

THE MAGIGALS MYSTERY
by Maxwell Grant

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I

THE CRYSTAL SKULL

WHEN Lamont Cranston entered the lobby of the Hotel Harbison, he found it filled with Magigals. They were of many shapes and sizes, they all wore big badges with red ribbons that said "Magigals" in gold letters, and they were holding the most unusual convention in the history of Chicago.

The Magigals are a society of women magicians with chapters all over the country. They had picked Chicago for their convention because it was centrally located and the attendance had exceeded all expectations. Although this was only the opening day, the convention was already rated as a huge success, except by a line-up of dour-faced hotel guests who were checking out as fast as more Magigals arrived.

Because of the unexpected turnout, the Magigals had not been able to find enough hotel rooms for all their extra delegates. Being magicians, they had tackled that problem in a characteristic way. Staid guests of the Hotel Harbison had been disturbed by loud raps on their doors. Upon opening their doors, they had been terrified by collapsing skeletons that floundered across the thresholds, only to rise, bow, and dance away.

The electric lights were also acting temperamental. The doors in the Harbison had special locks that put out the room lights when the key was turned from the outside by a departing guest. The Magigals had found some way to get at this device, because rooms were suddenly going black while the guests were still inside. That wasn't all; every time an outraged guest fumbled in the dark for a telephone, a lighted electric light bulb floated in through the transom, circled the room and floated out again.

Lights weren't all that were floating around the Hotel Harbison, however. Doves were flying up and down the corridors, rabbits were hopping in and out of elevators, and every time a beleaguered guest answered a ringing telephone, he heard ducks quacking across the wire. It was easier for one guest to check out than try to have five hundred Magigals thrown out, so guests were checking out, one by one.

Lamont Cranston heard them exchanging tales of woe as he passed the line of people leaving the hotel. Of course, the Magigals were being very nice about it. They were parading all along the line, showing their victims card tricks, cutting ribbons and restoring them, shaking silk handkerchiefs and making them change color. But invariably, they would reach into a victim's inside pocket and bring out a string of sausages, a cabbage, or even a live alligator. After that, nobody minded much about leaving the Hotel Harbison.

At the message desk in the spacious lobby, Cranston gave his name and inquired for any telegrams. There were none, so he left word that he would be waiting in the lobby. Then Cranston elbowed his way through a group of Magigals who were offering to burn his necktie and restore it, along with a few odd

miracles such as making his cuff links disappear or transporting his watch into

the center of a loaf of bread. With a suave smile, Cranston dismissed these entreaties and continued over to the news stand.

There, newspaper headlines marked a weakness in the Magigals Convention. Such a gathering should have gained notice on the front page, but it hadn't. The headlines were devoted to more shocking news. Chicago was experiencing a suicide wave, tallying eight cases in a mere three days. In ratio to the city's population, this was small, but considering the type of suicides, it was unprecedented.

These were not suicides of the type brought on by poverty, despondency, or any of the usual contributory causes. Every suicide was a man of means, reputedly in good health. Nor were they suicides of the prosaic gas-pipe variety. Instead, the victims went in for the spectacular. One man had deliberately wheeled a hired automobile in front of a stream-lined flyer, Milwaukee-bound. Another had flavored a mint julep with a powdery poison and tossed off the drink in one of Chicago's most exclusive bars. A third had rammed a speedboat head-on into one of the massive intake cribs of the Chicago water system, a tower-shaped structure rearing from the waters of Lake Michigan, two miles off shore.

Most startling of all was the man who had risen with the curtain in the Civic Opera House, finishing his trip with a plunge to the stage in the presence of two thousand witnesses. Considering that the stage of the opera house was thirteen stories high, it was not remarkable that the man failed to survive the fall.

All the victims were from out of town. They came from such cities as Dubuque, Zanesville, Tampa, Spokane, and Wichita, all of which had practically nothing in common. They were registered at fine hotels or visiting at swanky apartments. All had come to Chicago on business or for a good time. None of them had gone broke, for money had been found in their pockets as well as bank books in their suitcases. Yet all had climaxed their Chicago stay by seeking death in some spectacular manner.

The psychiatrists had the answer, according to a newspaper which Cranston picked up and began to read. It was a form of auto-suggestion, each suicide copying the example of another. If traced back, the case histories of these individuals would show that all had psychopathic trends. Such a suicide epidemic could grow into a form of mass hysteria. It behooved the public at large to remain calm.

The Chicago police were taking this theory seriously. Plain-clothes men were stationed in all public meeting places to discourage suicide attempts. This applied to the Harbison lobby where the Magigals were in conclave and Cranston was hearing grumbles from the regular guests on that score.

According to the regulars who had isolated themselves by the news stand, it would be very jolly if the Magigals caught the mass hysteria and made front page news by eliminating themselves, their magic and all, in one wholesale suicide pact.

"Look at those dizzy dames," one man was saying. "They're mobbing that poor soul who runs the perfume counter. Only they aren't buying perfume, they're probably showing him card tricks and getting ready to pull a pet skunk out of the back of his coat collar."

Cranston looked toward the perfume counter and observed a cluster of Magigals. But if they were hounding the dapper clerk behind the counter, it wasn't by dint of card tricks. On the contrary, they seemed to be pleading with him, but his only response was a continued head shake.

Sauntering over, Cranston watched from the fringe of a dozen Magigals and saw that the clerk was ready to capitulate.

"All right, girls," the dapper clerk was saying wearily. "I'll show you

the crystal skull. It's been on display for a week, though, so why couldn't you come around to see it earlier?"

"Because the convention didn't begin until today," piped a stylish Magigal, "and we didn't hear about the skull until we arrived."

"This is a magical convention," put in another. "That's why we're all interested in the crystal skull and it's all the more reason why you ought to keep it on display."

"It's been sold, I tell you," the clerk pleaded. "I was just packing it for delivery."

That brought a series of sallies from the Magigals.

"Sold? For how much?"

"Who bought it and why?"

"Maybe we'll give you a better offer!"

Spreading his hands helplessly, the clerk looked around for moral support.

He saw Cranston and was encouraged by the latter's calm demeanor. Lamont Cranston was a man who never became excited. His features, which seemed cast from a fixed mold, were immobile, except when his thin lips betrayed a suggestion of a smile which in itself was cryptic. His eyes, though steady, had

a friendly mildness on occasions such as this. The perfume clerk, much befuddled by the congregated Magigals, felt that he could depend upon Cranston as an ally.

Relieved, the clerk glanced away and saw another man on the border of the circling Magigals. This chap, too, was handsome, but in a silkier way than Cranston. Indeed, he was over-handsome and his pose of confidence could well have been defined as conceit. From his wavy hair down to the pointed mustache above his indulgently smiling lips, he showed suavity in every facial line. He was dawdling with a cigarette in a long amber holder and the light laugh that he delivered caused the Magigals to glance in his direction.

Immediately, half the Magigals forgot the crystal skull and began to buzz among themselves.

"That's John Halifax! He must have flown in from Hollywood!"

"They said he might be here for the convention, but we thought it was only a press stunt!"

"Somebody claimed he was working in pictures -"

"That was only talk. He's really planning to go out with his big show. They say he intends to carry ten tons of illusions and twenty girls."

"Maybe he will hire some of us! I'd rather be with the Halifax show than play kiddie dates around department stores."

The attention showered upon Halifax was helpful to the perfume clerk. It gave him a chance to exhibit the crystal skull while some of the excitement was

diverted elsewhere. Opening a large package behind the counter, the clerk brought out the crystal skull and set it on display.

The crystal skull was quite a remarkable device.

It was life size, assuming that the term "life" could be applied to a skull. It was made entirely of a transparent substance resembling glass, rendering the skull both unbreakable and light in weight. One indication of this was the skull's articulated jaw. It was hinged to the skull proper, yet with no trace of the joining. If of glass, the jaw would necessarily have been molded and, therefore, become an immovable part of the skull itself. This jaw, however, wagged up and down, as the clerk brought the skull toward the counter.

The clerk was not handling the skull itself. He was lifting a square base, like a small platform a foot square and three or four inches thick, on which the

skull was fixed. The skull's mounting consisted of oversized vertebrae, transparent like the skull. The base, too, was of that same clear substance, with four small legs at the corners, so that when the square platform was placed upon the counter, it stood completely isolated.

Set deep in the hollow eye-sockets of the skull were two huge rhinestones that glittered with the brilliancy of diamonds. Otherwise, the skull was undecorated, though the platform was ornamented with circular lines that formed

an intriguing criss-cross, like engraved filigree, or lacework. The brilliants gave the skull a certain semblance of life, enabling it to stare directly back at any human eyes which might focus upon it.

Such eyes were meeting the skull's right now.

The human eyes belonged to a Magigal whose badge proclaimed her home town as Seattle. She was an intriguing girl, so intriguing that Cranston found himself spending more time on her than on the skull. Her oval face was finely formed, its features accentuated in a setting of black hair which parted in the

center and fell to the girl's shoulders. She looked pale, but that was due partly to the darkness of her jet-black hair. The slightness of her make-up could also have accounted for her pallid appearance, but Cranston attributed it

largely to the girl's intensity.

For the girl's nerves seemed taut, her whole interest riveted upon the eyes of the skull. Her lips, so drawn that their color seemed that of a wilted rose, were moving, were delivering a sing-song undertone. Cranston was close enough to catch the girl's words.

"Listen, skull," the girl was saying. "Listen and remember. My name is Verity Joyce. I came from Seattle to Chicago. I am staying at the Hotel Harbison and am attending the Magigals Convention."

As Verity concluded her monotone, the skull began to nod as though understanding all that the girl had said. Yet the skull, of crystalline construction, seemingly lacked all capability of containing any hidden mechanism. The same applied to the platform on which the skull was resting.

As the skull's nod ended, Verity proceeded.

"Speak, skull," the girl urged. "Tell me all you know. Repeat whatever you have heard."

The skull swiveled from side to side in a slow but decisive head shake. Verity watched and waited, with pursed lips and puzzled frown; then, disappointed, the girl turned away. The clerk, prowling restlessly behind the counter, decided that it was time to end the demonstration.

"It's a crazy thing, that skull," the clerk said, speaking to Cranston, who was now standing alone. "You say things to it and it nods or shakes its head, only the answers don't make sense. You hold some fingers in front of its eyes though, and it always counts them right."

By way of evidence, the clerk held three fingers beyond the skull's eyes and the skull obliged by clicking its jaws three times. Lifting the platform, skull and all, the clerk put it down beneath the counter.

"Back you go into your box, Bosco," said the clerk. "You're safe now. I'm putting you where the Magigals won't get you."

Even before this, the Magigals had lost all enthusiasm for the skull; in fact, Verity Joyce alone had remained to test the mysterious contraption. The other Magigals had concentrated on John Halifax and were bombarding the suave young man with questions and demands for autographs. Halifax was giving them a standard Hollywood smile as he scrawled his signature and the only girl he really noticed was Verity Joyce.

Discounting the fact that Verity was probably as attractive as any Magigal

in the group, Halifax's interest in the raven-haired girl was probably due to the fact that she was giving him no notice. Verity's thoughts were elsewhere

and her solemn expression showed it. But whether she was brooding over the comparatively poor showing of the crystal skull, or simply trying to outsmart the other Magigals in their play for Halifax, was something of a question.

As for Lamont Cranston, he no longer had time to analyze either form of skullduggery. A bellboy was parading the Harbison lobby waving a telegram and calling for Mr. Cranston. Leaving the perfume counter, Cranston acknowledged the call and tore open the telegram. It was the very sort of telegram that he had expected, but it promised Cranston results sooner than he had anticipated.

Thrusting the telegram into his pocket, Cranston started for a phone booth, impervious to the milling Magigals about him. They and their curious convention could go their way, along with John Halifax, Verity Joyce and the puzzling if not amazing crystal skull which some ingenious mechanic had evidently fashioned to serve as an advertising device.

Lamont Cranston had gained a mission in Chicago, a mission that he had hoped to find. From now on he would be investigating the strange suicide wave that had swept the lake shore city. Already Cranston held a theory regarding that singular epidemic; now he was to put it to the test.

The question in Cranston's mind was this: Whether or not the chain of so-called suicides was a veil for something known as murder. From Cranston's immobile lips came a weird, whispered laugh, so uncanny that it might well have

crept from the jaws of the crystal skull he had so recently viewed. That mirth proclaimed Cranston's adequacy for the test he was to undertake. It was the laugh of the world's most celebrated crime-hunter: The Shadow.

II

DEATH GOES BERSERK

TELEPHONES were ringing right and left around Inspector Rick Smedley. Never in his years of experience on the Chicago police, had Rick encountered anything so hectic as this. Half a dozen assistants were busy answering the calls, but they couldn't keep up with them. More help would be needed, but by then Inspector Smedley would be a madman.

Big, bluff, brawny and with a face as purple as Lake Michigan under one of its sweetest summer sunsets, Rick Smedley didn't look like a man who ever had a weak moment. But he'd had one when he'd agreed to use his office as a clearing house for phone calls relating to the suicide wave. That had been day before yesterday; by now, the deluge was overwhelming, yet Rick was inclined to believe it a mere trickle, compared with what was still to come.

At least Rick had finally promised himself some relief. Originally, he had intended to answer each call personally. Later, he'd left that to assistants who weeded out the calls and passed the more important on to Rick. Now, the inspector had decided that even the most intelligent calls could be handled by subordinates, his capacity being solely that of a director. But it still wasn't the answer. What Rick had to do was get away from all this for a while and he intended to do just that. Cling-a-ling-a-lingggggg-

Six phones were jangling at once. From the jargon of answers that his men gave, Inspector Smedley could gather what was coming over the wire. Some crank was sitting with a gun pressed to his head, asking the police to wait and hear the shot. Another caller was asking if bay rum were a poison, having just seen a bearded man purchase a bottle in a drugstore. Somebody was saying that a pet dog had just jumped off the end of a Lake Michigan pier, indicating that animals were succumbing to the suicide mania. Out of all this, one of

Smedley's

men was waving a telephone at Rick himself.

"It's for you, inspector. It's Lester Tyburn."

"Lester Tyburn?" echoed Smedley. "You mean somebody says he's Lester Tyburn, the soap manufacturer?"

"That's right."

"Tell him to smother himself in his own suds," advised Smedley. "We can't discriminate where suicide is concerned. Anyway, Tyburn will find it cheaper to

leave his money to his wife than keep on paying her all that alimony."

Smedley's man gave a weary smile.

"It's really Tyburn, inspector. He isn't talking about committing suicide.

He wants to find some way to prevent it."

"That's a help," decided Smedley. "Give me the phone."

Over the phone, Smedley heard a man's crisp voice announcing himself as Lester Tyburn. Then, after Smedley stated his own identity, Tyburn proceeded:

"I'd like to see you, inspector. It's only a small favor, but most important to me. I'm worried about the way people are committing suicide in conspicuous places."

"You're worried?" demanded Smedley. "What do you think I am and everybody else in Chicago?"

"That's just my point," declared Tyburn. "You must take preventative measures, inspector."

"If you don't read the papers," snapped Smedley, "why don't you listen to the radio? We've posted men in every el station, theater, hotel lobby, department store, museum, tap room and children's playground. What else do you ask?"

"You should be checking on all special events," argued Tyburn. "I read the newspapers and so do these suicides or they wouldn't know there was a suicide wave. But we're wasting time, inspector. If you can come and see me, I might give you a suggestion that will prove a useful weapon to you. How soon could you make it?"

That last line was a welcome punch-line to Smedley's tired ears.

"Right now!" rejoined the inspector. "Where can I see you?"

"At my apartment in the Armistead Arms," replied Tyburn. "It's quarter of nine and you can easily make it in fifteen minutes. May I expect you at nine o'clock?"

"Nine on the dot, if not sooner."

As soon as Smedley hung up, a new sound greeted him. It was the clicking of a teletype, and from across the office, a detective was giving Smedley a hurried beckon. Going to the teletype machine, the inspector read the message that was coming through.

NEW YORK. OFFCL GX33. TO INSPEC. SMEDLEY CHI. POLICE. REQUEST
CONFIDENTIAL

INFO RE SUICIDE WAVE PREVENTION METHODS AND POSSIBLE CRIME CONNECTION. EXPECT
PERSONAL CONTACT L. CRANSTON TO RECEIVE SAME IMMEDIATE. R. WESTON COMM.
POLICE.

N. Y. REPLY OFFCL W32QX5.

Snatching the tape from the teletype machine, Inspector Smedley broke into a tirade.

"We've had enough crack-pot local calls," Smedley stormed, "without having the New York police go goofy on us. What's this stuff about a possible crime connection? And who is this Cranston the New York commissioner has authorized to contact us?"

An answer came from one of the helpers who was holding a telephone.

"Call for you, inspector. Mr. Cranston at the Hotel Harbison. Sounds like there's been a suicide there."

Snatching up the telephone, Smedley heard only bedlam over the wire. He shouted a "Hello" and a calm voice spoke out of the confusion.

"Hello, Inspector Smedley." The tone was Cranston's. "No trouble here at the Harbison. Nothing but a Magigals convention. Did you receive a wire from Commissioner Weston in New York?"

"I did," returned Smedley, "and what does he mean by these suicides having a possible crime connection?"

"That was my suggestion," Cranston replied. "It occurred to me that what looks like suicide often turns out to be murder."

"And you think the Chicago police might be covering up murder?"

"I think you could possibly be unaware of it."

From anyone other than such a quiet-toned speaker, such a suggestion would

have elicited a verbal blast from Inspector Smedley. But there was something authentic in that calm voice, a note that offered a solution to the confusion that reigned in Smedley's own mind. Remembering his appointment with Lester Tyburn, another man of status who held opinions pertaining to the suicide wave,

Rick Smedley decided that he could lose nothing by bringing Cranston into the interview. Indeed, for the first time in forty-eight hours, Rick let his bluff face relax into a smile at the thought of letting a couple of amateur sherlocks have their say.

"You have something, Mr. Cranston," decided Rick, politely. "I'll tell you

what to do. Get in a cab and go to the Armistead Arms. It's right across the river from the Hotel Harbison. Ask for Mr. Lester Tyburn and tell him I sent you. I'll meet you there in about fifteen minutes."

Ringling telephones remained unanswered while the members of Smedley's staff stared in profound amazement. Never had they dreamed that the tempestuous

inspector could adopt such an appeasing mood. But they were disillusioned the moment that Rick hung up.

"Answer those telephones!" howled Rick. "If any more yaps bother you, cut them off! Give me paper and a pencil and let me at that teletype! I'll send that stuffed shirt of a New York commissioner a message that will bum up the tape at the other end!"

What Rick Smedley sent was printable only on a police teletype. It took three minutes for Rick to get the message off and he paced the office five minutes more, waiting for a reply. When it came, it was couched in terms that made Rick's message sound like something out of Emily Post's Book of Etiquette.

Rick thought he had gone the limit in telling the New York police to mind their

own business, but Commissioner Weston had topped him and in anything but stuffed-shirt style. Translated, Weston had suggested that the whole Chicago force jump into the Chicago River, Lake Michigan being far too good for them.

In two minutes, Rick Smedley consigned Manhattan Island to an unnamed destination and advised Weston to take the voyage with it. Sending that across the teletype, Rick departed to keep his appointment with Lester Tyburn, meanwhile framing choice statements as a greeting for Lamont Cranston.

Having lost more than ten minutes of the scheduled fifteen that he had allotted for the trip to the Armistead Arms, Rick Smedley tried to make up time

by having the chauffeur of the police car siren his way through traffic. But time-saving methods failed when the car neared the Chicago River, which Rick,

like Cranston, had to cross to reach the Armistead Arms.

A bridge across the narrow river was rising to allow a ship to pass through. Along the river other such bridges were rising in succession, lifting in hinged fashion from the shore ends. Fuming, Smedley glared through the windshield of the car until his arm was grabbed by the police chauffeur beside him.

"Look, inspector!"

Out of a small group of pedestrians who were halted by the rising bridge, sprang a man who was screaming wildly as he flung aside his hat and the coat which other men were gripping to restrain him. Onto the rising bridge he dashed, up its inclining walk, which increased its slope so steadily that frantic followers lost their footing when they tried to overtake him. But the lone man, inspired by frenzy and the speed he had picked up in his early dash, managed to reach the towering end of the hoisted bridge. There, high above the crowd, he gave a crazy twist and plunged to the river in a headlong dive.

By then, Inspector Smedley was out of the police car and dashing through the throng. Passing men who were sliding down from the tilted walk, Rick reached the river just as a wheezy tugboat came sloshing beneath the upraised bridge. The skipper of the craft had seen the madman's dive; bells were clanging to put the tug's engine in reverse and its squealy whistle was shrilling an alarm. Members of the crew were peeling off their jerseys and diving overboard in a hurried effort to find the crazed man who had made the suicidal plunge.

Along the shore, other witnesses were trying to point out the spot where the man had disappeared. From the river, small boats were coming to the scene. Flashlights, automobile headlights, finally searchlights, played along the murky waters of the river, but all in vain. The members of the tugboat crew were climbing on board their craft again, shaking their heads, and pointing out where they thought the man had gone under, but there was no sign of the victim.

Police were arriving to aid the search. They were questioning witnesses and examining the hat and coat that the man had thrown away. The tugboat was waved on through, so that the bridge could be lowered. The police were watching

the river in case the body reappeared; after that, they would begin to drag for

the victim, the customary procedure.

Joining the police, Rick Smedley showed his inspector's badge, asked to see the contents of the coat. No papers of any consequence were in the pockets;

merely a pack of cigarettes and some matches which bore an advertisement for the

Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. The matches might prove a clue to the man's identity; Smedley returned them to one of the officers and looked at the hat.

The hat label showed it had been purchased in a Chicago store and it was a

new hat. It bore the initials W. B. But Smedley wasn't in a mood to pursue this

investigation further. He was off duty, he had an appointment, and besides, he was sick of the suicide business. Leaving the police to continue with their routine, Smedley returned to his car, told the chauffeur to drive him on to the

Armistead Arms. They crossed the river, reached their destination, and Smedley went up to Tyburn's apartment.

There, Lester Tyburn, a tall, rugged-faced man with grizzled hair, greeted

Rick Smedley and introduced him to Lamont Cranston, the other man Smedley wanted

to meet. Judging from a pair of empty drinking glasses, Cranston had arrived about the time that Smedley himself was expected, a half hour ago. With a gruff comment, "I guess I need it," Smedley accepted a drink that Tyburn offered him.

Then, wheeling to Cranston, whose manner was as calm as his voice on the telephone had indicated, Rick Smedley declared brusquely:

"If you're wondering why I'm late, I'll tell you. I've been watching the suicide wave at first hand. If you want to know if there are any new cases, the answer is yes. I know, because I saw the latest one happen. So don't tell me it's murder. We haven't been having murders in Chicago and won't be, unless somebody asks for it."

From Smedley's mood it seemed that Lamont Cranston might be that "somebody," so Cranston merely smiled and did not ask for details. Those would come later, of that he was sure. Gesturing to Tyburn, who apparently hadn't grasped the point at issue, Cranston spoke in calming tone to Smedley.

"Mr. Tyburn has a problem, inspector," said Cranston. "He was telling me about it and I'm sure that you can help him. Why not let him state it, while you sit down and relax?"

Inspector Rick Smedley decided that this was the best advice he had been given in all of three days.

III

CROSSED PATHS

LESTER TYBURN came directly to the point. He was impatient to get at it, so impatient that he kept glancing at his wrist watch, which registered approximately nine fifteen.

"Briefly, it's this, inspector," declared Tyburn. "There's no telling where suicide will strike next, but we can be pretty sure that the men who intend it will go out of their way to make a public show of it. Maybe they steel their nerves that way."

Rick Smedley nodded. He had just witnessed a case that supported Tyburn's opinion, which in turn was based upon the manner of the previous suicides.

"Here's something then, that might attract them," continued Tyburn. He picked up the society page of the Sunday paper, spread it in front of Smedley. "My wife is giving a big charity affair up at Longwood, our North Shore estate.

It's listed as one of the big social events of the year, but it won't be difficult for anyone to get into it. I don't want crazy people diving into lily ponds or impaling themselves on picket fences. But they're likely to be, if this suicide wave continues."

"Your place is twenty miles north," objected Smedley, looking up from the newspaper. "That puts it outside of our jurisdiction."

"All the more reason to worry," returned Tyburn. "The way you are clamping down on suicides, some of these fanatics may figure that a trip up the lake would be a healthy way to start out to die."

"But you have a local police force at Longwood."

"About enough to count on the fingers of one hand. They'll be on duty. Of course I have Regan - he's a private detective - and some hired men on the estate. But I want something resembling official protection."

Rick Smedley shook his head.

"If I come there," stated Rick, "it won't be official."

Tyburn promptly took Rick's words as a promise.

"You'll come then," said Tyburn. "That will be excellent. You have relieved my mind, inspector. In fact, you have relieved it so far, that I shall allow the charity event to proceed. I was about to order it canceled, the entertainment, bazaar, everything, rather than run the risk of some unfortunate incident. As it now stands, should some fanatic go berserk during the lawn party, you would be there, to prevent a suicide attempt."

The idea appealed to Smedley and he was nodding that he thought as much, until he recalled his own experience of fifteen minutes earlier, when he had proven quite inept at halting a suicide in the Chicago River. Nevertheless, that case had only sharpened Rick's desire to crack the suicide wave in what might be termed its budding stages.

"You've laid out my future pattern, Mr. Tyburn," declared Smedley, tapping the newspaper. "I'll have men covering all these society events, including weddings. That's where the cranks will show up next."

"Then you'll positively be at Longwood, the night of the lawn party," said Tyburn, stepping to an alcove to pick up a telephone. "Please excuse me while I phone the estate and tell the caretakers that the party will be held as scheduled."

While Tyburn was telling the switchboard to get the Longwood number, Smedley scanned the soap-king's sumptuous apartment. The living room where Smedley and Cranston were seated represented only a small portion of the place, but it was probably typical of the rest. Spacious, yet well-filled with furniture, its rental probably approached a thousand dollars monthly, while the expensive furnishings, which included magnificent tapestries and drapes, represented a small fortune in themselves.

Conspicuous upon an ornate side table was a large gold picture frame; in it, the colored portrait of a beautiful blonde with dreamy eyes who looked like a "cover" girl. Cranston noticed Smedley eye the portrait and deliver a slight knowing nod. That blonde's picture had been in the news fairly frequently, for she was Gail Tyburn, wife of the millionaire.

Tyburn saw Smedley studying the portrait and briefly, Tyburn's gray-mottled eyebrows bristled into a frown. Then, getting an answer to his phone call, Tyburn began booming in an authoritative tone that demanded all attention, including Smedley's.

Tyburn was talking to somebody named Webster, who from the conversation turned out to be the gate-keeper at the Longwood estate. Next, Tyburn asked for

Morse, the gardener, who promptly came on the telephone. Finally, with a narrowed glance across the room toward Gail's picture, Tyburn asked where Chaffin was. Chaffin was right there at the other end of the line and so Tyburn

asked that he be put on. The questions that Tyburn put to Chaffin were quite pointed. He wanted to know whether Mrs. Tyburn had been using the big car and if not, why not. Apparently, Chaffin was very prompt with his answers, for Tyburn ended the call a few minutes later. Pacing across the room he halted abruptly at the table where Gail's portrait stood. He looked from the picture to his visitors. Then:

"There's no secret about it," declared Tyburn, in a testy tone. "My wife and I have been separated for the past few months and whether it's to be temporary or permanent depends on her. Or you might say that it depends on Regan, the private detective. I've hired him to check on Gail."

Smedley accepted this with a bluff nod, as though such things were bound

to happen. Cranston's reaction was entirely impassive. This encouraged Tyburn to give further details.

"I told Gail she could have the Longwood place for herself," said Tyburn, his voice becoming confidential, "but she hasn't been out there in weeks. You just heard me talking with Webster, the gatekeeper and Morse, the gardener. They're in charge of what is practically an empty house. That's all right; it's Gail's privilege to stay in town.

"But Chaffin, the chauffeur, is out there, too. His only job is to drive my wife's car and he tells me he's been idle for a week. Yet Gail has been seen

constantly around Chicago - read some of those society columns if you don't believe me - and how she's been getting about without a car is a mystery. Unless" - Tyburn threw strong emphasis on the word - "unless Regan comes up with a solution."

Rick Smedley was busy with pencil and notebook, his purpose partly to divert Tyburn from unloading his matrimonial problems.

"Webster - Morse - Chaffin," jotted Rick. "All out at Longwood. They'll be there the night of the party, too?"

"There and at your service," replied Tyburn. "That will include Chaffin, because even if my wife decides to use her own car for a change, the lawn party

is her idea, so she'll be there and have the car handy. You can depend on Gail showing up at any place where she's in the lime light."

The phone rang as Tyburn finished. The grizzled man answered the call, spoke in short, choppy phrases and hung up. Turning to Smedley, Tyburn said:

"That was Hagathorn, so you'd better add his name to the list. Skip Hagathorn, we call him. He pilots my cabin cruiser. I've been trying to reach him at Holland, Michigan, across the lake, where he took the boat for an overhauling. Skip will be at the party and you'll find him useful. Like the others, he knows the grounds at Longwood and will help you check on any suspicious characters that may show up there."

It was close to nine thirty and Tyburn had covered all the needed details.

Deciding that he had better return to headquarters, Smedley invited Cranston to

join him and the two left together. As soon as they were in the police car, Smedley gave Cranston a sharp glance and remarked:

"That shows how this suicide stuff is getting on people's nerves. Tyburn hasn't caught the mania himself, but he's imagining that everybody else has. From the way he insisted on my coming to Longwood, you'd think he was sure that

something was going to happen out there."

"Perhaps Tyburn has come to my own conclusion," rejoined Cranston, "namely

that murder, not suicide, is the answer to these deaths. I can't imagine a better setting for a murder than a millionaire's estate after dark, particularly with a lot of strangers on the premises. It would be very embarrassing, too, on a night when the millionaire and his wife were meeting for the first time in months, possibly for a reconciliation."

Smedley answered that with a snort, which he followed by giving a sweeping

gesture from the car. They were crossing the Chicago River, which the police had

started to drag.

"Would you call this murder?" Rick demanded. "I saw the crazy guy jump, myself. There wasn't a chance for anybody to get at him or even near him.

We'll

find the body by morning and you can come around and have a look at it. If you

still think it's murder, try and convince me. Then we can work back from there."

The police car pulled up beside the Hotel Harbison and Cranston took it that this was Smedley's way of saying good night. Affably, Cranston left the car and went into the hotel, while Smedley kept on to headquarters.

It took somebody as efficient as The Shadow to get a room in the Hotel Harbison, considering how thoroughly the Magigals had taken over that establishment. However, Cranston had already maneuvered it and when he reached his room, he promptly took a black cloak and slouch hat from a secret compartment in one of his suitcases. Then he went down by the fire tower, to reach the back passage leading behind the shops that lined the hotel lobby.

There, clad in the black garments, Cranston became a mysterious gliding figure that no chance passer would have noticed. He was The Shadow, master of blackness, bound upon a quest. Finding the rear door of the perfume shop, Cranston opened it with a pointed, probing pick and entered a small store room, closing the door so softly behind him that not the slightest sound occurred. With a tiny flashlight, The Shadow picked out the box he wanted, the one that contained the crystal skull. It had a baggage check attached and was marked "For Delivery" but it bore no name. The shape of the box itself was more important than the label, for it was the only one of the right form to contain the crystal skull.

