

TWINS OF CRIME

Maxwell Grant

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TWINS OF CRIME

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CHAPTER I. BRAIN OF CRIME

FROM the window of his cab, Carlo Sarratin studied the rain-pelted street with a gaze as gloomy as the day itself. At moments his face took on a touch of worry, the kind that a rat would show. For Carlo, with his big-toothed mouth and pasty-yellow complexion, looked very much the rat.

When those fits of worry seized him, Carlo turned to his fellow passenger, Leon Grath, and, therewith, his troubles eased.

Carlo Sarratin had confidence in Leon Grath, and with good reason. Of all men in New York, Leon was most fitted to soothe the nerves of crooks like Carlo.

For Leon Grath was recognized as a brain of crime. Those whose side he took, as he had taken Carlo's, could expect results – for a price, of course, but it was usually worth it. Particularly in Carlo's case, because, for a mere pittance of a thousand dollars, Leon was arranging Carlo's departure from New York, despite the

contrary wishes of men who wanted Carlo to stay and pay them much more money.

There was much of the aristocrat, even more of the thinker, in the features of Leon Grath. His tapering face was dominated by a high-bridged nose; beneath were lips that wore a constant down turn, even when they smiled. It was difficult to tell when Leon was smiling or, for that matter, why he smiled.

Similarly, his eyes were creatures of his choice. They could harden like steel, or go soft with sympathy, though, when they did the latter, it was often possible to trace a touch of their usual glint.

Leon's entire countenance was dominated by a wide forehead, which gave the impression that it bulged with brains. His smooth black hair, slicked back from that same forehead, added something of the debonair to his odd, but definitely handsome visage. When he spoke the effect was curious, for Leon's voice carried silky smoothness along with its note of authority.

"You were new to things in New York, Carlo," spoke Leon in his patronizing way. "You were clever enough, opening the Club Elite as a front for a gambling house. You should have foreseen, however, that it would take a long while for your business to build up."

Carlo nodded; through his teeth, he muttered:

"Too long."

"Quite," agreed Leon, "considering you bought protection from a brace of gentlemen termed 'sharpshooters,' who would certainly furnish you with personal samples of their marksmanship, if they caught up with you."

Before Leon had finished, Carlo was crouching deeper in the taxicab, as though it were a rat hole and he the rat. Carlo's fright produced one of Leon's down-turned smiles. Looking from the cab window, Leon surveyed the misty vista and shook his head.

"Nobody in sight," he declared. "That is, nobody like Crimp Gandley or Sheff Halbert. No need to worry, Carlo. I wouldn't be in the same cab with you if I thought you were in danger."

The logic restored something of Carlo's composure. In his satin tone, Leon added:

"It is two o'clock, Carlo, and by four you will be in your cabin aboard the steamship Tropicola. At six you will have dinner served there. By midnight the Tropicola will sail, and you will be in Havana in a few days, while Crimp and Sheff are still hunting for you in New York."

A big-toothed smile appeared between Carlo's rounded lips. It broadened as Leon added a final point.

"And now, Carlo," said Leon, "our task is to arrange the sale of the Club Elite. Let me see that letter again – the one that you received from old Samuel Twildon."

Carlo produced the letter, and Leon studied it close to the cab window. Upon those ever-curving lips appeared a different sort of smile than any that Carlo had previously noted. It was a smile that Carlo couldn't quite understand; it carried a scheming touch, but what lay behind it was the question. The smile worried Carlo Sarratin.

AS the cab pulled up beside an antiquated office building, Leon handed the letter back to Carlo. They alighted, went into the building and took an elevator to the third floor.

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Stepping into a sumptuous but old-fashioned office, Carlo started to approach a girl who was seated at a reception desk, drawing the letter from his pocket in order to introduce himself.

Leon moved ahead and pressed Carlo back. With a bow and a half smile, Leon said:

"Kindly tell Mr. Twildon that Mr. Grath is here to see him."

The girl smiled in return. Making a note on a card, she beckoned to an office boy, handed him the card, and added verbally:

"Mr. Noel Grath is calling –"

"Pardon me," interrupted Leon, "but there is a slight mistake. I am not Noel Grath. I am his brother, Leon Grath. Kindly make that point clear to Mr. Twildon."

Carlo observed the stares that came from the receptionist and the office boy. When the correction had been made and the proper word was on its way to Twildon, Carlo drew Leon aside.

"They mistook you for your brother!" exclaimed Carlo. "Do you mean that you look that much like him?"

"Noel and I are twins," replied Leon. "We look alike, talk alike, act alike, and even think alike. Except" – Leon's smile was whimsical – "except that we disagree on matters of ethics. Where Noel gives financial advice to men of wealth and respectability, I favor chaps like you, Carlo; men who have money at times, but who lack that burden called 'respectability.'"

The boy was returning, to announce that Twildon would see Leon. So Leon entered the private office and, as a matter of course, took his companion, Carlo, with him.

They found old Twildon, stoop-shouldered and gray-haired, looking up from behind a desk that was many sizes too large for him. He had sharp little eyes, and they focused curiously on Leon. Then, with a chuckle, Twildon arose and pushed a thin hand across the desk.

"Ah, the other half of the Grath family!" greeted Twildon. "I've heard your brother Noel speak about you, often. Very often."

"No doubt," returned Leon in his satin tone. "Always something uncomplimentary, I presume."

"No, no!" objected Twildon. "Not always –"

"Then Noel's sarcasm must have eluded you," interposed Leon. "If Noel ever says anything nice about me, there is always a catch to it. I'm his black sheep, you know."

Old Samuel Twildon smiled.

"Noel complimented your cleverness," he stated. "He said your genius at finance was equal to his own, but that you made a great mistake in your choice of associates."

Leon gave a deprecating shrug, as though the statement, itself, proved his comments regarding his brother Noel's caustic attitude. Then, taking Twildon's words as a reminder, Leon turned, gestured toward Carlo and spoke smoothly:

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"I almost forgot, Mr. Twildon. Allow me to introduce Carlo Sarratin, who would like to complete some business with you."

THOSE beady eyes of Twildon's did not miss a trick. He recognized, both from Leon's words and manner, that Sarratin must have some reason for not coming alone. Catching Twildon's gaze, Leon explained that Carlo had asked him, as a patron of the Club Elite, if he knew Twildon, and that Leon, replying in the affirmative, had agreed to introduce him to the wealthy man.

He intimated, Leon did, that Carlo had reasons for wishing to travel incognito; that certain pressing matters made it urgent for him to leave New York.

All the while, as clearly as if in undertone, Leon was practically stating that Carlo would be willing to sacrifice his property, the Club Elite, at a price which would add another bargain to Twildon's huge real-estate collection.

"You see, Mr. Twildon," completed Leon, "a good time is part of my philosophy of life, something which poor Noel, stodgy and burdened with finance, cannot understand. Getting about as I do, I meet such chaps as Carlo, and find them very good friends.

"Of course, Mr. Twildon, I should like to meet those men esteemed by Noel, such as yourself, and conduct business in their behalf. It merely happens that I seldom have the opportunity."

Twildon's lips pursed in a smile. At present, Leon was conducting business in Twildon's behalf. He was dropping Carlo's assets to the freezing mark, and Twildon, catching the theme, was quick enough to cover his own reactions.

"Tell me, Mr. Sarratin," said Twildon. "How much do you want for the Club Elite?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," returned Carlo. "It's worth all that, and more."

"I was prepared to offer twenty-five."

Carlo started to snort at Twildon's offer. Then, in a sharp tone, he suggested:

"Split the difference. Thirty-seven thousand five hundred."

Solemnly, Twildon shook his head and kept shaking it when Carlo dropped to thirty-five. Beginning to understand, Carlo shot an ugly glare at Leon, who accepted it blandly; then, to stop Twildon's negative headshakes, Carlo went down by rapid steps to thirty thousand. There, Twildon stroked his chin and looked toward Leon.

"I feel that twenty-five thousand is a fair offer," asserted Twildon. "What would you say, Mr. Grath?"

A smirk returned to Carlo's ratlike face, for this was Leon's cue to back the thirty-thousand price. Indeed, Leon gave a preamble that pleased Carlo immensely, as it brought up a point quite as important as price.

"Mr. Sarratin needs funds," began Leon. "If you are prepared to write out a check, which can be cashed without delay" – he paused until he saw Twildon nod – "then I am sure that Mr. Sarratin would accept –"

Stopping short, Leon looked to Carlo, who gave a nod in his turn, and an eager one. Without an instant's hesitation, Leon added the perfect bombshell:

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!"

Totally confounded, Carlo could not stop his nods. Leon turned and gestured toward Twildon's check book, which was lying on the desk.

Gleefully, the old man wrote out a check for twenty-five thousand dollars, payable to Carlo Sarratin. Then, with machinelike precision, Twildon was summoning secretaries and a notary, to draw up the papers that completed the transaction.

CARLO still looked dazed when Leon guided him from the office. He didn't see the nod that Leon gave, back in Twildon's direction. Instead of taking the elevator, Leon steered Carlo down the stairs. At the second floor, Carlo became himself again.

"You double-crosser!" he snarled at Leon. "You played in with Old Million-bucks and did me out of five grand, maybe more! You knew I was helpless; that's why you did it! Look at this check –"

Leon interrupted by brushing away the check that Carlo was flapping against his nose. Smoothly, he said:

"Yes, Carlo, look at it. Read what it says."

"It says twenty-five thousand –"

"Read it again, and this time exert some imagination."

Squinting at the check, Carlo kept muttering to himself until suddenly he exclaimed aloud:

"Seventy-five thousand dollars!"

"Of course!" expressed Leon. "I knew it would look like that, from the moment you showed me the signature of Samuel Twildon on his letter. Look at that curlicue 'S,' and that fancy script 'T.' You can hardly tell them apart. If you read the 'T' in twenty-five as 'S,' the 'w' that follows becomes 'ev' in small letters. What else would you ask, Carlo?"

"Only this." Carlo pointed to a corner of the check. "The figures are 25,000."

"They won't be," returned Leon, "if you cut off the tail from that blocky '2' and make it into a '7.' I'd recommend a careful job, Carlo, with that sharp-pointed knife of yours. Just the easiest of touches. No deep scratches –"

By then, the knife was out of Carlo's pocket. Stopped beside a window ledge, he was working on the check, confining himself to the little line that formed the tail of the figure "2." He finished with a chuckle, and Leon, watching the stairs, turned around to survey the work.

"Quite good, Carlo!" said Leon. Then, reaching in his pocket, he produced a styptic pencil. "Moisten the tip of this and apply. Good for scratches, you know, but be careful not to let it touch the ink."

Carlo smoothed the job with the styptic pencil, folded the check and put it in a thickly filled wallet. Before Carlo could stow the wallet back in his pocket, Leon stopped him.

"I've added fifty thousand to Twildon's payment," reminded Leon. "I think ten thousand, cash, would be about right for the idea. I guess you begin to see why I pulled the sale down to twenty-five, don't you,

Carlo?"

Carlo certainly saw. Without a word he made up ten thousand from his own cash and handed it to Leon, who gestured him down the stairs.

"Take that cab we left outside," said Leon. "Get to the bank, cash your check, and then hop over to the boat. I'll stay around here and see that everything is all right at this end."

Standing on the stairs, Leon watched Carlo's departure. Then, his lips set in an inverted smile, Leon turned about and started up to Twildon's office.

As a master of finance, Leon Grath considered himself quite the equal of his twin brother, Noel. With this difference: Leon's brain was crooked, whereas Noel's mind ran to the legitimate.

And in that brain of his, Leon was quite sure that, contrary to all the arguments of his twin, Noel, he, Leon Grath, could continue to make crime pay!

CHAPTER II. THE BROTHERS MEET

NOT until late that afternoon did Leon Grath leave old Twildon's office. When he left, Leon went arm in arm with Samuel Twildon, out to the old man's limousine.

All the way uptown Twildon kept repeating that he would pay fair commissions for Leon's style of work. Any good buy in real estate that Leon could further to Twildon's advantage would be profitable to Leon, too.

Finishing his twentieth handshake with Twildon, Leon stopped off at his hotel, strolled through the lobby and stopped at the desk to ask for the key to his room. The hotel was a side-street establishment that could hardly be called fashionable, a reason why Leon liked it, because his off-trail friends were more at home in a place like this.

Of course, there were often curious characters around the lobby, and they usually eyed Leon – as they did tonight. They were the sort who might be spotters, working for fellows like Crimp Gandley and Sheff Halbert, which didn't bother Leon in the least. Such spies hadn't been trailing Leon today, and that was all that counted.

With Carlo Sarratin safe on the steamship Tropicola, Leon could give anyone the run-around just as long as he wanted. He'd bought Carlo's ticket to Havana, Leon had, and now he was free to write his own ticket.

In his room, Leon ordered dinner sent up, and ate while attired in a lavish dressing gown. After the meal he attired himself immaculately in a tuxedo, added a dressy black-and-white scarf, an expensive topcoat and a derby hat. He remembered a silver-headed walking stick, a gift from his father.

Thus equipped, Leon went out, took a cab and drove directly to an old brownstone house that stood on a side street in a very respectable but old-fashioned neighborhood well south of Times Square.

Paying the cabby, Leon tipped him a dollar and suggested that he stay around as he would be needed later. The cabby agreed to stay, and Leon went into the house, which happened to be his brother Noel's. One advantage that Leon had over Noel: when he wanted a cab in this forgotten neighborhood, he usually managed to have one available. The front door was open and Leon entered as though he had a half share in the house, which was no longer the case, since he had long ago sold his interest in the family homestead to his brother.

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But Noel, always the generous brother, had told Leon to treat the home as his own. It wasn't to Leon's credit that he had not abused the privilege. His visits here were comparatively rare only because he had no love for the house.

All that Leon wanted, this evening, was to play chess, and, much though he detested Noel, his twin was the only chess player of Leon's acquaintance who could match his giant intellect at their favorite game. In the lower hall, Leon saw the counterpart of his own hat, coat, and scarf, for Noel's tastes were identical with his own. The twin on the silver-headed cane was standing in the corner, which produced another smile from Leon.

Instead of leaving his own attire downstairs, Leon wore them up to Noel's study, just so his brother could again be reminded how much they looked alike.

NOEL was in the large, well-decorated study, seated at a chess-board working out a problem. Noting that Noel was also wearing a tuxedo, Leon threw back his topcoat and strolled over. Noel heard him and looked up.

Their faces looked as if they were mirroring each other. For in every feature – high nose, down-curved lips, bulging forehead and slick black hair – Noel Grath was the counterpart of his wayward twin, Leon.

Indeed, Noel reacted to Leon's display of duplicate attire exactly as Leon himself would have. There was no true way of tracing whether Noel smiled, or why. Even when Leon doffed his coat and paraded the tuxedo beneath it, Noel's expression was indefinable.

There was only one factor of difference between the twins, and it in a sense, was trivial. Noel was phlegmatic, lacking Leon's gusto. Instead of rising from the chess table in the hail-fellow fashion that Leon cultivated, Noel gestured in tired fashion, inviting his brother to sit down.

Without a word, they set up the chessmen, Leon doing most of the work. In choice, Leon won the white, and began the game with his favorite opening, the Ruy Lopez.

They were well into the play when Leon sacrificed a bishop for a knight, at which the down turn of Noel's lips became actually droll.

"My knights have been troubling you recently, Leon," remarked Noel. "I expected that you would soon decide that an exchange of pieces regarded as equal would be to your advantage."

"I've applied it to more than chess," returned Leon. "I made a swap this afternoon – one of my friends for one of yours."

The faces of the brothers showed an instant variance, not through any physical difference, but because their expressions were motivated by opposing thoughts. Noel's eyes were the ones that showed the glint, while his tone went to the extreme of smoothness as he demanded:

"Who was the friend, Leon?"

"Old Samuel Twildon," returned Leon. "I helped him make a bargain."

Noel's eyes still carried demand, so Leon smoothly gave the superficial details of Twildon's "trade" with Carlo Sarratin. But Noel wasn't satisfied. He put the question:

"What then, Leon?"

"A peculiar thing, Noel," replied Leon. "Carlo is very sharp, and very crooked. He noticed an odd thing in Twildon's curly writing, a similarity between the letters 'T' and 'S.'"

If Leon had mentioned the letters in the other order, Noel might have had to think a few minutes for the answer. As it was, Noel had it in a flash. He could visualize twenty-five changed to seventy-five, with a similar raise in the figures in terms of thousands.

"You let Sarratin pull that swindle –"

"Easy, Noel," broke in Leon. "You are drifting into the vernacular. If you mean that Carlo raised the check and cashed it, with a fifty-thousand-dollar profit – well, that was Carlo's business, not mine."

"And your business?"

"Was with Twildon. He gave me this." Leon brought a check from his pocket. "A ten-percent commission on the sale, exactly twenty-five hundred dollars. Please observe, Noel, that this check has not been raised, nor will it be, though I could pick up a neat five thousand from the process."

Noel forgot the chess game and leaned back in his armchair. His face showed anger, something that neither of the twins was apt to register.

"Carlo must have handed you ten thousand, at least," came Noel's tone, lacking most of its velvet. "With twenty-five hundred from Twildon to boot, you would naturally be satisfied. Particularly as Carlo's check will show him to be a crook, while yours, untempered, will, by false logic, give you the sham of honesty. I recognize your shrewdness, Leon, though I despise it!"

LEON wasn't ruffled in the least. He took the attitude that Noel was as shrewd as he, their methods of application being the only difference. He sat back, watched Noel's anger fade, and took delight in watching his respectable twin analyze other features of the situation.

Noel soon struck home. He decided that Carlo must be leaving the country in order to be safe when the Twildon swindle was detected. Analyzing further, Noel decided that Carlo was probably on the steamship Tropicola, which was due to sail at midnight for Havana.

At that point, Leon gave an approving nod.

"You've guessed it, Noel," said Leon. "But you're not going to do anything about it. You know, quite well, that Twildon can throw away fifty thousand like seeds from grapes! Whereas, if you expose Carlo's present whereabouts, you will make him liable to murder."

A trace of horror came to Noel's eyes.

"His enemies would really kill him, Leon?"

"They would," returned Leon. "Crimp Gandley and Sheff Halbert; either or both. They're taking turns casing the office of the Club Elite. By 'casing,' I mean watching; pardon the slip, Noel.

"What's more, they have their strong-arm crew – parcel of ruffians, to you – right handy to help them as soon as they locate Carlo Sarratin. Suppose I call up the Club Elite, Noel, and see which of the unsavory

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gentry answers: Crimp or Sheff."

Leon leaned to reach for the telephone, and Noel promptly drew it closer to himself. But he didn't take it from its hook, as he might have. Leon smiled, quite right in his conclusion that Noel wouldn't deliver Carlo into the hands of known murderers. Noel did not even intend to call the police.

"You see, Noel?" queried Leon mockingly. "Crime does pay, when properly managed. It paid me, and it paid Carlo. It would pay anyone who killed Carlo, considering that he has at least seventy-five thousand dollars, cash, in his wallet. But he's perfectly safe in Stateroom D-12 on the Tropicola, provided those chaps or their snoopers haven't sighted him.

"Of course, Noel, it is my status that really worries you. I think you would sacrifice Carlo, or others like him, if it would end what you term my criminal career. But I'm covered perfectly, and you know it. Actually, I'm making as much money as a brain of crime as you are by being a financial wizard who helps out old skinflints like Twildon. And I'm having fun in life –"

The telephone bell interrupted. Noel answered, and his tone took on its kindest note. Leon knew right away that Mona Brenton was on the wire. She was Noel's fiancée, and though Leon had never met her, he had seen her often, for Mona had a spirit of gaiety that Noel lacked and was wont to frequent the night clubs that he abhorred.

"Yes, Mona" – Noel's tone had an indulgence that made Leon sneer – "I should like to go to the theater, particularly since you have chosen the one play that I wish to see... Yes, it is the same trouble as before – those figures that I must complete for Allied Electric..."

"Get away from them for tonight?" Noel looked across the room at a desk cluttered with papers. "I might try, Mona... A very good idea, and very helpful." Noel paused to glance at his watch. "If I can make it I shall meet you right outside of your apartment house... Yes. Wait until eight thirty; no longer..."

As Noel finished the call he found Leon staring at him with a gaze of contempt.

"So, my fine brother" – there was a sneer in Leon's glossed tone – "you let a girl pick a play that you want to see, and then suggest she wait around while you decide whether or not you will go. If you want my advice –"

"I don't want it, Leon! You never take mine on questions of honesty. I can do without yours on other subjects."

"My advice is this," continued Leon serenely. "Meet Mona and take her to a night club instead of that show. To a first-class place, where you can dance with her, if you haven't forgotten how. Be somebody other than your stodgy self just for once!"

Noel tightened his lips and gave an annoyed gesture to show that he could no longer think of chess. Leon put on his hat and coat, adjusted the fancy scarf and gave the silver-headed cane a twirl. With a mock bow to his brother Noel, the renegade of the Grath family stalked from the room and out of the house to where the cab was waiting.

As he entered the cab, Leon smiled. A new idea had struck him, something that appealed to his conniving mind. Chats with Noel always helped Leon, though he never admitted so to his hidebound brother. Tonight, Leon had gained a thought as novel as it was daring.

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UP in the study, Noel, too, was showing a peculiar inspiration. Though Leon didn't know it, his brother Noel tolerated the renegade's visits because they stirred his mental processes. Noel was willing to grant that he had become stodgy, and more.

It was odd, indeed, that these men of extremes should mingle their minds without admitting it; yet not odd, considering that they were of identical mold.

Instead of bothering with his papers, Noel was stepping across the floor much in the manner of a dancer. He was limber, and it pleased him. He changed the dance step into the quick footwork that he remembered from fencing lessons, years ago, when the instructor had paired him off with Leon.

Noel's face took on a new expression that showed he was no longer surprised at finding himself so agile. His smile was one of anticipation. He was picturing the things that he could accomplish by a return to a more vigorous life, wherein he could outmatch the best efforts of his brother Leon.

Leaving the study, Noel went downstairs, put on his coat, and adjusted his hat at a rakish tilt. He fixed his scarf to make it appear fancy, and tossed his silver-headed cane under his arm.

Surveying himself in a mirror, Noel saw his brother Leon, and actually laughed as he thought of the impression that he could make if he adopted a swaggering style for benefit of Mona Brenton. Too much of it wouldn't do, as a first venture, at least not with Mona, though there were others who might appreciate a strong change of style in Noel Grath.

There was one thing, however, that the world would have to remember, and with the thought, Noel sobered his expression. He, Noel, was still the respectable half of the Grath combination; his brother Leon the evil genius. So the world understood them, and so they should remain.

Returning upstairs to the study, Noel placed his cane in the corner and sat down at his desk, still wearing hat and coat, while he debated his course for the evening to come.

CHAPTER III. MAN OF MURDER

LEON had given Noel an excellent picture of the Club Elite, the fancy spot that Carlo Sarratin had founded, only to abandon.

The Elite was still doing business on its downstairs floor, even though the gambling casino, one flight up, was closed. In fact, the room above lacked everything in the way of gambling equipment. Only bare tables and chairs remained of its former furniture.

Four men were seated about the place. One was Crimp Gandley, tall, sallow, with a sharp-pointed face and hands that moved restlessly. A former faro dealer, Crimp had been a good hand with a pack of cards until he had learned that he could handle a revolver quite as readily. Therewith, he had graduated.

Teaming with Sheff Halbert, a former lookout in a fancy gambling den, Crimp had gone into the business of protective service. Their partnership had proven profitable and they had raised the rates until only strangers like Carlo were foolish enough to buy. Crimp was voicing that very fact to his squad of strong-arm men.

"Twenty grand is what Carlo owes us," Crimp was saying, "and why not? He thought he could bring business into this joint. Our part was to see that the coppers stayed out. It was Carlo's fault the thing folded, so he hadn't any right to rat. Just let him walk into that office" – Crimp thumbed across the room – "and he'll find what a rat-trap is!"

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His stride carrying him in the direction of the office, Crimp halted to gesture at the door in question. It was at the head of the stairway, an excellent location, since it enabled Carlo, when present, to flag any unwelcome arrivals from the floor below. But Carlo was no longer occupying his office; in fact, it was supposed to be quite empty.

That was why Crimp ended his gesture and stared.

Crimp Gandley was positive that he saw the door move. His hand went to his gun pocket, but before he could draw his revolver, the illusion faded. The door hadn't moved; instead, blackness had simply edged away from it, creating a curious optical effect. In turn, however, Crimp was confronted with another mystery.

Why had blackness faded from the door, to be engulfed by the thicker darkness within the empty office?

Abruptly, Crimp drew his gun and shouldered against the door. Being ajar, the door slammed inward, and Crimp, snarling epithets meant for Carlo, began fumbling for the light switch, finally to find it.

Lights blazed, to show – an empty office!

By then Crimp's three followers were thronging the doorway, staring at their leader, whose sharp pointed face was poking like a ferret's. Crimp stared suspiciously at a big metal desk and a filing cabinet in the corner beyond it. Then, spying a closet door that was slightly open, Crimp strode over, wrenched it wide and aimed his gun into the closet, only to be greeted by emptiness again.

Turning with a glower, Crimp surveyed his men, and their expressions didn't please him. Those huskies dealt in real situations, not in imaginary bugaboos. It wouldn't help Crimp's stock to let them believe that he was the victim of his own delusions. Nor was it the sort of thing that Crimp could readily laugh off.

Instead of mentioning that curious fading of blackness from the threshold, something that he was sure the others had not seen, Crimp delivered a few general comments.

