



CLUE FOR CLUE

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CHAPTER I. THE DUTCH ROOM

TALBOT BRANFORD unlocked the door of the Dutch Room, gave a short bow and a dour smile as he spoke in a tone that was blunt, if not curt:

"There you are, ladies and gentlemen—the cherished treasures of my esteemed friend Wadden van Zuyder."

This wasn't the first time that Lamont Cranston had seen the Dutch Room, the strongly locked and heavily shuttered apartment on the second floor of Branford's brownstone home. Nor was it a novelty to Glenn Owen, the New York diamond merchant who was a mutual friend of both Branford and Van Zuyder.

Cranston simply glanced about with the calm air of an appraiser checking on items that he had noted before. Owen remained in the doorway, rather annoyed that Branford had taken time to give this preview of the Dutch Room.

Of course, Margo Lane was thrilled. With Cranston, she'd arrived among the early guests, but hadn't expected to view the Dutch Room until much later. Here it was, the room that the newspapers had mentioned without adequate description, its contents the household effects of Wadden van Zuyder, the Dutch diamond king.

The place was like a curio shop, or perhaps an art gallery in miniature, for in it Branford had set up everything that Van Zuyder had shipped to him on one of the last boats from Holland. Foreseeing invasion, the wealthy Mynheer had decided that his personal treasures would be safer in New York than in Amsterdam, but, unfortunately, Van Zuyder hadn't accompanied his collection to America.

Heavy furniture crowded the room, but that wasn't what attracted the eye. More important were the rare paintings on the wall, unquestioned specimens of Flemish art. There were mosaics which Branford stated had once been tops of tables, though they now stood upright in corners of the room.

On a mantel was a clock, its dial circled by a ring of genuine diamonds; on each side of it were statuettes of gold, inlaid with gems. In a closet, Branford displayed some rare specimens of kitchenware which included a row of Dutch cheeses that were works of art in themselves, their surfaces hand-decorated with the appearance of ornamental porcelain.

The reason why Branford was giving this preview was because he wanted to get rid of a nuisance named Clyde Burke, a reporter for the New York Classic. Having learned that Branford intended to unveil the Dutch Room to his guests, Clyde had come to the party uninvited.

It seemed better to let him have his exclusive story and go his way, so Branford was doing just that. And while Clyde listed the various Van Zuyder treasures, Branford kept reminding him that under no circumstances could the room be photographed.

"These are Van Zuyder's personal belongings," asserted Branford testily. "They were listed when they passed the customs, so I see no reason why they should not be listed again. But photographs"—Branford shook his head emphatically—"no!"

Clyde took it with a shrug. He simply asked how much the Van Zuyder effects were worth. Branford replied that he had no idea. Van Zuyder's American funds, totaling several million dollars, had been frozen when the Germans invaded Holland. The United States government was allowing a time limit for Van Zuyder to arrive and declare the value of his property.

"Then the full duty will be paid," assured Branford. "Until Van Zuyder appears, a complete appraisal is impossible. Take this portmanteau as an example."

He was talking less reluctantly, was Branford. Elderly but spry, he hopped to a corner of the room and turned in birdlike fashion, a pleased expression on his thin, withery face. The portmanteau proved to be an object the size of a small suitcase, about two feet long, a foot wide and six inches in depth. It was made of mahogany decorated with a pattern of bold strips that crisscrossed it in bands.

First, Branford called attention to the goldwork, which he termed a "filigree" since the bands were ornamented with little knobs and indentations, alternately arranged. Next, Branford opened the portmanteau, hinging one section flat beside the other. But it didn't open on a straight line, like a suitcase; instead, the division was a slant, so that the portmanteau, fully extended, had a level bottom but an angled top.

"An antique writing desk," Branford explained. "Perhaps once the property of a Dutch ruler, such as William of Orange. Notice how its surface forms an angle, like a writing table. Two surfaces joined into one, with pigeonholes beneath."

He lifted the top of the nearer half; beneath it were partitioned sectors, some large enough for writing paper and envelopes, others smaller, as though designed to contain pens and inkwells. Replacing that slab, Branford lifted the top of the other half. There he showed square partitions that were repositories for letters and other documents.

"Could you place a value on this antique?" chirped Branford. "Frankly, I cannot until I know its history. Nevertheless"—his eyes lighted as he stroked back his thin gray hair—"I should appraise it at a thousand dollars or more, merely because Van Zuyder valued it. Wadden is a man who knows values."

Glenn Owen put in an interruption from the doorway. He was an emphatic chap, Owen, tall, heavy of build, with blunt face and manner. When he became restless, he always interrupted people.

"Yes, Van Zuyder knew values," expressed Owen, "particularly in diamonds. And speaking of diamonds, Branford, you promised to look over those I brought from my store."

Nodding, Branford closed the portmanteau and fastened the old-fashioned clamp that held its portions. Clyde reached forward and lifted the portmanteau, finding it fairly light, not more than a dozen pounds in weight. Whereat, Branford smiled.

"Even in the old days, excess weight was inconvenient," explained Branford. "I suppose passengers had as much trouble with stagecoach luggage as they do today when traveling by airplane. Of course, the weight of the portmanteau would vary, according to its contents. But come along; I have shown you the Dutch Room, so you should be satisfied."

BRANFORD locked the Dutch Room and dropped his keys into a pocket of his smoking jacket. Still, Clyde wasn't satisfied, for he caught a glance from Cranston, which ordered him to learn more.

It happened that Lamont Cranston was also a personage known as The Shadow, and that Clyde Burke was one of his agents. As The Shadow, Cranston was specially interested in the Van Zuyder collection.

They went to Branford's living room, where Owen opened a display box to show the diamonds he had brought. Again Margo was intrigued, this time by the dazzle of rings and necklaces that rated high in value. But Branford, a connoisseur of diamonds, simply shook his head.

"Not interested, Owen," he declared. "Your diamonds have glitter, but they lack quality."

"You can blame Van Zuyder for that," returned Owen. "If he had only sent that final shipment of un-cuts, I'd have just the stock to please my clients."

"Without a doubt," agreed Branford, "considering that so many expert cutters have migrated here from Amsterdam. But don't worry; Van Zuyder will show up."

"With his diamonds, I hope," responded Owen. "Or maybe the diamonds will show up from somewhere."

With that, Owen closed his display box. Branford drew his ring of keys from his pocket and announced that he'd show Owen out the back way. A usual custom, since it made Owen appear to be an ordinary tradesman, rather than a diamond merchant toting a large supply of valuable wares.

"I won't say good-by," stated Owen, turning to the others, "because I'm coming back to the party. I don't think I shall be very late, considering that most of the guests have not yet arrived."

The moment that Branford left with Owen, things moved like clockwork. Cranston told both Clyde and Margo exactly what they were to do. Clyde was to stroll after Branford, to meet him when he returned

from the back door; then ask him some more questions. Margo was to remain in the living room and if Branford appeared there, she was to tell him that Cranston had gone to meet his friend the police commissioner, who was coming to the party.

With that, Cranston strolled out from the living room and down the grand stairway that led to the front door of Branford's brownstone home.

In his turn, Clyde reached the rear hall to see Branford unlocking the door to the servant's stairway which Owen was to use. He heard Branford tell Owen to close the door tightly, so that it would latch. Then Branford had turned and was coming along the hall, to stop suspiciously when he saw Clyde. Branford's tone was querulous:

"Well, Burke—what now?"

"You mentioned the history of Van Zuyder's collection," replied Clyde, "but you weren't very specific. If you could tell me more, Mr. Branford -"

Interrupting with a gesture, Branford led Clyde frontward past the locked Dutch Room and into a study. There, Branford hung his smoking jacket on a chair, put on a stiff collar and black necktie, and brought a tuxedo coat from the closet. All the while, he was discoursing on Van Zuyder's possessions, but only from recollections of conversations with their owner.

As he smoothed his tuxedo coat, he took Clyde by the arm and eased him out through another door, then across a hallway to the living room, where they found Margo alone.

"And now, Burke," finished Branford with a bland smile, "I have told you all I know. You have your story, so good afternoon."

Branford pressed a button, and a servant appeared from the front stairs. Branford told him to usher Clyde out; when that was done, the gray-haired man turned to Margo and asked where Cranston had gone. When Margo said that Lamont was meeting the police commissioner, Branford's smile widened.

"It is really ludicrous," declared Branford. "The police commissioner is coming here because he thinks the Van Zuyder collection is in danger. Such is the way of the police: when something is publicized, they become alert. But who would want to steal paintings, mosaics"—Branford's tone became a laugh—"or inlaid Dutch cheeses? No one with any sense!"

Margo reminded Branford about the jeweled clock. At that, his expression sobered.

"That is a point," he admitted. "Still, no one will know about the clock until Burke's story appears in print. But I still believe, Miss Lane, that if criminals really wanted a target, they would choose a man like Owen, a recognized diamond merchant, rather than someone like myself who happens to be custodian of a collection which has not yet been properly valued."

"And now"—hands in the pockets of his tuxedo coat, Branford bowed - "you will excuse me for a few minutes, while I return to my study."

ALONE, Margo Lane glanced from the rear window of Branford's living room. Below she saw a lovely garden with marble benches, a fountain playing in the center. Tempted by the sight, Margo stepped to the balcony that overlooked it.

Though small, the garden was a rare thing for Manhattan, and Margo regretted that its array of trees should be limited by a high wall connecting with the rear of the house.

Then her mind came back to more pressing circumstances as she realized that somewhere beyond that wall, Owen was leaving amid the gathering dusk with his valuable cargo of diamonds. At least, it wasn't fully dusk just yet, hence Owen would be safe.

But afterward—what? There was only one answer. With dark, crime would be due in Branford's own home. Crime, with the Dutch Room as its target, despite Branford's belief that Van Zuyder's treasures were secure. For the preview that Clyde Burke had wangled was but part of a strategic scheme designed by The Shadow to offset danger ahead.

Whenever crime was due, The Shadow was the first to know it, and likewise the first and foremost in the business of proving that crime could not pay!

CHAPTER II. FIGHTERS FROM THE DARK

LAMONT CRANSTON hadn't gone outdoors to see if his friend the police commissioner had arrived. He knew that Ralph Weston, the commissioner in question, was quite capable of finding Branford's house. What Cranston wanted was a personal preview of the outside scene, to counterbalance his look into the Dutch Room.

As yet, crooks weren't on hand. They would be soon, for The Shadow's secret agents in the underworld had reported that tonight certain unworthies intended to raid Branford's home. Those crooks were under the leadership of Rupe Bonsal, a racketeer who had been living on the profits of his former glory ever since the police had clamped down on his special fields of enterprise.

Rupe's come-back was overdue. Yet, it wasn't quite dark enough for Rupe and his men to be gathering outside of Branford's, the place where The Shadow knew he could expect them. But there was something else that concerned The Shadow, as he strolled down Branford's steps in the leisurely style of Cranston. He was thinking of Glenn Owen and the latter's diamonds. Maybe Rupe had gotten wind of those, too.

If so, Rupe would be disappointed, since Branford wasn't keeping the diamonds over night. But it might be that some lookout, employed by Rupe, was at present on the back street where he might chance to see Owen's departure with the display box.

Therefore it behooved The Shadow to make a tour around the block and see how matters stood. For that purpose, The Shadow, still in Cranston's style, beckoned to a cab across the way.

The cab was piloted by Moe Shrevnitz, one of The Shadow's agents. All that Cranston had to do was enter the cab and ride around the block. But before he could step into the taxi, a big, official car pulled up behind it and a booming voice called for Cranston to wait. It was Commissioner Weston, actually arriving early.

Rapidly, The Shadow detailed Moe to the inspection tour, telling him briefly what to do. Then, as he turned to greet the police commissioner, he saw Clyde Burke coming from Branford's front door. With a casual Cranston gesture, The Shadow signaled Moe to wait. With Clyde as a passenger, the inspection trip would be more efficient.

Seeing the cab and catching Cranston's nod, Clyde stepped toward the cab, only to be halted by Commissioner Weston, who inquired brusquely why the reporter was here. Clyde said he'd come to see the Dutch Room.

"What's more," added Clyde, "Branford showed it to me. Here's a list of things I saw"—he wagged his notebook—"and they were enough to make a good story. But I'm not staying for the party. Branford just

gave me the bum's rush in a polite sort of way. I may be a veteran reporter, but I can still take a hint."

Weston and Cranston were both entering Branford's front door when the cab pulled away. Around the block, Moe eased the cab to minimum speed, and they were just taking the corner to the back street when a car pulled away. Moe was about to gun the cab, but Clyde stopped him.

"That's Owen's coupe," informed the reporter. "He's not starting in a hurry, so he's safe so far. Take it easy, Shrevvy, and let's see if anybody tags him."

Moe stopped the cab in a gloomy spot where great shade trees towered above the high back wall of Branford's property. They saw Owen's car negotiate the next corner in normal style, and Clyde even identified Owen as the driver, thanks to the brilliant lights of a corner drugstore.

But there wasn't a ripple anywhere along the street. There were only a few parked cars, all empty. When Moe and Clyde peered at doorways and other crannies, they didn't see a single face poke into sight. All was still clear in Branford's neighborhood.

Taking Clyde to the Classic office, Moe detoured past Owen's jewelry store near Fifth Avenue. They saw the coupe parked in an alley between the store and an old theater.

There were lights in the store, indicating that Owen had arrived quite safely, but Moe didn't take that for granted.

On the way back from the Classic, he pulled up near the store and was on watch when Owen came out, wearing a tuxedo.

Seeing a handy cab, Owen decided to use it instead of his coupe, since the street in front of Branford's would be crowded with the cars of party guests. So Moe completed his routine duty by actually bringing Owen back to the bailiwick safeguarded by The Shadow!

FROM a darkened front window on Branford's ground floor, The Shadow watched Owen's arrival in Moe's cab. No longer was The Shadow guised as Cranston; instead, he was garbed entirely in black.

At least a dozen guests had arrived and it was easy to stroll away from them unnoticed. Downstairs, The Shadow had claimed a slouch hat and black cloak that he'd placed in this room when he first arrived. Now, fully equipped for heavy duty, he awaited crime's advent.

It would come soon. When Owen stepped from the cab and ascended the brownstone steps, there was a stir between cars across the street. Rupe Bonsal and his pack had arrived and were on the lurk. Spotting Owen for the first time, they were preparing for their raid, which fitted The Shadow's theory that crooks knew of the diamonds brought here earlier by Owen.

Naturally, they'd want such merchandise as a bonus with the trophies from the Dutch Room. Not having seen Owen's previous departure, they'd suppose his diamonds still were here. They might even think he'd come for the gems, hence their urge for action. Rupe Bonsal was too efficient to waste time with two robberies—inside and outside the mansion—when one job would suffice!

Since Owen was entering empty-handed, there was no need for The Shadow to convoy his trip up the brownstone steps. Gliding from the front room, the black-cloaked guardian was past the grand stairway when a servant admitted Owen by the front door.

Reaching a back stairway, The Shadow ascended it rapidly and stopped at the door that Owen had latched when he made his previous departure. Here was a narrow window from which The Shadow could see the full courtyard and the high back wall. No sign of crooks there, except for the top of a truck

parked just beyond the wall.

The Shadow gave a low laugh in the darkness.

In through the front, out by the back, such would be Rupe's system. But The Shadow didn't intend that crime should even reach that stage. After trying the door at the head of the stairs to make sure it was properly latched, The Shadow went down to the ground floor, arriving almost in answer to a brisk ring at the front door.

Shrouded in darkness by the stairway, The Shadow was aiming a brace of .45 automatics when a servant opened the front door, expecting more guests. If those "guests" had shown their fangs at that moment, they'd have received a roaring welcome from The Shadow.

But these incomers, Rupe Bonsal and his cronies, dressed in tuxedos and wearing handkerchief masks, didn't get too tough with the servant. Instead, they merely nudged him with their guns, telling him to lead the way upstairs and formally introduce them.

Ghostly was the shape that glided up the grand stairway behind the masked thugs, keeping to the shaded sector of its curve. The looks that Rupe's men darted across their shoulders gave them no token of The Shadow's presence immediately behind them. In effect, he was living up to his reputed power of invisibility.

It was at the stair top that Rupe Bonsal gave his first display of roughness, but only in brief fashion. A harsh snarl came through his mask, a tone that befitted Rupe's ugly glare and chunky build.

Simultaneously he shoved the servant to a corner of the hall, telling him to "stay put" where he landed. Gun ahead of him, Rupe reached the curtained entrance to Branford's living room and beckoned for his men to cluster behind him, which they did.

Branford had just finished introducing Owen to the guests. There was a jangle as Branford drew his batch of keys from his tuxedo pocket and announced that he was going to show his guests the Dutch Room. Branford turned to the doorway leading into the rear hall, and the guests crowded eagerly after him.

Rupe's men shoved forward, too, but their leader restrained them as he saw Branford pause.

"Don't crowd!" exclaimed Branford. "Please allow me time to unlock the room. Suppose you wait here, Owen, and usher the guests through a few at a time? If there are too many, I shall call to you, so others can wait until the first have had their turn."

Owen nodded and took his place in the rear doorway. Weston was standing near him, planning to be one of the first who would see the famed Dutch Room. Again, Rupe's men pressed forward, this time to hear their leader undertone:

"Wait, you lugs! Give Branford time to get the joint unlocked. It's going to be easier that way. Only we're not letting anybody else start through that hall. We'll handle them all right here—and now!"

RUPE'S final word came as Branford called from the distant door of the Dutch Room, telling Owen he could send the first guests through. Before Owen could even beckon to the nearest persons, all attention was swung the other way. And with good reason—for Rupe Bonsal was the man who demanded it!

Shoving past the curtains, Rupe grated a command for people to put up their hands. He punctuated that order with a gesture of his gun. Behind Rupe, three other weapons poked in from the doorway as an added threat. As a criminal, Rupe was something of a showman, so he stepped aside to let his victims

see what they were up against.

They saw.

Bristling revolvers, masked faces above them, not only added to the impetus of rising hands. They made people cower. Owen was half backed through the door to the hallway, from which Branford's voice was coming impatiently. Weston was edging in that same direction, anxious to spring for shelter, yet wondering if he had a right to desert the other guests.

In a corner near the balcony, Margo was giving hopeful looks toward the open window. She doubted that she could reach it, but she had an idea that The Shadow might arrive from there.

The other guests were shrinking as best they could, while Rupe Bonsal scoffed at their qualms. This was crime the way he liked it, a situation wherein he could stand back and let his men take over. Contemptuously, Rupe lowered his own gun and beckoned to his men, as he sneered:

"All right, boys. Herd these goats for me -"

Rupe paused, squinting above the top of his handkerchief. There wasn't a move from any of his men. They were frozen, their own guns lowering, as though actuated by a hidden force. Their eyes, peering above masks like Rupe's, looked beady, frightened. A scared trio, against a background of blackness, with no explanation for their behavior, until Rupe saw the blackness swirl.

It was living blackness, nudging in among those gunners, giving them the whispered word that any action on their part would be their last in life!

What Rupe's eyes saw, his ears corroborated. No longer did The Shadow require invisibility, or silence. This was the timely moment when a proclamation of his presence would make full flood of the tide that he had turned.

Strange, weird was the laugh The Shadow uttered. More than a challenge, it was filled with triumph. Voiced by hidden lips, it seemed to come from the very thugs who were trembling, cowed, under The Shadow's sole control.

Master of justice, The Shadow had stemmed this crime at its very outset. All that remained was to clinch the victory by sharp, direct action in which others could play a helpful part. A simple task for The Shadow!

Yet, even with the triumph of justice assured, crime was to score an unexpected point—a thing The Shadow was to learn!

CHAPTER III. CRIME'S LONE TROPHY

IT was Rupe Bonsal who began the trouble, though he behaved in accepted style. Savagely, Rupe flung himself at the curtained doorway, howling for his men to grab The Shadow at any cost, which they tried to do, much to their cloaked foe's enjoyment.

Sledging hard as dazed crooks tried to stab their guns at him, The Shadow sent them reeling, sprawling into Rupe's path, their guns popping harmlessly. Tripping over his own tribe, Rupe fired two shots himself, so wide that they completely missed the doorway.

Already living blackness was slicing from between a curtain and the side of the broad doorway. It was past the tumbled thugs who were rising shakily to copy Rupe's mistaken aim. The only persons who saw The Shadow perform his swift circuit to the center of the living room were Commissioner Weston and the

other guests.

The Shadow wanted them to take over, so that he could handle matters elsewhere. Take over they did. The Shadow prepared it by scattering masked crooks with cyclonic fury, cudgeling them anew, this time including Rupe in the festivities. Weston and the bolder guests piled upon the hapless thugs, snatching their guns away from them.

Finishing his whirl, The Shadow saw that control was under way, so he continued his spin out through the doorway. Those in the living room heard his laugh rise in new challenge.

The Shadow was at the stair top greeting Rupe's reserves, who had dashed in from the street when they heard the gunfire. These gunners weren't wearing tuxedos; they were roughly clad and unhampered by masks. But The Shadow outgunned them when they aimed up the stairway in answer to his challenge.

They couldn't see their cloaked foe; all they witnessed were the tongued flames of big automatics that bulleted the foremost crooks and staggered them back against the rest. The Shadow was turning that charge into an utter rout, except for a few marksmen who were aiming long range from the front doorway.

Those gunners had a bead on The Shadow—or did have, until they were suddenly slugged from the rear. As crooks caved, their guns unfired, The Shadow delivered an approving laugh. It was meant for the sluggers who supplied that timely aid: Cliff Marsland and his side-kick, Hawkeye, The Shadow's agents who patrolled the underworld. They'd done more than report Rupe's planned invasion of Branford's premises; they'd come along, Cliff and Hawkeye, to help The Shadow thin out human weeds.

And then, with triumph signed, sealed and delivered, came sudden, unexpected tragedy!

It started in the living room, where Weston and the guests were mopping up Rupe's shock force. But Rupe Bonsal wasn't giving in so readily. He'd lost his revolver, his mask had settled to his neck, and he was wrenching free from gripping hands, when he came face to face with Commissioner Weston. In that glance, the crook saw a stubby revolver in the Commissioner's fist, so Rupe made a grab for it.

As the pair reeled, struggling for the gun, they neared the door to the rear hall, where Glenn Owen was trying to press back the more excited guests so that he could take a hand in battle.

Sight of Rupe coming their way, with a gun almost in his clutch, was too much for the frightened guests. They piled for the hallway door, flinging Owen ahead of them, a few spilling headlong after him. The reason the rest didn't go through was because they clogged the narrow doorway.

There was a shout from Talbot Branford, who was coming from the Dutch Room brandishing an old-fashioned pistol that he'd found among Van Zuyder's effects and had hurriedly loaded. The door of the Dutch Room was open, Branford's keys dangling in its lock.

For a moment, Branford was in the light that issued from that doorway. An instant later, he was dashing into the gloomier section of the hallway.

At that moment, Rupe Bonsal, clutched by a new array of hands, gave an incoherent call. In response, a gun ripped from somewhere in the rear hallway. Twice that gun spoke, its target Talbot Branford. With a shrill, birdlike shriek, the custodian of the Van Zuyder treasures twirled and plummeted to the floor near the door of the Dutch Room.

Branford's antique pistol thudded to the floor before he sprawled. His twist was like a final effort to continue duty, for his empty hands made a feeble claw for the open door and the keys he couldn't reach.

Finishing that futile clutch Branford's hands stiffened and were still.

BY then, The Shadow was back at the door of the living room. He'd broken the attack from the front stairway and the muffled shots, coupled with Branford's shriek, told him of trouble elsewhere. Seeing that the living room was blocked, The Shadow decided to take the roundabout route that led past Branford's study. Commissioner Weston managed to reach the rear hall ahead of The Shadow. Blundering through the blockade, Weston stumbled over a pair of guests and reached Owen, who was on hands and knees scrambling for the antique gun that Branford had dropped. Grabbing that weapon, Owen didn't waste time to point the direction that Branford's murderer had taken.

Owen aimed the antique gun instead, at the same time panting to Weston:

"He went that way... the killer... through the door to the back stairs -"

The rest was drowned by the blast of the antique pistol, which Owen fired rather than waste further time in words. The single shot from the gun jarred the door and split its woodwork, but there was no telling whether it had reached a man beyond.

So Weston brushed Owen aside and dashed for the door in question. Ripping it open, he saw the back stairs and heard a clatter from below, but it wasn't the murderer who provided the commotion.

Rupe's reserves, thwarted in their attack on the front stairway, had cut through the ground floor and were starting up by the back route, not only intent upon reaching the Dutch Room, but by their very action screening the flight of Branford's murderer if he had chosen to continue out through the back door!

