



FORMULA FOR CRIME

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CHAPTER I. FORMULA FOR CRIME

A BIG, official car was twisting its way through the narrow streets of downtown Manhattan. The car had two passengers: one, a man of brisk manner and military appearance; the other, an elderly gentleman with thin face and shocky white hair.

The man with the military manner was Police Commissioner Ralph Weston, and this was his official car. He was intent upon finding a certain destination among the narrow streets, a task that was quite difficult, considering the darkness. Weston was anxious, too, that his approach should not be known; for the fifth time, he lifted the speaking tube and warned his chauffeur not to use the siren.

Then, recognizing a corner they were passing, Weston added through the tube:

"One more block, then stop at the old garage on the right. Inspector Cardona will meet us there."

As he leaned back, satisfied, the commissioner was somewhat startled by a chuckle that sounded in his very ear. He looked about, saw the gleam of eager eyes that peered from a fanatical face. The commissioner smiled, indulgently. He'd almost forgotten his fellow

passenger, Professor Achilles Troy.

Sometimes, on these excursions to a scene that promised crime, Commissioner Weston took along a friend named Lamont Cranston, who usually rode in meditative silence.

On this occasion, Cranston hadn't been around when Weston received the call to arms. Since Troy was present, the commissioner had accepted him as Cranston's substitute.

There were good reasons to invite Troy on a trip like this. Fanatic though the man might be, he was a criminologist of some repute, and his theories on crime, though eccentric, deserved some consideration. Still, Weston deemed it best to remind Troy that he was here on sufferance only.

"Calm yourself, professor," said Weston. "Nothing has happened, so far. Remember, we are acting merely on a tip-off."

Troy's eyes turned questioning.

"A tip-off?"

"Anonymous information," defined Weston, smiling at Troy's ignorance of police language. "We don't know who phoned Inspector Cardona, or why. We must hear his report, before forming further opinion."

The official car was stopping at the old garage. Weston and Troy alighted, to meet a stocky man whose swarthy, noncommittal face identified him as Inspector Joe Cardona. The inspector gave the commissioner a nod, but showed no surprise at seeing Weston's companion. Professor Troy had been much in evidence of late, and Cardona had conjectured that Troy had been playing for an invitation of the present sort.

"I was right about the address, commissioner," stated Cardona. "It's Bartier's, the wholesale diamond merchant. But the place is as dead as Coney Island in the winter."

"That may be a bad sign," returned Weston. "Crooks have a way of keeping quiet when on an important job."

"Burglar alarms don't keep quiet," reminded Cardona, "and Bartier Co. have a flock of them. Anyway, I've posted my men, and we can have a look for ourselves. Across the street and through the alley, commissioner."

The three emerged from the alley to find themselves near the corner where Bartier Co. were located. The diamond merchants occupied the ground floor of a squatty old building which had other wholesale jewelers on the floors above. The windows of the place were barred with heavy iron shutters, and didn't promise much of a look inside.

Cardona suggested that they move along toward the front of the building and take observations from the corner opposite. Weston was giving agreement by stepping in that direction, when a tight hand clutched his sleeve. The hand was Troy's, and the professor was using his other hand to point the opposite way.

"Behind the building, commissioner!" Troy's cackly tone was lowered to a sharp whisper. "Isn't that another alleyway?"

"It is," put in Cardona. "A blind alley."

"All the better, then." Troy's whisper was gleeful, as he centered his argument on Cardona.

"It should end right at the back door of Bartier Co.!"

Inspector Cardona didn't like blind alleys and began to say so. Prejudice on such matters did not suit Commissioner Weston. Hence, in authoritative style, Weston promptly sided with Troy, and the three set out for the alley, as the professor had suggested.

A bit reluctant, Cardona finally compromised with his dislikes by raising his hand in signal.

Two detectives came from doorways and joined the trio. Cardona dropped back to speak to them, but merely told them to come along.

His hesitation was a pretext. The inspector wanted to get a look at a low roof which projected a short way into the alley, just above the barred rear windows of Bartier Co. He saw that the roof was vacant.

Upon rejoining Weston and Troy, Cardona used a flashlight close against the brick wall of the alley. Trickling along the brick, the light finally halted on a heavy steel door. Professor Troy had called the turn; this was undoubtedly the rear exit from Bartier's, and as good a place as any to listen for alarms from inside.

At Weston's order, the five men took their silent station, and Cardona's flashlight flicked off. But, in the darkness, the ace inspector was visualizing that steel door and the possibilities of cracking it as a quick route into Bartier's, should occasion demand.

Cardona was beginning to have a hunch; it told him that all was not entirely well in the preserves of Bartier Co.

WITHIN the building, matters were bearing out Cardona's hunch. There were lights inside—lights that couldn't be seen from street or alley because of the thick steel shutters. Furtive lights that were blinking downward from a corner, like hovering fireflies coming down to roost.

One flashlight, stronger than the rest, emerged from the corner and then gleamed back again, revealing what was happening.

Intruders, half a dozen in number, were entering Bartier's from a doorway leading from a spiral staircase. They had come down the staircase to begin with, thereby showing their acquaintance with a secret much cherished by the heads of Bartier Co.

That stairway, hidden by a paneled door, led up to another office, kept by Bartier's under another name. It was a secret emergency outlet, to be used if daring crooks staged a raid by day. But these crooks weren't coming by day; they had arrived by night, and were using the upstairs exit as their entrance.

Having solved the riddle of any alarms above, their way was clear, and one man, evidently the leader, showed further acquaintance with the Bartier preserves by flicking his flashlight straight across the floor. Passing desks, showcases and counters, the gleam fixed on a ponderous safe in a deep wall of the ground-floor room.

Like a magnet, the safe drew the prowlers to it. The leader passed his flashlight to another man and thrust his face into the gleam. The light showed shrewd features, sallow in the yellow glow, and the grin on the man's lips was both contemptuous and hard. As he turned toward the light, the man's face revealed a short but jagged scar that crossed his square chin.

The scar was the final touch that identified this product of crimedom. He was Mort Lombert,

a very canny crook, who knew when to play things safe. Once, Mort had aspired to be a mobleader, in the days when warehouse robberies had been popular, but he had tossed aside such ambition about the time police began to smother that particular species of crime.

Still, Mort had not forgotten his skill at working into places; nor had he let his ambition go to seed. Crime was experiencing a revival, and Mort Lombert was to the fore. Instead of a warehouse, he was tackling a wholesale diamond house, and he had his mob, a streamlined crew, all specialists in their way.

With a glance toward two of his followers, Mort announced coolly:

"You fellows are good at open work. Take care of the pete."

Then, leaving the pair to work on the safe, Mort began to spread the others to strategic spots. He pointed one man behind a counter; another toward a door that led from the rear of the big room. He was starting to post the others, when he heard the second man's footsteps clatter on the stone floor.

Mort snarled for less noise. In so doing, he drowned a noise that occurred close by.

It came from behind the counter where the first man had stepped. There, as the fellow started to poke his flashlight into darkness, the darkness rose to meet him. It came as a living shape, that drove a steel cudgel to the crook's head. Mort's man sagged; there was a swish in the darkness and the unknown assailant was gone.

Invisible in the gloom, the lone fighter encountered another of the crooks near a showcase. Again a blow sledged home, and a thug settled silently. This time, however, the sprawl brought an untoward result.

Hooking the showcase as he fell the mobsman overturned it. The crash, though muffled by the falling man, was more than enough to bring Mort Lombert full about, swinging his flashlight as he snarled at his clumsy follower.

Then the light, like Mort, fixed in frozen style. Perhaps it was the chilling laugh that produced the result; or it could have been the black-clad apparition that confronted Mort Lombert.

Cloaked in black, a slouch hat on his head, a tall figure dominated the scene. The laugh that spoke a whispered mockery from his lips was backed by the brace of automatics that projected from his gloved fists.

Huge weapons, those, and in their slow wave they covered Mort and his remaining crew. Each .45 seemed a living extension of the dread fighter who gripped the formidable guns.

The Shadow!

FROM across the big room, this master foe of crime held Mort and his men at bay. His very presence confounded them; the fact that he had already begun to thin the opposition, was a promise of what would happen to the rest.

Mort's own revolver was half drawn, and other crooks were shoving hands to pockets. But the burn of The Shadow's eyes, the sinister finish of his laugh were invitations to disaster that none cared to accept.

Hands released guns and came upward. Under the sweeping movements of The Shadow's guns, gestures easily understood, crooks began to cluster. They weren't joining Mort near

the safe front because they had confidence in their leader; they were doing it because they feared The Shadow.

Of that trapped tribe, Mort Lombert, the big-shot, had suddenly shrunk to the smallest of the small.

Again The Shadow's laugh, its sinister whisper echoing from all about, pronouncing his triumph over crime. A triumph as good as accomplished, for, having cowed this crooked crew, he could easily march them out of the premises that they had invaded.

In token of such intent, The Shadow took three strides forward from his corner.

Lucky strides, those!

Hardly had The Shadow finished the third step before the floor coughed behind him. It coughed in a titanic style, with a muffed burst that shook the entire building.

Up from the floor, amid a gust of flame and a deluge of smoke, came chunks of solid masonry, like brimstone from a volcano's throat.

Only a pace clear of the blasting corner, The Shadow was lifted by the upheaving floor and flung forward ahead of the tidal wave of stone that gushed to the ceiling and bashed great chunks of plaster that descended, pulverized like snow, along with the hail of stone.

The Shadow's guns spoke as he took that long, sprawling dive, but their bursts were feeble, unnoticed, amid the echoes of the huge blast. Mort and his followers, spilled by the quake of the floor, were clear of The Shadow's gunfire.

Men of crime were saved from their arch-foe by the intervention of a power more formidable than The Shadow's own!

CHAPTER II. TRAPS REVERSED

HURLED headlong by the explosion, flayed by the chunks of stone, The Shadow should have proven easy prey for Mort Lombert and his murderous crew. But they were in no mood to take advantage of the fortune that had come their way.

The burst from the corner, timed almost to The Shadow's own endeavors, seemed something of his own making. Thinking it was meant for them, mobbies couldn't believe that The Shadow had suffered by it.

Staggering as they found their feet, they heard Mort shout to rally them, but thought that he was calling them to flight. All but one had lost their flashlights, and the man who still held one kept waving it frantically, trying to find the spiral stairway. The two men felled earlier by The Shadow were on their feet, blundering into the rest.

From somewhere on the floor they heard The Shadow's laugh, and Mort, like the rest, went short on nerve. Matters were swinging The Shadow's way, had he chosen to take immediate advantage; but The Shadow had a different plan.

His head had escaped blows from the peppering stones, and his quick wits were functioning at their fullest, when he turned and drove straight toward the huge gap that the explosion had opened in the floor.

The Shadow was expecting new invaders—and they came, out from the pit that they had manufactured. They, too, had flashlights, and the glow from below showed their leader, a

burly warrior with an oversized face that looked gigantic, from bulging forehead to underslung jaw.

There was only one face that looked like that. It belonged to Hogger Unstrum, noted for his ways of crime. Hogger had passed from sight when he tried to sabotage a river tunnel in which he and some of his cronies had been working. Wanted by the police, Hogger had shown skill in burrowing from their sight.

At present, he was coming up for air, along with his henchmen, in a place where Mort Lombert had already seen chances for profit. Hogger was simply taking over where Mort was leaving off; but, like his predecessor, he had to deal with The Shadow.

Wheeling in from an angle, The Shadow was merely in the fringe of the flashlights. It was one of those cases where crooks wouldn't even have a chance to find the fighter in black.

The trouble was that The Shadow no longer was a fighter in black. He didn't realize it until his enemies swung savagely in his direction, spotting him before he could use his guns.

The Shadow was entirely in white. Where stones had failed to put him out of combat, showering plaster had played its part.

Coated with the powdery stuff, The Shadow resembled a snowman, the frosty tint extending even to his guns. As bad as the fact that crooks saw The Shadow was their inability to recognize him as a foeman to be feared.

To them, he was simply an interloper who wanted to make himself a target. They dropped into their hole, Hogger with them, to take point-blank aim at this foolish foeman who was in the open. Their laughs, loud and derisive, drowned the mockery that might have informed them who their enemy really was.

In the instant that he heard derision greet his challenge, The Shadow understood. He preferred derision to death, and took advantage of it. The very fact that foemen laughed was a good token, for it meant that they would be deliberate in their aim. Split-seconds lost by trigger fingers of others were moments won by The Shadow.

He made a sudden whirl, and actually shook himself into darkness, under the very muzzles of the astonished marksmen who thought him the surest of targets!

A clever thought, that shake. It flung the plaster from the black cloak and made The Shadow's vanishment all the more startling. He was gone, and flashlights, swinging wildly, were sweeping past him, missing him completely.

So startling was the disappearance, that it transcended all belief, even among these witnesses who had heard rumors as to The Shadow's faculty for projecting himself into the unknown.

Had The Shadow been dealing only with Hogger and his crew, he would have won the fray right then. His foemen were too stupefied to even dive back into the oversized rat-hole that they had blasted in the floor.

They heard a laugh and could only picture it as coming from nowhere. Bullets were due from the same source, shortly, though Hogger's thugs didn't seem to realize it.

Then Mort Lombert and his crew stepped in, and spoiled The Shadow's strategy.

MORT'S mob wasn't teamed with Hogger's. Had the two groups met independently, both

seeking the same loot in Bartier's safe, they would have locked in a death fray. But criminal rivalries were forgotten with The Shadow on the ground, and Mort's men weren't stupefied.

They hadn't seen The Shadow shake himself from sight, for the transformation of white to black was accomplished before Mort's crew rallied. Mort saw the sweep of flashlights, watched the glare focus on a swirling white cloud that was dispelling itself to the floor.

For some reason, Hogger and his marksmen were dumbly mistaking that drift of pulverized plaster for The Shadow. Mort didn't make the same mistake.

He knew that The Shadow must be somewhere beyond, in darkness, and Mort set the pace for his own sharpshooters by firing in that general direction. Other guns barked savagely; bullets began to bite the front corners of the big room.

The shots were wild, but they served a purpose. They were boxing The Shadow in a spot where he would give away his location, if he fired in return.

What The Shadow needed was a shelter, and he found it in the form of the big front door of Bartier's. The explosion had jarred the formidable barrier loose, and it swung when The Shadow tugged it. The inward sweep of the door brought in light from the street, and Hogger, like Mort, caught a fleeting glimpse of a black-cloaked figure. At orders from their leaders, members of both crooked crews began to stab shots at the open doorway.

The Shadow was gone again.

Gone, while marksmen blinked, and there was seemingly but one route that he could have taken: through the doorway.

His sudden departure gave crooks the immediate impression that they had The Shadow on the run. In flight, The Shadow would be easy prey, if they lost no time in overtaking him. Hogger Unstrum, for one, was willing to drop all other business to settle scores with mobdom's greatest scourge, The Shadow.

Hogger and his crew were off through the doorway in a surge. Mort's band would have followed, had their leader not held them back. In Mort's opinion, it wouldn't take numbers to abolish The Shadow, should he be spotted before he reached shelter outside. Hogger could have the glory; Mort preferred to complete his unfinished business. Mort Lombert was a shrewder person than Hogger Unstrum.

Yet it didn't occur to Mort, with all his shrewdness, that Hogger might have taken up a false trail. Even when the huge front door slammed shut, Mort merely took its clang as evidence that Hogger's men had swung it as they went out.

No flashlights were turned toward the doorway to reveal the silent figure that moved from the space that the door had so recently covered.

With a double twist, The Shadow had wheeled behind that steel barrier when he opened it. He'd been ready for gunmen, had they spotted his lurking place. Instead, half of them had gone on a blind chase; and The Shadow, at the present moment, was barring their return, so that he could deal more readily with those who had remained.

Mort Lombert was turning a flashlight toward the safe. Before he could summon his specialists to work upon the strong box, his attention was directed to the alley door. It had been jarred by the explosion, but it wasn't off its hinges. However, it soon would be, judging from the noise beyond it.

Men in the alley were trying their best to pound an entrance into the premises of Bartier Co.

Swinging his flashlight toward the rear door, Mort beckoned his men along with him. As the flashlight turned, darkness followed its swinging gleam— living darkness, that moved with total silence. The Shadow was passing right behind Mort's men, almost brushing their elbows, as he chose a point beyond them.

The Shadow was picking the spiral stairway that led up to the next floor, a perfect spot to lay an ambush for Mort's crew, should they decide on sudden flight.

From outside came a flurry of shots. Mort listened, then chuckled. Hogger's outfit was probably having it out with The Shadow, which meant that Mort could concentrate upon matters closer at hand.

The Shadow, of course, did not share Mort's error of opinion. He knew that the shots could only mean the presence of police posted somewhere in the neighborhood, a fact that gave him a clue to something more.

There was a laugh, so low that it could not be heard above the pounding from the alley. The sibilant token was followed by a swish of The Shadow's cloak. Whatever his next purpose, it was known only to The Shadow, himself.

THE smashes against the alley door were being delivered by Inspector Cardona, and the two detectives with him. Commissioner Weston was superintending the activity, while Professor Troy stood by, his beady eyes gleaming happily, his shaggy hair waving every time he turned his head.

It was good, sound police practice to get to the heart of things by the shortest route. The blast within Bartier's was proof enough that crime was under way; the fact that alarms weren't clanging simply meant that they had been ruined by the explosion.

There were criminals inside the wholesale jewelry house, and the police wanted to get at them. It didn't occur to the commissioner, nor to his ace inspector, that matters might take a sudden turnabout.

The reversal came suddenly. Flashlights blazed from the mouth of the blind alley. The commissioner wheeled, as did the men beside him. They saw more than the glow of flashlights; they spied the glitter of leveled revolvers. To a man, Weston and his companions were trapped by the criminal horde led by Hogger Unstrum.

Losing track of The Shadow, and bothered by the scattered fire from the men that Cardona had posted earlier, Hogger's men had looked for a stronghold of their own. They'd found the alley behind Bartier's, and they heard the pounding that the police were making.

Crooks were declaring themselves in terms that lacked no certainty. Hogger Unstrum was their voice, his tone a triumphant snarl.

As Weston and his trapped companions turned, Hogger saw their faces and exulted. No quarter to such as these! Hogger's failure to eliminate The Shadow could be amended, in part, by erasing the police commissioner and his ace inspector, Joe Cardona.

Of course, others present would be included in the massacre. To the detectives with him, Cardona gave the quick word to shoot it out, rather than be murdered in cold blood. They flung themselves forward, drawing their guns, though such a drive was only hastening their doom.

For Hogger's men were ready. Before any of the victims could bring a gun into play, Hogger Unstrum rasped the order for a point-blank fire that would turn the alley into a shambles!

CHAPTER III. MASSACRE REVERSED

GUNS blasted with a volley that riddled the blackness of the alley; nothing more. No bullets drilled Cardona and the victims who were delivering a last, futile drive. For the stabs that knifed the darkness with tongues of living flame were darting at all angles except the point-blank range that Hogger had ordered!

The reason was an influx of new blackness—a solid, spreading mass of inky dynamite that descended like an unseen thunderbolt. It announced the personal advent of a jet-clad fighter.

If the paving of the alley had opened to disgorge The Shadow, mobsters wouldn't have been as surprised as they were. They'd used the trick of popping up from below, themselves, and The Shadow was going them one better. The master of darkness was arriving from midair!

There were things that Hogger Unstrum and his pack of murderers didn't know. They hadn't learned that Mort Lombert and his outfit used a route from the second floor; nor had they noticed the low roof projecting above the alley in back of Bartier's.

The Shadow had started along Mort's route, then taken a short-cut to the little roof. An excellent vantage spot, that roof, but The Shadow hadn't kept it.

Though he couldn't see the figures below him, he risked a headlong plunge in hope of finding Hogger's firing squad. He found them, his hands ahead of him, and in each fist The Shadow carried an automatic, with which he cudgeled as he came.

The Shadow's swings were stopped by heads; his fall was broken by shoulders on which he landed. Two marksmen were felled by The Shadow's slugging, and the rest went sprawling with him as he reached the paving.

All but Hogger, who was free of the tangle. But Hogger was overplaying his part as leader of the motley mob. He was giving orders, instead of executing them.

Seeing his men sprawled by the impulse of an invisible avalanche, Hogger hesitated just too long. By the time he decided to let his crew handle The Shadow, and attend to settling Cardona personally, Joe and the detectives reached him.

Like The Shadow, Hogger became the center of a human vortex. Each was too cramped to use his gun, and surrounding men were unable to shoot for fear of hitting members of their own faction.

But The Shadow, in his tussle, was keeping six men too busy for their comfort, whereas Hogger was having trouble battling against three.

Through the alley they reeled, smashing from wall to wall, stumbling, coming up again, while Commissioner Weston stood with gun waving in one hand, not knowing which way to shoot. With his other arm, the commissioner was warding back Professor Troy, whose bobbing head of shocky hair was visible in the gloom, while his high voice cackled suggestions that Weston neither heard nor accepted.

Professor Troy, at least, was pleased by this twofold conflict, his introduction to what might happen when men of the law clashed with those of crime. It was a real treat for the professor, considering that The Shadow, crime's greatest nemesis, was in the thick of the

struggle, doing his utmost to swing the balance in the law's favor.

There were moments when Troy would have lent a hand, but for Weston's sturdy efforts to keep him out of it. Then, before the excited professor could break through the commissioner's resistance, the climax came without Troy's aid.

The two swirls met.

HURLED together, friend and foe were at total loss—with one exception: The Shadow.

Crooks couldn't seem to find his cloak as the melee spread, but The Shadow found their heads—with guns! He was turning the fray into a one-man slugfest, and he was delivering all the goods.

Uncannily, The Shadow pulled his strokes every time he encountered Cardona or a detective. Whether he could spot the glimmer of their badges, in contrast to revolvers, or whether he was depending upon some sixth sense, that the other fighters didn't have, the result was the same.

Actually at large amid the men who crowded the alley, The Shadow was putting gunmen to rout.

Receiving a glancing blow, Hogger Unstrum reeled toward the street bawling for his men to follow. They did so to the mockery of a strange laugh, that might have come from anywhere. Some aimed stupidly for the alley walls; others actually pointed their revolvers upward, groggily remembering the direction from which The Shadow had come. Their guns blazed wide and high.

But there was nothing wrong with the volley that the police returned. They put their shots right down the alley where crooks were as thick as tenpins. Reels became staggers as Hogger and his men reached the street, where they were plain in the light: hopeless fugitives. The Shadow had put them on the run.

Crooks couldn't even scatter, for by this time Cardona's scanty outposts were closing in upon the fray. Foolishly, Hogger kept howling for his men to battle it through; equally foolish, they complied. With wild men frantically aiming their way, Cardona and the surrounding detectives had no choice but to supply well-aimed gunshots before the frenzied crooks could properly retaliate.

Reaching the mouth of the alley, Weston and Troy saw the struggle in the street. It had, indeed, become a shambles, but the victims were the crooks. The Shadow's prowess had put the massacre into absolute reverse.

Oddly, thoughts of triumph had led Hogger and his crew into disaster. Now, flushed with victory, the police were putting themselves on the spot. They'd forgotten the door in the deep end of the alley. But the thugs on the other side of it, Mort Lombert and his tribe, hadn't forgotten matters outside.

Hearing shooting in the alley, Mort attributed it, correctly, to a fray between Hogger and the police. He preferred to clear out interference before blowing Bartier's safe, and this looked like the proper opportunity. It would have been, if The Shadow had not foreseen Mort's action.

Picking up where the police had left off, Mort ordered the door ripped open. As his men obeyed, Mort led the charge out into the alley, gun in hand, a flashlight gleaming ahead of him.

Before he could open fire toward the alley's mouth, Mort heard a challenging laugh, and his sweeping flashlight picked up a cloak-clad form in black that faded in the direction opposite the flashlight's swing.

Flinging himself back into the doorway, Mort jabbed shots that were answered, not only by the burst of automatics, but by bullets which chopped chunks from the doorway itself.

Savagely poking their guns into sight, Mort's men jabbed hasty shots that brought an echoing laugh in answer. Then, as a daring hand swung a flashlight into play, crooks saw the thing they couldn't fathom. The thing was nothingness.