"You can't take no chances," he argued. "Leaving a door open, the way we have, a guy might do a sneak into it while we get talking on something different. Take a guy like Carlo –"

Crimp paused. His words weren't convincing his listeners. They didn't credit Carlo Sarratin with nerve enough, or skill enough, to slide upstairs and into his office unobserved.

"A guy like Carlo," repeated Crimp. "He couldn't pull anything smart like that. But you take Leon Grath; he's smart enough to try most anything!"

The statement carried conviction. Crimp's men knew, well enough, that Leon had served as Carlo's adviser during the past few days. If there was anything in the office that Carlo wanted, he would be smart, sending Leon for it.

Still, the office was empty; so, obviously, even Leon had not entered. Nevertheless, Crimp's precautions were justified, once he mentioned Leon as a factor in the case.

A VERY timely interruption saved Crimp the trouble of adding further arguments. It was the telephone bell that interrupted, and Crimp gestured for strict silence while he answered. After all, he was still supposed to be in Carlo's employ, so his presence in the office of the Club Elite was quite justified.

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After a few opening words, Crimp lowered his tone in confidential style, which made it difficult for the others to catch the gist of his conversation. The chat ended, Crimp turned to them and spoke his piece.

"It was Sheff Halbert," he announced. "He's leaving it to me to get a line on Carlo. Sheff's got his own assignment for tonight; he's making the rounds of the night spots. He'll be stopping at the Skyview Roof along about nine o'clock.

"I'm telling you this because maybe it will be our job to remember that Sheff was with us around nine o'clock. Get it? You know how Sheff is on those things" – Crimp's sallow features showed a shrewd gleam – "he always remembers friends who stick by him when he needs it."

From Crimp's comment it sounded as though Shed had deviated from the simple pastime of searching for Carlo, and might even be planning a first-class stick-up at the swanky Skyview Roof Garden. However, considering that Sheff, like Crimp, was anxious to settle matters with Carlo, Sheff's present excursion could hardly be as serious as the quest that he had abandoned. At least, Sheff's trip to the Skyview Roof might result in something less than murder.

The group was leaving the office when the telephone rang again. Crimp answered it as though he expected a call back from Sheff. Instead, he heard a different voice, one that he wasn't sure he recognized. Then Crimp lost interest in the voice and concentrated upon the words.

"You're talking about Carlo, huh?" queried Crimp abruptly. "So you're telling me where he is... Yeah? What makes you think I don't know? Or that I want to know? Carlo's a good pal of mine..."

"Cabin D-12... On the steamship Tropicola –" Crimp was making a notation on a slip of paper – "So that's where Carlo is, and you say you ought to know... I get it. You're one of the stewards... Took a trimming up at this gambling joint once. Well, I don't blame you for not liking Carlo –"

Further conversation was interrupted by a sharp clack from the receiver at the other end. Thrusting his telephone aside, Crimp Gandley turned abruptly to his men.

"Maybe the guy was faking who he is," spoke Crimp, "but that don't change what he knows. We've got nothing to lose by a quick trip down to the pier. All I hope is that Carlo has got the twenty grand he owes us!"

The group went from the office, and so sure was Crimp that the tipoff was correct that he didn't bother to leave a man behind. Nor did he consider it necessary to turn out the office lights, hence, the thing that happened immediately afterward occurred in full glow.

A cloaked figure stepped from behind the closet door – a shape clad entirely in black, with a slouch hat obscuring his features, except for a pair of burning eyes.

Crime's arch foe: The Shadow!

THE tall figure did not come from within the closet. Instead, The Shadow emerged from a space between the filing cabinet and the wall, actually pushing the closet door shut, not open, in order to come forth.

It was The Shadow who had glided into Carlo's office almost under Crimp's gaze. He had moved into a temporary hiding place while Crimp was turning on the lights. Crimp's glance, sharp though it was, had passed The Shadow by. Then Crimp, in his eagerness to search the closet, had whipped open the door so suddenly and so wide that the crook himself had turned The Shadow's temporary refuge into a perfect place of concealment.

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Coming right in front of the blackened corner where The Shadow had merged, the door enabled the cloaked investigator to bide his time and learn the opinions of Crimp Gandley, as well as the purport of the two phone calls that the fellow had received.

Out of concealment, The Shadow took time to make a call of his own – to Burbank, his contact man. The Shadow told Burbank to order competent agents to the Skyview Roof, there to keep watch for Crimp's sidekick, Sheff Halbert.

Then, as though time held little importance, The Shadow glided from the office, down the stairs and out to the street, where he blended with suitable darkness. There, The Shadow twinkled a tiny flashlight that gave a green glow.

From then on there was speed in plenty. A cab whipped from across the street; its door swung open and went shut again as the cab slackened speed. In that trice The Shadow was within the cab, giving orders to its driver, Moe Shrevnitz.

Like a creature unleashed, the cab began its race to the pier where the Tropicola lay docked; a race that could have but one result.

With The Shadow picking the route, and Moe, the speediest hackie in New York and a secret agent of The Shadow at the wheel, the start gained by Crimp and Co. was trivial. They had to worry about attracting attention on the way; an argument with a traffic cop would be untimely for men bound upon a mission of murder.

But The Shadow didn't care if he carried half the police in Manhattan along his trail. They would simply be on hand to greet arriving crooks!

As it happened, no police spotted the speeding cab. Pulling up at the North River pier, The Shadow found it practically deserted. He slipped through a gate unnoticed, reached the gangway and glided along it like a trail of stray smoke that some freakish breeze might have wafted down from one of the Tropicola's funnels.

Merging with a dim passageway, The Shadow neared the cabin marked "D-12."

As suddenly as he had materialized, The Shadow evaporated into a side passage. The door of D-12 was opening; a man peered out to glance both ways along the passage. The man wasn't Carlo Sarratin, whose face The Shadow knew quite well. His was another face, that The Shadow recognized upon sight.

The Shadow saw the face of Leon Grath.

It was logical, Leon being here. He was Carlo's friend, the clever chap who had framed the Havana trip that was taking Sarratin to permanent safety. Having made a visit to assure himself that Carlo was securely tucked away, Leon was leaving, to take his own chances upon meeting such troublesome questioners as Crimp Gandley or Sheff Halbert.

Leon was in style tonight, with his rakish derby, fancy muffler, and silver-headed cane swung jauntily from one arm. His eyes had their shrewd glint; his lips were turned down in the usual manner as he saw that no one was in sight. Closing the door of Carlo's cabin, Leon turned toward a companionway leading up on deck.

Instantly, The Shadow moved from darkness. Reaching the door of D-12, he turned the knob and found it unlatched. Silently, The Shadow entered; seeing light ahead, he drew an automatic simply as a warning for Carlo to preserve silence, should he view the cloaked intruder who was coming into his cabin. In cases like

this, a gun was usually an excellent persuader.

This was an exception to the rule. The Shadow's .45 was quite unneeded. Carlo Sarratin did not see the cloaked visitor enter, though Carlo's eyes were staring straight at the door.

For Carlo's eyes were very glassy, and they were looking up from the floor, bulging out of a face that was quite as dead as any that The Shadow had ever viewed!

CHAPTER IV. MEN OF MURDER

THOUGH The Shadow had traveled ahead of murder, it had arrived before him. Here, in the very cabin where Crimp Gandley and accompanying assassins intended to deliver death, The Shadow was viewing the thing they had planned to accomplish.

As to the matter of guilt, it pointed plainly to Leon Grath, the one man who, according to normal logic, would never be accused of Carlo's death.

But The Shadow had long since learned that normal logic could not be applied in the case of Leon Grath. Leon, in his crooked way, was a genius equal to his honest brother, Noel, whose standing was also known to The Shadow.

True, the evidence against Leon was purely circumstantial. The Shadow had seen him step from a room which contained a dead man; and, if innocent, Leon might have left Carlo's cabin in exactly the same fashion.

The law would find it difficult to prove this crime against Leon, even if traces of his visit, such as fingerprints, were found in the cabin. For Leon could freely admit having been in Carlo's cabin, claiming that he went there to make sure that his friend was safe.

The Shadow, however, had facts at his disposal which would dispute Leon's claim of innocence.

It happened that The Shadow could account for the whereabouts of the two men who wanted to kill Carlo. One, Crimp Gandley, was on his way here; the other, Sheff Halbert, was in the vicinity of the Skyview Roof Garden.

At that point The Shadow struck a snag in his own analysis.

He couldn't prove that Sheff was at the Skyview Roof. It might be that Sheff had murdered Carlo, called Crimp and given him a phony story. Then, with another call, Sheff could have lured Crimp here to take the blame for Carlo's death. But The Shadow was unwilling to accept such a theory, even when he built it personally.

Sheff had worked too long with Crimp to double-cross his partner. Besides, if Crimp had needed a tipoff to reveal where Carlo was, the chances were that Sheff would have required the same. The call from a supposed steward could readily have been made by Leon, to bring Crimp here. If Sheff had been at the Club Elite, Leon would have lured him instead.

There was one factor that pointed squarely to Leon as Carlo's killer. Knowing himself hunted, Carlo would have admitted only a friend like Leon into the cabin. Moreover, the manner of Carlo's death could not be overlooked.

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The dead man was sprawled near a chair in front of a small desk, and there were letters lying in sight, some scattered on the floor beside the body. Behind Carlo's ear was a great gash, inflicted by a blunt instrument, possibly the butt end of a revolver. Only a friend like Leon, fully trusted by Carlo, could have stood behind the victim to smash that death blow home. The Shadow could perfectly picture Carlo, stooped at the desk, chatting affably to Leon, suspecting no ill, while the murderer was poising his gun for the telling stroke.

A low laugh came from The Shadow's lips. A strange laugh, so repressed in its whisper that it might have come from anywhere. Even from the lips of Carlo Sarratin, fixed in their death leer. Indeed, those lips could well have laughed. Though silent, they had spoken to The Shadow, as if certifying his accusation of Leon.

There was just enough of affability, yet, withal, a touch of puzzlement in Carlo's death grin, almost to speak the name of Leon Grath. As for The Shadow, he had found a perfect loophole in this situation; one involving Crimp Gandley.

Whatever Crimp's catalogue of past misdeeds, it was certain that he hadn't murdered Carlo, and therefore had no present quarrel with The Shadow. Here was an excellent chance to use Crimp toward trapping the real murderer later.

With such a plan in mind, The Shadow arose from beside Carlo's body. Remembering Crimp's way with doors, The Shadow took a stance in the corner of the cabin, just within the door itself.

AT the end of a few minutes The Shadow heard a stir outside the closed door. The knob turned slowly; then, true to style, it came open with a hard slap and Crimp lunged through, a drawn revolver in his fist.

The Shadow did not see Crimp until he had passed, for the door was boxing in The Shadow in a narrow space. Crimp had shoved it so hard that it would have rebounded shut but for the fact that three other men shouldered through behind him.

They stopped, staring at Carlo's body. Crimp looked at the others and his sallow face twitched restlessly. Stooping, he began to go through the dead man's pockets. Looking up, he gave a sudden snarl and voiced words which fitted with The Shadow's theory.

On the spot personally, Crimp would certainly have accused Sheff of a double cross had he believed it possible. But Crimp placed the blame elsewhere.

"Leon Grath!" was Crimp's indictment. "He's the only guy could have done it! Leon took the dough that was owing me and Sheff, and whatever more Carlo had on him. I don't blame him for that; but trying to hang the rap on us is something else. When I find Leon –"

Crimp was swinging toward the door as though he expected to find Leon, but he hadn't started to raise his gun, when he froze. The others were riveted, too, by the whispered laugh that stirred the room. Its taunt was one they feared as greatly as if they had been trapped in actual crime.

The laugh of The Shadow!

Within the doorway stood the master in black, facing the light so that his eyes reflected a burning glow. His gaze seemed fixed upon each man, yet all knew that it included the sprawled form upon the floor.

The Shadow's mirth carried accusation that nullified all other. From his cloak a projecting fist displayed a heavy automatic, and its muzzle also carried the illusory effect of being directed at each man who viewed it.

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Seemingly, The Shadow was holding each individual responsible for Carlo's death, while laughing off all theories to the contrary. Hence, of all who faced The Shadow's vengeful wrath, Crimp, the man who had just done the talking, was the one whose fears rose highest.

As leader of the murder crew and a known enemy of Carlo Sarratin, it behooved Crimp Gandley to talk fast and convincingly. Yet, with all his reputed nerve, Crimp could only stammer.

"I... I didn't croak Carlo!" chattered Crimp. "Give us a break Shadow! We only wanted dough... the dough he owed us... me and Sheff –"

The Shadow inserted a timely laugh. Its shivery whisper woke Crimp to the fact that he had named a partner in crime: Sheff Halbert. Probably The Shadow knew that Crimp and Sheff worked together, but he had forced the fact from Crimp's own lips. This was the style wherewith The Shadow broke down the morale of his opposition and turned defiant men into whimpering cowards.

It was policy to make Crimp whimper; to reduce him to a state where he would listen to The Shadow's terms. Given the word, Crimp would kill Leon on sight, but The Shadow's justice would not allow the licensing of one murderer to oppose another. There were better ways of using Crimp to advantage, and The Shadow intended to propose one.

Unfortunately, the opportunity never came.

THE SHADOW shifted in from the doorway, thrusting his gun ahead of him, and the move cowed Crimp's men completely. So completely that not even a gulp came from them. Indeed, the cabin was so silent that even the slight swash of the river tide could be heard through the thick hull of the Tropicola.

Faint, that sound was not enough to drown another that The Shadow would not have heard had the trapped men even stirred.

The sound came from the passage outside the cabin – a creep, as deadly in its approach as the rattle of a venomous snake. It was so close that The Shadow could tell that whoever caused it was at a very short angle outside the cabin.

Without an instant's hesitation; The Shadow turned his forward pace into a rapid whirl. Full about, he was flinging himself through the doorway into the passage with a twist that carried him away from the stalking man outside the door.

As The Shadow moved, a gun stabbed hard, slicing in past the edge of the doorway, its bullet knifing through the folds of The Shadow's flowing cloak. So close was the stab that the gun flame seemed to issue from The Shadow's cloak!

In his wheel, The Shadow saw the face of Leon Grath. Carlo's killer had returned. On the way out he had spied Crimp and the others arriving. The craft for which Leon was noted had again asserted itself. The murderer had come back to corner the men that he had lured to the scene of death and sound an alarm that would bring the ship's crew here to snare them.

Hunting Crimp, the killer had found The Shadow!

At heart a crook and by profession the same, Leon could never have resisted the chance to finish The Shadow. Indeed, the scene was ripe for such a kill. It would just add one more death to the shoulders of Crimp Gandley. As an added benefit to Leon's cause, The Shadow's death would mean the elimination of the

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one witness who might place the guilt where it really belonged.

Having sensed all that the moment he whirled, The Shadow had given himself the impetus needed to get clear of the fatal shot. But The Shadow wasn't clear of trouble. Crimp and the others in the cabin were totally deceived by the shot. They were sure that The Shadow had delivered it.

Behind Crimp, they came lunging from the cabin, their guns raised as The Shadow swung back their way.

Whatever the reputed skill of Leon Grath, the murderer wasn't staying to give further battle. Bounding away, he fired one wild shot, hoping to disturb The Shadow's aim; then went for the companionway.

Before The Shadow could shoot after him, Crimp and his foolhardy followers were springing upon the fighter in black. The Shadow was slashing hard with his automatic, warding off aiming guns. Shots sounded, the slugs wide and upward. With a wrench The Shadow was clear, but he had to take the opposite direction.

His foemen were piling after him, still shooting, when he reached the deck. The Shadow looked for Leon but saw no sign of him. Members of the ship's crew were present, however, and they had guns, for they had heard the shots.

Diving away from a misguided flurry of bullets, The Shadow reached the shelter of a ventilator, where bullets clanged the metal work. Then, to a man, the ship's crew swung to meet the attack of snarling foemen who surged up from below. Crimp and his men were killers all when a gun fray loomed.

Knowing it, The Shadow inserted timely shots. Those punches were the ones that counted. The first clipped Crimp and staggered him. The next sent a wounded crook down the hatchway. The others, at the rear, were slower with their guns, particularly as they had to side-step two falling forms. The crew came through in rapid style and felled that pair before they could fire. But the battle wasn't over.

Wounded, Crimp Gandley was ferocious to the last. He brought his gun up and the seamen had to riddle him in self-defense. The Shadow had done his best to force Crimp's crowd to a quick submission, but they wouldn't have it that way. They could think only in terms of slaughter, and since The Shadow had prevented them from giving it, they took it instead.

DELAYED by the fray, and with seamen between him and the gangway, The Shadow had to take a roundabout course to leave the Tropicola. By then a man in topcoat and derby hat was rushing down the plank to the pier.

Aroused watchmen saw him and yelled after him, but he didn't stop. Only The Shadow, nearing the rail, could reach the proper angle to see the fugitive's face.

He spied the features of Leon Grath, angry yet leering in their curious way. Then the conniver was gone beyond a huge stack of boxes that awaited shipment on the Tropicola.

Men on the pier took up the chase but lost it. Coming down the deserted gangway, The Shadow headed for Moe's cab. He saw no sign of Leon on the way. The killer de luxe had reached a car and was gone. Even Moe hadn't spotted him, for The Shadow's cabby was parked in an obscure spot.

Shouting had replaced shooting on the Tropicola. The whole pier was in commotion as word of Carlo's death was passed along, for members of the steamer's crew had found the murdered man in his cabin.

The Shadow did not wait for the excitement to surge along the water front. He gave the word to Moe, and the cabby responded by whizzing away and picking the first side street that offered quick departure from the neighborhood of the piers.

From the rear of the cab came grim laugh. It was not so much a regret of the past as an anticipation of the future. Crime had been done and its results could not be changed. The Shadow was thinking in terms of crime to come and how he might alter the shape of things to be!

CHAPTER V. CRIME'S OTHER HALF

NOEL GRATH was in one of his rare moods – a mood so rare that it completely overwhelmed Miss Mona Brenton. Indeed, Mona was delighted by the turn of events; so delighted that she had given up an idea that she had long been nourishing – that of returning the ring that Noel had given her and calling off the engagement.

Waiting outside her apartment, Mona had not expected Noel to arrive, but he had appeared at the last moment in a cab and she had joined him. Then Noel had really surprised her. Instead of telling the cabby to take them to the theater to see the play that interested him, not Mona, Noel had suggested a night club.

Before she recovered from the shock, Mona was sipping a cocktail and staring in admiration, while Noel looked around the place and gave it a disapproving shrug. It didn't suit him at all. He preferred somewhere more lively, like the Skyview Roof.

So Noel left the table and phoned for a reservation at the Skyview for nine o'clock, just before the beginning of the floor show.

It was nearly nine o'clock, at present, and Noel was helping Mona into her fur wrap. She looked over her shoulder and smiled at the jaunty way he wore his muffler. The rakish tilt he gave his hat, the flip he supplied to his cane, were other features that pleased Mona. When Mona was pleased she looked it, for her smiles were really lovely.

"What's come over you, Noel?" she asked as they went out to their cab. "Why, you haven't been like this for months – if ever!"

"Careful, Mona," chuckled Noel, "or you will be saying something you may regret."

"There's nothing I can ever regret," returned Mona, snuggling her arm under Noel's as they sat in the cab. "Not now, Noel. You've really come to life. What caused it?"

Politely, Noel proffered Mona a cigarette and a light from a fancy lighter. Then, with his lips registering a very solemn expression, he announced:

"I have decided to disown my brother."

Mona's forehead furrowed under the blond hair that topped it. Her blue eyes met Noel's steady gaze. Her lips were very serious as she commented:

"I thought you disowned Leon long ago, Noel."

"Not exactly," said Noel with a headshake. "I still held some hope for him, Mona. But tonight he came to see me and deliberately branded himself a rascal."

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"How, Noel?"

"I'd rather not discuss that part of it, Mona." Noel's tone was serious, too. "But he told me something else. He said that he was really enjoying life, whereas I was getting stodgier all the while. It was his way of claiming that crime could pay, while honesty brought no reward."

Mona's eyes took on a far-away gaze. She had often heard Noel mention his brother Leon and how their ways had parted. She had wondered, sometimes, upon this very point. Always she had sided with Noel's views, but she could not doubt that he had missed something in life that Leon had found.

At last, Noel was seeing it that way, too, but Mona was sympathetic enough to feel that he was burying his sentiment toward Leon under the mask of gaiety.

"At least I intend to live," decided Noel. "I deserve it, Mona."

"Of course," Mona agreed. "It will show Leon that his ways are wrong."

"Never mind Leon," returned Noel. "You are the one who matters, Mona. I want to live so you can live, too."

Mona's blue eyes beamed with appreciation.

"Is this permanent, Noel?"

"I hope so," replied Noel seriously. "I suppose I shall lapse back into my stodgy ways upon occasion, Will you forgive me if I do?"

"Certainly." Mona nestled closer. "I can't expect too much all at once, Noel."

The cab swung up to the Skyview Roof building. Mona smiled, sadly but sympathetically, as she watched Noel straighten his derby hat, arrange his muffler more conservatively, and reach reluctantly for his silver-headed cane. He was becoming the old Noel, stiff and stodgy, as his brother Leon branded him.

Still, Mona could understand it. Noel probably expected to meet people he knew at the Skyview Roof, and they would wonder enough at seeing him there. At least he would have to preserve some semblance of his conservative self.

So they alighted, Noel quite stiffly. His manner was formal, too, as he turned to help Mona from the cab. He paid the driver quite carefully, counting the change in the same manner. In a rather self-important style he took Mona's arm and escorted her into the lobby.

THE Skyview Roof Garden was forty stories up, and at night two elevators were running. By day there were many more, because then they served the offices that were on the intervening floors. The lobby was very large, and in the evening there were always some people lounging about, waiting to meet others.

Tonight among those persons were two secret agents of The Shadow: Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke. But they weren't watching for Noel Grath and Mona Brenton. The Shadow's aids were on the lookout for Sheff Halbert and the type of men who would accompany him. So far they had not seen Sheff.

It happened that Sheff was around the corner from the elevators, talking with two men who stood beside him. Of the three, Sheff was the only one who looked respectable. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, and handsome in a coarse way.

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Seen closely, Sheff looked ugly, because his eyes had a mean shift and his nose was overlarge, like his thick lips. At a distance, however, his eyes were not too noticeable, and his other features looked properly proportioned.

Tonight, as Sheff put it, he was keeping his mug out of sight, because he saw too many people in the lobby. As for the men with him, Sheff had met them outside the Skyview Roof building and had practically sneaked them indoors. He didn't want them to be seen. However, they nearly shoved themselves into sight when Noel and Mona went by.

"Pipe that, Sheff!" exclaimed one. "There's Leon Grath, lugging a swell dame with him!"

"Pipe down, Marty!" retorted Sheff. "That isn't Leon. It's his ritzy brother, Noel."

"Yeah? I thought you were tailing Leon."

"On account of Carlo?" Sheff gave a snort. "I'm leaving that to Crimp. All I'm looking for is something worth going after in the way of jewels, up at the Skyview Roof."

"That dame's got 'em," returned Marty. "Take a gander, Sheff, if you don't believe it."

Mona had let her wrap drop from her shoulders. At least, she could be jaunty, as an example to Noel. Jaunty she was, in a most revealing way. In hope of stirring Noel's thoughts from financial figures, Mona had chosen a new evening gown that was absolutely ultra. In fact, Sheff and his companions couldn't see anything of the gown, because Mona hadn't dropped the wrap very far below her shoulders.

What they did see interested them immensely. Mona was wearing a diamond necklace that turned her smooth neck into a brilliant sparkle. The hand that she raised to catch her wrap was equally brilliant, with the diamond ring that Noel had given her to mark their engagement.

Sliding from her wrist to her elbow was a bracelet whereon the glow of intervening emeralds merely accentuated the sparkle of more diamonds. That bracelet had its mate on her other wrist.

As luck had it, Mona was at that moment outmatched by a very portly dowager who entered the lobby. The stout woman went in for jewels in a big way, too, and being bigger than Mona, she wore more of them. Sheff's other companion began to outdo Marty in his observations on the dowager. Both were so busy looking while they pointed that they didn't catch the shrewd smile on Sheff's lips.

"You fellows are right," decided Sheff. "Stick here, just in case I need you. I'm going to handle this job my own way."

Stepping around the corner, Sheff slipped behind the dowager and sidled into the elevator just as its door was closing. He did it so suddenly, so neatly, that The Shadow's agents saw only his back as he entered. The sliding door cut off further view, but Harry gave Clyde a quick look and said:

"That may have been Sheff."

"I'll go up in the next car," returned Clyde. "Give me a call from the lobby phone, and I'll let you know."

IN the elevator, Sheff moved to a corner near the operator, but his interest in jewels was less than his concern regarding the men on the car. He looked from Noel to the elderly gentleman who accompanied the dowager, then back to Noel again. All that while the car was speeding upward, and Noel's eyes fixed steadily on Sheff.

There wasn't an iota of recognition in Noel's gaze. In it, however, was something that Sheff recognized, and definitely. Steady, steely, those eyes were every bit like Leon's, the sort of eyes that made Sheff uneasy.

In return, Sheff gave a big-lipped grin and decided that he would follow it with action. From his hip he tugged a revolver and planted it in the back of the elevator operator.

"Stop this car, fellow!" spoke Sheff in a voice for all to hear. "This is a stick-up! I wouldn't want it to be a murder!"

The elevator stopped as though it had struck a horizontal wall. The elevator man came around, hands raised and trembling. The dowager gave a shriek and slumped back into the arms of her undersized escort.

Mona's lips tightened, but her arms rose slowly and her fur wrap fell. She looked appealingly at Noel, whose hands stopped at shoulder level, though his eyes still met Sheff's coldly.

