



THE TAIWAN JOSS

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CHAPTER I

JERRY GIFFORD had a way of clicking his pipe between his teeth that few people could have imitated even if they wanted. What Jerry was doing was spelling words in the international code, a sort of reflex from his career as a wireless operator.

It was a welcome relief, too, since the only clicks that Jerry heard nowadays were those of his typewriter when he beat out stories along with his brains, spinning tales that sounded like fiction for magazines that insisted they only published fact.

To Jerry there wasn't much difference between the two, fact and fiction, but Kip Ranstead didn't agree. In fact right now Kip was laughing at what Jerry considered his own most serious piece of work.

Staring from the window of his little office, Jerry glared through the Manhattan drizzle and managed to keep his temper. As a help toward Jerry's self-control came the deep throb of a steamship whistle, working up from the Lower Bay.

Jerry knew those whistle signals and liked to hear them. They reminded him of a more carefree period of existence when he hadn't thought of literary achievement as a future. Maybe from the way Kip was reacting to Jerry's latest story, Jerry should think of literary work as a past.

Then Kip gave his opinion in a tone that was far too frank.

"Nobody would believe this stuff, Jerry," said Kip. "It's more fantastic than anything written about the Spanish Main."

Swinging from the window, Jerry gave Kip a deep-set stare from under a frowning brow.

"Only I wasn't writing about the Spanish Main," Jerry argued. "That story covers piracy along the Chinese coast as it is today - or was until the war interrupted it."

A smile formed on Kip's sallow, doubting face, a prelude to the head-shake that followed.

"The Taiwan Joss," declared Kip, staring at Jerry's manuscript. "Even the idea is ridiculous. Imagine a lot of pirates, of varied nationalities, making their victims swear to pay high ransom in front of a jewel-studded idol made of basalt!"

"But they did!" insisted Jerry. "I've talked to some of the victims. They told me about others who tried to brazen it out and the things that happened to them."

"Good fiction," acknowledged Kip, "but it goes haywire when you bring in the renegade sea captain who stole the precious idol. Why didn't the pirates stop him?"

"Because they couldn't," explained Jerry. "The Japs wanted to fortify the islands off Formosa so they told the pirates to scram -"

"But the Japs were friendly to the pirates -"

"As long as the pirates preyed on Chinese shipping, yes. But when there wasn't any Chinese shipping left, that ended it."

With a slower head-shake, Kip tossed the manuscript on the desk.

"You talk as if you believed all this, Jerry."

"Because it's a fact, Kip. There is such a skipper and I know his name. An antique dealer commissioned him to steal the Taiwan Joss, just as I've stated in the story. The antique dealer has a special customer who will buy the Joss. And from there on -"

"Why don't you give names?" interrupted Kip. "That's the only way to prove a fact story."

"Because if the skipper ever admitted it," Jerry declared, "those pirates of the Pescadores would swoop down on him. Everybody connected with the thing would find their lives at stake."

Kip's hands spread despairingly.

"But if the Japs wiped out the pirates -"

"Nobody could ever wipe them out completely," interposed Jerry. "Where the Joss goes, they follow. I told you that story would be dynamite, Kip, and it is. I'm afraid even to try to sell it."

"So would I be," returned Kip, drily. "But I'm thinking more in terms of an editor's opinion. So why not hang on to it? Place it as a fact story after it stands proved."

The suggestion forced a nod from Jerry, much though he regretted it. From afar he heard the banshee tone of a plying steamship, a wail reminiscent of the China coast. To Jerry those sounds represented

living creatures with their moods and emotions, but after all he couldn't expect his readers to understand. Kip was right; the Joss story should wait. Nevertheless, Jerry gave a final opinion.

"If it ever broke!" he muttered. "If Captain Adalbart came from cover with that Joss, it would be murder! But that's his problem."

This time Kip Ranstead nodded approvingly. Carelessly, Kip tossed the manuscript in a wire basket on the desk. Then:

"Here's something to soothe your disappointment, Jerry. I've fixed the Troxell article for you."

"You mean I can go to the Troxell Theater?" demanded Jerry. "That I can live there, weeding and sifting all the records compiled by old Oscar Troxell himself?"

"Absolutely," assured Kip, "beginning with this afternoon. That is, if you'll agree to the terms."

"Agree to them," laughed Jerry. "They're the sort I would propose myself. I'm to stay in the place, under strict surveillance, to make sure I don't steal any of the valuable playbills, programs or other documents pertaining thereto."

"And you are not to leave," reminded Kip, "until you have completed your research; the material is almost priceless!"

"Why should I want to leave?" demanded Jerry. "Why, this is like taking a trip back into the past. How long can I stay there, Kip?"

"A week," Kip replied. "All your meals will be served by an old caretaker who answers to the name of Chichester. He was one of Troxell's staunch retainers, back in the good old days. You're to have no visitors -"

"Who wants them?"

With that, Jerry reached for his hat and coat, only to be interrupted by Kip.

"That column of yours," reminded Kip. "The thing you do for the Daily Shipper. Are you ahead on it?"

Frowning, Jerry shook his head.

"I thought not," smiled Kip, "so I mentioned it to old Chichester. He says he'll mail it for you. But you'd better tell the office that you're going out of town. If anybody starts looking you up at the Troxell Theater, the deal is off."

Nodding, Jerry picked up the telephone and called the Daily Shipper to announce that he was going up state and wouldn't be back for a week. Kip listened intently to the assurances that Jerry gave the office regarding the delivery of the daily column, but before the phone call ended, Kip had tilted his ear to catch something else.

The other sound was the clatter of a horse's hooves halting just outside the building. As Jerry finished the phone call, Kip beckoned him to the window and gestured down into the drizzly dusk. There stood a hansom cab, piloted by a driver with a conventional plug-hat.

"There's your coach and one, Mr. Cinderella," announced Kip. "Right from the Troxell Theater, to take you back fifty years. Chichester arranged it."

Jerry grinned at the Cinderella simile.

"I'd better get started," he decided, "before somebody turns into a rat. Thanks, Kip."

Watching from the office window, Kip saw Jerry emerge from the front door and clamber into the hansom. With a clatter of hooves the thing was off, bearing Jerry Gifford into the past. On Jerry's desk lay the manuscript he had forgotten in his enthusiasm, that story of a future menace surrounding a certain Captain Adalbart.

From the fog-laden dusk came further whistle blasts of the sort that put Jerry in a reminiscent mood. Kip Ranstead grinned as he heard the sounds, as if thinking what an odd chap Jerry was, to dwell always in the past or the future, never in the present except when he was pressed by the urgencies of his shipping column.

But Kip's grin wasn't pleasant. Had Jerry still been around, he would have been startled by the way his supposed friend dropped his mask.

Whether or not this was a Cinderella story, somebody was turning into a rat, at least in looks.

That somebody was Kip Ranstead.

CHAPTER II

INTENTLY Kip Ranstead listened until he heard the last hoof-beat fade into the far gloom from which the melancholy whistles emerged. Then Kip got busy.

First Kip took the manuscript which Jerry had tossed aside, mostly on Kip's say-so. Checking rapidly through the pages, Kip tabbed certain details which he had only casually noted during what had seemed a disinterested reading.

Finding all he wanted, Kip was more than pleased, but the capstone of his triumph was the object that fluttered from the loosened paper clip that bound the manuscript. It was an envelope of the sort that Kip recognized.

Picking up the envelope from the spot where it landed on the floor, Kip chuckled nastily.

This was a return envelope, bearing stamps to the proper capacity, which Jerry had intended for enclosure when sending the manuscript to the first magazine that he expected to reject it. The envelope was addressed to Jerry Gifford, care of the Daily Shipper. Still wearing his ratty smile, Kip reached for the telephone on Jerry's desk.

At that moment, the telephone bell jangled.

Briefly, Kip's face switched its expression to a hunted one. Then, with the manner of a man who had played his cards too well, Kip lifted the receiver and gave a suave "Hello."

A girl's voice responded and Kip immediately became oily, which was not unnatural, since that was his way with women. He knew the girl, both by name and voice. She was Janice Courtland, a rather earnest sort, who seemed to have more than a passing interest in Jerry Gifford, judging from the few times that Kip had met her.

Kip told Janice that Jerry had gone away on a trip, which suited the story which Jerry himself had certified. When Janice wanted to know where, Kip said "up-state" as though that settled it. There was an odd hesitancy, almost a disappointment in the girl's tone as she ended the call, but Kip decided it was unimportant.

What was important was the call that Kip himself put through as soon as the line was clear. From the moment that a man's voice answered, Kip became confidential.

"He fell for it," informed Kip. "I knew I could swing it... Yes, the manuscript is here and it has everything we thought was in it... Of course I talked him out of mailing it. What am I being paid for?"

Evidently Kip's flippancy wasn't appreciated at the other end of the line, because Kip immediately became serious. He nodded, a sign that he was taking instructions across the wire.

"Of course I'm mailing it," promised Kip. "That's what I'm here for." This time there was nothing smart in Kip's emphasis. "Jerry already addressed a return envelope... Yes, that will make it all the better..."

Plainly, Kip was becoming cagey, his eyes shrewd, like his half smile. But if he expected to learn what his instructor had in mind, the full purpose behind the mailing of the manuscript, Kip was due for disappointment. From the tone of the voice across the wire, Kip sensed that the call was about to end. He became anxious.

"But what about the dough?" Kip put the query quickly. "That's right, the thousand bucks... Call you back? But how soon?" Now the anxiety was registering itself on every line of the sallow face that thrust close to the light of the desk lamp. "In five minutes? Good... Of course I'll mail the letter first... That's right. Then the job will be complete... Signed, sealed, delivered -"

Kip was talking to a dead line as he added those unnecessary comments. After mopping sweat from his forehead, he found that his mouth was too dry to lick an envelope. After wetting his lips a few times, Kip finally maneuvered it; then he sneaked from the office, taking care to leave the door ajar behind him.

There wasn't any mail chute in this small office building, so Kip was forced to go down one flight to post the letter. Why he should have become so apprehensive during that short trip was something of a mystery, unless Kip happened to know too much that wasn't good for him.

Nevertheless, the sallow man was worried, as his manner showed. Maybe it was the thickening of the dusk and the incessant drizzle, for when Kip stared out through the downstairs doorway, his apprehension increased. Even Kip's hand trembled as he thrust the letter in the mail-chute; then, his smile twitching one side of his face, Kip started up the stairs again, throwing a quick look over his shoulder.

Somebody might be lurking in that encroaching darkness - almost anybody. All right, if they'd seen Kip mail a letter, so what?

Everybody who belonged in this building came down to mail letters, particularly late in the day. Going upstairs was smart, because it meant that Kip belonged here. In a sense he did belong, because he dropped in to see Jerry Gifford quite often. All the more reason why Kip should go back to Jerry's office to make his final phone call, and settle a little question of a thousand dollars due him.

Certainly no one would be able to trail Kip and listen in on that all-important call, if some outdoor lurker happened to have that in mind. You couldn't be too sure of anything when big money was at stake. When Kip reached the top of the stairs, he looked down to assure himself that his qualms were unjustified.

No longer able to see the outer door, Kip gained nerve from the lighted stairway, dim though it was. He had no fears now of shrouded figures stalking vaguely in the dusk. He was ready to be smart again and suggest more money than a mere one thousand for the job he had just performed. It might seem trivial, Kip's part in the peculiar business involving Jerry Gifford, but Kip regarded himself as a key man.

More than that - and this was the reason for Kip's sharp-toothed smile - he was in a position to end what

he had begun, and quickly, if his further terms were not met.

Entering Jerry's office, Kip closed the door and heard the latch click home. Turning to the desk, he was reaching for the telephone when his eyes narrowed sharply on the spread sheet of a newspaper on which the telephone rested.

Kip didn't remember that newspaper being there before. Even greater was his surprise when he recognized it as a late edition of an afternoon journal that Jerry couldn't possibly have brought here, since he was in the office when it went on sale. Kip himself had seen such a newspaper but had purposely avoided bringing a copy here.

Yet here it was, and open at the very page which accounted for Kip arranging that special excursion which Jerry had taken into the past, as represented by the Troxell Theater. Even more startling was the fact that the page was marked, blue-pencilled with a heavy ring around an advertisement which Jerry of all people was not supposed to see.

The ad was in a column that bore the heading "Personals" and it stated:

Curio Seeker: Rare item you want now available.

Inform P X when to deliver... Adalbart.

Kip's fists clenched, one on the telephone, the other on the newspaper. Had Jerry returned to mock him with this by-play? No, he had seen Jerry ride off in the hansom, chartered for this special occasion, so any hoax was the other way around. Nobody could have entered this building, at least not by the stairway, during Kip's brief trip down to the mail box. Frozen in the lamplight, Kip's face registered the fear that lurkers, already in the building, might still be about. Then, as if timed, Kip's stare fixed itself upon the window; not the window from which he had seen Jerry start his hansom ride, but the side window, which opened on a little narrow court, across to an equally dilapidated building next door. To learn if that window was latched, Kip strained his shoulders forward and craned his neck upward.

The slighter creak of a floor board was drowned by the greater groan from the ramshackle desk as its dried wood received Kip's weight. Kip, noting that the window clamp was tight, remained unconscious of the stir from the gloom behind him. The figure that moved from the darkened corner beside a bulky file cabinet did not have to come into the light.

Only its arm did, with the hand so heavily gloved that it looked like a robot's fist as it drove a long, thin blade straight downward. The steel disappeared deep in Kip's back, so smoothly, so sharply, that the stopping fist seemed to have delivered a blow.

Kip Ranstead didn't sprawl; he spread. His head, thudding the desk, skewed crazily about, showing eyes that goggled with surprise as sudden and complete as the grimace that remained upon Kip's sallow face. The gloved hand unwrapped itself from a silver dagger-hilt, revealing a blood-red gem that glittered as a symbol of death.

The gloved hand reached for the lamp cord and tugged it, bringing darkness to the room where death had been so swift. From afar came the throb of a great steamship whistle, somewhere in the fog.

Those tones had always reminded Jerry Gifford of sinister doings off the China Coast. Maybe he'd felt forebodings of a doom such as this, but if so it had been in terms of a certain Captain Adalbart.

Instead that doom had struck in Jerry's own office, the victim his false friend, Kip Ranstead!

CHAPTER III

JANICE COURTLAND brushed the drizzle from her eyes, pressed back her blonde hair and stared from the doorway where she had found a temporary refuge from the weather. What she saw, or rather what she didn't see, made her stare all the more.

Coming along the street, Janice could have sworn that she saw a light from a window that she thought was Jerry's office, but now it was blacked out. If she'd seen right in the first place, Jerry must have been there just a few moments ago, unless Kip Ranstead was the only person in the office.

Janice wasn't at all sure that only Kip had been there when she phoned. For reasons that she didn't fully understand, Jerry had been avoiding her of late. Maybe he'd grown tired of listening to a story that he probably didn't believe.

Whoever had left the office would probably come downstairs, so Janice decided to anticipate the situation. Crossing the street, she reached the lighted doorway, only to halt there very suddenly. It wasn't best to think of doorways and forget the street. That afterthought wasn't quite soon enough. As Janice peered along the sidewalk, it seemed that others must have expected her to catch the same idea. That was, unless they were figments of a very vivid imagination that Janice was ready to believe she had acquired lately.

Down and up the street, toward both ends of the block, figures that were grotesquely human faded from the blur of the drizzle-swept street lamps into doorways as convenient as the one that Janice had chosen earlier.

Whether to believe it was now the question.

Comparing her memory of the dissolving figures with other flickers from along the street, Janice was almost convinced that they were identical. There was a breeze that stirred the half-mist into a full-fledged drizzle and the results were strange. Anything from a frayed awning to a flapping shutter could cast grotesque shadows vivid enough to take on living shape.

Shuddering, Janice moved into the building hoping to forget those fanciful outside fears. As she turned toward the stairs, she saw a monstrous blackness on the wall, a downward creeping blotch of growing size, more terrifying than the evanescent shapes from which she had just fled. With an unrestrained shriek, the girl stumbled out from the doorway and across the sidewalk; tripping at the curb, she came into the gleam of headlights that had swung around the corner.

Brakes shrieked now, and a taxi cab veered to a halt. Its driver, thinking that Janice had merely slipped on the curb while signalling him, was quick with an apology.

"Sorry, lady," he said. "Hope you didn't hurt yourself. Need any help?"

Managing to gasp that she didn't, Janice sprang into the cab and since it was a one-way street, the driver started ahead before waiting for her to give the address. He slackened at the corner for further directions and looked around to see his passenger staring through the rear window.

In a last glance into the building, Janice had seen no further sign of the grotesque figure she'd imagined on the stairs. But the figures on the street seemed more real than before. Huddly in form, they had converged across the way, coming at an angle toward this very corner. Two, three - perhaps more of them - then Janice had lost count as well as any sight of those shapes in the darkness.

Like visual echoes of an over-wrought imagination, such disappearing creatures, Janice felt that she could

laugh at the very thought of them, once she was far enough away. Hearing the driver's query "Which way, lady?" Janice managed the firm reply "Uptown" as she settled back in the rear seat.

Then, as the cab found a better lighted avenue, Janice gave more specific instructions.

"I want the Malaysian Museum," she announced. "I forget just which street it's on -"

"I know the place," interposed the cabby. "Looks like some old mansion, in fact that's what it was once. Lots of funny old places around New York, like the Troxell Theater for instance. Kind of like ghosts those places, particularly when you see hansom cabs hauling up in front of them, like I did tonight, up by the theater. They're ghosts too, them hansom. Funny the way they hang on."

The subject of ghosts didn't appeal to Janice, nor did this talk of something hanging on. Along the avenue, passing objects didn't seem to have the flickery effect that made them seem alive, but now Janice had another worry. Two tiny pin-points of light, starting from a long way back, had grown larger until they proved to be the headlights of something bigger than another cab.

As Janice's cab swung a corner, she saw that the trailing vehicle was a closed truck, probably a delivery wagon, but too much like a hearse to be anything but foreboding. It was hanging on, all right, because it not only followed around the corner, but took the next turn too.

Why it didn't pass the cab, Janice couldn't understand, unless its driver's purpose was to drive her crazy, which seemed feasible enough. For all Janice knew, the truck was carrying a hidden crew in the persons of those imaginary figures that had cluttered the doorways along Jerry's street. Somehow, the more that Janice tried to laugh them off, the more real they became.

Another turn, and this time to Janice's relief, the truck kept on. She caught a good look at it now, and saw that it bore no name, either on its side or back. Anyway, its passing marked an end to Janice's qualms, but only briefly.

The taxi driver had taken the wrong street.

"Sorry, lady," he apologized again. "Guess I'll have to stop the clock and do a little looking. It's somewhere around here, that museum is."

It proved to be somewhere around, but on a street where Janice didn't want it when they found it. For as they swung into the block. that the driver identified as the right one, Janice saw the truck swinging the far corner, up ahead. Instantly, she began to plant huddly creatures in every available doorway.

"Don't stop here," Janice pleaded, quickly. "Go around the corner to the back street." She could say this safely, because the truck had turned in the other direction. "There's an entrance in back, the one I always use."

The driver didn't argue. He took Janice around to the back street where a row of old houses belied her statement. However the driver didn't want to be sorry again in case he proved wrong, so he accepted Janice's fare and pulled away, leaving her on the sidewalk. There, staring at a darkened house front, Janice found herself in another dilemma.

One thing she wouldn't do: that was walk around the block. Hoping she'd find a way through the museum, Janice looked for one, only to tangle herself in a blind alley that ended in a brick wall connecting two of the row houses. Here, all was so dark that Janice couldn't even picture the lurkers that she began to imagine. Coming out of the passage in a hurry, she could hear the clatter of her high heels followed by their echoes.

Apparently someone else heard those sounds too. As Janice turned along the sidewalk, she fancied that a figure stepped suddenly behind the high steps of an old house. This time Janice rallied boldly and approached the fancied menace. As she paused, it seemed that the echoes of her footfalls came from beyond the steps, but without their usual clatter.

Janice tried it again; a quick halt brought the same result. Then she had reached the steps, finding vacancy beyond them; yet when she looked up, she was sure she saw the same figure dodge beyond the steps of the next house. Tired of this hide-and-seek, Janice cut across the street and looked back.

Again, a bobbing shape seemed to lose itself beside the very steps where Janice had first imagined it. And that for Janice, was just about enough. She made for the corner full tilt, intending to stop the first cab that came along. Spying headlights she flagged them, but they weren't a cab's. They belonged to a big limousine that came to a smooth stop.

The gentleman who opened the car door was in evening clothes. His face was calm, impassive, so unperturbed that its very expression quieted Janice's alarm. In one glance, the man decided that Janice wasn't in a trustful mood and he handled the matter with a casual courtesy. Instead of inviting her to join him in the limousine, he stepped out and offered her the car, though indirectly, for his remark was directed to the chauffeur.

"I'll stop off here, Stanley," he said. "Suppose you help this young lady find a cab. If you are not successful, you might take her where she wants to go."

"But I can't take your car," protested Janice. "After all -"

"After all, I'm just going around the corner," the man interposed, his calm tone unchanged. "It happens to be a one way street, bound in the other direction, so why should I waste time by having Stanley drive me all around the block?"

An inspiration struck Janice.

