



SIX MEN OF EVIL

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. AT THE BORDER

THE torrid Mexican sun had set. The lingering rays from the distant horizon threw a faint afterglow that presaged a sweltering night. The gloom barely outlined a party of weary horsemen who were wending their slow way through patches of mesquite, heading northward.

The men were talking. Their voices were hushed as though the dimness of the arid plain held them in awe. Solitary wanderers in a deserted plain, they were temporarily traveling through a world peopled by themselves alone.

The voices faded. The horses dragged along through silence. The mounted figures were dimming in the gathering night. Then the tension broke as one of the plodders emitted a savage, growled oath.

The curse brought a coarse laugh from one of his companions. Grumbled mutterings followed from the others, with one exception. A single rider maintained his steadfast silence.

"We'll get there before dawn," growled the man who had cursed. "Yes - we'll get there - and then what?"

"We've got our divvy," returned one of his companions, thumping his hand upon a rough sack that lay across his horse's back. "That's enough, ain't it, bo?"

"Sure," cut in a third voice. "Every guy for himself. That's the only way we can make a go of it."

The dull, labored thudding of hoofs replaced the brief conversation. Then a querulous speaker cut in with a protesting opinion.

"We're splittin' eh?" he asked. "It's all we can do, I reckon; but it ain't goin' to get us nowhere."

"We've got Charley to thank for that," added a sarcastic voice.

The words brought forth an affirmative growl from all the riders but one.

The lone man who had maintained his silence still refused to speak for himself. He was riding behind the others, now, his horse three lengths in back of them. He could hear every word that was expressed; and his companions sensed that fact.

NOW that Charley's name had been mentioned, further sallies followed.

"He's the brains of this outfit, Charley is," said someone, with a laugh. "Had a way for us to make a clean-up. What have we got?"

"A few thousand apiece," grumbled another. "That's better than nothing."

"Would you go through another six months for it?" came a question through the dark.

"For a few thousand?" Another laugh came with the response. "Say, bo, I wouldn't go through a week of that misery we suffered even if we were to get the green chicquatil itself -"

"Sh-h!" A warning tone hissed beside the speaker's ear. "Lay off that stuff! It gives me the creeps. Don't talk about the chicquatil! Every time I shut my eyes I see that green glow! Green everywhere - green that never ends" - the man's voice was rising to a high, nervous pitch - "green light driving me mad -"

An arm thumped through the dark and punched the speaker roughly on the back. The man's words ended abruptly.

Subdued mumbles came from the other riders. It was evident that they, too, held a nervous dread of something that they all had witnessed. At length, one of the riders voiced the subject in an easy, reflective tone that allayed the worries of the others.

"We're out of it," he said. "We'll forget it, soon. There's nobody going to take us back to the Aztec temple. Let them keep the chicquatil there at Zeltapec. It's theirs, and they can have it. There's no one who could take it from them. We've got something out of the wreck - enough to stake us -"

"To stake us?" The question came in a high tone from the nervous man who had been silenced. "To stake us for what? We aren't even ourselves! Do you understand me? Not even ourselves! We're no one - no one! - and Charley's to blame! He took us to that hell! I'd kill him if he hadn't suffered with us!"

"Yeah, Charley got his along with the rest of us," said another man, in philosophic tone. "He's not feeling chipper, no more than us. Keeping mighty mum, there in back. Hasn't had much to say since we left Zeltapec. Eh, Charley?"

The speaker glanced over his shoulder as he said the last words. He could not see the man to whom he had referred as Charley. Only the slight thud of hoofs told that there was another man riding back there in the darkness. Somehow, Charley seemed to feel himself ostracized from the companionship of these men.

"See?" questioned the one who had called back. "Charley's got nothing to say. Afraid of us, maybe. He ought to be. He led us up into the mountains. Called himself our leader. A big shot, Charley - and now he's afraid of us!"

The others laughed in sarcastic tones. There was malice, not mirth, in their laughter. They were unanimous in the thought that the man behind them was afraid; and their growled utterances were boding ill for the one who had once been their leader.

"Charley's afraid of us -"

THE repeated challenge was broken by a harsh voice from the darkness. The lone rider had drawn close to the others. Now, he was thrusting his horse among them, and his silence had been broken. He was speaking in firm, even tones that commanded attention.

"I? Afraid of you?" Charley's question came in emphatic words. "Why be fools? There are five of you, that's all. I'll take on ten more like you. You say I put you in wrong at Zeltapec? You lie!"

Not one of the five grumblers dared respond. Charley, coming up among them, had demonstrated his power of command. As he paused to await an answer, the only response was the swishing of the mesquite through which the plodding horses brushed.

"You made trouble for yourselves at Zeltapec," declared the man called Charley. "I was no more to blame than any of you. We took a chance - for a big stake - and we lost. Be satisfied that you got away with your hides, and that the Aztecs let you keep the gold. That's all."

"I guess Charley's right," admitted one of the others, in a low, rueful tone. "But it's not helping us much. It seems all right here in the dark - but wait until dawn, when we look at each other. Then it will seem as black as it did today - as it did yesterday - as it did the day before -"

"Cut it!" ordered Charley tersely. "I've listened to the same talk until I'm tired of it. You say I've been keeping quiet. That's because I've been thinking. When you are ready to be quiet, I'll have my say - and it will be something worthwhile."

A suppressed silence was instantaneous. With a few well-spoken phrases, the former leader had regained his command. There, in the darkness, Charley's horse took the lead, with the others clustered close beside, each man listening without an interruption.

"We're coming close to the border, now," stated Charley quietly. "That's where we split - as you fellows decided. You say we've got to split - that if six men like us were together, we'd hit trouble just on our looks. You're right about that. But you're all wrong to think that this is the finish.

"We stuck together at the start, didn't we? We thought alike; we talked alike; we acted alike - and finally - we became alike. Six of a kind is what we are. Six men - with brains" - he paused after the compliment - "and only one who knows how to use those brains!"

There was no response. The men rode on, a docile, willing group. Each seemed to lose his individuality when the leader took the fore. Now, Charley became challenging in his tone.

"What are you?" he questioned. "I'll tell you. Five men that can fight a hundred if they follow instructions. The trouble is, you've weakened. You figured you could go back to the United States and pick up. You had your alibis.

"Maybe they've got you listed as men who scrambled across the border into Mexico - maybe they haven't. If worst came to worst, you could say that bandits had dragged you there. But that's all ended

now, because you're changed men - and you're all in the same boat.

"You've been little crooks - little enough to get away with it. You enlisted in the army so as to hide, like I did. You didn't like it, and when you found others of your kind, you deserted, like I did.

"I knew where there was something worthwhile getting, at Zeltapec. We went after it; we flopped; and now, with a few thousand dollars worth of gold apiece, you want to go back to where you left off.

"I want to go back, too, but not the same man as I went away. So I'm glad of what happened to me at Zeltapec - now that it's all over. I've got my brains; I know the ropes; and I'm free from recognition. When I hit New York, I'll be ready for business, and there's nobody going to know me. That's why I'm glad I'm different!"

Buzzed responses showed that the others understood their leader's meaning. Then, in mollified tones, one of the listeners spoke, raising an objection in a cautious manner.

"That's right, Charley," said the man. "It's good for you. You're fixed right. But what about the rest of us - how does it help us?"

Mumbles of agreement showed that the rest shared the opinion of the speaker. It was the final challenge to the one who dominated.

CHARLEY was ready for it.

"How does it help you?" he asked. "It helps you great! I know you fellows like a book. Small-townners, all of you. You went away from home; you got in dutch; you tried to grab a big haul so you could go back and make a grand splurge in the little burgs you came from.

"You forget that you may be in wrong there. Those alibis might not hold up. Uncle Sam is none too easy on deserters. You're not the first who skipped across the border!

"You all figured on going back home; the more you talked about it, the more you liked it. I let the idea ride until later; then those Aztecs at Zeltapec changed the whole works. Here you are - crying about the tough luck that's hit you - and all the while, you're passing up the opportunity that's worth a million each!"

Excited gasps came from the riders. They caught the ring of the leader's words. They crowded close in breathless silence, knowing that some stupendous plan was coming.

"Spring it, Charley," came an eager voice. "Give us the lay. We're with you. What'll we do - stick together?"

"We will go our own ways," declared the leader, in a low, firm tone. "Go as we had planned - each man to the place of his choice. But we shall go as men unknown. Forget your old names, and adopt new ones. You will be welcome, for each of you will have money. Forget crime; for it will be your duties to create confidence in the communities where you belong.

"As respectable citizens, you will soon be recognized. Remember that you have perfect opportunities, for you will be acquainted in your own home towns. The place of my choice is New York; there, I intend to harbor my funds, and to be guarded in my actions. I could pull jobs there now - but I intend to pass up the chance."

"Why, Charley?" came a question.

"Because," stated the leader, "I am going to wait for bigger opportunity. Each of you will have the time

that you require. Each will plan his own course; yet all will have the same objective; and I shall figure in each climax.

"Six months - ten months - a year - time does not matter. I shall wait until each of you is ready. Then, one by one, we shall reap the harvest. We are different; yet we are the same. Each will contribute; all will share."

"It ain't clear to me yet, Charley," announced a gruff-voiced rider, "but it seems like you're gettin' to somethin' worthwhile. We're to split; then each of us keeps in touch with you. I got that part straight. But how are you goin' to come to see us - or do we go to see you?"

"No one sees another," responded the leader emphatically. "There will be no letters between us. Each works toward his own objective. Then, when his time has arrived, he lets me know by special sign. You remember, back at Zeltapec -"

"The Aztec signs!" exclaimed a rider.

"Exactly," declared the leader. "Make your plans; notify me when you are ready. Have the details for my arrival; then we shall proceed."

"Proceed with what?" demanded one of the men.

The leader laughed. He rode ahead in silence; then, with carefully lowered voice, he began to speak.

Step by step, he weaved the details of the scheme that was in his mind. Not an utterance disturbed his discourse. Miles went by beneath the steady feet of the plodding horses. Still the riders listened to the words of the man who dominated them.

At last, the story was told. Words of admiration broke forth in jumbled chorus. One man had shown the way to five. All six were prepared for work that lay ahead. Terse questions sounded in the dark. To each, a reply was given by the leader.

THE glow of distant dawn was showing across the plains when the little caravan came to a halt. The border had been reached. The men were ready for their parting on American soil.

"Remember all that I have told you" - the leader's voice was stern - "and wait until the proper plans are made. There are five of you, and each has his job. I have told you how to reach me in New York. This is the beginning. The past is forgotten."

He paused and stared through the dim light at the outlined forms of the men who rested on their horses. Like the central figure in a group of statuary, the leader loomed and dominated.

"Each goes his way," he declared. "Each stays in his own place. No one can know our scheme - not even -"

His voice broke off; then continued in a reminiscent tone, tinged with a gruff chuckle.

"When I make plans," he said, "I plan big. I left New York because I was up against the only man big enough to lick me. I say a man, but he is more than that - he is The Shadow. Every crook that has tried to cross The Shadow has lost out. The pay-off has been death. We got away alive from Zeltapec. No one gets away alive from The Shadow.

"I was up against The Shadow; but I had time to get away before he spotted me. I saw what was coming; that's why I scrambled. You fellows may think New York is big; but you're wrong. I was afraid

to go back there, with The Shadow waiting for me. That's why I aimed for Mexico.

"But now, it's different. I've got nothing to fear in New York. The Shadow can't spot me now. I'm beyond his reach. He thinks that he can cope with crime. We'll show him crime that he can't touch! When we are ready, not even The Shadow can begin to suspect our crimes!"

The horizon was glowing pink. The leader stared toward the east and waved his hand in warning gesture. It was the signal for the parting. The others understood. Here, in the United States, by light of day, they were not to be seen together.

FIVE men spoke to their horses. One by one, they pulled away, each heading in a different direction. The leader alone remained. He watched the departing figures until they became tiny specks in the distance.

Now, in the glow of early morn, the one man lifted the reins of his horse. He had sent five men upon their missions. He was the sixth - alone and unperturbed. His face was visible in the rising light. That countenance was as impassive as a molded cast. Only the lips moved as their owner sat in thought.

"The Shadow!" The name was uttered in a low, slow tone. "The Shadow - the man who knows! This is a scheme he does not know; one that he can never know! Let him try to meet these crimes that will end when they begin!"

A coarse chuckle sounded from the spreading lips. The last of the six men slapped the reins upon the horse's back. The steed moved slowly across the arid plain.

One man had schemed. He had crossed the border. He had sent others on their way. Each carried limited wealth upon his saddle; each had, somehow, gained immunity from that suspicion which spells the end of crime.

Five had gone; the sixth was choosing his own course. Yet, even now, his way was certain. In the months to come, this man would deal in crime whenever he might be summoned.

He was a man who had dealt in crime before; but now, within his scheming mind lay plans for supercrime. He was ready to defy The Shadow! This band of criminals would strike - no one knew when. But until they struck, there would not even be any suspicion.

When this crime broke forth, would The Shadow know? Could The Shadow solve this crime?

CHAPTER II. BOLD CRIME

TWO men were seated in an oak-paneled study. The room was obviously a portion of a palatial home, for its heavy furnishings, from thick rugs to massive mahogany desk and chairs, symbolized the last word in expense.

One man, evidently a visitor, was sitting in a comfortable chair, idly smoking a cigarette. There was a certain restlessness in his attitude, but it did not betray itself upon his face. His features bore an impassive look. In fact, all who had ever met Earl Northrup were impressed by the singularity of his appearance.

The immobile expression of Northrup's countenance was accentuated by the characteristics of his physiognomy. His nose was broad and his cheeks, chin, and forehead seemed to slope away in uniform fashion.

His lips were thick and heavy. His eyes had a steady stare that changed only when they sparkled. Eyes and lips alone were the portions of Northrup's countenance that gave any evidence of emotion.

The other man - the owner of this home - was a dignified, elderly gentleman, with aristocratic gray hair. He was seated at the desk, going over a stack of papers with absolute indifference to Northrup's presence. That was the way with Anthony Hanscom. He was a business man who had become successful through concentration.

At last Hanscom glanced up, and his eyes met Northrup's. The elderly man smiled wanly. He pushed the papers aside, and leaned back in his swivel chair. He folded his hands and rested them beneath his chin.

"You're a very patient man, Northrup," he commented. "I think you are probably the most patient man in this part of Illinois. That's why I enjoy having you out here. Work comes first with me, and it's a pleasure to have a guest who does not interfere with it."

Northrup indulged in a slight smile. His restlessness, which had been unnoticed by Hanscom, was now gone. He glanced idly above Hanscom's head, and gave a short grunt of surprise as he noticed a clock upon the mantel.

"Quarter of nine," he commented. "It's getting quite near train time, Mr. Hanscom."

Hanscom looked at the clock and frowned.

"That's right," he remarked. "Let's see - that express to Chicago stops here in Tilson at nine fifteen. It will take us fifteen minutes to reach the station. I had no idea time had gone so rapidly. I must call my secretary at once."

HANSCOM rang a bell beside the desk. A quietly dressed young man entered the room. This was Carl Walton, Hanscom's secretary.

"It's getting late, Walton," said Hanscom. "I didn't notice the time. These bonds" - he drew a package from a desk drawer - "will have to wait. I intended to go over them while you took off the numbers. I don't like to neglect the job, especially as I will be a week in Chicago; at the same time, I ought to be on hand. Northrup was going over them with me; that's why he came up tonight. However -"

"I can come back from the station," interposed Northrup quietly. "There's no reason why Walton and I cannot do the work together. I have nothing to do this evening."

"Don't put yourself to that trouble, Northrup," responded Hanscom. "The work can wait until I come back. I'll just put the bonds in the safe and forget about them."

"It's no trouble to me," insisted Northrup.

"Very well," declared Hanscom. "I'll leave the bonds here, Walton. You can take off the numbers while Mr. Northrup and I are riding to the station. When you're finished, let Northrup go over the bonds when he comes back. After that, put the bonds in the safe and lock the combination. If Northrup does not come back, lock them up before you leave the room."

"I'll probably be back," said Earl Northrup.

Carl Walton nodded and left the study. Anthony Hanscom began to make the last preparations for his journey, talking to Northrup as he did so.

"I'll be glad to get to Chicago," asserted Hanscom. "It seems as though I am anchored in Tilson. Business is good here; I have this beautiful home; and I should be satisfied. Nevertheless, I like the big city. I have to get up there frequently. I don't see how you can stand it here in Tilson all the time."

"I've only lived here about eight months," responded Northrup, with a sour smile. "Maybe after a few years I'll be glad to get away, too."

"You have established yourself very nicely," said Hanscom, with an approving nod. "You have the right idea, Northrup. If a man comes to a small city with a reasonable amount of capital, and applies himself to a stable business, he is bound to succeed - especially when he is honest and friendly, as you are. Good will means a lot when a man has a limited number of neighbors."

"I have found that to be true," answered Northrup. "I have found Tilson an exceptional town. Of course, much of that is due to your presence here. Without Anthony Hanscom, Tilson would be merely another spot on the map of Illinois."

"Becoming complimentary now, eh?" laughed Hanscom, "Well, I guess you mean it, Northrup. You have a good business head, and I like your sincerity. Most of the people around here are limited in ideas. Well - we can have a last chat on the way to the station. I'll go along in your car with you. Sorry you aren't going to Chicago with me."

Hanscom rang the bell; then went to the door to meet Carl Walton. The secretary was bringing Hanscom's bag. The gray-haired man took it from him and hurriedly left, accompanied by Earl Northrup.

CARL WALTON closed the door of the study and picked up the stack of bonds. Noting the numbers, he marked them down one by one on a sheet of paper. Walton was slow and methodical in his work. That was his principal qualification as secretary to Anthony Hanscom.

Secluded here in Tilson, Hanscom, despite his wealth and numerous interests, managed to keep his affairs on a simple, definite basis. He did not require a secretary with initiative. Hence Carl Walton had an easy task, although the salary was low.

Walton's job involved very little responsibility. When Anthony Hanscom left Tilson, the secretary merely handled minor affairs during the employer's absence. Walton did not even know the combination to the wall safe in the room. It was a strong box of the latest pattern; one built to defy the most expert cracksman; yet it was seldom that Hanscom left articles of value in the house.

Tonight was one of the few exceptions. Hanscom had conducted business involving the transfer of various securities and had kept the bonds at home for a few days. Now, the examination of the bonds had been postponed, and after taking off the numbers, Walton's only duty would be to put the bonds in the safe and leave them until Hanscom returned.

While Walton was completing his task, he heard the whistle of the train leaving the station for Chicago. It reminded him that Earl Northrup had intended to return and that the bonds must be kept out in case Hanscom's friend came back to the house.

Walton knew little about Northrup except that he had come to Tilson several months ago, and had made a good impression in the town as a man of means. Northrup had easily acquired the confidence of Anthony Hanscom, and it was because of Northrup's own interest in sound investments that Hanscom had invited him to look over the bonds. Here, in the house with Walton, the securities were safe, especially as Mosier, Hanscom's six-foot butler, was also on duty.

When he had completed his list of numbers, Carl Walton placed the bonds in the open safe and went back to the desk. There, he made a careful copy of the list. Pushing both papers toward the front of the desk, Walton glanced up idly and was surprised to see Earl Northrup standing watching him.

"Oh, hello!" blurted Walton. "When did you come back, Mr. Northrup?"

"Just now," declared Northrup quietly. "Where are the bonds?"

"In the safe," responded Walton. "It's still open. I'll get them for you."

The secretary brought forth the securities and placed them on the desk. Northrup began to study them while Walton strolled about the room. The secretary noted that Hanscom's friend was examining the lists that had been prepared.

"Sure you took all these numbers correctly?" questioned Northrup suddenly.

"I think so," replied the secretary.

"I'll put the bonds away then," said Northrup.

He picked up the pile of securities and went to the wall safe. He carried the lists of numbers with him. Standing in front of the safe, Northrup made a motion of placing the bonds inside. He closed the door of the safe and turned the knob.

Coming back to the desk, Northrup folded the lists and dropped them in the desk drawer. He picked up his hat from a chair and strolled toward the door.

A DUBIOUS expression came over Carl Walton's face. A sudden suspicion had come to the secretary's mind - a suspicion that all was not well. He waited until Northrup had opened the door; then raised a sudden objection.

"You should have let me put those bonds away," declared Walton. "I'm responsible for them."

"They're in the safe," said Northrup quietly.

"I didn't see them go in there," stated Walton.

"Open the safe, then," volunteered Northrup. "Look them over. I put the lists back in the desk drawer."

"I don't have the combination to the safe," objected Walton. "Mr. Hanscom told me to put the bonds away. I didn't think you were going to lock the safe."

Northrup laughed in an indulgent tone and shrugged his shoulders. He started through the door; then paused as he heard Walton's challenging tone.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Northrup!" called Walton, in a serious tone. "You may be a friend of Mr. Hanscom; but I'm responsible for affairs around here. I don't like the way you walked in. You must have taken the liberty of coming into the house without ringing; otherwise Mosier would have notified me that you had returned. I'm on duty here, and I want to make sure that everything is right."

The secretary walked to the desk and drew out the two folded papers that Northrup had placed there. Watching Northrup, Walton unfolded the papers and looked at them. They were blank!

The truth struck home to Carl Walton. He knew the game now. Those bonds were not in the safe; they were in Northrup's pocket. So were the lists of numbers. Earl Northrup had deliberately stolen Anthony Hanscom's bonds - securities worth a quarter of a million - and had ingeniously substituted blank sheets of paper for the lists that might have aided in the tracing of the stolen goods!

"You can't get away with this!" cried Walton hoarsely. "You've got those bonds, Northrup, and the lists,

too! Give them back to me!"

An evil scowl showed on Northrup's puffy lips. By the action, the crook virtually confessed his guilt to Carl Walton. The secretary sprang across the room and seized Northrup by the shoulder.

"Give me those bonds, you thief!"

In reply, Northrup hurled the secretary halfway across the room. Walton plunged into the desk and caught himself before he fell to the floor.

But as he stared into the desk drawer, Walton saw the object that he needed. This was a revolver that Anthony Hanscom always had available.

Walton knew that the gun was loaded. He grasped it and swung toward Earl Northrup, holding the weapon in his right hand and steadying himself against the desk with his left.

Carl Walton never realized that in this action he had openly betrayed his intentions to the watchful man beside the door. Before Walton had a chance to aim the revolver, Earl Northrup was upon him. With a quick motion, Northrup seized the secretary's wrist and twisted the revolver from the hand that held it.

Walton struggled fiercely. Northrup, his evil lips grinning, met the secretary's attack. Warding off Walton's gripping hands, Northrup made a vicious swing with the revolver and struck a glancing blow beside Walton's ear. The secretary collapsed and sprawled upon the floor.

Northrup's gloating ended suddenly. With a quick turn, the man faced the door, just in time to meet Mosier. Hanscom's butler had heard the altercation. He had come upstairs. He had seen Northrup strike down the secretary.

Now, a new struggle was coming, and this time Northrup had no weakling as an adversary. Mosier, two hundred pounds in weight and six feet tall, was a powerful antagonist. His face was grim as he hurled himself upon the man with the revolver.

Northrup did not hesitate. He fired point-blank at Mosier's heart. The bullet reached its mark. Earl Northrup stepped calmly aside as Mosier's heavy form plunged forward and fell face downward on the floor. The butler's outstretched hands were within a foot of Carl Walton's motionless body.

There was no delay in Northrup's next action. The murderer leaned over Walton and laughed as he carefully wiped the handle of the revolver and placed it in the secretary's grip. The gun slipped from Walton's nerveless fingers, and dropped to the floor. Then the secretary's hand moved feebly. Earl Northrup grinned as he saw that Walton was regaining his senses.

Rising, Earl Northrup walked swiftly to the door of the room. He descended the stairs, found a darkened doorway in the rear hall, and stepped out into the night. The sound of distant shouts could be heard.

UP in the room where Mosier lay dead, Carl Walton was slowly opening his eyes. The secretary rubbed the side of his head in dazed fashion; then a bewildered look appeared upon Walton's face as he saw the dead form of Mosier.

Walton could not understand. He recalled that Earl Northrup had been here; that was all. He was thinking vaguely of the bonds. What was Mosier's connection? The butler had not been here.

In the midst of these reflections, Carl Walton saw the revolver beside him. He picked up the weapon and looked at Mosier. For the first time, Walton realized what had happened. Mosier was dead - slain with this weapon!

Earl Northrup! He was the murderer! Grasping the desk with one hand, Carl Walton rose unsteadily and wavered there, near the center of the room. His eyes stared about, noting that the room was empty. His ears could hear cries. The sounds came from outside the house.

Then came footsteps on the stairs. Walton looked up to see two uniformed men rushing into the room. As he tried to steady himself with his hand upon the desk, Walton pointed to the body that lay upon the floor, using the revolver as his indicator.

"Northrup killed Mosier!" he gasped. "Northrup - Earl Northrup - after he stole the bonds - he killed Mosier. Get him! Get Earl Northrup!"

CHAPTER III. WALTON EXPLAINS

CARL WALTON was sitting in a chair in the corner of Anthony Hanscom's study. Mosier's body still lay upon the floor. Two uniformed policemen and a physician were in the room; beside them was a stern-faced man in a light-gray business suit. This was Police Chief Culver, who headed Tilson's small but efficient force.

Carl Walton still wore a half-dazed expression. He was staring blankly at the wall ahead. He had told his story to Chief Culver, and the chief had immediately issued important orders. Now, as Walton rubbed his forehead and lost some of his bewilderment, Culver came over to the corner and sat down in front of him.

"Let's go over this again, Walton," requested Culver quietly. "You say Earl Northrup left here about ten minutes after nine to take Mr. Hanscom to the station."

"Yes, sir," responded the secretary.

"What time was it when Northrup came back?" questioned Culver.

"About quarter of ten," answered Walton. "He said he might be coming back and I was waiting for him."

"And he took some bonds from the safe?"

"He said he was putting them in there. He closed the safe and locked it. But I didn't think he put the bonds inside."

"And then -"

Chief Culver was artfully turning this resume into a statement on the part of Walton. The chief was moving his hand as a signal that the others should listen.

"Then," declared Walton, staring straight ahead, "I told Northrup I suspected him of stealing the bonds. I pulled the revolver from the desk drawer to make him wait until I called for help. He took it from me and hit me here" - the secretary rubbed the side of his head - "and - and that was all I knew until I came to and saw Mosier dead. I - I picked up the revolver. It was on the floor."

"You say that Mr. Hanscom went to Chicago?"

"Yes, sir, Northrup took him to the station, like I told you. They went out together."

"Very good," asserted Culver. "Well, we'll have Mr. Hanscom with us soon. We phoned ahead to Grahamstown to have him leave the train and come back. He's less than an hour out from Tilson."

LOOKING toward the door, Culver saw a man in plain clothes enter the room. The police chief walked over to meet the newcomer. The man spoke in a low voice.

"We've got Northrup's car, sir," he said.

"His car?" questioned Chief Culver. "Where did you pick it up?"

"At the station."

"At the station!" Culver's echo was a puzzled one. "I can't figure why he would have gone back there. The express to Chicago was the last train out."

"There was no one at the station," said the man in plain clothes. "The ticket office closes at nine thirty, you know. But we found the car down there."

"Hm-m-m," said Culver thoughtfully. "Then Northrup must have gotten someone to drive him back. I can't understand that. How do you figure it, Johnson?"

"Seems rather queer to me," responded the plain-clothes man. "If I could have located the agent, I might have learned something. We're looking for him now."

"Here's Walton's story," remarked Culver, going over the details that impressed him. "Northrup expected to come back, and he came back. He knocked out Walton and evidently made a get-away. Now if he came in another car beside his own, he may have had an accomplice - or he may have had a second car parked at the station. But why?"

Johnson shrugged his shoulders.

"The question is whether or not those bonds are in the safe," continued Culver. "We'll find that out when Hanscom gets here. As it now stands, all the evidence we've got is that Mosier was dead, and Walton was here alone. Looking at it that way, Walton could have killed the butler."

"He said that he was knocked out, didn't he?"