On his feet, wagging the antique pistol that had spent all with its one shot, Owen was about to go to Weston's aid, when The Shadow arrived. Grabbing Owen, the cloaked fighter whirled him back from foolhardy endeavor and sent him through the door into the living room, where he could be more useful in helping to suppress the last efforts of Rupe Bonsal. By then, Weston was on his way back, knowing that he couldn't stand off Rupe's reserves single-handed. Side-stepping into the doorway of the Dutch Room, The Shadow let Weston go by. Reaching the living room, the commissioner saw Rupe's last stand. Free, but gunless, Rupe was grabbing for a revolver that one of this captured crowd had lost. Owen was springing for him, slugging hard with the antique pistol.

Warding off the swing, Rupe snatched for the cumbersome pistol and Owen let him grab it. Smart work on Owen's part, for it enabled him to snatch up the very revolver that Rupe wanted. Rupe was charging in to bash Owen with the improvised bludgeon, when Weston jabbed shots at the murderous crook.

Timely shots in behalf of Owen, but they weren't necessary, for at that moment Owen came up with the revolver he'd picked from the floor and gave Rupe a close-range blast.

Whipped by the two-way gunfire, Rupe wavered crazily and side-slipped to the floor, a death rattle coming from his snarly lips. Then Weston was bawling for Owen and others to help him stave off the attack from the back stairs.

They started in that direction—too late.

Not too late to halt crime's final thrust; simply too late to have a hand in stopping it. Already guns were jabbing toward the rear of the hallway, accompanied by the mocking laugh of the cloaked marksman - The Shadow!

Out of the Dutch Room, The Shadow was weaving toward the back stairs, his automatics spurting ahead of him. Crooks broke and fled for the floor below, The Shadow hard upon their trail. More shots echoed

back as The Shadow's agents joined their chief and helped pursue Rupe's remnants out through the back of the house.

From the living-room window, Margo Lane saw the truck top as it lunged away from beyond the high wall, guns booming after it. For their getaway, the last few of Rupe's tribe were using the very truck that they had brought for carrying off the Van Zuyder treasures, a load of loot that only one man of their ilk—Branford's murderer— had even managed to see.

Crime was conquered by The Shadow, yet the laugh that Margo heard was grim because of Branford's death. So grim, that mirthless knell, that Margo fancied she still heard its echoes when she looked about and saw Cranston entering the living room by the front way, an inquiring look upon his face, as though he'd just returned to discover chaos that he couldn't explain.

HEARING voices from the back hall, Cranston went in that direction, and Margo accompanied him. They found Weston, Owen and a few others standing solemnly beside Branford's body near the door of the Dutch Room. It was Weston who expressed the common thought.

"Poor Branford," said the commissioner sadly. "If we'd only been a dozen seconds sooner, before that killer got away! But at least Branford accomplished his duty. He didn't let those rogues seize a single one of Van Zuyder's treasures!"

Owen gave a corroborating nod as he looked into the Dutch Room. He'd seen the Van Zuyder collection often, and he was checking on its items, all in their proper place, unmarred. Cranston took similar appraisal across Owen's right shoulder.

While Margo stared from the left, trying to match the present appearance of the room with her past recollection of it.

Abruptly, Owen stopped his nod. At the same moment, the calm gaze of Cranston showed a sharp burn, like the eyes of The Shadow. And Margo, catching the same impression, gave a sudden gasp.

It wasn't what they saw; it was something that they didn't see. Furniture, paintings, mosaics, golden statuettes, even the diamond-studded clock, were all where they belonged. But there was one item—the final object that Branford had displayed—which now was missing from its place in the corner.

That item was the gold-filigreed portmanteau which Wadden van Zuyder had used as a portable writing table. It had vanished, along with the killer who murdered Talbot Branford!

Crime's lone trophy, that missing portmanteau, yet the very fact that it had been picked from all Van Zuyder's treasures proved it to be the prize for which battle had been waged!

CHAPTER IV. CLUES FROM THE PAST

INSPECTOR JOE CARDONA finished another pace across Branford's living room and stared at the dawn that trickled through the garden window. Cardona was Weston's ace inspector, a tireless hand at tracking down crime.

Swarthy of visage, stocky of build, Cardona had marched this living room like a robot, with side trips all through the house, plus occasional calls to hospitals and headquarters.

But if Joe wasn't tired, the others were. The others consisted of Weston, Owen, Margo, and other guests at Branford's party: They'd repeated their description of events a dozen times over, and were actually exhausted. The only exception was Lamont Cranston.

He'd seen nothing, and was only staying around to take Margo Lane home, hence he was quite as much awake as Cardona. But Cranston didn't show it, for he was in one of his idle moods.

"It sums up to this," declared Cardona suddenly, his tone so sharp that listeners awakened with a start. "Rupe Bonsal and his bunch wanted all of Van Zuyder's stuff. So they raided through the front, intending to take it out the back where the truck was waiting. We all know how far they got—or didn't get."

Cardona waited until the witnesses had all responded with sleepy nods. Then:

"One guy got through," continued Cardona. "There's only one way he could have done it. He came in the back door, up the back stairs, and spotted Branford at the Dutch Room. Whoever this bird was, Rupe was using him as a sort of inside man. His job was to handle Branford—which he did."

The grim phrase covered the facts of Branford's murder, which Cardona had already attributed to an obvious purpose on the part of the inside man: namely, to keep the Dutch Room open so that Rupe's raiders would not suffer the delay of smashing down its bulky door. But that brought up other angles.

"For one thing," put Cardona, "how did the inside man get past that door at the back of the hall?"

He looked at Owen, who gave a puzzled headshake.

"That door was latched when I went out earlier," assured Owen. "Branford told me to make sure of it, and I did."

"Then the killer must have had a key to that particular door," declared Cardona. He swung to Branford's servant, who was with the group of witnesses. "What about that key? Did Branford have a duplicate?"

"Mr. Branford never gave me one," declared the servant, honestly. "I was in his employ for more than a year without even a key to the house. Mr. Branford said that servants lost keys too easily -"

Cardona's fingers snapped an interruption.

"Now we're getting somewhere!" he exclaimed. "Maybe some former servant kept a key instead of losing it. A guy like that would be just the sort of inside man that Rupe would use."

Weston brought up the point that such an individual might also have had a key to the Dutch Room, but Cardona reminded his superior that the lock to the treasure chamber was not only special, but new. So Joe's theory stood. What was needed next was a description of the murderer. Cardona hoped that Owen could give one, but the diamond merchant couldn't.

"I'd just landed in the hallway," explained Owen. "I heard Branford call and I looked up to see him coming from the Dutch Room, with the antique pistol. There were two shots from in back of Branford and there he was, twirling like a top. That's when I saw the door to the back stairway; it was half open and a figure was going through it."

"But you couldn't see his face?" inquired Joe.

"The hallway was too gloomy," insisted Owen. "I could catch the glitter of his revolver, because he was aiming back with it when he ducked through the door. That's why I grabbed for the pistol that Branford dropped."

"And the portmanteau?"

"I didn't see it. I hadn't an idea that it was gone until afterward. In fact, I'm not at all sure the killer took

it."

Bluntly, Cardona asked who could have taken the portmanteau if the murderer hadn't. Owen couldn't answer that one. So Cardona expressed the obvious conclusion that the murderer must have thrust the portmanteau through the door first so his other hand would be free to fire back.

"It's easy enough to reconstruct," declared the inspector. "While Branford was loading this"—Joe picked up the antique pistol—"the inside man sneaked into the Dutch Room behind him. He grabbed the one thing handy, the portfolio -"

"You mean the portmanteau," interrupted Weston. "But why didn't the murderer finish Branford then and there?"

"Why should he have?" returned Cardona. "There was a mob coming through to take care of that. Only when he saw Owen and the others, that made it different, particularly when Branford had his cannon ready for Rupe Bonsal. The inside man had sneaked to the back stairs by that time, so he shot Branford from there."

Two of the party guests were nodding when Cardona concluded. They were the ones who had tumbled into the hallway after Owen. They testified that they'd heard the murderer's shots but hadn't seen him, because they'd thought he ducked into the Dutch Room, which was only halfway along the hall.

They added that Branford had already toppled when they saw him, and Owen recalled that the stairway door had gone shut behind the killer at about that moment. Which brought the sequence up to the time of Weston's arrival, when Owen fired after the murderer and the commissioner took up the pursuit in person.

Later, The Shadow relieved Weston, and the cloaked fighter was still in charge when the commissioner and others came to survey Van Zuyder's treasures, only to learn that the portmanteau was gone. So the killer had unquestionably taken the portmanteau, though Cardona didn't consider that item to be a valuable clue.

"Only a cluck would try to peddle a hot antique," declared Cardona glumly. "Of course, if we could trace the portmanteau, we might find fingerprints on it. I'm going to search these premises to see if he ditched it. But if he didn't, well -"

Cardona's shrug indicated that he'd take up the other angles in due course. With that decision, he decided that the witnesses could leave.

ABOUT mid-afternoon, Lamont Cranston was dozing in an armchair at the Cobalt Club when he received a phone call from Glenn Owen. It sounded urgent, so Cranston went to see Owen at his apartment, which was in the Seventies.

Cranston was received by a rabbit-mannered secretary named Rowell, who ushered him into a small room fitted like an office.

There, Cranston found Owen, and with the diamond merchant was a square-jawed man whom Owen introduced as Fred Hargood, a private detective who operated his own agency.

Apparently, Owen had hired Hargood as a special investigator, and in so doing he'd made an excellent choice, for Hargood enjoyed a fine reputation. Apart from that, Cranston remembered that Hargood operated regularly for certain jewelers' associations located in Maiden Lane, where Owen had a wholesale office in addition to his uptown retail store, so it was logical that Hargood should have Owen

as a client.

Two questions were: Why did Owen need Hargood's special services; and why did he want to see Cranston? Without bringing up either question, Owen came directly to the answers.

"At Branford's, yesterday afternoon," began Owen, "I mentioned a shipment of diamonds that Wadden van Zuyder was about to bring from Holland. Do you remember it, Cranston?"

Cranston nodded.

"It was a large shipment," continued Owen, his face wrinkled in seriousness. "A very large shipment of uncut diamonds, valued in excess of a million dollars."

Reaching to a filing cabinet, Owen brought out a stack of papers and thumbed through them for Cranston's benefit. All dated more than two years back, and they were stamped with seals of notaries and other officials. Along with them were letters from which Owen picked the samples needed.

"I was to handle the diamonds for Van Zuyder on a commission basis," declared Owen. "With so many expert diamond cutters now in New York, it promised rapid sale and good profit. Here are the lists of diamonds, accurately described, along with photographs. And here is something equally important."

Owen presented a customs certificate covering the expected shipment. It went further than the matter of Van Zuyder's household treasures that Branford had received. In the case of the diamonds intended for Owen, full value had been declared, with an order for payment from Van Zuyder's American funds immediately upon the arrival of the uncut gems.

"The duty is as good as paid," assured Owen. "All I need to do is produce the diamonds and present my credentials as the authorized commission merchant. Thereupon, the customs duties will be collected from Van Zuyder's frozen funds. There isn't an inch of red tape to it, but for two years I've been sitting idle simply because I thought that Van Zuyder still had the diamonds."

Owen paused expressively, watching for Cranston's reaction. There wasn't any flash from Cranston's steady eyes. Even his voice was a calm monotone, as he inquired:

"You mean the portmanteau?"

Owen threw a triumphant look at Hargood, who nodded. Apparently, Owen had mentioned Cranston to Hargood as a man who would be quick at piecing conclusions. Leaning forward, Owen slapped the table hard.

"That's it, Cranston," he affirmed. "Whoever the murderer, he was after the portmanteau. Rupe Bonsal sent him there to get it, regardless of how the raid turned out. It's lucky The Shadow was on hand to smash the robbery, otherwise we'd totally lack this vital clue.

"Never once, in all my visits to Branford's, did it occur to me that Van Zuyder shipped those diamonds with his household goods, though he had a perfect right to do it, considering that the duty was paid and his country threatened with invasion."

Cranston's eyes held a meditative calm. Their gaze didn't reveal the thought behind them, but Owen guessed it.

"I know the portmanteau looked empty," agreed Owen. "But it wouldn't take a lot of secret space to pack that diamond shipment. I'm more than convinced that whoever killed Branford and stole the portmanteau, acquired a million dollars or more in one swoop!"

"Don't take it so hard, Mr. Owen," spoke Hargood. "We can't bring your friend Branford back to life, but there's still a chance of getting back those diamonds. The way I figure it"—Hargood swung to Cranston—"is that maybe the murderer didn't know what the portmanteau had in it. In that case, if we find him we can still find Van Zuyder's diamonds."

Slowly, Owen gave a tired nod.

"It's our only hope," he conceded. "That's why I hired you, Hargood. And I called you, Cranston, because I wanted your advice. Tell me: if I mentioned the diamonds to Commissioner Weston, do you think the news of the portmanteau's value would leak out?"

"It probably would," replied Cranston. "It might even be broadcasted."

"Then would I be within my rights," persisted Owen, "to put Hargood on the case without stating why I wanted the portmanteau found?"

"I would say so," returned Cranston, "considering that you have no actual proof that the diamonds are in the portmanteau."

The relief that showed on Owen's blunt face was reflected by Hargood's square features. Just as Owen wanted the diamonds that would promise him a hundred thousand dollars in commissions, so did Hargood want the job of finding them.

"I'm very grateful to you, Cranston," expressed Owen. "But there is just one thing more. Sooner or later, the commissioner will learn of this -"

"And when he does," interposed Cranston, "I shall tell him that you informed me of your purpose in advance, and that I advised you to proceed with it."

Leaving Owen's, Cranston smiled. He, not Owen, was the person to feel grateful. The information that Cranston had just gained was the very sort to spur his own hunt for the missing portmanteau and the murderer who held it. A hunt which, gauged by past performances, would be swifter than any that Joe Cardona or Fred Hargood could independently provide.

For Cranston's secret quest would be undertaken by his other self— The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. FACTS OF CRIME

IT was evening at the Chez Caprice.

One of Manhattan's fanciest night spots, the Chez Caprice featured soft lights and the mellow music of a marimba orchestra, accompanied by the harmonious voice of Lana Colquitt, exotic European songstress. She was something to look at, was Lana, a willowy blonde who could somehow blend Spanish rhythm with her Nordic appearance.

But with all her charm, Lana Colquitt irked some of the night-club patrons, most especially Margo Lane.

What really annoyed Margo was the way the Colquitt creature eyed the dance floor. She could catch the eyes of men and leave them staring, while she innocently met the glances of their feminine dancing partners, as if asking what was wrong.

Lana tried it several times with Lamont Cranston, who happened to be Margo's partner, but she couldn't capture his attention. Margo knew why Lamont didn't notice Lana. He was busy checking on a door in a deep corner of the night club, the entrance to the office of the owner, Mart Ingle.

From a table near the dance floor, Harry Vincent was keeping similar tab. Harry was one of The Shadow's secret agents and the perfect type for spots like the Chez Caprice, for Harry molded into evening clothes almost as well as Cranston.

They'd swung away from the orchestra, Lamont and Margo, when action started over by the door to Mart's office. Cranston flashed a signal to Harry, only to see him rising from his table. Quite nonchalantly, Harry cut in on Cranston as he passed, to finish the dance with Margo. Pausing by the table, Cranston gathered something from a vacant chair and strolled toward dimmer lights.

He'd picked up a cloak and hat which he used when he passed a pillar near Mart's corner door. When Cranston appeared on the other side of that pillar, he'd become The Shadow, a gliding shape of blackness that could defy detection from the keenest eye.

The action at the door to Mart's office was supplied by Inspector Joe Cardona, who had arrived with a pair of headquarters men at his heels. By the time The Shadow reached the door, the visitors were in the office and the door was closed behind them.

But that didn't matter to The Shadow. Turning the knob imperceptibly, he inched the door open and took a look inside.

Mart Ingle, tuxedoed, mustached, and with wavy hair, was seated behind a desk that had once belonged to the president of a large insurance company. As further proof of his affluence, the corner of the office was fitted with a vault from a defunct bank.

Another corner boasted a huge built-in mirror that Mart had bought at an auction sale held in one of Manhattan's famous old mansions. Heavily framed in gilt, the mirror was set only a foot above the floor and stretched almost to the ceiling.

Opposite Mart was Joe Cardona, flanked by the two headquarters men. With a pleasant smile, Mart offered cigars all around.

"This is a real occasion," said Mart, in a smooth tone. "It calls for some old brandy, that even my best customers can't buy. One moment, gentlemen, and I'll serve you some. I keep it in the vault."

"Never mind the brandy," gruffed Cardona. "We're here on business, Mart. When was the last time you saw Rupe Bonsal?"

Mart Ingle raised one hand mildly, calling on Joe and the others to listen. Lana Colquitt was singing and her voice carried to the office.

Inasmuch as Lana could turn on volume when she wanted, Mart didn't realize that the door was partly opened. He was more interested in the song, which happened to be "The Last Time I Saw Paris." Mart glanced at Cardona.

"Hear that, inspector?"

Joe nodded.

"Recognize it?"

Another nod from Joe.

"Quite a coincidence," observed Mart. "It fits right in with what you asked me. Remember when I sold out the Typhoon Club? Well, I went abroad to look for talent and learn how the foreign niteries

operated. That's where I got the idea for the Chez Caprice, and met Lana Colquitt. I told her if she ever came to the U.S.A., I'd have a spot for her."

"Get back to Rupe," snapped Cardona. "You saw him in Paris?"

"That's right," nodded Mart. "Rupe was there cooling off. Thought he had a rap to beat, only it turned out later that he was in the clear. He'd been acting pretty bad, Rupe had."

"You mean back when he worked for you?"

Mart gave Cardona a steady eye. "Yes, I knew Rupe in the old days, but that isn't saying we were partners."

"I'm saying you were partners," retorted Cardona. "The trouble was, you were both silent." Joe leaned forward, his gaze fixed hard. "Are you sure that you haven't talked to him, by phone, within the last couple of days?"

Suave again, Mart opened a desk drawer. Cardona was reaching for a revolver, expecting Mart to display one. But all that Mart produced was a copy of the Classic, which he slid across the desk.

"There's a description of the stuff at Branford's," declared Mart. "A guy named Burke wrote it up. On another page you'll read that a portmanteau was the only thing swiped, in case you don't already know. Burke said the thing was only worth a grand, which is about what it costs me to run this joint over a weekend. What's more, I don't go in for antiques unless they're in the heavyweight class!"

To emphasize the final point, Mart slapped his hand on the desk, rose to smooth his tuxedo in front of the gilded mirror, and turned finally, to the vault, to ask across his shoulder:

"How about the brandy, inspector? You talk like you needed some— or maybe it's the other way about."

Cardona proved he wasn't drunk by the prompt way he reached his own feet. With an interview like this, the best way was to close it abruptly.

"I'm not asking you if you had an alibi last night," declared Cardona. "I know you had, because I've checked it already. So you didn't knock off Talbot Branford, that much is settled. But I'm telling you this: if you had any deal with Rupe Bonsal, you'd better come clean. I'm not blaming you for anything Rupe did, because I know that nobody could keep him in control. But I'm looking for a killer who lammed with a portmanteau, and if you've even got an idea of who he was, I want to hear it!"

Mart shook his head, preserving a smileless expression. He said:

"I'm serious, Joe, when I tell you I don't know. Not a thing!"

That settled the matter. Cardona turned, beckoned for the detectives to come along, and strode from Mart's office. Easing into darkness as they passed, The Shadow heard what Cardona muttered as he and his companions went by:

"We'll follow some more leads on guys that Rupe knew."

THE dance was over when Cranston, transformed back from The Shadow, arrived at the table where Margo sat with Harry. In an even undertone, he told them what he had heard, but his verdict differed from that of Inspector Cardona.

"We're going to watch Mart Ingle," declared Cranston. "I'm leaving that job to you, Vincent, while Margo runs interference. The tie-up between Mart and Rupe Bonsal was one of those things that can last. So I want you both to stay here and spot whatever comes your way -"

Something was coming their way right then, in the person of a tall, dark gentleman who would have been handsome if he hadn't shown too many teeth when he smiled. This specimen of Manhattan's nocturnal fauna wore the conventional evening clothes and answered to the name of Don Boyette.

He'd met Margo Lane around various cafes and was bowing himself into a renewal of the acquaintance. A dance was starting and the sleek gentleman was inviting Margo to participate if neither of her friends claimed the privilege.

Nor did they claim it, for Harry caught a glance from Cranston that said: "No." There was more that Cranston wanted to discuss, and Harry could relay it to Margo later.

So Don and Margo wafted across the dance floor to the accompaniment of Lana's crooning—and glances.

"That chap Boyette needs watching," observed Cranston. "He is here because he knows enough about Mart Ingle—and sometimes enough can be too much. Have Margo cultivate his acquaintance, so we can learn his particular game."

Harry understood fully. He knew that confidence men and jewel thieves used night clubs as bases of operation; also that they preferred those spots run by gentry who were on the ragged edge with the law, such as Mart Ingle.

Undoubtedly, Don had spied Cardona's trip to Mart's office and was counting the Chez Caprice as an excellent camping ground, on the basis that whatever happened here would reflect on the proprietor, Mart Ingle.

There were other points that struck home to Harry. He turned to discuss them with Cranston, only to find the chair beside him vacant. Off through an outer door, a man in evening clothes was entering a taxicab to leave the Chez Caprice. Harry waited for the dance to end, so that he could discuss the latest turn with Margo.

Their duty lay here, while their chief, The Shadow, was off to other fields in search of clues to million-dollar crime!

CHAPTER VI. LINKED TRAILS

AFTER leaving the Chez Caprice, Lamont Cranston stopped at Owen's apartment, and was ushered into the little office by the secretary, Rowell.

Owen was doubly glad to see Cranston, because he wanted to question him on one subject and tell him facts on another. Owen wanted to know what line the police were following in their hunt for Branford's murderer; and he was quite pleased when Cranston told him that Cardona was checking on old associates of Rupe Bonsal.

Pleased because it meant that Cardona's work wouldn't conflict with Hargood's, which was the thing that Owen wanted to tell Cranston about. From his filing cabinet, Owen brought a bundle of papers and spread them on the desk.

"Records on servants," explained Owen. "Hargood obtained them from the association of employment

bureaus. All these are classed as 'doubtful,' which are the sort we thought should be weeded out first."

The weeding had been completed, because Owen drew one sheet from the batch and handed it to Cranston. It covered the case of a migratory servant named Larkin Sparr, whose photograph showed a cunning, pointed face. Following Sparr's name were a string of others, all with question marks.

"A most peculiar record," stated Owen. "This Sparr was once a steamship steward, and whenever he'd take a new job he'd claim that he'd just come off a boat. He was clever at faking recommendations, usually under different names."

"Both Hargood and I recognized this picture," asserted Owen. "So Fred went through his own files and produced these." Owen brought out some other papers. "Data on jewel robberies that could have been inside jobs. Note how they occurred in homes where Sparr had once worked under an alias. Furthermore -"

Cranston had reached the paper that Owen was about to mention. It covered robberies of gems that owners had brought from abroad. This linked with the idea that Sparr actually was a steamship steward between times. He was the type who would turn informer against wealthy persons who tried to smuggle jewels, but Sparr went that game one better. He'd learn of gems that were honestly declared by their owners, then tip off crooks on shore so that robberies could be staged later.

"This ties in with Rupe Bonsal," continued Owen, reaching for another file. "When Rupe was in his prime, one of his rackets was to recover stolen gems. He was very bold about it, even approaching diamond merchants like myself; but we'd have nothing to do with him personally."

"We left that business to Fred Hargood, and here are his own records on Rupe. You'll see that some of the gems that Rupe so obligingly uncovered—for a price—were stolen from people who once employed Sparr or could have met him on shipboard. No doubt Rupe had a hand in those robberies with Sparr abetting him. Rupe finally quit his racket because the jewelers' insurance association was too strong for him."

Cranston was again studying the sheet that bore Sparr's picture. Still noting those pointed features, he put the calm query:

"Do you remember when and where you saw this fellow, Owen?"

"Yes!" Owen was emphatic. "I saw him about two years ago when he was working for Talbot Branford!"

The record didn't cover the period mentioned. It was one of those times when Sparr had presumably been on a boat. Nor could Owen remember what name Sparr had used when employed by Branford. He explained that Branford had always been fussy about servants, hiring them on a week-to-week basis in a regular parade, until he found one that suited him.

"Sparr couldn't have lasted long with Branford," asserted Owen, "but he certainly must have acquainted himself with the premises and walked away with one of those missing keys. I don't recall whether I saw him before or after Van Zuyder's goods arrived from Holland, but he'd certainly have known which was the Dutch Room. There was only one room in Branford's house suitable to be a stronghold."

Handing Sparr's sheet back to Owen, Cranston asked what Hargood was doing about it. Owen replied that the private investigator was making the rounds of waterfront dives where Sparr might be found, since there was no record of Sparr's present address under his own name or any other.

RIDING away from Owen's in Moe's cab, Cranston indulged in a whispered laugh that was very much The Shadow's. Clue for clue, he'd made out well through his interview with Owen. In exchange for information on Cardona's activities, which Cranston could easily have learned from his friend Commissioner Weston, Owen had given triple measure by supplying full facts on Hargood's investigation.