Though they still heard The Shadow's laugh, there wasn't a trace of the cloaked fighter. He had staged another of his mysterious vanishes.

Shots might have betrayed The Shadow's whereabouts, so he did not supply them. He left that detail to Cardona, who, having finished Hogger, was naturally attracted by new shots from the alley.

When police revolvers began their chatter from the street, Mort and his flat-footed hoodlums didn't wait to argue. They sprang back into Bartier's, slamming the big door behind them, bolting it as well as they could. With a flashlight, Mort gestured to the safe, and men rushed there to make a last, hurried try for the Bartier diamonds.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

His mirth was within the room itself, and his foemen, stirred by their own plight, recognized its source. The Shadow was at the bottom of the spiral staircase, using their own outlet as a pillbox!

They realized, all too late, that he must have regained the low roof in the alley, which was why they couldn't account for his recent disappearance. Doubling around through the office above, The Shadow had cut off Mort's own line of retreat!

DISBANDED, crooks made frantically for the nearest outlet, the front door through which The Shadow had faked a departure. The Shadow's mockery pursued them, and they didn't catch its significance.

Dashing outdoors, they were making the same mistake as Hogger's men: their flight would carry them right into the fists of the law.

Those fists were too prompt. Before Mort and his disorganized crowd could reach the front door, it shoved inward, admitting Cardona and his picked squad, with guns and flashlights.

Mobsters shied from the invaders, and the police pounced after them. Fearful of The Shadow, Mort took another corner for his last stand and yelled for his companions to do the same.

Crooks didn't make a stand.

Instead, they began to sprawl and tumble even before the surging police could reach them. They'd reached the corner where the floor gaped, and they were spilling through the hole that Hogger had blasted!

If ever rats welcomed a chance outlet, these did. Dropped from sight almost en masse, they were below the floor level when Cardona and his squad let rip with shots. Reaching the hole, the police fired down into it; but by then, the fugitives were scurrying through an underground

passage that they found awaiting them.

The Shadow couldn't follow, for Cardona's squad blocked his way. When he saw detectives gingerly slide down into the hole to investigate what lay below, he knew that pursuit was useless.

Mort Lombert and his throng would have to be dealt with later. In contrast to Hogger Unstrum and his annihilated crew, this outfit had escaped unscathed.

Moving out through the deserted alley, The Shadow paused just short of the lighted street. He saw Cardona rejoin Weston and Troy, to tell them what had happened indoors. Detectives arrived, to report a brief skirmish with some reserves belonging to Hogger. Those crooks had fled, and in coming to report, the detectives had left the way clear for Mort and his followers to escape by some remote outlet.

Professor Troy had stooped above the body of Hogger Unstrum, which was lying in the middle of the street. The Shadow saw the shocky-haired man pluck something from the dead man's pocket. Cardona saw it, too, and lifted the object from Troy's hand.

It proved to be a note, which Cardona opened and showed to Weston, while Troy peered eagerly over their shoulders.

Whatever the paper slip was, it carried some special import; of that, The Shadow was certain, as he glided away in darkness.

Clear of the area that the police patrolled, The Shadow indulged in a whispered laugh. He knew how he could learn the contents of the note, and he was looking forward to it with anticipation. Crooks like Huger Unstrum didn't carry incriminating notes with them, except upon some rare occasions.

This night was, indeed, a rare occasion, as The Shadow would soon discover. He was to learn that behind crime's twofold thrust lay the hand of a strange, unknown genius, whose ways were to prove more baffling than any that The Shadow had ever before encountered!

CHAPTER IV. AFTER THE STRIFE

THE mysterious individual who called himself The Shadow had a habit of calling himself other persons, as well. Not only was he quite at home in half a dozen different guises, he could assume identities at random on very short notice.

His favorite guise, however, was that of Lamont Cranston, an identity that he assumed automatically when he doffed his robe of black. There was a very good reason why the identity of Cranston so suited The Shadow.

Lamont Cranston happened to be a member of the very exclusive Cobalt Club, to which Commissioner Ralph Weston also belonged. Whenever the commissioner ran into big-scale crime, he liked to talk about it at the club, where he could always find one listener, his friend Cranston.

There, as Cranston, The Shadow compared his own notes with those that the law had gleaned; so it was not surprising that when Weston returned to the club this evening, he found Cranston waiting there.

Not that Cranston seemed to be waiting for the commissioner; on the contrary, he didn't seem to be waiting for anything. By nature, Cranston was very indolent, and often waited places because he had nothing else to do.

Tonight, however, Cranston's masklike face showed a slight curiosity as his calm eyes surveyed Professor Achilles Troy. This was Cranston's first official introduction to the commissioner's new friend, so he made his glance a quizzical one.

Weston smiled as they entered the grillroom; there, he gestured to sheaves of paper that were lying by a brief case on a table.

"Those belong to Professor Troy," stated Weston. "They ought to interest you, Cranston. We were going over them when business called us away."

Troy ambled to the table and began to sort his papers with enthusiasm, looking up with little chuckles.

"They prove my case, commissioner!" said Troy gleefully. "I told you to expect crime, and it came!"

"Professor Troy has figured it all mathematically," Weston explained, somewhat wearily. "He isn't satisfied with simple arithmetic. He goes into algebra and higher mathematics."

"I do, indeed," declared Troy solemnly. "It is all a matter of graphs and curves. I have studied crime on a quantitative basis. As wealth accumulates, crime will increase."

"You may be right, professor," said Weston indulgently. "Bartier Co. have gone in for diamonds on a huge basis. Their place was a worthwhile goal for criminals. But I didn't expect to find so much competition on those premises."

"Ah, commissioner!" exclaimed Troy. "That is just the factor I was discussing when we were interrupted. I told you that this new crime wave would lead to such things -"

"One crime does not make a crime wave," interrupted Weston testily. He turned to Cardona. "Let, us go over this case, inspector."

They went over it, in detail, though some points were lacking. Cardona, had, of course, identified Hogger Unstrum and the other dead members of his crew. But he hadn't been able to place the outfit that belonged to Mort Lombert.

What Cardona regarded as most important, and far more valuable than Professor Troy's calculations, was a tip-off that had come this evening. He hadn't attributed it to The Shadow, at first, but he did now, because The Shadow had turned up in the midst of matters at Bartier's.

"The tip-off was most timely, Cranston," explained Weston. "I was here at the club when Inspector Cardona received it. In fact, I had just gone upstairs to call him at headquarters, when the call came through to him." Weston turned to Cardona: "I had some trouble getting a connection. You will remember, because you were talking on the wire."

Cardona nodded; but Cranston shook his head.

"You're wearing yourself out, commissioner," said Cranston. "I thought you usually had a telephone brought here to the grillroom and plugged into one of those floor outlets. Why go way up to the foyer to make a phone call?"

"I didn't want to annoy Professor Troy," returned Weston. "He was busy with some of his complex calculations."

A FAINT smile showed on Cranston's lips. Weston was actually indicating that he hadn't

wanted Troy to overhear a private conversation between the commissioner and his ace inspector.

Considering that Troy, at present, was deep in his graph papers and mumbling to himself, it was doubtful that the professor would have heard anything.

Still, men like Professor Troy had curious faculties. It might be that his very agile mind took in many things that he did not seem to notice.

At least, the matter of the tip-off interested The Shadow, because he hadn't sent it. His own excursion to Bartier's was not the result of mathematical calculation. He had noticed several small, but important, news reports pertaining to the diamond industry; how New York concerns, most notably Bartier Co., were acquiring vast supplies of the precious gems, due to the chaos of the world market.

The Bartier assets had simply outstripped the protective measures taken to guard them, and a final news item had mentioned that the wholesale diamond firm intended to move to more modern quarters. In any language, that meant the time was ripe for robbery, so The Shadow had remained in Bartier's after the place closed, on the chance that crooks had also read the newspapers and decided to act.

It wasn't usual for two aspirants to crime as varied as Mort Lombert and Hogger Unstrum to tackle the same crib on the same occasion, each by a different route. But The Shadow had heard of similar coincidences before.

He was interested, however, in any special reasons why either, or both, should have chosen Bartier's this evening. There was no immediate way of learning facts in Mort's case, but Hogger's purpose might have been inspired by the note that Professor Troy had found, only to have Inspector Cardona take it.

The Shadow awaited mention of the note. It came.

"This may interest you, Cranston," said Weston suddenly. "We found a rather mysterious note on Hogger Unstrum. Here it is; read it."

He passed the note to Cranston. It was a typewritten message, done on an old machine, for the letters were a trifle out of line. It read:

You will find the going good tonight. Proceed exactly as I have advised. Do not tolerate any interference. You will hear from me later. X.

Commissioner Weston summarized the note quite bluntly, as he received it back from Cranston.

"I would say that X was the brain behind the attempted robbery," declared Weston. "In Unstrum's case, that is. Do you agree?"

Cranston's response was a slow nod.

"I'd say the same," put in Cardona, "considering that a guy like Hogger needed a brain in back of him. Still, if X told Hogger to blow his way into the place, he was only telling him to do it his own way. Blasting in where he wasn't wanted was about the one thing Hogger could do right."

Weston looked to Troy for an opinion; then shrugged and laid the note aside. The professor was too deep in his calculations to be disturbed.

"I'd like to know who X is," began Cardona glumly. Then, brightening, he added: "Say, commissioner! You remember that contractor, Park Tossig, who bid for the tunnel job?"

Weston nodded.

"An ignorant cuss, Tossig," continued Cardona. "I was in his place one day, and he was having a secretary sign his checks. If he can't sign his own name, he'd use an X, wouldn't he?"

"What's more, he didn't get the tunnel job. The Apex Contracting Co. took it. They were the fellows who had trouble from Hogger Unstrum. There's our lead, commissioner."

Weston looked quite pleased.

"Follow it, inspector," he ordered, "and report tomorrow. This may solve the Unstrum angle. Our next job is to learn more about that other crew we met at Bartier's."

"Whoever they were," declared Cardona, "they nearly got the edge on us. Not as bad as Hogger did, though. That alley wasn't much of a spot to pick, commissioner."

For a moment, Weston's eyes were angry. Then, with a sweep of his hand, the commissioner remarked:

"It was Professor Troy who suggested it."

At mention of his name, Troy snapped from his coma and looked up, with excited eyes.

"Of course, I suggested it!" he exclaimed. "I said that crime would strike tonight. I advised a simple process of rejecting the places where we knew crime would not happen, thereby choosing the one where it would occur.

"My process of elimination"—he picked up some papers and thrust them in front of Weston—"would have left Bartier's as the final choice."

Weston's rejoinder was curt.

"We were speaking of the alley," Weston declared. "Not of the scene of crime itself. Confine yourself to your figures, professor, and let us manage other matters in the future."

"But I can prove -"

"Whenever you can prove anything, we shall listen, gladly. You predicted crime, and it occurred." Weston paused, after reluctantly granting the point. "Therefore, professor, we shall always be glad to receive the benefit of your calculations. I might add, however, that to be really useful, such calculations will have to be more specific."

TROY nodded very solemnly, as though taking Weston's words to heart. He gathered up his papers, stuffed them into his brief case, and gave a short good night, after which he left, stroking his long fingers through his shocky white hair and mumbling to himself so ardently that he almost tripped going up the stairs from the grillroom.

The blundering departure of the old professor brought new indulgence from the commissioner.

"That chap is really trying to help," declared Weston. "I wish he could. As it stands, however, we must depend on our own efforts." He turned to Cardona. "I am counting upon you to handle the Unstrum angle, inspector."

It was later, when Cardona had gone and Weston was leaving the club with his friend Cranston, that the commissioner said:

"The trouble with this case, Cranston, is that it has two angles. I am depending upon Cardona to track down one. I only wish that the other angle was in such competent hands. Crooks at large are always more dangerous than those who are dead."

By the "other angle," Weston referred to Mort Lombert, the living criminal as yet unidentified by the law. Though Weston did not realize it, Mort's case was in very competent hands: those of The Shadow. For The Shadow knew Mort's identity and had ways of tracking down the man in question.

After leaving the commissioner, Lamont Cranston rode off in a limousine. His lips phrased one of those low-toned laughs that belonged, not to himself, but to The Shadow. Yet the laugh, though it carried confidence so far as Mort's case was concerned, did not lack a slight touch of query.

The Shadow was thinking of an unknown factor in the case—the mysterious X, whose part in crime might prove far more reaching than his one note indicated!

CHAPTER V. THE LINK BETWEEN

THE huddly man was nervous as he sneaked warily along an East Side thoroughfare, poking anxious glances over his narrow, bent shoulders. He was usually nervous when he sauntered about by daylight, and on this particular afternoon his anxiety was carrying through to dusk.

This man answered to the name of Weasel Kelk, and his nickname flattered him. His face, yellowish, and so lipless that it showed his ugly teeth, was a visage that bore more resemblance to a rat than a weasel.

Crooks whose methods verged on the double cross were usually restless, and Weasel Kelk was as nearly a double-crosser as he could be. His technique consisted in playing the go-between in affairs of crime, and blowing whichever way the wind seemed strongest.

In fact, Weasel had sometimes served the police as a stool pigeon, usually in behalf of certain mobsters who wanted to make trouble for others of their ilk.

Either through fear or policy, Weasel had never dared to double-cross one specific crook for whom he often worked. The crook in question was Mort Lombert. In fact, Weasel's connection with Mort was very secret, known only to a privileged few in gangdom.

Because Mort considered it wise, Weasel had been on good behavior of late; hence, Inspector Cardona hadn't thought about quizzing the rat-faced go-between regarding crime at Bartier's.

Certainly, there was no hookup between Weasel and Hogger Unstrum, the dead leader of the demolished crew of crooks. And Cardona, at present, was concentrating solely on the Unstrum angle.

Which left Weasel to The Shadow; something which Weasel recognized - and feared.

All day, Weasel had been suspicious of shamblers like himself, for he had heard that The Shadow was a past master of disguise, who could readily rove the squalid districts that Weasel himself frequented. He'd thought, Weasel had, that dusk would ease his qualms; instead, it was increasing them.

So Weasel, passing along a narrow street, turned suddenly into the doorway of an old poolroom, where the glow of lights and the click of pool balls offered the temporary solace of companionship.

The poolroom was one of Weasel's favorite hangouts, and he chose a corner chair, to watch the door from there. He gave a start as another shambly figure entered; then Weasel grinned. He knew the sneaky arrival, a wizened little fellow called Hawkeye. Classing Hawkeye as a snooper like himself, Weasel was gratified that the other man, too, might be dodging The Shadow.

Hawkeye's gaze stayed toward the door, and showed sudden suspicion when it opened. Then Hawkeye relaxed. The man who entered was of husky mold, with a chiseled profile that had the hardness of rock. He was Cliff Marsland, well known in the badlands for his willingness to combat all comers.

At present, Cliff was looking for a contest in the gentle art of Kelly pool, and he found some takers. They chose a table at the rear of the poolroom, near the corner where Weasel was seated.

If any invader, even The Shadow, decided to storm this poolroom, he'd meet with prompt opposition from Cliff Marsland. So Weasel relaxed, as Hawkeye had, deciding that this was a very safe place to be. Even better, with Cliff practically guarding the door to the back room. Weasel would be able to answer any phone call that came from Mort Lombert.

Odd that Weasel, secretly serving Mort, did not suspect that both Hawkeye and Cliff might be engaged in similar employment!

If the thought had crossed Weasel's mind, however, it would have carried him the wrong direction. He would have mentally catalogued the big-shots of the underworld, seeking to guess the name that Cliff and Hawkeye acknowledged as boss. It wouldn't have occurred to Weasel to put the process in reverse and terminate with that dread name: The Shadow.

Actually, the new arrivals in the poolroom were agents of The Shadow. Hawkeye's entry had been a cue for Cliff to come along. Both knew that Weasel might be hearing from Mort, and each intended to do his bit toward learning what any phone call chanced to be about.

As for The Shadow, dread personage whose very name made Weasel shrink, he was at present moving in a much higher circle than an East Side poolroom. He was at the swanky Cobalt Club, posing as Lamont Cranston, in company with friends of the night before: Commissioner Weston, Inspector Cardona and Professor Troy.

The matter of chief moment was Cardona's report on the X question.

"I was all wrong, commissioner," Cardona admitted. "That contractor, Park Tossig, isn't X. He can't be. I put the question right to him."

"Bad policy," snapped Weston. "You revealed your hand. Naturally, Tossig would have denied the connection."

"But I was wrong to begin with," explained Joe. "When I went into Tossig's office, what do you suppose I found him doing? Signing letters! I made a bum guess when I said that Tossig was illegible."

"Illiterate is the correct term," informed Weston. "Proceed, inspector."

"I asked Tossig why he needed a secretary to sign his checks," stated Cardona. "He told

me why. Those checks I saw, that day, belonged to the Apex Contracting Co."

Weston stared, puzzled at first; then, as understanding dawned on the commissioner, Cardona nodded.

"That's it," declared Joe. "Tossig controls the Apex Co., along with his own business. So he wasn't bothered when he lost the tunnel contracts to Apex. And when Hogger Unstrum blew up a caisson belonging to Apex, he was hurting Tossig, not helping him."

"In that case," Weston decided, "Tossig must have wanted to help you gain new details in the Unstrum case. He should be anxious to track down X, the man behind last night's crime."

Cardona nodded. He unfolded a city map that Tossig had given him. It was marked with a red line, near a river tunnel. Cardona stated that the red line represented an excavation abandoned after Hogger's depredation.

"Tossig says the place has lights and telephone," Cardona declared, "because he hasn't gotten around to dismantling it yet. Tossig thought that Hogger had cleared town; now he has a hunch that the guy was using this old piece of tunnel as a hide-away."

"Then the left-overs of Unstrum's band must have fled there!" exclaimed Weston.

"It looks that way," agreed Cardona. "If we can dig them out of their rat-hole, they may be able to tell us something about X. Only, we'll have to take a few of them alive—something we didn't do last night."

Before Weston could begin to outline a campaign, Professor Troy bobbed up from a heap of papers, exclaiming:

"Eureka! Eureka!"

Then, shoving papers at Weston, the excited professor began to explain his newest calculations.

"The trend of crime will change," informed Troy. "Instead of dealing in mob violence, criminals will turn subtle. They will seek wealth by indirect measures, rather than by open attack."

Commissioner Weston was interested in Troy's theory, but he saw a flaw in it.

"Such men as Unstrum could never prove subtle," reminded Weston. "Have you included that in your calculations, professor?"

"I'm not considering Unstrum." There was a gleam in Troy's eyes. "He is dead, and therefore no longer a factor. I am calculating in terms of the other criminals who appeared on the scene at Bartier's. They, at least, were clever." Troy cocked his head wisely. "Enough so to elude you, commissioner."

"Perhaps your calculations can tell us who they are, professor."

"That is your task to learn, commissioner. Meanwhile, I advise you to forget these pitiful remnants of Unstrum's crowd, wherever they may be hiding. Concentrate upon criminals who may still be planning serious crime."

THERE was merit in Troy's argument, and Cranston was the one person who appreciated it.

Knowing Mort Lombert to be far cannier than Hogger Unstrum, The Shadow could have delivered the same advice as Troy was giving.

However, there was one point that Troy had sidetracked; the possibility that Hogger's remaining river rats might give a lead to X, the unknown crime master.

Commissioner Weston recognized that feature; hence he persisted in his present plan.

"We shall ferret out Unstrum's men," Weston declared decisively. "Afterward, professor, we can consider your new theory."

The gleam faded from Troy's eyes, only to return. Gathering his papers together, Troy stuffed them into his portfolio, and spoke a curt good night. They watched him stride toward the door; there, instead of stumbling, Troy halted and faced about. His expression had turned mild.

"Perhaps you are right, commissioner," said Troy. "My calculations are incomplete. I must consult my reference library and study such factors as the business index, before forming a final opinion. I shall see you tomorrow evening."

With that, Professor Troy departed, and the leisurely Mr. Cranston began to plan upon leaving, also. The Shadow had his own methods of calculation, where crime was concerned, and wanted to put them into practice. Unfortunately, Commissioner Weston was already mapping out a method of rounding up the last of Unstrum's adherents, and wanted his friend Cranston to see the arrangement.

At the end of fifteen minutes, Cranston was preparing himself for a lengthier stay, when a fortunate interruption came in the person of a club attendant, who announced that Mr. Cranston was wanted on the telephone, upstairs.

When Weston suggested that a phone be plugged into the grillroom and the call transferred there, Cranston gave him a very dry smile.

Remembering how he preferred to keep his own conversations private, Weston could only shrug as Cranston arose and strolled up to the foyer. But when he reached the telephone, Cranston lost his show of indolence. He recognized the voice that came across the wire. It said:

"Burbank speaking -"

"Report!"

The interruption was The Shadow's whisper; not Cranston's drawling tone. For Burbank, the methodical speaker at the other end, was The Shadow's contact man, who relayed word from such workers as Cliff and Hawkeye. It was from those two that the message came.

Weasel Kelk had received a phone call at the poolroom—a call undoubtedly from Mort Lombert, though Weasel had been very chary about what he said on his end of the line. The main point was that Weasel had fared forth in his snakiest fashion, and that Hawkeye was trailing him. Naturally, Hawkeye was using beckoning tactics to bring along Cliff Marsland and other agents in the vicinity.

The agents believed that Weasel intended to join up with Mort. In keeping with previous instructions from The Shadow, Hawkeye was to spot Weasel's destination, and warn off the other agents before crooks could spy them. Burbank's next report would come as soon as the setting was ready for The Shadow.

"Report received."

With those words, The Shadow hung up. He let a soft laugh escape the lips of Cranston. Considering all factors, The Shadow was confident that there would be time enough, before Burbank's next report, for him to perform a special mission of his own.

The Shadow was still Cranston when he came from the phone booth. In calm-mannered style, he spoke to a club attendant.

"My regrets to Commissioner Weston," said Cranston. "Tell him that I cannot rejoin his conference. I had forgotten that I had a previous engagement." He paused; then added a comment which he knew would be pointed enough to both convince and irk the commissioner: "You might mention that the engagement is with Miss Margo Lane."

Had they been awake, the armchair drowzers in the foyer of the Cobalt Club might have observed a slight quickening in the pace of the leisurely Mr. Cranston, as he went out to the street.

It was often so when Lamont Cranston fared forth to become his other self, The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. OUT OF THE FOG

It was foggy along the water front when The Shadow appeared there; that is, if he could be said to have actually appeared. Rather, The Shadow was a portion of the grimy, soot-stained mist that licked the blackened fronts of piers.

He was part of the swirl, that creature in black who represented night, itself. His trip here had been a swift one, and The Shadow was losing no time in further investigation. Etched in his mind were the details of the red-lined map supplied by Tossig. The Shadow had chosen to beat the police to their evening's goal.

It was necessary, this expedition, if real facts regarding X were to be learned.

Commissioner Weston would have done well to follow the advice of Professor Troy and forget about the human left-overs from Hogger's organization. If trapped, they would follow the example of the rest and go down shooting. Dead, such mobbies would be useless, as informants.

Inasmuch as Professor Troy had been overruled, The Shadow was taking the next best course. When he sought hiding crooks, he did it subtly, penetrating to their midst before they were aware of his arrival. He was quite sure that he could use persuasive measures that a police raid would not supply.

Filtering through the water-front area, The Shadow was making a rapid search for an entrance into the abandoned stretch of tunnel where wanted men might be. Amid the fog, he moved like a mass of inky smoke, penetrating narrow alleys and working into basement doorways.

At last, a block back from the piers, The Shadow found a square patch of wood in a sidewalk close to a building wall. It yielded under pressure and slid back from beneath the building edge.

Lifting the boards, The Shadow probed for a ladder, and found one. The wooden lid slid shut again, in singular fashion, as The Shadow worked his way into the narrow shaft.

There was a moment of pause before the trapdoor closed. The Shadow was listening for

any sound of approaching police cars. Hearing none, he continued on his way, hoping that Weston and Cardona had prolonged their debate as to the best system of approaching the tunnel hide-away.

The shaft was not very deep. At the bottom, The Shadow's flashlight, cautious in its glimmer, uncovered a horizontal cross passage, that went in two directions.

