

DEATH IN THE CRYSTAL

Maxwell Grant

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DEATH IN THE CRYSTAL

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CHAPTER I

MAHATMA XANADU stepped from the purple curtains, bowed to his small but fashionable audience, polished his crystal ball, and went right to work.

He was a singular personage, this bearded gentleman who claimed that he had brought the deepest wisdom from Tibet, to retail it via the crystal ball. But perhaps the most singular thing about Mahatma Xanadu was his ability to sell that same idea to swank New Yorkers at ten dollars a customer.

Since there were about two dozen clients in his fancy seance parlor, the Mahatma was doing all right – or would be until the police slapped down with a fortune telling charge, which was something always imminent. That was why the gentleman from Tibet conducted his affairs with the same charm and finesse that characterized a gambling joint.

The barred door had a peep-hole, through which visitors could be eyed, and the man in charge was Akbar, a huge Turk, who stood with folded arms and tilted fez. When not engaged in admitting visitors, it was Akbar's duty to stare at Mahatma Xanadu as though believing that his Tibetan master had stopped in Egypt to pick up the riddle of the Sphinx as a mere by-product to augment his Himalayan wisdom.

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Odd, the way intelligent people fell for this stuff.

Such was the opinion of Margo Lane on this, her first trip to the garish preserves of Mahatma Xanadu. Maybe the mystic could be excused for having his headquarters over an East Side tailor shop, because even a genuine vision in a crystal ball couldn't answer the present housing shortage in Manhattan. But to Margo, everything about the Mahatma spelled fake.

His fancy turban and rhinestone studded tunic looked like fugitives from a costume shop that had raced here under the leg power of the baggy pantaloons that didn't match them. The gleaming smile from the bearded mouth, like the roll of the Mahatma's eyes, reminded Margo of a side-show performer finishing a ballyhoo.

When Xanadu gestured to the crystal ball and finished with a hitch of his droopy purple sash, Margo almost broke the tension with a laugh. Then, like the customers who formed the sucker trade, she finished with a gasp.

The Mahatma had just picked up a folded slip that a wan-faced gentleman had written. With a toss, Xanadu flipped the wadded paper into a bowl that was filled with water, but which lacked gold-fish. There was a sudden puff of flame and the slip was gone, leaving the spectators dazzled.

When Xanadu was resting one hand on the gentleman's shoulder, holding the crystal ball before him with the other, asking the customer to concentrate upon the words that he had written on the vanished slip. In purring tones, the Tibetan marvel was revealing the very question, while the stupefied client nodded.

"You are awaiting word from someone," pronounced the Mahatma. "Someone whose initials we can both visualize in the crystal. The initials K. J. are very clear –"

"Very clear," the customer interrupted. "Yes, just as clear as when I wrote them."

"And the letter K," purred Xanadu, "signifies the name Kathleen. Ah, the crystal clears and I see the other name. J for Jenkinson, which is your name, sir!"

"That's right. Kathleen was –"

"Is your niece," corrected Xanadu. "Not 'was' because they do not recognize the past in the spirit plane where Kathleen now dwells. See! Her face is appearing in the crystal!"

Mr. Jenkinson blinked and nodded wonderingly. As he turned his face toward Xanadu, the latter bowed and stepped away. The crystal ball was no longer handy when Jenkinson took another look for the image of his departed niece. Having delivered an honest ten dollars worth, Xanadu was attending to another customer.

Another flame puffed as a folded slip was tossed to mysterious oblivion. This time a Peke-faced dowager was favored with information regarding her lamented dog Chan Chu who was drifting happily through interstellar spaces somewhere in the vicinity of Procyon, according to Xanadu, who evidently had a dash of humor. Margo tried to smile this off with the supposition that the dowager was merely getting a peek of her own reflection from the crystal, but that wasn't a satisfactory answer.

Not considering the way that Mahatma Xanadu was piling up the evidence in favor of his occult powers. In turn, the remaining customers were seeing their folded questions puff into flame, followed by accurate readings from the crystal. They were viewing things in that mysterious ball and the subjects were becoming important.

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Advice on stocks, matters concerning contracts, which relatives to trust – all these and more were piping through from spirit land under the helpful influence of the Mahatma. One shocker came when an elderly lady began quoting passages from her will, while Xanadu, keeping his own eyes on the crystal sphere, nodded or shook his head as the spirits recommended the retention or elimination of certain clauses.

Despite herself, Margo was very nearly sold when Mahatma Xanadu came her way. However, Margo was determined first to gauge his results with Sheila Waltham, the skittish blonde who had suggested attending this soiree. Margo had maneuvered a glimpse at Sheila's slip and knew its question, which read:

"What do I value most?"

Sheila's eyes followed the slip as Xanadu tossed it to a blazing fate in the bowl of water that he wheeled on its ornamental metal stand. Taking Sheila's elbow, he drew her gently forward so that she could stare into the crystal ball; then, in a tone that was becoming musical the more one listened, Xanadu declared:

"You are thinking in terms of value, Miss Waltham. You want the spirit guides to decide that which you find uncertain."

Eagerly, Sheila nodded, while Margo raised a puzzled, wondering frown. This business was getting too far beyond her.

"The answer is in the crystal," assured Xanadu. "If you do not see what you believe you should, close your eyes before you stare again. The spirits may question your sincerity – but only at first."

Sheila squinted at the crystal, then shut her eyes with determination. Her eyes came open as she shook her head, but they went shut again. As she repeated the process, Sheila winced and at last she began to sob.

"Only – only jewels," the blonde blurted. "Every color – like my own – as I see them every night. But they aren't what I value most" – she looked up with dimmed eyes at Xanadu – "or are they?"

"The spirits never lie," reminded the Mahatma. "Through the crystal they always tell. Look again."

Sheila looked and the image of those jewels must have glistened through her tears for she buried her face in her arm. Xanadu turned away, shrugging as he hitched his fancy sash; pausing, he patted Sheila soothingly on the shoulder.

"Perhaps some day you may value something more," declared Xanadu. "When you do, the crystal will reveal it. When you are really certain in your mind, you will know – and see."

With that, Mahatma Xanadu turned to Margo Lane. He must have read challenge in her gaze and marked her as the firm brunette type in contrast to Sheila, the sobbing blonde. For as Xanadu plucked up the slip that Margo had folded and placed on the little table beside her, Xanadu delivered what was certainly a hypnotic stare.

Black eyes glistened with an almost frightening power. Then, as Margo stiffened, the sharp gaze ended, and she was attracted by the wave of Xanadu's hand as he lopped the folded paper into the fishless bowl. Margo strained to see what happened and went back in her chair as the paper disappeared in another of those amazing flame puffs.

Then, his hand on Margo's elbow, Xanadu was politely directing Margo's gaze into the crystal as he spoke convincingly:

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"You are thinking of a person – someone very close to you – a person whose name and face are often in your mind –"

"I wrote the name," interrupted Margo. "I want to see the face."

Something was forming in the depths of the crystal but it remained only a blur. Noting Margo's intensity, the eager tremble of her hands, Xanadu let her hold the crystal, but still the image did not form. All that Margo could make out was blackness, yet that in a sense amazed her.

"You recognize the face?" queried Xanadu.

"No." Margo was grim but truthful. "I see a shape, but no features."

"You are asking too much perhaps. The spirits can not always develop –"

"This person is not in spirit land," interposed Margo, triumphantly, thinking she had trapped Xanadu. "He is still very much alive."

"You mean of this plane," corrected Xanadu, suavely. "When you interrupted, I was about to say that the spirits can not always develop the faces of mortals, particularly those who happen to be skeptics."

Margo bit her lip, wishing she hadn't tried to catch the Mahatma so quickly. Then, bluntly, she stated:

"But I don't see this face at all."

"You see something, though," reminded Xanadu, "and you must admit that it is significant."

Despite herself, Margo started a nod; then halted, with the guess that it was more significant than Xanadu actually realized. He wasn't going to catch her off guard again.

"The crystal is clearing," declared Margo, a bit sarcastic as she repeated the Mahatma's own pet phrase. "I haven't seen the face at all."

"Then I shall ask the spirits to reveal the name," asserted Xanadu, blandly. Taking the crystal from Margo he planted it in the hand that he removed from her elbow. "Gaze!"

Margo focused her eyes upon the crystal and gave a truly genuine gasp. In the depths of the sphere a name appeared as if inscribed by a spirit hand, its letters huge and bold. It was the very name that she had written and involuntarily Margo exclaimed it:

"Lamont!"

With a salaam, Mahatma Xanadu polished the all-revealing crystal and placed it upon a stand to announce the conclusion of a highly successful seance. Big Akbar unbolted the door and opened it so the customers could leave, which they did silently, with Margo the most subdued of the entire party.

From the threshold, Mahatma Xanadu, the man who knew all, watched his departing clients with a gleaming smile. But there was something in the flash of his dark eyes that Akbar understood. The Turk expressed it as soon as the door was closed.

"I shall pack at once, master."

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The turbaned head answered with an approving nod which could have meant that all was not well with the man who knew all.

Or perhaps all was too well. The future alone would tell, whether or not Mahatma Xanadu could or would disclose it!

CHAPTER II

BREAKING into conferences at the Cobalt Club wasn't one of Margo's regular habits. It was a fairly simple process though, after getting through the portals of the club itself, which Margo accomplished by default. This happened to be an evening when the Cobalt Club was receiving visitors and the clerk was checking the names of several when Margo barged past.

The brunette's entry created quite a stir. Sedate, conservative and exclusive, the Cobalt Club was distinctly a gentlemen's habitat. One hundred and fifteen pounds of femininity crashing the gate was as startling as a ton of dynamite bashing through the roof. Before the astonished hired help could rise to the occasion, Margo sensed their dilemma and applied it to herself. Sighting the sign marked grillroom, Margo hurried down the stairs to which it pointed, hoping she'd find Lamont Cranston below.

Margo did.

In conference with half a dozen industrial giants, Cranston was the first to recognize the familiar clatter of high heels. Rising from the table he flagged Margo as she came flying through, wheeled her breathless to a chair and politely introduced her to his friends with a series of gestures that ended in a sweep of dismissal to the club attendants who appeared at the bottom of the stairs.

Margo's smile of relief was reflected by Justin Cadbury, who sat on the other side of the table.

This wasn't the first time that Margo had met Cadbury, who was the most imposing and in a sense the most important member of the group. So Margo looked at Cadbury as though inquiring what the conference was all about.

Justin Cadbury arose to the occasion. From his broad, bland face, he fixed his gray eyes on Margo and spoke in a tone that was crisp but genial.

"We are seeking advice, Miss Lane," he said. "We are looking for ways and means to increase legitimate business at the expense of the black market. Rather a reversal of the usual procedure, but a noteworthy cause. Perhaps your opinions would be helpful."

Behind Cadbury's dry manner, Margo could sense a probe as though he were actually questioning the reason for her precipitate arrival. So Margo met the issue promptly.

"What about fortune tellers?" she queried. "Is their business bothered by a black market, too?"

Cadbury's chuckle was echoed by the men about him.

"All fortune telling is a racket," said Cadbury. "You wouldn't be referring specifically to crystal gazing?"

"I would," replied Margo, "and more specifically to a bearded gentleman who calls himself Mahatma Xanadu."

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That statement brought an outburst from the group.

"You mean the man from Tibet!"

"The chap who claims he can predict the stock market –"

"– And names sure winners at the race track –"

"An outright fake if ever there was one!"

It was Cadbury who waved for silence. His face had suddenly become serious and again he was reflecting Margo's expression, for many of her doubts had been dispelled by that strange seance with Mahatma Xanadu.

"Faker or not," declared Cadbury in crisp tone, "this so called Mahatma is becoming a very important influence in wealthy circles. I might say a dangerous influence."

"Dangerous?" It was Cranston who put the question in a casual manner. "How?"

"He has evidently impressed Miss Lane," replied Cadbury, with a gesture toward Margo. "Is she merely the exception – or the rule?"

"I'm afraid I'm the rule," admitted Margo. "The Mahatma gave some remarkable answers this evening. Why, he told Sheila Waltham that she –"

"Never mind Sheila," interposed Cranston. "Did the Mahatma make any actual predictions?"

Margo's eyes flashed sudden inquiry. She wasn't usually jealous where Lamont was concerned, but his sudden switching of the subject from Sheila might have a purpose. After all, it had been through Cranston that Margo had met Sheila and perhaps his suggestion that they attend the seance together had been with the purpose of playing one against the other.

It was Margo's mistrust of blondes that gave her that idea, rather than any lack of confidence in Lamont. This was no time to debate that subject, however, so Margo simply said: "I don't remember any actual predictions –"

"Then I'll make one," inserted Cranston. "Unless I usher you out of here, the whole Cobalt Club will be in a furor. Come" – rising he took Margo's arm – "and let me conduct you to the ladies' reception parlor."

On the way upstairs, Cranston was rapid with his questions regarding Xanadu's seance. By the time they had reached the secluded parlor, his calm, masklike face was tracing a slight smile at Margo's description of the Mahatma's act.

"So he fooled you with the old billet switch," said Cranston. "Here. Sit down and write something on this paper from my notebook. Fold it the way you did with the paper the Mahatma gave you."

Margo obliged and Cranston picked up the slip from the table where she laid it. Transferring the paper from one hand to the other, he gave a tossing gesture.

"Was that the way the Mahatma did it?"

"Yes," nodded Margo, "but the paper burst into flame when it landed in the fish-bowl."

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"Because he had a bit of potassium in it," explained Cranston. "The stuff forms hydrogen when water reaches it; so rapidly that the hydrogen ignites."

"But how did Xanadu put the potassium in the slips?"

"He didn't. He simply switched the slips he picked up for others that were already prepared. Just like I did."

With his left hand, Cranston was unfolding the visible slip and Margo saw to her surprise that it was blank. At the same time, she felt a nudge at her elbow and looking there, Margo saw Cranston exhibiting, the slip that she had just written.

"That's how Xanadu read it," stated Cranston. "At your elbow while you were staring at the crystal ball. So you've written 'Lamont'. Very nice of you, but was that what you wrote on the slip Xanadu gave you?"

Margo nodded. Then:

"People saw faces in the crystal ball –"

"They thought they did," corrected Cranston. "The potassium flare dazzled their eyes and gave them an afterimage. It doesn't take much exaggeration to form those blurry shapes into imaginary images."

"That's what I tried to do!" exclaimed Margo. "Only the blur stayed and I – well, I thought it represented you, but in another self."

Cranston smiled at this description of himself as a big black wavering spot in the depths of a crystal ball. Nevertheless, the analogy was accurate, for Cranston in his other self was a cloaked personage known as The Shadow who, to many observers, appeared as a vague patch of living blackness.

"The image faded," recalled Margo, "but then I saw your name, Lamont, right in the center of the crystal."

"After Xanadu took it?"

"Yes. But what had that to do with it?"

"A lot." Cranston made a gesture as though planting something on the palm that held the written paper. "Xanadu laid the ball right on your own slip Margo. The name you saw was the one you wrote yourself, only it was so magnified by the crystal that you didn't recognize it."

So it was as simple as all that! Piqued at her own stupidity, Margo tried to think of someone dumber than herself and suddenly remembered Sheila.

"I think Sheila was looking for a face," declared Margo, "and it might have been yours, Lamont. She tried to be smart by saying that she wanted to see what she valued most, but that was just to bluff me."

"And whose face did she see?"

"Nobody's. She caught the blur effect all right, until Xanadu suggested that she close her eyes –"

"And then?"

"She saw jewels." Margo's tone was a bit puzzled. "I can't understand why."

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"Because a flash of light makes you see colors," explained Cranston, "provided that you keep your eyes at least half way shut. Just another of Xanadu's gags."

"But Sheila said they were her own jewels," spoke Margo, reflectively. "The ones she looks at every night. She was still talking about them when I left her at the Cafe Marimba."

"You mean Sheila keeps those gems of hers in that penthouse where she lives?"

"I suppose so –"

Margo went no further. Cranston was ushering her out through the side door of the Cobalt Club, undertoning as they went:

"Get over to the Cafe Marimba and stick close to Sheila. Maybe you'll need an alibi before tonight is over. After all, Sheila talked to you about the gems."

A taxicab was handy and Cranston put Margo right in it. As the cab started, Margo looked back, only to see that Lamont was gone. He couldn't have returned into the club nor could he have become The Shadow so suddenly, but he must certainly have started on his way somewhere.

That final factor meant that Lamont Cranston would at least change his identity before he reached his destination, wherever it might be. Margo was wondering whether he'd need an alibi too, before the evening ended.

Margo wouldn't have wondered, if she had seen Justin Cadbury at that moment.

Cadbury, too, had left the grillroom conference. He was in a phone booth in the lobby of the Cobalt Club, gazing blandly through the glass as he spoke from the other side of his broad mouth.

"All set Fitz?" Cadbury was inquiring. "Good... Now get working in a hurry... Just one point, Fitz. Whose card are you leaving with the flowers?"

There was a reply which didn't suit Cadbury.

"Better change it," he said crisply. "Go through that batch I gave you... You have the cards with you? Excellent... You'll find one there with the name Lamont Cranston... Yes, use it."

With a dry chuckle, Justin Cadbury hung up the receiver, satisfied that he had added a neat touch to an imminent crime problem.

CHAPTER III

THE slim man in the smooth-fitting tuxedo glanced around the foyer of the Allingham Apartments and saw to his pleasure that Fred was absent. Fred was termed the elevator man, but his title didn't exactly fit, for a reason soon to be explained.

Since Fred was absent, as expected, Fitz Crosset tucked a cellophaned bouquet of flowers under his arm, and proceeded to light a cigarette which occupied the end of a long holder. The signal brought two men in from the street and Fitz opened the elevator door to gesture them inside.

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Fitz Crosset, smooth, roundish of face and with a well-combed flock of light, wavy hair, looked the part of a visitor to the exclusive Allingham Apartments. His companions, however, didn't fit, which applied to their tuxedos. The big man looked like a professional bouncer, which he was; while the stocky, hunch-shouldered chap couldn't hide the restless manner of an orchestra drummer who took life as a perpetual off-beat.

It was the big man who spoke first, his tone low and suspicious, like the glower on his thick, dark face. He was watching Fitz press the top button in the elevator.

"How come this elevator runs itself?"

"Because it's automatic," replied Fitz. "You've been around the better places, Griff. You ought to know there are such things."

"Yeah, but if it's that kind, why does this joint have an elevator man?"

"You mean Fred?" Fitz laughed indulgently. "That's just his honorary title. He takes up visitors to announce them and he assists the home folks when they're too drunk to push the right buttons. Besides, he answers calls downstairs."

"You mean on that funny board inside the door?"

"That's right. The people here have their own private telephones, but there's a house system which keeps Fred on call, except when he slides across the street for a quickie at the neighborhood bar and grill."

The hunched man put an abrupt query:

"Who's taking care of Fred?"

"A couple of friends he never met before," replied Fitz, "and never will again. They're taking turns buying each other drinks and they're including Fred in every round. He won't be back until we're through, but the faster we work the better. This is for you, Teach."

Abruptly, Fitz handed the hunched man a bandanna mask. Teach gave a dirty look at the thing and inquired:

"What's this for?"

"To put on," stated Fitz. "Here's another for you, Griff."

The elevator was stopping at the penthouse level. Instead of putting on the mask, Teach gripped Fitz's arm.

"I thought the job was fixed."

"So it is," affirmed Fitz. "But we've got to make it easy for the dame."

"What dame?" demanded Griff.

"The maid who works here," explained Fitz. "She will have to tell a sensible story to Miss Waltham, who owns the gems. So we're going to make it look sensible."

To set the example, Fitz produced a third bandanna and put it on. Teach and Griff silently did the same and copied Fitz's action of drawing revolvers. Opening the elevator door, Fitz strode out with his companions

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behind him. As they entered the penthouse they were greeted by a foreign-looking maid who lost her French accent when she saw the guns.

"Don't kill me!" gasped the maid. "I won't tell! You know I won't tell!"

"You'll tell a lot," said Fitz, through his mask. "That combination for one thing. It's part of the bargain."

Momentarily the maid looked relieved. Fitz eased her further by gesturing for his companions to lower their guns.

"I'll open the wall safe for you," the maid began. Then, her eyes worried, she added: "But how do I know you won't kill me afterward?"