As The Shadow stooped to open the well-tied box, footsteps sounded at the front door of the store room. Whipping back into the darkness, The Shadow became part of the general background as the door swung open and two bellboys entered. One was holding a baggage check; the other pointed to the box with the crystal skull. They tallied the two checks and nodded.

"This is the box," one said. "Bring it along. That dizzy dame is in an awful hurry."

"Yeah," said the other, "and she was pulling a five-dollar bill from her pocketbook. Let's get back before she finds anything smaller."

The bellboys took the box that The Shadow had hoped to examine. Hardly had they left by the front, before The Shadow made his exit by the back way.

Taking off cloak and hat, he was carrying them over his arm when he skirted the lobby,

just as bellboys reached the street door with their burden. There they were met

by a trim, well-dressed woman who gave them a five-dollar bill as they put the box into a waiting cab.

By the hotel lights, The Shadow, now in the guise of Lamont Cranston, recognized the lady who had called to get the crystal skull. He recognized her from a photograph that he had seen at the Armistead Arms. The woman was Gail Tyburn.

Even before the cab pulled away, Cranston was looking for other observers and saw one. A squatty man in a tan coat with a brown felt hat was lighting a cigar over by the hotel wall and making a bad job of it because he was trying to watch the woman at the same time. As Gail's cab started, the squatty man cut

out to the street, hoping to flag a cab for himself. As for Cranston, he took a

shorter way to pick up Gail's trail. Traffic at the next street turned right and the red light hadn't yet changed. This gave Cranston time to stroll rapidly

back through the lobby and down a side passage to another door that fronted on the other street, where he was sure a cab would be parked, as that street had a

hack stand.

Gail's cab came along just as Cranston reached the side door, but there the trail ended without need for Cranston to take a cab of his own. Gail's cab halted and was met by a brawny but handsome man, who scooped out the box the moment that the cab door opened. Waving the cab along, he tossed a departing kiss to the lady in the rear seat. He turned, entered the hotel carrying the box, and wearing his perpetual smile, the smile that belonged to John Halifax.

Halifax had hardly got inside the hotel before the squatty man with the tan coat came hurrying around the corner and stopped. There were a couple of cabs handy, but they could do him no good now. The cab containing Gail Tyburn was gone.

Going into the hotel, Cranston saw Halifax entering one of the elevators that flanked this side of the lobby. Stopping at the desk, Cranston asked for Halifax's room number. The room was 1412, on the same floor as Cranston's.

Only a few minutes later, the transom of Room 1412 inched inwards, silently. A keen eye, obscured by the blackness of a slouch hat above it, peered into the room where Halifax was taking the final cords from the precious box. At least The Shadow was here to see what Halifax did with the crystal skull, which was the next best alternative to The Shadow inspecting it on his own.

Halifax was eager as the package came wide open. Then, a low mutter escaped him. Instead of the crystal skull, the package contained bottles of cheap perfume, that went sliding helter-skelter on the bed where Halifax had opened the package.

The watching eye vanished; the transom inched shut. A whispered laugh trailed softly from the corner of the corridor, marking The Shadow's departure.

When the cloaked figure reappeared again, it was at the rear door of the perfume shop.

Studying the lock closely under the direct glare of his tiny but powerful flashlight, The Shadow now detected scratches on the metal. His pick hadn't made those scratches; his job had been too neat for that. The marks meant that someone had picked the lock earlier, someone who had taken the crystal skull and filled its box with perfume bottles to give it the necessary weight.

Removing hat and cloak, The Shadow strolled out through the lobby as Lamont Cranston and lingered beside a phone booth where a squatty man in a tan coat and brown hat was making a phone call. Cranston caught the man's name as he gave it over the phone and wasn't at all surprised to hear it.

"Hello," the squatty man was saying, "Yeah, this is Regan... Yeah, I spotted your wife, Mr. Tyburn... Right after I gave you that routine call at just nine thirty... No, nobody was with her, but she picked up a big package and took it along... Not in a car, she went in a cab that she had waiting... No, nobody was with her... Yeah, I'll find out all I can."

There was a lot that Regan wasn't going to find out, particularly that Gail Tyburn had made off with the wrong package, or more specifically the wrong

contents. The question now was who had taken the crystal skull and Lamont Cranston could readily recall a person who had taken special interest in that skull at the very time when Halifax, too, had seen it.

Going over to the desk, Cranston stopped at a window marked "Magical Convention Registration" and inquired for Miss Verity Joyce of Seattle. The registration clerk made a thorough check of the list.

"There is no Miss Joyce stopping at the Hotel Harbison," the clerk said. "In fact, I can't even find the name on the registration list. There must be some mistake, sir."

There wasn't any mistake, though Lamont Cranston didn't say so. The whole thing obviously had been well planned in advance and it bore the elements of mystery that appealed to Cranston's other self, The Shadow.

Lester Tyburn, the harried millionaire; his wife Gail, the blond

gadabout;

John Halifax, the heart crusher who let ladies do his skull shopping for him - All three dropped somewhat into insignificance when compared with a black-haired beauty with soulful eyes whose name might not even be Verity Joyce

and whose skill at picking locks rated close to The Shadow's own.

A slight smile showed on Cranston's lips as he thought of two sleuths named Smedley and Regan and wondered what they would think of all this. Yet there was something grim about Cranston's smile.

If murder lay behind Chicago's suicide wave, Cranston was now sure that the crystal skull had some connection with it and that the disappearance of that particular piece of evidence might prove the forerunner of further crime.

IV

MAGIC SPELLS MURDER

AT ten o'clock the next morning, Lamont Cranston received a phone call from Inspector Smedley. Rick announced that the body of the bridge suicide had been found and that water-soaked papers in a wallet had identified him as William Brett of Evansville, Indiana.

The wallet also contained a parcel check bearing the name of the Dearborn Station. Smedley had gone to the depot and claimed a suitcase which proved by its contents to be Brett's. At present, Smedley was tabulating the articles from the case and would be quite pleased to have Cranston come over and help him, if only it would put an end to the unrequested teletype messages from his New York friend, Police Commissioner Weston.

Cranston went promptly to police headquarters and found Smedley at a table where Brett's belongings were on display. They consisted of wearing apparel, some magazines, cigarettes, writing paper and a pack of playing cards. To these, Smedley had added Brett's hat and coat, plus the pack of cigarettes and the match-pack that had been found in the coat pocket.

"It's obvious," declared Smedley, "that Brett was on his way back to Evansville when the suicide bug got him. Now we've got to find out where he was

stopping in Chicago, who he saw while he was here. Probably he was in town a couple of days at least, in order to catch the suicide fever.

"He may have said something to somebody that would have given an indication of the trend his mind was taking."

"Hardly, inspector," said Cranston, "unless he confided in the clerk at the store where he bought this new hat. I doubt that Brett arrived in Chicago before yesterday afternoon. He must have left the suitcase at the Dearborn Station when he got off the train."

Smedley gave a heavy frown as an invitation for Cranston to clarify his deduction with a bill of particulars.

"This match-pack covers that situation," stated Cranston, opening the pack

to show it half-filled with matches. "It bears an advertisement of the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railway and is the sort of pack that Brett would have picked up in a club car on that line. The C. and E.I. is the only road that comes in from Evansville and if Brett had been in Chicago much longer than an afternoon, he would have used up all the matches in his only pack. You'll find that Brett came to Chicago only yesterday."

Out of the jangle of phones that persisted in Smedley's office came a call

for the inspector. Answering it, Rick found himself talking to Evansville. The data that Rick was getting corresponded with Cranston's statement.

"Yes, this is Inspector Smedley," Rick was saying. "Facts on William

Brett... Yes, I'm ready... Came to Chicago yesterday, you say... Wasn't sure about staying over... Said he might come back on the sleeper... Would wire family as to intentions... Prosperous hardware manufacturer... No indications of mental depression... Simply a routine business trip... Made them occasionally -"

"Ask about Brett's medals," suggested Cranston, catching Smedley's eye. "Find out if he ever tried for an Olympic team."

Thinking that Cranston was playing some sort of hunch, Smedley put questions along that line and finally hung up the receiver savagely.

"What kind of steer were you giving me?" Rick asked Cranston. "This Brett wasn't ever an athlete. His age is fifty-six and he only took up golf five years ago. He even gave up bowling duck pins because he thought it too strenuous."

"I wanted to know if Brett happened to be a swimmer," explained Cranston. "Experienced swimmers don't usually try suicide by jumping into water. But at that, they've under-rated Brett down in Evansville. He must have been something of an athlete."

"And who gave you that idea?"

"You did, inspector, from your description of Brett's death plunge. You said he shook loose some men who tried to hold him back and went up that rising bridge like a monkey while the people who tried to chase him all came sliding down."

Smedley's bluff face took on one of its purplish tinges. Then:

"The guy was berserk," gruffed Rick. "I've seen plenty of cases where people like that outdid themselves. Still" - Rick's face sober in the manner of

a judge's - "you put a fair question and it warrants a fitting answer. It's over

at the morgue, the answer: Brett's body. Do you want to see it?"

"Not right now," replied Cranston. "I don't doubt it's Brett's body. I'm simply questioning whether it was Brett who jumped off the bridge."

"You mean maybe somebody else jumped?"

"Exactly."

"Then what became of the fellow who did jump?"

"He could have climbed on board the tug with the crew that dived off to look for Brett."

Smedley began a speculative frown that turned into a disparaging glower.

"That would mean the whole thing was a plant," Rick argued. "We saw a guy jump and we found a body. If the fellow that jumped was picked up, the body must have been dumped by the same bunch that covered for the jumper."

"Which means the tugboat crew," put in Cranston. "How far from the bridge was the body found?"

"Pretty far," admitted Smedley. "In the direction that the tug was coming from, too. But there wasn't anything hooked to it. In fact, the body was floating when they finally found it."

"I've heard of bodies being weighted with salt," remarked Cranston. "Enough of it, inside the clothes, will sink the body and hold it until the salt melts."

"But the Chicago River isn't salt water," reminded Smedley. "The brine would have left stains, so salt is out. Guess again, Mr. Cranston."

"Very well. My guess is sugar."

Rick began another of his glowers, then gave an indulgent laugh.

"We'll look into it," Rick promised. "I've got to admit you're on the ball, Mr. Cranston. But there still isn't any connection between this case and those other suicides. Look at the stuff in Brett's suitcase. According to your theory, it wouldn't have been touched if he'd left it at the Dearborn Station, coming into town. Yet what do you see that's out of the ordinary?"

Cranston found one thing among Brett's belongings that might be an answer

to Smedley's query, namely the pack of playing cards. Opening the pack, Cranston studied the cards rather intently, even counting them to make sure the pack was complete.

"Pre-war manufacture," defined Cranston. "Standard design, but obsolete. Yet this pack has been very little used. Brett may have had it for years."

As he spoke, Cranston was holding the cards to the light, studying them from every angle.

"Maybe Brett played solitaire," suggested Smedley. "That would be enough to make anybody want to jump off a bridge."

"He might have performed card tricks," remarked Cranston, spreading the pack. "Take a card, inspector. Hold it right in front of your eyes and concentrate upon it."

Cranston shifted his position while Smedley was taking the card, but, otherwise, there was nothing unusual in his action. Looking at the card, Smedley gave a nod.

"All right. I'm looking at it. Want me to tell you what it is?"

"That won't be necessary," returned Cranston. "I can tell you that the card is the six of hearts."

"Say!" Rick's tone was startled. "Do you mean this pack is marked and you've spotted the system at one try? Maybe Brett was a card sharp, on the side."

"Hardly, with this pack," said Cranston. "It isn't marked. It's more unusual than a marked deck. In fact, it is practically unique. Turn toward that

strong sunlight, inspector, and look at the back of the card."

Doing exactly as Cranston told him, Smedley delivered another and more profound exclamation.

"Why, the whole card becomes transparent!" Rick grabbed for another card, gave it a similar test. "Against the light, the faces show right through. I didn't know they made cards like this!"

"They don't," was Cranston's verdict. "I never saw a pack exactly like this. It would be useless at a gambling table, but it's perfect for card tricks, particularly with people spread out around a room. I am sure we can class William Brett as an amateur magician of sorts."

"What do you mean of sorts?"

"He can't belong to the usual run, or he would have a lot of the gadgets they sell around magic shops. Instead, he shows up with a trick that a professional magician would envy. What about some of those other suicides, inspector? Did you find any packs of cards on them or anything in the same line?"

Rick Smedley went to a special file cabinet and brought out boxes labeled with the names of previous victims. Looking through the effects of Jerome Alton, from Dubuque, Cranston found a cigarette case and opened it. Studying it

intently, he finally closed the case and scrutinized it from the outside.

"That case was empty when we found it," stated Smedley, referring to a record sheet. "There were no cigarettes found among Alton's belongings."

"Alton didn't need to carry them," said Cranston. "Not while he owned this case. Have a cigarette, inspector."

Opening the case, Cranston extended it to Smedley who found himself taking

a cigarette. Rick's eyes opened wide; he stared sharply at Cranston, who merely

smiled and snapped the case shut.

"A cigarette for you," remarked Cranston, "and one for me."

Opening the case again, Cranston removed a cigarette for himself. Then he was snapping the case, opening it, and with each action a cigarette appeared within. Completely baffled, Rick Smedley sat back and shook his head.

"What goes on?" demanded Rick. "Where do those cigarettes come from? If it isn't magic, I'd say that case was a pocket cigarette factory!"

"As good a definition as any," returned Cranston. "I've caught the secret of it; now let's get a look at the mechanism."

With the delicacy of a watchmaker, Cranston patiently probed the cigarette case until it came apart in two sections, revealing its secret. The ends of the cigarette case were thick and formed hollow compartments containing flaky tobacco, tightly packed. Between the outside of the case and an inner lining was a pleated sheet of very thin paper. The closing of the case flipped a strip of metal that released sufficient tobacco into an approaching segment of paper, with a rotary action. The rolling of the cigarette was completed as the case opened, the metal strip going into place again.

"Very neat," was Cranston's verdict, "It works from either end, according to how you turn the cigarette case. That gives it double capacity. It should work about a dozen times before needing a refill."

Rick Smedley began pawing through file boxes to find more oddities. He had luck with every attempt, though in each case it was Cranston who identified the tricky objects.

One suicide victim, Lloyd Stelton, from Zanesville, had carried a lot of Chinese coins. Rick had regarded these as trivial souvenirs until Cranston tested one by ringing it, weighing it, spinning it, and finally tasting it. Then, filling a drinking cup with water, Cranston dropped the Chinese coin into the cup. In about six seconds, the coin dissolved until nothing was left of it.

"We'll have one of these analyzed," said Cranston. "I'll need some of the others, inspector. Now let's have a look at those two pencils which belonged to Ward Bronson, of Tampa. They look quite ordinary, but they aren't a standard make. It's odd that one should be green, the other red."

It was indeed odd, as Cranston demonstrated after he finally probed the secret of the pencils. When Cranston held the red pencil in his right hand, and the green in his left, and rubbed one lightly across the other, a strange thing happened. The green pencil turned out to be in Cranston's right hand, while his left now held the red. Repeating the transposition a few times, Cranston handed the pencils to Smedley, but Rick, more baffled than ever, couldn't begin to fathom their secret.

Among the effects of George Krugg, of Spokane, Cranston found a match box that was very wonderful. When you opened it, you drew out a lighted match; at least, that was the way Cranston did it. But when Rick Smedley tried it, his match wasn't lighted; in fact, it wouldn't light at all when Rick tried to strike it on the box.

Cranston's experiments and the resultant discoveries occupied a considerable length of time. He would have liked to have continued with other articles that were filed under the names of further suicide victims, but Cranston felt that his point was proven and he was anxious to put his findings to a more practical test. Briefly, Cranston summed it all up for Smedley's benefit.

"Every one of these tricks is unique," Cranston told Rick. "I doubt that

the magical fraternity at large has even heard of them. That would indicate some connection between the men who owned them, each the possessor of some mysterious device which, so far as we can guess, was his exclusive and individual property. Do you follow me?"

"Follow you!" retorted Rick. "I'm far enough ahead to figure that any bunch as nuts as this crowd would have gone in for a suicide pact. You've made sense where the suicide wave is concerned, but you're still a long way from murder."

"If I could uncover some outside influence," continued Cranston, quite unruffled, "some focal point, let us say, that concerns these victims and their tricks, I believe that you would agree it was worthy of investigation."

"Of course I'd agree."

"And if it were strong enough to indicate a murder motive -"

"You're jumping the question, Mr. Cranston. I'd have to find evidence of murder."

"In every case?"

"No, I'll grant you a point there. If you link up the lot and I find evidence in two cases or more, I'll agree that the motive could point entirely to murder. But you'll have to chase all over the country, to all the towns these victims came from, before you'll establish what you want."

Cranston shook his head.

"Not necessarily," he said. "The victims all died in Chicago, therefore the reason may be right here. But you'll have to let me borrow all these gadgets, so that I can make the rounds."

"Make the rounds?" echoed Smedley. "What rounds?"

"The rounds of the places where magicians meet," replied Cranston. "Chicago has several such places. My term 'rounds' is particularly appropriate, because the first place I intend to visit is called the Magicians' Round Table.

I would like to see what happens there when I deliver a few minor miracles."

Rick Smedley was quite agreeable. He gestured for Cranston to take whatever tricks he wanted and depart upon his self-appointed mission. Pocketing

the various articles, Cranston rose and Rick politely escorted him to the door.

There, Cranston inserted a reminder.

"I'll check for clues from these tricks," Cranston told Smedley, "but, meanwhile, inspector, I'm counting upon you to go back over the details of these suicides and see what new evidence you can find, pointing to something more serious than suicide."

"Leave it to me," assured Smedley, with one of his indulgent laughs. "You handle the magic, Mr. Cranston, and I'll take care of the murder."

V

AROUND THE ROUND TABLE

THE MAGICIANS' ROUND TABLE had begun its daily session when Lamont Cranston arrived.

A Chicago institution for more than twenty years, the Round Table had undergone some gradual changes during that period. Originally a daily luncheon club where magical hobbyists hobnobbed with visiting professionals, this informal group now went into all-afternoon sessions. Its gathering place was Drake's Restaurant and there the magicians occupied their own corner, not at a round table, which they had long since outgrown, but at a series of regular restaurant tables set together like a banquet table to which extensions could be added as needed.

Lamont Cranston was already passingly acquainted with some of the Chicago magic fans. Recognized by a few he knew, Cranston was given an immediate welcome. Taking his place at a table, he was introduced to the men nearest him with the promise that he would meet more before the session ended. Introductions were gradual around the Round Table, because the various clusters were so busy discussing diverse phases of magic.

None of the Magigals were present. They were holding their own luncheon and afternoon business session behind locked doors at the Hotel Harbison. Nevertheless, the Magigals Convention had swelled the Round Table attendance, because of the out-of-towners who had come to be present at a big show which the Magigals had scheduled for the general public, male magicians included.

Cranston was learning about all this from a chap on his right named Chick Schoke, who was one of the Round Table regulars and knew everybody, local or out of town.

"That's Dorny Dornfield at the end of the table," identified Chick. "He was one of the founders of this outfit. He's an emcee as well as a magician and

he stars at all the magical conventions. He's talking to Monk Watson, the most versatile character in magic. The fellow with them is Larry Arcuri; he's in from New York, where he organized a get-together group patterned after this one, which now meets daily at the Hotel Dixie.

"The energetic chap across the way is Doc Tarbell, who prepared a whole correspondence course in magic and now goes on lecture tours. Two places to the

right is Milbourne Christopher who did magic in the front lines when he was a G.I. and has written up his own experiences along with those of other magicians. Between them is Theo Bamberg who toured the world under the professional name of Okito. He's giving them a whole hatfull of tricks and anecdotes.

"That boisterous group at the other end are more serious than they look. They're all editors of magical magazines: Al Plough of the Linking Ring, Walt Gibson of Conjurors', Mel Melson of Tops and Bill Sachs, who handles the magic column in the Billboard. They're expecting John Mulholland of the Sphinx; but Gerry Larsen, who edits the Genii won't be around because she's one of the Magigals. In fact, she started that organization.

"Right over there is Rufus Steele, who probably knows more about gambling devices than anybody since Erdnase, who wrote a book on the subject and then mysteriously disappeared right here in Chicago. He's talking with Johnny Platt and Dai Vernon, who is a past master at card technique. Speaking of cards, if you have a pack handy, I'll show you a neat ace trick."

This was exactly what Cranston had wanted, though he hadn't said so. Producing the pack that he had gotten at Smedley's office, he handed it to Schoke, who immediately demonstrated a very nifty trick in which two pairs of aces, placed back to back, red and black respectively, changed their positions in some unaccountable fashion.

Demonstrations of magic, oddly enough, were purely secondary proceedings at the Round Table; in fact, anything in the way of strictly ordinary trickery was almost taboo. This was where connoisseurs of the art gathered and they preferred to discuss the lore and intricacies of magic to watching stereotyped performances. However, anything subtle, deft or novel was always appreciated. Aware of this, Cranston was ready when the pack was returned to him. Immediately he went into an impromptu act.

Asking that the pack be shuffled, Cranston brought out a Hotel Harbison memo pad, tore two slips of paper from it and passed each to persons across the table, handing pencils along with them. He had someone spread the pack so that the men with the pencils could each take a card at random. The cards taken, each person, at Cranston's request, wrote the name of his chosen card on a slip

and folded it.

Next, Cranston had each man pass his card to the other, so that each would know the other's choice. Thereby, he learned the faces of the cards, seeing them through the backs, against the light. With a fountain pen, Cranston wrote two names on other paper slips, tossed them across the table. When the papers were opened, the names that Cranston had written proved identical with those that the card choosers had written in pencil.

Neatly done, that trick, but Cranston followed it with another startling number. Taking back the pencils, he called attention to the fact that one was red, the other green. Rubbing one across the other, Cranston caused them to change places from hand to hand, while the Round Table habitués left their places to cluster closer about the source of this baffling mystery.

Tossing the pencils for examination, Cranston opened the cigarette case that he had borrowed from Smedley. Showing it empty, he closed it and produced a cigarette within. Asking someone to take the cigarette, Cranston closed the case and produced another, then another, and another. This went on until a dozen men were holding cigarettes, for Cranston had remembered to refill the amazing cigarette case while on his way to the Round Table.

To top it all, Cranston began furnishing lights for those cigarettes by drawing lighted matches from what looked like a perfectly ordinary match box and proved to be just such when he tossed the box on the table so that others could try the trick without success. That ended the most amazing display of impromptu mysteries that the Round Table had ever witnessed.

There were at least thirty people at the Round Table and Cranston was studying their faces without finding the one he wanted to see. The handsome countenance of John Halifax was missing from the throng. So Cranston decided to bide his time a while, in case the Hollywood mystic arrived and heard echoes of the chatter that was going on about the impromptu miracles.

From across the table, Rufus Steele handed Cranston his pack of cards. Steele, the expert, had given the pack a few deft riffles to see if little dots danced back and forth across the backs, this being the sure way of detecting a marked pack. This pack, however, stood the test.

Now the magic editors were politely monopolizing Cranston to learn if he would furnish any of his tricks for the pages of their magazines. No one had seen any of those tricks before, which was exactly what Cranston wanted to know.

A waitress came to the table saying there was a phone call for Mr. Cranston. Taking his props with him, Cranston went to the telephone, learned that the call was from police headquarters and that Inspector Smedley wanted him to come to the Hotel Royal at once. Important though it sounded, this urgent call would have spoiled Cranston's day, if he hadn't found two men waiting for him as he left the telephone.

The pair consisted of Rufus Steele, the man who knew cards so thoroughly, and Milbourne Christopher who specialized in magical research.

"If that pack of yours is the only thing it can be," declared Steele, "it's something that certain manufacturers have tried to produce for years, without luck."

"In America, yes," agreed Christopher, "but I have seen European packs that met those specifications."

Quite aware of what both speakers meant, Cranston gave a mild display of interest.

"I've heard of one man who might have had such a pack," said Steele. "They

called him Professor Marsh."

"Professor Sedley Marsh," elaborated Christopher. "I've crossed his

trail,
too, but this is the first time I ever linked him with card work. Those other specialties were typical of Marsh."

"In that case," suggested Cranston, "you might tell me something about Professor Marsh."

Briefly, the story was this:

The annals of modern magic held many names to conjure with: Charlier, Erdnase, Joseffy, Jordan, Malini, Ansbach. These were men whose careers, at least in part, had been as mysterious as their methods and creations. Some had passed along their secrets, sometimes at great prices, or occasionally to chosen pupils who were sworn to preserve such secrecy as in the days when magic had been a heritage from master to apprentice.

One man belonging in this ultra category was Professor Sedley Marsh. That name, however, was not to be found in any record whatever. Reputedly, Marsh was as elusive as his methods. Only one word could define him; that word was "untraceable." In fact, Marsh could have been charged off as a myth, but for one rumor that persisted; namely, that Marsh had confided his methods in certain trusted pupils who were sworn to absolute secrecy both as to the tricks and their source.

None of this favored group were amateur magicians nor members of magical organizations. They were all wealthy men whom Marsh had personally approached, stirred their interest with his wizardry and finally had sold them on the idea of buying some of his exclusives at fabulous prices. Only rarely someone who might be a Marsh pupil had performed one or more of these exclusives in the presence of magicians. Doubtless, this was in accord with some agreement set by Marsh himself.

Rumor went that Marsh had promised an amazing legacy to his unknown pupils; that secrets and devices which he was guarding until death would be theirs after his demise. When that time came, the pupils could identify themselves, each to the other, by their knowledge of Marsh Magic. Wild though this rumor might be, it gained credence by the fact that Marsh's pupils were as secretive as their master, all apparently holding back their own pet feats of wizardry until some appointed time when they would need them.

Cranston listened to this quite impassively as though analyzing every statement. The whole story told, he gave an obliging nod, said good-by and left. That was the perfect departure, the sort that a bona fide Marsh pupil would have made. This was important, too, because from the suppositions that he had heard regarding such people, Cranston could have vouched for their existence. They were represented by the alleged suicide victims whose tricks Cranston had displayed.

Murder, not suicide, was behind those Chicago deaths. Of that, Cranston was now certain; the next step was to prove it to the satisfaction of Inspector Rick Smedley. Preliminary to that, Cranston was trying to prove it to his own satisfaction; perhaps too much so.

Logically, the man behind murder would be a Marsh pupil, too. His purpose, judging from his wholesale measures to date, must be to eliminate all others of the clan. Since all were secretive as to their identity, the killer must have found some way to uncover them. From indications already at hand, this would depend on the victims. They would have to declare themselves.

Unwitting victims could do just that by performing their pet tricks in public and thus identifying themselves as Marsh men. Granted that they avoided

the company of other magicians, such a rule might no longer apply if something important were at stake, such as Marsh's legacy. Nor might it apply at all to the potential murderer who sought to ferret out Marsh's pupils. Hunters often belonged to a different brood than the hunted. Assuming that a master mind was playing every angle, he might be watching all places where magicians gathered on the chance that a man equipped with Marsh methods should appear there and be in a mood to display his marvels.

That explained why Lament Cranston had gone to the Round Table in the first place, though at that time, his theory had been more general than specific. Now the theory had become a substantial thing, provided that the speculations which Cranston had just heard regarding Professor Marsh had any substance to them. At least, it encouraged Cranston to play the game further.

Cranston played it by strolling through Chicago's central area, the Loop, in a manner calculated to encourage followers. He delayed his course by picking the wrong time to cross streets, then altering his route according to the traffic lights. This was a system that would force awkward moves on the part of anyone who had taken up his trail. But by the time Cranston reached the Hotel Royal, this policy had brought him no results.

Inspector Smedley, the perfect portrait of impatience, was waiting in the lobby when Cranston reached the Royal. His greeting was on the sarcastic side.

"I hope you've had a good time with those tricks," declared Smedley. "Did anyone try to murder you?"

"Sorry," replied Cranston. "Nobody tried."

"Did you feel any urge to commit suicide?"

"None at all."

"Then come up to the fifteenth floor," invited Rick, "and I'll show you the apartment of a man who not only felt the suicide urge but followed it. He hasn't any tricks in his suitcase and there's no way anyone could have got into his place to murder him."

Unquestionably, Rick Smedley was in a gloating mood at having successfully spiked the theory built by Lamont Cranston.

VI

MURDER PLAYS WARY

THE latest victim was named Edward Fleer. He came from New London, Connecticut, and his body looked about the size of a beetle, when Smedley pointed it out to Cranston from the courtyard window of Suite 1420 in the Hotel

Royal. Fleer was lying on the roof of a one-story extension, twelve floors below. One from fourteen subtracted to twelve at the Hotel Royal, because it had no thirteenth floor, not wanting to shy away superstitious guests.

The kitchen occupied the low extension and the cooks and kitchen help had heard Fleer's body thump when it landed, so the report of this new suicide had come quite promptly to the police. Fleer had been wearing a dressing gown when he jumped and no personal effects had been found on his body, which would shortly be removed to the morgue.

Smedley conducted Cranston about the hotel suite, which was large enough to be called an apartment, except that it had only one entrance. The large living room had windows fronting toward the lake, looking across some intervening buildings, one a warehouse, while the bedroom, from which Fleer had plunged, had windows only on the courtyard. The hotel was eighteen stories

high

and Smedley pointed out that for anyone to fly in and out at such a level, expressly to toss Fleer from a window, would be just about too unlikely to be considered in anything more intelligent than idiotic circles.

"That door was really locked," added Rick, pointing to a heavy door that had been smashed loose at the hinges. "The regular bolt and the chain bolt were

both thrown. We had to bash the door down. But take a look at Fleer's effects. If you can find any tricks in the lot, I'll eat them and I won't ask for mayonnaise."

While Cranston was looking over an array of rather ordinary articles, Smedley phoned headquarters and found that a call was waiting from Longwood. Smedley had the call put through and soon was talking with Lester Tyburn. At mention of Tyburn's name, Cranston listened intently on the chance that Gail might enter the conversation. Smedley's replies were too brief to get much from

them, but Rick elaborated, after finishing his chat with Tyburn.

"Tyburn was calling from police headquarters," informed Rick. "The Longwood police headquarters, I mean. I talked to the chief and they're counting on me to be at that clam bake that Mrs. Tyburn intends to throw. After

all, Tyburn owns the premises, so his wife can't very well object."

"Has Mrs. Tyburn been out there today?" asked Cranston.

"No sign of her," replied Rick. "Tyburn just came from the place and was talking to the three men who work there, the same ones he phoned last night, including Mrs. Tyburn's chauffeur. They haven't even heard from her."

"And when is Tyburn coming into town?"

"Right away. His cabin cruiser is waiting at the Longwood dock. That fellow Skip Hagathorn brought it over from Michigan. Tyburn says it will take him an hour or more to come into Chicago, as the motor has new pistons and he doesn't want to push it too hard. But how are you making out with Fleer's stuff?"

"There's nothing special in the suitcase," conceded Cranston. "But what about these articles on the dresser?"

He gestured to a watch and a ring lying near it. The watch was of a standard make, the ring simply a heavy signet bearing the initials E.F., which logically identified it as Fleer's.

"The watch was on the dresser," stated Rick. "The ring was on the washstand in the bathroom. Fleer evidently had left it there while he was washing his hands."

"And the watch was stopped when you found it?"

"No. It was running when I found it." Rick took a look at the watch and stroked his chin. "That's funny. It stopped just ten minutes ago, when I went downstairs to wait for you. I guess it was just about run down."

Picking up the watch, Cranston began to wind it, halting after a few turns of the stem.

"It was just about fully wound, inspector."