Taking the one to the right, The Shadow turned a corner and came to another vertical shaft. A short trip down another ladder showed him the beginning of another level passage that terminated abruptly in a wall of solid concrete.

This was the wrong passage. Having wasted valuable minutes, The Shadow had no choice but to return above and try the passage to the left. He was nearly at the underground corner when he slowed down, to listen anew.

Echoes played curious tricks in such corridors, but never before had The Shadow heard the sound of his own stealthy creep. The effect was very vague, but it continued, as though the walls were throwing back the tread from somewhere ahead of him. Flashlight extinguished, The Shadow reached the corner and paused completely.

The footsteps continued. They were not echoes. Some other prowler was on his way to the underground lair; someone who knew the right course and must have entered, to follow it, while The Shadow was traveling in the wrong direction!

From then on, The Shadow guided himself by the footsteps. They were taking the other passage, and when they halted, a slight scrape followed. Gauging the distance in the darkness, The Shadow stopped at the right moment. He could feel a slight coolness in the air, that denoted an open shaft, almost at his feet.

Stooping, The Shadow reached downward into emptiness; then, leaning farther, he found the top rung of a ladder.

Scrapes had ended below. New creeps began, and faded. Silently, The Shadow descended the ladder and reached a lower passage, where the footsteps still preceded him.

Though his own motion was absolutely silent, The Shadow, in following, recognized that the man ahead was unusually stealthy. In fact, there was an interval when The Shadow could not hear the creeps at all.

Then, from blackness just ahead, came the sharp click of metal against metal:

Tap... tap-tap... tap—

Someone was pounding a signal against a steel door, and the tapping implement sounded like the butt of a revolver. More important, however, was the message of those metallic beats:

Tap... tap-tap... tap—

A dash, two dots, and a dash. The signal was a letter in the international code. The letter X!

His own gun drawn, The Shadow worked forward. The man in the dark might prove to be X, himself; summoning the men who had formerly served Hogger Unstrum.

Certainly, X would have as much reason to arrive ahead of the law as did The Shadow.

Minutes were no longer the issue; things had to be done within brief seconds.

The Shadow's purpose was to suppress the rival prowler and pick up the tappings where the other man left off, thus drawing Hogger's remnants into a perfect trap.

Again the signal was given, and The Shadow, edging up beside the other man, could feel the vibrations against the steel. The moment the final tap was given, The Shadow made a sideward swoop and enveloped his startled rival.

There was a muffled clank as the other man struck wildly with his gun, only to have it bashed by The Shadow's swinging weapon. Then a cloak sleeve was smothering a surprised snarl, and the arm within the sleeve tightened around a neck that twisted, but couldn't wrench away.

A revolver thudded the stone floor, dropped from a loosening hand. Before The Shadow could pocket his unneeded automatic and bring his flashlight into play, the identity of his prisoner was disclosed. The revelation came when the steel door swung suddenly open, emitting a block of light.

The Shadow was staring into the white, lipless face of Weasel Kelk, who returned his gaze in bulge-eyed fashion!

Singular, this meeting with the sneaky go-between who should have been on his way to join Mort Lombert. It told facts in a flash. It couldn't mean a previous tie-up between Mort Lombert and Hogger Unstrum, for the two hadn't been teamed the night before.

It signified that Mort, like Hogger, must have received some word from X, and had sent Weasel to fulfill new orders from crime's mysterious master hand!

The Shadow completed that thought chain in an instant. He couldn't have spared more time for it, because his mind was immediately concerned with something else. In fact, The Shadow was acting in instinctive fashion. He was flinging Weasel about and at the same time driving for the door that had just swung open.

For beyond that doorway loomed a pair of huskies whose hands were coming up with guns. They were Hogger's men, the only two left, and they realized that their hide-out had become a trap. Determined to battle to the bitter death, they were to have their chance—against The Shadow!

At least, Weasel's signal had lulled them. They were holding guns in hand, but didn't expect to use them; which gave The Shadow moments of advantage.

He didn't try to reverse back into the passage; if he had, these killers would have blasted away, reconciling themselves to Weasel's death on the chance of bagging The Shadow in the bargain. Instead, The Shadow hurled himself bodily against the pair, thrusting Weasel ahead of him.

One husky tried to aim point-blank at The Shadow, only to have his gun hand knocked aside by a cross-slash from The Shadow's heavy automatic. The other didn't have a chance to aim, for he was thrown off balance by the spinning form of Weasel, which came with an impetus that the scrawny go-between couldn't have delivered of his own accord. The Shadow put a healthy arm sweep into that spinner.

Through the doorway, past the brace of husky foemen, The Shadow had ample space, for he was in the hide-away itself, a fair-sized chamber carved to the full dimensions of the proposed tunnel. Moreover, he was beyond the electric light that dangled from the center of

the room, and all the crooks could see of him was a huge silhouette that swept the floor, a shadow of The Shadow.

They heard a laugh reverberating in the confines, transformed into a dozen peals of mirth by the stony walls. Such a laugh was the deceptive sort that listeners could never trace, and in this case it produced an even more pronounced effect.

It gave its hearers the impression that they were surrounded. They'd been hurled back by a mass of blackness that had actually disintegrated before their gaze. Blackness had come with a force that seemed too powerful to be supplied by a single adversary. The occupants of the hide-away fancied themselves faced by a dozen Shadows; not merely a single foe.

THEY couldn't shoot it out against such odds. With frenzied accord, they sprang through the wide door to the passage, carrying Weasel ahead of them simply because he happened to be in their path.

As they went, they kept shooting back, hoping to stay off pursuit, and all the while they were bouncing Weasel along toward the same safety that they sought.

The Shadow returned the shots purely as a gesture. He wasn't putting himself in the path of bullets coming through the doorway. He preferred to keep a real surprise in store for the fugitives.

He let them reach a shaft and scramble upward, dragging Weasel with them. They didn't stop at the top, for they heard a laugh of challenge from below.

All the way up, the escaping trio fancied The Shadow at their very heels, for that mockery carried through the underground channels and rang loud in the ears of the fugitives. When they smashed up through the wooden barrier in the sidewalk, they could fancy The Shadow clutching them, though he had purposely stopped near the bottom of the final shaft.

The Shadow knew the crooks, once safe, would shoot back, and while thus engaged would make themselves easy prey for a sortie by The Shadow's own agents, who had trailed Weasel to this neighborhood, under Hawkeye's guidance. This was the perfect chance to gather in mobsters intact, and learn what they knew about the proposition of X.

Gunfire ended suddenly above, and The Shadow thought his purpose had been realized, until he heard the shrill notes of police whistles. Again, guns began to bark, away from the opening in the shaft. Scaling the ladder, The Shadow peered through the opening and took in the foggy scene.

Three men, two large ones and a little shambler between them, were retreating toward a corner, shooting at revolver spurts that appeared in streaked crimson from amidst the thickening fog. Weasel was shooting with the others, but he was urging them to flight, rather than continuance of battle.

The spurts of three guns were fading when The Shadow rolled from cover and sidled rapidly along the wall. Taking advantage of a momentary lull, he sped across the street, totally unseen, between the two fog-bound factions representing crime and the law.

At a corner opposite, The Shadow came upon his agents; they were three in number. Hawkeye, the little spotter, had been joined by Cliff Marsland and another stout fighter, Harry Vincent.

Their first token of The Shadow's presence came when they heard his sinister whisper close beside them. The tone was his, but the instructions amazed the agents, until their chief

added a few short words of explanation.

Then, with one accord, The Shadow's agents began a rapid fire, not toward the departing crooks but in the direction of the police!

Purposely high, the gunfire produced nothing except a response from police guns. Then the agents were on the move, hurrying back along the street. The voice of Inspector Cardona shouted: "There they go!" and police guns blazed more furiously.

Through the fog, the police caught a brief glimpse of The Shadow's agents: two stalwarts and a little man between them.

Before Cardona's marksmen could find human targets, The Shadow's agents were around a corner and making off through the fog, firing a few last shots to draw Cardona's squad along. The bait was perfect, for the police had mistaken the agents for the crooks because of the similarity of the two groups.

Moving the other direction, The Shadow heard the sounds of gunfire lessen. He knew that his agents were safely away, for there would be no tracing them in the fog. Then, his own keen hearing keyed to its highest pitch, The Shadow picked up sounds that guided him on his own quest.

Those sounds were the footfalls of Weasel and the two crooks with him as they scurried off to safety. Within another block, The Shadow closed in, until he was right behind them. They were getting away from the water front, out of the fog. Three figures showed dimly in the gloom. But the form that trailed them stayed within the shroud of darkness.

The safer crooks thought themselves, the better, for such was in keeping with The Shadow's plans. He knew where Weasel would lead them - to the new headquarters of Mort Lombert. That location learned, The Shadow would have crime well in hand.

When Mort and his mob moved anew, it would be by order of a certain mastermind called X, whose purposes The Shadow intended to learn in full!

CHAPTER VII. CRIME TO COME

THE SHADOW was in his sanctum, a black-walled room hidden away in the heart of Manhattan. There, cloaked in black and ready for new foray, he was making a rapid study of the crime situation, through the medium of newspaper clippings and reports from agents.

Clippings had proven useful in the Bartier case, and might do the same again. This time, the most important items related to something far different from a hoard of diamonds. They concerned a man named Rodney Albury, who, very oddly, was not a person of great wealth.

However, Albury represented wealth. He was the keyman in a large industrial set-up. Albury had come to prominence by designing new styles of factories for companies that weren't showing their proper quota of production.

He was termed a "speed-up" expert by the newspapers, which had spoken of Albury in million-dollar terms, based on his value to the companies that intended to alter their plants to his design.

The term "million dollar" was significant.

Bartier Co had been called "million dollar" men in the diamond industry, and had therewith become targets of crime. Crooks liked to think of millions in other people's cash. They might

be interested in acquiring either Rodney Albury or the plans which he had designed, but had not yet delivered.

Crime, in such a sense, would never have appealed to Hogger Unstrum, but it might to Mort Lombert. Besides, if Professor Troy was correct in his prediction of a crime wave, there must be other crooks at large quite ready to engage in unusual schemes.

In fact, the Albury prospect fitted, quite neatly, with Troy's declaration of a few nights ago, when the professor had solemnly prophesied that criminals would turn their hand to subtler crimes than diamond robberies.

During the last few days, The Shadow had been waiting for two things to happen. He intended to check the next move made by Mort Lombert, and he wanted to know the results of the wonderful calculations Professor Troy had promised.

So far, Mort hadn't moved from the headquarters The Shadow had discovered by trailing Weasel. Whenever The Shadow wasn't watching the place, Hawkeye was on duty; hence Mort was under sufficient observation.

Meanwhile, Professor Achilles Troy had become tangled in his own abstruse calculations, and hadn't managed to get them into shape. Commissioner Weston had promised to inform his friend Cranston as soon as Troy delivered, so The Shadow was keeping tabs on that angle, as well as the matter of Mort Lombert.

In between, The Shadow was studying the curious situation of Rodney Albury. He'd managed to make a call to Albury, warning him, in true Shadow style, that New York wasn't the healthiest of places.

Albury had taken that call to heart; too much so. He'd bobbed from sight before even The Shadow could trace where he went. Of course, Albury was a man who might be many places, and it was gratifying to know that if The Shadow couldn't locate him, crooks would have difficulty, too.

How well Rodney Albury had buried himself was being evidenced at a certain New York hotel. There, a man of thin build and worried face was studying himself in a mirror, judging the effect of a bristly mustache that sprouted well across his upper lip.

On a table in the corner was a large brief case that had once borne the initials "R. A.," like the Gladstone bag beside it. Both items of luggage had lost their identifying initials, thanks to a generous application of black ink.

A telephone bell jarred Albury from his reverie. Answering nervously, he spoke in a forced tone, and heard a girl's voice reply in puzzled query:

"Mr. Bronson?"

"Hello, Madeline," answered Albury, ending his forced speech. Then, as he heard a startled exclamation: "Yes, this is Mr. Albury. You're downstairs?... Good! I'll join you right away."

Gathering brief case and Gladstone, Albury descended to the lobby, where the girl awaited him. He gave a smile as he saw Madeline Dale. She was as attractive as ever, her dash of red hair befitting her trim style. She looked worried, though, when she saw Albury; more worried than he was.

"There's a cab waiting at the side door," said Albury, smiling. "It's been waiting all day. Let's take it, Madeline. By the way, has the mustache changed me?"

Slowly, Madeline shook her head, and her expression became more troubled. They reached the cab that Albury had mentioned, and he told the driver to take them to the Pennsylvania Station.

Closing the window to the driver's seat, Albury began to talk above the rattle of a faulty radio. Madeline looked for a button to cut the buzzing off, but Albury shook his head.

"Let it continue," he said. "I don't want the driver to overhear us. I'll tell you why I'm worried, Madeline. People have been watching me."

Madeline's eyes gave Albury an expressive glance; then, slowly, the girl inquired:

"What sort of people?"

"I don't know," returned Albury. "I'd imagine, though, that they're typical crooks. They've trailed me in cabs, for one thing."

"You're sure that they're not a smoother sort?" asked the girl. "The kind who might have noticed you in night clubs?"

"I haven't been to night clubs, Madeline. In fact, I haven't even been to my studio since the warnings came."

"What warnings?"

"Telephone calls," responded Albury. "Advising me to stay out of sight. So I have, under the name of Bronson. I called you this evening because I knew I could trust you. I wish you were still working for me, Madeline. You were very efficient."

The girl did not acknowledge the compliment. She was thinking deeply and Albury thought he understood why.

"You're wondering where I'm going," he said. "I'll tell you. I'm leaving for St. Louis on the nine o'clock train, and taking my completed plans with me."

While Albury spoke, Madeline was shaking her head, as though she didn't wish to hear. Albury smiled, because the girl's heartfelt alarm rather quieted his own qualms. In fatherly fashion, he patted Madeline's shoulder.

"I'll look out for myself," assured Albury. "What I want you to do, Madeline, is communicate with some of my special customers and tell them where to meet me. I'll keep you posted as to my whereabouts -"

This time, Madeline's headshakes were so emphatic that Albury was forced to pause.

"I'd rather not, Mr. Albury," said Madeline. "You see, certain people know—that is, they might guess—that I worked for you. If they should spy on me—well, I wouldn't be worried about myself, but I'd be afraid that they might learn where you had gone."

Albury's eyes became reflective.

"I see," he said. "Very well, Madeline."

The girl noted that Albury had drawn a key from his vest pocket, but was letting it slip back again.

"I wanted you to go to the studio," remarked Albury, "and pick up some correspondence that

is in my desk. But I shall arrange otherwise."

"You won't go there yourself!"

Madeline's outburst was so sincere, that Albury studied her more closely, as though seeking to analyze the reason for her new alarm. Then, in soothing tone:

"No, I won't go to the studio," declared Albury. He glanced at his watch. "I shall have dinner at the station, before train time, and mail the studio key to my attorney, telling him what I want done. He may be out of town, but it won't matter. I have no immediate need for the correspondence."

WHEN the cab wheeled into Pennsylvania Station, Albury asked where Madeline intended to go next. She said Times Square, so Albury paid the cabby sufficient fare to cover the rest of the trip.

Alighting, he turned his Gladstone over to a redcap, but kept tight clutch on his precious brief case that contained the million-dollar industrial plans.

A cheery wave from Albury and Madeline was on her way again. The first thing the girl did was find the knob that stopped the crackles of the defective radio; then, deep in the cab seat, Madeline studied the passing lights of Manhattan and pondered.

For certain reasons, Madeline Dale had been worried about her former employer, Rodney Albury, before she heard from him this evening. Several times, she had phoned his studio, and hadn't been able to decide whether the lack of a response was a good omen or a bad.

The studio was in the Thirties, and as the cab rolled along Madeline saw its building from the window. It was on the top floor of an old four-story house that had been converted into an apartment, and Madeline caught a glimpse of small, darkened windows beneath the roof. She was glad that Albury had decided not to go there.

During the rest of the ride to Times Square, Madeline treated herself to new suspicions, centering them on the cab driver. She couldn't see his face, but she studied his picture on the license card in back of the front seat. It showed a drab weak-chinned face, and it bore the name: Lou Firsh.

If the picture proved a proper index to Firsh, himself, he was probably a dull and very harmless person. But Madeline was taking no chances on Firsh, or anyone else.

Nearing Times Square, she observed that the clock on the tower of a large building registered approximately half past eight. She slid back the front window and told the driver to stop at the nearest drugstore.

"I'm going to make a phone call," stated Madeline. "Perhaps two or three calls. I want you to wait right here, because I may have somewhere else to go."

She caught a glimpse of the cabby's profile as he turned his head to nod, and it matched the picture on his license card. Alighting, Madeline entered the drugstore and took a phone booth which commanded a window view, enabling her to watch the cab and see that Firsh didn't leave it.

Madeline's first nickel was returned. She dropped it in the slot again and dialed another number. As she waited, she watched from the window, keeping the cab in constant sight, along with the drab driver who was slouched behind the wheel.

High above, across Times Square, the hands of a great clock were creeping slowly toward the hour of nine.

CHAPTER VIII. CAMPS OF EVIL

KEN BLANDON heard the ringing phone bell, and hesitated before he answered it. Despite his wise, self-sufficient manner, Ken was apt to hesitate on occasion. He didn't like it, waiting here alone in his small but lavish apartment.

He was quite a poser, Ken Blandon. For one thing, he posed as a young man who had inherited a legitimate fortune, which accounted for the fancy style in which he lived. His sallow face, with its natty mustache, could take on a very dead-pan expression whenever people talked about investments of the sort that Ken was supposed to own.

Alone, however, Ken let his face give way to nervous twitches, and they were quite apparent when he heard the phone bell ring. Then, stiffening, Ken picked up the telephone and gave a cool: "Hello."

The voice that greeted Ken's brought a return of his facial switches, but his own tone didn't lose its coolness.

"Hello, Madeline!" Ken paused, after the greeting. Then: "Yes, Chet Parridge is here... Sorry, you won't be able to talk to him. Yes, he's dead to the world. It's getting to be a habit."

Madeline's voice became insistent. In response, Ken indulged in some dramatic acting for his own benefit. Half turning from the telephone, he gestured across the living room.

"I tell you, Chet's out cold!" declared Ken. "Yes, he's sprawled on the couch, as usual... How long has he been here? About an hour, I'd say... he killed a whole pint, one drink after another... All right, I'll try to wake him -"

Setting the telephone down, Ken stalked over to the vacant couch and put sincerity behind his fakery, by pummeling pillows as though they represented the absent Chet. Then, returning to the telephone:

"It's no use, Madeline." Ken's tone was rueful. "I suppose I'll have to phone some friends and have them cart him back to his own apartment... It's getting to be a nuisance, Chet passing out in my place all the time -"

Hanging up, Ken mopped his forehead with a handkerchief, then opened the apartment door. Leaving it ajar behind him, he went to the head of a stairway and called down to a clerk behind a desk in the lobby, which was just one floor below.

"Anybody show up yet?" queried Ken. "I want to get this fellow Parridge out of here."

The clerk shook his head as he peered upward; then volunteered to lend a hand, if Ken wished.

"Better wait," decided Ken. "Sometimes it takes more than two to handle him."

Returning to the apartment, Ken paced about restlessly, slapping one fist, then the other against the palm of the opposite hand. He was beating off the minutes in that fashion, and his nervousness increased as time progressed. Then the slight sound of a closing window, somewhere in the hall, brought Ken alert.

He tiptoed to the door, heard the slight approach of footfalls. Opening the door, Ken

Bandon admitted the man he expected: Chet Parridge.

AS a specimen of suavity, Chet was jumps ahead of his crony, Ken. Chet's face was dark, but it was tanned rather than sallow, and rather handsome despite its signs of dissipation. Chet was wearing a Tuxedo, and he laid aside a sporty derby hat to smooth his glossy black hair.

Only Ken knew that Chet's gesture was a nervous sign. Chet, himself, proved it further, when he said:

"I need a drink, Ken."

From a table drawer Ken produced a full pint bottle. Uncorking it, he passed it to Chet, with the statement:

"You need a lot of drinks. You'd better kill the whole pint. I told Madeline you had already."

Bottle to his lips, Chet scowled.

"Madeline phoned?" he queried. "How long ago?"

"About ten minutes," replied Ken. "I've been faking a drunk alibi for you. Told the boys I might be needing them. I'd better give them a hurry call."

Chet nodded. In keeping with the situation, he proceeded to guzzle the pint of liquor as if it had been soda water. Ken was at the telephone, making himself heard above the sound of music from an elaborate radio in a corner of the living room.

The music had been soft at the time of Madeline's call, but now it was disturbing. Chet paused, holding the half-emptied bottle, and stepped over to turn off the music.

A low buzz continued after the radio was cut off; so faint that Chet didn't notice it. Seating himself on the couch, Chet was making more headway with the pint, when Ken finished the phone call and turned around.

"How did you make out, Chet?"

For answer, Chet tapped his hip pocket, which bulged with the thick shape of a gun. Then he slapped his hand against the inside pocket of his coat, which had a different bulge, indicating a packet of papers, tightly folded.

Ken's voice spoke, strained:

"You mean he really came there?"

"And stayed," completed Chet.

Swallowing what was left in the bottle, he began a cough that turned into an ugly laugh. "I told you it would be a sure thing!"

There was a nod from Ken, as though he felt that the thing had proven too sure.

"Whoever X is, he knows his stuff," spoke Chet. "I knew that, from the way he figured what we were after and told us how to get it. Well, I got it!"

Chet's voice was thickening; the rapid drinking of the liquor was taking effect. Easing back on the couch, Chet mumbled:

"You've got that X note, Ken. Better tear it up. We know it wasn't a phony steer. We've both got an alibi. We'll sit tight... until we hear from X again -"

Sagging backward, Chet tugged at his collar, which was bothering him, and gave his sleek hair a sweep from back to front, which ruffled it completely. Ken started to help the cause by unbuttoning Chet's Tuxedo jacket, but the mumbling man gestured otherwise.

"Leave it... buttoned, Ken. Only take the gun... off my hip. Park it somewhere... anywhere -"

Rolling sideward so that Ken could claim the gun, Chet lost his balance and took a crazy sprawl on the couch. He wouldn't need to fake that he was drunk; he was getting that way, very fast.

Sliding the gun from Chet's pocket, Ken turned to the corner and slipped the weapon behind a shelf of books.

Then, stepping out from the apartment, Ken Blandon shouted to the clerk downstairs, asking him to come up and see what the two of them could do about removing the obnoxious visitor, Chet Partridge.

SHARP in contrast to the apartment where Ken Blandon lived, was another meeting place of crooks, the back room of a so-called cafe on the lower East Side.

The back room was barred, with a sign on its door reading "Closed." Which meant that it was closed to ordinary customers, but not to a certain privileged group.

Those privileged persons were making it their headquarters. This was the chosen hide-away of Mort Lombert and his crew, which was amplified by the addition of Weasel Kelk and two husky river rats who had once served Hogger Unstrum.

These crooks felt safe enough. The police hadn't learned that they were the other mob at Bartier's. True, they had taken a chance, bringing Hogger's two men into the fold, but that task had been successfully accomplished, thanks in part to Weasel Kelk.

Mort Lombert was willing to give Weasel proper credit, but he still insisted that the chief glory belonged to X.

"Why should we worry?" Mort was saying. "We've got a brain in back of us. Look how smart he was, steering us to Bartier's the same time he sent Hogger there. We almost knocked off The Shadow!"

Mort's shrewd eyes gave a questioning sweep about the group of listeners, in case any chose to argue otherwise. None did, so Mort continued.

"The Shadow was lucky, that was all," declared Mort. "He got cold feet and tipped off the bulls, which was why they showed up, too. Between them, they managed to pull out of it. That's the way the brain figures it, and so do I."

Nods came from the assembled crooks. They knew that Mort had received new messages signed with the letter X. Mort gave a shrewd grin as he pulled the latest note from his pocket.

