barstead," replied Gern. "Barstead did not like me, but Lycombe did. In return, I liked him. He wanted a sure-shot buy that would double his money. So I sold him Amalgamated Mines because I had more of it than I could carry."

THE telephone was ringing. Gern gave an annoyed shrug, answered it. After that, his whole conversation consisted of yeses and noes, which he uttered in irregular fashion, finally finishing with a "Yes!"

Hanging up, Gern turned to Cranston, with the comment:

"That was the last man I wanted to hear from."

"Who was it?" came Cranston's calm-toned gibe. "Ted Lycombe?"

Gern blinked. Stroking his wavy hair, he forced a laugh.

"A pretty close guess," he said. "It was Guy Winrow. He's a pest, that fellow! He wants me to start a stock company and promote some of his punk inventions. He's coming here, in an hour. I suppose I'll have to talk to him, down in the office."

The Shadow could have asked why the poorness of Winrow's inventions mattered. Most of the things that Gern promoted were no good, anyway. But it was better to tone down the rest of the interview. The Shadow had learned what he wanted: the floor plan of Gern's penthouse.

During the next half hour, the two talked of other matters. Then, remembering that Gern expected Winrow, The Shadow made his departure. In Cranston's best style, he gave Gern a compliment.

"Since we are friends," he told the promoter, "I would appreciate your advice on certain investments. You certainly did well for Lycombe. We must get together again, Gern."

Leaving the apartment building, The Shadow entered his limousine and rode around the block. When he stepped from the car, he was no longer Cranston. Instead, he was a figure cloaked in black, apparently equipped to go back into Gern's building, unobserved.

But The Shadow did not enter Gern's apartment house. He chose the building next door. Going in by a basement entrance, he stopped at a freight elevator, which was loaded with boxes.

The operator had gone off duty: the boxes had been delivered after he left. Running the elevator to the fourteenth floor, The Shadow was met by a man who awaited him.

The fellow's back was toward the light; since the elevator was dark, it was impossible to distinguish his features. When he helped The Shadow carry the boxes to an open apartment, the bulky objects came in front of the man's face. Since the apartment was dark, too, the features of this silent companion remained as concealed as The Shadow's own.

The fact pleased The Shadow.

His companion was Burbank, his technical expert. The less people who saw Burbank, the better. In a sense, Burbank was the mainspring of the machinery that The Shadow used in his warfare against crime.

As contact man, he kept in touch with all the active agents; there were times when he actually ran things, during The Shadow's absence.

Tonight was one of those rare occasions when Burbank was needed on active duty. Nevertheless, the human cogwheel had connected up a switchboard and had a short-wave radio set handy, so that he could continue his contact duties from this empty apartment.

After a glance at the switchboard, Burbank helped The Shadow unpack the boxes that had come up in the freight elevator.

While Burbank was setting up a squarish cabinet, The Shadow unrolled a thin cable and let it down from the window. Below lay the terrace of Gern's penthouse; the wire offered an easy way to reach it.

But the wire also was to serve another purpose, as was evident when The Shadow tucked a round-shaped instrument beneath his cloak.

A WHISPER brought Burbank to the window. The Shadow pointed to the penthouse. Gern was still there, but he was turning off the lights, proof that he was going downstairs to his office.

At last, only a single light remained. It showed from the frosted window of Gern's strong room. The bars were visible against the dim glow.

Burbank understood the reason for the soft laugh that followed. The Shadow hoped that Gern might forget that light. The promoter had left it on when he closed the strong room earlier. It would prove helpful to The Shadow's coming plan.

For Gern's penthouse, dark save for a single light, was the place where crime was due to strike. Easier to be reached than the office of the Drober Corporation, yet quite as important to the crooks who had planned this crime.

The same skillful system that had been used to learn the combination of the Drober safe, might well be employed again.

Not that crooks would have trouble getting Gern's money from the strong-room desk. There was another, and very important reason why neat spy work was needed. Crooks expected The Shadow. They credited him with knowing that they intended an advance theft of the cash, before Gern gave the money to Marian.

The Shadow had made no secret of the fact that he was trying to move ahead of crime, instead of following close behind it. Their loss of the Drober funds had taught crooks that they would have to eliminate The Shadow, to make the future secure for their coming misdeeds. Gern's penthouse was to be the scene of more than a mere robbery.

It was to be a battleground whereon The Shadow was to meet solid opposition from Griff and his mob, when they covered Ted's invasion of the strong room.

Pointing straight downward, The Shadow indicated a square of reflected light that had appeared on a cement courtyard between the two apartment buildings.

The glow was from the window of Gern's inner office. It indicated that the promoter had arrived downstairs. It was the situation that crooks wanted. Crime's hour was almost due.

It merely awaited The Shadow.

Swinging from the window, The Shadow descended the hanging cable hand over hand, until he was just above the level of the penthouse terrace. Burbank saw him press his feet against the wall of the building, give a powerful, outward shove.

Like a human pendulum, The Shadow swung across the space between the buildings and cleared the terrace rail. His feet hooked the parapet, preventing his return. Vague in the darkness, The Shadow was entirely obscured when he dropped beyond the rail. But Burbank could feel the cable go taut, as The Shadow attached it to a post.

Then The Shadow was creeping forward, uncoiling more wire as he went, bound upon one of the most

daring forays that he had ever undertaken.

Only The Shadow could have divined the danger of the game that lay ahead!

CHAPTER XVII. MESSAGE OF DARKNESS

DOWN in his office, Sherwood Gern was shaking hands with two visitors. One was the pasty-faced inventor, Guy Winrow. The other was Inspector Joe Cardona. During the handshakes, Gern caught a gesture from Cardona and answered it with a nod.

"Go into my inner office, Winrow," suggested Gern, brusquely. "I shall be with you in a few minutes."

As soon as the door had closed, Gern turned to Cardona with a questioning air. Joe let his usually emotionless face display a smile.

"I came along, instead of Terry," said the inspector. "He's having dinner with Archie Freer and Marian Farris. Since Winrow was kind of scared to travel alone, I said I'd convoy him.

"It gives me an excuse to be here when the others come over to get Winrow. When I leave, you can give the girl the money. I'll pick up her trail and stick close. Believe me" - Cardona was emphatic - "I'll look out for her! Nothing will happen to that game kid while I'm around!"

The plan pleased Gern. He asked Cardona to wait while he finished with Winrow. Joe said there was no hurry; the others would not arrive for an hour. Gern gave a hopeless gesture, then decided that he could put up with Winrow that long.