"Yes, but that could be a fake. For that matter, Mosier might have cracked him, but not enough to have kept Walton from shooting. No, the bonds are the important matter. I'll tell you why. If they're gone, there's a third man mixed in this."

"Northrup, eh?"

"Maybe," said the police chief cryptically. "That's what Walton says, and that's why we've got to find Northrup. But I can't get over the fact that Walton was here with the body."

Culver glanced at his watch and strode nervously up and down the floor. He stopped his pacing and turned to Johnson.

"Wait until Hanscom gets here," he said. "Then we'll know more than we do now. He ought to be here at any time, coming back by car from Grahamstown."

As the police chief finished his statement, a man appeared at the door of the room. He was a wan-faced fellow, whom Culver recognized as the agent from the Tilson station.

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief. "You're the man I want! Did you see Earl Northrup down at the station with Anthony Hanscom?"

The station agent nodded.

"They came into the ticket office," he declared. "Mr. Hanscom bought a ticket for Chicago. Then Northrup said -"

"Wait!" Culver's exclamation was an excited one. "Here's Hanscom now - and there's Northrup with him!"

The words were true. Anthony Hanscom and Earl Northrup had come up the stairs together. Hanscom was staring at the body of Mosier. Northrup's odd features were impassive, but the lips were puckered in a puzzled manner.

Chief Culver did not know what to make of the double arrival. He glanced from one man to the other; then motioned a policeman to take charge of Northrup while he spoke to Hanscom.

"Please open the safe at once," requested Culver. "We're worried about your bonds, Mr. Hanscom."

WITHOUT a word, Hanscom went to the safe and turned the dials. The door swung back. Hanscom gasped. Culver nodded knowingly. The safe was empty.

"They're gone," said the police chief solemnly, "and the man who's got them either killed Mosier or knows who killed him! There's the man I want to talk to now! Earl Northrup!"

Culver swung toward the door. Earl Northrup's lips were opened in amazement. He did not seem to understand the situation.

"How did you get back here?" demanded Culver. "Why did you attack Walton and kill Mosier? What have you done with the bonds you stole?"

Before Northrup could respond, Anthony Hanscom intervened. The gray-haired man thrust himself in front of the police chief. His eyes blazed angrily.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "This is preposterous! What do you mean by questioning Earl Northrup, my friend, in this manner. Are you insane, Chief Culver?"

Culver was taken aback. He could not understand the cause of Hanscom's sudden wrath. Then he realized that Hanscom was in ignorance of Walton's statement.

"I'm going by what Carl Walton told us," he explained. "He said that Northrup was to come back here; that he did come back; that he took the bonds -"

"Walton said that?" cried Hanscom. "Walton has lied!"

Striding across the room, Hanscom glowered at his secretary. Walton, bewildered, shrank away from the accusation that he saw in his employer's eyes. Hanscom cast a withering glance; then pointed toward Walton.

"There is the culprit, Chief Culver," he declared. "His story is a deliberate lie. He has hung himself in his own noose.

"He expected Earl Northrup back here. But Earl Northrup did not come back. When we reached the station, Northrup decided to go to Chicago with me. He left his car parked by the station. He got off the train with me at Grahamstown. He has been with me every minute since ten past nine - the time we left this house!"

Culver was too astonished to reply. He looked at Hanscom; then at Northrup; finally at the station agent. This last man nodded.

"I was just going to tell you about it, chief," declared the agent. "When Mr. Hanscom bought his ticket to Chicago, Mr. Northrup decided to go along, too. He asked me if his car would be safe outside the station. I told him it would be. So I sold him a ticket, too, and I saw him get on the train with Mr. Hanscom -"

Chief Culver waited no longer. He sprang across the room and grabbed Carl Walton by the shoulders. He spun the secretary around and stared into the young man's eyes.

"Answer up!" he exclaimed. "What do you know about this? Was Earl Northrup back here?"

Carl Walton was totally bewildered by the statements that he had heard. He tried to rub his head as he feebly sought a response to the question hurled at him.

"I - I" - Walton's words were confused - "I thought I saw Northrup come in here - like I - like I told you. I - I got hit on the head, you know - and - and - maybe I don't remember things just like they happened -"

"But you remember taking that gun from the desk drawer?"

"Yes, I picked up the gun."

"And you pointed it at someone?"

"Yes - I - I pointed it at North - I thought I pointed it at Northrup -"

"And then what?"

"I - I - don't remember."

"You fired that gun, didn't you?"

"I - I - don't remember."

"And it might have been Mosier you pointed it at?"

"I don't think so," protested Walton.

"But it might have been Mosier?" grilled the police chief.

"I - I guess so -" stammered Walton.

Police Chief Culver beckoned to an officer. He pointed to Walton's huddled form in the chair.

"Take him away," he ordered. "We're holding him for murder."

"No - no" - Walton's protesting voice became a scream - "no - no - you can't take me! I didn't shoot Mosier! I found the gun lying on the floor -"

"Yes?" mocked Culver grimly. "You found it in the desk drawer, according to your last statement."

The policemen were dragging Walton away. Culver watched them go. Then he turned to Hanscom. He spoke in an apologetic tone, glancing at Northrup as he did so.

"Walton didn't fool us," declared Culver calmly. "I figured his story was bad, all along. But he talked about those bonds - and I knew that if they were gone, there must be a third man. The question was whether Walton was innocent or an accomplice. He named Northrup.

"Maybe Carl Walton killed Mosier. Maybe the other man did. We have the circumstantial evidence on Walton - all we needed was to find something fishy in his story. We've got it now, because he slipped when he named Northrup. He thought Northrup was coming back here.

"Driving alone in his car - whether he was coming here or not - Northrup would have been up against it for an alibi. But this trip to Chicago makes it great. Walton's goose is cooked now. We'll grill him for all he knows.

"Too bad about the bonds, Mr. Hanscom," he added, "We'll do all we can to get them back. Give us a chance to work on Walton. A lot may come of it."

Men were removing Mosier's body. The police chief followed them. The room emptied. Only Earl Northrup, completely vindicated of all suspicion, remained with his friend, Hanscom.

"I think they'll trace the bonds, Hanscom," declared Northrup solemnly.

Anthony Hanscom slumped in the chair by the desk. He mopped his forehead; then regained his composure and extended his hand. Earl Northrup received it warmly.

"It may be a big financial loss to me," declared Hanscom, "but those bonds weren't all I have in the world. I'd rather lose four times their value than see a real friend - like you - suffer through the false accusations of a dastardly coward.

"I never trusted Walton very far, Northrup. I didn't think he was crooked, but I never considered him reliable. If Mosier hadn't been here, I wouldn't have left those bonds in Walton's care.

"There's someone else in this - someone bigger than Walton. Some real crook was after those bonds, and he used Walton as his accomplice. That's the way I see it, Northrup."

Hanscom was staring straight across the room. He did not see the twisted smile upon Northrup's lips. When Hanscom did glance toward his friend, the smile was gone. An impassive expression had replaced the one of evil.

IT was after midnight when Police Chief Culver returned to find Anthony Hanscom and Earl Northrup still together. He reported that Carl Walton had collapsed under the strain of a continued grilling; that the secretary's story had become confused, although he still adhered to the impossible idea that Earl Northrup might have been the man who had entered Hanscom's home to take the bonds.

Northrup left a short while later, and the police chief lingered long enough to add a few remarks to Anthony Hanscom.

"We'll get the truth out of Walton," declared Chief Culver. "He played a good bet when he tried to lay it on Northrup, but he lost the gamble. The fact that Northrup was with you cleared Northrup himself; but there's another angle that shows Walton's complicity in the theft."

"What is that?" questioned Hanscom.

"Any plea of mistaken identity on Carl Walton's part," responded Culver wisely. "The only way he has tried to meet the facts is by saying that he thought the man who came in was Earl Northrup. That doesn't go with me.

"Take a look at your friend Northrup. He's an odd-looking fellow, with that flat, solid face of his. I've seen plenty of types of faces - but never one that could match Northrup's. That was where Walton played a clever card. He knew that unless Northrup had an alibi - which Walton thought was impossible - we would believe him. That's why I was almost inclined to believe Walton at first.

"Earl Northrup? You could spot that fellow out of a million. I don't believe there's another man in the whole State of Illinois that has a face that resembles Northrup's!"

"I think you are right," agreed Hanscom. "I am glad Northrup was with me tonight. I agree with you that there is probably no one else with his facial characteristics in all this State."

Chief Culver and Anthony Hanscom were wrong in their assumptions. At that very moment, a man was boarding an eastbound limited at a junction point more than a hundred miles from Tilson. The man's face was obscure in the darkness of the vestibule. His eyes were turned away as he handed the conductor a ticket that bore Baltimore as its destination.

But when this individual was safely behind the closed door of the compartment which he had taken for the night, his face was plainly revealed in the light.

Immobile features - steady, staring eyes - lips with a twisted evil smile - all were the characteristics of Earl Northrup!

CHAPTER IV. THE CIVIC FUND

IN Barmouth, Maryland, the First National Bank was an imposing edifice that stood on one of the principal streets of the town. Its effective architecture was enhanced by the low row of shade trees that ran along a little side street beside the bank.

There were entrances from both the principal street and the little lane; but it was seldom that depositors entered by the side door of the bank. Most persons preferred to come in from the business street, passing by the office where Gorgas Talmadge, the staid old bank president, spent quiet hours in solemn dignity.

Today, Gorgas Talmadge was seated at a desk which bore high stacks of paper currency. Two men were in the office with him when he summoned Sherman Brooks, the cashier. Talmadge indicated the money with a sweep of his scrawny hand.

"There are the civic relief funds, Mr. Brooks," stated Talmadge. "I am placing them in your charge. Two hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"Yes, sir," responded Brooks.

"You understand," continued Talmadge, "that the money is to be delivered only to Harold Thurber, the chairman of the Civic Relief Committee. He will call for the cash today. Place it in the vault until he arrives."

Sherman Brooks signified that he understood the arrangement. The money was gathered, and the two guards accompanied the cashier to the vault at the back of the bank. Brooks put the cash away and went to his office. The room was an isolated spot between the vault and the side entrance of the bank.

The fact that he was temporary custodian of nearly a quarter of a million dollars was not disturbing to Sherman Brooks. The matter of the civic relief fund was merely a matter of routine. Talmadge's instructions had been no more than a formality. Brooks already knew what was expected of him.

Through contributions extended over a period of six weeks, the city of Barmouth had passed its goal of two hundred thousand dollars. The sum had been converted into cash to be distributed among the unemployed.

The Civic Relief Committee had, until recently, been a latent institution in Barmouth. Its present activity was due entirely to the active interest of one man - Harold Thurber. The drive for civic relief funds had begun when Thurber, a newcomer to Barmouth, had urged the local business men to support the movement.

Thurber, himself, had made the first contribution, several months after he had opened a small business in the town. His example had stimulated a flood of contributions, and Thurber, because of his activity, had been unanimously chosen as chairman of the Relief Committee.

When the final mark had been passed, Thurber had announced that on a set date - today - he and the other members of the committee would disburse the funds in cash. All arrangements had been made for Thurber to call at the bank and receive the money from Brooks.

It was a custom with Sherman Brooks to leave the bank at two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, to catch a train for Baltimore. Today was Wednesday, and the cashier was a trifle disgruntled because of this special duty. There was no telling when Thurber would arrive; it was probable that Brooks would have to wait for the late afternoon train.

Stepping from his office door, Brooks noted that the clock registered ten minutes of two. He shrugged his shoulders and returned to the office. There was no way of hurrying matters. Brooks had not dared to suggest to Gorgas Talmadge that someone else take charge of the relief fund. The cashier's job had, for many months, been of a doubtful status. It was a known fact in Barmouth that certain directors of the First National Bank were dissatisfied with the cashier, and Brooks was using the utmost discretion in his actions.

At the same time, Brooks had frequently expressed his feelings to certain men whom he judged as friends. They knew that if opportunity should present itself, the cashier of the First National Bank would gladly leave Barmouth and seek employment elsewhere. Brooks had conducted negotiations with banks in other parts of Maryland; and today, his thoughts turned to his constant desire to locate in another town.

While the cashier was speculating thus, the door of the secluded office opened, and Brooks looked up to see Harold Thurber enter. The chairman of the Civic Relief Committee closed the door behind him and approached the cashier's desk. Brooks arose to shake hands.

"I have come for the relief funds," stated Thurber quietly. "They are in your charge, are they not, Mr. Brooks?"

"They are in the vault," responded the cashier.

"Can you get them for me immediately?" asked Thurber. "They are needed now. We are ready for the distribution."

Brooks nodded as he rose from his desk. Thurber was standing by the desk, a faint, friendly smile upon his impassive features. Brooks left the office and went directly to the vault. He returned, bringing the money with him.

Thurber produced a portfolio, and the cash was placed within it. The head of the Relief Committee motioned toward the side of the building.

"Others are meeting me outside," he remarked. "We decided that it would be best to receive the funds in an unpretentious manner. The less time we spend in the transaction, the better it will be."

"That suits me," observed Brooks. "I'm going down to Baltimore, as usual, and I'll just have time to make the train."

"That reminds me" - Thurber's voice became confidential - "that I have a suggestion for you, Brooks. It refers to a job - outside of Barmouth."

Brooks glanced up with avid interest.

"When you arrive in Baltimore," said Thurber softly, "take a train on to Westgate. Inquire there for Mr. Philip Garmon. He is interested in the forming of a new bank - and he wants an experienced cashier."

"Philip Garmon - at Westgate -"

Thurber nodded as Brooks repeated the instructions. He calmly took the portfolio from the cashier's hands.

"Suppose I step in and speak to Mr. Talmadge," suggested Thurber, in a friendly voice. "I can give him a receipt for these funds; and tell him that I thought it best to talk with him. That will give you a chance to make your train, Brooks - and be sure to mention my name to Garmon. The job is there - and the salary will be - well, more than in Barmouth."

Thurber's persuasive tone was effective. Brooks knew Thurber well, and the two had frequently held confidential talks. Of all his friends in Barmouth, Brooks felt that Thurber was the best. Nodding, the cashier reached beneath his desk and took out a small traveling bag that he had in readiness.

"I'll speak to Mr. Talmadge," declared Thurber. "I told the others to drive around to the front of the bank, after I dropped off at the side entrance. I think that you can make your train."

Brooks nodded and hurried from the office, after a quick handclasp. He went through the side door, because the little street led directly to the station.

No one was in sight, and Brooks quickened his pace, confident that he could catch his train with ease. He felt a warmth of gratitude toward Thurber for the man's friendly cooperation. Thurber was a fine fellow; he was in Talmadge's office now, finishing the negotiations. More than that, he had given Brooks the lead he wanted for another job!

IT was with satisfaction that Sherman Brooks looked back upon the past. He was glad that he had a friend like Harold Thurber, a man whom he had taken into his confidence. Personal influence, Brooks decided, was the one way to get ahead in life. It was good to have a man like Thurber working in one's interest.

Back in the First National Bank, however, the actions of Harold Thurber were developing in a manner quite different from the way that Sherman Brooks supposed.

When the cashier had left, Thurber had been standing in the door of the office, about to go to see Gorgas Talmadge. But from the moment that Brooks had left the office and turned into the hallway which led to the side door of the bank, Thurber had made no farther step forward.

Instead, the chairman of the Relief Committee had actually withdrawn into the seclusion of the cashier's office. He was standing there now, calmly waiting for some unknown purpose. In one hand, Thurber held the portfolio with its wealth of cash; in the other, he held a watch.

Five minutes passed. Thurber replaced the watch in his pocket. He stared directly ahead, and his eyes sparkled cunningly. His oddly molded face was expressionless, save for the lips. Upon them appeared a twisting smile of evil.

Harold Thurber opened the door of the cashier's office. He glanced cautiously beyond. Seeing no one, he walked softly toward the side door of the bank. There he descended the steps and gazed out into the quiet street. Thurber, like Brooks, found no one in sight.

Instead of returning into the bank to pay a visit to Talmadge's office, Thurber walked deliberately down the street for a short distance. He turned abruptly, and cut between a high hedge and a deserted house. He arrived at a coupe, parked upon a gravel drive at the rear of the empty building.

With the twisted smile still emblazoned on his gloating lips, Harold Thurber placed the portfolio within the coupe, and took the driver's seat. He backed his car from the drive, and headed along a narrow lane that led toward the outskirts of Barmouth.

With calm demeanor and perfect calculation, Harold Thurber had received a fortune in cash. He had acted without haste; and no one had seen him enter or leave the First National Bank. Sherman Brooks, lulled by Thurber's friendliness, had neglected his duty without realizing it.

The money had reached the hands of the man for whom it was intended - so Sherman Brooks believed. The entire transaction had excited no suspicion in the cashier's mind. Only two men knew what had happened in the ten minutes preceding two o'clock. One was Sherman Brooks, now traveling in the train to Baltimore; the other was a calm-faced man driving a coupe swiftly along a deserted Maryland road.

The events that had followed after Brooks had left the bank were unknown to the cashier, however. The only man who could have described them was the one in the coupe - the man whose twisted smile alone betrayed the sordid elation that existed in his scheming brain.

A second crime had been accomplished - successfully!

CHAPTER V. THE SECOND ALIBI

IT was nearly three o'clock when a group of men entered the office of President Gorgas Talmadge, in the First National Bank of Barmouth. The old gentleman rose to greet them. He singled out the one whom he knew was most important.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Thurber," said Talmadge. "We have been expecting you. The funds are ready. Mr. Brooks has placed them in the vault. Come! We shall go to his office."

The group followed the old bank president as he led the way. Thurber was speaking to Talmadge.

"We've been in conference all day," he remarked. "So many details to attend to, we left the money until the last minute. Then, when I saw it was close to three o'clock, we hurried over here."

"Quite all right, Mr. Thurber," responded Talmadge. "I told Mr. Brooks to wait until you arrived. It would not have mattered if you had come after our closing hour of three."

Talmadge had reached the door of the cashier's office. He called to Brooks as he opened the door. He was surprised to see that the room was empty.

An annoyed expression appeared upon Talmadge's face. He had expected the cashier to be here. Instead, Brooks was missing. Waving his scrawny hand, Talmadge indicated chairs to the committeemen. He left the office in search of the cashier.

It was three minutes afterward when Talmadge returned, accompanied by two tellers. He was talking in an angry, quavering voice, and his theme was the absence of Sherman Brooks.

"I can't find the cashier!" he exclaimed. "He had no right to step out. He knew my instructions. I am sorry to delay you, gentlemen. This is gross negligence on the part of Mr. Brooks. He shall answer for it!"

"He did not know when we were coming, did he?" questioned Thurber.

"No," responded Talmadge, "but that is no excuse for him. He has been negligent with other duties; and this was too important a matter. However, I shall not delay you, gentlemen. The funds are in the vault, and I shall deliver them to you in person. Come with me, Davis."

One of the tellers followed the old bank president. Talmadge's destination was the vault. He was gone for five minutes. Then he returned abruptly to face the men in the cashier's office. Talmadge's countenance was ashen. Davis, standing behind Talmadge, reflected the bank president's expression.

"What is the matter?" questioned Harold Thurber, gazing steadily at Talmadge.

"The relief funds!" gasped the president. "I - I cannot find them! They are not in the vault!"

A curious smile flickered upon Thurber's lips. It spread into the beginning of an ugly leer; then it stopped abruptly as Thurber regained his impassiveness.

"I must find Brooks!" cried Talmadge. "I must find him! He had the money - he was to place it in the vault -"

The bank president paused, a look of consternation upon his wizened face. His own words frightened him. He tried to show signs of composure; then failed. The thoughts that were in his mind could not be withheld.

"Has Brooks gone?" he questioned, suddenly turning to the tellers. "Did you see him go out of here?"

"No, sir," answered Davis, while the second teller shook his head. "I only know that he intended to go to Baltimore, on the two o'clock train, if possible. He had his bag under his desk to -"

The members of the Civic Relief Committee were sensing the situation. One man peered beneath the desk and announced that no bag was there.

"Be calm now, gentlemen" - Thurber's voice was solemn, as he took up the theme that all were thinking - "we must be calm. There is some mistake. Mr. Brooks is trustworthy and reliable -"

The strain was too great for Gorgas Talmadge. The old man collapsed into a chair and piteously bleated the fear that he could not restrain.

"I believe that Brooks has absconded!" he gasped.

SOLEMN nods were passing among the committeemen. All were worried. None knew what to do. Davis, the teller, made a sudden suggestion.

"If Brooks has gone to Baltimore," he declared, "his train is just about there. He might be intercepted at the depot -"

The suggestion brought approval. It was the signal for action. One of the committeemen seized the telephone and put in a call to the Baltimore police.

Gorgas Talmadge was in a pitiful state, now that he saw his fears being realized. Harold Thurber and the tellers helped the old man back into his own office. It was almost half an hour before they could fully revive him. When Thurber again joined the tense group in the cashier's office, he was met with a chorus of elation.

"They've got Brooks!" exclaimed one man. "A call just came in from Baltimore. They're bringing him here!"

"Nabbed him in the station," said another. "They were too late to catch him when he came in, but they searched outbound trains, and found him in the smoker of one just about to leave."

Thurber shook his head solemnly.

"Let us hope, gentlemen," he said, "that Mr. Brooks can satisfactorily explain the disappearance of the relief funds. I, for one, hesitate to brand him as a thief."

Accompanied by the committee, Thurber left the bank and went to the hotel, where the group had its headquarters. There was need of an urgent conference. Means were proposed whereby the activities could be postponed until the next day. This matter required considerable time. The committee had scarcely concluded its work before word came in that Sherman Brooks was at police headquarters.

Thurber and the others hurried there. They all arrived simultaneously with Gorgas Talmadge. An officer took them in to interview the prisoner. The chief detective stopped them on the way.

"We've got the man," he said seriously. "but he didn't have the money when they picked him up in Baltimore. He won't talk until he sees you, Mr. Talmadge. He says that he can explain. That's why we wanted you here so quickly."

The old president nodded and motioned to the others to follow him. They found Sherman Brooks sitting stolidly in the corner of a room. The cashier's eye lighted as he observed Gorgas Talmadge; then a clouded, puzzled expression came over his face at sight of Harold Thurber.

"Where are the city relief funds, Brooks?" questioned Talmadge. "What did you do with them?"

The cashier's features hardened. His puzzlement turned to keen antagonism, as he stared steadily at Harold Thurber.

"I'll tell you what I did with the relief money, Mr. Talmadge," announced Brooks firmly. "I did exactly as you told me. I put the money in the vault. At ten minutes of two, I gave the cash to Harold Thurber, in my office."

Talmadge stepped back in amazement. He looked at Thurber; then at Brooks. The cashier tightened his lips and continued his accusation, amid a strange, incredulous silence.

"At ten minutes of two," he repeated. "That's when Mr. Thurber entered my office and told me to give him the money. I took the funds from the vault. I gave them to Thurber. He said that he would take them into your office, Mr. Talmadge -"

"Just a moment, Brooks," interposed the chief detective. "Before you go on with this, tell us why you were on that outgoing train in Baltimore."

"I was going to Westgate," responded Brooks. "I wanted to see a man named Philip Garmon, a friend of Thurber's. I was acting upon Thurber's suggestion. Garmon is opening a new bank; I thought I might get a better job there."

"So you were dissatisfied here?" quizzed the detective quickly.

Brooks saw his mistake. He shrugged his shoulders and glared past the detective, toward Thurber.

"Talk to Thurber," he said. "Ask him what he did with the money. He had it the last I knew."

"Call Westgate," said the detective to one of his men. "Find out about this man Garmon. Westgate's a small place; the police would know who he is."

He swung toward Thurber and put a question.

"Can you answer this charge?" the detective asked.

Harold Thurber shook his head sadly. He looked around the group of committeemen. He stared at Sherman Brooks with a gaze that was almost pitying.

"I am sorry," he said, "that I can do nothing to substantiate what Mr. Brooks has said. By accusing me, he has proven his own guilt. I had hoped that Brooks was not to blame; that he could have helped us in the recovery of these funds. He states that I came into his office at ten minutes of two. That is untrue -"

"You lie!" cried Brooks. "You were there, Thurber, and you know it! You knew I was taking the train at two o'clock. You told me to go on to Westgate -"

The words faded on the lips of Sherman Brooks. The cashier could see that no one was accepting his statement. The members of the Civic Relief Committee were glaring at him with accusing eyes. Bewildered, Brooks sensed a bombshell. It came.

"GENTLEMEN" - Thurber was turning to the members of his committee - "it is evident that Brooks was not aware of my whereabouts today. Otherwise, he would not have offered a statement that is so palpably inaccurate. I have no more to say."

One of the committeemen stepped forward. Ignoring Sherman Brooks as a being beneath his contempt, he spoke to Gorgas Talmadge and the chief detective.

"Our committee conference began at nine o'clock this morning," the man testified. "Mr. Thurber called the meeting to order. He remained in charge throughout the entire morning. He lunched with us, and we were in conference until three o'clock. Then we went to the bank in company.

"I can vouch that Mr. Thurber was not out of our presence for even one minute all this day, except when he was helping the bank tellers attend to Mr. Talmadge."

A chorus of unanimous agreement came from the other committeemen. The chief detective turned to face Sherman Brooks. The cashier was stupefied.

"You tried to lay it on the wrong man, Brooks," growled the detective. "You picked a bum bet. Come clean, now. Who did you meet in Baltimore, to hand that money to? Where were you going when you were pinched?"

"To Westgate," protested Brooks, bewildered. "To see Philip Garmon - the man who is opening a new bank -"

An interruption came from the doorway. The man who had called Westgate was reporting.

"Word on Philip Garmon," he announced. "Chief of police at Westgate says that Philip Garmon has been dead for five months. He never was connected with any banking business. He ran a small grocery store."

Sherman Brooks leaped to his feet. He hurled himself across the room, and grappled with Harold Thurber.

"You double-crosser!" he cried. "You dirty crook! You pulled this job - there in my office - today -"

Half a dozen men were dragging Brooks away. The cashier was screaming his defiance. His words were wild and incoherent. The police had him in charge, roughly shoving him toward the cell room. Those who had intervened were watching the departure. None observed the triumphant, twisted smile that appeared upon Harold Thurber's lips and faded almost as soon as it began.

"That finishes Brooks," announced the chief detective grimly. "We've got the goods on him. He was clever enough to slip the dough to someone else - but he never guessed that we'd have him pinched in Baltimore. He's the crook - the cash is what we're after now."

Old Gorgas Talmadge was swaying unsteadily. The scene had weakened him; but now he suddenly regained his dignity. He walked across the room and extended his hand to Harold Thurber. The chairman of the Civic Relief Committee accepted the clasp and placed his free hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"Our bank will stand this loss," declared Talmadge quietly. "We misplaced our confidence in an unworthy employee. We are responsible. We shall have money on hand tomorrow for the relief fund. The loss of the money is bad enough, Mr. Thurber - but it hurts me more to hear a lying accusation directed against your own good name -"

"That is all right, Mr. Talmadge," interrupted Thurber, in an even tone. "Brooks has shown his treachery. It is better that he should have made an absurd accusation than one which might have been possible to believe. He has shown his guilt beyond any doubt. He merely made a hopeless effort to save his worthless hide."

The members of the Relief Committee crowded about the two men now, offering their sympathy to Talmadge, expressing their confidence in Thurber. The chief detective was letting in reporters for an interview. The arrest of Sherman Brooks was on its way to first-page news.

An hour afterward, Harold Thurber left the police station. His statement had been made; the members of the Relief Committee had stood by him to a man. For the first time today, Thurber was alone and free from observation.

A smile flickered over Harold Thurber's lips. The smile developed into an evil grin. The lips straightened - and once more Thurber's face remained immobile.

Sherman Brooks had failed in his accusation. He would remain in jail, charged with the theft of two hundred and twenty thousand dollars. But Harold Thurber would be free, a man of honor in Barmouth, for he had established a perfect alibi.

Again a crime had been carried out to perfection. The ground was well covered; the alibis were perfect. Two innocent men had been made to suffer.

But somewhere there was a being whose mind was attracted to these strange occurrences. The Shadow, master of crime detection, whose eyes were everywhere, had seen more than was on the surface of these crimes!

CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW SUSPECTS

A CLICK sounded amid darkness. A pale-blue light appeared in mid-air. Its weird rays threw a lurid

glow upon the polished surface of a table. Yet within that sphere of light there was no sign of a living being.

The bluish glare seemed to fade at its outermost edges. It was a solitary gleam that was battling with surrounding darkness that restrained the light like a living shroud. The very atmosphere betokened the presence of some sinister, living being.

This was the single light in the sanctum of The Shadow. Somewhere in Manhattan, tucked away from the roar and bustle of crowded New York, this spot formed the sanctuary where a master mind evolved its mighty plans to cope with hidden crime.

Of all mysterious abodes, The Shadow's sanctum was most amazing. Its very existence was not even suspected. The Shadow, himself, was a mystery. His true identity was unknown. Yet he was recognized as a personage of power whose strange activities were not restricted to New York alone.

It was an axiom among fiends of crime that The Shadow could be everywhere. The biggest shots of crookdom feared The Shadow when they plotted crime. Months before, a man of evil had spoken The Shadow's name with awe while riding northward through Mexico. That was no exception to the rule. In every city that harbored an underworld The Shadow was feared as a living presence.

In London, in Berlin, in Madrid, crooks of all nationalities lowered their voices when they discussed The Shadow. In Paris, skulking crooks still mumbled tales of The Shadow's prowess - of that eerie night when an unknown being in black had battled single-handed against a horde of apaches. In Moscow, there were men who remembered the time when The Shadow had fought himself free from a regiment of Red troops.

Who was The Shadow?

No one knew. Gangsters recognized him as an overpowering menace. The police of New York knew him only as a fierce foe to crime. Studious criminologists had expressed the well-founded opinion that The Shadow was the single factor that prevented the balance of justice from swinging to the side of lawlessness.

When crime became rampant, then did The Shadow strike. A living being of the darkness, he came and went unseen. Always, his objective was the stamping out of supercrime.

Dying gangsters had expired with the name of The Shadow upon their blood-flecked lips. Hordes of mobsmen had fallen before The Shadow's wrath. A man garbed in black, his face unseen beneath the turned-down brim of a slouch hat - that was the spectral form that gangdom called The Shadow!

HAD leaders of the underworld suspected the existence of The Shadow's sanctum, they would have spared no effort to discover it. Often had vicious plotters sought to reach The Shadow; but they had seldom gained more than a surface knowledge of his habitats.

Those who had found themselves upon The Shadow's trail were no longer living to pursue their quest. Time and again had The Shadow turned upon those who sought to kill him; and those who had encountered The Shadow had encountered death.

Thus, The Shadow, secret in his identity, preserved the places where he lurked. This sanctum was inviolate. Not even the trusted men who served The Shadow knew its location. In fact, they, like The Shadow's enemies, held no clew to the identity of the black-garbed phantom of the night.

When the weird blue light glowed, as it was glowing now, its strange rays were seen only by The

Shadow. Into the revealing gleam came the first visible symbols of The Shadow's presence. Two long, white hands, with tapering fingers, crept across the surface of the table beneath the light. They were like detached things, materialized from nothingness.

Upon the third finger of the left hand shone a mysterious jewel. The rays that struck it from above were reflected in a gleaming glory. At first they showed the blueness of the light that illuminated this corner of the room. Then the color of the gem underwent a visible metamorphosis.

Its hues deepened and turned to purple. Then they acquired a crimson touch that developed into a vivid red. Living sparks seemed to leap from the weirdly glowing stone.

This gem was unique. A rare fire opal, known as a girasol, its splendor was unmatched in all the world. That stone was The Shadow's symbol, its ever-changing shades a token of The Shadow's own prowess. For The Shadow, when he appeared by day, could adopt disguises that deceived the most brilliant sleuths.

When the hands of The Shadow crept beneath the sanctum light, they were guided by well-formed purpose. Tonight, they suddenly produced a long envelope. Deft fingers opened the packet. Out dropped a folded paper and a tiny bundle of newspaper clippings.

The hands opened the paper. Hidden eyes read the coded lines that appeared in ink. As the hands still held the sheet, the writing began to disappear. Letter by letter, all traces vanished, leaving nothing but a blank piece of paper.

This was the method of communication that The Shadow utilized in correspondence with his agents. This coded letter, which The Shadow read with ease, had been written with a secret ink that vanished immediately after exposure to the air. It was a report from Rutledge Mann, a chubby-faced investment broker whose office in the Badger Building was a contact point wherein The Shadow's agents met for instructions.

THE white hands spread the clippings on the table. These were accounts of unusual crimes, gathered by Mann for the inspection of The Shadow. Mann selected them in accordance with two formulas: first, those cases in which police were baffled; second, those which possessed some twisted element of crime.

The specimens that lay before The Shadow tonight were of varied types. Long, pointing fingers swept over the clippings, and one by one eliminated until only two remained. These, the hands placed side by side.

The item on the left told of a crime in Tilson, Illinois. The report stated that Carl Walton, secretary to Anthony Hanscom, was under arrest for the murder of Mosier, Hanscom's secretary. It gave the details of the bond theft, and mentioned how Walton's attempt to implicate Earl Northrup had been shattered by a perfect alibi.

The other report concerned a theft of funds from the First National Bank in Barmouth, Maryland. Sherman Brooks, the cashier, was being held; and his futile endeavor to cast blame upon Harold Thurber, chairman of the Civic Relief Committee, had served only to add further proof of Brooks's guilt.

Evidently, there were definite points of similarity in these cases, so far as The Shadow's observations were concerned. Rutledge Mann had indicated no connection. The Shadow, himself, had chosen these two reports from the multitude that had been submitted.

The hands produced a sheet of paper and laid it between the clippings. A pen appeared, and the hand of The Shadow inscribed a series of comparative notations:

Tilson, Illinois Barmouth, Maryland.

Bonds stolen Cash stolen.

Carl Walton Sherman Brooks.

Earl Northrup Harold Thurber.

The freshly written statements told their own story. Despite the differing circumstances, the essential details of these two cases were identical. In widely separated parts of the country, the same crime had occurred under a different guise.

Some one had been after wealth. Valuable spoils had been captured. One man was implicated. He had accused another. The accusation had been discountenanced because of a complete alibi. Such was the skeleton of each crime.

Could two such incidents, gleaned from local newspapers, have been mere coincidence?

The writing was fading from the paper; but the effect of The Shadow's thoughts still remained. Those clippings told their stories. To The Shadow the identities were obvious.

In Tilson, Carl Walton lay in prison, charged with a crime which he had futilely blamed upon Earl Northrup. In Barmouth, Sherman Brooks was in jail, hopelessly declaring that Harold Thurber was the culprit.

Each case was of importance locally; but it was highly improbable that either had attracted attention in the other town. It had remained for The Shadow, in New York, to grasp the duplicated facts.

A low, weird laugh echoed through the spectral gloom. The laugh of The Shadow! That ghostly utterance was filled with meaning. Its sinister tones denoted a knowledge of hidden plots.

When The Shadow laughed, The Shadow acted.

THE white hands became restless. The left, with its sparkling girasol, held a sheet of paper upon which the right rapidly wrote a coded message.

As the blue ink dried, the hands dropped the first clipping - from Tilson - in the center of the message, and quickly folded the sheet of paper. This was inserted in an envelope.

Using another pen - one supplied with ordinary ink - The Shadow wrote this address:

Harry Vincent,

Metrolite Hotel,

New York City.

The hands were busy again. They were supplying a code message to another sheet of paper. The second clipping - of the Barmouth theft - was folded within the second note. Upon the envelope, The Shadow wrote:

Clyde Burke,

Evening Classic,

New York City.

Both Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke were agents of The Shadow. They were men who had served him faithfully. Now, they were to act as his investigators. With Vincent in Tilson and Burke in Barmouth, The Shadow could gain the further facts that he required in the campaign which he had now instituted.

Both envelopes went into a larger one. This, The Shadow addressed to Rutledge Mann, in the Badger Building. The task was completed with the sealing of the large envelope.

The light clicked out. The Shadow's sanctum was in darkness. Not even the sound of breathing disturbed the silence; yet the air was charged with a strange hush that betokened the presence of the invisible being who used this weird abode.

Even the silence seemed to lull as though awaiting what was to come. Then a low, whispered laugh crept through the darkness. Its ghoulish tones crept upward to a higher pitch. They broke into a ringing peal of terrible mockery - a laugh that was chilling in its sound.

The strange mirth ended abruptly; then, from the blackened walls, came answering cries. A horde of fantastic, unseen demons might well have been concealed herein; for the returning tones were a sobbing echo that had no human note. Those weird reverberations came in rising waves; then, gradually, they died away until only ghastly silence reigned again.

A change had come throughout this room. No longer did it hold The Shadow's presence. In the midst of his mighty laugh, the strange being of blankness had made a mysterious departure. He was gone, through some secret exit, leaving fantastic echoes to cry forth the fact that he had been here.

The Shadow was gone, to meet the challenge of unsuspected crime. His mission was to bring hidden crime to light. One man had been murdered; half a million dollars had been stolen; the crimes lay foisted upon the wrong men.

What was the answer to the riddle? How could the perfect alibis be counteracted? The Shadow's task was to learn. When The Shadow sought crime, the schemes of superminds were wont to fail!

The hand of The Shadow was reaching out to thwart crime. Two crimes had already been done. Would The Shadow be too late to thwart others?

CHAPTER VII. A THIRD CRIME

OF all the prominent men in the city of Daltona, Georgia, Cuthbert Davenport was most influential. At one time he had controlled the manufactory which afforded employment to the greatest number of workers in the town. Now retired, Davenport still retained real-estate holdings of considerable extent, and his private fortune was estimated at more than two million dollars.

Cuthbert Davenport was a widower with two children. He had been successful in life; now, his later years were mingled with both disappointment and satisfaction.

The cause of Davenport's discontent was the behavior of his son Perry, a ne'er-do-well, whose waywardness had scandalized the town of Daltona.

A year before, Perry Davenport had left his father's home, but had continually refused to depart from Daltona. Perry's vices had become excesses. He was now a hopeless drunkard, and his presence in the city emphasized that fact to his father.

To offset this misfortune, Cuthbert Davenport had gained the satisfaction of seeing his daughter happily

married. Less than a year ago - shortly after Perry's actions had passed the bounds of reason - Thomas Rodan had arrived in Daltona. An enterprising man, Rodan had entered the real-state business on a moderate scale. He had made contacts with Cuthbert Davenport, and had become a frequent visitor to the Davenport mansion.

A courtship had resulted between Rodan and Sonia Davenport, Cuthbert's only daughter. The old man had given his consent to the marriage; the wedding had taken place after a few months; and now Tom Rodan was living, with his bride, at Cuthbert Davenport's home.

Many persons wondered how Tom Rodan had managed to make such effective headway with the Davenport family. The man was not wealthy; and he was by no means handsome. In fact, his facial characteristics were most peculiar.

Tom Rodan's physiognomy consisted of a somewhat flattened nose and sloping cheeks, chin, and forehead. His expression was immobile; only his lips and eyes showed his emotions. When Rodan smiled, which was seldom, the effect was ugly.

The answer to Rodan's successful courtship was his apparent sincerity. Sonia Davenport had led an unhappy existence since her mother's death. From Rodan, she had gained a sympathy which she had never known from her austere father.

Cuthbert Davenport liked Tom Rodan because the young man was the direct antithesis of Perry. Rodan was sober, capable, and enterprising. Those three qualifications made Cuthbert Davenport appreciate him as a son-in-law.

TONIGHT, in the Davenport home, the father, daughter, and son-in-law were gathered in the living room; and the topic of their conversation was Perry. The two menservants were upstairs. Family trouble was open for discussion.

"That son of mine!" growled Cuthbert Davenport, as he stalked up and down the room. "He is worse than ever before! He is living downtown in a squalid boarding house, constantly under the influence of liquor. Something must be done about him! I can tolerate this condition no longer!"

"It is most unfortunate," observed Rodan. "I have met Perry on various occasions, and I should like very much to be instrumental in bringing him home. He has been very well disposed toward me; but, as you say, he is hopeless when intoxicated."

There was a studied carefulness in Rodan's speech. It indicated him as a man who had gone to great pains to improve his grammar. In fact, his tone had an aping touch that seemed an imitation of his father-in-law.

"I appreciate your willingness, Tom," declared Cuthbert Davenport, "but I can only repeat what I have told you often before. A reconciliation is impossible between Perry and myself. I have disowned him absolutely. My only wish is that he would get out of my sight forever."

"Dad is right, Tom," added Sonia. "When Perry comes in here, it is sure to mean trouble. He was so threatening on one occasion that dad was forced to have him ejected. I really thought that he was going to attack dad. That was a good many months ago, Tom - but the town has not yet forgotten the incident."

"Before I came here," mused Rodan. "I have heard it mentioned by many people."

"I have cut off Perry without a cent," declared Cuthbert Davenport, in a decisive tone. "All my worldly

goods will go to Sonia. Tom shall never receive a penny of my money. That is why I insisted that Sonia should make out her will entirely to you, Tom."

Rodan nodded thoughtfully. The arrangement had been completed a few weeks before, after Cuthbert Davenport had first discussed the matter with Sonia and Tom.

In fact, Tom Rodan had foreseen that this would result. He had known - in his own mind - that his marriage to Sonia Davenport would put him directly in line for the Davenport estate. Nevertheless, Rodan had always expressed a regret that Perry Davenport had been disowned.

"I am sorry," remarked Rodan, in a slow, sincere tone, "that I did not know Perry before he became uncontrolled. I would have used all my influence to have helped him. Even now, I can hardly believe that he is hopeless."

The doorbell rang, and Tom Rodan arose. He went into the hall and opened the front door. He ushered in two men, and shook hands with them. These were friends whom Rodan had made during his sojourn in Daltona. One was Glade Fitzroy, the county attorney; the other was George Seaton, the county sheriff.

"Hello, Tom," greeted Glade Fitzroy, "Where's Cuthbert? Oh, there he is, in the living room. Hello, Cuthbert. Good evening, Sonia."

Both of these visitors were old friends of the Davenport family. Cuthbert Davenport shook hands with the attorney and the sheriff, and they exchanged pleasant words with Sonia. Then Tom Rodan announced that he was going over to Fitzroy's home for a few hours. After kissing Sonia good-by, he departed with the two men, saying he would be back at the usual time.

SONIA DAVENPORT and her father remained in the living room. The girl did not mind her husband's absence, because it was seldom that Tom Rodan went out in the evenings. On the rare occasions when he was absent, he invariably returned by midnight.

A half hour drifted by. Sonia Davenport was reading a book; her father was smoking a cigar, deeply engrossed in thought. It was the sound of the front door opening that made them both look into the hallway. Two men had entered the house. One was Tom Rodan; the other was the black sheep, Perry Davenport.

Trembling with suppressed anger, Cuthbert Davenport arose at sight of his son. Sonia laid a restraining hand upon her father's arm. Tom Rodan and Perry were approaching. Rodan was supporting Perry, who was evidently in a hopeless state of intoxication.

"I saw Perry on the street," remarked Rodan, in a low voice. "I left Fitzroy's car to look out for him. He wanted to come here - I couldn't talk him out of it, so I brought him."

"Wuz I on the street?" questioned Perry thickly. "Thass funny. Thought I wuz in my room. Thought you came in there to get me. Thass funny."

"He is befuddled mentally," remarked Rodan.

Sonia Davenport looked wonderingly at her husband. There was something in Tom's tone that seemed unfamiliar. He was speaking without his usual precision. Yet there was no mistaking that this was her husband. Tom Rodan's unhandsome features were unlike those of any other man she had ever seen. Other persons had often remarked the same.

"Come on, Perry," said Rodan briskly. "Brace up. Here you are. Did you want to talk to your father?"

Rodan shook Perry roughly. The black sheep stared at Cuthbert Davenport. The old man's challenging attitude awoke an instant response in the besotted son. Perry Davenport's face reddened with antagonism, as it had so many times before.

"Wanna talk to my father?" questioned Perry coarsely. "Course I wanna talk to him. Wanna tell him what I think of him. Wish he never was my father - thass what I wish! Says he's got no use for me, eh? Well, I've got no use for him!"

"Out of my home!" ordered Cuthbert Davenport. "Out of here, you ne'er-do-well!"

The old man shook his fist in Perry's face. Rodan suddenly released his grip upon the son, and Perry staggered until his hands gripped the back of a chair. Sonia Davenport was watching those two, while Tom Rodan quietly stepped away.

"Out of here!" ordered Cuthbert Davenport.

Perry's response was an angry thrust. He let go of the chair and precipitated himself forward. He seized his father with one hand and tried to pummel him with the other. Cuthbert Davenport broke away and staggered back, Perry following him.

TOM RODAN was standing by the telephone table. As Perry Davenport began to cry out mad expletives, Rodan pushed the telephone to the floor. The receiver fell off. The operator's voice could be heard buzzing over the line.

"I'll kill you!" exclaimed Perry Davenport. "Thass what I'll do! Kill you!"

"Perry!" Sonia shouted out. "Don't! Remember - he's your father!"

The girl leaped forward and threw her arms about Cuthbert Davenport. With one free hand, she tried to ward off Perry's staggering advance. In her fear for her father, she had forgotten the presence of her husband.

By the telephone table, Tom Rodan had calmly drawn a revolver from his pocket. He aimed it deliberately, but not at Perry Davenport. His objective was Cuthbert. Rodan pressed the trigger.

Sonia screamed again, as she felt her father's body fall away. Turning, she saw Tom Rodan, the smoking gun in his hand.

Sonia gasped as she observed her husband's face. No longer were those features impassive. Tom Rodan's lips had twisted into a terrible, evil smile - the grotesque grin of a heathen idol.

Wild indignation overruled the girl's terror. Clenching her fists as she faced this hideous traitor, Sonia screamed her accusation.

"You've killed him!" she cried. "You've killed my father! You - you beast -"

Deliberately, Tom Rodan pressed the trigger of his revolver. His aim was calculated. The bullet found its mark in the girl's heart.

As Sonia Davenport collapsed to the floor, her brother Perry came to his senses. With a cry of madness, he plunged toward his false brother-in-law.

Rodan, still maintaining his evil smile, turned swiftly as he detected footsteps in the hall. A man appeared at the door of the living room. It was Fairchild, Cuthbert Davenport's house man. Perry Davenport fell

upon Tom Rodan just as Fairchild appeared. But Perry was too late to prevent Rodan's next deed.

Coolly, Rodan fired two shots into Fairchild's body. The servant collapsed. Then Rodan sprawled upon the floor, under Perry's plunge. Perry's attack was futile, however. With one swift motion, Rodan sent the besotted young man rolling across the floor. Rising, Rodan looked quickly at the three persons whom he had shot. The bodies lay motionless. A chuckle came from Rodan's twisted lips.

The way was clear for escape. Rodan gave one last glance toward Perry, who was trying to rise from the floor. He threw the revolver against Perry's shoulder; then turned quickly and left the room. Hurrying through the hallway, Rodan slipped out through a side door and made his exit to the darkened lawn.

A few minutes later, Billings, Cuthbert Davenport's chauffeur, arrived upon the scene. The man had been asleep on the third floor. He saw the motionless bodies; he saw Perry on hands and knees, trying futilely to pick up a revolver. The front door burst open, and two neighbors came dashing into the house. Billings pointed to the horrible scene.

Seeing the arrivals, Perry Davenport clutched the revolver and stared with challenging gaze. He shouted the name of a man whom he did not see.

"Tom Rodan!" he cried. "Where's Tom Rodan? I'll kill him, thass what I'll do! I'll kill him for this!"

Three men leaped upon Perry Davenport and bore him to the floor as he tried to rise. The revolver was wrested from the young man's clutch.

A siren sounded from the outer street. The police were coming, summoned by the telephone operator. Grim-faced men were holding Perry Davenport until help should arrive.

CHAPTER VIII. HELD FOR MURDER

"YOUR deal, Tom," said Sheriff Seaton.

A group of men were in the midst of a card game at Glade Fitzroy's home. This had started immediately after Fitzroy, Seaton and Rodan had arrived.

Tom Rodan picked up the pack and began to shuffle. His face was immobile - a perfect poker face - save for the slight beginning of a smile that was wavering upon his thickened lips.

Off in the distance, Rodan fancied that he heard the faint echoes of a shrill sound. Mentally, he pictured a police car traveling through the streets of Daltona. But he made no comment.

Then Rodan's thoughts reverted to the last hour. He saw himself seated with Cuthbert and Sonia Davenport; he remembered the arrival of Seaton and Fitzroy. Then he pictured himself driving directly to Fitzroy's home, where he was now.

Rodan was dealing, and he turned his shrewd gaze toward Glade Fitzroy; then glanced at George Seaton. He had been with these men every minute since he had left his father-in-law's home. That fact brought secret satisfaction to Tom Rodan.

A telephone bell rang. Glade Fitzroy left the game to answer the call. The other men could hear his voice from the hall outside.

"What's that?" Fitzroy was questioning. "Wait a minute - wait a minute - it would be better for you to talk with Sheriff Seaton. He's here."

Fitzroy came back into the room.

"Some big trouble, George," he said to Seaton. "Shooting - police on the job - take the phone yourself."

The sheriff went out into the hall. A tense silence came over the group. Serious crimes were not common in Daltona. Everyone was wondering what had happened.

The card players could hear Sheriff Seaton grunting as he listened to details over the wire. Then came a sudden pause. A cry of amazement came from the hall.

"I'll be there" - Seaton's voice was grim - "yes, right away. This is terrible - terrible -"

The phone thumped upon a table. A few moments later, George Seaton walked into the cardroom. His face was colorless. His friends stared at him in alarm. They knew that some terrible calamity must have occurred. Never before had any of them seen the hard-boiled sheriff weaken.

GEORGE SEATON'S eyes rested on one man - Tom Rodan. Walking across the room, the sheriff extended his hand. Rodan, staring, puzzled, accepted it. Seaton's bluff voice broke as he tried to speak.

"Brace yourself, Tom," he said. "You're going to be hit hard - harder than you were ever hit before" - the sheriff's voice was choking - "but I've got to tell you. It's murder, Tom, and we've got the man that did it; but that won't help you. Cuthbert Davenport is dead, and so is - so is your wife!"

Gasps of sympathy came from the group. Tom Rodan's face never flinched. His lips were straight; his eyes stared ahead. He still gripped the sheriff's hand, but Seaton could feel the tension of the grasp release.

The momentary pause seemed endless. Then Seaton spoke again, this time addressing the other men who were present.

"Perry Davenport did it," he explained. "Came in there after Fitz and I had taken Tom out with us. One of the servants was killed, too. They've got Perry - drunk as usual. I've got to go over there."

"I'm going with you," declared Fitzroy.

The sheriff nodded.

"Look after Tom, boys," he said solemnly.

Seaton released his handclasp. He turned on his heel and walked to the door. Glade Fitzroy joined him. Tom Rodan rose mechanically from the table.

"Wait," he said, in his slow, even tone. "I've got to go along. I can't stay here. I've got to go with you."

Seaton looked at Fitzroy. The latter nodded.

Walking steadily, Tom Rodan joined his two friends. A solemn trio, they left the house and entered Fitzroy's car.

Not a word was spoken during the ride to Cuthbert Davenport's home. The three entered the front door wordless - that door which they had left not long ago, chatting in anticipation of the evening that had lain ahead.

George Seaton glanced at Tom Rodan. The man was bearing up. The sheriff knew that his friend could meet the ordeal.

The three walked across the hall and stopped at the living-room door. Police were in attendance. Solemnly, Tom Rodan gazed at the dead body of his wife, Sonia.

Rodan's face remained emotionless, but both Seaton and Fitzroy could picture the mental anguish that was sweeping through his brain. Their sympathy was with their friend.

The people in the room were watching them - those who had come to the rescue and the police who had arrived. The only one not watching was Perry Davenport, who was seated with bowed head. Now, the prisoner sensed that new arrivals were here. He glanced upward. His bleary eyes sighted Tom Rodan.

BEFORE his captors could restrain him, Perry was on his feet, scrambling across the room toward his brother-in-law. His eyes were gleaming with a murderous fury.

"I'll kill you, Rodan!" raged Perry Davenport. "I'll kill you for this!"

Men were seizing him now. Despite his helplessness, Perry was still trying to struggle forward. The sight of death had sobered him. His mind was furious, but clear. None could stop the words that he uttered.

"Let me get him! Let me get him! He did this! He is the murderer! Look at him standing there - Tom Rodan - the man who killed my father and my sister! Why is he free?"

Breathing heavy gasps, Perry looked about him and saw none but antagonistic looks. His hectic rage changed to earnest pleadings.

"Don't you understand?" he questioned. "Tom Rodan did this! I was in my room, when he came there. He wanted me to come with him. He drove me along the lane out back; then he walked me to the front door. I saw him kill! That's why he brought me here - so he could kill, and place the blame on me!"

Not a believing eye met Perry's. The young man's fury returned with desperation. Breaking free from those who held him, he plunged forward with clenched fists to attack the silent man whom he had accused.

Sheriff Seaton intervened. Stepping swiftly between Rodan and the attacker, the sheriff swung a quick upward punch that reached Perry Davenport's jaw. Perry folded on the floor. It was a perfect knock-out.

"Gentlemen," said the sheriff quietly. "I wish to make a statement to those of you who have heard this cowardly accusation.

"Tonight, Mr. Fitzroy and myself called at this house and talked with Cuthbert Davenport and his daughter Sonia, while they were still alive. Tom Rodan was with us when we left. He has been with us every minute since. He was playing cards with us when the news of these crimes was phoned to me.

"Tom Rodan was a real son to Cuthbert Davenport. He took the place that this scoundrel" - the sheriff indicated Perry Davenport - "had failed to fill. Tom Rodan is suffering now, on account of Perry Davenport's work. To have him accused of something he would never have done - of crimes that he could not possibly have committed - is too much!

"I'm glad that I'm Tom Rodan's friend. I'm glad that Glade Fitzroy is his friend. We are both here to protect him against a blackguard's accusations. There on the floor" - Seaton shook his fist at Perry's crumpled form - "is a yellow, lying hound. He is the murderer, and his attempt to wrong an innocent man is a new proof of his guilt. Take him away!"

A buzz of affirmation followed the sheriff's outburst. His dynamic words had spiked the belated

accusation that Perry Davenport had made. In the eyes of all, Perry Davenport was a murderer of the worst type.

It was only the sheriff's conscientiousness of duty that made him add a short remark. Seaton could sense the fervor that was brewing; the hatred for Perry Davenport that he had aroused.

"No talk of lynch law!" he warned. "That yellow hound deserves to be strung up, but the State will take care of it. Put him in jail and watch him."

Rough hands dragged Perry Davenport from the room. The police arranged for the removal of the bodies. Tom Rodan turned away and walked to another room, followed by George Seaton and Glade Fitzroy. These two spoke a few words of consolation to their bereaved friend. Then, as Rodan sat wearily in a chair, and turned his head toward the wall, they walked away to leave him with his grief.

As soon as the other men were gone, Tom Rodan allowed a twisted smile to curl itself upon his puffy lips. That smile brought an expression of hideous evil to his face. Had his friends seen him at that moment, they would have instinctively believed the accusations that Perry Davenport had uttered. For Tom Rodan's features were the symbol of an evil soul.

All anguish had been feigned by Tom Rodan. His secretly concealed emotion was one of gloating triumph. His plans had reached their culmination. Cuthbert Davenport was dead. Sonia was dead. The family wealth was scheduled to reach Tom Rodan, the son-in-law.

The only living person who might have fought to break the wills was Perry Davenport - and he was blackened as the murderer of his father and his sister!

Yet Perry Davenport was not a murderer. Tom Rodan knew that. He held the secret which none could possibly suspect. He knew why Perry had accused him. He was triumphant because well-laid plans had succeeded. With Fitzroy and Seaton to support him, no one could possibly implicate him with these murders.

Like other men of evil, Tom Rodan possessed a perfect alibi. The law would take its course. Perry Davenport would pay the penalty for the murders he did not commit. In the meantime, the Davenport wealth would come to Tom Rodan - through a simpler process of the law itself.