"But that's where I'm going too," she began. "I mean where I was going, when I changed my mind. You see - well, maybe I'm foolish" - Janice paused to cook a quick excuse - "but I suppose I should have phoned first. I wouldn't want Mr. Kremble to put himself out on my account. He might be busy, you know." Janice drew a breath. "This all must seem very silly, but if you ever met Mr. Kremble, you'd understand -"

"You mean Mortimer Kremble, of course."

"Why, yes!" In her astonishment, Janice hardly realized that the calm-faced man had waved away the car and was walking her around the corner. "He's the curator of the Malaysian Museum."

"Has he ever mentioned Lamont Cranston?"

"No." Janice pursed her forehead as they turned toward a pair of ornate brownstone steps. "You see, I've only met Mr. Kremble a few times."

"He mentioned you to me," came the reply. "He said that this evening I would meet Miss Janice Courtland."

"Then you're Mr. Cranston?"

Cranston's smile was a slight one, merely one of acknowledgment, Janice thought, not realizing that she'd admitted the fact that Kremble was expecting her. Along with his introduction, Cranston had rung the

doorbell and now a solemn servant who looked like a cross between a butler and a museum attendant was ushering them into a foyer that had once been the reception hall of a pretentious mansion.

Other guests were present, people who knew Cranston, and in turn he obligingly introduced them to Janice. As the girl looked around for Kremble, one of the guests laughed and gestured to some broad steps that led down into a deep cellar.

"Kremble is in his dungeon as usual," the guest said. "Now that he's passed his time limit we're organizing a search party to hunt him up. We'll probably find him repairing some Solomon Island canoe paddles or buried neck-deep in chunks of Fiji lava. Anyway, he's all present and accounted for, when he's down below, since this is the only way to reach him."

Those stairs were vaulted like the entrance to a tomb, but Janice felt no shivers as she descended with the party. Anywhere indoors was better than the outside world, where shadowy creatures lurked. Then it struck Janice all at once that she hadn't even thought of looking for those weird figures that she was sure had trailed her, to station themselves out front of this museum.

Very oddly, Janice had forgotten all about them, once she had met the self-possessed Mr. Cranston.

Perhaps Janice would have understood why shadows hadn't worried her, had she known that when accompanied by Cranston, she was being convoyed by the past master of all shadowy art, The Shadow himself!

CHAPTER IV

MORTIMER KREMBLE wasn't neck deep in lava, but he had just about reached the equivalent. Calling for him as they reached the cellar, his guests finally received a response from beyond a low wall composed of slabs of stone set against a wooden backing that looked something like a coal bin.

Over the top poked a shaggy head with a thin, gaunt face and rather bewildered eyes that had to blink a few times before they could recall their present surroundings. For all the world, Mortimer Kremble looked like a man who had started to build a house, forgetfully working from the inside, so that if he finished he would find himself imprisoned.

Only this wasn't a house that Kremble was building. He was just sorting more of the odd slabs with which he planned to face the bin which at present formed the store room for the slabs themselves.

Stone plaques over his arm, Kremble climbed a ladder from inside the bin, placed his free hand on the edge, and vaulted himself down beside his friends. Though he stumbled so that hands had to catch him, the fault lay in the weight of the slabs he carried.

Kremble seemed quite spry for a man of his age, but he wasn't as old as he looked. He proved that when he shook his head, ridding his shaggy hair of the gray dust that powdered it. Working in the bin was a grimy task indeed, as Kremble further proved when he set the loose slabs against the wall and stared at his dust-streaked hands. Then:

"What time is it?" asked Kremble. Tilting his head he added with a whimsical smile: "I might ask what day it is, the way I lose track of everything, down here."

Somebody told Kremble that it was still the same day and that he'd only been playing with the slabs for an hour. The gaunt man smiled again as he took another look at his hands.

"You wouldn't think I could get so grimy in so short a time," he declared. "Well, while I wash up, you can

study the Cambodian bas-reliefs." He gestured to the slabs. "I have already arranged some of them, but it's ticklish business with the rest."

They studied the slabs while Kremble was gone.

Apparently from some old temple wall, the flat slabs depicted various scenes, like a story told in pictures. Curious creatures composed those figures, probably representing forgotten deities of the Far East. The story however lacked continuity which was probably why Kremble was having trouble piecing it. Though his friends were interested in the subject, none of them seemed to have any suggestions, not even the steady-eyed Mr. Cranston.

Soon Kremble was back, washed and dusted, but shaggy as ever. He ushered his guests about the spacious cellar which was stocked with Javanese war drums, Annamese ceremonial masks, and other assorted curios, all safely harbored in stone-walled store rooms. At the extreme rear of the cellar, the party came to the only room which had gained the status of a museum exhibit.

Here, passing a stone simha or laughing lion, they entered. Fitted with the trappings of a Buddhist shrine, with a motif more Siamese than Hindu, this room was remarkable for its walls, which were adorned with marvelous creations in hammered brass and bronze. The side walls were composed of screens, decorated with life-sized dancing figures, but the back wall formed one great square, ornamented with the vast coils of a great serpent that continued across the closely-fitted sections and terminated in a great head, its wide-open mouth sufficiently large to swallow a human being.

Only this serpent was more ludicrous than horrible; its bulging eyes and the great fangs of the brazen mouth produced a jolly effect. Even funnier was the way it thrust that head through the arch of its own coils, so that the wide mouth, with its interior of beaten brass, was on a level with the persons who faced it.

Maybe this carving was supposed to frighten people in the land where it came from, but it didn't terrify Janice. In fact, the fanciful crest above its big-eyed head reminded the girl of Kremble's shaggy hair, and she wondered if the museum-keeper could open his mouth that wide, proportionately.

Kremble didn't try. Solemnly, he explained that this great brass wall had constituted the only solid remnant of an earthquake-ruined temple on a pnom, or hill near Hanoi; that it had been removed by a party of French archeologists and shipped to America in the early days of the present War. Having acquired and installed it here, Kremble considered this wall as the basis of what would become a "forbidden temple" after he had added enough more trophies of the same kind.

This was a nice lead-in to the subject paramount in Kremble's mind, so the shaggy man waxed to his theme as he led the way upstairs to the more delicate exhibits of ivory and silver which featured his main rooms. Taking his visitors into a room that was rather comfortable but barren, Kremble seated them around a conference table and continued his harangue.

"As you all know," said Kremble, in his earnest tone, "I was always a collector of Orientalia, my purpose being eventually to donate my possessions to some museum. At last I realized that my own exhibits of Malaysian art constituted a museum in themselves. Also I found myself living in this sizeable mansion, my family scattered and a group of servants dependent upon me either for wages or pensions.

"With taxes and expenses rising, it meant that I must sacrifice some of my belongings to preserve the rest, which in turn would defeat my whole purpose. So realizing that my whole interest lay in Malaysian antiquities, I adopted the intelligent course of turning my mansion into a museum, appointing myself curator, and hiring my servants as attendants."

With that, Kremble sat back, arms folded and a satisfied smile upon his lips. Janice noted the approval on the faces of his guests, all substantial gentlemen who evidently understood the financial complications of this modern era. Two faces, however, differed from the rest.

One was Cranston's.

Impassive as ever, Janice's new-found friend was calmly studying the reactions of Kremble's listeners, as though in some way wedding them.

The other man was sharp-faced; his name was J. Dazley Theobald. Just what Theobald's thin-lipped smile expressed, was as puzzling as how he had ever been given his name, or why he had dropped whatever the "J" stood for and decided to emphasize "Dazley" instead.

Contempt, envy, indulgence - Theobald's smile might have meant any of those as applied to Kremble. Perhaps the self-appointed curator recognized it, for his comments became pointed.

"There are other collectors," declared Kremble, "who would like to specialize in Malaysian art, now that I have set the pace. They are forcing up the prices on rarities which I could ordinarily acquire. To compete with them, I have decided to raise an endowment fund for the purchase of further items. That is why I have invited you here this evening."

Bowing, Kremble received nods of approval from his friends and Theobald joined the general show of assent. A query was put regarding the amount required, where-at Kremble merely spread his hands as though leaving it up to the contributors. So they began a huddle of their own, allowing Kremble to bow himself from the room, giving Janice a chance to follow.

In the foyer that had once been a hallway, the girl overtook the curator. Eagerly Janice inquired:

"Have you learned anything?"

"Not a thing, Miss Courtland," replied Kremble, wearily. "No one seems even to have heard of a Captain Adalbart."

"But there is such a man," argued Janice. "I know, because I've met him. He was in the copra trade -"

Kremble interrupted with a hopeless spread of his hands.

"Such men are more apt to use wrong names than their right ones," he declared. "That is why I have avoided all personal dealings with them. Whatever they might sell would necessarily be stolen; that is anything except copra, which itself is doubtful because it is untraceable. But I am thinking of Polynesian relics."

Janice wasn't bothering about Polynesian relics.

"But Adalbart said he knew the Pirates of the Pescadores," the girl insisted. "He was sure he could deal with their leader Malabar, the Gay Man From Afar."

Old Kremble repeated his tired smile. Persistently, Janice drew a slip of paper from her purse and began to unfold it.

"But here is the note, Mr. Kremble -"

"I am afraid you have lost your money," interposed Kremble, unhappily, "which is most unfortunate, since you lost your uncle too."

"My uncle is safe," returned Janice. "I'm convinced of that, even though I haven't heard from him. That's why Adalbart should return the money."

Nodding sympathetically, Kremble laid a kindly hand on Janice's shoulder.

"Good-night, Miss Courtland," he said. "Come back again soon. If finance is your only trouble, I think something can be arranged. We have work here, cataloging the collection, that will not require waiting for the endowment fund.

"In fact" - Kremble's tone became confidential - "no endowment is necessary in itself. I am merely hoping to win over a few collectors who would keep inflating the market with their foolish bids. You understand, of course?"

Knowing that Kremble must mean Theobald, Janice nodded. She only wished she could feel so kindly toward Adalbart. All Janice said was:

"Adalbart knows where to reach me, even if no one else does. I've seen to that, at least. My problem is reaching him. So thanks, Mr. Kremble, for wanting to help."

Realizing that Kremble would have to return to the conference, Janice said good-night. It wasn't until she was outside the mansion museum that she realized her haste had made her forget the possibility of lurking figures that had dropped from her fears after she had met the resolute Mr. Cranston.

Only that gentleman had not forgotten them.

In the mansion, Cranston was shaking hands with Kremble and promising to consider a contribution to the endowment fund. In his other hand, Cranston was carrying a flexible briefcase, which Janice had not even noticed, so inconspicuously had Cranston handled it earlier.

"Other business tonight," said Cranston, in his parting with Kremble. "If some of my investments prove as good as my broker anticipates, I'll need to endow something."

Just a trifling gesture of the briefcase indicated that it contained the papers pertaining to those investments, which it didn't. What it did contain became apparent when Cranston reached the darkness of the outside steps.

Under the sweep of quick hands, the briefcase disgorged darkness in the shape of a black cloak that settled over its owner's shoulders and was promptly matched with a slouch hat that completed this sable attire.

Or to put it properly, Cranston literally vanished on Kremble's front stoop. At least that blending with darkness was the equivalent of vanishing.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow!

CHAPTER V

MIDNIGHT found Jerry Gifford deep in the task he had so long sought, that of studying the private records of Oscar Troxell and learning what had caused the man to tick, which was reasonably important considering that many authorities considered Troxell as the greatest theatrical producer of the century.

Though Troxell had died a dozen years ago, his premises had been preserved exactly as they were. Now, except for those who had charge of the place, Jerry was probably the first person who had invaded the elaborate apartment above the Troxell Theater, which had been the producer's own realm.

Even the trip up had been something out of this world. The hansom driver, he of the plug hat, had delivered Jerry to an elderly man in overalls who looked like the original stage hand of the fifty-year-old theater. In turn, this ancient had conducted Jerry around the corner to an old building where they had gone to the basement and found what looked like the door to a store room.

There had been an elevator behind that door, the sort that operated with a pull cord and was large enough for about four people, probably on the theory that more than that many would be unsafe, hence a cramped car would set the capacity limit.

Upstairs, Jerry had met old Chichester, the faithful retainer mentioned by Kip. A withered character, this Chichester, who looked like a fashion plate of 1890 with his winged dollar, shoestring necktie, and dappled waistcoat. But Chichester had a sharp eye and a firm grip and looked capable, for all his age, of frustrating anyone who might have designs on the books, playbills and documents which went under the general title of the Troxell Memorabilia.

Lost from the world, the apartment was the finest place for anyone to study that memorabilia and having digested a quantity of Troxell's diaries, Jerry was now looking around with new appreciation of his surroundings.

The living room etched its every detail on Jerry's memory, though there were details in plenty, from floor to ceiling.

The flooring was a parquetry in seven varieties of wood forming mystical designs, while the dado and matching cornice had alternating panels of dull gold and hand-painted flowers. The doors and windows were paneled with painted miniatures of famous stage sets and the ceiling was done to represent a lightly clouded, delicately sunset-tinted sky.

A mantel of white marble bore hand-painted decorations, yet nowhere in this room that was all murals, could Jerry see a duplication of any pattern. Above the mantel was a massive mirror framed in carved mahogany that matched a great cabinet opposite, the latter being the repository for Troxell's records.

Artificial fruit and flowers were present in respective bowls, and most amazing was a mechanical bee that would occasionally interrupt Jerry with a buzz as it flitted from one flower to another, actuated by some unseen device. There were cages too, with artificial birds that now and then broke into song. Along with a few ornate chairs that looked modest in comparison, the room was furnished with ottomans, divans, and other antiques that Jerry couldn't classify.

On the mantel rested a fine old music box and now that Jerry was resting from his labors, Chichester entered and started a tinkling tune that belonged to the same past as the room. Then, apparently in keeping with old Troxell's formula, the servant brought a lacquered tray with decanters of Scotch, sherry and other drinks, along with their appropriate glasses.

Deciding on the sherry, Jerry lounged back on a divan and spoke to the servant:

"You've been here long, Chichester?"

"Twenty years, sir," replied Chichester drily. "That is, twenty years with old Mr. Troxell."

There was something sad in the servant's tone, as though time hadn't counted since his master's death. But there was another point that bothered Jerry, though he couldn't quite trace it at the moment.

"Then you remember the stairway," continued Jerry. "The one with the inlaid silver symbols in the ebony banister."

Chichester nodded mournfully.

"Too bad Mr. Troxell closed it," continued Jerry, quoting reminiscently from the notes that he had just read. "Did he dismantle it later, as he said he might?"

"He did, sir."

"No wonder," observed Jerry. "When a valuable actress like Elsa Wintersham tripped down those stairs and sprained an ankle too badly to play Desdemona, it must have been annoying indeed."

"It was, sir." Chichester cleared his throat. "Old Mr. Troxell was very disturbed. So was Miss Wintersham; she told me so herself, quite heartily."

Jerry frowned as though he had forgotten something. He knew now what had struck him as odd in Chichester's earlier statement. It was the use of the word "old" as applied to Oscar Troxell. Not far past middle-age when he had died from a sudden heart attack, Troxell should never have been "old" in Chichester's estimate.

Now something else was backing that theory of Jerry's. He shot home the tester.

"There was another Elsa," recalled Jerry. "I think she played Shakespeare too. You must have remembered her, too, Chichester, Miss Elsa Glenn."

Chichester nodded as he poured Jerry a refill on the sherry.

"You saw both of them on the stage, Chichester?"

"Indeed, yes." Chichester smiled as though he had never missed a show in the Troxell Theater. "Often, sir."

"And how did they compare?"

"They were different, sir, too different to judge. I would class Miss Glenn as melancholy, while Miss Wintersham was sprightly. Of course that is only an opinion."

"Of course. What was Jerome Joplin like? How did he do as hamlet on that gala opening night here at the Troxell Theater?"

"He was immense, sir." For once Chichester chuckled, as he replaced the stopper in the decanter. "I don't mean in size, but in ability. Why, the whole week was as much the rage as the opening night!"

As soon as Chichester departed with the tray-load of decanters, Jerry picked up one of Troxell's diaries and thumbed it through. He'd proved one fact, and fast; namely that Chichester was strictly a phony.

Whatever else he'd been, Chichester had never acted as Troxell's servant. He had made a further slip as a follow-up to the term "old" applied to Troxell. Chichester should have referred to Elsa Wintersham as "Mrs." which she herself did, after the death of her husband within two years following their marriage.

That was why Jerry had put the testers.

First the business about that other Elsa, Miss Glenn. What Chichester didn't know was that Elsa Glenn was the maiden name of Elsa Wintersham; that the two Elsas were the same. As for the gala opening night when Jerome Joplin had played Hamlet at the Troxell Theater, there never had been such a night.

Joplin wasn't a Shakespearian actor, he was a comic opera star of the Gilbert and Sullivan period. Due

to a dispute with Troxell, Joplin had refused ever to play at the latter's theater and had remained true to his word. The diary that Jerry had been reading was replete with Troxell's spite where Joplin was concerned.

Which brought Jerry right back to himself.

Too well did Jerry recognize that his sojourn here was arranged with motives other than those implied. He should never have trusted Kip Ranstead, a press agent of very doubtful background, with the business of planning it. At least not after he'd been telling Kip about the Taiwan Joss.

Evidently Kip had talked to someone who knew how to fix things right, or had started his own venture which included selling Jerry out. Because right now Jerry was really out, meaning that he was out of circulation.

All the fell things that Jerry had predicted as possibilities could really happen without interference, if Jerry himself wasn't around to stop them. Murders were in the making and Jerry knew the order of their progress.

Rising from the divan, Jerry walked out to the elevator door and found that it lacked a call button. Going back into the fanciful living room, he strolled to a window and found that its filigree decorations were the equivalent of bars. The window wouldn't have helped much anyway, for it opened down into a blind courtyard that hadn't any more exit than an air shaft.

Wild notions whirling through his sherry-quickenened brain, Jerry went to a corner writing desk where Chichester had placed his portable typewriter, slung a sheet of paper into the machine and knocked out the brief statement:

Captain Adalbart has the Taiwan Joss that once belonged to King Koxinga. He has a standing offer of \$50,000 for the joss from Goodall Shenrich, the antique dealer. Shenrich wants it for a very special customer named Coulton Rhyde, who will pay at least \$100,000.

If Malabar, former chief of the Pirates of the Pescadores, is still alive, he will have men on the trail of the joss. This can mean murder where any and all others are concerned.

Question Kip Ranstead on this. He is in the game and must therefore be working for Malabar. Watch out for a girl named Janice Courtland. She knows too much and has a few reasons for committing crime herself, with enough nerve to try it.

Perhaps Jerry Gifford would have modified that final opinion if he'd trailed Janice and observed her scary mood this evening. Still, Jerry could personally testify how moods could alter themselves, for he was going hot and cold right now.

Confident that he could force old Chichester to send this typewritten note to the police, Jerry suddenly changed his mind, as he glanced toward the great mirror above the mantel. It showed a painting on another wall, a curious stage scene involving an old-fashioned cannon reduced to a few inches in size.

Odd, the glitter of that cannon's mouth as Jerry saw it now. Pointed right in Jerry's direction, it was a genuine revolver muzzle fitted into this painting from some hidden space behind the wall. Now old Chichester was stalking into the room to wind the music box, the singing birds, and the buzzy bee. Jerry noted that the servant didn't cross the path of the aiming gun muzzle. This meant that Jerry was under surveillance of more than just Chichester.

The ancient stage-hand and the hansom hackie were probably working shifts with Chichester. Intently,

Jerry listened, wishing some helpful sound would reach him. It did, the only regular tone that could penetrate this forgotten abode tucked so deeply among Manhattan walls.

The sound was the great throb of a steamship whistle. As if to rival it came the distant squeal of a river tug. Those became Jerry's inspiration.

One thing was to go out: his column!

On the typewriter, Jerry hit off the story that he had in mind, but with a few modifications. He folded it, tucked it in an envelope, and looked around for Chichester. The servant had left the room, but he returned as suddenly as he would have if Jerry had called him.

"This is the column Mr. Ranstead mentioned," said Jerry. "Will you post it please, Chichester?"

Before Jerry could seal the envelope, Chichester's nod became a head-shake.

"Sorry, sir. I must see everything that leaves here. It's the rule, you know. Even some of Mr. Troxell's best friends tried to pilfer a few of his priceless playbills."

"You're right, Chichester," agreed Jerry, warmly. "Thanks for reminding me."

As Chichester left with Jerry's column for the Daily Shipper, Jerry sat down on the divan and let his half-closed eyes study the painting of the warlike stage set. Gradually the revolver muzzle warped back, letting the black mouth of the painted cannon replace its glisten.

In his pocket, Jerry crunched the statement that he hadn't tried to send out. From afar, a deep whistle throated a basso approval as though it were Jerry's only friend!

CHAPTER VI

IT was late afternoon when Lamont Cranston strolled into his favorite lounging place, the exclusive Cobalt Club. Fronting on a quiet avenue, the Cobalt Club represented one of the most secluded spots in Manhattan, though even its isolated reading room couldn't compare with the premises above the old Troxell Theater, where peace and calm were concerned.

So far, however, Cranston hadn't begun to consider the Troxell Theater in connection with Janice Courtland.

At Kremble's, Cranston had overheard the girl's conversation with the curator who owned his own museum. It wasn't surprising that Kremble should never have heard of Captain Adalbart, although Cranston had. The fellow was just one of a flock of thieving skippers who had once plied schooners in the South Seas, swindling unsophisticated natives of their dried coconut crops.