"He sent some of his crazy gadgets here," said Gern. "He'll probably want to explain them. So I'll have to listen. But these pests generally wear themselves out, if you let them talk."

Seated in Gern's outer office, Cardona was blithely ignorant of what went on outdoors. His arrival had been spotted by watching crooks along the street and the word passed along.

It reached the top floor of the apartment house, by way of the fire tower. Ted Lycombe and Griff Conlad had already reached that vantage point. They were ready to crack into the penthouse.

Ted was unusually cool. The impatience that he showed was not due to nervousness. It was of a calculating sort.

"The sooner I get started," he told Griff, "the quicker I'll have the dough."

"Unless Gern comes up unexpectedly," returned Griff, "and brings Cardona with him."

"They won't hinder the job," Ted argued. "I've told you how I feel about both of them, the way they've given me the run-around."

"They can hurt the getaway, though," snapped Griff. "So sit tight, until I get a flash from Peeper. He's down below."

Had Ted Lycombe been able to see through the penthouse wall, he might have lost his urge for collecting the cash that he regarded as his property. Already, an invader was moving across Gern's living room, through the darkened hall to the strong room.

The door of the room was unlocked, for Gern simply used it as an upstairs office. Nonetheless, The Shadow entered with his usual caution and followed a course along the wall.

It was a singular sight, that figure moving through a lighted room, considering The Shadow's preference for darkness.

Then, the scene offered a double spectacle. Two Shadows were in the room, as the cloaked fighter passed the mirror near the couch. The figures turned back to back when The Shadow moved toward Gern's desk, to look for the money.

OUTSIDE, Griff was nudging Ted, telling him that the signal had come. Reaching the penthouse door, Griff opened it with a key that he picked from a batch.

Handling locks was Griff's specialty, as he had proven when he removed the handcuffs that Ted had once borrowed from Cardona.

Griff's mob was a strong one. Half a dozen hard-faced thugs followed into Gern's living room. Light from outside showed the scene, though quite dimly. Ted promptly picked the passage leading to the strong room. He saw a crack of light at the end of the hall.

"Gern must have left the lights on," whispered Ted. "Unless he came back up here."

"Don't worry, Ted," returned Griff. "You can handle him."

"You bet I can! What's more, I'd like the chance!"

Ted was reaching for his gun. Griff stopped him. There was a crinkle, as Griff handed over a pair of cellophane gloves, with the reminder:

"Don't forget these, Ted."

Ted slipped one glove on his left hand. Remarking that he wouldn't need the other, he thrust it into his pocket.

Gun drawn, Ted advanced to the strong room, while Griff and the others covered from the front of the hall. They could tell from Ted's handling of his gun that he meant business.

His gloved hand on the door, he turned the knob; then twisted through the opening, showing his gun ahead of him.

In his sweeping motion with the gun, Ted thought that he had covered the entire room. He was wrong. As he shifted past the half-opened door, a cloaked arm sped under his. Before he could press the gun trigger, Ted's hand was numbed by a forceful twist.

Using Ted's arm as a lever, The Shadow whipped him into a tremendous somersault, that carried him clear across the desk.

Ted landed with a crash. At the same instant, The Shadow recoiled from a stooped position, wheeled back to the door and pressed the light switch. All the lights went out except one above the mirror. The Shadow extinguished that single bulb with a shot from an automatic.

Instantly, Griff's yell sounded from the hallway. It was a fierce-throated cry that stood for death:

"The Shadow! Let's get him!"

It was a perfect trap, that strong room. Griff and his crew of first-class trigger-men had all the opportunity they needed to eliminate their superfoe. They were ready to blast the whole place with their bullets, allowing The Shadow no escape.

Griff was letting the others go first, to take the brunt of it. They were starting forward as he yelled, taking it for granted that Griff's guess was right.

Up to that moment, however, they had neither seen The Shadow, nor heard his laugh. They had heard a crash, a gunshot. They knew that the lights had gone out.

So did Burbank. He had been watching the lighted window. Darkness was the message that Burbank awaited. His timely response to The Shadow's signal was evidenced by a prompt result.

Charging crooks heard the laugh of The Shadow - a swelling tone of mockery that ridiculed their drive. Reverberating through the penthouse, it carried a tone of doom. Its very source was proof that The Shadow had a right to taunt them.

The laugh didn't come from the strong room. It was from the living room behind them. Whatever had happened in the strong room must have been a hoax. In charging in that direction, they were putting themselves in the very trap where they had expected to snare The Shadow!

THEY still had a chance for life. For once, they thought, The Shadow had laughed too soon. Wheeling in a mass, the crooks drove back toward the living room, bowling Griff ahead of them. Guns broke loose in a terrific roar that drowned the shivering climax of The Shadow's mirth.

Then, out of its own dwindle, the laugh rose again. It wasn't one laugh; it was two. The false mirth had ended; The Shadow's real challenge was again behind the crooks. It was coming from the strong room, and The Shadow was approaching with it. His guns were talking thunder through the long, low-vaulted hall.

All the advantage that crooks wanted now belonged to The Shadow; with more besides. They were spread around the living room, clutching half-emptied guns, aiming in the wrong direction.

The slight light was sufficient to make them easy targets: whereas, by stopping short of the hallway entrance, The Shadow was safe against any shots except those from straight in front.

He eliminated that hazard with his opening fire; by raking the space in question. Realizing that his cooped pals did not have a chance, Griff made a grab for the door leading out to the terrace and shouted for flight in that direction.

Three of Griff's six followed. Diving for the darkness of the parapet, they stabbed shots too late to get The Shadow, as he whirled from the open doorway and took shelter of his own. Guns were barking wildly, when another batch of crooks came through the outlet that The Shadow had used.

Peeper had arrived with the reserves. The Shadow greeted them with bullets, as they spread. His shots were hard to trace, for he was always on the move, but Griff saw a chance to corner him.

At Griff's shout, desperate killers sprang from half a dozen spots, driving in upon The Shadow, as they had originally intended.

But that corner wasn't a boxed-up strong room. The Shadow was across the parapet, clinging outside it, shooting from cover. Nor was he firing alone.

Shots sounded from the windows of an apartment in the building next door. The Shadow's agents were on the job, firing at Burbank's order. Marksmen in their own right, they were helping their chief suppress the last attack.