Who could prevent it? Rodan's mind went back to a night when he and others had been riding northward across a mesquite-studded plain. That night had brought the inspiration from which this plan had developed.

A name had been mentioned on that night. Somehow, the name had stuck in the mind of the man who had come to Daltona as Tom Rodan. He could hear the name whispered now - as the leader of a band of six had pronounced it.

The Shadow!

Who was he? What could he do? Nothing! No one in all the world could divine the secret which Tom Rodan shared with other silent men. Evil was due to triumph over right.

The Shadow!

Tom Rodan still held his twisted smile as he thought of that empty name. Where hard-headed men had been deceived, shadows could not prevail. Tom Rodan was one of six, headed by a leader who had evolved a perfect regime of crime. All were free to act as they had individually planned. All were immune from danger. Why worry about an unknown person called The Shadow? He - The Shadow - could not

even begin to suspect this chain of supercrime!

Had Rodan known more, the smile of evil would have faded from his crooked lips. Already had The Shadow suspected crime like this; another link was all The Shadow sought. The wild accusations made by Perry Davenport might reach unlistening ears; but there was one whom destiny had provided to fathom their true meaning.

That one was The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. THE SHADOW FINDS

WITHIN his sanctum, The Shadow was at work. The girasol glimmered beneath the strange blue light. White hands were moving across the polished table.

Beneath the supple fingers were report sheets from The Shadow's agents. Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke had reached their destinations. From Tilson and Barmouth, these two capable men had sent their findings.

The written reports were negative. They had served only to substantiate opinions that existed in the towns where Vincent and Burke had gone.

In Tilson, Illinois, no one held any doubt regarding the high reputation of Earl Northrup. The man had been vindicated by his alibi. Carl Walton was to be prosecuted for the murder of Mosier, the servant, and he was also charged with theft of bonds belonging to his employer, Anthony Hanscom.

The same situation existed in Barmouth, Maryland. There, the status of Harold Thurber, chairman of the Civic Relief Committee, was higher than ever. His friends had laughed at the ridiculous charge that he was responsible for the disappearance of the relief funds.

All were positive that Sherman Brooks was the real culprit. The cashier had been caught in flight. He had made a wild accusation that had only served to prove his guilt. His case was being scheduled for court, and there could be no doubt as to the outcome. Sherman Brooks was unanimously classed as guilty.

An identity between the reports of The Shadow's agents was apparent. Since the Tilson and Barmouth crimes, both Earl Northrup and Harold Thurber had led serene, unruffled lives. They had gone about their usual affairs with no thought of the past. Neither one had moved from his own town. They were free from suspicion.

There was nothing to show that either Northrup or Thurber could have had contact with each other. In fact, all evidence pointed the other way. These men seemed content to remain within the sphere of their own localities.

One coincidence was manifest, however. Vincent's report of Northrup, when compared with Burke's account of Thurber, showed that each man had come to his respective town on approximately the same date, nearly one year ago.

IN preparing their reports, both Vincent and Burke had encountered a certain difficulty. When Vincent had sought for a photograph of Northrup, he had been unable to locate one. In the same way, Burke, looking for a picture of Thurber, had had no luck.

Both agents had persisted. Vincent had visited a local photographer, and had, through artifice, gained access to a batch of photographs taken in different parts of the town of Tilson. Among these was the picture of a group gathered in front of Anthony Hanscom's home. One of the men in the group was Earl

Northrup.

Burke, visiting the local newspaper in Barmouth, had presented himself as a New York newspaperman interested in the Civic Relief Committee and its work. The newspaper had no photograph of the committee; but they referred Burke to a printer who had prepared a pamphlet, outlining the purpose of the relief fund.

Obtaining a copy of the little pamphlet, Burke had discovered that it contained a picture of the Relief Committee in a group, with Harold Thurber as the central figure.

On The Shadow's table rested the two pictures. Vincent had indicated Northrup; Burke had marked an arrow pointing to Thurber. A pair of tiny scissors gleamed as The Shadow cut out the separate photographs and placed the pictures of Northrup and Thurber side by side upon a sheet of white paper.

Now the hands of The Shadow held a magnifying glass. Beneath its powerful lens, the photographs were enlarged so that eyes from the dark could compare them. A short laugh came from the gloom beyond the blue light.

The features of Earl Northrup and Harold Thurber were identical! From flat nose to sloping chin, cheeks and forehead, each was a counterpart of the other! It was remarkable that two such men should look exactly alike; it was more remarkable that each should be a man who could boast a perfect alibi!

Here was an answer to crime. Was it possible that Earl Northrup and Harold Thurber had worked together, each one serving as an alibi-maker for the other?

A skilled sleuth, with this evidence before him, would have leaped easily to such a conclusion. Yet The Shadow paused.

His keen mind was considering the time element. Between the bond robbery and the bank theft, there had been sufficient time for two such men to have traveled from Illinois to Maryland. Yet there was a reason why such action could not have been taken.

That reason lay in the report from Harry Vincent. It stated clearly that Earl Northrup had made no move from Tilson since Hanscom's bonds had been stolen and Mosier slain.

It was true that Vincent had not arrived in Tilson until after crime had struck in Barmouth; yet Vincent's inquiry had been a careful one, and he would surely have learned if Northrup had taken a sudden trip immediately after the affair at Hanscom's.

It was obvious that Northrup had stayed close to base - a sure protection for his alibi. So far as these two men were involved, the only point against them was their identity of appearance. That could not suffice as conclusive evidence of collusion between them.

The Shadow's hands pushed the photographs aside. They remained motionless, as though the brain that controlled them was perplexed. Then the hands produced a large envelope, opened it, and dropped out a bundle of clippings. These were new items from Rutledge Mann.

With keen fingers, The Shadow went through the clippings. There was a certain conviction about The Shadow's touch, as though he expected his probing fingers to find a slip that he required.

At last, the hands became motionless. A piece of newspaper dropped upon the table. The eyes of The Shadow were reading.

Crime had come to the peaceful town of Daltona, Georgia. There, the newspaper report stated, Perry

Davenport, disinherited son of Cuthbert Davenport, had slain his father, his sister, and a servant. The surviving member of the Davenport family was Tom Rodan, son-in-law of Cuthbert Davenport.

News of the murders had been brought to Rodan at the home of Sheriff George Seaton. He had gone to the Davenport home, there to be falsely accused of crime by Perry Davenport.

The report added that Perry Davenport had been under the influence of liquor, and that his useless accusation had been immediately disproven by reliable witnesses who testified that Rodan had been in their company.

The laugh of The Shadow sounded low amid the gloom of the silent sanctum. In this single report, chosen with keen decision, The Shadow had found a clue that he desired. His hand was active now. It was inscribing names upon a sheet of paper. These names formed a column:

Earl Northrup

Harold Thurber

Thomas Rodan

The hand of The Shadow paused. Beneath the list, it added an interrogation point. Its significance was plain. The symbol indicated that the trail did not end here; that others might well be involved in this strange course of repeated crime.

Now the hand was drawing lines, one from each name, and one from the interrogation point beneath the list. These lines converged to the right of the list. They formed a circle, and in the sphere The Shadow inscribed another interrogation mark.

WITH keen intuition, The Shadow had traced the probable procedure that had aided the operations of the men involved in crime. Earl Northrup, Harold Thurber, and Thomas Rodan were fixtures - each a man established in a small community. The question mark beneath their names indicated that there might be more than these three.

But with such men as fixtures, how could the crimes be staged? The question mark at the right was the answer. It indicated the possibility of another criminal - a wandering fiend engaged in a round robin of pillage and murder!

Northrup and Thurber looked alike. What of Rodan?

That was something to be learned. If The Shadow's suspicions were correct, Thomas Rodan, of Daltona, Georgia, would be the third in a list of identical men!

The writing had disappeared from the sheet of paper. Only blankness challenged The Shadow now. Long silence followed while the hands were resting. Then came a laugh as the hands withdrew into darkness. Out clicked the light.

The solemn, echoing mirth of The Shadow swept through the sanctum, presaging his departure. The silence of empty blackness followed. The Shadow was gone.

Later that night, a monoplane took off from an airport in New Jersey. Thrumming its way southward, the huge, man-made bird swept swiftly across the moonlit countryside. Flying low, the plane's wings cast a swiftly moving shadow on the ground beneath.

That shadow symbolized the identity of the man who piloted the ship. The Shadow was headed for

Daltona!

CHAPTER X. THE FORCED CLEW

ON the following morning, a gentleman entered the lobby of the Southern Hotel in Daltona, and approached the desk to register. The clerk noted the name that he inscribed. It was that of Lamont Cranston, from New York.

After instructing the bell boy to carry the guest's luggage to his room, the clerk happened to glance up. Then, for the first time, he noticed the appearance of the man who had registered.

Lamont Cranston's face was a study in impassiveness. It was a firm, chiseled countenance from which two eyes shone with burning gaze. As those eyes turned upon the clerk behind the desk, their steadiness seemed to fade. Nevertheless, the clerk experienced a peculiar magnetic attraction gripping him. It was as if he had been caught by some mysterious power, whose force had been purposely lessened by the man who controlled it.

Blinking, the clerk watched Cranston pass across the lobby. He marveled at the bearing of this mysterious guest. Tall, almost motionless in stride, Cranston formed a strange figure as he walked toward the elevator.

When he had entered the lighted lift, the clerk still stared toward him; then, suddenly, the man behind the desk found his gaze moving toward the floor. There, projecting from the doorway of the elevator, the clerk saw a most singular shadow. A long, grotesque blotch of black, its presence seemed uncanny. Glancing upward, the clerk caught a last glimpse of Cranston's burning, hawklike eyes. Then the door was shut, and the car had gone on its upward course.

There was a reason for this amazement on the part of the observant clerk in the Southern Hotel. In viewing this man who called himself Lamont Cranston, he had encountered the personality of another personage. He had seen the eyes of The Shadow!

In his hotel room, Lamont Cranston walked to the window and stared forth over the city of Daltona. He had come here on a definite mission - the tracing of Thomas Rodan. So far, there was no conclusive connection between Rodan and such men as Earl Northrup and Harold Thurber; nevertheless, this man, known as Lamont Cranston - otherwise The Shadow - had come to test the truth of his own keen intuition.

Lamont Cranston's first action was to consult the local telephone book. There he discovered the name of Thomas Rodan, listed as a realtor. Cranston laughed softly as he picked up the telephone, and called the number of Rodan's office.

He was informed by the girl who answered that Mr. Rodan had not yet come to the office; but that he was expected before noon. Cranston gave his name, and announced that he had important business to discuss with Rodan. His statement that he had just arrived from New York impressed the girl.

"Mr. Rodan can find me at the Southern Hotel," was Cranston's final statement. "I shall be in the lobby."

IT was shortly after twelve when Tom Rodan walked hurriedly into the hotel and approached the desk. He inquired for Mr. Cranston. The clerk pointed out a gentleman seated by the window, whose face was turned toward the street. Rodan, evidently curious as to the identity of the visitor, approached.

"Mr. Cranston?" he questioned.

The man arose and turned. Rodan shrank momentarily as he caught the glare of burning eyes. Then his courage returned as the glimmer faded. Lamont Cranston held out his hand.

"I am Mr. Cranston," he said, in a deliberate, even voice. "I presume that you are Mr. Rodan?"

As Rodan nodded, Cranston continued:

"Suppose we lunch together, Mr. Rodan? I have some important matters to discuss with you - involving real estate."

For a moment, Rodan was on the point of claiming that he had another appointment; but there was something in Cranston's attitude that restrained him.

Never, in all his life, had Rodan seen a man who impressed him as did Cranston. The persuasive words, the firm face, and, moreover, the strange, hypnotic eyes, brooked no refusal of the invitation.

Inwardly, Tom Rodan was ill at ease. With that feeling, he had a definite urge to learn more concerning this mysterious stranger.

Who was this man who had suddenly appeared from New York, with some important business to discuss?

The two entered the dining room of the hotel. Rodan faced Cranston across a small table. Both men were impassive and expressionless; but where Rodan's mind was filled with wonder, Cranston's contained the knowledge that it sought.

For in the odd features of Thomas Rodan, Lamont Cranston saw the identical characteristics that had marked the faces of Earl Northrup and Harold Thurber!

Here, staring toward him, was the third man in a chain of those who looked alike, and whose recent histories had been subject to similar circumstances.

Amazing and fantastic though the situation was, Lamont Cranston betrayed none of the thoughts that were in his mind. Instead, he calmly turned the talk to the proposed purchasing of land in the vicinity of Daltona. Tom Rodan listened solemnly.

It developed that Lamont Cranston was a man of great wealth; that he had decided to invest in real estate; that through some source - Cranston could not recall the exact circumstances - he had been advised to consult with Thomas Rodan.

In all this discussion, Lamont Cranston failed to display any knowledge whatever of the unfortunate events which had so recently entered Rodan's career. Coming from New York, a total stranger in Daltona, it was only natural that Cranston should know nothing of the murders which had been committed in the Davenport home.

THE fact that the deaths of his wife and father-in-law were important in Rodan's mind was evidenced by the man himself. Shrewdly, Rodan suspected some connection between Cranston's presence and the deaths. He wanted to test Cranston, and he chose a suitable opportunity.

Cranston had reached the point of expressing a readiness to buy subdivision properties on the outskirts of Daltona. He was ready to be sold. That was where Rodan found his chance.

"I should like to do business with you, Mr. Cranston," he remarked. "However, I have been in a very troubled state of mind recently. I had the misfortune of losing both my wife and father-in-law - and

through a most regrettable accident. Their deaths have disturbed me greatly."

Rodan was looking directly at Cranston as he spoke. His words were carefully phrased and well chosen. Rodan was watching Cranston's eyes; but he could trace no change in them. Yet, when Cranston responded by word, there was a cryptic significance in his statement.

"My sympathy," said Cranston, "is always extended to those who have suffered the loss of those who are dear to them."

The tone was sincere, but the impersonal phraseology offset it. The words could be interpreted so they did not reply to Rodan. They left the man wondering more than he had before.

Thus, by action, Cranston had given no indication that could arouse Rodan's suspicion; while by word, he had obtained exactly the opposite effect.

As a result, Rodan made another shift of decision. He had planned to postpone any pending business matters that Cranston might propose. Now, he was desirous of continuing the battle of wits.

"Suppose that I drive you around a bit," suggested Rodan. "We can look over some desirable properties outside of the town limits. Frankly, Mr. Cranston, I have temporarily laid business aside; but since you have come here from New York, I feel that it would only be the part of courtesy to accommodate you."

Cranston called for the lunch check. Drawing a wallet from his pocket, he searched the interior until he discovered a ten-dollar bill. Rodan, watching, noted that most of the bank notes were of five-hundred and one-thousand-dollar denominations.

Outside, Rodan invited Cranston in his car, and the two visited the outskirts of Daltona. Cranston showed a keen interest in the most desirable sites. Time and again, Rodan artfully turned the conversation toward matters that concerned himself; but Cranston invariably avoided such subjects. It was late in the afternoon when they returned to the hotel.

"I am quite interested in Daltona, Mr. Rodan," said Cranston, as he alighted from the car. "In fact, I have learned much that I wanted to find out. I intend to return to New York tonight. In fact, I shall leave before eight o'clock. You will hear from me later - perhaps unexpectedly."

Cranston extended his hand. He looked squarely at Rodan. It was then that Rodan again saw that peculiar light in Cranston's eyes - the gleam that carried a mesmeric glint.

Try as he might, Rodan could not withdraw his gaze until Cranston turned and stepped away. Rodan gripped the wheel before him, and drove up the street toward his home.

As he neared the Davenport house, Rodan laughed nervously. He realized now that he had been undergoing a nervous tension. He felt a marked sense of relief. But after that feeling had faded, a pronounced worry took its place.

RODAN realized that he had been matching wits with a man of cunning. Not once had Cranston made a false move; but he had betrayed a subtle antagonism that Rodan had detected. As a result, Rodan's worry began to increase; and each moment brought him into deeper perplexity.

Who was Lamont Cranston?

The man had stated that he was a millionaire. The money that he had so subtly exhibited was possible proof of the statement.

A few months ago, Rodan would have been highly pleased to have met a prospective customer like Cranston. Now, with the settlement of the Davenport estate pending, Rodan had no such feeling. He regarded Cranston chiefly in the light of a menace.

Here in Daltona, not one iota of suspicion remained attached to Rodan's name. Everywhere, he met with heartfelt sympathy. It had remained for a stranger from New York to arouse Rodan's qualms.

Since the murders at the Davenport home, Rodan had lived there in seclusion. He had hired a housekeeper, and had made a practice of dining alone. Tonight, in the large, empty dining room, Rodan found himself thinking more and more about Lamont Cranston.

Some peculiar influence controlled Rodan's mind. All his thoughts returned to those eyes that had watched him. At times, a twisted smile began to appear upon Rodan's lips - a sign of half-hearted elation because he had been keen enough to suspect Cranston as a man who had come here with a secret purpose.

Then, the smile faded quickly as Rodan realized that his suspicions brought him nowhere.

Who was Cranston? A detective?

The thought seemed ridiculous. Why should some stranger have come here to investigate a case that had been proven groundless?

No. To all appearances, Cranston was what he claimed to be - a prospective investor in real estate.

Rodan's mind could not change from the one subject. He began to wonder if Cranston had been a creature of his own imagination. After dinner, as he walked from the dining room, Rodan felt a strange, unaccountable dread. He began to fancy that his nerve was leaving him.

As he entered the living room, Rodan paused. He thought he heard a sound from the front door. He turned quickly, half expecting to see someone there. The door was closed.

Rodan stared into the gloomy hall. For a moment, he was on the point of probing its shadowy recesses. Then he laughed coarsely and continued into the living room.

The moment that Rodan's back was turned, something moved in the darkness of the hall. A tall, black-clad form came into being. It materialized itself into the figure of a man - a weird personage, whose sable garments were a cloak and hat.

Two bright eyes gleamed as this mysterious visitor noiselessly crossed the hall and stationed himself outside the living-room door.

Tom Rodan seated himself in a chair. For a moment, he was nervous; then his evil smile appeared. A man of iron nerve, he believed himself to be. Why should he be troubled by foolish worries?

He was ready to forget Lamont Cranston - on the point of deciding that the man was merely a chance visitor to Daltona, when something occurred that caused him to clutch the arms of his chair and stare about him in unrestrained terror.

"MURDERER!"

The word came in a low, mysterious whisper. It was like the voice of conscience.

Rodan was sure that he had heard the accusation; yet he could see no one in the room. Rising, he walked

quickly into the hall and reached the front door. He stopped there; and while he waited, his back was turned so he could not see the tall form that came batlike from the wall beside the living-room door.

When Rodan went back to the room that he had left, the unseen figure had entered there before him.

Rodan paced nervously back and forth. At times, he stopped to listen, fancying that he had heard an echo of that mysterious voice.

A single word from unseen lips. Could that be the explanation?

Rodan shook his head and shut his eyes. He saw, mentally, the image of Cranston's face. Then, to Rodan's ears came a repetition of the sound he had heard before.

"Murderer!"

Rodan leaped madly to his feet. He caught himself and uttered a mumbled growl. Never before had imagination affected him this way. Rodan steadied himself and tried to laugh.

Why should he fear this voice? He was not a murderer! He smiled maliciously as he gazed at the floor where he had seen three dead bodies a few nights before.

Some one else was the murderer. But the secret was Rodan's. That was the cause of his worries, he felt sure. The secret was the factor that made him weaken. The presence of an unknown man, Lamont Cranston, had started a chain of hectic thoughts.

This condition could be counteracted. Rodan began to see the way. He walked to the telephone, and called the Southern Hotel. He asked to speak to Lamont Cranston. He was informed that the man had checked out.

Rodan wondered.

Had Cranston returned to New York, or was he still here in Daltona? Whichever the case might be, one course was advisable. The present situation constituted an emergency. There was someone whom Rodan must inform.

Walking steadily across the room, Rodan reached a writing table and drew forth pen, ink, and paper. He sat in momentary speculation, and as he rested there, he was forgetful of the room behind him.

Something was taking place - something that Rodan did not see. From the darkness of the wall, a tall figure came into view.

Silently, and with gliding tread, The Shadow moved directly toward the seated man. Like a phantom of vengeance, he approached until he was but a few feet away. He stood there, his burning eyes focused upon Rodan. Then, from unseen lips came a softly whispered word.

"Beware!"

The sound was scarcely audible; but it reached Rodan's ears. The seated man did not move. His eyes were bulging, staring at the table before him. The Shadow glided into a fringe of darkness formed by a tiny alcove.

Rodan swung around in his chair. He stared toward the hall, believing that the sound had come from there. Then, with a grim laugh, he turned back to the writing table.

Upon a sheet of paper, he inscribed a mysterious symbol. It consisted of a circle, with two crosslines in

its center. Above it, Rodan marked a crescent, with the points turned downward. Below, he made the same symbol, pointing the same way.

While the paper lay beside him, Rodan addressed an envelope. The name that he wrote was Eastern Specialty Company; the address a street number in New York City.

WHILE Rodan was thus engaged, a silent motion took place behind him. The Shadow emerged from his hiding spot. His tall form glided forward. His brilliant eyes peered over Rodan's shoulder. They saw all that the man had written.

Rodan stared suddenly at the envelope. He rubbed his eyes.

A splotch of blackness was upon the writing desk; the envelope was covered by a strange shadow. Then the hallucination ended.

Rodan picked up the envelope; he folded the paper and thrust it into the wrapper. Holding the envelope half hidden in his hand, Rodan turned again and gazed across the room.

His eyes passed over a shadowy projection that extended from the alcove close beside him. He did not see the silent silhouette that lay almost at his feet.

With a gruff laugh, Rodan stamped the envelope and thrust it in his pocket. He went to the telephone. He called Sheriff George Seaton.

"Hello, George," said Rodan. "Busy tonight?... No? That's good... Think I'll drop over to say hello."

Rodan felt some relief as he left the house and posted the air-mail letter in a box at the nearest corner. His car was standing before the house. He entered it and drove away.

A low laugh from the darkness of the lawn followed Rodan's departure. A tall, silent shape came into view; then faded quickly in the darkness.

The Shadow had won the game. He had found a way to cope with the plans of an unknown supercrook to whom Northrup, Thurber, and Rodan were underlings.

The Shadow knew that three crimes had been timed; that each had required a secret communication to the chief. With crimes completed, the local malefactors in Tilson, Barmouth, and Daltona had no need for further communication with their leader - so far as crime was concerned.

But The Shadow had divined that a superplotter would have arranged for contact afterward, provided that any of his underlings might suspect the presence of danger. As Lamont Cranston, The Shadow had deliberately aroused the suspicions of Thomas Rodan. Then, a phantom in the darkness, The Shadow had stimulated Rodan's fears.

The result had been a secret message of warning, posted to the place of contact in New York.

The Shadow was through with Rodan for the present. He had bigger game - the tracing of the master mind.

Three crimes already. Would there be a fourth? A fifth? Or more? That was the problem which confronted The Shadow. He had taken measures to meet it. He was off to find the source of crime.

A fast airplane speeding northward through the night now bore The Shadow on his mission. A letter had been sent; its destination was known to The Shadow. He would be there to intercept the man who would

receive it!

The cryptic symbol, dispatched as a warning to the master mind of crime, was the clew which The Shadow had forced from Thomas Rodan. Upon that clew, The Shadow was to form the campaign that might doom the schemes devised by men of evil!

CHAPTER XI. THE MESSAGE DELIVERED

EARLY the next evening, a stoop-shouldered man was sidling along a squalid street of Manhattan. There was something shifty in his gait, and his furtive footsteps seemed aimless in direction. At times, the man paused momentarily, as though suspecting that someone might be watching him.

One of these stops was near the entrance of an alleyway. Here, the man's face came into the light of a street lamp. It was a whitened, wizened face, from which a cigarette drooped listlessly. The man paused to remove the cigarette from his mouth. He noted that the stump was unlighted. He drew a match from his pocket.

During the act of lighting the remains of his cigarette, the wizened-faced man glanced shrewdly back along the street which he had followed. Seeing no one, he threw the match away, turned suddenly, and entered the alley. So artfully did he duck out of sight that only the most careful observer would have noted the action.

Silence continued in the gloomy street; then, a few seconds after the stoop-shouldered man had disappeared, a new figure arrived in the glow of the lamplight. A tall, sinister form was momentarily revealed. Then, it, too, vanished in the darkness of the alleyway.

The Shadow was stalking his prey. Here, in New York's bad lands, he was on the trail of a lesser gangster. Despite the care which the stoop-shouldered man had displayed, The Shadow had followed him totally unobserved.

A door opened at the side of the alley. A faint light showed as the gangster entered. The door closed and the wizened man stood in a hall that was lighted only by a turned-down gas jet. Ahead of him lay a rickety flight of steps. The gangster ascended, confident that he was free from observation. He did not see the front door slowly open before he had reached the top of the stairs.

The little gangster tapped on an upstairs door. He followed this signal with a whispered statement:

"It's Pasty."

"Come in," was the response from the room beyond the door.

"Pasty" entered to find a thickset man seated by the window of a gaslighted room. The shade was drawn and the occupant was alone. Pasty, whose flour-white countenance showed the origin of his nickname, grinned as he extended an envelope and a post card.

"Here you are, Boots," he said. "I picked these up at the office like you told me to."

"BOOTS" examined the post card. On the front, it bore the address of the Eastern Specialty Company, but it carried no message. The back of the card showed the picture of a New Orleans hotel.

Boots made no comment. He merely tossed the card on the table beside him. He examined the envelope. It was also addressed to the Eastern Specialty Company, and it was post-marked Daltona, Georgia. Boots dropped the envelope with the post card.

"Thanks, Pasty," he said. "These don't mean nothin'. Just the same, I thought you might as well get 'em for me an' bring 'em here to the hideout. Nobody saw you sneakin' in here, did they?"

Pasty shook his head.

"Nobody seen me," he responded, "but I ain't sure nobody wasn't watchin' me somewhere along the line. You know how I am, Boots. I can spot anythin' that's wrong before it begins. Seems to me like there was someone hangin' around that office where you sent me. D'ya think there could've been any one layin' there?"

"Up there?" quizzed Boots. "Nah! Forget it. You're the only guy I ever sent up there. That place ain't got nothin' to do with the racket. I just wanted you to go up so I wouldn't have to slide out of here. That's all. Just so long as nobody seen you doin' a sneak in here, it's O.K."

"Well," responded Pasty, "there's a lot of gorillas who've got it in for Boots Marcus. It ain't a bad idea to be careful."

"Well," growled Boots, "I'm hidin' out, ain't I? You don't think I'm scared, do you? The only thing is, I'm wise. Keepin' in here saves me a lot of trouble. That's why I use you as a go-between."

"You make a good messenger boy, Pasty. When there's anythin' doin', then's when I step out with the mob. Believe me, Pasty, there's a lot of bozos who wouldn't be pushin' up posies if they'd been as wise as I am."

"Sure enough," agreed Pasty.

"O.K.," responded Boots. "Scram. Stick around with the mob an' come let me know when they're ready to go out. Remind me then that I'll have a letter to mail."

"You're a great guy, Boots," commented Pasty. "Here the mob has a hangout half a block from your hideout, and they don't have no idea where you're layin'. It makes me laugh sometimes -"

"Can that hokum!" rejoined Boots, with a growl. "Your business is to do what I tell you, an' quit thinkin' too much. Go on, now. Scram!"

Pasty grinned and opened the door of the room. He waved a scrawny hand in parting; then closed the door.

Boots Marcus picked up the post card and the envelope.

IN the underworld, Boots Marcus was known as the tough leader of a flock of trained gorillas. He and his gang had a racket of their own - blocking the plans of would-be big shots. As a result, Boots, though fearless when at the head of his pack, considered it the part of discretion to keep away from the live spots of the bad lands.

Pasty, who cut but little figure in the underworld, was, as Boots had remarked, the gang leader's messenger. He was the go-between who kept up contact with the mob. But of late, Boots, guarding himself more closely than usual, had given Pasty a new duty. This was the job of visiting a small, deserted office on an uptown street, to bring back any mail that might be there.