"I told you I had a better job than Bartier's," declared Mort. "You know what I said we'd do, if we missed out on the diamond grab. I said we'd try the snatch racket in a big way. You've heard of this guy Albury, who's worth a million bucks because of those factory plans he's drawn up -"

A clicking sound interrupted from the corner, and music began to play from a garish juke box that was the principal piece of furniture in the rear room of the basement dive. Weasel Kelk liked music, so he had dropped a coin into the machine and pressed the button.

"What's the idea?" demanded Mort savagely. "Didn't I tell you guys to lay off the juke box?"

Weasel shook his head.

"Not since I came here, Mort."

"Well, let it play," snapped Mort, above the tinny banging from the machine. "But don't start it again. I got a job for you, Weasel. Take watch on the alley door."

Weasel "took watch" by opening the door in question and peering into the alley, something he had done before. He observed an oddity that he had noted frequently—so frequently, that he regarded it an ordinary occurrence.

Darkness removed itself reluctantly whenever that door was opened; in fact, it gave the illusion of solidity, until the door was wide. Then the light from the corner of the rear room hide-away would flood across the alley, leaving only a corner niche of gloom against an opposite wall.

Invariably, Weasel shot a squint-eyed glance to that spot, and this time was no exception. Had there been the slightest stir in that fixed blackness, the little man would have become instantly alert.

But there was no stir, and the alley, itself, was quite deserted, as Weasel could see by a glance to the lighted street in front.

Finished with his brief inspection, Weasel slid back within the door and closed it. As he did, darkness crept forward again, blocking out the door itself. There was a gentle swish accompanying that tide, but Weasel did not hear the sound. It was almost as vague as the cloaked shape that caused it.

Darkness did live, in the person of The Shadow, who had taken over Hawkeye's vigil. But The Shadow was doing more than keep mere watch. He was listening in on happenings in the hide-away, or had been, until Weasel was detailed to inspect the alley.

However, Weasel himself was anxious to learn what else was taking place, and was therefore paving the way for The Shadow to do the same.

CLOSING the door behind him, Weasel edged forward through a little passage and craned into the back room, hoping to hear Mort's statements above the strident melody of the juke organ. The door edged open behind Weasel's back and blackness filtered through, to assume a human shape, fully cloaked.

With a loud bam-bam the juke music ended, and Mort's voice, raised loud so his followers could hear, reached The Shadow almost as a shout.

"It's nine o'clock." Mort was showing a watch in one hand, crinkling a sheet of paper in the other. "That's the time this note says we should start for Albury's studio. He'll be there, Albury will, because X says so.

"Albury will be waiting for somebody to show up, and we'll show up, instead. We'll find Albury and grab him. The job will be a cinch"—Mort's tone had lowered, because the only sound from the juke box was a low muffled buzz—"and I'll tell you why. If anything had happened to

sour it, X would have let us know by this time."

The door had opened and closed again before Weasel turned in its direction. Nor was there darkness in the alley when Weasel, himself, swung the door wide, so that Mort and the rest could follow him. Crime's zero hour was nine; it had become The Shadow's also.

Nine o'clock!

On that dot, a very puzzled, yet determined, girl was watching a train gate close in the Pennsylvania Station. Madeline Dale had returned to the railroad terminal from Times Square, and had watched the train gate from the moment it opened. She hadn't seen Rodney Albury go through.

Something was also happening at the Cobalt Club at this important hour of nine. There, Professor Achilles Troy was striding through the foyer, looking anxiously about for Commissioner Weston.

Troy had his brief case with him, but it was dangling open. In his excitement, the professor hadn't waited to find the commissioner. Troy's fist was brandishing his latest sheaf of calculations, with their findings concerning crime.

If those findings proved as accurate as Troy's manner indicated, the police would have their share in certain matters of deep moment to The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. HAND OF DEATH

THE narrow windows that fronted Albury's studio opened directly on a ledge where even a cat would have required some knowledge of acrobatics to navigate it successfully. Certainly, no one would have dreamed that any human prowler could move along that ledge.

In a sense, the shape that followed the ledge was not human. Rather, it was batlike. A broad-winged creature of mammoth size, it seemed to have materialized from the eaves above the windows. From the street below, the shape was invisible, for its blackness merged with the darkness of the windows.

The Shadow was performing a very neat trick. Lying on his side, his shoulder and hip touched the ledge, but overhung it so far that it could not support him. He was using the ledge only as a guiding line. On his hands and feet he was wearing rubber suction cups.

Oiled to just the proper degree, the suction cups made squidgy sounds as The Shadow pressed them. The squidges came, not when the cups were applied, but when they were released. With three disks gripping, a neat twist to the fourth operated a tiny air hole in the rubber, and the cup came loose, to be moved forward, carrying The Shadow that much closer to his goal.

Often, The Shadow had used his suction cups to make a vertical climb. This time, he was working on the horizontal. There was another point of novelty; instead of gripping a solid wall, The Shadow was using the cups on the surface of Albury's windows. The disks worked even better against glass than when applied to brick or concrete.

Inasmuch as these windows seemed immune to entry, The Shadow was hoping that one would be loosely fastened, and therefore easy to open. If he didn't find such a window, he would have to jimmy one, a rather difficult operation under the present circumstances.

It wasn't the difficulty that bothered him, as much as the time required. As he made the strange crawl, The Shadow was gauging the time element and had just about decided that

he could keep it in his favor, when he ran upon the very find he wanted.

In fact, the find was better than The Shadow wanted, and therefore worse. He planted a suction cup upon a window that had more than a loose fastening. The window was completely unclamped, and it hinged outward, as The Shadow discovered when with one disk clamped upon the pane in question, he reached his other hand forward.

The window swung out so suddenly that The Shadow became a living jackknife doubled below the flapping window, as it whipped back and forth under his shifting weight. His feet, thanks to the suction cups, had a firm grip upon the solid window; but only one hand was attached to the window that flapped.

The suction cup held; as a result, The Shadow's arm took the strain.

Instead of trying to relieve it, he gave a contortionist's twist that threatened to yank his shoulder from its socket. However, the flip saved him. In the midst of it, The Shadow thrust his free arm up beneath the flapping window and hooked it over the sill.

Then, loosening his feet, he took a pendulum swing that stopped abruptly when his knees struck the ledge below the window. His numbed fingers managed to twist the suction cup from the swinging pane, and The Shadow brought his wrenched arm down, under and around, to aid his clamp upon the window sill.

The Shadow's knees, rather than his arms, added the propelling force that rolled him inward, where he landed with only a slight jar on the floor of Albury's studio.

While The Shadow was removing the suction cups, he listened for any sounds within the studio itself. There were none, and the fact indicated that Albury was absent. Carefully, The Shadow closed the window; muffling a tiny flashlight in his cloak, he began to probe the studio.

Everything was dim; the bulky objects that caught the glimmer of The Shadow's light proved to be tables or filing cabinets.

One object, squattier than the rest, was a large safe, and The Shadow was about to push his flashlight past it to investigate a final corner of the studio, when he heard a muffled scraping from another direction. Turning, The Shadow brushed against curtains, and moving between them, heard the scraping just above his head.

He was in a little entry outside the studio, and the scraping came from a skylight in a ceiling that sloped at an angle. Gun drawn, The Shadow could have planted it against the frosted pane; but he chose another plan.

UNQUESTIONABLY, the newcomers were Mort Lombert and his crew, coming from a roof next door. Once inside, they would enter the studio, boxing themselves there.

Easing backward, The Shadow found a door and opened it. His flashlight showed a stairway, leading down. Testing the knob on the outside of the door, The Shadow found it wouldn't turn. It had a permanent latch that could be released only by a key.

Stepping to the stairs, The Shadow placed a special implement across the socket of the door latch; holding it there with one finger, he drew the door shut with his other hand. The door was tightly closed, when The Shadow heard Mort's crew come through the skylight and move into the studio. Therewith, The Shadow pushed the door inward.

The door went quite easily. Its latch hadn't caught, thanks to the implement The Shadow had

inserted. The implement, itself, fell to the floor, but it made no clatter whatever. Indeed, The Shadow did not even stoop to pick it up, for the "special implement" was nothing more than a paper match. Held horizontally across the socket, it had stopped the operation of the latch.

A neat trick, for the match, when jammed in place, had prevented the door from swinging as well as keeping it unlatched. Leaving the door ajar, The Shadow noticed that it had a tendency to swing open, for it had moved when he looked across his shoulder at it. However, he decided to leave it as it was, as a warning to Albury, should the man arrive.

Moreover, The Shadow wanted to see how Mort and the men with him were making out. They were blundering within the studio, using flashlights rather foolishly and snarling threats at what turned out to be the furniture.

The Shadow reached the curtains just as a flashlight focused on a wall switch. A moment later, the switch was pressed and the studio was properly illuminated.

Mort's voice rasped:

"Lay off, Albury! Unless you want to get croaked!"

Peering through the curtains, his automatic pointing from the fringe, The Shadow saw a singular scene; one that told him that, for once, he had taken too much for granted.

The studio wasn't empty. Rodney Albury was in it, seated at a desk in the lone corner that The Shadow hadn't spotted with his flashlight.

Half leaning on the desk, Albury had his arm resting across an opened brief case; his chin was propped on that arm, with his eyes glinting fixedly at the invaders. His other hand, his right, was dipped from sight at the other side of the desk and reaching into a desk drawer.

Albury could logically have assumed that pose at the time The Shadow came in through the window. Maybe he'd been seated at his desk waiting for someone, and keeping the studio dark, meanwhile.

Hearing an intruder, Albury could have decided to draw his gun and wait until the unknown declared himself. But The Shadow had left without flashing his light on the desk, and now Mort Lombert had taken over, a crew of three men with him.

Delayed tactics had produced a situation wherein Albury was hopeless. One move of his gun hand and crooks would forego their plan of kidnaping him and riddle his body with lead. At least, The Shadow was in a position to intervene. Though he couldn't block off shots directed at Albury, he could certainly cause crooks to wheel and fire shots his way, instead.

Often, The Shadow had pulled helpless persons out of jams by such a process. The first move was to deliver a whispered laugh that crooks would recognize as belonging to The Shadow. Such sinister mirth never failed to capture full attention. The laugh was on The Shadow's hidden lips at the very moment when he suddenly decided not to give it.

Instead, The Shadow remained rigid, motionless, his own eyes fixed on Albury's, which held their cold, steady stare. The Shadow's gaze took in Mort Lombert as the crook shifted toward the far end of the desk, still advising Albury to "lay off."

Shrewd as ever, Mort was trying to flank Albury, still hoping to seize the man, rather than kill him.

Then came Mort's lunge. Half across the desk he went, jabbing his gun toward Albury with his right hand, speeding his left toward the drawer below. As his own gun reached Albury's forehead; Mort chortled triumphantly. His other hand had grasped the revolver in the drawer before Albury could reach it.

At that moment, Albury swung. He shifted with a lazy, slow motion, accompanied by a creak. Only The Shadow realized that the pressure of Mort's gun had started Albury's shift, and that the creak came from the swivel chair behind the desk.

Albury's turn was half completed before criminals understood the truth.

The swing carried Albury from the desk. His shoulder rolled free and toppled him. He fell to the floor without throwing a hand ahead of him. Striking heavily, Albury's head banged with a thud he didn't feel. His coat, flapping wide, revealed a shirt front that bore an ugly crimson stain.

Rodney Albury was stone dead!

Arriving to claim a kidnap victim, Mort Lombert and his followers were learning that the hand of death had moved ahead of them, turning their own crime into a useless effort.

Murder done, a killer had departed, leaving others to bear the burden of his guilt!

CHAPTER X. TROUBLE FINDS THE SHADOW

CRIME'S twist was to The Shadow's liking. Much though he regretted the death of Rodney Albury, he couldn't have asked for a better setting than the one which had resulted.

His own search of the studio interrupted, The Shadow had left a death scene without learning that it existed, and had thereby produced an absolute dilemma for a criminal named Mort Lombert.

Not that murder in itself worried Mort. He was a killer by inclination, if not profession, but he wasn't used to burying someone else's dead. Finding Albury's body was a heavy shock to Mort, and his followers shared it. The thing was so out of keeping with their schemes, that it left them stupefied.

The Shadow could picture exactly what would happen if he stepped in on that scene. To a man, crooks would cower, forgetting past feuds in their urge to prove their innocence of a crime that was not their own. They'd regard The Shadow as a dread avenger, as formidable as death itself.

Already, their hands were getting so shaky that they could hardly hold their guns. Revolvers would slip from loosened fingers when The Shadow made his entry.

He was timing it by watching Mort. Standing by Albury's body, Mort was looking downward, his face much the color of the whitish scar that crossed it. Soon, Mort would look up to meet the puzzled gazes of his men, and stare back dumbly. That was when The Shadow would declare himself.

Mort's hand rested on the chair back. It gave; the swivel turned, producing another creak. Mort started, as though the dead man had voiced the noise. The Shadow lifted a curtain, ready to shift forward. Then, like the mobsmen within the room, he froze.

A gun muzzle was pressing the back of The Shadow's neck, and his own thoughts underwent a momentary whirl. For an instant, he held the idea that Mort's reserves had

sneaked in through the skylight; but that was palpably impossible. The skylight was right at The Shadow's shoulder. He would have heard it swing open.

His trapper must have moved in from the stairway door, pushing it at the same time Mort creaked the chair. A bad omen, for The Shadow was quite sure that Albury's murderer had gone out by that door; therefore, this could be the killer, returned.

He doubted, though, that a murderer would be giving him this respite. Besides, he was gaining the impression that the gun muzzle was very small, hardly the sort that would have figured in a major crime.

Then came the voice, low, in The Shadow's ear. A girl's voice, but definitely firm.

"Drop that gun," it said, "and put up your hands. If you don't, I'll shoot!"

Evidently, the girl couldn't see beyond the curtains, or she would have known why The Shadow hesitated. She was asking him to sign his own death warrant: to be executed by marksmen much more determined than herself.

The clank of a gun hitting the floor would bring Mort and his men from their coma, and once roused from that state, they would shoot to kill, where The Shadow was concerned.

Yet the girl meant business, and The Shadow had to comply. He let his hands come upward, and as he did, he brought his gun hand into sight. He was still holding his automatic, but it was dangling, his gloved fingers barely holding the trigger guard. He knew that the girl's eyes were upon the gun when he heard her tone again:

"Drop it!"

The Shadow let the automatic fall with a slight flip that carried it against the curtain on his right. In turn, the curtain infolded the weapon, letting it slide, rather than fall, to the floor.

All so careless, that gesture, but it carried the girl's gaze to the right and downward. She didn't see the sudden action of The Shadow's left hand.

With a grab, his left hand took the curtain on its side. Whipping full about, The Shadow wrenched the curtain free as he twitched into its folds. The girl's gun barked sharply at the vacancy where The Shadow had been; then, with a quick back step, the girl swung to her left to aim again.

THE girl was Madeline Dale, and she was no respecter of any intruder on Albury's premises, not even The Shadow. She intended to make that second shot count, where the first had failed, so she aimed point-blank at the form that came lunging toward her. Again the little gun spoke, this time amid smothering folds.

Not the folds of The Shadow's cloak but those of the curtain, which he tossed high, ahead of him, as he made a quick drop to the floor!

Madeline's shot was high because she mistook the flinging cloth for The Shadow. The persons who saw what really happened were Mort and his henchmen, as they swung around from Albury's desk. They saw two things, both puzzling.

Out in the hall, a figure was trying to disengage itself from a shroud consisting of a curtain, while in the doorway, a cloaked shape was rolling on the floor in a fashion quite unbecoming to The Shadow.

Added to all that was the echoes of two gunshots, which inspired false logic. Crooks mistook The Shadow's sprawl to mean that he had been hit; seeing that his hands were gunless, they drove forward, all intent upon riddling him with shots that would end his writhes.

The first gun that blasted was The Shadow's. He found it as he rolled across it and put his finger right upon the trigger. To the crooks, the thing was amazing, for The Shadow produced the gun right from the middle of a backward roll, as though he had plucked it from nowhere.

The spurt of the gun, the impact as its bullet cracked one of the front windows were enough to scatter Mort and his men.

They weren't staying in the open, not while The Shadow was shooting first. Each man, thinking for himself, forgot that there were others with him. Even Mort thought of advantage in terms of shelter, rather than numbers. The Shadow was coming to his feet, still shooting, as crooks ducked behind filing cabinets and tables.

He nearly clipped Mort, but the leader was just quick enough to gain the shelter of the big safe. Hearing The Shadow's bullet clang the metal, Mort yelled for his men to start shooting back.

The Shadow heard Mort's shout and gave a laugh, in invitation. But when his foemen poked their guns in sight, ready to blaze away, they saw no sign of The Shadow. He was out through the doorway, into the entry; there, he was disentangling Madeline from the curtain and plucking her .22 from her hand.

Still persistent in the thought that The Shadow was a foe, Madeline kept making trouble. Her own gun lost, she grabbed for the automatic in The Shadow's fist. He made a swing with it, and as Madeline tried to ward away the blow; he halted it.

With his other hand, The Shadow caught the girl's shoulder and sent her spinning to the far side of the entry, where she finished with a complete back somersault that whacked her head against the wall and left her somewhat dazed.

The Shadow had to put Madeline out of the combat, for the skylight was banging open and men were lunging through. Weasel was bringing the reserves that Mort had posted on the roof. They saw The Shadow, but by then he was among them, saving bullets by bashing aside their guns.

Then, twisting back into the studio, with fighters clinging to him, The Shadow was so well surrounded that Mort and the marksmen in the studio had no chance to pick him out. From the midst of the melee, The Shadow found the wall switch and pressed it. From sudden darkness, crooks heard The Shadow's triumphant laugh.

He'd arranged a battleground to his own liking. In darkness, The Shadow could be anywhere, everywhere, slugging or shooting, as he preferred. All men were his enemies, which made it all the better, for he didn't have to pause to look for targets. They were everywhere, while he was nowhere.

Mort's voice was howling above the rip of guns. He was ordering his men to get to the entry, where they would be clear of The Shadow and free to trap him. Crooks started to obey, and Mort was watching from behind the safe, in case The Shadow started shooting toward the doorway. If The Shadow did, Mort intended to spot him by his gun-spurts.

But The Shadow didn't shoot. Instead, he cut over to the doorway on his own, and the crooks in the entry suddenly heard his laugh among them. Wildly, they flooded through the nearest exit: the doorway leading to the stairs.

BEFORE The Shadow could fire after them, there were shots from below. Police had reached the building and were piling up to reach the fray.

On the stairway, The Shadow saw the factions meet. He wheeled back toward the studio, to be met by the glare of flashlights. Mort and his trapped men were making a rush for it.

The Shadow dived below the level of the glow as crooks began to fire. He caught the man with the flashlight, and gave him a headlong whirl that sent him bounding down the stairway. With a reverse twist, The Shadow reached the skylight, to block off crooks when they tried to use that exit. As he turned about, he found that the entry was cleared.

To a man, mobsters had preferred the stairway. Headlong, haphazardly, they were taking the plunge, carrying Mort with them. They didn't care how many police they might have to battle. They preferred it to a further gunfest with The Shadow.

Luck was with them in their choice. From the top of the stairway, The Shadow heard the firing fade. Someone was shouting orders, and the voice was like Cardona's. Evidently, the inspector hadn't brought along a large enough squad to cope with Mort's berserk band. The police had been forced to take shelter on the lower floors and let the thugs dash through.

Some of the squad would probably pursue the escaping horde from the top floor, but others would be coming upstairs. There was no reason for The Shadow to remain and be the person branded for the untimely death of Rodney Albury. For that matter, it was better that no one should be blamed, other than the actual murderer.

Acting upon that thought, The Shadow turned his flashlight across the entry, and the light produced a coppery glint. It came upon a girl's red hair, and The Shadow saw Madeline slumped in the corner, completely limp. She'd evidently started for the stairway, only to be bowled back by Mort's escaping crew.

Lifting the girl with ease, The Shadow elevated her through the angled skylight and let her slide gently to the roof outside. Footsteps were pounding up the stairway when The Shadow followed. Calmly, he eased the skylight shut and clamped it tight as the silhouettes of policemen were appearing within the frosted pane.

The Shadow laughed softly, almost whimsically, as he lifted Madeline over his shoulder and started across the darkened roof, where blackness waited to receive him and his human burden.

CHAPTER XI. TWO SIDES TO A STORY

WHEN Madeline Dale opened her eyes, she wondered what had happened to the little entry outside of Albury's studio. She remembered well enough that she had been there, for her senses hadn't blanked until a swarm of fugitive roughs had hurled her bodily from their path.

None had paused to slug her with their guns; in fact, they hadn't even seen Madeline during the fray. They'd been too busy with The Shadow after he blotted out the lights.

What puzzled Madeline, was the fact that the entry was moving, and it kept on puzzling her, until she realized that she was no longer where she thought she was. The moving thing that carried her was an automobile, and a very luxurious one.

It was a large limousine, and as she looked around, the girl realized that the car had another passenger, a man in evening clothes. Momentarily, she hoped that her companion was Albury; then, as she glimpsed his face, she knew that he could not be.

Albury's previous effort at disguise had been a very feeble one, and he could never have transformed his features into those of the man who was riding in the limousine. Madeline saw a face that was calm; so impassive that it was rather masklike. A handsome face, however, aristocratic with its hawkish profile.

The impassive man spoke, his tone very even.

"I am Lamont Cranston," he said. "And your name -"

He did not end it with a question; instead, his words were almost a command. At least, Madeline found herself speaking her own name aloud, whereat Cranston nodded. He spoke again:

"I presume that you knew Rodney Albury."

"Why, yes," Madeline began.

She stopped abruptly. Something in Cranston's emphasis of the word "knew" had flashed the fact that Madeline feared. Meeting Cranston's steady eyes, she questioned:

"He... he's dead?"

Cranston nodded. There was more to the nod than a mere answer. He was registering his approval of Madeline. The girl's eyes gave every expression of real regret when she had put the anxious question. Her reaction, moreover, established Cranston's finding.

Madeline did not become hysterical. Instead, she tightened her lips firmly and gazed straight ahead. Hers was the manner of a person who had lost a friend, and with it had determined to learn the why and wherefore of that loss.

Cranston was stating facts without unnecessary embellishment. He announced himself to be a friend of Police Commissioner Weston, adding that he often accompanied the commissioner on expeditions against crime. There had been a gun fray this evening, and soon afterward the police had found Albury's body, while Cranston had found Madeline, quite alive.

His own capacity being unofficial, Cranston had helped Madeline into his car. Whether he should turn her over to Commissioner Weston depended on her connection with the Albury case.

From Cranston's tone, however, Madeline detected the added implication that his own judgment in the matter would also be a factor. It was the best of invitations for Madeline to pour out her story.

MADELINE began with Albury's phone call; how she had met him at the hotel where he was staying under another name. She described his talk of "warnings" that he had received; how he had planned to leave for St. Louis, but had not taken the train.

"He wanted me to go to the studio," said Madeline ruefully, "and when I refused, he said he would send his lawyer. But he must have decided to go himself; there was time before his train left. If I'd only gone there -"

"You did go there," reminded Cranston, when Madeline paused.

"Of course," the girl nodded, "because I was afraid for Mr. Albury. The things that happened after I reached the studio—well, you'll have to believe them, because they were true."

She gave the details, beginning with her encounter with The Shadow, whose part still puzzled her. At first, she had classed him as an enemy; but subsequent events had altered her opinion, though she still wasn't sure just how The Shadow stood. At least, he had been at odds with other enemies at Albury's a whole flock of them; men who had fled before the police arrived.

Had Madeline realized that The Shadow was the person who removed her from the scene, she would have swung entirely to his favor. But Cranston did not inform her on that point. The less that Cranston seemed to know about the mysterious personage described by Madeline as "a man in black," the better it was toward The Shadow's policy of preserving his dual identity.

There was nothing of The Shadow's probing tone in the next statement that Cranston made. It came very casually, as though Cranston had simply struck upon a random point in Madeline's story.

"You said something about a telephone call," remarked Cranston. "One that you made from Times Square."

"Yes," Madeline acknowledged. "But my suspicion was unfounded. It wouldn't be fair to name persons who were not concerned in the death of Mr. Albury."

