

DEATH RIDES THE SKYWAY

Maxwell Grant

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Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. SAN FRANCISCO NIGHT

"PAGING Mr. Crofton!"

A square-built young man came to his feet as he heard the bell boy's call. Striding across the hotel lobby, he stopped the attendant and acknowledged the summons.

"Miles Crofton?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," returned the bell hop. "You're Mr. Crofton?"

Miles Crofton nodded as he passed the boy a quarter. The bell hop turned smartly about and indicated a row of telephone booths past the clerk's desk. "Telephone call, sir. Booth four."

Miles Crofton sauntered to the booth. Stopping there, he looked quickly about; then entered and removed the

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receiver from the hook. He gave his name to the switchboard operator. A click from the wire; a quiet voice gave a hello.

"Miles Crofton speaking," acknowledged the young man. "You are calling me?"

A pause. Then came a sinister tone, a whisper that held a strange reverberation as it quivered through the receiver at Crofton's ear:

"Report."

The voice of The Shadow! An eerie tone that had caused grim men to falter; a whisper that was sinister, even though it spoke but a single word. Miles Crofton's features tightened, then relaxed with an expression of relief.

"Cruisers still near Hylap's," reported Crofton. "Tam Soak's watchers in the offing. No change since last report."

"Report received," came The Shadow's whisper. "Instructions to follow."

Crofton listened to the intonation that resumed. Steady words hissed through the receiver. Finally, The Shadow's orders ended with a pause. Crofton acknowledged.

"Instructions received."

Hanging up the receiver, the young man strode from the telephone booth. He headed for the door, gave a last look at the lobby and continued on to the street. There he started briskly along the sidewalk, for the distance of half a block. He slowed his pace, coming at last to a standstill in front of a darkened opening between two buildings.

Glancing back, Miles Crofton noted the marquee of the hotel that he had just left. Above the projecting roof was an electric sign that flashed the name "Hotel Aldebaran." Crofton grinned. He had not registered at the Aldebaran; no one had followed him, from the lobby.

Raw, dank mist swept shroudlike about Crofton's shoulders. That fog was in from the Pacific; for this was San Francisco. The open spot where Crofton stood held the ruined foundations of a building that had never been rebuilt since the great fire. But off beyond, hazy through the swirl of sea fog, was the persistent orange glow from the lights of the modern metropolis.

From one spot, only a few blocks distant, came a lower glare. That was Chinatown; and Miles Crofton's view of those fog-sifted lights was a reminder that time had come for action. For Miles Crofton, here in San Francisco as an agent of The Shadow, had held important dealings with certain men who dwelt in the quaint Oriental district of the West Coast metropolis.

A TAXICAB was coming down the street. Its lights blinked from the fog; its tires sloshed along the moistened thoroughfare. Miles Crofton stepped to the curb and delivered a hearty hail. The driver pulled up; the young man stepped aboard.

"Where to?" queried the cabby.

"Cut over past Chinatown," returned Crofton, gruffly, "then head for Telegraph Hill. I'll tell you where to stop."

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The cab started. Miles Crofton settled back in the rear seat. Crofton had come to the city, weeks ago, at The Shadow's order. He had been delegated to remain in San Francisco as the appointed agent of a mysterious chief. The Shadow, ever vigilant against crime, had needed a trusted man to serve in such capacity.

Soon after his arrival, Crofton had visited Tam Sook. This meeting had given him an important contact, for Tam Sook was a crafty Celestial whose knowledge of San Francisco covered a much greater area than the mere confines of Chinatown. Tam Sook was a friend of The Shadow; and he had promised to keep Crofton posted. Tam Sook had lived up to the promise.

A few days ago, the Chinaman had sent word of shady characters – men who deserved suspicion, although they had managed to dodge the law. Stealthy and slinking, they had chosen a focal point – a residence on the side of a northern hill.

Crofton had visited the terrain. He had seen signs of prowlers. He had learned that the house was the residence of Seton Hylap, a retired financier. Yet he had guessed no reason for the presence of the riffraff. Seton Hylap, though a man of influence, was not enormously wealthy. His home, though large, was unpretentious.

Crofton had sent word to The Shadow. His chief had left New York by air. Tam Sook, meanwhile, had cooperated in measures of stealth. Influential in his own quarter, Tam Sook had supplied Chinese watchers. Craftily, these men from Chinatown were maintaining an outer cordon, ready to act should evil threaten the beleaguered residence.

The call that Crofton had so recently received was news that The Shadow had arrived at the San Francisco airport. From now on, the period of vigil had ended. If something was wrong at Hylap's, the time had come to learn the details. The Shadow had delegated Miles Crofton to that duty.

His voice hoarse from the fog-thickened night, Crofton gave a gruff order to the taxi driver. The cab changed course; it labored on a steep incline. The cabby shifted to second gear in order to make the precipitous hill. Half a block later, Crofton ordered him to stop. Alighting, The Shadow's agent paid the driver and stepped from the cab.

IT was an ideal night for duty. Crofton was wrapped in fog and darkness before he had gone a dozen yards. Crofton was proceeding shiftily. He intended to pass two thin groups of watchers: The Chinamen and the riffraff beyond.

Nothing disturbed his mission. Crossing a street at the middle of a block, Miles Crofton came within the massive gloom of an old stone residence. Lower windows were but dimly lighted; the upstairs part of the building was entirely dark. Treading carefully as he reached a flight of broad stone steps, Crofton ascended and huddled in the darkness close to the large front door. Fumbling in the dark, he found a push button and pressed it. A bell tingled faintly within the house.

Footsteps sounded, barely audible. The door opened inward, but showed no light, for the vestibule was darkened. Crofton saw the pallid face of a servant. Moving inward, he gave a friendly greeting that caused the man to step back without refusal of admittance.

"Who – who are you, sir?" queried the servant, his face startled and apprehensive. "I – I had not been informed that a visitor was expected."

"I've come to see Mr. Hylap," responded Crofton easily, as he drew a card from his pocket. "A matter of important business. My name is Gwynn" – he tapped the card as he handed it to the servant – "and my

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business is real estate. I have come to see Mr. Hylap regarding the purchase of some property."

The introduction was an apt one. Crofton had learned that Hylap was burdened with too much real estate. Apparently the servant knew the same, for he nodded wisely and motioned the visitor to a chair.

"I shall tell the master that you are here, sir," stated the servant.

CROFTON watched the servant waddle across the hallway, toward a door farther back and on the other side. There the fellow stopped and rapped. A few moments passed; the door opened part way and a long, peaked face peered into the hall.

"Who is it, Sowbry?" questioned the man from within, his voice low, but nervous. "Some visitor to see Mr. Hylap?"

"Yes, Mr. Danning," nodded the servant. "A gentleman named Gwynn, here to see the master about real estate."

"Impossible," returned Danning, with a shake of his head. "Mr. Hylap is resting. He does not want to be disturbed."

"This may be important," protested Sowbry. "Only yesterday, Mr. Danning, I heard the master mention that he wished to sell some property –"

"Eavesdropping, eh?" Danning's interruption was a snarl. He swung fully into the hall. "I shall report you, Sowbry. As for tonight, Mr. Hylap wants no visitors. As his secretary, I shall not allow –"

This time it was Miles Crofton who offered interruption. He had risen from his chair; he was striding forward as he spoke. His voice came gruffly.

"I have business here," interjected The Shadow's agent. "Since I have taken the trouble to come here, I feel that it is up to Mr. Hylap to decide whether or not he intends to see me. I have no time to listen to petty arguments. Is that understood?"

Danning shifted into the hall, pulling the door shut behind him. The secretary's nervous face showed high-pitched excitement. Throwing out his arms, Danning blocked the path.

"You can't see Mr. Hylap," he insisted hoarsely.

Crofton chuckled. He viewed the frail, long-limbed secretary and saw that the fellow was quivering with consternation. Crofton turned abruptly toward Sowbry; considering the servant as an ally, he gave an order.

"Come, Sowbry," suggested Crofton. "You have my card. Enter your master's study and announce me."

"I shall be pleased to do so, sir," acknowledged the servant. "But Mr. Danning is blocking the way –"

Another servant had appeared as Sowbry faltered. This fellow looked brusque and businesslike; his uniform indicated that he was a chauffeur, who had probably been in the kitchen when he had heard the noise of the argument. The arrival stepped up beside Sowbry; from his nod, his glare toward Danning, Crofton knew that this second servant would also favor his cause.

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"So Danning is the obstacle, is he?" queried Crofton. "Well, Sowbry, I don't think that he will persist in keeping you from your duty. Not after I have reasoned with him."

CROFTON took a step toward the secretary. With a wild cry, Danning leaped forward from the door, thrusting his arms at Crofton's throat, beginning an unwarranted attack before The Shadow's agent had even threatened him.