"Because of these," Fitz gestured to the very masks which caused the maid's uncertainty. "Don't you get it? Why should we croak you if you don't know who we are?"

Enlightenment wiped away the maid's scared look. She could tell that Fitz's voice was forced, another point that would make it difficult for her to describe him. As for Griff and Teach, they were a pair of nondescripts who could only be classed as average thugs. Griff was hunching forward to reduce his height to Teach's, which made it all the better.

The maid recovered her accent.

"Ah, certainly, m'sieu!" she said to Fitz. "You force me to geeve over the jewels of Mademoiselle Waltham? Ah, m'sieu, with guns to threaten me, what else could I do? Non?"

"You can cut the chatter for one thing," snapped Fitz. "We want this to look real, on your account more than ours. First thing, ring for that guy downstairs."

"But if he should come up here —"

"He won't, because he isn't down there. But the arrow will register on the call board. That's part of your story."

The maid suddenly understood. Turning to the wall, she pressed a button; then shuddered as she felt Fitz's gun pressing her neck.

"This happened next," reminded Fitz. "Remember?"

The maid nodded.

"You were just going out when we popped from the elevator," continued Fitz. "Better put on your coat as part of the story."

Trembling, the maid went to a hallway closet and produced a second-hand mink. From her shivers, she seemed to need it. Prodding his gun through the fur, Fitz marched the girl ahead of him into a living room furnished in rococo style. Pausing at a table, he dropped the cellophane-wrapped bouquet.

"You remember me bringing these," stated Fitz, gruffly. "Later I'm going to forget them in my hurry. Get it?"

The maid nodded.

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"Now the wall safe," ordered Fitz. "I don't know where it is, but you'll say I did."

The maid went through the living room into a modernistic boudoir, where she stopped at a wall which bore a curious futuristic painting, set in a chromium frame. Her hands shook as she pressed the picture at the lower corners.

"Take it easy," ordered Fitz. "We'll cover everything –"

There was a sharp interruption from Teach, much like a low whistle, which sounded plainly despite his mask. Fitz turned to see Teach gesturing to a large square package on the dressing table opposite the picture.

Teach gestured to the maid.

"Ask her what's in it."

Fitz didn't have to relay the question. The maid was already shaking her head.

"It came for Miss Waltham this afternoon," said the maid. "She never lets me open packages."

"We didn't send it," spoke Fitz, "so leave it alone."

This was meant for Teach, but his curiosity wasn't satisfied. As soon as Fitz concentrated on the picture and watched the maid find the hidden spring that swung it open like a little door, Teach began to examine the package. Finding a spot where the paper wrapping overlapped, Fitz prodded a gap with his finger and tried to look into the package. Seeing nothing he tilted the package up into the light and left it propped that way, upon an inverted hair-brush.

Meanwhile, the maid was pointing to a wall-safe set in a recess behind the opened picture. Before Fitz could turn and call Teach, the hunched man shambled over, moved a floor lamp and turned its glare full on the wall safe.

"Get busy," Fitz told the maid. "You know the combination. Working it is part of the deal."

Griff was crowding in to watch operations, so Teach went back to look at the intriguing package. As he gave it another poke through the paper gap, something clicked, so Teach stepped back as though he had been bitten. From beside the dressing table he watched operations at the wall safe.

In the bright glare, the maid was working the combination with a hand that rapidly steadied. At last the safe came open and Griff thrust his big hands inside to bring out the jewel cases. His gun already pocketed, Fitz simply gestured the maid to a chair in the corner, where he proceeded to bind her with some sport belts that were hanging in a corner closet.

Over the maid's shoulder. Fitz spoke to Griff without mentioning the big man's name.

"Stow the stuff," ordered Fitz, "and then smear any finger prints."

Griff's pockets received the jewel cases. To dispose of finger prints, he took off his bandanna mask and used it as a wiping cloth, keeping his back toward the maid. A snarl from Fitz told Griff that he had inadvertently turned his face into the light, so the big man was more careful after that. His head turned away, Griff swung the picture frame shut and it locked automatically. At the same moment, Teach picked up the package from the boudoir table and another click came from it, only to be drowned by the louder sound of the latching

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picture frame.

Nonchalantly, Teach came over to the lamp and turned it off. Griff was wiping the picture frame while Fitz finished binding the maid. Circling through the dark, Teach gave a low whistle that guided his companions to the door. It wasn't until they reached the elevator that Fitz noticed that Teach was bringing the package from the boudoir table.

"What's the idea, Teach?"

"More jewels, maybe," replied Teach laconically. "It's worth a look—see later."

Before Fitz could reply, Griff gruffed a sudden warning as he heard a rumble from the elevator shaft. Fitz delivered a smooth chuckle.

"All the better," he said. "We're going down by the fire—tower, anyway. Come on."

As Fitz whipped off his bandanna, and used it glove fashion to turn the knob of the fire—tower door, Teach heard a muffled click from deep in the darkness. Apparently it came from the boudoir, which was why Teach lifted his own mask and gave a puzzled stare at the box which he carried.

It couldn't have been the same sort of click that Teach had heard before. Maybe the maid had knocked over something, while starting a struggle in her chair, just to help the phony act. Probably she'd heard the elevator's rumble, for it was coming closer; too close, in fact for Teach to worry about anything else.

With a quick sidle, the hunched man followed Fitz and Griff through the fire—tower door, which thumped shut behind them.

Men of crime were on their way, leaving a well—faked trail behind them!

CHAPTER IV

THE sound from the inner room came from one of the large curtained windows. It horrified the bound maid when she heard it, but she couldn't scream because Fitz had gagged her after tightening the bonds.

There was a real reason for the maid's horror.

Those windows opened above a sheer wall and the maid knew it. For a human being to scale that wall seemed utterly impossible, and the fact awoke the maid's mind to thoughts far more frightening than those of complicity in crime just done.

The parting of the curtains added to the maid's terror. Her ideas of vampires or other night—flying creatures were crystallized by the figure which appeared. Against the dim outdoor glow it took on the shape of a gigantic bat, a man—sized menace which could only have arrived from upper air.

Such was The Shadow when he came post—haste to a spot where crime was due. Playing a hunch that Sheila's mention of jewels might link with the plans of Mahatma Xanadu, The Shadow had headed here to forestall crime. Unfortunately he hadn't traveled faster than Cadbury's phone call to Fitz which the latter had received at some appointed place in this vicinity.

Expecting to be ahead of crime instead of after it, The Shadow misinterpreted the quiet scene. He was too far from the elevator to hear its rising rumble, so he decided to investigate the apartment from this starting point.

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A flashlight glimmered in a gloved hand; its beam, sweeping the room, reached the futuristic picture on the wall.

With all the features of a Dali nightmare, that picture looked out of place in this otherwise exquisite boudoir. It wasn't the sort of mural decoration that The Shadow would have expected Sheila Waltham to cherish, since her own fantastic notions, such as imagining jewels gleaming from a crystal ball, were bizarre enough to need no stimulation.

To The Shadow's observation the picture represented exactly what it was, a blind to cover something more important. Without swinging his flashlight to the last corner, which was where the maid happened to be, The Shadow approached the picture to examine it more closely.

At that moment, the elevator door opened with a sudden clang.

Hearing the sound, The Shadow performed one of his patented moves. Instead of returning toward the window, he wheeled in the direction of the sound itself. His plan was to fade into some hiding spot as near the elevator as possible and let any arriving persons pass him. If they were crooks, The Shadow could then trap them, leaving them only the window for an exit, an impossible outlet for anyone except The Shadow himself.

The move didn't work because The Shadow flicked off the flashlight before he wheeled. He was guiding by the dim connecting doorway and didn't notice the intervening corner. By this time, the maid had decided that the uncanny visitor must be human, because ghosts or such would not resort to flashlight. In the interest of her fellow-crooks, the maid decided to make trouble for the unknown who was sweeping through the darkness.

Something resembling a fur-bearing mammal came lurching through the darkness right across The Shadow's path. He couldn't help mistake it for some singular creature, for the maid was still wearing her mink coat, and being bound to the chair, it came with her. Tripping across the living obstacle, The Shadow bowled the maid into a somersault and hooked his feet against the chair legs, which sent him into a lengthy sprawl.

More than a clatter resulted. Hitting the floor face first, the maid lost the gag that Fitz had so obligingly supplied. Anxious to increase The Shadow's problems the maid yelled.

Lights blazed suddenly in the living room, before The Shadow could reach his feet. They were turned on by Fred, who knew where the switch was. The elevator man had ditched his new acquaintances in the neighborhood saloon, and was coming up to answer the penthouse call.

With Fred was a brawny citizen who had evidently helped him back to duty and decided that he needed assistance operating even an automatic elevator. This husky saw the swirl of blackness on the floor and made a dive for it, in response to the maid's yell.

Seeing that his friend was after something, Fred voiced a loud "Grab him, Joe!" and came reeling forward to help the cause.

The Shadow crossed his hands as he shot them to Joe's ankles and was thus the first to grab. In almost the same motion, he performed a sideward roll that sent Joe into a crazy cartwheel. The person who was coming up from the floor when Fred arrived wasn't his friend Joe. Fred found The Shadow.

Or rather The Shadow found Fred.

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It didn't take much effort to launch Fred at his friend Joe, who was starting to come back for more. It was more a question of guiding him, though The Shadow did apply expert tactics in the form of an overarm throw. Catching Fred on the lurch, The Shadow tossed him against Joe so hard that both smashed into a table which collapsed as they crowded it against the wall too fast.

Big Joe still wanted to get at the cloaked fighter who never stayed in one place long enough to be grabbed. Something came sliding from the table and Joe snatched it, thinking he had found a bludgeon. The object proved so light that before Joe could really swing it, The Shadow had stopped him again.

This time The Shadow's system was an uppercut with the heel of his hand. It met Joe's chin squarely and jounced the back of his head against the wall. Sagging to the floor, Joe sat there dazed, clutching the cudgel that he hadn't used. The object was very appropriate, for it happened to be a bouquet of flowers.

Dangling from the posies was an envelope, swinging like a pendulum as if counting Joe out. The Shadow stooped long enough to tear the envelope from the cord which held it; then, with long strides he reached the light switch and turned it off. Reaching the elevator, he started the down trip while Fred and Joe were still trying to collect their scattered senses.

Stopping at the second floor, The Shadow reached a hallway window and dropped to an alley just below. He heard the clatter of running footsteps around a corner and started after them in time to see a car pulling away with its doors slamming. How many men were in the car, The Shadow couldn't tell, but he knew that they must have come from the fire-tower, which was sufficient reason to stop them.

Two shots thundered from a handy automatic that The Shadow whipped from beneath his cloak. In the open, those well-aimed stabs would have knifed a rear tire and halted the fugitive car, but this Manhattan street wasn't open territory. The Shadow's bullets were absorbed by a row of misplaced ashcans that some well-meaning janitor had placed near a corner curb. The car wheeled the corner and was away.

As though in answer to a signal, a cab arrived from the opposite direction. This cab was The Shadow's own; its driver, a hackie named Shrevvy, had an ear that recognized the cough of his master's gun. But by the time The Shadow was in the cab, it was too late to take up the chase. The other car had vanished when Shrevvy turned the corner.

Twenty minutes later, Lamont Cranston strolled into the Cafe Marimba, without the black regalia that marked him as The Shadow. He found Margo Lane seated at a table listening to the soft, melodious music of a Central American orchestra, but she wasn't as drowsy as she appeared to be.

"Sheila's table is the third from the left, across the way," confided Margo, as Cranston joined her. "But she isn't there right now. She was called to the telephone."

"They're probably phoning from the apartment house," returned Cranston, "to tell her about the robbery."

Margo's eyes went wide.

"The robbery?"

"It happened before I arrived there," explained Cranston. "I stumbled across the French maid, bound and gagged. I dodged the elevator man and a friend of his, but I was too late to overtake the crooks."

"Any clues?"

"Only this."

Cranston handed Margo the envelope that he had snagged from the bouquet.

"From somebody's flowers," he explained. "They were sent to Sheila. Of course it won't incriminate the man who sent them, but whoever he is, he'd have to do a lot of explaining if I hadn't brought the envelope along."

Apparently Cranston had curbed his own curiosity to witness Margo's. He was smiling at the way she hurriedly tore at the end of the envelope to draw out the card that it contained. Cranston expected Margo to frown or look puzzled, according to whether or not she recognized the name. Instead, the brunette's reaction was quite surprising.

Margo's fixed stare transformed itself into a glare that she raised straight to Cranston's eyes as she passed the card across the table. One glance at the card told Cranston that his surmise had been wrong; that the man in question would have to do a lot of explaining, at least to Margo Lane.

On the card was the printed name:

Lamont Cranston.

CHAPTER V

SHEILA WALTHAM opened her big blue eyes and said:

"Really, Margo, I don't know who could have sent me those flowers!"

It was the third afternoon since the jewel robbery and so far the police hadn't gained a single lead. On each successive day, Margo had sought out Sheila at her favorite haunt, the Cafe Marimba, to ask how the case was coming along. Always, Margo had finished with the same question:

"Who sent the flowers?"

Tonight, Sheila was becoming piqued.

"The flowers were so unimportant!" she exclaimed. "Why, the police didn't even give them a second thought."

"The police haven't given much thought to anything," argued Margo. "Or have they?"

"They say they haven't much to work with," declared Sheila. "They know there were three burglars, but the men were masked, so my maid couldn't even see their faces. Poor Francine! They came just as she was going out and tied her in a chair. Why, if I'd been there —"

"They'd have tied you too," put in Margo. "But go on."

"One of the burglars brought the flowers," continued Sheila, "and pulled a gun right out of the middle of them. That's when Francine saw he was masked."

Margo was studying Sheila closely to sift this portion of the story. It made a lot of difference to Margo, that question of how the flowers had come to Sheila's apartment. In fact, Margo was on the point of asking if she could personally question Francine on the subject, when Sheila added:

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"Then someone came in the window. At least that's what Francine said, but she was probably too scared to really know what happened. Why, that window is so high up from the first ledge below –"

"I know," interrupted Margo. "What did the police say about that?"

"They don't think it was possible. Inspector Cardona said he was going to write it off to Francine's imagination."

Being well acquainted with Inspector Cardona, Margo could understand why, and the fact made her frown. Cardona was a great believer in The Shadow and was careful never to embarrass the mysterious operator who served as a living preventive of crime. Like Cardona, Margo recognized that The Shadow could quite well have scaled to the dizzy penthouse and made a surprise entry.

Wherever The Shadow went, so did Lamont, the two being identical. But Margo couldn't fancy her boyfriend staging a Romeo to Sheila's balcony, even in the interest of law and order. Still, Cranston had known that Sheila was out; indeed, he had assigned Margo to watch her. Moreover, it would have been anything but subtle on his part to hand Margo the flower envelope, had he known that his own card was in it.

These weren't Cranston's arguments; he'd let Margo figure them out for herself. Now, at last, the answer was drilling home. Margo exclaimed it aloud:

"Mahatma Xanadu!"

Sheila's eyes became very sharp.

"What about Mahatma Xanadu, Margo?"

"Why, he's behind this," returned Margo. "You told him about the jewels and I told him about –"

Margo caught herself before mentioning the name "Lamont." She was thinking for something to say quickly if Sheila asked "About what?" only Sheila didn't. The fact that Margo had denounced Sheila's favorite crystal gazer was enough to throw the blonde young lady into a tantrum.

"I didn't tell the Mahatma about the jewels," snapped Sheila. "I saw them in the crystal. That proves that Mahatma Xanadu has mystic powers. Why, the robbers were probably stealing the gems at that very moment, or at least on the way to my apartment."

"I suppose so," nodded Margo. "Of course you told the police about Mahatma Xanadu."

"Yes," affirmed Sheila, "and Inspector Cardona said he'd find the Mahatma and have him look in the crystal to learn what had happened to the gems. Do you know, Margo" – Sheila became very serious – "I'm sure Inspector Cardona believes in Mahatma Xanadu, too!"

"What makes you think that?"

"The inspector said he was positive the Mahatma could tell us where the gems were. Only he hasn't been able to find the Mahatma."

Sheila's statement wasn't news to Margo. The Shadow had already reported Mahatma Xanadu missing from his usual haunt. Now, Margo's own thoughts were crystallized as solidly as Xanadu's famous gazing globe. The mastermind behind the robbery was unquestionably Mahatma Xanadu.

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If only Margo could help The Shadow find a lead to the missing seer!

That wish was answered very suddenly.

"I'm going to tell you something, Margo." Leaning forward, Sheila lowered her tone to the soft lilt of the marimba orchestra. "Since you trust Mahatma Xanadu, I think you ought to know. I'm going to see the Mahatma this afternoon."

"You mean you've found him?"

"No. I mean he phoned me." Not realizing the reason for Margo's eager tone, Sheila continued to deliver information. "He said he could solve the mystery if I paid him the reward I've offered."

"What reward?"

"Five thousand dollars for the arrest of anyone responsible for the theft of the jewels."

Margo was about to say she wouldn't believe that the Mahatma would give himself up for that amount, but wisdom caused her to restrain herself.

"So I took the money out of the bank," asserted Sheila, "and I intend to pay it to the Mahatma after he finds the answer in the crystal."

"But Sheila –"

"You can come along if you want," invited Sheila, before Margo could start to talk her out of it. "The Mahatma told me to come alone, but of course he wouldn't mind you. I really think there ought to be a witness to make it legal, don't you?"

Margo was too flabbergasted to think of anything. Gradually as her thoughts cleared, she wished heartily that she had invited Lamont to join her and Sheila at cocktails. It was only to humor Margo's stubborn mood that he'd let her handle the Sheila question. Three days of it and now with Mahatma Xanadu practically in The Shadow's clutch, the game was ready to slip away.

"Of course I can't start right away," said Sheila in a gloomy tone that provided Margo with a sudden hope. "I have to wait until I receive the message telling me where to go."

"Then that will give me time to call Lamont," urged Margo, generously. "He'd be the perfect witness, Sheila."

"But he's never met the Mahatma –"

"That wouldn't matter. Suppose I phone him. Wait right here, Sheila."

Hurrying to the phone booth, Margo called the Cobalt Club. As she looked through the glass pane in the door, she saw an attendant approach Sheila's table and give her a bouquet of flowers that was too reminiscent of the bunch that had been sent to Sheila's apartment the other night.

What was worse, the flowers had an envelope attached. As Margo watched, Sheila opened it, drew out a card and smiled. A sudden savagery swept Margo; she controlled it only by thinking of what she was going to tell Lamont when she reached him on the wire.

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Worst of all, Cranston wasn't at the Cobalt Club. When Margo asked for him, she was told distinctly and politely that he had left ten minutes before, without stating where he intended to go. By the time Margo had tartly replied that Mr. Cranston could find her at the Cafe Marimba if she decided to stay there, something else had happened.

Looking from the phone booth, Margo saw that Sheila had finished her drink and left. Of course she had taken those precious flowers with her, which made Margo fume all the more. But there was one thing Sheila had forgotten, or more probably had left on purpose.

That article was the card that had accompanied the flowers. It was lying right beside the envelope from which Sheila had removed it. Another of Lamont's cards, no doubt. Maybe he'd just decided to show Margo that she'd been right all along and to let her see if he cared.

Coming angrily from the booth, Margo reached the deserted table and snatched up the card. Her fingers were faster than her eyes, for she had actually begun to tear it when she saw that it bore writing instead of a printed name.

Gripping the card tightly, Margo studied it and began to wonder.

CHAPTER VI

IT wasn't Lamont's writing; that much was certain. Still, florists were obliging people who would write cards for you. That flashed home to Margo as she absorbed the message on the card:

Blue limousine waiting opposite the Hotel Martingale.

Don't delay... M.X.

Now the initials "M. X." unquestionably stood for Mahatma Xanadu, which was why Margo didn't believe it. She happened to remember that among other choice possessions, Cranston owned a blue limousine that was piloted by a chauffeur named Stanley. Maybe Lamont had learned a lesson about sending flowers with his own name attached, but the business of the car was too thin.

Sheila must have thought so, too, or she wouldn't have left the card just to irk her dear friend Margo. But the "dear friend" had come from the phone booth sooner than Sheila expected and therefore intended to make the most of it.