Gunfire was supplanted by a sudden silence. As crooks crawled blindly to shelter, a black-cloaked

shape moved along the parapet. Reaching the taut cable, The Shadow gave a sibilant whisper. It was answered from above.

While his own men watched for signs of motion on the terrace, The Shadow climbed the cable. As the angle brought him to the wall of the next building, he swung his feet against it and sped his upward progress.

His guns beneath his cloak, he was depending upon his agents to pick off any surviving snipers. No motion could have escaped that watchful group; they had Hawkeye with them.

By the time The Shadow had reached those higher windows, lights appeared in the penthouse. Inspector Cardona stepped out to the terrace, followed by two uniformed patrolmen. Behind the trio were the astonished faces of Gern and Winrow.

The arrivals had stumbled over crippled mobsters in the living room; they saw more when they viewed the terrace, which caught the light from the open door. It wasn't the sight of the vanquished mob that puzzled them; they were wondering what had happened to the horde.

They heard the answer to that riddle - a strange, vague laugh, its source uncertain, that was like an echo of the battle cry that had gone before. It could have come from anywhere, even from the heart of night itself, that trailing strain of mirth.

Others took that tone to be The Shadow's final triumph; but not Joe Cardona. It wasn't The Shadow's way to leave crime unexplained. To Cardona, that mirth contained an added message.

Crime's reign was not yet finished. The Shadow's hand was to play its part in strange deeds yet to come!

Such was the message that issued from the darkness, spoken by The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE VOICE FROM THE PAST

COMMISSIONER WESTON took his official duties very seriously; so seriously, that he was willing to let business interfere with all pleasures except eating. Dining alone at the Cobalt Club, he was annoyed, therefore, when an attendant summoned him to answer an urgent phone call.

It was Inspector Cardona on the wire, and when Weston heard what Joe had to say, he actually forgot his dinner and left the club at once.

The law had won a signal triumph. Crooks had been stopped cold while attempting burglary in Gern's penthouse.

Best of all, the thing that made Weston eager to reach the scene was the fact that Ted Lycombe had been captured. His supporting mob literally shot away, the wanted murderer had been found, half-stunned and helpless, in Gern's strong room.

Cardona had said something about The Shadow, attributing the clean-up to the mysterious fighter. Weston was grumbling over that point, when his official car pulled up at Gern's apartment, the Kingwood Arms.

It was too easy to credit things to The Shadow. Every time crooks fought among themselves and produced a shambles in their own ranks, the rumor went around that The Shadow had delivered another stroke against crime.

Commissioner Weston preferred to regard The Shadow as a myth.

It was a tall order, even for so self-satisfied a gentleman as Weston. The commissioner had to concede that there was a fighter who called himself The Shadow. In fact, Weston had met such a personage, on more than one occasion.

But Weston still argued that the so-called Shadow might be anyone, perhaps half a dozen people, who took turns cloaking themselves in black.

Commissioner Weston felt that he would like to meet The Shadow and ask him a few pertinent questions.

Uniformed officers stood outside the Kingwood Arms; they saluted the commissioner when he arrived. But when Weston entered the apartment building, he was pushed aside by other men, who did not recognize his importance.

They were hospital interns, carrying stretchers from the elevator to ambulances which Weston had seen outside. Moving back to let the parade pass, Weston eyed the figures on the stretchers, saw their thuggish faces, heard the words they uttered.

Some were staring with wide-bulging eyes, clawing with weak hands, as though trying to drive away some shadowy shape that kept looming into their field of vision. Others were gabbling incoherently in frantic tones.

One wild-eyed thug came up to his elbows, looked straight past the commissioner and shrieked:

"The Shadow!"

Collapsing, the crook lay drooping from his stretcher, his limp hands trailing the floor. Weston shifted uneasily; drew back to a corner, near an inner doorway. He hadn't liked the piercing focus of the dying man's eyes.

Maybe the others were victims of their own imaginations; but that crook had seen something. Perhaps he had heard something, too, for as the last stretcher passed from the elevator, Weston thought that he heard a mirthless laugh whisper through the narrow hallway, like a knell, delivered from invisible lips.

Then, before Weston could step forward, something prodded him between the shoulders. Sensing the rounded tip of a gun, the commissioner let his hands rise.

A sibilant voice spoke in his ear:

"This way, commissioner!"

A HAND gripped Weston's shaking elbow, swung him full about, through a doorway into darkness. With his invisible captor still following him, Weston moved deeper into the gloom.

He realized that he was in Gern's suite of ground-floor offices. He was being conducted through an outer room, into the Stygian depths of an inner office. Weston remembered the place, because he had once called to question Gern regarding some stock transactions of a doubtful sort.

As he recalled it, Gern kept the inner office tightly locked. That the door was open proved that The Shadow's skill at penetrating anywhere was definitely a fact; not an exaggeration.

Jerked backward, Weston found himself seated in a swivel chair; his hands, grabbing instinctively, were clamped upon a desk edge. He could still feel the prodding barrel at his back; he began to sputter indignantly.

The Shadow was real enough, but he had no right to be using a gun as a means of intimidating anyone who represented the law. A throbbing, sinister laugh silenced Weston's outburst.

"Have you seen your friend Cranston lately?" inquired The Shadow, in a low tone that made Weston shudder. "I supposed that he might come along with you.

"Cranston wasn't at the club," gulped Weston. "I don't know where he has been all day."

"He was here, not long ago. I chanced to see him, upstairs in Gern's penthouse."

The Shadow's words were literally true. He was referring to the time when, as Cranston, he had first glanced at the mirror in Gern's strong room.

"Cranston was here?" queried Weston. "Why?"

The Shadow responded with a chuckle.

"He talked of buying stock from Gern," he told Weston, still using the sepulchral tone. "I would advise you to warn him against such a purchase."

Such conversation lessened Weston's dread. He began a fuming protest regarding his present plight.

"I have business here," he began. "Inspector Cardona is starting to quiz Ted Lycombe. I must witness the proceeding -"

Again, The Shadow interrupted with stern sibilance that made the commissioner quail. Reaching to the desk in front of Weston, a gloved hand pressed a switch. A light appeared, but it did not flood the room. The glow came from a small, square screen that stood atop an oblong box.

Weston saw moving blurs upon the screen, heard sounds that reminded him of voices. The picture became clearer, the tones understandable. Wholly fascinated, Weston was leaning forward, staring, when a gloved hand pushed a pad of paper into the area of light.

Pressure removed itself from Weston's back; a moment later, The Shadow was placing a large fountain pen into the commissioner's hand.