Crofton swung aside to avoid Danning's leap. He thrust out a brawny hand and clapped it hard against the secretary's shoulder, giving a wide lunge with his arm. Danning spun around helplessly and sprawled to the floor like a man of straw.

Unhurt, he whimpered and knelt cringing. Crofton gestured toward the door; Sowbry nodded solemnly and placed his hand upon the knob.

A hysterical cry from Danning. With the servants, Crofton turned about. The three stood startled as they viewed the insane bulge of Danning's eyes. Their faces showed alarm as they caught the glimmer of a revolver that the secretary had drawn.

Frenzied, Danning had become a menace. Still intent to keep visitors from Seton Hylap's study, he had brought a weapon into play. He was ready to shoot; ready to kill, should any man attempt to step across the threshold of the room he sought to guard.

CHAPTER II. FLIGHT IN THE FOG

"MOVE away!"

Danning fairly shrieked the words. Sowbry sidled along the wall; Crofton copied the action in the other direction. Danning's glare fixed upon the chauffeur, now the most prominent of the trio whom he covered.

"You, too, Durfee!" ordered the secretary. "Get back from that door! All of you keep away from it! Far away!"

The revolver wobbled slightly as Danning kept shifting it back and forth, making a semicircle that caused him to turn his head as well.

The revolver was traveling with Danning's eyes. That was the fact that gave Crofton an opportunity. Sowbry and Durfee were too alarmed to act; but Miles Crofton had faced situations of this sort before. His sinews tightened; he waited for half a second, then launched a spring.

Crofton's leap was perfectly timed. It came at the instant when Danning's eyes had swung directly toward Durfee, the farthest member of the trio. Danning did not hear the onrush; it was through nervousness that he sensed it. Coming up from his crouch, the secretary tittered a cry and swung back toward Crofton.

DANNING was too late. The Shadow's agent was surging with full force. As Danning tried to aim his gun, Crofton's right hand crisscrossed and clutched the secretary's wrist. Danning's finger pressed the trigger as his hand went up. The revolver barked while pointing toward the ceiling. A bullet crackled deep into the plaster.

Danning's cry ended. Bowled backward, the secretary flattened to the floor. His head struck the upholstered side of a chair; the blow half stunned him. Danning moaned as his fingers loosened. Crofton snatched up the revolver just after it clattered to the floor.

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Rising above Danning's huddled form, Crofton looked toward Durfee and Sowbry. Then, as a gesture of alliance, he extended the revolver to the chauffeur, who accepted it. That done, Crofton spoke briskly to Sowbry.

"You may announce me to Mr. Hylap," stated Crofton. "And when you do so, Sowbry, you can explain what has happened here.

"Indeed I shall, sir," returned Sowbry, waddling toward the door.

Crofton stepped forward as Sowbry opened the door. He saw the servant enter a small, lighted study room. Crofton followed to the threshold. He heard a puzzled gasp from Sowbry. The servant was looking all about. Crofton did the same. His face, too, showed perplexity, for Seton Hylap was not in the study.

"The – the master has gone!" exclaimed Sowbry. "Of course – of course he could have left while I was not about. But why did Danning say that he was here?"

As if seeking an answer to his query, Sowbry stared past Crofton, toward the spot where Danning had fallen. A sharp cry was Sowbry's next utterance. Crofton wheeled about; so did Durfee in the hall. They saw the reason for Sowbry's alarm.

Danning had shown recuperation; coming up from the floor, the treacherous secretary was again showing fight. Fiercely, he was springing forward to snatch the revolver from Durfee's hand.

MILES CROFTON acted instinctively. He shot his own hand to his pocket and yanked out an automatic that he had brought with him on this mission. Gun in fist, he sprang forward to intervene.

At that instant, the door from the vestibule burst open. Into the hallway, shoulder to shoulder, came a trio of huskies who brandished big revolvers. These were the riffraff whom The Shadow's agent had avoided when he came here. They had heard the bark of the gun.

Crofton stopped short, just outside the door of the study. With one arm, he hurled Sowbry back to safety. Raising his gun, he shifted as he aimed point-blank for the invaders. Durfee had grappled with Danning; the chauffeur would have to take care of himself.

Shots roared simultaneously. Wild bullets zipped the plaster of the wall beside Crofton's shoulder. Leaping invaders were coming forward to overwhelm this lone enemy. Crofton's automatic spoke along with the revolvers.

One of his quick shots clipped a hoodlum's shoulder, for the invader staggered. But these three were not all; there were others behind them. The next volley seemed slated to spell Crofton's doom.

Then came a mighty sound from the rear of the long, gloomy hall. It was the fierce cry of a strident mirth; a proclamation of vengeance that made would-be killers swing with angry snarls. Backing that weird taunt, blending with its echoes, issued the roars of new guns in the fray. The Shadow had arrived.

Invaders sprawled, firing vainly as they fell. Others dived for the doorway, flinging away guns in their mad rush for safety. One alone persisted in wild shots toward that evasive, barely visible form. This rogue was close to Crofton. With a jubilant cry, The Shadow's agent flung himself upon the fiendish raider.

As they sprawled, Crofton drove the gun's muzzle to the fellow's skull. Half groggy, the thug came up for more, still clutching his revolver. As Crofton gave a grab for the man's wrist, someone sprawled beside him.

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It was Durfee, downed by Danning's choking clutch. Hard upon that came Danning himself, fear forgotten in madness. The secretary was pouncing upon Crofton, his first foe.

Crofton lost his grip upon the groggy thug's wrist. He and Danning rolled in a mad grapple. A revolver sounded a muffled bark as The Shadow sprang forward to enter the close-range combat. Danning groaned and sank from Crofton's grasp. The groggy invader had shot his own ally. But now he was rising, that thug, aiming to get Crofton before The Shadow's agent could roll in against him.

An automatic blasted its final stroke. The Shadow's shot singed an inch above Danning's sagging body. It found the form of the thug who had aimed for Crofton. That would-be murderer sprawled upon the floor beside Danning's writhing, long-limbed shape.

Durfee had managed to crawl into the study. Sowbry dragged him farther and slammed the door. Weaponless, these two men had found a place of safety, not realizing that they needed it no longer. Into the lull that followed came the muffled tones of Sowbry's frantic voice. The servant was calling the police over the study telephone.

Eyes upward, Danning was coughing incoherent words. The Shadow was close beside the wounded secretary. Burning eyes caught Danning's glassy gaze.

"Speak!"

THE hissed word was a command. Danning's lips moved; they managed to eject gasped words. Mortally wounded, the secretary gave the answer to the riddle of his master's absence.

"Mr. Hylap left," gulped Danning. "Left here – a few hours ago. Going – going East. Mountain Pacific – new train – the Typhoon. He – he – was not followed. Going to – to –"

Strength was spent. Danning's lips twitched; his glazed eyes bulged. The Shadow had gripped the man's shoulders; he could feel Danning's body sag. The thug's bullet had completed its unintended work. Danning was dead.

From far out in the night came distant crackles of revolver fire. Fleeing men of crime had encountered the cordon of Chinese. Shots were being exchanged during flight in the fog.

From somewhere, a siren was delivering its faint whine. Police were already on their way. The Shadow's gloved fist gripped Miles Crofton's shoulder. In obedience to his chief, the agent followed as The Shadow led the way through this hallway where frustrated invaders lay silent beside Danning.

LATER, a plane took off from the fog-filled airport. Miles Crofton was at the controls of the swift ship, rising for high altitude as he chose an eastward course. Visibility would be clear after the plane had cleared the bay.

The Shadow was aboard, resting silent in the cockpit. He had ordered his agent to pilot the plane; for Crofton was a skilled aviator, and The Shadow was fatigued from the flight that had brought him to the Coast. Moreover, The Shadow had work ahead.

His plane was off to overtake the Typhoon, a swift streamlined limited train that had become the pride of the Mountain Pacific Railroad. Through new flight in the fog, off to the clear atmosphere above the Sierras, The Shadow was on his way to find Seton Hylap, the man in whose absence crime had struck.

CHAPTER III. DEATH TRAVELS EAST

FLOODLIGHTS bathed the airport at the little town of Falko. Located near the foothills of a towering mountain range, this spot was of prime importance to transcontinental planes. Meeting place of air routes and railway, Falko served also as a transfer point for passengers.

Hours had passed since The Shadow had left San Francisco. Miles Crofton, steady at the controls, had headed the ship for Falko, hoping to reach the tiny town before the swift streamlined train that was traveling east on the tracks of the Mountain Pacific.

Crofton had almost reached his goal; already eyes from the ground were viewing the lights that twinkled high above the flooded gleam of the landing field.