"Kind of neat, huh?" queried Sheff, moving his gun about the group. "A stick-up in an elevator! It ought to fool the smart guys. Yeah, it ought to fool even the smartest of them!"

Sheff spoke triumphantly, and his tone would have carried an even stronger sneer had he known that his novelty in crime was at that moment presenting a problem to the keenest of them all: The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. THE WAYS OF THE SHADOW

IN the lobby below, men were staring at the lighted buttons that told the location of the elevator that had just gone up. By rights, those lights should have run in quick succession until they reached the fortieth floor.

Instead, the light had stopped at the twenty-eighth, and it signified that something certainly was wrong.

Harry and Clyde had watched it first, and their glances had brought others. Half a dozen men had begun to talk among themselves, and none could provide an answer to the situation. It wasn't until the other elevator arrived at the ground floor that some solution began to offer.

When Harry beckoned, the operator of the second car stepped out, took a look at the dial of the other car and shook his head. He decided that the only thing to do was call the building superintendent. So he went to the lobby phone and the others crowded about him.

It was at that moment that blackness paused in the revolving doorway leading into the lobby. The blackness represented The Shadow, fresh from crime on board the Tropicola.

The Shadow had a neat trick with revolving doors and was using it. The trick was to enter such a door while fully cloaked in black, and travel around with it while observing the lobby inside.

Having thus studied a situation while passing unobserved, The Shadow could divest himself of hat and cloak outside and enter as another personality. In this case, he intended to arrive as Lamont Cranston, well-known New York clubman, and frequent patron of the Skyview Roof Garden. However, having agents on the scene, The Shadow had decided first to look it over as himself.

One look was all The Shadow needed.

Instead of going around and out again, he swung in from the door, streaked across the lobby and entered the door of the second elevator. On the way he checked by the lighted dial of the other car and noticed that it was

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at the twenty–eighth floor. The first token of The Shadow's swift arrival was the clang of the grounded elevator when its door went shut.

The operator turned from the lobby phone and said: "Hey!" but could do nothing else about it. The only reply was an evanescent laugh that seemed to chime with the clang of the door.

Other people thought they imagined the fleeting laugh, but Harry and Clyde knew better. They looked at each other, realizing that their chief had stepped in where they had failed. All they could do was wait and play whatever part might come their way.

The Shadow sped the elevator up to the twenty–eighth floor and stopped it. The elevator was one with solid walls made of panels that looked like mahogany, but were actually steel. In one panel was a tiny cavity, much like a keyhole. The Shadow drove a pointed pick into it, found the catch and released it. He brought the panel inward.

He wasn't quite at the level of the next elevator, so he raised his car slightly and came alongside. These modern elevators had panels that could be opened with simple keys. If one went wrong, another could come up beside it and allow a transfer of the passengers.

It happened, however, that The Shadow was thinking in other terms as he worked his pick into the keyhole of the next car and released the catch.

A drawn automatic in his fist, The Shadow took a step across the one–foot space between the stalled elevators and drove shoulder–first into the next car. The metal panel gave and The Shadow was precipitated into a very remarkable scene – one which was rendered even more dramatic by his surprise entry.

SHEFF HALBERT was the dominating figure in the scene. He had already reaped a harvest of jewels. He was standing in the center of the car, where Mona and the dowager were facing him, both looking very bare of neck and arms, considering that bracelets, necklaces, and rings were all in Sheff's possession. The jewels were brimming from Sheff's left hand, which he held cupped against his chest.

Sheff's right hand glittered, too, for it contained his revolver. Sight of the weapon horrified Mona, for Sheff was aiming it straight at Noel, who struck him as the one man who might prove dangerous. In fact, Sheff's finger had already tightened on the trigger, and Noel was stiffened as though ready for a spring that would beat the fatal shot – perhaps.

Murder might have followed robbery but for the timely arrival of The Shadow.

Things happened then in a fashion most amazing. Sheff swung from Noel and aimed his gun rapidly for the mass of living blackness that had hurled itself right through the side of the elevator.

That blackness, ricocheting in the corner of the car, thrust a gun of its own straight for Sheff. The whole elevator shuddered and its steel walls clanged with echoes as the two guns blasted as one.

Both figures staggered. There was a difference, however, in their action. The Shadow was finding his footing, Sheff was finding his gun. For The Shadow's shot had clipped Sheff in the arm while Sheff had merely whizzed a bullet through The Shadow's cloak folds to put an unsightly dent in the fake mahogany of the elevator wall.

Strangely, however, The Shadow seemed to be the loser. As Sheff scrambled to regain his gun, defiant despite his wound, The Shadow made a complete reverse and leaped back through the open panels into the

other elevator.

Mona gasped because she couldn't understand; then, as Sheff roughly brushed her aside, she realized why The Shadow had retreated.

The black-clad figure wanted to draw Sheff's shots away from innocent bystanders. In the cramped quarters of a single elevator such a process was difficult; hence The Shadow had dived back into the other car.

Sheff took the bait beautifully. He blasted away at nothing, for The Shadow was entrenched in the other car. The black muzzle of an automatic poked around a metal corner and knifed a shot that made Sheff reel.

Mona gave a glad cry as she saw Noel rally to the situation. Springing across the elevator, Noel pushed the stupefied operator to one side and took the control handle.

From within his car, The Shadow saw Sheff make a thrust that ended with a backward sag. This was The Shadow's opportunity. He swung full about and drove through the open panel, intending to club Sheff down before the fellow could recover. But instead of a lighted elevator, The Shadow encountered blackness. Noel had sped the other car away.

Too late to catch himself, The Shadow went headlong over the edge, down an elevator shaft nearly thirty stories deep!

Never before had The Shadow pitched himself into such disaster. He'd missed seeing the most important happening: Noel's grab of the controls. Often, The Shadow had calculated that his career would end in a disaster such as this. Where bullets failed, some freak of chance could always supply doom.

At least, The Shadow would have nearly thirty floors in which to think it over. He could philosophize on the folly of making a drive into an elevator that wasn't there. But The Shadow had something else to think about in the form of an elevator cable that rammed his shoulder in midair.

He grabbed the cable, thinking he might use it to stay his drop. It didn't help, for it was greased. All it did was make The Shadow's drop strictly vertical, and very fast.

So fast, in fact, that the impact would have been fatal had The Shadow struck anything except the next object that he found.

The thing he hit jolted him, but not too severely, for it was not stationary. It was falling, as The Shadow was, and its speed was almost as swift as his own.

Riding down the greased cable, The Shadow had overtaken the elevator. Very fortunately for The Shadow, Noel had sent the car down instead of upward.

AT about the tenth floor the elevator met the air cushion and its speed decreased. By then The Shadow was comfortably perched upon the solid top of the car. His daze turned into a mental whirl as the elevator stopped.

Coming slowly to his feet, The Shadow groped, found a door catch in front of him. He pulled the doors aside and rolled out into the lobby. Noel had dropped the elevator to the basement; hence The Shadow, on top of the car, was at ground-floor level.

In the car, Noel opened the door. He gave Sheff's gun a kick that sent it out of the car, away from the mobster's reach. Noel scooped up jewels from the floor, letting Mona pick out hers. He flung the rest to the

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dowager and her pint-sized escort. Then, grabbing Mona by the arm and plucking her wrap with his other hand, Noel started out through the basement.

Footsteps came banging down the stairs from the lobby floor. Harry, Clyde, and others had seen the elevator dial perform its sickening drop. The Shadow's car had stayed where it was; hence both agents supposed that their chief was safe.

In the basement, they grabbed for Sheff when he staggered out to find his gun. By then Noel and Mona were gone.

Before the men from upstairs could capture Sheff they heard snarls behind them. Looking about, they saw Sheff's two companions: Marty and the other thug. Then, before that pair could open fire, a laugh sounded from the stairs above. Fierce, chilling, it commanded all attention.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

Marty and his pal turned, shooting as they swung. The Shadow's gun answered, and the whole basement rang with the noise of battle. Marty staggered and his companion did the same; but both still were showing fight when an excited janitor came dashing down another stairway, bringing a pair of policemen.

The cops didn't see how badly the crooks were crippled, nor that Harry and Clyde were about to suppress them.

From above, Harry and Clyde caught a warning in The Shadow's laugh. They dropped back as guns roared again. This time the police did all the shooting, against an inefficient opposition. Sheff and his men were dropping as they fired, and the police wilted them completely.

Only Sheff, reeling in his death throes, managed to pitch himself part way up the steps leading to the lobby, where he lay there, staring at blackness just above.

In that blend of increasing darkness, Sheff distinguished the outline of The Shadow. In his death spasm, Crimp's partner coughed his final words, but they proved very few.

"The... stick-up" – Sheff's words were like croaks. "I'll tell you... why I... tried it... Shadow. Because... be –"

Sheff's effort to repeat the word – "because" – ended in a gurgle that died in his throat. With it the dying man rolled off the step he was on, down into the arms of two receiving officers, who didn't need a police surgeon to pronounce him dead.

From above, trailing in tone until it faded into nothingness, came the grim, departing laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII. A QUESTION OF ALIBI

THERE was much commotion around the Skyview Roof building following the trapping and death of Sheff Halbert. Sirens created pandemonium as police cars raced to the scene, the officers only to be unneeded in battling crime that The Shadow had already broken.

Only a few blocks away, two persons who had figured in those events were now secure in an oasis that they had discovered. In the rear of a little restaurant, Mona Brenton was gazing across a coffee cup in admiration at the man who had brought her to this place of quiet.

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"It was wonderful, Noel!" exclaimed Mona. "Why... the moment you had the chance you lowered the elevator right out of sight, down where we could leave it unnoticed!"

"Put these right out of sight," came Noel's reply in a tone denoting worry. "In your handbag, where no one will see them."

Mona gave a hopeless sigh. The face across the table was serious, totally lacking verve. Noel had become himself again; he was the conservative who disliked excitement or adventure. The vim with which he began the evening had reached its apex when the elevator stalled, and though he had rallied to the situation, it seemed that Noel had therewith stifled his new life out of him.

Dejectedly, Mona received the jewels which Noel passed around the side of the table. They were the things that he wanted out of sight. Mona thrust them in her handbag after making sure that all were her own and none the dowager's.

"Can't you understand, Mona?" Noel's tone was so pleading that it sounded like a whine. "We can't let anyone see those jewels. They might think we stole them."

"But we didn't steal them, Noel," argued Mona. "I can prove that these are my gems."

"You'd have to answer questions, Mona, and so would I. Our reputations would be hurt. Think of it! Our pictures in the newspapers with the statement that we were held up in an elevator on our way to the Skyview Roof!"

Mona thought of it and shrugged. She didn't care for notoriety, but there certainly could be nothing wrong in going to a night club as respectable as the Skyview Roof and doing one's bit to ward off chance crime on the way.

The shrug caused Mona's wrap to slip, and the moment that her shoulder came in sight Noel slid around from his chair and raised the fur.

"Keep tightly wrapped!" he insisted. "Women in evening gowns seldom come to an obscure restaurant like this. We don't want anyone to connect us with the recent excitement."

Mona noticed that Noel's topcoat was buttoned, and that he had his muffler tight around his collar to hide his evening clothes. Thoroughly disappointed in Noel, Mona was about to add new rebukes when he managed to forestall them.

"I have to be careful, Mona," spoke Noel solemnly, "because of my brother Leon. He would capitalize upon anything that might occur to me, particularly after the way I chided him tonight. I can't afford to have my name associated in any way with crime. Not even as a victim, because Leon would gloat."

"If my picture appeared in the newspapers, the resemblance to Leon would cause talk. Why, Leon's criminal friends might even associate that holdup man, whoever he was, with both Leon and myself! I didn't like the way the rogue stared at me, Mona. I'm afraid that he does know Leon."

BEGINNING to understand Noel's viewpoint, Mona felt that she had acted rather small. She nodded sympathetically, then inquired about the fighter in black who had come to their rescue from the other elevator. She saw Noel stare blankly.

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"I heard the shots," stated Noel, "but I didn't see the person you mention. I was too busy getting the elevator started."

"It was perfect teamwork," smiled Mona. "Unless" – her expression became a worried frown – "unless our friend in black tried to rejoin us when you started the elevator."

The possibility worried Noel. He looked at his watch and noted that it was half past nine. Noel's eyes became very solemn as they blinked. Characteristically, he was deepening into his sedate mood.

"We have had too much excitement," decided Noel. "It is advisable, Mona, that I take you back to your apartment and then return home. I might even stop by at the Cobalt Club, where I am a member, because I might find the police commissioner there.

"He will know the details that we failed to learn; particularly what may have happened to our friend in black. If it develops that we were recognized, Mona, I shall frankly admit our presence in the elevator. If no one knew us we can keep the matter to ourselves."

Mona agreed with the plan. Noel escorted her from the restaurant, and they took a cab. On the way to Mona's apartment Noel added another solemn suggestion.

"Let us forget this evening," he said. "Assuming that we escaped recognition, there is no reason why we should mention these unfortunate events, even between ourselves. The slightest lapse might bring us undue notoriety. What happened is our secret, Mona. I hope that you agree."

Mona's smile showed that she agreed fully. Already she was beginning to cherish a recollection that seemed quite apart from other incidents. That was the memory of Noel as he had revealed himself this evening. No longer a slave to finance, he had dropped his stodgy manner long enough to show that it could be done.

When nerve and action had been required, Noel had shown both. Mona was therefore hoping for another evening when Noel would again display such qualities, and she felt that adherence to his proposed policy would win his confidence sufficiently to produce the future that she desired.

Indeed, Noel showed a flash of his more volatile self when he said good night outside the apartment house. Stepping back into the cab, he tipped his hat in rather jaunty style and gave a parting wave with his silver-headed cane.

MEANWHILE, another participant in the evening's events had decided to visit the Cobalt Club. Clearing the neighborhood of the Skyview Roof building in Moe's cab, The Shadow had ordered a roundabout route that ended at the club door.

The doorman at the Cobalt Club was taken somewhat aback when he opened the door of the cab and saw who stepped from it.

Not The Shadow; he had stowed his cloak and hat in a secret compartment under the rear seat of the cab. But the doorman would have been less astonished by sight of a mysterious figure cloaked in black than he was when he observed the passenger who did step forth.

The man from the cab was all, calm of countenance, indolent of manner. He was the prize member of the Cobalt Club, a gentleman named Lamont Cranston. It always shocked the doorman when he saw Cranston step from a common cab. Usually, Cranston arrived in an expensive, chauffeured limousine.

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Smiling slightly, as though a cab ride was his idea of a lark, Cranston strolled into the club. He found Ralph Weston, the police commissioner, in the grillroom, his usual habitat.

As Cranston expected, Weston was not alone. With him was Inspector Joe Cardona, whose presence smacked of something important. There was a third man present: Noel Grath.

It didn't surprise The Shadow that Noel should be around so soon. It was quite logical that Noel should have fled from the Skyview Roof building, taking Mona with him. Equally natural was the fact that Noel, a man of high integrity, should have felt it necessary to explain himself if occasion so demanded. Dropping in to see the commissioner was, therefore, an excellent course.

However, Noel wasn't being called upon to state his recent whereabouts. Events at the Skyview Roof building were dwarfed by the report that Inspector Cardona brought.

"So they got Carlo Sarratin," Cardona was saying. "Crimp Gandley and his murder crew breezed right into Carlo's stateroom on the Tropicola and rubbed him out."

"Have they confessed the crime?" queried Weston.

Cardona replied with a deprecating grunt.

"Would you expect them to, commissioner?" he demanded. "Of course they didn't! Anyway, Crimp couldn't. He tried to shoot it out with the ship's crew and they got him. They – and The Shadow."

There was a sharp look in Weston's eyes that often came when Cardona mentioned The Shadow. Officially, the police commissioner didn't recognize The Shadow's existence, for he took the ground that an unknown person could not be identified as an actual individual.

There was something else on Weston's mind, however, but before he could express it Noel Grath put a query to Cardona.

"I've heard of this man Sarratin," said Noel. "Tell me, inspector, did he have a large sum of money with him?"

"None at all," rejoined Cardona. "Not even a nickel in his fist to show that he was a double crosser. I guess Crimp didn't have time to put one there."

"Carlo should have had some money," put in Weston. "A few thousand dollars, at least. Did the killers take it?"

Cardona shook his head.

"We didn't find anything on them, commissioner."

"Then maybe they were right!" asserted Weston, pounding the table with his fist. "Someone else could have killed Carlo, the way they said, and taken his money!"

The commissioner swung to Noel, who was slowly stroking his chin, while his eyes, very troubled, had a faraway gaze.

"Your brother Leon knew Carlo," said Weston to Noel. "Did you know it?"

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"Yes," Noel acknowledged soberly. "Leon mentioned the fact when he stopped at my house this evening."

"How early did he stop there?"

"Too early, I'm afraid." Noel shook his head. Then, almost pleadingly: "But I don't think that Leon would have killed Carlo, commissioner. They were friends."

WESTON'S grim smile showed how little he thought of friendship between crooks, where money was concerned. Eyeing Noel's face, The Shadow knew that the same thought was in Noel's mind.

Quite impassive in the guise of Cranston, The Shadow resolved to acquaint himself upon that point: namely, to learn just how much money might have been in Carlo's pocket at the time of Leon's visit.

"Of course, Crimp could have stowed the money somewhere," began Cardona. "There's a chance too, that a couple of the fellows with him got away. Maybe his side-kick, Sheff Halbert, was along –"

"I was coming to that point, inspector," inserted Weston. "Just forty minutes ago" – the commissioner glanced at his watch and noted that it read twenty minutes of ten – "Sheff Halbert was killed while attempting a holdup in an elevator in the Skyview Roof building. Furthermore" – Weston's face showed a smile that Cardona began to understand – "The Shadow was the person who thwarted him."

Cardona met Weston's stare bluntly.

"And what does that prove, commissioner?"

"It proves that The Shadow can't be two places at once," rejoined Weston triumphantly, "unless he happens to be two people!"

Cardona calculated the time element, writing figures on the back of an envelope, which he finally tossed to Weston.

"The Shadow could have made it from the pier to the Skyview," the inspector declared. "There was just about time enough, commissioner. Look over the figures and you'll agree."

Weston did agree, after some reluctance, but he modified his opinion by adding that Sheff might have done the same, which somewhat relieved the Leon question, though Cranston noted that Noel still looked troubled when his brother's name was mentioned. In fact, Noel was so concerned over Leon that he paid little attention to something of considerable importance to himself.

The "something" was Weston's mention of the elevator holdup. When the commissioner stated that two of the holdup victims, a young lady and her escort, had fled the scene without being recognized, Noel displayed a marked indifference. Cranston was watching him at the time but could see no change in Noel's expression.

This, of course, was quite in keeping with The Shadow's analysis of the situation. He could understand Noel's dislike of notoriety. Since no one had identified Noel and Mona as passengers in the elevator, there was no reason why Noel should mention that he and his fiancée were the persons who had disappeared. The remaining witnesses were quite qualified to place full blame for the holdup on Sheff Halbert.

When the group left the Cobalt Club, Cranston's limousine was waiting outside, and Noel accepted a ride home. On the way he talked moodily about Leon, criticizing his brother's penchant for associating with men of criminal background.

When the limousine reached the Grath homestead, Noel shook hands solemnly with Cranston and went up the steps, opening the door without using a key.

As the big car rolled away a whispered laugh came from the lips of Cranston, and the strange tone had a note of prophecy tonight, The Shadow had seen both Noel and Leon, in circumstances which each had sought to veil. Though they differed as to good and evil, those twins were enough alike to understand each other's ways and methods.

Noel regarded himself as his brother's keeper; more than that, however, Noel had something heavy on his mind regarding Leon. The Shadow hoped to have the answer to that problem after the brothers met again!

CHAPTER VIII. MOVES BY NIGHT

EARLY the next evening, Noel Grath received another visit from his wayward brother, Leon. As usual, Noel was in his upstairs study, engaged with facts and figures. His eyes were annoyed when he saw Leon enter, and if Leon had met their glint with a cold stare of his own there would have been trouble.

However, Leon was thoughtful enough to remember that Noel had disowned him. Leon strolled over to the chessboard and silently began to set up the chessmen. The bait was too much for Noel. When chess was concerned, Noel could still regard Leon impersonally. Noel took his place at the board and soon the twins were deep in their game.

Leon was using his new system of exchanging pieces for Noel's knights. Leon even sacrificed a pawn in the process, ready to accept a temporary handicap if it deprived Noel of those deadly knights. At last there came a lull in the game, and Leon, leaning back in his chair, remarked:

"I heard from another friend of yours today, Noel."

Noel's eyes snapped angrily. He was on the point of rising from his chair and calling an end to Leon's visit when his brother gave him a dry smile and motioned for him to sit down.

"Nothing unethical about it, Noel," stated Leon. "The friend who phoned me was the police commissioner."

Noel became interested despite himself.

"He asked you about Carlo?"

"Of course," returned Leon smoothly. "I told him that poor Carlo and I were the best of friends."

"He assumes then that someone else murdered Carlo?"

"Why not?" Leon's smile was indulgent. "All the evidence points that way. Sheff and Crimp caught up with Carlo and finished him. One got away, the other didn't; that's all."

Setting his lips grimly, Noel returned to the chess game. His knights were gone but he still had his bishops. Noel began to move them with devastating sweeps across the board, at the same time eyeing Leon, whose eyes registered surprise.

"You think of everything, don't you, Leon?" quizzed Noel with a touch of sarcasm. "You thought you could trip me by exchanging knights. You didn't look far enough ahead to realize that I would practice with bishops to make them quite as formidable as the lost knights."

Sourly, Leon studied the chessboard.

"A good lesson for you, Leon," gibed Noel. "Let us apply it to life. Just what are you going to do" – he leaned forward, giving his twin a steady gaze – "when old Samuel Twildon finds out that Carlo raised his check and cashed it?"

Leon lowered his eyes. Chin dipping into his hand, he studied the chessboard. Then:

"Why should that worry me, Noel?" he asked. "I covered myself on the matter."

"So long as Carlo lived, yes," returned Noel. "But it happens that you were the one person who knew that Carlo had sold the Club Elite to Twildon. If the police suspect that you had any knowledge of the check swindle they will conclude that you had a motive for murdering Carlo. The motive of money."

Leaning back, Noel gestured to the chessboard.

"You were too clever, Leon," declared Noel sadly. "You have trapped yourself in other affairs as you have in this game."

THERE was a restless twitch of Leon's down-turned lips. Suddenly stiffening, he resumed his game. He moved a castle across the board, halting it on a black square.

Immediately, Noel swooped a bishop along the black diagonal and captured Leon's castle. Leon retaliated by taking the bishop with his queen, whereat Noel laughed.

"You lost a castle for a bishop, Leon," declared Noel. "Considering that a castle has twice the value of a bishop, you have given me two for one. Your game is hopeless!"

"Not quite, my dear brother!" Leon's eyes came up with a glitter. "Remember, you are playing a bishop game! One bishop is restricted to the black squares, the other to the reds. You need them both to play the game that you have chosen. Where is your game now, Noel? Try to take anything with your remaining bishop. You can't, because my pieces are all on the black squares!"

As Noel's eyes drank in the situation that the board displayed, Leon drove home his object lesson.

"Did you think I was fool enough to overlook the Carlo complication?" demanded Leon. "It was popping through my head ever since" – he paused, watching Noel shrewdly – "ever since I read the newspapers this morning. So I told your friend the police commissioner exactly where I was last night. I told him that I was over at the Arizona Club, calling on Tex Danver."

Noel gave Leon a sharp look.

"Tex Danver is a notorious gambler," reminded Noel. "His club is quite as disreputable as Carlo's was."

"But the patrons are respectable," laughed Leon, "and they saw me come out of Tex's office around ten o'clock."

"And what time did you go in there?"

"Shortly after eight o'clock," replied Leon casually. "At least, so Tex says, and there is no one to dispute it. You see, Tex went into his office at eight, and when he came out, at ten, I was with him. So, Noel, you see –"

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"I see it all!" Stormily, Noel came to his feet, upsetting the chessboard and scattering the men. "You murdered Carlo last night! You managed to sneak into Tex's office last –"

Leon interrupted with a polite gesture. His smile was very bland.

"But I didn't murder Carlo, Noel."

Keenly, Noel saw that though Leon denied one fact, that of murder, he let the other point pass. His trip to Tex's had all the earmarks of a "sneak," as Noel described it. Reprovingly, Noel asserted:

"You paid Tex for that alibi, Leon!"

Leon shrugged.

"Tex is worth a lot of money," he reminded. "Why, sometimes he pays off in thousands at that gambling club of his! Payment for an alibi would be chicken feed to Tex!"

The telephone bell rang before Noel could reply. Smiling, Leon gestured for Noel to answer it, saying:

"Probably your friend the commissioner, Noel."

It was Commissioner Weston, giving Noel the glad news that his brother Leon was vindicated in the matter of Carlo's death. Listening while Noel talked, Leon learned that Tex was coming over to the Cobalt Club, bringing a signed affidavit to establish Leon's alibi; whereat, Leon chuckled all the more.

The climax came when Weston, over the wire, invited Noel to drop in at the club to meet Tex Danver and view the document in question. Reluctantly, Noel said that he was very busy, but would try to get up to the club later.

Finishing the call, Noel turned on his heel, glanced at the overturned chessboard, and went back to his desk to resume the financial work that Leon had interrupted.

FINDING himself totally ignored, Leon approached Noel, leaned over his brother's shoulder and spoke into his ear.

Noel's face, grim and rigid looked like that of a helpless mortal tormented by a wandering demon who represented the evil in himself. For Leon's face was the counterpart of Noel's, except that it wore a satanic leer.