Thrusting the card back in the envelope, Margo scrawled Cranston's name on it, while she was going to the door. There she gave the envelope to the doorman and turned in the direction of the Hotel Martingale which was less than two blocks distant. It was still daylight and Margo saw Sheila quite plainly, along with the blue limousine.

Sheila was getting into the big car that looked very much like Cranston's and with half a block to go, Margo wouldn't have had a chance to overtake the limousine if a traffic light hadn't turned color just as it started.

Panting, Margo reached the corner before the red light ended. Through the window she saw Sheila staring rather vacantly toward the chauffeur's window. At least Sheila was still alone, and she turned to look at the window when Margo rapped there, but her stare remained the same.

Sheila was looking right through Margo, as though she either didn't see her, or didn't care to notice her. That was just too much for Margo, so she yanked the door open and hopped into the car just as the light went

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green. As Sheila gasped an excited cry, the limousine started forward, so Margo slammed the door and began to say something.

What she intended to say, she didn't remember.

With that slam of the door, Margo had taken herself right out of this world. Of a sudden she was in a complete void of absolute blackness. The effect was horribly frightening until Sheila's voice came with a whimper:

"It's happened again, Margo! I saw you just for a moment, then everything went black, like it did before. If you only hadn't closed the door!"

Madly, Margo tried to rectify that error, but she couldn't find a knob inside the door. When she pounded on the glass window in front of her, a gruff voice responded. It was the chauffeur, talking through a two-way speaker; and he wasn't Stanley.

"Turn on the light, lady," the voice said. "You'll find the switch up by the dome."

Margo found the switch and clicked it. Staring at Sheila, she saw a face as scared as her own. Then the voice spoke again, still gruff but encouraging.

"It's only on account of the boss," the chauffeur informed. "He ain't anxious to have nobody find him, that is, nobody he don't want to see. If you don't know where you're going, or how you got there, you won't be able to answer any questions. Which makes it easier all around."

The car made a right turn as the chauffeur finished and Margo calculated that it had gone two blocks by that time. Taking a little notebook from her pocket, she began to jot down the data, when the voice warned:

"I wouldn't do that, lady. You ain't the one that's supposed to be taking this trip. The boss mightn't like it."

Just what the boss wouldn't like, Margo wasn't sure, but it might be both the notes and herself. So she decided to eliminate one count against her by putting away the notebook. At least she could keep mental tally on the trip, which wasn't very difficult, because Margo had cultivated a memory system that Cranston had taught her.

The real problem was Sheila who kept up a running conversation that occasionally threatened to throw off Margo's calculations.

"It must be two-way glass!" exclaimed Sheila, now quite herself again. "How clever of the Mahatma to think of it! People can see us, but we can't see them." She paused doubtfully. "But why couldn't the windows just be black and have done with it?"

Getting no response from Margo, Sheila pondered a short while, then continued:

"Oh, I see! Black windows would make people suspicious, particularly traffic cops. But as it is, we're just riding along comfortably in a nice big car, except that we're silly enough to have the dome light turned on, which doesn't really amount to anything."

Margo was doing alright with her calculations, despite Sheila. She counted another turn to the right; then one to the left, with an estimate of several intervening blocks. Then came another right, another left, so close together that Margo was sure the chauffeur must have sped the pace.

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Since the Cafe Marimba was on a side street with one-way traffic West, this gave Margo the following sequence of direction:

West, North, East, North, East, North.

As for blocks, her numbers ran: Two, Five, Five, Four, One. After those approximations came the present stretch, due North, and Margo began timing it as well as she could count the seconds, at which she was fairly good.

The limousine was moving along at a regular, uninterrupted speed, which meant that it must be keeping to the time regulated lights of an avenue. If Margo could clock it correctly or even closely so, it would be easy to calculate the approximate distance covered. From that, Cranston could gauge the general location of Xanadu's new headquarters.

For by this time, Margo's last flurry of suspicion had ended and she regretted her undue resentment toward Sheila. The right thing now was to treat Sheila as a friend in need, a term that certainly applied to anyone about to be fleeced of five thousand dollars by a fake Mahatma.

One very harrowing thought temporarily overwhelmed Margo. Certain unworthy characters had been known to commit murder for such a sum, but Margo finally decided it wouldn't apply in the Mahatma's case. At least nothing serious had happened to Francine when the gems were stolen. Not yet familiar with the crime's inside story, Margo didn't realize how badly her rule applied, so the thought lulled her.

Minutes passed as the limousine rolled monotonously toward its unknown destination. At last it gave a slight forward spurt and made a left turn which Margo registered as West. From then on, turns were frequent and close together until at last the car reduced to a crawl, with its wheels jouncing a curb on its final turn.

From this Margo decided that they had entered a narrow alley and she was right. The car stopped; in a few moments the door was opened by the chauffeur, who wore a muffler around his chin and kept his cap down over his eyes. These precautions were hardly necessary, for dusk had settled during the long ride and it was particularly gloomy in this alley.

Tall walls, blank like those of warehouses, cut off most of the view. It was a blind alley with a connecting brick wall between the buildings and the car itself crowded the outlet. There was a little space beside the car leading right to the steps of an old brick dwelling and it was into that modest residence that the chauffeur waved the two girls.

As at Xanadu's former headquarters, the seance parlor occupied the second floor. At the top of the stairs, Margo and Sheila found the open door of a reception room, containing the familiar furniture that they connected with the Mahatma. There was another door beyond, but before they could approach it, the door opened, and Xanadu himself stepped forth with his usual salaam.

Maybe the dim light was the reason, but Margo was sure she detected a pallor under the Mahatma's heavy beard. The seer was quite pleased to see Sheila, but his courtesy was a bit stiff toward Margo. Maybe the five thousand dollars was the difference, but the Mahatma didn't bring up that subject right away, though he did glance avariciously at the fatted purse that Sheila carried.

For some curious reason, the Mahatma seemed especially interested in Sheila's bouquet, for with a bow he took the flowers from her. Margo watched him dip his head as he scented the odor; then, with a gleaming smile, Xanadu said to Sheila:

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"An excellent passport, these gardenias. You will forgive me for sending you my favorite flowers. I do not know yours because you never asked for it to appear in the crystal. Indeed" – there was a smooth subtlety to Xanadu's tone – "I do not know if you value flowers at all."

Gesturing to two chairs, Xanadu turned back into the seance room and spoke through the door as he closed it.

"You will wait a few minutes," he said. "I must concentrate upon the subject that brought you here. Akbar will admit you when I am in trance."

Those final minutes were grueling to Margo, who emphatically did not share Sheila's enthusiasm over the coming demonstration. Outside, the sky must have completely darkened, though there was no way of telling, since in this room the shades were drawn. At last the door opened and Akbar, complete to his fez, gestured from the threshold.

The big Turk spoke one word:

"Enter."

It was like a trip into some fabled chamber publicized in the Arabian Nights. Akbar was grim enough, but in the gloomy seance room, Mahatma Xanadu outdid his formidable servant. The bearded master was seated upon a divan in a cross-legged yogi pose. His eyes were like glittering orbs, white bulges that seemed to magnify the shaded lights.

In front of Xanadu was a pedestal upon which rested a crystal ball far larger than his former gazing globe. Slowly Xanadu pointed to the great sphere and the effect of his own trance – real or faked – produced a hypnotic influence upon his visitors.

Like Sheila, Margo stared into the crystalline depths and a strange sensation swept her. In a trice, Cranston's explanations of Xanadu's fakery were swept away.

Margo Lane felt that she was standing upon the threshold of the unknown, where the unbelievable was soon to be revealed!

CHAPTER VII

FACES in the crystal.

Reflections, perhaps of those that peered into those depths, for somehow the great ball had the magnetic power of drawing persons closer. Margo's dark hair was brushing the blonde locks of Sheila, while Xanadu was leaning forward until his turban almost touched the foreheads of the girls.

Something flickered before Margo's eyes. She was fancying figures in the crystal, like forms remaining from a dream. But instead of dwindling or wiping themselves into oblivion, those forms took shape.

Margo was conscious that Sheila was breathless also. They were both coming under the peculiar spell and this wasn't trickery. It couldn't be, for neither of the girls had written any questions; nor had Mahatma Xanadu resorted to his blinding flashes. Fantasy was being realism both to Margo and Sheila.

One question only crept through Margo's mind: Were those forming images the same to all who discerned them? Xanadu must have caught the thought, for as if in answer, he declared aloud:

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"Gaze! What you see you will remember, for this is no dream. It is a vision of the past, a scene indelibly etched upon the scroll of fate. Gaze and believe!"

Light glimmered in the crystal, strong light too powerful to be reflected from the shaded bulbs around Xanadu's sanctum. But that brightness didn't dazzle; instead, it revealed. To Margo's amazement, she clearly saw a woman's figure, wearing a fur coat, reaching a hand into what seemed an opening in a wall.

The vision was equally clear to Sheila, but to her the scene was recognizable. Still breathless, Sheila gasped:

"Francine!"

With that pronouncement, Margo recognized what this must be. The, mental picture included not only Sheila's maid, but the wall safe in the penthouse boudoir. A deed of crime was being wrenched from its hidden past under the psychic guidance of Mahatma Xanadu!

"But it couldn't be Francine!" gasped Sheila. "Somebody must have bound her; those masked men she mentioned –"

In interruption, the masked men stalked into the distorted scene. There were two of them in tuxedos and Margo felt a sinking fear that Sheila would declare that one was Cranston. At least one man's appearance was faultless, except for the mask; unless it simply happened that he profited by contrast with his larger companion who was definitely a thug.

But Sheila, eyeing the crystal narrowly, was more interested in the woman in the case. The latter seemed to be opening something in the wall and as she finished, her face came into the light.

"It is Francine!" exclaimed Sheila. "Why, the nerve of her! After my giving her my old mink coat. Look, Mahatma! You can recognize the coat yourself. It's the one I wore when I came to your first seances!"

Mahatma Xanadu replied in sepulchral tone as though wrapped deeply in a trance.

"It is the crystal that reveals, not I," spoke Xanadu. "From this clairvoyant vision of the past, you must form your own conclusions. But remember: the crystal never lies."

Francine's face had vanished, which annoyed Sheila, but Margo felt relieved because the man in the faultless tuxedo was gone too. Only one image remained in the singularly bright light that was concentrated within the crystal, that was the figure of the thug who was busily stuffing jewel cases into the pockets of his ill-fitting jacket. Then, while Margo's eyes remained strained on the gazing globe, the lone actor made the mistake of taking off his mask.

Briefly, the big man's face came into the vivid light, but that was sufficient. Those coarse features, blunt in profile, glowering when they turned toward a full-face pose, were easy to remember. They were tawny even in the strong light, and Sheila recognized them.

"Why it's Griff Thurver!" identified Sheila. "You've seen him, Margo. He works at the Club Hayrick. He's the man who helps people out to taxicabs."

Griff helped them out all right, but there were frequent customers that he pitched across the curb when a cab wasn't waiting there. Always having money to pay her checks, Sheila wasn't acquainted with bouncers and their functions. Having witnessed Griff in operation, Margo could have supplied a few more details, but they weren't necessary.

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The face in the crystal belonged to Griff Thurver, which was quite enough.

Apparently Mahatma Xanadu thought so too, for he roused from his trance and the scene in the crystal dimmed, to vanish as though the life had left it when Xanadu brought himself back to par. But in the final glimpses, Sheila was convinced that the scene had represented her own boudoir.

"It was the wall safe," she told Margo. "Empty just the way I found it after I opened it for the police. You saw it, too" – Sheila clutched Margo's arm eagerly – "in the crystal, I mean. You'll remember it, won't you?"

Margo nodded, a trifle too emphatically. Her agreement brought a sharp stare from Mahatma Xanadu, whose eyes denoted something more than worry. But the seer was reverting to his dreamy stare when Sheila looked his way.

"You'll testify too, Mahatma –"

"It is not my policy to talk to the police," interposed Xanadu. "They are skeptics and narrow in their opinions. They cannot differentiate between prophetic vision and what they term fortune telling. But you will not find my testimony necessary. In fact the less you speak of this experience, the better."

Apparently Xanadu included Margo in his speech, but his gaze was set on Sheila, or more specifically upon her well-stocked purse. With a nervous laugh, the blonde opened the bag and counted out the money, all in crisp bills of high denomination. As she reached the five thousand dollar mark, Sheila hesitated, saying:

"But suppose the charges can't be proven –"

"They will be proven." Xanadu gave a gleaming, confident smile. "Simply say that you suspect your maid, but do not give the real reason why. Mention the man whose face you saw and let the police do the rest. They have ways, you know."

"But if they fail?"

"You will hear from me. I shall either return your money or invite you here for another study of the crystal. Good night, Miss Waltham" – Xanadu gave a profound bow; then turned to deliver another – "and good night to you, Miss Lane."

There was a hard, cold glint in Xanadu's eyes as Margo saw their final glance. It seemed that the self-styled Mahatma was silently expressing a warning, indicating that his own policy was to apply in Margo's case. Perhaps it was simply that Margo added the facts logically. If Sheila wasn't to mention the crystal gazing seance, obviously Margo couldn't add her testimony. In any event, Margo didn't like Xanadu's parting manner.

Nor would she have liked his manner afterward.

As soon as Akbar had gestured Sheila and Margo to the stairs and had closed the door behind them, a low, quick call sounded from the entrance of the seance room. Turning, Akbar faced his robed master, Mahatma Xanadu.

The bearded seer gave a quick nudge in the direction of the seance room, ending with a downsweep of his thumb, all indicating the existence of a back way out, which he expected Akbar to use at once.

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What Xanadu said wouldn't have pleased Margo either. His tone was cold, hard, and most of all practical as he ordered:

"Take care of the Lane girl, Akbar."

The grip that Akbar gave to a knife-hilt projecting from his belt was sufficient proof that he understood what his master meant.

CHAPTER VIII

LAMONT CRANSTON was lounging at a table in the Club Marimba, with his fingers dangling idly inside the pockets of his tuxedo jacket. Seated with him were three friends, the most important being Justin Cadbury.

That was, Justin Cadbury tried to be the most important. He always did, and usually succeeded. His broad face and shoulders marked him as a man of strength; his gray hair gave him dignity. The contrast of his sharp eyes and bland smile kept most persons uneasy in Cadbury's forceful presence, though the rule didn't apply to Cranston.

In fact, Cranston was something of an enigma to the dominating Mr. Cadbury.

To Cadbury, Cranston was a keen man who didn't show it. The reason why Cranston preferred an indifferent pose was the puzzle. Until a few nights ago, Cadbury hadn't held any theory on that subject; even now he wasn't at all certain that his glimmer was correct.

A man of long and varied experience, Justin Cadbury was not inclined to overemphasize coincidence. At the same time he couldn't help but wonder what had happened to a certain calling card that a smooth character named Fitz Crosset had placed with a certain bunch of flowers, three nights ago.

Cadbury should have been thinking in more recent terms; namely of a card that had come with another batch of flowers right here to the Club Marimba, this very evening. That card, with its message and initials "M. X." was at present in Cranston's pocket, where his fingers were plucking it.

Keeping one eye open for Margo, Cranston was using one ear to listen to Cadbury's usual theme, the menace of the black market. It was bringing sympathy from Cadbury's other listeners.

"Here I am with a million dollars to invest," brooded Cadbury, "but with nowhere to place it. I talk with men like yourselves, manufacturers of legitimate products, and I find that you can't get materials to produce the finished goods that I want to buy.

"Yet all the while I am receiving mysterious offers from persons who say they will supply those very products – at a price. It isn't the money that matters; with me it's a question of ethics. I'm not buying or investing in anything that smacks of the black market."

Cadbury's listeners nodded their approval but their faces remained mournful, signifying that they knew no way to help. Cadbury brought a heavy fist down to the table.

"Ways were found to smash bottlenecks in production," he insisted. "Why not do the same with bottlenecks in trade?"

"That means," remarked Cranston, casually, "that you'll have to smash the black market."

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"And why not?" Cadbury's tone was defiant. "I'll spend half my fortune trying it, if enough other people will do the same."

Looking from man to man, Cadbury found them lukewarm to his proposition. They agreed with Cadbury in principle but felt that his plan was impractical. They argued that the authorities were handling the situation as far as was possible and that additional regulations plus more arrests of violators would accomplish more than any Quixotic effort on the part of business men.

It was Cranston who gave Cadbury a practical suggestion, apparently hoping that it would soothe his ruffled spirits.

"Why don't you buy into some retail enterprises?" questioned Cranston. "For instance, you might acquire a group of independent jewelry stores and make a chain of them. People have money nowadays; they'd be good customers for gems –"

"And where would they get them?" boomed Cadbury. "From those jewelry stores? No, sir! Try to look into the manufacture of new jewelry and you'll find it dry! Stocks are getting more and more depleted, that is of the items that customers want.

"Of course you can buy through the black market" – Cadbury's tone was becoming savage as he aired his favorite hate – "the same as in any other businesses. Goods delivered and no questions asked. What do you think started this new epidemic of gem robberies?"

"The black market, of course. Being crooked, it's a stimulus to crime. That girl whose jewels were stolen the other night, Miss Waltham I think her name was, will never see her gee-gaws again. They don't fence stolen gems nowadays; they peddle them straight through to hungry customers who can't find what they want in the stores. I've looked into the jewelry situation along with my general survey of the black market."

Getting up from the table, Cadbury lifted a fat briefcase which was filled with data covering his pet peeve. He strode haughtily out of the Cafe Marimba as though it had been an insult to even invite him to such a place.

With a shrug to the others, Cranston accepted the blame. He'd personally transferred this conference from the Cobalt Club on the ground that the Cafe Marimba had an informal atmosphere. His real reason for holding the meeting here was a personal one that he hadn't stated.

Actually Cranston felt that it was time he looked in on Margo's hob-nobs with Sheila. He'd given Margo just about the proper time limit in which to regain her common sense. In fact, he'd allowed her a trifle too much.

All Cranston had to show for patience and consideration was a mysterious card that told him he'd arrived too late. The business of a secret trip to see Mahatma Xanadu was something that Cranston had personally hoped to handle as The Shadow. Indeed, his interest in the question was far greater than before and the need for action was imperative. Cranston hadn't revealed his mood to his companions, but he'd played Cadbury's hauteur as a foil to break up the conference.

Not that Cranston wasn't acting while he waited. He was doing so by proxy, as he was soon to prove. Meanwhile, however, the members of the other camp weren't failing to keep tabs on Cranston.

Hardly had Cranston strolled out of the Cafe Marimba before a figure stirred from the far corner of the bar. The man in question was Fitz Crosset and he went directly to a telephone. Dialing rapidly, he obtained his number and asked for Teach Morgan.

DEATH IN THE CRYSTAL

What Fitz had to say to Teach was both pointed and confidential, his tone so low that all of his words were confined to the telephone's mouthpiece.

Meanwhile, Lamont Cranston was finding himself a cab. There was always a demand for cabs at this hour and people crowded ahead of one another whenever they had the chance. But for some reason, an odd cab stopped short of the cafe entrance and Cranston promptly spotted it.

A minute later, he was riding around the corner and Shrevvy was making a report from behind the cab wheel.

"It sounded easier than it was, boss," declared Shrevvy, "or maybe it was harder than it sounded. There's not many limousines on the streets, particularly blue ones, but finding guys that noticed them is tough."

"Did you find any?"

"Yeah, that's the funny part," replied Shrevvy. "Different hackies remember seeing one of them over toward the river apartments, but the cabs that hang around the fancy dead-end dumps don't know anything about it."

"You mean the riverside apartments north of here?"

"That's right. North and east, with kind of a blind area in between. Only somebody would have seen the car if it parked in that half-way district. All the hackies have to drive through when they take fares to the river apartments."

Shrevvy was heading for what he termed the blind area, as it formed a logical jumping off point. Meanwhile, in the darkness of the cab, Cranston was undergoing a smooth transformation. From a secret drawer beneath the rear seat he was drawing a black cloak that blurred him from sight the moment that its folds shrouded his shoulders. Adding a slouch hat, planting a brace of automatics in holsters under his tuxedo jacket, Cranston completed the metamorphosis that produced his other self, The Shadow.

Despite his long service with this mysterious chief, Shrevvy gave a nervous quiver when he heard a low whispered laugh from the rear darkness. Maybe it was the sudden way the laugh came, plus the fact that Shrevvy had reached the blind area, where even the atmosphere was ghoulish.