The plane made a rapid landing. Rolling along the ground, it came almost to a stop, then wheeled and taxied toward a hangar. From the cockpit dropped a tall passenger who held a light suitcase in one hand. With the other, he waved instructions to the pilot; then strode rapidly from the edge of the landing field, heading across a blackened area toward the lighted station, a few hundred yards away.

The arrival was just in time to make connection. Already, a gleaming headlight was whizzing into view from beyond a curve. Then, into the lights of the railway station glided the Typhoon, a slithering, snakelike shape of silvery metal. The streamlined limited had arrived.

Sliding doors opened. Passengers alighted from low steps and tramped the station platform. All of them were planning to take planes that were due later; most of them looked about to find the direction to the airport. There was one, however, a thick-set man in gray overcoat, who needed no instructions. Coat collar turned up; chin wrapped in a muffler, this individual strode past the others from the train and paced straight toward the road that led to the landing field.

THE SHADOW was just in time to spy that muffled passenger. A moment later the fellow was gone, too quickly for The Shadow to observe his muffled features.

Pausing on the platform, The Shadow glanced through darkness toward the airport. A small plane was visible, moving forward, in preparation for a take-off. It was obviously no commercial ship. Instinctively, The Shadow linked this private plane with the muffled man who had departed from the station.

"All aboard!"

The conductor of the Typhoon was giving the final call. Forced to immediate choice, The Shadow delivered a soft, whispered laugh; then boarded the train. Doors slid shut; the Typhoon glided from the station.

The Shadow gave no new evidence of curbed mirth as he walked into the club cafe that formed the observation section of the Typhoon. He had recognized that the departing passenger might be a man who needed watching; but he had gained no evidence that the muffled man was Seton Hylap. The Shadow's best course was to take the limited, particularly since he had left a trump card at Falko.

The trump was Miles Crofton. A skilled agent in The Shadow's service, Crofton would allow nothing to slip his notice. Still at the airport, Crofton would observe any passenger who took off in a private ship; hence The Shadow would receive a later report on the man whom he had seen.

The chances were still large in The Shadow's favor. Odds were that Seton Hylap had chosen to ride farther east than Falko. The Typhoon was not due for another stop until it reached Ridgley, a station one hundred and

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fifty miles east of Falko. All passengers would still be aboard at the next stop.

The Shadow seated himself by a window near the rear of the car. He rang for the porter and ordered refreshments, then leaned back in his cushioned chair and smiled slightly as he stared at the blackness beyond the shatter-proof window pane.

IT was long after midnight. Some passengers must have stayed up in order to leave the train at Falko; but they were gone and all others had retired. Except for the porter, The Shadow was alone in this rear unit of the streamlined limited. His thoughts were concerned with the time that lay ahead.

A conductor entered the club car. He spied the tall passenger whom the porter was serving and approached to collect tickets. The Shadow produced a wallet, extracted a stack of currency and paid his fare from Falko to Chicago. The Pullman conductor arrived during the process; he prepared a receipt and assigned the new passenger to lower Berth 4, Car 2.

The conductors took seats opposite The Shadow. They began to check off the tickets that they had collected. Forgetting the passenger who was dining across the aisle, they entered into a discussion that concerned the very fact that The Shadow had noticed – the reduced speed of the Typhoon.

"Five hours from Falko into Ridgley," grumbled the railway conductor. "That's no better than the Eastern Limited used to do along this stretch of pike."

"Only one hundred and fifty miles," observed the Pullman conductor. "It ought to be clipped to two hours flat. This windjammer could do it."

"Not quite. The grades would slack us a bit. But right at present it's the curves. We can't hit them at top speed."

"When is the road going to bank them heavier?"

"They can't touch that stretch over the rise," the railroad man declared emphatically. "Not a chance of changing it. The pike was laid for heavy hauls and that's how it will stay. Let's see" – the railroad conductor paused to speculate – "forty-five miles to the K and R junction – that could be stepped up a bit.

"But from the Junction into Ridgley, the freights have it tough enough as is. That traffic still has rights, even though we're trying to compete with airplanes. Any monkeying with the curves would play hob with the freights."

"How about picking a new right of way?"

"Couldn't be done. There's one bet, though." The railroad conductor leaned forward and spoke confidentially. "You know the old K and R, don't you? Cuts off from the junction, goes through Altamont and terminates at Ridgley?" The Pullman conductor nodded.

"Well, there's a rumor about," stated the railroad conductor. "I heard it for the first time when I was in Frisco yesterday. They say the Mountain Pacific is looking to buy up the K and R."

"To use it for a freight line?"

"No, for passenger service. There's going to be fortunes made out of high speed trains like this one. If the Mountain Pacific takes over the K and R, they'll rig it up for speed."

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"And if they don't get the K and R?"

"They'll be out of luck competing with the other transcontinental lines. Three hours lost is going to be plenty bad, when every through pike is running streamlined limiteds."

THE railroad conductor gave his head another emphatic shake. He became silent as he counted through a stack of tickets. Suddenly he paused and examined one slip of pasteboard.

"Fellow getting off at the K and R Junction," he remarked. "Let's check this one. Where did you locate him?"

"Lower 8, Car 3," returned the Pullman conductor. "Charged him same fare as for a berth into Ridgley. No rate listed for the K and R Junction."

"It's not a regular stop for any through train," mused the railroad conductor, "but we've got an agreement with the K and R in case a stop is called for. Funny how that bird knew about it. First time any passenger ever reminded me about it."

"Maybe he was an official of the K and R?"

"He'd have been traveling on a pass if he was. No, sir, this chap was a straight fare. He said K and R; and there I was."

"There's a local pulls out on the K and R, isn't there?"

"Yeah. To Altamont, where the power dam is under construction. Like as not this fellow is switching to the local."

The conductor placed the ticket aside. He went on with his other details. Neither he nor the Pullman conductor glanced across the aisle. The Shadow had completed his light repast. He was rising silently, leaving his grip by the seat.

Walking forward, The Shadow passed the corner where the porter was dozing. He walked through the short vestibule into the car ahead. This unit of the articulated train was the portion to which the Pullman conductor had referred as "Car 3." The Shadow's unit was one ahead; but he did not continue on to Car 3.

Instead, he stopped at curtains that read: No. 8. This was the berth occupied by the passenger whom the conductor had discussed – the man who was due to leave the train at the K and R Junction.

The Shadow had learned much from the short conversation that he had overheard. He knew that the occupant of this berth must be a man who had some unusual purpose. He could be no chance traveler, for he would not have called for the stop required by a little known regulation.

The Shadow had deliberately passed by the muffled passenger who had alighted at Falko because he had conjectured no reason for Seton Hylap leaving the limited there. Conversely, The Shadow was stopping at this berth because he had decided that Hylap might be its occupant.

The retired financier was close to affairs in San Francisco. It was quite probable he had learned of a deal that concerned the K and R Railroad.

CAREFULLY, The Shadow spread the curtains. Beyond them, he encountered a metal barrier; the berths of these streamlined trains were equipped with such doors for passengers who chose to use them. The Shadow

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slid one hand along the barrier. He found a slight space. The door was not fastened from the inside.

Smoothly, noiselessly, The Shadow slid the steel sheet open. His hand moved through the darkness; it found a switch beside the window. Covering the little bulb of the berth lamp, The Shadow pressed the switch. His palm covered the glow; carefully, he moved his hand sidewise, to let light trickle into the berth.

Keen eyes were staring toward the man whom they saw lying in the berth. The glow increased as The Shadow continued the motion of his hand. Then, with suddenness, The Shadow removed his hand entirely.

The man in the berth was dead. The burning lamp revealed that fact in all its horror. Lying face upward, his body half out from the blankets, the victim was staring toward the bottom of the berth above. The dead man's eyes were bulging sightless; his lips were twisted in an expression of agony.

The Shadow had seen such death before. He knew what had caused it. The victim had been poisoned; the killer had taken no chances in making sure of certain death. The man had died amid fierce pangs that had prevented him from making an outcry.

However the killer might have administered the dose, it was evident that he had made no visit here to view his handiwork. That would have meant too great a risk; furthermore, two articles of clothing indicated that no intruder had been here. These were coat and overcoat, both neatly hung on hangers, carefully buttoned from top to bottom as the dead man had arranged them.

CALMLY, The Shadow searched the pockets of both coats; he found only a handkerchief, a pack of cigarettes and a pair of gloves. Through the cloth of the dead man's suit he could feel the slight bulge of a wallet. The Shadow unbuttoned the coat and removed the object; then unfolded it in the light that filled the berth.

Through the celluloid front of a pocket in the wallet, The Shadow viewed a photograph that matched the dead man's face. An oldish countenance, wrinkled with lines, blunt-nosed and thin-haired. On the same card was a typewritten name; beneath it an identifying signature.