"I no longer need this," spoke The Shadow, his tone a low chuckle. "You can use it to take notes, commissioner."

It dawned on Weston that he hadn't been feeling the muzzle of an automatic in the middle of his back. The Shadow had taken him under complete control by nudging him with the big end of the fountain pen, which the cloaked invader had evidently borrowed from Gern's desk!

But Commissioner Weston was no longer in a resentful mood. He was muttering thanks to The Shadow for having brought him here. He heard his cloaked friend move away, but Weston remained at the desk, no longer anxious to go up to the penthouse.

MEANWHILE, in Gern's strong room, Joe Cardona was grilling Ted Lycombe. Cardona had faced Ted toward the couch mirror, and replaced the shattered bulb with a fresh one. He wanted Ted to keep staring at a light; it helped a lot, in connection with a quiz.

Still somewhat groggy, Ted was slow responding to the grilling. Slumped pitifully in his chair, he tried to ignore the light and look at the merciless faces that surrounded him.

He saw Sherwood Gern, glowering with pompous indignation. Beyond was Guy Winrow, his pale

features strained to an expression of real hate. Archie Freer, usually jocular, was glaring at Ted as if remembering the murder of his dead friend, Frank Barstead.

One face, alone, showed sympathy. Marian Farris was present, her lovely features strained with sorrow. Behind that sadness lay a touch of pity, that was almost sympathy. But Ted had no chance to catch Marian's gaze. Cardona was forcing Ted to look at the light again.

"We've got the goods on you, Lycombe!" asserted Cardona, flapping a bundle of money in front of Ted's face. "You came here to steal this cash! You can't deny it."

Ted snapped from his daze.

"It's actually my money!" he retorted, hotly. "A man has a right to take what belongs to him!"

"Not by unlawful entry -"

"Whatever I do is unlawful," gritted Ted. "With you hounding me, how did you expect me to collect what Gern owed me? You can't call this a crime."

For answer, Cardona pulled a cellophane glove from Ted's left hand, yanked another one from the prisoner's pocket. Grabbing Ted's hands, he drove their fingers into a smudgy substance, pressed them promptly against a sheet of paper that lay on a low table.

Comparing the prints with a photostat that he had handy, Cardona showed a perfect match with the impressions from Ted's right hand.

"A smart idea, those gloves," scoffed Joe, "but you slipped, Lycombe, when you were bundling that cash at the Drober Chain office. You had one glove off just long enough to leave your prints on a paper band that dropped from a stack of cash."

Ted stared, his lips failing him. The glare of the light was taking its effect. He seemed bewildered.

"We've settled that case without argument," decided Cardona, "but now we'll get to the start of things, the murder of Frank Barstead. You used a .38 for that job, Lycombe, and the slugs we found in Barstead match those that you tossed at me last night.

"They came from this gun" - Joe dangled Ted's revolver, which he had found lying on the floor - "and we won't have to wait for a firearm identification. Because" - the inspector's chin was thrusting close to Ted's - "I've already recognized the gun!"

He pointed to the handle of the weapon, indicating a missing chunk from its walnut grip. He rubbed his finger across a rough spot in the metal.

"You can't use a gun for a sledge hammer," reminded Cardona, "without expecting it to show. I got a good look at this daisy, down at the Five Spot Cafe. It's yours, right enough, Lycombe!"

"Call it my gun!" retorted Ted. "I didn't plug you with it, did I? You were ready to take a shot at me -"

"Maybe I was," interjected Cardona, "But what about Frank Barstead, the night you murdered him?"

Gripping the chair arms, Ted shoved himself half to his feet. His voice was hoarse, as he shouted:

"Leave Barstead out of it! I don't know anything about him, except that he was a rat! I didn't want to kill him; he wasn't worth the trouble. But -"

TED's sentence ended when Cardona shoved him violently back into the chair. Swinging the incriminating gun right in front of Ted's blinking eyes, Cardona voiced his solid accusation in a tone that told all argument was useless.

"But you did kill Barstead!" The words were as cold as the gun steel. "Four witnesses heard you argue with him; two of them are right here, to remind you of everything you said. They heard the shots when you fired them, Lycombe. Shots that Barstead didn't have a chance to stop - except with his heart. It was murder, Lycombe, and no one can deny it!"

Cardona paused. Dramatically he waited, giving all a chance to break the silence. Not a person moved, nor spoke. Silence was telling its own story, certifying Ted's absolute guilt.

Then, from outside that singularly quiet room came the throb of a strange laugh. It was The Shadow's tone, but its mirth did not rise. Instead, the weird mockery changed to words, uttered in a sibilant tone.

It was a thing of the present, that chilling throb; but listeners were to learn, from its own words, that The Shadow's tone was a voice from the past!

CHAPTER XIX. CRIME IN DUPLICATE

BEFORE The Shadow's words were fully audible, Ted Lycombe gulped a recollection. It was something that he remembered from those dazed moments when he had been lying, half paralyzed, on the floor of this very room.

"The Shadow pulled that trick before!" expressed Ted. "He was here - but he was out there, too! That's where Griff and the mob heard him!"

Cardona yanked the door wider. The living room was lighted; two officers on duty there were puzzled by the sound. They could hear The Shadow, but they couldn't see him. The thing scared them.

"Look around!" bawled Cardona. "Find where the voice is coming from!"

Meanwhile, The Shadow's tone was delivering impressive words, slowly spoken, with the weird emphasis that only his voice could produce.

"I am speaking from the past," announced The Shadow, "to disclose a source of crime. Its story is a strange one -"

There was a jarring crackle, as one of the officers pulled a roundish instrument up from behind a radiator in the living room. Cardona recognized that the device was a loud-speaker. He saw a wire attached to it.

The wire ran out through a window to the terrace, but where it led wasn't important at the moment. Cardona didn't want the voice cut off. He yelled for the officer to set the loud-speaker on the window sill above the radiator.

That done, the crackle ended. The Shadow's tone was coming from a record, that Burbank had placed on a phonograph. The Shadow's trapping of Griff's mob was explained.

Burbank had used a different record, a while before; one that provided a perfect imitation of The Shadow's challenging laugh! Small wonder that crooks had swung in the wrong direction, to meet their invisible foe!

"Let us return to a night of murder," spoke The Shadow's tone. "The place is the apartment where Frank Barstead lived. The time is approximately half past eight."