"Don't forget your appointment, Noel," sneered Leon. "It should please you to see the proof that your brother is innocent of murder. You should be waiting with your friend the commissioner to greet Tex Danver when he arrives. Unless there is something more important –"

Leon's hand was gesturing toward the papers on the desk, but it shifted to indicate the telephone as the bell began to ring anew. Noel picked up the phone, gave an abrupt answer. His tone immediately relaxed. Mona was on the wire.

"Hello, Mona –" Noel paused to look back across his shoulder where Leon withdrew with a bow of mock politeness. "Why, no, I'm not alone. How did you know?"

Leon gave a chuckle, leaned close to Noel's ear to whisper an interruption.

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"You disappoint me, Noel," he undertoned. "Anyone would know that you weren't alone from the worried way you answered that call. Tell Mona that your dear brother Leon is here."

With a grimace, Noel thrust Leon aside. Regaining his composure, Noel continued his conversation.

"Last night?" he queried. "Oh, yes, Mona – sorry that I couldn't meet you... This evening? Tell me where you are, and perhaps I can meet you later..."

There were some words from Mona, and Noel's face showed disapproval.

"Very sorry, Mona," he said stiffly. "You know I don't like Helene Chalmey and her crowd... Yes, I suppose I could stop by in an hour or so, when you're ready to leave... No, don't count on it... Yes, I'm very busy, and I have an appointment with the police commissioner... Regarding Leon? Well, yes – I'd rather not talk about it, Mona... Good–by."

Leon was lighting a cigarette when Noel turned around. The glow from the lighter gave Leon's face a demonish tinge and caught the glitter of his eyes, showing them as sharply as brilliant beads.

"You'll have to drop in on the commissioner," gloated Leon, "or else make explanations to Mona tomorrow. Integrity is your watch–word, Noel. You couldn't think of telling an outright lie to anyone. What a miserable thing the truth is, when a person allows it to master him!"

"I haven't found it that way," snapped Noel. "Furthermore, you are no authority on the subject, Leon. You and truth can't get along at all!"

"How absurd, my dear Noel! Why you've heard me tell the truth often. I told you the truth about Carlo."

"On the matter of the check, yes, but not when it came to a question of murder!"

Leon shook his head at Noel's words. Picking up hat, coat, and cane, Leon strolled from the room. At the door, he paused.

"I tell the truth when it suits me," stated Leon. "With that, at least, you must agree. If you cannot tell my true statements from my false, I pity you, because it shows that you have dulled yourself. Good night, Noel, and finish that work of yours. You have an appointment with the police commissioner!"

As soon as Leon had left, Noel arose from his desk, shoving the papers aside. He placed his hand upon the telephone, as though he intended to make a call. Then, with a headshake, Noel pushed the telephone aside. Gathering his own hat, coat, and cane, he went downstairs and outside.

There was no cab on the street so Noel stalked around the corner debating whether to hunt for one or use the subway, which was a few blocks distant.

AT the Cobalt Club, Commissioner Weston was in the ground–floor foyer chatting with his friend Lamont Cranston.

This evening, The Shadow had intended to stop by Noel's house and observe if Leon visited his brother. The thing that forestalled The Shadow's plan was Weston's call to Noel. Learning that Noel might be coming to the club, The Shadow had decided to remain there.

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More important, however, was the fact that Weston expected Tex Danver. So, while waiting as Cranston, The Shadow put in a call to Burbank, ordering the contact man to send Harry Vincent to the Arizona Club. Should Harry see Tex leave the place he was to call back. So far there had been no call from Harry.

A cab stopped in front of the Cobalt Club. From it came a man with a big hat, cowboy style, and a broad red face beneath it. Entering, Tex shook hands with Weston, nodded to Cardona, and was introduced to Cranston. From an inside pocket, Tex Danver produced the required affidavit.

"This ought to square Leon Grath," boomed Tex in a big voice. "A fine fellow, Leon! Often drops in and spends an evening in my office, like he did last night. Anything else, commissioner?"

There was nothing else. Tex's statement, which bore his own signature and those of other persons, was quite satisfactory to the commissioner. Weston suggested that Tex remain and meet Leon's brother, Noel, but Tex politely declined on the ground of pressing business.

When Cardona inquired how business was at the Arizona Club, Tex delivered a broad smile and departed.

When Commissioner Weston looked around for Lamont Cranston, his friend was gone, too. Weston decided that Cranston must have remembered an appointment, probably a date with a girl named Margo Lane, who had been occupying too much of Cranston's time of late.

Never, even in his wildest dreams, would Commissioner Weston have believed that his friend Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow and was on the trail of Tex Danver!

CHAPTER IX. PAYMENT FOR SERVICE

IF ever The Shadow had trailed a cagey customer, that person was Tex Danver. Riding in Moe's cab, The Shadow was keeping track of a similar vehicle ahead, and recognizing what was in the mind of its passenger.

Tex was behaving boldly this evening, and was therefore on the lookout for certain consequences. Actually, Tex was trying to test the police, to see if they suspected something. Instead, it was The Shadow who held the suspicions.

The situation was very simple; yet it was simplicity that made it so effective.

Assuming that Tex Danver had a private way in and out of his office, a way other than the main route through the gambling room of the Arizona Club, it was plausible that the private passage would be known to certain of Tex's friends.

Such privileged friends would doubtless include Leon Grath. As the brain behind all sorts of crooked schemes, Leon had access almost anywhere. It applied particularly in Tex's case, for Tex Danver was a gambler, like Carlo Sarratin.

As late as last night it was generally conceded that Leon had rendered remarkable service to Carlo by keeping him where enemies could not find him. Therefore, Tex, who might some time need similar services, would naturally have cultivated Leon's acquaintance and given him the inside facts as to the operation of the Arizona Club.

Assuming that Leon, last night, had bought an alibi from Tex, The Shadow moved to another conclusion. Said alibi would depend upon the use of Tex's private entrance, and it would fail if the police guessed that such a route existed. So, tonight, Tex had come out by that very route to see if anyone was watching it.

TWINS OF CRIME

Spotting no observers, Tex had gone directly to the Cobalt Club.

This was quite apparent to The Shadow. If Tex had come out through the gambling room, The Shadow would have heard from his agent, Harry Vincent, who was posted at the Arizona Club. No word from Harry was, in itself, a most enlightening report.

Now came The Shadow's own problem.

Tex Danver was playing doubly sure. He wanted to learn if police were tailing him back to the Arizona Club. The police had clever ways at times. If they were following Tex, he would know that they suspected him; in that case he would have to go through the main door of the club. Otherwise, he would use the secret entrance as a matter of course.

So The Shadow's problem was twofold. He couldn't tag Tex too closely or he'd be mistaken for a police trailer; but if he let Tex get too far ahead the gambler would slip him.

Fortunately, The Shadow could depend on Moe.

Whispered words from The Shadow and Moe was performing tricks with his taxi. He whizzed ahead of Tex's cab, swung right into an avenue, skipped two blocks and went left. Timing the traffic lights to perfection, Moe was running parallel with Tex's cab, two streets away. At the next avenue Moe swung left again and came in behind Tex's cab on its street.

During the interval Tex hadn't been trailed at all. He took Moe's cab for a different one. To add to the illusion, Moe pressed a special switch under the dash and changed the light over the top of his windshield. When Tex looked back the lighted sign read that of a different cab company than originally advertised.

When Tex's cab went right, Moe turned left. Making a U turn down the avenue, Moe came up again behind the shelter of a rapidly moving truck. He turned off his lighted sign entirely. This was the home stretch and Moe was looking for Tex's cab again so that his chief, The Shadow, could spot where Tex dropped off.

It was the truck that almost spoiled the game. As Moe started to pass it, the truck tried to go by another vehicle, found that it couldn't and dropped back. Just one block short of the Arizona Club, Moe started a new burst of speed only to hear The Shadow's countermanding whisper.

With a quick glance down the street, The Shadow had spotted Tex's cab. By then Moe was past the side street, so he was forced to stop farther up the avenue.

The moment the cab halted The Shadow glided from it. Moe had picked a darkened spot near an empty storefront; hence The Shadow was able to merge with the building wall when he retraced his course to the corner where Tex's cab had turned.

By then Tex was in an alleyway that led through to the rear of the Arizona Club. Looking back, Tex was quite sure that no one was following him, but he was wrong. Near the corner a waiting man had seen Tex arrive and was already close behind him.

But the man in question was discreet. He watched from the entrance of the alley until Tex had opened a door and closed it; then the man hurried after him.

The Shadow, coming from the corner, glimpsed the man who followed Tex. But the distance from the corner was greater than the depth of the alley, and Tex's trailer was out of sight before The Shadow arrived.

TWINS OF CRIME

At least, The Shadow had one clue; there were doorways along the alley. It was simply a case of finding the right one into the Arizona Club. So The Shadow started to inspect them.

ASCENDING a flight of narrow, dingy stairs, Tex Danver had reached his office which, like his gambling club, was on the second floor. A light was burning and Tex was turning to lock the door when he heard footsteps on the stairs.

Listening, Tex was quite sure he recognized them. Opening the door boldly, he admitted his visitor.

With a smile Tex greeted affably:

"Hello, Leon!"

"Hello, Tex!" The visitor took a chair. "Surprised to see me so soon again?"

Tex shook his head to show he wasn't surprised. He didn't answer aloud, because he was listening at the secret door to make sure that no one else was coming up. Satisfied on that point, Tex closed the door, locked it from the inside and slid a close-fitting wall panel across it.

Though he didn't know it, Tex Danver was making matters rather difficult for another visitor called The Shadow. For the present, however, Tex's thoughts entirely concerned Leon Grath.

"I was expecting you most any time, Leon." Tex removed his big hat and laid it on a table. "I left the door open. Why didn't you come in and wait?"

Tex received a characteristic smile, the sort in which Leon specialized. He watched Leon toss his hat to the table and lay aside his cane.

"Somebody else might have found me here," was Leon's suave reply. "It wouldn't have been good policy, hurting my own alibi."

"You can't hurt it now," assured Tex. "I gave the commish the dope sheet. How about the thousand bucks you promised to pay me for it?"

Leon reached into his pocket and nonchalantly produced his wallet. From it he drew a bundle of bills and counted off the amount in question. Tex was eyeing the size of the bundle and noted that it came to several thousand dollars.

"You didn't make out so good, Leon," remarked Tex, "if that's all you got from bumping Carlo."

Tex received one of Leon's hard glares.

"What makes you think I murdered Carlo, Tex?"

"Why else would you need an alibi, Leon?"

"When I need alibis," returned Leon coolly, "I usually frame them in advance. Fact is, I didn't expect anyone to murder Carlo. I didn't even expect Crimp or Sheff to find him. So I thought I ought to be on the safe side. Carlo had already paid me off for services, so I thought I could afford a thousand dollars as insurance."

Tex gave a long laugh.

TWINS OF CRIME

"You're a cool one, Leon," he said. "Fact is, you could have heard of Carlo's death over the radio before you showed up here that night. My trouble is I didn't hear about it until later, or you wouldn't have bought your alibi so cheap. I didn't know you were dodging a murder rap."

Putting the remaining money back in his wallet, Leon proffered the thousand dollars, his expression carrying a "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude.

"I made the bargain," declared Tex, "and I'll stick to it, though a grand is chicken feed to me!"

There was a nod from Leon.

"Exactly what I told my brother Noel, tonight."

Tex's response was a glower.

"Why were you talking to your brother about me?" he demanded. "Was that good sense?"

"Considering that the police commissioner called Noel," returned Leon, "I thought it was good policy to repeat your remark, Tex. I simply used it as an argument to prove that you weren't in the business of selling alibis."

Mollified, Tex reached for the money, but Leon's hand promptly withdrew it. Apparently, Leon wanted further service, even though Tex was giving him a bargain price.

"I'd like to see a copy of that affidavit, Tex," stated Leon. "I wouldn't care to drop around and ask the commissioner to show me the original. My brother might be there and I don't meet him socially, except over a chessboard."

Indulgently, Tex turned to a large safe in a corner of his office. Covering the dials with his body, he began to work the combination, occasionally darting looks across his shoulder to make sure that Leon wasn't noticing the turns of the dials.

When the safe came open, Tex bothered about Leon no longer. Delving behind bundles of cash, he came to a metal box and removed it.

"It's in here," Tex began, "along with other important papers. You can have the copy, Leon –"

"I don't want it!" Leon's interruption was as steely as his gaze. He was close to the safe, for he had stepped up while Tex was busy. The echoes of Leon's harsh tone seemed to resound from the safe itself. "I've changed my mind, Tex. When I change my mind it always makes me think that someone else might do the same. You, for instance, Tex!"

COMING around while he heard the final sentence, Tex saw more than the glitter of Leon's eyes. Tex was looking right at a revolver aimed toward his heart. Shakily, he raised his hands.

"I wouldn't squeal, Leon," Tex pleaded, "if that's what you mean. I'd queer myself with the commish if I said the affidavit was phony. I'll never tell, Leon!"

"Correct, Tex." Leon's words were like stabs. "You will never tell!"

Along with the knifing words came the sharp stab of the revolver. Its bullet found Tex's heart, and the gambler coiled to the floor, the metal box falling beside him.

The murderer paid no attention to the box. In the same style that marked Leon as the coolest crook in New York, he gathered in the bundles of cash from the safe; stacks which, by their size, totaled at least a hundred thousand dollars.

With the money stuffed in his pockets, Leon put on his hat, picked up his cane and let it dangle from his left arm. His right hand still pushing money into his overcoat pocket, the killer slid back the panel and opened the hidden door.

An instant later he was stepping back to the center of the office. The sight the killer faced was enough to disturb the sangfroid of Leon Grath. Payment for services had been rendered, but there was recompense to be made.

On the threshold stood The Shadow, facing the murderer who had disposed of both Carlo Sarratin and Tex Danver!

CHAPTER X. THE DOUBLE VANISH

THOUGH he had come here to offset crime, The Shadow could hardly regard his advent as a failure. True, Tex Danver lay dead, slain by the same killer who had murdered Carlo Sarratin. But Tex, in framing Leon's alibi, could be regarded as an accomplice in Carlo's case.

In a way it was better that Tex should have died. Only The Shadow could bear witness to Leon's murder of Carlo. Here there was an opportunity to hold a murderer on the scene of crime until the law arrived.

In his gloved fist The Shadow gripped a leveled automatic; yet, when he studied Leon's features, he saw that the murderer was not fully awed. Usually crooks quailed at sight of the black-cloaked avenger known as The Shadow. There must be an answer to Leon's coolness, and The Shadow was quite sure that it lay in the man's right hand.

While thrusting Tex's money deeper into his pocket, Leon's hand still held the death gun. He was looking for a chance to use the weapon against The Shadow. Instead of ordering Leon to raise his hands and thereby force him to a hasty shot, The Shadow took a more effective measure.

Side-stepping toward Leon's left, he kept the killer well covered, yet made it impossible for him to use the concealed gun without an awkward give-away. Very definitely The Shadow had his victim all the more helpless, due to the fact that the man's hand was encumbered with a pocketed gun!

Finding the position that he wanted, The Shadow stood motionless. His pointing gun was like a freezing instrument, for, before him, The Shadow saw Leon Grath, likewise rendered immobile. If The Shadow had never seen this man before he still would have identified him as Leon. The rigid countenance that faced The Shadow was the counterpart of Noel's in every detail with one vital exception.

The face that The Shadow viewed displayed an ugly leer, quite foreign to the other twin. Recalling Noel, The Shadow remembered how the man's expression bespoke integrity, as though governed by an inner honesty. Here was the same face, but it was controlled by a brain of evil, under circumstances which made it show at its very worst. It stood for Leon, unrestrained.

TWINS OF CRIME

Strange how faces so much alike could differ! If ever a man bore the mark of Cain he was Leon Grath as The Shadow saw him. Not in the least did Leon's face express regret for the murder of Tex Danver. Indeed, The Shadow felt sure that if the killer's own brother had replaced Tex, the murderer would have been all the more pleased.

With The Shadow, such reflections were brief. His task was to see that murder was amended as far as it could be. The trapped killer recognized the same and spoke.

"Well, Shadow, you've found me!" The tone was the disgruntled snarl that Leon habitually used. "You were clever enough to figure it out. I knew you would eventually, but I hadn't expected it quite so soon."

Leon did not specify the reason behind his comment. It involved the check that Twildon had given Carlo. As yet, the details of that swindle were not known.

"You saw me, of course, outside of Carlo's cabin on the Tropicola," proceeded Leon in the same tone. "You knew I was Leon Grath. Perhaps you'd seen me before, Shadow. Or was it because you knew my brother Noel and noticed how much I looked like him?"

The snarl was lessening when Leon put the question. Even in his present dilemma, the trapped man was showing the shrewdness for which he was famed. He was actually trying to pump The Shadow, which meant that he wanted facts for future reference.

In turn, that implied that Leon hoped to get free of his present jam in spite of The Shadow. In all his experience with men of criminal brains, The Shadow had never before encountered one so canny as Leon Grath!

The Shadow's only reply was a laugh; a solemn note of mockery that should have quailed the man before him. Instead, those hard eyes of Leon's glared, trying to probe The Shadow's own features, which were shaded by the brim of the slouch hat.

Only The Shadow's eyes were visible. Their burn outmatched the glint of Leon's. Finding that he couldn't bluff his cloaked captor, Leon slid his right hand from his pocket, empty, and let both arms lift with a helpless shrug.

"I give you credit, Shadow," spoke Leon bitterly. "You, alone, would believe that I had murdered my friend Carlo. Similarly, you are the only person who would think that I would kill Tex after he supplied me with a written alibi for last night."

AS he spoke, Leon was backing across Tex's paneled office, past a big desk, toward the door that led out to the gaming room of the Arizona Club. He was eyeing The Shadow, wondering how quickly the cloaked figure would shoot. Leon evidently decided that The Shadow would be too quick, for he halted suddenly.

"I said only you, Shadow!" Leon spat the words. "I was wrong. My brother Noel suspected that I killed Carlo. He would believe that I killed Tex, too. I didn't count Noel because his mind is the same as mine. We think alike, Noel and I.

"Yes, we think alike!" Leon's tone rose. "So much alike that we differ only by a hairbreadth. Noel's honesty! Bah! His mind is scheming, too. He chose honesty because it was profitable just as I took up with crime for the same reason!"

TWINS OF CRIME

Finishing his tirade with a gesture of his arms, Leon sped a hand to a switch beside the door and flipped it, expecting the lights to go out. If they had, a bullet from The Shadow's gun would have felled the killer before he could make another move

But the lights didn't go out. Leon hadn't pressed the right switch.

Weirdly, The Shadow's laugh filled the room. Even before the chilling tone reached Leon's ears, an expression of consternation swept the killer's face. The Shadow was approaching, his gun looming ahead of him.

The situation threw the killer into a frenzy. No longer was Leon's sangfroid apparent; frantically, the trapped man grabbed the door and wrenched it open.

With one swift sweep The Shadow reached the doorway. He was in it, blocking escape, and Leon's face showed dumfoundment. Shrinking away, the killer dropped half behind the open door only to quail.

Though thick, the woodwork of the door wouldn't protect him if The Shadow began to fire through with his big automatic. To all intents, The Shadow had completed the trapping of Leon Grath.

Then came the complete reversal.

Footsteps thudded hard behind The Shadow. Before the cloaked avenger could whirl into the room, men were upon him. They were huskies from the gaming room. The switch that Leon had pressed by mistake was the one that Tex always used when he wanted men to eject unruly visitors!

The newcomers saw only The Shadow, for Leon was diving behind the open door. Whirling from grappling hands, The Shadow aimed for the killer to prevent Leon from getting his gun from his pocket.

At that moment Leon kicked the door and it struck The Shadow's gun hand. There was a blast as the .45 stabbed wide of its human mark.

Behind the door, Leon grabbed another switch and this time picked the right one. The lights went out, producing immediate chaos. Entering men had spied Tex's body and mistook The Shadow for a killer. They were doing their utmost to overpower him, but he was hurling them everywhere. Guns were talking for these fellows were armed; but above the shots, The Shadow's laugh rose strident.

It was evasive, that mockery, the sort that The Shadow used when battling in the dark. It might have been anywhere, yet nowhere. The tone misguided the marksmen who sought to down The Shadow. They thought that the laugh was meant for them, and it terrified them, forcing them to hurried shots.

Actually, the taunt was meant for Leon, the man The Shadow intended to capture at any cost.

Knowing it, the hunted killer dived behind the open door of Tex's safe and tried some wild shots of his own that only revealed his position. Wheeling in darkness, The Shadow drove for the safe, intending to jam the door still wider, smashing Leon behind it.

At that moment three more of Tex's strong-arm boys came driving through the doorway of the office.

As luck had it, they met The Shadow in the dark, and from the shouts and tumult it was only logical that a man of Leon's shrewdness would guess that The Shadow was again occupied with misguided foemen.

TWINS OF CRIME

Shoving out from behind the safe door, the killer made a quick dash for the open panel of Tex's private exit. On the way he stumbled across the body of his own victim.

Luck seemed fully on Leon's side. At that moment The Shadow fired in an attempt to halt the fugitive's dash. Those stabs of The Shadow's .45 were given with uncanny precision in the dark, but they didn't find Leon. Tex Denver, dead, had saved the life of his own murderer. The Grath twin was sprawled behind the desk, below the level of The Shadow's shots.

WHAT happened next was further evidence of Leon's skill, plus luck. Grabbing at the desk, the killer clutched the edge. Finding a switch, he pulled it for good measure, then, with a long lunge, went right through the open panel into the passage that led to the stairway.

The Shadow fired after him, too late. The fugitive had found the stairway and was stumbling down below the line of The Shadow's fire.

Pounding footsteps told Tex's men that someone had gone by the secret exit. Knowing Leon's ways, The Shadow was quite sure that the fugitive had tried to close the panel when he left. But Leon hadn't managed it. The switch on the desk did not control the panel.

For the first time Tex's strong-arm men learned that the office had a secret exit, and they went through it in quest of a man they hadn't seen. They thought that The Shadow, instead of Leon, had gone by that open route.

Rather than divert a worthy pursuit, The Shadow dropped away from the crowd and wheeled out through the ordinary doorway. His idea was to cross the gaming room, go out the front way and speed around to cut off Leon's flight.

But The Shadow merely was getting out of a peck of trouble to precipitate himself into a bushel of it.

Strange things had happened in the gaming room. Lights were wildly blinking a distress signal. Frightened patrons were lined along the walls. In the center of the room roulette wheels and faro tables were folding themselves mechanically and starting down into the floor on elevators.

The switch on Tex's desk was the emergency control, intended for use only in case of a police raid!

Around the gambling hall were croupiers and other attendants who wouldn't ordinarily have precipitated themselves into a battle. But this was a situation that they had never anticipated – that of trouble starting in Tex's own office, the inner stronghold of the Arizona Club.

Despite the bobbing of the lights they saw The Shadow. Though he was no more than a black-clad shape, they recognized him as a human fighter. Drawing guns and knives, they sprang from all directions, hoping to pull him down.

The Shadow's gun spoke first, spurting in volcanic fashion from the center of the room among the descending gambling equipment. Dropping low, The Shadow was using the disappearing tables for temporary entrenchments, hoping to scare off the men who sought his life. They were falling back, not realizing that The Shadow's shots were purposely high.

Among the patrons, Harry Vincent, The Shadow's own agent, recognized his chief's dilemma and felt that his aid was needed. Harry shouted to the other customers, telling them to grab the excited attendants. With that Harry led the drive, expecting the customers to follow.

None did. Spilling two attendants, Harry flattened on the floor with them just as The Shadow raised a challenging laugh.

Then, before Harry could regain his feet, guns blasted from all around, and with the fusillade The Shadow's laugh ended, clipped abruptly at the height of its crescendo. A dozen men had fired and the finish of The Shadow's mirth made it a certainty that they had found their cloaked target.

The lights came on. Rising, Harry saw men dashing from Tex's office, shouting about a vanished killer. They meant Leon Grath, for in dashing down the secret stairs they had come to a bolted door that stopped them.

The attendants in the gaming room misunderstood the strong-arm specialists. Harry saw the attendants gesture toward the center of the gaming room.

That space was clear. Roulette and faro equipment were gone, on the elevators, and the floor had closed completely above the buried evidence. Glumly, Harry looked for the cloaked figure of The Shadow, only to hear amazed voices about him.

One vanish had produced another. Like Leon Grath, The Shadow had disappeared so completely from the Arizona Club that it seemed doubtful that he had even come to the place on this eventful evening.

For the floor was a blank without a trace of the cloaked master whose laugh had ended like a bursting bubble amid the tumult of a dozen guns!

CHAPTER XI. A QUESTION OF MURDER

DESPITE his remarkable departure from the Arizona Club, The Shadow was by no means free of difficulty. Indeed, he was as badly cooped in as it was possible to be. Lying flat upon a carpeted surface, he couldn't even come to hands and knees without striking a low ceiling just above his head.

Flattening again, The Shadow managed to turn sideways. Stowing his empty automatic beneath his cloak, he brought out a tiny flashlight and focused it along the carpet. The glow showed a pattern of white squares on green, with numbers at random from one to thirty-six.

The floor on which The Shadow lay was the green felt surface of a roulette layout.

Not that The Shadow was surprised. He had always used ingenuity at getting out of fixes, and often the most ingenious way was the simplest. Seeing that Tex's gambling equipment was going through the floor, The Shadow had decided to ride along with it. A very wise course, considering that the biggest roulette table had no longer been a bulwark against gunfire.

So The Shadow had rolled right on the layout as it went into the floor. His laugh, given to retard the gunfire of his enemies, was cut off when the floor slid shut above him. Bullets had simply raked the space where The Shadow once had been, but was no longer.