The Shadow's search had ended with a thwarted mission. Death had gained its way before The Shadow. The man who lay lifeless in Lower 8 was Seton Hylap!

CHAPTER IV. THE SHADOW SUBSTITUTES

THE SHADOW had completed a brief examination of Seton Hylap's wallet. He then replaced the wallet and its contents in the inside pocket of the hanging coat.

Immediately after that action, The Shadow swung about to face the aisle. His action was timely; the porter had appeared at the end of the car and was coming along the aisle. The Shadow's hand found the sliding door of the berth and drew it shut. Then, as the limited lurched on a curve, he swung about to face the closed berth. The porter, arriving, saw stooped head and shoulders as The Shadow closed the curtains. He mistook The Shadow for Hylap.

"Just coming to give you a call, suh," informed the porter, thinking that he was speaking to the occupant of the berth. "We're due at the junction in 'bout twenty-five minutes. Ah'll get your suitcase, suh. Right from under heah where Ah placed it."

As the porter pulled a small dress suitcase into view, The Shadow reached down to take it from his hand. He spoke in a voice that was slightly querulous, a tone that might well have fitted an elderly traveler like Seton

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Hylap.

"I'll carry the bag, porter," informed The Shadow. "I intend to go back to the observation car. My overcoat is back there and I have nothing to pack. Do not disturb this berth, however. I might decide to return."

With that, The Shadow thrust a dollar bill into the hand of the rising porter. Turning about, he walked toward the rear of the car, carrying Hylap's suitcase.

That role of Hylap had to be dropped, however, when The Shadow entered the club car. The conductors were still there; they would remember him as the passenger who came aboard at Falko.

Just inside the club car was a little writing desk. The Shadow saw the attendant, dozing on the opposite side of the aisle. He stowed Hylap's suitcase beneath the writing desk. That done, The Shadow awakened the porter by jogging the fellow's shoulder.

"Another cup of coffee," ordered The Shadow, quietly. "Bring it back to my chair."

FIVE minutes later, the conductors arose. As soon as the conductors were gone, The Shadow rang for the porter and told the man to bring the suitcase that he had left beneath the writing table. The porter obeyed, a trifle puzzled.

He had not recalled two bags coming aboard with this passenger. The porter found the bag, however, and brought it to The Shadow. As soon as the attendant had left, The Shadow opened Hylap's suitcase.

Except for a few articles of clothing, the only item in Hylap's bag was a timetable of the K and R Railway. The Shadow perused the pages of the schedule. He discovered that a local was due to leave the K and R Junction about fifteen minutes after the Typhoon would arrive there. There was only one station of consequence on its route. That was the town of Altamont, where the local's run ended.

The time-table listed names of officials of the K and R Railway. The president and general manager was Gifford Barbridge. His office address was Altamont. That town was obviously headquarters for the K and R. That fitted with facts that The Shadow already knew concerning the jerkwater line that paralleled the Mountain Pacific.

The K and R Railway had but one present reason for existence. It served the town of Altamont, which had become important because of a new power development. The K and R afforded transportation for supplies and equipment that were required by the Altamont Power Company.

Seton Hylap had been on his way to Altamont. He could not have intended a visit to the officials of the Altamont Power Company, for they were located in Chicago and New York. Obviously, his purpose had been to meet someone who represented the K and R Railway, probably Gifford Barbridge.

Seton Hylap was dead, however. The Shadow had gained no clue as to how the deed had been done; but he did have an idea of its purpose. The murderer of Seton Hylap had wanted to keep the financier from meeting Gifford Barbridge in Altamont.

HYLAP'S death, however, was not the only mystery. Tracing back, The Shadow found contradictions in the happenings at San Francisco. First Hylap's house had been surrounded by potential killers; yet none had attempted to stay Hylap's departure from his home. The combination was paradoxical.

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Next was the case of Danning, Hylap's secretary. Danning had tried to keep Miles Crofton from entering Hylap's study. On the face of it, that would have indicated Danning to be a protector of his master. But Crofton's discovery of an empty room had proven that Danning had played a bluff.

Last, the actions of the crooks had shown that they were with Danning, not against him. The secretary's death had been an accident so far as the hoodlum raiders were concerned. The Shadow could see the answer now. A weakling, the secretary had succumbed to bribery. Danning had let Seton Hylap travel East to doom which the secretary knew his master would surely encounter.

With Hylap dead, The Shadow's present course was a single one. Hylap was expected in Altamont. It would be morning before the porter would discover Hylap's body. The law would institute an investigation in San Francisco; days would elapse before investigators would decide that the trail might lead to Altamont.

Therein lay The Shadow's advantage. By arriving at Altamont as soon as possible, he could study conditions there and gain an answer before the law was on its way. Seton Hylap had intended to go to Altamont; in the dead man's place would be a substitute, but an unexpected one. That substitute would be The Shadow.

Minutes alone remained before the diesel-powered limited would make its stop at the K and R Junction, the station where the conductors expected a single passenger to alight.

The Shadow's course was plain. Rising, he picked up his own satchel; in its place he put the flat suitcase that had belonged to Seton Hylap. Strolling past the unwatchful porter, The Shadow placed his own bag by the outer door.

THE speed of the Typhoon began to slacken smoothly. The Shadow strolled back and again aroused the porter. He remarked that he was getting off at the junction. The porter nodded; the conductor had told him that a stop would be made there.

Lights blinked beyond the blackened window as the Typhoon glided to a stop. The glimmers of a station platform; the dull illumination of the depot itself; beyond that the glare from the headlight of a locomotive that was waiting on another track. The porter joined The Shadow. Sleepily, he slid open the car door just as the Typhoon halted.

Picking up his bag, The Shadow brushed by the porter as the man stepped to the station platform. The porter turned to look for luggage; then saw that the passenger was carrying a grip close to his body. The conductor then came back through Car 3, to learn from the porter of that car that the passenger from Lower 8 was in the club cafe.

Reaching the door that the club car attendant had opened, the conductor saw a hunched-up figure striding away from the train. He asked the sleepy attendant if that was the passenger for the junction. The reply was an affirmative. Swinging to the platform, the conductor waved to a brakeman who had stepped from a front unit of the train.

Both clambered aboard. Doors slid shut; the Typhoon slid forward. Gathering speed, the streamlined limited bent fantastically as it reached a curve. Seconds later, its rear lights had twinkled out of sight. The Shadow's ruse had worked completely. Individually, conductor and porters had believed that the right passenger had stepped from the train at the K and R Junction.

Had Seton Hylap been alive to leave the Typhoon, his first act would have been to enter the station waiting room and buy a ticket for the K and R local. The Shadow, however, had no such intention. He had stepped to a blackened spot beyond the baggage room; there darkness had swallowed him.

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Depot loungers had come over to learn why the Typhoon had stopped; but the limited had left too soon for them to make inquiry. None had seen the alighting passenger. Later, should investigation be made, there would be a conflict of testimony.

Conductors and porters of the Typhoon would swear that a passenger had alighted. People at the station would declare they had seen no one; furthermore, the crew of the K and R local would testify no stranger had ridden into Altamont, the train being on the other side of the tracks.

Stooping in the darkness, The Shadow extracted blackened folds of cloth from his satchel. Gloves encased his hands; then two fingers grasped automatics. Next, the bag itself flattened and spread out like a knapsack. Then The Shadow affixed it to his back, and the satchel had become an untroublesome burden.

GLIDING from darkness, The Shadow headed toward the K and R local, reached the second baggage car, then followed it to the coupling. Rising upward, The Shadow huddled into a fixed position between the cars. No eye would discern that motionless form.

Minutes passed. The conductor gave the cry of "All aboard!" Last to ascend the steps of the passenger car, he pulled the bell cord. With bell clanging, the K and R local started its run to Altamont. With it rode an unseen passenger. The Shadow was heading forth to learn the cause of murder, his purpose to thwart the schemes of crooks. But even now, while The Shadow was riding blind-baggage on the K and R, cross-purposes were still at work. New and insidious crime was in the making, beyond The Shadow's reach!

CHAPTER V. DOUBLE-CROSSERS

MOUNTAIN blackness spangled with twinkling lights. Such was the town of Altamont as viewed from the platform of the railroad station. Small though the place was, it seemed to maintain an all-night vigil. Dawn was not due for another hour; yet activity was apparent.

Men were on the station platform, huskies who were garbed in flannel shirts, with khaki trousers tucked into the tops of high boots. They were clustered beneath a glow of light, exchanging jests, these early workers waiting for their shift.

A rugged-faced man stepped up to the platform. Firm-jawed and cold-eyed, he looked over the chatting group. Better dressed than the other men, he appeared to be someone of authority. His arrival brought respectful nods of greeting from the men.