Reaching his favorite haunt, the exclusive Cobalt Club, Cranston sent Moe's cab back to the Chez Caprice to be handy in case Harry or Margo needed it. Since those two agents were checking on the trail that Cardona had started—the lead to Mart Ingle—The Shadow decided to put two others on the same job as Hargood: that of finding Larkin Sparr.

Still Cranston, The Shadow strolled into the Cobalt Club and stopped in a phone booth. There his voice became a whispered tone as he talked to his contact man, Burbank, instructing him to send Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye on a tour of the water-front dives. Whatever Fred Hargood could uncover, these two would go him double—which, in this instance, meant that they might operate twice as fast as the private dick.

Having thus settled two trails, The Shadow wanted a third of his own. He intended to build it right here at the Cobalt Club. Coming from the phone booth as Cranston, he sauntered into the club library and approached a corner where a round-faced man was seated at a chessboard, working out a problem. Cranston took the opposite chair.

The roundish individual was Rutledge Mann, who happened to be Cranston's investment broker as well as an agent of The Shadow. Mann had a brief case filled with investment papers which he spread on the chess table.

It wasn't at all odd that such data would deal with corporations which had trade agreements with foreign concerns, for such companies had come under government investigation and were naturally a worry to the whole investment world.

In every report that Mann showed to Cranston, there appeared a certain name: Alexis Ault. It was a noteworthy fact that Ault and his associates held controlling interests in companies that had exchanged patent rights with German concerns. At present, Ault was unloading his stocks at a loss, openly admitting that his control was an indictment against those companies.

"At least, Ault has cleared himself," declared Mann soberly. "He has disavowed any intention to retard America's war effort. His foreign connections were purely commercial, and they date back to a period when such were legitimate. He is even disposing of his interests in certain steamship lines, rather than be suspected in any submarine sinkings."

At that, Cranston's eyes showed a sudden gleam. Like his gaze, his voice carried a touch that represented The Shadow, for there was sibilance in the undertone.

"From what you tell me, Mann," declared Cranston, "Alexis Ault is the very person to be watched."

Mann didn't quite understand, so Cranston elucidated. Analyzing in The Shadow's style, he took the premise that Ault's business with the patent exchanges had been for the purpose that the man denied—that of hampering the progress of American companies. In which case, Ault rated as a Nazi agent, supervising matters of commercial importance.

That game was over and Ault was gracefully bowing out. The next string to his bow was his shipping connection, another key job. In dropping it, he could still have matters sewed up as he wanted, while he cleared himself of all impeachment. Yet there was something premature in Ault's relinquishment of his

shipping status.

"It means just one thing," concluded The Shadow, his tone Cranston's calmest. "Alexis Ault is needed for something even more important to his Nazi masters. Something that might have to do with diamonds."

Enlightenment gave Mann's face the shine of a full moon. Van Zuyder's diamonds, the contents of the stolen portmanteau! It could be Ault's business to recover "claims" of that sort. Invading Holland, his masters could have learned of Van Zuyder's secret shipment, but not until recently. Here was the brain behind the raid staged by Rupe Bonsal—a brain named Alexis Ault!

"It fits with Owen's theory that the diamonds are concealed in the portmanteau," stated Cranston, quietly taking it for granted that Mann's thoughts had jumped along the proper track. "In classing Owen as correct on one point, we can credit him with another: the matter of Larkin Sparr.

"Assuming Sparr to be the inside man who was to speed Rupe's robbery, we have him marked both as the murderer and the thief who gained the portmanteau. Still, Sparr could rate no higher than Rupe's tool, too much the sneak to be trusted with vital information. Chances are that Sparr hasn't an idea of the portmanteau's importance."

"But he'll have to deliver it to Ault," put in Mann. "What then?"

Cranston returned a cryptic smile:

"Did I say that Rupe was working for Ault?"

"Why... no." Mann's round face was really puzzled. "But if Ault wanted the portmanteau... and Rupe told Sparr to get it -"

"Rupe's racket was selling people things they wanted," interposed Cranston, "particularly reclaimed diamonds. And Rupe Bonsal worked with a silent partner named Mart Ingle. Perhaps that partnership was once dissolved, but it was the sort that could be renewed automatically. It may happen that Ault is looking for the same thing we are, an antique portmanteau still held by the missing link in the Bonsal-Ingle partnership. A human link: Larkin Sparr."

Mann was calculating again, this time correctly. He could definitely understand why the portmanteau wasn't to have gone along with the contents of the Dutch Room, had Rupe's raiders managed to truck away the more massive loot. The big robbery was just a blind to cover the portmanteau's secret travels elsewhere.

While Mann pondered, Cranston reached among the papers and brought out a photograph he saw there. It was a portrait of Alexis Ault; long-faced, an outthrust lower lip, and bulging forehead accentuated by short-clipped hair. After studying the picture, Cranston replaced it.

"Contact Burke tomorrow," he told Mann. "Have him make copies of this photograph for all agents, since Ault may cross any of these linking trails. Two agents are checking on Mart Ingle. Another pair are hunting for Larkin Sparr. Since Alexis Ault figures on his own, he should come under similar surveillance. So I'm assigning you to that job, Mann, along with Burke."

Mann wondered suddenly whose trail The Shadow intended to follow. He looked up, his eyes already questioning Cranston, only to finish his gaze with a blink.

Cranston wasn't there. Looking toward the foyer, Mann saw only a gliding stretch of blackness along the floor: Cranston's shadow, departing with him. But there was something in that fading silhouette, its hawkish profile for example, that portrayed Cranston's other identity—The Shadow.

Maybe it was Mann's imagination, but he fancied that he heard a whispered, parting laugh that answered his unspoken question. Three links—The Shadow had left each to separate pairs of agents, but when The Shadow roved, all those trails would be his own, as well!

CHAPTER VII. CLUES EXCHANGED

IT was night again, foggy night along Manhattan's water front where great gaunt piers towered like monsters in the sooty gloom.

There was something forlorn about this area, where once great liners had docked on transatlantic schedules, now to be replaced by indiscriminate freighters and tankers that ran the gamut of undersea lurkers on every cruise.

Fred Hargood looked very out of place among the seamen in waterfront bars, but he was blundering along his mission, derby hat and all. He wanted to find Larkin Sparr, and said so, which made his problem almost hopeless. Taciturn barkeeps weren't saying where anybody could be found, not in these times. So Hargood, working at the slow rate of three joints a night, was likely to find Sparr in about a year—if ever.

In contrast, Cliff and Hawkeye were getting places fast. They looked as if they might have come off a boat, and they didn't ask where Sparr could be found. Instead, they hunted for their quarry, and having spotted him, they tagged him.

At present, they were coming from a fish-and-chip joint which Sparr had left a little while before, but they weren't in any hurry, because they knew where they could find him next.

Black fog swallowed Cliff and Hawkeye as they turned a corner. From it came solid hands that gripped their arms, while a whispered voice issued the command:

"Report!"

It was The Shadow, contacting this particular trail. In turn, Cliff and Hawkeye stated what they'd learned.

"Sparr is after an alibi," stated Cliff. "He's trying to build one for the time of the Branford murder."

"But he's having trouble," added Hawkeye. "The barkeeps don't seem to remember him being around the times he says he was."

"Funny about Sparr," commented Cliff. "He acts like he was on the level. He ties up with Rupe Bonsal, all right, or he wouldn't be so worried. But he's too worried."

"Guys get that way when they fluke an alibi," reminded Hawkeye. "I'd say that Sparr slid into these dumps just before and after he was at Branford's. He thought maybe the barkeeps would remember it, kind of approximate -"

"But they don't remember it at all," chimed Cliff. "Sparr must have been too casual."

"Or plain dumb," concluded Hawkeye. "Anyway, his next stop is at Lugger Pete's. Maybe he'll have luck there."

The Shadow went along to Lugger Pete's and sent Cliff in alone, with instructions to stay until Hawkeye returned. Hardly had Cliff entered before Sparr came out another door, his pointed face peering anxiously back across his shoulder, indicating that he might have noticed Cliff too often, which was

something The Shadow had conjectured.

So The Shadow took up the trail with Hawkeye, and at Sparr's next stop let Hawkeye go in alone. Hawkeye was an exceptionally good spotter and could make himself less noticeable than Cliff. Again, Sparr's stay was brief, and seeing that the fellow was about to leave, Hawkeye slid out ahead of him and reported to The Shadow.

"He was talking about a bet, Larkin was," informed Hawkeye. "One that the barkeep won from him the other night. Only they couldn't agree on which other night it was. Larkin tried to fix it as Tuesday, when things happened up at Branford's, but the barkeep remembered it as Monday."

As Hawkeye finished, Sparr came from the door and paused on the sidewalk. The Shadow spoke to Hawkeye, who had edged from sight, and told him to rejoin Cliff at Lugger Pete's. From now on, the trail would be The Shadow's own, since Sparr would show the utmost caution when sneaking back to whatever place he lived. With Cliff, Hawkeye could await a call from Burbank which would arrive after The Shadow traced Sparr to his lodging.

Over his shoulder, Hawkeye could see Sparr dwindling into the fog, his shifty figure barely visible under the dingy glow of the lights he passed. But there was no sign of The Shadow, unless the spot where fog swirled blackly could mean that a cloaked shape was traveling solidly through what seemed an utter void!

REACHING Lugger Pete's, Hawkeye had hardly joined Cliff before a bulky man entered, shoving back his derby hat to wipe the moist mist from his brow. The arrival was Fred Hargood, again missing Larkin Sparr by something close to a mile.

Hargood was about halfway through a beer he had ordered when a shriek out front announced the sudden stopping of a car. The noisy patrons in Lugger Pete's stopped their arguments and looked unruly, many of them nudging toward Fred Hargood. They'd marked him for some sort of a detective and thought the sound of brakes might mean a police raid.

Things weren't looking good for Fred, so Cliff and Hawkeye rose from their table, intending to give a helping hand to their friendly rival, when somebody growled that the car out front was only a taxi, whereupon the tension ended.

Cliff sat down again and motioned for Hawkeye to do the same. Then Cliff's face showed puzzlement when he observed an odd squint of Hawkeye's wizened features. It wasn't often that anything stupefied the wise little spotter, so Cliff turned to have a look. He saw a man coming in from the street, a passenger from the newly arrived cab.

Cliff knew that face; he'd seen it in a photograph. The man from the cab was Alexis Ault! That long face with its outthrust lip and heavy forehead was unmistakable.

By this time, Hawkeye was over his surprise and was mooching up to the bar in panhandler fashion. When men with a "front" like Ault's came into cheap barrooms, they were always bothered by barflies, so Hawkeye was playing that role in order to stay close to Ault and learn if possible why he'd made this slumming trip.

Seeing that Hawkeye was doing all right, Cliff slid into the back room to phone Burbank, hoping that he'd reach the contact man about the same time The Shadow's call would be coming through. So Cliff missed what happened at the bar.

Hawkeye started by trying to bum the bartender for a drink. He knew it wouldn't work, but that would

be an excuse to transfer his appeal to an affluent customer like Ault.

"Listen, you!" snapped the bartender. "Haven't I been bothered enough tonight with that guy Larkin Sparr crying all over my shoulder? Get going!"

Ault propped an elbow on the bar. He shoved out his other hand and pressed Hawkeye away in emphatic style. Paying no attention to Hawkeye's plea for a drink, Ault questioned the bartender:

"Did you say Larkin Sparr?"

"What if I did?" retorted the bartender. "What's it to you?" He stopped and began to fumble with a beer glass, for by that time the thrust of Ault's lip, the cold gaze of dominating eyes, were registering their effect. "I mean" —the bartender fidgeted more— "well, I mean, why would you like to know, sir?"

"I asked the question," reminded Ault importantly. "You can answer it, and then mix me a brandy with soda. As for this pest"—he sidled a glare at Hawkeye —"soothe it with its usual panacea of wood alcohol or whatever poison it absorbs, and instruct it not to annoy me further."

The bartender mixed the brandy and soda, then poured Hawkeye a shot of bar rye. But he still hedged at repeating Sparr's name, so Hargood took over. Nudging one hand toward the barkeeper, using his other to shove back his derby, Hargood informed:

"He said Larkin Sparr. I heard him!"

Ault turned his gaze on Hargood. He apparently mistook Hargood for a regular habitue of Lugger Pete's, for he inquired:

"Does Sparr come here often?"

"Only occasionally," hazarded Hargood. "I'm slightly acquainted with the fellow -"

"Slightly' is probably too much," interposed Ault. He paused to try his drink. "If you see him, you can tell him why he didn't get the steward's berth for which he applied."

"You mean you're a steamship man?" inquired Hargood, who had never met Ault. "And that Sparr asked you for a job?"

"You form conclusions rapidly, my friend," rejoined Ault. His lip curved to form a half smile. "And accurately. Tell Sparr that his penmanship was poor; so poor, that we couldn't hire him."

Hargood's broad face was really puzzled this time. With a short laugh, Ault produced an application blank which was typed with Sparr's name, address and other information. Below were typed references which bore signatures of former employers.

"I mean these," Ault indicated the signatures. "As a forger, Sparr is not even an apprentice. We communicated with the persons whose names appear there. Sparr never even worked for them. You might also tell him that if he tries such tricks again, the police will be given this evidence."

AULT finished his brandy, tossed a dollar bill on the bar and strode out. His cab pulled promptly away.

Fred Hargood wasn't thinking of Alexis Ault, whose name he didn't yet know; nor even of Larkin Sparr in terms of the latter's name. Just one thing was ranging through the detective's mind: the address that he had read on the application blank.

Paying for his beer, Hargood left the place. Hawkeye sidled to the back room and found Cliff hanging up

the phone. Quickly, Hawkeye informed Cliff how Ault had dropped the information that Hargood wanted practically in Fred's lap. Data that Hawkeye hadn't been able to spot because Ault's shoulder was too big to look across.

The phone rang as Cliff was reaching for it. Burbank was on the wire; he'd heard from The Shadow, right after Cliff's call. Sparr had left another joint and was apparently starting home. The Shadow was trailing him and would contact the agents later.

When Cliff relayed Hawkeye's information, such as it was, Burbank simply replied methodically:

"Report received."

One trail at least was coming to a close, that of Larkin Sparr. But again the rule of clue for clue was in operation, this time the exchange having passed between such total strangers as Alexis Ault and Fred Hargood.

Strange facts were to be unraveled by The Shadow, but not until he delved much further in this business where everyone involved was exchanging clue for clue!

CHAPTER VIII. ROAD TO DEATH

LARKIN SPARR poked his pointed nose from an alleyway as though sniffing for danger. His eyes darted along the quiet street; then, with a gait as ratlike as his inspection, Larkin came from his hole and moved along the sidewalk close to the house fronts.

In darkness, The Shadow waited. This wasn't the first time that Larkin had used such tactics since leaving the water front. This trail had brought The Shadow to the fringes of Greenwich Village, a neighborhood of old but sedate houses that had been transformed into apartments.

The Shadow was giving Larkin leeway. As a man without a proper alibi for murder, Larkin Sparr, whether innocent or guilty, could not afford a meeting with any accuser who might have learned of Larkin's former connection with Rupe Bonsal.

So The Shadow waited, to allow Larkin a half-block lead, which was quite easy to calculate. This time, however, the calculation didn't work.

Instead of rambling half a block or more, Larkin turned suddenly and slid into the lighted doorway of the fifth house past the alley where he had left The Shadow. Coming out from darkness a dozen seconds later, The Shadow looked in vain for traces of the cunning sneak.

So The Shadow correctly surmised that he'd cut into one of the houses on this side of the street. In that case, Larkin would probably reappear in the back street, engaged in the process of reversing his trail.

So The Shadow reversed his own. He went right back through the alley to take observations from the other end. As yet, it hadn't occurred to The Shadow that Larkin might actually be living in one of these rather respectable apartment houses!

The man who already knew that fact was Fred Hargood. He was watching from a doorway across the street and he saw the house that Larkin entered, observing the act as well. Which didn't prove great talent on Fred's part, since he'd simply come to the address given on the application blank that Ault had shown him.

Where Fred did show talent, unwittingly, was in remaining in the doorway; but that was simply because he happened to be slow minded. At any rate, when Fred came out from hiding, The Shadow had left, so

Investigator Hargood wasn't spotted by his cloaked rival; not yet. That was to happen a little later.

Going to a corner drugstore, Hargood entered a phone booth by the window and called Owen's apartment. It was Rowell who answered, and the secretary said that Mr. Owen was busy appraising diamonds and couldn't be disturbed.

Hargood argued so hotly, that Rowell finally said he'd tell Owen that the private dick had called. If Owen cared to talk to Fred, he'd call him back. Hargood gave the number of the pay phone and stayed in the booth, confident that he'd receive a return call.

It came in about three minutes. Owen was on the phone himself, demanding to know why Hargood had disturbed him.

So anxious was Hargood to spring the good news, that he didn't notice a slight dimming of the booth. It happened when a mass of moving blackness clouded the window right at Fred's shoulder. Eyes were watching from that blackness—the eyes of The Shadow. They watched the motion of Fred's lips and picked up their words as perfectly as if The Shadow had heard them.

Rounding the block after Larkin failed to reappear, The Shadow had spotted Fred instead, and was learning everything the detective had to tell.

Hargood was stating that he'd learned Larkin Sparr's address and that the wanted man had gone up to his apartment, which was number 3B. Fred wanted to know what he should do next, and when Owen told him, the dick repeated it.

"Wait here for you." Fred nodded to himself. "All right, Mr. Owen. I guess Sparr will stay put that long... A half hour, yes. It will take you that long to get down here from your apartment... Don't worry about Sparr getting tough. I've got a gun..."

There came a pause while Hargood shoved back his derby and rubbed his red-lined forehead. Evidently Owen didn't approve of Fred using a gun. Each time that Hargood started to blurt an interruption, Owen's voice stopped him. At last, Hargood listened to reason.

"All right, Mr. Owen," he affirmed. "I'll call Inspector Cardona and tell him I've got a hot tip... Yeah, I'll just say it has to do with the Branford case. That ought to bring him here... Trouble was, I didn't want Joe to gum things up; but I guess he won't, the way you figure it..."

"If Sparr has the portmanteau, our job is done. If he hasn't got it, we don't have to mention what we think is in it... We're just trying to help get Branford's murderer. Yes, that makes sense... All right, Mr. Owen. If Cardona gets here first, I'll have him wait until you show up..."

Hanging up, Hargood fished in his pocket for a nickel to make his next call. By then, the booth was brighter. Having learned what he needed, The Shadow was leaving to make the most of the next half hour. The interim promised The Shadow an ample opportunity to deal with Larkin Sparr.

THERE wasn't any trouble finding Larkin's apartment. Hargood had named the house number to Owen, and 3B was obviously on the third floor. However, The Shadow simplified matters by going around by the back street to see if the house had an exit there.

It had and the door was unlatched, though Larkin probably hadn't known it; otherwise, he could have used this door instead.

Before entering, The Shadow noticed dim lights in a third-floor window near the rear corner of the house. Not only did they indicate Larkin's apartment; the lights showed something else: a short roof projecting

from the second floor.

Up a gloomy stairway to the second floor, The Shadow found a hallway window that suited him. Emerging from it, he stretched upward, clutched the projection, and swung himself to the blackness of the roof just below Larkin's window, which was slightly open. Lifting his head, The Shadow peered through the window space. Again, The Shadow saw—and this time, he heard!

What The Shadow saw was a presentable living room furnished in the style of a ship's smoking room, even to a small bar in the corner. Evidently Larkin had assembled it piece by piece, with things he'd stolen and brought ashore after his cruises as a steward. There were other odds and ends which looked like minor loot from homes where Larkin had worked under his various aliases.

In the midst of this was Larkin Sparr himself, and though his attire was shabby, it didn't mean that he was broke. In fact, there were some good clothes hanging on a chair, proof that Larkin played the bum only when he visited waterfront hangouts. Another sign of Larkin's affluence was a telephone.

Larkin was just hanging up when The Shadow spied him. Lifting the receiver again, the fellow dialed a number and received a busy signal. So he dropped the receiver on its hook and sat down in a lounge chair, turning to a table beside him. In sitting down, Larkin revealed what was on the table, even before he turned to it.

The object that The Shadow saw there, the thing over which Larkin gloated briefly, then looked worried, was the missing portmanteau that belonged to Wadden van Zuyder!

Nervously, Larkin drew an envelope from his pocket and crumpled it. From its sound, the envelope was packed with cash. Instead of opening it to count the money, Larkin remembered the telephone and dialed again. This time, The Shadow checked the number, including a few figures that he'd missed before. It was the same number, one that The Shadow was sure he'd recognized: Mart Ingle's private number, that of the office phone in the Chez Caprice.

This time, Larkin got results. A few moments later he was speaking in a hoarse, cautious tone:

"Hello, Mart. This is Larkin... Yeah, Larkin Sparr. It's about Rupe Bonsal... Yeah, I've got the thing he went after... Listen, Mart, don't bother me with questions. The main job is for me to get the thing to you, because that's what Rupe wanted...

"Sure, I know it's hot, but that's all the more reason. You squared yourself with the bulls, didn't you?... Well, I haven't yet, because they ain't been around... Yeah, when they show up, they'll want to hear my alibi, and I've still got to build one...

"You're right, it would be tough if they found this portmanteau thing on me... Sure, my best bet is to lam, but I'm not lugging it along... Listen, Mart, there's a one-arm lunchroom down the street. I'll give you the phone number. Put it down, then I'll tell you why..."

Larkin gave the number, and after Mart repeated it, Larkin proceeded further.

"Hop out somewhere," suggested Larkin, "and call that number. Ask for Jerry... Yeah. Jerry. He's a hackie who owns his own cab and parks it outside the lunch joint. Lots of people use Jerry's cab, because he makes rates. Tell him where you want him to come... The thing will be in the cab. Get it?"

Evidently Mart "got it," for Larkin ended the call. Rummaging about, Larkin looked for paper in which to wrap the portmanteau, but he couldn't find any that was large enough.

A sudden gleam came to his pointed face as he remembered a trash box on the ground floor, which The

Shadow had also noted. It contained some large wrapping paper that Larkin could use, so the fellow sneaked from the apartment, carrying the portmanteau with him.

COMING through the window, The Shadow picked up Larkin's telephone and called Burbank. He ordered the contact man to summon Moe's cab from the Chez Caprice, a trip that wouldn't take more than ten minutes. Mart would certainly require that much time to get somewhere from the Chez Caprice, some place from which he could summon Jerry's cab without giving a lead to himself.

From the apartment, The Shadow descended to the second floor. There he saw a convenient front window that offered an excellent observation post. Watching from its darkness, he saw Larkin sneak from the front door and along the street toward the lunchroom where Jerry's cab was parked. Under his arm, Larkin had a wrapped bundle containing the portmanteau.

Across the street, Fred Hargood stepped slightly from a doorway, then drew back. The Shadow noticed Fred, thanks to the higher angle of the second-floor window, but Larkin didn't. Keeping along the street, Larkin was thus under double surveillance.

When Larkin opened the door of Jerry's cab from the side street and thrust his bundle in the rear seat, Hargood shifted from his doorway, then fell back when he saw that Larkin was returning to the apartment house.

The Shadow's laugh phrased an undertone, proving that he'd foreseen Fred's reaction. The dick thought that Larkin was going back for something else, probably a suitcase; therefore, the bundle in the cab could wait.

It had taken Larkin five minutes to get downstairs and wrap his package. Five more to the cab and back, for Larkin was making a door-to-door canvass along his side of the street, while he kept glancing back at the driverless cab outside the lunchroom.

As proof that ten minutes were gone, another cab nosed to a stop just around the corner: Moe's cab, here from the Chez Caprice.

Cupping a tiny flashlight in his gloved hand, The Shadow blinked signals from the window. He was ordering Moe to cruise around the block. Somewhere The Shadow would join him, to pick up the trail of the other cab when it started.

His signal given, The Shadow moved back along the hallway, and had just reached the stairs when he heard Larkin coming in the front way. Easing into darkness just behind the stairway, the cloaked observer waited for Larkin to come up and pass him, something that should happen shortly, now that Larkin had started the portmanteau along its proper road.

But there was another road that Larkin Sparr was to follow personally. One which didn't include the stairway up to his apartment. Something happened, very suddenly, down below. So suddenly, that it was all over before The Shadow could even spring to the stairs.

Larkin began it as he halted with a surprised gasp. The reply that came was the blast of a revolver, spurting from the rear door of the apartment house. The rip of the gun turned Larkin's gasp into a shriek, which cut off as though a knife had chopped it when the revolver stabbed again. The echo of that second shot was accompanied by the thud of Larkin's body.

In sending Van Zuyder's precious portmanteau along to Marty Ingle, Larkin Sparr had found his own road—to death!