Cardona heard a shriek behind him. It was uttered by Guy Winrow. The pale-faced man was shouting: "No! No!" as if the very mention of that terrible experience harrowed him. Striding across the room, Cardona pushed Winrow back to the couch, growled for him to be quiet.

By then, the pause had ended; through the hallway came the sound of voices other than The Shadow's, tones that awoke amazing recollections.

Two voices were raised in argument, breaking into disjointed accents. The voices of Ted Lycombe and Frank Barstead!

It was Archie Freer who exclaimed:

"That's what we heard through the transom! Listen - they're arguing about the money, and Marian Farris -"

TED was on his feet, straining away from Cardona's hard clutch. Grabbing at Archie, Ted was trying to make him listen.

"It was earlier than that, Archie," expostulated Ted. "Those are things that Frank and I said that afternoon. Only, they've been changed about; they're twisted -"

Ted's own voice was interrupting him, as it came along the hall from the throat of the loud-speaker. Ted heard himself uttering a threat to Frank, a distorted threat, pieced from words that he had spoken on an earlier occasion.

The voices ended. In their place came scuffling sounds; the muffled report of a gun, which was repeated. Next, a thud, an incoherent groan. Finally, the rattle of a bolt, the slash of an opening door.

Cardona flung Ted back in his chair, then shot a look at Winrow, who was huddled on the couch. Swinging to Archie, Cardona shook him, to get rid of the stupefied look on the fellow's face.

"Was that what you heard?" demanded Cardona. "The time when Barstead was murdered?"

Archie nodded.

"I wonder how The Shadow got hold of that," mused Cardona. "He wouldn't have let Barstead get killed."

"You have listened to a recording," came The Shadow's tone, "prepared by Guy Winrow, prior to the murder of Frank Barstead. You will now hear portions of the original records, from which Winrow prepared his dialogue and sound effects."

Again, the voices of Ted and Frank. They were engaged in their original, and actual, dispute, the one of the afternoon. As their words finished, a string of sound effects began: gunshots, rattles of doors, plus other sounds that Winrow had rejected.

Ted Lycombe took a long spring from his chair. He laid his hands around Winrow's throat, whipped the pale man upright from the couch. Ted was saying something about rats; that choking them was the proper process, when you couldn't poison them.

Marian threw herself into the struggle. She grabbed at Ted's hands, fought to get them away from Winrow's neck. But Ted wouldn't listen to her pleas, even though she begged him to let Winrow confess the guilt that would clear Ted's hands of murder.

Tossing Ted's gun to a chair in the corner, Cardona shoved himself between the strugglers. Marian sank back gratefully as Joe took over.

Ted's hands were loosening their hold; angrily, he pulled back one fist to take a punch at Cardona. The inspector didn't wait for it. He landed an uppercut first.

Ted's ample jaw withstood Cardona's knuckles, but the punch carried him clear of Winrow. Staggering back, Ted swayed in the grasp of the two officers who had come in from the living room. Massaging his hand, Cardona growled:

"That's what Lycombe needed. Maybe he'll keep his head, after this. Any guy that doesn't, only makes himself a sucker!"

Ted heard the words and subsided. He understood what Cardona meant. Ted had proven himself a sucker and a first-class one. Blamed for a crime he didn't commit, he had behaved in the very form that crooks expected. Fighting against the law, he had put himself in deeper.

Cardona was concentrating upon Winrow, using the same tactics that he had employed earlier with Ted.

"You must have used Barstead's radio to fake that stuff," challenged Cardona, remembering the scene in the murdered man's apartment. "Come on, Winrow, out with the facts!"

Winrow was protesting that the radio was out of order; but Ted, remembering the completeness of Winrow's studio, snapped out an explanation.

"Winrow had the whole rig in his own place," Ted told Cardona. "A microphone and everything. He could have piped the recording through to Barstead's room!"

TED had struck the truth. Timed to his statement, a laugh came from the hallway. The Shadow's voice had finished; the final tone of his recorded mirth had chanced to come at a timely moment.

The laugh was designed for Winrow; for The Shadow knew that by this time, the real murderer would be fighting off a barrage of accusations.

Rising in its mockery, the laugh reached the top of its crescendo, broke into shivering echoes that seemed to cling to the very walls. Winrow's resistance broke completely. His confession poured from his pasty, trembling lips.

"I killed Frank," he admitted. "I recorded lots of arguments between Frank and Ted, but the best one came that afternoon. I dubbed in sound effects, to make it strong. I used the mallet and the carton for the muffled shots, the little door to imitate the opening of the door to Frank's balcony.

"I piped it through, the way Ted said. I had a bunch of wires in the extension cord to Frank's radio. The tubes were all right; so was the loudspeaker. The trouble was in the dial connection; I gummed it, so that Frank couldn't use the radio.

"I was in there, talking to Frank, when Archie and the rest arrived. I shot Frank twice" - Winrow gave two nervous jerks - "while he was starting to the door. I moved the chairs and opened the door to the balcony. I hurried back to my place and started the record going -"

Winrow's statement ended with a choke. The fellow shrank back to the couch. Cardona turned to Archie Freer, who nodded.

"It fits," declared Archie. "The others will say the same. We must have been ringing for three or four

minutes, before Winrow showed up to let us in. Right now, he's acting like he did then. But his nerve came back when we got upstairs."

"It should have," put in Ted, savagely. "From then on, he was a master of ceremonies, letting you hear a murder that had already happened, and fixing it on me."

Cardona was pumping Winrow further. Marian heard the whiny murderer admit that the cigarette case was one that Ted had sold to Frank. When Cardona pointed to the chair in the corner, where Ted's gun lay, Winrow quailed, paler than ever.

"You killed Barstead with that gun," accused Cardona. "Then" - Joe had a sudden hunch - "you left it in your studio, where Griff could get it and palm it off on Ted!"

Winrow started a nod, then became frantic with his denials. His face showed utter terror, as he shrieked that Griff Conlad hadn't had a thing to do with it.

Cardona didn't believe that lie. He could understand why Winrow was trying to cover Griff. The mob leader was missing from among the crew that The Shadow had demolished on the terrace. Winrow was afraid that Griff might return.

Gern stepped forward and undertoned a suggestion to Cardona.

"If you clear the room," said Gern, "you can probably make Winrow talk. The fellow is scared stiff, for fear that what he says will get back to Griff. If you quiz him alone -"

Interrupting with a nod, Cardona motioned the others out to the hall. Marian and Archie went first, followed by the two patrolmen. Cardona went along, as far as the door, dragging Winrow with him, while Gern stood behind them, waiting for the pair to move aside.