Picking up the watch, Rick shook it. The watch started, but as Rick replaced it on the table, it stopped again. More puzzled than ever, Rick looked

at Cranston, who asked:

"Did you ever swallow a signet ring?"

"No," gruffed Rick. "Why?"

Cranston picked up Fleer's ring and put it on. He brought his hand over to

a bunch of keys that were lying on the far side of the dresser. The keys made a

sudden jump in the air and hit the ring with a clang.

"A magnetic ring," defined Cranston. "Composed of one of those new alloys

that absorb magnetic power most phenomenally and retain it. Nobody would suspect that a simple ring could be so magnetic. Let's see what might go with it."

There was a box of golf balls in a dresser drawer. When Cranston opened it, three golf balls came up with his hand, hanging there like a daisy chain.

"Metal cores," declared Cranston. "I won't let you eat them, Rick, because

I want to take them along with the ring. They'll go well with those other tricks. Now will you think in terms of murder?"

"Not right yet," returned Rick. "You've linked this case with the others, but it still could be suicide. This is even a wilder theory than the one you had about Brett's death, last night. Well, you've found your trick, so keep it and let's go."

As they left the Hotel Royal, Cranston suggested that they walk by the lake side. Rick obliged and as they passed the hotel, Cranston pointed upward.

"Painters at work," remarked Cranston. "A pretty daring job, hanging down from that roof on a scaffold. Working their way from the top down. So far, they've only reached the sixteenth floor."

Rick stared upward, his mouth saying things that his voice didn't utter. Suddenly he found words:

"They could have done it!"

"But they probably didn't," said Cranston. "When you check, inspector, you

will find that those painters were out to lunch at the time Fleer began a one-way trip from his bedroom window. That left the scaffold very handy for another crew that wanted it. All they needed was to dress like painters, let themselves down to Fleer's living room window, enter and gang up on him. Naturally, they'd have pitched him into the courtyard. They needed time to get up to the roof again, on the other side of the building. Maybe they threw that extra chain bolt, inspector, just to make it harder for you."

"I'll see you later," returned Smedley. "I'm going back to the hotel and see what I can uncover there. You stick to the magic angle. I'll get whatever I can on murder."

Soon after that, Cranston put in a call to a man named Burbank, who served

as The Shadow's contact to certain agents long in his service. Cranston had brought his own investigating squad to Chicago for special duty of the sort that had developed.

So far, all reports were negative.

A neatly handled inquiry at the Harbison perfume counter had proved that the clerk knew no more than he claimed and the same applied to the proprietor. The crystal skull had been delivered there a week before, bearing the label of a wholesale jewelry firm in New York and accompanied by a card which stated "For Display." The stub of a package check had also come with the skull and a printed sheet announced that a representative would call for the display unit on a date that was filled in with a rubber stamp.

Perfumers had been testing the value of displays in recent months, handling them in routine fashion. So the crystal skull had been accepted on its

own merit and the Harbison perfumer hadn't bothered to contact the New York wholesaler.

Instructing Burbank to check the New York end, Cranston also detailed data

concerning Professor Marsh. This was to be followed through, but meanwhile, Cranston wanted any facts on John Halifax, Gail Tyburn and Verity Joyce.

Halifax and Gail were easy. They'd been lunching that day with friends at a very swanky cafe and it would probably be mentioned by a Chicago columnist who was also present. They had gone their separate ways afterward. But as for Verity Joyce, nothing had been learned concerning her.

That left Cranston to his own devices, which wasn't a hard assignment considering that he had a pocketful of them.

That evening, Lamont Cranston dined at the Pump Room in the Ambassador East. There, recognizing a few acquaintances from the Round Table, he soon found himself in their company and next they were joined by Bert Allerton, presiding genius of the Pump Room. Allerton was a professional magician, one of

the most unusual in the business. In a mild, almost benign fashion, he would chat with guests while a flower mysteriously left his buttonhole and traveled over to his opposite lapel, only to return to its starting point. Reaching beneath the dinner table, he brought out a bird cage that he found there and asked Cranston to hold it. Before Cranston could take it, the bird cage vanished in a sudden style that would have done credit to The Shadow.

Those were only a few of Allerton's wonders. He had a whole galaxy of close-up marvels. But while he performed them, he admitted that he wouldn't be averse to seeing a few things which he had unfortunately missed by being unable to attend the Round Table that day.

Cranston did the business with the cigarette case and followed it with the lighted matches from the box. Then, as an encore, he handed out a Chinese coin, let someone place it beneath a napkin and drop it in a glass of water. With a wave of his hands, Cranston suggested that the glass be uncovered and the water poured out. This was done, leaving everyone quite amazed to find the coin vanished. Napkin and glass were subjected to thorough inspection; never had either left the hands of the spectators. That was the really baffling part of it.

If anyone had been at the Pump Room watching for something strictly unusual, this would have been it. On that account, when Cranston left he insisted on going in a cab alone. He picked up a package that he had checked and in the cab, he opened it. The contents proved to be the black garb of The Shadow, complete to a brace of guns. Cranston had purposely mixed his directions to the cabby so that retracing his route would be necessary. This was in case something resembling a suicide squad happened to be on his trail. Only they weren't.

Cranston's next stop was in Cicero at a rendezvous inhabited by a most capable gentleman named Johnny Paul. From behind the bar, Johnny performed some very unusual marvels and in plenty. One of his best was an unfathomable stunt of causing a genuine ice-cube to vanish when he tossed it from his right hand and land in a glass that he was holding in his left, with the top covered so that the cube couldn't possibly arrive there, except that it did.

Johnny Paul liked to watch tricks as well as do them and he was quite intrigued when Cranston produced a cigarette from an empty case. Before Cranston could supply a lighted match from his match box, Johnny drew one lighted from his pocket, a clever bit of business that Professor Marsh must have missed. So Cranston passed up the match box and brought out the golf balls.

No golf balls ever before behaved like those.

Cranston made them move back and forth across the table at the mere snap of his fingers. They rolled in circles around drinking glasses. When Cranston inverted a glass over a golf ball and snapped his fingers above the glass, the ball jumped up inside it. Most surprising of all was Cranston's three ball balance where he held a golf ball in his right hand, two others set upon it, with his left hand ready to catch the balls if they dropped - which they didn't.

In testing the merits of the wonderful ring, Cranston had discovered that

its magnetic field was sufficient to control three balls thus balanced, holding them to the balance point as with an invisible glue. People were so busy watching the golf balls that they never got around to noticing the signet ring.

Hence no one wondered how the initials E.F. fitted with the name Lamont Cranston.

When Cranston left, Johnny Paul was entertaining the customers with his version of the famous Cups and Balls, a demonstration so remarkable that it captured attention even after Cranston's near-miracles. People were so intrigued at watching little rubber balls pass to, fro and through solid metal cups that Cranston was able to slip away unnoticed.

Unnoticed, that was, except by any person who might have been watching him

purposely, intending to stalk him down as one of the marked pupils of Professor

Sedley Marsh. Again, however, Cranston was due for disappointment. Once more The Shadow, riding unseen in the gloomy interior of a taxicab, Cranston found the trip back to Chicago definitely monotonous.

The monotony ended at Matt Schulien's.

This was a restaurant on Halsted Street, run by the Schulien Brothers. Matt, portly and genial, made a specialty of serving magic to the customers. He

could do card tricks by the hour and he performed them at an actual round table,

a big one, while the crowd gathered all about.

Matt was at work when Cranston arrived. Noticing a few magical faces in the throng, Cranston was recognized in turn and soon found a place. Buzzes reached Matt regarding Cranston's wizardry and soon the two were introduced. Following that introduction Cranston did the Chinese coin trick and again scored a hit with it. Then they were back to cards again. After Matt uncannily restored a card that a spectator had torn to pieces, Cranston suggested that they do a two pack trick. This brought the Marsh-made pack into the game and very soon Cranston was naming anybody's card as soon as it was taken.

When Cranston left the restaurant an hour later, he employed his Shadow tactics again. He was hoping that a car would overtake his cab, that faces would peer into the cab only to find it apparently empty. After that, things would happen to The Shadow's liking. But nothing did happen. The cab arrived serenely at the Hotel Harbison and it was Lamont Cranston who alighted, a package under his arm.

Up in his room, Cranston switched immediately to The Shadow's garb, then eased himself out the window and along a ledge which was anything but wide. Entering a darkened room, he moved out to the corridor and merged with a gloomy

stretch of the hallway that was made to order for his black garb. Even a keen-eyed interloper could have blundered right into The Shadow, without noticing him there.

For half an hour, The Shadow played this one-man game of hide-and-seek to no avail. Nothing happening, he returned to his room, became Cranston again and

decided to call it a night. What he'd established tonight was all on the negative side. It fitted, though, with the story that the pupils of Professor Marsh abhorred the company of all other magicians. Whoever was hounding them, simply wasn't looking for victims in the places that Cranston had visited.

There was a chance that stories might reach the man behind murder, stories

of a wealthy New Yorker named Lamont Cranston who was performing Marsh magic everywhere he went. This was Cranston's only hope of dividends for the time that he had invested.

Against these was the possibility that there wasn't a Professor Marsh;

that perhaps there never had been. It could be just a name, coined as a gag, to explain the origin of tricks that couldn't be traced. In that case, nobody was committing a chain of well-planned murders in Chicago. People were just succumbing to a suicide wave, the way Inspector Smedley figured it and the epidemic was spreading most rapidly among persons with the quirked minds of amateur tricksters.

Such dour thoughts disturbed Lamont Cranston as he stared from his window at the city lights. Never before had he advertised himself as target for murder without getting prompt results. That this should happen in Chicago of all cities, was discouraging, indeed.

Yes, life had its disappointments. It was becoming too safe for Lamont Cranston and that applied equally to The Shadow.

VII

EAST COMES WEST

THE next day, Chicago was serene. The suicide wave was over, ended as suddenly as it had begun. By mid-afternoon, not a single suicide had been reported during the past twenty-four hours. This was highly encouraging from the statistical standpoint.

On a national basis, suicide cases annually struck a ratio of one to ten thousand, or one case to every million of population. With a population of some three and a half million, Chicago's quota should therefore, have averaged one suicide a day. This, of course, included the more prosaic cases as well as the spectacular kind that had been making headlines lately.

Hence Chicago was now back to better than normal and everybody was breathing more easily, particularly Inspector Rick Smedley. Also, Rick was breathing easily because he was enjoying the pleasant air of Lake Michigan. He was visiting Lester Tyburn on the latter's elegant cabin cruiser the Cerberus, which was moored off Navy Pier. Lamont Cranston was also visiting on board the craft and they were chatting pleasantly with Tyburn, while Skip Hagathorn, pilot of the Cerberus, was serving drinks from the cruiser's galley.

Skip was a limber, tawny-faced chap, who looked as though he enjoyed outdoor life. As a direct contrast, a squatty man with a tan coat and a brown hat was perched uncomfortably in a deck chair, his moon-face looking yearningly toward land. This was Regan, the private detective assigned to Gail Tyburn. Regan was waiting for Tyburn to read his latest report, which consisted of a dozen thin paper pages, typed single space.

"I'm glad the suicide wave is over," Tyburn was telling Smedley. "That is, I hope it's over. Frankly, I feel you deserve the credit, the way you've had the police keep watching all the places where some frustrated character might just decide to put himself out in a big way."

"This last case wasn't like that," reminded Smedley, glumly. "Fleer didn't kill himself in front of a crowd. I only wish he had."

The glance that Rick gave Cranston was expressive. It meant that Rick hadn't got very far with the clue of the lurching painters at the Hotel Royal. Then, snapping from his low mood, Rick continued:

"We're getting results, though, Mr. Tyburn. What's more we're going to stay right with it. Compliments help, especially when they come from people like yourself."

Tyburn bowed an acknowledgment. Then:

"Tell me, Smedley," he asked. "When do you go off duty today?"

"At seven o'clock this evening."

"Too late," said Tyburn. "I want to get this cruiser up to Longwood before

dark. But here's a suggestion, Smedley: Why don't you drive up there? You could

make it by eight o'clock. I never take more than an hour, even with traffic. It's only about twenty-five miles."

"You mean to your estate in Longwood?"

"No, no. You wouldn't be able to find the place without an Indian guide.

I

mean the police headquarters. I'll get over there at eight and be waiting for you. Then we can make the arrangements for the Fiesta Night or whatever Gail intends to call that oversized society picnic. From what you've just told me, how your vigilance has halted this suicide craze, I'm more anxious than ever to

have your services."

Rick agreed to be in Longwood at eight that evening. Therewith, Regan found a chance to get in a few words.

"If you'll read my report, Mr. Tyburn," said the private op, in a gruff, impatient tone, "I'll go back on duty. You're paying me to find out facts. I want to earn my money."

"You're earning it," conceded Tyburn, "but don't expect me to read all this drivel. Why, if Gail stops for a milk-shake, you have to specify whether she ordered chocolate or vanilla. You even worry about the kind of flowers she wears."

"That's all important," argued Regan. "Suppose I lose her somewhere? I go into a drugstore or a flower shop and ask if a lady was just in there. They remember milk-shakes or flowers better than they do faces. Besides, when it comes to cocktails, those details are more important. Maybe you won't believe it, but about half the dames around the ritzy bars are always letting some guy switch them to some different brand of drink. That's how you know when they've been switching boy friends."

Interested, Tyburn thumbed through the report.

"Alexanders and more Alexanders," remarked Tyburn. "That's all Gail drinks. I suppose that an Alexander is Halifax's favorite drink."

"That's right," acknowledged Regan, "except when he takes brandy-and-soda.

Then it's always Martell's brandy. You'll find it in my reports."

Tyburn gave an indulgent smile.

"Very well, Regan. You know your business; stick to it. But why be in a hurry to go ashore? Your report says that Gail is meeting Halifax at the Mirror

Grill at five thirty. Your work won't begin until then."

Regan had tilted his head and was listening uneasily to the lap of waves against the cruiser. A breeze was spanking up the lake and a slight roll of the

ship was becoming more noticeable.

"I might run across one of them earlier," argued Regan. "Frankly, I'm trying to check on Halifax in his spare time. It may be important."

"Very well," decided Tyburn. "Skip will take you ashore."

Hagathorn beckoned Regan to a little outboard tender that was hitched to the Cerberus. Remembering something, Regan pulled a big manila envelope from his pocket, began opening it to show the contents to Tyburn.

"Here are the exhibits," explained Regan. "They go with the report.

Things

I picked up during my investigation."

"You mean theater programs, wilted flowers, hat-checks, match-packs, cocktail menus, and all that sort of truck, I suppose." Tyburn gave a depreciating laugh. "Your reports tell everything, Regan. Why waste time

collecting rubbish?"

"But I've given you memo sheets with phone numbers -"

"All mentioned in your reports."

"But when I find envelopes or letters in some person's handwriting -"

"Look, Regan," interrupted Tyburn. "I'm not criticizing your work. On the contrary, I am commending it. From now on" - Tyburn's tone was very patient - "be as meticulous as you want; in fact, more so than ever. Only try to classify

these exhibits as you call them according to their importance. Understand?"

Regan nodded.

"And when you phone me," added Tyburn, "don't pour out everything in one blue streak. Be brief and if there's anything that particularly interests me, I'll ask for details. The rest can go in your reports; but even in that case, give me a condensation. The remainder can be supplementary, purely for the record. If it means more work to do it that way, I'll pay for the overtime."

Tyburn dismissed Regan with a wave and Skip helped the private detective into the tender. Then the outboard was whizzing shoreward and Regan, hanging onto his hat, was bobbing like a jack-in-the-box at the bow. They could see him

waving frantically to Skip, who simply responded by veering the tender into the

wake of speedboats that were roaring along the lake front. In fact the speedboats got into the game themselves as if they had been loitering around, just for the fun of tormenting Regan. They whizzed across the tender's path so that Skip could get the benefit of sudden waves, which he took in expert style.

After what amounted to a pretzel-shaped tour, the tender finally dropped Regan off at the pier.

"I guess Regan annoys Skip, too," Tyburn was saying. "I'll tell Skip though, to stop his fooling when he takes you two ashore. Regan is a good man, but a fool. If that silly wife of mine sails off to Reno on account of a Grade B movie actor, I just want the facts, that's all. I won't fight a divorce, but I will fight alimony. I'm not in the soap business to buy swimming pools for Halifax."

"Regan has found out all my lawyers will need, but I can't fire the fellow

because he's done an honest job and I may need him again. Gail and Halifax are palsy-walsy; that's beyond dispute. If Gail takes it seriously enough to start a divorce move, I'll have my lawyers throw a scare into Halifax. He'll drop Gail like the hot-potato she is, and she'll come running home."

Rick Smedley inserted a dry opinion. "Maybe they've figured you to be a Foxy Grandpa," suggested Rick. "They might be playing house right now, without you knowing it."

"The only house Gail has," reminded Tyburn, "is the place out at Longwood.

That's why I'm paying three men to stay there on a twenty-four hour basis: Morse, Webster and Chaffin. Of course, Chaffin is on call when Gail needs the car, but she hasn't called him. Skip Hagathorn has full charge of this ship so that Gail can't decide on a Great Lakes cruise with John Halifax as a stowaway.

All Gail can do is stay in town and run up hotel bills, at hotels where I have credit."

"You've covered it well," agreed Cranston, "from your side, Tyburn. But what about Halifax?"

"He stays with friends," replied Tyburn. "With one friend until he wears out his welcome, then he sponges on another. Regan has a list of all of them. The only way he's getting by, is by borrowing Gail's pin money. He hasn't a chance of establishing a Chicago residence of his own. He doesn't have a shekel

to rub against a ducat."

Finishing his harangue with a laugh of real amusement, Tyburn took time out to chide Skip, who had just returned.

"Lay off the porpoise stunts, Skip," ordered Tyburn. "You're captain of a cabin cruiser, remember? Bring us another round of drinks; then you can take my friends ashore and we'll put off for Longwood."

It was when Cranston and Smedley were leaving that Tyburn added the final note to his conversation.

"My problems may only be trivial," admitted Tyburn, "but they concern two people who may think otherwise. One or the other may feel frustrated, or even persecuted. Those are complexes which psychiatrists have linked with the recent suicide wave." With that, Tyburn looked directly at Smedley and added, "You may realize now, inspector, why I feel it's important for you to handle the Longwood proposition."

Ashore, Cranston accompanied Smedley to headquarters where Rick checked over recent reports. Nobody had yet checked the name of the tug that had been passing through the Chicago River at the time of Brett's jump, nor had any witnesses testified to the presence of strange painters at the Hotel Royal. Fleeer's alleged jump had taken place when the regular painters were at lunch; that much had been established, nothing more.

"Not much in the murder line," decided Smedley. "How are you making out with magic, Mr. Cranston?"

"It's a bit barren, too," admitted Cranston. "I haven't met up with anyone I really wanted to fool. I'll phone you when you get back from Longwood, inspector."

Stopping by at the Round Table, which was just breaking up for the afternoon, Cranston shook hands with the few magicians he found there and remarked that he had forgotten to sign the guest book of the day before. While doing that, he looked over the names of the other guests, on the chance that a few strangers had dropped in after his departure and heard about his tricks. There was one name Cranston was looking for but didn't expect to find. He didn't find it. That name was John Halifax.

In fact, John Halifax hadn't been seen at any magical rendezvous the day before. That, however, didn't mean that Halifax was hard to find. Knowing the right place to go, Cranston went there: the Mirror Grill.

A brand-new night-spot in Chicago, the Mirror Grill lived up to its name. It was enclosed completely by mirrors, which gave the guests the privilege of seeing themselves as others saw them, which in most instances meant double. There, Cranston ran into immediate luck. John Halifax and Gail Tyburn were at a large table with half a dozen other people, among them a man Cranston knew. Chancing by, Cranston was recognized, invited to join the group and was promptly introduced all around.

The Mirror Grill was well filled, which seemed rather surprising for this hour, until Cranston learned that it was featuring an innovation, a Cocktail Hour Show. An orchestra began to appear on a mirror-backed platform and immediately the voice of Gail Tyburn became peevishly evident above the buzz of general conversation.

"But I tell you, Johnny," Gail was protesting, "I don't want to see this show."

Halifax tilted his head to make his fixed smile look indulgent.

"It's only a short show, pretty."

"Johnny!" Gail's eyes flashed. "I told you not to call me things like that, at least not -"

Gail caught herself before adding "in public" to her statement. Halifax by

then was covering his own slip.

"I said that it was only a pretty short show," Halifax declared. "Now tell us why you don't want to see it. Is it because there is a magician in the show,

or is it because there is a magician in the show?"

"Both!" snapped Gail, seeing no humor in Halifax's query. "You know how I hate magic -"

"Except when I perform it," inserted Halifax. Then, to the rest of the group he added, "Gail appreciates talent, that's all. You can't blame her. She wants the best."

Snapping his fingers for a waiter, Halifax ordered Gail another Alexander.

That was enough for Gail; she was the sort who wouldn't take orders, even indirectly. Impetuously, Gail came to her feet while Halifax, rising slowly, showed her a printed program that was standing like a little easel on the table.

"But you've never seen this magician," began Halifax. "He's a Chinese wizard, named Chung Loo."

"I don't care what he is!" stormed Gail. "I'm not going to watch him, nor do I intend to see those Magigals perform tonight. Magigals! They must be a fine-looking lot! How could they wear evening gowns and do their magic without sleeves? I'm leaving, Mr. Halifax, and when you get this magic off your mind, you can look me up."

Gail was tearing up the program as she strode away. Following her, Halifax

turned to call back to the group, above the rising music of the orchestra.

"I'll be back in time to catch Chung Loo's act. There's no use in letting Gail go away mad."

By the time she reached the door, Gail had torn the program into pieces and was throwing them away. Cranston saw a chunky man stoop forward from a table near the door to gather up the pieces. The man was Regan; he was pocketing this new "exhibit" as Halifax hurried by to overtake Gail outside. Then, in a sidling manner which he evidently felt a private detective should use, Regan also hurried out.

Remarking that he had friends at another table, Cranston followed. When he

reached a foyer filled with potted palms and little side doorways, he saw Gail through an outer door, getting into a cab. Regan was standing in the entrance, hand on hip, apparently looking for Halifax. But Cranston, knowing that Halifax

intended to return, was no longer concerned with The Smile, not for the present.

A girl had captured Cranston's eye, a girl who was hurrying in through the entrance, right past Regan, who didn't even notice her, not knowing who she was.

The girl's face formed a perfect oval; her features, though finely formed, were

pale, perhaps through worry. Again, it could have been the background of flowing black hair that produced that pallor by contrast.

The girl was Verity Joyce.

Cranston lost himself among the palms while Verity hurried by into the Mirror Grill. A few moments later, Cranston followed her. Scarcely had Cranston

seen Verity settle at a corner table, before the orchestra hit a discordant Oriental beat and every light in the Mirror Grill and the outside foyer was extinguished.

Then, a single spot of light thrust itself upon the stage and probed there, searchingly. The orchestra hit a strange jangle, replete with bells.

Drums beat as the light moved; suddenly, a weird face appeared in the glow. Cymbals crashed, the whole stage lighted and there stood a bowing Chinese in a Mandarin robe, surrounded by a curious array of Oriental paraphernalia, with tapestries and screens as a background, covering the mirrored walls.

Such was Chung Loo's introduction to his public and they liked it. The whole thing was bizarre and authentic. Something from the East had been transported to the West as though the magician himself had arrived at the rub of an Aladdin's lamp.

All eyes but Cranston's were fixed on that brilliant stage. His eyes were looking for Verity Joyce but could not find her. Even the eyes of The Shadow could not penetrate the complete darkness that persisted everywhere save on the stage itself.

Lamont Cranston decided to watch Chung Loo.

VIII

AMONG THE MAGICALS

CHUNG LOO was worth watching.

His act was a series of dazzling surprises, all in Chinese style. From a curious table shaped like a dragon's head with flashing eyes, Chung Loo picked up a pair of bowls, showed them empty and handed them to a girl in Chinese costume.

Spreading his hands in air, Chung Loo caught fistfuls of rice, flung the grains clattering into a bowl until it was filled. Snatching the bowls, he poured the rice from one into the other, clapped the mouths of the bowls together. Whipping the bowls apart, Chung Loo showed that the rice had turned to water, which he poured from bowl to bowl. Again he inverted one bowl upon the other, turned them horizontally and swung them apart, mouths upward.

Each bowl was now filled with fire, its flames flaring fiercely as high as Chung Loo's shoulders. As the audience gasped, Chung Loo tossed the fire bowls in mid-air where they turned to huge bouquets of flowers, which the magician caught and flung to his assistant. There was only one slip; the girl nearly muffed the flowers but the audience hardly noticed this. Chung Loo saw it, gave his assistant a glare as he went into his next trick.

This was the instantaneous transformation of several silk handkerchiefs into a huge banner bearing a silver dragon. Chung Loo threw the banner to the girl who nearly tangled herself in it, but by then, Chung Loo was picking up three taborets and tossing the ornamental stools in the air, where he handled them like a juggler. This was a stunt, indeed, juggling three articles of furniture and Chung Loo prolonged it because of the applause, which was fortunate, for the girl was slow in coming on again. She was bringing three large cloths, of the style called foulards. As the girl arrived, Chung Loo neatly finished his juggling by planting the taborets one, two, three in a row.

Then, whipping the cloths one by one, Chung Loo spread each above a taboret; snatching the cloths away, he revealed stacks of fish bowls three feet high. Not content with this, the magician met the girl halfway across the stage, where she was tardily returning with the dragon cloth. Somersaulting toward the audience, Chung Loo came up to his feet, flinging the cloth to display a fish bowl two feet wide that he had captured from nowhere during his acrobatic stunt.

From then on, Chung Loo was like a whirling dervish with his rapid-fire

act. He transformed fish bowls to bird cages, produced a lighted lamp on a tray. He planted a pane of glass on a bowl filled with goldfish, inverted another bowl on the glass, turned both over and caused the fish to drop through the glass sheet, water and all.

Most amazing were the magic butterflies, which Chung Loo tore deftly and swiftly from sheets of colored paper. They became alive, flitted through hoops and finally circled over the audience. By then, the spectators were convinced that Chung Loo could do about everything except vanish in a cloud of smoke, so the wizard proved that he could do that, too. Impatiently grabbing a large cloth from the slow-moving girl, Chung Loo flung it over him with a wave of his arms. There was a great burst of flame, a cloud of smoke, and as it cleared, the girl was bowing ceremoniously toward the spot where Chung Loo had been. Then, as the smoke thinned away, the girl hesitantly turned, spread a large fan and waved it as she pointed above the heads of the audience.

Every stage light went off. In the utter blackness, tiny points of light appeared, like multitudes of fireflies which for aught anyone knew, might be the reincarnation of Chung Loo. There were gasps, awed exclamations, finally the clapping of hands. The fireflies danced fantastically, changed colors in kaleidoscopic style, then suddenly vanished in little puffs of flame. That was all. It was enough.

On came the lights of the Mirror Grill, showing a blinking, gaping audience that the wizardry of the vanished Chung Loo had thoroughly captivated.

Three things had definitely impressed Lamont Cranston and he was weighing them now. Those three were the opening bowl routine, the goldfish through the glass sheet, and finally the fantastic fireflies. They had points of novelty that some of the other tricks missed; all in all, a distinct touch of the incredible.

And the incredible, where Lamont Cranston was concerned, had begun to link with the name of Professor Marsh.

Mere thought of that name snapped Cranston from his reverie. He turned to look for Verity Joyce. For once, the usually alert Mr. Cranston was too late. During those entrancing minutes when all had been blackness except for the alluring sparkle of the varicolored fireflies, the girl with the black hair and soulful face had slipped from the Mirror Room.

Glancing about, Cranston saw John Halifax. The Smile was over by a wall, an ideal place, since a mirrored panel gave his reflection and thus produced two images for the world to admire. But vanity wasn't the cause of Halifax being there. In the darkness that had persisted throughout Chung Loo's act, Halifax, trying to regain his table, could only have found his way along the wall. Now that he could see the table, he was working his way there, to resume his seat beside the empty chair that Gail Tyburn had left.

Cranston wangled his way to the same objective and sat down with the group in time to hear Halifax answer queries regarding his authoritative opinion of Chung Loo's act.

"Middling," was Halifax's easy-toned comment. "Or perhaps I should say middling to muddling. Good magic, but Chung Loo out-raced his assistant. That wasn't her fault, it was his for hiring her. If he knows his business, he'll get a new girl. Then, if I see the act again, I might give it a better appraisal. The tricks look new, but that's because they're old and, therefore, you haven't ever seen them."

Cranston didn't agree with Halifax's last remark, but he didn't dispute

the point. It was the stock answer that many professionals would give rather than admit there were tricks of their trade they didn't know.

"Well, my good people," said Halifax, rising from his chair. "I have an important engagement in the near soon. The Magigals are holding sway and I must

be there. After all, they represent at least a portion of my public."

With that, Halifax sauntered from the Mirror Grill, past a group of people

who had entered after the lights came on. Among the group was Regan, who gave Halifax a steady, but puzzled stare, the last part evidenced by the way the private dick scratched his head. Then, abruptly, Regan clamped his brown hat on

his head and started on Halifax's trail.

People were talking about staying for Chung Loo's next show, but it turned

out that it wasn't scheduled until ten o'clock. As the group broke up, Cranston

went with them. He was realizing that he hadn't anything to do until ten, if then. Inspector Smedley was due at Longwood to meet Lester Tyburn at eight o'clock; if Rick stayed there an hour, he wouldn't be leaving until nine and, therefore, wouldn't be back until ten. But there would be nothing that Cranston

could learn from Rick's preliminary visit to the Longwood police headquarters.

Lamont Cranston decided to see the Magigals' show.

Decorum was the keynote at the Hotel Harbison when Cranston arrived there.

No pranking tonight among the Magigals; instead they were prinking to look their

very best. Since the organization was unique, it had decided to make the show the same. The bill had several scheduled acts, but between them, surprise numbers were slated. In fact, any Magigal was privileged to do from three to five minutes if she could convince the committee that her work was sufficiently

good to grace this show.

Also, there were to be two intermissions and during these informal groups were to gather around tables at which all comers, guests included, could toss impromptu trickery.

The first act was under way when Cranston arrived. He watched Magigals perform all sorts of magic from sleights to illusions. Then came the intermission and the informalities began. Mooching around, taking copious notes, was the indefatigable Regan. He was particularly interested in a table where John Halifax was showing some very expert card deals.

So was Lamont Cranston.

There was a special reason on Cranston's part. Out of the crowd of Magigals who had swarmed about Halifax, like flowers enfolding a bee, had come the mystery face that Cranston wanted to see again.

Verity Joyce.

The girl's face had color, now; her eyes were sharp, with a vivid sparkle.

She was peering over Halifax's shoulder, but wasn't watching his sleights. Instead, Verity was scanning the crowd, apparently looking for someone else.

Perhaps she was expecting a crystal skull to come popping out of nowhere.

At any rate, she was a trifle disappointed, for her gaze began to droop. She wasn't noticing Regan, apparently didn't know him, though he had elbowed close to Halifax in order to jot down everything The Smile was doing.

Finished with his card work, Halifax gave a broad gesture of his arms, practically took a bow as he smiled his way backward. Somebody else was due to follow, so Cranston eased into Halifax's place. Cranston did just three tricks for the Magigals, the cigarette case, the lighted matches from box, and the dissolving coin. It was just a case of playing policy, a going through of the

motions. Having worked these Marsh effects at so many other places without the result he wanted, Cranston merely felt that the Magigals at least were entitled to witness them.