CHAPTER IX. A QUESTION OF MURDER

REACHING Larkin's body, prone at the bottom step, The Shadow cleared it and took a swift whirl toward the short back hall. He'd become a living tornado that threatened to overtake the killer who hadn't waited. For the back door was just slamming as The Shadow turned—which meant that Larkin's slayer couldn't hope to outdistance his black-cloaked pursuer, even though the fugitive had made an immediate start.

What the killer needed was an ally, rather than an alley. He obtained one at this critical juncture.

A loud voice hoarsed for The Shadow to stay where he was. It came from the front door and The Shadow spun in that direction. On the threshold was Fred Hargood, his revolver drawn for business.

His own gun drawn, The Shadow made a gesture Fred's way, intending to discourage him. But, totally disregarding The Shadow's automatic, Hargood lunged forward, his revolver ahead of him. The Shadow delivered a shot that was a masterpiece in aim, for it whistled past Hargood's right ear.

But the dick must have been hard of hearing, for the bullet's whine didn't deter him. Still lunging, Fred fired in his own turn, banging away at blackness.

The Shadow didn't happen to be there. His gun stab had blinded Fred somewhat, and The Shadow had dropped with the recoil, finishing his momentary retreat with a lunge of his own. He was below the path of Hargood's fire, and short of it, when he came up to meet Fred with a gun swipe that reeled the burly man backward.

By then, the cloaked fighter was wheeling out through the back door, but with very little to spare, considering Hargood's quick recuperation. Indeed, The Shadow could have used an ally at that moment.

And he gained one.

A stocky man swooped in through the front hall. He had a revolver in his own hand, and he slapped the weapon in Hargood's gun fist just as Fred fired. Knocked high, Hargood's gun blasted toward the ceiling instead of the door that was slamming shut behind The Shadow.

Before Hargood could do anything more about it, he was gripped by Joe Cardona, who had given The Shadow that timely aid.

Out back, a glare of brilliant lights flooded the rear street. Moe's cab provided them, for he'd come this way when he heard the gunfire. If a murderer had still been handy, Moe would have spotted him for The Shadow. But the street showed blank under the brilliance, which meant that the killer had found an alley this time. There was one available at an angle across the street.

A one-way alley. A passage where the killer could be bottled, if The Shadow could reach the other end ahead of him. For there were others coming to the chase: Cardona and Hargood. The Shadow knew that he could rely upon Joe to explain things properly to Fred. Hence, instead of negotiating the alley himself, The Shadow sprang into Moe's cab and ordered a rapid trip around the next block.

Even counting the seconds that The Shadow had lost, and the longer trip that Moe would have to make, there were excellent chances of finding the murderer at the other side and boxing him right back into the alley, which would then become a trap instead of a refuge.

The Shadow was promising himself a quick settlement of the mystery surrounding the death of Larkin Sparr. A solution seemed just ahead, when Moe's cab was about to turn the second corner of the block.

And then, instead of swerving, Moe gunned the cab. It leaped beyond the crossing as though its wheels had transformed themselves to legs. Something jolted the rear of the cab and turned its hop into a spin that carried it across a curb clear to a house wall.

Moe was dizzy from that whirl, but the cab actually seemed to revolve around The Shadow, who rotated in the opposite direction the moment the spin began. A cab door slapped open and the cloaked fighter dropped to shelter, to aim back at the big car that was responsible for the trouble.

It hadn't come from the direction of Sparr's house, that oversized sedan. It had barged in from another street, hoping to smash Moe's cab, unless the crash could be called an accident. No chance of the murderer being in that car, though it could be on its way to pick him up. But the men it contained were murderous. They jutted revolvers from partly opened rear windows and let go at The Shadow's cab.

THEY received a mocking laugh in reply. The Shadow was out of the cab, away from the blazing guns. Moe was reasonably safe below the level of the wheel, since the shots were directed at the back of the cab. But Moe couldn't stand too much gaff, hence The Shadow wanted to divert the fire—and did, taking to darkness, moving about as he loosed a barrage of fire, his laugh interspersing the gunfire.

Immediately, the sedan did a peculiar thing. It took to flight, but not along the street where it was headed: the spot where it could pick up Sparr's killer. Instead, the sedan was going the other way.

It had to back in order to turn around, a most cumbersome process, though the driver managed it swiftly. This brought the right side of the big car toward The Shadow.

In the moment of pause during the change from reverse to forward gear, The Shadow was looking right through the window at the face of the man beside the driver.

The Shadow saw the face of Alexis Ault.

Framed like the picture that Mann carried, Ault's face was a perfect replica of the photograph, but not for long. His eyes widened, showing their whites, as Ault glared through the thick sedan window at The Shadow. Gun for gun they faced each other; but it was Ault who fired first.

A useless shot, in one sense, for it couldn't pierce that bulletproof glass of the sedan. But it accomplished what Ault wanted, for it bashed the pane and spread a blotting sunburst that wiped Ault's visage from The Shadow's sight.

Ault snapped an order to the driver. The sedan whipped away, The Shadow dropping back as it zoomed past him. It was just as well to let Ault think he'd escaped recognition. As for trailing him, that could be better done in Moe's cab than by hanging to Ault's car—should The Shadow choose to follow.

But that didn't happen to be The Shadow's choice, for by the time he reached Moe's cab, he decided he had a chance to perform another mission. The Shadow hadn't forgotten the cab outside the lunchroom, the one that contained the much-sought portmanteau.

At that moment, The Shadow wasn't the only person thinking in terms of Jerry's cab. Cardona and Hargood were in the alley in back of Larkin's place. Failing to find a murderer there, Joe was all for cutting through to investigate the firing they'd heard from somewhere farther on, when Fred grabbed his arm.

"There's a taxi back by a lunchroom!" exclaimed Hargood. "Sparr stuck something in it; maybe it's what the killer was after! We've got to stop that cab!"

They were dashing back to do it when Moe's cab started for the lunchroom, carrying The Shadow as a

passenger. En route, The Shadow was looking for the missing murderer, but saw no sign of him, which wasn't surprising, since there had been plenty of time for him to get away.

The portmanteau still ranked first in importance. But when Moe swung the final corner, The Shadow saw the same thing that Cardona and Hargood viewed when they dashed through the apartment house and out the front door.

That thing was space in front of the lunchroom. Jerry's cab had come and he was gone.

The Shadow ordered Moe to scout around looking for the trail. It still might be found, for Moe had an intuition at guessing right directions in a hurry. But within the next five blocks, the hunt was off, for Moe's imagination wasn't good enough to pump a tire that was going flat. He'd smacked a too-high curb too hard, back at the time of the mix-up with Ault's sedan.

Moe heard a whispered laugh as the cab jolted to a halt. It wasn't a token of past disappointment; rather, it was an answer to a future challenge, that mirth voiced by The Shadow. Moe's black-cloaked passenger held no regrets for the death of Larkin Sparr, a suspected murderer and a proven rat.

Rather, The Shadow seemed pleased that someone more important than the go-between had gone to the limit of committing murder. Clue for clue, The Shadow would track down that killer and in the process obtain more facts regarding hidden crime!

CHAPTER X. THREE MEN MISSING

WHILE things were popping fast on the fringes of Greenwich Village, matters hadn't been too slow at the Chez Caprice. True, the surface there seemed very calm and there wasn't any display of heavy violence, but the tension was plentiful.

It began when a waiter approached the table that Harry Vincent occupied nightly. Politely, the waiter told Harry that his cab couldn't wait any longer. Inasmuch as there was no cab waiting for Harry, the message simply meant that Moe had been summoned elsewhere, which signified in turn that The Shadow was on the move. That meant that Harry should contact Burbank.

So Harry went to a booth and phoned Burbank, who outlined the Village situation and suggested, very methodically, that Harry should learn, by hook, crook or both, just what Mart Ingle happened to be doing. Looking toward the office door, Harry saw a waiter enter, which proved that the office was unlocked.

Sauntering from the booth, Harry started toward the office, but changed direction when the waiter reappeared. A detour past the table seemed a good idea, so Harry made it, to find Margo there.

It was rather surprising to see Margo Lane alone, considering how Don Boyette had been around so much. In fact, the last time Harry had noticed Margo she was dancing with the sleek gentleman in question. Right now, Margo looked quite piqued and gestured the fact to Harry, who promptly sat down at the table.

"You'll have to finish the dance with me," pleaded Margo. "I'm in a jam, Harry. Don walked out on me."

Margo explained further. She'd finished one dance with Don and was just about to begin the next, when a waiter approached the bar, where they had stopped. At which Harry nodded, for he'd noticed that much earlier and knew that Don was running true to form when he took a drink between dances.

"It was something about a check," continued Margo. "One that Don had given Mart. It must have

bounced, because Mart wanted to see Don in the office. Don said he'd attend to it and be right back, but he didn't return. So I was parked at the bar, all alone, with Mademoiselle Colquitt giving me the laughing eye while she shook those potato mashers she thinks are gourds!"

Harry was thinking about more important things. Don's trip to the office reminded him that he ought to make one himself.

"I'll look in on Mart," Harry told Margo. "Wait here. I'll be right back."

"That's what Don said," retorted Margo. "I don't fancy having Lana Colquitt laugh twice in the same place. You're going to finish this dance -"

Right then, the dance finished itself. Rising from the table, Harry gave Margo a smile and gestured toward the orchestra platform, where the musicians were relaxing and occupying Lana's attention. It was the right moment for Harry to slide away unnoticed, while Margo was still staring at the devastating blonde who was billed as a Continental crooner.

HARRY'S thoughts bundled themselves into sense when he reached the door of Mart's office. The door occupied a niche beyond a pillar, just the sort of spot where one could pause and remain very much unnoticed. Appreciating the lull, Harry wondered about Don Boyette.

The first guess was that Mart Ingle had summoned Don Boyette after hearing from Larkin Sparr. That would indicate that Mart was using Don in his business, even to the point of having him go out, and call Jerry's cab. But the first guess wasn't sure. It had things against it.

For one, Mart had summoned Don prior to the last dance, which must have been before the all-important phone call. Again, Don had a habit of bouncing rubber checks at people, which made Mart's summons more a reason than an excuse.

Nor could Harry picture Mart assigning anyone—most especially, Don—the very confidential task of picking up a present like Van Zuyder's portmanteau, which had been relayed from Rupe Bonsal, a known crook, through a very dubious character like Larkin Sparr.

All of which gave Harry the idea that Don had done exactly what Harry himself was doing. That was to pause outside Mart's office and wonder about risking a peek through the door. Don wasn't the sort of chap who wondered very long or often. Assuming that Mart had dismissed him abruptly upon receiving Larkin's call, Don's curiosity would certainly have been aroused.

With good reason, too. When somebody passed a bad check and had to make good on it, he'd naturally like to secure himself against the future. What better way could Don have found than to listen in on Mart's phone call and learn why it was so important?

Harry smiled at his own question. This was really carrying it too far. If Mart hadn't sent Don to get the portmanteau, Mart would have had to go himself. And Mart couldn't have gone, because he was still in the office.

Harry tried Mart's door, opened it a few inches. Next thing the door was fully open and Harry was across the threshold, slowly closing it behind him.

Mart Ingle wasn't in the place!

This was a bigger dividend than Harry expected. It carried proof that Mart Ingle wasn't using Don Boyette, for the simple reason that Mart didn't require Don's services. If Mart could go in and out of this office unnoticed, he could handle his own errands, especially important ones like picking up a

portmanteau that was worth a million dollars.

As far as Don was concerned, Harry's theory still held. Don might have stayed outside the door and overheard Mart's chat with Larkin. But at present, Harry was thinking in terms of Mart Ingle. Granted that Mart had sneaked out, how had he managed it?

This room was solid walled, without any of the ornamental panels that smacked of secret exits. Harry eyed the huge desk and wondered what was underneath it. He stepped over to the vault, tried its door, but found it locked. The vault was large enough for a person to use as a door; it might be the answer.

Turning about, Harry drew back suddenly as he glimpsed a figure stepping toward him. The figure dodged as Harry did and put its hand quickly to a pocket in Harry's own style, but left-handed. It ended with a laugh when Harry saw that he'd merely met his own reflection in the huge mirror that occupied the next corner to the locked vault.

Harry was looking at the reflection of the office door in the mirror, when its knob turned and the door itself swung inward. Instinctively, Harry made for hiding. The door being in one front corner of the office, Harry naturally went for the other, and the thick-rugged floor didn't betray his footfalls.

That corner had a washstand, slightly obscured by a partly opened screen. It wasn't a hiding place as it now stood, but it did offer reasonable shelter if whoever was coming into the office should fail to look too closely at that corner. And the man who entered didn't look that way at all.

THE arrival was just another of the waiters. He was carrying a dinner check that some guest had signed, and he approached Mart's desk methodically. Stopping there, the waiter spoke in a rather loud tone:

"I'd like you to O.K. this, Mr. Ingle."

Since Mart wasn't there to give the O.K., the waiter calmly plucked a pen from its writing stand and green-inked the initials "M. L." on the dinner check. Turning about, he walked to the door, which Harry then noticed was ajar.

When the waiter closed the door behind him, Harry realized that the spoken farce must have been for the benefit of someone waiting outside the office.

Feeling more confident, Harry began to rummage about Mart's office; but without much result. Only one desk drawer was unlocked, and the keys that lay in it didn't fit any of the others. After about ten minutes, the phone bell began to ring, and Harry made for the front corner again, opening the screen a trifle when he arrived there.

A waiter entered, answered the telephone and purred that Mr. Ingle was on the floor watching a new act, but would be glad to call back later. Evidently the call wasn't important enough, for the waiter simply planted the phone on its stand and departed without jotting down a number.

All that Harry could now gain by remaining would be to witness Mart's return, which wasn't good policy, considering that Mart was the one person who might be looking for lurkers. Furthermore, a lot of time had passed.

Harry calculated it roughly in three ten-minute periods: first, the preliminaries before he entered the office; next, the time through the episode of the dinner check; finally, his rummaging through the office. Which added to about a half hour since Moe's cab had left the Chez Caprice.

Harry slipped out of the office. Before he could reach Margo's table, Don Boyette appeared there from the direction of the street door. Back again and bland as ever, Don bowed an invitation to the dance,

which Margo accepted.

Having accounted for one missing man, Harry followed his original plan of checking on the other. Heading to a far corner of the night club, he reached a rear exit past the dressing rooms.

Harry's trip didn't pass unnoticed. From the vantage of the orchestra platform, Lana Colquitt observed Harry's start toward Margo's table and the change of course that followed. If the smile that Lana gave was Continental, it spoke a universal language. It told that an exotic blonde had designs on an eligible young man answering the description of Harry Vincent.

Out back, Harry posted himself where he could watch, not only the rear of the Chez Caprice but a range of half a block beyond. He was watching for traces of Mart Ingle, still missing after the return of Don Boyette. It didn't occur to Harry Vincent that there was a third man missing from the Chez Caprice: himself.

That point was lost on Harry because of his intensity to learn new facts for his chief, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. CRIME DENIED

THE SHADOW, at that moment, was learning some facts his own way. Coincidence played a great part in The Shadow's operations; or rather, it seemed to do so. For coincidence, when it occurred, was often of The Shadow's own design.

It was just a freak of chance that Commissioner Weston, at the Cobalt Club, should have received a casual phone call from his friend Lamont Cranston at the very moment when Weston was starting somewhere in answer to an urgent call from Inspector Joe Cardona.

Inasmuch as the call concerned the Branford case, Weston was very glad to hear from Cranston and therefore told his friend where to meet him.

As a result, Cranston reached a corner drugstore on the outskirts of Greenwich Village just as the commissioner's official car arrived there. They'd just exchanged greetings when a patrolman approached and informed Weston that he'd find Inspector Cardona at an apartment house midway in the block.

Hardly had Weston and Cranston started in that direction, before a cab pulled up to emit a fuming man who flung a dollar bill at the driver, along with some imprecations. The irate man was Glenn Owen.

"Finding places in this neighborhood isn't difficult," snapped Owen to the driver. "The trouble is finding a cabby who knows how to look for them! You're only the third I tried after I reached the Village, and most of that sixty cents on your meter represents circles around the same blocks!"

"No, keep the change." Owen pushed away the cabby's hand.

"Spend the money on a Manhattan street map. Better see if you can buy one in this drugstore, so you can find your way out of this section, though it can't be more than three blocks in a straight line!"

Thus dismissing the cab, Owen turned to the men he had noticed on the curb. His anger was gone and an eager expression was forming on his blunt face, only to change to a look of genuine surprise when he saw Weston and Cranston.

"Why... hello, commissioner!" exclaimed Owen. "I expected to find Inspector Cardona. And Cranston"—Owen's perplexity was greater—"you're not the other man I was to meet. I thought -"

"You thought you'd find Fred Hargood," interposed Cranston, as Owen hesitated. "I think Commissioner

Weston understands. If he doesn't, you can explain later."

"Or Larkin Sparr can," asserted Owen, "after he's been arrested for Branford's murder. Unless"—Owen's eyes became anxious—"unless Sparr managed to slip from Hargood before Cardona arrived here."

"He didn't," returned Weston briefly. "Come along, Owen, and we'll show you why."

THEY found Sparr's body pitifully sprawled at the spot where a murderer had felled him. Owen stared narrowly at Hargood, as though wavering between anger and accusation. He put his thoughts into words when he blurted:

"I told you not to use a gun, Hargood! Whether you did this accidentally or purposely, justifiably or otherwise, you have ruined our whole cause!"

"Fred didn't shoot Larkin," put in Cardona. "He was coming across the street when the shots were fired, because I saw him. The murderer was lurking at the back door. He got out before we could even see him."

It was Cardona now who was staring steadily at Hargood, but for a reason of his own. Joe didn't want Fred to complicate things by mentioning The Shadow. Hargood kept silent as a matter of policy, for Cardona had convinced him that The Shadow couldn't be the murderer, and Hargood didn't want to admit his own blunder in stopping the cloaked fighter's pursuit of the actual killer.

The silence didn't last long, because Owen broke it.

"When did it happen?" Owen asked Hargood. "How long after I talked to you from the apartment?"

"About ten minutes," replied Hargood, "or maybe a little more. You must have been just about halfway down here when it happened, Mr. Owen."

Cardona corroborated the time element, basing it on Hargood's call to headquarters, which Fred said he'd made immediately after his telephone chat with Owen, at the latter's advice. But those were details that Owen felt could wait.

"What have you been doing since?" he demanded. "Did you look in Sparr's apartment?"

Both Cardona and Hargood nodded glumly.

"But you didn't find the portmanteau!" exclaimed Owen. "Then the murderer must have taken it!"

"He could have," conceded Hargood, "if he grabbed the cab down by the lunchroom—the one where I saw Larkin plant a package that looked a lot like the portmanteau."

Out of bewilderment, Owen showed a new flare of anger, and this time he wasn't alone. While Owen was pitching into Hargood, Weston hurled criticism at Cardona. It took a lot of explaining from both Fred and Joe, though the former had the hardest task.

Hargood had to admit that he could have grabbed Sparr, portmanteau and all, when the fellow sneaked to the cab. But he could give good reasons why he hadn't. Sparr's return from the cab had rated a further wait, especially since Hargood was expecting Cardona. Furthermore— Hargood added this as an afterthought—Sparr's package might have been a dummy intended to coax somebody like Fred into showing undue interest.

Cardona sided with Hargood and commended the private detective for having marked Sparr as a go-between in the partnership of Rupe Bonsal and Mart Ingle. At that, Weston wheeled on Owen, demanding to know why he hadn't been informed that Hargood was working on the Branford case. Owen looked helplessly to Cranston, who intervened in his behalf.

"Owen asked my advice," stated Cranston calmly, "and I told him that you dealt in facts, commissioner, rather than theories. Since Inspector Cardona was busy tracing known friends of Rupe Bonsal and Mart Ingle, he could hardly have wasted time on a speculative character like Larkin Sparr.

"At any rate"—Cranston gave an approving gesture—"Owen ordered Hargood to notify Cardona immediately after locating Sparr."

Cranston's acceptance of the blame rather mollified Weston. Seeing that the commissioner was no longer critical, Cardona, picked up where Cranston left off. This was Joe's chance to really play a hunch—and better.

"Mart Ingle thinks he has outsmarted us," declared Cardona. "He doesn't know we've tagged Sparr as the go-between. Mart thought the heat was off, so he told Sparr to send along the portmanteau. To clinch it, Mart came here and bumped off Sparr. Suppose we hop over to the Chez Caprice before Mart gets his wind back."

It didn't behoove Cranston to state what he had learned as The Shadow— that, Sparr had contacted Mart, instead of the other way about. Still, that didn't alter Mart's reason for murder. Either way, the trip to Mart's night club was in order, so Cranston accepted Weston's invitation to come along.

AT the back of the Chez Caprice, Harry Vincent saw a quick-moving figure coming along the street. He placed the man as Mart Ingle, but noted that he was empty-handed.

Just as Harry assured himself of Mart's identity, the cagy night-club owner dropped from sight a few doors before he reached the back of the Chez Caprice.

It was something very sudden. One moment Mart was there, the next he was gone. Literally, the sidewalk seemed to have swallowed him. About to start for a closer look, Harry dropped back to his alley as a big car jogged from across the street and swept rapidly by.

It was an oversized sedan, with all its windows down, and at the door on the front right, Harry was sure he saw the face of Alexis Ault!

What produced that impression was the way the long face thrust from the car window, like a loose portrait toppling forward from a frame. The bulging forehead was the feature that identified Ault, just as wavy hair had marked Mart. But the image was promptly blurred by a sweep of Ault's arm, his face disappearing back into the car as though his passing sleeve and widespread hand were wiping it from sight.

Harry turned and retraced his route through the short alley, up steps to the doorway that marked the rear exit of the Chez Caprice. He was debating matters when he passed the dressing rooms; eager also to have a look into the night club, hence he didn't notice the star-marked door that was ajar when he passed it.

The door opened and from it stepped Lana Colquitt, wearing the same evening dress that she had sported on the platform. Her work was over for the present, because the regular floor show had started.

Following Harry, Lana overtook him as he paused by a table near a corner of the dance floor. Beyond a

troupe of acrobats, Harry was watching Mart Ingle come from the door of his office, when a soft voice crooned in monotone:

"Good evening, Mr. Vincent."

Harry turned to meet Lana's very naive smile. It wouldn't do for Harry to say he was looking for Mart, because in that case Harry should have gone to the office. So he took the smart way out, which happened to be the most pleasant system. He bowed Lana to the table, sat down beside her, and summoned the nearest waiter.

"I'd hoped to meet you, Miss Colquitt," said Harry, not without a dash of truth. "I mentioned it to Mr. Ingle and he promised to introduce us. But you know Mart -"

"Yes, I know Mart," interposed Lana. "He's so forgetful, especially when I am—do you say intent?—yes, intent upon meeting anyone."

That opened Harry's eyes. "You mean you told Mart that you wanted to meet me?"

"Ah, yes!" Lana's smile became quite soulful. "I asked him your name only last night, and he told me. And to myself, I thought you were too bashful to introduce yourself. But since I knew your name. I told myself that I could make the introduction if Mart would not. And so -"

"I must have caught the general idea," interposed Harry with a nod. "You see, I'd come to the conclusion that I didn't need to leave it to Mart. But now we've finally gotten together, I think Mart ought to know. Wait here, and I'll invite him over."

Rising, Harry saw Mart Ingle actually watching the floor show, something he had been supposed to be doing earlier, according to the waiter, who had lied over the telephone. Just what he could learn from Mart, Harry didn't know; but it seemed worth a try. At least, Harry might gain some clue to Mart's empty-handed return.

A moment later, Harry was back at the table again, smiling at Lana as though he'd decided that Mart's presence would be superfluous. The blonde's lips traced a Mona Lisa pattern, showing that she saw the real reason for Harry's change of mood.

Mart Ingle was no longer disengaged; he was receiving visitors. Foremost was Inspector Cardona, jogging Mart's arm. In the background were Commissioner Weston, Fred Hargood, Glenn Owen—and Lamont Cranston.

It struck Harry that Mart was in for heavier accusation than possession of the Van Zuyder portmanteau, which, for some reason, Mart hadn't brought back with him. But whatever the charge, crime would be denied by Mart Ingle, alibi artist extraordinary.

And Harry Vincent, who could testify to Mart's mysterious absence, would have to wait to tell his story to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. THE CLUES GATHER

ONCE In Ingle's office, Commissioner Weston came right to the point. He named Larkin Sparr as a go-between employed by Rupe Bonsal and Mart Ingle. When Mart took that statement with a dubious frown, Weston announced the facts of Sparr's murder.

Surprise showed on Mart's face, but it wasn't tinged with grief. He still denied acquaintance with Sparr, but remarked that according to descriptions of the fellow, his death wasn't a great loss. Rising, Mart

started to bow the visitors out, whereupon violence proclaimed itself.

Cardona, and Hargood both grabbed Mart and thrust him back into his chair, which tilted and rolled him on the floor. Mart scrambled to his feet, hot under his rumpled collar. Cooling suddenly, he showed a perfect display of suavity.