"Hello, men," spoke the rugged newcomer. "Any report on Number Four?"

"Running about ten minutes late, Mr. Barbridge," replied one of the men. "She ought to make it up, though."

Barbridge grunted. He produced a pipe and pouch. He stuffed tobacco into the pipe and dug some matches from his pocket.

"Expecting anybody, Mr. Barbridge?" came a polite inquiry.

"Maybe," returned Barbridge, eyeing the speaker coldly. "Why did you ask?"

"Thought maybe he could've come in by plane. There was a ship went over here about half an hour ago."

"Did it make a landing?"

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"Couldn't tell. It passed the brow of the hill up yonder, where the emergency field is located. I couldn't see it after that."

Barbridge lighted his pipe and puffed furiously. He shrugged his shoulders; then spoke in a casual tone:

"If anyone asks for me, tell him I'm in the temporary office. I expect some friends of mine to come in on Number Four."

THIS instruction given, Barbridge strode across the tracks and took to a muddy road that ran close to the railway. His course carried him straight toward the blackened hillside that the man on the platform had mentioned. The rails veered somewhat in the opposite direction. By the time that Barbridge had covered a quarter mile, he was a full two hundred yards distant from the tracks.

Coming to a darkened building, Barbridge produced a key and fumbled for a lock. He opened a door and stepped into an empty room. He pressed a light switch to reveal a little office with shuttered windows. The furniture consisted of a desk and half a dozen chairs.

Barbridge pressed another switch. A large incandescent glowed outside the crude frame building. The rugged faced man stepped out to view the effect. The light above the door read:

K R

OFFICE

Stepping back into the office, Barbridge closed the door but did not bolt it. From off of the hillside, directly behind the shack came a muffled blast, one that made the crude building quiver. Barbridge grunted.

The night shift was finishing with a series of blasts before the day men came to work. A second roar of muffled thunder sounded while Barbridge stood beside the window.

Ensuing silence; Barbridge closed the shutter. He turned as he heard an unexpected sound. It was a rapping at a side door of the temporary office building. Barbridge stroked his chin; then went to the door and opened it. A muffled man came into view.

BARBRIDGE watched the arrival remove coat and muffler. He found himself staring at a visitor whom he did not recognize. The newcomer was thick-set; his face formed the shape of a square. Sallow in the light, the man's features were not pleasant. The smile that he delivered revealed jutting, fanglike teeth.

"Well?" queried Barbridge sharply. "Who are you? What do you want here?"

"Dropped in to see you," returned the stranger, his voice a smooth purr that did not fit his expression. "You are Gifford Barbridge, aren't you? President and general manager of the K and R?"

"That's who I am. But who are you? What do you want?"

"You never heard of me before. My name is Zullick. Foy Zullick. From the East."

Barbridge watched the fang-toothed man sit down in a chair beside the desk. Zullick's grin persisted; again the fellow spoke, as suavely as before.

"Saw the light out front," he chuckled. "That's why I came around to the side door."

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Barbridge, seating himself behind the desk, said, "But that doesn't answer my question. What's your business here?"

"The same as that of Seton Hylap."

Gifford Barbridge stared; his big fists clenched.

"Let's talk turkey," suggested Zullick. "First of all, Barbridge, I'm going to state some facts that I know. After you've listened, you'll understand why I'm here."

"Go ahead," growled Barbridge.

"All right," agreed Zullick. "Here's the situation. You're president and general manager of the K and R. Up until a short while ago, you had a lemon on your hands and a bad one. This jerkwater line was in the red, just about due to go under.

"You had dough tied up in the K and R. You knew the road needed something more than a stuffed-shirt president who spent his time behind a mahogany desk. That's why you came up here and made yourself general manager, to run things right."

ZULLICK'S tone was not uncomplimentary. The man's smoothness had a note of persuasion; at the same time, Barbridge felt himself on guard. He sensed that this was a build-up.

"You saw a good proposition," continued Zullick, "and you grabbed it. A deal with the Altamont Power Company to handle their business and to use their juice to electrify your line. You landed a swell break on the contract, too. But it meant laying new tracks, building sidings along the hill. That called for cash.

"The Altamont Power loaned you the dough – half a million – to be paid back in five installments, They let you ride past the first payments; but the works is due, mighty soon.

"And your railroad is in hock. If you don't come through with the whole amount on a specified date, you lose your security. By your security I mean the K and R."

Zullick paused. Barbridge had unclenched his fists; he was drumming the top of the desk.

"The Mountain Pacific may want the K and R," purred Zullick. "If they do, they'll pay plenty. It might mean five million dollars, clear, to you, Barbridge, provided you own the line."

"And if I don't?" demanded Barbridge. "What then?"

"They'll still pay. Not to you, but to the Altamont Power. What's more, they'll pay more than they'd pay you, because the Altamont Power could hold out – for double the sum or more!"

"What is your racket, Zullick?" Barbridge demanded.

"No racket," was the smooth reply. "Just a suggestion. An easy one, too. Let the works slide, Barbridge. Let the Altamont Power get what they want. Nobody can blame you; it would look all right. Just forget the stockholders of the K. and R; and pull in a cool bonus of one million dollars for yourself."

"So that's it!" Barbridge came to his feet; his glare was savage. "You're the under-cover man for the Altamont Power! I knew they were in on the dirty deal that I've been getting! Trouble with the workers;

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mistakes that took days to correct; anything, everything that caused delay and cost money! Zullick, I'll give you my answer! I'll make no deal with the crooks you represent; and when I see them personally, I'll give them a type of settlement they don't expect!"

"You'll never find the men you want, Barbridge," Zullick assured, in his suave tone.

"It doesn't matter who they are," challenged Barbridge. "I've beaten them already. They will have their half million before it's due. No one can stop me. No one – unless –"

BARBRIDGE paused abruptly. His face clouded as he noted Zullick's hard smile.

"Unless," supplied Zullick, "is a good word. In this case, it means you've won out unless your angel fails to show up. You're waiting for him right now; Seton Hylap, due in on your jerkwater local. Well, Barbridge, you'll have a long wait for Hylap.

"Let me tell you a few facts. You wrote to Hylap and arranged a deal with him. He was to lend the half million at interest, and with it a flock of loose shares of K and R stock. A big profit for Hylap when the Mountain Pacific would be ready to buy up K and R.

"But Hylap had a secretary – a fellow named Danning – who didn't mind telling me all he knew. I paid him for the information; and I watched him at the same time. I've been keeping a strong-arm squad around Hylap's home for a couple of weeks.

"Danning did all that was required. Kept me posted on the details. Destroyed all the letters that you wrote to Hylap. Danning did that right after Hylap left his home this afternoon. My squad was posted to let Hylap pass; but they still kept watch after he was gone.

"Danning was rather short on nerve, so I didn't take any chances. Yes, Barbridge, Seton Hylap left aboard the Typhoon, intending to get off at the K and R Junction. But I was aboard the train with him."

"You – you threatened him?" stammered Barbridge. "Made him go on, while you – while you took his place?"

"Not exactly," leered Zullick. "I left the limited at Falko. I had a plane waiting; I flew in here. My ship is still up at the emergency landing field. No" – Zullick paused to deliver an insidious chuckle – "I didn't have to talk to Hylap, but I fixed him so he'll never be around to arrange his deal with you. There won't be anyone here in place of Hylap."

BARBRIDGE had come to his feet. His face showed fierce understanding. His hands were gripping the edge of the desk. He knew the significance of Zullick's cold-blooded statement. Barbridge's voice rose in accusation.

"You murdered Hylap!" denounced the railroad president. "I understand your innuendo. Hylap cannot come here because his life has been ended! By your hand! You –"

Barbridge stopped. Someone was knocking at the side door of the shack.

Zullick threw a nervous glance in that direction, then rose to his feet. The door swung open.

Barbridge never looked toward the door. Instead, he yanked open the drawer of his desk and jerked forth a revolver. Pointing the .38 straight toward Zullick, the railroad president gave the command:

"Hands up!"

Zullick complied promptly. This time it was Barbridge who chuckled as he shot a glance toward the door and saw the ungainly, hard-faced man who had entered. Still covering Zullick, the railroad president spoke:

"Close the door Findlay." Then as the hard-faced man complied, Barbridge added to Zullick: "This is one man you couldn't reach, Findlay, my special supervisor. He's one of the loyal workers who made your rats dig for their holes after I came on the job in person."

Still looking at Zullick, Barbridge paused; then spoke to Findlay.

"This man is a murderer," informed Barbridge. "He is going to pay the penalty for the crime that he has practically admitted. I'll watch him, Findlay, while you go out and spread the word. I want you to bring –"

Barbridge's sentence ended as a husky form hurtled hard upon the railroad president. The attacker was Findlay, springing in while Barbridge's attention was centered on Zullick. A rough fist landed on Barbridge's rugged jaw. The revolver clattered to the floor; Barbridge sprawled and tried vainly to rally against this attacker.