Only the war could have driven Adalbart into some more pretentious form of knavery. From what Cranston had overheard Janice say, it would seem that the copra captain had been working as intermediary with pirates like Malabar, ransoming persons who had fallen into the latter's clutches. But that might just be Janice's story.

As The Shadow, Cranston had observed much when he convoyed Janice home without her knowledge. First, he had learned that the girl was very clever when she neared the neighborhood where she lived; again, The Shadow had actually found himself trailed at the finish.

Strange, creeping figures, the kind that Janice might have classed as imaginary figments, had closed in upon The Shadow near the trail's end. In giving them the slip, The Shadow had been forced to let Janice

slide away, though he was sure she had reached her home neighborhood. It had then been The Shadow's turn to pick up the trail of the slinky men who had lost him, only to have them scatter through gratings and gates that they were quick to clamp behind them.

Ordinarily The Shadow would have looked forward to fun tonight, since he intended if possible to resume where he had left off. But there was something behind all this that smacked of the insidious, and with a tang.

What The Shadow needed were some basic facts as a background on which to set the superficial, just as Mortimer Kremble required a stone wall as a solid frame for brazen bas-reliefs, except that in Kremble's case the analogy was the other way about.

In brief, The Shadow wanted facts on Captain Adalbart, if only to prove whether or not Janice was talking nonsense.

Not that Janice was out of the picture, she and the disappearing men who were either trailing her or were part of a well-rehearsed act. On the contrary, The Shadow was taking care of Janice in a subtle sort of way.

Posted up in the girl's neighborhood were a crew of agents who among them could cover the situation.

There was Hawkeye, whose skill as a spotter was second only to The Shadow's own. There was Shrevvy, the cab driver, who was quick to snap up any opportunity. There was Jericho, the huge African, as brawny as he was jolly. There was Harry Vincent, a likable young chap who could rival the presentable qualities of Cranston.

Added up, they could approximate The Shadow's own power, provided they were hitting all four and were able to combine their capabilities. But they were better in daylight than in darkness. After dusk it was preferable for Cranston to supplant them and provide the inimitable faculties of The Shadow's own self.

Right now, Cranston was snatching up the last short period before his transformation to The Shadow, seeking any slight detail that might fit into the shapeless pattern surrounding the secondary personality of Captain Adalbart. Soon there would be a phone call from Burbank, The Shadow's contact with the active agents, giving their report. If nothing had developed, it would be The Shadow's job to take over as usual. Until that call, a last few minutes might be spent profitably.

Idle moments, they seemed, to anyone in the reading room of the Cobalt Club. Lamont Cranston, gentleman of complete leisure, looking around among the current magazines, was trying to alleviate his boredom, so it seemed. Otherwise, he couldn't have found interest in the free copy of the eight-page Daily Shipper which everyone else ignored on the table in the club reading room.

A curious sheet, the Daily Shipper. Rushed on and off a photo-offset press, it was sent around daily to keep people posted on developments in the shipping business, which sometimes flared into rapid importance. Then the Daily Shipper was sought; but at other times it was thoroughly neglected. However if it hadn't been a daily, it wouldn't be consulted in those times of need; hence its policy of frequent publication.

Between times, the pages were drab, uninteresting, except for a picturesque column conducted by one Jerry Gifford who had whalebacked all around the world and liked to chat about the places he had been and what they were like in those days. So it was only logical that Cranston should begin with a glance at Jerry's column.

One thing was immediately apparent. The editor of the Daily Shipper didn't know his geography. Or possibly he didn't care, or else Jerry Gifford had gone completely haywire. At any rate it made good reading.

Today's subject was on the importation of African tigers to replace the shortage of the Bengalese variety. Now Cranston among other things was a big-game hunter and knew that tigers didn't grow in Africa at all, so he read the column with interest. It ran as follows.

Can anybody please tell an ignorant numbskull a detail about lost business and restricting tigers?

Many useful remedies deter exports regularly!

This is true of the tiger trade. Formerly most tigers were imported from Bengal, but now they must be found in Africa, which means that a whole new business has been formed in an effort to supply our zoological gardens. Unfortunately, African breeders are unacquainted with the restrictions imposed by American customs regulations.

There, Cranston stopped. Gifford was writing sense, in a sense, except that nobody raised tigers in Africa. It was the third paragraph which told what was wrong with Jerry's story, but in turn it forced an apt reader to reconsider the lead sentences. Beginning a story with an interrogation was silly unless it carried an immediate point, and the response, an exclamatory statement, a trifle alliterative but considerably irrelevant, was not in keeping with Jerry's ordinary column.

It called for word study, rather than ordinary reading. Cranston's eye began to visualize the composing words as those of titles, which therefore should be set in capital letters. In turn the letters themselves began to shout the very message that Jerry had hoped somebody would gain after checking his misinformation regarding tigers.

Breaking with the letter "a" which might begin a new word in itself, the first letters in the opening paragraph plainly spelled: CAPTAIN ADALBART.

In turn, the words in the brief exclamation announced their first-letter message, deserving of the punctuation mark that followed: MURDER!

Tossing the Daily Shipper back where it belonged, Cranston drew an envelope from his pocket and began to run through a batch of clippings. These were from his broker, Rutledge Mann, who in his off-moments acted as The Shadow's clipping bureau. His moments being mostly off, Mann usually did an efficient job, but in this instance, he had either failed or had been unable to find something that wasn't there. None of the current clippings could be even remotely connected with Captain Adalbart.

The clippings vanished into their envelope as an attendant entered the reading room to tell Mr. Cranston that he was wanted on the telephone.

Though The Shadow couldn't afford to be wrong very often, it was all right with Cranston. So this time, the bad guess could be charged Cranston's way. Expecting to hear Burbank's voice across the wire, Cranston was rewarded by Mann's.

"I made a mistake in the clippings," apologized Mann. "I mean those from the newspapers, not the stock coupons. When I went through the personals in the evening newspapers yesterday, I only had the early editions. Checking just now I found -"

"Something about Captain Adalbart."

"Why, yes!" Mann's tone showed the surprise that Cranston always relished. "But how -"

"Never mind how I found out," Cranston interrupted. "I'll check the personals personally. Stay with today's news, Mann, and don't forget to read the Daily Shipper."

Dropping the receiver on Mann's surprised response, Cranston returned to the reading room and looked through the late journals of the day, before, which were still on file. He found the ad with Adalbart's name and its all-important statement:

"Inform P X when to deliver."

Maybe Jerry Gifford would have guessed the meaning of those letters, for he might have thought in terms similar to Cranston. But Jerry had never seen the classified ad in question, unless in some unknown fashion he had personally managed to set it on his office desk without the knowledge of Kip Ranstead.

At least Cranston played a direct hunch, whatever it was worth.

He could think of "P" for "Pacific," and "P" for "Pier," two terms suggestive of Captain Adalbart. As for the "X", he doubted that Adalbart was illiterate enough to use it as a signature, so Cranston thought of it phonetically in terms of words. The pronunciation of "X" stood for "ex" when spelled, which was enough.

Leaving the Cobalt Club, Lamont Cranston stepped into his limousine as the door man summoned it. Then, as the big car rolled into the gathering dusk that was fashioned for his coming transformation to The Shadow, Cranston calmly gave his destination through the speaking tube to Stanley:

"Pacific Export Pier."

CHAPTER VII

SPEECHLESS, Janice Courtland hung up the telephone receiver and stared vacantly from the window.

Yes, this was New York, for she could still see the skyline etched against the fading daylight, but she still couldn't believe that such things could happen even in this town where people seemed willing to spend money as fast as they made it, or faster.

Still, Janice couldn't afford to pass up a very proper and outright offer from a man who announced himself as Captain Adalbart and admitted the debt he owed. Particularly as it still was daylight, which gave her time to get around before the streets began to people themselves with shadowy creatures that looked too real for Janice to defy their threat.

Deserting the room and a half that had been misrepresented as an apartment, Janice went down the back stairs and out through a service alley which afforded a turn through another narrow passage. Here, all was already dark, very thick with gloom, which suited Janice so long as she knew her way.

Next across a side street, through a building which had a rear door to a delivery driveway; from there across another street and into a beauty shop where Janice knew the proprietor; out a back way and down a passage to the kitchen of a little restaurant where she often dined; then, Janice finally emerged from the front door of the restaurant itself.

A nice system, if Janice hadn't overlooked one factor. Having been trailed a certain distance, there was always a likelihood that a person might return to the spot last seen, which was exactly what Janice was doing now.

On the scene, The Shadow's agents operated like clockwork.

A shambly little man, moving aimlessly across the street, spotted Janice from the corner of his eye. This was Hawkeye, and the match he struck to light his half-burned cigarette was a signal flash to Jericho, who was operating as door man on a tip basis, outside a neighborhood hotel. Jericho's special arm-wave for a cab was a signal to a man standing in a movie lobby, Harry Vincent, who in turn flashed word to Shrevvy, filling up on coffee in a side-arm lunch room where his cab was parked outside.

In this vicinity, cabs were very scarce at this hour, which was the particular reason why Shrevvy couldn't be sitting in his, otherwise he'd have become conspicuous with people stopping to ask about hiring his cab.

The lunch room system, used before, was a very reliable bet, for in less than a minute, Shrevvy could be around the corner and stopping when Janice hailed him. The only hitch would be if another cab came along and that was provided for. Jericho would simply flag it for Harry while Hawkeye slouched past Shrevvy's cab to hear the driver repeat whatever address Janice gave.

Hawkeye could then join Harry, and take up the trail in the other cab, which would be better than waiting for one, leaving Jericho to report by phone to Burbank.

But there not only was another cab in sight; it didn't stop at Jericho's signal. It swooped right past the big door man, scooped up Janice as she was starting to lift her hand, and was off around a corner.

So Shrevvy's only course was to stop and pick up the fare that Jericho supplied, namely Harry. And with Harry, Shrevvy not only gathered Hawkeye, but Jericho too. The big fellow wasn't staying on a door man's job, not after glimpsing the face of the passing hackie.

"He had a big scar from here to here," informed Jericho, with a hand sweep that started at one ear and ended at his other jaw. "I'm not even guessing where he's from. You'd need an encyclopedia to pick out a face like that. About the shade of the neon bulbs on that theater sign, with the scar looking like the red ones."

Around the corner, Shrevvy saw the other cab twisting into an avenue ahead. At the next, it became unorthodox and took to a one-way street against traffic. Maybe the scarred driver could chance it along a deserted street, but Shrevvy reaped the benefit, or lack of it.

A nondescript truck, bearing no name whatever, was parked on that same street and it decided to pull out, just as Shrevvy tried to follow the fugitive cab. This led to a lot of braking and other trouble, with a police whistle somewhere up the avenue.

The truck whipped off to the south and snapped around the next corner to avoid an argument with the law. Ordinarily Shrevvy would have taken a different direction, but Hawkeye popped the quick words:

"Follow it."

There was a reason, as Shrevvy learned when he followed. Rounding the corner, Hawkeye leaned forward to announce that he had seen the other cab turn in the same southward direction when it reached the end of the one-way block.

The truck took the same turn from its street, so Shrevvy copied the action, at the same time playing the hunch that the two vehicles were working in concert. Shrevvy's hunch consisted in dropping back and letting the truck think that it had lost him.

Thinking herself lucky in finding a cab so quickly, Janice didn't recognize its odd behavior. On the contrary, she was pleased by the driver's alacrity, and didn't bother to check his face by the harmless

looking photo that was pasted on the hack license displayed in the rear of the cab.

Looking out through the back window, Janice was quite worried at seeing another cab on the trail; hence Shrevvy's near-tangle with the truck pleased Janice. The truck being helpful, it didn't occur to Janice that it could be the skulking vehicle of the night before, the one that had followed from the vicinity of Jerry's office.

Now, running parallel with the waterfront, this cab was taking Janice to the address that she had given the driver, which made everything fair. Janice would expect Captain Adalbart to be living on an avenue beside the river. Likewise, truck traffic didn't surprise her, so she gave no further heed of it.

The cab was keeping under the pillars of the express highway, with great steamship piers looming along side. A slight mist hovered over all, accounting for the continuous blare of whistles from the river, which might have meant much to Jerry Gifford, but little to Janice Courtland.

Some piers were lighted, others dark, and it was amid a row of the latter type that one loomed with the huge, faded sign above it:

PACIFIC EXPORT LINES

Janice didn't even notice the sign, because just then the cab swerved. Cutting across the broad avenue, the driver began to fish for addresses among a row of nondescript buildings which had the look of rooming houses. Finding the one he wanted, he halted the cab and huddled his face as he opened the door, merely gesturing at the meter.

Paying the fare, Janice alighted without a word. She waited for the cab to pull away, which it did, in slow but reasonably normal fashion. There was another car moving across the avenue and Janice gave it a suspicious stare, only to decide that it looked too respectable to give trouble. Though her impression of the car was vague, it reminded her somewhat of Cranston's limousine, though Janice laughed at the thought of either that car or its owner visiting this disreputable district.

If Janice had looked back across the avenue as she entered the dimly lighted doorway of Adalbart's rooming house, she would have seen a lantern gleaming in the window off what had once been the office of the now deserted Pacific Export Pier. But Janice had started up the dingy stairs before the lantern began to blink in a fashion that would have given her qualms.

The signals were produced by the pier's watchman, who was using the simple expedient of blocking off the lantern's light with his cap. The message that he sent must have heralded Janice's arrival, for it brought a questioning response from a window of the rooming house, which though at the rear of the building, was visible at an angle from the pier.

Again the watchman signalled. This time his message read "All clear." There were a few blinks from the dim window on the third floor; then, taking his lantern from its hook, the watchman started out to make his rounds.

From close beside the office window, a whispered laugh stirred the darkness. Soon after, a gliding shape clouded the dim doorway that Janice had entered; then faded, much in the fashion of a shadow!

CHAPTER VIII

THE upstairs door creaked open of its own accord, as Janice rapped it firmly but softly with the glove she wore. At the creak, the girl dropped her hand quickly to her purse, fumbled there frantically to remove her glove and clutch a small gun instead.

Then, Janice's fears lessened, though she still held doubts as she stepped forward into the room.

Captain Adalbart was there, leaning half across a rickety table, facing toward the door. In explanation of his stupefied condition, Janice saw a half-filled liquor bottle, an empty glass beside it. But neither of Adalbart's hands was toward the bottle. He was leaning on one arm, while the other was extended, holding an envelope in its half-clenched fist.

Janice knew that the man was Adalbart, from his mane of red hair strewn down across his eyes until it seemed to join the equally ruddy beard that spread unkempt from his face. Starting to close the door, Janice hoped its creak would awaken the bearded skipper, but it didn't.

The girl spoke in the most penetrating whisper she could command:

"Captain Adalbart!"

The only answer was the flapping of a window shade, a rather startling sound. The window was in back of Adalbart and its shade was drawn almost to the sill. It accounted for the slight breeze that drifted through the room, for the other window, in the side wall, was closed, as Janice could see because the shade was up.

Over her slight start, Janice moved forward firmly, not caring when the floor boards creaked, because she hoped that Adalbart would hear them. As she neared the table, Adalbart moved his head, so Janice spoke in a quick whisper.

"It's nice of you to return the money -"

Interrupting herself, Janice decided it would be better to save her thanks until Adalbart did return the money. So she changed her story.

"I'm Janice Courtland. Remember? You talked to me on the telephone, a little while ago. You said you were coming back here, that you'd have the twenty-five thousand dollars if I hurried here right away. So here I am."

Another creak from the floor board at Janice's next step. Thinking she heard a corresponding sound from the door, the girl gave a quick look across her shoulder, to see only blackness there. The window shade furnished a trifling flip, bringing Janice full about, staring past the electric-lighted table lamp, which was about the only modern object in the room.

Adalbart stirred again.

As though taking Janice's identity at her word, the bearded captain didn't bother to look up as his hand thrust itself toward her, raising the envelope. Reaching to receive the envelope, Janice noted that it looked thickly wadded, but before she could take it, the envelope dropped from Adalbart's fingers.

Oddly, the thick envelope fluttered as it fell to the desk. Turning over, it revealed Janice's name, unevenly scrawled in pencil. Picking up the envelope, Janice stared anew.

It must have held money, this envelope, for it showed the shape of a stack of bills in just the right size. But the currency was gone, the envelope empty. Whether this was a hoax or not, only Adalbart could explain. Her gun back in her bag, Janice stretched across the table to pluck Adalbart's arm and shake him back to normal. That was to be more difficult than Janice supposed.

What stirred Adalbart was the pressure the girl gave the desk. This time the man's figure swayed and Janice gave a trifling gasp as he began to topple sideward. Stepping quickly around the edge of the desk,

Janice made a valiant effort to halt the skipper's sprawl.

Janice was too late.

She couldn't have stopped that weight if she had tried, for Adalbart was bulky, and it was all dead weight.

Hitting the floor face downward with a jolt that rattled the table lamp, Adalbart displayed the reason for his silence. Projecting from the skipper's back was the silver handle of an Oriental knife, studded with a deep red gem!

Captain Adalbart was as stone dead as that jewel whose dye seemed to have absorbed his heart's blood!

What Janice had discovered was a facsimile of an earlier murder as yet undiscovered, that of Kip Ranstead. A reasonable facsimile too, considering the rapidity with which it had happened, though Janice could not testify to the time element, not having seen the signals that Adalbart flashed from his side window.

Perhaps a handy comparison might have brought Janice to her wits; but having none, the girl acted in that strangely unaccountable fashion which follows a startling shock and is difficult to reconstruct later. Paradoxically, Janice's senses were both dulled and sharpened at the same time.

Forgetting the rear window with its flapping shade, Janice wheeled toward the door. It hadn't creaked anew, but she thought it had, for her own recollections were catching up with her like a flood. The creaks that Janice really remembered were those of the floor, pressed by her own footsteps, which in turn had stirred the table just enough to make Adalbart's body shift. Yet Janice at this moment would have sworn that she had seen a knife come from nowhere, dealing murder with the stroke of an invisible hand.

A hand belonging to some phantom creature that must have followed Janice up the stairs and passed her on the way to Adalbart's table, invisibly plucking a bundle of cash while on the way!

Janice had another recollection: her gun.

If the creature of Janice's fancy had swooped past her from the door, it wouldn't be entering there again. But as part of her mental aberration, Janice's thoughts were playing merry-go-round. She'd dispose of the menace and begin all over, perhaps bringing Adalbart back to life, money and all.

Her gun coming up in her defiant hand, Janice found the trigger and fired point-blank at the door.

Before she delivered the first shot, Janice saw a realization of the phantasmagoric images she thought existed. But though she saw, her sight was blind. Just as she had turned strained memory into grim reality, so did she class the real as recollection.

Blackness, living blackness was spreading toward Janice, almost with the speed that she had attributed to something of invisibility. Though it didn't have the speed of imagination, the great cloaked shape was faster than Janice's hand. Caught just within the doorway, The Shadow couldn't chance waiting out the hectic shots from Janice's gun.

Swooping to stop this untimely fire, The Shadow maneuvered the next best thing. His gloved hand, stretched more than half his length ahead of him, caught Janice's wrist and thrust it upward, so that the bullets from the puny but dangerous gun spattered only the ceiling.

As though the concussions had jarred it, the window shade flapped again and whirred upward. Carrying

Janice in a spin, The Shadow didn't turn to look for some other cause. With one fling he sent the girl sprawling to a corner while he took a hurdling drive the other way, across Adalbart's body. In his lurch, The Shadow caught the desk lamp and hurled it.

It wasn't the yanking of the lamp cord that extinguished its light. The glow vanished in mid-air before the cord had reached its length. What blacked it were the tongued shots from a revolver much larger than Janice's, though this gun too was on the pull away, thanks to The Shadow's quick action.

The threat of the flying lamp produced the receding aim from an assassin who sought to riddle The Shadow but wrecked the missile instead. In the ensuing blot-out, it might be anybody's fray.

Except that blackness was The Shadow's favorite battle ground!

CHAPTER IX

FLUNG high, the lamp crashed the top half of the window. An instant later, the table clattered, announcing that a figure had lunged into the room. Guns stabbed in quick precision, both from The Shadow's fist and that of his unknown foe.

High shots these, particularly The Shadow's, because he was keeping them away from Janice. At least they had the effect of drawing and wasting a murderer's sting, in the form of bullets, for a click in the darkness was the last response to the blast of The Shadow's automatic.

Then, groping expertly in the darkness, The Shadow made a sudden, silent swoop past the door. With it, he thrust Janice against the wall, subduing the clatter of her heels that came when she started a wild break for what she thought was the safety of the stairway.

How safe it wasn't The Shadow proved by the continuation of his own whirl. Something literally slashed the darkness and pinioned itself through a panel of the door. That driving object was the Oriental knife, plucked from Adalbart, the victim, by the hand of a murderer who hoped to run up his score of kills!

Stabbing a bullet in return, The Shadow followed through his shot. He didn't hope to land the killer with that one, but by putting the man on the dodge, he could come through with the next. What The Shadow was doing was blocking off the window, just as his adversary had tried to block off the door.

This time The Shadow met the unexpected.

It wasn't logical that the killer could have gotten almost to the window, yet it was from that very direction that a flying figure met The Shadow head-on. A moment later, The Shadow and a ferocious fighter were lashing in a riotous fray that made even the sound of guns seem tame.

Only there were no guns blasting now.