Pulling a batch of keys from his pocket, he unlocked all the desk drawers and yanked them wide, waving for his accusers to rummage through them. While that was going on, Mart stepped to the corner and opened the vault. He waved that way, suggesting that Cardona and Hargood inspect the whole interior for the portmanteau that Mart had never seen.

Next, Mart pressed a button on the desk, then stepped to the big mirror to smooth his tuxedo and stroke his wavy hair. A parade of waiters answered Mart's ring. Still facing the mirror, he called upon them to testify where he had been during the past hour.

One man stated the truth, declaring that Mart had talked business with a customer named Boyette. From then on, they lied better than troopers.

Another declared that he'd brought in a dinner check for Mart's O.K., and produced the initialed document to prove it. A third went out to bring in the patron who signed the check, recalling that he'd seen him outside Mart's office at the time.

The customer arrived, and unwittingly helped the cause by saying he was sure that Mart had been in the office, because he'd heard the waiter talking with him.

By that time, another of Mart's staff was telling how he'd answered a phone call at Mart's order, since Mart was watching the floor show at the time. Nor did the alibi crew stop there. One waiter departed and came back with a brawny chef, who solemnly swore that Mart had spent ten minutes in the kitchen supervising the planking of a steak for a very special customer. The waiter produced a dinner check to prove it, and the chef offered to bring in the plank.

Whereupon, Commissioner Weston called a final halt to the quiz and dismissed the witnesses.

"Your alibi stands, Ingle," Weston declared. "I know what you're going to say. We're always welcome. That's your usual line of talk."

"Tonight happens to be unusual." Mart finished adjusting his tie and turned from the mirror. His tone was crisp, not smooth. "On this occasion, Mr. Commissioner, I am telling you to get out—and stay out! That applies to these two"—he nudged at Cardona and Hargood—"and I'll tell you why."

"If they don't stay away, I'll have them up for assault and battery for the way they treated me a while ago. For witnesses, commissioner, I'll subpoena your friends Cranston and Owen. Any time you want to scour these premises again, get a search warrant first, and be sure you have sufficient cause for it. Otherwise, I'll throw a banquet for every columnist in town and air this whole case wide!"

OUTSIDE the Chez Caprice, Glenn Owen suggested that they all go to his apartment and review the evidence concerning Larkin Sparr.

They did, but Weston wasn't any too convinced when he saw it. Not that Rupe to Larkin to Mart wasn't the logical answer to the travels of the missing portmanteau. The job was to prove it.

"I'll prove it," declared Owen abruptly. "I'll shed the final clues, commissioner. I'm sure that Cranston will approve, even though we're working solely on theory. You can't see a murder motive behind a mere portmanteau. But if that portmanteau should contain a million dollars' worth of diamonds, it would be

worth murder and the price to cover up!"

With that, Owen produced the certified documents that gave him full claim to receive and sell Van Zuyder's uncut diamonds, with their customs payment already arranged from the Hollander's frozen funds.

When he saw those papers, Weston didn't have to be further convinced. He accepted the theory as fact, without waiting for Cardona to urge him. This time, the commissioner was out-hunching his ace inspector.

"So that's it!" exclaimed Weston. "Why, if Rupe knew what was in that portmanteau—and he must have known—he'd have gone to any limit to get it!"

"He did go the limit," put in Cardona, "by sending Larkin to murder Branford and grab the portmanteau."

"And it was to go to Mart," added Weston, "so there would be no chance of tracing it from the rest of the Van Zuyder collection, which Rupe intended to steal as a blind."

"No question that Mart knows its value," completed Cardona, "or has made a good guess at it. That's why Mart pulled that stuff about a search warrant. He's going to get that portmanteau yet and stow it in his vault, the only place he can be sure to keep it."

Nodding, Weston began to speculate further, but Cardona didn't listen. Stepping out to the hallway, Joe met Rowell and asked the secretary if there was another phone downstairs. When Rowell nodded, Joe closed the door of Owen's little office and went downstairs.

Since Weston's further speculations proved nothing but a review of things already said, Cranston inserted a few remarks. He was glancing at a newspaper, the latest copy of the Classic, when he provided his suggestion.

"Since these are Dutch diamonds," said Cranston, "we might expect some rivalry over them, commissioner."

Weston frowned; then queried: "What sort of rivalry, Cranston?"

"From persons connected with the Nazi government," returned Cranston. "They consider all property of an invaded country to be their own. The thought struck me when I noticed this story in the Classic."

Cranston passed the newspaper to Weston. The story was brief, but pointed. Written by Clyde Burke, it told how the reporter had tried to interview Alexis Ault, but hadn't been able to locate him.

"An odd chap, Ault," added Cranston. "A broker friend of mine wanted to handle some of those stocks that Ault is selling. But he couldn't seem to find Ault, either."

Staring past Weston's shoulder, Hargood gave a sudden exclamation when he saw Ault's picture, boxed in beside Burke's story.

"Say!" expressed Hargood. "He looks like the gent who gave me the lead to Sparr! I'm beginning to get it now! He wanted me to take the rap when he knocked off Sparr. That's why he sent me there!"

"You're neglecting Mart Ingle," reminded Cranston calmly. "He still could be the killer. Perhaps Ault wanted you to take the rap for Mart - to express it in your own language, Hargood."

Hargood stared at Cranston with something much like admiration. Weston saw the look and nodded

slow approval.

"You may be right, Cranston," said Weston. "Alexis Ault could have hired the team of Bonsal and Ingle to do this job. As a go-between, Larkin Sparr wouldn't have known what was at stake. All that interested him was cash. He had an envelope containing a thousand dollars in his pocket, Cardona tells me."

Glenn Owen leaned across the desk.

"You must find the portmanteau, commissioner," he pleaded. "Once the diamonds are recovered, the rest will clear. So far, it lies with Rupe Bonsal and Mart Ingle. That proven, we can be positive that Larkin Sparr murdered Talbot Branford."

"That's right," argued Hargood. "There's your case, commissioner. This guy Ault is just another angle. Of course, he might be the brain behind it, and maybe he thinks that Rupe and Mart were trying to double-cross him -"

WESTON waved his hands impatiently. He'd accepted theories far enough. When they began to pyramid, it was just too much. In brusque fashion, Weston declared that the hookup between Rupe and Mart was quite enough, and must be followed to its conclusion. He turned to emphasize that point to Cardona, only to find that Joe was gone.

Before Weston could really fume about the inspector's absence, the door popped open and Cardona made a rapid entry. He had something to say, but Weston cut him short and made Joe listen to the business of the diamonds.

Impatient though he was, Cardona absorbed those details, but when Weston showed reluctance on the question of Ault, Cardona saw his chance to interrupt.

"I just picked up a lead we'd forgotten," explained Joe. "I called that lunchroom down near Sparr's, and found the cab was back. The cabby's name is Jerry Weems, and he gave me his end of it. Somebody phoned the lunchroom and told him to come up to Thirty-fourth Street. His fare was there, all right."

Weston wanted to know what the passenger looked like and where he went. Cardona repeated what Jerry Weems had told him.

"The fellow was wearing evening clothes," said Joe. "That's about all that Jerry remembered, except that he was tall. When he paid his fare he let some change drop, and when Jerry had picked it up, the guy was gone. Whether he had a package or not, Jerry doesn't know."

"That settles it," announced Weston. "Mart Ingle! His tuxedo would answer the description of evening clothes. The Ault angle is out, for the present."

"I'm not so sure of that," returned Cardona. "I talked with the fellow who runs the lunchroom where Jerry parks his hack. It seems that somebody else kept calling for Jerry's cab after it had gone. Not once, but four times, about five minutes apart."

Weston began to twitch at the points of his military mustache. Then, brusquely, he inquired:

"Where did you say that Jerry took his passenger?"

"I didn't say," replied Cardona. "But Jerry told me. His fare dropped off near Times Square. That's about five minutes by cab to the Chez Caprice, or a ten-minute subway trip down to the part of the Village where Sparr lived."

Cardona's mention of Sparr's neighborhood was just an afterthought, but it produced a review of the time element. Cardona had reached Sparr's place in about ten minutes after he heard from Hargood. A half hour was a proper estimate for Owen's trip from this apartment.

Weston calculated the time he'd taken from the Cobalt Club and looked to Cranston for corroboration; only to remember that his friend hadn't been at the club, but had merely chanced to phone there.

Weston was remarking on the coincidence, when the telephone bell rang. When Owen answered, he handed the phone to Cranston, who talked a short while and finished with a smile.

"Margo Lane again," Cranston told Weston. "As usual, commissioner, she blames you because I didn't keep a date with her. I'm glad that Mart Ingle didn't include me among those he banned from the Chez Caprice, because that's where Miss Lane wants me to meet her."

As soon as Cranston had gone, Weston resumed his discourse on the portmanteau and its diamonds, repeating that he'd go through with the search warrant that Mart didn't expect.

Both Cardona and Owen were heartily in accord, but Hargood didn't voice an opinion. The private detective was thinking about something quite different.

He was thinking about The Shadow.

Not in terms of the black-cloaked fighter that Fred had met right after Sparr was murdered. Joe Cardona had satisfactorily explained that The Shadow, as a being in black, could be expected whenever crime was rampant. Hargood was thinking in terms of The Shadow's other self. He was wondering why Lamont Cranston had happened to phone Commissioner Weston when he did.

A funny coincidence, in Hargood's opinion. Interesting, too, that Cranston had brought up the name of Alexis Ault. Those calls to the lunchroom were likewise odd. Maybe Mart Ingle had been making them while somebody else was meeting Jerry Weems' cab. Somebody else who hadn't bothered to account for his own whereabouts at the time the Van Zuyder portmanteau disappeared.

Somebody whose name might be Lamont Cranston.

That fact struck Fred Hargood when he muttered something that the others didn't hear. What Hargood undertoned was the description that Jerry, the cab driver, had given of the passenger who had used his cab just long enough to pick up the million-dollar portmanteau that Larkin Sparr had planted.

The words that Fred Hargood had muttered were:

"A tall guy in evening clothes."

CHAPTER XIII. WANTED: A SHOWDOWN

WHEN Margo Lane called Lamont Cranston, she was really worried. What worried her was the fact that Lana Colquitt had taken full possession of Harry Vincent. So intrigued was Lana with her new boy-friend, that she'd called off crooning for the evening, all on Harry's account.

Too, Don Boyette was insisting upon taking Margo home from the Chez Caprice, something that could be avoided if Harry were free to intervene. Unable to flash an S O S to Harry, Margo had called Lamont instead. He'd simply said "Yes" when she'd asked if she should go with Don Boyette.

Margo's departure with her sleek escort didn't surprise Lana, who classed it as an orderly retreat. But it worried Harry badly, considering that he hadn't managed to communicate with either Margo or Cranston.

Looking for an out, Harry spied Mart Ingle talking to a waiter and gave him a nod. Mart came over to join Harry and Lana at their table. As Harry hoped, Mart wasn't pleased to see the blonde away from her usual pedestal, the orchestra platform.

Mart suggested that the music would be improved by a dash of song, so Lana left the table. She paused, when Mart's back was turned, to tell Harry that she'd rejoin him in about ten minutes. Harry didn't dispute the point, though he could have. In ten minutes, Harry was going to be some distance from the Chez Caprice.

Meanwhile Margo Lane was alighting from a cab at her apartment house, accompanied by Don Boyette. The cab happened to be Moe Shrevnitz's. Finished with other expeditions, he had returned to the Chez Caprice.

With Moe on call, Margo's concern was lessened; she took it for granted Shrevvy was the reason why Cranston had told her not to worry about Don.

Which was why Margo smilingly gave Don her apartment key, telling him that he could unlock the door for her. Whereupon Don, receiving the key casually with one hand, dipped his other into Margo's handbag and scooped a .22 automatic he found buried there.

Margo fumed at her idiocy while she faced the muzzle of her own gun, with Don's narrowed eyes and widened lips leering as coldly as the weapon. Don had guessed there would be a gun in Margo's handbag, and he'd made the most of it.

"Get inside," slurred Don between his teeth. He unlocked the door and let Margo feel the gun muzzle between the back straps of her evening gown. "Turn on a light... no bright ones... and then talk. I'm here for a showdown."

Margo pulled the cord of a corner floor lamp and faced Don as he stood by the door, which he left a trifle ajar. Defiantly, the girl demanded:

"A showdown... on what?"

"On the racket that you and Vincent are working," returned Don. "What are you trying to do—shake down Mart Ingle, now that you're afraid to trip Lamont Cranston? Kind of a jolt, wasn't it, when you learned that Cranston was so thick with the police commissioner? It wouldn't be safe to work a con game on him."

Margo gave Don a very vacant stare.

"Don't try to bluff it out," sneered Don. "Ever since the police called on Mart Ingle, you've been trying to cover up for Vincent. You figured I was watching him, that's why. So tonight I put it to a test. I was in Mart's office explaining how I'd accidentally overdrawn my bank account. I told him I'd go out and get some cash to make good the check I'd given him.

"I wasn't out long; not more than ten or fifteen minutes." Don's eyes fixed sharply, while he watched for Margo's reaction. "When I came back, I stopped inside the door and looked for Vincent. He should have been with you, but he wasn't. He'd gone somewhere—and I want to know why!"

The demand didn't shake Margo's defiance.

"What utter nerve!" the girl exclaimed. "A cheap crook trying to pose as an amateur detective! Is that

how you work your con games, Don? Or the way you find out where people keep their jewels?"

At the final word, Don's eyes glittered like the objects Margo mentioned.

"So that's your dodge," remarked Don. "You and Vincent go in for sparklers. It wouldn't be diamonds, would it—Dutch diamonds, that Mart is after and you're trying to pry from him?"

Don's tone was so shrewd, so crafty, that Margo knew there was guesswork behind it.

"Wadden van Zuyder shipped a portmanteau to his friend Talbot Branford," stated Don. "Branford was murdered and the portmanteau disappeared. Rupe Bonsal was mixed in the crime and he was once a partner of Mart Ingle. Now we find Glenn Owen, a diamond merchant, hiring a fellow named Fred Hargood to look for the portmanteau. All that spells one thing: diamonds. Tonight, somebody went after that portmanteau. Was it Mart Ingle—or your friend Harry Vincent?"

The final name was like an introduction. The door beside Don's shoulder was moving wider, and through the increasing space Margo could see the very man under discussion—Harry Vincent. He was pressing the door with one hand, drawing a gun with the other, while he looked to Margo for a signal in case Don noticed.

Don being none the wiser, Margo was giving a blank look that meant "all clear," when the door went an inch too far and jogged Don's right elbow.

Even as Margo gave a warning cry, Don Boyette took a forward step, yanked a stub-nosed .38 from his left hip pocket and covered Harry Vincent left-handed. All the while, Margo's little .22 was covering its owner, which resulted in Don winding up in cross-armed fashion, but in full control.

Don happened to be left-handed, though he'd used his right hand in manipulating Margo's gun. Having his better hand free, he'd gained the bulge on Harry, who had no choice but to drop his automatic and let his arms rise.

"All right, you two," spoke Don. "If you have that portmanteau, it's in this apartment. Margo did plenty of hedging about my bringing her home. Maybe it wasn't on account of the portmanteau; but if it was, I'll soon know."

He wangled the guns, indicating that Harry and Margo were to take the place apart, piece by piece.

Margo was still wondering about Lamont Cranston and why he wasn't here. Flinging back a small curtain to show that there was nothing behind it, she heard a whispered laugh just beyond the open window. That was when she realized that Lamont was here—as The Shadow.

He hadn't intervened as yet, because he wanted to see this episode through. Again the game was reaching a stage where it was clue for clue, Don Boyette having stated things he guessed—or knew.

Maybe more facts would out; hence The Shadow's waiting policy. So Margo continued in the futile search, hoping she could tip off Harry to the presence of their cloaked chief.

The search was done, leaving Margo's apartment quite a wreck. Don's arms had uncrossed during the hunt, and he still held both guns. He was standing with his back toward the door, which he'd closed except for a crack. He was eyeing Harry and Margo, both much rumped from dumping bureau drawers and dismantling other furniture.

"You don't have the portmanteau," admitted Don. "So Mart Ingle must have it somewhere. All right, Vincent, you're coming with me, to stay on ice a few days. As for you, Margo"—Don shot a warning

look across the .22—"if you blab anything about this, it's curtains for your boy friend!"

Don gestured with his own gun, meaning for Harry to start toward the door. In the middle of that beckon, Don froze.

Planted in the middle of his back was the muzzle of the automatic that Harry had discarded near the door. It was poking through the doorway, and with it came a contralto tone that matched the deepest croon of Lana Colquitt. Across Don's shoulder, Harry caught a flash of the girl's blonde hair.

"If you're taking anybody for a hostage," Lana informed Don, "you'd better choose Miss Lane. It would be a better arrangement all around, wouldn't you think? Or wouldn't you?"

"I don't think," grumbled Don. "Not while a gun is jamming my back. But if you'll give me just a moment _"

DON took the moment. A slam of his half-raised elbow against the door and Lana was sitting hard in the middle of the hall, the gun stabbing toward the ceiling as her finger jolted the trigger.

Margo expected prompt action from The Shadow, but it didn't come, because Harry was in the way. Harry, however, landed a punch on Don's chin as the latter swung around from shoving the door.

Slipping sideways, Don lost Margo's gun, but clung to his own. Yelling for Margo to grab the gun, Harry wrenched the door wide and snatched his own automatic from Lana's hand. Swinging around to take control of groggy Don, Harry moved suddenly to the shelter of the doorway as shots rang out from down the hall.

New invaders, who had Harry on the spot! Thinking he'd have to draw their fire to protect Lana, Harry was making himself a perfect target against the light from the apartment. If ever intervention was needed, it was now.

Frantically, Margo looked toward the window too late!

Yes, too late to bring The Shadow to Harry's rescue, for the simple reason that the black-cloaked fighter had already arrived. Harry was blotted out as a target because a black-clad whirlwind had reached him, to grab his shoulders with wide-reaching hands. Next, Harry was spinning across the room, while The Shadow's laugh rang out its challenge to invaders.

Halting suddenly, arriving marksmen realized that the blackness of the doorway was alive. It stood for The Shadow, whose gloved hands hadn't yet regained the guns that they had cloaked before he grabbed Harry.

Savagely, the men in the hallway aimed. They didn't hear the crash within the apartment that preceded the roar of their guns by about half a second. But they did hear the sound that followed when they'd finished their fiery stabs at living darkness.

Again, the laugh of The Shadow!

He hadn't flung Harry haphazard. Instead, The Shadow had spun his agent toward the floor lamp, that he would crash into it and put it out.

The invading gunmen were right at that doorway, now. The Shadow wheeled to pound them with his heavy guns.

On her feet again, Lana had dashed away beyond the screen of fighters and they turned to follow suit,

The Shadow flaying them clear to a stairway, down which they pitched headlong. At the stair top The Shadow wheeled back as he saw guns aiming from below.

Then The Shadow was right between a pair of swinging guns wielded by Harry and Don, who had begun a running grapple on their own. Whipping both arms crosswise, The Shadow flung the pair a dozen feet apart.

Bounding from a wall, Harry made a grab for the fighter that he thought was Don, only to seize The Shadow blindly. With a swift whirl, The Shadow shook Harry loose and turned to handle Don. By then, the fellow was gone.

The Shadow's heave had sent Don to an open window. He'd gone through, head first, to a fire escape beyond. Clanging sounds told that he was halfway to the ground, so The Shadow dropped Don's trail and went down the stairs instead.

The way was clear by now, and when The Shadow reached the street, he saw a big sedan with lowered windows as it disappeared around a corner.

That car could only stand for Alexis Ault, and Lana Colquitt had gone with it. Again, The Shadow laughed!

CHAPTER XIV. THE WRONG APPOINTMENT

AT dusk the next day, Cranston dined with Harry and Margo elsewhere than the Chez Caprice. This was their first, real get-together since the affray of the night before, because both Harry and Margo had been busy with trips to police headquarters looking over "suspects" in the "burglary" at Margo's apartment.

Having recognized none, they'd joined Cranston for dinner, and from his complacent smile, they felt sure he'd undergone a busy day reviewing reports and adding clue to clue. Harry and Margo wanted to hear those facts—and did.

In tracing the case to date, Cranston dwelt briefly on the fact that Larkin Sparr had placed the portmanteau in Jerry Weem's cab, intending it to reach Mart Ingle. The question was whether Mart or someone else had picked it up. If Mart had, he certainly didn't bring it to the Chez Caprice, for Harry's report, proved that Mart entered the back route empty-handed.

"But if Mart didn't get it," put in Harry, "who did? The only other candidate is Don Boyette, and he doesn't have it."

Cranston's undertoned laugh was much like The Shadow's. He inquired if Harry knew where Boyette lived. When Harry shook his head, Margo stated that Don lived at a hotel. But when it came to which hotel, she was puzzled, too. And there were many hotels in Manhattan.

"When Don talked to Margo last night," observed Cranston, "he lined up the facts very well. So well, that he must have recognized the only thing he didn't mention: namely, that if Van Zuyder's portmanteau contained a fortune in diamonds, Nazi agents would be after it, too."

"I doubt that Don identified you two as such"—Cranston looked from Margo to Harry—"but he may have guessed that Lana Colquitt was connected with someone like Alexis Ault."

Harry's face went glum. He couldn't dispute the Lana angle. Remembering the arm sweep that Ault had made while passing behind the Chez Caprice, Harry realized only too well that Lana could have received

the signal from the stage door. A signal meaning that Mart Ingle didn't have the portmanteau with him.

All this from Harry's own report, though he hadn't guessed it then. The thing that proved it was the way that Lana had vanished with Ault's crowd after the battle outside Margo's apartment. She belonged with that tribe, because The Shadow had learned today that Lana was safely back at the Chez Caprice, crooning through the cocktail hour.

"Don was sure that his trip to Margo's would be checked by Ault," declared Cranston. "So Don made a great show of searching the apartment—for one specific reason. He wanted to prove, negatively, that he didn't have the portmanteau himself.

"The more trouble he went through, the better the proof. And in my opinion"—Cranston's eyes had the glitter of The Shadow's—"the proof is that Don Boyette has the portmanteau himself."

The thing tallied. By overhearing Mart's phone chat with Sparr, Don could very easily have called the lunchroom first, thus bringing Jerry's cab to a destination named by himself. Which meant that the cab would have been gone by the time Mart phoned for it, something that accounted for the later calls to the lunchroom.

"The odds were with Don," summed Cranston. "He knew that he had to beat Mart to the call, so he probably did -"

"While Mart was on the way to murder Sparr!" put in Harry. "Say, Mart must have been frantic when he lost out on the portmanteau because he took time for murder!"

"Mart had a murder motive," Cranston conceded, "which was hardly the case with Don. If Don picked up the portmanteau, he could not have killed Sparr, too, because the things happened at the same time, some distance apart. To be impartial, we can say that the one who has the portmanteau has cleared himself of murder, though it would be difficult to convince the police of it, since Jerry's description of his passenger was rather vague."

A pause, then Cranston resumed:

"For a murderer, Mart acted oddly. If he knew the portmanteau's value, he should have acquired it before killing Sparr. His repeated calls to the lunchroom, his delay in returning to his night club, were bad policy. The strongest count against Mart is the fact that he alone could have reached Greenwich Village in time to murder Sparr; that is, if we eliminate Don."

"Collusion between the two is totally out. If Mart had sent anyone after the portmanteau, he would have used one of his own staff. This case is replete with clues, enough to make a sizable pattern, yet there are vital pieces still missing. As an example, consider Alexis Ault."

Therewith Cranston considered Ault.

FOR a man who wanted to do an undercover job, Ault had certainly pushed too much into sight without accomplishing enough. He was like a submarine operating on the surface. His meeting with Fred Hargood, his presence in the neighborhood when Larkin Sparr was murdered, were bold actions but foolish, considering that with a little more nerve Ault could have obtained the much-prized portmanteau.

Again, Ault had nibbled at the fringes when he checked Mart Ingle's return to the Chez Caprice; the same applied to Ault's thrust at Margo's apartment, where Lana Colquitt had already gained what information was needed. At least, Ault had managed to keep out of sight in a general way, since only The Shadow and the latter's agents were able to spot him.

The rumor existed that Ault was out of town, which helped him somewhat. Still, he hadn't shown himself the brain that he was supposed to be.

"Ault couldn't have murdered Sparr," assured Cranston, "because he came from the opposite direction. But he is careless, or dumb. If the latter should be true, we can assume that Ault was deceived by the bluff Don Boyette staged last night.

"So there is still a chance that Ault will concentrate on Mart Ingle. Which means"—again Cranston's eyes roved from Harry to Margo - "another stretch of double duty at the Chez Caprice until I arrive there."

Harry and Margo having no objections, Cranston went his way, which brought him to the Cobalt Club. Weston and Cardona were there with Owen. They were going over reports while they waited for Hargood.