Then Zullick leaped forward. His pounce ended Barbridge's resistance. The two attackers subdued the railroad president; then hoisted him, limp and overwhelmed, into the chair behind the desk.

Half groggy, Barbridge opened his eyes; he was staring into the muzzle of his own revolver; the gun was gripped in the fist of Findlay. Zullick was leaning upon the front of the desk, a sneer upon his ugly countenance.

"Let me make the introduction," jeered the crook. "This man's name isn't Findlay. It's Ramsted – they call him "Soup" Ramsted, because he knows plenty about blowing safes. He was just the fellow we wanted here. A fellow with his talent could fit in with your blasting crew. Of course, you didn't wise to his racket. His job was to work close to you. Soup Ramsted, our inside man."

Gifford Barbridge groaned groggily from his chair. Double-crossers had sprung their trap; and Barbridge was the victim!

CHAPTER VI. DEATH AT DAWN

"KEEP him covered, Soup. I'm going through the desk."

Foy Zullick gave the order harshly. His suave purr was no longer evident. While "Soup" kept Barbridge at the gun point, Zullick started his search of the desk. He calmly fished out a stack of correspondence, went through letters and discovered the ones he wanted.

"These are all that Hylap wrote," sneered Zullick. "Danning slipped me the copies, so I know. Well, old socks" – he leered at Barbridge – "here goes the evidence, right in my pocket."

Barbridge was staring coldly, though bound. Zullick observed Barbridge's expression. The crook knew that compromise was useless.

"You've got yourself to blame for this mess, Barbridge," informed Zullick.

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The crook's tone was significant. It meant that death could be his only verdict. Barbridge remained unflinching.

"I wish there was still an out for you," spoke Zullick, resuming his cultivated purr. "Not because I mind croaking you, Barbridge, because I don't. But nobody's ever going to lay the Hylap job on me. I don't leave trails. Just the same; it's best to be safe. What do you say, Soup?"

Before the safe cracker could reply, a new sound reached the ears of the three men. It was the distant whistle of a locomotive, blaring from beyond the bend. The K and R local was approaching Altamont.

A sudden expression showed on Barbridge's face. It was half-hope, half anxiety. Zullick spotted it; his grin hardened.

"So that's it," he said smoothly. "You still think that maybe I've been bluffing about Hylap? Well, I'm going to give you a break. I'll wait until that local pulls in. I'll let you see for yourself that Hylap doesn't show up. Then maybe you won't be so independent. That offer of a million bucks may look good enough then to take."

Again the whistle. Zullick leered wolfishly. Barbridge remained cold in expression; but Soup Ramsted began to display anxiety.

"It's mighty close to dawn, Foy," remarked the dynamiter. "The day shift's due to go on inside half an hour. You're going to put us in a bad spot. I've got some of the night crew all set the way you wanted them. What's more, daylight ain't going to help us none."

"We'll wait until the local comes in," retorted Zullick, his tone a sudden rasp. "Don't get jittery, Soup. Barbridge knows the proposition. He'll have about three minutes to make up his mind, after he's sure that Hylap hasn't come."

BOASTFUL, hardened to crime, Zullick intended to show Barbridge that he had made no bluff concerning Hylap. The crook's quirk seemed to strengthen his game; not balk it. Actually, the delay was a timely one – for Barbridge. Rescue was aboard that rattling local. A superfighter had neared his goal. Hylap was not coming to the office of the K and R, but The Shadow was.

Chance, however, was due for a sudden change. Crooks had chosen their course; their intended victim was the one who was to alter it. As the stopping local blared for the final crossing, a surge of thoughts drove Barbridge to desperate action.

A double murder! The thought was overwhelming to Barbridge. He pictured Hylap – believing him still alive – walking into this very trap. He could fancy Zullick chuckling as he and Soup performed a double killing. Thoughts of his own danger had not inspired Barbridge to action; but his imagination concerning Hylap did.

WITH a fierce cry, Barbridge launched himself forward, squarely upon Soup. Zullick snarled as he leaped in to intervene. Barbridge had caught Soup's wrist; the henchman was going down beneath his drive. Then, as Zullick arrived to wrestle with the grapplers, a muffled report sounded from the floor.

Barbridge's body went limp in Zullick's grasp. The railroad president rolled upon his back. Soup, his gun still smoking, came up on hands and knees to stare at the body. Zullick delivered a triumphant snarl.

"You've croaked him, Soup," rasped the crook. "Well, that ends the argument. He thought I was bluffing about Hylap."

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"Weren't you?" queried Soup, coming to his feet. "Say, Foy, I was thinking that maybe –"

"You're as goofy as Barbridge," interrupted Zullick. "Sure I croaked Hylap. Dosed his coffee while he was eating dinner on the limited. He's not coming here, but we're going."

"Sure thing," acknowledged Soup. "We'd better scam by that side door, Foy. Listen – I'm pulling out with you. I've got it fixed so it won't look phony. I'm supposed to have left for another job."

"You've got the pay-off fixed? Ready to cover this mess!"

Zullick nudged toward Barbridge's body as he spoke. Soup nodded. Zullick motioned toward the side door. Together the murderers made their way from the shack. They ducked to the rear of the office shack and scrambled up the deserted slope.

The locomotive of the local was clanging its bell as the train jolted slowly into the station. Faint dawn had streaked the sky; the loungers at the depot were looking over the cars as the train rolled in. But they saw no sign of anyone riding blind-baggage.

The Shadow had dropped from the train just after it had made the final crossing. From his perch between cars he had spied the light in front of the office shack.

AS he approached the front of the building, The Shadow could not see the door on the side, due to a slight angle of his course. He had failed to witness the departure of Zullick and Ramsted. The Shadow then reached the door through which murderers had departed.

The door was unlocked. The Shadow opened it and entered. He saw Barbridge's body immediately. He stooped to examine the dead man's form. The Shadow could smell the pungent aroma of powder. One bullet only had slain Gifford Barbridge. The shot had been fired only a few minutes before.

The half-opened drawers of the desk showed that the office had been rifled. The bolted front door was proof that the killers had left by the side. Though he had arrived too late; The Shadow still had opportunity to pick up the trail of murderers.

He understood why Barbridge had been here; why the light was on at the front of the building. An appointment had been due with Hylap.

But as he studied Barbridge's dead body, The Shadow recognized that certain facts needed explanation. The killers must have known that Hylap was dead; that no one was coming promptly to the office. They had still possessed opportunity to cover up their crime, either by removing Barbridge's body or by making the death look like suicide. Why had they failed to do so?

The answer came in the form of silence. The Shadow's mind had the precision of clockwork; as he studied Barbridge's form he expected a sound which did not arrive. A new time blast was due from the slope. None occurred.

To an ordinary investigator that might have meant simply that the night shift had ended its duty. But to The Shadow, it meant more; he knew that silence and inactivity could often carry grim foreboding.

Without an instant's hesitation, The Shadow yanked open the front door of the shack. He leaped out into the light; with long, swift bounds he sprang away into the increasing glow of dawn. He had traveled a full fifty yards before the catastrophe occurred.

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A TERRIFIC roar shook the hillside directly in back of the office shack. Accompanied by a volcanic spew of flame, the thunderous roar hurled forth a huge area of soil and rock directly above the doomed building.

The Shadow flattened to the ground, dropped by the concussion. Staring upward, he saw the hillside loosen its huge burden. A mammoth landslide deluged the office building, shattering the crude shack and burying it beneath an enormous mass of earth.

As the echoes of the thunder ended, the shouts of men arose. The cries came from the station, where glass had crackled from the windows of the standing train. Witnesses had viewed the havoc of what they had taken for a misplaced, ill-timed blast. They were coming toward the spot on the run.

The Shadow arose, unsteadily. His tall figure was plain against the whitened mass of tumbled rock which caught the direct rays of the rising sun. Shouts announced that he had been discovered. Mistaken workers had instantly connected the presence of this phantom figure with the overwhelming crash that had buried Barbridge's office.

They knew that the railroad president must be dead. They thought that The Shadow was responsible. Ready revolvers crackled as loyal men sought vengeance on the tall intruder who had appeared so suddenly upon the ground.

Shots were wide; but The Shadow had no time to tarry. Vengeful men were closing in; his only course was to leave without attempt at explanation. Swinging across the space toward the railroad, The Shadow brought forth automatics and opened a return fire. His fire was wide, for he had no quarrel with these men.