The Shadow's one regret was the fact that he could no longer hope to overtake Leon Grath. As for getting out of his present predicament, he was quite sure that he could find a way. The Shadow had faith in the ingenuity of Tex Danver.

Very clever of Tex, having everything fixed to drop his gambling machinery from view at the mere pressure of an office switch. But the police were often ardent in their search for missing paraphernalia when they found an empty gambling lair.

TWINS OF CRIME

Sometimes they were even unkind enough to take up the floor and look underneath it. Well acquainted with such cases, Tex Danver would have planned to be one jump ahead.

Worming along the roulette board, The Shadow rolled to a flat-top faro table and kept probing with his flashlight to find where the next jump lay. The dice in a chuck-a-luck cage clattered as he elbowed past, and he finally came to a little doorway in the end wall of the cramped room.

The door was locked from the other side, so The Shadow produced a fresh automatic, muffled it in his cloak sleeve and blasted at a spot that glinted from the door crack. That one-shot ripped the latch away, and The Shadow pushed the door open.

His shot couldn't have been heard in the gaming room above. Not only did the cloak muffle it; the ceiling was thick enough to deaden the noise.

Crawling through the opening, The Shadow found himself on the landing of a flight of stairs. He was in the building next to the Arizona Club and its floors were on a slightly different level. Apparently, this landing was meant as a loading platform where men could slide the gambling equipment from its nest between floors and take it downstairs and away.

Such men, whoever they were, would require a summons from Tex Danver, and since he had not called them, they were nowhere about. So The Shadow decided to use the stairs as his own exit.

Descending them, he found a full-sized door at the bottom. It was locked, too, and this time The Shadow preferred to use a tiny pick-like instrument. It took him only a few minutes to work the door open.

Stepping through, The Shadow entered a small garage, where a truck was standing among some other cars. Stationed here, it was ready to be loaded with the gambling equipment. Along with the truck were two husky truckmen whose job was to hustle upstairs and bring down the load. Not having received a call from Tex, they were merely loafing around the garage.

THE SHADOW started across the floor unnoticed by the truckers. He was looking back at them when the door suddenly opened and a pair of patrolmen came squarely in his path. They saw The Shadow, raised a shout as he wheeled suddenly away.

Summoned because of trouble at the Arizona Club, the police were looking for an unknown killer. They had no description of Leon Grath who had fled in darkness; furthermore, Tex's murderer had already cleared the neighborhood. Spying The Shadow, the cops took him for the wanted man and went after him.

The officers didn't know the risk they ran. Tex's two truckmen were gunners, too, and sight of the blue uniforms aroused them. Their guns were out and they were aiming at the police, who in turn were drawing guns to halt The Shadow.

Blasting quick shots across the garage, The Shadow brought the truckers his way. He was between two fires when guns replied to his.

The first shots were wide, but the next threatened disaster for The Shadow, for he was boxing himself in a corner. But when the officers and the garage men came dashing up together, forming an unwitting alliance, they found themselves facing blank walls.

It was amazing, that disappearance of The Shadow, as mystifying as if he had vanished into thin air – until he, himself, revealed the secret of his sudden departure.

TWINS OF CRIME

There was a rumble from the motor of the truck. The big vehicle roared for the door of the garage which was open only a few feet. The Shadow had gone right through the rear of the truck, into the driver's seat, and he wasn't stopping for any barriers. Amid the wild burst of guns the truck ripped the flimsy door asunder and wheeled out into the street.

Police cars were arriving in plenty and they took up the chase at once. The Shadow did marvels with the cumbersome truck, whipping corners, keeping ahead of his pursuers. But the chase was short. A few blocks away the police saw the truck slue across the street and ram a building wall.

Patrol cars sped up to spot a taxicab taking off from the next corner. The cab was Moe's, and The Shadow was on board it. He had slung the truck across the street to hold up the chase. Given a head start, Moe could outdistance all pursuit, and The Shadow saw to it that his speedy cabby gained the necessary leeway.

That chase was to produce unusual consequences.

IN the lobby of an apartment hotel, a few miles distant, Mona Brenton was stepping from an elevator, to stop short with an exclamation of surprised delight as she saw the man who moved forward to greet her.

"Why, Noel!" Mona exclaimed. "Why didn't you come up to Helene's apartment?"

"I told you I didn't care for Helene's crowd," was Noel's stiff reply. Then, his face relaxing, he added: "But I knew I'd be in time to meet you. I've been here a half-hour."

Mona's face was rueful. The doorman of the apartment house was standing by and did not want to take the blame.

"I told the gentleman I'd call you, Miss Brenton," said the doorman. "But he said he would rather wait."

"I wanted to surprise you, Mona," put in Noel. "Apparently, I did."

"You did, indeed!" With a smile, Mona slid her hand under Noel's arm. "Where are we going now, Noel?"

"Wherever you say, Mona."

They went outside and took a cab to ride downtown. The evening was still young and Mona was suggesting that they see the show that Noel had missed the night before, but he shook his head. He preferred to have Mona take her choice of all the shows in town, and during the next dozen blocks she was debating which she would like.

Then, as suddenly as on the night before, Mona's hopes of a pleasant evening were rudely interrupted.

From far down the avenue came the wail of police sirens. The cab pulled over to the curb to let the law cars sweep past. One patrol car detached itself and pulled alongside. An officer stepped from it and thrust his beefy face into the cab.

He wanted to know where the cab had come from, and Noel told him, as Mona nodded her corroboration. The officer turned to the cabby, who gave the same reply. The cop thought it over a few moments, then spoke an apology. This cab couldn't possibly be the one that the police were chasing. The time element was far too short.

"We're looking for a cab that was down by the Arizona Club," the officer stated. "There was some shooting there. Tex Danver, the boss of the place, was murdered. Sorry I had to stop you."

The cab proceeded on its way but Mona saw that Noel's face was troubled, and she wanted to know why. He told her.

"Leon was at the house tonight," said Noel soberly. "He mentioned Tex Danver. So, for that matter, did the police commissioner when he phoned."

"What was the connection?" inquired Mona.

"Tex was to give Leon an alibi for last night," explained Noel. "Odd that Tex should be murdered like Carlo Sarratin."

"Did Tex have enemies, too?"

"I don't know," returned Noel with a headshake. "But this worries me, Mona. I was supposed to stop over and see the commissioner at the Cobalt Club, but I called for you instead. I wonder –"

Mona's hand tightened on Noel's. "Drop me at my apartment," said Mona firmly, "and then keep your appointment with the commissioner. I'll forget that you met me, Noel. I did it last night."

Her smile showed that she would forget, exactly as she had before. In her phone call to Noel, Mona had purposely avoided mention of their halted trip to the Skyview Roof. His nod showed that he remembered, and approved.

But there was still that solemn look on Noel's face, and Mona felt that she understood it. She admired Noel for his concern over his wayward brother. He talked as though he had disowned Leon, but she was quite sure that he never could.

Mona gave the cabby the address of her apartment and they started there. As they rode she kept watching Noel. She could understand why he was troubled. In the time required for Noel to come to Helene's apartment house, which was far uptown, Leon could easily have gone to the Arizona Club to settle certain matters with Tex Danver.

Again, the question of murder had reared itself, and the finger was pointing to Leon Grath, man of crime. As for Noel Grath, man of honor, his mind could never be content until he knew the law's opinion concerning the twin whose career had been so much the opposite of his own.

CHAPTER XII. THE DEADLOCK

IT hadn't taken Moe Shrevnitz very long to shake off the pursuit of the police cars. With the head start The Shadow gave him, the expert cabby had dropped right out of sight and let the chase go by on its long journey uptown.

Nevertheless, Moe was cautious when he poked the cab from hiding and he made a wide circuit in driving back to the Cobalt Club.

The Shadow approved Moe's tactics. Or, rather, Cranston approved them. For it was the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston who alighted from the cab when it stopped in front of the club.

TWINS OF CRIME

Again the doorman was perturbed. He felt that the tradition of the Cobalt Club was falling clear out of sight when so fastidious a member as Lamont Cranston could stoop to ride in common cabs on two successive evenings.

Entering the club, Cranston found that the news of Tex's death had arrived ahead of him. Inspector Cardona had gone over to investigate the case, and reports from the "front" were rolling in like election returns.

The only reason why Commissioner Weston hadn't gone to the Arizona Club was because a visitor had arrived before he could leave. The arrival was Noel Grath, here to inquire the status of his brother Leon.

Joining the conference, Cranston found his friend the commissioner quite perplexed.

"It is preposterous, Cranston!" exclaimed Weston. "People are trying to blame The Shadow for the death of Tex Danver, simply because they found him in the office where Tex was lying dead."

"Circumstantial evidence, commissioner," remarked Cranston calmly. "I thought it always went a long way with you."

Weston's gaze darkened, then brightened again.

"It can't in The Shadow's case," he declared, "because we don't recognize The Shadow officially. Besides, we have heard definite testimony to the effect that someone else was present in Tex's office."

"You have identified the other man?"

"Not yet. We hope to do so shortly."

As he spoke, Weston glanced toward Noel Grath and noticed that his companion's face was troubled. With a smile the commissioner reached into his pocket and produced Tex's affidavit.

"Danver gave me this," stated Weston. "It exonerates your brother in the matter of the Sarratin murder. So cheer up, Noel. The Shadow is innocent, and so is Leon."

Cranston wanted to know the details of all that had happened at the Arizona Club, so the commissioner gave them. According to all reports, The Shadow had performed an amazing disappearance. Later, he had reappeared, only to vanish again when patrol cars had started to pursue him.

"They should have been searching for the other man!" stormed Weston. "He was definitely the person who murdered Tex. Why, the fellow actually escaped through a secret exit in Danver's office!"

The statement brought a sharp glance from Noel.

"A secret exit, commissioner?"

Weston nodded.

"So Tex had a private way into his place!" exclaimed Noel. He picked up the affidavit and tapped it. "In that case, this paper —"

Noel paused, and Weston eyed him, puzzled.

TWINS OF CRIME

"What about the affidavit?" demanded Weston. "Do you see anything wrong about it?"

Hesitation showed itself on Noel's face, and Cranston understood. The affidavit was valueless now that Tex's hidden route had been discovered. The fact that Tex could go in and out of his office unnoticed, proved quite conclusively that Leon could have done the same the night before.

But Noel stiffened suddenly, and for a reason that The Shadow could well understand.

It was the law's business, not Noel's, to prove the flaw in Leon's alibi. High though his repute, Noel was reluctant to hurl an accusation at his brother Leon. Subsiding, Noel passed the affidavit to the commissioner and inquired tactfully:

"Did Danver give you this personally?"

"He did," replied Weston. "He came here sooner than I expected. I wanted him to stay so that you could meet him, Noel. But he was anxious to leave, poor chap! He didn't know that he had an appointment with death!"

Rising, Noel abruptly extended his hand.

"I'm going home, commissioner," said Noel. "I must finish work on my financial reports. I am glad that Leon is exonerated. I hope he will remain so."

AS soon as Noel left the commissioner turned to The Shadow.

"Did you hear that, Cranston?" Weston inquired. "Noel hopes that Leon will remain exonerated. I'm afraid that Noel worries too much about his brother. Still, I can't blame him. Leon has built himself a very doubtful reputation. Let's go over to the Arizona Club and see how Inspector Cardona is making out."

They were just getting into Weston's official car when Cranston remembered some important phone calls. He said he would join the commissioner later.

Turning to the doorman, Cranston gave the usual nod, which meant that he wanted his limousine, parked across the street. The doorman was much relieved to see Cranston depart in proper style.

Not having overheard Cranston's remarks to Weston, the doorman didn't wonder why Cranston failed to return into the club to make the phone calls. As for the limousine ride, it ended just around the corner. There, Cranston transferred to Moe's cab, which whipped away at rapid speed. When it completed its trip, Cranston had become The Shadow.

The trip ended near Noel's old-fashioned residence. Speedy as ever, Moe had practically overtaken Noel's cab, for it was pulling away from the house just as The Shadow arrived.

Gliding along the street, The Shadow ascended the brownstone steps, tried the front door and found it unlocked. Opening the door slightly, The Shadow saw Noel laying aside his hat, coat and cane.

As Noel crossed the front hall and went upstairs, blackness followed him. Living blackness that Noel did not notice, for his head was bowed in thought. As he entered his study the cloaked shape of The Shadow was close behind him, but the gliding figure halted outside the door.

Glancing past Noel, The Shadow saw the man who was sitting at the chess table, working out a problem on the board; The occupant of Noel's study was his brother Leon. As Noel approached, Leon looked up

suddenly.

"Hello, Noel!" greeted Leon. "I hoped you would come back soon. I thought we might try another game."

Noel's eyes met Leon's with a fixed stare.

"How long have you been here, Leon?"

"A good while," replied Leon smoothly. "I returned within a half-hour after I left."

"I don't believe it!" snapped Noel. "I was here that long myself."

"A few minutes one way or the other," spoke Leon, shrugging in indifferent fashion. "Anyway, you're back. So how about the game?"

Noel seated himself at the chessboard and helped Leon set up the pieces. Leon won the white and made the opening move. His hand upon a pawn, Noel paused. Looking squarely at Leon, he announced:

"Tex Danver was murdered this evening, Leon."

Dropping back into his chair, Leon opened his eyes in wide surprise. Then, reverting to his usual self-sufficient form, he said quite coolly:

"I hope Tex was considerate enough to deliver the affidavit first."

"He did deliver it," declared Noel sternly. "Perhaps that was why you decided to murder him, Leon."

Leon gave a short laugh.

"Why should I kill Tex?"

"So he wouldn't change his mind," retorted Noel, "or ask more payment for that false alibi he gave you."

Again Leon laughed. Gesturing to the chessboard, he remarked:

"Your move, Noel."

Noel made the move. The Shadow watched the progress of the game. Deftly, the brothers waged their combat as though chess, alone, was occupying their minds. Noel refused to sacrifice a knight when Leon gave him the opportunity of an exchange.

For several minutes the twins studied the board intently. It was Noel who broke the silence.

"Much happened at the Arizona Club," said Noel. "The commissioner tells me that the police found a secret way into Danver's office."

Leon raised his head and gave a gaze of well-feigned surprise.

"You mean that Tex had his own private route?"

"He did," replied Noel, "and you knew it all along!"

TWINS OF CRIME

Leon leaned back and folded his arms.

"Suppose I did," he said in his snarly tone. "What would it mean to you, Noel?"

"That you killed Tex for his money," retorted Noel, "just as you murdered Carlo Sarratin! You knew that Tex had enemies to take the blame."

Leon's eyes narrowed but their glitter did not diminish. At last he shook his head.

"You're wrong, Noel," declared Leon. "I couldn't have gotten over to Tex's in time –"

"In time to murder him?" inserted Noel. "I think you could have, Leon. What is more, I believe you did!"

"But I was here –"

"Not when I left, Leon. If you think that I am going to supply you with a false alibi you are quite wrong."

Leon arose and paced around the table, with Noel studying him intently all the while. When Leon spoke again his tone was bitter.

"I suppose you told the police commissioner that I killed Tex. It would be like you, Noel."

"I told the commissioner nothing," returned Noel. "I can promise you this much, Leon. I shall be fair, very fair. Until the police have finished questioning all of Danver's known enemies I shall reserve my final decision in the case."

As he finished Noel gestured to the empty chair and Leon sat down. The two resumed their game and The Shadow, acquainted with the ways of chess addicts, decided that they were settled in for the evening. He was turning away when he heard Leon query:

"Did you see Mona this evening, Noel?"

"Let us consider this evening closed," replied Noel. "I can only hope that it will remain so permanently for your sake, Leon."

From the finality in Noel's tone The Shadow recognized that chess would be the rule from that moment onward. So The Shadow made a gliding departure and returned to Moe's cab.

But he did not go directly to the Arizona Club, even though he resumed his guise of Cranston. Mention of Mona Brenton reminded Cranston that he, too, had a date this evening.

When the cab stopped at a night club, Cranston stepped from it and strolled indoors. He joined a group that included a very stunning brunette named Margo Lane.

From the glance that Cranston gave her, Margo understood that something important was on his mind. It wasn't very long before the two were alone at a corner table where Margo promptly undertoned:

"What is it, Lamont?"

"We were together earlier," remarked Cranston. Then, as Margo nodded, he added with a slight smile: "It seems that alibis are in order this evening."

There was one thing about Cranston's alibis – they were always required in the cause of justice. Knowing that Cranston was The Shadow, Margo never hesitated to play a part in his behalf. With a smile, she questioned:

"Anything else, Lamont?"

"Yes. Something quite important." Cranston looked about to make sure that no one was within earshot. "You have heard of Mona Brenton. Would you know her if you saw her?"

"Yes," replied Margo. "I've met Mona, off and on."

"Look her up again tomorrow," said Cranston. "Watch her, at first, and if she happens to notice you, remind her of your acquaintance. Let me know whatever develops."

That was all. From Cranston's tone Margo knew that he preferred to let her unravel matters by degrees. For Cranston, even in his present self, could still maintain the air of mystery that belonged to The Shadow. He had found that it made Margo all the more alert to play a part wherein she had to learn facts for herself.

How much Margo Lane might learn was still a question. It all depended upon the importance of Mona Brenton as a factor in the strange case of those twins who represented good and evil, the Grath brothers, Noel and Leon.

Such, at least, was the opinion of The Shadow, whose theories were seldom wrong!

CHAPTER XIII. THE SHADOW'S CHOICE

IT was noon, and Mona Brenton was waiting anxiously in the booth of a little cafe, one she had never been in before. She was watching through the window opposite, looking for Noel Grath. Mona was wondering why Noel had called her apartment and had asked her to meet him here.

As for Margo Lane, she was wondering still more. She was in the next booth to Mona's watching the same window. She doubted that Mona could be waiting for Noel, because Margo had learned that Mona's fiance was so busy hatching wonderful schemes for important financiers that he couldn't see Mona evenings, let alone by day.

Such rumors faded from Margo's mind when she saw the man who alighted from a cab and hurried into the cafe to be greeted by Mona. He was certainly Noel Grath, for he had the important, aristocratic look that Margo had seen in photographs of Noel. Moreover, his worried air was that of a man who had been delving deep into financial facts. As a final point, Mona herself declared Noel's identity as soon as he had joined her.

From the next booth Margo could plainly catch Mona's query:

"Tell me, Noel. Has something serious happened?"

"In a way, yes," replied Noel seriously. "It's about Leon. I'm really puzzled, Mona."

"How?"

"You remember the other night, the last time we were together, coming from Helene's –"

"You want me to remember it?"

TWINS OF CRIME

"Yes – and no." Noel's tone showed doubt. "The point is this, Mona: Leon was at my house when I arrived there."

"You mean he hadn't gone to the Arizona Club?"

"Frankly, I'm not sure." Noel paused, then put the case slowly. "If I had stayed at home instead of meeting you, I might have seen Leon earlier – provided that he is telling the truth. In which case –"

"I understand." Mona's tone was sympathetic. "Very well, Noel. I still don't remember having seen you."

There were grateful words from Noel. He left the booth and Mona accompanied him to the door. Drawing deep into her own booth, Margo watched Mona return to the other booth, and understood the smile that the girl's lips showed.

To Mona, Noel was more than the human adding machine which most people considered him to be. He had proven that he could subordinate his schemes of financial wizardry to deal in other phases of life. It was apparent to Margo that the times Noel wanted Mona to forget were those that she would really remember.

From Margo's viewpoint the situation was most important because it had a bearing upon Noel's sentiments toward his brother, Leon.

MATTERS were tightening for Leon Grath. At the very time when Margo was watching Noel leave the uptown cafe, Commissioner Weston was preparing for a conference in his downtown office.

Present were Inspector Cardona and Weston's friend, Lamont Cranston. Another visitor was also in the office: old Samuel Twildon.

On the commissioner's desk lay two canceled checks: one made out to Carlo Sarratin, the other to Leon Grath. Twildon had brought them as evidence that he had been swindled, but only by Carlo.

It was quite plain that Leon could have raised his check from twenty–five hundred to seventy–five hundred dollars, exactly as Carlo had done in terms of thousands. Therefore, Leon's check, brought for purpose of comparison, exonerated Leon from complicity in the swindle.

It happened, however, that facts were dawning upon Commissioner Weston. Knowing the ways of Leon Grath, he suspected deep duplicity and intended to uncover it. When the telephone rang, Weston pounced for it, then paused long enough to say to his guests:

"If it's Leon, saying he can't get here, I'm going to send for him." Weston shot a look at Cardona. "It will be your job to bring him in, inspector."

The call wasn't from Leon. It wasn't even for Weston. A girl was inquiring for Mr. Cranston, so Weston thrust the telephone across the desk to his friend. A minute later The Shadow, calm in his guise of Cranston, was hearing Margo's prompt report of the meeting between Noel and Mona in the uptown cafe.

Finishing the call, Cranston laid the telephone aside and sat down. At that moment the office door opened and a man stepped into sight.

Weston came to his feet, a stern expression on his face, while Cardona, already standing, stepped across to take charge of the door. They had waited long enough for Leon Grath; now that he had arrived they were going to keep him here.

TWINS OF CRIME

Bewilderment was something that Leon rarely displayed. His face registered it at present. His eyes looked from man to man as though astonished by the accusing glares that came his way. His lips even lost their habitual down turn.

"I... I don't understand, commissioner!" It was odd to hear Leon stammer. "Why... what... why should I receive a reception like this?"

"You'll understand soon enough," put in Cardona from the door. "Just sit down and answer a few questions, Leon."

Instantly, Leon's bewilderment vanished. So, for that matter, did all traces of Leon Grath. The man didn't disappear; instead, he simply became someone else. Or, to put it more precisely, he became himself.

"So you're expecting Leon!" he exclaimed. "That explains it! Don't you recognize me, commissioner? I'm Noel!"

It took more than the mere statement to convince Weston of the truth. Noel finally managed it by repeating snatches of conversation from his last meeting with the commissioner. Turning to old Twildon, Noel furnished final proof.

"If you have those reports on the Community Fund," said Noel, "I can sign them for you, Twildon. Wait!" Noel raised his hand as Twildon produced the papers. "Let me recite the figures while you check them off."

Therewith, Noel gave a most marvelous exhibition of master memory. While Twildon checked the list of contributors to the Community Fund, more than two hundred in all, Noel reeled off every name in order together with the exact amounts, not only in dollars but in cents, covering each donation.

After he had given a dozen names it was plain enough that he must be Noel, because the list was of Noel's compilation. However, no one saw fit to stop him. The demonstration was too magnificent to be halted. Nor did it represent the limit of Noel's ability. When he had finished with the two hundred names he saw that Twildon held another paper and inquired what it was.

"Additional subscriptions," stated Twildon. "Sixty-three in all. We haven't totaled them yet, Noel."

Reaching for the paper, Noel ran his eye down the list, gathering in the names in a single sweep. The downward motion of his head ended in a shake.

"Only fifty-nine," corrected Noel. "There are sixty-one names in this list and two of those are duplicated in the other, reducing the number to fifty-nine."

Twildon reached for the paper but Noel stopped him. Noel's eyes ran down the list again, this time along the right-hand column. His action was only slightly slower than before; instead of shaking his head, Noel closed his eyes reflectively and handed tile sheet back to Twildon.

"The total of these new contributions," announced Noel, "is exactly twenty-one thousand, four hundred eighteen dollars, and fifty-three cents."

IT was too much for Weston and Cardona. They wanted to add the figures for themselves. Their totals disagreed, so Weston sent for an adding machine. His secretary clicked away while Weston called off the figures. When the total was handed to Weston he smiled.

TWINS OF CRIME

"I knew you were bluffing us, Noel," said Weston indulgently. "Your guess was short by four hundred and twelve dollars."

"And twenty-eight cents, commissioner?"

"Why, yes." Weston studied the figures and then looked up in surprise. "How did you know?"

"Because I didn't include the duplicate contributions," stated Noel. "Deduct those that appear under the names of Burrigge and Tomlinson, and you will find that my addition was correct."

Making the required deductions, Weston found to his amazement that Noel was indeed an adding machine in human form. He sat back in his chair, quite dumfounded, while Noel chatted with Twildon regarding the Community Fund. Its gross total, new contributions added to old, came to more than one hundred thousand dollars.

The sum in question was to be delivered in cash at the meeting of the fund committee in the Hotel Marmora that evening. When Noel asked why the committee was demanding cash instead of check, old Twildon gave a wry wince.

"We've taken too many bad checks," he said. "The only way to make sure that they are good is to cash them first. Speaking of bad checks and good, some of mine are too good! Look at this one, Noel!"

Twildon was referring to the check that he had given Carlo. As he started to pick it up to show it to Noel, Twildon paused and stared. He wasn't looking at Noel, he was looking toward the door. But he might have been staring straight at Noel, for Twildon saw his counterpart.

Standing just within the doorway, blandly surveying the ground around the desk, was Leon Grath.

Noel looked around. Seeing Leon, Noel remembered the cool reception that he had received when mistaken for his twin. Therefore Noel, in true brotherly fashion, introduced Leon to the group. Leon did not seem to appreciate the favor.

"Why smooth it over, Noel?" demanded Leon. "I wasn't asked here for a social call." Turning, Leon looked straight at Weston. "Whatever you want me for, commissioner, let's hear it."

Weston gave it, straight and hard. He began by stating that Cardona had quizzed all known enemies of Tex Danver, and that none of them was responsible for the gambler's death.

To that Leon replied that Cardona either hadn't quizzed them properly or his list of Tex's enemies was not complete. Weston brought up the matter of the secret route into Tex's office, whereat Leon shrugged as though surprised to learn that it existed.