She met Cranston's eyes very frankly, and the way they returned her gaze made Madeline realize that there was another angle to the business of being fair. Her acceptance of Cranston's terms actually constituted a promise to tell him everything. After all, he was to be the judge, in Madeline's case. She had to be fair to him, and, somehow, that seemed the only way for Madeline to be fair to herself.

So Madeline told how she had called Chet Parridge, a man whose motives she mistrusted, and she had talked to his friend, Ken Blandon, instead. Ken had said that Chet was too drunk to answer the phone, and Madeline didn't doubt it. Chet's favorite indoor sport was passing out in his friend's apartment.

"If Chet's friends came and took him home," declared Madeline, "I could easily make sure of it. I've met most of them, and I've been to the night clubs where they go. They're mostly cafe society, you know."

The limousine was stopping outside an apartment house. Cranston opened the door and stepped out to greet a brunette who came from the apartment house. He introduced the girl to Madeline.

"This is Margo Lane," said Cranston. "She knows the night spots, too. Suppose you two drop in at the places where you might find Chet Parridge's friends. It's time that I was getting back to see the police commissioner."

WHILE the limousine was leaving with Madeline and Margo, Cranston summoned an approaching cab and told its driver to take him to the Cobalt Club.

The cab happened to be The Shadow's own, driven by an agent named Moe Shrevnitz. It had trailed the limousine from the neighborhood of Albury's studio. Moe and his cab were always in reserve when The Shadow needed them either as himself or Cranston.

Reaching the club, the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston was mildly surprised to learn the things that he had missed by not being with the police commissioner earlier. Commissioner Weston had returned there, bringing Professor Troy with him, and both were awaiting the return of Inspector Cardona.

"A most amazing thing, Cranston," expressed Weston. "These new calculations of Troy's pointed right to crime! I was going over them in detail when the tip-off came."

Cranston's eyebrows gave a quizzical rise.

"Inspector Cardona received the tip-off," explained Weston. "I was so engrossed in these figures, that I didn't realize that a call had come for me, so Professor Troy went up to answer it. Cardona told him that an anonymous phone call had come to headquarters, declaring that criminals intended to kidnap Rodney Albury from his studio."

Professor Troy beamed a smile at Cranston.

"My figures indicated it," declared Troy. "I'd worked them out in terms of dollars. According to latest reports, Albury and his plans were worth a million dollars. Therefore, I picked him as a target for crime."

Cranston nodded; then turned to Weston and inquired casually:

"Did they try to kidnap Albury?"

"They did," returned Weston gloomily. "They failed, so they murdered him instead."

"And his plans?"

"Gone, judging by his empty brief case. Who the culprits were, we do not know."

Professor Troy began to shake his head. The thing didn't fit with his calculations. He reasoned that the Albury case showed two definite angles. Criminals of one type would have preferred to murder Albury quietly, take his plans and demand cash for them. Those of an opposite breed would value Albury, rather than the plans, and would therefore play the kidnap game, holding Albury for ransom.

"The tip-off spoke of kidnaping," Troy reminded. "A leopard cannot change its spots; nor would criminals of the crude type change a set purpose. Kidnapers come under the head of crude criminals."

"In my experience," snapped Weston, "kidnapers have proven to be murderers. Very often, professor."

"Never until they have first abducted their victim," argued Troy. "Furthermore, there was a gun fray at Albury's before we arrived there. It indicated a clash between two criminal factions."

Before Troy could answer, Cardona arrived. He laid a report in front of Weston.

"Not much in it, commissioner," admitted Cardona. "We found a couple of dead thugs up in Albury's studio. Whether they shot each other in the dark, or took some bullets from The Shadow, we don't know."

Weston started to put a question, then stopped. It wasn't his official policy to admit the existence of The Shadow. He'd overstepped the bounds the other night, because he had

seen The Shadow on the scene at Bartier's. But in this case, the only evidences of The Shadow were a tip-off and a gun fray that had ceased before the police reached Albury's studio.

"We know the dead guys," added Cardona, "but we don't know who they worked for. One thing, though: they were out to kidnap Albury, not to kill him. Something must have missed."

Professor Troy gave a triumphant nod. Observing it, Weston stared hard at Cardona's report. Finding nothing there to back the kidnap theory, he turned to chide the inspector, when Cardona pulled a crumpled paper from his pocket.

"Somebody chucked this from a getaway car," explained Cardona. "A patrolman picked it up. It's like the note we found on Hogger Unstrum. Read it, commissioner."

WESTON spread the note upon the table. It was typed in the same crude style as the other note that Cardona mentioned. It stated:

Start at nine o'clock, unless you hear from me before then. Albury will be waiting in his studio alone. Abduct him promptly and pay no heed to anything he says, as he will probably try to deny his identity. Hold him and wait instructions regarding ransom.

"There you have it, commissioner," Cardona declared. "Our friend X is behind the thing again."

"Preposterous!" snorted Weston. "This note is palpably a fake!"

"Hardly, commissioner," put in Troy, in a canny tone. "These criminals could not have learned that we found a similar note in Unstrum's possession."

"But if this note is bona fide, professor, why did they toss it where we could find it?"

Professor Troy clucked a chuckle.

"To prove the very point I mentioned," he affirmed. "It was their way of assuring you that they did not murder Albury. True, this crowd intended to kidnap him, but he was dead before they tried. I would say"—Troy cocked his head as he studied the note anew—"that this bit of evidence not only clears them of murder, but reduces their crime of intended abduction to a body-snatching charge."

Angrily, Weston shoved the X note to Cardona, along with the inspector's report.

"File these for future reference," ordered the commissioner. "Meanwhile, find the men who raided Albury's studio. The charge will still be murder!"

Later, when the others had left the Cobalt Club, Lamont Cranston sat idly in the foyer. He was considering two sides of crime's story: Madeline's version, and the one that the police had presented. But this story had two other sides.

One was The Shadow's own; the other was the theory maintained by Professor Troy, the man who was entering the limelight by reducing criminology to mathematical calculations. It did not behoove The Shadow to criticize Troy's theories. They fitted too closely with The Shadow's own findings.

Rising, the leisurely Mr. Cranston strolled past the desk, then stopped. Turning back, he spoke a mild reproof to the attendant who was on duty.

"Next time you receive a call for Commissioner Weston," said Cranston, "be sure he receives it personally. He was rather annoyed because Professor Troy answered it in his stead."

The attendant blinked; then he referred to the carefully kept records upon which the Cobalt Club insisted.

"There was no call for Commissioner Weston this evening, Mr. Cranston."

"Nor any for Professor Troy?"

"None for Professor Troy." The attendant stopped as he saw a memorandum slip. "Yes, he did receive a call—in a way. You see, Professor Troy made a call, but it was cut off rather suddenly."

"And then?"

"He simply told us to transfer the next incoming call to him, because he was sure it would be the restored connection. Professor Troy waited in the booth, and the call came very shortly. So we transferred it to the booth without inquiry. We made a memorandum, of course."

"Of course."

Strolling out to the street, Lamont Cranston looked back at the staid Cobalt Club and tipped his hat in honor of the fussy old members who insisted upon strict adherence to a set of useless rules. On occasion, useless things could prove very useful. They had in this case.

The limousine was waiting, back from its circuit of the night clubs, having left Margo and Madeline at their respective apartments. As he rode away, Lamont Cranston smiled, but his lips did not phrase The Shadow's laugh; not even a whisper of it.

Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, had just decided that any person who had two identities should not overlook the slightest detail in preserving such an important secret.

CHAPTER XII. STRANGE TRAILS

CHET PARRIDGE was slouched on the big sofa toying with the dials of the fancy radio, while Ken Blandon, seated by a table, kept strumming nervously with his knuckles. Finding the music that he wanted, Chet turned an annoyed glance in Ken's direction.

"If you have to bang away, Ken," remarked Chet, "do it in time with the music. This happens to be good music."

"And it happens to be my apartment," retorted Ken. "Have you forgotten?"

"Hardly." Chet gave a droll smile. "I've been too frequent a visitor. The other night, for instance -"

"Don't talk about the other night!" Ken's interruption was hasty and excited. "Do you know what Madeline was doing after you left here? She was making the rounds of the night spots, checking on your alibi."

"On our alibi," corrected Chet. "You're in this as deep as I am, Ken, so turn off that radio and let's talk sense."

Chet's idea of sense was quite simple. He felt sure the alibi would stand; that Madeline

would finally believe that he had been too drunk, the other night, to go to Albury's studio. The friends who came to take Chet away had accepted Ken's claim that Chet had been drinking since early in the evening.

He calmed Ken's qualms by agreeing that if the alibi wavered, it would be good policy to take an unexpected trip from New York. Such would hardly excite additional suspicion, since both Chet and Ken were in the habit of going to such places as Saratoga or Miami during racing seasons, and sometimes were wont to wander farther afield.

"Albury is dead," stated Chet, in a matter-of-fact tone, "and some dopes that X steered to his studio are taking the blame for it, instead of me or us. Albury walked right in while I was waiting for him, the way X said he would.

"He took what I had ready, and I took what I wanted: Albury's plans. Albury himself wasn't worth a nickel, but those plans of his are good for plenty. I'll show you why, Ken."

Chet was reaching into his pocket, which still carried the plans in question. He stopped when he saw Ken at the radio, reaching down to pull the floor plug.

"What's the idea, Ken?"

"The thing buzzes," Ken replied. "It makes me nervous."

"Leave it plugged in," ordered Chet. "We may pick up some news reports. Take a look at this."

The paper that Chet brought from his inside pocket wasn't one of Albury's plans. It was a typewritten note that bore the X signature. Chet tapped it as he showed it to Ken.

"We're going to cash in," Chet stated, "because X says so. There's an old gent named Caleb Yetter that nobody knows much about, except that he's worth scads. According to X, Yetter is a fence who handles big-time stuff.

"He'll pay us a couple of hundred grand for these plans of Albury's, and see that X gets a chunk besides. How Yetter handles the deal after that is his business, not ours. I'm going over to see Yetter at the time X states. Here, Ken—read the note for yourself."

OTHER crooks were at that moment reading an important note from X. In their back room hideaway, Mort Lombert and his slightly depleted crew were holding conference, while Weasel, tending door, was craning forward to listen.

The big juke box was silent, because Mort had reminded Weasel to "lay off" any music.

Silent, too, was the shape of blackness just within the doorway, a mass that might have been Weasel's own shadow cast to large proportions, judging from the way it edged forward or receded, according to Weasel's motions.

"We had the wrong idea," Mort was saying, "blaming X for that mess over at Albury's. The whole trouble was The Shadow again. He was mooching around Albury's and he tipped off the cops to come there, the same as he did at Bartier's."

Weasel put in comment from the doorway.

"It don't make sense, Mort," said Weasel, "The Shadow pumping Albury."

"Who says The Shadow did?" demanded Mort. "This note from X gives us the real

low-down. I tell you, X is a real brain! He had a guy posted at Albury's, just in case things went sour. A guy who croaked Albury when there wasn't any other out.

"Naturally, X don't say who the guy was, any more than he'd tell the other guy about us. Anyway, the guy grabbed Albury's plans and is going to peddle them tonight. We're going to get our cut."

"For doing nothing?"

Weasel's question amused Mort. He handed the note to a man close by and told him to give it to Weasel. The little man's eyes bulged as he read it.

"You mean"—Weasel's words came in a gasp—"that X is chasing us after The Shadow?"

"Not exactly," corrected Mort. "It says for us to trail a gink named Lamont Cranston, when he comes out from the Cobalt Club. Before we've finished, we'll have our whack at The Shadow. I'm game, considering the dough that's in it."

The rest were game, too, and saying so, while Weasel watched them with his darty eyes. Behind Weasel, blackness was fading through a door which opened silently, just far enough to allow the passage of a cloaked figure.

As he closed the door, The Shadow caught a last glimpse of Weasel, announcing that he was as game as the rest. Mort's response reached The Shadow's ears.

"I thought you'd be with us, Weasel," approved Mort. "Drop a nickel in the juke and treat yourself to some swing. I'm getting tired listening to the thing hum without playing anything."

WHEN Lamont Cranston entered the Cobalt Club, he was in a very meditative mood. Behind his masklike exterior, his keen mind, that of The Shadow, was still weighing the rather startling turn of events.

The Shadow's apprehensions had been realized. A master mind, termed X, had caught the link between Lamont Cranston and The Shadow. Hardly surprising, when analyzed, considering that Cranston had been conspicuously absent at times when The Shadow was actively engaged in battling crime. Disconcerting enough, however, to require considerable forethought before making another move.

Cranston's manner was still reflective when he joined Commissioner Weston and Professor Troy in the grillroom. Inspector Cardona, was seated in a corner by himself, checking a list of names that looked long enough to be a petition.

"Glad you joined us, Cranston," greeted Weston. "Professor Troy is advancing his theories on crime control."

"An interesting subject," remarked Cranston. "Rather far from the professor's specialty of mathematics, however."

"You are wrong, Mr. Cranston," put in Troy, looking up from his papers. "Previously, I treated crime as a matter of algebraic equations. Now, I am considering it under the head of geometrical propositions. Crime control is the result."

Troy laid out a sheet of paper and drew a large triangle on it. He used his pencil to tap the angle at the left.

"This represents the crime at Bartier's," stated Troy. "An attempt to acquire wealth on a

large scale, engineered by a clever band of criminals. We call it point 'A'."

Commissioner Weston explained that Troy referred to the crew that had escaped—which, to The Shadow, signified Mort Lombert and his crowd. Hogger Unstrum and his river gang had become a dead issue.

"Crime followed this line." Troy was moving his pencil upward and to the right. He stopped at the apex. "This was the attempted abduction of Rodney Albury. We shall term it point 'B'."

He was marking the letters A and B where they belonged. Watching, Cranston did not inquire why Troy was so sure that the same crowd of crooks had made a stab at both crimes. It wasn't always advisable to put questions to Professor Troy. He was apt to remember them and use them in his calculations.

"These criminals will now revert to type," assured Troy. He ran his pencil down to the right, to stop at an angle far below the others, since his triangle was irregular. "Having failed in larger crime, they will attempt something more in keeping with their limited ability. Such as a warehouse robbery. We shall mark this point 'C'."

Weston gave Cranston a knowing look. The commissioner was impressed by Troy's logic.

"It has all the merit of a theorem in geometry," declared Weston. "Troy says that all crime follows this pattern. It's a matter of angles: C, then A, and finally B. What does that spell to you, Cranston?"

"I should say it spells 'cab,' commissioner."

Cardona, looking up, had to lift his fist to hide the grin that he could not suppress. Weston gave an angry glare.

"This is no time for banter, Cranston," spoke the commissioner testily. "According to Professor Troy, this triangle spells crime control."

"Precisely," acknowledged Troy, with a nod. "If we know the type of crime that criminals will attempt, we can be ready to forestall it."

CARDONA came over and laid his papers on the table. They proved to be several lists. One contained the names of wanted criminals, and Cardona had checked off a dozen who were apt to specialize in warehouse jobs, Mort Lombert's name being among them. Another list was composed of the names of warehouses. Cardona had finally picked one name from the sheet.

"Trans-State Storage looks most likely," declared Joe. "They're loaded with goods they've had to hold there. Priorities stuff, like silk and aluminum. Can't release it without a government order. Selling those goods would be a cinch for a warehouse mob. Their only worry is how much they can lug away at one crack."

"They'll lug none of it," snapped Weston. "Post a squad at Trans-State, inspector, and be on the watch for trucks"—he shot a glance at Cranston—"not cabs! And by the way, Cardona, make sure that you take along enough men, this time."

Cardona hadn't taken enough to Albury's, which was why Weston made the final comment. Joe had tried to explain that the Albury tip-off had been sudden. He'd only had time to phone Weston and talk to Troy, who answered instead; then Joe had gone on his way with a few men immediately available.

There was no use going all over that again, so Cardona simply gathered his lists, arose, and announced that the Trans-State warehouse would be thoroughly under surveillance within the next hour.

Soon afterward, Lamont Cranston left. As he entered his limousine outside the club, he looked for lurkers and saw them near a car, just around the corner. He told his chauffeur, Stanley, to stay on lighted avenues and to drive about quite slowly. Watching from the rear window, Cranston noted that a car was following the limousine.

Back at the Cobalt Club, Professor Troy was commencing an erudite exposition of the relationship between geometry and crime, when Weston remembered an important appointment that he had mentioned earlier, before Cranston came to the club.

They went out together, Weston and Troy. In front of the club, their paths separated. Weston left in his official car; Troy walked in the direction of the subway. No cars followed Weston's. Nor did anyone trail Troy.

Strange were the trails upon this evening—so strange, that Professor Achilles Troy seemed quite forgotten in the pressure of things that were to come!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S PLAN

It was quite a novelty for Lamont Cranston, having crooks upon his trail—crooks who believed that he would lead them to The Shadow. Of course, he was taking into account the fact that they did not identify him with The Shadow, personally. Probably they considered Cranston to be the sort of person whom The Shadow would protect.

Behind this situation, the ways of X, like the master mind himself, remained an unknown quantity. Perhaps X was not sure that Cranston and The Shadow were the same; possibly he preferred to keep it to himself, if he knew the truth.

Mort Lombert might not have believed it possible; in that case, X would be acting wisely to class Cranston and The Shadow as different personalities.

Along with the business of X, Cranston was considering how Professor Troy had reduced crime to a simple A, B, C, as represented by the points of a triangle. Troy's notions were incorrect: Mort wasn't going to tackle a warehouse job tonight, unless—

The interrupted thought brought the slightest of whispered laughs to Cranston's lips. How easy it would be to turn Troy's theory into fact! The Shadow could kill a half-hour as Cranston, then switch into his black-clad personality and let Mort catch sight of him. Then, like a human will-o'-the-wisp, he could lead crooks into the trap that Cardona was preparing for them.

Yet The Shadow wasn't sure that he would like to give Troy's theory the sterling mark of proof. It would be better to shake the trust that mobsters held regarding X. Moreover, The Shadow was thinking in terms more important than Mort Lombert. Trapping Mort and pinning crime on him was something that could easily wait.

The real man to get was Chet Parridge, along with his crony, Ken Blandon. Though The Shadow saw enough flaws in Chet's alibi to brand the fellow as Albury's murderer, he knew that the case would be difficult to prove without further evidence. The real way to incriminate Chet was to nail him red-handed with Albury's documents in his possession.

Stopping at a night club, Cranston alighted and entered to chat with friends inside.

Margo and Madeline were among those friends, and Cranston paused momentarily at their table, as he did at others. But his hand, with a note slipped between its fingers, brushed across a napkin that was lying on the table and finished with a slight, pointing gesture that Margo caught.

After Cranston had strolled out, to carry crooks along his trail to a few more night clubs, Margo slipped the note from beneath the napkin and read it. The writing faded afterward, as was the way with The Shadow's messages, leaving not a single trace. Margo whispered to Madeline:

"Come along."

They went out to Moe's cab, which was parked close by. As they rode away, Margo queried:

"Do you think that Chet is at Ken's?"

"He may be," replied Madeline. "If you want to stop, I'll phone and talk to Chet, if he's there. Provided, of course, that he's sober enough to stagger to the telephone."

"We'll stop near Ken's," decided Margo. "But if you talk to Chet, tell him you're somewhere else; the farther away, the better."

They stopped at a drugstore only a block from Ken's. There, Madeline made the call, and nodded to Margo when Chet came on the wire. Madeline spoke quite affably; she said she would like to see Chet. When he asked where she would be, Madeline named a night club in the Fifties.

"I'll come up," remarked Chet, "in a half-hour, more or less. It all depends on whether Ken wants to come along. He'll have to get dressed, if he does."

Madeline hung up, and debated the proposition with Margo. They agreed that Chet's promise might be a stall, but that he could have meant what he said.

"I'll stay in Moe's cab," decided Margo. "If Chet comes out, we'll follow him. You'd better take another cab, Madeline, and get up to the night club."

MADLINE had hardly started away in her cab before she began to think that she was being shelved. So she told the driver to take her around the block and wait there. He complied, and while Madeline waited, she formed a simple plan.

Chet would take a cab of his own, and Madeline could follow it, like Margo. If Chet actually headed for the night club, Madeline could tell her driver to speed there ahead, and thereby be waiting for Chet when he arrived. But if Chet didn't start for the night club—

Madeline didn't have to debate it further. From the corner, she saw Chet come from Ken's apartment, alone. He took the cab that was usually parked in front and rode away. At the next corner, his cab swung left, instead of right, which meant that Chet wasn't going to the night club.

Moe's cab was pulling out, with Margo as its passenger, when Madeline said to her own driver:

"Follow those cabs."

The trail led to a neighborhood where old-fashioned houses stood. Chet's cab was slowing

up along the row of brownstones to allow him to pick the address he wanted. Moe's cab, its lights extinguished, sliced neatly in beside the curb, its dark paint hiding it in the gloom.

Madeline's cab was still on the avenue, and she told her driver to go past the street where the other cabs had turned, and let her off a block away.

MEANWHILE, The Shadow was taxing his Cranston personality to the limit. He could tell it, when he was returning to the limousine, from a chat with some friends in a hotel cafe. Despite the instructions they had received from X, Mort's followers were becoming more than restless.

They poked themselves so boldly into sight that Cranston had to glance the other way in order not to see them. As they clambered back into their car, they were apparently in a mood to overtake the limousine and start trouble for Cranston, to see what would happen.

It was possible that they thought The Shadow might be on their own trail, and that action was therefore imperative. In any event, it was time to treat them to something fresh. So the obliging Mr. Cranston ordered Stanley to take him to the Hotel Brentwood, which was only a few blocks away.

The Brentwood was a very exclusive hotel, the sort that Cranston would frequent, but that was not the only reason why he chose it. Among its ultra features, the Brentwood had a limousine entrance on a side street, and the entrance not only had a marquee, but side curtains as well.

When Cranston's car pulled up beside the Brentwood, its rear door nearly brushed the curtained entry leading into the hotel. A smartly uniformed doorman stepped up and opened the door to let out the passenger.

But there wasn't any passenger. With a mere twist toward the door, Cranston had swung himself into the folds of a ready cloak, placing a slouch hat on his head with an added sweep. Dropping to the far corner of the limousine, he blended with the interior darkness.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow, whose ways, under conditions of his choice, became those of invisibility.

A car was stopping in back of the limousine. Its headlights, focused through the rear window, showed the big car to be empty. From the actions of the doorman, Cranston must have stepped out and gone into the Brentwood; at least, so the trailers thought.

For the doorman, seeing no one in the car, was closing the door again on the assumption that Stanley had come to receive a passenger, not to drop one.

Naturally, the covered entry was a strong point in the deception; for anyone alighting from the limousine would be out of sight while entering the hotel.

But there was something even more important. By the time the time the door was shut, the limousine was actually empty.

Out through the door on the other side had gone the black-cloaked passenger, in his most famous style. The door didn't swing far enough open for Mort and his watchers to notice it from their car, so close against the curb. Nor did they see the flitting shape that picked patchy darkness, to reach the opposite curb. The limousine blocked off whatever light would have revealed The Shadow.

There was light, however, across the street, from the windows of a drugstore. Against that

glow appeared the outline of a figure cloaked in black, even to the form of a gun. Ready and watchful, The Shadow seemed to be aiming directly toward the car in back of Cranston's.

Suddenly, the outline left the window and streaked itself against the building wall farther on. The Shadow, alert to the utmost, had spotted a stir within Mort's car. His shift was timely; he made it while crooks were bringing out their guns. They were wary, this night, as The Shadow knew they would be.

They watched for further signs of a streak in black. It reappeared near some taxicabs, then did a sudden fade. Immediately, however, a cab pulled away, exactly as if it had taken on a passenger, which it had. Mobsters trailed it for half a dozen blocks, and came upon the cab halted by a curb.

The Shadow had left it and was within the darkened entry of an office building opposite. He'd picked that entry because a phone booth was available.

Contacting Burbank, The Shadow received a report from Moe, naming Chet's destination. From there, Moe was taking Margo to a night club, where Madeline was supposed to meet Chet, later.

MORT LOMBERT was trying to argue Weasel Kelk into investigating the halted cab. Weasel, hesitant at first, was actually getting out to make the inspection, when he shuddered and pointed across the street, gulping the name:

"The Shadow!"