This was the sort of sector where muggers were apt to crop whenever an epidemic of hold-ups began. It made Shrevvy jittery when driving through after dark and he'd forgotten momentarily that he had The Shadow with him. In a trice, Shrevvy's confidence was back, which was well, for he wasn't going to leave this neighborhood soon.

"Keep from avenue to avenue," ordered The Shadow. "Zigzag the side streets, working northward."

The Shadow didn't add instructions to watch for the missing limousine. He wanted Shrevvy to keep glued to his driving. Keen though Shrevvy was at spotting anything lurking in the darkness, better eyes than his were taking up that task.

The Shadow's.

CHAPTER IX

ALL sense of distance and direction had slipped from Margo's mind when the limousine stopped at the end of its return trip. She had jotted down her original notes, during the few minutes' wait in Xanadu's reception room, so they were safe enough, but the business with the crystal had knocked out future calculations.

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It was like a strange dream, Sheila claimed, and Margo definitely agreed. That was what Sheila was going to call it when she talked to the police; just a dream. However, while Sheila was dwelling on that fact, Margo was becoming more and more convinced that the dream wasn't over.

The mysterious limousine had done a lot of twists and turnings which bothered Margo badly. It was odd for the chauffeur to throw Margo off the track after having gone to Xanadu's rather directly. All of which made Margo feel that these new tactics were for Sheila's benefit rather than her own.

That was proven when the limousine stopped. The door opened and the muffled chauffeur thrust his hand into the glow from the dome-light. Beckoning, he said:

"You."

He meant Margo, but she didn't stir, partly because Sheila gripped her.

"Why not stay with me, Margo?" queried Sheila. "I've still got a lot to talk about."

"Orders," announced the chauffeur. "Got to follow them."

"But Mahatma Xanadu didn't say so," argued Sheila. "We went to his place together –"

Sheila stopped with a slight gasp as the chauffeur put a heavy hand on Margo's arm.

"It's all right, Sheila," assured Margo. "Remember, that was before we looked into the crystal. What we've seen since makes a difference."

"But how?"

"Because it was just a dream," replied Margo, getting out of the car, "and two people don't dream the same thing – not very often."

Sheila was staring rather blankly as she nodded. The chauffeur helped Margo to the curb, slammed the door, and started back toward the driver's seat, giving a gesture over his shoulder.

"You'll find a subway a couple of blocks west," he gruffed to Margo. "Sorry I couldn't drop you any closer."

The big car pulled away and when its tail-lights vanished, Margo realized that she was standing on what was probably the darkest and most uninviting street in all Manhattan, presuming that this was Manhattan. After all, she couldn't blame Xanadu for detaching her from Sheila and a darkened spot was certainly proper for the parting, considering that Xanadu might have foreseen an argument with the chauffeur.

So Margo started westward, and crossed an intermediate avenue, which she recognized by name. It was quite dark, but there was enough light at the corner for Margo to see the street sign. What surprised her was the street number. She'd expected it to be something in the Hundreds, instead it was much lower.

Moreover it was an odd-numbered street.

That in itself was odd. The thought struck Margo as she was entering the next block, which was even darker than the first. Traffic on this odd-numbered street should be westward, according to the one-way system. Yet Margo was going in the opposite direction to that which the limousine had taken when it pulled away.

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Why had the muffled man named West as East?

The question halted Margo in her tracks. He'd wanted her to think she was getting out of trouble instead of into it. The mere misnaming of the direction proved that Margo had been tricked, but that was only part of it. If she'd recognized this general vicinity – which by now Margo had – she'd know that here the East Side was a turbulent area where anything might happen.

Nothing was going to happen if Margo could help it.

Turning abruptly, Margo started back to the corner she'd just left. As she did, a figure bulged into sight, cutting off retreat. One glimpse of that huge, formidable form, during its brief blocking of the street lamp, was quite enough for Margo. The man's face wasn't recognizable, but his head gear was.

Akbar, the giant Turk, should have laid aside his fez before taking up Margo's trail. As high as an average hat, but with the close fit of a skull-cap, the fez did all but shout its owner's name.

Pivoting on one high heel, Margo started eastward on the run as though a flock of devils were coming after her. Akbar didn't waste a moment; over her shoulder, Margo caught a glimpse of him as he lunged from darkness into which he had briefly ducked. One look was enough. Margo's intention now was to reach the next corner and turn it, for she was sure she wouldn't find safety anywhere along this horrible street.

Margo was more than right.

Before she reached the corner, another figure lunged to meet her. For a brief instant, Margo thought that it was Akbar; that in some unexplainable fashion, the Turk had maneuvered ahead of her. Then she saw that although the man was Akbar's size, he didn't wear a fez.

What he did wear were two thick gloves that he clamped to Margo's neck. As the clutching hands stifled Margo's screams, she lashed away and reeled this enemy into a spot of light. He didn't seem to mind her writhe, so long as he kept his grip, but he did object to the light.

Voicing a snarl, the man recoiled and in that instant Margo saw his face. It was like a vision from Xanadu's crystal, that contorted visage.

The tawny face that was leering into Margo's belonged to Griff Thurver, the man whose complicity in robbery had been established by Xanadu's revelation!

Margo didn't try to reason whether Griff knew about the recent seance. She simply took it for granted that he did and therefore was determined to kill her. Equally anxious to live at least a little while, Margo took advantage of Griff's shyness toward the light. Clutching the gloved hands, she broke their hold just long enough to twist around.

Then, before Griff could pounce forward to regain his hold, Margo was confronted by a human menace much more horrible.

This was Akbar, lunging hard, with one hand high. Apparently he was trying to get around in back of Margo, to use the weapon which he carried in that lofted fist. Akbar's weapon was a knife, all set for a downward drive, and to Margo the blade looked long enough to be called a short sword.

Not that Margo was bothering about such definitions. It was just that strangulation seemed such a peaceful death compared to a stroke from that big-caliber dirk. Wildly, Margo flung herself around and into Griff's

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grasp, as she gave a shriek for help that she never expected to arrive.

That shriek was answered.

Even the brakes of Shrevvy's well-kept cab could complain under the shock he gave them. Turning an obscure corner in the midst of his zigzag quest, Shrevvy hadn't expected to come upon a human tangle wherein a frantic girl was trying to beat off a driving knife with one hand and stop two choking fists with the other.

All this was happening in the middle of the street, under the glare of Shrevvy's headlights. One life at least was worth preserving, slight though its chances seemed, so Shrevvy did the right thing in jamming the cab to a sudden stop. But he came close enough to the struggling three to break up any notions of immediate murder.

Instinctively, Akbar and Griff flung themselves aside, which allowed Margo a path of escape between them. Also instinctive, she dived away from the threatening cab and was lucky enough to find an opening. Griff's howl explained why, for in the sudden shift of things, his arm had crossed in front of Akbar's slashing knife. Meeting the blade, Griff didn't like its taste.

Nevertheless, both men bounded after Margo, who darted across the sidewalk at an angle where she thought she saw a sheltering doorway. That action proved in Margo's favor, for it brought her almost in line with Shrevvy's cab. Already the cab was disgorging a new fighter, who came with an invisible swiftness.

The new factor was The Shadow.

Momentarily the cloaked figure formed a whirl of blackness only to be lost in the gloom beyond the curb. Coming full about, The Shadow loomed suddenly in the converging paths of Akbar and Griff, meeting the pair with a flay of guns that he brandished like a pair of Indian clubs. Akbar's long knife, coming slantwise, was stopped with a clang that nearly buckled the blade into its owner's fist. Griff's good arm rose to form a buffer, only to be driven down and back by the swing of The Shadow's other gun.

Akbar didn't wait for further treatment. The laugh The Shadow gave must have filled the Turk's mind with a flood of fears; perhaps he believed he had met some phantasm of the sort that Mahatma Xanadu described as residents of other worlds. As a net result, Akbar turned and fled, leaving Griff to battle The Shadow alone, or vice versa.

It was largely vice versa.

Half-crippled, partly stunned, Griff clutched The Shadow drunkenly, fighting only with the strength induced by rage. In a few moments, The Shadow would have subdued this adversary through the use of skillful tactics, if another factor hadn't intervened.

Margo was the first to sense the creeping danger, for it was coming up behind her. Hearing a slight stumble, the girl turned in time to see a stocky figure coming past a pair of stone house steps. Whoever he was, the man had tripped a trifle on the lowest step, giving a warning of his approach.

In the man's upswinging hand, Margo saw a gleaming revolver. She didn't wait to view his face; instead, she shouted to The Shadow and made a dive on her side of the steps. Purposely perhaps, The Shadow reeled backward into the lights of Shrevvy's cab, dragging Griff with him.

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This was to attract the attention of the new attacker and it did. Instead of starting after Margo, the man by the steps aimed for The Shadow, who caught the glitter of the veering gun. With amazing speed, The Shadow whipped Griff around and used him as a shield, aiming his own automatic across the fellow's shoulder.

It should have happened faster than the other man could fire but something went awry. Instead of taking to his heels, the huddled man delivered belated shots. Those bullets lodged in Griff's back, almost jouncing the big man from The Shadow's grasp. Only then did the man by the steps dart back into the alley from which he had emerged.

Luck went with him, for Griff's contortions disturbed The Shadow's aim and the cloaked marksman fired wide. Nor could The Shadow disentangle himself from Griff in time to take up the pursuit. Through the alley and out the other end, the fugitive crossed the next street at an angle to gain another passage on the opposite side.

Only then, when he was in the clear and where he couldn't be observed, did the fugitive's face come into the light. The man who had fled The Shadow's fire was Teach Morgan, Griff Thurver's partner in crime!

CHAPTER X

STRANGE is the law of the Manhattan jungle.

Its deepest wilds can be transformed to places least remote, once the proper impetus is given.

This rule applied to the dismal area wherein The Shadow had just scattered an opposing trio. This was regarded as a neighborhood to be avoided; the people who lived hereabouts stayed indoors during periods when trouble was apt to be on prowl.

If householders heard sounds of scuffles, screams, or running feet out in the street, they gave such tokens no concern. Whoever had found trouble should have stayed away from this district according to the local philosophy.

But gunshots were different.

They might be the prelude to anything, such as bashing doors, armed invasions, house-to-house battles. Until Teach's shots from the dark had staggered Griff and produced a return fire from The Shadow, the houses along this street had seemed deserted. But now the residents were rallying to a mutual cause.

Windows were slashing open. People were shouting, blowing whistles. Mingling with these sounds were the loud crackles of old-fashioned burglar rattles, things which had been novelties when these old houses were new. People who had telephones were using them to call the nearest police precinct, which wasn't really necessary.

Already the whine of a siren told that the bedlam had been heard. A patrol car was on its way.

So was The Shadow.

Easing Griff's groaning figure to the house steps, The Shadow gripped Margo's arm and whisked her into Shrevvy's cab which was already on the move. So swiftly did The Shadow follow that Margo thought he had stayed behind until she heard his order to Shrevvy.

It came in Cranston's tone:

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"Club Hayrick."

Shrevvy's course was swift, but as devious as that of Xanadu's limousine. It was Shrevvy's policy to drive by ear when he heard sirens in the offing. Such minor traffic violations as using a one-way street in the wrong direction were not only excusable in these circumstances, but useful. As for traffic lights, Shrevvy could go color-blind when the occasion demanded.

In a matter of five minutes, this clever hackie had wangled enough zigzags to confuse a snake. He was back within three blocks from where he started, but by that time the police cars had reached the street of trouble without even glimpsing the circumnavigating cab.

What was important was this: Shrevvy's cab was now entering this general area instead of leaving it, which made all the difference in the world. What was more, he was simply bringing two respectable passengers to a logical destination, a fancy night spot called the Club Hayrick.

As the lights of that establishment came in sight, Cranston smiled at Margo's bewilderment. His black garb stowed away, Cranston was no longer The Shadow and could therefore relax into his more leisurely self. As for Margo, she was just beginning to add up facts.

Margo had forgotten that the Club Hayrick was near the border of the disreputable neighborhood in which cutthroats, stranglers and gunmen had all been individually represented in quick succession. That was because Margo had always approached the Club Hayrick from the west. Every taxi driver who knew his business preferred the better avenues when taking customers there.

It was dawning on Margo why the limousine's chauffeur had dropped her at the spot he had. It was all for the convenience of Griff Thurver, the steady bouncer at the Hayrick. Just a few blocks through back alleys had placed Griff exactly where he could meet Margo when she came along. A quick strangle job and Griff could have returned to his familiar post with his absence scarcely noticed.

Margo threw a grateful glance at Cranston in appreciation for his hindrance of Griff's secret duty.

Fitting Akbar into the picture was very simple, as Margo saw it. The terrible Turk had simply followed the limousine in order to cut off Margo's retreat. The only factor that puzzled Margo was the stocky man who had popped up from darkness, fired a few shots at the wrong target and immediately fled.

Who was he?

So far, even Cranston didn't have the answer, yet both he and Margo saw the missing assassin the moment they entered the Club Hayrick. The orchestra had just finished a popular swing number called "Lady in the Light," and the leader, a moon-faced gentleman named Dickie Wimbledon, was gesturing his baton at a trap drummer who was beating everything out of the instruments that surrounded him.

The trap artist's name was Teach Morgan and he looked like the original marijuana kid. Associating him with the marksman from the alley was something that wouldn't have occurred to anyone at that moment; not even to The Shadow.

In Cranston's style, The Shadow was surveying the customers and hired help around the Club Hayrick and finding none who might tally with the missing gunman. The logical assumption was that the fellow had fled elsewhere.

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That theory tallied all the better after Cranston heard Margo's story. Her description of the scene in Xanadu's crystal was most illuminating, though Cranston made no comment. It seemed logical that the masked man in the crystal revelation, the one who tallied so closely with Cranston himself, was the alley marksman whose bullets had stabbed Griff's back.

This threw the trail further from Teach Morgan, for the man in the crystal had been Fitz Crosset, who was still at the Cafe Marimba building himself an alibi. Certainly a man whom Margo pointedly described as "a well-groomed figure" could not be Teach Morgan, who was standing up to take a bow with Dickie Wimbledon.

Teach's tuxedo jacket was ruffled; his black tie was awry; his hair was shaggily dropped across his eyes. All this was attributable to his gyrations with the traps, rather than a mad race through back alleys. Besides, "Lady in the Light" was a prolonged number, which must have begun about the time when shots were echoing in the street that Margo wanted to forget.

The atmosphere of the Club Hayrick irked Margo, particularly after the music stopped. Leaning across the table, she insisted:

"Why don't you do something, Lamont?"

"Don't upset your drink," warned Cranston. "You need it more than the tablecloth. These notes of yours aren't bad" – he referred to the paper that Margo had given him – "only I'm sorry you didn't check the return trip."

"It was all mixed up," said Margo. "I lost all sense of direction, because I didn't even know East from West."

"What about distance?"

"If you mean in terms of time," replied Margo, "it was about half as long as the original ride. I'm only guessing in a way, but I ought to be right. I can remember everything Sheila said and I know about how long she takes to say something."

Cranston gave an indulgent smile which didn't remedy Margo's mood.

"What about Sheila?" demanded Margo. "What's happened to her?"

"The limousine probably took her home," replied Cranston. "Don't worry about Sheila."

"But she saw the crystal images too –"

"Because she was meant to see them. You weren't and that makes all the difference."

"Suppose Sheila calls the police?"

"She probably has already. We can expect her here later. How soon depends on two people."

"What two people?"

"Inspector Cardona and the maid," replied Cranston, calmly. "It all depends upon how long it takes Cardona to make Francine confess."

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It couldn't have taken very long, for in about half an hour, the stocky police inspector strode into the Club Hayrick accompanied by fluttery Miss Waltham. Cardona was looking around for the manager, who happened to be at the telephone. The inspector interrupted his quest when he saw Cranston. Before Cardona could reach Cranston's table, Sheila was ahead of him.

"It was Francine!" blurted Sheila to Margo. "When I described what I saw, she suddenly broke down and confessed she'd been working with the crooks. It was exactly like –"

"Exactly like that silly dream of yours?" put in Margo, sweetly. "What a coincidence, Sheila."

"Why, yes." Blank a moment, Sheila suddenly caught on. "Only I didn't say anything about Mahat –"

"About your hat?" snapped Margo, before Sheila could add the final syllable. "What has a hat to do with it? I thought all you gave Francine was your old coat."

Blank again, Sheila gradually understood and beamed a smile at Margo. Sheila's nod meant that she would be careful not to make any further slips. This one had passed Cardona completely, because the ace inspector was busy talking to Cranston.

"Dreams are crazy," Cardona was telling Cranston, "but sometimes they come through. This one scored a ten-strike on Francine the maid. Now Miss Waltham claims she dreamed about Griff Thurver, the big bouncer who works around this joint. Have you seen him here tonight, Mr. Cranston?"

Cranston was giving his head a truthful shake when the club manager arrived in a complete dither.

"There's been a shooting, inspector," informed the manager. "Somebody waylaid Griff Thurver a couple of blocks from here. A patrol car took him over to the hospital. They say Griff's in a bad way."

Leaving Sheila with Margo, Cardona gave a quick gesture to Cranston and said:

"Let's go over."

They reached the hospital to find Griff in a worse condition than Cranston expected. It was plain that the thug was dying and knew it. To Inspector Joe Cardona, that situation spelled opportunity.

"Come clean, Griff," urged Joe, as he leaned beside the cot. "We know what's in back of this. That jewel robbery."

Between coughs, Griff spat:

"What jewel robbery?"

"At the Waltham penthouse. The maid told us all about it."

"What maid?"

Getting nowhere so far, Cardona played a hunch. He simply transcribed Sheila's alleged dream into terms of Francine's confession.

"The one who saw you take off your mask," stated Cardona. "That was a dumb stunt, Griff, after everything was in the bag. You were supposed to fix things so the maid could stick to her story, only you muffed it."

DEATH IN THE CRYSTAL

Griff's answer was a pained scowl.

"One look at that mug of yours," continued Cardona, "and the dame couldn't forget it. Her description tagged you perfect, Griff."

"All right." Griff's tone came gritted. "I was in on it. So what?"

"Who else was in it?" demanded the inspector. "That's what we want you to tell us, Griff."

With a sudden effort, Griff Thurver propped himself on his elbows, shoved his face close to Cardona's and combined a cough with a sneer as he said:

"Now wouldn't you like to know!"

That effort did for Griff Thurver. His propping elbows failed him and without a groan, Griff sagged back dead.

CHAPTER XI

JUSTIN CADBURY spent five days a week in a great big sumptuous office that was reached through a door which bore the imposing title:

CADBURY ENTERPRISES
INCORPORATED

That was only the first door. There were three or four others, leading through outer offices before coming to an inner door marked "Private." Those offices were occupied by a skeleton staff of workers, all as idle as Cadbury, since his enterprises hadn't found anything to be enterprising about.

By turning right and following around an inner corridor, Cadbury's office could be reached by a side door without passing any of the hired help. Cadbury had specially provided this secret route and it was the one Fitz Crosset used.

Smooth-faced Fitz was still the fashion-plate, even in street clothes. He played the man-about-town handsomely, though today there was a troubled look on the face beneath the marcelled hair.

"Xanadu must have played a hunch," declared Fitz. "Solving that robbery was something I didn't figure he could do."

"He didn't solve it," returned Cadbury, with a bland smile. "The stolen gems have been unloaded through proper channels and will never be traced, unless I hand over the evidence."

Fitz gave a startled glance.

"What evidence?"

"Letters from people who peddled the gems for us." Cadbury gestured to a locked file cabinet in the corner. "Checks, bills of sale, telegrams and other incriminating data. I'm keeping it just to make sure the various go-betweens play ball."

"But it might bounce back on us," admonished Fitz. "You're taking a big risk keeping that stuff here."

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"No risk at all," disputed Cadbury. "Why should anyone suspect me as the brain behind crime? I'm shouting down the black market and offering to spend a fortune in fighting it, if others will do the same."

"Suppose they take you up?"

"They won't," chuckled Cadbury, "and that leaves me clear to supply the black market with all the gems we can steal. We'll make twenty-five thousand out of the Waltham job alone."

Fitz nodded, but his heart wasn't in it. Stalking to Cadbury's window, he looked down at the street a dozen floors below. Fitz was jittery, as if he expected to see a fleet of police cars suddenly surround the building.