There wasn't time for any more, much though the Magigals were amazed by Cranston's miracles. The intermission was over, so Cranston gathered up his props, elbowed Regan out of the way, almost knocking the pencil from the detective's hand. Cranston noticed that Halifax was standing with folded arms, impressed at least by the tricks that he had just seen. But Verity Joyce, though she had been watching a few moments before, had slipped away again.

She was getting very adept at that, Verity was. Leaving Cranston at loose ends, every time. This time, he had nothing to do but watch the first specialty act on the second part of the bill. Indifference left Cranston when he saw the girl who walked on as one of the surprises. She was a real surprise from Cranston's standpoint:

Verity Joyce!

A soft laugh came from Cranston's lips. What he had taken for a disappearance on Verity's part was merely a matter of her getting ready for an act she was to do. Then the act began and with it, Cranston's interest reached intensity.

The girl could do astounding magic. Into a transparent plastic bag, Verity thrust her hand, showed it back and front, then closed it. Opening her hand, the girl revealed an egg, which she removed and placed in a glass. Back into the bag went her hand; the result, another egg. This continued until Verity had produced half a dozen eggs.

Next, over all six glasses, Verity placed circular sheets of paper. Catching two cigarettes from the air, one with each hand, she passed them above the glasses. Instantly, the paper cylinders disappeared in a quick flash of flame. Five of the six glasses were empty; in the sixth were all the eggs, forming a zigzag stack up to the very top of the glass and even above it.

That was all.

It was enough for Cranston. The enthusiastic spectators knew they were applauding good magic, but they couldn't have named the particular brand. Cranston could, for he recognized the touch that made it different.

Verity Joyce, the mysterious Magigal, had done two tricks that bore the exclusive and inventive touch of Professor Marsh. Of this Cranston was certain, for his own performance of such had given him a definite insight as to the basic phases of Marsh magic. Putting the rule in reverse, Verity could have recognized the origin of Cranston's tricks. Important though that point might be, it was secondary to another prospect.

If death threatened Cranston as a possessor of genuine Marsh secrets, Verity would also be venturing along that same trail which led to what was so far called suicide.

The optimistic note was that no death thrusts had come Cranston's way; therefore, Verity might not be in danger. But Cranston was inclined to be pessimistic. He still felt that bad luck or wrong timing could be the reason why he had been ignored. There was still a chance that he could be spotted, perhaps right here. Since the same applied to Verity, Cranston decided to watch the girl, making sure that this time she did not slip away.

Moving away, Cranston looked for Halifax; saw the handsome Hollywood

wizard watching the show. Not knowing that he was being watched, Halifax had relaxed his smile into one of genuine interest at Verity's performance. The credit that Halifax had refused to give Chung Loo vocally, he was extending silently to Verity.

In a phone booth at the side of the room, Regan was making a call, reading from his notes as he glanced from the booth. Cranston saw him there, observed that the detective was watching Halifax. It was now about nine thirty, the usual time for Regan to report to Tyburn. The phone booths were in an alcove, hence Regan had a good observation spot where he wouldn't ordinarily be noticed. In his hand, Regan was holding a notebook, from which he was reading, leaving Tyburn the privilege of questioning him on any specific points.

As he answered queries that doubtless came from Tyburn, Regan kept watching Halifax and also tilted his head to look toward the stage, because Halifax was looking at the show. Thus, in a sense, Tyburn was getting Halifax's observations at second hand through Regan. But all that ended as Cranston, strolling past the alcove, reached the exit from the improvised platform which formed a stage.

Halifax, watching a full stage act which was following Verity's turn, had suddenly tired of the show and had started elsewhere. Of all places, Halifax was heading straight for the alcove where the phone booths were located. Cranston could no longer see Regan, but he correctly pictured the fellow's reactions. As Halifax neared the alcove, Regan came out, head bowed while he lighted a cigarette so that Halifax would not see his face, while with his other hand, Regan was stuffing notes into his pocket.

This room was actually a banquet hall converted to an auditorium with built-up platform and folding chairs. Hence Cranston wasn't sure that Verity would leave by the particular stage exit that he had chosen, for there might be

another on the opposite side. So Cranston went back stage, where several Magigals were bustling about, getting their acts ready.

Moving around behind the back drop, Cranston saw Verity Joyce in the other wing. The girl was talking on a back stage telephone, just finishing the call when Cranston spied her. Hurriedly, Verity came behind the back drop, heading directly toward Cranston who promptly disappeared. He didn't need The Shadow's regalia to accomplish this. All Cranston did was grip the edge of the back drop

and roll himself within it. Verity went past and as her footsteps faded, Cranston unfolded himself from the curtain to take up the trail.

That trail led directly to the street, where the doorman bowed Verity into

a cab as it pulled up. There was another cab behind and Cranston not only hailed

it, but was on board by the time Verity's cab pulled away. Telling the driver that he had a friend in the other cab who was guiding him to his destination, Cranston stayed right on Verity's trail. In methodical fashion, he looked back toward the doorway of the Hotel Harbison and saw Regan pounding along the street, waving his arms at the doorman.

It was another of those quaint situations that fitted Regan so aptly. Apparently, he'd seen Halifax take a cab and had rushed up to the corner to find one for himself. By then, Verity and Cranston in turn had come from the hotel and taken cabs; now, Regan was rushing back too late, with papers flapping from his overstuffed pockets, only to find that he was still left at the post.

Luck favored Regan, however, for as Cranston looked back, he saw the doorman flag another cab and gesture the gum-shoe into it. Next, Regan's cab was trailing Cranston's, which Regan might just have been dumb enough to mistake for the cab that Halifax had taken.

Things at least were on the move, though all this might prove a blind trail. Regan's call had been a routine report to Tyburn; of that, Cranston was certain, though he could check it later. As for Halifax, whatever the purpose of his phone call, he had made it after witnessing two persons - Lamont Cranston and Verity Joyce - perform magic of the type identified with Professor Marsh. That in itself might produce immediate results.

The final factor was Verity Joyce herself. Had she planned to perform her magic before she saw Cranston do his? Had she purposely done those Marsh tricks so that Cranston could witness them? Why had she been talking to someone on the telephone immediately afterward? Did she know that Halifax had left the show before she came from back stage? Was she hoping that someone would pick up her trail, and if so, whom?

Lamont Cranston answered his own barrage of questions with a softly whispered laugh, the sort of mirth that usually preceded the advent of The Shadow into the business that was to come.

IX

THE LAST BET

VERITY'S trail led right back to the Mirror Grill.

That wasn't too pleasing to Cranston, who felt that he was playing his last bet in the game of making himself a target for murder. Nevertheless, he kept on the trail.

So did Regan.

At first, Regan's cab dogged Cranston's as persistently as Cranston's driver kept tagging the cab in which Verity rode. Later, Regan's cab turned off somewhere, but by the time the others neared the Mirror Grill, it shot into sight again. Then the cabs were halting in succession, dropping off their passengers.

Nobody seemed interested in anybody else. Verity was heading directly into the Mirror Grill itself. Cranston was following in leisurely fashion, as if merely a chance arrival. Regan was ignoring Verity entirely and overlooking Cranston. Cagily, the private detective was trying to spot someone else, doubtless Halifax. He was just stubborn enough, Regan, to suppose that Halifax had pulled out in one of those two cabs just ahead of his own. But Cranston was dismissing Regan from present consideration.

Verity Joyce demanded full attention.

So Cranston thought, until he entered the Mirror Grill. There he saw another lady who looked as though she needed attention and wasn't getting it. A

blonde with an upsweep hair-do topped by a hat that looked like a pint-sized snow plough taking a banked curve on a roller coaster. She was the subject of Tyburn's one-woman photo gallery, the same dreamy-eyed charmer who had been monopolizing John Halifax, Gail Tyburn.

Maybe Gail had got over her cocktail hour pout. Perhaps she'd decided it was time for him to be forgiven; or for her to be. Whatever the case, she had returned to the scene of their last rendezvous and she was looking for somebody. Probably Halifax.

Cranston decided to let Gail look while he watched Verity, who was a quicker hand at slipping out of sight. Verity wasn't at a table near the doorway, as she had been at cocktail time. Instead, she had found a seat at a very poor table, to one side of the mirrored room, a place that nobody else

wanted because a pillar with big mirrors blocked the view of the stage. Before Cranston could wonder too much why Verity had taken that location, he learned the reason.

Thinking herself unobserved, the dark-haired girl reached for the nearest wall mirror, pressed it inward like a panel and slipped right through from sight.

A nice disappearance and done with mirrors, too. For that, Verity deserved a blue Magigal badge instead of just a red one. Perhaps Cranston would rate an honorary membership if he did the same trick. Smiling at the thought, he worked

his way around the tables, took the vacant seat, picked the moment when the orchestra began to arrive, and pressed the mirror just as Verity had.

The panel wasn't bolted from the other side. It gave quite freely and Cranston stepped through, letting it hinge shut behind him. He was in a passage

that led behind the wall, simply a short route that obviously went back stage. Following along it, Cranston came to the stage itself, paused where steps turned to go up, and listened to voices that he heard above.

Verity Joyce was speaking to a man who spoke in short-clipped sentences. Moving to a closer vantage point, Cranston saw that the man was Chung Loo.

"And since your phone call interested me," Verity was saying, "I came here. You say you can use me in the act. Why?"

"Because of egg trick," replied Chung Loo. "Very good."

"How do you know it's good?" demanded Verity. "I didn't see you there. Anyway, you called me right after my turn."

"Luck, maybe," said Chung Loo. "I ask Magigals: Tell me, who does what tricks tonight. When I hear Miss Joyce, egg trick, I decide to call you."

"I don't intend to sell the egg trick -"

"I don't buy anyway. I know plenty tricks already."

"Then what do you want?"

"An assistant. Good one. Anybody handle eggs, sure to be good. I tell Magigals I want assistant bad. I don't mean bad assistant. Good assistant."

Verity was nodding; she paused to study Chung Loo closely. From longer range, Cranston could fairly well analyze Verity's impressions. Chung Loo looked the part of a magician, the sort who was wrapped closely in the art. His

face was cryptic; only his mouth was expressive. The little mustachios that drooped to the sides of his chin gave his features a demonic touch, but that fitted the magical character he strove to represent. Apart from the fact that he, too, was a specialist in Marsh magic, Chung Loo looked sincere and substantial.

Moreover, Chung Loo did need an assistant badly. Having seen the show, Verity knew it. Still, she wanted to probe a trifle further.

"You told the Magigals you had an opening for an assistant?"

Chung Loo bowed acknowledgment.

"But why didn't they announce it?" queried Verity. "Half those Magigals would like to go with a show."

"Committee lady say same," returned Chung Loo, blandly. "But she say no use to announce. They all want to go with Halifax."

"They can all go to Halifax," said Verity, "if that's the way they feel. Every picture I ever saw of Halifax was framed thick with girls. What chance would just one have?"

Chung Loo merely shrugged.

"You take job, lady?"

"I'll take it," agreed Verity. "How soon?"

"Beginning next show," replied Chung Loo. "You watch this one back here. You see enough to be better than girl I have now. She say she quit, anyway."

Drum beats were coming from the orchestra. It was almost time for Chung Loo to start his act. Moving back along the passage, Cranston went through the

mirror and found a better seat than the one at the special table. Lights blinked; the show was on.

Only once during Chung Loo's act did the lights go up enough for Cranston to spot other people about him. That was when Chung Loo was juggling the three taborets. During that spell, Cranston spied Gail at a table, Regan at another. Then things went dark and stayed that way until the finish of the firefly number. Gail and Regan were still there; Verity would probably be coming out soon. So Cranston strolled out through the foyer, carrying a small portfolio under his arm. It would do just as well to wait outside. Then he could check on people as they came along.

When Cranston stepped to the sidewalk, he stepped into adventure. The Mirror Grill was near a corner and hardly had Cranston appeared beside the curb, before a big truck rumbled around the corner. It was swerving fast, but looked as though it were going to hit the sidewalk near where Cranston stood.

Cranston did the natural thing. He made a quick dart in the other direction, so the truck would pass him. Then, in one quick flash, he saw that the truck had a trailer, a big one. The truck was under control, but the trailer wasn't. It was making a wide sideswipe, about to climb the curb at the very spot where Cranston expected to find a zone of safety.

With an amazing twist, Cranston came about, grabbed for the truck and caught a hanging chain with one hand. The wrench on his arm was terrific, but the chain snatched Cranston up and out of disaster's path. Hitting the curb with its wheels, the trailer not only toppled; it snapped its hitch. As Cranston swung from the chain like a trapeze jumper, he saw a few tons of trailer smack the sidewalk in conclusive style, covering about every inch of area where Cranston would have been.

Landing in the street a hundred feet ahead, Cranston saw the truck take the next corner, its driver totally unconcerned by the loss of such a minor item as a trailer. There was a taxicab parked across the way, its driver sitting petrified. In three bounds, Cranston was inside the cab, speaking persuasively to the driver.

"Let's go, chum," suggested Cranston. "We'll say we didn't see it happen. If anybody was mashed under that go-cart, we can't help them. Why stick around and waste time being witnesses?"

The cabby caught the idea and started. But there wasn't any copyright on Cranston's notion. A car parked further down the street was doing the same thing and a few other cabs began showing skittish tendencies, as though wanting passengers as an excuse to get away from this particular scene.

Cranston's cab rounded a few corners at his suggestion. The car that followed did the same. Farther back, Cranston could see other lights turning a corner. All Cranston did was sit back and relax with a whispered laugh.

He could afford that laugh, being no longer Cranston.

On the cab seat, Cranston's portfolio was lying wide open and empty. He was now wearing a black cloak and hat, while he stowed a brace of heavy automatics in special holsters meant for them. The portfolio came last; Cranston simply spread it and placed it around his body, beneath the black cloak. Until then, he could still have regarded himself as Cranston; fully girded, equipped for the action he had so long awaited, he was The Shadow.

None of this was noticed by the driver of The Shadow's cab. The hackie was pretty much perturbed, talking to his passenger spasmodically in reference to the recent trailer crash. Meanwhile, in Cranston's tone, The Shadow was inserting directions to the driver.

"Cheez, if that trailer hadda swung the other way!" the driver was saying.

"It woulda clipped this buggy for sure!"

"Speaking of turns," came Cranston's tone, "take the next corner to the left."

"Whatta smash-up that woulda been," continued the cabby. "More'n a smash-up. It woulda been a mash-up, with me the mash."

"Next corner, right."

"Flatter'n a pancake, that's what this hack would be right now if that trailer hadda hit it."

"Take another right at the next corner."

"And the way that truck kept right on going! The goon that was driving it acted like nothing had happened!"

"Another right turn," Cranston's voice ordered quietly. "Take it a little faster."

As the cabby complied, he became a trifle argumentative.

"Hey, mister." The cabby darted a glance back to the rear street. "Not to be too inquisitive, but who's driving this cab? I don't mind you telling me when to turn and where, but how I'm to do it is my business, see?"

The cabby was looking for his passenger but couldn't locate him in the back seat. He heard the voice, though, that replied, more imperturbably than ever:

"Very well, driver. Take the next street right and drive as slowly as you like. Just don't block traffic, that's all."

"Next right," began the cabby. "Here goes - hey!" He was darting longer looks into the rear seat now. "What's the idea? We're going in a circle. And what's this stuff about not blocking traffic?"

Still unable to locate the mysterious passenger who spoke in the quiet tone, the cab driver tried to clinch his final argument by looking back through

the rear window. He didn't like that crack about not blocking traffic in a street where there probably wasn't any.

But the cabby changed his mind as he heard the shriek of brakes, saw a rakish car take the corner behind him on practically two wheels and follow with

a sudden spurt. He remembered now, the cabby, that he'd seen lights turning corners in his mirror and he recalled that rakish car as it outlined itself in the glow of a corner street light.

It was one of the cars that had been parked across from the Mirror Grill before the trailer crash. The cabby had been studying its long, low lines, figuring it to be an old buggy, but a fast one. The kind of car that made him think of the old hijacking days in Chicago, except that it was a lot newer than

the cars used then. Nevertheless, that reminder was sufficient.

The cabby knew now why his passenger had wanted him to drive in circles. The man in the back seat had been wanting to learn if they were being tailed.

They were.

That, too, was enough. The cabby gave his hack the gun. It launched forward like a diver from a springboard. If he couldn't beat pursuers on the turns, he'd try it on the straightaway. Poor judgment, for the long-lined car was probably much faster than the cab, but it was exactly what The Shadow wanted, at least for the present.

Subtly, The Shadow had suggested danger to the cabby and the man had taken

the hint. That proved the cabby was desperate; now he'd do whatever The Shadow told him. All during his driving about Chicago, The Shadow had pictured a situation such as this, hence he had long ago resolved what his course would be. He had even been studying the cab drivers, their impulses and responses, so

that if he happened to get a skittish specimen, he could plan accordingly.

Three blocks more before another turn; that was The Shadow's plan, on the theory it would bluff the pursuing car. But before the cab reached the next corner, The Shadow changed his strategy. From around a corner, just two blocks ahead, came a big truck that identified itself the moment it hove into sight. It was riding light and carefree, having dropped plenty of weight in the form

of a trailer.

It was the death-truck, back in the game again!

The way the truck veered, its short squatty build, were the features that identified it. That truck, bound on murder once, would logically be sticking to

its task. It was coming head on toward The Shadow's racing cab and the driver of

the truck could see the pursuing car which proved that the cab must contain Lamont Cranston, the man slated for quick death.

The Shadow had made a last bet to make himself murder's target and it was paying off in the form of a daily double!

X

ALONG THE LAKE FRONT

"TURN left."

It was the whispered voice of The Shadow that gave the command; no longer the quiet tone of Cranston.

The effect on the cab driver was electric. He, too, had recognized the truck; knew that he was boxed between it and the pursuing car. He hadn't an idea that he was near a corner; for all he knew, he might be aiming straight for the wall of a building when he made that swerve. But the command of The Shadow's voice was all-compelling. The cabby swung the cab.

Tires screeching, the cab threatened to topple as its right wheels grazed the far curb of an intersecting street. It was like the mad swing that the truck had made when it flung the loosened trailer at Cranston. So sudden was the cab's change of direction that the pursuing car overshot the mark and had to haul back. Further down the street, however, the driver of the approaching truck saw the cab's veer in time to swing into a cross-street a block away.

That did not perturb The Shadow; quite the opposite. His whispered laugh came as an encouragement to the harried cab driver. The cab had gained enough leeway to shake the car that was chasing it. The truck, though a fast one, couldn't overtake the cab if it made another turn left.

This was a time when The Shadow laughed too soon.

He repeated the order, "Turn left" as the cab reached the next corner.

The

cabby started to obey, braked the car, and yanked it into reverse. The street into which he tried to turn was blocked off for repairs. Beyond a barrier with red lights lay a great gaping stretch, totally devoid of paving. The trip would

have come to a sudden end right there, had the cabby attempted to navigate that gap.

Now they were racing along the same street that they had tried to leave. The car behind them had gained, not lost by the cab's delay. The next cross-street was topped by an elevated structure and the pursuing car was cutting over to the cab's left, hoping either to get abreast of it, or to ram it when it tried to take another turn to the left.

The Shadow's next command took care of that:

"Turn right."

The cabby did it on two wheels, those on the left. Daring though his swerve was, it rated as trivial, compared to The Shadow's own maneuver. The door on the left flung open and The Shadow launched outward with it. As he went, he caught the handle of the front door beside the cabby and yanked it open, too.

Startled, the driver could only clutch the steering wheel to hold himself in place as the door flew wide beside him. He couldn't watch what was happening, for he was completing the cab's swing into the street where the

elevated railway ran. Nor did the men in the car behind see what happened, for The Shadow and the flying doors were out of their sight.

First, The Shadow grazed an elevated pillar. What prevented him from really bashing it, was his quick grab at the cab's front door. However, that was not his only purpose in pulling the front door wide. Performing an amazing twirl on the running board of the cab, handling the two doors as an acrobat would twist between a pair of gymnasium rings, The Shadow literally wrenched himself from the rear of the cab into the front, just as the cab hit the straight stretch down the street beneath the elevated.

In a trice, The Shadow had turned himself from a passenger into a driver.

As the cab righted itself, the doors came slamming shut and The Shadow also flung himself the same direction, jouncing the cabby out from beneath the wheel. An instant later, The Shadow himself was handling the helm and in an unprecedented style. The pursuing car was right behind him, cutting over to the

left, while the truck, which had been gaining all the time, had swung into this

street from the next corner and was taking the wrong side of the street, to meet the cab head on.

Neat business, this, the swift car boxing the cab so that the truck could bash it. Except that The Shadow didn't give it time to work the trick. He swerved the cab to the left, just beyond an elevated pillar, to get there ahead

of the rakish car. The truck saw the maneuver, swung promptly across the street

to meet the cab on that side.

Again, The Shadow was guessing a jump ahead. Instead of continuing that swerve to the left, he whipped the cab to the right. He simply snaked himself out of the trap, leaving the other car to meet the truck point blank, if it were so inclined.

The car didn't take the bait. It came after the cab, and the truck, about a hundred feet ahead, angled itself across the street to close a new and fatal box. But The Shadow was still giving the cab an undulating course. Whipping around an el pillar, he cut left, all the way across the street, zigzagging right past the truck before its driver could counter the maneuver.

Even then The Shadow's neat tactics had not ended. He came right again, around another pillar, clear over to the proper side of the street, where he swung in back of the fast moving car that had been trying to overtake him. The driver of that car and his companions were still looking for the cab, because the truck in passing had obscured it. They expected to see it loping on the left, but it wasn't there. Before they could guess that it had pulled behind them, the car passed the next corner. There, The Shadow simply turned to the right and took another street.

It had been in and out, around and between the el posts, a mad flirt with death that left the cabby sitting numbed beside The Shadow, glad that his amazing passenger had taken over the wheel. This, however, was not the end of the danger trail. Somehow, the cab seemed to have lost its speed. The car behind was resuming the chase.

There was a reason for this. The Shadow had not forgotten his original purpose, not even after that wild experience beneath the elevated. He wanted followers to keep along his trail, so that he could trick them. His only problem now was the safety of the cab driver and The Shadow had a way to settle that.

Aiming straight for Michigan Boulevard, The Shadow crossed that lakeside thoroughfare and spurted the cab into Grant Park, which formed the central link

in Chicago's chain of lake front parks. There, he made a sudden turn to the left, threw his weight against the cabby on his right and pulled the handle of the door on that ride. The Shadow gunned the cab as the door went wide.

Out went the cabby with the flying door. Lacking The Shadow's acrobatic ability, the cabby couldn't find anything to grab except some flowers of a huge bush that flanked the corner and found a bristly but happy landing place. The Shadow's parting laugh ended with the slam of the door as it slapped back into place. Then the cab was gone and before the dumfounded cabby could find wits enough to crawl from his nest, the pursuing car had swung past also, without noticing the reclining figure in the bush.

Up ahead, the cab was coming to a halt. The rakish car hauled up beside it, dropping two men, one of whom approached the cab in crouching style from the near side, while the other circled it to cover the opposite doors. In through the windows, they suddenly shoved guns and flashlights.

All they found was an empty cab. The Shadow had already filtered from the vehicle in his own shadowy fashion.

The men were puzzled, but they didn't stand around and advertise the fact.

Instead, they extinguished their flashlights, dodged back to their car and started away. To all intents, they might have been police in a prowler car, taking a look into an abandoned taxicab. They had good reason to be cautious, for other cars were coming along this driveway and a double blockade would cause too much notice, particularly if a real police car showed upon the scene.

Nevertheless, these unknowns weren't giving up their hunt.

Somewhere further down the driveway, they pulled off the road and extinguished the lights of the car. They probably thought that the cab driver, and perhaps his passenger, had ducked for cover of the bushes and would return to the cab now that the way looked clear. In fact, the car had pulled far enough along to fool anybody who might be hiding in the shrubbery.

That didn't apply to The Shadow.

The cloaked investigator was already on the rove, preparing to turn the hunters into the hunted. His keen ears sensing the cessation of the car's motor, The Shadow was able to locate it fairly accurately in the dark. He had moved somewhat ahead, playing the hunch that the other men would do the same with their car. The hunch was paying off.

Indeed, The Shadow had reached the crux of this expedition, perhaps of his whole investigation in Chicago. The very method of this compact gang fitted with his theory, the same theory which he had thrown at Inspector Rick Smedley as an argument that murder, not suicide, was the thing to be investigated.

The list of strange deaths all savored of strong-arm tactics, with William Brett and Edward Fleer, the cases which The Shadow had personally studied as Cranston, representing two illustrations of that point. In those cases, too, The Shadow had figured the handiwork of an extra man, or even a crew, whose purpose was to pave the way to murder and do the cover-up work.

Somebody must have done the jump from the bridge into the Chicago River, while the others were operating on the tugboat, after knocking off Brett and dumping his body. Similarly, unless someone had checked on Fleer, or even rigged the business of the scaffold, the trick of the substitute painters would not have been possible.

That man of daredevil quality had been in the game again tonight, for only such a hand could have launched a huge trailer as a lethal weapon with Cranston as its target. The bunch in the waiting car in this case had resembled cover-uppers until the deed of murder had been passed along to them. Now they were stalking Cranston as they had gone after Fleer, Brett and previous

victims.

There were differences, however. They didn't have their reckless companion handy; at least, not yet. He had been left somewhere back along the line with his truck. This was a time, though, when they wouldn't ordinarily need him. The

plan to dispose of Cranston was anything but subtle; it was brutal, as witness the business with the trailer.

An accidental death would be better than a faked suicide, for it wouldn't be linked with the other cases. Besides, Cranston was too full of life and magic to be the sort who would do away with himself. He might become morbid, but not until after the Magigals had finished their convention and the killers couldn't wait that long. They couldn't wait because their boss wouldn't let them, whoever that boss might be. Even now The Shadow was speculating on the identity of the mind behind the game of death and he had a variety of guesses, which included women along with men.

The way to settle the present party and gain a direct lead to lead direct to the source. That was to take out the murder crew one by one. This was exactly what The Shadow intended to do and even if he only managed to bag the first of three prospects, his task would be accomplished. One would unquestionably be a lead to all and, therefore, to the whole game.

From close to where he gauged the car was parked, The Shadow caught the blink of guarded flashlights, which gradually diverged, then disappeared. They were prowling separately, the three men from the car, which was made to The Shadow's order. Not that he ordinarily minded handling three killers at a clip;

there were times when he preferred it. On this occasion, however, The Shadow did

not want to produce a situation wherein he might have to deal them their own medicine. A captured killer would be better than a dead one, because he could be made to talk.

There were creeping sounds along the grass and among the shrubs. The prowlers were skirting The Shadow instead of finding him, partly because of his own shifting tactics, which went unheard. They were looking for Cranston and a taxi driver, not The Shadow; that was where the creeping men were making a grave mistake.

They would converge again as they neared the empty cab, tightening their circle slowly, surely. They'd pause though before they came too close to each other, so they could listen for sounds ahead and learn if anyone had tried to sneak back to the cab. Now The Shadow was gliding along the rim of the imaginary circle, just outside it, ready to decide which killer he should overpower first. One of the three was almost sure to lag; he would be the logical choice.

The creepers were slackening sooner than The Shadow expected. The reason was that other cars had stopped briefly along the driveway, then gone on again.

Apparently, the abandoned cab was exciting some curiosity. This might work even

more to The Shadow's advantage. It could mean that the murder crew would postpone their hunt. Their game was to do away with Cranston in such a way that

his death would look like the work of typical park prowlers engaged in a standard hold-up. It wouldn't do for the whole crew to come bounding up on a victim in sight of witnesses. If they decided to give up this present job, they

would retreat, bringing themselves back into The Shadow's own bailiwick.

The Shadow waited, on that very chance.

Suddenly, a flashlight blinked, not from along the three-man circle, but from a darkened space across the driveway. Immediately, the creeping men

flashed signals of their own. The result brought a quick finish to The Shadow's

well-formed plan. Instead of a slow retreat, the three promptly began to draw together and start a rapid sideward departure along the line of the driveway.

The Shadow took immediate bearings on his present position. Off obliquely to the right, he could see the great white shape of the Chicago Natural History

Museum, its marble mass looming in ghostly fashion in the darkness. Beyond it the skyline of Chicago was etched against the night, revealed by the city's own

illumination. The Shadow was facing inward from the lake; therefore, he knew that the crooks were heading northward.

Going in that direction, The Shadow spotted dim figures cutting across his

path. They weren't going back to their car, those three, they were heading for the causeway leading to Northern Island, where the Planetarium occupied the northeast corner. Just as they had tried to box The Shadow earlier, so were they boxing themselves now.

All that The Shadow had to do was follow, catch up with the trio after they became careless, which they would, now that they had given up their hunt for Cranston. He might not even have to nab them one by one; a quick surprise when they least suspected it, might result in the bagging of all three.

A whispered laugh that vanished in the sigh of the lake breeze was The Shadow's prophecy of trouble for those three. It wasn't a bad prediction, but he might have included himself along with it.

Surprises might be due for anyone, even The Shadow.

XI

THE STARS RULE ALL

THE esplanade approaching the Planetarium was divided by a series of twelve pools, all in a long line, with a ledge along the sides. Those pools represented the signs of the zodiac, whose symbols since ancient times have been regarded as a ruling agency in the affairs of mankind.

In its turn, the esplanade was flanked by separated hedgerows, while straight ahead, the Planetarium loomed like a mighty cheese-box topped with a squatty turret that supported a huge dome. It was along this route that three men were hurrying, keeping well apart as if they did not know each other and showing preference for the darkish shelter of the hedges.

There were other people walking along the esplanade, but they were few and

far between. Comparatively speaking, the concourse was deserted except for the three men and the cloaked figure that was on their trail. If he had personally conjured up this situation, The Shadow couldn't have had it more to order.

In the darkness, the three men fitted the term of nondescript. They differed somewhat in gait and size, but they were all wearing dark clothes. As for The Shadow, he couldn't even be seen, let alone described. Gaining ground along beside a hedge, The Shadow was represented only by a fleeting patch of black, his own shadow gliding against the white paving of the esplanade.

There was only one thing certain about those three men up ahead, and that was their own uncertainty. They had evidenced it previously, now they were to show the trait again. Just as The Shadow was silently overtaking the last man of the lot, the fellow broke into a rapid jog. Simultaneously, the middle man halted in his tracks. The man up front wheeled about and came hurrying back toward the others.

They couldn't have suspected that The Shadow was close upon them; certainly not all three. The only man who might have guessed it was the one who

had suddenly sprung forward almost from The Shadow's grasp. But he hadn't given any signal, not even a blink of his flashlight, so his action could not account for those of the men ahead.

That was why The Shadow decided to play the role of a one-man clean-up squad. Whipping his brace of automatics from beneath his cloak, he flung himself directly upon the trio as they came together. With his drive, he delivered an uncanny laugh, which carried a chill that even the winter lake winds had never matched when they raked this esplanade.

A bit sporting of The Shadow, to announce himself so lustily, but the three men didn't take it in that light. Instead of a warning, The Shadow's sardonic laugh was a threat and more. It had thrown shivers into hardened killers in the past and it did the same on this occasion. Instead of uniting The Shadow's three foemen, it threw them into confusion. It was each man for himself and no two thought alike.

One fellow fumbled for a gun, while backing in his tracks. A second turned to dive for a safety that didn't exist. The third made a wild spring in the direction of the laugh, hoping to grab The Shadow bare-handed and hold him until the others helped.

It was a perfect setup for The Shadow.