Mort demanded: "Where?" and others echoed the question. While Weasel was trying to point to a gliding shape that he could no longer see, the parked cab pulled suddenly away. Mort yanked Weasel back into the car and told the driver to keep tailing the cab.

Again, The Shadow was tempted to lead crooks to the warehouse; but he relinquished the idea, in keeping with a better plan. However, he evidently included Cardona in his purposes, for, at that moment, the ace inspector was receiving a phone call from police headquarters.

In establishing a cordon about the threatened warehouse, Joe hadn't forgotten the importance of keeping contact with headquarters. As a result, he was getting a special message from a very excited detective sergeant:

"A tip-off, inspector! Like the others that came through! Listen to this -"

Cardona listened; then told the sergeant to communicate the same news to the police commissioner. Thereupon, Joe picked three detectives from the warehouse cordon, ordering the others to maintain their vigil and shoot at crooks on sight. Joe Cardona was bound elsewhere.

For Joe firmly believed that the latest tip-off carried the sort of information that only The Shadow could supply!

CHAPTER XIV. THE AMAZING VANISH

CALEB YETTER was a curious old fossil, as much a relic of the past as the house in which he lived. Nevertheless, he was as well preserved as the house itself. In appearance, manner and speech, Yetter was meticulous; and the fact impressed his visitor, Chet Parridge.

Finding Yetter's front door open, Chet had entered and guided himself by lights that he saw ahead. A hallway, a flight of stairs, another light on the floor above, and finally a glow from a

room which proved to be an office containing Yetter, himself.

Ordinarily, in entering a strange house, Chet would not have taken so direct a route. The darkened lower hall, the chances of finding a flight of back stairs, had appealed to him. However, knowing that Yetter expected him, Chet had behaved as an invited guest should.

Behind a large flat-topped desk, Caleb Yetter was seated in a heavy chair, his elbows resting on the arms. His face had a saffron tinge, and the lenses of his large horn-rimmed spectacles were yellow, too. Perhaps the effect was increased by the glow from the desk lamp, for its bulb was a frosted orange.

Yetter's hair looked white; it was slicked down and parted in the middle, as suited an old gentleman of his precise style. His necktie was white, too, and adorned with a diamond stickpin as out of date as his wing-tipped collar. Though Yetter seemed to be resting back in his chair, he was sitting quite erect, giving an air of self-importance.

When he spoke, Yetter wheezed, but his peculiar tone in no wise lessened the effect of his words. From the very start of the conversation, Yetter proved himself punctilious, and preserved that impression throughout.

"Let me see the documents you have brought," suggested Yetter. "I shall then give you a prompt answer, Mr. Parridge. Incidentally"—Yetter looked over the top of his glasses—"you were late in keeping this appointment. I was just about to telephone you."

He gestured a yellowish hand toward a telephone on his right, and Chet nodded.

"Sorry," said Chet. "Someone else phoned, and it delayed me. Here are the papers, Mr. Yetter."

Spreading Albury's plans on the desk, Yetter inspected them with eyes that impressed Chet as being sharp as well as large. There was no lost motion on Yetter's part, but the man's insistence on detail annoyed Chet.

There was a small clock ticking on the desk, and Chet watched it tell off minutes, until he found himself getting nervous. Rather than fall into one of Ken's bad habits, Chet began to look about the room.

The place looked like a box. It had evidently been a huge linen closet in the old days, for it hadn't a single window. There was a skylight, but it was a small one, heavily clamped. Its frosted glass showed the pattern of a wire, probably between double panes.

Chet took it to be a type of unbreakable glass; in fact, he couldn't consider it as otherwise. In this lair where old Yetter dealt in unseemly transactions, it wouldn't do to leave a route for people to come breaking in upon a conference.

Thinking of the kind of people who might like to do so, Chet pondered on the question of The Shadow. He'd heard of the cloaked investigator, and was sure that The Shadow had taken a hand in smashing recent crimes.

The fact that Chet hadn't met The Shadow was no insurance against a future encounter. Indeed, by the law of averages, Chet might expect a meeting with crime's superfoe. The prospect made Chet anxious.

CHET threw a last look around the room, noting its solid, papered walls, which showed no crevices nor crannies. The furniture—chairs and tables only—afforded no chance whatever for concealment. Yetter's big desk was the only bulky object in the room, squatting heavily

upon the completely carpeted floor.

The desk was somewhat toward one corner, and set at an angle. From behind it, Yetter commanded direct view of the room's only door. At present, Yetter wasn't watching the door, which was slightly open, for he was busy with his study of Albury's million-dollar plans.

Swinging to eye the door, Chet began to fancy he was hearing sounds, that might have been creaks from within the old house. Before Chet's worries could reach a state of real alarm, old Yetter interrupted with a wheeze.

"These plans appear bona fide," declared Yetter. "And now, Mr. Parridge, your price for them."

Chet studied Yetter very steadily.

"I was leaving that up to you, Mr. Yetter."

Wrinkles began creeping up the sides of Yetter's face. Chet didn't like the smile they signified, and the sucking way the old man drew his breath sounded like the beginning of a laugh. Chet leaned forward.

"Don't forget, Mr. Yetter," he reminded, "that you will have to dispose of the plans. I can't name a price until I have taken your future trouble into account."

"I shall have no trouble," returned Yetter frankly. "How do you suppose I have accounted for my wealth?"

Chet shook his head. He'd heard a lot of rumors about Yetter, mostly from people who had never met the old man. Some claimed that Yetter was a financial wizard; others, that he was simply a lucky old miser.

There were claims to the opposite: namely, that Yetter wasn't anything other than an ordinary old recluse, whose reputed wealth was all newspaper talk started by a smart reporter who had cooked up a good story.

Even more outlandish was a rumor that Yetter, himself, was a myth. Nobody ever went into his old house, and from the street the place invariably looked empty.

Naturally, Chet Parridge had spiked the rumor of Yetter's nonexistence, but he hadn't found out a lot of things that he would like to know. So Chet gave his negative headshake in hope that Yetter would say more. Yetter did.

"I pull the strings of a dozen holding companies," wheezed Yetter, raising his hand and closing it like a claw, as though he intended to tug the cords in question. "When I wish, I make puppets dance. Important puppets—bankers, brokers, presidents of large corporations.

"None sees my hand, for I do all this through proxies. These plans of Albury's?" With the question, Yetter opened his claw and gestured toward the papers. "Bah! I can dispose of them for what ever price I desire, all in the course of my everyday affairs."

Chet reached in his pocket, produced the X note and spread it on the desk, turning it so that Yetter could read it. He felt that frankness was the proper policy.

"This says you will pay two hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Yetter."

The old man began to nod as he read the note. Watching Yetter, Chet noted that his face darkened, and wondered why. Glancing at the lamp, Chet saw darkness on the table just beneath it; darkness that had the motion of a cloud passing across the sun. Studying the umbra, quite puzzled, Chet stared suddenly as he saw it form the outline of a hawkish silhouette on the wall.

Then, before Chet could spring about, or even voice a word to Yetter, there was a sinister whisper throbbing in his very ear.

"Stay where you are," it told him. "Lift your hands, Parridge!" The direction of the whisper shifted, as the speaker added: "The same applies to you, Yetter!"

The Shadow!

EYES open wide, Chet saw blackness swirl grotesquely between himself and the desk. It took the form of a cloaked being whose burning eyes were the only visible features of his face.

From beneath the brim of a slouch hat, those eyes swept from Chet to Yetter and back again, accompanied by the shift of a mammoth automatic that looked big enough to blast another doorway in the solid wall of Yetter's office.

Looking toward Yetter, Chet heard the old man whimper, saw him slide down in his big chair as his arms came shakily upward. On the desk were crime's products—Albury's stolen plans and Chet's X note with them—complete proof of the illicit transaction that The Shadow had interrupted.

Even worse, they were evidence that Chet Parridge had murdered Rodney Albury. Chet's plight was therefore far worse than Yetter's. Chet was totally helpless, and knew it. He saw The Shadow reaching to gather Albury's plans and the incriminating note; heard the sardonic laugh that the cloaked avenger uttered.

Yetter's reaction, that of another whimper and a further shrinking, only added to Chet's hopeless outlook.

Never had Chet seen such a transformation. Caleb Yetter had lost the look of a proud vulture, to become a groveling worm. His was the air of a defeated braggart who could not make good his boasts. Until—

Even The Shadow didn't see the sudden stiffening of Yetter's quaking knee beneath the desk. Instantly, the light from the desk lamp was blotted out and a great, hulking mass was hoisting up from the floor, to fling The Shadow backward. Papers cascaded to the floor and the extinguished lamp landed with them, crashing as it struck.

The Shadow's automatic, punching shots across the desk, delivered its stabs high against the opposite wall; too high to take Yetter as their target. For, with one tremendous effort, old Yetter had flung the desk squarely against The Shadow, flinging back the challenger in black!

The heavy missile did not flatten The Shadow. He recoiled ahead of it, though the desk forced him into an awkward lean that made his shots ride high. Chet was the person who took the desk's full force.

Coming to his feet, Chet was met head-on by a weight which he couldn't stop. The desk floored him, flat on his back, and he gave frantic kicks that somehow managed to send it back where it belonged.

Amid his contortions, Chet heard a deluge of shots from downstairs, coming like multiplied echoes of The Shadow's rapid fire. There was a laugh: The Shadow's. Dropping the battle in Yetter's office, The Shadow wheeled outward to the front stairway to take a hand in things below.

Again the laugh, returning: a warning that The Shadow had not forgotten the men trapped in the boxlike office. He'd be back when needed, ready to block flight if they attempted it. Chet heard a big gun chatter at the stair top and knew that The Shadow had stopped there.

Madly, Chet found his feet and slammed the door, hoping to barricade it against The Shadow. Fumbling along the wall, Chet found a switch and turned it on. He looked about, saw that flimsy chairs wouldn't block the door. The only thing heavy enough was Yetter's desk.

Remembering the strength that Yetter had displayed in hurling the desk forward, Chet decided that, between them, he and Yetter could prepare the barricade.

Chet looked toward the desk, saw it upright, as he himself had kicked it when it threatened to pass the balance point. Beyond the desk was Yetter's chair, empty. Chet decided that the old recluse must have stopped The Shadow's bullets after all. Stepping past the desk, he looked at the carpeted floor.

No one was lying there. Nor was there any sign of a human being, crouched or huddled, in any other corner of the room. Under the glow of the ceiling lights, Chet Parridge stared, amazed, his hearing oblivious to the sound of gunfire that still came from the stairway.

Caleb Yetter had not only outwitted The Shadow; he had escaped the cloaked avenger. To Chet's amazed gaze, Yetter had vanished as mysteriously as if he had never existed!

CHAPTER XV. GATHERED EVIDENCE

ACTUALLY dazed, Chet Parridge moved in a dreamlike manner. Proof of the unreal had jarred his mental faculties. He'd accepted The Shadow as reality, even though the cloaked avenger had come in ghostlike fashion; but, at that, Chet had felt himself in a nightmarish mood while The Shadow held control.

One thing more had been all Chet needed to make the nightmare actual. Old Caleb Yetter had supplied the needed thing, by vanishing from a room that he couldn't possibly have left.

Chet had seen the door and knew that only The Shadow had left by it. The skylight was too high for Yetter to reach, even by climbing on the desk. Besides, the skylight was still clamped shut.

Spasmodic shots that reached Chet's ears were but fabric of the dream stuff. Even his slump into a chair impressed him as unreal. Then he was staring at things he had to believe existed: Albury's plans, lying on the floor in front of the desk, with the note from X among them!

Frantically, Chet began to gather together the papers that could mean a fortune, or the electric chair, according to what luck he had with them. He was piling them on the desk, panting so violently that he didn't hear the door of the office open behind him.

But Chet heard the voice that came next.

"Leave those papers where they are, Chet." The tone was feminine, but firm. "Then turn around, and keep your hands where I can see them - high!"

Chet came around to face Madeline Dale. The girl was holding the .22 that she had sported at Albury's. Compared with The Shadow's .45 it had the appearance of a toy, but Chet didn't care to play with it. He gave a sickly grin, shrugged his shoulders feebly, as he raised his hands.

"You murdered Albury," Madeline told him. "I know you'll try to squirm out of it by claiming this evidence was planted. I'm going to help you squirm, Chet, but in a different way. You're going to make that evidence good!"

Madeline meant it, and Chet knew it. There were many things that Chet remembered about Madeline. He recalled how he had tried to bluff her into betraying her former employer, Albury, only to meet with failure. Along with such failure, Chet had roused Madeline's suspicions.

"Sit down behind that desk," ordered Madeline. "You're going to sign a confession telling the truth about Albury's death! Keep those hands up!" The girl snapped the words as she gestured Chet into Yetter's chair. "I'll supply the writing materials."

Her gun pressed close to Chet's temple, Madeline pulled open a desk drawer. Watching Chet, she felt for pen and ink and found both. She planked them on the desk, reached into the drawer again and discovered a sheet of paper by its crinkle.

Backing around the desk, Madeline placed one hand upon Albury's stolen industrial plans and thrust the other forward with its gun. Firmly, she spoke one word:

"Write!"

Timed to the gesture and the word, came a last spasmodic burst of guns from downstairs, and Chet heard the strident laugh of The Shadow issuing along the hall. He guessed that The Shadow had completed another successful thrust against the crime.

The surmise was correct.

The Shadow had thrown his strength into a struggle between Cardona's picked squad and Mort Lombert's mob. The Shadow's entry into the fray had turned the balance in the law's favor.

True, The Shadow had precipitated the struggle earlier than he had wished, by starting things himself. Those shots at Yetter in the upstairs office had brought police and crooks into the house, forcing an immediate battle.

But The Shadow had amended the situation, properly and efficiently. His laugh indicated that he was again free to resume his unfinished business.

THE threat of The Shadow's return told upon Chet Parridge. One look at Madeline's gun reminded him of a different weapon, one big enough to swallow this one. Clutching the pen, Chet placed it to the paper.

He was trembling worse than Yetter. His knees struck the sides of the desk. Each time his right leg hit, Chet felt a rattle. He'd heard it, he remembered, when Yetter had been quivering behind this very desk. Recalling how the old man had suddenly stiffened, Chet had a sudden inspiration.

Chet stiffened, too, backward in his chair, as he drove his knees hard. Madeline saw the action and pushed her gun forward. Then she was flying backward, gun and all, as the big desk came heaving toward her, overturning with all its weight.

The .22 was popping a shot at the ceiling as Madeline landed squarely on the floor, papers flying all about her. She saw the inkwell sailing for her head and threw up an arm to ward it off.

Madeline was kicking, too, as Chet had when the desk came at him. Her high heels struck the corner of the desk top and it wavered at an angle above her. Another kick and the desk was dropping backward, lazily at first. Madeline was rolling over to her hands and knees when she heard the desk thud back where it belonged.

Turning, Madeline thrust her gun across the desk top, determined to shoot Chet before he could draw a revolver and aim at her. But she didn't see Chet; all she saw was Yetter's empty chair.

Warily, Madeline crawled around the side of the desk, then stopped, blinking very puzzled. Chet was gone, and she couldn't believe that he had dashed from the room in such short order. Still, the door was the only route that he could have taken, so Madeline swung in that direction.

Seeing an incoming shape, she would have fired instinctively if the arrival hadn't stopped her. He came with a swoop so swift that Madeline didn't realize who he was until he gripped her.

Hauled to her feet, the little gun dropping from her fingers, Madeline felt the clamp of powerful hands upon her wrists and saw the burning eyes of The Shadow close to hers.

Swift, startling, were the thoughts that swept her brain as Madeline remembered Albury's studio. She couldn't forget that murder had been done there, and that she had met The Shadow soon afterward. So soon, that he could have been Chet Partridge masquerading in black.

The absurd idea was returning to Madeline's mind. It had taken on logic, because Madeline had seen Chet, moments ago, and was sure that he must have started for the door. The Shadow, coming from that very direction, could certainly be Chet in camouflage.

Except for the burning eyes!

Those eyes weren't Chet's. They belonged to The Shadow; no one else. Eyes that outpowered any that Madeline had ever seen; stronger eyes, even, than those of her new friend and adviser, Lamont Cranston.

Fully accepting The Shadow as a friend, Madeline relaxed. She saw him glance at the papers on the floor, heard his whispered laugh give approval. The Shadow turned toward the door, drawing Madeline with him. Hearing the pound of footsteps coming upward with a gruff voice that belonged to Joe Cardona, he paused.

The Shadow could have left unnoticed; even if seen, the police would have understood his presence. But Madeline's situation was different. Getting her away was difficult enough; explaining why she had come, even more so.

Madeline had once worked for Albury; it wouldn't do for her to be found here along with the papers that would incriminate their owner as Albury's murderer!

Flashing a quick glance at Madeline, The Shadow spoke, a statement rather than a question:

"Partridge was here... alone -"

"Why, yes!" began Madeline. "He seemed puzzled about it, too. I thought I had him trapped, but he flung the desk at me and -"

"Quickly!" interrupted The Shadow. "Behind the desk! Wait there!"

As Madeline went behind the desk, The Shadow sprang to the door and slammed it in the faces of arriving men. He clicked the wall switch while they were clattering the knob, with Cardona's voice booming loudly.

The door came whamming open, and Cardona, heading his squad, saw someone loping for the desk. That was Joe's only glimpse of The Shadow; he didn't see Madeline, at all.

As Cardona charged toward the desk, The Shadow, diving behind it, gave a quick jab at a leg on the right. His hand did the same thing that Yetter's knee had accomplished; the trick that Chet had duplicated later.

Actuated by a powerful spring, the desk shot forward on hinges that ran along its lower front.

Met by the lunging desk, Cardona landed back against his men. Joe's gun was speaking, its bullet going high the way others had.

Behind the desk Madeline gave a startled gasp as she found herself skidding into darkness down a chute through the floor of Yetter's office. Behind her came The Shadow's laugh; he was taking the same route. Like the girl's gasp, the mirth was muffled by a bulky barrier that settled back in place above them.

The barrier was Yetter's desk. The Shadow had divined its trick. Old Yetter couldn't have flung the desk with his own strength alone. Nor could Chet have kicked it back in place once the desk had started to overturn.

The desk was mechanically equipped to go forward halfway to the floor, and then settle back again, whenever the release catch was pressed.

Yetter had chosen an old linen room for his office, because the floor had a laundry chute leading to the cellar. He'd purposely placed the desk over the hidden slide, so as to have a suitable outlet whenever he chose to make a rapid exit.

A very clever system, too, since the desk was able to hurl back anyone who came too close, and force such persons to fire high.

Caleb Yetter was gone, and away. So, too, was Chet Partridge, the other participant in a shady deal. And now, The Shadow was conducting Madeline Dale out through the same cellar door that the previous fugitives had used. Even though Yetter and Chet had escaped, The Shadow had evened matters by getting Madeline away.

Matters were more than evened. Up in Yetter's so-called office, Inspector Cardona had forgotten the disappearance of unknown persons in the dark. He was too busy gathering up the million-dollar evidence that was lying on the floor. Albury's plans for industrial speedup were regained; plans that had kept the country worrying ever since their theft.

As a bonus, Cardona, had found another note from X, that would stand as further evidence against the unknown brain of crime. As he folded the note and tucked it in his pocket, Cardona gave a knowing nod.

The ace inspector wasn't overlooking proper credit for this find. Joe's nod was a taciturn appreciation to an ally who had come and gone, leaving it to the law to gather the fruits of his

success.

Joe Cardona duly appreciated The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVI. CRIME'S COME-BACK

CHET PARRIDGE had gone down in the world since his visit to Caleb Yetter; farther down than any laundry chute could have carried him. Chet had dragged Ken Blandon with him, and oddly, Ken was glad.

Still, it wasn't so very odd, considering that Ken had felt jittery about showing his face too much in public.

Immediately after his flight from Yetter's, Chet had told Ken to pack and leave his apartment. Joining up, the two had taken refuge in their present quarters, a very dingy upstairs room in a none-too-lovely neighborhood.

The only thing of value that Ken had brought from his apartment was his expensive radio. Chet had insisted upon Ken bringing it, because it would be needed in keeping tabs on news reports.

Plenty of voices had talked across that radio, mentioning the police raid at Yetter's. But the reports dealt entirely with Caleb Yetter; not once did they mention the name of Chet Parridge. The police were more interested in finding Yetter than in checking on his visitors.

"Good enough," spoke Chet smoothly, as he cut off a windy commentator who had been rehashing the entire Yetter case. "Let them hunt for Yetter. They'll never find him."

"The old duck must be foxy," observed Ken. "He's faded out just like The Shadow."

Chet's features hardened into an ugly glare. He didn't like to hear The Shadow mentioned. Noting Chet's expression, Ken misunderstood it. He thought it meant that Chet was in a very tough mood. Actually, Chet's glare was his method of hiding jitters that were worse than any he had ever experienced.

Ken decided to elaborate on the Yetter theme without further mention of The Shadow.

"From the way Yetter cleared out," Ken remarked, "you'd think he never existed. They can't find anyone who knows what he looks like, or anything else about him. Except you, Chet."

"They won't find me, either," returned Chet. "They'll have to do their own worrying about Yetter. We're going to stage a big job, Ken, to make up for losing those plans of Albury's."

"The job you've been talking about?"

"Yes. I've figured out the way to work it. All we need is a crew to help us -"

"And a getaway afterward," interrupted Ken, in a worried tone. "Don't forget that part of it, Chet."

"I haven't forgotten -"

Chet interrupted himself, with a gesture for Ken to stay silent, too. There were footsteps in the hallway outside their room; light footsteps. Someone rapped once; then twice; finally, once more.

"It means X," whispered Ken. "How does he know where we are, Chet?"

"I'll find out." Chet was drawing a gun. "Be ready to back me up, Ken."

Unlocking the door, Chet whipped it open, keeping his gun hand out of sight. A grimy-faced newsboy was standing in the hall, grinning as he passed Chet a note.

"Did I do it right, mister?" the kid questioned. "The guy with the muffler and the kelly said you'd give me two bits, if I did. Or was it just a gag?"

Chet tossed the boy a quarter and dismissed him. The note proved to be another X message, and its details impressed both Chet and Ken when they read it.

"He's figured it to a dot," declared Chet. "Not only our angle, but the crew we need and the getaway. It's a set-up, Ken!"

"Yes. But how -"

"How did X hit on the same thing?" queried Chet. "I'll tell you why. He's uncanny! Go ahead, Ken—mention The Shadow all you like. He means nothing, now that we've heard from X again."

OTHER men of crime had found the going tough since the episode at Yetter's. Mort Lombert and his faction were in a new hide-away, buried deeper than before.

It was a smaller back room than the other, and it lacked a juke box. Instead, it had a pinball game, that could be played with much less noise.

Weasel had picked this hide-out; it was a place that he had frequented in the past.

Weasel was playing the pinball game and darting quick looks at the steel balls as they zigzagged down the board. His ears, however, were taking in the things that Mort was saying to the rest of the crowd.

"If we'd stayed away from Yetter's," Mort was explaining, "everything would have been jake. It was our own fault, letting The Shadow horse us into going there. We should have jumped him on the way. That's what X wanted us to do."

"How d'ya know?" came an objection. "You ain't heard from X since, have yuh?"

"I'm using the bean, that's all," snapped Mort. "I've got enough sense to figure these things out."

"Like that professor the papers squawk about," put in another mobbie. "The guy that knows what's going to happen next, and puts the coppers wise."

"Professor Troy," added another crook. "Only, he puts them wise to nothing. They ain't found us yet, have they?"

Weasel shot a look over his shoulder.

"Neither has X," he reminded. "Say, Mort, if we don't hear from X, what do we do about it? You've been talking about a bank job, and it sounds all right, but somebody's got to get into the place to set things off. And afterward, there's a getaway to think about."

Mort decided to squelch Weasel.

"Get on the door," ordered Mort. "We won't have to hear from X, this time. We can't blame him for not knowing where we are -"

Mort halted, to watch Weasel. The little crook had drawn his gun and was pointing it at the darkness of a stone stairway leading up to the alley door. Mort motioned to the others, and they drew guns, too. One man produced a flashlight and sent its gleam across Weasel's shoulder.