Turning, Cardona motioned to Ted, who rose from a chair, scarcely realizing that he was free. Even when the blame was placed on Winrow, Ted had remained a prisoner, in a sense. He had been punched by Cardona, grabbed by a pair of officers. It didn't seem sensible for Ted to find himself squared with the law.

From the door, Cardona grinned. The feud with Ted was over; crime was through. So, at least, Cardona supposed; but circumstances fooled him. Crime wasn't finished; there was more to come. Things hadn't shaped exactly to The Shadow's schedule.

One man alone was to blame: Joe Cardona. Unwittingly, the police inspector had set a scene for crime!

CHAPTER XX. WITNESSED MURDER

CARDONA had guessed wrong about Guy Winrow. The pale man had spunk of a sort, though he hadn't displayed it under accusation. If Winrow had been the jellyfish that Cardona considered him to be, he never would have gathered nerve enough to murder Frank Barstead.

Gern had analyzed the fellow better than Cardona. He had claimed that Winrow would talk, after the room was cleared; but Winrow did more than talk. He suddenly showed action, that fitted with his own confession. He displayed the savagery of a killer.

Perhaps it was the fading of footsteps along the hallway; possibly some other factor - that made Winrow believe the field was clear enough for action. Whatever the reason, he saw his opportunity and took it.

Cardona was turned toward Ted; the grip on Winrow's shoulder had relaxed. With a snarl, the

pasty-faced killer gave a forceful wrench; clear of Cardona's clutch, he dived across the room.

Gern sprang to stop him, only to be lashed aside by Winrow's flaying arm. Catching an oath from Cardona, Ted took it as an order and launched after the diving murderer. All saw Winrow's objective; the death gun that lay on the chair.

Pulling his own revolver, Cardona aimed. He side-stepped in front of the doorway, where the pounding of feet told that the officers were coming to his aid along the hall.

But Cardona didn't fire. Winrow had failed to get the gun. Ted was making a lower swoop to grab it, when Winrow snatched up the chair.

The gun bounded along the floor, with Ted after it. Winrow was wheeling toward the door, hoping to slash Ted with the chair, when Gern reached the killer, lunging with all his weight. They hit the door together; it slammed in Cardona's face - not figuratively, but actually.

Joe took the door right on the chin, as hard a thump as the punch that he had given Ted a while before. Lifted from his feet, Cardona landed in the arms of the two patrolmen who were hurrying in to aid him.

But Joe wasn't knocked out. Amid the spinning sensation that came with his sag, he heard the sounds that came from beyond the door.

There was a splintering smash, which told that Winrow had flung the chair. A snarl; a triumphant one, that only the murderer could have uttered. Then, in the midst of Winrow's maddened glee, Cardona heard a gunshot.

Winrow's triumph died with a rattling sound. Something thudded the floor. Cardona drove forward, grabbed at the handle of the door. It was tugged inward before he could grip it. Gern had crawled to the door on hands and knees, to admit the rescuers.

Two forms were on the floor. Ted Lycombe was prone amid the wreckage of the chair, pressing one hand to his head. His other hand was clutching for the revolver that lay close by it. Smoke was curling from the death gun. It had done new duty.

Winrow was the evidence. He lay groaning, his hand pressed to his breast. Bloodstains showed that the bullet had taken him in the chest. The self-admitted murderer was dying, very much as he had deserved.

Cardona bent above Winrow, began to ply him with questions. Joe was demanding the truth about Griff, and anything that went with it. Winrow tried his best to talk, but his words meant little. His pasty lips were flecked with blood that choked him. His statements were incoherent gurgles.

All that Winrow could do was raise one hand, as if to point; but the effort was too much. His arm flattened, and his frame subsided with it. The murderer was dead.

THE officers picked Ted up and put him on the couch. Cardona pocketed the death gun and stared at Ted's square-jawed face, with its half-opened eyes.

Marian had come in from the hall; observing Ted's inert form, the girl started toward the couch. When Cardona stopped her, Gern protested.

"You can't call it murder!" exclaimed Gern. "Why, Ted shot Winrow in self-defense. I saw Winrow strike him down with the chair. He'd have swung it again, if Ted hadn't fired."

Cardona lowered his arm to let Marian go by. Still, he didn't like the look of things. The law had plenty

against Ted Lycombe, if it wanted to press the case. Maybe Ted's methods were nothing but mistakes, but he had made too many of them.

This one struck Cardona as just too much. Winrow was the one man who could have cleared Ted entirely, by giving all facts regarding Griff Conlad. But Ted had shot Winrow, instead of waiting for others to suppress the fellow.

The possible answer struck Cardona very forcibly. Ted could have decided that Winrow had told enough; that more would have been too much.

There was still the crime at the Drober Corporation office. Winrow had played no part in it. He had been under police guard all the time. As for the attempted robbery here at Gern's, Ted had been caught with the goods. Considering such facts, Cardona turned to Gern.

"Suppose that they were both crooked," declared Joe. "Ted Lycombe and Guy Winrow. In that case, it wouldn't be self-defense. It would be murder - one crook getting rid of another."

As Cardona finished his statement, another voice spoke, from the doorway. It was a crisp tone, that said:

"It was murder!"

They turned, to see Ralph Weston. The police commissioner was holding a gun. Cardona couldn't see the need for the weapon, since Ted was lying helpless. But Weston kept the gun trained across the room.

"It was murder," repeated Weston. "Witnessed murder. I saw the crime myself, inspector. I want you to arrest the culprit."

There were times when Cardona believed that Weston lived in a little world of his own, listening to the warble of the cuckoo birds. But he hadn't expected the commissioner to go clean off his nut at a time like this. Weston was usually in his sanest mood when surveying a scene of crime.

It was impossible for Weston to have witnessed Winrow's death, for the commissioner hadn't been in the penthouse at the time, let alone the strong room. But since the commissioner held a gun, and looked as though he would like to use it, Cardona decided to humor him.

Pulling a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, the inspector stepped toward the couch.

"Come back here," chided Weston. "I didn't refer to Lycombe. I told you to arrest the murderer!"

Cardona turned, amazed. He saw the actual direction of Weston's gun. It was pointed straight for Sherwood Gern!

TWO seconds later, Cardona realized that the commissioner was not crazy, never had been.