The half-broken table smashed completely under the double weight of the landing grapplers. There were splintering crashes as both fighters grabbed loose table-legs and clubbed them through the empty darkness. Out of the void, they lunged like tangled bulls and punched half through the door with their shoulders.

Light that filtered through the broken panels showed a saffron face curved with a livid scar that followed the line of a constable's helmet-strap. Neck muscles, tightened under the clutch of The Shadow's gloved fist, forced a vicious crimson along that ugly mark, matching the sudden, unblinking glow of a red gem set in a knife handle that was lazily toppling from a halved door panel, between that yellow visage and the face its glaring eyes could not see: The Shadow's!

The Shadow, however, saw his adversary's face, as did Janice. She'd heard of such a countenance and its connection with Adalbart brought from the girl a sharp cry:

"Malabar!"

The cry helped, at that moment. A hand as jaundiced as the fierce, piratical face, was coming up in the fashion of an open claw. Squarely into it was sagging the handle of the long, thin-bladed dagger, a weapon that Malabar could use and would. The twist of the man's head, made so his lips could snarl in Janice's direction, drew his shoulder with it.

Half-glancing from Malabar's fingers, the knife handle twisted for a further fall. Madly Malabar tried to grip this unexpected prize, but now The Shadow's other hand, swooping in hard and fast, was clamping over the saffron fist. The Shadow could have turned the freed knife-point straight between Malabar's ferocious eyes, if the crash had not arrived.

Sensing it from the suppression of light outside the half-shattered door, The Shadow was away, carrying Janice with him, and letting Malabar take the brunt.

It was the door that crashed, and completely.

Swift figures had come up the stairs, all in a silent group. Their footfalls hadn't allowed a thud, not even on the bare stairs. To say that they were like snakes in human form would have been a wrong comparison. Rather, snakes could have been termed the copyists of amazing men such as these.

What they possessed in slimy grace, they lacked in other ways, these pirates of the Pescadores. Perhaps it was just that they lacked a leader, for Malabar was groggy. His own silent men had deceived him by their sudden arrival; he'd taken the brunt of the smashed door. Now they were spreading blindly, almost madly, as they did when they boarded ship decks, seeking enemies everywhere.

For one, they found Malabar without immediately recognizing him.

For another, they pounced upon Adalbart's body and hoisted it half to their shoulders, thinking it alive from the mad force they themselves imbued to it. They didn't find The Shadow, at least not right away, for he was at the window, his figure blotting out what little light might have aided his enemies.

And with The Shadow was Janice, not realizing how soon she was to involuntarily betray him.

Outside The Shadow saw a narrow but ample roof, the springboard from which Malabar had made his lunge, a perfect route for a murderer's escape, and therefore suited to the purposes of any who chose to use it.

Janice was going to choose it.

The trouble was that Janice didn't see the roof as The Shadow started her across the window ledge. She conveyed the notion that she saw it, because she was so anxious to be clear of the battle-swept room that she was ready to start anywhere.

But when Janice felt her balance going, and saw what she thought was space below her, she couldn't restrain her protest. At the girl's half-scream, Malabar's men swooped for the window.

The Shadow simply let Janice thump the roof a few feet below while he whirled to meet the surge. What might have happened to the Pescadores tribe at meeting this one man typhoon was to be reserved for a future occasion. Into the fracas came the sudden gleam of flashlights, handled by The Shadow's agents. With Malabar in action again, though somewhat incoherent in his peculiar native tongue, the pirates

swung to repel these unexpected boarders.

Driving the throng ahead, The Shadow counted on his agents to spread, which they did - two of them - Harry and Hawkeye. From the flank, they aided their chief in the drive wherein Jericho supplied the follow-up. Two steps down, so that his gigantic size was reduced to working proportions, Jericho simply took the tawny men as they came snaking out and turned their twisty staggers into genuine sprawls.

One, two at a time, Jericho headed them down the stairs so fast that they didn't use the steps. Malabar was amid the flying squadron of acrobatic pirates who should have piled up in an insensible heap, the way Jericho was heaving them.

Only this wasn't like taking doors head-on, not to these creatures of the China Coast. They were used to being pitched off steamers en masse and preferred landing in sampans rather than the sea. They struck the floor at the foot just like they arrived in their own boats, only better, since they had more scope.

To all appearances, they behaved like rubber balls, only to resume their snakish squirms as they wriggled around the corner to the next flight down, acting as though they wished another Jericho were there to speed them on their way. As amazed as The Shadow's other agents, Jericho stood there looking down at vacancy, until a whispered order came, with a slightly amused laugh.

"Follow them."

The agents took to the task without delay, hoping that a repeat encounter would give them a chance to test the weaknesses of these tumblers who followed Malabar. Alone in Adalbart's room, The Shadow ran a flashlight's beam past the bearded captain's much mauled body and spotted the envelope bearing Janice's name.

There was something else the girl had forgotten or lost in the rush; her gun. So The Shadow gathered it as an extra souvenir. Then, swinging across the window sill, he picked his way rapidly down to the lower roof and a shed behind it, taking the easiest course because he knew that Janice must have followed it.

The waterfront by now was about as alive with whistles, sirens, shouts and searchlights as any place could be. More important to The Shadow were the tail-lights of Shrevvy's cab, twinkling more than a block away. The Shadow knew that the alert hackie had picked up the correct passenger: Janice Courtland.

As for the bouncing products of the Pescadores, they had vanished. From a corner, The Shadow saw his agents joining a group of waterfront habitues who were gesturing up toward Adalbart's room and claiming that the trouble had come from there. Waiting until the throng, police included, had started up into the house, The Shadow glided across the broad avenue to the Pacific Export Pier.

It was there that a cowering watchman thought that Adalbart's ghost had found him, when a shrouded shape approached and issued a whispered command.

Quivering beside his shaky lantern, the watchman soon realized that his questioner was the strange personage he had heard about from the fear-stricken lips of human water rats.

"I'm telling you, Shadow, I've done nothing," the watchman pleaded. "Don't blame me if onc't I shipped with Cap Adalbart. Others will tell you that Jim Nevley is an honest sort, even if he was onc't Adalbart's matey.

"Twasn't money he paid me, because all he did was give back what he owed me. Always paid his debts did Adalbart, leastwise when he could. Said no man that ever passed up a debt could win the confidence

of the South Sea natives and there's no way to gyp them if you can't win their confidence."

Pausing to wipe his sweaty brow, Nevley steadied the lantern and continued.

"All Adalbart asked of me was to flash him when somebody came to see him, just to make sure there was not nobody else tagging along. When I seen that a cab was dropping somebody, I waited until it was gone. I flashed 'All Clear' and Adalbart answered."

The Shadow's query came like a command:

"You are sure it was Adalbart."

"Couldn't have been nobody else," assured Nevley. "He'd just gone up, he had. It was our own code we were using, like we had on the old copra schooner, so nobody could pick up what we talked about. It was Adalbart all right, and I'd like to know who the man was that came in that cab. Only it wouldn't do me no good to talk -"

It was doing Nevley no good to talk right now, except for his own companionship. When the watchman looked around, he found himself alone. From somewhere came a low, trailing laugh that faded amid the harsh blare of a ferry-boat's whistle, tuning in from the foggy river.

CHAPTER X

GIFFORD'S COLUMN in the Daily Shipper carried its second message. In the same first-letter style, it broadcasted its warning of murder to come. Lamont Cranston had read it even before it was printed, by the simple expedient of visiting the office of the shipping journal and talking to the editor.

Today's column read:

Getting out of debt always leaves losses since healthy enterprises never raise investment costs higher.

Debts engender additional tax hazards!

Never was this more true than in the Republics of Panama, which is essentially a one industry nation. As the source of Panama hats, from the manufacture of which the nation derives its principal revenue, Panama is dependent entirely upon its export trade.

There was no reason for Cranston to check the financial status of Panama in hope of finding an error in Jerry's column. He recognized a very pointed error, the reference to Panama hats. Such hats were a misnomer, since the bulk of their manufacture was done in Ecuador, not Panama.

As before, Jerry had purposely inserted a glaring mistake in the hope that someone would analyze the lead sentences in the column. Again, Cranston took the cue and looked for the hidden message. Like the previous one, it was told by the first letter's of the words in the first two sentences.

The first sentence revealed a name: GOODALL SHENRICH. The second exclaimed the menace: DEATH!

Since the editor of the Daily Shipper took Jerry's statements at face value, Cranston did not enlighten him. What Cranston did was inquire about Jerry's whereabouts. He learned that Jerry had gone up state, that his mail was being forwarded there. In turn, Jerry was mailing in his column.

As evidence, the editor gestured to an envelope lying on his desk. The envelope was handwritten, not typed, and the only postmark that it bore was New York City. Tabbing those facts, Cranston left; later

he held a conference with Harry Vincent on the subject.

The conference took place in the office of Rutledge Mann, the investment broker who wallowed among newspaper clippings. In contrast to Vincent, who had something of Cranston's calm and poise, Mann was a chubby, round-faced individual whose solemn appearance gave a serious aspect to the occasion.

"You'd better go up state," Cranston told Harry. "I doubt that you'll find Gifford there, but find out what you can."

Harry Vincent nodded.

"Gifford has an office here in town," vouchsafed the methodical Mann. "An apartment, too. Here are the addresses and phone numbers."

"Thanks," said Cranston. Then, drily: "You haven't any facts on Goodall Shenrich, have you?"

"Not where he is nor why," replied Mann, ruefully. "He left for a three day trip, they told me when I phoned his antique shop."

"Did you ask what else the shop handles?"

"Only antiques, that is officially. They did say that occasionally Shenrich makes special purchases for private customers. But they couldn't give me any details."

"Couldn't or wouldn't?"

"I am sure they couldn't." Mann was quite emphatic. "I have met Shenrich and he is a very untalkative sort. Sly, conniving - those are the impressions he gives you."

Harry Vincent was reading through the Daily Shipper. He put the logical question:

"If Gifford knows so much, why can't he tell us more in this column of his?"

Eyes half-closed, Cranston responded with a well-visualized deduction of the present circumstances involving Jerry Gifford.

"Gifford must be somewhere here in town," decided Cranston. "He has obviously taken on some special assignment, since he does not want to be bothered. I would say that it involves research because he wants to be out of touch with people for a while.

"This was largely voluntary on his part for two reasons. First he phoned the Shipper personally, whereas if he had been under threat, he would probably have been forced to dictate a letter and sign it. Again, he could not have learned of his dilemma until he arrived where he is at present, otherwise he would have arranged some better means of communication than through his column.

"He is allowed to write his column; therefore that must have been understood beforehand. But someone else mails it for him, as is obvious by the pen-addressed envelope. Therefore Gifford is mistrusted and probably knows it."

Pausing, Cranston seemed to review all that he had said. Then:

"Being mistrusted, Gifford must be careful when he writes his column, because he is probably under observation. He can think out the lead sentences beforehand and flash his warning through them. But after he is actually getting into his column, hesitancy would excite suspicion."

Having established Jerry's peculiar status, Cranston wrote out a memo for Mann with a copy for Harry. The memo covered things to be learned about Jerry regarding both his ambitions and his friends. Anything that could give an inkling to Jerry's whereabouts would be helpful; but meanwhile Cranston had his own case to consider.

The case of Goodall Shenrich.

"Money was stolen from Captain Adalbart," asserted Cranston, "but it wasn't what those pirates were after. Malabar's crew were seeking something that Adalbart must have sold, something that carried a death threat to the owner.

"Gifford could not have heard of Adalbart's death when he wrote that second warning covering Shenrich. Therefore he is working under the correct assumption that Adalbart could have disposed of the fatal object that placed him under the menace of murder. So Gifford named the man next in line: Shenrich."

Cranston was rising, turning toward the door. He paused there, as was his frequent custom. In an even tone, Cranston added:

"Shenrich's disappearance was probably self-planned. Adalbart recognized a menace, as witness his arrangements with the watchman on the old pier. If Shenrich is as smart as he claims, he will stay out of sight until he has disposed of whatever he bought from Adalbart. When Shenrich returns, he can tell us who is menaced next. Unless -"

Cranston left it with that word "unless" but the unspoken sentence was graphic in itself. It meant, without so many words, that Shenrich still could be tampering with fate, purely because of his connection with the clandestine transaction that had brought death to Adalbart. Adalbart hadn't lived to tell his story; perhaps the same would apply to Shenrich.

The next place Cranston stopped was the Malaysian Museum.

There were good reasons for his visit there. Since Mortimer Kremble had at least heard of Captain Adalbart, he might have some opinions regarding the copra skipper's death. As a prompter to those opinions, Janice Courtland would soon be at the museum. Cranston had learned that from a phone call made by Hawkeye who was stationed outside the apartment house where Janice lived.

Last night, Janice had been profuse in her thanks of Shrevvy, the timely cab driver who had picked her up after her mad flight from Adalbart's.

She'd not only found Shrevvy affable, but had learned that his regular stand was in her neighborhood. The result had been arrangements whereby Shrevvy would be on call when Janice wanted to go anywhere.

In choosing a favorite cab, Janice had thereby picked The Shadow's and from now on would be under proper auspices.

At the museum, Cranston found not only Janice, but also J. Dazley Theobald. The sharp-faced Mr. Theobald was here to talk about contributing to the endowment fund, but his comments were bringing shakes from the shaggy head of Mortimer Kremble.

"Officially I am only the curator," Kremble was telling Theobald. "There will be directors appointed soon and they will discuss future finances. Sorry, Dazley, but we must postpone this."

Theobald gave a grumble.

"Maybe I'm not welcome here."

"Of course you're welcome," insisted Kremble, "provided your interest concerns the exhibits. But I don't want to be bothered, Dazley" - Kremble glanced at his watch - "especially since I must do some more deciphering of those Cambodian plaques."

Waving earnestly to the main exhibit room, Kremble dismissed Theobald. Then, turning to Cranston:

"I'm glad you're here, Cranston," Kremble undertoned. "Miss Courtland has a problem which needs your help more than mine."

Cranston turned to find Janice eagerly waiting her turn to speak.

"It's about a Captain Adalbart," explained Kremble. "He was murdered last night and he owed Miss Kremble some money. In fact she has a note that he signed, but I'm afraid it is worthless now."

With a shaggy head-shake, Kremble bowed away and went down to the lower vaults. One of the servants carefully closed the door and stood on duty there to see that Kremble wasn't bothered by Theobald or any of the curator's other friends, some of whom were arriving just in time to receive Kremble's farewell wave as he went below.

"It's not just the money," Janice expressed to Cranston. "I'd like to see justice done on Adalbart's account. He was good enough to promise me my payment."

Cranston's face remained impassive as he queried:

"You mean you saw Adalbart and talked with him?"

"Why - why, no," stammered Janice. "I couldn't see him - how could I? I didn't know where he was; that is, I didn't know until after he was murdered, or at least I couldn't have found him until then, could I?"

In trying to cover the truth, Janice was more or less telling it. Her emphasis on the word "see" along with the way she dropped the term "talk" was plainly an admission that she had received a telephone call from Adalbart, telling her where to meet him.

Cranston let the subject pass. As The Shadow he had witnessed enough of Janice's peregrinations and tribulations to know where she stood. Very calmly he asked:

"Did you ever hear of an antique dealer named Goodall Shenrich?"

After a few moments of thought, Janice shook her head.

"I heard him mention Adalbart once," recalled Cranston, idly, "but it was probably inconsequential." He glanced around the museum, then inquired: "You are staying here a while, Miss Courtland?"

"I suppose so," replied Janice. "I might find something important among the exhibits; that is if anything can be regarded as important now."

Cranston was glancing out into the gathering dusk.

"Shall I call here in an hour?" he questioned. "We might have dinner together, you know. That could prove important."

Smiling, Janice nodded. Somehow, she felt that her quest was not yet over, that somehow there might still be a chance to reclaim the money that Adalbart had all but repaid her. At least there was encouragement

in talking it over with Cranston.

Such were the girl's opinions as she watched Lamont Cranston stroll out from the museum to take the cab that would be back in time for Janice, by special arrangement with the driver. Shrevvy had said that he'd have to take fares in between, but that Janice shouldn't worry.

In fact there seemed no cause for worry on any score at all, which only proved that Janice Courtland didn't see the lurking outdoor figures that watched the cab roll away.

This quest, involving much more than Adalbart's unpaid note, was closer at hand than Janice could suppose!

CHAPTER XI

IT was J. Dazley Theobald who started Janice on an excursion she should have strictly avoided. Lamont Cranston had given the girl an hour's respite from unnecessary trouble, but she didn't take advantage of it.

The reason was that Janice saw Theobald come smugly from a phone booth in the museum foyer, soon after Cranston had left. Not having seen him enter the booth, Janice couldn't tell how long the sharp-faced man had been there, but the eager way in which he clutched his hat and cane and started from the museum, was enough to excite Janice's overstrained suspicions.

Heading for the phone booth, Janice found the classified directory lying open on a rack beside it. Forgetful in his hurry, Theobald had left a trail. On the yellow page in front of her, Janice saw the printed classification:

ANTIQUÉ DEALERS

That was enough. It meant that Theobald, of all people, might be thinking in terms of the man that Cranston had mentioned: Goodall Shenrich. Her thoughts working overspeed as they had the night before, Janice found herself out on the brownstone steps, hardly realizing how she'd gotten there.

Another thing: Janice was looking for Shrevvy's cab, thinking stupidly that Theobald must have taken it, until - her recollections catching up - she realized that Cranston had gone in that very cab. Theobald couldn't have hailed another this quickly, so Janice found her wits and looked for the man.

J. Dazley was almost at the corner and making good speed with his long legs. So Janice started right after him, using what she thought were first-class camouflage tactics, by keeping close to the house walls.

Far more efficient than Janice were the figures that came to life along the street. The silent men were at large again tonight; unreported in Janice's own neighborhood, they must have been watching the museum as an alternative. If Malabar himself was among them, his scarred face looked like the rest, which meant that it wasn't showing at all.

Rounding the corner after Theobald, Janice was sure of one thing - that he hadn't noticed her on his trail. At the next street, Theobald turned again, following the sidewalk that fronted the old houses in back of the museum, where Janice had once played hide-and-seek with a man she now felt sure was Malabar.

This awakened unwanted recollections and with them came alarm. Glancing back over her shoulder, Janice looked for flitting figures; seeing none, she turned her eyes toward Theobald, just in time to see him step into a handy doorway.

Maybe this street had an atmosphere that made people want to dodge from sight. Anyway, Janice took

the hint and did the same. Peering across some house steps, she saw Theobald emerge, but in the dusk he had become a huddly figure that Janice recognized only because she knew he was around.

Moving forward, Janice saw Theobald duck again. Then he was edging into sight, a few doorways further on, only to perform another dodge. Crouching behind the next steps, Janice was surprised to see Theobald's tactics continue, as if the man were playing hide-and-seek with himself. Then she decided that he hadn't seen her, but was merely working his doorway sidles as a general precaution.

The man's speed varied, as did his huddle. Sometimes he covered a stretch of wall quite quickly, bobbing from sight and back again, covering a few doorways in a matter of moments. Again, he would spend several seconds in one place. As a prowler, Theobald seemed to work in the fashion of hop-skip-jump.

All this convinced Janice that it would be folly to follow. After all, she knew Theobald's destination: Shenrich's. So Janice retraced her course back to the original corner, smiling at the darkened doorways that she passed, knowing they could not now contain J. Dazley Theobald.

Those doorways held something more.

From half a dozen such caches, men of padded footfalls emerged to the sidewalk, treating it like the deck of a boarded vessel. Their silent half-trot brought them close to Janice; then evaporating instantly, they let the girl regain her distance. At the avenue, they allowed leeway while Janice crossed; when she hailed a passing cab, they remained unseen.

Only it wasn't Shrevvy's cab that Janice took. Maybe the rubbery men of darkness recognized the fact, and therefore lost no time. For they bounded suddenly into sight and sprang into an arriving truck that seemed to leap from nowhere like themselves. The truck was the same black vehicle that had served these followers of Malabar on their previous expeditions.

As before, the truck sped off on Janice's trail.

Blind business, this all seemed tonight, considering the motive behind The Shadow's own excursion. He was after clues, nothing more, shreds of evidence that might enable him to learn the whereabouts of Goodall Shenrich.

Such clues could best be found in Shenrich's Antique Shop, now closed for the night, provided there were any clues at all. If smart, Shenrich would have eliminated them, and the antique dealer was unquestionably smart. There was a chance, though, that Shenrich had made some slip.

Right now, The Shadow was entering the antique shop by the hard way that was easier.

Situated against a blank-walled building, Shenrich's shop occupied the ground floor of a house that had been altered into a store. The upstairs floors were used as storage rooms, the proof being their barred windows. Antique shops as a rule represented a half-way stage, where protection against entry was concerned.

Unquestionably Shenrich had installed a burglar alarm along with the barred windows. His was no junk shop that all but petty sneaks would ignore. On the contrary, his wares were bulky; it would take a truck to carry away a worthwhile amount. Certain minor spots could therefore have been overlooked in the protective system.

The Shadow was looking for just such a spot. He was working down the rough wall of the adjoining building into what seemed a narrow crevice, just below. That gap couldn't be seen from the street, but The Shadow had speculated on its existence and had won. The space was a well, furnishing ventilation

more than light, though it had provision for the latter.

Finishing his human fly descent, The Shadow found a window just about large enough to receive him. It was barred but the bars showed dull rust under the tiny twinkle of The Shadow's close-focused flashlight; therefore they weren't wired against the burglary business.