Communications to the Eastern Specialty Company were comparatively few. They were chiefly picture post cards, like the one Boots now held. On other occasions, Boots had received envelopes. These he forwarded instead of keeping.

Tonight, in conformity with his method, Boots Marcus produced a larger envelope than the one that had come by mail. Upon its face he wrote the name of Craig Kimble. He looked at the picture postcard, and used the name of the New Orleans hotel as the address on the envelope which he was inscribing. Then he inserted the letter that Pasty had brought, and sealed the large envelope.

As he completed the duty, Boots Marcus shrugged his shoulders. Opening a drawer in the table, he tossed the post card within.

After affixing a stamp, Boots placed the envelope in his pocket. He arose from his chair and walked away from the window. He glanced upward in an absent-minded fashion, and stood stock-still.

Facing him, from just within the door, Boots Marcus saw a man clad in black. Tall, weird, and imposing, this personage might have come through the floor, so unnoticed had his entrance been. A long, flowing cloak hung from the visitor's shoulders. A broad-brimmed hat obscured his features. Only his eyes were visible as they shone with penetrating gaze.

It was not the eyes alone, however, that impressed Boots Marcus. In an outstretched, black-gloved hand, the stranger held a huge automatic. The muzzle of the weapon yawned like the entrance of a tunnel as Boots viewed it with alarm.

The gang leader never budged when he saw that he was covered. The only change that came over him was a pallor that swept his face.

For Boots Marcus, man of the underworld, knew that he was in the power of The Shadow!

IT was an axiom in the bad lands that a meeting such as this was a sure forerunner of death. Boots Marcus, engaged only in wolfish battles with others of his ilk, had felt himself somewhat immune from The Shadow's wrath.

But it was also known that the ways of The Shadow were mysterious. He seldom gave a reason when he struck. Hence, Boots Marcus, petrified by sudden terror, felt the sign of approaching doom.

A low, soft laugh came from The Shadow's hidden lips. Whatever doubt Boots had entertained regarding the identity of this phantom being were now dispelled. That laugh carried an unearthly echo.

Boots had heard talk of The Shadow's laugh. Now he had heard the chilling tones themselves. The gang leader shuddered.

"Go back to where you were," came The Shadow's voice, in solemn, whispered tones. "Sit down - by the window. I have questions to ask you."

Boots Marcus obeyed mechanically. For the first moment since he had seen The Shadow, he felt a touch of relief. The eerie whisper was fearful; but its words at least offered a chance for parley.

"I ain't done nothin' against you," began Boots, in a choking, fear-tinged tone. "What d'ya got against me? I ain't never even as much as tried to buck The Shadow -"

A repetition of the laugh curbed the plea that Boots was making. The laugh was sinister now. Its foreboding tones made Boots decide that silence was in order.

"You have recognized me." The Shadow's words came in a weird monotone. "That is excellent. It will enable us to terminate our business promptly."

The Shadow was approaching the gang leader. The automatic was directly before the eyes of Boots

Marcus. The hard-boiled mobster quailed. Then The Shadow's free hand was extended.

"Give me the envelope that is in your pocket," demanded The Shadow.

Boots fumbled for the envelope and produced it. The Shadow took it from him. The envelope disappeared beneath the black cloak.

"Now those postal cards," added The Shadow. "The cards with which you placed the one that you received tonight."

Boots gasped as he realized that The Shadow must have entered immediately after Pasty had departed. The Shadow had seen the post card that went in the drawer. He had seen other cards lying there.

Still fumbling, Boots produced the post cards. He handed them, in a small bunch, to The Shadow.

Holding the cards within his gloved left hand, The Shadow, with a smooth, skilled motion, spread them so they formed a wide fan. He raised his hand so that he could look at the cards, and still watch Boots Marcus.

With one glance, he noted that the addresses of the cards were identical. Turning his hand over, The Shadow viewed the reverse sides. Every one of the cards bore the picture of a hotel in a different city.

With another short note of mirth, The Shadow slipped the post cards beneath his cloak. His automatic followed. With folded arms, The Shadow faced Boots Marcus.

The gang leader gasped. The Shadow had deliberately put away his weapon! Could this be a gesture of friendliness? It seemed incredible!

IN his pocket, Boots had a revolver. He realized that it would be possible for him to draw it now. But deep in his dulled brain, the gang leader knew that he could never beat The Shadow on the draw. His only relief came from the fact that temporarily, at least, The Shadow had granted a respite.

"Who is Craig Kimble?" questioned The Shadow.

Boots Marcus hesitated. He eyed his questioner for a few moments; then responded:

"I don't know."

The Shadow laughed. His black right hand slipped out of view. Boots sensed the menace of the automatic. He chewed his lips nervously.

"I know the game, Marcus," declared The Shadow coldly. "I entered that office before this mail came in. It is plain what those post cards mean. I am giving you your chance to tell all that you know. If you do not -"

The sentence ended with a laugh as The Shadow's hand swept into view. The muzzle of an automatic pressed itself against the forehead of Boots Marcus.

"I'll - I'll squawk!" whined the cowed gang leader. "I ain't goin' to bluff you. But if I squawk, will you call it quits?"

"I make but one promise," announced The Shadow, in his chilling whisper. "If you fail to tell me all that you know, you will die. Speak - unless you prefer death."

Marcus cringed away. He nodded as he felt the pressure of the automatic leave his forehead. The gun

disappeared. The Shadow's arms were once more folded. The threat however, still remained. Boots stared with blinking eyes and chewing lips.

"It don't mean nothin' to me," he began. "I ain't goin' to try to hold out on you. If Charley had told me you was mixed in this, I'd have laid off. I don't think I'd have touched it anyway if it hadn't been because Charley had me buffaloed -"

Boots paused, as though in final effort to keep from telling what he knew. He fancied that he saw a motion of The Shadow's right hand. A sudden fear swept over the gang leader. If that automatic should appear again, it might mean the end of The Shadow's patience.

"Gimme a chance!" pleaded Boots. "I don't know much, but I'll tell you the whole works. It's Charley that's to blame - not me. Charley Kistelle. I used to work with Charley before he scrambled. That was nearly a couple of years ago. I don't know why Charley cleared out."

"Charles Kistelle fled," declared The Shadow coldly, "because he feared me."

Boots nodded unconsciously. A sudden understanding told him that by betraying Kistelle, he might save his own hide. It was Kistelle whom The Shadow wanted!

"I - I'll tell you all I know about him," repeated Boots. "I thought that Charley" - he paused suddenly, his eyes staring - "I didn't know that Charley was in wrong with The Shadow. I know you're The Shadow. You've got me - there ain't nothin' I can do.

"If I had my mob with me, I could put up a scrap; but there ain't no chance of nobody comin' here to help me. That's why I'm goin' to talk. If the mob knew what was goin' on, they'd come here to help me. But there ain't no use -"

Boots Marcus stared directly into The Shadow's eyes. He cringed before their gleam; but in his heart, he felt a secret elation. He knew that he could stall no longer; The Shadow's glance told him that. But Boots, by his sudden change of tone, had accomplished something that he was sure The Shadow could not suspect.

In his brief moment of hesitation, Boots had seen the door of the room move slightly. He realized that Pasty had returned. His words of pleading had been a secret warning to the little gangster. Pasty, crafty and skulking, had taken the tip. The door was moving no longer now.

"Proceed."

The Shadow's single word spoke volumes. Its tone showed that further stalling would not be countenanced. Boots Marcus knew that he would suffer if he taxed The Shadow's patience.

"I'll come clean," said the gang leader. "Here's the whole lay -"

With eyes half closed, Boots began his squealer's story. He was betraying the man whom he called a friend - Charles Kistelle; but Boots had a purpose in the action. He was doing more than attempting to save his own skin. He was holding The Shadow here until his mob arrived!

CHAPTER XII. GUNS IN THE DARK

"I THOUGHT Charley Kistelle had taken the bump," explained Boots Marcus to The Shadow. "Then all of a sudden he calls me up, pretty near a year ago. I knows his voice when I hears it. He wants to see me. I had this place then, an' I told him to meet me here.

"When he comes, he taps on the door an' says hello. I knows his voice again, see? But when he walks in, it ain't Charley Kistelle! At least I didn't think it was.

"When I seen Charley before he went away, he was a guy with a good-lookin' mug. But this wasn't the Charley that I'd used to how. He has a round, moony face, an' he's grinnin' like a monkey.

"When I asks what's happened to him, he just keeps on grinnin'. Says he's fixed himself so's nobody can figure who he is. Says he's goin' around to square things even with some guys he don't like. He wants me to help him out. That's when he tells me about the office an' gives me a key to the place. All I had to do was go up there an' pick up the mail."

Boots Marcus paused to stare directly at The Shadow. The gang leader was using every effort to convince the blackclad master that he was telling the whole truth.

"Charley didn't say nothin' about you bein' on his trail," continued Boots. "He just asks me to help him out by sendin' him any letters that come in. He says to use the name Craig Kimble, which was enough like his own moniker so's I could remember it easy, without any chance of it givin' him away.

"He never writes nothin' - just sends post cards showin' the picture of the hotel where he's stoppin' at the time. You picked up the last one. That's all there is to it."

"Except the letters," declared The Shadow.

"Yeah," agreed the gangster quickly. "There was some letters like the one that come in today. I never opened none of 'em; just put 'em in the new envelopes an' sent 'em on to Charley. I don't know what he wanted 'em for."

"How many letters have you forwarded to Kistelle?" inquired The Shadow coldly.

"Just a few of 'em," began Boots. Then, as he saw The Shadow's piercing eyes, he added: "Let's see. There was one - two - three - this one was number four since Charley went away. You see, he was around here a lot of the time. It was pretty near three weeks ago he started out the last time. Before that, he'd go away once in a while, an' just send me post cards. There weren't any letters before these begin to come."

"Where were the letters from?"

Boots acted as though he wanted to evade The Shadow's question. The gang leader resented the domination which was being exerted over him. He was on the point of pretending that he could not recall any more concerning the letters; but he suddenly changed his mind.

"Seems like one was from some joint out in Illinois," he mused. "Then there was one from a hick town in Maryland. These last two - the one you got and the one I sent to Charley Kistelle - was from the same place, some town in Georgia. I ain't even been up to the office" - now that his story was told, Boots was trying to disclaim connection with Kistelle - "because I've been layin' low. I sent another guy up there to get the mail. It didn't mean nothin' to me."

The Shadow stared coldly at the gang leader. He knew that Boots Marcus was as yellow a rat as the underworld could boast. Boots half-grasped The Shadow's thoughts. He edged backward in his chair. Avoiding The Shadow's gaze, he stared at the door beyond the form in black.

UNLESS his mob had failed to move through fear of The Shadow's presence, they should be there by now. Ready for a surprise attack, they would be awaiting a signal from their leader. The time was ripe for it now.

Boots knew that his fate rested, at this moment, with The Shadow. He sensed that from now on he could be of no use to The Shadow's plans.

In fact, as traitor to Charley Kistelle, Boots Marcus would be better dead than alive, so far as The Shadow was concerned. Living, Boots could double-cross The Shadow by communicating with Charley Kistelle. Dead, he could not interfere with any of The Shadow's undertakings.

There was no time to lose. Boots must tip off the mob; or, better, take a chance that his men were outside, ready to help him. Acting shrewdly, the gang leader tried to give a signal without betraying his intention to The Shadow.

"I've given you all the dope," whined Boots. "I ain't tried to keep nothin' from you. You got me without my mob. If the boys was here, they'd help me. I wish they was here, right now -"

The door was slowly opening. Boots Marcus could see it as he stared past The Shadow. The man in black was looking at the gang leader's eyes. A laugh came from the lips that were hidden by the collar of the black cloak.

In his tense eagerness, Boots Marcus had betrayed the game. The Shadow's form turned suddenly. It whirled toward the door, just as the barrier swung inward. One man, peeping in, had seen The Shadow's back. He had waved the others forward.

The rush was a split second too late. The Shadow's hands were moving as he swung. His automatics blazed - one from either hand - while his tall shape was still revolving. Staccato shots marked the bursts of flame.

The bodies of two gangsters sprawled headlong through the door. Revolvers clanged upon the floor. The Shadow had met the surprise attack.

Reversing his turn, The Shadow swung toward Boots Marcus. Springing from his chair, the gang leader had drawn his revolver.

The Shadow had timed the action to the instant. His right-hand automatic covered Boots as the gang leader's finger was about to press the trigger of the revolver. The automatic spoke again. Boots Marcus, like his henchmen, had been too late to meet this marksman who dealt in split seconds.

Quick victory had been The Shadow's; but the fight had just begun. From those lips beneath the hat brim came a burst of taunting mirth. The laugh of The Shadow rang out its defiance to the forces of the underworld.

With one swift motion, The Shadow extinguished the light. A second later he was in the hallway; there, his automatics broke forth, blazing a trail of lead along the walls. The bright splashes of light revealed the forms of lurking gangsters. Some fell from the bullets; others dived to the floor to escape the barrage.

Through the dark, The Shadow swept back into the room. He reached the window and swiftly opened it. There was a darkened courtyard beneath. There, in the dimness, men were waiting, ready to cut off this avenue of escape. Shouts echoed through the hall; they came from the stairs below. They showed that others were blocking the normal exit from this place.

The Shadow never hesitated. His tall form was totally invisible as it stood by the open window. It emerged, close to the wall of the building. Clinging batlike to the bottom of the window. The Shadow lowered his body over the edge.

A flashlight gleamed from below. Its glare revealed the outline of the form in black. Wild, eager cries

arose. Then came revolver shots. The tall shape was dropping from its perch beside the window!

ONCE again, The Shadow had dealt in timed split seconds. It was the light, not the shots, that had caused him to drop to the narrow court below. The bullets came while he was falling. They were flattened against the brick wall. Not one was discharged in time to reach the body of The Shadow.

The spotlight came swinging downward. Before its gleam had reached the place where The Shadow had dropped, an automatic roared through the night. The man with the flashlight staggered. Another shot clipped one of the gunmen beside him. Desperately, other gangsters dived away. The Shadow was still in action!

Now a light gleamed from above. A gangster had dashed into the room vacated by The Shadow. Leaning from the window, he played the rays of his torch downward, hoping to reveal The Shadow to his pals below. Instead, he revealed himself.

A shot barked from near the entrance of the court. Moving swiftly, The Shadow had gone directly toward his enemies. He had answered the challenge of the light. The proof of his marksmanship came when the man with the torch toppled headlong and thudded in the court. The falling torch was shattered as it struck the paving beside him.

Then came a desperate struggle at the spot where the court started from the alley. Here were the gunmen who had ducked. Now they sprang forth desperately to prevent the escape of the man whom they could not see. Had The Shadow fired at any one of them, he would have revealed his position. Instead, he worked in silence.

Unseen in the darkness, two powerful arms swung up and down. Invisible hands wielded heavy automatics with unrelenting force. Caught in the narrow space, the bewildered gangsters fell before The Shadow's fury. In the dim light of the alley, a tall form broke loose from futile, yielding clutches.

It was then that The Shadow chose the unexpected objective - the front door of the house where the fray had begun. Stationed there were half a dozen gangsters. At first, they had started up the stairs; now they were returning.

Had The Shadow taken to flight, pursuers would have been on his heels. But such was not The Shadow's course. He conquered danger by meeting it.

As the reenforcing mobsters came toward the door, The Shadow encountered them face to face. His automatics broke loose with all the lead that they still contained. Charging men toppled forward. The last advancing mobster made a mighty leap and fell writhing at The Shadow's feet.

A long burst of weird mockery sounded through the darkness. It came as the knell of doom to the ears of dying mobsters. Not a single shot answered it. The Shadow, alone, had silenced the guns of the gorillas who served Boots Marcus.

In the alleyway, the tall form appeared once more. The hands of The Shadow thrust the emptied automatics beneath the black cloak. They emerged with two new weapons. Swinging toward the street at the end of the alley, The Shadow emerged and stepped into the lamplight.

"The Shadow!"

The cry came from less than thirty yards away. The man who uttered it was the only member of the Marcus mob who had escaped. Pasty, the wizened gangster, who had brought the now-conquered horde, had reached the street during the conflict, and had run to summon new aid. He had encountered

half a dozen mobsters.

To them, the news that the Marcus gang was in trouble brought no incentive toward a rescue. But the word that The Shadow was on hand was sufficient to stir all black-hearted killers to action.

This crowd was coming toward the alley. They were running forward, with Pasty in the lead. As the little gangster cried his warning, he made a dive for cover. His shrewd eyes had sighted the form beneath the lamplight.

One hasty revolver shot sounded the hostilities. It was the only burst that preceded The Shadow's reply; and it failed to clip the black-cloaked fighter.

The Shadow's automatics roared their answer. Mobsters staggered back. One fell as he fired a futile shot. Another sprawled, kicking at the paving of the street. The others scattered in wild retreat.

Pasty, crouching by the wall, was holding a revolver in his nervous clutch. He was aiming toward The Shadow, waiting for a chance to fire accurately. Then, as he saw the others take for cover, the little gangster lost his nerve. He fired wildly; once, twice, his aim wavering through fear. He pressed the trigger for the third time; but the shot that was heard did not come from his revolver.

The Shadow, spotting the revolver flashes, had responded. It was the roar of his automatic that sounded the final shot in this hectic struggle. A whistling bullet found its mark in the body of Pasty, the cringing gangster who had sought to thwart The Shadow. The last of the Marcus mob had fallen.

Complete silence followed the throbbing echoes of that last report. The tall black shape glided from the sphere of lamplight. A long, triumphant peal of laughter echoed along the narrow street. Blackened windows crackled back the gibing cry.

The Shadow had merged with the night. He had wiped out one of Manhattan's toughest mobs of human wolves. Justice had gained a triumph. Yet this achievement was but a step toward The Shadow's distant goal.

He was after bigger crime, seeking to thwart the schemes of men who worked by master methods. Tonight, The Shadow had made new progress. He had learned the identity of the man who had planned for perfect crime.

Boots Marcus, the key to the superplotter, was dead. And so was Pasty, the one underling who might have held an inkling to the dealings with Kistelle. None remained to block The Shadow's course!

CHAPTER XIII. THE RESEARCH

THE SHADOW'S sanctum was alight. A mellow bluish glow spread throughout the entire room. The pale, mysterious hue ended abruptly as it reached the unreflecting walls, which were jet-black in color.

Even the floor was black. The Shadow, as he stood in the center of this mysterious chamber, had the appearance of a living silhouette - a projection of black that extended from the darkness that surrounded him.

Less than an hour had elapsed since the man of the night had battled with desperate denizens of the underworld. Phantomlike, he had disappeared into gloom, to pursue a path which was untraceable. Now, in this spot whose existence was known to him alone, The Shadow was returning to the task that lay ahead.

The weird figure moved across the room. A motion of one arm beside the wall caused a parting of

enshrouding curtains. A row of massive volumes were displayed, niched in a portion of the opened wall.

These were the archives of The Shadow - those complete and detailed records that listed every event in The Shadow's ceaseless war on crime; from minor skirmish to extended battle.

The black-clad figure shrank almost to nothingness as it stopped to consult one of the heavy bound books. The black-brimmed hat was raised. Not only the gleaming eyes, but the face beneath them appeared visible. In this sanctuary, there was none to see the hidden features of The Shadow.

His study ended, The Shadow replaced the volume that he had consulted. Another curtain opened and displayed a cabinet. From a drawer, The Shadow removed a folder. He carried it across the room to the polished table above which hung the work light.

Hidden switches clicked. The room was in darkness save for that single corner where only a shining tabletop received illumination.

From a single tome among his archives, The Shadow had gained the records that he wanted. The folder which now appeared in the light contained the details. Its contents - carefully prepared reports - slid into view. Before the eyes of The Shadow lay the facts that concerned the checkered career of Charles Kistelle.

Among the crooks whose schemes had been thwarted by The Shadow, Charles Kistelle was unique. His course of crime - so the records showed - had been limited, yet smooth.

Kistelle had come within The Shadow's sphere of action, due to his connection with other criminals. He was a man who had chosen to remain in the background until opportunities for evildoing came his way.

WHEN The Shadow had met and demolished Kistelle's associates, this lurking criminal had seen the writing on the wall. Through pure coincidence that had worked in his favor, Kistelle had been saved from destruction with the others.

A minor figure in a gigantic scheme that had failed, Kistelle had taken advantage of opportunity. He had fled, leaving the field to The Shadow.

Others had done this before; but invariably they made the mistake of believing that The Shadow would forget them. Kistelle had been too wise for that. He had not only stayed away from his old associations; he had been clever enough to avoid New York entirely. In an effort to bury himself completely, he had enlisted in the United States army under an assumed name.

Yet the hand of The Shadow, reaching everywhere, had plucked forth data that showed the course Kistelle had taken. This information had been gained too late. Records showed that Charles Kistelle, alias Charles Kitchener, had deserted along with others, when stationed near the Mexican border.

A photograph came into view upon The Shadow's table. It was a picture of Charles Kistelle as he had been. It bore no resemblance to the three men who looked alike: Earl Northrup, Harold Thurber, and Thomas Rodan. As Boots Marcus had stated, Charles Kistelle had returned to New York a completely different person.

Since Kistelle had changed; since he had adopted the new name of Craig Kimble, there was one important inference. This was, namely, that the other three were new men also.

The Shadow's laugh was evidence that this fact impressed him as intriguing. In all the mad orgies of crime that The Shadow had encountered in the past, none reached the fantastic heights of this one.

Four men who looked alike! Each an individual with an odd, but distinctive physiognomy that made him conspicuous to those who knew him. The situation seemed unbelievable; but to The Shadow it brought only further thoughts. Nights before, here in this very sanctum, The Shadow had foreseen a further possibility.

With two, three, four men whose strange facial characteristics were identical, what could prevent the possibility of more? Why not five - or six? Why not a dozen? Until the answer to the perplexing riddle could be gained, The Shadow must hold that assumption.

Behind this very thought lay the explanation of The Shadow's extraordinary encounter with Thomas Rodan, in Daltona, Georgia. Three crimes had been perpetrated. How many more were to follow? The only course was to travel ahead of crime - not to be behind it.

The hand of The Shadow began to write. It was inscribing the thoughts of The Shadow's brain. Short words shone on paper. As each sentence faded, another replaced it. Step by step, The Shadow was developing the course of crime as Charles Kistelle had planned it.

KISTELLE was the crime-maker. Through some amazing circumstance, he was plotting and perpetrating mighty schemes with the aid of men who looked exactly like him. In Tilson; in Barmouth; in Daltona - each place a crime protected by a perfect alibi. Such men as Northrup, Thurber, and Rodan were mere instruments in the hands of this daring crook.

Now, The Shadow knew Kistelle's identity; knew where he could be reached. Kistelle was in New Orleans, waiting for word from some unknown source, biding his time until a new crime would be ready for its culmination.

Boots Marcus had said that three letters had come to Charles Kistelle by way of the blind office. The Shadow knew the significance of those letters. Each had been a summons - a call to the daring master crook, telling him that the stage was set for the perpetration of a perfect crime.

The fourth letter!

It came from The Shadow's cloak; it lay there, in its original envelope - that message which The Shadow had seen Rodan prepare. This was not a summons. It was a warning. Should it reach Kistelle, it would indicate the advisability of caution.

This message would not arrive as Rodan had intended. In Daltona, now, Rodan's qualms had ended. The man was probably chiding himself because he had fancied Lamont Cranston to be a menace. He would send no further warning to Kistelle.

In New Orleans, Kistelle was serenely waiting. He might move to some other city; if he should, word would come to the empty office of the Eastern Specialty Company. Picture post cards would artfully disclose Kistelle's itinerary.

There, too, would come the letter presaging the next crime. Boots Marcus was dead. Pasty was dead. All communications would lie unreceived, unless -

The Shadow's laugh rippled softly through the sanctum. No - Kistelle's letters would not go unreceived. So far as the crook would know, Boots Marcus would still be on duty. But the real recipient, the one who would take over the dead gang leader's contact work, would be The Shadow!

THE hand of The Shadow inscribed the name of a city upon the paper before him.

New Orleans.

The brilliant ink spoke unwritten meanings. It showed the trend of The Shadow's thoughts.

There was a simple way to deal with Charles Kistelle. Tonight, The Shadow could set forth to meet the master crook face to face. That would end the criminal career of Charles Kistelle.

But, as the name of the city faded, The Shadow's hand inscribed another word.

No.

This negative announcement also had its important meaning. It was followed by the listing of three names:

Carl Walton.

Sherman Brooks.

Perry Davenport.

These three were held for crimes that they had not committed. Should The Shadow, acting as avenger, eliminate Kistelle, what would be the outcome? It might prove beneficial, so far as the future was concerned; but the grave danger existed that it would also obliterate the traces of the past.

Three innocent men were helpless. Unless the action of the Shadow could clear them, they would pay the penalty for the crimes of the supercrook and his alibi henchmen. The Shadow's laugh was grim. It showed that he knew Kistelle must be temporarily neglected. The man could be reached when needed.

When would that be?

The hand revealed the answer:

The next crime.

There was the solution! If Kistelle were awaiting another summons, its arrival would be The Shadow's opportunity. Then, striking from the dark, he could catch Kistelle and an underling in the act.

But, as the words faded from the paper, The Shadow's hand deliberately inscribed a large interrogation point.

When would the next crime be? What proof was there that more than four men existed who looked alike with such a remarkable resemblance? Would another crime occur?

There was but one answer. The Shadow, to deal fully with this crime ring, must first know all. Could he discover the cause of the amazing coincidence that had brought the same strange facial resemblances to these crooks, he would be capable of striking with certainty.

Delving into the past was the only course. Through it, The Shadow could learn the total number of these men. To date, he had worked on theory. Now, he needed facts. Where were they to be found?

The hands held Kistelle's record. Beside it lay the photograph of the man as he once had been. Some time - during that period when Kistelle had disappeared - a change had come over the physiognomy of the supercrook. Where had Kistelle been when the change had transpired?

THE SHADOW laughed. He knew. Kistelle had fled to Mexico. He had unquestionably been joined by others there. Where had they gone? What had happened to them?

The hands of The Shadow ripped open the envelope that Rodan had addressed to New York. Out

dropped the folded paper. The Shadow spread it and studied the cryptic sign.

A circle, with crossed center. Above it and below it, crescents, with their points turned downward. A primitive inscription designed by some ancient race.

The white hands of The Shadow turned the paper in different directions. Which was the top of the sheet? Were the crescents pointing up or down?

The Shadow knew, because he had seen Rodan inscribe the symbol. Now, examining it closely, he saw the indicating mark.

The vertical line that formed the upright of the cross mark did not touch the circle at the bottom. This lack of completion was all that the symbol required to prove its purpose.

The Shadow copied the cryptic sign upon a blank sheet of paper. Then he turned the paper upside down, and performed the same action. In each instance, he left the vertical line incomplete at the bottom.

Now he had two symbols; one indicating down-turned crescents, the other upturned.

The logic was evident. Since Rodan's symbol had been carefully designed to show that the crescents were down, there must be a different meaning if the crescents were up. The Shadow laughed. Below Rodan's sign, at the left, he wrote:

Stay away

Underneath his own cryptic symbol, he marked:

Come here

This was surely a sign of primitive hieroglyphics. A crude, simple form of writing that dealt in opposites. The two symbols told their silent story as they shone from the paper with The Shadow's translation beneath.

Then the markings vanished; the one at the left passing out before the one at the right.

Again, The Shadow laughed. He knew what to expect - if his conjecture of further crime was correct. A symbol signifying "Come here" would arrive for Charles Kistelle. It would lead the master plotter to a new and carefully prepared scene of operation.

Kistelle would receive that message; but not until after it had passed through the hands of The Shadow. When he answered the call, Kistelle would find The Shadow awaiting him.

This course of delayed action had obvious advantages. But in the interim, what would The Shadow do? It was not the policy of this master mind to remain dormant. The hands of The Shadow were fingering the paper which bore Tom Rodan's mysterious message. There was a deep significance to The Shadow's action.