Blackness was obliterated. Nothing showed except the grime of the stone steps and the battered door above.

"Thought I heard something," began Weasel. "Listen -"

Weasel did hear something, and the rest heard it, too. It came: tap... tap-tap... tap—from the doorway. Springing forward eagerly, Weasel opened the door and saw a peddler, holding out some pencils.

"On your way, bum," snarled Weasel. "This ain't no public joint. We're holding a private party."

Lowering the pencils, the peddler extended a folded slip of paper.

"The gentleman said to give you this," he declared. "He said maybe after you read it, you would buy a few pencils."

Mort shouldered up the steps.

"We don't have to read it," he said. "Here's a buck; and you can keep your pencils. That's all."

He eased the peddler out into the alley and closed the door. The rest were peering over Mort's shoulder, Weasel included, when the leader opened the note from X. What Mort read, astonished him.

"Say, X has got hold of our idea!" exclaimed Mort. "He's been thinking about those gold shipments, too! He's figured our part, just the way I did, but he's doped out the rest of it, too. Inside men, the getaway they're both all set. And the way X has it figured"—Mort finished with a chuckle—"all the coppers in town can't stop us, not even if they had The Shadow running them, instead of that dope, Joe Cardona!"

Flattening the note face down on the table, Mort fished in his pocket for a pencil, but couldn't find one. With a grin, Weasel supplied the wanted object, remarking that Mort should have taken some from the peddler, after paying for them.

Mort told Weasel to get back and mind the door; but Weasel did not go. Instead, he remained on the edge of the group, peering between elbows to see what Mort was drawing on the back of the note from X.

Weasel soon found that he didn't have to watch. When Mort drew diagrams, he talked about them, too. So Weasel turned about and went to guard the door. He paused again at the foot of the steps, thinking he heard a creak from above. But the door was tight shut when Weasel finally reached it.

OUTSIDE, a shape was gliding through the alley; a figure so vague that it seemed to lack form, until it had turned the corner.

Even then, it was scarcely more than a ghostlike figure, though there were moments when it assumed the proportions of a tall form that wore a slouch hat and a flowing cloak.

Merging with the blackness of another alley, the shape was totally gone. There were manifestations, however, in the darkness. A tiny flashlight gleamed, with a dot of light resembling a firefly, except that it was green. Men moved through the alleyway, to join the figure with the light.

The Shadow was holding conference with his agents. He'd found it no trick to locate Mort's new hideout. Chet and Ken were the sort who could disappear at random, but Mort's case was different.

When Mort moved on his own, he left a trail behind him; when he didn't move on his own, he depended upon Weasel. Thus, by making the rounds of Weasel's known hangouts, The Shadow had eventually struck upon Mort's new headquarters.

What The Shadow had heard, was enough. He knew the type of job that Mort Lombert intended, and the probable place where crime would strike. As for the "inside men" that X was to supply, they could only be Chet Parridge and his friend, Ken Blandon, the very pair that The Shadow hoped to meet again.

Which left The Shadow with one point to solve: the matter of the getaway. He intended to look into that subject, and he wanted his agents in readiness. He appointed Hawkeye to take over watching Mort's crowd, with proper discretion. Hence, when the other agents moved away, Hawkeye remained.

Then, at The Shadow's word, Hawkeye started for the other alley, where Mort's hide-out was located. Over his shoulder, the little spotter watched for blinks from The Shadow's tiny flashlight. They were green, at first; when they turned yellow, Hawkeye slackened pace. Finally, a red blink halted him. Hawkeye had gone far enough to take his watcher's post.

What puzzled Hawkeye was how The Shadow had kept tabs on him. It was very dark where Hawkeye stood, and the only answer was that The Shadow had the faculty of seeing through deep darkness.

It didn't surprise Hawkeye; on the contrary, he took it as a logical solution of another problem: The Shadow's amazing skill in traveling through areas that resembled a blackout at its thickest.

In fact, The Shadow was traveling in that very fashion when he moved through his own alley. Threading his way from the disreputable neighborhood, he reached a limousine parked in a quiet street.

Entering the big car, The Shadow disposed of his hat and cloak by packing them in a secret drawer beneath the rear seat.

Then, through the speaking tube, he spoke directly into the chauffeur's ear. His tone, though calm, was close enough to wake the chauffeur from a doze.

The words were repeated in the quiet voice that belonged to Lamont Cranston:

"The club, Stanley."

CHAPTER XVII. THE SHADOW WAITS

COMMISSIONER WESTON had reached the limit of his patience. He was behaving in his stormiest manner, pounding with his fist, shoving things aside when they came in his way.

Of course, he wasn't at the Cobalt Club. If he had used such tactics there, he would have

been ruled off the membership list. Weston confined his bursts of temper to his office.

There were two witnesses to the commissioner's unruly mood. One was his friend, Lamont Cranston; the other, Inspector Cardona. Both were very patient. They didn't blame the commissioner for the way he felt and acted. They'd have done the same, had they been so inclined.

"I leave it to you, Cranston," Weston finally declared. "Where have we gotten by listening to Professor Troy? Every evening, at the club, he talks figures, figures, figures! You can't argue with him; he always has an answer. One that he proves right by his own calculations, even though it's wrong."

Cranston made no comment, so Weston looked to Cardona. Joe gave an uneasy shift then spoke bluntly.

"We can't say that Troy was wrong about the warehouse," conceded Cardona. "Crooks were on the move, that night. Maybe they'd have gone there if The Shadow hadn't coaxed them over to Yetter's. I figure The Shadow wanted to get them all together in one place."

"Bah!" Weston followed the ejaculation with a snort. "You're talking like Troy, inspector. Tell me: where is Yetter? Who is the man he tried to deal with? You don't know, do you? Of course not! They slid down a sliding board, right under your nose, and it took you the rest of the night to find out where they went!"

The telephone began to ring. Weston snatched it off its stand and shouted that he wasn't answering any calls. Slamming down the phone, he snapped at Cardona:

"You've been watching the warehouse ever since, and no one has shown up there. Yet you still think Troy is right."

"Maybe Troy is right." The quiet comment came from Cranston. "Don't forget his triangle, commissioner. Perhaps crime has moved from C to A -"

"And will go on to B," interrupted Weston. "C A B spells cab and C A T spells cat! I can think up jokes, too, Cranston."

"This is no joke, commissioner. There have been no major crimes since Yetter disappeared. I would suggest that you give Troy's theories a further hearing. Calm yourself—and answer the telephone."

The telephone was ringing again. Accepting Cranston's advice, Weston answered it and spoke with reasonable mildness. Then his eyes showed an interested flash, and he continued the conversation rather eagerly, though he did most of the listening and very little of the speaking.

"It was Troy," declared Weston, as he hung up. "He wants us to come up to his house. He is sure that he has something that will interest us."

TROY'S house was well uptown, in a very quiet neighborhood. A solemn servant admitted the visitors and turned them over to another, who conducted them upstairs.

All along the route, they passed rooms that were simply furnished and in perfect order. The contrast came when they reached Troy's study. It was a wreck.

Papers were strewn everywhere; books were piled in heaps. Old Troy was seated behind a desk that couldn't even be seen because of the things piled on it, though it must have been a

rolltop, judging by the height to which the books and papers pyramided.

Troy knocked over a stack of books as he stumbled from his burrow to shake hands. In his other hand he clutched a paper which he evidently prized, for he was careful not to drop it and lose it in the heaps that surrounded him.

Tilting his head, Troy saw a table peering from beneath a load of books; sweeping some volumes aside, he spread the paper that he held.

"All figured out for you, commissioner," declared Troy, bobbing his shocky head in Weston's direction. "This time, it is simple arithmetic, instead of higher mathematics. The next crime to be attempted will be the robbery of the East Branch of the Uptown National Bank."

"Why the Uptown?" queried Weston testily, "and why the East Branch, when there are a dozen others more important?"

Looking about, Troy found a newspaper on the desk; then he thumbed through its pages, he found that the clipping he wanted had been cut out. It was in his wallet, he finally remembered, so he produced it.

"In view of present business activity," announced Professor Troy, "everyone has seemed to have forgotten something that was considered very important, and very valuable. I refer to gold."

Troy paused to stare at Weston, who merely shrugged. Taking it as a good sign, the professor continued.

"Gold is still much wanted." Troy gave a slight smile. "Indeed, it is more highly prized than ever. People have simply become accustomed to think in other terms. They don't realize the real extent of gold shipments, nowadays.

"A few million dollars in gold arrived in New York the other afternoon, and was installed in the vault of the Uptown National's East Branch. I was there when it came, and I was the only person who even noticed it. Unfortunately"—Troy shook his head and handed the clipping to Weston—"the matter was printed in the newspapers."

Weston read the clipping and passed it back. His gaze still carried question.

"Criminals can read, too," reminded Troy. "We are sure of that, since Inspector Cardona has finally decided that the man behind the X notes is not illiterate. This item concerning the gold in the Uptown bank affords criminals their finest opportunity.

"One single crime, and they can leave us, carrying with them a commodity that can be used in any country on the globe. Therefore, commissioner, I suggest that you have Inspector Cardona transfer his watch from the Trans-State Storage warehouse to the East Branch of the Uptown National Bank."

It took Commissioner Weston just two minutes to unburden himself of all the things that had been annoying him for weeks. He called Troy everything from a double-dealer to a lunatic, and the professor drank it all in with open mouth and eyes. When Weston had finished, Troy gave a cheerful cackle.

"You have a sense of humor, commissioner," Troy asserted. "I really thought you meant the things that you were saying, until your statements became so utterly preposterous that I appreciated the jest behind them.

"I take it"—Troy gave an appreciative bow—"that you intend to follow my advice and forestall the robbery of Uptown's East Branch."

Totally out of words, Weston could only gaze from Cranston to Cardona. What he saw flustered Weston even more. Both looked impressed by what Troy had said.

"Gold is valued internationally, commissioner," Cranston remarked. "Professor Troy is correct when he states that it would appeal to criminals who wish to flee the country."

"The prof has figured out a lot of things," added Cardona, "and they've worked out, commissioner."

Weston couldn't find an answer for Cranston; but he had one for Cardona. Bluntly, the commissioner demanded:

"What worked out?"

It was Troy who replied. From somewhere, he produced a thick batch of papers and thrust them into Weston's hands.

"These are the duplicates of my calculations following the Albury murder," stated Troy. "Read them, commissioner, and you will find that I analyzed the case correctly. I said that the murderer would betray himself when he tried to sell the stolen plans. That proved correct."

"Perhaps it did," retorted Weston. "We regained the plans; but where is the murderer? Or who is the murderer? We haven't even found Yetter, the man who was going to buy the stolen goods."

"The murderer lost the plans," reminded Troy, cocking his shocky head. "The way to find him is to watch for further crime, when he will try to make up for his loss. All the more reason to guard the East Branch of the Uptown National, commissioner."

Weston was out of arguments. He finally decided that the bank should be watched, though he put in the jab that such a process might lay the Trans-State Storage open to crime that Troy had predicted earlier, yet was still unfilled. In response, Troy suggested blandly that the warehouse be guarded, also. Weston having no answer, Cardona put in a few words.

"Don't forget The Shadow," said Joe. "He tipped me off to go to Yetter's."

"Tipped you off!" exclaimed Weston. "Why, the call came to me!"

"I told them to call you, commissioner."

"I told them to call you, inspector."

Finding Weston and Cardona at loggerheads, Cranston suggested that each had probably received a tip-off. He added that The Shadow was reputed to be very thorough in such matters.

Of course, Cranston wasn't particularly acquainted with The Shadow's methods; he added that point as an afterthought. Still, it was plausible to suppose that he would have shown the same courtesy to Weston that he did to Cardona.

Professor Troy was smiling happily as he listened to Cranston's statements. The theme had wandered from Troy's original suggestion, leaving the professor with his own point won. Soon afterward, the visitors departed, with Troy waving a cheery good-by from the door.

Cranston's limousine had followed Weston's official car to Troy's. It was late afternoon but the daylight still held, and Cranston, glancing along the street, saw a cab near the corner; one that looked exactly like Moe's.

Stepping into the limousine, he told Stanley to swing the next corner. The cab followed, and began to honk its horn as soon as it was out of sight of Troy's house. Cranston told Stanley to stop.

Madeline was in the cab, and she had much to say. She had been looking for Cranston all afternoon. She had even called Weston's office, thereby learning that Cranston had gone to see Professor Troy. All this came in one breath from Madeline, when she joined Cranston in the limousine.

"Margo told me to wait until I heard from you," she added, her eyes snapping as she spoke. "Only, I didn't. I had to talk to you, Mr. Cranston. Don't you realize that we know Chet Parridge murdered Rodney Albury? Can't you see that the longer we wait, the less chance we have of ever finding Chet?"

Cranston's smile was calm. Madeline ended her outburst and sat back. The sun through the rear window burnished her red hair; her eyes sparkled. Worry made her all the more attractive, but Cranston did not say so. Mere compliments would not soothe Madeline's mood.

"Until tomorrow," Cranston advised. "Wait that long, Madeline, and I am sure that we shall have results."

"You have heard from The Shadow?" queried the girl eagerly. "Is that it?"

Cranston shook his head.

"I have talked with Professor Troy," he replied. "He has a new theory, which I am sure will be proven."

"Professor Troy!" pouted Madeline. "Why, he hasn't scored a single hit!"

"He can't miss much longer," said Cranston, with a smile. "Suppose we give him another chance."

Madeline nodded. Cranston offered to drop her off at Margo's, so they rode there in the limousine. Madeline remembered that Margo was out, but she had given Madeline another key to the apartment, so Madeline left the limousine, nodding again at Cranston's assurance that a wait of one more day would surely lead to the trapping of Chet Parridge.

FROM Margo's, Cranston had Stanley take him past the East Branch of the Uptown National. More than that, he ordered Stanley to drive him around the block so many times, that the chauffeur wondered when Cranston would start reaching out to grab at a brass ring.

Stanley guessed wrong when he thought that Cranston was playing merry-go-round; but his idea of a brass ring was a glimmer of the truth. Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, was thinking of something yellower than brass, and more valuable. His mind was on gold worth two million dollars.

A large load, two million in gold. Cranston's eyes traced the only route along which crooks could carry it, even though the route was unseen. Cellar to cellar, eastward from the bank, would bring them to the river front.

Through the speaking tube, Cranston told Stanley that he craved some river air. Stanley turned the big car toward the East River.

There, parked in a dead-end street, Cranston studied a dilapidated pier. Moored to the end of it was a trim, low-built craft, rakish in design, yet with the sleek lines of an ocean-going cabin cruiser, that might have been designated a yacht.

The Shadow knew that ship. She was the Barracuda, the swiftest light yacht in her class. Her owner, a wealthy friend of Cranston's, intended to turn her over to the government. At present, her old crew was on board, and The Shadow remembered that her skipper, Jed Mankin, would thereupon lack a berth when the government took the craft.

He had a bad reputation, this Jed Mankin. A rumrunner in his time, he was one of the class that had passed counterfeit American currency upon foreign ships that sold him loads of liquor. He'd behaved himself since those days solely because he had obtained a soft berth as skipper of the Barracuda. The owner of the yacht was too careless to realize the graft that Mankin was getting from the job.

A curious coincidence, the Barracuda berthed at this particular pier. Nearby was a water-front cafe that had a telephone in it, and The Shadow saw Jed standing outside the place, hands thrust in his pockets, a cap tilted sideways on his head. He was a slouchy type, Jed Mankin, the wrong sort for a yacht skipper, but suited, perhaps, to other things.

Another curious detail was the flag that floated from the yacht's mast. It was after sundown and the ensign had been hauled in, but this flag still waved. It was a white flag with a blue cross that divided it into quarters.

Gathering dusk hid The Shadow and the limousine as well, but the blue-and-white flag was still visible when a coupe came along the dead-end street and paused a few minutes before it backed away. Hardly had the coupe gone before an old sedan pulled up and stopped, only to back away soon after.

Apparently, the water front was popular this evening, not only with people who rode in neat couples, but persons who favored old sedans. Such cars, however, could not be classed with Cranston's limousine. Through the voice tube, he told Stanley to return to the club by way of the Uptown bank.

Lights were aglow within the bank when the limousine passed it, and Cranston remembered that the branch stayed open evenings.

Arriving at the club, Cranston sauntered through the foyer and stopped at the nearest phone booth, where he made a call.

It was Burbank's voice that answered, and The Shadow spoke in his own tone, not Cranston's. He gave instructions, repeated by Burbank in methodical fashion. Finishing the call, The Shadow delivered a whispered laugh heard by his own ears, alone.

The Shadow had solved the X problem and was ready for a final showdown. Perhaps others could handle crime in their own fashion; indeed, The Shadow had provided them with the chance. There were points, however, that others might miss, and The Shadow was prepared to amend their oversights.

As Cranston, The Shadow planned to dine with Commissioner Weston, and then be on his way. Meanwhile, he was confident that he had taken care of every factor that might prove of consequence in events to come.

There were times when even The Shadow took too much for granted. This was one of those times. The factor in question could be summed up not in a word, but in a name.

The name was Madeline Dale.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE WRONG SHOWDOWN

MADELINE had really been impressed by her chat in the limousine with Cranston. There was just one trouble: she had been impressed too well. She had been fully convinced of something that she had previously doubted: namely, the ability of Professor Achilles Troy.

Madeline wanted more answers than Cranston had given her. She wished that she could talk with The Shadow. Not knowing how to reach him, she began to think of the nice things that Cranston had said about Professor Troy.

It struck Madeline that she could call on that gifted gentleman and learn his opinion regarding matters that concerned Chet Parridge. So she started out.

Reaching Troy's, Madeline was admitted by one of the solemn-faced servants, who conducted her to a parlor on the second floor. Passing Troy's study on the way, Madeline was intrigued by its disorder.

After the servant went to summon Troy, Madeline decided that there could be no harm in going to the study and letting the professor find her there.

Entering the untidy room, she saw a large radio cabinet projecting from batches of books and papers. She heard voices that were vaguely familiar. Wondering what program they represented, Madeline approached the cabinet and absently turned a dial.

As voices lifted, Madeline froze with an amazement that turned into a flood of horror. She knew those voices; they belonged to Chet Parridge and his bosom friend, Ken Blandon!

"Credentials?" Chet's tone scoffed. "We don't need them. This box of silverware will do. They'll have to take us to the vault so we can see them store it."

"But what about the other box?" came Ken's anxious query. "It doesn't contain silverware."

"I'll say it doesn't! It's the same weight, though, and they won't ask us to open it. After that, Ken"—Chet's tone was the smooth one that had caused Madeline to mistrust him—"we stay right there, in the East Branch of the Uptown National, until —"

Footsteps from the hallway caused Madeline to make a quick turn of a knob. She picked the wrong one; instead of tuning down the voices, she cut them off entirely. Madeline heard a buzz, but didn't wait to learn what it meant.

Turning to an inner corner of the study, she ducked behind some huge books that were stacked like a low wall. Peering between the piled volumes, she saw Professor Troy enter.

He stopped at the radio cabinet. It was dawning upon Madeline that the device wasn't a radio at all, but a wireless dictograph, probably of Troy's own invention. He was using it to pick up conversations of the sort that Madeline had heard; talk that he should have reported to the police.

Madeline Dale was getting a remarkable insight into the real ways of Professor Achilles Troy. New voices were coming from the cabinet: one raspy, the other something of a whine. Professor Troy clucked merrily as he recognized the voices of Mort Lombert and Weasel

Kelk. Troy tilted his head to listen, and Madeline listened, too.

"It's time to move," Mort was saying. "We'll do this job the way X wants it. He's never given us a bum steer yet."

"I've checked those cellars, Mort," responded Weasel. "It's a cinch, getting through as far as the foundation of the bank."

"The inside men will handle that part for us, Weasel."

"But what about the alarms? They'll go off, won't they?"

"Sure, they will," declared Mort. "But we'll be on our way out five minutes after we come in. Using our own private route."

Finishing with a chuckle, Mort paused, then added:

"What I like is the way this guy X gets in on everything. D'you know, Weasel, sometimes I figure he's got some system of knowing what goes on, right in here."

"Yeah," agreed Weasel. "It was that way at the old hide-out, too. You'd have thought that X was listening in on everything we said."

One person had certainly been listening in on all such conversations: Professor Achilles Troy. His deep, conniving chuckle seemed to certify the statements that he had just overheard. The truth could no longer veil itself from Madeline.

Professor Troy was X!

LAST words were coming from the loud-speaker. Mort was assuring Weasel on another point.

"I was over by the water front," said Mort. "It's all set for the getaway, like X said -"

X, himself, was cutting off that conversation—X, in the person of Professor Troy. He switched back to Chet and Ken, and Madeline caught their words:

"Let's go." It was Chet who spoke. "Lay off the jitters, Ken. The whole thing is planned, the getaway included."

"I know." Ken's tone was confident. "That trip we took past the pier was a bracer, Chet. When I saw the thing we looked for, I knew that -"

Professor Troy snapped off that conversation, and other voices came from his remarkable machine. The first was a rough tone, that carried a salty tang. The man who spoke was talking over a telephone.

"Yeah, this is Jed Mankin," he said. "Captain Mankin... That's right... So you're the supervisor of wharves. I thought I'd be hearing from you... Yeah, I know my permit runs out today, but it's good to midnight, ain't it?... All right, I'll be sure to move the Barracuda before then -"

There was the clank of a telephone receiver dropping into place. Madeline could hear faint voices, that sounded like a crowd in a waterfront dive. Then Jed Mankin, in a low, rolling tone, was confiding to a member of his own crew, who was standing by.

"You bet we'll move tonight!" said Jed. "We'll move when X says so, and we'll pick up

anybody or anything he says. He sent me one chunk of cash, and there's another coming later, he said. Let's go back to the ship and see if there's another message. He said to be ready for any last-minute word."

Professor Troy gave the knob a final click. Reaching his desk, he shoved papers aside and lifted batches of books. From beneath, he produced a decrepit portable typewriter, inserted a sheet of paper and began to click away. Madeline couldn't tell what he was writing, but she knew when he had finished.

Hitting the line spacer, Troy slid the carriage to the left and struck a single key to supply a signature of one letter, which could only be "X"!

Folding the typewritten sheet, Troy stuffed it in an envelope, which he sealed. He pressed a button on the wall and a servant appeared. Troy handed over the envelope.

"Get it to Jed Mankin," Troy ordered. "At once! I must leave"—he was chuckling as he arose—"and keep an appointment with my friend the police commissioner. Ah!" Troy paused and looked around. "I almost forgot. I have some new figures for him. Where did I put them?"

Troy ended the statement with a surprised blink. He was looking right into the muzzle of a cute .22 that poked across a stack of books. Above the gun muzzle was the face of a very determined girl. Madeline's voice was firm, too, when she said:

"Stay just as you are, Professor Troy. Or should I say, 'Mr. X'?"

Beyond Troy, the servant was starting a sneak to the door. Madeline thrust a pile of books aside, and emerged. She halted the servant with a wave of her gun. As he raised his hands, Madeline plucked away the note he held.

"You're both staying here," she declared. "As for your appointment with the commissioner, professor, I shall see that you keep it."

She tucked the note under a fancy belt that she was wearing, and reached for the telephone on Troy's desk. The professor extended his upraised hands and spoke in wheedling tone.

"If you will only listen!" he pleaded. "I can explain everything, Miss -"

"Miss Dale," inserted Madeline, as Troy hesitated. "Madeline Dale. Just in case you don't already know."

Troy's change of expression showed that he did know. His bluff hadn't worked. He smiled, however, when he watched Madeline use the phone dial, without result.

"It's an extension phone," explained Troy. "You'll have to use the one downstairs. Unless an incoming call arrives, in which case my other servant will transfer it up here."

"Good enough," declared Madeline. " We'll wait."

ANGRILY, Troy chewed his lips. He didn't want to wait. A fit of temper seized him.

"You're spoiling everything!" stormed Troy. "All my plans that I arranged so carefully!"

"Exactly what I wish to do," assured Madeline. "I've made a good start, haven't I, professor? This note"—she drew the envelope from her belt—"is one note from X that won't be delivered."