"All right, Leon!" snapped Weston suddenly. "Tex was murdered for his money. We know that because his safe was empty. Do you agree?"

"It sounds plausible, commissioner."

"And Carlo Sarratin was murdered for money, too –"

Smiling, Leon interrupted with headshake.

TWINS OF CRIME

"No one knew about Carlo's money," said Leon. "I don't think he was spotted when he cashed Mr. Twildon's check for twenty-five thousand dollars."

Coming to his feet, Weston roared: "You mean seventy-five thousand dollars!"

Total surprise registered itself on Leon's features. They had to show him Twildon's check so he could understand what they meant. When he saw how the check had been altered to give Carlo an added fifty thousand, Leon's expression became grieved.

So capable was Leon's bluff that even old Twildon was convinced that Leon knew nothing of the fraud.

All the while, Cranston's steady eyes were watching two faces: Noel's and Leon's. With the keen intuition of The Shadow, he recognized that Noel, at least, knew that Leon was party to Carlo's fraud, and probably the instigator of it. With all his sangfroid, Leon could not resist a few sidelong glances toward Noel, proving that he was worried by his brother's presence.

"Very well," decided Weston suddenly. "Tex gave you an alibi, Leon, covering Carlo's death. If you can tell us who murdered Tex, you will have an alibi in that case, too."

Leon asked for a list of persons questioned by Cardona. The inspector supplied it; after brief thought, Leon wrote some more names at the bottom.

"Question them, too, inspector," suggested Leon. "One of them may be the man you want."

"Suppose none of them are," retorted Cardona. "What will you do for an alibi in that case, Leon?"

"I can assure you of one thing, inspector," declared Leon. "If necessary, I can account for my whereabouts at the time of Tex's death."

THOUGH speaking to Cardona, Leon was staring straight at Noel. Only Cranston understood the significance of Leon's gaze. It was Leon's reminder that Noel could give the needed alibi, by simply stating that Leon had been playing chess with him at the time when Tex was murdered. All it would take would be a slight error on Noel's part where the time element was concerned.

Sternly, Noel met Leon's gaze. He showed none of the leniency that Margo had reported. Of course, Noel would naturally voice softer sentiments to Mona, and reserve a hard-shell pose for Leon.

Then, as Cranston watched, he saw a flicker of shrewdness on Leon's lips. Ending his stare, Leon turned away from Noel and spoke to Weston.

"Call me again, commissioner," said Leon affably. "When you really need to hear my alibi, I'll have it. Good afternoon."

Leon left, alone, while Noel went out with Twildon. Remaining in the office, Cranston heard Weston and Cardona discuss the recent interview, but he gave their comments no attention. Cranston's mind, The Shadow's, was still contemplating the silent duel that had taken place between the Grath twins, Leon and Noel.

Of the two, one must be watched. The slight smile on Cranston's lips was proof that The Shadow knew which twin to choose as the key to things to come!

CHAPTER XIV. CRIME TURNED ABOUT

EARLY that evening, Leon Grath strolled from his apartment in his jauntiest style. As he walked along the street he glanced behind him very casually, but enough to assure himself that no one was on his trail.

Leon, for reasons of his own, did not want any of Cardona's men around at this particular time. He knew that Cardona, despite his hands-off policy, might have decided to put a few excess detectives on the job of tagging a man still under suspicion of murder.

Seeing no trace of headquarters men, Leon kept on his way. He didn't notice the patch of blackness that kept pace with him along the street.

It moved strangely, that blackness. At times it filtered from one doorway to another; often it merged completely with the gloom of a house wall. At times it took on the actual shape of a being cloaked in black, only to fade strangely into nothingness.

The Shadow was on the trail of Leon Grath. The cloaked investigator had picked the wayward twin as the one to be watched. However, The Shadow expected to see Noel very soon, for Leon's trail invariably ended at his brother's house. This evening, as much as any other, was a fitting time for Leon and Noel to face each other across the chessboard.

In a corner drugstore, Leon stopped to make a phone call. Watching through the window, The Shadow saw him dial a number, noted the coins that Leon dropped into the pay box. In addition, The Shadow observed that Leon was reading something from a slip of paper. From all appearances he was sending a telegram from that pay booth.

Coming from the drugstore, Leon immediately took a cab. Hardly had it gone around the corner when another cab appeared, beckoned by a green glimmer from The Shadow's tiny flashlight.

It was Moe's cab, and it took up Leon's trail with The Shadow as a passenger. The trail led directly to Noel's house.

This time it was Leon who went upstairs with The Shadow following him. The chief difference was that Leon was wearing hat and coat and carrying his walking stick, whereas Noel habitually placed those articles in the lower hall.

Keeping to the dimness of the gloomy, old-fashioned hall, The Shadow watched Leon enter the study, where Noel was seated at the desk. Hearing his brother enter, Noel looked up and shook his head.

"No time for chess this evening," stated Noel. "I have an important appointment, Leon."

"A date with Mona?"

"I hope to see her later," returned Noel tersely. "I have been neglecting Mona too much of late. However, my present appointment happens to be at the Hotel Marmora, in connection with the Community Fund."

Leon yawned, as though the matter didn't interest him. He sat down at the chess table, placed a few pieces on the board and began to move them.

"Mind if I work out a few problems?" he inquired. "By the time I've finished, you might be back for a game."

TWINS OF CRIME

Noel delivered Leon a suspicious glance.

"Very well," he said at length. "If you are trying to produce another alibi, I should be glad to learn it. Regarding the other night, Leon, I am almost inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Good old Noel!" chortled Leon. "I was sure you would come around. I didn't murder Carlo and Tex, nor did I take their filthy money. You should know me well enough, Noel, to realize that I never stoop to a direct form of crime."

Before Noel could dispute the point he was interrupted by the telephone. Leon remarked that it might be Mona, but it proved otherwise. The call turned out to be a telegram which Noel jotted on a pad. Rising, he folded some financial reports and locked them in a desk drawer.

"I'll have to make a special trip," declared Noel, "almost up to Morningside Heights. You remember old Mrs. Hester, who lives in an old house up there? She wants me to call in person to receive her special contribution to the Community Fund. A fussy old creature, Mrs. Hester."

Leon nodded as though he remembered, then turned his attention to the chessboard.

"Probably a fifty-dollar contribution," decided Noel, "but the old lady will appreciate it if I go there. I shouldn't be very late for the meeting. Not more than half an hour at most."

NOTING that Leon was busy with his chess problem, Noel strode from the room without saying good-by.

By then The Shadow had withdrawn into an open doorway at the side of the hall. He let Noel go past and downstairs, then moved along the hall to take another look into the study.

There, Leon was no longer at the chessboard. He was at the study window, keeping himself well hidden by a heavy drapery while he watched the front door.

Seeing Noel go out, Leon gave a chuckle. Glancing at his watch, he strolled about for five minutes, then put on his coat and hat and picked up his silver-headed cane.

While Leon was so engaged, The Shadow moved silently downstairs. He noted that Noel's derby and cane were still in the lower hall. Without waiting for a closer look, The Shadow glided outdoors, signaled Moe's cab, and was in it and around the corner before Leon appeared from Noel's front door.

Cabs being infrequent in this neighborhood, Leon had to take a walk to find one. Meanwhile, Moe was cruising with The Shadow as passenger so that Leon wouldn't hail this particular cab. When Leon did find a cab he was immediately trailed by The Shadow's.

The course led back to Leon's apartment where he went indoors and came out again in a few minutes minus his cane and wearing a soft gray hat instead of his derby.

Leon's coat was open and a gray suit showed beneath. Noel had been wearing a gray suit and, from the window, Leon must have seen his twin come from the front door with a gray hat. One look at Leon told The Shadow all. He gave the order to Moe:

"Hotel Marmora."

TWINS OF CRIME

Pulling away from across the street, Moe's cab was gone while Leon was looking for another. Moe's speed added to the head start that he had gained, and when The Shadow alighted at the Marmora in the guise of Cranston he had plenty of time to telephone Margo.

Cranston's instructions were brief but specific. Margo was to go to the apartment house where Mona lived and wait for Harry Vincent. Finishing that call, The Shadow made one to Burbank.

He told Burbank to contact Harry and order him to establish himself in the apartment next to Mona's, a detail which The Shadow had previously arranged. There, Harry and Margo were to await emergency instructions.

Matters were coming to a climax. The Shadow could foresee a real duel between Leon and Noel before this evening ended. Once the brothers really bared their fangs, no holds would be barred. Mona might become involved under such circumstances. For Leon Grath was planning a campaign against his brother Noel that would force the latter to retaliate.

There was a limit to every man's patience and The Shadow was quite sure that Noel, despite his fine reputation, would call Leon to account. In turn, Leon would certainly use every possible method to complete his tricky ends, and therewith Mona would come into the case.

Finishing his second call, Cranston entered an elevator and rode up to the mezzanine floor. He stopped at a corner door where a husky man who wore a derby hat gave him a watchful eye. The fellow had the air of a hotel dick, which he was.

When Cranston said he wanted to see Mr. Twildon, the dick asked his name. It wasn't on a list that the dick produced; so the husky called a bellboy and told him to watch the door. With that the detective went into the corner room.

Samuel Twildon came out with the detective. Twildon was overjoyed to see Cranston and invited him in to the meeting. As they went through the doorway, Twildon said to the dick:

"Mark Mr. Cranston's name on the list, Ambler. He is not a committee member, but I am sure he intends to become a contributor."

The door had hardly closed before another man appeared from the stairway leading up to the mezzanine. The arrival was Leon Grath and he approached the door quite confidently. Ambler nodded, for he was the regular watchdog assigned for these meetings.

"Good evening, Mr. Grath," said Ambler. "Everyone else is inside. They're expecting you."

Leon returned the good evening, but he did not add Ambler's name because he did not know it. Still, Leon felt that his stodgy brother Noel would hardly address a hotel detective by name. In that, Leon guessed right. Opening the door, Ambler admitted him without the slightest display of suspicion.

Even Leon's smile, at being identified as his brother, was quite the sort of smile that Noel would display. Closing the door behind him, Leon paused in a little entry.

There, he took off his gray hat and drew a knotted handkerchief from it. He slid the handkerchief over his head so it masked the lower portion of his face. Replacing his hat, Leon turned the brim down and drew a revolver from his pocket.

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Though playing the part of Noel, Leon was careful to make his disguise thorough. He had reasons for wanting to do so; very good reasons. Crouching in a fashion that made his height difficult to gauge, Leon advanced into the meeting room. His voice was a hard, forced rasp when he gave the order:

"Put 'em up!"

HALF a dozen men turned, quite astonished, away from a table. As Leon brandished his gun the six drew away, their hands raised helplessly. On the table lay the contributions to the Community Fund. The committee members had been counting the cash at the moment of Leon's entry.

"Looks like a crap game," sneered Leon through his mask. "Only, there ain't no dice! That don't bother me!" His voice was harsh; his eyes, narrowed above the edge of the mask, gave a sharp, hard glitter. "This take is mine! Understand?"

They understood. The committee members were old fossils, like Twildon, and they didn't show the least desire to fight.

Keeping them covered by the swing of his gun, Leon used his free hand to bundle the cash into his pocket, paying no attention to several hundred dollars in coin that lay among the stacked bills. The paper currency represented fully one hundred thousand dollars, and Leon was taking it in bulk.

Of all the men present there was only one who in any wise worried Leon. That man was Lamont Cranston. Leon wasn't disturbed because Cranston was a friend of the police commissioner. The reason was that Cranston looked capable of putting up opposition. He had withdrawn to the wall, close by the entry, and was standing with hands half raised in a spot where he might prove dangerous.

Leon decided to make an example of Cranston – one that would thoroughly cow the other men present. Having pocketed all the cash, Leon turned toward the entry. Stopping suddenly, he gave his revolver a shove toward Cranston's body.

"Get 'em higher, you!" snarled Leon. "If you don't I'll croak you, sure! Maybe I ought to croak you anyway _"

Cranston's hands were going upward, but as they did a strange thing happened. As Leon gestured with his gun every light in the room went off!

It was so sudden that Leon didn't expect it, but Cranston did, for he wheeled in darkness, away from the threatening gun, and flung himself upon the astonished crook.

Leon's gun spoke but it failed to find its target. Cranston was driving in from the left; his hand had a viselike grip as it caught Leon's wrist and shoved it the other way.

Louder than the staccato gunbursts came a strident laugh, the mocking challenge of The Shadow.

Well could The Shadow laugh. In pitch darkness he was no longer Cranston. He was The Shadow, dealing with a masked man of crime whose capture, on this scene, would end the mystery surrounding previous deeds of evil: the murders of Carlo Sarratin and Tex Danver!

Crime was turned about. Leon Grath was trying to pin crookery upon his esteemed brother Noel. As the first step to place crime where it truly belonged, The Shadow was turning the game on Leon!

CHAPTER XV. MASKED FLIGHT

IN those exciting moments Leon Grath failed to realize that Cranston was The Shadow. When the lights went off Cranston's hand was nowhere near a switch, which made Leon suppose that the lights had been extinguished elsewhere.

What Leon hadn't seen was this:

In choosing his position near the entry, Cranston had deliberately backed against the light switch. His shoulder blade was pressing it, and the upward motion of his arms was the only cover that he needed to give the switch the final click. Leon hadn't heard the click, because Cranston's shoulder muffled it.

Then, darkness and the laugh.

The laugh that might have come from anywhere – the laugh of The Shadow. Accompanying it was a fighter who couldn't be Cranston; not in Leon's opinion. For Cranston was gone from one spot and The Shadow was coming from another. So, at least, did Leon picture it there in the dark.

The shots from Leon's gun cut the darkness like the spurts of a lazy pin wheel when The Shadow sent the masked crook somersaulting through the entry. That hurl should have knocked Leon senseless, for he was bound headfirst for the door.

However, even in the midst of a helpless whirl, Leon encountered luck. That is, he didn't encounter the door. Ambler, hearing the wild shots, yanked the door open just as Leon came along. Flying through, the masked crook bowled over the hotel detective who made a grapple for him.

The two came to their feet in a struggling embrace. The Shadow's gun was drawn but he couldn't clip Leon while Ambler's bulkier body was blocking his path of aim.

Within the darkened meeting room, old Twildon showed sudden zest for battle. Perhaps the memory of his lost fifty thousand stirred him to heroic efforts. At any rate he led a surprising charge in which his companions joined. Pouring through the entry, they swept The Shadow with them and he came out into the hallway as Cranston again.

Leon, his mask twisted across his face, was reeling for the stairs, carrying Ambler with him. The two went rolling downward to the lobby while other men chased after them. On the balcony of the mezzanine, Cranston waited, ready to play his part when the two strugglers came into sight on the floor below.

That part was to prove important.

At the bottom of the stairs Leon sprang clear of Ambler. Gun in one hand, Leon was clutching his mask with the other, keeping it around his face as he dashed across the lobby.

Bellhops, clerk and doorman, all were cutting in to head him off. Calm in his Cranston pose, The Shadow was prepared to drill Leon if he tried to shoot down any blocker.

But Leon didn't try. Others did.

They popped in from other doorways, rough-clad gunzels of the type who could be bought for a few dollars. Leon had anticipated trouble in his getaway. He had phoned cheap thugs in the dives that they frequented and told them to be around the Hotel Marmora this evening.

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He hadn't told them who he was, but he had certainly promised them some sort of payoff if they would do expert shooting when occasion called.

Aiming from various directions, the thugs were ready to pick off Leon's adversaries when Cranston became The Shadow. Alone on the balcony, he delivered his outlandish laugh and opened fire through the upright posts of an iron rail.

Gunners heard the laugh and saw the flashes of The Shadow's automatic. They blasted a return fire.

Those crooks were playing with suicide. The Shadow did not need his black attire, for a fade-out wasn't necessary. He was aiming through the metal posts, changing his fire as required.

In their turn, Leon's hired gunners were shooting from such angles that none could get a straight shot through the rail. In every case their bullets clanged the uprights before reaching The Shadow, which meant that they never reached The Shadow at all.

The metal posts were quite as effective a protection as a shield of solid steel. There wasn't a space for bullets that came from those wide slants. To the tune of The Shadow's triumphant laugh, crooks were staggering, wounded, while The Shadow remained unscathed.

DURING this turmoil the hotel employees scattered. Alone in the center of the lobby, his mask still covering his face, Leon looked up to the mezzanine. There was a glitter from the space between the brim of his gray hat and the upper hem of the masking handkerchief: an ugly gleam of calculating eyes.

Leon saw the source of trouble and he, at least, had a chance of taking a direct shot. The mezzanine was gloomy; through the frequent posts along its rail Leon could distinguish The Shadow only as a crouched figure, but that was enough.

In fact Leon thought that The Shadow was fully cloaked, for Cranston's evening clothes, drawn about his crouched shoulders, created that illusion. Which was all the more reason, to Leon's crafty mind, why robbery should be topped with murder.

It wasn't just that Leon wanted to rid the world of The Shadow. He felt that if he could dispose of that intrepid foe his own game would be safer. A master brain of crime, Leon had already schemed sufficiently to counteract his brother Noel, who represented integrity. Leon didn't care to have another keen brain interfering with his future plans.

Up came Leon's revolver on a level with his glaring eyes. He was oblivious to the staggering crooks who reeled about the lobby. Completely, he ignored the bellboys and others who had tried to halt his escape and then had scattered. Leon's evil brain could think of one thing only:

Death to The Shadow!

After that, flight would be easy. Gloating, Leon was about to press the gun trigger. He didn't see the snout of an automatic that poked down from the mezzanine rail. The muzzle of that .45 was black against the midnight hue of Cranston's evening jacket. The Shadow's trigger finger had already begun its squeeze.

If any fate was settled it was that of Leon Grath!

Fate could employ strange instruments. This time it chose a cumbersome one. The implement was Ambler, the hotel detective.

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He was at the bottom of the stairs, and in the middle of the lobby he saw the masked man aiming upward. Who Leon was aiming at Ambler didn't know or care. He wanted to grab the masked man and he saw his chance.

With elephantine technique, Ambler charged. His bulky form was eclipsing Leon's just as The Shadow's trigger finger completed its squeeze. Only the deft hand of The Shadow could have changed the direction of the shot that would have taken Ambler instead of Leon. The muscle of the trigger finger carried an instantaneous twitch back to his wrist. Roaring, The Shadow's gun sizzled its bullet wide.

The shot was only a split second ahead of Leon's. It was a long risk on The Shadow's part, but he was counting on Ambler, whose life he had saved, to return the favor. And Ambler did, unwittingly. The same blunder that had spoiled The Shadow's chance put an end to Leon's.

Ambler's outthrust hands were pawing Leon's shoulders when the masked man's revolver barked. Jogged high, Leon's gun whizzed its slug above the mezzanine rail over The Shadow's head.

Then Ambler and Leon were grappling in the center of the lobby. The dick tried to wrench off Leon's mask, thinking that the crook would weaken once his identity was disclosed. In turn Leon smashed his revolver downward upon Ambler's derby, driving the hat over the detective's eyes.

It was time that The Shadow joined the grapple. Up from behind the balcony rail came the tall form of Cranston.

The Shadow didn't bother with the stairway. Just below the mezzanine wounded crooks had rallied, ready to charge out into the lobby. They were worried, though, for fear of shots from the mezzanine. Guns lowered, they were peering upward. Suddenly, one gave an excited shout.

Over the rail, itself, was coming the marksman who had clipped them. Like Leon, they couldn't tell Cranston from The Shadow. He was simply a blur of blackness as he vaulted the mezzanine rail and came plunging down, full tilt, into the clustered men below!

THERE were three of those crooks but they hadn't even time to raise their guns before The Shadow was upon them. Not only did he flatten them by the purposeful sprawl that followed his quick vault, his own fall was broken by the human buffers who received it.

Furthermore, The Shadow was slugging as he came. Crooks who tried to swing up from the floor found their guns knocked from their hands.

Actually jouncing to his feet, Cranston sprang across the lobby. Leon was wresting free of Ambler and making for the revolving door. The bulky dick was after him, an easy target, had Leon cared to shoot him.

But The Shadow wasn't worried about Ambler. Having masqueraded as Noel, Leon couldn't afford to shoot Ambler, for the hotel dick was a factor in Leon's scheme.

At the door, Leon grabbed up a lobby chair and whipped it behind him. Then Leon was going through the door with the detective stumbling over the chair. Head foremost, Ambler landed in a section of the revolving door and jammed it.

Cranston's gun was shooting over Ambler's head, but by then Leon had squeezed through the door and its metal center section diverted Cranston's shot.

With the speed of The Shadow the persistent Mr. Cranston reached Ambler and hauled him back to clear the door. But before Cranston could go through other men piled ahead of him.

Twildon and the committee members were showing themselves at last to be bold and were trying to catch the masked man who had stolen their cash. Letting them drive ahead, Cranston looked back, saw that hotel employees were taking charge of the dazed and wounded crooks who had aided Leon's getaway. Then, hurrying through the door, Cranston found Twildon and the others staring along the street.

Leon had dashed around the corner, snatching off his mask as he went from sight. The only witness to that flight was Moe, stationed close by in his cab. Reaching out, Moe beckoned to Cranston, who stepped over.

"He went around the corner there, boss –"

"Which corner?" inquired The Shadow in Cranston's calm style. "That one?"

He pointed to the wrong corner; and Moe shook his head.

"Not that corner," Moe began. "The other –"

Moe halted. He couldn't speak further for his mouth was wide open. Coming from around the corner that Cranston indicated was Leon Grath, the man who had fled in the other direction!

Moe heard a whispered laugh from Cranston's lips. It was the mirth of The Shadow. Gradually, the truth dawned upon the bewildered cabby. Moe was actually right. Leon had fled in the opposite direction.

The man who had just come into sight was Noel Grath, arriving to learn that he had become a victim of the duplicity so capably arranged by Leon, his twin of evil!

CHAPTER XVI. THE GAME THAT FAILED

So far, Leon's clever game had worked despite The Shadow's intervention. Of course The Shadow wasn't worried over it. He knew who the masked man was; furthermore, he knew where Leon would go with the money he had stolen. Definitely, The Shadow expected to catch up with Leon later and have a showdown on the matter.

However, another phase of Leon's scheme was developing to perfection.

In timing his robbery in the room upstairs, Leon had allowed for his own flight ahead of Noel's arrival. He hadn't cared if Noel returned rather late from the blind trip on which Leon, by means of a fake telegram, had sent him.

The important thing was for Leon to be away before Noel appeared. The delay in the lobby had chopped the time differential to the minimum; hence the scheme had worked even better than Leon required.

Noel had joined the group on the sidewalk. They were asking eagerly if he had seen where the masked man went. Noel shook his head and traces of bewilderment showed upon his usually acute face. He couldn't understand why Twildon and the rest were talking to him about things which he couldn't possibly have witnessed.

The group was going back into the hotel. Cranston followed, nodding affably to Noel, who returned the greeting, though still puzzled. They found Ambler quizzing the wounded thugs, all of whom were sticking to

their story.

They'd had a call from somebody who called himself a "right guy," and had proven it by telling them certain things he knew about them. He'd told them to be at the Hotel Marmora, ready to cover a getaway which would be made by a masked bandit. Each participant would be remembered when the payoff came, so the mysterious caller had stated across the telephone.

As for those who didn't show up, they would be remembered, too. The man who telephoned had facts on all of them. Things which he could inform the police about if they didn't play ball. So, one and all, the cheap gunzels had decided to be on the job. They were wanted men, anyway, and one crime more wouldn't hurt, considering that it would toss some cash their way.

While the prisoners talked thus, Cranston's steady eyes kept watching Noel's face. Enlightenment was dawning on those aristocratic features, but they also showed a certain grimness. In the things he heard Noel was recognizing the evil technique of his crooked brother, Leon.

Then Noel heard the rest of it.

Ambler had begun to state his version of the case and the beefy hotel dick picked Noel as the right man to address.

"How the guy sneaked in I don't know," asserted Ambler. "There wasn't anybody went in after you, Mr. Grath. Jerry, here, will say the same" – Ambler gestured to a bellboy who was standing by – "because the two of us was right there together, outside the door."

Noel started to say something; then changed his mind. He preferred to listen further rather than add more complications to a situation which he was already finding difficult.

"Tell me one thing, Ambler," put in old Twildon querulously. "Did you search the meeting room before any of us arrived?"

"We did," assured Ambler. "Me and Jerry both. When we finished we locked the windows tight. Right from then on we stayed outside, and we didn't let in anybody who didn't belong."

As the finished, Ambler glanced toward Cranston, the only man who did not belong to the committee. Suspicion registered itself on the dick's beefy face. Twildon immediately interjected statements in Cranston's behalf.

"Mr. Cranston was with us when the masked man appeared," declared Twildon. "Not only that, he was the person most definitely threatened." Twildon swung to Cranston. "I thought for the moment, Cranston, that the scoundrel intended to shoot you. You showed remarkable presence of mind, turning off the lights."

"It happened quite by accident," was Cranston's casual reply. "I didn't even realize that the light switch was behind me until my shoulder encountered it."

Other committee men began to state the parts that they had played and soon they were exchanging favors by corroborating each other's statements.

A frown came to Noel's face; he was in a dilemma. He saw that questions would be coming his way when he failed to state his own impressions of the melee. It would be bad, too, when the witnesses began to remember that they hadn't seen Noel during the time of the masked man's visit.

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It would all build to the assumption that Noel was the masked robber. He recognized the answer very plainly. Ambler's statement proved conclusively that Leon must have come here impersonating Noel, as a means of gaining access to the funds in the meeting room.

Watching Noel's hand, Cranston saw it move into a pocket and finger the fake telegram that Noel had learned was a hoax.