Slashing crosswise with a black gloved fist, The Shadow reeled the man who was springing at him. It was powerful, that back-hand blow, for in his fist, The Shadow carried the added weight of an automatic. With a twist, The Shadow hooked the staggered man under the arm, pitching him bodily upon the fellow who was trying to draw a gun. As the pair flattened, The Shadow was spinning away to overtake the coward who had started to run.

That task was ridiculously easy.

True to type, the man had tried to dive for a hiding place. The nearest was the hedge, so he had ploughed right into it, tangling himself worse than the cabby whom The Shadow had helpfully pitched into a bush, back along the distant driveway. Cloaking one automatic, The Shadow used his free hand to haul the fugitive from the hedge with a terrific roundabout sweep that should have added him to the pair already piled upon the paving. With that The Shadow could have subdued the three as easily as one.

It was the fourth man who made the trouble.

The Shadow hadn't counted him at all, but he was to prove the most formidable of the lot. He came vaulting over the hedge, swinging a weapon ahead of him. That weapon was a flashlight which the fellow had been blinking as a signal to the others that this was to be their meeting spot. The Shadow hadn't seen the flashes, for they were half-smothered by the hedge.

Full force, the flashlight found The Shadow's head as he hoisted his gun hand to ward away the blow. He warded too late, but he bobbed his head at the same time, which deflected the flashlight as it landed. The Shadow's slouch hat also took some of the brunt, but if the flashlight had been heavier, the blow would have stunned The Shadow.

As it was, the flashlight barrel cracked apart, scattering the batteries. Staggered by the blow, The Shadow lost his grip on the man he had started to fling. Coming around blindly, he grappled with the fellow who had sprung across the hedge and tried to lay home a gunstroke in retaliation for the blow from the

flashlight.

The Shadow's adversary whipped out a revolver in time to meet the sledging automatic. The guns clanked and the pair wheeled apart, to drive in for another clash. By then, the men The Shadow had first flattened were on their feet and grabbing him from in back. Twisting out of their clutch, The Shadow wheeled them into the path of the big man, who halted his gun swing just in time to avoid knocking out one of his companions.

From then on it was a whirling fray, in which The Shadow, though half-groggy, proved his prowess at dealing with men of crime. His twists were sudden, often in reverse, the sort that made it impossible to hold him. Never, though, did he wheel away. Always he came in for further combat, so rapidly that no one could bring a gun into play. Always, The Shadow was using one man as a shield against the others, generally disappearing from behind such a human buffer to come in at an angle upon another fighter.

With it, The Shadow had an uncanny faculty for spotting a revolver's glint. His reach was so long that he invariably could whack another weapon or the hand that held it with his own automatic. All during the brief, twisty fray, The Shadow was carrying his adversaries out into the open so they couldn't box him up against the hedge.

The finish occurred at the center of the esplanade, not far from the Planetarium itself. There, one man managed a quick aim at The Shadow, but before he could pull his revolver trigger, The Shadow's automatic came whipping

straight up to meet the fellow's gun hand and carry clear up to his chin.

There was a howl as the revolver scaled from the man's hand, a splash as he took a flying back dive into one of the zodiac pools. Coming full around, The Shadow grappled with another enemy whose revolver stabbed wildly twice as he and The Shadow climbed the ledge beside another pool. Twisting free, The Shadow tripped this fellow into the water, thus temporarily eliminating two foemen.

There were two others, one the big man. As The Shadow sprang for them, the other fled for the hedge. Alone, the big man grappled madly with The Shadow. Meanwhile the first pair were clambering from the pools, drenching the paving with their dripping clothes, as they, too, took to flight. Here was The Shadow's chance to make a capture, the biggest man of the lot. But as The Shadow twisted to drive a solid stroke with his automatic, he slipped on the wet paving and lost his grip.

The big man dashed for the hedge and cleared it before The Shadow could prop up an elbow and overtake him with a shot. Coming to his feet, The Shadow started in pursuit among the hedges and finally came into the clear. Though he had used a flashlight along the hedgerows, The Shadow hadn't found a sign of the four.

Only the lake lay in this direction, so The Shadow doubled back along the trail. He saw figures beyond the hedges, moving into the entrance of the Planetarium, but they were too distant to be identified. Nevertheless, there was a chance that the scattered thugs were taking refuge in the building, perhaps individually, so The Shadow headed there. Inside the entrance, he saw that a show was about to start in the Planetarium room. One of the attendants was about to close the door.

Whipping off his cloak and hat, The Shadow packed them in the self-folding portfolio, along with his gloves and automatics. As Lamont Cranston, he reached the Planetarium room just in time for the show. The lights were already dimming when this last customer joined the audience.

Like some monstrous Martian creature, the huge projection instrument towered above the circles of chairs which held the scattered spectators. Taking a seat, Cranston looked over the audience, hoping to identify certain unworthy members before they recognized him. In the dim chamber, that was difficult, yet the advantage was Cranston's. He was sure that the two with the soaked clothes hadn't entered; the other pair, if present, would be huddling in their chairs to avoid notice.

Picking out such prospects, Cranston changed his seat a few times to get a closer look at them, always approaching from in back. At close range, none of them appeared to be the men he wanted and by then, the chamber was too dark to continue the hunt. The lecturer was speaking, calling attention to the horizon of the great domed room. There, the fading light showed a representation of Chicago's skyline, so realistically proportioned that the walls of the room could have vanished, placing the audience outdoors.

Except that this was Chicago's skyline of some hours ago, when dusk was settling over the city. Gradually, the silhouetted buildings were wiped out, indicating that night had fallen. That night would pass in terms of minutes rather than hours, here in the Planetarium, until artificial dawn would again bring the skyline into a gradually increasing light.

Stars were studding the sky, as represented by the great dome. Leaning back in his chair, Cranston smiled to himself. This was, indeed, an interesting sequel to the battle that he had waged as The Shadow. It was getting back to nature in a safe way. Nice to look at the starry heavens above Chicago, here indoors. Better than out of doors, where anything might happen, particularly in Grant Park.

The stars were moving on their speeded up routine. Cranston's head was swimming slightly, too, from the effects of that jarring flashlight blow. He'd forgotten it in the heat of the fray, but perhaps it accounted for a few oversights. The battle could be marked as a victory for The Shadow, but it had fallen below his own exacting specifications. At least one member of that murderous tribe should have been bagged as a trophy. Lamont Cranston felt more than slightly disappointed in The Shadow.

That made it The Shadow's turn to be disappointed in Lamont Cranston and the turn was coming very soon.

There was a slight stir behind Cranston's chair, as though someone had taken a seat there. Then, as Cranston raised his head slightly, something cold and round planted itself squarely in the back of his neck. Above the lecturer's

droning spiel, Cranston heard a firm contralto tone announce:

"Stay right where you are. The slightest move may be your last."

Cranston stayed motionless. But the voice hadn't admonished him not to think. How this had happened was a puzzle that didn't link with the crooks that

Cranston was hunting. The voice was unquestionably a woman's; how long she intended to keep Cranston at this gun point was the next question.

That question needed an answer and Cranston decided to provide it. He could hear another stir in the row behind him, indicating that someone else was

creeping into the invisible scene. Perhaps the voice had been faked; if so, Cranston might be really on the spot. It would be folly though, for anyone to fire a shot. The lecturer's talk, the buzz of the star projector, wouldn't be enough to cover the report of a gun.

Cranston moved his neck, almost less than slightly. Gradually, he was easing the pressure there, getting his shoulder and one hand around. Then he twisted, carrying his neck clear and thrusting his hand not for the gun, but

for the wrist above it. Cranston heard a sharp gasp, a woman's gasp with a twinge more of surprise than terror. That came as he caught the wrist and shoved it high. Then, with his other hand, Cranston made a snatch for the gun, but too late.

The gun was gone and in the darkness, Cranston's fingers brushed a man's hand, the very hand that had tugged away the gun a split-second ahead of his grasp!

Launching over the back of his chair, Cranston grabbed for the man who had snatched the gun. Cranston wanted that gun and he found it, but not the way he wanted. Unless he wanted it in the worst way. The result certainly fitted that specification.

Down out of the blackness came the gun, swung full force by the hand that had taken it. It found a head that no longer wore a slouch hat and found it squarely. As Cranston took the blow, the whole great room about him seemed to light with a sudden burst of shooting stars that shamed the pitiful show that the projector was etching on the interior of the dome.

Lamont Cranston saw the light, nothing more. Sliding down between the rows of chairs he flattened upon his portfolio as it struck the floor ahead of him. Night was still moving at its geared-up pace and the lecturer was announcing the approach of dawn in those artificial heavens; but Lamont Cranston neither heard nor saw.

The Shadow was noted for moving swifter than the night. This was a place where night moved swifter than The Shadow. Either that, or this just wasn't The Shadow's night.

XIII

REGAN REPORTS

SHOOTING stars were throbbing into mighty sunbursts and with them, Lamont Cranston could feel his head swell, then contract, time and again all in monotonous rhythm. Then, through his aching brain, came a slow recollection of what had happened.

Cranston opened his eyes. He saw the silhouette of Chicago's skyline creeping back to life again, in a light like a dim dawn. Cranston was lying with his head propped on an arm and the portion of the skyline that he saw was so set that it seemed to be within a frame.

There was something wrong with that painted picture. It wasn't illuminating fast enough. Time might be passing slowly to Cranston's numbed senses and hazy vision, but he still could gauge it somewhat by his head throbs. Painfully, he counted ten of them, but the light showed no increase.

If something had gone wrong with the Planetarium show, it was all the better. For now Cranston was remembering what had happened in the midst of it, as well as he could remember. Something had come out of somewhere, probably the

constellation of Orion the warrior, and had clouted Cranston properly. Now he recalled what it was that hit him, the butt end of a gun.

Cranston could vaguely recollect the stroke as he stared at the dim panorama which represented dawn. Whoever gave the blow must have lost the gun with it, for it had been practically flung at Cranston's head. Just a wild chance in the darkness, but it was no longer dark here. If Cranston could find that gun, or his own portfolio which contained a brace of automatics!

Half rising, Cranston began to paw around on the chance of finding the missing gun, if missing it were. Realizing that some other person might be planning a similar search, Cranston raised his head wearily. Between himself and skylined light he saw a huddled man slouched in a chair at the next lower

level. Something in the fellow's crouch indicated that he might be planning a surge as soon as the light increased sufficiently. So Cranston decided not to concede that chance.

With a lunge, Cranston reached the huddled man and tried to clamp him in the chair thinking that like all the seats in the auditorium, it would be fixed solidly to the floor. Instead, it was loose. Cranston bowled it over, man and all. They hit the floor together, came up against a wall. By then, the other man was roused and grappling, while Cranston's senses swam anew. Then they were at grips by the frame through which the skyline showed and a breeze, whipping Cranston's face, brought back his scattered wits as he looked at the man with whom he struggled.

That man was Regan, the private detective.

This wasn't the planetarium chamber with its circles of seats. It was Cranston's own room at the Hotel Harbison. That skyline and the dawn that etched it weren't artificial; they were real. What Cranston had been looking at was actually Chicago.

Relaxing, Cranston let Regan get his breath. Turning on a table lamp, Cranston set the chair upright, then went over and sat down on the bed, which was where he had been lying when he came back to his senses. Now it was Regan's turn.

"Whew!" expressed Regan, as he sat down in the chair. "You sure came back fast. I should have figured maybe you'd be surprised to find yourself back here."

"I wasn't, precisely," rejoined Cranston. "I thought I was finding myself back over in the Adler Planetarium. I take it that you helped me out of there."

"Lugged is the word for it," said Regan. "You were lying there like something had really hit you. They were going to call for an ambulance, until I showed them my credentials and said I'd be responsible."

"Whom do you mean by they?"

"The professors or whatever they are that run that shooting star gallery. I told them I'd met you out on Tyburn's cruiser, that you'd been having dizzy spells and the doctor had said you ought to take a lake trip. They listened."

That brought a smile from Cranston. Regan, of all people to be recommending lake cruises, after the way he'd balked at a speedboat ride with Skip Hagathorn.

"I found your brief case and brought it along." Regan gestured to the bureau and Cranston saw the portfolio lying there. "And then," added Regan, "I took a look under those seats, while the professors were carrying you out to a cab. I found your gun."

Reaching into his pocket, Regan brought out an automatic that looked to be of .32 caliber and tossed it on the bed where it clattered slightly as it landed. He asked cagily, "Yours?"

Cranston nodded, watching Regan from beneath lowered brows. He was convinced now that Regan hadn't opened the portfolio, which would, indeed, have been difficult as it had a very tricky catch. Therefore, the detective couldn't know that Cranston was The Shadow. By claiming the loose gun to be his own, Cranston was diverting Regan's thoughts from the portfolio, which he probably thought contained nothing more than papers pertinent to the suicide cases that Cranston had been studying with Smedley.

"Kind of risky toting a rod around," observed Regan. "They're fussy about that, even here in Chicago."

Cranston said nothing. He had picked up the gun and was beginning to study it.

"Of course knowing Inspector Smedley like you do," continued Regan, with a shrug, "it shouldn't matter much. Of course, he likes to handle things his own way and didn't like the New York commissioner butting in on it. Maybe Smedley would like to get that out of his hair."

"Tell me, Regan," asked Cranston, suddenly, "aren't you working exclusively for Lester Tyburn?"

"Why, yes." Regan hesitated. "Well, not exactly on an exclusive basis."

"But you were covering a job for him last night -"

"Of course. Why are you asking?"

"Just to learn what you are after," retorted Cranston. "If this is a shakedown, Regan, forget it. You're a wrong guy and you picked up a wrong gun. You can see for yourself that this trigger is jammed so the gun won't fire even though it's loaded."

By way of illustration, Cranston was approaching Regan with the gun, tugging at the trigger. The muzzle was pointed straight at Regan's stomach and the dick was waving his hands excitedly as he came to his feet, kicking over the chair behind him.

"Take that thing away!" cried Regan. "Forget what I said. I'm not asking for anything. Take it away!"

"Don't worry," assured Cranston. "This gun won't pitch any slugs your way."

"I'll work with you!" screeched Regan. "I'll tell you my business without asking yours. Only lay off that trigger!"

Regan was in the corner now and Cranston, his face showing surprise, had finally managed to release the jammed trigger. He gave it a tug and Regan sagged in the corner with a howl, only to sit there staring at what he saw.

The automatic had gone off, but not in orthodox fashion. Nothing had left the muzzle; instead a section of the barrel had popped up on a spring, just above the handle. Poked in sight were half a dozen cigarettes, standing upright.

"Have one, Regan," suggested Cranston proffering the dummy gun. "Haven't you seen these before? They're novelty cigarette cases, sold at magic shops and such places. This one doesn't happen to be mine. Somebody slugged me with it and dropped it. I'd like to find out who did it and why."

Cranston could have answered his own question in part, but he wanted to hear what Regan had to say. He knew that some woman had been using the gun to bluff him; that when he grabbed for it, a man who was working closer in the darkness had snatched it first and used it as a bludgeon. It was fortunate that

the gun wasn't a real one for it would have been much heavier than this. Maybe Cranston would have slept through the real dawn as well as the artificial one, in that case.

"There's only two people who might have been carrying it," declared Regan.

"Halifax or the Joyce dame."

Cranston's eyebrows raised as though asking Regan to give the particulars of his deduction.

"You ought to know," gruffed Regan. "You were over there at the Mirror Grill, too."

"I remember being at the Planetarium," rejoined Cranston, with a smile. "I'm asking who else was there."

"All right."

With a resigned shrug, Regan set his chair upright again and sat down.

Then he went into his spiel.

"I was over watching the Magigals, see?" Regan began. "I'm tailing Halifax for a change. It's as good as shadowing Gail Tyburn anyway, because what the old man wants to know is how often his frau gets together with her smiling boy friend.

"I call up Tyburn and report to him. He's with Rick Smedley having a conference with the local coppers out at Longwood. I'm reporting like he asked, giving it brief, except when he wants certain particulars. I'm just winding up when this Halifax comes to make a phone call, so I duck outside and wait, see?"

"Next, Halifax shows outside, grabs a cab and says to get to the Mirror Grill and hurry. That being the place where he left Gail Tyburn, I figured she'd be back there, and she was. Only Halifax wasn't. That's the part that gets me. Maybe he thought that I was tailing him and told the cabbie outside the Harbison to take him to the Mirror Grill as a blind. He could have changed the address after he got in the cab."

As he concluded, Regan gave Cranston a very sharp look. Probably Regan either knew or suspected that Cranston had been both at the Harbison and the Mirror Grill. Still, he might have seen him at only one of those places or perhaps not at all. In any case, it was Cranston's purpose to keep Regan talking, so he followed that policy.

"So you saw Gail Tyburn," stated Cranston. "Then she should be the woman in the case. But who is this Joyce girl you mentioned? How does she enter?"

"She was on the bill at the Magigal show," explained Regan. "It was right after her act that Halifax left. Maybe he could have been phoning her. I've got

to check downstairs here and find out if there's a back stage telephone in the ballroom. Anyway, she headed for the Mirror Grill, too."

"You saw her leave the Harbison?"

"There were a couple of cabs that pulled out before I could grab one. I saw a dame going into the Mirror Grill right after I got there, but didn't notice her close enough to be sure who she was. I was too busy trying to spot Halifax. Then, when I got inside the place, I saw Gail Tyburn. She was looking for Halifax, too, I guess. Only he wasn't around."

"And you didn't see this Joyce girl?"

"Not a sign of her, at least not then."

"What did you say her first name was?"

"I didn't say," replied Regan, cagily. "I know what it is though, because it was on the bill at the Magigals. Her first name is Verity and she does tricks with eggs."

Cranston nodded, as though tricks were of only slight consequence in his life. Then he said to Regan, "Go on."

Regan went on.

"Just then a Chinese magic act gets started," said Regan. "At the Mirror Grill, I mean. Some guy called Chung Loo was working there and his act wound up

with a blackout. Then on came the lights and I'm getting a look at Gail Tyburn,

but no sign of Mr. John Q. Halifax. Then who goes sailing out of the place all of a sudden but the Joyce dame. She must have been in there all along."

"So you followed her?"

"Sure. By then I was putting one and one together and getting three. Halifax ditches Gail and winds up at the Magigal show. There he sees this Verity Joyce and it's a cinch she saw him, too. On account of she was around when Halifax was doing card tricks -"

As Regan cut off suddenly, Cranston gave a slight laugh. Regan's first answer was a shrug. Then:

"Yeah, I saw you doing tricks there, too," Regan admitted. "So maybe I'm not telling you too much that you don't know."

"I'm interested in what happened at the Mirror Grill," said Cranston, calmly, "so let's have it."

"If you were there, I didn't see you," declared Regan, defensively, "but I've already told you I was trying to spot Halifax. Anyway, right after the show, this Verity Joyce goes piling out like she's trying to catch up with somebody. See?"

Cranston saw and nodded.

"That's the first time I spotted her," continued Regan. "It looked like Halifax had somehow got word to Verity to meet him some other place, since Gail

was around. So I came outside, too. There's a trailer piled up on the sidewalk;

been an accident, I guess. But there's a cab pulling out across the street and a car starting right after it."

"And where was Verity?"

"Getting into another cab. She joined right up with the caravan, so I did the same. When I looked behind, another cab was starting. It was coming along, too."

"Did any more follow?"

"They might have. Only it was a coincidence, maybe. After all, it was show-break at the Mirror Grill and that is when a lot of people yell for cabs."

"Naturally. Go on, Regan."

"Well, the first cab and the car got out of sight somewhere, but finally, I spot another cab, the one with Verity in it, I think, and I notice it's picked up the same two cars, one of them a cab. We were all heading out of the Loop by that time, over across Michigan Boulevard. Next thing, we're in Grant Park and there's a cab hauled up beside the driveway, but the car that was chasing it has disappeared. All I could do was follow Verity's cab and it was hers all right, because I saw her get out of it. So I did the same."

"And there were other cabs behind you?"

"One that stopped somewhere. Who was in it, I don't know."

"It couldn't have been Halifax?"

"If he'd come from the Mirror Grill, yes," decided Regan. "But I've told you I didn't see him around there. Maybe he went out in that first cab. Still, he could have been at the Planetarium and waiting there. Maybe you can guess. You were over there."

Regan put the final statement bluntly. Cranston gave him a calm reply.

"I like Planetariums," stated Cranston, "or perhaps I should term them Planetaria. I had been to the Fels Planetarium in Philadelphia, the Hayden in New York. I felt that a visit to Chicago would be wasted unless I visited the Adler Planetarium. Now that I have seen all three, I feel that I have achieved something. Life should never be too mundane. It is inspiring to travel among the celestial spheres and view the heavens in their orbits."

The language brought puzzled blinks from Regan. Then the detective came back to his theme.

"There was a fight going on along the esplanade," said Regan. "A bunch of guys were in it and somebody knocked a couple of them into those pools."

"The zodiac pools?" queried Cranston, quite interested. "You wouldn't know which ones?"

"One guy got clouted into Virgo," informed Regan, referring to some notes that he pulled from his pocket, "and the other landed in Libra. Then they all beat it and I chased after them."

"Where did they go?"

"Over toward the lake. Since they couldn't have gone any further, I figured they'd ducked back into the Planetarium. So that's where I went. I got there just as the show was starting, if you want to call it a show."

"I didn't see much of it," conceded Cranston, rubbing the part of his head that still ached. "You'll have to tell me the rest, Regan."

"When the lights came on," said Regan, "they showed dawn" - he gestured toward the window, where the Chicago skyscrapers were now plainly visible in the rosy light - "and it looked just like it does now. I'm right inside the door, see, casing the whole joint. I'm looking for guys to come out, particularly a couple that need dry suits."

"Only who comes out but John Halifax with that big smile of his. How he kept his teeth grinning after watching that bum show is more than I can figure."

Then who else comes along but Verity Joyce, with that worried pan of hers. It wasn't just an expression; she was really worried. They weren't together. In fact, they didn't notice each other. Maybe, though, they were just acting like they were each there alone.

"If they'd figured on meeting up though, they couldn't have picked a better spot than that Planetarium, for more than a lot of reasons." Regan paused with a wise nod. Then: "But I'm still wondering what happened to that bunch that was fighting outside. I figure maybe some of them are hiding in among the seats. So I start looking around and I come across you. I call the professors and you know the rest."

Regan relaxed, his story finished. The room was now bathed in strong daylight. Dawn had come more slowly here than in the Planetarium, but Regan's report had unquestionably been more entertaining than the wind-up of the Planetarium lecture.

Rising, Lamont Cranston went over and turned off the table lamp. Regan's attitude became quizzical.

"All right, Mr. Cranston," suggested Regan. "It's your say. What comes next?"

"Next," replied Cranston in his most casual tone, "we go down to the breakfast room and order ham and eggs. Remind me, Regan, to tell the waitress that I like my eggs over easy."

XVIII

MURDER MUST OUT

DURING breakfast, Cranston hoped to get more information out of Regan, so he went at the proposition systematically but tactfully. Cranston's way was to speculate at first, bringing up questions indirectly. He chose a good subject for a starter: Verity Joyce.

"I remember the Joyce girl," said Cranston. "A very neat number. I mean her magic, of course. Just why did those egg tricks particularly intrigue you, Regan?"

"They didn't," replied Regan. "I just wasn't missing anything, that was all. It's the way I work, like I told Mr. Tyburn. I always see that people get their money's worth."

"Even when you offer to sell back guns?"

"Let's forget that, Mr. Cranston. You've got to admit that I wasn't passing up anything out at the Planetarium, or I wouldn't have found you lying there. Let's forget the egg tricks, too, and talk about the dame."

"You have her address?"

"No, but I wouldn't mind getting it."

"How about asking Halifax for it?"

"A good idea." Regan rubbed his chin. "I'm not exactly chummy with Halifax, though. I wish you'd ask Halifax for me."

"So you can make a date with Verity Joyce?"

"I wish I could," returned Regan, glumly. "Anything to get her away from Halifax. Don't think I'm a fellow who is always trying to snag a few extra

bucks, just because I thought it would be worth something to you, bringing you back from the Planetarium and picking up the loose gun I thought was yours. If I do favors on a cash basis, it's because I deserve a little extra. There's plenty of times I have to hand over dough for favors done to me."

Cranston was thinking ahead on that one.

"You mean you'd pay the Joyce girl to drop Halifax," said Cranston with a nod. "Naturally, you would, since you want to keep Tyburn as a customer. He won't need your services any longer if he learns that Halifax has dropped Gail and is taking up with Verity."

"That's right," admitted Regan. "It proves I'm honest. The only way Tyburn

could find out, would be through me. I'll put it through on my report if it turns out to be a fact. Everything goes on my report if it belongs there. But if I offer somebody like the Joyce dame a free trip to Bermuda and she takes it, that's my own business."

Perhaps it was. At any rate, Cranston was impressed by the way Regan balanced his own code of ethics. Switching the subject, Cranston remarked:

"Odd, the way that mob disappeared near the Planetarium. If I didn't have your word for it, Regan, I could hardly believe it ever happened."

"It happened all right."

"They couldn't very well have doubled back. Dodging you would be pretty difficult, Regan."

Regan swelled at the compliment, never guessing what was in Cranston's mind. Cranston's logic was this: As The Shadow, he, too, had pursued the four men off beyond the Planetarium. For all four to escape The Shadow would have been highly artful on their part, since he had covered most avenues of escape. The only way they could have eluded The Shadow was to cut back between him and the Planetarium itself.

In the course of events, Cranston hadn't seen Regan at all. He was taking Regan's own claim of having been on the spot, for it tallied satisfactorily.

It

was natural that Regan hadn't seen The Shadow. The question was: Why hadn't The

Shadow seen Regan?

The answer was obvious.

Regan must have been coming toward the lake by the one route that The Shadow had been forced to neglect, along which four men of murder would have had to double back. Regan couldn't possibly have missed all four, or putting it

the other way, all four couldn't have missed Regan. The fact that Regan was around to tell the tale, was proof that he hadn't been anywhere near the thugs when they finally escaped. They would have taken him as an enemy and it would have been short shrift for Regan.

Of course, Regan didn't know all that. He was simply accepting his own over-valuation as a sleuth when he decided:

"There's only one place they could have gone. They must have ducked into the lake. Two of them were wet anyway, so why should they care? And if they didn't care, why should the others? That made them all wet." Regan chuckled. "That's a good one, huh? All wet!"

"I believe you have it, Regan," asserted Cranston. "Of course, you intend to include this in your report to Tyburn."

"I put everything in my reports," bragged Regan. "I don't even miss a trick." He laughed again, but not as heartily. "I sprang that gag on Tyburn himself last night, when I was phoning him at nine thirty. I didn't miss a trick, get it? I mean the tricks that I was watching at the Magigals show. I noted them all down and all I had to do was read them off. I've still got my notes here" - Regan flipped the papers that were sticking from his coat pockets

- "and as soon as I get over to my office, I'll start typing them out."

Another voice promptly intervened. "Better get over to your office soon

then, Regan," it said. "You've got a lot to do. So have I, but I won't be needing you."

The voice belonged to Inspector Smedley, who had strolled into the Harbison breakfast room. Regan gave Rick an affable nod, gulped what was left of his coffee, mouthed a "So long" to Cranston, and was on his way.

"Little ears have big pitchers," said Rick to Cranston, "and by that I mean Regan. He'd like to work along with me, but I don't believe in the pot and

the kettle washing each other. If he heard me say that the suicide wave is really over, he'd go around taking some of the credit for it."

"He might," agreed Cranston, "considering that you were out of town last night and couldn't have been doing much to stop it."

"I wasn't away all night," returned Rick. "But I'll admit I was gone most of the evening. That place at Longwood took some looking over."

"You were out at Tyburn's estate? I thought you were only going to the Longwood police headquarters."

"That was the original idea," said Rick, snapping his fingers for a cup of

coffee. "But when I saw what Tyburn was up against, I decided he and I would have to plan things right."

"You mean the Longwood force is inadequate?"

"Totally. Their headquarters needs a new roof, their squad car is about the speed of a Model T, they're carrying guns that were left over from the Spanish War, and their badges look like give-away prizes at a firemen's carnival. That covers the Longwood police in a thumb-nose sketch."

Smiling at Rick's summary, Cranston asked:

"They don't mind your taking charge at Tyburn's place?"

"Mind?" echoed Rick. "They'd have elected me chief if I'd wanted the job. They couldn't begin to handle it." Rick took a look from the counter where they

were seated, then said, "Let's go over to that corner table. It has a tablecloth

and I can draw you a diagram.

They went to the table and Rick drew the diagram. It took up most of the tablecloth because Tyburn's estate was a big one.

"The place is just in from the lake," explained Rick. "This is a barb-wire

fence running along the front road. Here's the gate, way down here, with a house

where the three hired hands stay, except when they're out working on the grounds. Webster, the gate keeper, Morse, the gardener, Chaffin, the chauffeur."

"Mrs. Tyburn's chauffeur," nodded Cranston. "He was out there?"

"He was," replied Rick. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I saw Gail Tyburn and John Halifax wasn't with her. She left him and said maybe she'd see him later, maybe not. I thought that would be one time

when she would want her car."

"She didn't phone for it while I was there. In fact, she hasn't used the car since Tyburn brought the subject up."

"What time were you there, inspector?"

Rick calculated.

"I left at seven prompt," he stated. "Traffic was light and I made it in just about forty-five minutes driving pretty fast. Tyburn was at the police headquarters, but he took me right over to the place. Thought I ought to see the estate before it got too dark. I got a general look at the premises and met

the three hired hands. It was getting dark by then, so we went back to the Longwood headquarters."

"At what time was that?"

"Eight twenty. We got to the headquarters at exactly half past and the ride took just ten minutes. Tyburn was clocking it, so we would know how long it would take the local force to get there, in case they were ever needed. We stalled there until nine o'clock. That's when I got a line on the inadequacy, as you politely term it, of the Longwood police."

"Then you came back to the city?"

"No. Tyburn wanted me to see the mansion. We drove back to the estate. Webster had locked the gates for the night, but we rang and he showed up and let us in. We scared up Morse and Chaffin. They brought flashlights and lamps, so they could take us into the big house."

"The electricity is cut off?"

"Sure. Mrs. Tyburn is supposed to pay the bills out of her household allowance. So she disconnected the electricity, the gas, even the telephones. Downstairs, the furniture is all covered over, in the reception rooms and such.

On the second floor, some of the rooms are locked, on the top floor, all of them. No heat, no nothing. Gail Tyburn needs all her spare pennies so that Smile-face Halifax can catch money out of the air."

"You mean that's Tyburn's opinion."

"It's everybody's, except maybe yours. One swallow doesn't make a drink, Cranston, and just because you saw Gail Tyburn doing the town alone for once, doesn't mean that Halifax isn't her steady. You might catch her some time with her hair down, but that would be unusual, too. Generally, she wouldn't be seen without Halifax any more than she would without a permanent."

Cranston nodded to show that he accepted Rick's opinion. The inspector made more markings on the cloth.

Then:

"Here's the house," said Rick, "set way back. Out front is the lawn, trees set all around it. Over here is the Oriental garden, with pools and a stream that runs under bridges and then goes out of bounds to the lake. That's about all, except that Gail regards the house as hers and has all the keys. Webster keeps one to the back door, probably in case of fire. With all the shrubbery, trees and what-not, it will take good covering, that lawn picnic will, to make sure that nobody goes sneaking off somewhere to commit suicide in pleasant surroundings."

"Tyburn still thinks that may happen?"

"He thinks anything may happen and I don't blame him. Anyway, to conclude my story, we looked the place over from about nine ten until half past. Then we

heard the phone ringing from out at the gate house, where there's a phone still connected and paid for personally by Tyburn."