"I still can't figure Xanadu."

"It's easy, Fitz," assured Cadbury. "Let me show you how he fits. That's a good one: Fitz and fits."

"I'll be having them," snapped Fitz. "Fits, I mean, unless you boil down this Xanadu business."

"Very well," declared Cadbury, dropping his broad smile. "We picked Xanadu for the fall-guy, because he's a fake and crook combined. That made him a natural. All we had to do was throw a scare into him and he had to disappear. That gave us a good start."

Fitz nodded for Cadbury to continue.

"We knew two things," continued Cadbury. "First, where Xanadu would go, because Teach Morgan helped us to arrange it, by tipping off Xanadu that the heat was on. Again, we knew that Xanadu would continue to operate with special customers in order to make money and Teach helped that angle too."

Again, Fitz nodded.

"Teach did a swell job," complimented Fitz. "He dug up Dingo Bandorf, the guy with the old limousine and sold Xanadu the idea of using him –"

"I know all that," interrupted Cadbury. "Now let's consider what happened last night. Xanadu did exactly what we hoped he would. He sent for Sheila Waltham."

"Of course," nodded Fitz. "He wanted to convince her that he didn't steal her jewels. It was a bad coincidence, for Xanadu, that robbery happening right after he lammed."

"It's only the first coincidence," reminded Cadbury. "There will be several, because we intend to rob other people who are on Xanadu's sucker list. By then the police will see the connection and blame Mahatma Xanadu."

"Not if he keeps cracking crimes for them."

"You think not?"

There was something in the lift of Cadbury's eyebrows, the suave note of his deep voice that made Fitz stop and ponder. Along with Fitz's gradual enlightenment, Cadbury boomed a chuckle.

"I get it!" exclaimed Fitz. "They'll think that Xanadu is getting rid of people who know too much. That is, they'll think it after they link Xanadu with the robberies."

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"Exactly so," agreed Cadbury. "A faker of Xanadu's caliber would be just smart enough to cover up a robbery by exposing it afterward and collecting a reward for that service. What did Francine know? Nothing, except that someone phoned her saying it would be profitable if she learned the combination of that wall safe.

"Griff was the type of man who wouldn't talk, even if Teach hadn't accidentally shot him instead of The Shadow. It would be wise to replace Griff with another worker of equal merit, Fitz. You know the type: strong, silent – and dumb."

Fitz grinned at that one, for he was becoming much relieved. Then, reverting to his troubled mood, he questioned:

"But we still don't know how Xanadu learned all he did about the robbery."

"Don't we?" queried Cadbury. "What is Xanadu's business, Fitz?"

"Why, he's a crystal gazer."

"Correct. As such, he makes a practice of furnishing people with information that they think he couldn't possibly know."

"Yes, and sometimes he tells them things that even they don't know at the time he spills it."

Nodding at Fitz's summary, Cadbury spread his hands in a conclusive fashion.

"There's the answer," announced Cadbury triumphantly. "You called the shot yourself, Fitz. Xanadu can only pick up facts through stooges. He's been using them for months, ever since he opened shop."

"Say!" exclaimed Fitz. "Maybe Francine was one of them!"

"I am convinced she was," chuckled Cadbury. "Probably she mistook our offer as one from Xanadu. Well, she can look to him for payment instead of to us. We told her that cash would only go with silence."

"That's probably Xanadu's line, too," laughed Fitz. "Say – we're framing this better than we thought! What about the next job? Maybe we can play through one of Xanadu's stooges again. How do you pick them?"

"By choosing the person most easily reached," declared Cadbury. "I think the apartment janitor will be the right man to help us with the Lenfield problem."

"You mean you're going after Arthur Lenfield, the antique collector?"

"We are. Not only is he on Xanadu's sucker list, I happen to know that his antiques include jewelry, a fact which most persons have overlooked."

"How can I phone the janitor?"

"You won't." Cadbury folded his arms with the important air of a man delivering orders. "This will require a personal interview, Fitz."

"That's something I can't risk," argued Fitz. Then, hastily he added: "Not on my account, but yours. I'm the only man who knows you're back of this. So I have to play things pretty safe myself."

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"Of course," agreed Cadbury, smoothly. "I'm not asking you to take the risk, Fitz. Send Teach; he's our ace in the hole. We picked him just for work like this."

"And because he knew Xanadu," reminded Fitz, "which is still a big help. Only we've got to watch ourselves, chief."

"In what way?"

"Where people like the Lane girl are concerned. Trying to knock her off wasn't a good idea. I'm just as glad it didn't happen."

"It appeared necessary," Cadbury's eyes were sharp, his tone pointed. "I shall make the decisions, Fitz. It is your duty to put them into execution."

The term "execution" made Fitz wince; nevertheless, he nodded.

"And the final conclusions will be mine," added Cadbury. "In this case we happen to coincide. I am just as pleased as you are that Margo Lane survived. Our object was to keep her from talking about the trip with Sheila Waltham. Two witnesses would have made the story too substantial."

"But the Lane girl didn't talk –"

"Which is one reason why I am glad she is still alive. Nevertheless, my policy was sound. Evidently Xanadu agrees" – Cadbury relaxed into one of his hearty chuckles – "because he planned to murder Margo too. Otherwise he wouldn't have sent along that big Turk of his."

Fitz's qualms were vanishing.

"I see your other reason," he said suddenly. "If you find you have to get rid of the Lane girl later, maybe you can frame the job on Xanadu."

"Everything will be blamed on Xanadu eventually," assured Cadbury, "but that is not my reason, Fitz. Facts have come to my attention which convinces me that Margo Lane is valuable in dealing with a certain unknown quantity."

The statement brought a look of consternation to Fitz's handsome face. Knowing that his henchman had caught the startling answer, Cadbury worded it in an insidious tone that he felt would lessen Fitz's fears regarding the unknown.

"We can use Margo Lane," emphasized Justin Cadbury, "because she is the one person who can lead us to a greater rival than Xanadu; to an enemy who must be eliminated before our schemes can be called complete."

Pausing, Cadbury delivered a sneer that fitted the contempt in his tone as he added the name that Fitz so dreaded:

"The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XII

A PARTY was in progress at Lenfield's apartment, if it could be called a party. When Arthur Lenfield entertained, he did it in a stodgy way which suited the environment. For Arthur Lenfield lived in a world of a

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hundred years ago, and looked it.

The Lenfield apartment occupied the third floor of an old Greenwich Village mansion, which formed part of a row. It was a curious hodgepodge of chopped-up rooms, with windows only at the front and back. These windows were heavily barred to protect Lenfield's antiques.

There was a third room with a skylight which was also barred on the underside. The rest of the rooms had solid walls, in fact they gave the general appearance of closets built to an exaggerated size.

All this enabled Lenfield to subdivide the various antiques which so filled the apartment that in some places it was impossible to squeeze between them. But Lenfield didn't confine his collecting to furniture. He liked old glass, ancient pottery, old-fashioned clocks, in fact about everything that wasn't modern.

Afternoon tea was being served in the front room when Margo Lane arrived and found herself an unwelcome contrast to the lavender and old lace that dominated the reception. All the other ladies present were dowagers and elderly spinsters who had known Arthur Lenfield since his boyhood days when this had been the family mansion.

They were talking about how "daring Arthur" used to climb the cherry tree in the back yard and wave to them from its highest boughs. From the look on Lenfield's face, Margo decided that the tree must have borne pie cherries, for his expression was very sour. It turned out, however, that it was the chatter, not the recollection that pained him, for his withered face beamed a smile the moment Lenfield saw Margo.

Having wangled a roundabout invitation to this party, Margo had never met Lenfield. But despite his love for the antique in everything else, Lenfield preferred the modern in femininity. He immediately deserted the crinoline contingent to welcome this streamlined model.

"Come, my dear," cackled Lenfield. "Let me show you my treasures." Scarcely taller than Margo's shoulder, Lenfield tilted his head to let his eyes roll upward. "As if you weren't a treasure yourself!"

Lenfield's playful banter brought a rattle of lorgnettes as the dowagers and spinsters surveyed the hussy who was stealing their hero of the cherry tree. Until Lenfield captured her, Margo had assumed that her afternoon frock was really quite conservative, but in this company its trim fit seemed positively outre. Wishing that she'd worn a hoop-skirt and whatever paraphernalia it demanded, Margo let Lenfield escort her from the parlor as the lesser of two undesirable choices.

Nevertheless, Margo didn't appreciate Lenfield's company, even if he had spoken of "treasures" which were the very things she'd come to learn about. In looking over the list of Xanadu's known clients, Cranston had studied the name of Arthur Lenfield as a definite potential.

In brief, Lamont Cranston was following the very course that Justin Cadbury expected the law to take later. He was linking Mahatma Xanadu with crime on the very basis that a man who knew enough about a robbery to expose it, could very well have managed its commission.

Nothing had been heard of Sheila's jewels, yet she felt that Xanadu had earned the reward that she had paid him. If one of the Mahatma's dupes could be taken that easily, another might logically follow. Picking Lenfield had seemed a long shot to Margo until Cranston had brought out the obscure fact that certain types of jewelry – which included some of the most highly valued – came under the classification of antiques.

Perhaps Lenfield's rapid method of making himself acquainted would enable Margo to divert the subject to antique jewelry. It was difficult though to talk to him and at the same time avoid his ogling glances. Hence

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Margo was glad when they met an elderly butler hobbling from the front door to announce that three gentlemen had arrived. Hoping that Cranston was among them, Margo interjected:

"You must show them your glassware, Mr. Lenfield! That's what you said would interest me most, wasn't it?"

"I suppose so," returned Lenfield, glumly. "Only maybe these gentlemen don't like glassware."

"I'm sure they do," insisted Margo. "They're interested in antiques, or they wouldn't have come here. Since you prize the glassware most of all, it must be exactly what they want to look at."

Lenfield shrugged in the direction of the superannuated butler.

"Show them to the glassware room, Harvey."

Margo recognized the men the moment they arrived. The three consisted of Justin Cadbury and two friends who had been with him at the Cobalt Club the night Margo had bolted in from the night. This same trio were with Cranston at the Cafe Marimba on another evening while Margo had been making a secret trip by limousine to Xanadu's new headquarters.

Those facts added up to Cadbury's credit, should he ever be doubted. Cadbury's constant denouncement of crooked practices removed him far from Xanadu's category. In fact Margo felt a new confidence with Cadbury's arrival, probably because of his own manner.

Cadbury had good reason to be confident, even on a scene where he had ordered crime.

To Fitz Crosset, Cadbury had expressed the belief that Mahatma Xanadu used stooges to good advantage. If anyone should know, it was Cadbury, for he was adept in that practice. His two companions, gentlemen of high standing in the business world, were Cadbury's stooges without knowing it. So far they had sustained Cadbury's imposing bluff so well that he was using them as unwitting assistants in a coming crime.

Things were to happen right under the eyes of Cadbury's friends, without their becoming one whit wiser.

Booming a welcome to Margo, Cadbury asked if she expected her friend Cranston. When Margo replied that Lamont would be calling for her, old Lenfield's face renewed its crab-apple expression. Lenfield was a bit testy as he showed his visitors through the gorgeous glassware collection. Taking Margo's delighted exclamations for granted, Lenfield threw a dour glance at Cadbury, and demanded:

"Don't you like these items?"

"Very much," replied Cadbury, "but old glassware wouldn't fit my purpose."

"What purpose is that?"

"I'm trying to start a business," explained Cadbury, "but I'm finding it impossible in these times when new materials are not available. It finally struck me that antiques would be a good line, as they are always available."

"If you can find them," clucked Lenfield, suddenly becoming interested. "You'd specialize in one variety of course?"

"Yes, but not in glassware, because it's too fragile. I would have to ship all over the country."

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"What about clocks?" queried Lenfield. "Take a look in here!"

He ushered his visitors into a room where they were greeted by ticking sounds from every wall. There were hundreds of clocks in the place and they seemed to be engaged in a wild, maddening race. Cadbury fairly had to shout above the tumult.

"Clocks won't do! You can't get parts to keep them in repair, particularly the old-fashioned kind."

Lenfield beckoned the group out through another door. Following the hallway, they came to a door on the other side. Unlocking it with a special key, Lenfield introduced them into the room with the barred sky-light.

All about were tables; stacked on them were caskets of assorted shapes and sizes. They were music-boxes as Lenfield demonstrated, when he went about, pressing their springs. Tinkly tunes blended, then became discordant as too many notes conflicted. Lenfield might have an eye for music-boxes, but he certainly had no ear for music.

Wondering how far the sound would carry, Margo glanced upward to the frosted pane above the sky-light's bars. It was dim, that pane, for dusk was settling, and Cadbury had been forced to turn on the lights here in the music room. Nevertheless, there was still a trace of outdoor glow, coming through the skylight.

Against it, Margo saw something flit. It was a shadowy something that slid away as if alarmed by the clashing tinkles from below. It was too large to be a bird or even a prowling cat. Though her glance was only fleeting, Margo was sure that the disappearing blackness must be something human.

Margo's mind jumped instantly to thoughts of Cranston's other self, The Shadow. With nightfall almost at hand and a sense of menace in the air, Margo was comforted by the impression that crime's greatest foe was very near.

Margo Lane might not have believed the truth if it had been told her. Instead of being what she thought, that flicker of passing blackness was the shadow of crime itself!

CHAPTER XIII

JUSTIN CADBURY waved his hands unhappily and shouldered toward the door while Arthur Lenfield was touching off more music-boxes.

"They're worse than clocks," shouted Cadbury. "Besides, nobody wants music-boxes!"

"Clocks? Music-boxes?" Lenfield cackled the questions in a high, shrill tone. "Yes, I have a combination of them, over there!"

He pointed to a grandfather's clock against the opposite wall. Under its long pendulum was another compartment with a square glass door which Lenfield opened to bring out some large brass plates that looked like thin phonograph records. Lenfield brought them over to Cadbury.

"Very rare," shrilled Lenfield. "A grandfather's clock with a music box combined. I used to keep it in the clock room until it went out of order; then I brought it here."

Retiring to the hall so that others could do the same, Cadbury gave a polite nod. Lenfield was welcome to the jargon, but Cadbury wanted no more of it.

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Nor did the others, particularly Margo. She retired to the hallway too, while Lenfield was replacing the brass disks in the bottom of the tall clock. His happy cackles audible above the din, Lenfield couldn't resist the temptation of playing with his favorite curios. He started another circuit of the room, winding some music boxes, starting others. At last he reached the door and paused as though loath to close it.

Shuffling footsteps were coming along the rear hall. Lenfield suddenly forgot his music boxes when he saw two men bringing a small organ in his direction. One was an expressman; the other was evidently the apartment house janitor, because Lenfield called him by name.

"What's this, Jerome?"

"It just came by the back way," replied the janitor. "I'd say it was an organ, Mr. Lenfield; only it don't look exactly like an organ."

"It's a melodeon!" exclaimed Lenfield. "I've been advertising for one all this month! Where is it from?"

Jerome shrugged.

"Dunno," he said. "Question is, where's it to go?"

"In there, of course." Lenfield gestured to the music room. "There's plenty of space between the tables over in the far corner."

Lenfield watched the two men work the melodeon into the stated corner. They came out looking back over their shoulders as though they minded the tumult of the music boxes much more than their recent effort. Lenfield drew the door shut and its automatic lock clicked tightly.

For the first time, Margo noted that the door was very strong and thick. but it didn't cut off the penetrating tinkles of the music-boxes. All were audible, though muffled, and the sound carried clear to the front room, where the group went next. Remaining long enough to pay off Jerome and the expressman, Lenfield followed to rejoin his guests.

Amid the gradually decreasing tinkle of the music-boxes, a singular thing was happening within the room that Lenfield had locked. Two doors kicked open at each side of the old-fashioned organ which Lenfield had termed a melodeon. A contorted figure did a sideward roll and came out to the floor, straightening its arched back as it arrived.

The man arose and stretched himself. In the light which Lenfield had forgotten to turn off, this visitor's face grimaced into a hard, fixed leer. The man was the trap drummer who made crime his side-line: Teach Morgan.

The clangor of the music-boxes didn't bother Teach at all. He could make more noise – and worse when he bandied the drums, bells and cymbals in Wimbledon's orchestra. Kicking the doors of the melodeon shut with a bass-drum motion of his foot, Teach opened the top and dipped down into the center. From it he produced another music-box, as if this room needed more.

Stepping to a table opposite the big grandfather's clock, Teach placed his own music-box there. The table being already crowded, Teach set the box on two of Lenfield's, finding that the pair differed in height, he carefully arranged the angle, so his music-box wouldn't topple or slide.

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That done, Teach went to the door and carefully opened it an inch. Trying to listen for anything was impossible, with so many music-boxes still running, so Teach peered through the crack of the door instead. With his other hand, Teach was drawing a bandanna handkerchief from his pocket, but he waited while he watched a figure that was waiting down the hall.

As soon as that figure moved Teach's way, the stocky drummer stepped back and slid the knotted handkerchief down across his face so that its folded edge stopped on the bridge of his nose. As the door opened, Teach heard the ringing of a bell; nevertheless, he was quick to close the door as soon as a man in overalls shoved through.

"That was lucky," gruffed Teach, through his mask. "I'd say the doorbell drowned most of this racket when I let you in here."

The other man nodded nervously. He was the janitor, Jerome. He thumbed toward the closed door as he replied:

"It chased Harvey, too, the doorbell did. He's the butler. He don't see too good, he don't, but still I was kind of leery about moving through while he was in the hall. His answering the door-bell helped."

"All right, Jerome," gruffed Teach. "Get busy with the clock."

The janitor blinked.

"Ain't you the guy that phoned me?" he queried. "Didn't I tell you how I saw old Lenfield set the clock at twelve and work it around?"

"It must have been somebody else," replied Teach in the same forced tone. "So show me."

Stepping to the clock, Jerome opened the top door, which covered the large dial. As the janitor began to move the hands, Teach stepped over to the table and clicked the switch of his music-box. Most of the other tunes had died and the sudden starting of a new one caused Jerome to turn about.

"What's the idea?" queried Jerome. "Ain't that noise bad enough, without making a lot more?"

"We've got to keep a few going," growled Teach. "You don't want old Lenfield to get unhappy and come back here, do you?"

Eyeing the tilted music-box, Jerome shook his head. Sight of the new box intrigued him.

"That's a funny one," said Jerome, referring to the box. "Looks like ebony, all black, with brass-work around it. You'd think it was punched with holes."

From beside the table, Teach gave an impatient gesture. He was wearing gloves, otherwise Jerome might have noticed the restless twitch of those deft fingers.

"Hurry it," ordered Teach. "Get into that clock."

Turning to the clock, Jerome set the hands at twelve. From there he moved one, then the other, to different numbers on the dial, as though operating the combination of a safe. There were moments when he paused and turned, his face a trifle worried; nevertheless, his work was rapid.

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Jerome didn't have trouble until the final numbers. There, he made quick tests around the dial, was suddenly rewarded by a click. A moment later, the whole dial was swinging outward like a door.

Repressing an urge to start forward, Teach let Jerome produce the contents of Lenfield's strange, secret strong-box. The janitor's fists came around loaded with an array of vivid gems. Lenfield's tastes were like those of a jackdaw; bright things intrigued him and he preferred them large.

Jerome's hands showed the hues of sapphires, amethysts, garnets, studded with the amber tint of topaz. These were stones that could be divided into smaller jewels suitable for modern settings, instead of the heavy gold that now contained them. Teach's eyes glittered above the mask, but he didn't budge from where he stood.

Instead, Teach picked up the music-box, turned it off, and opened the ebony lid.

"Dump them in here," ordered Teach. "I like music-boxes, so I'll take this big one with me. The skylight next."

Several music-boxes were still running, but Jerome was worried because his masked companion had stopped the black one. Noting Jerome's look, Teach started one of Lenfield's music boxes. Satisfied, Jerome climbed a table and brought a screw-driver from his pocket. Rapidly he removed the thread-bolts from the metal frame that held the heavy bars.

As soon as the bars came loose, Jerome lowered them. Climbing the table, which was strong enough for two, Teach hoisted himself up through the skylight, which shoved open as he reached it. With him he took the ebony box, the stolen gems rattling inside it.