The Shadow watched to see how Noel would handle the dilemma. Integrity was Noel's watchword. He couldn't lie and say that he had been at the meeting. Indeed, if he did, he would merely be putting himself in line for a later accusation. To accuse Leon of the impersonation was hardly wise on Noel's part until he had looked further into the case.

Now Noel side-stepped the issue very neatly. Gesturing impatiently, he halted the babbled testimony of his friends.

"This is a matter for the police," he declared. "Call the commissioner and have him send Inspector Cardona over here. Meanwhile, since our money has been stolen, I shall return home. Phone me there when I am needed."

Turning on his heel, Noel made an abrupt departure.

IN his last glimpse of Noel's face The Shadow saw a satisfied smile appear upon those aristocratic features. It was rather surprising that Noel should smile, considering that Leon had pinned a crime on him, leaving him no alibi. It was quite obvious that Leon must have first ascertained that there was no one at the Hester house before sending Noel there.

So The Shadow, still as Cranston, stepped away from the group and entered Moe's cab. Twildon and the rest had begun to talk about some mysterious fighter in the dark who had first attacked the masked robber. They were discussing The Shadow, of course, and in so doing were postponing the suspicion that would eventually center upon Noel.

Meanwhile, in the cab, The Shadow was actually becoming his cloaked self.

A whispered word to Moe and the cab eased around the corner where Noel had gone. Noel was getting into a coupe, his own car, which he kept in a garage near his house and used on trips of such length as to make cab fare too high. As Moe's cab halted, The Shadow alighted on the street side and moved up beside Noel's car.

Noel was speaking to someone in the coupe. A girl's voice answered; The Shadow knew that Noel's companion must be Mona Brenton.

"There was trouble at the meeting," stated Noel. "The Community Fund was stolen. I don't like it, Mona!"

"You mean... that perhaps Leon –"

"Perhaps, Mona." Noel's tone was solemn. "I shall drop you off at your apartment on my way home. Stay there until you hear from me. I shall settle matters with Leon, once and for all!"

"So Leon did send you that telegram!" Mona exclaimed. "Just as you said he must have when we found no one at Hester's."

"It seems that way," decided Noel. "But Leon is not so clever as he believes. He thought that I would drive up to the Heights alone to –"

That was all that The Shadow heard, for Noel's car was pulling away. But The Shadow's laugh was audible as he returned to Moe's cab. Hearing it, Moe recognized that his chief had learned all that was needed.

Moe wasn't at all surprised when The Shadow ordered him to drive back to Noel's house and speed the trip so as to arrive ahead of Noel.

The real surprise was coming. It would strike as soon as the brothers met. Leon, the crafty twin, was to learn from his honest brother, Noel, that the best laid schemes could go astray. What such a meeting would produce only The Shadow could foresee.

Past crimes were to mark the progress of the future, in ways that The Shadow could divine. Nevertheless, he intended to be present as a witness to make sure that his assumptions would require no amendment!

CHAPTER XVII. A BROTHER'S VERDICT

FROM the upstairs hall at Noel's, The Shadow looked into the study and watched Leon at the chessboard. Totally absorbed in a chess problem, Leon was making notations on a sheet of paper well covered with penciled markings. Leon looked as serene as though he had not stirred from the spot all evening.

The craft which Leon had displayed had not ended with his flight from the Hotel Marmora. Instead of coming straight to Noel's, he had detoured by his own apartment and switched back to his tuxedo. Thus Leon was perfectly set to give his brother Noel a real surprise as soon as he arrived home.

Noel had come home.

Standing at the head of the stairway, The Shadow heard footsteps and glided into a side doorway. A few moments later Leon heard the footfalls, too, and looked up from the chessboard. When he was sure that the approaching man was Noel, Leon returned to his problem and stayed wrapped in it, even after Noel entered and came over to stand beside him.

Again watching from the doorway The Shadow saw Noel clap his hand on Leon's shoulder and say:

"Clever work, Leon!"

Leaning back, Leon looked up with his most pleasant smile, if any of Leon's smiles could be so termed.

"Honest work, at least," agreed Leon. "Working away on chess problems instead of using my brain to help crime. Somehow, Noel, I'm really beginning to believe that there is a reward in virtue."

"I know there is," assured Noel. "But virtue does not consist in pretending innocence while placing a burden of crime upon someone else."

Leon's eyes showed a triumphant twinkle. He gestured Noel to the opposite chair, inviting him to a chess game. Slowly, Noel sat down and began to set up the men. No longer hiding his real opinions, Leon spoke in a gloating style.

"So you walked right into it," he sneered. "Well, Noel, it was a lesson for you. At last you can understand how it feels to be blamed for a crime you didn't do. You're going to need an alibi tonight, Noel, and you'll

have to ask me for it!"

Noel shook his head.

"An alibi won't help, Leon."

"It will if you return the money. You can make yourself a hero by finding it somewhere. It's in my overcoat pocket, Noel, so help yourself to it."

"You mean you don't want it, Leon?"

"Of course I want it, but I know I can't get away with it! Between us we can cook up some plausible explanation of how it was recovered. Of course, I expect a certain service, Noel."

It was very plain what Leon wanted. He was still after the alibi that Noel wouldn't give, covering the evening when Tex had been murdered. Only Leon, as he outlined the plan again, was more pressing in his demands than before.

He wanted Noel to testify regarding an earlier evening: the night of Carlo's death. It would be easy enough for Noel to swear that Leon had been with him so long that he could not have possibly reached the Tropicola by the time Carlo was murdered.

Leaning across the chessboard, Leon put his cause ardently. His face had a devilish expression, for he was a tempter, arguing how easy it would be for Noel to stretch the truth into a lie. To back the argument, Leon was smoothly assuring Noel that the falsehoods would be justified. For Leon, true to form, was again taking oath that he had slain neither Carlo nor Tex.

At last, when Noel wouldn't yield, Leon arose and brought the money from his overcoat. He stacked it on the chessboard, picked up heaps of currency and flaunted the bills in front of his brother's eyes.

"How easily I could keep it all!" gloated Leon. "A tip-off to the police and they will begin questioning that hotel dick as to who went into the meeting room. Then the police will talk to the others, and no one will remember having seen you, Noel."

"No one except the flatfoot and the bellhop who was with him. That will make you the masked man, Noel! You'll blame it on me, of course, but it won't hold. You were around later, just as I knew you would be. How easy it was, chasing you up to Hester's all alone so you wouldn't have any alibi!"

This time Leon's laugh became contagious. It actually produced a smile from Noel. Watching his brother's face, Leon let his laugh subside. Those eyes of Noel's were talking, along with the smiling lips.

The twins were playing chess again without chessmen. Mental chess, wherein Noel had somehow matched Leon's move, though the latter could not understand it.

Then Noel dropped his bombshell.

"Yes, I went up to Hester's, Leon." Noel's tone, for once, carried a gloating note. "But I didn't go alone! Do you remember that I mentioned how I had neglected Mona? I felt remorseful, so I stopped at her apartment and took her along."

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"So I have my alibi, Leon. I couldn't have been at the Hotel Marmora when the robbery occurred, because Mona can prove otherwise. But there was someone there who passed for me, and that someone could only be you, Leon. By your own logic, you therefore become the masked man who stole the money!"

Leon's fists tightened. He stared hard at Noel, wondering if his brother had told the truth. Noel's reputation stood him in good stead. Of all people, Leon was most completely sold upon the point that Noel never lied; in fact, it was the chief reason for Leon's hatred of his twin.

At last Leon relaxed weakly, overpowered by the incontrovertible conclusion that the snare he had arranged for Noel had become his own pitfall.

By then Noel was gathering up the money that represented the profits of Leon's latest crime. Coldly, Noel announced his terms.

"I shall return this money," he declared, "and state the whole truth when I do so. I shall need no confession from you, Leon. Mona's testimony that she was with me will be full proof against you. The question next in order concerns your other crimes."

Leon rose halfway in his chair to give Noel a very savage glare.

"No more denials," spoke Noel wearily. "Your own face betrays you, Leon. You murdered both Carlo and Tex. I expect you to return the money that you stole from them."

"Return it?" echoed Leon. "To whom?"

"Carlo's money goes to Twildon," declared Noel. "You can send Tex's cash to the police."

"Suppose I don't have any of the money?"

"It goes without saying that you do have," replied Noel. "Unless you return it within the next hour I shall call the police and have them hunt you down."

"And if I do return it?"

"You will be free to go your way. After all, you are my brother. It is not for me to pass judgment upon your crimes. I cannot make you bring two dead men back to life, but I can, at least, force you to restore what you took from them. You have heard my final verdict."

FROM the doorway, The Shadow watched Leon's reaction. At moments Leon seemed to brood; occasionally his savagery returned. He wanted to argue the whole case anew, but his glances at Noel told him it would prove useless.

There were other furtive looks on Leon's part; they were toward the money that Noel had gathered from the chessboard. Even Leon's eyes seemed to water at sight of all that cash. In this game of turnabout he was seeking some way to turn the balance back in his own favor.

At last the curl in the corners of his lips showed that an idea had struck him. Immediately his expression sobered.

"You win, Noel," declared Leon. "Thanks for giving me the hour. When it's over, call your friend the commissioner. If I haven't returned everything I stole you can start the bloodhounds of the law on my trail. I

might come back here before then, though. You'll be around, won't you?"

Noel nodded solemnly.

"You're a lucky chap, Noel," said Leon, picking up his hat and coat with the cane that went with them. "Lucky to have a girl like Mona, particularly when she can give you such an excellent alibi. If it weren't for Mona, I'd really have fixed you!"

In the friendliest of fashion, Leon clapped a farewell hand upon his brother's shoulder and stalked from the room. Again The Shadow was gone when Leon went along the hall, but this time the cloaked witness did not take up Leon's trail.

The Shadow had completed his present business with Leon. The next move would be Noel's when he started the law upon Leon's trail.

Noel had given Leon just one hour, but The Shadow doubted that he would wait that long. There was a reason, and a very good one, why Noel could not wait. Something was stirring in Noel's mind as the result of Leon's parting remark. Something that could lead to fatal consequences.

From the hallway, The Shadow heard the front door close, marking the departure of Leon. Still waiting, The Shadow kept watching Noel, while slow minutes passed.

Soon the thing would happen to produce another climax in the affairs of the brilliant twins who stood for right and wrong.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVIII. LIFE OR DEATH

IT happened five minutes after Leon had gone. Standing at his desk, Noel, still in a meditative mood, was counting the money he had reclaimed from Leon, making sure that his tricky brother had not held back any of the cash.

Then Noel, glancing upward, let his eyes notice the clock. With a sudden gesture he dropped the remaining money to the desk.

Snatching the telephone, he dialed a number. When he received a reply he asked breathlessly if he was talking to the Hotel Marmora. Learning that he was, Noel gave his name and insisted that he speak to Inspector Cardona at once.

Noel's final words were imperative, yet spoken in a tone of anguish. "Hurry! It means life or death!"

Then Cardona was on the wire and Noel was pouring out words as fast as he could. He was telling the inspector that he, Noel, hadn't been to the hotel meeting; that Leon had gone instead and stolen the money. Cardona's interruptions maddened Noel.

"Yes, yes, inspector!" Noel exclaimed. "It was a frame-up. Leon wanted to put me in a dilemma... I know you believe me, but I can furnish proof. Mona Brenton was with me, elsewhere, at the time... Yes, her testimony will be important, and that's why I'm calling you, commissioner..."

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"Leon just left here. He promised he'd restore the money he took from Carlo and Tex. But there's something else he might do. I was a fool not to think of it before. He'll go to Mona's, inspector... Why? Can't you see why? To murder her!

"Don't you see? If she is dead Leon can still blame me for tonight's robbery... Yes, I'll give you the address, inspector. You'll still have time to save her... How long ago? Five minutes... Yes, I'll try to overtake him, too. But there's not another minute to lose!"

Noel started to hang up. Hearing words from the receiver, he recalled that he hadn't given Cardona the address. Lifting the telephone, Noel told Cardona the name of the apartment house, its location, and the number of Mona's apartment. Then, slamming down the telephone, Noel took a long breath.

Seeing the money on the desk he brushed it aside peevishly, as though it were responsible for his slow recognition of Mona's danger. Turning, Noel started out to the stairway on the run.

By then The Shadow was in the lower hallway. Out through the front door, he reached Moe's cab. Going around the corner, he looked back to see Noel climbing into his car. The race against death was on!

In the race, Leon was the uncertain factor. It was logical to assume that he had gone to Mona's. The Shadow had his own reasons to suppose that such would be Leon's destination, without the arguments that Noel had voiced to Cardona. The question was how rapidly Leon would seek his present goal.

Noel had given Leon an hour's respite. Always a cool calculator, Leon might have weighted his future course and therefore have taken his time in going to see Mona. On the contrary, it happened that Leon, of all people, knew the workings of Noel's mind better in some ways than did Noel himself.

For one thing Leon hated Noel's integrity so much that he feared it. Always, Noel had harped about his duty to the law. In giving Leon that hour, Noel had yielded to a brotherly impulse, which had probably faded as soon as Leon left. Noel wouldn't feel bound to his promise; not if his stronger nature predominated.

On that account alone, Leon would have reason to hurry to Mona's, and if he did he would surely arrive there ahead of Noel or Cardona. Noel was traveling the same route while Cardona's was even longer, since the Hotel Marmora was quite a distance from Mona's apartment house.

Only The Shadow could cut down Leon's headstart, for The Shadow had Moe at the wheel of his cab and knew how to pick short cuts for the speedy driver. Indeed, during the first five minutes of that breakneck trip it seemed that Moe was sure to overtake Leon no matter how rapidly the crooked twin had traveled.

Then came one of Moe's rare disasters.

It happened on an avenue where trucks were plentiful. Moe preferred such avenues, which was why The Shadow had picked one for him.

Along such thoroughfares, Moe handled his cab like a jeep car among tanks, scooting around the lumbering vehicles in a most remarkable fashion. It was easy to gauge such traffic and clip through spaces where most drivers would have balked. This time Moe took one risk too many.

From the side of one truck Moe saw another nosing out ahead of it. Like a water bug, Moe whizzed ahead, intending to zigzag through as soon as the faster truck went clear. He saw the rear of the head truck and made the swerve. What he didn't see, until too late, was the batch of iron pipes that projected from the back of the truck ahead.

TWINS OF CRIME

They, stuck out a full five feet, which was most of Moe's clearance – and they loomed right across the windshield of the cab; Moe tramped the brake pedal full force and yanked the wheel, performing a remarkable whirl.

The taxi glanced the sides of the pipes, knocked away the red lantern that was hanging, unlighted, from the end of them. Skidding full about, the cab lifted on two wheels and seemed to balance there.

The cab didn't overturn. At that moment the next truck overtook it. The truck driver had air brakes and used them, but not soon enough. The truck shunted the cab as a freight engine would do with a box car, but with this exception. Instead of coasting gracefully to a stop the cab performed a series of most phenomenal bounces across the avenue.

It smashed into a truck that was coming the other way, ricocheted and went clear across the street. It mowed down a fire hydrant that immediately spurted like an oil gusher. It cleared the sidewalk and stopped hard against a brick wall.

In that last bounce the cab's wheels didn't touch the sidewalk at all, but that wasn't very remarkable considering that the wheels were no longer on the cab. They were rolling hither and yon about the avenue, lost during the shuffle.

Crawling from the front door, Moe found himself right on the sidewalk level. Truck drivers came hurrying over to aid him. They saw Moe yank the rear door open and start to help a passenger. The only trouble was they couldn't see the passenger. Moe was simply pawing around in the blackness as though he expected to find someone there.

The truckers pulled Moe away. They heard him moan something about somebody in the cab. One of them produced a flashlight and turned its beam inward. Moe groaned, expecting to see a cloaked shape massed upon the floor. Instead, the cab proved empty. Then Moe saw that the door on the other side was slightly open.

What no one saw, not even Moe, was the figure that was crawling across the sidewalk. Forced to emerge in Moe's fashion, The Shadow had decided to stay on hands and knees until he reached a darkened doorway past the brick wall. There, he brought himself to his feet and found that he could stand.

The Shadow had doubled himself during the cab's gyrations and had come through the crash well. He was more concerned about Moe than himself, for the last smash had threatened to drive the steering wheel into the cabby's chest.

However, The Shadow saw Moe's head and shoulders above the wheel-less cab. He recognized from the way the cabby was talking to the truckers that Moe had caught on to the situation and was keeping the men occupied.

When Moe faked a dizzy stagger the truckers grabbed him, and that was when The Shadow made a limping glide from the doorway toward the next corner.

The minutes that Moe had gained were proving precious. Between the crash, his limp, and the fact that he would have to go on foot for at least a block before he could find another cab, The Shadow was losing ground. However, the time he had made earlier was still keeping him in the race so far as Noel and Cardona were concerned. The Shadow might still be the first rescuer to reach Mona's apartment.

Meanwhile, The Shadow could only hope that Harry and Margo would recognize danger when it arrived and take due measures to offset it. There hadn't been time for The Shadow to inform his agents of the exact status of Leon, or the fact that Noel was coming to Mona's, with Cardona also on the way.

More than ever this had become a case of life or death, one of the strangest in which The Shadow had ever participated. Grim was the laugh that came from hidden lips of the cloaked being whose glide was hindered by a limp.

Life or death! Always related, in this case they were twins, as represented by the brothers Grath, with Mona Brenton the person whose fate lay at stake. And upon Mona's life depended the proof of crime so deeply veiled that, without her testimony, the world would never believe facts which, to date, only The Shadow had suspected.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XIX. MURDERER'S CHANCE

MONA'S apartment was located on the third floor and directly across the hall from it was the empty apartment where Harry and Margo were on watch.

Their location was a strategic one because the empty apartment had a front window facing on the street, while the kitchenette opened just above a fire escape that formed a rear route to the third floor.

Margo was watching from the front window while Harry kept a lookout at the rear. Just what the vigil might produce neither was sure, but they felt certain that Leon Grath was involved.

The Shadow had made it quite plain that Leon was in a bad predicament because his brother Noel would not believe his claims of innocence in matters of murder. It was logical, therefore, that Leon might attempt to persuade Noel through Mona.

As a persuader Leon was a specialist. His favorite mode was to employ lesser crooks who stopped at nothing. Usually, Leon had things fixed so that such underlings would take full responsibility for their actions.

This had been definitely demonstrated at the Hotel Marmora on this very evening, but Harry and Margo were as yet uninformed of what had occurred there.

They knew, at least, that any of Leon's hirelings would prefer a rear route upstairs, which was why Harry had taken watch above the fire escape. On the chance that a suspicious car might go past the apartment house, Margo was watching the front street.

For The Shadow's warnings, so far, indicated that Mona might suddenly disappear if the feud between Leon and Noel became too hot, and kidnapers would be apt to circuit a neighborhood before they moved to action.

Of course, such predictions dated back to earlier events. Leon's impersonation of Noel this evening, and the subsequent debate between the brothers, had completely altered the situation. Any thrust that now might come Mona's way would be a stroke of death.

Moreover, in Leon's case, time was too short for him to intrust any work to others. Leon's negotiations with Mona would have to be handled in person.

TWINS OF CRIME

It was Margo, therefore, who viewed the approach which could be regarded as a forerunner of doom. She saw a cab pull up in front of the apartment house. From it sprang a man who wore a hat and a fancy muffler and carried a silver-headed cane.

Margo saw his face when he turned to pay the driver, and she gave a low call to Harry, who reached the front window just after the man hurried into the apartment house.

"I just saw Noel!" exclaimed Margo. "He's coming up to Mona's and he isn't losing any time about it."

"You're sure it isn't Leon;" queried Harry. "They look a lot alike, you know."

"Why would he be Leon?" demanded Margo. "Mona is engaged to Noel. Besides, if Leon was coming to kidnap Mona he wouldn't leave a wide trail behind him."

"It wouldn't be much of a trail," reminded Harry, "if people mistook him for Noel. Still, there's a way to test it."

He beckoned Margo into the kitchenette and there Harry took a close look down the fire escape. There wasn't a sign of a lurker. Since Harry pictured Leon as working with accomplices, he decided that the arriving twin must be Noel.

It was unfortunate that The Shadow hadn't taken time to put in a call through Burbank. In that case Harry would have known that Noel couldn't have changed from his gray suit into his tuxedo. Margo mentioned the matter of the visitor's attire, but Harry only shook his head.

"It's been quite awhile since Noel dropped Mona from his car," argued Harry. "He probably went home to change so they could go to some fancy place."

"But Noel doesn't go to fancy places – much." Margo added the amendment, remembering that Noel had once started to the Skyview Roof with Mona. "Anyway, why did he come back in a cab instead of his coupe?"

"Because they won't be able to park around a night club," returned Harry. "Nevertheless, I'd like to know why Noel is in such a hurry."

"I'll find out," declared Margo. "I'll use the emergency plan, – the way The Shadow ordered. I'll drop over to Mona's apartment and say hello. She's sure to remember me –"

HARRY caught Margo's arm as the brunette was turning toward the door. A sound from the hallway told that the elevator had reached the third floor, bringing the man that both Harry and Margo now agreed was Noel.

It was curious how Harry had first doubted the fact, only to have Margo argue it. Each had talked the other out of the truth, in turn!

"Too late," decided Harry. "Anyway, it would spoil the set-up. We want to learn what Noel has to say."

"And how will we learn that," demanded Margo, "if I don't drop in at Mona's?"

"You will drop in," replied Harry, "under circumstances that will give you a chance to hear what's said. Out the window, Margo – and stretch!"

TWINS OF CRIME

Harry's strong arms started Margo headfirst through the window and gave her a bird's-eye view of the ground straight below. Stretch, he had told her, and stretch Margo did as Harry relaxed his grip momentarily to give her the fearful thrill of a possible fall.

Margo stretched for the only object that offered a possible hold, the rail of the fire escape. She made it just as Harry grabbed her to make sure she wouldn't miss. Over the rail, Margo looked back indignantly as though ready to start the return journey and call Harry to account.

"Good enough," said Harry. "If you can get back here you can make it into Mona's kitchenette on the other side of the far rail. Get going, Margo, and don't forget you have a gun!"

Margo's ire faded. She ought to have thanked Harry for putting her nerve to the test, but she didn't waste time. Thanks would come later.

Climbing the other rail, Margo saw that the window of Mona's kitchenette was open, something that Harry had observed earlier. She had the mettle to try a thing that she would earlier have feared, for it offered a real mental hazard.

The apartments were so laid out that, although across the hall from each other, they ran lengthwise to the corridor and their kitchenette windows had the same outlook.

The only way to reach the other window was to start a fall from the rail, with the harrowing thought of the long drop that would come if Margo didn't catch the window ledge. But the fall, itself, brought the ledge within easy reach, and Margo clamped it with outstretched hands.

There was plenty of space to spare and she had no trouble pulling herself right over the sill. Only for a moment did her weight hang outside the window before the impetus of her haul carried her through.

Harry lingered at the other window long enough to make sure that Margo made the grade. If she hadn't he could easily have made a quick trip to her rescue while she dangled.

Seeing that Margo was safely into Mona's kitchenette, Harry gestured for her to close the window and latch it. As Margo nodded Harry started out through the hall.

As matters now stood, Harry would be able to watch the door of Mona's apartment. If anyone came up the fire escape they would have to smash the kitchenette window and thus reveal themselves by the sound, or come through the hallway, which Harry guarded. In the meantime Harry hoped to check on Noel's visit by listening outside Mona's door.

Reaching the hall, Harry saw the door of the other apartment closing. Mona had admitted the man who passed for Noel. Reaching the door, Harry cautiously tried the knob, and from its give decided that the door was unlocked. But he didn't try to open it farther.

Inasmuch as Margo was inside the apartment, the purpose of the supposed Noel's visit could be learned without risk of spoiling the situation.

MEANWHILE, Margo had opened the door of the kitchenette and was peering from a little passage into Mona's living room. She saw Mona, very charming in a negligee. The blonde was staring at her male visitor somewhat in surprise.

"Why, Noel!" Mona exclaimed. "I thought you had gone home for the evening! And now –"

She paused, puzzled. The smile she received was more suave than any that Noel had ever displayed, even on those evenings when he had been less reserved than his usual self. Trying to guess at Noel's thoughts, Mona asked suddenly:

"What about Leon?"

"What about Leon?" The words mocked Mona's query. "Did I say anything about Leon?"

"Of course you did," replied Mona. Stepping forward, she took hold of her visitor's arms. "What has happened, Noel! You don't seem to be yourself!"

"Odd that you should say that, Mona. You never noticed it before."

Mona's eyes were looking at the face that so resembled Noel's. Even at such close-range vision she did not guess that this man was Leon.

Naturally, Margo hadn't an idea of the deception. Already inclined to treat the visitor as Noel, Margo was taking Mona's word for it.

It was the man himself who ended the hoax. His deepened smile, the hard stare of his eyes, could not declare the truth to Mona. It took words to do it.

"I am not myself, Mona." The words were solemn. "Or, let us say, I am myself. I am not Noel. I am Leon!"

Mona dropped back, her eyes filled with horror. It wasn't that she regarded Leon as a monster; nor that she resented the imposture so far as his part in it was concerned. It was the fact that her own intuition had failed her.

Mona had thought that she loved Noel but had never been quite sure. To learn, so suddenly, that she could not tell Noel from the brother he tried to be unlike was a thing that roused all of Mona's suppressed doubts.

With all his perspicacity, Leon failed to recognize Mona's mood. He thought she hated him and was taking this way to show it. He thrust his hand forward, digging his fingers deep into the silken sleeve of her negligee. His words came sharply, savagely.