The reports amounted to very little, though they did mention Alexis Ault. The trouble was, the mention was favorable. Ault had been attending a banquet the night of Branford's death when the portmanteau had disappeared, which apparently counted him out of matters.

Since then, Ault had been away, except for a trip to an office on a steamship pier, which covered his chance meeting with Fred Hargood. The fact that Ault had mentioned Larkin Sparr was something to his credit, for it seemed to show that he knew very little about such small fry.

Listening to Weston voice these conclusions, Cranston began to class Ault as the brain he should be.

When Hargood didn't arrive on schedule, Weston swung to the matter of the search warrant covering the Chez Caprice. It would be better to give Mart Ingle time to reclaim the portmanteau from wherever he had stowed it. The longer the wait, the more likely the portmanteau would be found in Mart's vault.

Having learned about all he could, Cranston remembered an appointment, and left without waiting for Hargood to arrive.

Outside the Cobalt Club, the doorman shrilled his whistle to awaken Cranston's chauffeur, Stanley, who was dozing in the limousine across the street. The big car arrived and Cranston entered it jauntily, only to settle suddenly in the back seat.

Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, was flanked by a pair of derby hats, which had men underneath them. A third kelly popped up in the front seat, proving that Stanley was also under guard. The leader of the derbyed tribe was Fred Hargood. When he told Cranston what it was all about, Hargood termed his helpers "operatives."

"I'm going to have a chat with you, Mr. Cranston," Fred informed. "I brought these operatives along to see we wouldn't be disturbed. These guns we've got are pretty, but they're just for show. Only don't start to shove them, because they might go off. We're on our way to a nice quiet place."

THE "nice quiet place" proved to be the rear room of a pool parlor, where Hargood was well known. Fred had other operatives waiting, and he stationed them outside the door while he took Cranston into the back room alone.

This intrigued the complacent Mr. Cranston immensely, because he hadn't carried his guns into the Cobalt Club. They were out in the limousine, in a secret drawer under the rear seat.

"What I want to know is this," announced Hargood bluntly. "What did the tall guy in evening clothes do with the portmanteau he found in Jerry Weem's cab?"

The slightest of smiles formed itself on Cranston's lips. Again he'd met with something for which he hadn't bargained. So Fred thought he, Cranston, had picked up the portmanteau!

"If you mean me," said Cranston calmly, "I can tell you what I would have done with it. I'd have turned it over to my friend the police commissioner."

"No dice," snapped Hargood. "Nobody would get that daffy with something worth a million bucks!"

"Too bad you aren't tall, Fred," Cranston observed, "and that you don't fit a dress suit. Otherwise, you might have picked up the portmanteau yourself, and kept it—by your own argument."

"I couldn't have," gruffed Hargood. "I was over at Sparr's at that time -"

"And I wasn't," interposed Cranston. "So I'm cleared of the only crime that happened—Sparr's murder. There's nothing wrong about picking up a bundle in a taxicab. I'm glad I wasn't around, though, when Larkin died, for it would have been incriminating. By the way, Fred, weren't you the first person to reach the body?"

Hargood finished a cigar and fished in his pocket for another. He chewed the end off it before he growled:

"All right, what of it?"

"Too bad you couldn't overtake the killer," replied Cranston. "Something must have slowed you up—or did it?"

Fred shoved back his derby to rub away some perspiration. His idea was to question Cranston, not to be quizzed himself. He was wondering if Cardona had let something slip about The Shadow.

"What I'm working on," declared Hargood, "is this coincidence stuff. It doesn't quite jell, you phoning the commissioner just at the time you did."

"Coincidences are quite peculiar," agreed Cranston calmly. "I know we'll agree on that point, Fred. It was quite a coincidence, your running into Alexis Ault and having him tell you where to find Larkin Sparr."

That thrust really threw Fred on the defensive. In arguing his way out of it, he was weakening his own charge against Cranston. Nevertheless, Hargood argued. Bluntly, but precisely, he began to detail all his actions on the night he had traced Larkin Sparr. Once he proved his own case, he could insist upon questioning Cranston further.

Cranston would be quite willing to talk when Hargood finished, for this was a situation that he liked.

It was turning into another exchange of clue for clue, the process upon which the riddle of Van Zuyder's portmanteau seemed largely to depend.

At this moment, Cranston was gaining facts from Hargood that the fellow wouldn't have remembered except under stress. Whatever was happening elsewhere could not prove as important as this. Such was the opinion of Lamont Cranston.

Perhaps if Cranston had changed to his other personality, that of The Shadow, he would have altered his opinion. For things that had started at the Chez Caprice were proving that The Shadow was needed there!

CHAPTER XV. THE WAY OUT

MART INGLE was making the most of his present freedom, which he based on the belief that Commissioner Weston wouldn't issue the necessary search warrant for another business call. In brief, Mart was not confining himself to the Chez Caprice, but was taking trips out through the front door, for periods of increasing length.

Mart was using a cab on his expeditions, and sometimes he picked Moe's. So Harry called Burbank and learned what it was about. Mart was making the rounds of the various hotels, hoping to locate Don Boyette, who wasn't at the Chez Caprice this evening. Inasmuch as Clyde Burke was also trying to trace Don Boyette, but hadn't found him, there was little cause for worry.

At least, not until Mart returned from one trip by reappearing through his office door, instead of the main entrance, which meant that he'd used his secret route. Maybe it was just a whim of Mart's; still, it bothered Harry Vincent, along with the fact that Lamont Cranston had not arrived. So Harry watched until Mart went out again, this time by the front door.

"I'm going to have another look into that office," Harry told Margo. "Mart didn't take Moe's cab last trip, and it just might be that he picked up the portmanteau somewhere."

"You'd better wait until Lamont arrives," argued Margo. "He ought to be here any minute."

"Minutes count, right now," returned Harry. "Particularly since Lana Colquitt has just gone to her dressing room. While she's backstage, she can't see what happens here."

"But suppose she returns while I'm alone?"

"She won't know anything if we're both gone, Margo. Suppose you slide out front and keep watching for Cranston. If Mart comes back, you can help by stalling him until I've left his office."

"But Mart might come in the back way -"

Margo's final protest was useless. Harry had already started for Mart's office. So there was nothing else to do but go to the door and, watch for Lamont or Mart, as the case might be.

Reaching the office without any trouble, Harry entered and began to look around as he had done before. The trip proved a dud, for the vault was closed and the desk drawers were locked. A few minutes of inspection convinced Harry that he'd drawn a blank, until he turned toward the door. What he saw there was certainly no blank.

Lana Colquitt was just within the door, which was tight shut behind her. She had come directly from her dressing room, for she was wearing a dressing gown. Clutched tightly in her right hand was a gun.

"I looked for you at the table," declared Lana firmly, "and I saw that you were gone. So I came here without wasting any time. You are going to leave—at once!"

Harry faced Lana steadily. He was weighing the girl against the gun. If she cared for him the way he thought she did, the gun was no more good to her than an empty one without a trigger. So Harry held his ground and merely smiled when Lana gestured forward.

He hoped her fancy slippers would trip her on the thick rug, but they didn't. For a moment, Harry felt the urge to grab the gun; then he switched to another tack.

"So you want me to leave." Harry kept a steady face. "For my own good, I suppose... or yours. Why try

to fool each other? You're after what I'm after— Van Zuyder's portmanteau."

Lana halted and took a tighter grip on the gun.

"You're in it deep," continued Harry. "So deep, that you can't afford to take a shot at me. I know where you went last night; you skipped off with Ault and his crowd. I wish I could be mad; but instead, I'm sorry. So go ahead and look for the portmanteau, but at least give me the privilege of staying around to watch."

As he finished, Harry stepped toward the desk as though he intended to sit down in Mart's chair. The move carried him a trifle closer to Lana, and the impulse was too great. With a sudden turn, Harry swooped and grabbed for the gun.

Harry got the girl instead.

THE gun was gone, for Lana tossed it away. She was in Harry's arms, her face close to his shoulder, her eyes tearful. Lana was saying that she didn't care for consequences. She cared for Harry and wanted him to know it.

"But you must leave!" she pleaded. "I'll admit the truth: I'm working with Ault. He wants me to find the portmanteau, though I don't know why. Just let me go through with it and I'll try to explain later. The part I'm playing is so little!"

Lana, referred to the part she played for Ault. It was little, indeed, compared to her thoughts toward Harry, who needed no further evidence to prove that he was master of the situation. Turning, Harry rested Lana in Mart's chair, then picked up the gun and gave it back to her.

"It's a deal," declared Harry. "Find the portmanteau, if it's here. All I want is to see the thing. I've heard so much about it without seeing it, that I'm beginning to wonder."

Oddly, Lana didn't hesitate. She laid the gun on the desk, rose from the chair and went to the vault. Deftly, her slender fingers turned the combination, while she explained that she'd seen Mart handle it often.

That was the reason she'd been planted at the Chez Caprice, Lana declared: to learn the combination of the vault, though she had the added duty of finding some way to draw Mart from the office, should it be necessary.

The vault came open and Lana stepped inside. It took her about two minutes to learn that the portmanteau wasn't there. She turned to Harry with a hopeless sigh.

"When will this all end?" voiced Lana. "If Mart doesn't have the portmanteau, who has?" Her eyes fixed steadily on Harry's. Suddenly, she exclaimed: "I know! Don Boyette!"

Lana was seeing through Don's bluff. Harry couldn't deny it, so he didn't try. He changed the subject by reaching for a bottle of Mart's very special brandy which he saw on a shelf within the vault. There were glasses on the desk, so Harry filled two and put the brandy back. He closed the vault, took one glass and gave Lana the other.

"To the portmanteau," toasted Harry, "and the person who will find it."

Lana drank to The Shadow. Placing her glass beside Harry's, she reminded him that their mutual task was over. They had looked for the portmanteau without finding it. More than ever, it was imperative that Harry should leave. But Harry was a bit stubborn, or perhaps it was Mart's brandy.

Facing the big mirror in the corner, Harry looked at Lana's reflection while he adjusted his tie.

"All right, we'll leave," said Harry. "You go first, Lana. I wouldn't want to be impolite."

Lana picked up her gun. Nonchalantly, Harry looked at himself in the mirror. He was giving Lana time to cross the office and close the door behind her, the final proof of her sincerity. Harry wanted Lana to prove it; that was why he darted looks from the mirror.

But he didn't see Lana on her way to the door. Instead, he heard her voice and felt the pressure of the gun muzzle.

"Stay where you are," ordered Lana. "One move -"

Harry didn't move. He was staring at the mirror, but he couldn't see his own reflection. Yet he was looking at a figure that he recognized. The full-length portrait of Alexis Ault, alive!

The truth drilled home to Harry Vincent. No wonder Lana wanted him to leave; she knew that Ault was coming here! The mirror was Mart's secret door to the house that adjoined the Chez Caprice; but it was more a window than a door, because it pulled up like a sash, something that Ault had learned, perhaps from Lana.

Though the mirror had been moving up while Harry viewed his own reflection, he hadn't noticed it. You couldn't see a mirror in motion, for reflections didn't shift with it. Thus, in a most fantastic fashion, Harry's reflection had transformed itself into the actual figure of Ault, the man beyond the lifting barrier.

And Lana, for Harry's own sake, had suddenly gone back to sham. She was pretending that it was she, not Ault, who had really trapped Harry!

BEHIND Ault were others. They grabbed Harry without delay, while Ault listened to Lana's story. The blonde said that Harry had found her peering into Mart's vault, but that she had turned the tables just before Ault arrived. She added that Mart had been in and out all evening, even using his private route through the mirror, but the portmanteau wasn't in the vault.

"That settles it," declared Ault thickly. "Don Boyette has the portmanteau. Last night he tricked The Shadow into thinking otherwise, but we are too clever for him. We shall handle this fool"—Ault indicated Harry—"so you will have no worry, Lana. Again, I congratulate you, and urge that you continue the good work. You may go."

Lana went. At the door, she threw a cold, contemptuous glance at Harry, which he accepted as the sweetest look she'd given him. Of one thing, Harry was sure: he could depend upon Lana Colquitt. But while he was waiting for Lana to bring him aid, Harry had much else to think about.

Ault's gang were by no means gentle. They plastered Harry's lips with adhesive tape, bound his hands behind him and shoved him through the mirror exit. Next, they were taking him down through a cellar, where Harry learned the riddle of how Mart Ingle had vanished from the sidewalk. The difference was, they took Harry up instead of down.

The real trick of Mart's secret route was one of those sidewalk elevators that usually went up and down with bells. This one was silent; it had no warning signal. It brought Harry up to the street between two captors, who thrust him into Ault's big sedan, which was nicely fitted with new windows of bulletproof glass.

At least, Harry had learned one thing. He'd found the way out of Mart Ingle's office—the wrong way, unless Lana would set it right.

It chanced that Lana was doing the best she could. On her way backstage, she stopped in a phone booth and called the Cobalt Club to ask for Lamont Cranston. From those times that she had seen him, Lana had become quite convinced that Cranston was a gentleman who could handle heavy emergencies. Cranston wasn't at the club, but they gave Lana another number, which she called.

A gruff voice answered, saying that he'd take any message for Mr. Cranston. Lana hesitated; then decided not to bicker. Instead, she stated briefly:

"This is Lana Colquitt. Tell Mr. Cranston that I must see him. If he comes to the Arcturus Hotel, Room 405, I can meet him there. He's not to call the room, you understand -"

The speaker understood. He asked if that happened to be all. Before Lana could reply, a girl's voice spoke from behind her shoulder, in excellent imitation of Lana's tone:

"Yes, that is all."

A gun muzzle pressed Lana's neck, while a hand relieved her of the telephone and forked the receiver. Then Lana was turned about and marched from the phone booth under the guiding hand of Margo Lane, who kept right on going until they reached the dressing room that bore a star. Once inside, Lana tried to explain:

"But you don't understand -"

"I understand enough," interrupted Margo. "I'm not asking questions, because I wouldn't get the right answers. I know that Harry has been taken away and that you're trying to lure Lamont to the same place. So we'll meet him there, both of us. If you want to make an issue of it, I can meet him there alone."

Margo's prodding gun meant business. Emphatic, too, was the way she handled Lana's dressing gown, whipping it from her shoulders. Then the gun was pressing Lana's back while Margo ordered her to put on whatever clothes she could manage most swiftly.

Convinced that she couldn't argue with Margo, Lana complied, though she wished she'd grabbed her own gun from the pocket of the dressing gown before Margo deprived her of the garment.

As soon as Lana was dressed in superficial fashion, Margo marched her out the stage door and half around the block, still using a gun for a convincer. They found Moe's cab and entered it, Margo naming the destination as the Arcturus Hotel.

Moe threw a backward glance and saw that Margo was both firm and calm. So the cab began its trip.

Small wonder Margo Lane felt serene. She had completely cowed Lana Colquitt, to the point where the blonde was even afraid to speak. It didn't occur to her that she'd have done better to let Lana talk. That was something that Margo would learn later.

And so would The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI. TROUBLE BRINGS TROUBLE

WHILE Margo was finding a way out for Lana, Cranston was seeking one with Hargood. They were getting along nicely in the back room of the pool parlor, largely because Fred was having his own way. The phone call that Hargood took was a case in point.

"Don't worry, Mr. Cranston," said Fred jeeringly. "If any more of your girl friends phone, you'll get the calls here. I told them to relay all calls from the Cobalt Club."

"Forget the phone calls," returned Cranston, indifferently. "By the way, Fred, you're out of cigars. How about a cigarette?"

Cranston brought a platinum cigarette case from his pocket, opened it and extended it to Hargood, who reached, then drew his hand away. Calmly, Cranston took a cigarette from the other side of the case and lighted it. He closed the case, laid it aside, and said:

"So you phoned Owen and Rowell answered?"

"That's right," interposed Fred. "Owen was busy, but Rowell told him that I'd called. So Owen called right back and I told him that I'd spotted Sparr. He said he'd be right down."

"By that, he meant in half an hour?"

"Of course. It takes that long to get down from the Seventies to where Sparr was living. Cab or subway; it makes no difference. You've got to figure on crosstown travel, too."

"I know," nodded Cranston. "I've been to Owen's apartment. Tell me, Fred, how soon did you call Cardona?"

"Right off," returned Hargood. "That's what Mr. Owen told me to do." He paused, watching tobacco smoke trickle from Cranston's lips. "I guess I will have a cigarette, Mr. Cranston."

Cranston gestured to the case. Fred opened it and took a cigarette from the side that Cranston had used. Cranston offered a light and Fred's eyes showed wisely in the flame. Leaning back to puff the cigarette, the private detective suggested:

"And now, Mr. Cranston, suppose you cut the stall? I've told you my story. Let's hear yours."

Cranston began. His penchant for details equaled Fred's. He told how bored he'd been on the evening in question. No good shows in town, no interesting night clubs, nowhere really to have a good time. As a last resort, Cranston had thought of Weston.

By the time the narrative reached that point, Cranston's tone had become a lazy drawl and Hargood was losing interest. Indeed, the detective was so influenced by Cranston's style, that the next words didn't jar him at all.

"And what if I told you, Fred"—Cranston was leaning forward confidentially—"that I was the man to blame for everything—the robbery at Branford's, the death of Sparr, the disappearance of Van Zuyder's portmanteau —"

A long pause, while Cranston drew a deep puff on his own cigarette. Then came his dry comment:

"You might believe it, Fred, even though it isn't the case. I simply wanted to startle you a bit, because I noticed you weren't listening."

Fred Hargood definitely wasn't listening. The detective was sound asleep, his head propped on the table beside him, his cigarette dangling loosely from his fingers. Cranston caught the slipping cigarette and tamped it out in an ash tray. He didn't want to burn up Hargood's favorite hangout. Besides, Fred had enough.

Cranston had let the private detective help himself to a heavily doped cigarette, that packed a terrific wallop behind its Turkish and Egyptian blend. Quite as potent as a gun, when persuasion was necessary, the cigarette had caused Fred to drop all thoughts of quizzing Cranston further. In fact, Fred had

dropped all other thoughts at the same time and wouldn't be making any trouble for a while to come.

HAVING placed Hargood by the wayside in a style quite suited to Cranston, The Shadow's next step was to eliminate the operatives who covered the exit from the back room. Again, it was proper to stay within Cranston's limitations. Hence, in the leisurely manner of the club man, The Shadow produced a small, rounded box with two sections, each containing a different type of ointment.

Dabbing of one paste on his thumb, of the other paste on his forefinger, Cranston opened the door to the poolroom, where two of Fred's derby-hatted pals hopped from chairs and closed in to offer challenge.

They eased a bit when they saw Cranston calmly beckon, as though Hargood had requested him to ask them in to the conference. Another man, turning from the pool table with a cue in hand, was also stepping forward, when Cranston's beckon ceased.

It stopped with a finger snap.

Right between the faces of the peering men, that snap produced a blast that sounded like a giant firecracker. Those chemical pastes could unite with a terrific explosion under the slightest friction, as Cranston's deft hand proved. [Note: Because The Shadow's explosive powder used in this instance is too dangerous for any but the most experienced to use, we do not reveal the nature of its formula, so that the inexperienced might not attempt this experiment and thereby suffer harm.—Maxwell Grant.]

The two men reeled back, jolted as well as startled by the flame and roar that greeted them. Their derbies flew one direction, their half-drawn guns the other.

The fellow at the pool table was too distant to feel the shock. He drove forward when Cranston swung between the staggered pair. Sidestepping the charge, Cranston caught the cue that the man dropped to draw a gun. Then there were three derbies bouncing on the floor, their owners with them.

All Cranston did was trip the last attacker with his own cue; when the fellow found his feet again, Cranston had strolled out to the street.

There was another man on guard beside the limousine, but he didn't witness Cranston's swift, though roundabout, arrival. Evening clothes were a good substitute for The Shadow's favorite cloak along a street as gloomy as this one chanced to be. The thing that jolted the guard was the sudden opening of the sedan's rear door, hauled with such force that its swinging edge sprawled Hargood's watchdog headlong on the cobbles.

While Stanley, the chauffeur, was staring fascinated, wondering what special brand of invisible lightning had felled the guard, Cranston's voice came through the speaking tube, ordering in a bored tone:

"The Acturus Hotel, Stanley."

Planning to meet Lana Colquitt as she had requested, The Shadow intended to retain his guise of Lamont Cranston. It wasn't difficult to analyze Lana's relation to Ault's crowd. Why she worked for them might be a question but what she did was plain. Hers were the duties of an informant, not a decoy.

Last night, Lana had overstepped herself in a manner that wouldn't have suited Ault, had he known the full facts. Seeing Harry Vincent in a jam, Lana had actually tried to help him out of it.

That was a clue to her call to Cranston this evening. It meant that Harry had found trouble in a way too large for Lana to offset. Having seen Harry at the Chez Caprice with Cranston, knowing that Harry wasn't a crook, as Don Boyette claimed, Lana counted Cranston as the best friend in need. Her choice of the obscure Arcturus Hotel as a meeting place indicated clearly that she had special and pressing

information; otherwise, she would have asked Cranston to come to the Chez Caprice.

There was just one missing element in the calculations. That was Margo Lane. Not only had she cut off Lana's conversation with Hargood; to add further complication, Margo was rushing Lana's trip to the Arcturus Hotel and making it quite plain that she wouldn't listen to any explanations from the blonde.

OUTSIDE Room 405, Lana made a final try. Turning gingerly about despite the pressure of Margo's gun, she said in her most pleading tone:

"If you'll only wait! Let me go in first... or stay here until Cranston arrives. He'll understand -"

"They all seem to understand you, Lana," interrupted Margo sweetly. "Or do they? Maybe I'm the one that understands. I'd be a fool to let you out of my sight or do anything else you asked. In you go!"

Margo nodded her head at the door of 405, and when Lana argued that she didn't have a key, Margo pulled Don's stunt of a handbag grab. Out of Lana's bag, Margo triumphantly brought a key that bore the number "405."

"No key?" queried Margo. "You'll be telling me next that this belongs to another 405 in some other hotel."

"All right," returned Lana wearily. "You asked for it."

Lana unlocked the door and went in first. There was a little hallway, with another door ahead, for 405 proved to be a suite. Margo noticed doors on both sides and presumed that one meant a closet, the other an adjoining room. But all that mattered were the doors, for both swung open instantly. And Margo's .22 looked like a toy compared with the revolvers that loomed from each side.

Ault's men were already on the job, with scowls that told Margo she'd receive two bullets for each that she gave Lana. So Margo didn't give any bullets; she gave Lana the .22 instead. Or in a way, Lana took it, for the blonde turned and planted her hand on the gun just as Margo's fingers unloosed.

In their professional fashion, Ault's men bound Margo's hands behind her and slapped adhesive across her mouth, while Lana obligingly kept Margo covered.

"You shouldn't carry things like this," gibed Lana, referring to the gun. "Not if you intend to be so generous, Margo. Don took your gun last night, I have it now. What about tomorrow night?" Lana finished with a very pointed laugh. "I almost forgot. You won't be back in circulation by tomorrow night— if ever!"

Marched into a living room beyond a door ahead, Margo found Ault waiting with others of his hard-faced followers. In a corner, Margo saw Harry propped in a chair, his plight the same as hers. Lana looked gloatingly from one to the other, and her manner did much to relieve a scowl that was growing on Ault's long face. Nevertheless, Ault put the stern query:

"What was the idea of this, Lana?"

"The Lane girl heard me say I was coming here," returned Lana, "so I brought her along, though she thought she brought me."

"Who did you tell about this place?"

"I was talking to Cranston," replied Lana coolly. As Ault's eyes widened, the blonde gestured from Harry to Margo, adding: "These two are just a pair of cheap crooks, like Boyette said. They're trying to trim

Cranston, though he doesn't know it. If I hadn't called him, the Lane girl would have, on the hope he'd bring in the police and help Vincent out of his jam."

"I understand," nodded Ault approvingly. "You did well, Lana. When Cranston arrives, we shall convince him of the truth. Unless -"

As Ault paused, his eyes maintaining their shrewd glare, Lana's eyes questioned back, as though asking, "Unless what?"

"Unless you are entirely mistaken, Lana," completed Ault. "In that case, too, we shall be prepared. Yes, I am very glad that Cranston is coming here alone."

His tone thickening, Ault ordered his men to place Harry and Margo in another room of the suite and lock them in. That done, he arranged three men as a reception committee, and beckoned another pair into the anteroom, where they were to wait behind the side doors with ready guns. Lana, was stepping to the hall when Ault stopped her.

"Not that way, Lana," declared Ault. "You will not have to meet Cranston. The door will remain unlocked. You and I are going to check on the question of our prisoners being crooks. We must convince Cranston, you know, when we return. If we find the evidence negative, we shall have Cranston as a prisoner, too. Have you a better suggestion?"

Before Lana could conjure one, Ault bowed her through the door at the left, which opened, not into a closet but a little elevator. The door closed and the car started downward, with Lana racking her brain for a way to amend the coming situation.