"That must have been Regan, phoning his routine report."

"It was. Tyburn went and talked to him. Then, having no drinks in the house, Tyburn suggested that he and I drive out to a roadhouse. I said good enough. I needed a drink after being in that clammy mausoleum that Gail Tyburn refuses to call home. We stayed at the roadhouse about an hour, then drove back

to the place and said good night to the boys. After that, I drove back to the city."

"Tyburn didn't come in with you?"

"No. He was staying on his cruiser. Skip Hagathorn was around; at the police station when I got there. He dropped back while we were going through the mansion. He was waiting to pick up Tyburn at the time we said good night."

Rick was studying Cranston, waiting for a query. When none came, Rick decided to answer what was probably in Cranston's mind.

"There's no way any of this could have a bearing on Gail Tyburn," assured Rick. "Tyburn strictly avoids any criticism of his wife in front of the servants, so that puts them in a neutral class. If she came out there, they'd

know it, so that's why she never shows up. She wouldn't want to be without Halifax and the hired hands would recognize him. They'd be too apt to talk. So if you want to know where Gail Tyburn went last night, I can tell you one place she didn't go. That place was home."

Getting up from the table, Rick suggested that they go over to headquarters and arrange for the official announcement that the suicide wave was finished. Rick made the suggestion with a slight touch of sarcasm which he probably hoped that Cranston would take back to New York, for the benefit of Commissioner Weston.

"You're welcome to stay around, of course," Rick told Cranston as they neared headquarters. "I know you wouldn't want to miss the picnic out at Longwood. They'll have everything from a May pole to dancing on the green. Only there won't be any suicides, not while I'm around. The epidemic is over, anyway."

Rick changed that opinion the moment he entered his office. There, people were busy at telephones again and communications were rattling over the teletype. Some long-faced assistants met the inspector and handed him a report that had just come in. Rick crumpled the sheet angrily, chucked it into a basket.

"It's begun again," groaned Rick to Cranston. "Another suicide, just found this morning. An antique dealer on the North Side, named Paul Corland. The madness has started all over."

"Perhaps not," observed Cranston. "You can still say that Chicago is free from suicide."

"And how?"

"By calling it murder, right from scratch. This case will probably prove the point. Murder beginning with the first of those cases that we analyzed and ending with this one, we can hope." Cranston's voice was smooth, even.

"Murder will out," declared Rick, "and in this case it is out, which puts us right back on the suicide trail. I've read the report, Cranston, but you haven't. Come along and you'll see what suicide looks like, with no room for argument."

As they left, Lamont Cranston found the remnants of his headache throbbing those words that Rick Smedley had spoken: "Murder will out." Of that, Cranston was certain and he was willing to apply it to the death of Paul Corland, sight unseen.

If murderers had gained their way last night, Lamont Cranston himself would have been a victim. His hunch was that the killers had not been idle earlier. Should that hunch be right, Lamont Cranston was on his way to another scene of murder.

XIV

CRIMES ANSWER

THEY rode up Michigan Avenue to Lake Shore Drive with Rick Smedley, in the style of the veteran police inspector, maintaining a cryptic attitude regarding Corland's death. Lamont Cranston expected this, for he had met with many officers of Smedley's type. Their way of looking smart was simply to play dumb, letting people form their own conclusions.

Not that Rick Smedley remained silent. To the contrary. He appeared interested in the passing sights, giving the impression that the only reason

Chicago had begun to tick this early in the morning was because Rick Smedley was on hand to supervise it. How Chicago managed to function on days when Rick slept late, was something the inspector didn't care to suggest.

From the flow of Michigan Avenue traffic, Rick took a careful look to see if the famous old Chicago Water Tower was still standing after its eighty years

of existence. He leaned forward to study the Palmolive Building to make sure it

still had its beacon tower. When the car reached Lake Shore Drive, Rick carefully checked the greensward of Lincoln Park on the chance that mad dogs might be running loose there and he took a good look at the lagoon in case any dead ducks were floating on it.

About the only thing that Rick didn't watch was the traffic, because that wasn't his department. Cars were charging into Chicago like the famous Light Brigade, with violations to the left of them, violations to the right of them, but Rick was watching the spaces of Lake Michigan, where speedboats were zooming along the shore.

"Those babies are the tickets," Rick told Cranston, referring to the speedboats. "Even an old plugger can do better than thirty and you can step up a real job to better than sixty. I saw a lot of them kicking around out at Longwood. They start off smooth and easy, then all of a sudden they pick up and

zoom off like a shot. I'd rather have one of those jobs than a cabin cruiser like Tyburn's. Those things can really run rings around a cruiser."

The car turned left, away from the lake, picked a diagonal street for a few blocks, made a left oblique and finally pulled up in a back alley at what looked like a delivery entrance. Alighting, Rick badged his way through a few uniformed police who were guarding the place and Cranston went with him. They came into the back of the antique shop belonging to Paul Corland. There Rick introduced Cranston to a precinct detective and the checkup began.

There wasn't much to check, however. The case was open and shut in more ways than one. The back door was open, but that was because the police had broken it down, smashing the bolt and setting off the burglar alarm. A big back

room was filled with old and beaten-down furniture that went under the misnomer

of antiques. Apparently, it was Corland's rule to pick out items from that reserve and place them in the front shop, where they looked better, because there was less junk with which to compare them.

Reached by a connecting door, which was made of steel and slid open, the front shop proved quite attractive, as it contained many pieces of fine pottery, Oriental carvings, ornate metalware, music boxes and cabinets of all sizes from huge mahogany chests down to ivory jewel cases.

The connecting door, too, had been bolted, and from the front side. The police had given it the torch, setting off another alarm. All this, however, was preferable to cracking through the front, where locked bars crisscrossed the show windows and the heavy street door was triple locked and wired with the inevitable alarm system.

There was an office in one corner, but its door wasn't locked. To lock it would have been unnecessary as the little room was windowless, merely a partitioned corner of the front shop. Corland's safe was in that office. It was

a formidable contrivance which an expert was at present trying to open.

Considering that the shop was barred and bolted both front and back, there

had to be an exit by which Corland could have left. There was such a door, in the side wall of the shop. It was steel, too, and locked from the other side. The police had worked through it, then found that they'd gone to a lot of unnecessary trouble. Beyond the steel door was a small apartment, where

Corland

had lived when in Chicago and also where he had died, last night.

The steel door connecting from apartment into shop not only was wired to the anti-burglar system; it had a time lock on the apartment side, hence Corland didn't have to carry a key to it. This was a not uncommon notion. It meant that if burglars attempted to persuade Corland to unlock his shop and let

them in, he couldn't oblige, not even at gun point. The shop just couldn't be opened until nine in the morning, even if Corland wanted and the burglary alarm

was ingeniously set to the time-lock on the all-important door.

The police could have saved themselves a lot of bashing if they'd waited until nine o'clock. Trouble was, they didn't know that Corland had an apartment

with this private way out. At least they'd accomplished one thing; they had kept

the apartment intact. As it stood, it formed something of a sealed room problem,

taken in reverse. The police might as well have cracked through a solid wall, as

come by the route that they had used.

However, there wasn't any problem. The apartment consisted of bedroom, bath and kitchenette. The bedroom could have been classed more as a living room

with a sleeping alcove, which Corland didn't use because the room had a day bed.

The windows were metal-framed, solidly locked from the inside. The door of the apartment, on the far side of the living room, was the only exit except the steel door into the shop. The door on the far side had a lock of the usual spring latch type, but it was further equipped with a chain bolt, which was in place.

Thus Corland had been safely ensconced at home the night before, with nothing to molest him other than his own worries and the lengths to which they might prod him.

Corland must have been tormented by severe mental prods. He had gone to the sleeping alcove, which had a solidly locked skylight overhead. To the metal

bar which clamped the skylight shut, the antique dealer had attached a silk cord, taken from one of a pair of drapes that masked the steel door to the shop. He had looped the other end of the cord around his neck and had hung himself. His body had been dangling there in the alcove when the police found it. Now, cut down, it was awaiting the trip to the morgue.

Inspector Smedley began checking on the circumstances leading to this rather prompt discovery of a suicide. Though Corland had hung himself the night

before, it was not yet time for his shop to open this morning. Ordinarily, that

would have been the time for people to wonder where Corland was.

Last night, Corland had closed shop at exactly eight thirty, bowing a few late customers out. He was a stickler for details always closing exactly on the

dot. Particularly so, last night, because Corland had been expecting a phone call at nine o'clock, in his apartment. It had to do with some insurance matters, as he was leaving for Mexico in the morning.

The insurance man had phoned; no answer. He'd even come around to the apartment, knocked awhile, then gone around the neighborhood to some stores and

bars that Corland patronized. The proprietors of those places had expected to see Corland, too, this being his last night in town.

Corland had been scheduled for a dawn flight on a plane leaving for

Mexico. He hadn't shown up at the airport and that was when his friends had begun to worry about him. None of these friends were very close to Corland; they were mostly persons who had come to know him through business transactions. Corland was well liked, but kept much to himself, seldom confiding in anyone.

In Corland's writing desk, in the apartment, were postcards, and on the desk a portable typewriter. It was Corland's practice to send out typed cards relating to antiques. One of his customers had received such a card in the early mail today. It described some antiques and priced them. At the finish, Corland had typed a final line:

"If I am dead when you receive this card, show it to my attorney."

Naturally, upon receiving such an ominous statement, the customer had phoned police headquarters, adding one more reason why the law should lose no time in finding out what had happened to Paul Corland.

There was an old alarm clock lying on the writing desk. Its time was set at quarter of nine, but it wasn't running. The alarm was set for four thirty, which would have awakened Corland so he could get to the airport. But neither the time nor the alarm had been wound. Obviously, Corland had seen no use in winding the clock when he had suddenly decided to take a trip that would carry him further than Mexico.

The final evidence came from neighbors whose second floor window opened just over Corland's skylight. They had heard thumping sounds outside their window at quarter of nine last night, or thereabouts. Looking out, they'd seen an outline of someone beneath the skylight, apparently trying to pound it open.

Then the person had given up the task. Obviously, it had been Corland, fixing his suicide cord. These witnesses had thought nothing more about the matter, not even being acquainted with Corland. After the police came around and began to question the neighborhood, the people next door had told their brief but significant story.

Cranston learned all this as Smedley checked the report. Then Rick opened the apartment door and they went out through a passage to the back alley. That checked, Rick started to return indoors when Cranston asked:

"How far is it to the lake, inspector?"

"About three minutes' drive," replied Smedley, "if you came straight over.

What's on your mind? Do you think Corland considered jumping in Lake Michigan or

do you figure that the noise from those speedboats drove him to suicide?"

The distant buzz of the speedboats could be heard while Rick spoke. They used the lake as a broad boulevard, day and night, those whizzing craft. So Rick had a right to feel that his query had a bit of humor in it. What made him

really laugh, though, was Cranston's answer.

"Neither," said Cranston. "I'm not thinking about suicide. I deal in terms of murder."

Rick laughed and let it go at that.

They went through the apartment into the antique shop and there Cranston began to look at some of the odd objects. Among them, he found a very old drinking horn, tipped it upside down and shook it.

"Looking for a drink?" laughed Rick. "Corland wouldn't have kept any in that. He had a few bottles up in his kitchenette."

For answer, Cranston tipped the horn again and to Rick's amazement, liquid

flowed out, filling a glass which Cranston had placed below.

"Corland's mind apparently ran to tricks, too," observed Cranston. "Like the minds of Fleer, Brett, and the others."

Rick became a trifled ruffled.

"That's an antique," he said, referring to the drinking horn. "These

other

fellows had new gadgets."

"Like this," suggested Cranston, picking up a square box made of chromium plated metal. "Very modern, I would say, but it has an ancient inscription engraved upon it."

Rick saw the inscription, but couldn't read it, as it was engraved in queer characters. Leaning toward the box, Cranston spoke two words:

"Open sesame."

To Rick's amazement, the lid of the box opened slowly and mysteriously. While Rick was staring to see if Cranston had pressed some secret spring, Cranston said, "Close sesame." The lid of the box went shut in the same slow, mechanical style.

"How did you do that out?" asked Rick.

"From the inscription," replied Cranston. "It's in Arabic. It says this is the box of Ali Baba and that the magic words will make it open and close."

"How did you know what the words were?"

"From reading the Arabian Nights."

"The only knights I ever read about," said Rick, "were King Arthur's.

That

box must have a gadget. See if you can find it."

Cranston found it, a little disc set in the top, with tiny holes so that a

voice would reach the disc and cause it to vibrate, thus starting a clockwork mechanism that opened and closed the top. Testing the box again, he found that a simple pronunciation of the letter "S" would operate the box both ways.

"Other words beside sesame would do," declared Cranston, "but that is the most appropriate word. I think we're on the right trail, inspector. This box reminds me of the crystal skull."

"The which?"

"I should have mentioned it before," replied Cranston, in a regretful tone. "The crystal skull was on display at the Hotel Harbison when the Magigals

came to town. When you said 'Listen, skull,' it listened. When you said 'Speak,

skull' it was probably supposed to speak, only it didn't."

"Where is the skull now?"

"Somebody bought it. Either John Halifax or Gail Tyburn, I think, but I don't think either of them has it."

"Always getting back to those two," snorted Rick. "You've been talking too

much to Regan. That's his department, so let him have it. Come into the apartment and we'll finish checking on this suicide case."

They went into the apartment. Corland's body had been removed. Ceremoniously, Rick gestured about the place and reconstructed the final scene in Corland's life.

"The door was locked with the chain bolt on," declared Rick. "Corland had come in from mailing some postcards. He may have picked up this book and started to read it."

Rick picked up a book that was lying by the day bed. It was a copy of Hamlet, with a ribbon marking a page. Rick opened at the ribbon and gave a snort.

"Shakespeare," said Rick. "A scene about some grave diggers. That may have

given Corland morbid ideas." Rick closed the book, tossed it back onto the table. "Anyway, Corland decided to hang himself. See that big chest?" Rick pointed to the object in question. "You can tell that it was in the alcove, by the lack of dust on the floor there. Corland pulled it out after he'd fixed the

rope. Do you follow?"

"I'm ahead of you," returned Cranston. "Why didn't he just leave the chest there and stand on it when he hung himself?"

"Because he couldn't kick it out from under him," explained Rick, patiently. "Look over there, under the writing table. See that little red footstool? That's what he used to stand on, it's right in line with the alcove.

In fact, it's the only thing he could have used."

The thing that Rick termed a footstool was a Chinese taboret, one of several antiques that were in the apartment. Cranston went over, picked it up. His eyes became reflective as he weighed the taboret.

"That's how Corland did it," decided Rick, "and I suppose you'll still be telling me it's murder."

"It definitely was murder," came Cranston's calm-toned verdict. "Corland did not take his own life. He was overpowered, choked, and strung up in the alcove to make his death appear a suicide. I can prove it."

Rick gave another snort. "How?"

For answer, Cranston set the red taboret in the direct center of the alcove, then gestured to Rick.

"Suppose you were Corland," suggested Cranston. "He was about your build, Rick, though probably considerably heavier. Anyway, your reach would be about the same. I'd like to see just how Corland would have reached for that cord and

tied it about his neck. Would you show me your idea of it?"

"Sure thing," returned Rick. "It must have been a cinch."

It couldn't have been a cinch for Corland. Rick Smedley found that out before he even went through the motions of preparing himself for an imaginary hanging. Rick lifted one foot, placed it on the taboret, brought his other foot

up to join it. The moment the taboret received Rick's full weight, it collapsed

in a mass of flying splinters, amid which Rick Smedley floundered to the floor - and hard.

"In order to have kicked away that taboret," said Cranston, calmly, "Paul Corland would have had to stand on it first. You've just proved that he couldn't have stood on it, Rick, and that wipes out your theory of suicide."

Before Rick could nod while picking himself up from the floor, Cranston added the positive verdict:

"Paul Corland was murdered."

XV

THE SHADOW'S PLAN

WITH murder proven, the next thing was to track it to its source and Inspector Rick Smedley was only too anxious to begin. Appreciating Rick's new mood, Lamont Cranston promptly provided leads. The first was the big chest that stood near the alcove.

"You were correct regarding this chest," declared Cranston. "It must have been there in the alcove. Why not put it back there before we analyze this case further?"

Taking the suggestion, Rick started to lift the chest only to find that he couldn't budge it. The chest was made of teakwood and felt as heavy as iron. Cranston took the other end; together, he and Rick hoisted the chest back where it belonged.

"Two points the murderers overlooked," stated Cranston. "Not only was the taboret too frail to support Corland's weight, the chest was too heavy for him to move alone."

"Right enough," agreed Rick. "But how do you explain this?"

From his pocket, Rick took the postcard that one of Corland's customers had received that morning, with the final statement that in the event of his death, the card should be shown to his lawyer as proof of an intended sale of antiques.

"Take a close look," said Rick, handing the card to Cranston, "and you will see that all the typing was done on the same machine. That's it, right over there." Rick pointed to the typewriter on the writing desk. "I know, because I've already compared the type."

Cranston gave the card a close scrutiny. Then:

"Check the last sentence," he said. "You'll see that the line is slightly off register and slanted a trifle, too. Microscopic examination will make it evident that it was added later. The killers must have found this card already typed and signed. There was enough space to add a death statement above Corland's signature."

Studying the card, Rick decided that Cranston was right.

"A smart job," conceded Rick, "but not smart enough. This is evidence we can use against the murderers when we find them. You've proved, too, that there

must be more than one killer, because it took at least two men to move that chest. One of them must have banged the skylight purposely to attract attention

and make the people next door think it was Corland. But why?"

"That's easily answered," informed Cranston. "They wanted to establish the

time of Corland's supposedly suicide. They even set the old alarm clock at quarter of nine." Picking up the clock, Cranston wound it a few turns, then shook it without result. "Do you know, Rick, this clock is practically an antique itself. They must have found it in the closet. It probably hasn't run for years. It certainly won't run now."

Rick rubbed his chin, puzzled.

"I've heard of faking the time of someone's death," Rick said, "but this is the other way about. Suicide or murder, the time was all the same. Corland must have been bumped about a quarter of nine, just as we originally figured. If the killers were here at that time, why should they be advertising it?"

"Probably to support an alibi," said Cranston.

"But if they were here," argued Rick, "how could they have an alibi?"

Judging by Cranston's distant gaze, he might have answered that question, but he didn't. Actually, Cranston was comparing the strong-arm murder of Paul Corland with another attempt that had failed. He was thinking of the death attack on himself, which had been a running affair starting at the Mirror Grill

and ending near the Adler Planetarium.

Chung Loo started his act at the Mirror Grill shortly before ten o'clock, ending about ten minutes after the hour. The chase, with its rapid culmination on the esplanade, had occupied some twenty minutes, bringing the time to half past ten. That, like the time of Corland's murder, would need to be an alibi period, where the killers were concerned.

"Skip the alibi," suggested Rick, getting no reply from Cranston. "How did the murderers get out of here? That's more important. In fact, the whole case hinges on it."

Methodically, Cranston went to the door of the apartment, opened it and stepped outside. Closing the door to a slight crack, he slid his fingers through and tried to manipulate the chain bolt. It didn't work, because Cranston's fingers pressed the crack too wide. Cranston withdrew his fingers, when they returned, they held a long nail-file. Manipulating the file deftly

with his fingertips, Cranston engaged a link of the chain, raised the bolt and neatly flipped it so that it caught in the socket.

Through the slight crack, Cranston told Smedley:

"It would be much easier, Rick, with one of those flexible metal rulers.

A

little practice and anyone could do it."

Rick unbolted the door and came out.

"Let's get back to headquarters," said Rick. "I'm going to try and tie this case in with those other murders. I called them suicides once, but I've changed my mind about it now. Only we'll let it ride along as a suicide wave for the present."

At headquarters, Rick had amassed a great deal of data regarding the earlier victims, all based on reports from their respective home towns. Following the clues that Cranston had gained, Rick had learned one thing at least; there were people who recalled that each of the victims had occasionally

done a few remarkable impromptu tricks. They had claimed, too, that they had learned their magic from a master at the art.

"If we're getting some place," declared Rick, "I'd say it was no place. Unless" - he eyed Cranston hopefully - "unless you can tell me who this master could be."

"I've heard tell of a Professor Marsh," returned Cranston. "Sedley Marsh was the full name. According to rumor, he may be dead. If he is, he could have left his remaining secrets to his pupils."

Rick wrote down the name Sedley Marsh.

"But I still think you have two better leads," continued Cranston. "The tugboat and the painters. If you can find some similar lead connected with the earlier murders, go after it."

"I will," promised Rick, "but this thing kind of gets me. If Marsh died here in Chicago, this is where the bunch would come to collect whatever he promised them. Maybe they thought it was first come, first served. Instead, it looks like he who laughs last, laughs longest."

Leaving headquarters, Cranston went back to his hotel and contacted Burbank. There were still no details on Professor Marsh. Apparently, he had kept the secret of his death as completely as those which he had sold to his pupils while he was alive. And therein, Cranston saw an answer.

In all the reports that Smedley had received, there was nothing to show in

the way of correspondence between the victims and their unnamed tutor. That stood as proof that Marsh must either have given all his instructions verbally,

or that anything he had ever written had been destroyed, probably by agreement.

It followed, therefore, that Marsh had either managed to call his pupils individually before he died; or failing that, had seen to it that letters reached them telling them to come to Chicago. They would logically have destroyed such letters if that had been the understanding, or such instructions

came in letters themselves. Their method of identification, Cranston was already

sure, was through the tricks they performed. They would have had no suspicion that murder awaited them in Chicago.

Yet there must be more to it, some formality or system, whereby Marsh's pupils were to get together. That answer could lie only in the crystal skull and it might be known now to the person who had acquired that trophy. In all likelihood, that person was Verity Joyce.

Another point impressed Cranston. The murder of Paul Corland, though Cranston had cracked it, was every bit as ingenious as any of the others, perhaps more so. It was one case wherein suicide had been faked to the absolute

limit. This wasn't because it was the latest in the list. With the police classing all the murders as suicides, the killers could have afforded to become careless. Yet the plans, in Corland's death, had been very thorough.

There was only one answer. Corland must have been suspicious. He had better opportunity to gain suspicion, since he was living in Chicago while the other victims were from out of town. The proof of the theory lay in the fact that Corland had planned to leave Chicago. He alone was willing to pass up the legacy from Professor Marsh, unquestionably because he valued his life more.

Behind murder lay a sharp, keen mind, the mind of a man who knew that Corland might have left some clue. That was why the murder crew had been told to set the suicide stage with meticulous detail. Their mistake was that they had overdone it.

Where had that crew been in the time between Corland's death and the thrust at Cranston?

The mental question brought a whispered laugh from the lips of the man most concerned, Cranston himself. It was an echo of a laugh belonging to The Shadow, that mysterious investigator who was supposed to know all, and would, before long. From approximately quarter of nine until nearly quarter past ten, an hour and a half, killers had been off duty. That time element was important, too.

Yet the immediate lead was still Verity Joyce, provided she could again be found. That might be rather easy, around cocktail time this afternoon. Meanwhile, Lamont Cranston saw no reason to be idle. Picking up the telephone, he called Regan's office and received a prompt answer.

Regan was glad to hear from Cranston. He wanted to know what had happened with Rick Smedley.

"Routine stuff," said Cranston. "Just another crack-brained suicide. Speaking of routine, I suppose you're geared to it as usual. What's the latest on John Halifax and Gail Tyburn?"

"All lovey-dovey," replied Regan. "They're lunching together at a new place on State Street called the Anchorage."

"How did you find that out?" Cranston questioned. "Did you capture one of Halifax's carrier pigeons in flight?"

"Simpler than that," returned Regan. "Old Tyburn cut off all Gail's credit. The only place she could get it on her own would have to be a new one. So I called the Anchorage to learn if she had a luncheon reservation. They said yes."

"Better check on them," said Cranston, "and keep watch for any peculiar characters with your other eye."

It was one o'clock when Gail and Halifax met at the Anchorage. The only person resembling a suspicious character was an old gentleman named Isaac Twambley, who sat at an adjacent table. He was a withery sort and very hard of hearing, because when a waiter told him he was wanted on the telephone, the news had to be practically shouted into old Twambley's ear.

Regan, seated around beyond a pillar, wished that he could have taken Twambley's vantage spot but Regan couldn't afford to be seen by Gail and Halifax. When Twambley came back to his table, the loving couple gave him a brief glance and continued with a low-toned conversation.

"Don't worry about that venerable character," said Halifax, referring to Twambley. "He's as deaf as the post that Regan is hiding behind."

"That stupid Regan!" exclaimed Gail. "How long will Lester keep up this silly business of having me watched by a common private detective."

"As long as I'm in town, I suppose," returned Halifax. "Perhaps we'd better not be seen together so often."

"You've said that before," pouted Gail, "and I don't like it. Not while all those Magigals are in town."

"Their convention ended today, Gail, and that makes it more difficult. Being a magician, I had a reason to be around Chicago while the convention was in session."

"That stupid convention!"

"That's just where you're mistaken, sweet. You should have played along with it. If you pretended to be interested in watching magicians work, you could see me whenever you want."

Gail's dreamy face brightened as if she had gained a wonderful idea.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "How silly I was not to stay at the Mirror Grill yesterday."

"I couldn't tell you then, beautiful," continued Halifax, "because there were too many people around. But why don't you go back there today? Ask to see Chung Loo. Tell him you know me and that he's as wonderful as I am."

"But he isn't!"

"I mean as a magician. Actually, he does some very neat tricks. I wonder where he got them."

"I really wouldn't know."

"I know you wouldn't, but you might find out. Why don't you engage Chung Loo for that lawn party tomorrow night?"

"But I thought -"

"You thought that I intended to appear there," interposed Halifax, with a smile, "but you know, dear, that I can't. It would be too obvious."

"But Chung Loo is working at the Mirror Grill."

"He's only filling in for two days. He'll be free tomorrow. Get him out to Longwood and give Regan something to worry about. He'll come there expecting to see me."

Gail laughed at that and so did Halifax. With another bright look, Gail added:

"It will worry Lester, too. That's the part I like. He will be looking everywhere else for you. Maybe, though, you could be there."

Slowly, Halifax was shaking his head.

"But if you aren't there," Gail persisted, "I can't give you the -"

Gail caught herself as Halifax put his fingers to his lips. He must have guessed what she was going to say, because he started the gesture from the moment Gail began to speak.

They had finished lunch and now Halifax was glancing at his watch. Mentioning something about an appointment, he suggested that they leave. As they neared the door, Halifax looked for Regan, saw the detective easing out of

sight. Halifax gave a nod which meant for Gail to go ahead. She did and Regan tagged along, in what he thought was an unnoticed style.

Giving Regan a head-start, Halifax went out to the street and there found a convenient store window that attracted his attention. Keeping a watch on the door of the Anchorage, Halifax saw old Twambley come out, hobbling on a cane. As the old man turned in the other direction, Halifax gave a short laugh.

There was a good reason why Halifax had cut Gail's statement short, back in the restaurant. He was quite sure that the old man was a plant, probably some stooge of Regan's. If so, what he had heard didn't matter. It wasn't anything that Regan didn't know or couldn't have figured out.

Halifax was half right.

Old Twambley had heard everything, but he wasn't working for Regan. As he hobbled around the corner, Twambley delivered a slight laugh of his own. It was identical with the whispered laugh that Cranston sometimes gave, an echo of The Shadow's.

What little The Shadow had learned was helpful, more perhaps than John Halifax supposed. It meant, for one thing, that The Shadow's task would be

easier around cocktail time at the Mirror Grill. Until then, The Shadow expected no further developments.

A development came, however, when The Shadow, again guised as Cranston, was about to leave his room at the Harbison, later that afternoon. Answering a phone call, he found Rick Smedley on the wire.

"Something that may interest you, Cranston," the inspector said. "I've been going over Corland's mailing list. I found a name on it that may mean something."

"Mine, I suppose," returned Cranston. "I buy antiques and I suppose that nearly every dealer has me listed. They have a way of finding out each other's customers, you know."

"No, not your name," laughed Rick. "Gail Tyburn's. She had an account there and she's on a list that looks like active customers. Maybe it was Corland who sold her that crystal skull. I've called the perfume shop that displayed it and they're mystified themselves about where it came from and what happened to it."

"You're going to question Gail Tyburn?"

"Not until after the party tomorrow night. I'll see you then, Cranston."

That was all, but it was enough. Better news than Cranston had expected from Inspector Smedley, especially the part that Rick was postponing the matter

of the crystal skull. The Shadow already had a plan that might involve the crystal skull.

The Shadow's plan was set for this very afternoon.

XVI

SECRET OF THE SKULL

CHUNG LOO, the Chinese wizard, not only could speak English, he could read

it. He preferred Chinese newspapers, but there was also a copy of a Chicago journal lying on his dressing table. Verity Joyce noticed this when she stopped

in the dressing room to tell Chung Loo that she was ready. Glancing at the newspaper, she was somewhat horrified to learn that the suicide wave had begun again, the newest victim a man named Paul Corland.

Hearing a footstep, Verity turned to see Chung Loo. For a moment the girl was horrified by the demoniac expression on his face, then, as a bland smile spread upon his lips, the girl decided it was all a matter of make-up. He had to play the devil-man, Chung Loo, to do a proper show. His smile itself was intriguing, involving his lips only, never bringing even a wrinkle to the remainder of his face.

Chung Loo's smile must have signified approval, for he was studying Verity's own make-up. Wearing a Chinese costume, the girl looked the complete part. She had fixed her face with saffron greasepaint, sharpened her eyebrows with a jet-black pencil. Her lips were perfect in their ruddy contrast, while her hair now formed a tight topknot under her tiny hat.

"Very good," approved Chung Loo. "How long did it take?"

"Nearly an hour," replied Verity.

"Too long." Chung Loo came over to the dressing table, picked up the Chicago newspaper and looked for something underneath it. "You must cut it to half an hour at most. That is about the usual time. Of course, for myself" - Chung Loo smiled again as he dropped the newspaper in a wastebasket - "I take only a few minutes. Being Chinese, I am practically playing a straight part."

A bell was ringing the five-minute call, so they went on stage. Verity noticed that Chung Loo kept watching her nervously. He couldn't be blamed, perhaps, considering that she was a new assistant, but Verity felt it should

be
the other way about. At least, that was the impression she tried to give Chung Loo.

This was the cocktail show, but the audience was a large one. It started in its usual strident style and as the act progressed, Verity found no trouble in keeping pace with Chung Loo. But that wasn't all to Verity's credit. Chung Loo, it seemed, was slower than usual, fumbling at times. When the lights came on after the firefly illusion, Verity was happy that it was over.

A waiter had come back with a message for Chung Loo, stating that a Mrs. Tyburn would like to speak with him. Verity heard the name, tightened her lips, and went into her dressing room. It was Verity now who was nervous with haste as she changed from her Chinese clothes and hurriedly took off the make-up that had taken so long to put on.

Then, finding her way out from back stage, Verity left the Mirror Grill wearing strictly American clothes and trying to look like anybody but Chung Loo's assistant. Spotting the lights of a cab, Verity hailed it, gave the driver an address and was on her way.

The cab threaded a course to the West Side and there Verity alighted at a presentable rooming house. Indoors, she went up to a second floor room and shouted until a sleepy-looking man appeared. Verity gestured to some large suitcases that were already packed, took a dollar bill from her purse and said:

"I'm leaving, George. I've already paid Mrs. Blake. She probably told you. I'll send my forwarding address later."