A chugging sound caused The Shadow to turn. A tiny car was coming around the railroad bend. Three track walkers were aboard the gasoline car, following the local into Altamont. A whispered laugh escaped The Shadow's lips as he whirled about and swung toward the crossing. He had found the means of departure that he wanted.

Revolvers barked as new pursuit began. The Shadow sent back a brace of shots, purposely wide. The gasoline car coasted to a stop. Its alarmed occupants were looking past the darkened ground over which The Shadow sped. Their attention was centered upon the horde of pursuers who were coming toward the tracks.

The Shadow swung up suddenly from a low embankment. He delivered a fierce laugh of challenge as he appeared upon the tracks before the slowing car.

As The Shadow bounded upon the end of the car, two men dived to the right of way, fearful of the looming automatics that they saw in black-gloved fists.

The last man leaped forward to put up a fight. He encountered The Shadow; the cloaked arrival sent him sprawling to the ground beside the tracks. Grasping a lever, The Shadow put the car into reverse. Rising, he delivered a last round of high shots over the heads of the running men who were nearing the tracks.

REVOLVERS crackled; spent bullets dug into the ties of the railroad track. The gasoline car was rolling away, the space increasing between The Shadow and those who had given chase. Aided by the downgrade, the little car whizzed around the bend.

Past the bend, speeding through the dawn, The Shadow saw something that no others could arrive in time to observe. From behind the brow of the hill, an airplane was rising from a low plateau.

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Murderers were on their way. They had buried the evidence of crime. Crushed beneath the ruins of his office, mangled beyond recognition, the body of Gifford Barbridge might never be found. If it should be uncovered, the chances were that no one would learn that the president had been shot before the hillside had tumbled down upon him.

An airplane had come in from the night. It had left at dawn. Its arrival and departure were known to but one: The Shadow. Murderers had covered their trail; temporarily they were free, while The Shadow was sought as a fugitive.

That situation soon would change. His own dilemma ended, The Shadow would seek a new trail to some lair that harbored men of crime. Alone, aboard the speeding track car, The Shadow delivered his grim laugh of challenge to the villains who had eluded him.

CHAPTER VII. THE LONE CLUE

THIRTY-SIX hours had passed. It was early evening in Chicago. The Midwest metropolis lay glittering with myriad lights, its mighty buildings undisturbed by chill winds that whistled inshore from wave-swept Lake Michigan.

Viewed from the window of a room in an antiquated hotel, the city seemed lacking in menace. Half a dozen stories below, an elevated train was curving lazily as it swung about the loop, the lights of each car blinking off and on in slow succession as they passed a break in the third rail.

Beyond were the gleaming headlamps of automobiles on Michigan Boulevard, toylike sparkles that continued in ceaseless procession. Even farther off were quivering glows that betokened vessels on the blackness of the lake.

Yet to Miles Crofton, standing by the window, these sights were scarcely noticeable. The Shadow's agent was tense, listening while he waited. Only four feet away was a closed door that connected with an adjoining room. Beyond it, Crofton could hear some occupant moving about.

A buzz sounded from the side of Crofton's bed. Quickly, The Shadow's agent sprang across the room and picked up the telephone. He had fixed the bell so it would not even give a stifled ring.

His problem now was to keep his voice unheard. Crofton settled that by carrying the telephone into a closet just beyond the bed. Closing the door after him, he spoke in a low but steady tone.

A whisper answered. Eerie though it sounded; the words were plain. The Shadow was on the wire. Crofton spoke tensely, his utterances but brief corroborations of facts which The Shadow apparently already knew. Conversation ended, Crofton hung up and stepped out into the room.

From a suitcase, The Shadow's agent produced an automatic. He thrust it into his coat pocket, flattened the cloth so the gun did not show; then stepped to the door. Cautiously, he emerged into the hall. His own room number was 714; Crofton went to the entrance of 712.

There he stopped to listen again. A bell was ringing inside the room; a partly opened transom gave clarity to the sound. Crofton heard someone move about; then the occupant of 712 began to speak in an undertone.

"Hello..." The voice was a bit strained. "Sure thing, Finger... Yes, I'm all ready. Just been waiting to hear from you... What's that? The car will be waiting for me? Good... Sure, I'm glad to save taxi fare..."

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"No, no, I'm not worrying any longer... Sure, I must have been goofy... Yeah, I saw the evening newspapers... Sortta clear things up, don't they? All right, Finger... Sure. All I've got to do is call the porter and check out after that... In about ten minutes – say fifteen."

Crofton heard the receiver click. He placed his hand upon the knob of the door and gave a slow turn. The door was unlocked. Carefully, Crofton entered, his right hand ready at his pocket. Just inside the door, he stopped to observe the stooped form of a man who was strapping a large suitcase.

Crofton closed the door just as the fellow finished his task. He saw the man reach for the telephone, to make his call for the porter. It was then that Crofton gave audible sign of his arrival, by reaching backward and rapping the door with his left hand.

THE man whirled about, away from the telephone. Crofton saw a pale but well-featured face. He caught the gleam of startled eyes. The occupant of 712 gave a hoarse gasp; then stood riveted. Crofton advanced slowly toward him and spoke in an inquiring tone.

"Your name is Jolles, isn't it?" questioned The Shadow's agent. "Newell Jolles?"

The man hesitated; then nodded. His fists were half clenched; they loosened suddenly as he saw Crofton's fingers dip into the right coat pocket beneath them. Jolles delivered another gasp.

"I – I haven't done anything," he stammered. "If – if you're a dick, you don't want me. Honest –"

"Sit down," ordered Crofton.

Jolles complied. His fingers plucked nervously. Crofton stretched out his left hand and drew up a chair. He sat down opposite the nervous man.

"My name is Crofton," he stated. "Miles Crofton. Don't worry; I'm not a dick. Here – this will explain."

He reached into a vest pocket and produced a card. He extended the pasteboard to Jolles, who studied it, then looked relieved. The card was an airplane pilot's license.

"I flew a ship out of Falko two nights ago," remarked Crofton, casually. "the same night you were there. I landed just before you took off. I learned who you were and found out later that you were in Chicago. Thought I'd better look you up."

Jolles began to twitch his lips. His restlessness had returned. He chose to listen, however, as Crofton proceeded.

"A friend of mine just landed at the airport," resumed Crofton. "I had left a message there for him. He called me up; I made sure about something that I'd looked into when I was out there. I came to ask if you were going out tonight."

"Certainly I am," returned Jolles, trying to curb his nervousness.

"In whose ship?"

"The one I brought in here."

Crofton chuckled.

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"That ship went out this afternoon," declared The Shadow's agent. "You're flying it no longer, Jolles. What's more, you're not expected at the airport."

"Why Finger told me," began Jolles in excitement that ended with a sudden correction. "A friend told me that —"

Jolles hesitated. Crofton was shaking his head; the gesture was emphatic. Jolles could not help but believe the negation. He stared anxiously toward his informant.

"Tell me about that trip from Falko," suggested Crofton. "Why did you make a landing near a place called Altamont? Come on, fellow, I'm here to help you out of a tight jam."

"Mind if I call the airport first?"

"Not at all."

JAW set, with nervousness curbed, Jolles picked up the telephone. Crofton lighted a cigarette and sat back in his chair while the aviator got the airport on the wire. In brief conversation, Jolles corroborated Crofton's statement. He hung up the receiver and turned squarely to The Shadow's agent.

"You're right, Crofton!" exclaimed Jolles. Then, in a worried tone: "This business looks bad. It's worrying me; because I was scheduled to fly down to Kansas City. You look like a fellow who is on the level, Crofton. Tell me — what do you know about this Altamont business?"

"That's what I've come to ask you," grinned Crofton. "I saw you take off from Falko. Later, a friend of mine reported seeing your ship take off at Altamont. He called me by long distance. I'm here to find out about that passenger who was with you."

"He had nothing to do with that explosion at Altamont," declared Jolles, nervously. "Look at this evening newspaper. They're after a fellow who made a getaway on a gasoline railroad car."

"I know all that, Jolles. I also know that they are on the wrong trail. The man responsible for that Altamont business was your passenger. What's more" — Crofton took the newspaper that Jolles had picked up — "your passenger did this job. It wasn't any suicide; no mysterious person who left the Typhoon at the K and R Junction figured in the death of Seton Hylap. The murderer, Jolles, was the man who joined you at Falko!"

Crofton was pointing to a photograph of Hylap. A newspaper story told of the financier's mysterious death aboard the streamlined limited. Hylap's body had been discovered in the morning; the authorities were investigating, but they had seen no apparent link between the death of Seton Hylap and that of Barbridge.

Jolles gaped as he heard Crofton's denunciation. A look of fear showed on the aviator's face. Crofton observed it; he knew that his thrust had gone home. Jolles would talk.

"Let's hear what you know," suggested Crofton.