Seeking to gain Cranston as an ally, Lana had betrayed him despite herself. Out of trouble was coming more trouble for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. METHODS REVERSED

WHEN Lamont Cranston knocked at the door of 405, it opened of its own accord. Across the threshold, Cranston found a polite man bowing through the anteroom to a larger apartment, where others awaited.

They were equally polite amid the mild light that softened their hard faces. One man, acting as spokesman, stated that Miss Colquitt had been detained at the Chez Caprice, but would soon arrive.

They were subtle, these chaps, in a style that Cranston expected from Ault's men. They didn't explain too much in words. Rather, they intimated that they were friends of Lana Colquitt and that if Cranston cared to ask questions, they would answer them.

But they had a silent manner, too. One man, leaning back in a chair, let his coat slide open just far enough to reveal a glittering badge; then drew his coat together as he folded his arms.

That flash was for Cranston's benefit. He could mistake this crowd for police detectives, private operatives, or Federal agents, as he might choose. He rejected all three suppositions, though he didn't mention it.

To Cranston, all this was palpable fakery. The things that really mattered were the open door, too much of an invitation; the prompt trip through the anteroom, which marked it as a snare; finally, the matter of the folded arms, which didn't symbolize patience but an easy reach for a gun, should one be needed.

Not just one gun, but three. All of the greeters were displaying folded arms. They were leaving the door

to the anteroom wide, which didn't deceive Cranston into mistaking it for a route to freedom. Quite the contrary, it proved that the anteroom was a sure snare.

So Cranston took it all quite calmly. He asked no questions; instead, he simply strolled about as though expecting Lana to arrive late.

In pacing near the anteroom, Cranston could hear motion there and knew that gunners must be easing in from the sides. Turning to stroll the other way, he noted that one of the three men in the living room was standing with his back against a closed door. That was the final give-away that Cranston wanted. The keen mind of The Shadow, working behind the masklike features of Cranston, was quick to reason that the man at the inner door was guarding it.

Something had happened to Harry Vincent, and very possibly to Lana Colquitt, since The Shadow, as yet, had no clue to Margo Lane being in the present mess. Hence it wasn't a matter of solitary escape, to be staged by The Shadow. This was a situation that called for rescue in addition.

The explosive ointment wouldn't help, even though the ingredients were again smeared on Cranston's thumb and forefinger. His opponents were too far apart, too alert, to be dazzled all at once. A surprise blast would force the sort of action that would ruin chances of rescuing the prisoners, unless the breaks of battle came entirely Cranston's way.

Dipping his hand into his coat pocket, Cranston brought out his cigarette case, at the same time rubbing the paste from his thumb and finger. All the while, he was conscious that hands beneath folded arms were keeping him covered with guns.

As though quite ignorant of the situation, Cranston opened the cigarette case and proffered it, only to receive negative headshakes from the three men present. So he took a cigarette himself, from the side of the case that was filled.

One man did unfold his arms and bring out a pipe and pouch of tobacco, to prove that he'd refused the cigarette because he preferred a different kind of smoke. By then, Cranston was on the stroll again, lighting the cigarette. He stopped near the anteroom, blowing clouds of smoke toward the outer door, glancing through the drift reflectively, as though he expected Lana to appear.

Turning after half a minute, Cranston noticed that the pipe smoker needed another light, so he provided a match and struck it. The other man's hand went to his own pocket, but stayed there, secretly gripping the gun, while Cranston applied the match to the pipe, flavoring the aroma of the smoking mixture with some puffs from his own cigarette.

Again on the stroll, Cranston neared the man at the inner door and inquired how long Miss Colquitt would be. The fellow used one hand, his left, to draw a watch, after which he simply shook his head.

Still smoking indolently, Cranston approached the third man in this room and put a more pointed question:

"You chaps are detectives, aren't you?"

The man gave a nod and drew back his coat, flashing the badge beneath it. Cranston leaned forward in interested fashion; along with a blow of smoke, he reached for a closer look at the badge. As Cranston's hand gripped the coat lapel, its owner came up with a snarl, whipping out a gun. He was met with another puff of cigarette smoke.

Odd, how slowly that gun came to aim! Cranston's hand was in no haste, yet it reached the revolver

before the muzzle covered him. Likewise, the man who held the gun was losing his grip, for the weapon yielded under Cranston's grip. Another whiff of smoke from Cranston's cigarette and the fellow was sagging in his chair.

Turning the revolver across the room, Cranston momentarily covered the man with the pipe, only to observe that he had likewise succumbed. Stepping to the inner door, Cranston gave the guard a shove. Only the door was propping the fellow up, for he slumped to the corner under the slight push.

OPENING the door, Cranston saw Harry and Margo. He laid his cigarette aside while he unbound them and wrenched away the adhesive gags. Starting them ahead of him, Cranston told each to take a gun from a slumped man in the living room. With the last inch of cigarette between his lips, Cranston strolled ahead to the anteroom.

There, two sagged men stirred, trying to raise drawn revolvers. Cranston supplied each with more smoke like the sort that he had previously used to cloud the anteroom. He caught two guns while they were dropping from slow-motion hands.

Then, opening the door to the corridor, Cranston ushered Harry and Margo through, steadying them as they wavered. He placed the cigarette in a sand receptacle while they waited for a regular elevator.

In the lobby, Cranston explained the riddle of the sleeping beauties in suite 405. He prefaced it by briefly recounting his experience with Fred Hargood. The setup of Cranston's cigarette case was very neat indeed. On the left, he kept doped cigarettes in odd positions, while they occupied the even places on the right side of the case.

Thus when Fred had refused the first cigarette from the left, Cranston had taken the first from the right. Thinking the right side of the case was safe, Fred had taken the next in line, only to go under.

To deal with Ault's crew, Cranston had taken the first cigarette from the left, actually lighting a doped one for himself. But he hadn't inhaled a single draw. Instead, he'd blown the smoke completely from his lips, holding his breath each time he'd finished.

He'd filled the anteroom with the soporific vapor, while he'd later furnished direct clouds to the men in the living room. Two of those close-range puffs were quite enough. Ault's men were dozing in an atmosphere that wouldn't lend quick recuperation.

Instructing Harry and Margo to return to the Chez Caprice and keep lookout there, Cranston entered a phone booth in the Arcturus lobby and called Burbank. From the contact man came news that The Shadow hoped to hear. Clyde Burke had finally located Don Boyette, living in an apartment that he had sublet from a friend who was out of town.

In the confines of the booth, Cranston's lips phrased The Shadow's laugh as he gave brief instructions to Burbank. But the laugh was for Cranston's own benefit.

Since Clyde had traced Don, it followed that others could have. One other in particular was Ault. He'd be wanting to meet up with Don again, since he'd learned that Mart Ingle didn't have the portmanteau after all. Moreover, Ault probably believed that Harry and Margo were crooked, as stated by Lana when she staged her strongest bluff. That was another reason why Alexis Ault would want to chat with Don Boyette.

Ten minutes later, Lamont Cranston alighted from his limousine, not as a gentleman in evening clothes but attired as his other self, The Shadow. By a route that was devious, but swift, he reached the rear of an apartment building, merged with the blackness of the fire escape and arrived on the third-floor level.

There, The Shadow ventured forth along a ledge that offered only a few inches more than a toe hold. His gloved fingers, digging into narrow crevices between the bricks, were the only other grip he needed. Slowly, steadily, The Shadow moved toward a window that belonged to Don's apartment.

Not once did The Shadow deviate his creeping speed. To pause would have been fatal, for he was literally pressing into the wall with each grip, and his weight tended to carry him outward again. Always a new grip, farther along, but never was the pace rapid, for any attempt at hurry would have meant an insufficient hold, even for the few seconds that The Shadow needed.

At last The Shadow was at the window, raising it with ease, for this was one window that Don hadn't bothered to lock, since it offered no access—so Don thought—to anything short of a fire ladder.

Entering a darkened room, The Shadow saw a shaft of light beyond. From the door that it represented, he heard a buzzing sound. Don Boyette was at work on something; just what, The Shadow was soon to learn.

It happened, however, that others were to learn sooner. Before The Shadow had reached his door, he heard another open with a thump. A thick voice commanded:

"Up with your hands!"

By then, The Shadow was at the door crack, looking into the kitchenette of Don's apartment. There stood Don Boyette in the shirt sleeves of his evening clothes, turned toward a far door.

Don's hands were up, and with good reason. He was facing the dilated glare of Alexis Ault, who was looking along a revolver barrel. Behind Ault was Lana Colquitt, holding the .22 that she had taken from Margo.

This scene, the trapping of Don Boyette, did not merely represent another step in crime. Instead, it promised a climax. Beside Don's elbow was a machine used for taking X-ray photographs; it had given off the buzzing The Shadow heard. More important, however, was the object, standing on a table in front of the X-ray machine.

That object was the long-sought prize that men had sought through robbery and murder, the million-dollar portmanteau once the property of Wadden van Zuyder!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE THREE-WAY DEAL

COVERED by Ault's gun, Don Boyette gave a smile that was half sickly, half shrewd. He decided to let Ault do the talking, which the big-browed man did, though he prefaced it by slapping Don's pockets to make sure the fellow didn't have a gun.

Watching from the adjoining room, The Shadow saw Lana Colquitt enter the kitchen to support Ault in case Don made trouble. But the blonde's expression proved that she was siding with Ault only through policy. Lana still had hopes of aiding Harry and Margo, but to turn against Ault would be dangerous, since she mistrusted Don, too.

Having found that Don was unarmed, Ault shut off the X-ray machine, removed its photographic plate and smashed the latter on the kitchen floor. To complete that job, Ault ground the broken plate beneath his heel.

Turning to Don, Ault demanded in a guttural tone:

"What was your purpose in this?"

"As if you didn't know," sneered Don. "I was looking for diamonds, a million-dollars' worth. I thought they'd show up on an X-ray plate, so I rented the apparatus. But I was looking for something else besides the gems. Maybe you could help me find it."

Ault's eyes glared a further query.

"The gaff to the portmanteau," explained Don. "I've tried every one of those knobs without result. I thought the X-ray might show me the hidden catch."

"Very clever," returned Ault thickly. "But what makes you think the portmanteau has a hidden compartment at all?"

"There's plenty of space for one," Don argued. "Do you want me to show you?"

Ault nodded, and Don stepped to the table. He opened the portmanteau so that it became a writing desk. He lifted a slab, showing the visible compartments underneath.

As he did, Don very coolly plucked his revolver from one section and wheeled to cover Ault with the weapon.

Caught totally off guard, Ault went rigid. His own gun was no longer aimed at Don, nor was Lana properly covering the prisoner.

"I wanted to check the X-ray picture," informed Don, with a big-toothed grin, "so I put the gun in the portmanteau. I figured it would show up if nothing else did, in which case I'd know that the portmanteau was diamondless.

"Now that you're here, Mr. Ault"—Don's widening grin proved that he'd recognized Ault from newspaper photographs—"you can save me a lot of trouble. Perhaps we can make a deal."

Ault's glare subsided, but his eyes still held their gleam as they narrowed. His tone came bluntly:

"State your terms, Boyette."

Don gestured for Ault and Lana to put away their guns, which they did. Ault's went into his pocket, while Lana dropped the .22 into her handbag. Keeping his own revolver steady, Don continued:

"I suppose you want to ship the diamonds back where they came from, Ault. So why should I interfere? All I ask is a fair price. You were willing to pay Rupe Bonsal to get them, you know."

Again, Ault's eyes dilated.

"I had nothing to do with Rupe," he retorted. "He interfered with my own plans to acquire the portmanteau!"

"All the better," declared Don smoothly. "In that case, I saved you the trouble of dealing with Rupe's partner, Mart Ingle. And now, Ault, about this deal of ours -"

A voice smoother than Don's interrupted from the same doorway that Ault had entered earlier. Turning, Don found himself under the muzzle of a gun aimed by Mart Ingle!

"Let's make it a three-way deal," suggested Mart. "Only, I'll arrange the terms, since I happen to hold the upper hand."

So saying, Mart gestured his gun a bit too emphatically, which meant that he concentrated too heavily on

Don. Bothered by his own plight, Don forgot Ault, who also found himself slighted by Mart. Grabbing his opportunity, Ault whipped out his gun and aimed it, not at Don but at Mart!

Both Don and Mart had cool heads. Neither budged when Ault staged his surprise. From his doorway, The Shadow viewed a perfect impasse involving three men of crime. Ault was covering Mart, who held Don helpless, while in turn, Don was again focused on Ault, controlling him, too.

Three of a kind; each with a bulge on another, while Lana, the visible witness to the vicious triangle, stood totally amazed.

FOR nearly half a minute, the situation stood. Then, as if by common consent, each man relaxed. Next thing, their guns were going into their pockets, while Mart, the newcomer, spoke as though entitled to the first say in what would have to be a legitimate three-way deal.

"Let's get this straight," suggested Mart. "Rupe Bonsal went after that portmanteau because it was worth a million bucks. He had Larkin Sparr working the inside, so it was Larkin who bumped Branford and grabbed the portmanteau."

"Quite so," agreed Ault, "but you must not forget the rest, Ingle. You and Rupe were partners, which is why Sparr sent the portmanteau on to you. It was clever of you, killing Sparr so he couldn't talk."

Coolly, Mart Ingle shook his head.

"I didn't rub out Sparr," he said. "I had no piece of this portmanteau business until Sparr phoned me. He made the same mistake as everybody else. He thought that because Rupe and I worked together once, we still were partners. At least, that's what I gathered from his talk over the phone, and figuring that the portmanteau was important, I told him to ship it along."

Ault's lower lip showed a curious thrust, which might have been a smile. He seemed to be admiring the resourceful way in which Mart disclaimed a part in murder, but Ault showed no tendency to believe the tale. So Mart threw a sharp look at Don.

"Set this guy straight, Don," insisted Mart, indicating Ault. "You may as well tell him how you chiseled into things. You grabbed the portmanteau, because if you didn't, it wouldn't be sitting here. But why did you croak Sparr?"

"I couldn't have murdered Sparr," returned Don simply. "I was picking up the portmanteau from Jerry Weem's cab at the time the kill was staged. So it bounces back on you, Mart."

There was silence while the three men eyed the portmanteau that was resting on the table in their very midst. Then Mart stepped forward, closed the odd box and clamped it shut. Gripping the portmanteau handle, Mart remarked:

"Since you both agree that I croaked Sparr, maybe this portmanteau ought to bounce my way, too. Suppose I take it along and keep it in my vault? We can talk terms in my office tomorrow night."

"And suppose Cardona picks up the portmanteau, meanwhile?" sneered Don. "The last I heard, Mart, he was coming your way with a search warrant."

"Old stuff," returned Mart. "Joe came and went, a little while ago. That's why I hopped over here. Joe's search warrant didn't help him any, but he went away happy because the commish called him with a hot tip about something that happened at the Arcturus Hotel."

Ault's expression showed real alarm. He swung to Don, asked where the telephone was. Don gestured

to the darkened room beyond the slightly opened door, but shook his head when Ault started in that direction.

"Better stay here, Ault," said Don. "Lana can get the phone and bring it here. It has a long extension cord."

Lana went for the telephone, The Shadow stepping back into the darkened room as the girl opened the door. As soon as she was in the dark, Lana brought the .22 from her handbag and held it ready as she groped for the telephone.

The Shadow could tell what she intended: this was Lana's chance to call the police. She was hoping that her subdued voice wouldn't be heard over the conversation of the three men in the kitchen; but she was getting her gun ready, just in case.

Then a gloved hand closed over Lana's gun. Another hand covered her mouth to halt any exclamation. And the whispered tone of The Shadow was close to Lana's ear, telling her to let Ault have the telephone and make his call. Whatever the outcome, The Shadow would be on hand to set it right. He could swing the balance that would decide the fate of the precious portmanteau.

Convinced, Lana nodded as The Shadow's grip relaxed. The girl returned to the kitchen, carrying the telephone. She closed the door as she had found it, giving The Shadow benefit of his previous listening post.

"And I assure you, gentlemen," Ault was saying, "that I can obtain full price for those diamonds, something that neither of you can do. From the proceeds, I am willing to pay you a quarter share apiece."

Both Don and Mart were satisfied with the terms, but they felt that the portmanteau should remain in their possession, not Ault's. To which Ault agreed, thus reducing matters to the previous proposition: whether Don or Mart should be the custodian.

While the two disputed, they let Ault make his phone call. Getting the Arcturus Hotel, he asked for Room 405.

Ault spoke a few words bluntly, but did not introduce himself. Suddenly, he muttered something about a wrong number, ending the call abruptly. Turning to Don and Mart, Ault stated that the police had raided his secret headquarters, taking his men prisoners.

"They may be here next!" exclaimed Ault. "There is only one safe place for the portmanteau: that is in your vault, Ingle, since the police have released you from suspicion. And yet"—his tone was doubtful—"I fully appreciate your position, Boyette. So suppose we intrust the portmanteau to a neutral party, temporarily?"

Both Don and Mart were agreeable, if Ault could name the party.

LOOKING about, Ault saw some wrapping paper in the corner, the same that Sparr had used when he bundled the portmanteau. Wrapping the prize, Ault called for string. While Don was supplying it, Ault declared:

"Lana will take the package -"

"Not to Mart's!" interjected Don. "We'd have to keep watching the Chez Caprice after he goes back there, to see that Mart wouldn't make off with it!"

"Maybe Lana wouldn't even go to the Chez Caprice," argued Mart. "She's working for you, Ault. That's something that really surprised me, when I found it out."

"Lana will take the package," continued Ault. "She will go to the postal substation at the next corner, which I noticed when I arrived here. She will mail the package parcel post to the Chez Caprice. Tomorrow, Boyette, both you and I can be there when Ingle receives it."

Mart asked if Lana could be watched during the trip. When he learned that the route was visible from the apartment window, he nodded his agreement to Ault's plan. Don also agreed. Handing a pen to Mart, Ault told him to address the package personally.

Lana said nothing, but she was thinking much. The news from the Arcturus Hotel relieved her of worry concerning Harry and Margo. She was sure, too, that Cranston was safe, as she supposed that he was the one who had brought the police to the Arcturus. And now, Lana was thinking in terms of The Shadow, hoping that she could somehow turn over the portmanteau to her black-cloaked friend.

From behind the door, The Shadow phrased a laugh, so softly whispered that it failed to reach the three criminals who thought they were deciding the portmanteau's fate. In this game of many clues, men of varied crime were providing a perfect climax.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XIX. DEATH'S DOUBLE HAND

WHEN Lana Colquitt entered the automatic elevator, she wasn't surprised to find The Shadow waiting there. Promptly, the girl offered her cloaked friend the million-dollar package, but he shook his head. The Shadow wanted Lana to go through with the deal exactly as arranged. She was to return to the Chez Caprice, where he would meet her later.

Outside the apartment house. The Shadow faded into night so suddenly, that Lana was startled. Finding her wits again, the girl crossed the street and went into the post office, where she had the package weighed and stamped at the postal window. Then she dropped it in the hopper for big packages.

On her return, there wasn't any need to glance up toward Don's apartment. Lana knew that the three portmanteau partners were watching from a darkened window, probably with guns trained her way. From Don's window they had been able to look through the post office's big window and see her mail the package.

Her job done, Lana took a cab, which happened to be Moe's, and started back to the Chez Caprice. She was to learn, later, how timely her departure was, for The Shadow hadn't informed Lana of certain things that were to happen. The reason for that oversight was that The Shadow was just beginning to learn such facts for himself.

Halfway up his chosen route, the fire escape, The Shadow could hear footsteps ahead, dispelling the notion that he was returning alone to Don's apartment. Other persons had learned of the conference which included Ault and Mart Ingle and were evidently arriving to be present for the finish, even though too late to view the long-sought portmanteau.

For once, The Shadow credited Joe Cardona for having found out things fast and moving to a goal with equal hurry, for there was just about time for such a crew to have reached Don's apartment from Mart's office after a brief stop-off at Ault's hotel.

When The Shadow reached the third floor, the men ahead had moved in from the fire escape, so the

cloaked investigator took the ledge route to gain an inside view of the apartment.

There were voices from the kitchenette. His guests about to leave, Don was offering them a round of drinks. Looking through the door, The Shadow saw Ault and Mart sample Don's whiskey. Ault gave an approving nod, but Mart said he still preferred brandy and that when they tasted his favorite brand tomorrow, they would agree. Nevertheless, Mart joined in the toast that Ault proposed:

"To our mutual fortunes!"

Don's hand stopped as he was lowering his glass. He was listening for something, a sound that he thought came from the rear door of the apartment. Mart listened, but wasn't sure he heard anything, so Ault stepped over to investigate. Inasmuch as Ault was drawing a gun, while Don and Mart were merely reaching for theirs, it simplified The Shadow's task.

He had only Ault to cover at the crucial moment when Cardona and his plain-clothes squad would come piling through. And Ault looked easy, too, for he was busier with turning the key and the doorknob than with keeping his gun aimed.

The door was opened. With it came a surge that brought surprise— even to The Shadow!

Thrust back by the rush of entering men, Ault wheeled about, gesturing his gun toward Don and Mart. A clever system, for it put Ault behind a screen of invaders, in a spot where Don or Mart could not reach him with a hurried shot. Nor, for that matter, could The Shadow, unseen witness to this double cross. Ault was safely placed for the present, gloatingly voicing his triumph.

For the men from the fire escape were the same five that The Shadow had left doped and helpless at the Arcturus Hotel!

How they had managed their escape was another riddle, for they shouldn't have recuperated in such short order, not in a room still filled with soporific smoke. Moreover, it stood to reason that they must have started before Cardona reached the hotel on the tip-off that The Shadow had sent to Weston, via Burbank.

Why, then, had Ault declared that they were captured?

It couldn't be that Ault was misinformed when he called the hotel room and learned that the police had taken over. In fact, his call might have been answered before the police arrived. At least, his partial statement of fact proved that. Ault knew the police were expected. But he must likewise have learned that his men were free, or he wouldn't have expected them here.

THE SHADOW suddenly had an answer.

Ault suspected Lana of a part in the raid at the Arcturus Hotel. He'd lied to impress her. It was the easiest way to make her go through with the mailing of the portmanteau. Again, it was good policy for Ault to make Don and Mart think that the police were getting close to the end of the trail.

There was a different policy, now.

Bluntly, Ault was telling his demoted partners that they were going on a trip to parts unknown. These men had come to take them on the trip. Whatever deal Ault had offered, was off. He made that very plain, but he didn't mention diamonds by name. Which caused Don and Mart to exchange shrewd glances, despite their predicament.

"Maybe these fellows are getting the run-around, too," suggested Don, gesturing at Ault's men. "If they

are, we ought to tell them."

"It will keep until tomorrow," returned Mart. "We can tell them what's cooking after we've started on our one-way ride."

"Unless Ault still wants to play ball."

"That's sensible. We ought to give him another chance."

Ault was staring over the shoulders of his men. He was calling for silence, and at the same time telling his men to lower their guns. Ault didn't want too much talk in terms of a million dollars. If his own men knew about the diamonds, they had at least settled on a price for the work they were to do. A price that two men like Don and Mart would gladly better, when their lives were at stake.

"This was only to impress you," stated Ault, as his glare relaxed. "Certainly, I still wish to 'play ball,' as you term it. We are all in this business very deeply -"

It was Don who interrupted, with a sudden nudge that he gave to Mart, though it might have been applied to Ault, considering the effect that it produced. The nudge started Mart right toward the door where The Shadow watched. Nor did Mart miss his cue. He launched through the door, drawing a gun as he came, with Don right behind him.

The Shadow was wheeling into darkness when they passed, and guns were roaring in the kitchenette, drowning Ault's angry howl.

Too late, those shots, to stop the timely flight of Don and Mart, who had guessed that Ault's stall in their behalf was only a stop-gap. Once they'd stopped talking, Ault would have ordered his men to blast them in the kitchenette, as he was proving at this moment.

Don and Mart had managed the first stage of their get-away, but they still could be overtaken, for Ault's men were charging in pursuit. Don was wishing now that he'd started first, for Mart couldn't find the front door of the apartment and was therefore in Don's way. Indeed, the blunders of those two were threatening them with immediate death—when intervention came.

From the darkness of the room through which the pair fled rose the strident laugh of The Shadow, a challenge for Ault's murder crew. Halting in their tracks, hoping to locate the laugh, those five didn't listen to Ault's bellow to keep after Don and Mart. But they wouldn't delay long, unless The Shadow put teeth into his laugh, which he promptly did.

Swooping from an unexpected angle, he was among the killers as the first few fired in a wrong direction. Slugging hard, The Shadow was scattering his foemen in the light from the kitchen doorway.

A rare thing, The Shadow siding with men like Don and Mart, by giving them an opportunity for flight, but he regarded them as scarcely criminals at all, compared to Ault, the representative of a heinous foreign regime.

Indeed, The Shadow gave Don and Mart a chance to prove themselves as being worthy in a pinch. All they had to do was to stop at the front door, turn about and come to The Shadow's aid, in return for the favor he was doing them. Even though they might be inspired largely with hope of revenge against Ault, they would be doing much to wipe their past slate clean.