George nodded, picked up the bags. "There's a box in the closet," added Verity. "I want to leave it here. Mrs. Blake said I could put it in Locker D."

"It's there already," informed George. "I took it down an hour ago. I'll give you the key unless you want Mrs. Blake to mail it. Shall I get you a cab, Miss Joyce?"

Verity nodded and followed George downstairs. It was then that darkness stirred in the second floor hall, a shadowy blackness that had followed Verity upstairs. In fact, that shape, for such it was, had come by cab all the way from the Mirror Grill. Now, however, the trail was to be broken.

As Verity went out through the front door, the shape that had followed her turned at the bottom of the stairs and moved back along the ground floor hall. Now visible, had anyone been present to observe it, the figure was that of a being cloaked in black, who moved with silent tread. Having tracked Verity to her lodging, hearing mention of a box that might contain the crystal skull, The Shadow intended to inspect the trophy that somehow was looming larger than ever before in affairs of murder.

In the cellar, The Shadow found Locker D in a remote corner. The padlock gave him practically no trouble and he opened a slat door into the locker, which consisted of two stone walls and an adjoining partition to Locker C. There were some old trunks against the wall; on one of them stood a large square wooden box, bearing the name of Verity Joyce.

Pulling the cord of an overhead light, The Shadow no longer needed his flashlight while he pried open the box and discovered the crystal skull, platform and all. Setting the thing up on its box, The Shadow went to the slat door and listened. From outside, he heard the faint rumble of a departing taxicab. Therewith, The Shadow concentrated entirely upon the skull.

It was a fascinating contrivance, this crystal skull with the glittering rhinestone eyes that shone like mammoth diamonds. The Shadow studied it from all angles, looking down through the transparent base that had the

crisscrossed

circular lines as its only decorations. Then, under the glare of the large overhead bulb, The Shadow began to test the skull.

When The Shadow passed his black-gloved hand before the skull's eyes, the transparent head turned from right to left. When he asked it questions, the skull nodded or shook its head. Sometimes it clicked its jaws as if counting numbers. In all, the demonstration was most effective, yet not exactly amazing.

Those rhinestone eyes unquestionably concealed the mechanism, which was the equivalent of a photo-electric cell. Perhaps the skull's inventor - in all probability Professor Marsh - had planned to develop the skull into something that would exhibit more intelligence. But when The Shadow thought in terms of the Ali Baba box that he had tested back at Corland's, he decided that even now

the skull might show something more remarkable than it had so far.

Remembering how Verity had addressed the skull, The Shadow tried the same system. In sibilant tone, he said:

"Listen, skull."

The skull nodded. "Speak, skull," continued The Shadow. "Tell me all you know. Repeat whatever you have heard."

The skull wagged its head.

That was the part that had balked Verity. Apparently, the girl was following a system that only partly worked. This was the thing that The Shadow had come to test and until today, he could not have tried the idea that was in his mind. Again, The Shadow was thinking in terms of Corland's and a book that Smedley had picked up from the table beside Corland's day bed.

That book was a copy of Hamlet; it was marked at the grave-digger's scene.

That scene involved a skull and the skull had a name. The Shadow spoke that name

now, as he addressed the crystal skull.

"Speak, Yorick."

The jaws of the skull opened and a voice spoke. It stated:

"Listen, skull. Listen and remember. My name is Jerome Alton, from Dubuque. I shall be at the opera house this evening, wearing a light-gray coat and carrying a gold-headed cane. If I do not hear from you, I shall speak to you again tomorrow -"

A pause. A different voice came from the skull:

"Listen, skull, and remember. I am Lloyd Stelton from Zanesville. I am stopping at the Lakeview Hotel, and can be reached there at any hour -"

"Listen, skull," a third voice said. "Remember what I say. I am Ward Bronson. I come from Tampa. You will find me at the Hawthorne Club, where I have a guest card -"

Next came two more voices, giving names that to The Shadow seemed singularly familiar, though he had never heard them. They were those of William

Brett and Edward Fleer. Another pause, then a voice announced:

"Listen, skull. I am Paul Corland. I live here in Chicago and you will find me listed in the phone book -" A pause followed, then came Corland's voice

anew, speaking in low but sharp command: "Speak, Yorick! Tell me all that you have heard!"

It fitted perfectly. Corland not only knew how to record a statement to the listening skull; he had used the key-name "Yorick" to obtain an answer in the form of everything that the others had said. To add a final check, The Shadow listened closely while the skull continued. From the opened jaws came the voice of Verity Joyce, low, serious, stating her name after the opening words of "Listen, skull!" Then came the words with which Verity had failed to make the skull talk.

"Speak, skull, tell me all you know -"

Verity's voice kept on, but The Shadow wasn't listening to it. Another sound had attracted his attention, a noise behind him. It was the slight scraping of the slat door, the sudden click of the padlock. Wheeling about, The

Shadow whipped an automatic from beneath his cloak as he swung clear of the skull with the moving jaws that was completing Verity's statement.

A revolver blazed two shots, straight for the spot where The Shadow had been. Instead of The Shadow, the bullets found the crystal skull, cracked it and broke it loose from the platform which supported it. Then the gun muzzle was gone, to find other slats through which to poke, that its owner might aim again at The Shadow.

And for once, The Shadow was at the huge disadvantage which he usually thrust upon his foemen. Here in the locker, the light was bright, fully revealing The Shadow, despite his black garb. But the man in the cellar, with darkness as his background, was invisible beyond the slat door!

All that could betray The Shadow's opponent was his gun muzzle, but he no longer intended to shove it into view. As The Shadow made a sudden skid across the locker, his arm sweeping against the flat, thick platform that had supported the skull, the murderous revolver stabbed between a pair of slats, just too late to clip the cloaked fighter.

The Shadow was literally trapped. His dodging tactics could only prolong the impossible battle. His enemy had all the cellar to rove, giving him opportunity even to reload, clear of The Shadow's range. Realizing this, The Shadow took a different course, but a mad one.

With a whirl, The Shadow flung himself hard against the slat door on the chance that he could crash it with a single jolt. The barrier gave a few inches, that was all. The man beyond it gave no mercy. As the black form of The

Shadow blocked the light, the hidden marksman fired three shots point-blank between the slats, choosing The Shadow's heart as the target.

Jolted backward with the first shot, The Shadow flung one arm upward. As the second bullet jarred him further, his hand swung its automatic at the hanging light. With the third burst from the merciless revolver, the light crashed. In the blackness, there was a tumbling, thudding sound, The Shadow's sprawl.

Then silence.

Half a minute ticked by.

Then came a grating laugh. The man of murder had reloaded. But he didn't use a flashlight; he wasn't taking chances that The Shadow, dying, might still manage to return a shot. Instead, this canny enemy raked the floor with six bullets, firing each from between a different pair of slats, confident that one or more of the slugs would be added to the quota that The Shadow had already accepted.

Silence, then departing footsteps. The closing of an outer door. Silence again.

A whispered laugh stirred the blackness of what should have been a dead man's cell. A tiny flashlight gleamed as The Shadow warily climbed from in back

of a trunk that was a few feet from the wall. Reaching the slat door, he shoved

an automatic through and whacked the padlock, breaking it. His avenue of escape

was open, should the frustrated murderer return.

This would have amazed the man who had fired those point-blank bullets. The Shadow hadn't been behind the trunk when the first three shots were fired. He could have toppled there purposely, after knocking out the light, thus nullifying the bullets that were delivered later. But it was incredible that he

should have survived the flaying he had taken from the triple blast.

There was an explanation, however, and The Shadow's probing flashlight uncovered it.

On the floor lay the foot-square block of transparent plastic forming the platform that had supported the crystal skull. It was cracked now, but its four-inch thickness had served The Shadow well. In his twist toward the slatted

door, The Shadow had scooped up the square slab as a shield. Unseen against the

slats, that square of tough material had taken the bullets intended for The Shadow's heart.

The impact of the slugs had jolted The Shadow and so had the back dive with which he had cleared the trunk after his swinging gun had smashed the hanging light. But the bullets themselves had never reached him and in addition they had solved a most interesting problem.

Cracked by the shots, the plastic square showed itself to be of three-ply construction. Its edge had been broken, showing the interior. From between two square layers, The Shadow pulled out the core of the plastic platform, in the shape of a round disk. That disk was scored with circular lines, hidden by the ornamental tracings on the platform top.

The disk was a transparent phonograph record. Above it, a thin, flat arm held a tiny needle. The whole thing connected with a transparent mechanism, also of some special plastic, that had operated down through the neck of the crystal skull. This was indeed, a remarkable invention, an invisible recording device, with automatic playback, housed in a transparent container!

Both delicate and intricate, the machine could be geared to operate by the vibratory tones of different words. The little box at Corland's had worked both

ways from the sibilance of the word "Sesame," but this device was twofold. "Listen, skull!" was the combination that made the thing record.

"Speak, Yorick!" put the play-back into operation.

The transparent disk, preserved between the cracked layers of steel-tough plastic, would serve The Shadow as future evidence against the murderers whose victims could still speak for themselves. But The Shadow did not have to play it now, to recall the salient differences of the various speakers.

All the victims had been content with asking the skull to listen - with one exception. Paul Corland had added:

"Speak, Yorick!" to learn if the skull would answer, which it had. Verity Joyce had talked to the skull and tried to make it answer, but without result, as "Speak, skull" had not been the key.

Apparently, no one else had even tried to make the skull talk. That problem still bothered The Shadow as he tucked the disk beneath his cloak and padlocked the slat door of the locker where a murderer believed that a cloaked victim was lying dead. The shots had not been heard in the remote corner of this house, for all was as calm as ever when The Shadow reached the street.

Finding a corner cab with a sleepy driver, The Shadow stepped into it and gave a downtown address in Cranston's voice. During the trip, The Shadow switched to his guise of Cranston. His destination proved to be a music shop. His portfolio under his arm, he entered, asked to hear some of the latest records, and was ushered into a soundproof room where he was given a supply.

The first record that Cranston played was the plastic disk from the platform of the crystal skull. It came much more clearly than from the jaws of the skull. So clearly that Cranston could hear an interpolation that had not been audible when he played the record before.

Between the statements of each speaker, The Shadow heard a low, ominous whisper giving the key-words:

"Speak, Yorick!" None followed the speech of Verity Joyce, however. She had been the last person either to confide in the skull or to question it.

Low, forced in tone, the tell-tale whisper proved only that someone

acquainted with the riddle of the skull had made the most of it to learn the name of each successive victim and where that person could be reached. Who that person was, still remained the pressing problem. To find him, would be to find a murderer.

Tonight, that murderer had found The Shadow. Of that there was no question. It would be The Shadow's business to make sure that the next meeting was the other way around.

XVII

DISASTER AHEAD

THAT night, Lamont Cranston vanished from Chicago. It was not until noon the next day that he reappeared; then, the place where he arrived was Smedley's

office. The brawny, bluff-faced inspector was glad to see Cranston, but at the same time registered indignation because his visitor hadn't shown up earlier.

"I've been calling the Harbison all morning," stormed Rick. "They said you hadn't checked out, but they didn't know where you were. I was thinking you'd gone back to New York, right when this case was getting hot!"

Lamont Cranston smiled, but slightly. Rick Smedley didn't know how hot it really had got. However, for the present, Cranston preferred to be a listener.

"There's a tinge of suspicion in every one of those cases we called suicide," declared Rick. "But I can't lay a finger on any of them. One man hired an automobile and got struck on the Milwaukee tracks; another went to a bar, where he'd never been before; a third for some reason went out in a speedboat and cracked up."

As Rick paused, Cranston shrugged. "Wrecking a speedboat wouldn't be too difficult," he said. "I was trying one out last night. They're tricky."

"With John Halifax?" queried Rick, with a bluff stare.

"No," replied Cranston. "Why did you ask?"

"I'll come to that later," returned Rick. "So you took a speedboat trip last night."

"Yes, up to Milwaukee," said Cranston. "Like you said, you have the whole lake for a boulevard. But when they're doing sixty, they're sensitive to every little ripple. There's not many you can let go that fast, even if they can do it."

"At night," agreed Rick, "it would be tougher."

"No, the moonlight was perfect," argued Cranston, "and the lake was very calm. I clocked it to Longwood, for a sample. Twenty minutes flat."

"But Longwood is more than twenty miles -"

"By road, yes, but under twenty by the lake route. I stopped in Longwood, by the way, to see how well that police force functioned."

"How well did they?"

"Not at all. There wasn't even an officer in headquarters. They must have all gone out to eat. They ought to turn the police duty over to those men who work on Tyburn's estate. They really patrol those grounds."

Rick gave a wise smile.

"That's what I ordered them to do," he said. "I want them to be in practice for tonight. You didn't stop and ask for Tyburn, did you?"

"No."

"You wouldn't have found him. He was out in his cruiser. He needed to get away from some new worries. You'll find out what they are, when we go over to his apartment. Now, let's get back to those murders. We've located the tugboat.

She was the Bluebird, ready to be junked. She was moved to another berth, but

who did it, we don't know. You're right about the painters, too. We found extra sets of suits, stuffed in a furnace. Somebody had tried to burn them in a hurry, but it didn't work.

"All this proves something, though" - Rick was thrumming the desk with his knuckles as he spoke. "It proves that whoever is mastering these murders has a small mob, practically on call. By the way" - Rick's eyes narrowed - "what time did you come back down the lake?"

"At about dawn."

"It must have been nice," observed Rick. "Seeing the Chicago skyline brighten is a very pretty sight. Even in the Planetarium, if you're awake to watch it."

Cranston gave a mild look of surprise.

"I found out that you were there," continued Rick. "What happened?"

"Somebody sledged me with this," replied Cranston, tossing the dummy cigarette gun on the desk. "As to who it was, your guess is as good as mine, perhaps better."

"Why were you over at the Planetarium?"

"Because it was the one public place you had forgotten," replied Cranston.

"I thought it might be a good spot for a murder, so I thought I'd have a look at it before suggesting that you keep it covered."

"It's covered now," said Rick, "but it should have been before. We might have spotted a car that was abandoned in Grant Park. We found it there, yesterday. It had been stolen from a used car lot and who do you suppose had been looking for it, wanting maybe to buy it?"

"That's easy. John Halifax. He's noted for wanting to buy anything," replied Cranston. "Cars, airplanes, trucks. Once he even wanted to buy a combination Pullman and baggage car to travel his show."

"You're right about the trucks," agreed Rick. "There was a job with a trailer that was wrecked just before things happened over in Grant Park. Halifax had been pricing that, too. It was taken from a garage where he had gone to see it."

"Halifax might be interested in speedboats too," suggested Cranston, "but I don't think he'd go for antiques."

"We've already checked the speedboats," said Rick, "and you're right. That

was what I intended to tell you. But antiques aren't in Halifax's department. Gail Tyburn goes for those."

"Would either be interested in phonograph records?"

"I haven't checked. Why do you ask?"

"I thought," said Cranston, "that you might listen to this one."

From his portfolio, Cranston produced the transparent record. Much intrigued, Smedley decided to play it immediately on an office machine. When the record began its listing of murder victims in their own voices, with the whispered words "Speak, Yorick!" coming after each, Rick was very much agog.

"Where did you pick up this thing, Cranston?"

"I was looking for a girl named Verity Joyce," stated Cranston. "Today, I found that she'd checked out of her boardinghouse. She'd left a box in a cellar

locker, so I found a chance to go down there. Somebody had been doing target practice at the box, through the slats of the locker door. The crystal skull was in the box and it was knocked all apart and so was the platform on which the skull stood. This disk had slid out of the platform and I could just reach it through the slats. So I brought it along."

"That whisper," muttered Rick. "It might be anybody's, even a woman's."

Where did the girl live? I'll send a squad car there, right away."

"I wouldn't," said Cranston. "I'd have the place watched, but at a reasonable distance. If anybody comes to pick up what's left of the skull, that

would be the time to pick them up with it."

Rick nodded that Cranston was right.

"Nor would I mention it to anyone," added Cranston, "until after tonight. Something may be brewing out at Longwood."

"You're right," agreed Rick. "There's a magician billed to do a show there and Gail Tyburn won't look at anybody but the Great Halifax. It's her party, so

draw your own conclusions. I'm counting on you to be there, because you're marked as somebody who knows those Marsh tricks. Maybe that's why you were slugged at the Planetarium, so you'd better watch yourself out at Longwood. About this Verity Joyce" - Rick rubbed his chin - "does she do any of that Marsh magic?"

"I would say yes," replied Cranston, "after watching her at the Magical show."

"No wonder she ducked out," decided Rick, "but there's still another angle. Somebody could be doing those tricks as a come-on to the suckers. By suckers, I mean victims, or potential victims, who didn't register their names on this record you found. That leaves a big question mark around Verity Joyce or anybody else that's strutting that Marsh stuff. Come on, let's go to Tyburn's."

Cranston could have added a few facts if Smedley had paved the way, but he

was just as glad not to. Rick had analyzed matters rather well, regarding the murder crew; but Cranston, as The Shadow, had carried the situation further. Last night, he'd drawn fire from the master's hand, in person. The reason was that the crew hadn't been needed, just to pick up a box that Verity Joyce was leaving in a cellar. By being first on the scene, The Shadow had forced a murder attempt from someone who had until then left such work to others.

The intruder in the cellar could have been almost anyone, even Verity herself, if she'd decided to double back on the chance of trapping someone who sought the crystal skull. The main point, however, was that the master hand in this game was quite ready to do murder personally when helpers were not available.

AT the Armistead Arms, Cranston and Smedley saw Regan snooping around outside. The reason was explained when they reached Tyburn's apartment. Gail Tyburn was visiting her husband and they had evidently reached a heated state of argument when the visitors arrived.

"So you're Inspector Smedley," stormed Gail. "Very kind of you to come out this evening and see that no one gets murdered during my lawn party."

"Suicide is the word, Mrs. Tyburn," returned Rick. "We just don't want the wave to spread."

"That's what Lester tells me," said Gail. "So call it suicide if you wish.

But since the estate will be under complete protection, perhaps you can convince Lester that he should let me wear some of my jewels, particularly my diamond necklace."

"You have an excellent replica," interrupted Tyburn. "Why not wear it, Gail, as you always do?"

"Because there are people who would know the difference," retorted Gail. "This is my party and the necklace is still mine or is it?"

"Until we settle our personal affairs, it is yours," decided Tyburn. "Still, that is no reason why something worth fifty thousand dollars should be put in jeopardy."

"If you don't trust Inspector Smedley to protect a necklace," argued Gail,

"how much good can he be at preventing murder or suicide?"

Tyburn couldn't answer that one.

"Very well," he said, "I shall bring along the diamond necklace. You may wear it, under my protest."

Gail smiled sweetly as though her whole married life had been a career of riding over Tyburn's protests. Turning to Smedley and Cranston, Gail said:

"I have my car today. Could I drop you gentlemen anywhere?"

"Yes," replied Cranston promptly. "You can take us over to Navy Pier. We want to try out a speedboat John Halifax once planned to buy."

It was a neat thrust, for it made Gail ill at ease. Flustered, she tried to pretend that she'd never heard of Halifax. Tyburn promptly picked up the theme.

"I'll phone Skip Hagathorn," said Tyburn, "and have him meet you there.

He

might give you an opinion on the boat. Afterward, we can go to Longwood in my cruiser."

"Or my car," put in Gail. "I prefer Chaffin as a chauffeur to Hagathorn as

a skipper."

"Anything for an argument," said Tyburn, wearily. "Good-bye, Gail. I'll see you later."

Cranston and Smedley went out with Gail and stepped into her luxurious car, which was piloted by Chaffin, a sleek, polite chap. This amazed Regan who stood dumfounded as the limousine drove away; then decided to go into the Armistead Arms and deliver a package of reports and exhibits to Lester Tyburn.

When the big car reached Navy Pier, Skip Hagathorn was there. So was the speedboat, with the man who had brought it from its mooring. Skip volunteered to go along with Cranston and Smedley while they tried out the craft.

"Too bad you didn't bring Regan," Skip laughed. "We'd give him a real thrill. But don't expect too much from this plugger" - he spoke from the side of his mouth, behind his hand - "because it's too cheap a buy, or Halifax wouldn't have looked at it. That's why I said we'd test it out ourselves. I want to see if the motor has been doped."

Rick took the wheel with Cranston beside him, while Skip sat in back. As they spurted away, Skip tilted his head to catch the motor's thrum. Finally, he tapped Rick's shoulder and said:

"Open it up."

Giving the gun, Rick found that the boat responded well. Bow high, it was roaring into the forties. Above the noise, Skip shouted into Rick's ear:

"Go left around that breakwater, but watch for anything coming from the right."

Rick banked the speedboat to the left. He was swinging it at top speed, when another shout came from Skip:

"Look out!"

Even as he shouted, Skip was diving overboard, but Cranston was acting still faster. He'd been looking left, not right, and he saw the hazard too, a moored barge squarely in the speedboat's path. With a fling that matched Skip's, Cranston took Rick with him and they hit the water with the barge a full hundred feet away.

That would have been a lot of leeway in an ordinary crash, but in this case it was slightly more than scant. Instead of merely crashing, the speedboat

exploded with a terrific blast as it struck the barge and the whole center of the barge disappeared with it.

The bow of the speedboat had been filled with a high explosive,

converting
it into a veritable warhead. Anyone who had stayed with it until the last
moment
would have gone to oblivion along with the vanished craft!

XVIII

CHINESE MAGIC

THAT narrow squeak from absolute disaster was a more than gentle reminder to Lamont Cranston that Chicago wasn't a very safe place for him to show himself. After he had hauled Inspector Smedley ashore with a sidearm rescue stroke, Cranston went to find some dry clothes and promptly did another disappearance, leaving Rick to handle the tag ends.

Cranston reappeared in time to ride out to Longwood with Smedley in Gail Tyburn's car. Chaffin proved to be an excellent chauffeur, while Gail made chatty company. It was dusk when they rode through the big gates of Tyburn's estate, where two rugged men, Webster, the gatekeeper, and Morse, the gardener, were posted like two big watch-dogs, checking on all comers.

"That trip was safe enough," avowed Rick, when he and Cranston had alighted to stroll the great lawn. "I figured it would be. Halifax wouldn't have planted an infernal machine in his girl friend's car."

"If Gail is still his girl friend," returned Cranston. "He's a great switcher, you know. I suppose our ride proves that Halifax still loves Gail or wants to pretend so. Or maybe Chaffin is just safer to ride with than Skip Hagathorn."

"I wouldn't say so. It was my fault that we almost hit that barge. When Skip said to go left around the breakwater, he meant go around the left end of it and look to the right, which would be natural. But we were already going toward the right end, so I turned left around it instead. What's more, I looked the wrong way. Skip explained my mistake, afterward."

Cranston was watching the guests arrive and spread about the lawn. There were tables where bottles of soda and spring water cost a dollar and a half, while ice was a dollar for a small cardboard bucket. Guests brought their own liquor, for Longwood was a dry town. There were small tents and pavilions where roulette and dice wheels were in operation and the proceeds of the games, like those of the refreshments, were all going to charity.

Among the guests, Cranston saw a considerable sprinkling of men who looked like Chicago plain-clothes men. There were others, a trifle on the sportier side, who were obviously private detectives, assisting Regan, who was all about the place. Neither Lester Tyburn nor Inspector Smedley intended to take any chances on crime rearing its ugly head.

"I've put a general flyer out for Halifax," Smedley told Cranston. "There's only one place he won't be picked up and that's here. I just want to make sure he shows, that's all. I'm not making any accusations until after I've tracked down his gang, but that won't take long. Whenever Halifax starts out with a show, he hires back a lot of his old help and those are the guys I'm looking for. I got lists of them from some theatrical agents who used to send expense money to bring them on. If any have been in Chicago lately, they will be the boys I want."

THE guests were walking in from the gate, a few hundred yards away, as

all cars except those bound on special business, had to be parked outside. A cluster of people were very interested in two new arrivals who wore Chinese costumes and were bowing as they walked along. One was Chung Loo, the other Verity Joyce, in her Chinese make-up. Either Verity didn't want to be recognized, or she thought that there would be no dressing room facilities at Longwood. However, that had all been arranged. Meeting the two foreign-looking arrivals, Gail Tyburn escorted them into the big mansion, where the ground floor rooms had been made ready for the party.

Lester Tyburn arrived with Skip Hagathorn. They had come up from Chicago in the cabin cruiser. Sending Skip to join Chaffin and help tend the gate, Tyburn suggested a stroll in the Oriental garden, which lay just past a special stage that had been erected in one corner of the lawn.

By then, dusk had settled. Caterers were beginning to serve refreshments at long tables on the lawn. Lights were glowing in many colors from wires strung among the trees, forming an effect as brilliant as the firefly illusion performed by Chung Loo. Here, however, in the garden, Chinese lanterns were the theme. They cast a mellow glow in the canal that ran beneath a quaintly curved bridge near a miniature golden pagoda. Looking along the canal, Cranston could see the curve where it joined a stream that flowed between deep banks, out beneath the barb-wire fence that barred the outer world.

"I've brought the necklace," Tyburn told Smedley and Cranston. He held the necklace into the light and its diamonds magnified the dull reflection into a thousand sparkles. "Gail was right, a replica would be recognized in these surroundings. After all, I bought it for her to wear on suitable occasions and I suppose this is one of them. But I only want her to wear it until after the show, so I'll speak to her about it then. When the guests begin drinking and playing those games heavy - well, that's when anything may happen."

"I'll be around," promised Rick, "and my men will be ready."

"Halifax isn't going to show," added Tyburn. "Gail just told me she hired a Chinese magician instead. That means Halifax won't be here -"

"Who says John Halifax won't be here?" came a cheery interruption.

"Wherever there is magic, there you will find John Halifax."

It was Halifax in person, smart in white evening clothes. At sight of Halifax's gleaming smile, Tyburn remembered the diamond necklace and hastily pocketed it, but left an end in sight. Shaking hands with Cranston, whom he had

met, Halifax looked at Rick Smedley as though wondering who he might be.

Cranston introduced the Chicago inspector.

"Nice to know you, inspector," said Halifax. "I may be needing you if my luck gives out. Do you know, I was thinking of buying a car and a truck. When I

went around yesterday, the car had been stolen and the truck was wrecked with its trailer. Tonight, I heard that a speedboat blew up, the very one that I intended to buy.

"If things like that happen after I buy anything, I'll look you up, inspector. Right now, I'll leave you" - he gestured over toward the portable stage - "because the show is about to start. I want to see this Chinese, Chung something-or-other, and wish him luck."

The stage lights had been turned on; the orchestra was tuning up. Halifax went around behind the stage, while Tyburn hurriedly found Gail and gave her the necklace. By then, Cranston and Smedley had joined the audience. All this happened in some three or four minutes. Then the show began.

Chung Loo had changed his routine tonight. He was working more deliberately, interspersing his novelties with standard Chinese magic. In fact, he was holding back some of his best stunts for the finish, such as his juggling

feats. More bland than ever, he relaxed occasionally to put mimicry into the broad smile that graced his lips alone. Verity, looking one hundred percent Chinese, was assisting Chung Loo very gracefully.

Near the end of his act, Chung Loo introduced a very special number. He brought on a huge brass pistol, definitely a Chinese model, and asked for the loan of something valuable. Gail Tyburn, playing queen bee in the front row, promptly arose, detached her necklace and dangled it in the footlights where everyone could get the full effect of its dazzle. Taking the necklace, Chung Loo poured it into the gun muzzle, added some powder and wadding, then pointed the gun at a toy pagoda that Verity was holding above her head.

The gun boomed, the pagoda dropped open. Inside was another, then a third.

When the final pagoda was opened, Chung Loo reached into it and brought out the necklace, which he returned to Gail with a profound bow, while the audience applauded. Taking both the gun and the little pagodas, Verity toddled off the stage.

"Say, that was something!" said Rick to Cranston. "It looked about impossible. I've seen a lot of stalling with tricks like that, but not with this one, there wasn't."

Cranston didn't reply. He was no longer around. Skirting the audience, Cranston was going toward the car where he had left his portfolio. There, totally unnoticed, he changed to the black garb of The Shadow. Chung Loo was doing some artful jugglery, cutting an apple in the air with a tossed knife, while Verity stood by. But even if the audience hadn't been watching Chung Loo,

they would not have seen The Shadow. He was doing an amazing glide across a lighted stretch beside some trees, his form seemingly no more than the wavering

shadow cast by the gently swaying boughs. Noiselessly ascending some steps, The

Shadow found a curtained booth that proved to be an improvised dressing room used by Verity Joyce.

There, beside the mirror of a dressing table, lay the diamond necklace. It

could have been a duplicate, of course, because even Chung Loo, the Chinese wizard, couldn't actually have made one thing be in two places simultaneously. But The Shadow, from his own knowledge of ways magical, felt positive that this

was not the duplicate. Near it lay the brass pistol, and the real necklace had actually gone into that gun.

Picking up the necklace, The Shadow raised it to the light, watching the mirror to note how effectively the sparkle was reflected. That look into the mirror proved fortunate. There, The Shadow saw more than the necklace. Beyond his own reflection, he saw that of Verity Joyce, in her Chinese garb and make-up, hand raised and holding the sharp knife that Chung Loo had just used in his juggling trick.

The point of the knife was poised just above The Shadow's shoulders, ready for a downward stab!

Death could have followed The Shadow's slightest move, so strained was Verity's pose. Slight moves, however, were not part of The Shadow's system in circumstances such as this. Without an instant's hesitation, he whirled full about, speeding a clamping fist to Verity's wrist before the girl could do no more than recoil. If she'd intended to turn that back step into a driving

thrust, she never had the chance.

Out from the light of the dressing room, down the steps and to the darkness behind the back drop of the stage, The Shadow carried Verity as she struggled. Already he had taken away the knife and now had it entangled with the necklace. He was also stifling any cries that Verity might have given, but now, away from interference, he was willing to let the girl talk.

Verity's gasp came defiantly:

"You... you murderer!"

The Shadow whispered a laugh that was anything but murderous. Nevertheless, Verity held to her opinion.

"I saw you over by the Planetarium," she said. "I know you must be working with Cranston. You were around at the Hotel Harbison, too, after I took the crystal skull that Cranston wanted. You may even be Cranston, though perhaps you're not. Anyway, I saw the tricks he performed, my uncle's tricks!"

The Shadow's tone came sibilant:

"Your uncle, then, was Professor Sedley Marsh."

"You know it as well as I do," retorted Verity. "Why else would you suppose that I was performing some tricks of his?"

"Perhaps Cranston was performing them for the same reason."

"You mean to contact my uncle's pupils?"

"That was his reason."

Even in the gloom, The Shadow could see furrows beneath the make-up on Verity's forehead. Then the girl said:

"But before my uncle died, in a Canadian sanitarium, he sent me a letter, like the others."

"And the letters said -"

"Nothing. They were merely empty envelopes. That was the agreement. But they were mailed from here in Chicago."

"And that meant -"

"That all were to come here. They were to find the crystal skull and speak to it, telling who they were and how they could be reached."

"And the skull was supposed to speak to you -"

"Yes." Verity was still responding to The Shadow's phrases, as they came in a compelling monotone. "But something must have gone wrong. The skull would not speak. So all I could do was try to find someone who knew what had happened."

"Someone like Chung Loo -"

"Yes. I trusted him instead of Cranston. Both were doing my uncle's magic, but Chung Loo contacted me. I felt that one might be a friend, the other a killer. Perhaps both were friends or maybe from what you tell me, I had twisted them about. But when I saw you in the dressing room, just now, taking the necklace -"

"You thought that I must be an enemy. This, however, happens to be the real necklace."