With Shenrich's own life the question at stake, The Shadow had no compunctions about removing these bars, jimmying the windows, and sliding into the shop. He performed these operations efficiently, but they took time.

Too much time.

Time when The Shadow was out of contact with the world outside. To save time, he hadn't bothered to arrange a system of communication with his agents during what he was sure would be no more than a ten or fifteen minute task. In fact none of The Shadow's agents were around, not even Shrevvy, for The Shadow had sent the cab back to the Malaysian Museum, too late however to arrive there as soon as Janice wanted it.

Adding a few more minutes to The Shadow's task was the problem of the door leading from the little store room in which he had landed. It was locked from the other side and had to be worked open, too. Then all was done and The Shadow moved free, silent and invisible among the antiques that formed Shenrich's main stock.

Many of these objects had been covered for the night and their white shrouds gave them the appearance of great ghostly figures, looming to clutch the intrepid invader in their midst. Quite unconcerned, The Shadow used these ghoulish contrivances as markers and let them muffle his flashlight whenever he used it.

What The Shadow wanted to find was Shenrich's office and to all appearances it was on a little balcony set at the back of the main display room. The odd problem was finding the stairs to that balcony among the massed white squadron. It took several trips amid the shrouded antiques before The Shadow located the steps. They led up to a little landing, then turned and reached the balcony.

Pausing, The Shadow listened.

Here was ghostly stuff at work!

Creaks were coming from those stairs, moving upward! Not at the spot where The Shadow was, but at the higher portion of the flight, above the landing.

If The Shadow had not been so close, he could not have heard them, but as he took the steps to the landing, he practically saw the higher steps quiver. It certainly seemed that some phantom being was on the stride, but The Shadow wasn't a believer in phantoms. For one thing, he could outdo this one. As the creaks neared the balcony, The Shadow followed, making no noise whatever. He halted, turned his back against the wall, as a door clattered open above; then onto the balcony stepped a man who was definitely not a ghost, though his face showed white and peaked in the dull gloom.

A pasty, chinless face answered the description of Goodall Shenrich. The antique dealer looked down the steps, mistook The Shadow for part of the blackness, and finally turned to go back into his office. Resuming his creakless ascent, The Shadow let one gloved hand knuckle the slanted panel of the wall beside him.

No wonder these steps were narrow. They continued through to the other side of what The Shadow had

tested as a mere partition. The hidden half of the stairway was a secret entrance to Shenrich's office, reached by a door from the back alley. Only Shenrich should have learned to sneak up to his office more carefully, to avoid ghost creaks.

Silently entering a tiny anteroom to the office where Shenrich had returned, The Shadow saw no sign of the stairway's other half. He knew therefore that it must have an extra turn, leading around to the rear of the office.

In fact, as The Shadow looked into the office, he saw the back door that Shenrich had used. It was ajar, as though the antique dealer had it ready in case of hurried flight.

At present, Shenrich was in another corner. He was going through a file cabinet that stood near a prize antique, a great, two-doored chest of black walnut, mounted on sturdy legs that gave it a height equal to Shenrich's own.

Finding the file that he wanted, Shenrich snatched it from the case. Thumbing through its papers, he found the one he wanted, and turned to study it in the light. He was outlined against the background of the great walnut chest, as he drew a match from his pocket and nervously tried to strike it.

Shenrich's purpose was plain. He intended to burn the paper. It might be just the evidence that The Shadow wanted in the case of Captain Adalbart, or something more.

The match didn't strike, because Shenrich's hand gave up the effort. In fact, his hand seemed to freeze, like the rest of him, as Shenrich heard the shudder of a strange, whispered laugh, a taunt which the walls gathered and echoed like so many living tongues.

Staring across a desk near the center of the room, Goodall Shenrich saw the cloaked figure of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII

MEN like Shenrich revealed their dubious pasts in one sweeping flood, whenever they faced The Shadow. If a movie camera had registered Shenrich's reactions in slow-motion, the film would have been worth a prolonged analysis later.

Every bit of swindlery, conspiracy, even thievery and certainly extortion that Shenrich had used to spice his business career, was reflected from the man's mind to his face. If Shenrich could have talked, he would have gulped names, blaming certain people for putting The Shadow on his trail, and winding up with pleas for mercy.

It was rather ironic from The Shadow's viewpoint to have come here in behalf of a man whose caliber was on display and proving worthless.

Shenrich must have realized this, but with it he guessed the cause behind The Shadow's visit. Putting two and two together, Shenrich nullified them and made zero. Plead he did, but on a score wherein he was safe.

"I didn't murder Adalbart!" he finally blurted. "Honestly, I didn't! Our deal was straight - we went through with it - no matter what Adalbart told you. I gave him money, yes, but I was making mine. Adalbart was entitled to his, where I was concerned."

Encouraging, this. The further Shenrich went with such talk, the less questions The Shadow would have to put. Spontaneous information always carried fine points of detail that mere questioning would not bring

out.

"Look, here it is!" Shenrich let the piece of paper shake of its own accord. "The receipt that Adalbart gave me for fifty thousand dollars. I wouldn't have taken it if I'd been going to kill him."

The Shadow throbbed a whispered laugh that made the paper quiver like a poplar leaf. Tightening his hand with an effort, Shenrich squinted a shrewd look from his pasty face. His own laugh came hollow.

"Maybe I'd have taken the receipt," Shenrich admitted, "but I would have destroyed it sooner. Only there's more than one reason for getting rid of something. One reason is you don't want it; the other, you don't need it.

"I don't need this receipt, now that Adalbart is dead. I wouldn't like it to get around that I'd had dealings with him, because I wouldn't be safe. But maybe I'm safer if I depend on you, Mr. Shadow. You can keep this for me."

Stretching his hand forward, Shenrich let the paper flutter from his hand. The Shadow caught it with gloved reach, but at the last moment, he was forced to stoop. Profiting by that fact, seeing also that neither of The Shadow's hands contained a gun, Shenrich showed himself a rat and more.

Whipping back, he yanked a revolver of his own, aimed it for The Shadow and thrust his finger for the trigger. If he'd used the gun only as a threat, he could have justified it later, where The Shadow was concerned; but Shenrich's purpose was a kill.

The swiftness of The Shadow's counter was amazing. The whip back of the plucking hand that caught the paper was outmatched by the wrist-swivel of the gloved fist that had come against his cloak front. The automatic that appeared seemed literally to grow from The Shadow's fist, with his forefinger the stem, attached to the trigger.

That The Shadow could have beaten Shenrich to the shot was proved when The Shadow didn't fire.

In a split-second, The Shadow had seen Shenrich's own trigger finger falter, fumbling momentarily before it froze. Leaning squarely back against the walnut cabinet-chest, Shenrich gasped. His gun descended as though actuated by the hypnotic force of The Shadow's automatic with its looming muzzle.

The Shadow had seen so many characters like Shenrich wilt away, that this time even his keen eye didn't detect the difference.

Besides, The Shadow wasn't all eyes at this moment. His ears were busy too.

The Shadow was hearing creaks from the stairs, oddly alternating creaks, as though somebody had chosen the hidden route while somebody else was coming the regular way, much as The Shadow himself had ascended while footsteps were still audible on the other side.

Shenrich's gun slipped from his fingers and hit the floor. With the thump, the pasty man's gasp became coherent. What Shenrich said was:

"The Taiwan Joss!"

A pause, as Shenrich's chinless jaw sagged down into his collar. Then Shenrich croaked:

"King Koxinga!"

Finally, tone muffled as his head lowered, Shenrich muttered:

"Ride - midnight - pencil -"

Approaching creaks were drowned by a clatter as Shenrich sprawled forward. The clatter came from the walnut chest, for with his fall, Shenrich whipped its split doors open. The startling climax was self-explanatory.

Buried deep in Shenrich's back was a long-bladed dagger. The Shadow knew its length because only last night he had acquired a similar trophy as a sequel to the murder of Captain Adalbart. Only this time, death had been delivered with a startling technique in the very presence of The Shadow!

Someone in that cabinet had slipped the thin blade between the halves of the door. The dagger was waiting when Shenrich took his backward step to draw his gun. As quickly as The Shadow's responding gun draw, the receiving stab of the Oriental poignard had frozen Shenrich, bringing that falter to his trigger finger!

Perhaps The Shadow owed his own life to a murderer's untimely deed, though he was inclined to doubt it. But the only man who could have settled the question was Shenrich, who now was dead. To Shenrich's credit at least were those last important gasps that he had managed. His revelation of the whereabouts of the man who had murdered him could be charged, however, to the killer's own oversight.

The knife blade had sliced between the doors of the chest but the handle hadn't. In his topple, Shenrich had brought the knife along and the hilt had whipped the doors wide.

Now The Shadow was whipping bullets into the darkness of the chest, probing every portion of its high-set interior. The Shadow was neither vengeful on Shenrich's account nor ruthless on his own. This was simply an occasion that allowed no respite. It called for immediate justice against a crafty killer, plus The Shadow's own necessity for preventing a thrust against himself.

The Shadow had not forgotten how this same killer had barely missed him with a knife fling as a follow-up to the stabbing of Adalbart. The proof that the murderer was one and the same was evident from his tactics. Tonight's death weapon, however, was gone from his clutch with Shenrich, but that didn't mean the killer lacked a duplicate. What the killer really didn't lack was ghostly quality.

Instead of tumbling a lurker from the walnut chest, The Shadow's shots simply flayed another pair of doors which opened at the back, giving a clear view through. This explained why the killer hadn't retained his knife. He had preferred a quick departure before Shenrich sprawled.

The chest was a few feet out from the wall. Behind it, coming just above the leg-tops of the chest, was an ornamental screen, fronting an old-fashioned fireplace. The murderer had rolled into that sizeable recess, finding shelter below the level of The Shadow's shots.

Clever, but only so far. Though The Shadow had wasted a gunload of bullets on the empty chest, he had a reserve automatic ready for the self-trapped murderer. Unfortunately The Shadow hadn't time to use that gun. The creaks from the stairs had ended, announcing new contenders.

Wheeling, The Shadow never paused. The very silence of the charging men from the front door of the office, defined them as Malabar's piratical crew. The Shadow knew the way to scatter this tribe. It was direct attack. Flinging himself right into their midst, he turned them into a milling throng, their knives flashing high and harmless as he slugged with his two guns.

A fierce hiss announced Malabar himself, springing in from the rear of the room. The Shadow whirled for the scar-faced chief, just as a light switch clicked. In the darkness, knives became weapon against

weapon and The Shadow was impossible to find. His laugh, tossed in the teeth of the crew that surrounded him, brought a sharp command from Malabar.

In their remarkably swift style, Malabar's men scattered, scooting headlong through the exits. This time there was no Jericho to pitch them down the stairs, but they managed it themselves. Some didn't bother with the stairs; they just hopped the rail of the balcony and fled through the antique shop.

The place wasn't wired at all. This crowd had come in through the front door after cracking its lock with chunks of muffled iron, the way pirates did when posing as steerage passengers behind the grilled gates on steamships plying the China Coast. They knew every trick, these fellows, both in playing dumb and smart.

Having broken the massed onslaught, The Shadow took the back route, the way that Malabar had gone. By the time he reached the rear alley and emerged to the street, all participants in the recent events had vanished, Malabar among them. The only person The Shadow found was Janice, huddling bewildered in a doorway.

As she heard The Shadow's whisper, Janice realized that he was her rescuer of the night before. Not knowing who he was or what he knew, the girl could only point to a corner beyond the front street. There, The Shadow recognized the man who was legging it away from the corner light: J. Dazley Theobald.

There was something grim in The Shadow's laugh as he identified this new participant in events sinister; that was, if Theobald's part happened to be really new. Perhaps The Shadow also regretted the fact that Janice had been dragged into another area of danger through something that he had not foreseen.

Whatever the case, the danger was over, as Janice suddenly realized when she found herself alone, recalling some last words from The Shadow, about getting away from this neighborhood, which Janice promptly did. She decided to find another cab and ride back to the museum, there to await Cranston's return.

One block away from Shenrich's, Janice had a last but brief chill. That was when she saw a truck wheel around the corner and speed down the avenue, a truck that was solid and dark in color, like an old-fashioned Black Maria.

As she drew back into shelter, Janice was reassured by something that she thought belonged in her imagination. It drifted back, as though from the past; a fleeting, fading laugh that seemed meant for her alone.

It was.

If Janice had noted that truck more closely, she might have discerned what looked like a bulge upon its top; part of the truck it seemed, for it was of the same identical black. That bulge happened to be The Shadow.

The jet-hued truck used by Malabar and his imported followers couldn't have been painted better to The Shadow's order!

CHAPTER XIII

POLICE COMMISSIONER WESTON laid the Oriental knife on his desk and spread his hands along its length as though measuring the weapon by the yard. To the calm-faced friend who sat across from him, Weston affirmed:

"This is serious business, Cranston."

It was more than policy for Lamont Cranston to agree. He too had a souvenir of the same sort, a long-bladed knife with a gleaming garnet in its silver handle.

Weston pointed to his knife's garnet.

"I thought maybe it was a ruby," confessed the commissioner. "In that case the knife would be worth a ransom. But they sell these garnets by the dozen and the gross in Malaysia, where this knife came from."

Again, Weston toyed with the odd dagger.

"Cheap but not common," he defined. "I'd like to know who collects weapons like this. It would be a help."

Cranston could have named one collector, outside of himself. In his pocket, Cranston had Mann's latest report on Jerry Gifford. Among other things, Jerry had been a wireless operator along the China Coast and he had brought back a lot of souvenirs, were several Malaysian daggers. One of Jerry's friends had merely mentioned them in the course of conversation.

In fact, Jerry's friends were quite as important an item. One of them, Kip Ranstead, had gone on a trip the same day as Jerry. Kip was a press agent whose publicity jobs were astonishingly negligible. About anybody who might need publicity received a call from Kip and ended up by not hiring him.

What The Shadow had now set Mann to trace were those accounts that Kip didn't get.

"Of course this might have been Shenrich's knife," mused Weston. "They say he occasionally handled curios, though his regular business is antiques. So we'd better take the practical viewpoint or we'll be getting off on a lot of fanciful, impossible notions."

That was Weston's fault: he invariably confused the fanciful with the impossible. In routine police cases, however, one was almost as rare as the other. Hence Cranston decided not to enlighten Weston regarding something he wouldn't believe.

Instead of having lunch with the commissioner, Cranston met Janice. The girl had much to tell him, because last night she had been too overwrought to go into details. Janice began by discussing the activities of J. Dazley Theobald.

"Maybe he heard us talking about Shenrich," the girl declared. "He's a nosey sort and being a collector, he might have supposed that Shenrich had something special to sell. Anyway, he didn't go into the antique shop."

Cranston's eyes were as steady as his query:

"You're sure?"

"Quite sure," affirmed Janice. "Theobald just browsed around outside. He did look into the back alley once or twice, but it was so dark it must have scared him."

Cranston was satisfied on the most important point; namely, why Janice had gone to Shenrich's. Unwise though it was, her trailing of Theobald, or rather her attempt to get there ahead of him, was commendable as an emergency measure. From the time element involved, Janice couldn't have arrived more than a few minutes late and possibly had reached Shenrich's first. Therefore her report really covered the Theobald question.

Except that Theobald hadn't returned to the Malaysian Museum. The excitement around Shenrich's had scared J. Dazley half out of his wits. That at least was Janice's opinion; Cranston was reserving his own. He was calculating how deeply J. Dazley might be in this game; how much the man knew beforehand or had guessed as events developed.

None of the other visitors at the museum had commented on Theobald's absence after Janice's return. She had found them chatting about endowments and directorates and a short while later, Mortimer Kremble had emerged all dusty from his research among the Cambodian plaques, to begin another conference.

Kremble had clucked a bit when Theobald didn't appear. He seemed to feel that he had offended his friend Dazley and was rather sorry about it. Otherwise, everything had proceeded quite normally. Then Janice had an afterthought on the subject.

"Of course I left when you called to take me to dinner," the girl told Cranston. "I suppose they wondered why you didn't join the conference."

"They already knew why," returned Cranston, drily. "I told them the other night that there was no use estimating the necessary endowment until Kremble finished cataloging the items in the museum."

Janice smiled.

"So instead," she said, "Kremble went to his plaques."

"Logically enough," decided Cranston. "Their value depends on their entirety. Nobody would buy a jigsaw puzzle that had some of its pieces missing."

A nod from Janice.

"Starting from the beginning," suggested Cranston, "how much did you know about Adalbart?"

"Only that he was go-between for a group of pirates off the China Coast," explained Janice. "They called themselves the Pirates of the Pescadores and their leader, Malabar, was holding my Uncle Edgar for ransom, a few years ago."

"So you raised the ransom money -"

"Yes, and placed it with Adalbart. Twenty-five thousand dollars. Then everything broke apart around the Pescadores, wherever they are."

Cranston smiled at that one.

"The Pescadores Islands," he said, "lie west of Formosa. They are a volcanic group and the principal island, Hokoto, has a fishing harbor. The inhabitants of some of the other islands go in for fishing - of sorts."

By that, Janice understood that Cranston meant piracy.

"The Japanese encouraged these pirates," continued Cranston, "as long as the pirates preyed only on Chinese shipping. That was, until a few years ago, when the Japs decided to fortify the Pescadores."

"I suppose the pirates objected?"

"They did, and the Japs bombed them out. Of course the pirates did their utmost to preserve the lives of the prisoners they were holding for ransom, since they were valuable."

"Then that's how my uncle escaped to China!" exclaimed Janice. "I heard that he was there - and safe."

"It also explains Captain Adalbart," added Cranston. "Apparently he spent your money, or most of it, hoping to make it back from some other venture."

"Which he did," admitted Janice. "I may as well tell you that Adalbart phoned me, saying that he could pay me the cash. But he was murdered so shortly after that I didn't have time -"

Janice was about to add that she didn't have time to reach Adalbart, but she was becoming frank enough to hesitate on anything that was only a half-truth. Cranston helped the problem with an interruption.

"Did you ever hear of the Taiwan Joss?"

Shaking her head. Janice paused suddenly:

"Taiwan is another name for Formosa," she said. "Am I right?"

"You are," replied Cranston, "and a joss is a Chinese idol, which brings us to King Koxinga."

That name was entirely new to Janice. So Cranston went into the history of King Koxinga. He related briefly how three centuries ago, Koxinga, whose parentage was half Chinese and Japanese, had risen to become the ruler of Formosa. Originally named Ching Ch'ing-kung, this chieftain had gained such power through piracy that the reigning Ming Emperor of China had conferred upon him the royal surname of Chu.

Therewith the Japanese had termed him Kwoh-hsing-yeh, which meant His Worship of the National Surname and the Portuguese traders of that day had corrupted the pronunciation of the title to Koxinga. Still the great national hero of Formosa, Koxinga represented the spirit of the island, its effort to maintain a Chinese tradition while absorbing Japanese influence, a most unpalatable compromise.

At least Koxinga had demanded independence and a few descendants of the pirate crews had maintained that status through the centuries, even though their only remaining homeland had been the barren Pescadores. They differed, however, from the nondescript pirates who had molested the China Coast until the British had tracked them down with submarines as late as 1927 in Bias Bay. Cranston added an interesting detail.

"Their names are titles," he told Janice. "Like Koxinga, His Worship of the National Surname, there are such pirates today as Malabar, the Gay Man From Afar."

"Malabar certainly came from afar," acquiesced Janice. "But how could he import those followers of his?"

"These pirates once figured in the coolie trade," explained Cranston, "working chiefly out of Macao. Since smuggling human beings was their business, they could readily apply it to themselves."

"But why are they here?"

"Because of the Taiwan Joss," replied Cranston, linking his facts promptly. "I have checked vague reports regarding such an idol, presumably an image of King Koxinga."

"Then you mean that Adalbart stole it!"

"Precisely. He sold it to Shenrich for fifty thousand dollars, half of which Adalbart intended to return to you. I have seen the receipt that Adalbart gave to Shenrich for the money."

Having learned that Cranston was a friend of the police commissioner, Janice took it for granted that he had gained this information through such channels.

"Then Malabar has the joss!" exclaimed the girl. "He must have taken it when he murdered Shenrich -"

Cranston's head-shake interrupted.

"The trail still continues," he stated. "Shenrich disposed of the Joss to someone else. As for murder, almost anyone might kill to gain the Taiwan Joss."

"You can't mean J. Dazley Theobald!"

"Not last night," smiled Cranston, "particularly after the efficient way you trailed him. Nevertheless, there are cross-trails in this game. What I intend to do is find the man upon whom they may next converge, the person who bought the joss from Shenrich, probably at double price."

That was all. Cranston didn't have to remind Janice that she was to stay at home this evening, unless she heard from him to the contrary. But in parting, Janice had a question.

"What about Jerry Gifford?" she asked. "He must know something about the Taiwan Joss, I'm convinced of it now. I met Jerry through some friends and he promised to help find Captain Adalbart; then suddenly he dropped the whole thing completely. I wonder why!"

There was pique in the girl's final tone; her frown showed an expression of mistrust. Treating her "I wonder why" as a query, Cranston decided to leave it unanswered. What most concerned Cranston regarding Jerry was what new information - if any - might appear in today's issue of the Daily Shipper under the head of Gifford's column.