Turn about, Don and Mart did. They saw The Shadow in the midst of Ault's mob, bowling one against another, making amazing swings that drove guns upward just as they were about to blast in his direction. Therewith, Don and Mart made their great decision.

"It's The Shadow," declared Don. "We ought to blast him."

"That goes double," agreed Mart. "If we croak that guy, we can go in for rackets that will make Ault's diamonds look like small change!"

TOGETHER, the pair aimed. Wheeling behind a pair of Ault's fighters, The Shadow saw the glitter of guns from the front doorway. That was when both Don and Mart should have fired, when they had Ault's men as targets. In giving them that chance, The Shadow was risking much, for Ault was aiming at him from the kitchenette. One glance told The Shadow that the men he'd rescued were quite as bad as Ault.

A sinister laugh cleaved the darkness. With it, The Shadow was gone. Like Ault, both Don and Mart were blazing at blackness between the pair of huskies who had reeled apart under The Shadow's spinning heave. What they didn't see was the finish of that twirl.

It ended in a forward dive. Flat on the floor, The Shadow propped a gun ahead of him, while bullets whistled overhead. Of three foemen, Don was the first to spot The Shadow, or guess where he had gone. Don lunged forward, aiming, so The Shadow's big gun spoke.

Staggered, Don tugged his own trigger, but the frantic shots were wide and high. They were peppering toward the kitchen doorway, where Ault was framed.

Thinking the shots were meant for him, Ault riddled Don with bullets, then turned and fled out to the fire escape. By then, Mart knew what had happened, for he'd seen The Shadow's gun spurt. Mart aimed at the blackness on the floor.

Again, a .45 drilled home. Mart howled as a bullet clipped his gun arm. Diving out through the front door, he made for the elevator, transferring his gun as he went. The Shadow followed, considering the front route the quickest way to head off Ault, while settling Mart on the way. But Mart was already as good as settled.

The elevator slid open as Mart reached it. Out poured Joe Cardona and three detectives. Mart dropped back to aim at them, but their guns blasted first, which wasn't surprising, considering that Mart had switched his gun to his left hand.

Mart flattened, as dead as Don. From the door of the apartment, The Shadow saw the finish of his chase and turned the other way, preferring the fire escape, now that he saw the elevator occupied.

By the time The Shadow reached the rear street, a big sedan was whisking around the corner, bearing Ault and two of his five men off to safety. As they went, they heard the laugh of The Shadow pursuing them. Strange, that laugh, though Alexis Ault did not catch its full significance.

The tone was more than a mere promise to settle a personal score. It meant that The Shadow, clue for clue, had solved the final riddle of the Van Zuyder portmanteau by a process of sheer elimination. For reasons of his own, The Shadow preferred to bide his time before recovering the Van Zuyder diamonds.

Tomorrow would be soon enough for The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. THE PRIZE REGAINED

IT was business as usual at the Chez Caprice. A trifling matter like the death of Mart Ingle couldn't close the night spot, for others beside Mart had financed the place, which meant that there were stockholders to think about. Or rather, the stockholders were thinking about themselves, when they appointed a temporary manager.

The only place closed was Mart's office, because it was filled with floral decorations and other mementoes from Mart's former friends, ex-racketeers. The flowers were stowed in the office to await the time when Mart's body was released from the morgue.

Along with such tributes came an oblong package, delivered by parcel post. It was placed on Mart's desk, along with other mail, and as the flowers continued to heap the place, the bundle representing Van Zuyder's portmanteau was almost obscured.

In her dressing room, Lana Colquitt was completing her make-up, when she was startled by a knock at the door. Everything was startling Lana this evening, for when she recognized the knock, she realized it shouldn't have worried her at all.

Opening the door, Lana admitted Lamont Cranston, whose calm manner promptly dispelled all traces of alarm.

Cranston's first words were a quiet query:

"Have you heard any more from Ault?"

"Not since last night," replied Lana. "He phoned me after he escaped from Don's. He didn't blame me for summoning you to the Arcturus Hotel, not after his men told him how you slipped them. It was very remarkable, Mr. Cranston. Almost -"

Lana caught herself. She was going to say almost as remarkable as The Shadow, but she didn't want to detract from Cranston's exploit, even by so generous a comparison.

Apparently, Cranston didn't notice Lana's self-interruption. He merely nodded, because he'd heard all this the night before, having paid Lana a visit some hours after the battle at Don's apartment.

"I've told you why I had to work with Ault," declared Lana, again reiterating something she had stated previously. "It's the usual story of a refugee: friends in my own country are under threat of death. But my task is finished, so I know they're safe as long as I don't reveal that the portmanteau is here. Still I'm worried -"

"I understand," interposed Cranston. "You're afraid that if someone like myself should reveal the fact, you might be blamed. I can assure you, Lana, that such will not happen. This case will not be cracked until after the climax that Ault wants, and expects. Another, and an unmistakable, hand will settle it."

Unquestionably, Cranston referred to The Shadow, but Lana still was puzzled. All she could do was wait and trust in the black-cloaked friend, who evidently was acquainted with Cranston, too, considering the confidence that he had shown.

Leaving the Chez Caprice by the back way, Cranston picked up black cloak and slouch hat, that he had left behind a door. Becoming The Shadow, he proved his confidence, in part, as he glided unseen past the secret entrance that Mart Ingle once had used.

Both Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye were on watch; they reported when they heard their chief's whisper. No one had entered Mart's office by this route; which satisfied The Shadow, quite. For the inside route had likewise been unused; something that The Shadow had learned in Cranston guise from Harry and Margo, who were occupying the nearest table to the regular door of Mart's flower-laden office.

THE SHADOW was Lamont Cranston again when he stopped at the Cobalt Club to meet Commissioner Weston. Glenn Owen was present with Fred Hargood. Like Weston, they were listening to Cardona's analysis of crime, which the ace inspector had figured to perfection.

The case was obvious. When Rupe Bonsal raided Branford's home, Larkin Sparr, as inside man, had murdered Branford and escaped with the Van Zuyder portmanteau. Sparr had sent the prize to Mart Ingle, but Don Boyette had intercepted it while Mart was murdering Larkin, who had served his part as go-between.

To Cardona, this would normally have signified a tie-up between Mart and Don; but apparently the two were in conflict when the police reached Don's apartment the night before. Nevertheless, it didn't matter, because Alexis Ault had escaped with the prize, despite The Shadow. Which made Cardona very glum, particularly when he realized how close he'd been to capturing Ault's entire mob.

"Tell me some more about that, inspector," suggested Cranston. "I didn't get the details quite clear."

Before Joe could begin, Weston took over. He'd stayed at the Cobalt Club with Owen when Cardona started to the Chez Caprice with the search warrant. It was Weston who received the tip-off that certain criminals could be easily captured in Suite 405 at the Arcturus Hotel. Weston had gone there alone, but waited outside until Cardona arrived, ten minutes later.

"We were just too late," declared Weston. "We could hear the rumble of an elevator in which Ault's men left. We even saw them and fired from the open windows while they were running to a car, but we weren't able to stop them."

Cranston's eyes were steady as he asked:

"Did you say open windows, commissioner?"

Weston nodded, not realizing that he was explaining how Ault's men had managed to recuperate from their lethargic state, the answer being a supply of fresh air on which The Shadow had not reckoned. Meanwhile, Hargood was favoring Cranston with a hard-fixed stare, which ended when Owen suddenly upbraided Fred.

"If you'd been there, Hargood," snapped Owen, "you could have helped! I went to look for you after the commissioner left, and it took me half an hour to find you half asleep in the back room of your favorite pool parlor! Why, your friends were still trying to awaken you when I arrived!"

Cardona took the pressure off Hargood by swinging back to the original theme. Joe protested that he'd gotten to the Arcturus Hotel as soon as possible, and that he'd amended any delay by the fact that he'd detailed some plain-clothes men to trail Mart Ingle from the Chez Caprice.

As a result, Cardona had received a call from the apartment house where Don Boyette lived, and there he'd gathered in a few of Ault's crowd after the double death of Mart and Don. Enough had been learned from that capture to identify Alexis Ault as an enemy agent.

While Cardona was telling this and adding that he'd eventually find Ault, a phone call came for Owen, who went to answer it. Returning almost on the run, Owen interrupted Cardona's final boast. Thrusting a sheet of paper into Weston's hand, Owen exclaimed:

"Read that, commissioner! A telegram that I made them repeat after I'd written it down, so I could believe my own ears. From Wadden van Zuyder; he will be in New York within another hour! He reached Mexico a week ago!"

The sensational news was dulled by the fact that Van Zuyder's portmanteau was still missing. Urged by Weston, Cardona racked his brains for some new clue; and Hargood did the same, at Owen's insistence. When Weston suggested that he and Cardona go over reports in detail, Owen decided that he and

Hargood could cover some ground of their own.

"We might learn something at those water-front places," Owen told Hargood, "unless you can think of somewhere better."

"What about the Chez Caprice?" queried Fred. "Mart Ingle was more important than Larkin Sparr."

"That's right," put in Cardona. "Some of those waiters might weaken and give, now that Mart is dead."

"Suppose you and Hargood start over there," said Weston to Owen. "Cardona and I will join you later. We don't want to disturb the place too much, so it would be better for private parties to pave the way."

SOON after Owen left with Hargood, Cranston tired of reports and decided also to visit the Chez Caprice. But if he intended to guide results there, his trip was hardly needed.

Owen and Hargood had already arrived at the night club, and when they told the new manager their purpose, he ushered them to Mart's old office, saying that he would send the waiters one by one.

Hargood was standing by glumly while Owen admired the various flowers. From the way he named the species, Owen proved himself acquainted with subjects other than jewels.

Personally, Fred felt that so many conflicting bouquets produced too heavy an aroma. He remained near the door while Owen poked through a batch of flowers that covered the desk. Hence it was Owen who made a sudden discovery.

"Look, Hargood!" he exclaimed. "This package on the desk. It was almost out of sight!"

Even as Owen lifted the bulky package, Hargood bounded over to have a closer look. Immediately, Fred began to tear off the wrapper, and out of the paper came a thing he recognized, though he had never before seen it—the missing portmanteau!

Jiggling the telephone on the desk, Owen found that it was disconnected. Taking the portmanteau from Fred's hands, he gestured the investigator to the door, telling him to phone Commissioner Weston at once. Hurrying out, Fred was making a call from a phone booth when Lamont Cranston entered the Chez Caprice.

Stopping at a table near the office door, Cranston received a report from Harry and Margo. He had just resumed his stroll when Hargood overtook him. Without a word, Fred opened the office door. He smiled at the look of well-feigned surprise that Cranston gave at sight of Owen standing by the desk, both hands resting on the missing portmanteau.

The million-dollar prize was regained; the only thing remaining was to prove its reputed worth. That done, the whole truth of the crime could be revealed.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XXI. CRIME'S GRAND TOTAL

THE flowers were gone from Mart's office. In their place was a group of men working over an antique portmanteau. They'd been at it for an hour or more: Owen, Hargood, Weston and Cardona. Present also was Lamont Cranston, but he wasn't supplying suggestions. Those could come later—much later.

"It's no use," decided Owen, laying his hand wearily on the portmanteau, which stood closed and upright. "If this contrivance has a secret, it is beyond our ability to find it."

"We could smash the thing," argued Hargood. "But if the diamonds don't show up, Van Zuyder will be out a good antique."

"Suppose we X-ray it," said Cardona. "That's what Don Boyette was trying to do. Say—he and Mart must have mailed the thing here before Ault came along! They'd have had time while my men were trying to locate the apartment Mart went into."

"Our best plan is to wait," put in Weston, getting back to the present subject. "Van Zuyder will certainly know the secret of his own portmanteau, and he should be here shortly."

There was a knock at the door, but it wasn't Van Zuyder. Cardona admitted Owen's secretary, Rowell, who had arrived with two customs officials and the documents that proved Owen's rights to the undiscovered diamonds, as Van Zuyder's agent. In their wake came Clyde Burke and Margo Lane.

As a reporter, Clyde was after a story, while Margo had simply come to find her friend Cranston. Both stayed, since no one objected, but when attention went back to the portmanteau, Cranston calmly strolled from the office as though bored with the delayed proceedings.

Lana Colquitt was crooning softly when a solemn, gray-haired man entered the Chez Caprice, flanked by a pair of squatty companions who looked like bodyguards.

The arrival was Wadden van Zuyder; and at sight of him Lamont Cranston left the table where he was seated with Harry Vincent. Following Cranston's leisurely departure, Harry saw him go out through the backstage route from the Chez Caprice.

By then, Van Zuyder was in the office. While he shook hands with Owen and received introductions to the others, Van Zuyder explained that the men with him were the bodyguards. He'd brought them with him from Mexico, and he was going back there as soon as his present task was finished. Bluntly, Van Zuyder stated that he didn't feel safe in New York while Alexis Ault was still at large.

Rather than take the statement as a personal affront, Weston switched back to the subject of the portmanteau. When he asked if the diamonds were in it, Van Zuyder nodded. Stepping to the desk, he proceeded to reveal the secret of the antique.

At the very start, he did something that no one else had tried. Instead of playing around the outside of the portmanteau, Van Zuyder opened it in writing-table fashion. Then he ran his finger along the crack that marked the join of the opened sections.

"You see?" he queried. "The two backs come together. Two little pins in one half fit into spaces of the other. On the outside, of course, but now it is the inside—or perhaps we should call it the in-between. And then—well, you shall see."

Working at the edges, which now constituted the central portion of the portmanteau, Van Zuyder suddenly pulled out a sliding section, or rather two sections, though at first they came as one. They formed the bottom of the portmanteau when it was closed; the backs of the joined halves when open.

As they slid away, these linked sections proved to be shallow drawers, bottom to bottom. The rattle they made was due to their contents.

All over the desk were bouncing precious baubles, the uncut diamonds meant for Glenn Owen, who was the first to pounce upon them before they could roll to the floor. Bits of tissue paper fell, too, having been used to wad the precious stones in place. That detail, however, was trifling, compared to the recovery of the diamonds.

It was Owen who checked them by the lists, to the satisfaction of the customs men. The papers were all in order, nothing more being needed from Van Zuyder, though he preferred to settle thoroughly the status of the diamonds.

Seating himself at the desk, Van Zuyder signed a paper establishing Owen as his commission agent and authorizing the payment of the duty from the funds that the government had frozen.

Then, with a bow, Van Zuyder arose, flanked by his bodyguards. The trio were turning toward the door, when a strange tone halted them.

The startling laugh was rivaled by the sight that greeted all eyes when they swung to an inner corner of the office. Astonished persons saw two figures cloaked in black, both The Shadow. Then viewers realized that they were looking at Mart's big mirror, which reflected The Shadow to produce his double. As the cloaked visitor stepped forward, his reflection receded.

THE SHADOW, master of justice!

If ever the term was fitting, it was now, for from beneath his cloak The Shadow produced a pair of scales, which he placed upon the desk, as though he intended to weigh crime and find it wanting.

Gathering the heap of diamonds and the paper upon which they had been placed, The Shadow set the jewels on the scales.

"Two pounds, troy weight," declared The Shadow. "Correct according to the total appraisal. Two pounds of diamonds, valued at a million dollars. But there is more than diamonds to be weighed."

Steadily, The Shadow faced Van Zuyder, who managed to keep his gaze upon those burning eyes.

"One point is absent from your statement," declared The Shadow. "You did not swear that you actually sent those diamonds in the secret compartment of the portmanteau. State it now!"

Van Zuyder stared speechless. It was Owen who spoke for him, declaring that Van Zuyder must have sent the diamonds, or they would not have been found. The Shadow's laugh came in a low, strange whisper, a tone which his voice maintained.

"Assume that Van Zuyder did not ship the diamonds," spoke The Shadow. "Grant also that Branford knew the secret of the portmanteau. Being truthful, like Van Zuyder, Branford would never have admitted that the gems came in a portmanteau that he knew was empty."

"So it was necessary to murder Talbot Branford and steal the portmanteau in order that the diamonds could be planted there later, thus establishing the fact that Van Zuyder had sent them personally, before his country was actually invaded."

They carried logic, those words, revealing a singular, yet simple, conspiracy to put banned diamonds on the American market. A scheme which showed the real brains of Alexis Ault behind it—and more.

"Rupe Bonsal was hired to raid Branford's," continued The Shadow. "During the attempted robbery, Rupe was slain. Later, a go-between named Larkin Sparr found the missing portmanteau in his place, along with an envelope filled with money."

"A phone call came to Larkin, telling him to contact Mart Ingle and send the portmanteau along. Sparr did as told and was murdered for his service, in order that he might take the blame for killing Talbot Branford. As the third link in this insidious chain, the portmanteau was to be found with Mart Ingle, former partner of Rupe Bonsal."

A remarkable analysis, yet one that fitted perfectly, backed by such points as Hargood's quick finding of Sparr, thanks to information supplied by Ault. As The Shadow said, the trail would have ended promptly if Don Boyette hadn't intercepted the portmanteau. Eliminating that side issue, the whole thing was plain.

Again The Shadow delivered his sibilant laugh. He knew the question that was in every mind, for perplexed faces revealed it. The Shadow answered that question when he resumed:

"You wonder why Alexis Ault wanted the diamonds found. It was because he saw larger profits in disposing of them by legitimate sale, with the duty paid from Van Zuyder's own funds. So Ault approached the man who had the right to sell the diamonds and won him over to the cause of international crime. The man concerned was to gain a huge commission for his services in disposing of gems that Van Zuyder lost when invaders swarmed through Holland."

As The Shadow finished, he fixed his burning gaze directly upon the traitorous criminal to whom he referred:

"Glenn Owen!"

CHAPTER XXII. PARTNERS IN DEATH

ASTONISHING though The Shadow's accusation was, Glenn Owen took it very coolly. Furthermore, Owen began to talk in confident style. The one thing wrong with his tone was the sneer it carried. It branded him as a man of crime.

"I suppose I murdered Branford," scoffed Owen. "I made the portmanteau vanish. I bribed Sparr and then killed him by making a half-hour trip in ten minutes. If those questions can be answered -"

"They can be," interposed The Shadow. "You did kill Branford, Owen. He was turning back to the Dutch Room when you fired. The bullet in his back supported your story of a man who fled. No one else saw the fugitive in question."

Turning to Clyde and Margo, The Shadow urged them to recall all details of that early visit to Branford's, when they first saw the Dutch Room.

First, Clyde remembered that Branford had left his smoking jacket in his study, with his keys in the pocket of the discarded garment. Then Margo recalled how Branford had appeared in a tuxedo coat, only to leave a short while later.

The Shadow's laugh told the rest.

During that interim, the keys had still been in the study, in the pocket of the smoking jacket. Meanwhile, Glenn Owen had waited beyond the back door without latching it. He'd sneaked back for a try at the door of the Dutch Room and had found the keys in Branford's jacket. It had taken him only a few minutes to unlock the door, steal the portmanteau and replace the keys.

Owen had taken the portmanteau on his first trip from Branford's, thus making its later disappearance appear the work of someone else!

"You knew Branford well, Owen," accused The Shadow. "So well, that he must have shown you the secret of the antique portmanteau. That gave you the idea of planting the diamonds in it. You knew Rupe Bonsal from the days when he visited jewelers and offered to buy back stolen goods. So you hired Rupe to stage a robbery at Branford's. Having no qualms about killing Branford, you marked Rupe as second on your list."

Owen was getting the accusing eye from Weston and Cardona. Both remembered how Owen had slain Rupe in pretended self-defense. They could see clearly how Owen had planned the chain for the portmanteau to follow, leaving dead links along the trail.

"Your next victim was Larkin Sparr," continued The Shadow, his gaze fixed on Owen. "As an alibi, you hired an honest man, Fred Hargood, to establish your theory about the diamonds. He was also an alibi for murder. You had another crook in your employ"—The Shadow gestured toward Rowell—"and he did you a needed favor. When Hargood phoned you from near Sparr's, your secretary said you would call back.

"You did call back, Owen, after Rowell reached you by phone. Just where he reached you does not matter, except for the fact that you were stationed within ten minutes' distance from Sparr's apartment!"

That thrust made Owen waver.

The very circumstances of the phone call, to which Hargood could testify, were enough to ruin Owen's alibi. And Fred was in no mood to help his crooked employer, considering that the private detective had nearly become the goat for Sparr's death. Indeed, Fred's own life would have been at stake, had he spotted Owen on the scene of crime.

On a sudden hunch, Owen rallied.

"So you claim the portmanteau was to reach Mart Ingle," argued Owen, boldly facing The Shadow. "It was to be found with the diamonds in it, thus proving that Van Zuyder had originally shipped them. But the diamonds weren't in the portmanteau -"

"Of course not," interposed The Shadow. "You wouldn't have risked them during the portmanteau's trip. Or better"—The Shadow's laugh was significant—"let us say that Ault refused to risk them. The diamonds were in his possession, hence he was the person to plant them in the portmanteau once it reached Mart's vault!"

THAT statement cleared the final shreds of mystery. It was plain that Ault and Owen were partners, because Ault could realize larger profits from the diamonds if Owen disposed of them through legitimate sale. Moreover, by such a process, Ault would still be free to handle smuggled gems that his Nazi masters sent him, perhaps with Owen aiding on future jobs.

Naturally, Owen had demanded a special commission from the sales to come, which Ault had granted, providing that Owen handled the work of murder. Already suspected as having Nazi connections, Ault had been forced to remain in the offing. Ault had helped steer Hargood on the trail, he had covered up for Owen where he could, but his main job had been to plant the diamonds.

That was why Ault was using Lana Colquitt, though she didn't know the reason. But the portmanteau hadn't come to Mart's, as Ault expected. He'd found it at Boyette's instead, and hadn't been able to plant the diamonds there, a fact which paved the way for The Shadow's final statement.

"Last night, Ault became a fugitive," announced The Shadow. "So he transferred the diamonds to you, Owen. This evening, you discovered the portmanteau and planted the diamonds while Hargood was phoning the commissioner."

"As for the proof"—The Shadow gestured to the desk—"simply compare the postage on that wrapper with the weight of the portmanteau. You will find that the two tally. The postage does not include the two extra pounds that represent a million dollars' worth of diamonds!"

As he finished, The Shadow produced a brace of automatics and leveled them at the men who flanked Van Zuyder. Their hands came up and Van Zuyder stepped away, bowing his thanks to The Shadow. Then Van Zuyder was explaining how he happened to be here.

Van Zuyder had lost his diamonds when invaders swarmed through Holland. Recently, the Nazis had secretly shipped Van Zuyder to America, by submarine, along with his diamonds. He'd been turned over to Ault, who told him that the diamonds were to be found in the portmanteau.

"And unless I would say I put them there," added Van Zuyder, "my poor friend Owen was to die. Not once did Ault suggest that Owen was crooked, like himself. I was afraid for Owen, so tonight I lied, thinking it would be death for him, like myself, if I spoke the truth.

"Owen was to sell the diamonds and send the money to me. Of course, I would have to turn it over to Ault, but that was something Owen would never know, so I was told. But now"—Van Zuyder looked toward The Shadow—"I am free to speak."

"Ault was a fool!" snapped Owen. I told him I could handle the payoff alone, but he insisted on ringing in Van Zuyder to bolster the game. A fine partner, Ault -"

Owen's slight change of tone was all The Shadow needed to recognize a sudden situation. Leaving Owen to other hands, The Shadow wheeled to the big mirror. Again, people saw two figures, but the second wasn't The Shadow's reflection.

Sensing the same trick that had been sprung on Harry Vincent, The Shadow was swinging in time to meet Alexis Ault in person, coming through by Mart's old route!

Guns blasted. The Shadow beat Ault to the punch, though it wasn't necessary. Already a muzzle was spurting from behind Ault's back, fired by Cliff Marsland, who had followed Ault from the rear street. Ault was spilling forward when The Shadow's bullet met him and knocked him back with its impact.

Other guns were being drawn.

Owen was yanking one, as were the pair who released Van Zuyder. Weston, Cardona, and Hargood were quicker on the draw. They aimed point-blank at these men of crime, and yet such fire wasn't needed. The Shadow was more than one ahead.

Pounding each of Van Zuyder's fake bodyguards with an automatic's wallop, The Shadow wheeled and gave Owen the benefit of both smoking muzzles ahead of other shots that jabbed the killer's way. And Cliff, from across Ault's body, was sinking Owen with a telling shot hard upon The Shadow's flaying fire.

Three more guns boomed the finish of Owen's murderous career, and with those blasts came the knell of The Shadow's departing laugh. A solemn tone that ended abruptly as the persons who heard it turned to view the surface of a mirror that reflected only this room where crime had made its last thrust and failed.

The Shadow was gone by the secret route that crooks had found and used, to their own undoing. Gone, to reappear again when some new brain of crime would arise to challenge The Shadow's might—and lose. For the fact stood proven, once again, that crime could never pay!

Not even a million dollars' worth could win against The Shadow, master of justice!

THE END