There was work for both as soon as Teach was through the trap. The masked man's job was to lower the skylight and replace the outside screws that normally, kept it tight. Meanwhile, Jerome was putting back the bars and fixing the bolts where they belonged.

Of the two, Jerome worked faster. This was a janitor's business, and he had good light. Besides, Jerome was worried because all the music-boxes had stopped except the one that Teach had finally started. A single tune was like a single thread to Jerome. He didn't reason that it would be good for several minutes more; he'd lost track of time, just like the grandfather's clock.

When that one music-box halted, Lenfield might come back, which was something Jerome certainly didn't want to happen. Finishing his job in rapid time, Jerome dropped to the floor, shoved the table where it belonged and started for the door. Opening the barrier, the janitor slid through, reaching his hand back to press another switch.

Not the light switch, for Jerome was leaving it on. What the janitor pressed was the switch on the nearest music-box, close beside the door. Letting the door come shut, Jerome started along the hall, reaching in his pocket for a sheet of paper that he had purposely forgotten until now.

Crime stood completed and there was no need to worry about Lenfield. With that thought, Jerome took it that all cause for worry was over.

Jerome was wrong. Crime's worry had just begun.

CHAPTER XIV

IT was Lamont Cranston who noted the change of tune. He was the guest who had arrived when Harvey answered the door-bell.

In entering, Cranston had observed the hallway, but all was clear by that time. Hearing the confusion of many music-box tunes, he had looked inquiringly at Margo, after joining the other guests in the front parlor.

While Lenfield had been talking antiques, Margo undertoned the details of the music room, but only in terms of music-boxes. The melodeon seemed unimportant, largely because Lenfield hadn't decided to play it. Anyway, it was just another addition to some rather quaint instruments in the room which Lenfield was so careful to keep locked.

When the crux came, Cranston checked it.

Despite the cackle of Lenfield's incessant voice, Cranston heard the rise in volume of a single music-box. That change marked the moment when Jerome was coming from the room. Then, as the sound diminished, denoting a closing door, the second tune mingled with the first.

The effect was deceptive, even to Cranston's keen ear. The pins on the cylinder of the second music-box did not reach the prongs immediately and the slight interval gave the impression that someone had started the new tune after entering the room instead of leaving it.

That determined Cranston's course.

Instead of starting rapidly into the hallway, Cranston maintained his leisurely pose. So casually did he leave his chair that Margo didn't realize he was gone until she looked around. As for Cadbury, he didn't notice Cranston's departure at all. Like his friends, Cadbury was giving polite attention to Lenfield's vapid harangue on antiques.

Once in the hallway, Cranston paused to pick up a briefcase that he had left with Harvey. Inverting the briefcase, Cranston opened a secret compartment in the bottom and from a division that formed an inverted V between the ordinary sections, he produced The Shadow's garb.

This hallway, darkening with the dusk, was a perfect spot for a rapid transformation, but Cranston was in no hurry. Smoothly rather than swiftly he became The Shadow; gliding along the hallway, he reached the door from which the music came and began to probe the lock with a slender pick.

Jerome was luckier than he knew.

The janitor had reached the back stairway just before Cranston's advent to the hall. He'd pulled a door shut behind him and was now knocking at the apartment below, where he had some chores to finish. From the alibi standpoint, Jerome was set.

That didn't quite apply to Teach Morgan.

As one music box finished its chime, The Shadow heard a sound above the tinkle of the other. It was a scuffling sound, of footsteps that were unquestionably from the roof. How anyone could have reached there so rapidly was a question that The Shadow didn't stop to argue. Abandoning his work at the strong room door, he started toward the rear of the hallway, the direction that the faint scuffle had gone.

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Things happened very suddenly.

Old Harvey, who neither saw nor heard too well, came blundering from the clock room just as The Shadow was about to pass it. Before he could twist away, the cloaked investigator jostled Harvey and the effect was electric.

Seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but feeling plenty, Harvey thought some wandering spook was loose. If any house deserved to have ghosts, it was this old Village mansion and Harvey had often claimed he sensed their presence. Old Lenfield had scoffed at the notion, querulously demanding proof.

Here was proof, so Harvey shouted it.

The servant's cry brought Lenfield from the front room, with others close behind him. In fact, Cadbury was almost shoving his host aside, a fact that Margo noticed and considered very impolite, though she was too startled to give it much attention. Shoulder to shoulder with Lenfield, Cadbury suddenly eased away as Harvey called again:

"It's gone – whatever it was, it's gone! Like a ghost – through there!"

Harvey was waving toward the door of the back stairway. Reaching it first, Lenfield wrenched the door open and heard sounds from a floor below. As Lenfield shouted down, voices answered; one was Harvey's, the other belonged to a man who lived on the second floor. Apparently they hadn't seen any one, for they wanted to know what the trouble was.

They should have been looking at the roof. The Shadow was gazing in that direction from a fire escape, to which he had swung from a window on the back stairs. Still at the level of Lenfield's apartment, The Shadow was just below a crouched figure that was poising for a leap.

It was too dark to make out the man's features. Huddled, he looked more ape than human, except for a white splotch that formed an open shirt front. He was clutching something under one arm and was adjusting what seemed to be the cord of a knapsack over his shoulders. Otherwise The Shadow gained no impression of Teach Morgan and even these visual notations were indistinct.

Apparently the huddled man was going to leap straight down to the fire escape and there wasn't a chance that he could see The Shadow in that lower, thicker darkness. One hand gripping the rail, The Shadow drew an automatic with his other, intending to use it as occasion called. There would be a surprise for that jumper when he landed. Either he'd find a gun muzzle pressing him or he'd receive a neat, well-placed rap that would quiet his desire to struggle.

There wouldn't be a witness to that silent, sudden meeting unless one counted Lenfield's cherry tree, which now reared higher than the house in whose garden it had originally been planted. Stirred by a passing wind, the tree formed a great, grotesque figure weaving its limbs like a multitude of arms.

Tilting to what seemed an impossible angle, the man from the roof lurched forward. Then, and only then did The Shadow catch the trick, too late.

The man didn't leap; he swooped. Something carried him on a long, fantastic dip that curved above The Shadow's head, missing the fire escape entirely. Lunging up from the rail. The Shadow tried to halt that ride, but the swing was too forceful. A pair of hard-hitting feet kicked aside The Shadow's gun-hand and the flying figure was past before The Shadow's other fist could grab it.

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Half-topped across the rail, The Shadow saw the speeding man disappear in the darkness below. Hanging at an angle, The Shadow jabbed two shots as a deterrent to further flight, aiming them close to where the fellow should have landed. But Teach wasn't making stop-offs along this remarkable journey.

As if he had bounced, the fugitive reappeared at the limit of Lenfield's yard, riding up and over the high fence that marked the end of a blind alley just beyond. He was following the same swift curve and the open background between two buildings revealed the reason.

Teach's knapsack was a double rope, looped over a high limb of the cherry tree. It must have been measured from limb to roof edge, which was slightly shorter than from limb to ground. For a whirlwind getaway, Teach had merely to tilt from the roof and let the rope do the rest.

The finish of that elongated swing carried the flying man across the fence with plenty of footage to spare. He dropped from sight with a peculiar twist before The Shadow could again take aim. Shots into the darkened alley would have been useless if The Shadow had dispatched them, which he didn't. The Shadow was experiencing unexpected troubles.

Those shots from the fire escape had been located by people in the house and they were coming with great hue and cry. Moreover, somebody was shooting from the rear street, using the spurts from The Shadow's gun as a target. Obviously these shots were intended as a barrage to cover the escape of the man who had dashed down the alley.

The Shadow offset these complications by some acrobatics of his own. Instead of using the steps of the fire escape, he dropped down the outside, catching at rails and braces as he jolted toward the ground. It was like descending a ladder that had missing rungs, a rough but rapid process.

As The Shadow reached the ground, something flogged down from the tree limb. Lashing across the ground like a snake, the thing disappeared across the fence. It was the rope; Teach had slashed it with a knife when he dropped off. Keeping one end, he'd brought the other after him. A car was speeding from the rear street as The Shadow scaled the fence. Wild shots blazed back and as The Shadow dropped into the alley, there were answering echoes from Lenfield's house, along with spurts of reflected flame. Those shots were actual, however, for The Shadow heard the bullets sizzle past.

In the fleeing car, Teach Morgan was hauling in the last stretch of rope and growling to the driver, Fitz Crosset.

"You should have got some other guy," unburdened Teach. "If I hadn't pulled the rope trick, The Shadow would have nabbed me sure."

"That's why we needed you," returned Fitz. "A specialty like that was your meat, Teach. Don't worry, well be using other fellows later."

"You won't be using anybody," argued Teach, "if you don't hop me back to the Hayrick fast. Dickie Wimbledon is going on in fifteen minutes. He'll need me at the traps."

"Don't worry," assured Fitz. "We'll make it."

The Shadow meanwhile was returning to Lenfield's apartment by a circuit around the block. The front way was to be preferred, because with his pick The Shadow could open Lenfield's main door and stow the black garments in the special briefcase. A normal return as Cranston was The Shadow's present policy with the hope that in the excitement he hadn't been missed.

Apparently he hadn't.

The door of Lenfield's music room was open when Cranston reappeared in the front hall. All attention was focused upon that room, because Lenfield had gone there, much worried, after the confusion ended.

There, Lenfield's guests had watched in wonderment while the little man stood on a chair and tinkered with the hands of the grandfather's clock. Most of the people thought that Lenfield had gone crazy; when the dial of the clock swung wide, they were sure of it.

Coming in from the hallway, Cranston heard the ardent howl that others took as proof of Lenfield's stark insanity.

Arthur Lenfield had found his secret strong-box empty.

CHAPTER XV

THE robbery at Lenfield's was classed as strictly unaccountable. At least that was the police verdict based on the descriptions given.

According to Inspector Joe Cardona, anybody coming down through Lenfield's melody room couldn't have tightened the skylight on the roof, because that was an outside job; whereas a crook working up through couldn't have rigged the bars in place because that demanded inside business.

It was one of those things that fiction writers term a "sealed room mystery" except that this happened to be fact. The sealed room stuff was hokum according to swarthy-faced Joe.

There was none of that bunk in the Lenfield case. Lenfield had closed the door of a room containing nobody as several witnesses could testify. The door had latched automatically, a proven fact because Lenfield had been forced to unlock it later, with a key that never left his possession. When Lenfield had looked into the clock-dial strong box, his antique gems were gone.

"Period."

That was the word Cardona used to finish his description of the case for the benefit of Police Commissioner Weston and the latter's friend, Lamont Cranston. However, Cardona didn't realize that he was building up the very thing he was trying to crack down, namely the sealed room angle, until he saw the commissioner give a disapproving headshake.

"You'll be talking about ghosts next," declared Weston, "the way that butler did. Unless, inspector, you are willing to accept the obvious."

"Which is?" demanded Joe.

"That somebody had a duplicate key," returned Weston. "That simplifies the whole thing, inspector."

"Good enough, except that Lenfield had just changed the lock."

"Then find the locksmith who did it for him."

"Lenfield did it himself," announced Cardona. "Among other things he collects locks, thousands of them. About every week or so, he chooses another one at random and installs it. Incidentally, commissioner" –

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Cardona drove this home bluntly – "Lenfield knows the lock business. You install them from the inside of the door, so that nobody can remove them from the outside."

Weston gave up with a hopeless shrug, so Cardona became lenient.

"I'll tell you the real answer, commissioner," said Joe. "Lenfield admits he hadn't looked at those gems in the last week. Yet occasionally he did get careless and leave the door open because he thought nobody knew about the trick clock. Actually the gems were stolen a few days before the supposed robbery, though Lenfield can't remember just when."

That theory rather satisfied Weston except for one point, which he promptly put.

"Then why all the commotion at the time of Lenfield's tea party?"

"To blame the job on somebody who was there," replied Cardona. With one of his rare grins, Joe gave a nudge. "On your friend Mr. Cranston, for instance."

Cardona was hinting closer than he realized. The Waltham robbery had nearly bounced back at Cranston, and the Lenfield case had been similarly planned, except that crooks had omitted flowers, for which Cranston duly thanked them when he thought of Margo's possible reactions.

"I guess that closes it," decided Weston. "Your job now is to find the jewelry, inspector."

Considering the nature of the gems, Cardona was being assigned to an almost impossible task, as Cranston told Margo when he met her later. But Margo was thinking in terms of crime rather than loot when she exclaimed:

"Didn't they even mention the melodeon?"

"They didn't," replied Cranston, "because Lenfield forgot it after he found that the instrument had been shipped from a very reliable secondhand dealer. The janitor had the express receipt."

"But somebody could have gotten into the melodeon while it was in the express wagon. You know" – Margo frowned reflectively – "that melodeon looked pretty heavy. I'm sure somebody was inside it, pulling the same trick that Achilles did."

"It wasn't Achilles who planned the Trojan Horse," smiled Cranston. "Only I'm glad you mentioned him. This case has a weakness too. The problem is to find the heel."

"You mean the man who was in the melodeon?"

"That's a good way to put it," returned Cranston, retaining his smile. "Let's suppose a criminal was shipped into that strong room, Margo. How did he operate after that?"

"Why, he got out, opened the clock, then went to the door and opened it too –"

"So that he could leave right then?"

"Of course."

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"Then what was he doing on the roof? I told you about the trapeze act that I couldn't quite break up. It was neat, but whoever staged it needed a lot of nerve and luck."

Margo nodded, puzzled.

"You're right, Lamont," she admitted. "It does look like a skylight job after all. But how?"

"How is easy enough," replied Cranston. "Our friend in the melodeon admitted an accomplice to the room. That made the skylight business easy, since they could fix everything from top and bottom. The accomplice simply left by the door. What I want to know is why they went to all that trouble."

Margo had a bright idea.

"Maybe the thief couldn't afford to be seen," she said, "but the accomplice might have been able to take that risk."

"I've thought of that," stated Cranston, "but the accomplice might have well have done the whole job. Unless _"

The pause meant much to Margo. She waited a few moments, then exclaimed eagerly:

"You know who he is?"

"Jerome, the janitor," replied Cranston with a positive nod. "He had to help lug the melodeon, so he couldn't have been inside it."

"Then the thing to do is make Jerome confess!"

"It won't lead anywhere," decided Cranston with a head shake, "any more than it did with Francine. Besides, I'd rather see what happens to Jerome."

A new light dawned on Margo.

"You mean through Mahatma Xanadu!" Margo exclaimed. "You're wondering if he's going to reveal crime in the crystal, the way he did in Sheila's case."

Cranston nodded. Then:

"You really saw those figures, didn't you, Margo?"

"Absolutely," the girl replied seriously. "Maybe I was hypnotized, Lamont, but I saw them very plainly. If there is any way of explaining it except by hypnosis, I'd like to know, because it's had me worried ever since."

"There is another way," assured Cranston, slowly. "It is beginning to come clearly," – he gave a slight smile – "like something in the crystal. It explains why the crime was committed the hard way. I think that Arthur Lenfield will be visiting Mahatma Xanadu, perhaps this evening."

That worried Margo as she looked from the window of Cranston's limousine in which they were riding uptown to dinner.

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"We ought to be going toward Lenfield's then," insisted Margo, "but we're headed the wrong way."

"Shrevvy is at Lenfield's," replied Cranston. "That's why I had Stanley bring this big car out of storage. Which will it be for dinner, Margo: the Cafe Marimba or the Club Hayrick?"

For answer Margo turned the dial of the limousine's radio. Then:

"Make it the Marimba," she said. "I'll get enough of Dickie Wimbledon's music without going to the Hayrick, from which his orchestra broadcasts. The music ought to be starting soon."

It started almost as Margo spoke and the first rendition was "Lady in the Light." Remembering the bang-up finish that characterized Wimbledon's orchestration, Cranston showed slight surprise at the mildness of the tune.

"Nice, isn't it?" queried Margo, sitting back. "If Wimbledon didn't spoil every number, he'd be really good."

"What do you mean by spoil?"

"You should stay in the groove, Lamont," chided Margo. "I see you aren't up on Wimbledon's latest. No boom-boom for him until the very finish; then he makes up for it by giving over to the traps. Listen and you'll see or hear."

Cranston listened and did more than see. For better than five minutes there wasn't the slightest token of a trap. Then came the clatter-bang of everything that Teach Morgan could give. Amid the din Margo cut off the radio.

It was easy for Cranston to picture a scene that could have been of an orchestra platform stocked with all the necessary musicians except one, the drummer, who might have stepped up from the back just when his solo part was due.

Maybe it hadn't been that way tonight, but Cranston was thinking of an evening when crime had struck very close to the Club Hayrick at a time when minutes could have counted.

In brief, Lamont Cranston was thinking of an alibi that wasn't.

CHAPTER XVI

JUSTIN CADBURY was working late in his office. Having no work to do, this meant he was holding a conference with Fitz Crosset, the only man with whom Cadbury actually conducted business.

"So the Mahatma called Lenfield," said Cadbury, "and you sent the package."

"That's right," answered Fitz. "Flowers wouldn't do for Lenfield. He likes locks and the box has one. He likes jewels too and he'll think there are some inside the box."

"Are there?"

"I didn't open it because I couldn't. It's too tricky even for Lenfield to open. Teach says he got it from the Mahatma."

"Then Xanadu can open it, of course."

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"That's the idea. Lenfield will be so curious about the box that he won't pass up Xanadu's invitation. Of course Xanadu will keep the box and we can turn it into evidence against him later."

Cadbury leaned back in his chair, quite satisfied. As a matter of course, he gestured to the filing cabinet that contained his correspondence with the jewelry black market.

"Along with the genuine letters," remarked Cadbury, "I've forged a few with Xanadu's name. They're under 'X' if you want to see them."

"Pen-work isn't my line," said Fitz. "How good are they?"

"Good enough," replied Cadbury, "considering that we'll let the police build their own case first. Xanadu won't be able to dispute the letters when we spring them as a follow-up. He'll be in too deep by that time."

There was a pause as Cadbury leaned forward and propped his elbows on the big desk. Then:

"Now tell me about Teach," suggested Cadbury. "How does he feel after the other night?"

"First rate," replied Fitz, "except that he didn't like mixing it all alone with The Shadow. He says he'll need more support in the future."

"Have you arranged it?"

"Yes, with a couple of strong-arm boys. I did it by telephone of course. They'll have their try-out tonight, like you suggested."

"Very good," decided Cadbury. "We wouldn't want The Shadow to trail Lenfield when he visits Xanadu. Only I don't think The Shadow will."

"Why not?"

"Because he isn't where he can watch Lenfield. At present, The Shadow is at the Cafe Marimba, having dinner with Margo Lane. I told the head-waiter to phone me if Mr. Cranston arrived there. In fact, I left the same word at most of his favorite spots."

Fitz gave a doubting stare.

"You're that sure Cranston is The Shadow?"

"Who else could he be?" queried Cadbury, blandly. "No one else has been so close to matters as Cranston, except ourselves, of course. I can assure you that I am not The Shadow. Are you?"

"Not a chance," laughed Fitz, as he rose to leave. "Well, I'll lazy over to the meeting place and call off the strong-armers after Lenfield gets under way."

The meeting place was a building on Forty-second Street which had an entrance leading through the block. In the daytime, this arcade was thronged, but after office hours it was practically deserted. Pedestrians used it as a thoroughfare, but they were comparatively few. Most of the persons entering the building were those who wanted to use the all-night elevators to their offices.

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The front street was bright, but the arcade was dim at night, which was why it discouraged foot-traffic. In addition, the rear street was very dark, so nobody cared to go there. That was, nobody except Arthur Lenfield.

Alighting from a cab in front of the arcaded building, Lenfield showed that he was in a hurry. The reason was that the cab he had picked up outside his apartment had proven very slow, partly because the driver had misunderstood Lenfield's directions.

Of course Lenfield didn't know that the cabby was nicknamed Shrevvy and that he worked for The Shadow. Nor did he guess that Shrevvy had been waiting specially to pick up this particular passenger in an area where cabs were scarce. As for Shrevvy's detours, they had purpose too.

First, Shrevvy had swung past a drug-store where Burbank, another of The Shadow's agents, had been waiting with a phone booth handy. There, Shrevvy had timed himself to a red traffic light so that he could flip a wad of paper from the cab, bearing Lenfield's destination. The rest of Shrevvy's stalling had been to give The Shadow time to get there ahead of Lenfield after receiving a call from Burbank.