CHAPTER XIV

THE papers lay deep on Mann's desk and merely to winnow them looked like a week's work. A collection of fact articles, gleaned from various magazines, all bearing the name of Jerry Gifford, were in themselves a problem.

Apparently Jerry wrote on any subject that he might come across; hence to discover what sort of research at present engaged his attention was a matter of complete speculation.

Oil promotions, Florida cocoanuts, Mississippi flood control, Australian aborigines, Yucatan ruins, polar explorations, Seminole Indian customs, Ozark superstitions, and Great Lakes navigation were but a few of the subjects that had rattled from Jerry's fertile typewriter.

Among them there was nothing that fitted with Cranston's supposition that Jerry was still in New York. Among the subjects so far neglected by Jerry, the theater was one. It happened that he had confided his interest in the Troxell records to the only person who might have helped him gain access to them: Kip Ranstead.

There was a report from Harry Vincent.

He'd visited the upstate town where Jerry often went, but had learned that nobody had seen Mr. Gifford. The only inkling that Jerry might have been expected, was a letter - and a fat one - that had arrived at the local post office. But since Jerry's mail was always forwarded to New York when he wasn't around, it had been sent on its way and was probably still in the mail. The address to which it had been forwarded was that of Jerry's office.

What was more important was a copy of the Daily Shipper. Cranston was reading it while Mann mulled through the other data. Jerry's column was up to the form that Cranston expected. It stated:

Custom or usage leads to odd notions, really hindering your daily existence.

Delay often occasions misadventure!

Take for example the great steamships that ply the river amid the hordes of passing tugs. They talk to each other with their whistles, using the code that is familiar to all wireless operators, the customary dot and dash.

Yet those dots and dashes are unfamiliar to you. They are the custom, the usage, to those who understand them, but you regard them as an odd notion; therefore you miss much of what is happening around you.

Cranston hadn't missed much, even though it wasn't happening around him. From the first sentence, he had gained a name, which Jerry had neatly separated into two parts with a comma, an innovation over his previous efforts. Of course the next paragraphs contained the usual type of error which Jerry used to flag attention. Anybody familiar with the ways of steamships, except perhaps the dull-minded editor of the Daily Shipper, would know that whistles along the waterfront did not operate in dots and dashes like the usual code.

They had their own language, those whistles. A tongue that Jerry Gifford understood, otherwise he wouldn't have misrepresented it.

The whole thing fitted with Cranston's theory, namely that Jerry was still in Manhattan. Lonely and isolated, Jerry had probably sought information and found it, from an unexpected but universal source. Which in turn gave Cranston a very novel notion, one that made him smile as he thought of the way that Mann would respond to simple but explicit instructions. Cranston wrote those details on a slip of paper, folded it and laid it on the desk. Then:

"Coulton Rhyde," suggested Cranston. "The name sounds familiar to me. How about you, Mann?"

Mann gave a methodical blink.

"What has Rhyde to do with this?" he inquired. "He is an investor, not a collector."

"Collections can be turned into investments."

"Why, yes." Mann agreed as though it had never occurred to him before. "But we have no data on Coulton Rhyde."

"Call it a hunch, then," remarked Cranston. Actually he was repeating the comma divided name that was spelled by the first letters in the words of Jerry's lead paragraph. "Rhyde is just the sort who would mix himself in something unusual."

Mann shrugged to indicate he wasn't so sure.

"See what you have on Rhyde," suggested Cranston, "including photographs. They might help us."

What Cranston didn't add was the message that he had found in the second sentence of Jerry's column. Four letters only, one to a word, it spelled its warning: doom!

Finding a copy of a book entitled "Who's Who in Wall Street," Mann not only supplied Rhyde's

biography but a photograph as well. Cranston wasn't interested in the biography, which merely covered the fact that Rhyde had invariably fluctuated with the stock market. What he wanted was the picture.

The photograph portrayed Rhyde as a thin-faced gentleman with gray hair and the wisp of a similarly colored mustache. In fact, Rhyde looked like anything except a wolf, of the Wall Street variety. Checking the photo, Cranston closed the book.

"I have an appointment, Mann." Gazing from the window, Cranston noted that the six o'clock dusk was gathering. "Just about six hours from now. Meanwhile go through with my instructions, tonight if possible."

Strolling from the office, Cranston was gone before Mann could open that special memo which lay on the desk. Cranston didn't want to be around when he heard Mann's amazed objections to what might prove a maddening task. Mann worked better when left alone.

Besides, Cranston was thinking of the last three words that Goodall Shenrich had uttered just before he caved from the thrust of a knife with a garnet-studded silver handle:

"Ride - midnight - pencil -"

Dusk was welcome to Cranston. It meant that he had a long while in which to operate before midnight. Cranston intended to do a great deal in those intervening hours.

Quite opposite was dusk's effect on Janice Courtland. She hated the very sight of the thickening sky as she viewed it from the window of her apartment. Having made a promise, Janice intended to keep it; even Adalbart had done as much. But Janice didn't like it.

Her promise was that she wouldn't leave her apartment after dark and it was growing dark too soon to suit her. Still, Cranston was right; darkness was the only time when those strange figures moved along the street to take up Janice's trail, the shapes which could only be those of Malabar and his piratical band.

Janice didn't like being a prisoner, even on the honor system. The hours when everyone else was starting out for a good time, was something of a zero hour for Janice, meaning that there was nothing to which she could look forward. Nothing except to wonder who was going to be murdered next, despite the efforts of Lamont Cranston and The Shadow, two persons who would do better, in Janice's opinion, if they combined their efforts.

However, Janice hadn't been asked for an opinion, nor was she needed in tonight's investigation. About her only choice was to go to bed and catch up on much needed sleep. More piqued than ever, Janice kicked her shoes across the room and was tossing her dress on a chair when a sudden thought struck her.

She had promised not to go out after dark, but nothing had been said about not leaving the apartment before. Though the dusk had thickened, it wasn't quite dark outdoors. Realizing that she had a few minutes left in which to evade her promise without actually breaking it, Janice scrambled into her dress, pawed the floor for her shoes and found them. As madly as if Malabar's crew were after her, the girl hurried downstairs, out the back door, and along her old route to a neighboring street.

Having told Shrevvy that she wouldn't be going out tonight, Janice didn't expect his cab to be around. By now, she was sure, Malabar's tribe would no longer be watching for her and besides, it still wasn't dark.

That last opinion was a technicality.

Janice was thinking in terms of the sky, not of the street, which had gathered a considerable quota of

nightly gloom. In scurrying for the nearest subway station, Janice didn't bother to look for flitting figures that would have roused her imagination. She was too willing to believe that they weren't around.

One was, the figure of a slightly shabby man with a tawny face that was practically saffron. Except that it lacked a scar, that face resembled Malabar's, a common characteristic of the blood-brethren who formed the clan from the Pescadores.

This man took up Janice's trail, down into the subway. As he disappeared, a black truck moved into the gloaming and began a trip along the avenue beneath which the subway ran.

It was really dark, a quarter hour later, when that truck pulled up at a corner where a silent man was waiting like a lone sentinel, so motionless that passers-by scarcely noticed him. The truck driver saw the man, being on the lookout for him. The sentinel was Janice's trailer; he had simply left the train at the same station as the girl and waited for the truck to appear.

Where Janice had gone next was no mystery to this man of Malabar and the few others who had joined him. They were in a neighborhood that they knew quite well. After a short, swift ride, they left the truck and spread amid the darkness.

Janice Courtland had decided upon another talk with Jerry Gifford, if she could find him. What better hiding place could Jerry want than his own office, now that everyone had decided that he was really out of town?

Not knowing how deeply Cranston was checking Jerry's affairs, Janice had good reason to suppose that she was playing smart. Picking a doorway across the street, she took a look toward the office window, as she had that other night.

There was no drizzle this evening, but a mist was filtering through the streets, a sign that a fog was growing in the river. Occasional whistles throbbed, but in the distance, indicating that the creeping fog was heavier down the bay. The sky was heavy with murk, another token of the rapidly thickening weather, and Janice should have noticed how closely the darkness shrouded her.

But to Janice, the darkness at this moment was a help, for it accentuated the brief dart of light that she saw from a window opposite.

The glint came from Jerry's office!

It could only have been a flashlight, but that made it the more important. Janice was now convinced that Jerry must be lurking on his own premises. Watching still more closely, the girl awaited another betraying blink, but none came.

Nevertheless, it hadn't been an illusion, such as the reflection of passing car lights. A truck, slithering along the street, failed to produce any effect from Jerry's window. Janice gave little attention to the truck, nor did she look along the sidewalk. She was interested only in that upstairs window.

Then, all patience ended, Janice started across the street. The fog was gathering rapidly, perhaps that was why peculiar shapes seemed to grow rapidly from the ends of this block, converging toward the dim doorway of the office building. But Janice wasn't worrying about such phantom creatures.

She should have worried.

Janice was scarcely across the other curb when the gathering horde enveloped her. They might have sprung from the cement sidewalk, so suddenly did those dark men arrive. Out of a human huddle that lurched itself together came sweeping arms that thrust their clutching hands about the girl.

This was the way the pirates handled the Sikh guards on steamships, disarming them, pinning them, silencing their shouts of alarm, all in one concerted action, wherein each participant supplied a well-rehearsed portion.

With Janice it was so much easier that the huddle didn't even pause. With a writhe, the human mass disintegrated, its separating parts swirling off into the mist. One clump was larger, for it consisted of two men carrying Janice between them, bound and gagged all in a single, continuous action. Into the thickest darkness went that clump, to be blotted further by the arrival of a pitch-black truck, that gathered in all hands with doors that opened and closed like a yawning mouth.

Up in Jerry's office, the flashlight blinked what might have been considered a farewell, except that it couldn't be seen from the street, for the glow was muffled now. In fact no one, except Janice, had caught even the tiniest twinkle of that flashlight.

Focused from the folds of a black cloak, the beam showed the contorted body of Kip Ranstead, long stiffened in death, the marked newspaper beneath his arm, the garnet-studded knife-handle projecting from his back.

There was a grim laugh, The Shadow's laugh, that seemed to analyze this first link in a chain of death that had continued further. Then the flashlight, still muffled, took a slow sweep and reached the floor, just inside the door.

Letters were lying there, but none of them had a thick-packed envelope. The forwarded letter mentioned by Harry Vincent had not yet reached this final destination. Whatever bearing it might have on the case, it would have to wait. However, that didn't matter, since The Shadow's plans were all arranged.

The Shadow's plans didn't include Janice Courtland, except that he had arranged that she would be some place where she would stay out of things.

Definitely, The Shadow was right. Janice had gone where she would be staying out of things.

CHAPTER XV

THERE was a strange old clock in Troxell's gingerbread living room, an ornate piece of mechanism that fitted nicely with the divans, the ottomans, the gilt and all the rest of the gee-gaws that Jerry Gifford had learned to hate.

Most of all, Jerry hated the clock.

It was a French clock with tall pillars inlaid with mosaics. It had a marble base, a summit of the same material, and walls of plate glass. The inlaid dial was circled with rhinestones and there were sixty of them, one for each minute.

At every quarter hour, the clock delivered a trilling chime. At every half hour, the chime became a melody. At every hour, the clock hammered its message with a big gong. Twice a day, the clock really went to town. Noon and midnight, it chimed, gave music, banged twelve times, and left a listener expecting a cuckoo to pop out and say "Hello!"

Only there wasn't any cuckoo, though Jerry wished there was. It would be a relief from the singing imitation birds and the artificial bumble bee. What was even worse, the music box had repeated its tunes too often. If it played "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton" a few times more, Jerry felt that he would break it. The approach of this particular midnight rather horrified Jerry. It marked the hour when Coulton Rhyde was due to die, according to a clockwork schedule as inevitable as the ticks of the ornate monstrosity that

adorned Troxell's mantel. Adalbart, Shenrich - probably both had died. However, they didn't worry Jerry.

Rhyde did.

Unquestionably, Coulton Rhyde had been talked into buying the Taiwan Joss. Therefore he couldn't be blamed for what happened, particularly if he happened to be murdered. Rhyde's life depended on Jerry's column in the Daily Shipper, or rather upon whether anybody read that column closely enough to catch its hidden meaning.

Jerry couldn't afford to make those secret messages too pointed, otherwise Chichester would suspect them. Right now, Chichester was waiting for Jerry to type tomorrow's column, but Jerry didn't have the heart. The whole chain ended with Rhyde; if he died, it meant that Jerry had failed.

Unless he could feel that he had accomplished something, Jerry was ready to quit right now. His nerves were through, breaking under the strain of this slow-motion ordeal.

It was foggy out tonight, getting worse and worse. Jerry knew it because of the river whistles, blaring weirdly and frequently. They were his only solace, those whistles; he had said so in his column. Whistles that talked to each other could talk to Jerry too.

If only they could talk!

A basso blast penetrated the fog, followed by another, Then came a tug-boat's shrill, with repetitions. Seated at his typewriter, Jerry tilted his head to listen to a ferry-boat's intermediate blare and was surprised at what it said. Those whistles were really talking!

The usual signals were off tonight. None of the usual business of port and starboard, full speed ahead, or stop. More whistles now, picking up the same theme. They were doing what Jerry said they did, but knew they didn't.

Those whistles were spelling out a code!

Incredible - or was it?

As he listened, Jerry decided that the correct term was the word ingenious. Somebody had read Gifford's Column and added an idea that Jerry hadn't had. Mere bunk, Jerry's statement that whistles spelled out their signals like a wireless code, but they were doing it now.

They were saying this:

"Gifford - where - are - you - Gifford - where - are - you - Gifford - where -"

And now, Jerry was telling where.

On the typewriter, Jerry was knocking out tomorrow's column. His lead sentence ran as follows:

The reign of Xerxes eclipsed legendary limits, transcending Homeric epics and thrilling every realm.

Rather a ridiculous lead for a shipping column, but it was in reasonable keeping with Jerry's unreasonable style. It filled its main purpose, however, for the first letters of the words spelled: Troxell Theater. All Jerry needed now was the follow-up, which was easy. He went into the maritime history of ancient races, particularly the Phoenicians, relating how they had stormed the Persian cities of Tyre and Sidon, thereby bringing upon themselves the wrath of Xerxes, the Persian king. All this of course had a bearing on trade

conditions of the period.

Now there were many people who might dispute this, because they had read enough history to know that Tyre and Sidon happened to be Phoenician cities, not Persian. But Jerry was quite sure that Chichester, ancient though he was, didn't date back to the time of Xerxes and probably didn't read history books.

The column was all done by the time the funny clock went haywire at midnight and Jerry, sighing his relief, felt ready for his first good night's sleep since he had come here. The whistles were still speaking their encouragement and it was like a lullaby.

Midnight was producing something else, from a train gate in the Pennsylvania Station. There, a thin-faced man with grizzled hair and mustache was coming up the steps followed by a red-cap who was carrying some bags.

Whatever was written on the man's face wasn't pleasant. His features carried a mingling of fear, worry, suspicion, tempered by a dash of bravado. He wasn't concerned with the other passengers from the Western Limited on which he had arrived; apparently he had studied them thoroughly during the train ride. What bothered him were the people outside the train gate.

One man stepped forward and said:

"Hello, Rhyde."

To Coulton Rhyde, the mere mention of his name in public had the impact of a bullet punch. The man wheeled, as if to dart back through the train gate, but the porter and the bags were blocking him. Then a firm hand steadied Rhyde's arm.

"You must remember me," spoke a calm voice. "My name is Cranston, Lamont Cranston."

Recognizing the name, Rhyde studied Cranston's face. They must have met before, though Rhyde wasn't sure. Certainly he had heard of Cranston's, and this man of impassive manner fitted the fame that he had gained as a globe-trotter.

Very suddenly, Rhyde felt glad at meeting someone of Cranston's background and understanding. There was just a last flash of suspicion in his eye as he queried:

"Who sent you here?"

"Goodall Shenrich," returned Cranston in a confidential undertone. "He told me you would reach the Pennsylvania station at midnight. Those were his last words."

"Ride - midnight - Pencil -"

Cranston had taken the first word as a name and hence had made allowance for a difference in spelling. The second word was obvious. The third, ending with Shenrich's death croak had been incomplete, so Cranston had assumed that it might have a few more syllables. From this had come his interpretation:

"Rhyde - midnight - Pennsylvania -" The word "Station" and whatever else Shenrich might have wanted to say, were speculative, but Cranston had drawn sound conclusions. He and Rhyde were now alone, the porter having gone ahead with the bags, so Cranston continued:

"Of course Shenrich sold you the Taiwan Joss. It was better that you should have come back to New York separately, better for you, I mean."

Rhyde's knees were going shaky. Cranston's grip steadied him anew.

"Adalbart gave Shenrich a receipt," continued Cranston. "What did Shenrich give you, Rhyde?"

Licking his lips so hard that he included his mustache, Rhyde finally whispered, hoarsely:

"He delivered the Taiwan Joss. I told him where to get the money."

Cranston's eyebrows lifted quizzically.

"It's at my penthouse," confided Rhyde. "It seemed safer to leave it where Shenrich could pick it up."

"Safer for the money," agreed Cranston, "if not for Shenrich."

Rhyde's shaky hands gripped Cranston's arm.

"I know nothing about Shenrich's death," Rhyde panted. "Nothing. You understand?"

"I understand."

"Nothing." Rhyde paused, then became frank. "Nothing except that it was dangerous to own the joss. I thought Shenrich would be safe after I bought it from him."

The porter was waiting, so Cranston gestured Rhyde along. The bags were placed in Shrevvy's cab and the two men followed. Rhyde tipped the porter and they drove away; then Rhyde noticed that Cranston was studying the bags.

"I don't have the joss with me," declared Rhyde. "It would be too bulky, too heavy to carry. I shipped it where it will be safe."

Rhyde didn't specify where he had shipped it. His eyes, narrowed, were studying Cranston's face, to see how it reacted. The reaction was Cranston's usual sort; his features remained unchanged. Looking from the cab window, Rhyde noted the direction they had taken.

"We're going to my penthouse?"

Cranston nodded. Soon the cab pulled up in front of a small but sumptuous apartment building. As they alighted, Cranston's keen eyes took in all surroundings. His vision was the sort that could trace lurking figures where anyone else saw blank, but tonight there were no skulking figures resembling the pirates of the Pescadores.

Everything was so serene that it seemed certain the trail had at last moved well ahead of Malabar, the Gay Man from Afar. But Cranston was taking nothing for certainty, as yet.

Entering the building, Cranston and Rhyde rode up to the penthouse in the automatic elevator. Instead of fishing in his pocket for the key, Rhyde removed it from beneath a door mat. Unlocking the door, he pressed a light switch.

"Easier for Shenrich," explained Rhyde, referring to the key. "But nobody else could find the money. It's hidden right here, Cranston."

Striding across to a low fireplace, Rhyde tapped a marble panel above the mantel. The sound of the stone was solid. Turning, Rhyde stooped to the tiled hearth in front of the fireplace. He began counting the stones of the tiling from left to right.

"Watch the panel behind the mantel," suggested Rhyde. "You'll see what happens when I press the proper tiles. Nobody would suspect that the hidden spring was down here, the secret panel up there."

Back to the fireplace, Rhyde indicated "up there" by a gesture of his left thumb, over his shoulder. His right forefinger pressed the final tile. There was a sharp click from above the mantel and the marble panel shot upward.

It happened so quickly that Rhyde could never have turned from his crouch in time to see it, the down fling of a human figure from the ample space above the fireplace. No leap was necessary, simply a forward topple, that hurled this assassin's shape straight down toward Rhyde's bent back.

In the tight clench of his extended fist, this man from the hiding place held one of the vicious weapons that had figured in every recent murder, a silver-handled dirk with a garnet gleaming from it. More vivid though was the flash of the blade, with its thin length tapering to a needle-point.

If Cranston had tried to stop the drive of that well-aimed weapon, he would have been too late to prevent its burial in Rhyde's back. Instead, Cranston made a hard, diving drive of his own. Hitting Rhyde shoulder first, he hurled the victim from the assassin's path, and with a side twist of his own, Cranston rolled clear as the plunging figure struck the hearth, knife first.

It wasn't necessary to draw an automatic to deal with this assassin. The man simply flattened there, lying as if stunned. Cranston's eyes roved to the cramped cache above the mantel, saw that the space was empty, then lowered again toward the figure on the hearth.

Cranston did all this while coming to his feet. But Rhyde got no farther than his hands and knees. He too was staring at the slayer who had failed, with eyes so wide that they were white-circled all around. For Rhyde was viewing an amazing thing indeed.

Matching the Oriental dagger in the sprawled man's fist, was its exact duplicate, protruding with only the handle visible, from the middle of the killer's back.

No murderer, this man, at least not of his own intent. For he himself was already dead, slain by the very sort of thrust that his body had been arranged to deliver to Rhyde!

One dead man placed to produce another!

As frozen as the slain man whose corpse had failed to kill him, Coulton Rhyde watched while Lamont Cranston stooped forward and turned the dead face into the light. Anyone who had ever seen those sharp, dry features would remember them, for they wore their contemptuous, self-satisfied smirk, even in death.

The face on the hearth belonged to J. Dazley Theobald.

CHAPTER XVI

COMMISSIONER WESTON never would have believed that a dead man could be responsible for an attempted murder thrust, so Lamont Cranston spared him the details. Coulton Rhyde gave the same simple testimony; that they had returned to the penthouse and found Theobald's body there.