Gern was wheeling away, his hands upraised. Half about, he was viewing his own florid face in the mirror above the couch. Weston's sharp chuckle must have told Gern that the game was up.

"Don't put them on me!" Gern gestured toward the handcuffs. "I'll talk, if you'll only treat me right."

Cardona had drawn his gun, along with the handcuffs. He stopped Gern with the muzzle; the florid man sagged to a chair. Weston motioned for Cardona to put away the handcuffs. Joe did, but he kept Gern covered.

The way things were shaping up, Cardona wished he had six hands, with a gun in each. Guessing who was which had become a problem that made him suspect everyone in the place. But Commissioner Weston seemed to know what it was all about.

Stepping to the wall, Weston removed the big mirror from beneath the glowing light.

The mirror, Cardona saw instantly, was a sheet of semitransparent glass. Behind it was a squarish object that looked like a silvered screen. Its background had supplied the reflection for the mirror.

Hanging to the level of the couch back, the false mirror's wide frame had hidden a wire.

"Winrow's invention," explained Weston. Then, turning about: "What did he call the device, Gern?"

After a short hesitation, Gern replied: "A teletector."

"An excellent name for it," returned Weston. "It is something like a dictograph, Cardona, but with a television attachment. We shall find a use for it ourselves, later on. It carries pictures, as well as sound, and I was watching the other end of it, down in Gern's office."

"Do you mean" - Cardona was astounded - "that you were a witness to everything that happened here?"

"I said that before," reminded Weston, dryly. "I saw several interesting things, inspector. It was Gern who actually slammed the door shut; Gern, again, who grabbed up the gun while Winrow was striking Lycombe with the chair. Gern fired the death shot and dropped the gun beside Lycombe's hand, before opening the door for you."

Weston turned toward Gern, as he spoke. The florid man took the accusation stolidly. But his look changed when the commissioner's next statement came.

"While you have been hearing the voice of The Shadow," declared Weston, "I have been talking with that gentleman, in person. Before you start your confession, Gern, I shall ask you to read these notes."

He passed Gern three sheets of inked notations. The Shadow had made them on the pad downstairs. Gern's face rivaled the paper in whiteness, as his fingers let the sheets flutter to the floor. Until then, Gern had not guessed how deeply The Shadow had combed the facts.

Head of the crooked game, Sherwood Gern had considered his own position secure. It was no longer so. The Shadow, through his masterful investigation, had divined all.

CHAPTER XXI. WHERE CRIME FAILED

THE facts that dripped from Gern's ashen lips were concise and simple; as simple as they had been difficult to prove. It was Weston who punctuated them occasionally with certain explanations concerning The Shadow's part in the discovery of those well-hidden moves.

While Gern talked, Ted Lycombe propped himself upon the couch, to hear the remarkable story.

Coolly, Gern admitted himself to be a crook - but one of a deeper dye than the law supposed. He had used his shady stock transactions to cover more vicious crimes, in which he had used Griff Conlad as his lieutenant. One of Gern's pet games was the theft of valuable inventions.

In trying to sell fraudulent stock to Frank Barstead, Gern had learned that Barstead was backing Winrow in some new invention, which the two were keeping a close secret. It wasn't one of the gadgets with which Winrow fiddled when other persons were around. It was obviously something much better.

Ignoring Barstead, Gern had approached Winrow, with the best of bait. He had offered to back the mysterious invention, sight unseen, on a far bigger scale than Barstead could. Winrow had listened. Most inventors did.

Gern had learned about the teletector. He recognized its possibilities in crime. With its aid, crooks could look in on scenes that would offer them huge profit.

Scenting a crooked streak in Winrow, he had told the inventor of its possibilities, offered him a half share in the fruits of supercrime. Winrow accepted, with ardor.

There was one obstacle: Frank Barstead.

Knowing what Winrow's invention was, Frank would have the key to crime when it began. The conspirators had to dispose of him beforehand. It meant murder, cleverly contrived.

Between them, Gern and Winrow planned the synthetic crime. Needing a dupe, they picked Ted Lycombe. At that time, Ted was Frank's best friend.

By selling Ted sure-fire stock, Gern saw to it that delayed returns would put Ted out of funds and force him to borrow from Frank. When Gern paused at that point, Weston supplied an interjection.

"I said it was illogical," declared the commissioner, adding: "But The Shadow saw logic in it. Go on, Gern."

"Ted was getting down and out," continued Gern. "I told Griff to get hold of him and do some missionary work. It went over better than I hoped. Ted was ready for about anything."

"But he did not begin crime on his own -"

"No. He told Griff to watch me. When the right night came, I went to the Wessex to talk with Marian. I had to keep her from meeting Ted, so he wouldn't have an alibi."

Weston nodded.

"Exactly what The Shadow said," was the commissioner's comment. "He saw through your game, Gern. But when Miss Farris wouldn't talk to you -"

"It didn't matter," inserted Gern. "Griff was on hand, supposed to be tailing me. So he delayed Marian instead, knowing that he could square it with Ted, under the circumstances."

The commissioner smiled. Gern's statements fell right in line with The Shadow's deductions.

GERN proceeded. When accused of crime he hadn't committed, Ted had behaved in his usual hotheaded way. He had welcomed "rescue" when Griff provided it.

With Ted safely in the hide-away, Griff had raided Winrow's place to smash the telltale records and pick up the death gun that Winrow had left in his desk. Griff had ruined Barstead's radio cabinet, but had left the money in it. Winrow knew about the cash, felt that its discovery would protect him.

It hadn't with The Shadow. Having removed the incriminating records before the rest were broken, The Shadow recognized Winrow's full part. But his discovery of the teletector was another thing. It went with the Drober Corporation robbery.

"We used the teletector to pull the Drober job," admitted Gern. "I had it planted behind old Drober's picture, and I was in an office below. I saw Burman open the combination. When I went up, I packed

the teletector equipment first; then I went after the dough.

"I planted a money band from some cash that Griff had given Ted, when he slipped him Winrow's gun for future use. The band had Ted's fingerprints on it. But The Shadow queered the job. He messed things again, the night we let Marian see Ted."

Cardona remembered that night. He glanced toward Ted and shook his head. No wonder Ted had shown a killer's tendencies on that occasion. But, at present, Ted was taking things quite calmly.

He was rubbing his jaw, as he listened to Gern. Perhaps he still felt the punch that Cardona had given him. Joe hoped so.