"I know. Chung Loo told me he was to keep it. That made me trust him all the more, because he didn't have to tell me. He said it was all arranged and I began to think that soon he would confide in me on other matters. I'll tell you more, whatever I learn later. But now" - Verity turned a troubled glance toward

the stage - "you must let me return. Chung Loo will need me as soon as he finishes his juggling."

Releasing Verity, The Shadow kept the necklace. As the girl went up the steps to the stage, The Shadow sidled around toward the front. From a shaded spot, half protected by a tree, he saw Chung Loo reaching the finale of his juggling routine. The Chinese wizard had scooped up three taborets and was

starting to toss them in the air.

Then came an interruption. Up from the audience bounded Rick Smedley, pulling a revolver as he came.

"Stop this show!" the inspector was shouting. "Stop it, in the name of the law! I want you for murder, Chung Loo!"

XIX

TRAILS REVERSED

WITH a great bound, Chung Loo sprang to the far side of the stage and over the footlights to the ground. Rick Smedley was shooting at the fleeing Chinese wizard, but the flying taborets acted like a moving target in a shooting gallery. Rick's bullets caught them in mid-air, splintering them in tell-tale fashion.

Rick had recognized those taborets as duplicates of the frail stool that he had broken at Corland's. There was enough of the unusual in Chung Loo's magic to link it with the fabled methods of Professor Marsh. And now, to support the sudden theory that Rick had formed, namely that Chung Loo was the spider in a web of crime, Lester Tyburn was leaping to the other corner of the stage, waving a necklace that didn't glitter as it should, while he shouted to the audience:

"This necklace! It's false! Chung Loo has stolen the real one. Capture him while I see if I can find the other one."

Tyburn ducked away, on his side of the stage, as though fearful that Chung Loo might return some of Smedley's shots, which would have put Tyburn directly in line. Chung Loo, however, was not pausing in flight. Skirting the lawn, where Chicago detectives and private dicks were weeding themselves from spectators who were listed in the Social Register, Chung Loo sped for the intricate paths of the Oriental garden. At least a dozen pursuers immediately formed a cordon to surround him, while others threaded after Chung Loo through the maze.

The Shadow was among those who reached the garden, where the subdued lights of the Chinese lanterns aided his gliding progress. All along, The Shadow could hear shouts from here and there, as Chung Loo appeared suddenly from some new quarter. Unfortunately, The Shadow was blocked off by a huge ornamental Chinese gate at the time the climax came.

On one of the humped bridges, Chung Loo ran squarely into Regan; turned and darted the other way again, as the squatty operative shouted:

"Stop him if you can, but don't worry if he gets away! I can tell you all about him. He's -"

Darting down the bridge as he shouted, Regan was stopped short by a blast that sounded like a miniature of the motorboat explosion. It came, though, in the form of a gun shot, with all the volume of an ancient blunderbuss. Regan caved face forward on the bridge; as he rolled down it, the weapon itself was flung beside him. It was the brass pistol that Chung Loo had used in the necklace act.

Chung Loo, himself, was dodging away from the shrubbery at the end of the bridge. Springing for him was Tyburn, who grabbed him but lost his grip on the magician's silk robe. Stumbling, Tyburn sprawled headlong across the path of Rick Smedley, who was cutting in from another direction. Chung Loo, darting off

at another angle, skirted a lily pond while his two pursuers were getting to their feet. Then, as men headed toward him from the other direction, Chung Loo sprang off through an ornamental Chinese archway.

The Shadow was coming around beside the gate. He saw three men converging on the archway, with Smedley and Tyburn coming through from the other side. In the midst of it all, Chung Loo was gone. There was a clump of shrubbery near, but it was less than waist high and men were cutting in between the bushes without encountering the missing Chinese.

It was as if Chung Loo had dissolved into nothing. They gathered around, Tyburn, Smedley and the others, to shake their heads in baffled fashion. Among the arrivals was Halifax, staring about as puzzled as the rest. Deciding that he should be with them, The Shadow took off his cloak and hat, bundled them inconspicuously under one arm and joined the group.

They were going back to look at Regan's body. One full charge from that huge Chinese gun had been enough. Regan was dead, killed instantly. Rick Smedley picked up the pistol as evidence against Chung Loo and shouted for men to keep searching the garden until they trapped the missing Chinese. The others, meanwhile - Cranston, Smedley and Halifax - started back across the humped bridge to the great lawn.

There they found Gail Tyburn, in the midst of a circle of sympathetic guests. But Lester Tyburn saw no point in humoring his wife.

"Fifty thousand dollars, that necklace cost," stormed Tyburn, "and you hand it over to a Chinese magician who gives you a phony instead."

"But it was my necklace," protested Gail. "I had a right -"

"Your necklace!" interrupted Tyburn. "It was bought with my money, wasn't it? This is worse than when you ordered all those antiques that you never even looked at."

"We've argued about that before," protested Gail. "I told you I know nothing about those antiques. They came while I was away."

"They were ordered in your name and they are still up in the attic."

"You never received any bills for the antiques. If you had, you certainly would have shown them to me."

"I'll get the bills, eventually," said Tyburn, in a resigned tone. "I always do. Perhaps in this case, you bought that junk with some of the money I've been giving you."

"You mean my so-called allowance?" demanded Gail. "It isn't enough to buy false whiskers for that comic opera detective that you've hired to keep annoying me -"

"Don't speak of Regan that way," interrupted Tyburn, his face going solemn. "He's lying over there in the garden dead, poor fellow. All because he was doing his duty, Gail, trying to regain your stolen necklace."

Gail began to sob and Halifax promptly played the big-brother act so she could rest her head on his shoulder. They started to walk away and Cranston could hear Gail's choky words:

"If he hadn't chided me... about those antiques! I... I don't know a thing

about them. They were sent here and I said to let them come and take them away again, only they didn't. But they haven't cost Lester a cent -"

Soothingly, Halifax was urging Gail to tell him all about it, right from the beginning.

Meanwhile, Rick Smedley had arrived to talk to Tyburn. This gave Cranston a chance to step up to the stage and find something lying by the footlights. He

turned, displaying a sparkling object which had actually come from his own pocket.

"Here's the necklace, Tyburn," called Cranston. "How it landed here, I couldn't say, but it looks like the genuine one."

When Lester Tyburn hurried over, Cranston handed him the necklace so that he could show it to Rick Smedley. That gave Cranston his chance to go around the stage, switch back to his guise of The Shadow and find Verity Joyce. The girl was in the improvised dressing room, hurriedly taking off her Chinese make-up.

"What's happened?" asked Verity anxiously. "They didn't catch up with

Chung Loo?"

"They will soon," replied The Shadow, grimly, "or something pretty close to it."

A shout came from out front and The Shadow wheeled to peer through the curtains. He saw a man running from the garden, carrying a Chinese robe, a wig, and an object that looked like a deflated mask. Other searchers were following, all shouting the news.

"We found these under a bayberry bush!"

"The outfit Chung Loo was wearing, mask and all."

"The mask is a regular false face, with the mouth missing. The mustaches hid the joint!"

"That's why Chung Loo could smile and make his face look real."

"He's a fake, but one thing certain, he's a magician."

"Find the Chinese girl who worked with him!"

"That's an idea. She can tell us all about him. Anyway she was his accomplice!"

Even before those final words were spoken, The Shadow knew that they were coming. He was back in the dressing room, giving Verity a hand at getting off her Chinese robe, which was as tight fitting as an evening gown. Footsteps were

pounding upon the stage as Verity scrambled into her own dress; then, while she

was still tangled in its folds, The Shadow literally whirled her to the space behind the stage and down the steps. Getting Verity into the Tyburn limousine, The Shadow left her there, bundled his cloak and hat beneath a bumperette and strolled back as Cranston to the scene of the excitement.

Rick Smedley was pumping questions at Lester Tyburn.

"Remember what Regan shouted just before Chung Loo shot him? Something he could tell us about Chung Loo? Didn't Regan mention anything about it to you?"

"Regan mentioned a lot of things," replied Tyburn, patiently, "but most of them meant nothing. You will recall how I told him not to bother with so much detail. I have his report here, though. I always file them, even though I don't read them."

Pulling out a sheaf of onion-skin paper, Tyburn began thumbing through its pages. Suddenly, he stopped.

"This is odd," said Tyburn. "Twice, when Regan was trailing Halifax, there was a complete break in the trail. He says check back to the phone call from John Halifax to Verity Joyce." Tyburn thumbed the pages. "Now jump ahead to Chung Loo -"

Pausing as he reached the proper page, Tyburn lifted his gray-streaked eyebrows.

"This explains it, inspector," said Tyburn, in a surprised tone. "There wasn't any Chung Loo. That we know. But Regan says that whenever Halifax's trail ended, Chung Loo's began. He got back stage, found a combination wig and mask, a zipper robe, all fixed for a quick change. John Halifax and Chung Loo are one and the same!"

Rick Smedley had figured that already. Somebody must have played Chung Loo and whoever did must have been a magician. That accounted for Halifax being here, as well as his willingness to let this fancy, high-priced date go to Chung Loo. Now all Rick had to do was find Halifax.

That wasn't easy. When Rick looked over to where Halifax had been sympathizing with Gail, he saw the blond Mrs. Tyburn standing alone beneath a weeping willow tree. Out in the driveway, a caterer's truck suddenly roared

off

down the driveway and, as it flashed past, Rick recognized Halifax at the wheel.

Rick shouted madly, but not loudly enough. His voice couldn't be heard out at the gate, where that truck would certainly be allowed to pass.

"Get other cars!" bawled Rick. "Go after him! We'll send out a general alarm and cover every road for miles around. We won't let that guy get away!"

There was a brief flurry of new excitement as some detectives came from back stage bringing Verity's Chinese attire, but Rick Smedley was too busy with

the Halifax matter to give attention to this lesser discovery. Cranston, however, saw well enough ahead to know that Verity Joyce would soon be in the fugitive class along with John Halifax. Strolling over to the big car, Cranston

saw Chaffin nearby and beckoned for the sleek chauffeur to take the wheel.

"Mrs. Tyburn said we could use the car," explained Cranston, calmly. "You can bring it back shortly."

Chaffin drove them out through the gate and Cranston explained things to Verity as they rode along.

"Halifax will be back," assured Cranston. "To begin with, he can't get far

away. Again, he has plenty at stake here."

"You mean Mrs. Tyburn's diamond necklace."

"More than that. He's after a lead to your uncle's legacy and I'm sure he thinks he can find it at the mansion."

"Then we must come back here, too!"

"Exactly," said Cranston with a nod. They were past the gates now, riding down a back road. "I'll take you back, now that we're beginning to understand each other."

Cranston might have mentioned that The Shadow had been the person who arranged that understanding, but he left it to Verity to form that conclusion for herself. They swung a corner, passing the caterer's truck, ditched beside the road and Cranston gave a slight laugh, quite unlike The Shadow's.

"The police will think that Halifax picked up another car," remarked Cranston. "But we can count on Johnny to outguess them. It doesn't matter, since he won't be outguessing us."

Cranston stopped the car near the half dozen buildings that formed the center of Longwood; told Chaffin he could return to the Tyburn estate.

Stepping

behind the limousine before it pulled away, Cranston reclaimed cloak and hat from beneath the bumperette without letting Verity see him do it. Keeping the bundle on the far side, Cranston conducted Verity down a rustic path to a small

boathouse. There they stepped into a rowboat and Cranston poked the bundle into

the bow.

To Verity's surprise, Cranston rowed away from the lake, back inland toward the Tyburn estate. They came to a huge barbwire fence, but Verity noticed that the banks of the stream cut deep beneath it; in fact, the fence was a few feet above their heads as they drifted under. Then, with muffled oars, Cranston worked the boat into a canal that proved to be the one in Tyburn's Oriental garden.

They could hear men patrolling the road outside the picket fence. Rick Smedley had called for the state police to take over that job. But inside the grounds, all was quiet and unwatched. Whether John Halifax had returned by the water route, or slipped through the gate while pursuers were crowding out through it, Verity couldn't guess, but she was sure that Halifax was smart enough to work it either way.

Softly, Cranston told Verity to steal toward the mansion, that he would attend to the boat. Following orders, Verity found a figure awaiting her

there,
against the whiteness of the mansion's pillars. Cranston had made a rapid short-cut to the mansion without Verity realizing it. The waiting figure was that of The Shadow.

The big front door was open, as it had been at the time of the party. Using a flashlight guardedly, The Shadow conducted Verity to the second floor. There they found an unlocked door, with a stairway to the third. At the top, another short flight, again unbarred, took them to the attic that Lester Tyburn had mentioned.

The attic was filled with partly opened boxes and among them, a man in shirt sleeves was working busily. The attic had no windows, so he had been free to turn on some electric lights. They were in operation, because Gail Tyburn had arranged for electricity to illuminate the grounds for the lawn party.

It wasn't difficult to recognize the man who was working at the boxes, even though he was out of character. The face that the arrivals saw still wore its never-failing smile.

The Shadow was right when he said that John Halifax would return. Those boxes that he was unpacking contained the very things that would bring him. One glance at the objects that Halifax had unpacked told that these were the fabled treasures left by Verity's uncle, Professor Sedley Marsh!

XX

CRIME'S LAST STROKE

AMONG the items already uncovered by Halifax, were curious looking lamps, strangely shaped fish bowls, cages, frames and even a few cabinets, built tall and upright, mounted on platforms. They were the stupendous ideas of yesteryear, magical creations that had never been shown to the public and which, therefore, could still produce a sensation.

Doubtless, Professor Marsh had been impressed by such magic masters of the past as Kellar, Thurston and Raymond, the great American magicians of their day. Therefore, his mind had turned to stage illusions as well as smaller devices. There were many of the last-named items, however. Halifax was at present studying a carved hand that rested on a board, while beside him were miniature figures, one a Hindu holding a flute, another a Mediaeval archer gripping a cross-bow, with a quiver of arrows at his side.

Both as Chung Loo and himself, John Halifax preferred stage work to close-up magic, thus he was totally wrapped in the prizes which he had uncovered. It would take something equally mysterious to jolt Halifax from his present mood, so The Shadow provided it: a low, sinister laugh that rose to a whispery crescendo, bringing ghoulish shivers echoing from the attic's rafters.

Halifax raised his face, smile and all. His right hand went toward where his coat pocket would be, if Halifax had still been wearing his coat. Then, seeing that The Shadow had drawn an automatic, trained full upon him, Halifax simply folded his arms and retained his smile.

One thing that put Halifax at ease was sight of Verity Joyce. Almost ignoring The Shadow, the smiling magician bowed to the girl and said:

"I am glad you are here. These are your uncle's properties. I wanted you to claim them."

A whisper from The Shadow signaled that Verity was to question Halifax on

that score.

"You were one of my uncle's pupils?" queried Verity.

"No," replied Halifax. "His pupils never took up magic professionally. In fact, they seldom associated with magicians at all. So I wouldn't be their type."

"How did you find out about them?"

"Through rumor, inquiry, and finally, luck."

"What sort of luck?"

Halifax studied Verity narrowly, then let his gaze flicker toward The Shadow. Meeting a pair of burning eyes, Halifax came right to the point.

"Everybody who tried to check on Professor Marsh thought in terms of small

magic only," declared Halifax. "I decided that anyone so inventive as Sedley Marsh must have had big ideas, too. So I looked for persons who might have bigger stuff that looked like Marsh magic. I found such a man here in Chicago, an antique dealer named Paul Corland."

Halifax paused to note the effect on the listeners. Verity remained poker-faced; The Shadow's eyes still retained their cryptic burn.

"Corland had some unusual apparatus that he claimed was real Chinese," continued Halifax. "I knew otherwise but did not say so. When Corland finally sold me those items, I was sure that I had acquired some bona fide Marsh magic.

One day I visited Corland and found him repairing a crystal skull in his shop. The skull couldn't be Chinese, so I was sure about my Marsh theory.

"I stayed around Chicago, hoping to find Professor Marsh. I figured that his pupils wouldn't want the larger apparatus. Corland looked like the exception, but he had lost his interest. Meanwhile, I had met Gail Tyburn. In fact, she looked me up in Hollywood. She had learned how wonderful I was through mutual friends and naturally I didn't try to disillusion her. She'd left her husband and besides, I wasn't serious about her. I wanted a sponsor in Chicago."

"A sponsor?" echoed Verity.

"As good a name for it as any," replied Halifax. "I had to be financed while I tracked down the Marsh secrets. I plan to pay back all the money I owe Gail. But when the suicide wave began, I became worried."

"And why?" asked Verity.

"Corland had shut up like a clam," answered Halifax. "Besides, I saw the crystal skull down at the Hotel Harbison. I asked Gail to buy it and we framed a clever way to get it by proxy. I wanted to find out how it operated and why, but somebody grabbed it ahead of me."

Halifax's eyes shifted to The Shadow. Though he still smiled, Halifax was delivering what amounted to a look of accusation. Then:

"It was wild, perhaps," said Halifax, "to hook the suicide wave with Marsh's pupils. But I decided to perform what Marsh magic I had, on the chance that some of them, if desperate, would contact me. I appeared as Chung Loo to keep my identity secret, so I could dodge any danger. I found that a chap named

Cranston was also doing Marsh magic and figured he was playing a game similar to mine.

"Also, I saw your work, Miss Joyce. I'd heard once that Professor Marsh had a niece, his only living relative. I phoned you, saying I was Chung Loo. Regan was just dumb enough to think I'd called you as John Halifax, because he saw me leaving for the Mirror Grill, where you went later. That was why he was the only person who guessed my dual identity."

A whispered laugh came from The Shadow and Halifax promptly caught its significance. Still smiling, he bowed.

"I mean Regan was the only dumb person who guessed that I was Chung Loo," corrected Halifax. "Anyway, I don't suppose you guessed, Mr. Shadow. Probably

you just knew."

Then, concentrating upon Verity, Halifax said steadily:

"I followed Cranston from the Mirror Grill to protect him. I took him for a Marsh pupil, who must be in danger. You followed him because you mistook him for a murderer. That was why I snatched the gun from your hand in the Planetarium. I recognized it as a dummy after I grabbed it. I had to take a clout at Cranston to quiet everything, because I was afraid the place was full of killers."

Verity's lips tightened. Halifax was correct about the opinion she had held of Cranston. It gave Halifax's whole tale the ring of truth. To dispute that point, Verity tried a few more questions:

"Why did you try to steal Gail Tyburn's necklace?"

"I didn't," replied Halifax. "I needed money and she hadn't any more. The necklace was the answer, so I told her to see Chung Loo. When I met her as Chung Loo, I told her who I really was. I thought that would fool Regan. Anyway, Gail gave me the replica and talked her husband into letting her wear the original. That was so she could lend it to Chung Loo and get the imitation back."

"But when Regan started to spoil your game, you killed him!"

"With that brass Chinese gun? Impossible! You're the person who should know that, Miss Joyce. You took the gun to your dressing room on the right side

of the stage. When Smedley came after me, I jumped from the left, to head for the garden. I never had a chance to get back to the stage as Chung Loo. Somebody else fired that shot, somebody close by me in the garden."

That ended Verity's questions, but Halifax had more to tell.

"I bought these taborets from Corland," declared Halifax, "and they were all he had. Somebody must have planted another in his place to frame me. Tonight, when Lester Tyburn began telling Gail about antiques she had bought, I

realized that Corland might have been keeping Marsh's equipment and could have shipped it here. I was right; here it is." Halifax turned to gesture about the room. "Some of it was already set up, like this big frame." With that, Halifax took a few side paces and stepped forward through a full-length metal frame that was riveted to the floor. "I must admit, it puzzled me a trifle, finding some of the apparatus set up. Particularly a frame" - Halifax let his smile go slightly sour - "because if anybody was framed, I was."

Something singular was occurring in back of Halifax. As he stepped forward, his figure seemed to form a double image. It couldn't be the lights in

this room; recognizing that it wasn't an illusion, The Shadow veered sideward, then forward with his gun, too late.

By the time he'd got out of line with Halifax, The Shadow saw that the figure behind the smiling magician had risen to full height from a fast-operating elevator in the floor. As Halifax wheeled, he saw it, too, and so did Verity. Behind the frame, wearing a leer that made Halifax's smile seem as mild as a Mona Lisa painting, stood Lester Tyburn, also with folded arms.

There was a difference, however, between the poses of Tyburn and Halifax. Poked from each of Tyburn's cross-draped hands was a glittering revolver.

"Framed is right," taunted Tyburn. "You are all framed. Even I am framed, but in a way I like. A sheet of bullet proof glass rose with me in this metal frame, when I came up through the floor. If you want to test it, Shadow, you are welcome."

Tyburn's tone rang with a peculiar echo, proving that a glass did partially block his voice. Instead of falling for Tyburn's invitation, The Shadow swung full about, aiming both of his automatics toward the attic's open door. He was just in time to cover a group of men who were moving in with guns while Tyburn tried to draw attention in the other direction.

The group consisted of Webster, Morse and Chaffin, the watchdogs of these premises. They were backed by Skip Hagathorn. Given a few seconds more, they

would have assumed control, but The Shadow had caught them flat-footed in what amounted to a stalemate.

It was The Shadow's challenging laugh that held them. If The Shadow had opened fire, they would have spurted bullets in return. With Tyburn ready to spring to action behind him, The Shadow would have had to wheel among the boxes, leaving Verity and Halifax helpless in the line of fire. As it now stood, though the murder crew knew that they might win through force of numbers, none was willing to be the first to taste the leaden slugs from The Shadow's big guns.

With the echoes of The Shadow's laugh, there came a spasm of ugly mirth from Tyburn.

"Suppose we hold matters in abeyance," suggested Tyburn, in his ringing tone, "while you tell us, Shadow, how much you really know."

Somewhat to Tyburn's surprise, The Shadow accepted the challenge.

"You played the alibi business too heavily, Tyburn," declared The Shadow, still facing the men at the door. "You phoned here to Longwood from your apartment soon after Skip Hagathorn jumped off the bridge, playing he was William Brett, and joined these others when they faked a rescue act from the tugboat Bluebird. Nobody answered that call. You simply faked it."

"And that," retorted Tyburn, "would be difficult to prove."

"When Fleer died," continued The Shadow, "you were out here at Longwood, Tyburn. You phoned stating that your hired men were also here. There was only your word to prove it." The Shadow paused a moment.

"My word is still good," asserted Tyburn.

"You used Inspector Smedley as a stooge," continued The Shadow, "the night you sent this band of killers in to murder Corland. They established his death at nine forty-five, the time it actually happened."

"I thought that one out carefully," came Tyburn's ringing voice.

"When they returned here," added The Shadow, "you promptly sent them on another job, directed at a man named Lamont Cranston. You kept Inspector Smedley out at a roadhouse until you were sure they were back home again."

"And that," claimed Tyburn, "was the neatest touch of all."

"It was the give-away," returned The Shadow, "because it ended on the lake shore. It proved conclusively that your crew was using a super speedboat to cut the time of their trips in half. They couldn't have got away from the beach by the Planetarium in any other fashion. The alibis are ruined, because the time element no longer stands."

The men at the door shifted uneasily and Tyburn saw it. Before Tyburn could decide what to say, The Shadow spoke:

"Your own predicament is worse, Tyburn. You have no alibi at all for the time you tried to kill me in the cellar locker with the crystal skull. Tonight,

when you killed Regan, you were the only man who could have loaded and taken that Chinese gun from the dressing room where Verity Joyce left it."

"Unless you took it, Shadow -"

"But nobody saw me go back stage, Tyburn."

"Somebody is going to find you here," snarled Tyburn. "This time you actually will be dead."

"It's lucky Lamont Cranston will still be alive," was The Shadow's answer.

"You know, Tyburn, the alibis you fixed for your murder crew depend somewhat on him."

That was something Tyburn hadn't thought about, early in the game before he began to identify Cranston as The Shadow. The night of Brett's death was a particular case in point. The men at the door knew it and began exchanging glances among themselves.

"You're bluffing, Shadow," declared Tyburn, savagely. "My methods have been too well geared. I happened to be a Marsh pupil myself. In fact, I could show you a few tricks if my hands were not so full of guns. I wanted all this wealth of inventive genius for myself" - Halifax and Verity watched Tyburn unfold his arms and wave his gun-hands to indicate the paraphernalia on display

- "and I ferreted out Corland before Halifax did.

"I discovered that Marsh was ill in Canada. I opened an account for my wife in Corland's antique shop. I bought some odd items and stopped by one day to tell Corland how my wife frequently bought crates filled with antiques and stored them in the attic without ever looking at them. It gave him the idea of a good place to send the crates that Marsh had left with him. I was worrying Corland with anonymous calls that made him think someone was after the professor's stuff." Tyburn chuckled, harshly. "And someone was. Myself."

The men at the door were showing signs of their former bravado; nevertheless The Shadow waited for Tyburn to conclude his tale.

"Corland decided to change the keyword that would make the skull speak," declared Tyburn. "Instead of the word 'skull' he used 'Yorick.' He mailed a letter to Professor Marsh, telling him of the change and I intercepted it."

"That's why, my uncle never sent me word!" exclaimed Verity. "I wondered why the skull didn't speak. But it must have spoken for you" - she was facing Tyburn defiantly - "you... you murderer!"

Tyburn accepted the compliment with a bow. Then Verity riveted as she heard The Shadow's whisper, so low that no one else could catch it.

"Those little figures," said The Shadow. "The musician and the archer. They have names -"

"Yes," undertoned Verity. "One is Hassan, the other is Athelstane."

"Ask Tyburn if he ever heard of them," whispered The Shadow. "Ask him very loudly. He can't hear well through that glass."

"Tell me, Mr. Tyburn," called Verity in a defiant tone. "Did you ever hear of Hassan and Athelstane?"

The little figures were beyond the big frame. Halifax had placed them there when he unpacked them. The Hindu musician sat near Tyburn's elbow, the mediaeval archer almost directly behind him. At the name "Hassan," the musician

figure raised its flute. When Verity spoke "Athelstane" the little archer began to move.

"Those names mean nothing," declared Tyburn. "We shall end this travesty right now. The police will hear gunfire, when they arrive they will find three bullet-riddled bodies; those of Verity Joyce, John Halifax and a no longer mysterious character who calls himself The Shadow."

Tyburn finished with a mock bow that The Shadow could not see. Actually, it was a nod to the men at the door, for The Shadow watched their gun-hands tighten.

Verity gave a quick undertone to The Shadow.

"Tyburn is pressing the glass with his gun muzzles," informed the girl.

"I think it is moving downward, from the way the guns wave. I can't see the top edge, though."

As The Shadow whispered a slight laugh as though to say he had expected this to happen, the little figure called Hassan began to play its flute.

The balance between life and death hung thread-thin as Tyburn gave a sharp glance at the piping flute player. It was drawing his attention from Athelstane, the archer, behind him, but there was a chance that Tyburn might remember the cross-bowman and look around.

Instead, Tyburn pressed the floor with his foot. The figure of Hassan jogged slightly, for it was set a trifle over the edge of the elevator trap on which Tyburn stood. Thinking that a slight jar had set it off, Tyburn laughed.

"We have music with our murders," said Tyburn, his voice still carrying an

echo. "Nice murders, these. The police will think that John Halifax killed Verity Joyce and then shot it out with The Shadow, who was coming to the rescue. We shall plant the right guns to prove our case."

Tyburn's guns were still pressing the glass, waiting for its invisible edge to pass them. While Hassan piped, the figure of Athelstane, hidden by Tyburn's body, was busily at work. From the quiver, the little archer was taking an arrow and attaching it to the cross-bow. Slowly the mechanical hands were raising the bow to the level.

From his slight angle, Halifax could see all this and was on the alert. So

was Tyburn, but his attitude was gloating.

"Too bad, Shadow." No longer did Tyburn's tone echo, for the bullet-proof glass had slowly slid below his chin. "You will be found with bullets in your back. They will be mine unless you prefer to turn about and let my men provide them."

Shadow began a slowly whispered laugh. It was rising as Tyburn's guns gave

an upward jog, indicating that the edge of the glass had passed. Tyburn shouted

two words:

"Give it!"

A trigger-finger gave it. The mechanical finger that pressed the trigger of a miniature cross-bow. An arrow was in flight as Tyburn shouted and the pointed missile found the murder master in the center of the back. Tyburn jolted upward as he fired both his guns. Their bullets ripped the ceiling.

Simultaneously, The Shadow's .45's thundered a more accurate message. They

beat the men at the door to the punch, by instants. Expecting The Shadow to whirl, alarmed by Tyburn's sudden jolt, the members of the murder crew were belated in their fire. Their shots, too, went wide and high, for The Shadow was

clipping them as they pulled their triggers. Flayed by repeated shots from the cloaked marksman, Tyburn's men spun toward the stairs and went diving, sprawling downward.

As Tyburn rallied from the arrow shot, Halifax met him with a dive across the sinking plate of glass. They spilled backward, upsetting the figure of Athelstane, while it was placing another arrow on the cross-bow. Wrenching free, Tyburn rose to one knee and drilled a shot straight for the charging figure of The Shadow, whose own gun spoke only a split-second later.

Though Tyburn's shot was first, The Shadow's was the one that counted. Fired from a lower level, Tyburn's bullet flattened just under the edge of the sinking glass while The Shadow, aiming downward, cleared that edge with the slug that found Tyburn as its target. Rolling from Halifax's grasp, Tyburn spread-eagled motionless upon the floor.

Now Verity and Halifax were following The Shadow down the attic stairs, hurdling the sprawled men who lay there. Halifax nearly tripped over the writhing form of Skip Hagathorn, the speedboat pilot who had tried to frame him

by planting an explosive charge in the bow of a boat that Halifax had tried out

as a prospective buy. Of course, it would have gone harder with Lamont Cranston

and Rick Smedley if Hagathorn's scheme had worked. Perhaps Skip would live to confess the crime and blame its inspiration on Lester Tyburn.

Police whistles were shrilling from the outer gate with answering blares

along the barb-wire fence, when The Shadow and his two companions reached the Oriental garden and found a speedboat moored in the deeper part of the canal. This was the getaway craft that Tyburn and his men had planned to use, the same boat that had whizzed murderers between Chicago and Longwood in twenty minutes flat. The Shadow motioned Halifax behind the wheel and thrust Verity in beside him.

As Halifax pressed the starter, the motor gave the quietest of purrs. The boat moved noiselessly down the canal, sneaking out beneath the Chinese bridges and the wire fence beyond. In a matter of mere minutes, it had reached the broad waters of Lake Michigan.

From back along the stream came the rising tone of a strange, weird laugh that reached a strident crescendo, then broke into shivery echoes. It was the triumph laugh of The Shadow, marking his victory over crime and accepting full credit for the scene that the police soon would find upstairs in the Tyburn mansion.

John Halifax gave the speedboat all that its accelerator would take. It roared along the moon-bathed waters of the lake, following the shore line southward. As the dial climbed to the sixty-mile mark, Halifax felt a surge of his old nonchalance. He glanced at the girl beside him. Her black hair flowing free in the wind, the lake air bringing the flush to her cheeks, Verity Joyce looked like something that belonged with moonlight.

For a brief instant, Halifax's foot eased the accelerator pressure; then, remembering The Shadow's final laugh, Halifax again gunned the speedboat to the limit. The Shadow had timed one speedboat trip from Longwood to Chicago. He might be clocking this one, too.

There was no combination more fascinating than moonlight and a girl, but for once John Halifax, of all men, preferred speed and speed alone. Smiling John Halifax wasn't looking for an argument over any woman, and particularly Verity Joyce.

At least, not with The Shadow.

THE END