Kistelle and his men of evil had not designed their symbolic code. It was evident that they had learned it from some persons whom they had met. Where? In Mexico!

The Shadow laughed. His hands disappeared. When they returned, they carried a sheaf of loosely bound pages. These, The Shadow spread upon the table.

The glossy sheets were filled with photographs and symbolic signs that dealt with the Aztecs, those Indians of Mexico who had developed a degree of civilization before the Spaniards had conquered

them.

Here, in The Shadow's possession, lay detailed information on the Aztecs - descriptive matter that included recent findings. The pages turned with precision, indicating that The Shadow had studied Aztec lore. To the eyes in the dark, these facts were familiar ones. But in all this accumulated data, The Shadow saw no symbols like the one Rodan had sent Kistelle.

AT the back of the loosely bound pages, The Shadow's finger paused upon a written paragraph. This had reference to the lost tribes of Aztec origin. It mentioned how offshoots of the major race had, because of their obscurity, escaped the conquest of the Spaniards.

Succeeding paragraphs attempted to classify these hidden tribes. Each was reputed to possess a source of great wealth - treasure that had been harbored through centuries. Each paragraph listed a different tribe, with speculative data concerning its customs.

"Zeltapec."

The word stood out before The Shadow's eyes. It was the name of a place in the mountains of northern Mexico. There were Indians who lived thereabout, and they had talked of Zeltapec, but none of them had given its exact location. They only knew that it rested in one of the hidden gorges of a high mountain range. So far, explorers had been unable to penetrate the fastnesses of the mighty hills.

The Shadow's finger paused upon another paragraph. The words referred to the supposed customs of the tribe that dwelt at Zeltapec. It stated that they were moon worshipers.

The crescents!

The Shadow laughed as his hands carried away the loose-sheaved papers. A short while later, the hands reappeared and unfolded a map of northern Mexico that spread over the entire table.

For long, slow-moving minutes, the hidden eyes pored over the large chart while The Shadow's fingers pointed out certain spots within a mountain-studded radius. Gradually, the fingers reduced the area. They chose the region that was most vaguely mapped, and rested upon that part.

A hand reached forward and drew a set of ear phones from the darkness. A tiny spot of light shone - a signal that telephonic communication had been established with someone.

"Burbank speaking."

The quiet voice sounded over the wire. Burbank was an agent of The Shadow. Passive and efficient, he was always at The Shadow's bidding. He was the contact man whom The Shadow kept unseen. When plans were forming; when campaigns were at their height, Burbank was always in readiness.

The voice of The Shadow whispered its orders. They referred to Harry Vincent. Both Harry and Clyde Burke had returned to New York, and were available for duty. Now, The Shadow's instructions made it plain that Harry was to visit the blind office to intercept all mail that came there.

The conversation ended. The tiny bulb no longer glowed. Beneath the blue light, the hands of The Shadow folded the map of northern Mexico. A piece of paper came into view. The left hand held it; the iridescent girasol gleamed in mystery. The right hand wrote a single word:

Zeltapec.

The writing faded. The light clicked out. A long, weird laugh swept through the darkness. Dying echoes

were repeated with convulsive shudderings, as though a host of ghouls were joining with gruesome mockery.

Then stillness. The Shadow was gone. His plans were made. Charles Kistelle could wait in ignorance until the next summons reached New York. In the meantime, The Shadow had a new and amazing purpose; a way to meet the problem that he faced.

The last word that the mysterious hand had written was filled with important significance. It told the one thought that was in The Shadow's mind.

There was a place that he must find. Swiftly, with no delay, The Shadow had set forth to a new destination. Later that night, a swift plane winged its way southward, at a speed exceeding two hundred miles an hour.

The Shadow was heading for a Texas airport. There, awaiting him, was a special type of ship that had been reserved by wire - at the order of a New York millionaire named Lamont Cranston.

Texas was not the final goal. The real objective was beyond.

The Shadow was seeking the lost city of Zeltapec!

CHAPTER XIV. THE MOON MESSENGER

THE crescent moon was rising above a towering mountain summit. The sky was still bright with the glow of the setting sun. But within the secluded valley of Zeltapec, a premature gloom announced the coming of early evening.

A strange survival of an ancient day, the village of Zeltapec bore untarnished traces of the Aztec civilization. Adobe buildings rested against the sides of the valley. Robed Indians, with firm, bronzed faces, stood in clusters outside their homes.

The Aztecs had been known as ferocious warriors. These survivors of their race had softened. Their faces still showed the sternness of the Aztec race; yet in their bearing, the natives of Zeltapec were quiet and mild-mannered. Protected by the high mountain walls about them, they had drifted from the ways of warfare.

The dull, monotonous beat of tom-toms sounded weirdly through the gloom. It was the call that the Indians were awaiting. Slowly, the little groups turned toward the center of their valley. There, upon a broad, flat area, stood the leaders of their clan.

The space provided for the mystic rites was a large, raised square of table rock that measured fifty feet in each direction. Those who stood upon this spot were gathered at the edges. In the center, like a giant bull's-eye thirty feet in diameter, was a perfect circle, painted white upon the flattened rock.

This circle was marked with cross lines, and outside its sphere were thin, crescent-shaped designs, four in number.

To the Aztecs of Zeltapec, this was a sacred spot. To tread upon it would mean instant punishment.

The chiefs of Zeltapec, men clad in gorgeous robes, were the only ones who dared step upon the tabled rock. But even they were guarded in their actions. They carefully avoided any contact with the circle or the crescents. They stalked about the edges of the flattened area.

As the people assembled and took their places below the rock, the chieftains, who were also the priests

of the tribe, acted with definite procedure. Each took his spot at one side of the sacred rock. Four in number, these tall, imposing men stood with folded arms, each gazing steadfastly at the crescent that was inscribed before him.

The most impressive ceremony of Zeltapec had begun. It was the welcome to the crescent moon. Beating tom-toms, chanting voices - both ascended through the increasing gloom, and in the midst shone the glistening rock, with its whitened, painted surface.

THE people of Zeltapec were moon worshippers with a reason. To them, the changing positions of the sun were not apparent. But the moon, rising high above the secluded vale, seemed lifelike in its phases. They regarded it as a sign of the world beyond - a chariot in which some god rode forth to gaze benignly down upon his chosen folk.

The appearance of the crescent moon was of vast importance to the natives of Zeltapec. It was a sign that the moon god had returned.

With wild, savage fervor, the tom-tom men beat forth their welcome. The people joined in a swelling chant. The four silent leaders raised their heads and stared skyward.

Some day - so the legend said - the power that controlled the sky chariot would send forth a messenger to visit the people of Zeltapec. For centuries, the Indians had persisted in this belief.

Story had it that once such a messenger had come; and then returned. Ever since, the people had been in readiness. They were determined that should the messenger arrive again, he would not find their welcome lacking.

The four tall leaders were chanting now. Their powerful voices arose above the cries of the people. The tom-toms ceased to beat. The populace was stilled. Four men alone were singing forth the welcome to the crescent moon that glimmered in the darkening sky.

The Indians were watching their leaders. Only the four were staring skyward. Then, suddenly, the people looked on in wonder. Simultaneously, the four had ended their chant, and were gazing agape above the mountain peak.

Never before had the ceremony broken at this point. Instinctively, the people raised their heads and followed their leaders' gaze. In the deep hush of the valley, a new sound manifested itself faintly from the sky.

Hovering about the mountain was a birdlike object that had appeared directly beneath the moon itself. It was singing a throbbing tune. Above it, wondering eyes could detect the whirling of a fanlike wheel.

This object looked like a windmill in horizontal flight; to these Indians, who knew nothing of the world beyond, its appearance was incredible.

Almost motionless in the air, the strange ship remained in constant view. Then cries of exultation arose spontaneously from the crowd below. The creature of the air was descending to the valley of Zeltapec. It was the answer to rites of centuries - the messenger from the moon!

The valley of Zeltapec offered no safe landing place for even the most skilled pilot of an ordinary plane. But this ship of the air, which the Indians had first mistaken for a huge bird, was an autogyro. The man who piloted it had seen the space below. The glistening rock, with its target center, was a perfect spot for a gyro landing.

Awed gasps were uttered as the descending autogyro became more plain. With its huge, revolving wing

whirling with terrific speed, the ship slackened its descent and came straight downward.

Its objective was plain. The autogyro was heading for a landing in the exact center of the sacred table rock.

The motor thrummed, and its unfamiliar tone gripped the waiting Aztecs with terror. They had longed for this strange visitant; now they were fearful lest its purpose be wrathful. As the autogyro landed squarely in the sacred circle, even the chieftains trembled.

THE landing was a perfect one. The wheels of the gyro scarcely turned upon the rock. The noise of the motor ceased. The people looked toward their four leaders. These imposing men had fallen on their faces. Even they dreaded the presence of the moon messenger.

A figure loomed from the cockpit of the autogyro. Piercing eyes studied the mass of cringing Indians. Those gleaming objects saw the four prone chieftains.

Then, from that rising form came a long, weird laugh. Its terrible echoes cried back from the silent mountainsides. The figure stepped from the autogyro. It was the shape of a tall, black-clad being, whose face was obscured by the down-turned brim of a hat.

The Shadow had found the valley of Zeltapec. Intrepidly, he had flown by autogyro, from Texas into the mountain fastnesses of northern Mexico. He had discovered the spot he sought. With no fear of what might lay below, The Shadow had descended.

His black-gloved hands were beneath the folds of his cloak, gripping a pair of automatics. Now, those hands emerged weaponless. The Shadow understood the awe that his arrival had created. Peering into the gloom, he could distinguish the forms of the bowing leaders. He knew that these were the men whom the mob would obey.

Extending his arms, The Shadow motioned toward himself. The nearest of the four men saw the action. Faltering, he arose and stared. The others followed his example. Then they cautiously watched as The Shadow, turning about within the painted circle, still continued his gesture.

The leaders moved forward. They paused at the edge of the sphere into which to step was death. Still, The Shadow called them toward him. One man crept onward. The others duplicated his act.

A low murmur of awe came from the multitude. Their leaders had been allowed to enter the space which belonged to the god of the moon!

With bowed heads and folded arms, the leaders stood before The Shadow. Their keen eyes were watching him. The Shadow laughed softly, and the whispered echoes of his mysterious mirth cast a weird spell that reached the gloom beyond. The Shadow spread his arms; then folded them.

One of the leaders understood. This was the messenger from the moon. Now arrived, he was awaiting the welcome that was his due. The leader turned and uttered a hoarse cry. There was a confused mumble in the crowd; then four tall men advanced, carrying a rude palanquin. They stopped fearfully as they neared the tabled rock.

The Shadow understood their purpose, and he walked directly forward. The four leaders followed him. The men who bore the palanquin trembled as The Shadow solemnly entered the chair provided for him.

With folded arms, he rested upon a crude, grass-woven seat, which was attached to two long poles. The chairbearers awaited the leaders. These men arrived, and two stepped in advance of the palanquin, while the other pair remained behind.

A leader uttered a cry; the bearers raised their burden, and the procession began. As it hewed a path through the assembled Indians, the murmur of the big crowd became subdued. The Shadow turned his piercing eyes upon those who were moving back. Gasps of awe came from the nearest Aztecs.

One word alone was uttered by the populace of Zeltapec. The Shadow could hear it oft repeated.

"Chicquatil! Chicquatil!"

The meaning of the terms was not evident. Yet that word seemed to creep from lips on all sides. Whatever chicquatil might signify, The Shadow knew that it was definitely connected with his arrival in Zeltapec.

Raising his eyes upward, The Shadow observed the crescent moon. He knew well that his coming had been timely. Outside Indians had spoken to explorers of the Aztecs in this unlocated valley, whose worship involved the crescent moon.

Straight ahead lay the open door of what appeared to be a temple. As the palanquin neared it, the bearers let down their burden. The leaders took their place. They bore the moon messenger in triumph through the open gate. Others closed the door from the outside.

Through the temple stalked the dignified leaders, until they reached a closed doorway at the other end. There they lowered the palanquin. Two of them stood at the barrier ahead. The others, bowing, urged the moon messenger to enter.

Rising, The Shadow stepped from the palanquin. With folded arms he walked directly to the double-doored gate where the Aztec leaders stood. The men drew back the gates. The Shadow walked into the room beyond.

A weird green glow pervaded the Aztec shrine. The cause of it lay glittering before The Shadow's eyes. There, upon a pedestal in the center of a small room, lay a huge emerald - a jewel of unmatched beauty.

"Chicquatil!"

The word was uttered from the doorway, and The Shadow understood its meaning. That was the name these people had given to the priceless gem that rested within the inner temple.

The Shadow's eyes detected high slits in the vaulted sides of the room. Through these, the filtering rays of the crescent moon were caught and reflected by the emerald. This explained the glow that filled the room.

Straight ahead lay a vacant throne. The Shadow never paused. He walked to the high stone seat and took his place there. The leaders of the Aztecs, uttering low murmurs of approval, came and stationed themselves by the throne - two on either side.

The Shadow's eyes stared steadily at the glowing gem. They raised and looked beyond. There they became fixed at the object which they saw for the first time. A soft, sinister laugh came from The Shadow's lips.

Squatting on the floor beyond the emerald was a metal statue of life-size form. It was a hideous idol, molded with clawlike hands and feet. Its body was a twisted, grotesque shape.

It was the face of the idol, however, upon which The Shadow fixed his stolid stare; it was that metal countenance that had brought the sardonic laugh to his hidden lips.

The Shadow had seen that face before. The features of the idol were a perfect replica of the countenance of Thomas Rodan - the face possessed by every member of the evil band whose crimes The Shadow had set forth to foil!

CHAPTER XV. THE AZTECS TELL

AN hour had passed since The Shadow had entered the inner shrine of the secret temple at Zeltapec. During that time, he had witnessed a strange chanting ceremony by the four who had brought him here - the greetings of the Aztec chieftains to the messenger from the moon.

Now, as the four stood silently before the throne, The Shadow knew that they awaited his bidding. With slow, careful gaze, he studied the faces of the Aztec leaders. Then, signaling one, he gestured to the man to approach.

Until this moment, The Shadow had not uttered a single word since his arrival at Zeltapec. Listening to the ceremony which had been conducted in his honor, he had distinguished the meaning of certain phrases.

The Shadow's reference to Aztec information, before embarking on a journey to Zeltapec, was evidence that this mysterious man knew much concerning the language and customs of the ancient peoples who had inhabited Mexico. Now, his words were fitting proof of the fact.

By applying his previously gained knowledge, The Shadow phrased a question that resembled the dialect of the Zeltapec chief. The man understood the words. The messenger from the moon was asking him why the strange, base image rested within this shrine.

Fearfully, the Aztec leader began his explanation. His words were apologetic and The Shadow sensed their theme.

The chief referred to the metal image as Colpoc, a god of evil. With fervent gesticulations, he told the moon messenger that Colpoc had been placed here as a warning.

Backing away from the throne, the chief pointed to the glittering emerald.

"Chicquatil!" he exclaimed.

He made a gesture as if to lift the beautiful gem; then shrank away in horror. A fiendish look came over his face. He pointed to the image of Colpoc while he babbled in his native tongue.

He signaled to one of his companions. The other man went to the idol and picked up a stack of objects that lay beside it.

These, the second chief brought to The Shadow's throne. Bowing, he began to separate a nested pile of curved, metal sheets. A gleam came to The Shadow's eyes.

There, laying upon the floor before him, was a row of metal masks, each a replica of the face of Colpoc! One chief lifted a single mask; another shrank away, but his fellows were upon him. Despite his feigned protests, they applied the mask to his face.

They clasped metal bands behind the fellow's head. With fierce gesticulations, they showed how tightly the crushing mask would fit. Releasing their prisoner, they removed the false front from his face and brought it to The Shadow.

The Shadow received it in his black-gloved hands and inspected it closely. The mask had holes for eyes,

nostrils and mouth. Its weight and firm solidity were noticeable.

Here lay an explanation. Applied to a human face and kept there under pressure, this mask would mold the features of the victim into a form that would be its own!

The interior of the mask contained a very peculiar, sticky substance. This, apparently, added to the effectiveness of the mold. Holding the mask upon his lap, The Shadow raised one hand and asked a slow question in the Aztec tongue.

"This you have used?"

The chief whom The Shadow had selected as spokesman bowed and nodded. He began to relate a story, adding expression with motions of his hands, while The Shadow listened. The details of the chief's account were plain to the silent personage upon the throne.

No one in Zeltapec, so the chief explained, would have dared to enter this temple to touch the chicquatil. But always had there been a fear of strangers.

It was a rule of the tribe that all men should be welcomed here. Centuries ago, the belief had been established that the moon messenger might come in some disguise. Hence visitors - though they seldom appeared within the walled valley - were treated with the utmost respect.

Not many moons ago, so the chief related, strange men had wandered into the valley through a narrow defile in the mountains. The Indians had received them well.

The men had traded with the natives, giving them peculiar objects in return for articles of gold - for that metal was common here among the people of Zeltapec.

These men had brought with them some strange animals - the chief gave a graphic description of a horse - and had loaded them with the gold that they had received. But, somehow, the visitors from the outside world had learned about the hidden shrine wherein rested the emerald called the chicquatil.

They had entered here by stealth. They had been surprised. They had been caught in the act of attempting to purloin the chicquatil. Upon them had been forced the punishment provided.

These men acted like Colpoc, the god of evil. So like Colpoc they must remain. Upon them had been pressed the face of the Aztec image. Then, since punishment had been received, they were allowed to depart from the valley of Zeltapec.

None of the gold that they had received had been taken from them. These Indians would not recall a gift that had once been conferred. They were merely driven forth upon their horses. Wherever they might meet men, all would know that these outcasts had acted like the god of evil.

The simplicity of the Aztecs was apparent. These people of Zeltapec believed that their god of evil, Colpoc, was known everywhere. They did not realize that Colpoc was recognized only within this secluded valley, where a small remnant of an Aztec faction had survived all others of its kind.

Listening, The Shadow had learned the truth about the men of evil. He had received the explanation of how four men could look alike and thus indulge in supercrime. Now, he had a question which was of the utmost importance.

"These men?" The Shadow asked. "How many?"

Solemnly, the chieftain raised the fingers and thumb of his left hand. Then he raised the thumb of the

right.

The Shadow's question was answered. Charles Kistelle and his fellow plotters were six in number!

THE SHADOW placed his hand in front of the Aztec's face and made a motion of applying a metal mask.

"How many moons?" he demanded.

The chief held up five fingers of his left hand and three on his right. It had required approximately eight months for the six men to complete their ordeal.

The chief was gesticulating; he was explaining the treatment that had been accorded the prisoners. He was showing how they had been fed through the mouth-holes of the masks; he was pointing out the spots where they had been kept, here in the temple, always under guard.

Each night, it developed, they had been forced to stare for two hours at the glittering green gem that they had come to steal.

The other Aztec leaders were joining in with gusto. They were portraying the fear that the prisoners had shown; how the sight of the green jewel had become an abomination to them; how the chicquatil would never again be sought by those men who had been driven from the peaceful valley of Zeltapec.

The Shadow arose from his throne. His eyes sparkled fiercely in the green light. The chieftains cowered. They bowed in humility as they heard the tones of The Shadow's whispered voice.

This shrine had been defiled. The image of Colpoc did not belong within it. The watchers should never have allowed strange thieves to enter. Raising his hand, The Shadow pointed upward, to show that he intended to return to the sky.

Humbly, the tribal chiefs withdrew. Standing beyond the huge green emerald, one of them pointed to the stone and begged the moon messenger to accept the chicquatil as a gift from the people of Zeltapec. The Shadow raised his hand in refusal.

All the chieftains began to plead. Their words were filled with terror.

For centuries that stone had been kept in this resting place - a tribute to be sent to the moon god by his messenger. Should the leaders fail to have the gift accepted, they would no longer hold the confidence of the people. They would be carried to the top of the towering mountain; then hurled into the depths below.

The Shadow raised his hand; this time his motion indicated acceptance. Moving forward with gliding tread, he raised the emerald from its resting place and held it in his right hand. Without a word, he turned and walked toward the outer door.

The chieftains hurried to unclosethe exit, The Shadow entered his palanquin. He was carried from the temple. There, the waiting bearers took the palanquin while the Aztec leaders formed their pairs.

"Chicquatil! Chicquatil!"

The glad cry was echoed by the throngs of Aztecs who stood about the temple. The moon messenger was returning to the sky. With him, he was taking the gift of those who dwelt in Zeltapec.

The Shadow left the litter at the table rock. He walked alone into the sacred circle, holding his right hand

high above his head. The huge emerald glistened like a mammoth green eye in the moonlight, its splendor dazzling the eyes of those who saw it.

The Shadow stepped up into the cockpit of the autogyro. The green light vanished as he placed the emerald beneath his coat. The motor began its roar. There was a rush of air as the huge fan above the ship began its revolution.

The autogyro moved. Forward it rolled; then upward in an almost vertical ascent. It rose higher and higher until it was but a black shape in the moonlit sky. Up toward the crescent moon - out of sight beyond the mountaintop. A tiny speck in the sky, it headed northward toward Texas.

The Shadow had found the lost city of Zeltapec. There, he had learned the secret held by six men of evil. He was on his way to deal with them now; and in his possession was the green chicquatil.

Six men of evil had come to Zeltapec to steal that matchless gem. They had been thwarted; and they had been marked with the face of Colpoc, the image of evil. The Shadow, here alone, had gained the magnificent jewel as a gift, in spite of his own protests!

The Shadow was returning now, to put an end to crime. There were six men - so the string of outrages was not ended. Other crimes were even now in the making as The Shadow's plane rushed him back.

CHAPTER XVI. THE FOURTH PLOT

THE lobby of the Salina Hotel was virtually deserted. This was not unusual. The Salina Hotel was one of the oldest and least-frequented in Fargo, North Dakota. Business at this inn was so light that there was not even a clerk in constant attendance. Guests rang a loud bell on the desk and waited for someone to come in response.

On this particular evening, the man who entered the hotel lobby seemed pleased to note that no one was there to observe him. He walked past the desk, ascended a flight of stairs and walked along a dim corridor until he came to a room which bore the number 206. There he stopped and tapped softly. Leaning close to the door, he whispered a countersign:

"Chicquatil!"

The door opened. The man entered a darkened room. The door closed behind him. A light clicked on, to reveal the fact that the window shade was drawn. The light also snowed the features of the visitor and the man who was there to receive him.

Both of these men were alike in countenance. Their expressionless features sloped away from their flat, pudgy noses. Wordless, the two men smiled. The sinister, twisted curves of their lips formed identical expressions.

More than that, their grotesque leers produced another effect. Each of these men became the exact image of Colpoc, the god of evil whose hideous statue was in the Aztec temple at Zeltapec!

The grinning host waved his visitor to a chair. The two sat down and began a low, important conversation. They became totally oblivious to their secluded surroundings.

"Nobody saw me come in, Charley," declared the visitor. "You picked a great spot here. I got your postal card three days ago, but I didn't want to come over from Sharport until I was all set."

"That's the stuff, Horace," responded Charley. "It was best to wait a few days before we got together. I did that with the others. No one suspects anything about a little trip out of town - a few days before the

fireworks begin."

The men were no longer smiling. Their expressions were solemn and impassive. It was curious that there should be two men so exactly like. Horace, the visitor, seemed to realize the fact as he gazed reminiscently at Charley.

But Charley, the host, was quite indifferent. For to him, this was but another meeting. Within the past several weeks, he had held three such consultations with other men who were his doubles. The fact suddenly impressed itself upon him and he mentioned it to his visitor.

"It does seem funny," he declared, "to have you speak to me as Charley Kistelle. I don't look any more like myself than the man in the moon.

"This is a great game - being someone else. Back in Tilson, Illinois, I was Earl Northrup. In Barmouth, Maryland, I was Harold Thurber. In Daltona, Georgia, I was Tom Rodan. Here, I'm going to be Horace Fenwick.

"You know, Horace, I thought I was going to hear from Eddie before I did from you. He's down in a town called Riviere, near New Orleans. Your letter was sent there from New York, so I hopped up here to Fargo. It's only about twenty miles to Sharport, isn't it?"

"Twenty-two," responded the man called Horace Fenwick. "So I edged in ahead of Eddie, eh?"

"Yeah," responded Charley Kistelle. "He's got a good lay down there in Louisiana. Calls himself Edward P. Montague. Nice moniker he's picked. I don't think Eddie will be ready for me for another week yet."

Kistelle paused reflectively. He was staring at Fenwick. His eyes were away from the window. Hence Kistelle did not notice a peculiar phenomenon that occurred there.

The window shade was moving very slightly, as though the soft raising of the sash beyond had caused it to flutter. Then the window shade was still, its bottom a few inches from the sill. Yet through that small space, a shaft of blackness was projecting. The stunted outline of a phantom shape was moving inward upon the floor. Then the unnoticed motion ceased.

ALTHOUGH neither Charley Kistelle nor Horace Fenwick realized it, someone was beyond that shade. There, in the outer darkness, someone was listening.

That someone must have been a veritable creature of the night, for not a sound betrayed his hidden presence. Only the unmoving blotch upon the floor could have served as evidence to declare the presence of The Shadow!

"You see," declared Charley, "everything has been pulled without a slip. I've got a man posted in New York. He attends to the forwarding of the mail. Your case has worked just like the others, but it took a little longer, as I wasn't expecting you just yet.

"When I was in New Orleans, I sent a hotel card to New York. So when your letter blew in, it was forwarded to me. I hopped here in a hurry and sent a card air mail from here in Fargo. As soon as this job is finished, I'm moving south. Probably St. Louis or Kansas City. There I'll send in another card to New York."

"What if Eddie's call comes in and is sent here?" questioned Fenwick anxiously.

"What of it?" responded Kistelle. "I'll notify this hotel where I'm gone. They'll forward it. Suppose any one should see the letter? That Aztec signal won't mean a thing. The only point is that I have to get

notification from you fellows far enough in advance. I've counted on all of you to have a perfect job ready for me."

Fenwick laughed.

"I've got a corker," he responded. "Ready any time - if I keep watching. Listen, while I spill the works."

He looked anxiously about him. Noticing that all seemed well, Fenwick lowered his voice to a buzz and began a soft, careful story, to which Charles Kistelle listened with understanding nods.

"I get you, Horace," he said. "Old Dagwood will go down to the jeweler's shop any night you suggest it. Is that the idea?"

"Sure thing," responded Fenwick.

Kistelle arose and paced the room. He glanced at his watch. It showed half past eight.

"Listen, Horace," he said suddenly. "It's a long jump from here to New Orleans. I've got the lay here perfectly. Why should we wait? How about tonight?"

"I think we can do it," returned Fenwick. "This is Saturday. The jeweler stays open until ten. Dagwood is at home. But I'll have to head for Sharport pretty quick. I wouldn't want to call Dagwood from Fargo."

"Get going then," ordered Kistelle. "I've got a car. Bought it yesterday over the phone. It's waiting for me at a garage. Leave the rest to me. When you come out of that jewelry store, with Raymond Dagwood, give the crescent sign. I'll be watching. You say it takes ten minutes to go from the jeweler's to Dagwood's?"

"Right."

"You can get to the store at half past nine," declared Kistelle, thoughtfully. "Then, after you're gone with Dagwood and the jeweler, I can wait until just before closing time at ten."

Fenwick nodded, and Kistelle pointed toward the door. Fenwick arose; then hesitated. He curved his right thumb and fingers so they formed a crescent. Pointing them upward, he said:

"All clear."

Then, turning his hand so that the crescent points were down, he added:

"Lay low."

Kistelle laughed and again pointed to the door. Fenwick departed.

Kistelle waited several minutes, then picked up his suitcase and strolled down to the lobby.

The clerk was not at the desk. Kistelle printed some words on a card:

Craig Kimble checked out. Will notify you of forwarding address later.

Kistelle was chuckling to himself as he walked along a street toward the garage where a car was waiting for him. He had paid his hotel bill in advance. He was through with Fargo now.

AT the garage, Kistelle found the proprietor. Keeping his face turned away as though looking for the car that he had bought, Kistelle introduced himself as Henry Adams and asked about the car.