"We had to get The Shadow!" stormed Gern, suddenly. "The best way was to bring him here. This room was the trap we wanted. I rigged the teletector so that Winrow and I could watch when The Shadow entered. I flashed the signal to Griff, and he sent Ted through.

"We figured Ted would give The Shadow a battle, and that Griff and his gunners would finish both of them. We didn't want The Shadow, and we didn't need Ted. Even when The Shadow chucked Ted across the desk, I thought Griff had a chance to win. It was the phony laugh that ruined it - from out there!"

Halfway up from his chair, Gern stabbed a finger toward the hallway, indicating the living room beyond. Then, grabbing one chair arm, he spun about.

Taking the chair with him, Gern made a backhand swing that almost telescoped Cardona's gun arm. As Joe's revolver fell from his numbed fist, Gern sped for the door.

A side swing of the chair staggered Weston when the commissioner tried to draw his gun. One of the patrolmen fired, but Gern chucked the chair at him, forcing him to lose his aim. By the time the second officer opened fire, Gern was through the doorway.

Pursuit began. It stopped at the door. Gern had reached the living room; and he wasn't alone. Two ghosts from the past were there to aid him; solid ghosts, still very much alive: Griff and Peeper. One of Griff's arms was dangling, and Peeper had a limp; but they were ready for battle.

The two had duplicated The Shadow's stunt of rolling across the parapet of the terrace, where they had remained, safely hidden, until they wondered what was going on inside. They had chosen the right time to find out.

"Stay back," rasped Griff, in no mood for smooth words. "If you don't, we'll let you have it!"

Then, as Cardona blocked those behind him and thrust them back into the strong room, Griff turned to Gern.

"We've been using your phone," chuckled Griff. "I'll pay you the nickel later. You know those extra torpedoes I told you about? They're on their way here. We'll wait for them, so they can cover the getaway. They ought to be here any minute."

FROM behind Griff came a whispered laugh, a sinister chuckle that outvied the crook's ugly laugh.

Gern gave a startled exclamation; but Peeper swung full about. Griff kept covering the hallway; as the laugh rose, he snarled:

"Don't fall for that stuff! It's only the loud-speaker. Nobody fools me twice the same way - not even The

Shadow. Keep the hall covered, like I'm doing, Peeper."

The whispered mirth faded. With its echoes, Griff heard something thud beside him. Looking down, he saw Peeper. The little crook lay stunned. His charge toward the loud-speaker on the window sill had ended in a sudden fall.

Whipping about, Griff backed suddenly away, as if expecting the amplifier to deliver a few hundred thousand volts. He knew what had dropped Peeper: the hard sledge of a heavy gun, swung at the moment of the scrawny crook's spin.

Griff was blasting as he turned; but his gun didn't talk alone. The burst of a .45 chimed with the barks of the .38 that Griff held. A dagger of flame pierced Griff before he could get in a straight-aimed shot.

Sagging, Griff sprawled at the feet of the cloaked fighter who had fooled him twice. He had heard The Shadow's own laugh, from the one spot where he expected an imitation.

During that double settlement, Gern had seen The Shadow. Desperately, Gern snatched up Peeper's revolver and made for the main door. He wanted to reach the fire tower ahead of The Shadow's shots. The chance he took was like one that Cardona had once taken: about one in a million. But Gern was lucky, like Cardona.

Guns were blazing from the doorway as Gern neared it; he dived through while The Shadow was firing at the tonguing targets. Griff's new supply of cover-up men had arrived, a half dozen of them. Like others, they were too anxious to get The Shadow.

As he fired, the cloaked fighter wheeled out to the terrace. Crooks, following, saw him roll across a parapet, to escape the glow from the living room. Flinging after him, they were met with bullets that wilted their drive.

Along with The Shadow's fire, his agents were shooting from the window next door. Cardona and the two patrolmen had reached the penthouse living room and were adding their efforts to the cause.

Out of the six-man mob, only one crook reached the rail. Taking bullets as he shoved his shoulders over it, he continued past the parapet on a prolonged dive to the street below.

The Shadow watched the tumbling thug dwindle. He heard Cardona yell for the officers to follow him in pursuit of Gern. Remaining where he was, The Shadow awaited an opportunity in which the odds were exactly even.

A tiny car spun into sight below. Its speed told who the driver was. Sherwood Gern was making his getaway. He had chosen the direction that The Shadow wanted.

His automatic propped against the roof edge, The Shadow sighted on a traffic light at the corner just ahead. He changed his aim the hundredth of an inch.

As the car veered past the light, its left side was toward The Shadow. Pressing the trigger, The Shadow triggered a single shot, at a downward angle. His target was the window beside the driver's seat. He scored a bull's-eye in that blackened square.

The car lurched cater-cornered, ricocheted from a swerving truck and smashed a building wall head on. Guided by a wounded driver, the automobile did not slacken speed. The hood telescoped through the windshield. The body of the coupe billowed over the rumble seat.

Out from a gap that had once been a door came a staggering figure, that flattened as its hand began to

shoot a useless gun. Other revolvers were talking from the sidewalk; but Cardona's fire was unneeded, although well aimed.

Gern was as good as dead when he rolled from the bashed car. The Shadow's timely shot had sent the master crook on a rocketing trip to self-destruction.

RETURNING through the front door of the apartment house, Cardona found Weston awaiting him. The commissioner beckoned the inspector into Gern's ground-floor office, to show him the receiving end of the teletector.

On the screen, Cardona saw the interior of the strong room. He saw two persons, heard their subdued voices.

They were standing near the door: Ted Lycombe and Marian Farris. Soberly, Ted was explaining things that he thought Marian had not fully understood. He was telling her that he had teamed up with Griff only to watch Gern; that all his talk of anything resembling crime had been his idea of collecting the money that was rightfully his own.

"I was a fool," conceded Ted. "A terrible fool to listen to Griff at all! The blacker things got, the worse I made them, because I trusted Griff. Yes, I was a real fool -"

Ted's eyes met Marian's. Her gaze told him that he was still a fool, to be talking at all. His arms tightened about the girl; he drew her waiting lips up to his own.

On the screen below, two witnesses saw the kiss that followed, and might have heard it, too, if another sound had not intervened.

From somewhere, probably the terrace, the teletector picked up the tone of a distant laugh and brought it to the listeners in the ground-floor office. Both Weston and Cardona could sense the thought behind that mirth.

It was The Shadow's triumph, a parting laugh that sent its trailing echoes to the scene where crime had failed!

THE END