As Lenfield hurried into the dim arcade, a piece of the granite wall detached itself. At least the effect was such, though curiously the wall remained whole. What really happened was quite different. In actuality, a figure slid from the shelter of the wall and glided after Lenfield, but nobody would have believed it.

Living figures didn't emerge from solid stone and fact into nothingness.

At least none did, except The Shadow.

The streaky darkness that followed Lenfield through the arcade looked like a shadow of his own, except that it violated all the usual rules. It traced one wall, then the other, occasionally when the light was between it and Lenfield, which was truly extraordinary.

When Lenfield looked back, however, he didn't glance along the walls. He was thinking in terms of ordinary followers, as his nervous glances told. Not believing in ghosts, Lenfield wasn't looking for anything that resembled them.

As he reached the rear street, Lenfield halted, startled by its darkness. For a moment he was drawing back into the arcade; then, as he saw a limousine wheel invitingly to the curb, he realized that it was the car he was to meet. Lenfield stepped forward just before the car arrived.

Behind Lenfield was a loom of blackness, which could easily have been Lenfield's own shadow, except that it didn't move during the next half-second. Lenfield's actual trailer, The Shadow, had drawn back at his pause and was a step late when the man made his sudden forward stride. Across the street, a quick-eyed observer detected that slight linger.

A low, quick call came in a tone that might vaguely have been identified with Fitz Crosset. At the signal, two hulking men sprang from the pillars that flanked the rear entrance of the arcade. They came blindly, those huskies, like the human machines they were. Their orders were to cover Lenfield, so they did.

Through sheer luck, the pair struck substance. What they took for a flicker of blackness turned out to be The Shadow. An instant later the strong-arm duo were slugging hard with guns and getting results. Barely in time to ward the blows, The Shadow wasn't able to draw weapons of his own.

Instead, The Shadow grappled, sagging in the process. Lenfield was hopping into the limousine which was ready to get underway and despite the thuds that reached his head, The Shadow realized that the path would

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then be open for gunfire from across the street. With a savage wrench, The Shadow broke from his attackers. Reeling right into the path of the limousine, he would have been run down if they hadn't pounced after him. Snarling because he'd missed an opportunity, the driver, big Dingo Bandorf, decided to hold back the car.

As Dingo did, the figures veered into the darkness of the street, The Shadow beating hard with his arms to stave off gun-strokes. Rounding the limousine, he was lost against its dark body, so Fitz didn't have a chance to fire; but The Shadow's attackers were grabbing him again and from the sounds, Fitz thought he could locate the struggle.

Right then The Shadow needed help and it came. Around the corner rolled Shrevvy's cab. True to custom, Shrevvy was checking on matters as far as he could and was also putting himself where The Shadow could use his cab if he needed it to trail the limousine. The corner was where Shrevvy would have stopped if he hadn't glimpsed The Shadow's struggle. On that account, he bucked the one-way traffic to give all possible aid.

Fighters broke apart at the cab's approach, as they had the night of Margo's rescue. Fitz was blocked off as the cab came to a halt, while the limousine was forced to wait until the cab cleared its front. Reeling against the cab, The Shadow whipped its door wide and gave a hurried, half-gasped order. The cab spurted ahead as the door slammed shut.

Fitz was the first to fire and his two huskies copied his example. All three were lunging after the cab as they aimed and its sudden zigzag made them think they had scored hits. But Shrevvy was merely springing the old trick of clipping from curb to curb to bother the aim of the gunners.

During the shooting, Dingo started the limousine in the other direction. His job was to take Lenfield on a special trip to Xanadu's, so it wasn't good policy to wait. The limousine whisked one corner while the taxicab was rounding another. With one going East, the other West, the chances of their trails crossing again were practically nil.

Realizing that the main job had been accomplished, Fitz snarled for his new men to stop blasting with their guns. Beckoning them along, Fitz hurried through the darkness to find an obscure subway entrance where they could duck and travel far before the police arrived.

There were two things Fitz could tell Cadbury: one, that predicting The Shadow's whereabouts was an uncertain policy; the other, that wherever The Shadow had gone, he wasn't on Lenfield's trail.

Crime's game was still safe, despite The Shadow. Battered by Fitz's strong-arm recruits, the cloaked fighter had fled in complete confusion.

This could be counted a victory for crime.

CHAPTER XVII

MAHATMA XANADU bowed from his doorway and received the curious box that Arthur Lenfield handed him. The box was cubical, measuring about three inches in each direction and it had a knob on top, like the dial of a miniature safe.

Having toyed with that dial without result, Lenfield was anxious to see what Xanadu did with it, but the Mahatma simply retired to the seance room, stating that he would receive Lenfield shortly. As soon as his back was turned, the Mahatma began to tilt the box, which gave away the real secret, though Lenfield didn't notice it.

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The dialed knob was simply a dummy. To open the box, a series of tilts were necessary. Those tilts worked a little ball-bearing from one hidden channel into another groove and thus released the catch. The box was simply a ten cent puzzle with its working parts concealed.

While Lenfield waited, he worried. This dim reception room bothered him. As he looked about, he shied away from shadowy walls as though they were about to creep forward and seize him. Lenfield was in his most nervous mood, when the Mahatma returned. Ushering Lenfield into the equally gloomy seance room, Xanadu merely glanced at the dim corners. He was more interested in watching Lenfield. In fact, Xanadu had seated the visitor in front of the crystal ball, before remembering to go and close the connecting door.

"You are troubled," purred Xanadu. "You must relax before you gaze into the crystal."

"I wish I could," whined Lenfield, "but with all that shooting –"

"What shooting?"

Lenfield stared sharply at Xanadu's question. The visitor's manner became suspicious.

"I thought you knew the past, Mahatma Xanadu."

"Only when I gaze into the crystal," declared Xanadu, impressively. "Even then, I prefer that the visions should relate to the unknown, because such is true clairvoyance. We must not waste time; hence I would like to hear your version of this shooting that you mention."

Lenfield gave his version of the affray near Forty-second Street. He explained that he had heard much more than he saw because he was in a car with windows that blanked any outside view. He finished by describing the slam of a door. Then, in strained tone, Lenfield added:

"All during that pitch-black ride, I stayed huddled in my corner. I feared that some secret presence was with me in the limousine."

"Didn't the chauffeur turn on the light?"

"No. He said it wouldn't be safe after what happened. Do you know, Mahatma, at moments I was sure I could hear heavy breathing from the seat beside me!"

"Echoes of your own, no doubt."

Lenfield gave a wry smile and forced a nod.

"Yes, I was scared," he admitted, "and the ride was a long one. Why, that one stretch must have covered at least forty blocks."

Ignoring Lenfield's comment and the look of inquiry that accompanied it, Xanadu gestured to the crystal.

"Concentrate on whatever is in your mind," purred the Mahatma. "The crystal will reveal the answer."

Lenfield shuddered fearfully.

"I might see something shadowy," he said plaintively. "I felt shrouded, surrounded by blackness when I came from the limousine."

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"That was simply the outside darkness."

"But the impression followed me up the stairs," argued Lenfield. "It was all around your reception room, as though some demon were hovering close. Tell me, Mahatma" – Lenfield looked up restlessly – "do you ever invoke strange spirits?"

"Never," returned Xanadu. "Come, Mr. Lenfield, gaze into the crystal. Concentrate upon the less recent past. Go back to a few days ago, to the time when your gems disappeared."

Lenfield complied. Soon both he and Xanadu were studying the gazing globe as though they expected to see something in its exaggerated depths. The mild light of the room was focused on that crystal and both men became more closely geared to it. Indeed, the very blackness that Lenfield had mentioned, seemed to creep in from the walls, almost as though taking shape.

That effect was lost upon the gazers. The crystal commanded their full attention for a scene was forming in its midst. A face appeared deep in the globe and Lenfield gave an amazed exclamation:

"Jerome!"

It was certainly Jerome and more. Lenfield could see what the janitor was working at: the grandfather's clock with the special dial. Breathless, Lenfield checked Jerome's frantic efforts with the last part of the combination; then saw the janitor paw into the secret strong box, the moment that it opened.

What impressed Lenfield most was the conclusion. Jerome turned about, with hands ahead of him, he grew until those laden fists became a veritable close-up. The gazing globe scintillated with the varied sparkles and colors of Lenfield's antique gems; then, as if completing a confession, the hands vanished in a vivid splash.

All was gone so suddenly that the crystal seemed to swirl with darkness. Gripping Xanadu's arm, Lenfield exclaimed:

"Look, Mahatma! There it is, the phantom thing that was at my house – the thing that followed me here."

Xanadu's eyes went upward, startled, as though he expected to see a shrouding shape close by. Lenfield's stare was equally swift and to his strained imagination, the figure looked real, except that it evaporated as no living thing could have. Still, the corners of this seance room were very deceptive in their gloom, a natural contrast to the central glow above the solid pedestal that supported the crystal ball.

For the moment, Xanadu was nervous, but he regained his calm. Coolly, the Mahatma reminded Lenfield that a reward was proper for the service just rendered. From a fat wallet, Lenfield counted out ten thousands dollars, none of the bills being smaller than hundred dollar notes.

"It's worth it," affirmed Lenfield, as Xanadu ushered him out. "I must trace those gems before they are cut into modern styles, which would destroy their value as antiques. The crystal vision shows the way, Mahatma."

Closing the door, Mahatma Xanadu crossed the seance room alone, pocketing the money beneath his garish robe. He reached a large chair that was much like a throne and sat there, arms folded chin high. Behind the Mahatma were two scimitars, crossed to form an X upon the wall. Their handles were downward, so placed that they looked like epaulettes on Xanadu's shoulders.

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His eyes fixed straight across the crystal ball, Xanadu stared rigidly at the door. Between two purple curtains, the dark wood showed black and as Xanadu gazed, he could have sworn he saw the barrier move. A faker like Xanadu wasn't the sort to believe in the unreal, but he was being convinced despite himself.

Suddenly, Xanadu spoke:

"I warn you, Shadow, I can see you, so step forward! If you do, I shall receive you as a friend. If not –"

There was a pronounced pause as Xanadu's eyes glittered sharp and white. Then:

"If not," the Mahatma continued, "I must treat you as an enemy. The choice is yours; the moment has arrived."

It was a long moment, a matter of several seconds in fact. Xanadu was giving an imaginary listener ample opportunity to accept the ultimatum. His eyes moving left and right, Xanadu was watching to see if either curtain stirred as indication that a figure was trying to slip from sight. Then, his eyes centering on the door, Xanadu snarled savagely:

"Your last chance, Shadow."

The chance wasn't taken. Xanadu allowed just the interval that it took for him to clamp his right hand on the handle of the scimitar that was nudging his left shoulder. Then, with a terrific cross-whip of his arm, Xanadu snatched the curved sword from the wall and with the same sweep sent it whizzing straight across the room.

Striking squarely in the center of the door, the scimitar buried itself inches deep. Its long blade, shivering, whined back that it had done its work, but found no target waiting it. Sagging deep in his throne, Xanadu removed his turban and used the sleeve of his robe to mop the perspiration from a baldish head.

The door opened and Akbar entered, leaving the barrier wide behind him. As he advanced toward the throne, Akbar queried:

"Did you knock, master?"

Xanadu gave a slow shake of his lowered head. He wasn't watching the curtains and Akbar's back was turned toward them. For the first time, one curtain stirred. From its folds, blackness emerged; filtering through the open doorway, it took the brief semblance of a cloaked shape that faded immediately into the darkness of the stairs beyond the outer room.

"I was seeing things, Akbar," admitted Xanadu. "Seeing things that weren't in the crystal. Close the door and bring the scimitar that is imbedded in it. Replace the scimitar where it belongs."

Down below, moving blackness had blended with the blind alley. As it glided from that cul-de-sac, the form became The Shadow. Unseen lips, hidden by cloak folds, whispered back a strange, revealing laugh.

Though he had sensed The Shadow's presence in the seance-room, Mahatma Xanadu had only imagined that he saw a cloaked shape against the door. He didn't suspect that The Shadow had stayed behind a curtain until a more timely moment for departure.

That earlier blackness, encroaching upon Xanadu's pedestal table, had been The Shadow. Like Lenfield, the cloaked intruder had looked into the mysterious globe.

The things seen in that crystal were real, not imaginary; real in the sense that they were records from the past.

The Shadow knew and would be guided thereby.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was late afternoon and Margo Lane was listening in amazement to Cranston's story as they rode through Central Park in Shrevvy's cab. This was their first real chat in three days, since Cranston had been busy with other matters. Now Margo was learning what they were all about.

"So you slammed the cab door and hopped into the limousine instead," exclaimed Margo. "How clever, Lamont!"

"Not exactly clever," smiled Cranston. "I was too groggy to get into the cab before Shrevvy started. Dingo wasn't so quick on the takeoff."

"Dingo?"

"Yes, the bruiser who drives the special limousine. I've found out all about him. Anyway, I went with Lenfield –"

"And did he see anything in the crystal?"

"He did." Cranston smiled at Margo's breathless question. "He saw Jerome and so did I. The crystal vision revealed the crime in detail, except for the masked man who assisted."

Margo gave a reflective frown. She'd read in the newspapers about Jerome's confession, which the janitor had made when confronted with startling facts by Lenfield. But Jerome had also told about the two-way job with the skylight, and how a masked man had carried off Lenfield's gems.

"An odd thing," remarked Margo. "Sheila and I saw two masked men in the crystal, working with Francine. But when Francine confessed, she said there were three. Why" – Margo brightened suddenly – "it's the same thing! One masked man missing each time!"

"And other things were missing," reminded Cranston. "Francine mentioned a package that had been on Sheila's table. It disappeared with the gems, remember?"

Margo nodded.

"According to Jerome's confession," continued Cranston, "the masked unknown put the antique jewelry in a music-box that he took along too."

"But what has all that to do with the crystal visions, Lamont?"

Cranston didn't answer. With a slight smile he changed the subject. The cab was out of the park and traveling eastward toward the area where Margo had been rescued by The Shadow.

"When you rode in that limousine," said Cranston, "how many blocks did you cover during the long stretch?"

"About forty," replied Margo. "Based on a time calculation which you checked."

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"Except for one thing," stated Cranston. "You can't get forty blocks of green light anywhere in Manhattan. By the way, it was a smooth stretch, wasn't it?"

"Smooth and steady."

"But it began with a sharp double turn in less than a single block. There was a bit of a jolt at the start and finish of the stretch."

Margo recalled that there had been.

"Watch this," said Cranston. "All right, Shrevvy."

Shrevvy veered the cab around a corner, went half a block and made another twist toward the closed door of an old garage. Something clicked under the cab wheels; Margo saw the garage door slide open, very swiftly. The cab rolled indoors and Margo saw the door close behind them.

There was another door in front, opening into the next street, but the cab didn't reach it. Instead, as Shrevvy eased the speed a trifle, the cab kept right on going without getting anywhere. It was a smooth but amazing sensation to be in a moving cab that was actually standing still!

At Cranston's suggestion, Margo looked from the window and saw the reason. The cab had reached a leather-belted treadmill that occupied the center of the garage floor. Wheels were rolling, giving the sensation of an uninterrupted ride, but they weren't gaining a foot!

"Forty blocks!" exclaimed Margo. "It certainly seemed like it!" Shutting her eyes, she added: "Yes, it's just like it was in that car with the black windows."

Cranston told Shrevvy to spurt the cab. It lurched from the end of the rollers, tripped another gadget in the floor, and the far door opened. They rolled out into the next street.

"No wonder the limousine slipped from sight so easily!" exclaimed Margo. "All it had to do was keep rolling nowhere while people were looking for it outside."

"Looking for Xanadu's place was quite as hard," added Cranston. "Instead of being forty blocks north, he is practically in this neighborhood."

"So that's why I lost direction coming back!" expressed Margo. "Instead of using the treadmill Dingo just drove around in circles. But how did you find this out?"

"Partly from your story," replied Cranston, "and partly from my own trip. I found the treadmill a little too monotonous to be mistaken for a real ride. Besides, when I left Xanadu's, I didn't come by car. I just walked out."

"And learned where you were –" Margo halted, as a new notion struck her.

"What have you been doing these last few days?" she queried. "Watching Xanadu – as The Shadow?"

"I've been checking on other people," replied Cranston. "First on a man whose alibi won't stand: Teach Morgan."

"The drummer in Wimbledon's band!"

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"Yes. He had time to be in on that block party from which I rescued you, Margo. He was back at the Hayrick soon enough to beat the finish of 'Lady in the Light' as rendered by Dickie Wimbledon."

"You found Dingo through Teach?"

"Yes," replied Cranston, "and I also saw him contact Fitz Crosset. So I trailed Fitz and where do you think he led me?"

"I couldn't guess."

"To Justin Cadbury."

At first, Margo couldn't believe Cranston's finding, but gradually the details fitted. Reminded that she'd mentioned Sheila in Cadbury's presence, Margo could see why the master brain had planted something on Cranston. It was a good blind to get Margo suspecting her friend Lamont and it was something for the police to work on. Yet Margo was still puzzled.

"Why should Cadbury cover crime," she asked, "and yet let Xanadu expose it?"

"He's framing Xanadu," explained Cranston, "but he didn't want to bear down too hard until after a lot of robberies."

"But Xanadu is coming through with facts –"

"More than facts, Margo. He is actually revealing crime in operation, which probably bothers Cadbury no end."

"Then Xanadu is outsmarting Cadbury!"

"It looks that way."

There was something faraway in Cranston's tone as though he were considering the different sides of an unfinished story. Margo caught the significance; the duel between Cadbury and Xanadu was the sort that promised new developments. Until it reached a climax, much might remain unsolved.

As The Shadow, Cranston could not afford to let crime continue rampant. Yet his duty to his cloaked self demanded that he make the most of all he had so far discovered in this case. Margo knew the only answer, because Cranston had often encountered similar dilemmas.

The only answer was that The Shadow would have to anticipate crime and literally crack another robbery before it happened. Unquestionably, Cranston's silence meant that he was thinking in such terms. Then:

"Mrs. Willis–Willingham likes pearls," declared Cranston, quietly, "and pearls are very valuable, Margo."

"Pearls are valuable?" echoed Margo. "Why, I thought they'd gone down to almost nothing since cultured pearls came on the market."

"Cultured pearls come from Japan," reminded Cranston, "so they are no longer on the market. Real pearls have risen beyond their former price."

"But they can't be distinguished from the cultured kind."

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"Yes, they can, Margo. As they have done with everything else, the Japs outsmarted themselves when they raised cultured pearls. Instead of forcing sand grains into oyster shells so that pearls would be formed naturally, the Japs used chips from mother-of-pearl as a nucleus in order to produce finer specimens."

"Did it work?"

"To outward appearances, yes. But when a pearl is x-rayed the core becomes visible. Anyone can tell whether it is natural or cultured. No real pearl lover wants the cultured type; besides, it would be trading with the enemy to buy them."

Impatiently, Margo questioned:

"What about Mrs. Willis-Willingham and her pearls?"

"She is buying more and more of them," replied Cranston. "So many more, that a friend of ours is going into the pearl business."

"And who is he?"

"Justin Cadbury. He will be at the Willingham mansion this evening with a fine assortment of all-natural pearls."

"You mean he's selling them to Mrs. W. W.?"

"That is his ostensible purpose. I would assume that Cadbury is out to learn where Mrs. Willis-Willingham puts pearls after she buys them. I'd like to know also."

The cab was crossing an East River bridge, bound for Long Island where Mrs. Willis-Willingham lived. Margo Lane needed to ask no more. She knew that crime was going to meet its real test tonight.

This time The Shadow would be ahead of crime.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. NICHOLAS-RINEHART WILLIS-WILLINGHAM gave a broad-armed gesture that included her entire living room and inquired:

"Don't you like the new decorations? Don't they look shipshape?"

Everybody was supposed to laugh and did. The reason the lady with the double-barreled name used the term "shipshape" was because her sprawling mansion was furnished in the manner of a yacht. Having donated her half-million-dollar craft to the government, Mrs. Willis-Willingham had decided to go to sea on shore.

The mansion overlooked Long Island Sound, which gave it a smack of salt air, but tonight the chat concerned interior decorations only. In keeping with the occasion, Mrs. W. W. conducted her guests into a room that looked like a ship's cabin.