"You'll listen to me, Mona! You'll have to listen, because –"

Mona didn't shriek. She had too much nerve and pride. Wrestling away, she started for the telephone on a table not far away. The sleeve gave and she tugged her arm from it. With Leon trying to clutch her shoulder, Mona reached the telephone and snatched it from the stand.

Before she could dial the operator Leon caught her roughly and gripped the bare arm that she swung toward him. His tone had the snarl that excitement always produced.

"If you don't listen, Mona –"

The thing that interrupted Leon was a clatter from the kitchenette. Margo was swinging into sight, producing the .32 automatic that Harry had reminded her not to forget.

At sight of the gun Leon spilled Mona into an armchair and made a quick wheel back across the room. He was starting his right hand toward his pocket when he heard Margo's voice:

"Don't reach for that gun, Leon! If you do –"

Margo interrupted herself. Bearing straight toward Leon, she was keeping her gun aimed for him and her eyes fixed upon her human target. She didn't see the footstool near the chair where Mona had landed, and not far from the spot where Leon had recoiled. Tripping over the misplaced object, Margo took a headlong spill.

Surprise, more than anything else, produced the cry that Margo gave as she began that header. She added to it, realizing that a shriek would bring Harry to the scene should it be loud enough for him to hear.

Leon, twisting away from Margo's lunging gun hand, caught her sidewise as she came along. Stopping her fall with one hand, he literally plucked the automatic from her loosened fingers with the other.

As luck had it, Leon was faced straight toward the door as Harry thrust it open. The clatter gave Leon time to aim before Harry had his gun half drawn. Sharp but cool, came Leon's order:

"Drop that gun, whoever you are! I have you covered and if you fire this direction you will hit the wrong person!"

A GLANCE told Harry that Margo, not Leon, would be his probable target. He recognized that the gun that pointed toward him was Margo's.

Fancying that Leon might have come here unarmed, Harry decided that the best plan was to parley. He let his own gun fall and raised his hands, almost with a shrug, as though he had simply happened by.

The bluff didn't work with Leon. He dropped Margo to the floor and wheeled away. From his new angle he had all three covered: Harry, just inside the door; Margo, sprawled and staring from the floor; Mona full length in the chair, wrapped in the tangle of her negligee.

Leon's laugh was anything but pleasant. It told that he had found the chance he wanted and intended to take it. He had a matter to settle with Mona and he was including Harry and Margo in the deal. Even The Shadow could not arrive in time to forestall Leon's plans.

Time was short for Leon Grath and he hoped to use it to full advantage. Anything was at his disposal, even murder. Despite The Shadow, this had become a murderer's chance!

CHAPTER XX. THE DEATH THRUST

COOLLY, Leon flipped Margo's gun from his right hand to his left, catching it so neatly that he still kept Harry covered. From his pocket he produced his own favorite weapon, a .38 revolver, thus ending Harry's belief that Leon might have come unarmed.

In fact, Harry was still quite puzzled as he backed away under the double gun gesture that Leon made in his direction.

Even yet, Harry hadn't identified this man as Leon. In terms of Noel, the situation had seemed reasonable, but it was getting bad. Outside the door Harry hadn't heard Leon declare himself, but the flip of a gun denoted that the fellow was something other than a law-abiding citizen. To prove it Leon added another touch.

Nearing the door, Leon tipped Harry's gun between his feet, gave it an upward lift as he stooped. Thrusting his own gun straight at Harry, Leon pocketed Margo's as he stooped; then, with a kick of his foot, he had Harry's gun instead.

TWINS OF CRIME

Blinking as he backed against a chair, Harry decided to sit down. He knew that he was looking at Leon, not Noel.

"And now," said Leon Grath as though summing much that had gone before, "I am going to have my say while everyone listens. I am glad that there are witnesses to hear."

He was speaking to Mona, though he was including everyone with the gestures of his guns. Harry and Margo decided to listen, too, since there was nothing else to do. In his corner, Harry was quite as helpless as Margo on the floor and Mona stretched in her chair. Besides, it was wise to listen. The longer that Leon talked the more chance for The Shadow to arrive.

Not to any of those listeners did it occur that what Leon had to say might produce an incredible change in their own situation. His first words did not reveal what was to be.

"I am wanted for murder," spoke Leon. "I suppose, Mona, that my brother Noel has emphasized that fact to you. He has also told you that I asked him to give me an alibi for the evening when Tex died, so as to establish Tex's alibi, in my behalf, covering the time of Carlo's death.

Slowly, Mona drew herself up into the chair. Facing Leon boldly, she nodded.

"What Noel did not tell you," continued Leon, "was that I asked him to help me, not on my account, but yours."

Mona stared.

"On my account?"

"Of course," returned Leon with a cryptic smile. "Noel does not know it, but such is the case. Noel didn't want you to mention that trip to the Skyview Roof, did he?"

Mona shook her head.

"Nor that he met you at Helene's," added Leon, "the night when Tex was murdered?"

Again Mona started her headshake. Then:

"Why did Noel tell you?" she queried. "He said that he and I were to keep those meetings secret."

"You are wrong," smiled Leon. "I said that we were to keep them secret."

Something was dawning upon Mona as she heard those words. Something that she could never have believed before this evening. However, not so long ago, she had mistaken Leon for his twin Noel, and that fact made the others possible.

Watching Mona, both Harry and Margo saw the changes that swept her face as her emotions ran the gamut from amazement to understanding.

"ALL these things were just beginning," spoke Leon, "the time you phoned Noel and he said he couldn't meet you. I advised him that he ought to see you, Mona, and when he didn't heed my advice, I met you instead. That was the night when someone murdered Carlo.

TWINS OF CRIME

"I framed my alibi with Tex." As he spoke, Leon was lowering both hands, as though the weight of the guns annoyed him. "It was worth a thousand dollars, Mona, just to keep you out of the whole case. I felt that, in return, I had a right to see you again. So I did, the night Tex was murdered."

Rascal though he was, Leon showed a touch of gallantry that impressed Mona. She remembered the times that Leon had mentioned, and she nodded.

"I told you to forget what happened," reminded Leon. "I even saw you again –"

"That day at lunch," interrupted Mona. "You repeated what you had said before, just to make sure."

Enlightenment was striking home to Margo, too. She flashed a look to Harry that told him Leon was stating the full truth. Harry wasn't quite willing to believe it until Leon came through with his full reason.

"I want you to remember what you forgot," said Leon to Mona. "Phone Noel and tell him about our meetings. Let him decide if your word is sufficient for him to drop his overgrown sense of honor and say that I was with him when Carlo and Tex were killed."

Mona reached for the telephone and began to dial Noel's number. As she did, she turned to Leon.

"If Noel won't clear you, I will," declared Mona. "You shouldn't have deceived me as you did, Leon. Nevertheless, the question of your innocence or guilt is more important than my pride."

Leon gave a bow. As he did, Harry and Margo heard odd words coming in Leon's smooth tone.

"Drop those guns," was the statement, "and put down the telephone! I am taking charge of this!"

The guns fell from Leon's hands and the telephone clattered from Mona's grasp. Leon, at least, knew when he hadn't spoken, and Mona happened to be staring toward the door.

Turning, Harry and Margo saw the man who was taking charge, the person who had spoken.

Noel Grath was standing in the doorway, swinging a leveled gun. He was the duplicate of his brother Leon; surprisingly so. Leon, by neat imitation, had posed as Noel several times, and it appeared that Noel was quite capable of reversing the situation.

For in the eyes of Noel and the evil leer upon his lips were displayed, in full, the murderous traits that had been wrongly associated with his twin, Leon. Criminal though he was, Leon could not match Noel for sheer satanic portrayal!

With a shove of his arm, Noel slammed the door behind him. Of all who faced him, only Leon had immediately grasped the full import of Noel's arrival. Yet even Leon was amazed and the fact pleased his twin.

"You gave me advice," sneered Noel, directing his words at Leon. "Much advice, Leon. Not just concerning Mona, but on other matters. You told me how easy it was to make crime pay and I believed you. I saw how I could build up crime from where you left off. You took ten thousand dollars from Carlo Sarratin. How easy it was for me to take many thousands more!"

For once in his life Leon showed an expression of righteous indignation. Staring straight at Noel, Leon exclaimed:

"You murdered Carlo!"

"I did!" returned Noel. He stepped forward, stooped, and picked up Leon's gun. "I could afford to do so. I had a scapegoat, Leon, and he happened to be you!"

Leon's fists tightened, only to relax as Noel gave a threatening gesture with one gun. Moving back, Noel was again using the door as his base.

"You bought an alibi from Tex!" laughed Noel. "How easy it was to kill that alibi, along with Tex, by watching near his gambling club to learn the private route he used when he returned!"

"So you killed Tex, too!"

"Certainly! He was more profitable than Carlo. Again, it was a crime that I could pin on you, Leon."

Noel paused. His eyes narrowed suddenly in a style that Leon would have envied but for the fact that he was facing death. Crouched by the door, Noel was turning slowly with both guns.

"I made only one mistake," spoke Noel. "I let you come here, Leon, thinking you would kill Mona. I started the police after you and they will be here soon. They will have to find you dead, along with Mona. As for these others, they must die, too –"

MURDEROUS were Noel's eyes. Straight was the aim he gave his guns. Wise was his choice of Leon and Harry as his first targets. Quick were the tugs he gave triggers as he loosed the first bullets that were necessary to his plan of fourfold murder that would cover his own guilt. No gun could have halted Noel's intention.

The thing that did was the door.

It came inward with a sweep. The knob thumped Noel's elbow, numbing one hand and sending the spurting gun from his fist. The door itself swept Noel forward, spoiling his aim with the gun that he still gripped.

Fiercely, Noel came about in a long sweep that was far too tardy. A strong hand took his gun wrist. Another laid an automatic straight between his eyes.

Noel Grath, twice a murderer, foiled in his effort at delivering multiple death, was in the grip of The Shadow!

The death thrust had failed!

A hard twist of The Shadow's gripping hand and Noel's gun fell to the floor. It happened to be Harry's gun, and its owner streaked across the floor to scoop it up. Harry grabbed Leon's revolver, along with Noel's, and pocketed both at The Shadow's order.

Leon accepted the situation with a satisfied shrug. His face even showed a gloat as he studied Noel's dilemma.

With a long shove, The Shadow pushed Noel to a chair. There were footsteps from the hallway, and The Shadow stepped aside to let Cardona enter. Behind Joe were two detectives; they halted in the doorway when Cardona held them back. Joe had seen The Shadow. Then, at the gesture of the black-cloaked victor, Cardona was staring at two men before him.

TWINS OF CRIME

One was wearing a tuxedo, the other a gray business suit. Cardona couldn't tell which was Leon and which was Noel. Then, feeling that a choice was necessary, Joe played smart.

He decided that the man with the tuxedo must be Noel, so he went over and planted his hand upon the shoulder of the man in gray, mistaking him for Leon.

The Shadow's laugh was filled with approval of Cardona's choice. But the ace inspector gaped at the words that followed.

"You have found the murderer," spoke The Shadow. "His name is Noel Grath!"

In a tone so strange and sinister that it seemed a voice from another world, The Shadow then stated the indictments which he, alone, could give. As they listened, Harry and Margo realized that The Shadow had built his theories and established them even before the meeting of the twins, here in Mona's apartment!

The fact that The Shadow had seen one Grath twin at the time of Carlo's death was not the starting point, for the framing of Crimp Gandley could have been Leon's work. The thrust that Sheff Halbert had made at the Skyview Roof was the first of The Shadow's inklings. It wasn't likely that Sheff would have mistaken Noel for Leon, the man who was Sheff's real quarry.

Listening, Leon realized that Sheff must have been on his trail before he reached Noel's, and had therefore followed him to his meeting with Mona. This explained the dying statement that Sheff had tried to give.

"Still, Sheff could have been mistaken," declared The Shadow. He turned to Mona. "When you lunched with Leon and discussed events of the evening when Tex died, it proved Noel's duplicity in the case."

"But how" – Mona paused, somewhat awed by the being in black – "how did you know that it was Leon who lunched with me?"

"Because Noel was elsewhere," returned The Shadow. "As I recall it" – The Shadow's burning eyes were toward Cardona – "Noel called upon you and the police commissioner, inspector. He arrived there ahead of Leon."

"And I came straight from the cafe!" put in Leon. "You couldn't have made it that quickly, Noel!"

Cardona was beginning to understand. As for Margo, she was far past the preliminary stages. She remembered calling Lamont at the commissioner's office right after Leon, posing as Noel, had parted from Mona. The Shadow was right. Noel could not have been two places almost simultaneously, unless one of those Noels had been Leon!

THE SHADOW did not explain that on this evening he had let Leon go through with his crime, knowing that it would fail. The Shadow's plan had been to trap Leon and thereby force the issue. Leon's lucky escape had forced postponement, all to be handled in due fashion. Then Noel had changed the picture in a way that suited The Shadow to perfection! Noel and his alibi, through Mona.

Noel was right when he thought that Leon would go to Mona's. But he didn't know that Leon was going there to demand a double alibi for himself. For Noel hadn't the least idea that Leon had played the part of his twin and met Mona on certain important occasions.

Nor had Leon even suspected that on those same occasions he had been impersonated by Noel. To even think that Noel had shed his integrity and gone in for crime was beyond Leon's imagination. And Noel, knowing

that such would be, had gone the limit with those crimes, committing murder for profit!

The twins were staring at each other when Cardona drew them together and slapped a pair of handcuffs on them, one cuff to the wrist of each...

When he turned to look at The Shadow, Cardona saw only the empty doorway. Others stared, too, for The Shadow, leaving at a timely moment, had seemingly disappeared before their eyes.

From beyond that doorway came a strange parting laugh that denoted conquest over crime.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. CRIME'S CONSEQUENCE

MANY were the pieces in the pattern, and perfectly did they fit, once crime was fully understood. With The Shadow's departure, Cardona questioned the prisoners and they talked on matters of murder. Noel admitted killing Carlo and Tex as stoutly as Leon denied those crimes.

They hadn't come to tonight's events when Cardona decided to take them along. He was informed that Commissioner Weston was on his way from the Cobalt Club and would soon arrive outside. So Cardona marched Noel and Leon downstairs with the detectives right behind him, and was waiting when Weston arrived.

Cardona hoped that Cranston would be along to watch Weston's face when the commissioner learned that Cardona had met The Shadow in person. But Cranston was absent, so Cardona alone had that pleasure.

Brusquely, Weston brushed off mention of The Shadow and listened to the recital of the twins. When he learned that Noel was the murderer, Weston stood amazed.

"That covers everything, commissioner," declared Cardona. "That is, everything up until tonight. It seems that they both switched back to their old habits, down at the Hotel Marmora. Leon here" – Joe gestured to the tuxedoed prisoner – "decided that he could pull a Noel act –"

"One moment, inspector." It was the man in gray who interrupted. "I may as well confess the whole truth."

Cardona turned to Noel, who faced him very calmly. Joe didn't notice the steady stare that came from Leon.

"I took the Community Fund," declared Noel. "I was out for all I could get and it seemed the easiest crime of all."

"But you were with Miss Brenton," reminded Cardona. "She said so."

"Mona was deceived before," explained Noel. "Leon happened to dupe her again."

Then, before Cardona could ask for further details, Noel gave Leon as ugly a glare as Joe had ever seen.

"I hate to vindicate Leon," snarled Noel, "but I prefer to have him suffer for crimes he actually perpetrated, not for any of mine. It was well enough as long as I had a chance to win. But now –"

"Right now you're licked!" broke in Leon. "And will I cackle while you fry, Noel! But you're wrong when you think that the law will have anything on me, ever. I've just been waiting to watch certain faces when they

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realize they haven't a charge on which they can hold me."

The faces belonged to Weston and Cardona. They exchanged glances that ended when Weston gave a nod. Cardona unlocked Leon's half of the handcuffs and waved along the street.

"On your way," snapped Cardona. "Unless you want to be picked up on a vagrancy charge!"

Leon gave a mock bow. He held out his hand to Cardona and gave an ugly glance at Noel. But Cardona had no time to accept Leon's grip even if he had so chosen. In the most abstract fashion Leon doubled his fist and placed it, full force, on the inspector's jaw.

As Cardona folded the two detectives sprang forward. Leon whirled away from them and took a punch at Weston, who received enough of it to stagger him. As for the detectives, they went down one by one under the blows of something harder than a fist.

Noel, swinging the loose handcuff, rapped it from one head to the other in double-quick style.

Only Weston's chauffeur blocked their path to freedom. He came from the official car, drawing a revolver. Noel slashed at it with the handcuff and the chauffeur dodged. From his pocket Leon whipped out Margo's forgotten gun and took aim.

At that moment Harry, coming from the apartment house with Margo, supplied a timely shot that missed Leon by inches.

The twins didn't wait to battle. Noel dived for the wheel of the official car, and Leon followed, shooting back at Harry. There were no hits during that flurry of gunfire. Leon was too anxious to join Noel in the car, while Harry was busy blocking off others from harm.

First, Harry shoved Margo back into the apartment house, and she was wise enough to scramble quickly from danger. Then Mona was the problem. For some reason she had dashed downstairs and was arriving at this critical time.

Not realizing the danger, Mona would have sprung through the doorway despite Harry's efforts if Margo hadn't caught the other girl and hauled her back. Then Harry was free to empty his gun after the departing car, but it was around the corner to the accompaniment of Leon's last wild shots.

IN the car, Noel turned from the chauffeur's seat and favored his twin with a diabolical grin.

In the style of a chauffeur, he inquired:

"Where to, commissioner?"

"Home, my man," returned Leon.

"But you have no home, sir," spoke Noel. "Have you forgotten?"

"Your home will do," chuckled Leon. "We have business there, I believe. Financial business!"

For the first time in years the antagonism between the twins had ended. They found themselves on the same level – that of crime. Having failed perpetually to lift his wayward brother to a higher plane, Noel had finally weakened and dropped down to Leon's status, though he did not regard the experience as a fall.

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Having tasted the fruits of crime, Noel relished them and actually gloried in his new career, much to the delight and admiration of Leon. As they sped along, Noel found a siren on the dashboard of the commissioner's car. Since the dangling handcuff handicapped him, he gestured for Leon to use the siren.

Leon did so and they cleared a path like magic. Between the blares that he pumped from the siren, Leon voiced his new esteem of Noel.

"Grand stuff, Noel!" said Leon. "You had the makings all the time. You went further with the crook biz than I ever dared."

"The credit is yours," reminded Noel. "I was using you, though you didn't know it. I'm glad you don't mind, now that you know. Everything is legitimate in crime, I understand."

"Quite! Teamed together, we can go places. Why, that stunt you staged to start this getaway was an inspiration!"

Noel gave a slight bow to his brother. Then:

"You took the cue, Leon," said Noel. "You had to play a part as much as I did. I knew I could depend on you, once you were loose."

"Your confession was perfect," laughed Leon. "A double hit! We're both completely clear!"

"Not quite." Noel raised a hand and rattled the dangling cuff. "I'm handicapped by this. It will be difficult, having it sawed free. How can I go about it, Leon?"

The anxiety in Noel's tone brought a smile from Leon. Examining the handcuff, Leon identified its make and named it. He then told Noel how easy it would be.

"A standard pattern," stated Leon. "All keys to those cuffs are the same. All you have to do is walk into any hockshop with a gun in your other hand and tell the fellow at the counter to unlock you with the right type of key. Funny how panicky some people get over handcuffs. They don't mean a thing when you're used to them."

Noel's smile turned whimsical.

"I have much to learn, Leon," he declared. "I appreciate this first lesson in the technique of crime."

"Don't mention it," returned Leon. "We're partners from now on. Think of how we'll fox the police all over the world staging this double act of ours. We can alibi for each other in places where they will think there is only one of us! With that cash of yours to back us we can travel anywhere!"

There was a sudden gleam in Noel's eye. Its flash ended as he stopped the car and looked along the street. They had arrived at Noel's house. Climbing from his door, Noel gestured for Leon to do the same on the other side.

Together they hurried into the house and upstairs. Just before they reached the study Noel said to Leon:

"I'll bundle the money. You pack the chessmen. We'll need them with us wherever we go."

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"Couldn't do without them," nodded Leon. "Our brains work better over the chessboard. If we disagree on any plan for crime we can settle it according to which wins a chess game."

"Very true." Inside the doorway, Noel gestured Leon toward the chess table. "So hurry and don't waste time tackling any chess problems."

Leon joined Noel's laugh. As they turned away from each other, Leon failed to see the smile that Noel added. Reaching his desk, Noel whipped the drawers open, looking back over his shoulder to see Leon busy packing the chessmen. Noel's next darted look was across his shoulder toward the door.

He thrust one hand into an empty drawer then began to paw with both. His other hand brought along the handcuff and it began to clank inside the drawer.

A panic had gripped Noel Grath. The cash, amounting to nearly a quarter million – the profits of his two crimes and Leon's one had disappeared from within the desk!

Close to Noel's ear came a whispered laugh, heard by Noel alone. He swung about, and at his very elbow he saw The Shadow. In one hand the cloaked avenger held an automatic; in his other, stacked half under his arm, were the bundles of cash that represented the real fruits of crime!

THE SHADOW had come here first. Whether or not he had expected the Grath twins to arrive later he was certainly prepared for them.

But Noel, for one, wasn't going to yield so easily. Already wanted for murder, he could risk bullets from The Shadow's automatic in preference to the electric chair.

Savagely, Noel twisted and started his hands toward The Shadow. He wanted to grab The Shadow's gun with one fist and clamp the other to the black-cloaked fighter's unprotected throat.

One arm burdened with money, The Shadow couldn't very well ward off Noel's thrust. At least, not with his hand. He used his knee instead. With that knee The Shadow drove the desk drawer shut and held it clamped tight. He did it as Noel's hands were coming out, but the dangling end of the handcuff hadn't time to follow.

The top edge of the drawer stopped the chain between the cuffs. His arms crossed, Noel couldn't get his free hand at The Shadow.

Still pressing the desk drawer, The Shadow turned to consider the Leon proposition. A few moments ago it had been quite static, Leon's hands being filled with chessmen. But the sudden clatter at the desk had roused Leon to rapid action.

Through the air a heavy missile was scaling straight for The Shadow's head. Leon had flung the chessboard with one hand and was yanking out Margo's revolver with the other!

Forced to dodge the chessboard, The Shadow wheeled from the desk. Remembering The Shadow's quick work with his knee, Noel showed what a foot could do. He shoved one forward and tripped The Shadow, who rolled across the floor, still clutching his gun and the money.

Noel pulled the handcuff clear of the desk drawer and turned to dive down upon The Shadow.

Meanwhile, Leon was swinging to aim at the rolling figure in black. He still had two shots in the gun and he meant them for The Shadow.

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If ever the cloaked fighter had been powerless between two murderers, this seemed to be the moment. He was half lying on his gun, requiring moments to roll clear of it. So futile was the effort that The Shadow made that it seemed quite ridiculous.

Seeing Noel charging for him, The Shadow flung a missile – the bundle of money. All three stacks were tied in a single lump, but the whole made a very puny missile, compared to the wooden chessboard. Contemptuously, Noel didn't even dodge the wad of money that came his way.

For a split second The Shadow's fate depended solely on quick-witted action. It wasn't a case of his own wits responding. He was counting on Noel's!

And Noel came through. With the bundle almost at his head, he grabbed it from air, tucked it under his arm and made for the door. The Shadow was giving Noel the chance he wanted – that of making away with the cash and leaving Leon to the law!

Again wits were needed to save The Shadow's life. This time the wits were Leon's, and they ran true to form. Leon caught a glimpse of Noel and recognized the truth. It bore home harder than The Shadow realized, for Leon remembered Noel's worry about the handcuffs, and how he – Leon – had so obligingly revealed how easily they could be eliminated as a problem.

Two bullets in Leon's gun. He used the first one to reclaim a fortune of which he had demanded a half, and now felt that he was entitled to all. He aimed that first shot after Noel, reserving the second bullet for The Shadow.

Leon's first shot scored a perfect hit. It took Noel right in the left side of the back. As Noel sprawled, with the money bouncing ahead of him, Leon stared long enough to make sure his double-crossing twin wasn't simply faking a fall.

That wait was too long. As Leon turned to aim at The Shadow, he found he had to fire hastily.

The bark of Leon's gun was drowned out by the bigger roar of the automatic that The Shadow was pointing up from the floor. The cloaked marksman had completed his roll and was taking perfect aim.

Leon jolted high as a big slug jounced him. His own shot, fired in a hurry, whistled wide of The Shadow by a dozen inches.

As Leon collapsed The Shadow arose and cloaked his smoking automatic. He heard the wails of approaching sirens and knew why the police were coming.

Immediately upon reaching Noel's house and finding the money, The Shadow had called Mona and told her to send Inspector Cardona here. Such was the message that Mona had been bringing at the time the twins fled together.

Downstairs, The Shadow stepped into darkness beneath the stairway as Weston and Cardona dashed into the house. Upstairs, they nearly stumbled over Noel, and Cardona paused long enough to learn that the man was dead. Then, while Weston was grabbing up the money, Cardona moved into the study. There, Leon rose to greet him, lifting a gun.

Cardona didn't know that the second twin was badly wounded, nor that the gun was empty. Joe beat Leon to a shot that the snarling man never could have made.

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From below, The Shadow heard the gun burst and went out into the night. Grim was the laugh that stirred the darkness and carried to the room where Weston had joined Cardona to stare at Leon's body, which lay as lifeless as Noel's. Hearing The Shadow's mirthless tone, both listeners knew it for a knell.

The Shadow had conquered twins of crime. Noel and Leon Grath, once so opposite in their notions, had finally thought alike in life. Alike they would remain in death. With all their efforts at a mutual double cross, the bargain between the twins was closed.

Closed and sealed, by the hand of The Shadow!

THE END