If Rhyde needed an alibi, he had one, for he proved that he had come into town on the Western Limited, and Cranston testified that he had met Rhyde at the station. So Theobald's death was classed for what it really was, a case of a man engaged in attempted burglary meeting doom at the hands of a rival engaged in the same enterprise.

The mystery seemed to surround the silver-handled knives. Why these weapons were becoming so popular seemed hard to explain unless someone had tossed a job-lot on the market. Still, there was a certain thread of sense behind it. Often one style of murder created a pattern, for the simple reason that newcomers felt their crimes would be attributed to killers already sought by the police.

Since somebody with a garnet-studded knife had murdered Shenrich, two people had decided to go after Rhyde with a similar dirk. Of the two, J. Dazley Theobald had lost, and as a lesson to other amateurs, the murderer had left his own knife in the victim.

As for Rhyde, he didn't mention a missing sum of one hundred thousand dollars, because the money wasn't his. It actually belonged to Shenrich, a fact that Rhyde also evaded, rather than talk about the Taiwan Joss.

"It's better that no one else should know," Rhyde expressed to Cranston, while they were lunching after their visit to police headquarters. "That is, no one else except Mortimer Kremble."

Mention of Kremble brought a slight smile from Cranston.

"Of course Kremble will be surprised," added Rhyde. "I told him that I would like him to be custodian for any curios that I might obtain if they were of Malaysian origin. But I doubt that he has ever heard of the Taiwan Joss."

"When do you expect it to arrive at the museum, Rhyde?"

"Some time this afternoon." Rhyde had evidently calculated the matter carefully. "Of course Kremble will recognize it as a rarity, even though he won't know what it is."

"Very probably," agreed Cranston, "considering that basalt idols are very uncommon. Brownish black, you say it is?"

"Yes, with slight tinges of green, from a mineral that Shenrich described as olivine. An odd substance, basalt, surprisingly light in weight."

Quite clever of Rhyde, to ship the Taiwan Joss to the Malaysian Museum. Scarcely known as a curio collector, Rhyde wouldn't normally be connected with Kremble. Shenrich had met Rhyde in the Middle West, bringing the joss along; it had been sent by express in Shenrich's presence, allowing him time to get back to New York and pick up the money before the joss arrived there.

Rhyde told all this to Cranston, explaining that if Shenrich hadn't found the money waiting, he could have gone to the museum and demanded his precious joss, when it was delivered, which would be this afternoon. With all these precautions, Rhyde hadn't expected that Shenrich would be murdered.

And right now, Rhyde was very worried.

"My case is really bad," he admitted. "I have an alibi, but still, there's no reason why -"

There, Rhyde hesitated.

"No reason why you couldn't have hired someone to murder Shenrich," supplied Cranston, "and to dispose of Theobald the same way."

Rhyde gave a nod.

"No reason," repeated Cranston, "except that whoever accepted such an assignment would take the joss

and the money too. I don't think you could be quite that foolish, Rhyde."

"The police might think so."

"Which is why we didn't put them on a false track," Cranston stated. "I can blame you for only one thing, Rhyde; not learning more about the joss itself and the people who were seeking it."

That brought a hopeless shrug from Rhyde.

"Blame Shenrich," said Rhyde. "He wouldn't let me talk to Adalbart. Shenrich said it wouldn't be safe, but I took it he didn't want me to know how much profit he was making on the deal. I didn't care, because I was convinced the joss was worth a hundred thousand. I looked into the history of similar idols and was amazed at the prices that were paid for them. Besides, I could afford it."

That was very true. Cranston happened to know that Rhyde was worth a million dollars and a few times over.

"I checked on the joss," added Rhyde, "through a chap named Jerry Gifford who does a shipping column. Of course I was careful not to let Gifford know I intended to buy it. Why, Gifford can't even have guessed that the joss was brought from the Pescadores Islands!"

Rhyde couldn't have stated his innocence more conclusively. Already, to Cranston, Rhyde has shown his penchant for telling everything he knew without realizing he was telling anything. Cranston hadn't needed to prime Rhyde's talk-pump to make him gush, which indicated that Jerry's experience had been the same.

"Forget Gifford," suggested Cranston. "Go over to the museum and wait there for me. But be sure you get there before dusk."

This was a helpful hint, a reminder that Rhyde ought to be in shelter before the hour when Malabar and his men began to move. But Rhyde didn't catch that inference.

"Of course I'll go there early," Rhyde told Cranston. "I want to be on hand when the joss arrives."

Leaving Rhyde, Cranston went directly to the Cobalt Club, where instead of forgetting Jerry, he took immediate interest in today's column in the Daily Shipper. That message "Troxell Theater" brought a curiously phrased laugh from Cranston's whispering lips. When he called Mann on the phone, Cranston wasn't surprised at the reaction.

"The Troxell Theater!" came Mann's exclamation. "Why, the Troxell estate sold it long ago!"

"I know," returned Cranston. "But the deal wasn't announced publicly."

"Everything must have been removed," added Mann. "The place must be as empty as an old barn."

"Suppose you check on the new owner, Mann. I'll find out about the theater itself."

Cranston didn't add his opinion that the theater might not be as empty as Mann supposed. Remembering the fame of the Troxell apartment above the theater itself, Cranston was correctly picturing it not only as intact, but as a gilded prison now housing Jerry Gifford.

Compared to Jerry's fancy quarters, the prison that held Janice Courtland was practically a dungeon. Still it was habitable and Janice couldn't complain of the treatment her captors had accorded her. The girl was in a small room furnished chiefly with a metal cot, the only exits being a skylight and a door with a little

wicket.

At intervals, someone knocked on the wicket, then opened it and politely proffered a tray of food. Always, the man outside the wicket looked the same, yet different. Tawny faces with narrow eyes and straight black hair, seemed the rule with this clan. But none of the faces had worn the distinguishing scar that stood for Malabar.

Where this place was, Janice didn't know, for the truck had turned so many corners when it brought her here. But Janice had an idea she could escape from this cell, if she could prevent herself being heard. It had become a ritual with Janice to listen at the door, and always she heard someone pacing outside it.

That was, always until now.

For some reason the vigil had relaxed, and this was Janice's opportunity. Going to the iron cot, she tossed the mattress from it and propped the cot on one end. That was the difficult part, not that the cot was heavy, but that it clanged the wall so loudly that anyone outside the door would hear it.

Only now there was no one outside the door!

Janice's next course was to climb the cross-bars that held the framework of the cot, using them like a ladder. The skylight was very high, so high that the pirates probably supposed the girl could never reach it, but Janice did, with the help of her self-constructed ladder.

It was a real thrill to find the skylight loose. No longer worrying about noise, Janice pried it open, and climbed up through. Then she found why the pirates hadn't bothered to clamp the skylight.

All that Janice had reached was a brick-walled shaft, that went a full story further up. There wasn't a chance of scaling those walls and the only other outlet was a very tiny window opening into the building itself. Working the window open, Janice thrust her head and shoulders through and looked down into the deserted hall outside her own cell door.

Thought of taking a ten-foot drop from a window through which she could hardly squeeze, was far too great a hazard, until Janice got a bold idea. There was a large bent nail, driven deep in the woodwork of the window sill and Janice forced the sharp nail-head through her dress hem.

Then, sliding feet first down through the tiny window, Janice lived one breathless moment during sickening drop, hoping she wouldn't finish with a pair of broken legs or a fractured neck. Her arms were raised and her hands were clutching her dress sleeves when the nail stopped the dress hem short.

Her weight shooting her down through the dress as it automatically turned inside out, Janice delayed her fall in mid-air, thanks to the grip she had upon the reversing sleeves. As she dangled there, the dress hem gave and the girl landed lightly on the hallway floor, only a few feet below, the dress showering itself over her shoulders.

Turning the dress outside in, Janice put it on and stole along the hallway to a door that she hoped would lead her to safety. But when she softly turned the knob and peered past the door edge, the girl found her way was blocked.

Janice was looking right into a room which the pirates used as their main headquarters, for there were more than half a dozen of them lounging around. Only the sound of their conversation had prevented them from hearing the door open, and now Janice hardly dared to close it again.

Before Janice tried, a door opened on the far side of the room and in strode Malabar, his arrival bringing his followers to the equivalent of attention, which meant that they merely sat up a little straighter and

stopped their conversation. Then, after a lull, one tawny man inquired.

"What have you to tell us, Gay Man From Afar?"

The term "Gay Man" hardly suited Malabar, whose face was glowery beyond Janice's imagination. That, plus the scar, gave Malabar a most villainous appearance. His tone suited his looks as Malabar snarled his reply.

"You know my message," announced Malabar. "We must find the joss. I have told you the same thing often, Purple Peacock who Struts among the Pleasant Poppies."

One of the pirates shrugged.

"We have heard that message often," he said. "So why should it trouble us more than before?"

"Because of our prisoner. We must learn if she can pay her own ransom. Therefore she must swear by the joss." Malabar paused, rebuke in his glare. "You know our law, Scourge of the Southern Sea."

A very deliberate pirate removed a pipe from his lips and spoke:

"Other prisoners have languished long while they awaited ransom, Gay Man From Afar."

"Among our own islands yes," agreed Malabar, "but there all law was our own. Here it is different, Mildest Monsoon of the Midsummer Moon."

That brought a snarl from a listening pirate:

"What do we care about the laws of others?"

"We care much, Fiend of the Furious Deep," retorted Malabar, "because to defy those laws leads to increasing trouble. What they call crime in this country must be done swiftly, so it will be forgotten. Therefore I say: tonight we shall find the joss whose secret is the symbol of our chief!"

The far door closed behind Malabar, bringing the pirates to their feet with an excited babble. From her door, Janice felt sure that the throng would soon be starting out; therefore she could only wait and hope.

As she hoped, Janice wished for about the hundredth time that she could think of some way to bring The Shadow here!

CHAPTER XVII

A HAND was knocking at Janice's door.

Not the door of the bolted cell from which Janice had escaped only to find herself still trapped, but the door of the apartment that the girl had left the evening before.

It was Cranston who knocked; when he received no reply, he tried the door, found it unlocked, and stepped into the apartment.

Dusk hadn't quite arrived, hence all the room was plainly visible, including items that Cranston promptly checked; a run-down alarm clock, yesterday's newspaper, were evidence that fitted with some letters lying under the door, to prove that Janice had been gone perhaps as long as twenty-four hours.

Certainly Janice had been away more than twelve, because Shrevvy hadn't seen her today. So Cranston lost no time in getting out to where the cab was waiting. He gave Shrevvy an address on an East Side

avenue.

Street lights were aglitter when the cab pulled up in front of a shabby-looking store that was no better nor worse than its neighbors in this wholesale district. Above the store was a sign that said:

RABALAM AND COMPANY

IMPORTERS

BRASS - SILVER - BRONZE

It wasn't Cranston who alighted from the cab. Instead an elderly and somewhat decrepit man stepped forth. His coat collar was raised against the inclement weather, which was living up to the drizzly, foggy season. The elderly man was carrying an umbrella with a hooked handle, but he didn't bother to open it. Instead, he simply tottered into Rabalam's store, brushed the rain from his coat, and hung the umbrella on a counter.

The proprietor, Rabalam, was a bearded man who looked more like the conventional pawn broker than a dealer in metal wares. He bowed when he saw the customer and purred politely:

"Good evening, Mr. Twambley."

Looking up, the visitor cackled:

"You remember me?"

"I always remember an old customer."

"An old customer!" Twambley chortled. "You mean an elderly customer. Why, I've only been here once before."

Rabalam bowed as though Twambley's mere return entitled him to be classed as a regular patron. Then:

"I am closing shortly," said Rabalam. "So if there is anything special, Mr. Twambley -"

As he spoke, Rabalam was dipping his hand in a brass bowl on the table behind which he sat. In the bowl were little counters, much like checkers, except that they were made of metal. They clanked as Rabalam toyed with them and the noise caught Twambley's attention.

"What are those, Rabalam?"

"They are counters used in some sort of game. I believe they call it Fan-Tan."

Reaching in the bowl, Twambley picked out some of the counters, noting both their weight and color.

"They are silver, Rabalam?"

"They are silver."

"Have you any of gold?"

Smiling through his beard Rabalam shook his head in answer to that question. Now both he and Twambley were jingling the counters, making a lot of clang with them. Old Twambley's eyes showed a glint that Rabalam didn't see, for the customer's head was lowered.

They were playing a game that wasn't Fan-Tan.

Rabalam wasn't toying with the counters because he was nervous. He was using their sound to hold Cranston's attention. At the rear of the shop, stealthy figures were coming down a short flight of steps, turning to sneak past an array of bronze and brassware that included everything from gongs to vases; lamps to candelabra.

Only the keenest of eyes could have spotted the passage of those figures as they filed toward a rear door leading into an alley where Rabalam's delivery truck was parked. But Twambley's eye was keen, more than that, its sidling glance gave him a peculiar advantage. Twambley could practically make out the faces of the sneaking men that Rabalam thought he didn't see.

"How much are these, Rabalam?"

"One dollar each," replied Rabalam, referring to the small but thickish counters. "They are used as currency some places. They have just the weight of the Mexican dollar."

"I shall take five of them."

Gathering the counters, jingling them, Twambley started to put them in his pocket. There was something in the old man's move that roused Rabalam's suspicion, for the bearded shopkeeper slid his hand beneath the table, as though reaching for a weapon. That in turn was just the move Twambley wanted.

Rabalam had put himself completely off guard for the thrust that came. Speeding upward like steel springs, Twambley's hands caught Rabalam's throat. The choke of those fingers silenced Rabalam, but to make the process more effective, Twambley's thumbs came under Rabalam's beard and forced it upward. Held by elastic cords, the beard snapped into Rabalam's mouth, half-choking him.

From Twambley's lips came the whispered laugh of The Shadow.

Only Rabalam heard the laugh, for by now the last of the sneaking men had passed the curtained doorway beyond the brassware at the rear of the shop. But that fact spurred Rabalam all the more. Starting a return grapple, the unbearded man suddenly turned his grip into a snakelike twist that enabled him to wrest from Twambley's choking clutch.

All that Twambley's hands managed to keep was Rabalam's beard. But Rabalam was still too gaspy to cry out for aid. As he started toward the rear of the shop, Twambley overtook him from behind, literally catching Rabalam's neck with quick fingertips that jerked the man's head backward.

That brought the unbearded face right into the light, turning it straight toward the steps beyond the brassware. There was a quick cry from that direction as a determined girl surged into sight, grabbing the first missile handy, a candelabrum.

The girl was Janice Courtland. She had seen and recognized the face that was no longer the bearded mask of Rabalam. The proprietor of the shop was Malabar!

The Shadow already knew that Rabalam was simply Malabar in reverse, for this was the very place where he had gone with the pirate crew the night that he had ridden unseen on their truck. Now The Shadow's hands were taking a hold that would have clinched the piracy situation along with Malabar's throat, if Janice hadn't tried to play a part.

The girl's mistake could be excused, considering that old Twambley didn't appear to be a match for the famed Malabar; still, Janice shouldn't have made all the clangor that she did. In trying to swing the candelabrum at Malabar's bobbing bead, Janice toppled a vase, whammed a gong, and finally crashed a lamp. Tripping, she fell headlong into a mass of bronzeware.

A bad ending to the stealthy strategy that Janice had used in following Malabar's men out from their lounging room, which they had left without bothering to see whether their prisoner was still properly bolted in her cell!

The terrific clatter reached the alley, and with din still raging, Malabar's crew surged out from the curtain to learn what had possessed their chief. Rather than be encumbered with Malabar, the spry Mr. Twambley sent him flying into a stack of brass serving stands, trays and jardinières that literally buried the Gay Man From Afar.

Continuing his sweep, Twambley scooped Janice from the heap where she had landed, brought her to her feet, and sent her headlong, so fast that her feet could just about catch up with her, toward the street door at the front of the shop.

By then a surge of tawny men were bearing down on Twambley. Headed by Scourge of the Southern Sea, with Fiend of the Furious Deep and Purple Peacock Who Struts Among the Pleasant Poppies only a few steps behind, this vengeful horde intended to make short work of the rejuvenated fossil who had so roughly handled their leader Malabar.

Twambley had a quick trick for them, too. Grabbing the brass bowl with its silver Fan-Tan counters, he used a bowling motion to send the contents rolling along the floor. Like little wheels, the counters came under the driving feet of the pirate horde, sending them headlong here and there. Hurling the bowl at Malabar who was climbing from the piled brassware, Twambley whirled about and caught his umbrella; sweeping the whole covering from the umbrella, he transformed the latter into a cane, while the umbrella cloth, unfolding in voluminous style, became a black cloak which Twambley flung across his shoulders, a slouch hat settling from its midst upon his head.

In one great twist, old Twambley had become The Shadow!

Janice thought she was seeing the finish of that fray as Shrevvy's cab gathered her from the sidewalk. Through the slamming door, Janice viewed a whirl of blackness scattering another surge of wayward pirates; heard the rise of a mighty, taunting laugh that seemed to pronounce an absolute triumph.

It wasn't quite the finish.

His cane reversed, The Shadow had tripped Fiend of the Furious Deep and beaten off Scourge of the Southern Sea, when he found he needed further leeway. Janice and the cab were gone before The Shadow's figure went whirling to the back of the shop, traceable only by the flying metalware that represented the cloaked whirlwind's path.

Malabar, springing in from an angle, was suddenly tangled in the curtain of the rear door, which was flung about him by The Shadow's timely hand. Back into the pitch-blackness of the rear passage, The Shadow was making an invisible spin, his strident laugh inviting foemen to come and test the clouting power of his cane-head, or to defy the automatic that had appeared in his other fist, as he made that final whirl.

The canny Malabar was not anxious to meet either test offered by his uncanny foe. The unhappy Gay Man From Afar had a better way of dealing with The Shadow.

Reaching for a gold-threaded cord that hung beside the flung back curtain, Malabar tugged it. There was a sharp, resounding clatter as the halves of the rear passage opened downward; one half from front to back, the other from back to front.

Big springs sang and the split floor came thumping upward into place. Malabar beckoned and his crew followed him out through a passage that again was solid, though uneven, above the deep pit into which

The Shadow had been dropped.

When Malabar demanded deep pits, he got them. He'd chosen this store because it had one, in the form of an old abandoned subway excavation. Even The Shadow was unlikely to recover soon from the effect of a twenty-foot plunge and even a lucky landing wouldn't help him to get out. Malabar didn't provide cots with his pits.

Malabar was sure The Shadow would stay, because he had seen The Shadow drop. Massed blackness had simply vanished downward, clearing the dim light that represented the alley beyond. Into the waiting truck piled Malabar and his men, wheeling off to the quest of regaining the Taiwan Joss.

The Shadow wasn't riding the Black Maria tonight. Instead, he had found the blackness of Malabar's pit!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Malaysian Museum stood wide open and there wasn't an attendant in sight. Arriving there because she could think of no better place to go, Janice released Shrevvy's cab, and hurried into the museum. All of which suited Shrevvy who intended to go back to Rabalam's neighborhood and bring The Shadow here.

So far the museum had been a safe place for Janice and it looked doubly so tonight, for inside the girl saw the doorway to the cellar open and knew that she would find Mortimer Kremble down there. Probably the curator was showing his finished set of Cambodian plaques to prospective directors.

Only Kremble wasn't with the plaques. Remembering his other habitat, the brass-walled temple room at the rear of the cellar, Janice went there. Passing the laughing simha, Janice entered the dragon chamber with its side walls of life-sized dancing figures and saw Kremble talking quietly with another man.

Both turned, and Kremble's gaunt face dropped its worried air to furnish Janice with a welcoming smile. The girl didn't recognize the grizzled man with the slight mustache who was standing beside Kremble, nor did his name click home when the curator introduced him.

"Good evening, Miss Courtland," said Kremble. "This is Mr. Rhyde. Coulton Rhyde."

Having been out of touch with the world since the night before, Janice wasn't acquainted with the business of murder that had brought Rhyde and his penthouse into headlines and picture pages.

Besides, Janice was staring at something which intrigued her more than did Rhyde.

Resting on a granite pedestal that Kremble had evidently furnished, was a curious stone image, brownish-black in color, except for its greenish streaks. The figure was seated and it looked like some primitive idol, the sort hewn by untutored savages. Having learned something about archeology, Janice would have classed the idol as Polynesian, until Kremble announced:

"If Rhyde is correct in his assumption, Miss Courtland, you are looking at a really unique object. Rhyde tells me that this is known as the Taiwan Joss, the legacy of a pirate ruler named King Koxinga."

Horror riveted Janice. Her frozen stare caused Kremble and Rhyde to glance at the idol, to learn if it possessed some hypnotic force. Then Janice found her voice.

"The pirate joss! The one Malabar wants!" Gripping the arms of both men, Janice pleaded: "Hide it! Close the museum! Do anything, only don't let them find it here!"

The protest was too late. Janice's delay in finding Kremble had worked against them all. Figures were filtering in past the guardian simha, with a silence befitting this room of the great dragon snake. From the portal came a sneering voice, foreign in language, commanding in tone.

Turning, Janice and the others saw themselves half surrounded by Malabar's pirate crew, who were spreading at the pirate leader's order. To a man, this dozen from the Pescadores were armed with silver-handled knives, each with a studding garnet.

In something of the tone he used as Rabalam, Malabar spoke in English.

"We sell souvenirs of the Orient," he said, gesturing to the knives. "Perhaps you have already seen a few in circulation. But we kept the rest for our own needs."