"My pearl room," she said, showing a fat-faced dimple. "Notice anything unusual about it?"

The walls were decorated with paintings of oysters, which was unusual enough. At one end was an enormous oyster shell that apparently fronted what had been a fireplace. The chairs and tables were inlaid with

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mother-of-pearl, which was garish but attractive.

Very plainly the big oyster shell was the door to a vault, for snuggled in the rough exterior was a mother-of-pearl dial. It followed therefore that the shell was actually metal, surfaced to fit the setting. But none of these were the unusual thing that the lady meant.

"The port holes!" she exclaimed. "Couldn't you guess?"

Everyone looked at the port holes. They were brass and tightly clamped to the wall. Bolt-heads proved that they would be difficult to remove, even from this side. As for entering by one of those port holes, it would be impossible.

None of them were windows. Instead, they were simply mirrors and the double-chinned lady with the double name laughed heartily when her guests stared at those port holes and saw themselves.

"I can't use windows here," she explained, "because this is my treasure room. In here" – she leaned confidently on the arm of Justin Cadbury – "is where I keep my pearls!"

Lamont Cranston stared casually at the decorations as though he hadn't heard the news. Margo Lane did the same as a matter of policy. Most of the other guests showed sudden interest.

As for Cadbury, he snapped up the subject instantly and boldly.

"You must show us your pearls," he insisted, "but first my dear lady, I want you to examine those that I have brought."

They went back to the living room where Mrs. W. W. became promptly interested in a set of fine pearl earrings that were in Cadbury's selection. When she inquired if they were natural pearls, Cadbury suggested:

"Suppose we test them."

This took the party to the room adjoining the treasure room. Here the furnishings were plain, though the room had port holes for windows and in one wall, a mirror porthole served to balance the arrangement. Most important, however, were the x-ray machines and other paraphernalia. This room was where the pearls were tested.

While Cadbury was putting the earrings under the x-ray, Cranston strolled to the corner to inspect a large sun lamp that had evidently just been delivered, for it was still tagged. It had the appearance of a small searchlight projecting from a horizontal cylinder that was set on a metal post. Through the plain glass of the lamp, Cranston saw what appeared to be a bulb socket.

Though it had no bulb, the lamp was attached to a long extension cord, plugged in the wall. Cranston didn't need a bulb to produce the light that dawned upon him; in fact it was the absence of the bulb that produced it. Motioning to Margo. Cranston met her back in the living room. There he gestured to an enclosed porch where some idle guests were seated.

"Did you notice the wall-flowers, Margo?"

Margo shook her head.

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"Fitz Crosset is with them," stated Cranston. "They're playing it strong tonight, Cadbury and his good man Friday. Cadbury will do the cover-up, while Fitz handles the job. Stealing into that treasure room is easy."

"But what about stealing something out? Only Mrs. Double Doubleyou knows the vault combination."

"She'll be putting away those earrings," reminded Cranston. "That's when somebody will spot it."

"But where would anybody hide?"

"That's for you to find out, Margo."

"You mean I'm to sneak in there and watch?"

"Yes. To see who else is trying it – and how. If I know Cadbury and Fitz, they'll be making perfect alibis for themselves all the while the hyphen lady is in the treasure room."

"And what will you be doing?"

"Staying right with them." Cranston gave a slight smile. "Just to put the 'A' in 'alibi' and let them think I'm too dumb to be The Shadow."

Cranston's arm did more than gesture. It literally propelled Margo into the treasure room, because she didn't try to slow the start he gave her. In fact, Margo was just nicely through the half-opened door when she heard voices coming from the room with the x-ray machines. People were coming back to the living room and, since the pearls had stood the test, Mrs. Willis-Willingham was buying them from Cadbury.

Getting out of sight behind a pearly chair was fairly easy for Margo. Waiting tensely, she could hear the approach of Mrs. Willingham's voice, which then receded maddeningly. Always slow about making up her mind, the portly lady was stopping to say something else every time she started toward her treasure room.

At last footsteps arrived and Margo watched Mrs. Willingham close the door. She didn't lock it, but simply came past the chair and started over to the oyster-shell vault. Working up behind the chair, Margo looked everywhere for spying eyes, but saw none.

Mrs. Willis-Willingham was actually opening the vault, yet no one was watching her as Cranston had predicted!

It didn't make sense to Margo, although she had looked everywhere. Perhaps her confidence that Lamont must be right inspired Margo to her next move, even though it seemed superfluous. The one place where a person couldn't be hiding was behind Margo, for she was very close to the wall; nevertheless, she turned to look there.

Up from the chair, Margo's face came on a level with a mirror porthole right behind her. She'd seen her reflection in one of those before and expected another look at it. Instead the face that strained from the mirror wasn't Margo's.

It was the face of Teach Morgan!

Margo shrieked.

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There was a clang as the vault door slammed. Mrs. Willis–Willingham flounced about with pearls dripping from her hands. Seeing Margo she rushed over and seized the horrified girl by the shoulders. Margo hadn't even tried to run; instead, she'd recoiled from the impossible sight in the mirror.

Margo had seen a twitch of Teach's face, a poisonous look from his darting eyes. As she'd thrown her own hands out wardingly, his had appeared like strangling claws, itching to clutch Margo's neck. Being shaken was a pleasure compared to the clutch that Margo had expected. All Mrs. W. W. was doing was bringing Margo from a half–trance like that induced by Xanadu's crystal ball.

Margo's scream brought help. Men came dashing into the room, Cranston and Cadbury among them. Turning Margo toward them, Mrs. Willingham howled the accusation:

"I caught her spying here! She watched me open the vault! Turn her over to the police at once!"

"Wait!" Margo caught her breath. "I was in here looking for spies." Excited, Margo didn't catch Cranston's warning motion for silence. "I saw one and that's why I screamed. A man's face was looking through that porthole!"

Pointing, Margo thrust her own face forward and stopped astonished. She wouldn't have feared Teach's face had she seen it in the presence of all these people, but it didn't appear. Instead, Margo's own amazed countenance looked right back at her!

It was Lamont Cranston who undertook to solve the riddle. Calmly, he stepped forward and pressed his hands against the brass circle surrounding the mirror. Finding it tight, he told Margo to stay with the others; then bowing to Mrs. Willingham, Cranston invited her to come with him. He gave a nod to Cadbury that meant the same, but he didn't include Fitz because the latter wasn't present.

Conducting his companions into the testing room, Cranston stepped to its one mirror port hole and gripped the brass frame. To the others he said:

"This seems to be directly in back of the mirror where Miss Lane saw someone else's face. Watch."

Under Cranston's twist the brass frame turned. The mercury that formed the mirror disappeared, its level falling like water draining down a sink. No ordinary mirror could have acted in that fashion, but this wasn't an ordinary mirror.

It consisted of two circles of glass each mounted in a brass frame, one on this side of the wall, the other in the port hole of the pearl room. The frame on this side was the only one that turned; when it did so, a supply of mercury between the circular panes, found an outlet down between the brass frames.

That simple action transformed the double–sided mirror into a two–paned window!

Through the double glass, Cranston was looking at Margo who stared back amazed. She had seen Teach's face before, because he had been here looking through to watch Mrs. Willis–Willingham work the combination of the oyster–shell vault!

And now Cranston reversed the process just as Teach had when he realized that he, the spy, had been spied. A turn of the port hole in the other direction forced the quicksilver up to its former position between the panes. Each room again contained a port hole mirror. It had taken Cranston's keen eye to gauge the potential connection between the two, along with the logical fact that the device would operate from the spy's side, namely the room where he now stood.

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Mrs. Willis–Willingham was gasping something about workmen having recently installed these portholes, which meant of course that criminals had paid them to do the special job. Cadbury, still playing his game of bluff, was highly sympathetic. He was neatly covering the fact that he or an accomplice intended to use the spy's information to complete the robbery. It was Cranston who put an end to Cadbury's sham.

"That's only part of it," remarked Cranston. "The business of the double mirror, I mean. Tell me what you make of this, Cadbury."

At Cranston's gesture, Cadbury noticed that the new sun lamp had been drawn over to a spot near the port hole and that it was focused toward the rounded mirror. Obliging, Cranston removed the glass front and Cadbury stared at something quite different from a bulb socket, once it could be clearly observed.

It was the lens of a movie camera.

A sudden change swept Cadbury's broad face. This was something he hadn't heard about, an item introduced by Teach as an important adjunct to crime. It explained the follow–up of the previous robberies; how confessions had been forced from Francine and Jerome.

Purpling at the thought that he too had been tricked, Cadbury started to give himself away.

"Why, that double–crosser –"

Such reference to Teach wouldn't do in the presence of Cranston, the man whom Cadbury had labeled as The Shadow. Knowing his game was up, Cadbury gave Mrs. Willis–Willingham a swing that sprawled her in the doorway through which he darted to the living room. Shouting for Fitz, Cadbury dashed for the front door and was lucky enough to encounter Margo, coming around to join Cranston. Catching the girl in their rush, Cadbury and Fitz hauled her out through the front door, before Cranston could hoist Mrs. Willis–Willingham from his path.

When Lamont Cranston reached the front door, all he saw was the vanishing tail light of the black–windowed limousine, as the special car, piloted by Dingo, sped away with Margo and her captors!

CHAPTER XX

SEATED behind the pedestal with the crystal ball, Mahatma Xanadu said "Come in" when he heard a rap at the door of the seance room. Xanadu expected to see Akbar, and it was Akbar who entered, but the Turk came with upraised arms.

Behind Akbar was a gun muzzle clutched in the tight fist of Justin Cadbury, who gave Akbar a shove to a corner and covered Xanadu instead. Then Fitz Crosset entered, marching Margo Lane ahead of him. Her hands tied behind her and her mouth tightly gagged, Margo was unceremoniously thrust in the corner with Akbar.

His eyes showing a whitened stare, Xanadu silently inquired the purpose of this visit, while he slowly raised his hands. Cadbury came right to the point after introducing himself on the chance that it was necessary.

"So you thought you could out–smart me," sneered Cadbury, "just because I was letting you stay in business."

"It appears I did outsmart you," returned Xanadu, coolly, "by giving my customers their money's worth."

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Cadbury stepped forward and lifted the crystal ball from its pedestal. He gestured for Fitz to glance at what lay beneath.

"A movie projector," defined Cadbury. "That's why he made Teach take films, the way he intended to do tonight."

"Like he did at Waltham's," nodded Fitz. "He must have had the camera in that box somebody left there. I guess at Lenfield's he took it in and out in a special music-box."

Cadbury stared at Xanadu for the answer to these riddles, but the bearded Mahatma only shook his head.

"Getting the pictures was Teach's job," stated Xanadu. "He sent me one reel in a bunch of flowers; the other in a jewel box."

"And how was he to send those he intended to take tonight, when Fitz and I were stealing the pearls?"

Cadbury spoke as though the robbery had actually been accomplished, which it hadn't. Xanadu merely shrugged.

"That would have been up to Teach," he said, "but the pictures had to be developed first."

"Then why was the car waiting for Mrs. Willis-Willingham?"

"It wasn't. Teach was probably trying to bluff you into thinking I'd ask her here tonight. I couldn't, because the pictures weren't ready. She would have heard from me in due course."

By that, Xanadu meant when he would be able to show an actual camera record of robbery as he had with Sheila and Lenfield. Hearing all this, Margo could understand why both she and The Shadow had seen such graphic scenes in the crystal ball. Projected up into the globe, the movies magnified and appeared to be forming in the crystal itself.

These facts didn't lessen Cadbury's glare. All it brought from Xanadu, however, was a gleaming smile. Quite calmly, the Mahatma folded his arms and rested back in his throne.

"What next, Cadbury?"

"I was going to frame you," retorted Cadbury, his mood changing. "I thought you'd just be using hokum when Teach suggested that we let you work the crystal stuff. We forced you into hiding because we thought you'd be useful."

"So Teach told me – in part."

"I still have the papers that would do it," continued Cadbury. "I'll stop at the office for them – along with genuine documents that wouldn't do me any good if they were found."

"Would anything do you any good right now?"

Cadbury's eyes hardened at Xanadu's query. Then, with a short laugh, Cadbury admitted:

"I guess not. I'm afraid I gave the game away. It's put us in something of the same boat, hasn't it?"

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Xanadu nodded.

"Brain meets Brain," chuckled Cadbury, suddenly. "Maybe we should have worked together from the beginning, Xanadu. Neither of us recognized how capable the other was."

"What would you propose?"

"That we clear out of here immediately. Then we can arrange to dispose of our one real rival, The Shadow. We can go fifty-fifty, Xanadu."

Slowly, Xanadu nodded as though the terms suited him. He was taking on an impressive pose, quite that of his old self. Suddenly Xanadu halted his nod, his eyes gave a quick, sidelong glance toward a panel at the inner corner of the room. Before Cadbury could realize what was due, the panel opened and Teach Morgan stepped into sight.

Like Cadbury, Teach had a gun and he was backed by Dingo, the crooked chauffeur. In the rush of events, Cadbury had forgotten that Dingo was Teach's man and not one of Fitz's recruits. Catching both Cadbury and Fitz off guard, Teach was at present master of the show, but he didn't overdo it.

"Relax," suggested Teach, with a gloating chuckle. "I heard that crack about Brain meeting Brain. Only you didn't get it just right, Cadbury. There's only one Brain and I'm it. Ask Xanadu."

Cadbury gave a puzzled look at Xanadu who nodded that Teach was right.

"You thought that Teach convinced me that I ought to drop my regular trade and go in for this," said Xanadu. "But why should I have dropped a neat sucker racket to become involved in actual crime?"

As Xanadu put the question, Margo stared from the corner where she had landed rather helter-skelter. She was looking at the main door, thinking she saw it move, but she decided that hope had deceived her. Remembering how the darkness of the door had tricked Xanadu on The Shadow question, Margo sighed as well as she could with a gag in her mouth.

"I'll tell you why," said Xanadu, while Cadbury pondered. "Because Teach had enough goods on me to spoil my business anyway. He knew who my informants were."

"People like Francine," nodded Cadbury, "and Jerome."

Shaking his head, Xanadu smiled again.

"My stooges were the suckers themselves," said Xanadu. "I rarely pumped them about themselves. I talked them into telling me about each other. That's the real secret of the crystal gazing business, Cadbury. It builds, the longer you work it."

"Then how could Teach have exposed you?"

"By telling the police. He'd been my assistant once and knew the works. He could have made it quite convincing. He's very smart, Teach is."

To show that he meant it, Xanadu looked at Teach and broadened his smile.

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"I didn't like being made a sucker," laughed Xanadu, "but it's all squared now, Teach. I knew you were lying when you said I'd really be helping crack crime by using your movies, because you never sent them until the last minute. I could see enough of the future to know that a frame would be the pay-off, but I had to play along.

"But now that you've put Cadbury in the sucker class, I'll call it even. The police want him, so how can he frame me? You're the Brain, Teach, and a smart one. All I want to know is: how did you get as good as you are?"

Teach looked from Xanadu to Cadbury and saw real admiration in the latter's gaze. Cadbury's offer of a partnership to Xanadu obviously was open to Teach on even better terms. Teach could be the mainspring if he wanted, for Cadbury's original plans were washed up. In short, Cadbury was a big enough crook to recognize a bigger one.

Teach decided to stress that point.

"I thought in terms of an old but honorable racket," declared Teach. "I mean piracy, the greatest of all games when it comes to playing one person against another. You've heard of Henry Morgan, the famous buccaneer. I'm one of his descendants.

"There was another famous pirate among my ancestors. They called him Blackbeard, but his real name was Teach. That's where my name came from – Teach Morgan. I'm the prize black sheep of a family that always went in for black, the crepe they hung on other people."

Blackness was moving in on Teach. Margo could see it actually, for the door had definitely gone ajar. She wondered why Xanadu hadn't noticed it, being door-minded. Probably Xanadu was too interested in listening to Teach to observe what Margo was sure must be the advent of The Shadow.

"The law of piracy was to band together," declared Teach. "The bigger the band, the bigger the profits. They always picked the smartest man to run the show, when he proved his title to it. That's what I've done."

There was one objector. He stood just within the doorway and his laugh came in sinister sibilance. His was a lone, defiant challenge to the power of Teach Morgan, who knew the author the moment he heard the mockery.

The Shadow!

Teach didn't wait to argue. He snarled an order that he expected all to follow. It was death to The Shadow, as Teach indicated, when he swung his gun toward the doorway from which the taunt came. Dingo copied Teach's example, but it was on Cadbury and Fitz that Teach depended chiefly, because both were armed and nearer the door.

They swung, Cadbury and Fitz, eager to show their evil loyalty to the leader they accepted. In turning, they formed a screen for Teach, with a gap where he could shoot between them. Dingo's gun was almost beside Teach's, making four in all.

Margo Lane could see The Shadow's finish. Two guns against four, he couldn't expect to reach the men beyond, even if he beat the first pair to the shot.

Of course Margo didn't count Mahatma Xanadu. He wouldn't be needed, so she thought, but he was.

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Even before The Shadow's gun blasts stopped Cadbury and Fitz in their tracks, Xanadu's hands were clasping the scimitar handles by his shoulders. Staggering, Cadbury and Fitz were tugging their triggers too late, but Teach and Dingo were letting their fingers pull, too soon for The Shadow.

Not too soon for Xanadu.

With a terrific criss-cross the Mahatma had flung the curved scimitars, one with each hand, in the swift accurate fashion that The Shadow had witnessed on his last visit here. But Xanadu's target wasn't the door. He had two targets: both enemies.

As Teach and Dingo fired, they were falling forward, their guns going wide ahead of them. To the echoes of The Shadow's laugh, they sprawled face down on the coiling figures of Cadbury and Fitz. Straight up from the backs of Teach Morgan and Dingo Bandorf were the tilted handles of Xanadu's long-bladed weapons.

It had all happened so swiftly that Akbar the Turk, was caught with his knife half-drawn, lacking time to play a part in the fray. With a surprised shrug, Akbar promptly showed his status by helping Margo to her feet, so he could use the knife to cut her bonds and gags.

Shots had brought shouts from the alleyway below. Inspector Cardona's voice accompanied the pound of feet, coming up the stairs. With long strides, The Shadow caught Margo's arm, hurried her across the room to the secret panel and closed it after them.

Mahatma Xanadu, his arms folded, was waiting in the throne, with the patient Akbar standing beside him, both ready to meet the law. Xanadu threw a hopeful glance toward the closing panel and in return received a whispered, reassuring laugh from The Shadow.

The tone told that Mahatma Xanadu would have a friend in court – if he needed one.

It was doubtful that Xanadu would need one after Inspector Cardona heard his story, which the facts, plus confessions from two wounded crooks, would prove. The Shadow had only crippled Cadbury and Fitz, knowing that their testimony would be useful.

Teach Morgan and Dingo Bandorf were dead, as they deserved, for Xanadu hadn't been able to go lightly with the scimitars he hurled. Why they deserved their fate was something The Shadow told Margo, after they were in Shrevvy's cab.

"They were murderers, both," declared The Shadow, in Cranston's tone. "Teach Morgan deliberately killed Griff Thurver after deciding he didn't need him."

"Why, so he did!" exclaimed Margo. "Only I didn't realize it then! Teach tried to murder me, too, and Dingo was just as much involved because he sent me into the trap."

"Exactly," said Cranston. "Only your life was saved –"

"By you," put in Margo, "under orders from The Shadow."

"By Akbar," corrected Cranston, "under orders from Mahatma Xanadu. I merely came along in time to stop Teach Morgan, after Akbar had handled Griff Thurver."

"You mean that when Akbar made that knife slash –"

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"He intended it for Griff," completed Cranston. "The cab made everybody dodge, but Akbar did manage to nick Griff's arm."

"That's why you could depend on Xanadu tonight," said Margo, suddenly. "I never would have realized it."

"You should have," returned Cranston. "Xanadu practically stated his case. He said he wanted no connection with crime and practically intimated that he'd run the crystal movies hoping they'd produce clues that would serve the law – which they did."

Though no longer cloaked, Cranston finished his brief speech with the whispered laugh of The Shadow. To Margo that tone was a commendation of Mahatma Xanadu and Akbar, the fakers who had redeemed themselves by aiding The Shadow's battle against crime.

THE END