The owner led him to the rear of the garage. There Kistelle saw a small coupe. He put his bag in the back, peeled off two hundred dollars in twenty-dollar bills and paid the money to the garage man.

Then the new purchaser drove his car out to the street. He stopped to let the garage owner fill the tank. After that, Kistelle pulled away.

As the coupe rolled along the dim side street from the garage, a figure emerged suddenly from a darkened front of a deserted building. Like a living phantom, it swept through the slowly moving coupe. With a swift leap, it landed silently upon the rear of the coupe and nestled down within the tire rack.

To all appearances, this living being immediately became nothing more than a large, dark bundle jammed upon the back of the automobile. Charles Kistelle had no suspicion of what had happened behind him. He did not realize, as he headed along the road to Sharport, that he had gained a mysterious passenger.

In fact, Charles Kistelle was so engaged in a chuckling soliloquy that he had very little thought of anything except the road ahead. He was talking, half-aloud, as the car rolled along.

"Another swell job tonight," were his elated words. "There's nobody can spoil this game. Nobody - not even The Shadow!"

The mention of that name brought a contemptuous sneer to the lips of Charles Kistelle.

"The Shadow!" he repeated. "That's the guy that was after Charley Kistelle. Fine chance he has of ever finding me now. This is the last place he would ever be - on my trail!"

Kistelle's chuckle sounded above the roar of the speeding motor. Little did the evil plotter suspect that he was not alone - that the very man whose name he had ridiculed was riding five feet behind him.

Charles Kistelle was starting out to commit a perfect crime. The Shadow was accompanying him! The fourth plot of the evil men was destined to encounter unexpected consequences!

CHAPTER XVII. INTO THE NIGHT

SARGON'S JEWELRY SHOP was the most pretentious store in the prosperous town of Sharport, North Dakota. On Saturday night, when the main street of Sharport was crowded, the store stayed open until ten o'clock. Occasionally, worth-while business came in just before closing time.

This night, James Sargon, the proprietor, was seated in the little office back of the store when Maurice Cotter, his trusted junior partner, came in to inform him that Raymond Dagwood and Horace Fenwick had come to the shop.

"Show them in!" exclaimed Sargon, in a pleased tone.

The two men entered and Sargon, rising to greet them, rubbed his hands with enthusiasm. He proffered a box of expensive cigars and sat down at his desk after the visitors were seated. Cotter, the junior jeweler, remained at the open door so that he could see the visitors and the outside shop as well.

James Sargon, the jeweler, was a prosperous-looking man who had done well in his long term of business. He was elderly and of obsequious manner. His understudy, Maurice Cotter, was a young man who aped his superior. Both were servile in the presence of Raymond Dagwood, who was reputed to be the most wealthy man in Sharport.

Dagwood was a stout, imposing individual who was filled with self-importance. Most of the natives of Sharport lived in awe of him.

Horace Fenwick, who had come to Sharport less than a year ago, was one of the few who managed to work up a real acquaintance with Raymond Dagwood. Hence, Dagwood, like so many puffed-up persons of his type, had made Fenwick one of his real confidants and the two were on the most friendly terms. Dagwood felt that those whom he favored should be accorded the same respect that he gained.

"Good evening, Sargon," said Dagwood, in a condescending tone. "Mr. Fenwick was at my home this evening. Dropped in to see me and we began talking about those diamonds that I have considered buying from you. I should like to have Fenwick see them."

"Certainly, Mr. Dagwood," said the jeweler with a bow. "I shall be glad to show them to you. A wonderful collection, Mr. Fenwick. Wonderful!"

He arose and opened a door at the rear of the office. It led to a strong room. The visitors entered; Sargon followed. Maurice Cotter went back to attend the shop.

James Sargon opened a large safe and brought forth flat boxes which he placed upon a table. He opened them one by one to display a collection of glittering diamonds.

As he had said, the gems were of high value. Dagwood pointed out certain pieces to Fenwick.

"Here is the list," remarked Sargon, taking a sheet of paper from the safe.

Fenwick nodded. He glanced at the list of items and gave it back to Sargon. Finishing a brief inspection of the gems, Fenwick signified that he was satisfied.

"What do you think of them, Mr. Fenwick?" questioned Sargon, as he began to replace the boxes.

"Quite good," responded Fenwick. "I fancy that they are worth the amount that you have asked."

Sargon laid the list in the safe with the boxes and closed the door of the strong box. He turned to Fenwick and spoke in a convincing tone.

"They are worth every bit of three hundred thousand dollars!" he declared. "Indeed they are, Mr. Fenwick, indeed they are! You know their history - they came from the Davis estates and I obtained them in hopes that Mr. Dagwood would buy at least a portion of them. I shall hold them for a while longer, because I am sure that Mr. Dagwood will buy."

"I haven't made up my mind yet," returned Dagwood, brusquely. "Nevertheless, you can count upon at least a partial sale, Sargon."

"Thank you, Mr. Dagwood," bowed the jeweler, "thank you. I am keeping these while I await your decision. The diamonds are safe here" - he looked about the room approvingly - "because I have fitted this room with every device for security. Only Cotter and myself can enter here. We have spared no pains in assuring the best of protection."

"I was looking at Mr. Dagwood's present collection of gems," remarked Fenwick, in a matter-of-fact tone. "He tells me that he has never gone in for jewels to any great extent."

"I fancy that my gems would bring about thirty thousand dollars," interposed Dagwood. "I should scarcely call it a collection, Horace."

"You have some nice items," replied Fenwick, "and it was my suggestion" - he turned to Sargon - "that Mr. Dagwood should have his own jewels appraised carefully before going ahead with this contemplated purchase. Suppose, Sargon, that you look them over?"

"Gladly! Gladly!" responded the jeweler. "Any time, Mr. Dagwood. I should indeed be pleased to appraise your jewels -"

"We are going back to your house," suggested Fenwick, turning to Dagwood. "Of course, Mr. Sargon can not well leave here -"

"Indeed I can," interposed Sargon, quickly. "It is nearly closing time and Cotter is in charge here."

"A good idea," declared Dagwood. "Come along, Sargon. My car is outside. You can ride up to the house with us. I'll have you look over my jewelry right away. I might dispose of some items in connection with the purchase of these diamonds that you have."

The three men left the strong room, Sargon carefully closing the door behind them. The jeweler spoke to Maurice Cotter and explained where he was going. The three men left by a side door which locked automatically after they had departed.

As they passed under a dim street lamp, Horace Fenwick raised one hand. He made a slight motion as he formed his thumb and fingers into a crescent sign. The thumb and fingers were turned upward.

A car was parked in the darkness across the street. A man, seated at the wheel, made no response. But he had seen that sign. Charles Kistelle - for he was the watching man - smiled grotesquely in the darkness.

At the same moment, a figure detached itself from the side of Kistelle's coupe. Moving silently, it reached the sidewalk and followed the three men who were walking along the street to Raymond Dagwood's limousine. The phantom form attached itself to the rear of the big car.

When Dagwood's limousine arrived at the wealthy man's mansion, ten minutes later, it stopped directly behind Horace Fenwick's small sedan. Raymond Dagwood alighted, accompanied by James Sargon and Horace Fenwick. The chauffeur drove up the drive, avoiding Fenwick's car.

Dagwood, Sargon and Fenwick entered the mansion. Not one of them turned to look back. None saw the phantom shape that followed noiselessly. The three entered the house. Dagwood was speaking as he led the way through the door.

"We shall go right upstairs," he said. "I have the jewels in a safe in my bedroom. You can look at them right away, Sargon."

Fenwick was the last to enter the door and he paused suddenly. He fancied that he had heard his name whispered in the darkness. He seemed to recognize the voice of Charles Kistelle. He paused on the door sill.

"Chicquatil!"

The whispered word startled Fenwick. It was the countersign that he had given Kistelle tonight in Fargo. In an instant, he decided that something must have gone wrong; that Kistelle had hurried here to intercept him.

"I'll be with you in a moment," he called to Dagwood, who, with Sargon, was halfway across the ground-floor hall. "I just want to see that my car is all right. I may have left the key in it."

"All right, Horace," called back Dagwood.

Fenwick stepped outside and closed the front door. He moved into the darkness toward the spot where

he had heard the whispered word. He stopped - a cry of surprise caught upon his twisted lips.

Two burning eyes were staring from the darkness. The muzzle of an automatic was rammed against Fenwick's ribs. He had walked into a perfectly laid trap.

"Come!"

The command was uttered in a sepulchral whisper that made Fenwick's limbs quiver. He did not know the identity of this person in the dark; but, instinctively, his mind leaped back to a night, long ago, when he had been riding northward to the border line of Mexico.

"The Shadow!"

Charles Kistelle had uttered that name on the last night - and the strange title had stuck in Fenwick's mind. The Shadow - the only man whom Charley Kistelle had feared. Could this be the weird personage who had driven the master crook into obscurity?

THE man who called himself Horace Fenwick did not know. He realized only that he had met his master; that he was walking mechanically toward the driveway at the bidding of an invisible being, who had materialized from nowhere to overwhelm him with fear such as he had never before known.

They were going toward the car. The whispered voice was stern and sinister. It was ordering Fenwick to take the wheel. The crook obeyed. The threatening automatic still pressed against Fenwick's body. The eyes were glaring; but Fenwick did not see them. He was staring straight ahead, obeying The Shadow's command.

The whisper gave the destination. Fenwick nodded shakily and started the car. He could do nothing but obey, for he realized that a moment's hesitation would mean his doom. He was going back to the jewelry store, at The Shadow's bidding.

Fenwick uttered a scarcely audible groan as he followed the route toward the place from which he had so recently come. A distant chime was striking ten. They were going back into the night - Horace Fenwick and The Shadow - to the spot where the master crook was now at work!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW STRIKES

TEN o'clock. Maurice Cotter extinguished the lights in the jewelry store. He walked back into the office for a few moments; then went out to leave by the side door. Everything was in perfect order.

The young man stopped suddenly. He could hear a light tapping against the small window of the side door. He stopped and peered through. He saw a white face pressed against the glass. Drawing a flashlight from his pocket, Cotter turned it to see who was there. He breathed a sigh of relief as he recognized the odd features of Horace Fenwick.

Freed from worry, Cotter opened the door and admitted the man who was waiting. The explanation of Fenwick's visit was immediately forthcoming.

"I got here just in time, Cotter," the visitor declared. "I thought I could make it before you left. Sargon wants that list describing the diamonds. I think he's going to make a sale tonight."

"Good!" exclaimed Cotter with enthusiasm. "Come in, Mr. Fenwick, come in!"

He closed the door and conducted the visitor through the darkness. Cotter turned on the office light and operated the mechanism that opened the door of the well-protected strong room. Another light came on

and Cotter went to the safe.

"We appreciate your interest, Mr. Fenwick," he declared, as he turned the combination of the safe. "The list is right here with the diamonds. I'll give it to you right away. Mr. Dagwood has a real opportunity in buying these diamonds, but he has been very slow about making up his mind. I am indeed glad that he is considering a decision tonight. Here is the list -"

Cotter's words ended. His jaw dropped. Turning, he had found himself staring into the gleaming muzzle of a revolver, held in the hand of Horace Fenwick. A hideous, twisted grin was on the face before him.

"Hand over those diamonds!" ordered Fenwick, in a sneering tone. "Wait - move over that way. I'll get them myself."

Cotter, surprised, obeyed stupidly. Covering him with one hand, the robber used the other to draw forth the boxes containing the valuable gems. With this task completed, he swung sharply upon Cotter.

The young jeweler could not understand this situation. He knew Horace Fenwick to be a trusted friend of Raymond Dagwood. He had never imagined such an event as this could occur. Gasping, he raised his voice in faltering protest.

"You - you'll pay for this, Fenwick!" he exclaimed. "You - you can't get away with it! I should never have let you in and I'll - I'll see that you -"

The evil smile was playing over the face of Fenwick. The bold robber stared coldly at the young jeweler. Then, in a slow, cold tone, he spoke the words that added to Cotter's bewilderment.

"You are the one who will pay for this, Cotter," came the evil voice. "You opened the safe. Sargon will believe that you took the diamonds."

"I'll tell the truth!" protested Cotter. "I'll name you, Horace Fenwick. You'll pay -"

"Fenwick will not pay," was the leering reply.

A sudden enlightenment dawned upon Maurice Cotter. This man before him - this daring robber who looked like Horace Fenwick - was not Fenwick at all! There was a slight difference in the tone that Cotter would not have noticed, but for the words that had been said.

CHARLES KISTELLE continued to smile. He had played the role of Horace Fenwick in order to get in here and obtain the diamonds. It would be easy to wound Maurice Cotter and make a quick get-away, leaving the junior jeweler to tell a hopeless story.

But there was a reason why Kistelle planned this crime differently than the ones he had performed before. He had decided that with Maurice Cotter, the truth would be the most efficient method. For Fenwick, in his conference with Kistelle, had mentioned a most vital fact.

"I am not Horace Fenwick," declared Kistelle, boldly. "Horace Fenwick is at present with Raymond Dagwood and James Sargon. Therefore, when you tell the world that Horace Fenwick came here, you will make a hopeless accusation. Dagwood - most important man in this town; and Sargon - your own employer, will testify against you.

"Before you came here, Cotter, you lived in Chicago. There, several years ago, you had plenty of trouble with the police -"

"I did nothing wrong," objected Cotter. "I was arrested - yes - because of thefts in the store where I

worked; but I was let free -"

"And discharged from your position," added Kistelle with a leer. "You came here and managed to get another start. You worked in with Sargon. He never looked up your past. But" - Kistelle's smile twisted - "Fenwick did!"

Whitening, Cotter realized the game now. He had talked occasionally with Horace Fenwick, who had been a friendly customer at the jewelry shop. He had given Fenwick threads to the past. Fenwick had followed them and had prepared this game!

Cotter knew that the situation was hopeless. The man before him was Fenwick's double. Who would believe that there was such a man in Sharport. Cotter groaned; and Kistelle smiled.

"The blame will be on you, Cotter," declared Kistelle, in a tone of finality. "Tell your story. It will not hold. The past will be learned. You will go to prison, unless" - the speaker paused - "you get away from here before the theft is discovered."

Cotter saw the answer. He had but one chance; that was to flee from Sharport. If he chose to remain, he would be as certainly condemned as if he had fled. He realized that he could not shatter Horace Fenwick's alibi. He could only say that a man who looked like Fenwick had duped him. Who would believe such a ridiculous story?

"That is your one chance," declared Kistelle, calmly. "Will you take it, or must -"

"I'll take it!" gasped Cotter.

Kistelle laughed. The holdup was easy, now. He reached forth to gather the boxes that contained the diamonds. He would make a get-away, leaving Cotter to shift for himself. If Cotter should flee, as Kistelle believed he would, he would be blamed; if he stayed, Fenwick could use the perfect alibi.

With eyes still steady upon Cotter, Kistelle noted a sudden shift in the direction of the young man's gaze. Cotter was staring in new bewilderment toward the door that led to the office.

Instinctively, Kistelle turned to look. To his amazement he saw Horace Fenwick standing just within the door!

WHAT was Fenwick doing here? Kistelle's evil smile faded. The master crook was as bewildered as Maurice Cotter. Kistelle had been playing upon the effectiveness of a perfect alibi. For an instant he thought that Fenwick must have gone mad to come here.

Then came the answer to the mystery - an answer that caused Kistelle to tremble in unrestrained fear.

A low, sinister laugh rippled through the room. From the obscurity just beyond Fenwick appeared the outline of a weird, black-garbed form. Two automatics showed in black-gloved hands. One was trained on Fenwick; the other covered Kistelle.

That laugh brooked no resistance. The revolver dropped from Kistelle's trembling fingers. Tonight's game was ended by the master trapper. It was The Shadow who stood before Charles Kistelle!

The tall form moved to the center of the room. Three men stood agape. The bewilderment of Maurice Cotter was equal to that of the two men who had sought to ruin him by their alibi plot. The automatics moved and in answer to their silent order, both Kistelle and Fenwick backed away to a corner, with arms upraised.

The Shadow's eyes shone upon Maurice Cotter. A whispered voice came from hidden lips.

"Go into the office, Cotter," was The Shadow's order, "and call Dagwood's home. Say that you have trapped two crooks. Then call the police."

Cotter obeyed like a man in a dream. He walked into the office and phoned Dagwood's home. He heard himself asking for James Sargon; heard himself telling the jeweler that he had trapped two crooks. Then mechanically, Cotter hung up the receiver. He lifted the receiver again and called the local police.

The Shadow's voice brought Cotter from his daze. In obedience to a new command, he came into the strong room. The spectral tones of The Shadow were telling him what he should do. Cotter picked up Kistelle's gun and used it to cover the cowering rogues.

The Shadow's automatics dropped from view. The man in black moved silently toward the doorway. His sharp eyes showed him that Cotter, awakened to new determination, held full control of the two men of evil - those two who peered with solemn, terrified faces - both replicas of the hideous idol Colpoc.

"Upon the desk" - The Shadow's voice whispered weirdly in Cotter's listening ear - "is the information that will convict these men. Give it to the police - for there are others like these." Cotter nodded. His mind was clouded with fantasy. He could only keep his eyes glued upon the two faces before him; those faces that were so grotesquely identical.

The Shadow stepped into the office. He placed a sheet of paper upon the desk. It was a closely typewritten report that named the others of this evil crew and exposed their crimes in terse words. At the bosom of the statement, The Shadow inscribed the name of Edward Montague - the last of the six, whom Kistelle had mentioned earlier this night.

THE SHADOW paused; then swept suddenly to the door of the strong room. He saw Kistelle and Fenwick slowly shifting forward as though to leap upon Cotter. The Shadow laughed and with his mockery, he brought his automatics into view. The rogues cowered back against the wall of the room.

The gibing tones of The Shadow's laugh reechoed through the close-walled room. That laugh sounded as a knell of doom. Its recurrent mirth reverberated in taunting cries that might have been uttered by the walls themselves.

With this triumphant taunt, The Shadow made an end to any thought of struggle against his might.

The sound of a siren came faintly to the room. The police were nearly here. The Shadow's form faded away into the adjoining room. Moving beyond, he passed into the darkened store.

Men were at the side door. They found it open - for so The Shadow had left it when he had picked the lock to bring in Fenwick.

Seeing the light from the inner room, the police dashed in that direction. A few moments later, Raymond Dagwood and James Sargon arrived, to follow the path the others had taken. It was then that The Shadow stepped from the darkness of a counter to gain the outer darkness.

Charles Kistelle, master plotter, was in the hands of the law. The Shadow had captured him and one of his underlings tonight. He had left evidence to incriminate the others.

The schemes of six men of evil had been frustrated. The path was open to deprive them of their ill-gotten gains. The clearing of innocent men could now be consummated.

The Shadow had left vengeance to others, solely because in the elimination of the evil men, it was

necessary to clear the names of those who were now wrongly held as criminals. The Shadow had invoked the law - but even now he waited. Strong though the law might be, The Shadow had often seen it fail!

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW STRIKES AGAIN

CHARLES KISTELLE and Horace Fenwick were prisoners. Glaring maliciously at the two police who held them covered by their guns, they waited helplessly while Maurice Cotter tried to tell his story.

The junior member of the jewelry firm was half dazed by all that had happened. He poured out his accusation against the men whose very looks incriminated them. He could only explain that some mysterious stranger had intervened to aid him; but he could offer no further information.

Suddenly Cotter remembered The Shadow's words. The paper on the desk! When Cotter spoke of that document James Sargon rushed out to get it. Back in the strong room, in the presence of Raymond Dagwood and three policemen, the elderly jeweler read forth the statements that The Shadow had left.

As Sargon named the other members of the evil band: Northrup, Thurber, Rodan and Montague, a fierce glare came upon the face of Charles Kistelle. He was hearing his own crimes exposed. That paper was an indictment for murder!

Sheer desperation drove Kistelle into action. With a fiendish cry, he leaped from the wall and struck down the policeman who was covering him with a revolver.

The other officer aimed directly at Kistelle; but as he pressed the trigger, his fire was diverted. Horace Fenwick, acting with quick precision, leaped forward just as he saw the policeman turn to shoot. He struck the officer's wrist just in time to save Kistelle.

Confusion reigned. A pair of unarmed men had opened the attack; but they were wild with desperation. Kistelle seized the revolver from the man with whom he was grappling and shot the officer through the heart. Raising his arm, he struck down the third officer.

Then Kistelle and Fenwick were the center of a milling mob. Revolver shots flashed wildly. Men staggered away. Out of the brief, hectic battle came the master plotter unscathed. With a fierce grab he seized the boxes of diamonds and fled toward the outer door, Fenwick at his heels. Two revolver shots followed; but the policeman who aimed them missed.

Out into the street dashed Kistelle, squarely into Dagwood's chauffeur, who was standing by the limousine. Kistelle swung with his free hand. The man went down.

Hurling the diamonds into the rear of the car, Kistelle leaped to the wheel. The motor had been left running. Jamming into low gear, Kistelle started the car forward with a lurch.

Fenwick, too, was present. He leaped into the back of the car as it pulled away. Climbing over the seat, he joined Kistelle and pointed out the road to safety.

THE mad escape did not forestall pursuit. A police car was resting near the corner. Its driver came quickly to life. Then two pursuing policemen dashed from the store and leaped into the car beside the driver.

Simultaneously, another car came into action. This was the coupe in which Kistelle had come to Sharport. The crook had left his vehicle some distance down the street.

Almost on the instant when Kistelle had felled the chauffeur, the motor of that car burst forth. It was

sweeping onward now, passing by the police car. The officers shouted as they saw it, not knowing whether it was manned by friend or foe.

A low, sinister laugh swept from the man at the wheel. The Shadow was driving Kistelle's car!

The big limousine was a block ahead. Sweeping past a traffic light, it was heading from the open road that led from Sharport. Behind it came the car driven by The Shadow. The police car was in the rear.

Three minutes after the chase had begun, the cars had gained the countryside. Whirling along a curving paved highway, Charles Kistelle and Horace Fenwick were hurtling toward freedom with three hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels.

The limousine was a powerful car. By all odds it should have left the pursuers far behind. The coupe in which The Shadow rode was an old car; the Sharport police car was by no means a swift one. Nevertheless, as miles sped by, Kistelle could still see the lights of the coupe not more than two hundred yards behind him.

The windings of the open road were maddening to Kistelle. They were holding back the limousine every time that the driver attempted to reach top speed.

The coupe, on the contrary, was driven by a man who knew no caution. Clipping turns, pushing the light car to its utmost, The Shadow was clinging to the margin that separated him from the car ahead.

As the limousine swept along a straight stretch, Fenwick suddenly gripped Kistelle's arm. Directly ahead was a railway crossing, its red lights flickering a warning.

A grim oath came from Kistelle. He heeded neither lights nor clanging bell. He shot the limousine squarely over the crossing while Fenwick stared aghast at the brilliant headlight of a lumbering freight locomotive approaching from a distance of a hundred yards.

"Look back," growled Kistelle. "Look back and see what happens. Watch that guy behind us take it!"

Fenwick stared back, expecting to see the lights of the coupe come to a swerving halt. Instead, he saw that the car was coming on!

Then the glare of the locomotive threw a mid-day light upon the crossing. Into that brilliance swept the coupe. It jounced upward on the crossing just as the pilot of the locomotive came black from the night.

Then, with a quick swerve, the coupe shot on, the locomotive bulking behind it. The cars of the long freight rattled in succession, no longer a barrier between the fleeing crooks and their pursuers. Fenwick gasped; then groaned.

"He got by!" he cried. "Got by with inches to spare!"

Kistelle's response was an oath. He narrowly averted disaster as the limousine rounded a curve.

The pace was telling on the crook at the wheel. Sharper curves were coming and as the man instinctively ground the brakes, Fenwick's tense voice warned him that the coupe was gaining rapidly.

A HALF mile more of winding road brought new evidence of The Shadow's gain. A pistol shot burst forth from the rear. The bullet shattered the back window of the limousine. Kistelle's nerve was sagging. Well did he know who was on his trail.

The Shadow! Only such a superman could have pushed a light car forward in such a chase. Only The

Shadow would have dared that crossing!

Ahead lay a twisting down grade; a turn across a bridge lay halfway to the bottom of the hill. Kistelle gave his car the gas. The lights of the coupe dazzled him as they were reflected in the mirror above the wheel.

Brakes saved Kistelle from disaster as he took the turn on the bridge. The limousine sped along the straight stretch and reached the end of the bridge as Fenwick saw the coupe make the dangerous curve at top speed. Another shot came from the coupe, just as the limousine swerved to the left.

That shot was a masterpiece. Aimed by The Shadow's unfaltering hand, it pierced a rear tire of the big car. The limousine jounced at an angle. It cut across the road. It crashed into a stout fence and shattered the wood as though it had been paper. The headlights pointed straight downward into a deep gorge, the bottom a hundred feet below.

Kistelle, the wheel wrenched from his hand, yanked at the handle of the door as the big car twisted onto its left side. The door broke open just as the limousine hung suspended on the sloping edge of the ravine.

Fenwick's cry was a piercing shriek. The limousine plunged nose downward. It turned in its drop and struck bottom up when it reached the depths. The expensive automobile was shattered into a mass of wreckage.

A few seconds later, the coupe came to a stop beside the jagged section of the fence. Sharp eyes peered toward the edge of the gorge. A low, solemn laugh came from unseen lips. There was no elation in The Shadow's tone. His laugh was one of retribution, formed by the knowledge that evil had been rewarded by stern doom.

The door of the coupe opened softly. The Shadow's black-clad form moved through the night until it reached the fence which was dimly outlined by the light from the coupe. The scrubby, curving bank of the ravine was plain to The Shadow's piercing eyes.

The rapid chugging of a motor could be heard. Two tiny lights appeared at the top of the hill where the mad death flight had begun its final stretch.

Swiftly, The Shadow regained his coupe. The little car shot away and sped down the road, its tail light disappearing before the police car had crossed the mid-hill bridge.

The driver of the police car saw the broken fence rail. He came to a stop. He and the others scrambled out and flashed their lights over the edge of the ravine. They saw the wrecked limousine. They knew that no one could have remained alive within that car.

A long, curving road led down into the ravine and the officers headed for it, so that they might make their inspection of the wreckage. They drove down the highway and turned off at the required point. Silence reigned over the spot where The Shadow had struck again.

Amid that silence, a huddled figure came to life. Out of the scrubby brush that edged the top of the ravine, a man crawled and walked unsteadily toward the road.

It was Charles Kistelle. Miraculously, the superplotter had escaped the doom that should have been his.

The opening door had dropped him while the limousine had made its momentary hesitation on the brink of death. Gripping the scrubby bushes, he had lain on the edge of the gorge. He had escaped the inspection made by The Shadow because the arrival of the police car had caused the black-clad avenger to depart.

Only Horace Fenwick had died. The master schemer still remained, and his one thought now was to offset the work that The Shadow had accomplished.

Charles Kistelle had escaped, but his perfect plan had been spoiled. He would have to seek elsewhere, now, to carry out his evil desires - elsewhere, where The Shadow would not find him!

CHAPTER XX. BEYOND THE LAW

IN the chill of an early evening fog, a man was wending his way along a narrow San Francisco street. Ahead of him, towering through the mist, was a strange galaxy of Oriental signs. The man had reached the fringe of San Francisco's Chinatown.

This visitor to the Oriental district seemed to know his way perfectly. Yet there was something furtive in his step as he kept to the inner side of the walk, avoiding persons whom he met.

As he reached the bizarre section where East and West were mingled, the man turned from the brilliant street and sought the seclusion of one of those mysterious alleys which are so common in that part of San Francisco.

The man walked more easily now. His gait became a long, lusty stride. Using the dim street lamps as a guide, he stopped before a darkened door that appeared to be the entrance to a closed shop. He opened this door and came into a narrow entry. There, he rapped upon an inner door.

A bland-faced Celestial appeared. He gazed solemnly at the visitor as though to inquire his purpose. There was a brief pause; then, as the man from the street did not speak, the Chinaman questioned him in English.

"Who you want to see?"