Dirks raised, but Malabar gestured them down.

"You will swear by the Taiwan Joss," Malabar told Janice. "Swear whether or not you reclaimed the ransom fund that you paid for your uncle's release. Face the joss and swear."

Facing the joss, Janice steadied and spoke in a low, firm tone:

"I do not have the money. I swear by the joss."

From the way knives had been tossed during the past several days, Janice expected to receive a few, if only because she told the truth. But not a dagger was raised.

Arms folded, Malabar turned to Rhyde and Kremble, studying each in turn. Coldly, Malabar asked:

"Which of you now owns the joss?"

Faltering at first, Rhyde suddenly realized that Janice had told the truth and survived. Weakly Rhyde said:

"I do."

"You have told the truth," approved Malabar. "The joss however belongs to us. Relinquish your claim and you may depart."

Rhyde nodded, meaning that he was giving up his claim. Malabar motioned for his followers to spread apart and Janice was hoping that she too would be dismissed, when a shrill tone commanded:

"Wait!"

The tone was Kremble's. The shaggy curator had stepped behind the joss, which almost concealed him, for it was more than half human size. Kremble's face had taken on a leer, unless it was an illusion caused by the great sneer of the dragon's mouth that adorned the wall behind him.

"That man has lied!" Kremble's bony finger pointed out Rhyde. "I own the joss. He gave it to me!"

Rhyde tried to stammer that the joss had not been a gift, but merely a loan, until Kremble interrupted him.

"My word stands!" gloated Kremble. "My word is law! Because I know the secret of the joss that marks the owner!"

Dipping his hands to the sides of the joss, Kremble probed the cracked basalt with his fingers and found

the catches that he sought. With a sudden lift, he raised the whole top of the figure, as one would lift a cover from a carton.

Rhyde had wondered why the stone idol was so light. Now he knew. Inside the joss was a seated figure, almost the size of the hollow basalt cover, a royal image that could only represent King Koxinga!

It was lifelike, amazingly so, that form the size of a half-grown child, but with a fiendish maturity written on its grotesquely-carved, almond colored face. Its eyes were sapphires which sparkled with a merciless blue. The figure was clothed in woven gold, bedecked with patterns of shimmering gems. The green of emeralds, the ruddy glint of rubies vied with the amber hue of topaz, as background for the scintillating fire of magnificent diamonds.

The pirate pelf of centuries adorned this image. For a price of one hundred thousand dollars, Coulton Rhyde had bought millions! Only Rhyde had relinquished that claim, for Mortimer Kremble to seize it!

From Kremble's lips came a fiendish cackle that announced him as the master of the show. With it, Janice realized that the old curator must be the arch-murderer behind the chain of deaths. She was recognizing now that Kremble had been unaccounted for at the time of every death. That included Kip Ranstead and J. Dazley Theobald along with Captain Adalbart and Goodall Shenrich, though Janice knew only of the last two cases.

Only the term "unaccounted for" carried something of a subtle twist. Presumably Kremble had been here in this very cellar. Now Janice knew he couldn't have been and the fact distinctly chilled her. It meant that Kremble couldn't afford to let any witness live who could reveal his treachery, which put Janice in the same dilemma as Rhyde.

For Malabar and his pirate band were bowing to Kremble as their master. They could never betray him for they themselves had taken certain oaths upon the Taiwan Joss. It remained only for Kremble to follow the recognized conventions of the pirate law, which Kremble did.

Pointing again to Rhyde, Kremble declared:

"This man shall have his chance to prove his claim of truth. Let him play the joss the game it loves. If he deserves to live, the Taiwan Joss will let him win. From then on, the power of the joss shall be his!"

Mildest Monsoon of the Midsummer Moon thrust Rhyde in front of the Koxinga image. In front of the strange statue was a board of twenty small squares, five across, four deep. Beside the board, there was a covered urn, like an incense burner. Lifting the lid, Mildest Monsoon of the Midsummer Moon revealed a quantity of Fan-Tan counters, of the sort that Cranston had bought from Rabalam, otherwise Malabar.

The difference was that these were gold instead of silver. The difference would have been difficult to detect, but the light was shining full upon the bowl and its contents. In solemn tone, Mildest Moon of the Midsummer Monsoon told Coulton Rhyde how the game was played.

"One, two, three or four," he said, raising a finger with each word. "You may take any of those numbers, no more, and lay that many counters singly upon the vacant squares. The joss will then play according to the same rule. Whichever finally fills the board becomes the winner."

Janice watched Rhyde wipe the perspiration from his brow, then give a confident smile. To match wits with a mechanical figure in a game of fours with the goal twenty, seemed easy, if he merely kept his wits.

Yet there was a smile on the lips of Mortimer Kremble that out-matched Rhyde's forced smirk. It told that in this game of Fan-Tan, Kremble was counting fully upon the image of King Koxinga. As for

Malabar and his men of fanciful titles, they stood with folded arms, their faces expressionless, as though they had watched this game often before.

As Rhyde leaned forward, his figure cast a shadow on the Fan-Tan board, darkening it until the color of the golden counters became only glitters from the bowl. Momentary hope thrilled Janice, then faded, as she realized Malabar and his company wouldn't be here, if what she hoped could be true.

Janice Courtland realized now that something had happened to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX

TAKING a single counter from the bowl, Rhyde placed it on a square and waited, meeting the cold eyes of the Koxinga figure. A few seconds ticked by; then the time limit of the play was finished. Mechanically, the image moved a carved and jeweled hand.

One - two - three - four. Thus did the mechanical hand remove counters and set them on squares. Having gone the limit allowed, the hand no longer moved. The total was five: one for Rhyde, four for Koxinga.

Smartly, Rhyde decided to beat the figure's own game. He gathered four counters from the bowl and dropped them square by square. Apparently Rhyde had forced Koxinga's hand, for the figure copied Rhyde's earlier play by simply adding one counter to the board, then stopping.

With the total count at ten, Rhyde played two counters. He wanted to see what the figure would do then. The hand of Koxinga moved three times, a counter being dropped with each. That brought the total to fifteen.

Now Rhyde was over-eager. Quickly, he drew counters from the bowl and laid them on squares: one, two, three, four - then Kremble's sharp tone stopped him.

"Four counters, Rhyde," spoke Kremble. "That is the limit of any play!"

One square alone remained vacant and it was Koxinga's play. Rhyde's eyes grew big as goggles and swallowed the sweat that streamed down from his forehead, as he watched the figure take its turn. One counter was all the image played; no more were needed. That single counter filled the twentieth square.

Janice could sense the blackness that she knew Rhyde felt, as he swayed backward from the board. A hiss that might have been the mighty dragon's came from Kremble's vicious lips. A signal for death, that hiss, for long-bladed daggers rose from every pirate hand.

Then all was truly blackness.

From somewhere near the grinning lion that guarded this chamber of horror, a light switch clicked. From amid the blotted atmosphere there came a titanic laugh that echoed amazingly from the brazen walls, as though the blanketed images upon them had come to life and joined in the challenge.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

A howled order came from Kremble, calling upon Malabar's men to meet this menace. There was an oddly hushed surge of figures in the gloom, then big guns blasted, clanging the brass walls. Flattening on the floor, Janice heard the laugh go fading through the cellar, gun shots trailing with it. Then, singularly, the sounds were near again. There were sharp spurts from within the door, babbled calls from without. As suddenly as they had blinked off, the lights came on again. Janice looked up, then around.

Crouched on the floor beside her was Rhyde, also unharmed. Malabar and the pirates were gone, completely hoaxed by The Shadow. He had fired those first shots high, rather than risk hitting Rhyde or Janice, but with them, he had wheeled out from the room, drawing the pirates after the sound of his receding fire.

Detouring somewhere in the pitch black cellar, The Shadow had used his sense of direction to perfection, reversing back into the brass-walled room, cutting off his foemen from their self-appointed master, Mortimer Kremble, and the priceless Koxinga image, the token of Kremble's power.

But Kremble still had power of his own, that he was willing to share with Koxinga.

When Janice looked for the master of murder and his self-claimed prize, she was amazed to find that both had vanished. In drawing off Malabar's tribe, The Shadow had lost his chance to trap the killer and the automaton of death!

Logic rapidly paved its way into Janice's thoughts. There wasn't anything wonderful about the mutual disappearance of Kremble and Koxinga. It simply meant that there was a secret way out, something that had earlier drilled home to Janice; otherwise Kremble couldn't have been engaged in murder when he was supposed to be here. Kremble had taken advantage of the darkness to use the route again and he had taken the Koxinga image with him.

But what way had Kremble gone?

From the door beside the sentinel lion came the answer, spoken by The Shadow. Ready with his guns to stave off a counter-thrust from Malabar's crew, The Shadow turned long enough to give these words:

"Try the dragon."

Looking at Rhyde, Janice realized that the millionaire was completely wilted. So she turned to the great grinning dragon whose mouth took up a full six feet of wall. Of course it must be the dragon! Kremble's only possible exit was through the back of the building.

Again The Shadow looked across his shoulder and added:

"The teeth."

Great dragon's teeth, jabbing down in front of a deeper bas-relief of beaten brass. Grabbing those tusks, Janice tugged them. The background that represented the dragon's gullet moved up like a rising theater curtain. Before Janice could say a word, The Shadow wheeled, gathered up Rhyde as he came along and pushed Janice through the opening.

On the other side, The Shadow paused to find the catch that dropped the brass panel. That would hold Malabar's men until they figured the secret, too. With probing flashlight, The Shadow picked the way through a barren cellar; next, he and his companions were going up steps into an empty house that finally let them out on the back street.

Arriving as if by clockwork schedule, Shrevvy's cab picked up its passengers. Driving off jauntily, Shrevvy vouchsafed some information.

"The boys with the truck left pretty sudden," said Shrevvy. "Just like they'd been thrown out, boss, for parking their truck out front."

That covered the question of Malabar and his crew, but Shrevvy added another detail.

"They stopped at the corner," informed the cabby. "Like they were picking up a passenger."

That could mean Kremble, with the image of Koxinga. The Shadow's low-toned laugh was like an order, giving Shrevvy the next destination.

Passing street lights showed Janice something that was lying in the cab, the umbrella-cane that belonged to Twambley. It looked badly battered, particularly the hooked handle and Janice wondered whose head had been battered with it.

The answer was nobody's.

That cane had served The Shadow differently. It had been his last resource when he plunged into Malabar's pit. With it, The Shadow had hooked the closing trap. The very jaws that had swallowed him, saved him when they clamped shut. Hanging by the end of a cane was one thing; working up to the top of it, another. But the hardest task had been from that point on. It had taken plenty of The Shadow's skill to worm his supporting fingers until they found the catch that released the trap again, so that he could twist across from one half to the other, and let the two bounce him back up to a solid floor.

After handling that little situation, it had been simplicity itself for The Shadow to figure out Kremble's little gadget of the tricky teeth in the dragon's mouth.

Speeding along through the drizzle, taking corners with due allowance for the skids, the cab pulled up in an unexpected place; a deep alley that looked like the back entrance to a theater. Two men stepped forward to challenge its arrival. They were the pair who had posed as the driver of a hansom cab and an antiquated stage hand, the night when Jerry Gifford was shanghaied to the Troxell Theater.

They didn't know that they were dealing with The Shadow and they never found out. They were settled before their cloaked visitor could give them better than a nuisance rating. Out of the drizzle loomed a giant named Jericho who took their heads and bounced them together, quite gently. That turned them into something that the police could question later.

The Shadow took Janice and Rhyde up in the little elevator. His other agents, Harry and Hawkeye, had arranged such a trip by studying out the situation during the afternoon. At the apartment floor, The Shadow gestured Janice and Rhyde ahead. Rather wonderingly, they arrived in the fabulous living room that old Oscar Troxell had developed during his heyday.

There, Jerry Gifford sprang to his feet to meet them, staring in real amazement when he recognized Janice Courtland. A moment later, Jerry was apologizing for much that he neither knew about nor could explain. Yet with it, he realized that he was talking something that made sense to Janice.

"Whatever happened," conceded Jerry, "I could have stopped it. I wanted to tell the world about the Taiwan Joss -"

The interruption introduced the joss itself.

In a corner of this very intricate room, a portion of the wall slid open. From it stepped Mortimer Kremble, carrying the figure of King Koxinga. As Jerry and the others wheeled, there were slithering sounds from other portions of the wall. The whole place was made up of sliding panels that disgorged Malabar and the members of his pirate crew.

From doorways peered Kremble's servants; not just the museum crowd, but Chichester and a few others, their guns serving as a secondary threat to the pirate daggers. It was a complete trap, sprung in a twinkling, to nullify the efforts of The Shadow.

Then, with a strange laugh that seemed but an echo of his own, The Shadow himself stepped into the scene, to admit the fault that could only be his own!

CHAPTER XX

ONE thing remained to The Shadow's credit.

In bringing a climax to his long career in the service of justice, The Shadow could not have chosen a more dramatic way out. He was confronted by odds that seemed impossible to conquer, odds so great that they almost excused his policy of bringing other persons into the same hopeless situation.

Gloating over The Shadow's dilemma, Mortimer Kremble didn't have to catalog his crimes. It was plain that he had spent one fortune to acquire another that would prove far greater: the wealth as represented by the jewels that adorned the Taiwan Joss, now Kremble's sole property.

The Malaysian Museum was just another of the accounts that Kip Ranstead had tried to sell on a publicity deal. From Kip, Kremble had learned a lot about Jerry Gifford. Kremble had used Kip to decoy Jerry to the Troxell Theater - already bought by Kremble himself - and then had murdered Kip in Jerry's own office.

Adalbart and Shenrich had followed as victims, because Jerry, the one man who could have exposed the scheme, was safely removed from contact with the world. Kremble had let Jerry live, not through charity, but because he had framed all crimes to lead back to Jerry himself.

If the police found Kip's body in Jerry's office, with Jerry's own story of the Taiwan Joss lying on the floor where the postman had finally brought it after all its forwarding, who else could be blamed for crime except Jerry Gifford?

Among other curios, Jerry had bought a few knives with silver handles and garnet studs at Rabalam's brass shop. Those would be traced to Jerry to complete the vicious circle.

These things didn't occur to Janice Courtland, but others did; things that she wondered why The Shadow had not uncovered. The man who had ducked along the back street behind the museum must have been Mortimer Kremble himself, going in and out of the museum by his own private route. Of course there was the night when J. Dazley Theobald had been quite evident, but now Janice understood why she had imagined two figures instead of one, or rather why she wondered how J. Dazley had managed to bob around so much.

The reason was that J. Dazley had been checking on Kremble's game. In the offing at first, Theobald had finally gone to Rhyde's to snatch the funds left for Shenrich. Close on the trail, Kremble had murdered Theobald instead of Rhyde, but had set the stage for Rhyde's death too. As Cranston, The Shadow had saved Rhyde from death in vain, for now Rhyde was doomed. He was back in the power of Kremble, who had decreed his death through the automatic operation of the Koxinga image.

Jerry's efforts to reach the outside world, The Shadow's stratagem of a reply through the aid of steamboat whistles, all were nullified by this climax over which Kremble could not only gloat, but brag.

It was to The Shadow, helpless and surrounded in quarters too cramped for action, that Kremble addressed his most effective sneer.

"And where do you suppose I learned the secret of the Taiwan Joss?" queried Kremble. "Right here, from Troxell's notebooks, after I bought the place. It was all related in an old Portuguese manuscript of the eighteenth century. There was one man who played Fan-Tan with this image and lived."

As he spoke, Kremble set the statue upon a marble-topped table.

"He lived," added Kremble, "because Koxinga himself allowed it when the automaton was first tested. Koxinga wanted to see what would happen if the automaton made the first play. Therefore the statue lost."

Kremble's shrewd eyes studied The Shadow, to see if he knew why. Kremble could tell that The Shadow did know why. The Fan-Tan game worked in fives. The victim played first and the automaton brought the total up to five. One and four, two and three, it made no difference, so long as the image supplied the second number. Five - ten - fifteen - twenty - and the Joss was the winner.

Toying with the gold counters in the little bowl, Kremble gave an indulgent laugh. The weight of the counters made the machinery work and always in correct proportion. If the victim laid one counter, the clock-work would make the automaton's hand place four. Two and three, three and two, four and one it was always the same, that adding up to five.

Yet Malabar and his friends of the long-winded names thought there was something mysterious about it. To them it was a ritual that stood for their interpretation of law. To control that able crew, Kremble had only to go through with the usual ceremony. They would kill if the Taiwan Joss commanded; therefore, Kremble would let the joss command the death of The Shadow.

To supplement the Taiwan Joss, Kremble decided to put Troxell's mechanical marvels in action. He gestured to Chichester, who promptly wound the singing birds, the buzzing bumble bee, and the old-fashioned music box. As these contrivances began their operation, Kremble bowed The Shadow to the marble table.

"Whoever loses to the joss is doomed," reminded Kremble. "Whoever defeats the joss becomes its master. Play!" The Shadow played.

Taking first turn, The Shadow was sure to lose; nevertheless, he began the travesty which would mean a few minutes more of life. The fancy clock on the mantel was nearing an hour that would chime The Shadow's doom, but he didn't seem to care.

Malabar and his men were taking no chances. They drew close to The Shadow, their long-bladed knives poised for the thrust that was to come. Murderous though they looked, Janice was forced to shudder more at the thought of Kremble, for it was he who had been the only murderer - and still would be, since he had commanded this game of certain death.

Somehow Janice forgot that her fate would be sealed along with Rhyde's and that Jerry would share the same unfortunate end. Everything else could be forgotten during those tragic moments when The Shadow would bravely play the game that he was sure to lose. Between the shoulders of Malabar's clustered men, Janice could see those fatal counters resting in the bowl.

Gold counters, their yellow hue shaded by the shoulders that cut off the light, which was dimmer here than in Kremble's dragon chamber. But their glitter was visible, a fatal glitter. Once twenty of those counters had been laid upon the board, The Shadow's death would be immediate.

Kremble's crisp voice spoke again:

"Play!"

The Shadow took two counters and laid them on the squares. He waited while the figure of Koxinga played its three.

That made five, a fatal five!

Again, The Shadow played two counters. In turn the mechanical hand of the Koxinga figure made three plays.

That totaled ten, as fatal as five!

Reaching to the bowl, The Shadow deliberately brought two more counters to the board and played each on a square.

The hand of Koxinga responded: One - two - three -

Fifteen, another fatal number!

Only the hand of Koxinga did not stop. It continued to the bowl, picked out another of the glittering counters and laid it on the sixteenth square!

Janice felt her breath come with a gasp. Instead of three counters, Koxinga had played four!

And four was The Shadow's next choice!

He took the counters and laid them cleanly, openly, upon their squares, those vacant numbers: seventeen, eighteen, nineteen - and - twenty!!!

The Shadow had done the impossible. He had beaten the mechanical figure of Koxinga at the very game for which the automaton was geared!

No need for The Shadow to announce himself as master. He simply turned to Malabar and gave a sweeping gesture in the direction of an astonished, maddened man named Mortimer Kremble.

Wildly, Kremble sprang away, howling for his servants to battle the pirates. Guns came up, but Malabar's men brushed them aside before they could be fired. They wanted to finish Kremble, whose word was no longer law, and they wouldn't waste their knives on anyone else.

But Kremble's word would be law again, if he could dispose of his successor, The Shadow!

Dodging skillfully, Kremble drew his own gun and laid it across a mass of artificial flowers. He was aiming for The Shadow, who was turning to cover him with an automatic. Jerry was wrestling with Chichester; Janice found herself as helpless as Rhyde.

In this moment of victory, it seemed that Kremble had gained a trifling edge, but enough for him to beat The Shadow to the final shot. Then, though no one was near him, Kremble gave a shriek and whipped his hand upward, firing the gun toward the ceiling.

Kremble's hand had brushed Troxell's remarkable mechanical bumble bee and found it more wonderful than he had supposed. The buzzing mechanism was equipped with an artificial stinger, sharp as a needle point, that operated instantly when contacted.

The Shadow lowered his own gun, unfired. Malabar's men were swarming all over Kremble. Their driving knives stopped short when they heard The Shadow's quick command. Obediently, the pirates of the Pescadores marched their prisoner down the old stairway which Kremble himself had revealed, along with Chichester and the other subdued servants.

Death was no longer the law of the Taiwan Joss. The Shadow had annulled that decree.

While Malabar's men were gone, The Shadow stepped to the figure of Koxinga and plucked two counters from the board. Now, in the light, Janice could see their color.

They were silver!

Counters that The Shadow had bought from the bearded Mr. Rabalam. He had played them as his third pair, numbers eleven and twelve. Being but half the weight of gold, those silver counters had been only the equivalent of one.

Therefore the Koxinga figure had played four instead of three, running its total up to sixteen, from which The Shadow could score out to twenty! Gone was The Shadow with his tell-tale silver counters when Malabar and his silent followers returned to take away their precious joss. The tawny pirates paid no heed whatever to Jerry, Janice and Rhyde, those three who now were freed from all threat of further doom.

The antique clock chimed and gonged the hour that was no longer fatal, as the pirates departed, bearing the image of Koxinga with them. Janice Courtland smiled at Jerry Gifford whose face relaxed in the same style.

From somewhere came the strange, weird laugh of The Shadow, a parting laugh that told two happy people that the way to freedom now was theirs.

THE END