"You fool! Can't you realize that every minute counts? If that note isn't sent at once, it will be too late ever to deliver it!"

Madeline received Troy's outburst with a smile. In her sweetest tone, she replied:

"You're making me very happy, professor."

Troy's raised hands began to fidget in the air, as though seeking imaginary strings. He kept looking at a clock on a high bookshelf, watching it toll off the minutes, while Madeline waited patiently. Suddenly, Troy calmed. He spoke cannily.

"If you would read that note," he suggested, "you would understand more, Miss Dale."

Madeline glanced at the envelope then tucked it back into her belt. Troy kept watching her shrewdly, saw her fingers touch the envelope again. This time, it was Troy who was using patience. He forgot the passing minutes, satisfied that a woman's curiosity would work in his behalf. It did.

Suddenly, Madeline pulled the envelope from her belt and thrust it to the servant.

"Open it," she ordered, "and read the message aloud."

Her eyes were on the servant, but she kept the gun pointed toward Troy, satisfied that she would hear any motion that he might make in her direction. In fact, Madeline could even see Troy from the corner of her eye.

He looked weary, his arms sagging, his elbows propped on piles of books. A move from Troy, and Madeline intended to pull the gun trigger.

The move came. Old Troy hurled himself forward with a surprising lunge, but he didn't come alone. Books flew ahead of him as he overturned a table on which they stood. The table was light enough for Troy to fling, and the effect was much the same as the action of Yetter's mechanical desk.

Instinctively, Madeline dodged the hurtling books as she fired, and her shot was both high and wide, about six inches obliquely above Troy's left ear. Springing away, the girl turned to deliver a point-blank shot; but by then, Troy's servant was in the game.

He grabbed at the gun, forcing Madeline's aim away from Troy. Then both the professor and the servant were struggling to suppress the girl.

Madeline fought with a desperate fury, tearing away from the hands that clutched her. The belt snapped when Troy grabbed it; a sleeve of Madeline's dress ripped in the servant's grasp. For once, Madeline was glad that a material was proving flimsy, for she found herself free and in the doorway.

Hauling away the flapping sleeve that bothered her aim, Madeline thrust her gun straight at Professor Troy.

Then she was sprawling backward, her last shot popping at the ceiling. Troy's other servant had arrived from downstairs, attracted by Madeline's gunfire. He was just in time to plant his hands on Madeline's shoulders and yank her out into the hallway.

As the girl flattened, Troy came flying through the doorway, plucked the .22 from Madeline's hand and gave it a fling that sent it bouncing down the stairway.

The servants dragged Madeline to her feet, and she found herself too weak, too shaken, to offer further fight. Screams wouldn't help, for they were ready to gag her at the first shriek.

Rather bewildered, Madeline wondered where Troy had gone; she realized suddenly that he was downstairs, working the dial of the lower telephone.

Whatever the number that Troy was calling, a response was lacking. He came bounding up the stairs, a furious glitter in his eyes. He stared at Madeline angrily; then snatched up the X note, which was lying in the study doorway.

"It's too late!" snapped Troy. "This note can no longer be delivered. Come!" He snapped the command at the servants. "We must take measures of our own, despite the danger it involves. Bring her along!" He jabbed his finger at Madeline. "Let her see what X can accomplish when he acts in person!"

Troy was leading the way, down through the kitchen, to a car that was parked on the back street, while Madeline, following in the clutches of the professor's servants, found herself wishing that she had left this business to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. NEEDED: THE SHADOW

IN the vault room of the East Branch of the Uptown National Bank, a sturdy guard was standing with his hand on his holstered revolver. He was watching an assistant cashier completing the storage of two boxes of silverware in the vault.

The door of the vault was open, and inside were stacks of stout, square boxes that didn't look particularly valuable.

Actually, they were worth about two million dollars, for they contained that much in gold.

The assistant cashier was smiling at the apprehensions of the two customers who didn't think the vault was strong enough to protect their precious silverware, which they valued at five hundred dollars.

He explained that the vault was an old one, true enough, but that the bank was equipped with very modern alarm systems, and that trained guards were on duty, night and day.

He didn't add that police had taken up watch outside the bank. Nor did Chet Parridge and Ken Bandon mention that they had seen those same police; at least, not until they had a chance to speak privately between themselves.

That chance came while Chet and Ken were going upstairs. The guard had remained below while the assistant cashier closed the vault. It was Chet who undertoned:

"Don't let those police bother you, Ken. They don't suspect anything yet, and won't until it's over."

"But they're getting warm, Chet," insisted Ken. "If Professor Troy steered them here, he must be smarter than we thought."

"Smart enough to be X, Ken. Have you thought of that?"

Stopping at the top of the stairs, Ken stared and shook his head.

"I have," smiled Chet. "It explains two things: why the police have been around, and why they haven't caught us. Professor Troy, or X, if you prefer it, is smart at covering up—not only for

us and fellows like us, but for himself."

Chet stopped his opinions there, for the cashier was coming upstairs with the guard. Chet asked about a receipt for the boxes of silverware, and the cashier made one out. Then Chet remembered that he wanted to buy some traveler's checks for the trip that he and his friend were making. The cashier obligingly started to arrange the new transaction.

At that moment, a muffled blast sounded from deep within the vault room of the bank. The floor quaked; windows cracked. Shouts of alarm from the customers were followed by quick action from the guards, who drew their guns.

Though the explosion had come from below, the first move by the guards was toward the outer door, for they were trained to watch for trouble from that direction.

It was a teller's shout that set the guards right. They turned about, to see two men streaking for the stairway to the vault room. By the time the guards began to shoot, Chet Parridge and Ken Blandon were diving below. The guards followed, to be greeted by shots from the bottom of the stairs.

The vault room was filled with smoke, and most of it was filtering up the stairway to the banking floor. Through that thick blue cloud, Chet and Ken could not be seen, as they continued the steady gunfire that held open the only route to the vault itself. But the shooting that Chet and Ken supplied was not the only thing that was happening below.

Packed in a box labeled "Silverware," a charge of high explosive set by Chet and Ken had blown the vault from within. Not only had the blast ruined the vault door; the terrific concussion within the air-tight space had shattered the very walls of the vault itself.

Alarms were ringing madly, but they were of little use. Through an open hole from an adjoining cellar, Mort Lombert and his company of specialists were piling in full force, grabbing up the precious boxes that contained the gold.

Each box was a heavy burden in itself, but Mort and his crew were present in sufficient numbers to handle the job.

SOMETHING came bounding down the stairs to the vault room and exploded with a puff. Chet grabbed Ken and rushed him into the vault, where Mort was sending the last boxes through the hole to the cellar next door.

Mort didn't have to be introduced to Chet and Ken. He accepted them for what they were: the inside men that X had promised.

"Need some gunners?" queried Mort. "I've got plenty."

"They'll have to cover while we're going through the cellars," returned Chet. "Those monkeys upstairs are chucking tear-gas bombs."

"Good stuff," laughed Mort. "They'll hold themselves up while they're getting gas masks. Come on."

In the next cellar, Weasel Kelk was hurrying the gold along its way. On his trip to the bank, Weasel had found a stock of handcarts in the storage room of a hardware store. Crooks were hauling the gold boxes on the little wagons, enabling one man to do the work of two, except where there were differences in the levels of the cellars.

At those spots, however, the wagon pullers got together, helping each other lift the burdens

to the next level, wagons, gold, and all.

At least half of Mort's sizable crew was thus relieved for gun duty, had it been needed—which it wasn't. The wagons were rolling so fast that the reserves had to hurry to keep up with them. Meanwhile, the bank guards and incoming police were encountering the very trouble that Mort had predicted.

They'd thrown so much tear gas into the vault room, that they needed masks in order to descend. Not having enough masks to go around, the few men who donned them were wary in moving down the stairs, thinking that crooks were still in the vault room, perhaps with gas masks of their own.

A full block from the scene of robbery, Mort and the other raiders were emerging from a cellar doorway near a corner leading to the dead-end street, which afforded a down grade to the pier where the Barracuda was moored. They could hear the wails of sirens, the shrill notes of police whistles, but all were far away.

Neither Cardona's squad nor the bank guards had yet discovered that a whole tribe of criminals had come and gone from the vault room, taking the gold with them along a route of their own manufacture.

"Roll the wagons right to the yacht," ordered Mort. "Nobody will bother us. Every cop within a mile has headed back to the bank. Only, don't waste any time. We don't want anybody to pick up our trail from here."

At Mort's term "anybody," Chet's face tightened, and Ken, observing it, knew that "anybody" might be The Shadow. So far, the cloaked avenger hadn't shown his hand, which struck Ken as unusual, until he decided that tonight the measures provided by X had been so startling, so sudden, and so swift, that even The Shadow might not be able to catch up with them.

Ken's opinion seemed justified when they reached the Barracuda. There wasn't a ripple along the river, save for the slow chum of the small yacht's propeller, which started moving as soon as Mort and Chet stepped on board to introduce themselves to Captain Jed Mankin.

Watching the crooks load their weighty boxes to the deck beside the yacht's main cabin, Jed furnished advice to Weasel, who seemed to be in charge of the job.

"Get those boxes down into the hold," suggested Jed. "If you run into any of my crew, they'll help you. Stow the handcarts in the cabin. We'll dump them down the bay."

Gesturing to a helmsman in the compact pilothouse, Jed put the Barracuda under way, and led his privileged passengers, Mort, Chet, and Ken, to a canvas-roofed deck at the rear of the little yacht.

There, clustered in deck chairs, they were riding smoothly down the river, when Mort, looking upward, observed the white flag with the blue cross still atop the masthead.

Mort turned to Jed: "Do you need that any longer?"

"I'll say we do," replied the skipper. "It's the way X will know the Barracuda, if he wants to come on board her. It's his flag; that's why we're flying it."

Mort nodded. He knew that the square flag with the upright and crosswise stripes was the international code signal for the letter X. Meanwhile, Ken was calling Chet's attention to happenings back up the river, and Chet spoke to Jed.

"Sounds like the sirens are getting to the pier," observed Chet. "Maybe you'd better put more speed into this packet."

Jed replied that too much speed would attract attention; nevertheless, he went to the companionway and called down for a few more knots.

Soon, the Barracuda was slithering beneath the long sash of lights that constituted the Brooklyn Bridge; then she was past the lower end of Manhattan and gliding smoothly toward the Lower Bay.

Men were coming from below, to gather along the sides of the Barracuda. Some were mobsters; others belonged to the yacht's crew. They hadn't bothered to introduce themselves; they were simply taking each other for granted. They were listening, as Jed Mankin declared:

"There's a hundred ports we could head for. You fellows wanted a getaway, and I'm giving you a clean one. But I'm expecting further orders from X -"

OUT of the river's darkness came the slice of a strong searchlight, that caught the Barracuda in its sweep, held itself upon the yacht, and finally focused on the blue-and-white flag.

Mort and Chet were coming to their feet, reaching for their guns, when the searchlight started to give flashes.

Blink—blink-blink—blink.

A long, two shorts, and a long: the code letter symbolizing X. The master mind, himself, was joining the crowd on board the Barracuda, which slackened speed at Jed's prompt order, so that the other craft could overtake it.

A trim speedboat hauled up beside the yacht. A rope was thrown and a short ladder dropped. A white-haired man detached himself from a huddled group in the speedboat and came over the rail. Chet threw a triumphant glance at Ken.

The arrival could be none other than Professor Achilles Troy.

In the speedboat which dangled from the yacht's stern, Madeline Dale was seated helpless between Troy's servants, a witness to the meeting that was taking place upon the canopied rear deck of the Barracuda. She saw faces in the offing; knew that they must represent crooks and members of the yacht's crew.

One person was needed: The Shadow. Yet Madeline did not wonder at his absence. For she realized that even the black-cloaked avenger could never hope to cope, alone, against the tremendous odds presented by Professor Troy and the combined crews that he ruled under the title of X!

CHAPTER XX. STRANGE SETTLEMENT

BLANDLY, Professor Troy introduced himself to his followers, and thereby elicited wonderment from all except Chet and Ken, who had already guessed the real identity of X. Then, with a pleasant chortle, Troy began a review of past events.

"My compliments, gentlemen," said Troy. "You planned your crimes well; it simply needed proper leadership to combine your efforts. A thing which I managed with the aid of my detectophone, or wireless dictograph."

Surprise showed itself on the faces of listeners. They were getting their final real insight into the prime secret behind Troy's uncanny tactics. Troy turned to Weasel.

"Remember the juke box in the old hide-away?" queried Troy. "And the coin machine in the new one? They concealed the detectors and transmitters necessary to convey the short-wave communications to the short-wave receiving device in my home."

Troy paused, and turned to Ken.

"The same applied to that fancy radio set that you bought at such a bargain," declared Troy. "You carried it with you, Blandon, and I could always keep track of you and Parridge, along with everything you planned. There was another transmitter"—Troy's tone was reflective—"in a cab that Rodney Albury used. But I digress."

He turned to speak to Jed Mankin. The skipper, at that moment, was realizing that another of Troy's pickup instruments must have been planted in the phone booth at the water-front cafe. Seeing that Troy was about to address him, Jed snapped to attention.

"Tell me, captain," said Troy, "are your men all armed?"

Jed gave a nod.

"Then order them to draw their guns," declared Troy. He paused, while Jed snapped the command. Then, pulling a revolver from his pocket, Troy set the precedent, as he added in a loud, triumphant tone: "Now, have them cover everyone else on board!"

It happened so suddenly that crooks found themselves unable to budge. Troy was grinning as he kept his gun moving, and Jed and the crew of the Barracuda seemed intrigued by this new turn, in which they were playing a major part. Though comparatively few in number, the yacht crew held the bulge and were keeping it.

"You fools!" Troy was addressing Mort and Chet. "Do you think I wanted you to succeed in your crimes? Why, from the start, I was matching crook against crook, as a way toward elimination. Mort against Hogger, at Bartier's. I even had the police on hand, to mop up after the dog-and-cat fight! The trouble was —The Shadow!"

There was no venom in Troy's tone; rather, he spoke with regret. His words were true; it was the unexpected intervention of The Shadow that had caused Mort Lombert and Hogger Unstrum to form an impromptu alliance, under conditions which would ordinarily have produced a fray between them.

"I sent you to Albury's studio," Troy told Chet Parridge, "so that Mort would mistake you for the kidnap victim and try to take you along with him. You'd have thinned Mort's crew, and been killed yourself, in that fight. Too bad that such a plan of crime control, went to nought.

"Poor Albury! Heedless of warnings from myself and The Shadow, he went to his studio, and was murdered there. The first I learned about it was when you returned to Blandon's apartment, Parridge, to frame your alibi. So I let Mort go to Albury's anyway, to kidnap a dead man.

"I brought the police in on that one, too, but again The Shadow was ahead of me. A fine fellow, The Shadow, but a trifle overzealous. Nevertheless, he helped me. At least, you fools never mistrusted X. You always blamed your hard luck on The Shadow."

IF ever a man had baited a crowd of murderers and made them take it, Professor Troy was accomplishing the feat. Backed by Jed Mankin and the yacht crew, he could go the limit. For

the tougher things became, the more those fellows liked it. The nods that Jed gave were proof that he would see Troy right through to the limit.

"Tonight, The Shadow wisely stepped aside," declared Troy. "I am sure that he at last sensed my full purpose. He knew that the gold robbery, arranged so there would be no bloodshed, was intended as a trap. So it would have been"—Troy turned to Jed—"if I had sent you my last message.

"I have the note with me, Mankin. It orders you to remove to the North River pier, where I keep my speedboat. There, I intended to pay you the thousand dollars that I promised. These criminals"—he gestured his gun toward Mort and Chet—"would have been left high and dry on the East River pier, where the police could have trapped them like the rats they are."

Thrusting his gun into his pocket, Professor Troy produced a sheaf of currency and counted off one thousand dollars, which he handed to Jed Mankin.

"Honest money, Jed," spoke Troy. "I am willing to testify that, in your case, I tempted you to become a party to crime, whereas, with these others, I guided them into things of their own planning. Here is your payment; you will now return to Manhattan, so that we can deliver these criminals over to the law."

Jed Mankin shook his head. With his gun, he pushed away the cash that Professor Troy offered.

Troy's eyes beamed happily; he thought that Jed's reform had reached the high degree where Jed would not accept a payment that bore even a semblance of a taint. Professor Troy was far astray in his judgment of Jed Mankin!

"A thousand bucks!" sneered Jed suddenly. "You offer me that chicken feed while I've got two million right on board this ship, with right guys like Lombert and Parridge ready to hand me my third of it, if I play ball! I'm playing ball, professor!"

Professor Troy had thrown a boomerang right to his own chin, and he knew it. Wildly, he sprang for the ladder leading down to the speedboat, while Mort and Chet, receiving Jed's nod, were springing forward to slaughter their old master, X.

To their minds, Troy's pet symbol was not a measure in behalf of justice, but a token that should have been written twice, to signify a double cross.

Troy's servants were bobbing up with their guns, hoping to protect their master, and Madeline saw her .22 in her own hand, where one of the servants had placed it. The turn of events thrilled her, but only for the moment.

Sheer common sense told Madeline the horrible truth: that she and the servants would be chopped down without quarter, if they tried to defend Professor Troy.

Yet death seemed just as certain under any circumstances. Like the men beside her, Madeline raised her gun as Troy sprawled into the speedboat with them.

Into that moment fully fraught with doom came a portent that Madeline would have welcomed earlier, but which, in this time of greater need, seemed totally inadequate.

The laugh of The Shadow!

The mirth burst loud, with all its challenge, a mocking invitation for men of murder to forget all

lesser feuds and meet crime's nemesis in person. It was a call for a death duel, in which The Shadow was giving odds against which even he could not compete. The strident laugh came from on board the Barracuda itself.

MORT LOMBERT and Chet Parridge, head men of murder, gave Troy a temporary respite as they swung to find The Shadow. Turning with them was Jed Mankin, equally determined to meet the challenger who was taking over the ship that Jed wanted for his own.

All three saw The Shadow, fully cloaked, as he drove forth from the cabin. He had been on the yacht, a stowaway, long before crooks had brought the gold on board.

Not three guns, but a dozen, were swinging toward The Shadow to outmatch the brace of automatics he carried. Yet, not for a moment did he desist in his prime purpose: that of meeting crime's real leaders—Mort and Chet—along with the actual traitor, Jed. The Shadow's big guns spoke.

One shot clipped Mort, the other withered Chet. Wheeling full about with the recoil of his guns, The Shadow was inches clear of the bullet that whizzed past his shoulder, triggered by the third marksman, Jed. Another spurt of The Shadow's gun and the crooked skipper hit the deck, writhing like the others who had sprawled ahead of him.

All that, without a single other marksman taking a shot at The Shadow! For, during the quick duel in which The Shadow, alone, had settled three foemen, lesser crooks had found themselves occupied with unexpected enemies.

The Shadow's agents were on deck. A picked crew of four, they were among the very men that crooks had accepted as their own breed. As fast as gunmen aimed for The Shadow, they were clipped by the cloaked fighter's own followers. The agents were making up for lack of numbers by the simple expedient of springing a surprise attack, so complete that its action was as swift as The Shadow's own.

Simple, too, was the expedient whereby the agents had placed themselves on board the Barracuda. They weren't stowaways like their cloaked chief, who had found it easy to hide in the yacht's small hold. The agents had lurked close to the pier until the mobsters arrived with the gold, and had then pitched in to help load the boxes on the Barracuda!

Crooks had mistaken The Shadow's men for members of the yacht crew. In their turn, those on the Barracuda supposed that the extra helpers were part of the mob that had raided the East Branch of the Uptown National Bank. With every man accepted as a rogue, all strangers had been taken for granted, to the undoing of the rogues themselves!

The battle was as good as won. Whirling in the center of the deck, The Shadow was a living gun turret, his huge guns marking catastrophe for all who crossed their paths. Crooks were fleeing from that black-clad menace—over the cabin, along the side decks, and down into the hold.

Crouched by the rails, The Shadow's agents heard their chief's command for them to follow those who had gone below. Unleashed, the four drove after the fugitives who were too scared to fight.

Alone, The Shadow was raking the side decks and jabbing quick shots at the cabin top, to keep foemen from returning by either of those routes.

There were men still determined to deal with The Shadow. Mort Lombert and Chet Parridge were propping themselves upon the motionless form of Jed Mankin, striving to take aim

despite their crippled plight.

Even more dangerous was Ken Blandon, who had dived for cover at the beginning of the fray but was showing his mettle at last, because The Shadow's back was turned. Ken was aiming steadily, as he sneaked out from behind a deck chair.

They had forgotten something that The Shadow hadn't. Troy's speedboat was still hitched to the Barracuda. On his feet again, Troy was coming over the ladder, with Madeline and the servants close behind him.

The Shadow knew he could depend on Troy, and the professor proved it. Copying The Shadow's own tactics, Troy cackled challenge at the crooks on deck.

Mort and Chet still tried to bag The Shadow, but they were too late. At Troy's call, the cloaked fighter wheeled, clearing the slow aim of the wounded crooks. Ken fell for Troy's challenge and changed aim, but the professor fired first. Ken was sprawling, his own gun unfired, when Troy's servants riddled him.

Then, finding that their own shots couldn't reach The Shadow, who had vanished somewhere in the blackness of the deck, Chet and Mort swung about, hoping to deal with their ex-master, X.

They had wasted too much time. Troy and his servants gave them the same medicine that Ken had been given. Rolling sideward, Mort flattened on the deck; Chet with a last lurch, sprawled across him.

A strange laugh spoke from the darkness, grim in its mirth. Staring, Professor Troy caught the significance. Troy was looking at the silent forms of Mort Lombert and Chet Parridge. The bodies, because of the manner in which they had fallen, formed an X.

SOUNDS of gunfire carried far across the water. Police boats headed for the yacht that was drifting in the bay. As they approached, the police saw a speedboat cut away from the Barracuda.

Guns were talking from the speedboat, clipping lurkers on the side decks of the yacht—crooks who fired wild shots in return, as they spilled into the water.

The Shadow and his agents were leaving in Troy's speedboat, and seeing to it that the professor remained master of the scene.

When the police arrived, they recognized Troy and accepted his presence without question. He had been promising to put a curb on crime, and he had apparently done it, recovering crime's latest loot—the gold from the Uptown National Bank.

But Troy was taciturn when he received congratulations. He could hear the trail of a strange, parting laugh floating back across the bay. Troy knew that the real credit for crime's conquest belonged to his black-cloaked friend, The Shadow.

Later, Troy related every detail to Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona. Madeline was present; she felt anxious, not for herself but for Troy, for she realized that the professor had outstepped ordinary limits in his scheme of working against crime.

Madeline testified, of course, regarding the last X note, that she had prevented Troy from sending in time to block crime, as the professor had intended.

There was another listener: Lamont Cranston. His calm personality dominated the scene. It

was Cranston who suggested that Troy give his wireless detectograph to the authorities, to which Troy willingly agreed, thus scoring a point in his own behalf.

"Always the mathematician, Troy," said Cranston, with a smile. "After all, we should have known that you were X. The symbol stands for an unknown quantity."

Cranston's quiet comment relieved the tension; whereupon, he added calmly:

"And when X is not sufficient, you use Y to denote another unknown. As an example: Y for Yetter."

"Yes, I was Yetter," acknowledged Troy. "I created the personality for emergency. I became Yetter to trap Chet Parridge with the goods. But Mort Lombert showed up, too."

"Blame The Shadow," laughed Cranston. "He led Mort astray. He should have coaxed Mort to the warehouse to be trapped there. You hoped for that, professor, but The Shadow wasn't quite sure of your intentions at the time. So you see, commissioner"—Cranston turned to Weston—"you mustn't deal harshly with Troy."

"We won't deal harshly at all," decided Weston. "We shall give you a vote of thanks, and forget the unknown quantities."

Thus the meeting ended. Madeline Dale, as she left, was still pondering over Weston's final statement. It was well to forget those unknown quantities, X and Y, that represented Professor Troy; but the rule applied no further.

There was one unknown that no one would forget—the most powerful factor of them all, and one that would remain unsolved:

The Shadow!

THE END