"You savvy English, eh?" responded the visitor in a growling tone. "All right. I want to see Tam Sook. Tell him Charley Kistelle is out here."

"Charley Kistelle," repeated the Chinaman. "All right. I tell him. You wait here."

The Chinaman disappeared and returned about three minutes later. He pointed to the door and the visitor followed him. They went up a flight of steps and the Chinaman ushered the man into a lighted room.

There, seated at a table, was a man dressed in American garb whose face showed his Oriental ancestry. This man was Tam Sook, one of the most important figures in Chinatown. He turned his gaze upward and his almond eyes narrowed as he saw the face of his visitor.

"You are not Charley Kistelle," he declared.

The visitor laughed. His face, pudgy-nosed and sloping, remained impassive until the lips began to form a smile.

Tam Sook stared incredulously at the evil leer which spread upon the countenance before him. He was more sure than before that this was not Charley Kistelle. Then came words that astounded Tam Sook.

"Don't look at my face, Tammy," said the visitor, in a friendly tone. "Listen to my voice. That's all. You'll hear Charley Kistelle's voice. That ought to be enough for you."

Tam Sook began to nod. There was something about the voice that he recognized. Yet he could not connect the voice with the man. Here, Tam Sook decided, was something extraordinary.

"I KNEW you in New York, Tammy," said the visitor, seating himself in a chair. "We worked together there. When you moved to Frisco, we made an agreement. If I needed you again, I would know where to find you. So I'm here now.

"A lot has happened since I saw you last, Tammy. See this face of mine? Well, I picked it up in the meantime. It makes Charley Kistelle look different, doesn't it?"

Tam Sook nodded. "You are Charley Kistelle," he said, solemnly. "I know it now. Tell me how you got your new face. Tell me what I can do for you."

"I picked up the face in Mexico," responded Kistelle, with an evil chuckle. "That's a long story. I'll come to that later. But right now I'll tell you how you can help me out.

"There are six of us, Tammy -" Kistelle paused for a correction - "that is, there used to be six of us. Now there's five. We all look alike. Sounds funny, eh? Well, it's true. Five of us - all alike.

"So we worked together and we went after some nice hauls. We made three clean-ups, Tammy, and we were on our way to a fourth. Then we hit trouble" - Kistelle's lips formed a reminiscent leer - "and we had to scam. I'll tell you what it was, Tammy. We landed up against The Shadow."

"The Shadow!"

Tam Sook's echo was a knowing one. It was evident that the name of The Shadow held a powerful effect upon the Chinaman. Kistelle saw Tam Sook's expression and responded with a growl.

"Yes, The Shadow," he said. "Another fellow and I were making a getaway and he queered it. Shot a tire off our car out on a Dakota road. We went over the edge of a cliff. The car did - with my pal in it - but I managed to get out in time."

"You were fortunate," declared Tam Sook.

"You bet I was!" said Kistelle. "But it put me in a bad jam, just the same.

"The only thing that saved me was that The Shadow thought I was dead, too.

"Get this, Tammy. Here were four of my pals sitting pretty. One in Illinois, one in Maryland, one in Georgia, one in Louisiana. Each has a mug like mine. I pulled alibi jobs with three of them and the other guy was waiting.

"Then The Shadow pops up and queers the whole lay. The police have all the dope - and I'm out in the middle of North Dakota. Well, that's where I acted smart.

"Way back, Tammy, a year ago, when I framed all these alibi jobs, I figured that there might be some need for a general scam. So I had each of my pals tipped. An emergency signal - by telegram - would mean to scam. Where to? Ah, that was where I was wise. Get for cover was my order and call on Tam Sook in San Francisco, ten days later.

"I never thought I'd have to pull the rip cord, but I was mighty glad I had it all set. Out there in Dakota, I hoofed back to a railroad line and walked a mile until I came to a station. There was a man on duty and a train coming in. So I sent telegrams to my pals and caught the train west."

"You were lucky to get away," observed Tam Sook.

"It was a break," admitted Kistelle, "but you must remember that everybody thought I had been killed,

including The Shadow. The real break came when I sent the wires. The cops had got the names of all my pals. But they didn't send out the word until the morning. So my wires landed in ahead and the boys had a chance to scam. So they're coming here."

"When?"

Kistelle counted on his fingers. He stopped at the count of eight.

"Today is Wednesday," he declared. "They will be here Friday night."

"And then?"

"We want to get together. There'll be some swag to divvy, and you'll get a cut."

Tam Sook smiled and nodded. He pointed downward with his thumb.

"I have the place," he declared.

"A hop joint?" questioned Kistelle.

"It used to be," informed the Chinaman.

"Great," said Kistelle. "We'll meet there. When each man shows up, send him down. We can make our plans then."

Tam Sook bowed.

"Very good," he declared. "What are the names of these men? How shall I know them?"

Kistelle thrust his face into the light.

"Take a good look at that," he laughed. "You won't forget this face very quick. That's all you need to know, Tammy. Any guy with a mug like mine gets in and stays in. That's enough."

Tam Sook bowed again.

"Just one thing," said Kistelle, becoming serious. "I'm worried, Tammy - worried about The Shadow."

"Why?"

"He knows too much about me. Must have me listed in his big book, I guess. He was on my trail when I scammed from New York - before I went to Mexico. If he knows as much as I think he knows, he'll link me up with you. What's more, he'll know where you are. Maybe - maybe not - but The Shadow's mighty wise."

Tam Sook nodded. He was staring straight at Kistelle. He did not notice the door beyond. There, on the floor, was a splotch of black. That splotch - had Tam Sook known it - was the sign of The Shadow!

"So," resumed Kistelle, "I'm taking something of a chance. Once I get the gang together and split what we've managed to haul, we can all scam for Mexico. The boys made a get-away, all right - I've checked up on that. But the game is up and we're marked men. The cops won't be looking for us here in Frisco, just yet. It'll take them too long to trail us. That's why we can get away."

"Friday night, then," declared Tam Sook.

"Friday night," repeated Kistelle. "But if The Shadow should come here then -"

Tam Sook smiled.

"Let The Shadow come," he said, quietly.

Kistelle formed his evil smile.

"You know your stuff, Tammy," he declared. "You aren't in the Tong racket for nothing. I guess you have things just the way you want them."

Tam Sook waved his hand.

"Do not worry," he said, "All Chinatown will do my bidding. Let The Shadow come. That is all I ask. He will find Tam Sook ready."

Charles Kistelle turned to the door. He paused as he heard Tam Sook ask another question.

"You are sure that none will be here before Friday night?" the Chinaman interrogated.

"Not until then," said Kistelle, emphatically. "They know the orders. Ten o'clock on the tenth night after the signal. They'll go by the rule. Remember, Tammy, they all look like me. Six of us - I mean five of us - counting myself."

Tam Sook nodded. Charles Kistelle laughed. The man with the evil leer left the room. Tam Sook leaned back in his chair and began to inscribe Chinese characters upon a sheet of paper before him.

A few minutes later, the splotch of blackness that showed from the darkness of the outer hall disappeared. Kistelle had gone by without seeing that sign of The Shadow. Tam Sook had not noticed it.

The Shadow was gone. Like Kistelle and Tam Sook, he was awaiting Friday night!

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW SPEAKS

IT was eight o'clock on the appointed evening. Tam Sook, the bland-faced Oriental who affected American garb, was seated at his accustomed desk. As before, he was inscribing Chinese writing. For Tam Sook, despite his youth, was one of the most important figures in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco.

Here, in this district where Tong warfare often raged, Tam Sook's sanctum was an oasis amid strife. An intermediary between rival factions, Tam Sook could call upon any to do his bidding.

This room upon the second floor was innocent in appearance; yet, in reality, it was a spot of utmost danger. Tam Sook was a man who cared but little for life. Even his own was of no consequence to him. It was that fact that had enabled Tam Sook to gain his important position among the Chinese.

Tonight, Tam Sook had made arrangements for the gathering of Charles Kistelle and his crew of evildoers. That, to Tam Sook, was a simple favor to a man with whom he had been friendly.

Tam Sook owed but little to Charles Kistelle; and it was merely the opportunity for substantial profit that had caused him to acquiesce to Kistelle's request for a meeting-place.

Here, in his San Francisco hideout, Tam Sook lived his self-important life and held all strangers in contempt. Thinking of Charles Kistelle now, Tam Sook smiled. Kistelle had come here as a friend. Had he been an enemy, he would have found matters quite different.

Thinking of Kistelle brought Tam Sook's mind to The Shadow. He had heard often of The Shadow. Recalling past events, Tam Sook remembered that The Shadow had carried some of his exploits to the Chinatowns of both New York and San Francisco.

Charles Kistelle feared The Shadow. Therefore, The Shadow might come here. Tam Sook remembered his own words. He had told Kistelle:

"Let The Shadow come."

Tam Sook smiled blandly as he recalled the statement. There were two men on duty below, placed there especially for this Friday night. Let The Shadow try to pass them! What if he should pass them? Then he would meet Tam Sook in person - Tam Sook who did not fear death and who was prepared to deliver it!

THERE must have been something telepathic in Tam Sook's thoughts. At the very moment when Tam Sook was considering the question of The Shadow, a black-garbed figure was entering the anteroom at the foot of the stairs.

The Shadow was here, in advance of Kistelle and his crew. Sweeping silently across the entry, The Shadow paused and tapped the inner door. With a gliding motion, he stepped back into a fringe of darkness just as the face of a Chinaman appeared from within.

Seeing no one, the Chinaman advanced into the entry. An instant later, powerful hands were upon him. He collapsed in a heap beneath The Shadow's attack. Black-garbed arms worked swiftly. The Chinese guard was soon bound and helpless.

While The Shadow still bent over his victim, the door again opened. The slight sound of the hinge was audible. The Shadow made a forward sweep as the second Chinaman appeared.

The result was the same as before. The new investigator plunged forward as The Shadow seized his body, landing the Chinaman half stunned upon the floor. A low laugh sounded as The Shadow bound the second of Tam Sook's underlings.

Upstairs, Tam Sook was writing. He finished his inscriptions and stared at the sheet before him. He noted, curiously, that the paper had darkened slightly. He wondered what had caused the blotting smudge that covered the surface of the table. He looked up and his bland expression became fixed.

Before Tam Sook's table stood a figure garbed entirely in black. Tall, weird and unexpected, it appeared as a being that had conjured itself from nothingness.

Tam Sook could not see the face of the mysterious visitor. He noted only two sharp eyes that glistened as they peered from beneath the turned-down brim of a slouch hat.

Tam Sook bowed.

"You are The Shadow," he said.

A soft, whispered laugh came from the phantom shape. Even to Tam Sook, the man who had disclaimed all fear of The Shadow, that laugh was chilling. But, as the weird tones died away, the Chinaman regained his bland composure.

He noted that The Shadow bore no weapon. That was surprising. Having passed the door below, The Shadow should have anticipated danger here. Nevertheless, he seemed unprepared.

In a sense, Tam Sook deemed The Shadow wise. Had he come with threatening automatics, Tam Sook might have acted quickly against him. As it was, Tam Sook considered it best to wait.

"Tonight" - it was The Shadow's voice that spoke - "men are coming to this place. They are men whom I seek."

"You will not find them," responded Tam Sook, calmly.

"Why not?" questioned The Shadow, in a low, eerie whisper.

"Because" - Tam Sook's tone was slow - "you will not be here when they come."

The eyes of The Shadow stared steadily at Tam Sook's face. The Chinaman shifted uneasily. He sensed a menace, even though he knew that he was prepared.

"I have no quarrel with you," declared Tam Sook. "Therefore you had no right to come here. What have you done with my men below? Have you killed them?"

"They are alive," returned The Shadow.

"That is good," remarked Tam Sook. "If they were dead, death would be your lot. Since they are still alive, I give you the opportunity to live. Go - while you are safe."

The Shadow laughed softly. His whispered mirth brought an instinctive shudder to Tam Sook's shoulders. The Chinaman felt uneasy. With a quick motion, he pressed his hand against the side of the table. Then, with a smile, he rested back in his chair.

"There is no escape now," he said. "Should you attempt to leave this room, death would be yours. A single false step toward the door or the window will set forth a charge that will blow this place to pieces.

"Furthermore" - Tam Sook spoke slowly, as though proud of his perfect English - "all this will happen within five minutes, unless I am alive to prevent it. So kill me, if you wish. I am not afraid to die."

Tam Sook spoke with assurance. On other occasions, he had used this measure against enemies. In every instance, they had pleaded for mercy. Tam Sook was interested to see what The Shadow would do. He heard The Shadow laugh.

"Your life for mine" - The Shadow's words were sardonic - "would be an excellent exchange. There is, however, a way to prevent it. I shall show you."

THERE was a note of regret in The Shadow's voice. It seemed to indicate that he would have liked to end the life of Tam Sook and then meet the Chinaman's boast. Instead, it was obvious that The Shadow intended to use a simple, though unexpected measure.

With his right hand, The Shadow peeled the glove from his left. He held the bared hand close to Tam Sook's eyes.

The Chinaman stared at the glittering gem that shone upon the third finger of the slender hand. The gleaming girasol, with its everchanging hues, was, indeed, a marvelous sight. Tam Sook suddenly realized that he had set five minutes as the time for death. Yet time was moving slowly by and neither he nor The Shadow seemed to fear the approach of doom!

"Look!"

As The Shadow spoke, he made a motion with his hand. The iridescent girasol popped upward, on a

hinge. A cavity was revealed beneath the precious stone.

Within that cavity was visible a tiny, weird-scrawled figure.

Tam Sook's eyes bulged as he saw the figure. A gasp came from the Chinaman's lips.

"The sign of Chow Lee!" he exclaimed. "The sign of The Great One!"

"Yes," came the weirdly-whispered reply, "the gift of those of Chow Lee - those who are even more powerful than you! Only one man, other than your own, has this sacred symbol. I am that man!"

Tam Sook was still staring at the symbol. To him, as to all important Chinese in America, the sign of The Great One was a symbol of faith and loyalty. Whatever hates or friendships were made, all were leveled before this mystic symbol. All the leaders of Chinatown respected those who carried it.

Tam Sook was in a daze. It was The Shadow's quiet voice that aroused him.

"Four minutes have passed," declared The Shadow. "It would be wise for you to press the other side of the table."

Tam Sook obeyed with wonderment. He realized, as he did, that The Shadow had divined the modus operandi of his trap; how one side of the table held the button which set the explosives that prevented escape; while the other side held the button that would break the contact.

All this time, The Shadow, with his keen intuition had held Tam Sook at his mercy. He could have killed the Chinaman and still have escaped with ease. That thought was in Tam Sook's mind and The Shadow knew it. With calm precision, The Shadow spoke the answer to Tam Sook's unasked question.

"I have need of you," declared The Shadow. "Need of you and of your guards below. I have a purpose tonight and I do not propose to prevent the meeting which Charles Kistelle has arranged."

Tam Sook was totally bewildered. How did The Shadow know that the meeting had been arranged? The Chinaman stared incredulously.

The Shadow knew all, he believed. Why not? The Shadow possessed the symbol of The Great One!

Tam Sook looked once again at the symbol just as the girasol closed over it. The flashing gleam of The Shadow's mysterious gem alone remained before Tam Sook's eyes.

The Chinaman arose and bowed again. He motioned to a chair beside the table. The Shadow took the seat. Tam Sook remained standing, in respectful attitude.

"I am here," declared the Chinaman, "to do your bidding. Speak what you wish. I shall obey."

CHAPTER XXII. FIVE OF THE SIX

IT was after ten o'clock when Charles Kistelle appeared in the entry at the foot of the stairs leading to Tam Sook's abode. The Chinaman who met him did not even inquire his name. He pointed to the stairs, his face remaining an inscrutable mask.

Kistelle smiled a twisted grin. This was proof that the others - some of them at least - were already here. Evidently the guard had been told to admit all who bore the same features as the first arrival.

Reaching Tam Sook's sanctum, Kistelle found the bland Chinaman seated at his table. When Kistelle spoke, Tam Sook glanced up in recognition.

"It is you, Charley," he said, in a suave tone. "The others all are here. Four, as you said. You were right - you are all the same. But your voice is different. Come."

Rising, Tam Sook conducted Kistelle through a panel that opened in a side wall. The two walked along a dim corridor; then down a flight of stairs, that wound into the depths below the building. Kistelle felt a chill as they reached the subcellar. This was far beneath the level of the street.

Tam Sook stopped before a door that blocked farther passage. He pointed, bowed and retired. Kistelle opened the door and entered.

The master schemer found himself in a low-ceilinged, paneled room. A dim light illuminated the place. Kistelle recognized the faces that were there to greet him. He should have recognized them - for they were replicas of his own!

The others rose to greet their chief. Kistelle shook hands and took his place in a chair beside the table where the others were seated. The furniture was of a Chinese pattern and here, in this Oriental setting, Charley Kistelle addressed his minions.

As he addressed the group, Kistelle noted the solemnity which held them. They were anxious to hear the details of his story. Kistelle told everything - how The Shadow had foiled his well-laid scheme - and how Horace Fenwick had died while Kistelle himself managed to escape.

Then came the matter of business. A gleam of triumph spread over Kistelle's face as he drew a large package from beneath his coat. Here, at least, were spoils of war. From the package, Kistelle dropped forth a stack of thousand dollar bills.

"There we are," he declared. "I collected on two jobs. I converted the bonds from Tilson into cash. Here is the dough I landed when I was in Barmouth. Now, we want to hear from Daltona."

One of the men responded. Although he could not be distinguished from the others, his words indicated that he was the one who had gone under the name of Thomas Rodan.

"I TOOK a chance, Charley," he declared. "I waited until morning, after I received your telegram, and grabbed all that I could raise from the Davenport estate. I was lucky to get away. A hundred thousand was all that I could find."

He pulled a thick folder from his inner pocket and spread the gold certificates upon the table. Kistelle gathered them in and began a division of the spoils. When he had finished, he shoved a stack of money to each of his comrades in crime.

"It's more than a hundred grand each," he declared. "I figured we were going to make a million apiece. I lost the diamonds that I grabbed in Sharport. I never had a chance to work with Eddie, down in Louisiana. It's tough that Horace had to take the bump."

"Just the same, I'm satisfied. If The Shadow had given me the bump along with Horace, it would have queered everything. We're marked men now, but we've got a hundred grand apiece. We can head for Mexico. That looks like the best bet to me."

"So long as we keep away from Zeltapec," interposed one of the others.

The statement brought an affirmative response from the group. The very word Zeltapec seemed to bring a feeling of awe into the minds of these evil men.

"Zeltapec!" exclaimed one. "Say, Charley, when you told me to use chicquatil as the countersign, it gave

me the creeps. I can't forget that place those Aztecs stuck us - with that green light glowing -"

"Lay off," ordered Kistelle. "You fellows have lost your nerve, that's all! Do you know what I'm going to do when I get to Mexico? I'm going to head for Zeltapec, if I can find the right birds to go with me. This time, I'm going to get the green chicquatil. That's something The Shadow don't know about -"

The words died on Kistelle's lips. He saw his fellows staring beyond him. Kistelle turned in the direction of their gaze. His blood froze.

There, standing by an opened panel in the wall, was a tall, somber being in black. One glance told Kistelle the identity of the arrival. His comrades had already guessed it.

The Shadow!

BY some mysterious plan, the black-garbed phantom had managed to enter the midst of this group. He, alone, had divined their meeting place. He was here alone to square accounts with them!

No one made a move. The gleaming eyes of The Shadow were focused upon the faces of the five men, all of whom were the exact image of Colpoc, the Aztec god of evil!

Slowly, impressively, The Shadow advanced. His hands were ungloved. The right was advanced toward the men at the table.

Kistelle, alone, regained his scattered wits. Leaping to his feet, the chief of the crooked crew made a motion as though to draw a gun.

The Shadow snapped the fingers of his right hand. A sudden explosion burst forth from the finger tips. The flash of light was directly before Kistelle's startled eyes. The chief of the plotters staggered back and slumped into a chair.

The others were aghast. They did not know how to respond to this unexpected action. They were half stunned by the mysterious explosion which The Shadow had caused. Those chemicals - one upon The Shadow's finger tip, the other upon his thumb - were unfailing in their prompt reaction.

While the five men hesitated, The Shadow performed a new deed. Reaching beneath the folds of his cloak, he drew forth an object which he held hidden. He walked the few paces that he needed to reach the table and unclosed his hand.

Instantly, a strange green glow filled the room. All - Kistelle included - cried out in startled amazement. There, on the table before them, rested the green chicquatil!

In the midst of that emerald light, these bold fiends of crime weakened. They buried their faces in their hands. They cried out like so many frightened children.

In one brief instant, The Shadow had worked a total transformation. He had carried their minds from the room in which they were back to the temple in Zeltapec. They were prisoners again, men with metal masks pressed on their faces; poor, pitiful creatures who could see nothing ahead of them but certain death!

One - Kistelle - had boasted that he would again go in quest of the mammoth emerald. Here it lay, upon the table, within reach. But Kistelle, like the others, was helpless. He, too, hid his face in his hands.

"You sought the chicquatil," declared The Shadow. "It lies before you. Take it!"

Not a man moved.

"You bear the mark of Colpoc" - The Shadow's tone was a scornful irony - "and Colpoc lives within the shrine of Zeltapec. His eyes are not blinded by the green light of the chicquatil. Why should your eyes fail?"

Five plotters were faced by one avenger. They were helpless. The Shadow's words were jeering. They stood the taunts without a murmur.

"Perfect crimes!" The Shadow's sarcasm continued. "You see how they have availed against The Shadow! See how they shall avail you now! All those upon whom you sought to place crime have been vindicated. All that remains is for you to add your useless statements."

FROM beneath his cloak, The Shadow drew forth sheets of paper. He laid these one by one before the five covered men. He bade them look and they did. Each statement bore the man's own confession of past crime, and of the one crime that so far had only been planned. With keen intuition, The Shadow had singled out each man despite the fact that all looked alike.

"Sign" - The Shadow was addressing the man nearest to him - "sign this paper with the name that you assumed - the name of Thomas Rodan."

A pen dropped on the table. The man picked it up and wrote the required name.

"Sign here," said The Shadow to the next. "Your name, too, is needed, Edward Montague."

As the signature was completed, The Shadow moved to the next man. In response to his command, the name of Harold Thurber was affixed to the paper. Next came the signature of Earl Northrup. The Shadow moved to the master plotter.

"Charles Kistelle," he ordered. "Sign your paper. Your full confession lies before you."

Weakly, Charles Kistelle gripped the pen. He wrote his name; then dropped his hand. His boasts were ended. In the presence of The Shadow, he collapsed before the glow of the green emerald - the chicquatil which he had conspired to steal and now dared not even touch.

The Shadow laughed. His rippling mirth sounded as the forerunner of doom. One by one, he gathered up the signed sheets. They disappeared beneath the black cloak.

The white hand of The Shadow reached forth and plucked the green emerald from the table. Moving backward toward the panel through which he had come, the black-clad master held the priceless gem in full view.

"Living images of Colpoc," he said, in a sepulchral tone, "your reign of crime is ended. You are marked for life. Perhaps that will not be for long. The chicquatil is before you. I brought it here, by arrangement with the man who gave you this meeting place - Tam Sook. When you choose your friends, Charles Kistelle, you should remember that The Shadow knows!"

In a trice, the green light faded. The chicquatil, gift of the Aztecs to the messenger from the moon god, had gone beneath the black cloak. The Shadow stood in the dim light of the room, the spectral glow no longer surrounding him.

There he waited - and from his invisible lips came the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXIII. "THE CHICQUATIL"

CHARLES KISTELLE raised his head from his hands. The chief plotter of the men of evil stared toward the end of the room, where The Shadow, looming black, stood silent.

The Shadow!

Kistelle hated the very name!

The scheming villain looked about him. He saw his four comrades raising their heads. They were trembling; but in this dim light they seemed to have lost their paralytic fear. The glow of the chicquatil was gone!

A sudden frenzy swept through the brain of Charles Kistelle. He looked along the table. The piles of money were no longer there. Kistelle realized what had happened. The Shadow had taken those spoils - all that the six crooks had fought to grasp.

Under that cloak was a fortune of half a million. There also were the confessions that the cowed crooks had signed. Moreover, The Shadow held the green chicquatil!

A terrible frenzy seized Kistelle. He remembered how he and Fenwick had arisen to strike down a superior crowd of enemies. Here was the end of the trail, unless his nerve would be with him now!

The solemn faces of his companions - faces that were all alike - were looking toward him for leadership. With rising fury Kistelle gave the cry.

"Death to The Shadow!"

Kistelle had heard that cry in the underworld. He shouted it now, and with his exclamation, he leaped to his feet. Not one of the five hesitated. Each had a gun in readiness. They were drawing as they rose.

The Shadow saw the action. His hands came suddenly from beneath his cloak. They carried neither money, confessions nor emerald. Instead, they were armed with two huge automatics.

The Shadow was advancing as he drew; so were his enemies.

Five against one! The odds would have been hopeless, had that one not been The Shadow!

For as the long white hands came into view, the automatics spoke - a split second before the first shot that came from an enemy's gun. The cannon roar of the powerful .45's resounded through the subterranean den.

Vainly, the revolvers splashed their answering bursts of flame. The only hands that fired were the ones that shot too soon to gain effective aim. Bullets cracked against the paneled walls. Others - those fired by The Shadow - found the marks they sought.

THE roaring echoes died. The smoke-filled room showed blinded, staggering figures that were rolling helpless on the floor. The Shadow's firing ceased. His living targets lay before him. He stood unscathed.

Once again, The Shadow had conquered odds by his perfect formula. He had fired before the others.

Slowly, the black-clad victor approached the motionless bodies. He stooped above them, singling each from the other. A clamor arose outside the room. Men were beating at the door. The terrific fire had been heard upon the street. Police were coming to investigate.

Crash!

The closed barrier burst. As it toppled, The Shadow glided swiftly away. Unseen by the entering bluecoats, he stepped through the opening in the wall and the panel closed behind him.

Five dead bodies were on the floor. The officers stared about; seeing no one else, they examined those who had been killed. A surprised exclamation came from one policeman. It was echoed by others.

Thrust in a hand of each dead man was a sheet of paper - a signed confession of the crime which he had planned or committed. Flashlights showed the closely typed words - true statements of each individual contribution to the entire plot.

A wise officer wrote names upon slips of paper and attached them to the correct bodies before he plucked the confessions from unyielding gasps. The dead forms were carried forth. The one policeman remained. Upon the table he saw a sheet of paper. He read the words inscribed upon it. This was the unsigned confession of Horace Fenwick - the one of the six who had died before the others.

As the officer stared, he noted that a name was written at the bottom of the sheet. In lieu of Fenwick's signature, the paper bore the signed approval of the one who had forced the final issue. There, in bold letters, the policeman glimpsed two words:

THE SHADOW

The writing faded. The confession of Horace Fenwick was blank at the bottom. That one of the six had escaped the final outcome, only because he had gone to his deserved death ten days before the rest had paid the penalty.

SIX men of evil were dead - six men who had started forth in common crime. Exiled with the mark of Colpoc upon their evil faces, they had not learned their lesson in the shrine at Zeltapec. Instead, they had used their misfortune to pave the way to the strangest careers of crime that had ever confronted the law.

Six men of evil - whose faces, molded with the image of wickedness, matched their hearts - had done their utmost to further supercrime. Armed with perfect alibis, they had sought to gain millions and had followed murder by foisting the blame upon innocent persons.

With their very identities unsuspected, these men would have succeeded under the guidance of the archplotter, Charles Kistelle, but for the presence of The Shadow. He, alone, had marked the end of crime and had delivered deserved doom to these six fiends.

Five bodies in a sunken room - another shattered in the wreckage of a ruined limousine. That was the fate that the six had gained. The green chicquatil had lured them on their quest. Its glare had marked the end of their strange career.

The room below the street in San Francisco's Chinatown was empty now. The panel in the wall reopened and sharp eyes surveyed the deserted scene. From the hidden lips came a low, uncanny burst of mirthless laughter - the last token of the doom that had struck down six men of evil.

It was the laugh of The Shadow - the laugh of retribution!

THE END