JOLLES gulped and nodded. He had trouble finding his voice but finally managed it.

"I've been flying private ships," explained the aviator. "Out of Chicago, mostly. Carried some retired racketeers at different times. Fellows who thought they were big shots in their day; some of them still have dough."

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"Finger Lurbin was along on one trip. He's a tough egg who's in wrong in New York; but that doesn't keep him from going back there. In fact, he's not in Chicago often. But he was here about a week ago; that's when he propositioned me.

"I was to fly to Falko and stay there. I was to get word when a friend of Finger's was coming through; to pick the fellow up and follow his instructions. Finger assured me there was nothing phony about it; and Finger wasn't a guy to argue with. Get me?"

Crofton nodded.

"I picked up the passenger in Falko, two nights ago," resumed Jolles. "Couldn't see his face; he was all muffled up. As soon as I took off, he shoved me a note, telling me to head for the emergency landing field above Altamont. I did what he wanted; he left me there.

"I heard blasting on the hill while I waited for the fellow to come back. Last of all, that big blast the newspapers spoke about. Right after that, this passenger of mine showed up, another muffled man with him. The two came aboard, and I took off for Chicago."

"And after you arrived here?" quizzed Crofton.

"They left me at the local airport," returned Jolles. "But Finger Lurbin was here when I arrived; he knew I stopped here at the Coliseum Hotel. Told me to keep my trap shut, Finger did; I was to fly to Kansas City tonight.

"Reading the newspapers made me think there was nothing wrong after all. I was just starting down to meet Finger, to go out in his car to the airport when you popped in on me."

"It's lucky I did, Jolles."

"You mean –"

"Finger Lurbin has you slated for the spot. He wants to put you where you'll never have a chance to squeal."

Jolles paled. He sank back in his chair, gulping. Miles Crofton picked up the telephone and called for the porter. Calmly, he hoisted the bags that belonged to Jolles and carried them to the hall.

The porter arrived almost immediately; Crofton ordered him to get the bag in 714 and send all three suitcases to the airport by taxi. He tendered the porter a five-dollar bill; then went back into 712. He found Jolles slumped in his chair, head buried in hands.

"Buck up," snapped Crofton. "You've shot square, Jolles. I'm getting you out of the mess. Our bags have started out to the airport. We'll head there in another cab. My ship's waiting; we'll fly it to Frisco."

"We will?" Jolles looked up, hopefully. "You'll keep me out of sight, Crofton, so Finger won't get me?"

"He'll never know where you are," assured The Shadow's agent. "Come along" – he clapped Jolles on the back – "we're starting."

JOLLES arose and gripped Crofton's hand. The aviator started to speak; suddenly he gulped and tried to point straight ahead. Miles Crofton wheeled about; then became rigid. The door of 712 had opened; on the threshold stood three men, armed with revolvers.

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The center of the trio was a glowering ruffian whose face showed malice. Miles Crofton needed no word of introduction to this leader of the intruders. The man in the doorway was "Finger" Lurbin.

Wondering at the delay made by Newell Jolles, Finger had come to seek the man whom he had slated for the spot. He had brought two tough thugs with him; a trio of killers, they were ready for business.

But instead of one potential victim, they had found two. Finger Lurbin's leer was proof he knew that Jolles had been talking. Finger Lurbin had a cure for that. He was ready to rub out Miles Crofton along with Newell Jolles.

CHAPTER VIII. THE CLUE REMAINS

"TRYIN' to stage a run-out, eh?" snorted Finger Lurbin, in an ugly voice. "Thought maybe you was pulling something like it, Jolles, when you didn't show up out front. Who's this bozo with you?"

Finger gestured toward Crofton. Rigid, hands half up, The Shadow's agent made no reply. Jolles spoke instead. His fears realized, the aviator could scarcely express himself.

"He – his name is Crofton," stammered Jolles. "A – another pilot – friend of mine. He's all right, Finger. Just – just showed up to say hello. I was talking to him – asking him to fly down to Kansas City with me –"

"Yeah?" Finger snarled the interruption. "Well, he's going where you're going, Jolles. And that's with us. Savvy? Out by the stairway – for a ride. Come on – both of you! Walk up here!"

Jolles advanced unsteadily. Crofton followed. Finger's two aids stepped back into the hall, still keeping their revolvers leveled, while their chief shifted to the side, to let the intended victims pass.

Miles Crofton stared sourly at Finger as he edged by the fellow. He noted the hand that held the leveled gun. One finger – the little one – was missing. That was probably the reason for Finger's nickname.

INWARDLY, Crofton was fuming. His past had been a checkered one; circumstances had forced him in with brutes of Finger's ilk. That period past, Crofton had become an agent of The Shadow, to do his part in balking men of evil. Twice The Shadow's agent had been stopped from following a trail. Present circumstances made it appear that this single clue – the mention of Finger Lurbin – would never reach The Shadow.

That thought rankled Miles Crofton. As he and Jolles reached the hall, he felt a wild desire for action. Finger growled to the prisoners to face the stairway at the end of the corridor. They turned in that direction while Finger's henchmen edged up to cover them. It was then that Crofton acted.

Straight ahead was blackness, the little-used stairway that descended to a spot secluded from the lobby of the Hotel Coliseum. That was the route by which the killers intended to march their proposed victims.

That stairway offered a chance for escape, could a man reach it ahead of the assassins. One could gain the exit if another could momentarily handle Finger and the thugs. One man safe would mean a clue preserved for The Shadow, who was already on his way in from the Chicago airport.

Jolles was the man who could run for it. Unarmed, already terrorized, he would make a bolt if he had the chance. Crofton decided to give Jolles the opportunity, even though to do so would mean Crofton's own immediate death.

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Crofton was a step ahead of Jolles; both were holding their arms upraised. With a slight shift, Crofton edged to the right, a trifle in front of the aviator. He dropped his right hand to his pocket, unseen by the thugs behind. In an undertone he mumbled:

"Dive for the stairway! Quick!"

As he gave the mumbled command to Jolles, Crofton wheeled about, yanking his automatic from his pocket. He pumped shots as he turned, hoping by luck to down an adversary; as he delivered his wild bullets, he sprang squarely toward the two thugs who were coming up behind him.

SNARLED oaths were the rejoinder. Both of Finger's henchmen aimed for Crofton. One fired wild in his hurry; then Crofton grappled with the second. Finger himself came plunging from the room, bellowing an order for quick murder.

Jolles had started for the stairway; then faltered. He had spread himself against the wall, staring open-eyed at the men by the door. The rowdy who had missed Crofton heard Finger's order, then saw Jolles. With a harsh oath, the henchman turned and aimed at the helpless aviator.

At that instant, a fierce challenge came from the blackness of the stairway. A wild, outlandish laugh, it riveted the aiming crook. Recognizing the cry as a menace, the thug forgot Jolles. Swinging toward the stairway, he fired quick, random shots.

A roar from the stairway; a spitting tongue of flame from an automatic. After the burst came a weaving figure cloaked in black, a fighter who delivered another token of defiant mirth. The Shadow, arriving from the airport, had chosen as means of entrance the very route that Finger had picked for exit.

The thug was sagging as The Shadow forged forward. Downed by the cloaked fighter's single shot, one ruffian was out of the fray. His pal was still grappling with Miles Crofton; behind the pair was Finger Lurbin, about to pitch in and finish Crofton.

But Finger knew The Shadow's laugh. He had heard of that fierce cry; he knew the menace of this cloaked foe from darkness. Dropping back, Finger snarled viciously as he aimed past the strugglers and fired toward The Shadow. His first shot sizzled wide.

The Shadow replied with a quick shot. His bullet, too, was inches from its mark. A shift made by Crofton and the thug had disturbed The Shadow's aim. Oddly, neither Finger nor The Shadow could take a pot-shot at that grappling pair. The thug's back was toward Finger; Crofton's toward The Shadow.

Finger ripped a volley of shots as The Shadow weaved across the hall. All were wide and high; moreover, in his effort to clip The Shadow, Finger had no chance to bag Jolles. The Shadow had swung away from the spot where the aviator cowered.

Again an automatic spoke. This time, it was Finger's chance drop back that preserved his life. The Shadow had picked a space between the struggling men for a quick shot at Finger. Luck alone had spoiled The Shadow's opportunity.

Finger dived farther back, against an elevator door. Furiously, he fired the last two cartridges that his revolver contained. Bullets flattened against the wall; The Shadow had already driven forward, closer to Crofton and the thug.

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UP came an automatic, aiming, its muzzle thrust toward Finger. Frantically, Lurbin clicked the trigger of his emptied gun. The Shadow's fierce laugh formed a mighty whisper that seemed to presage the killer's end. Then came a break that gave Finger a momentary respite.

Crofton and his antagonist lurched toward The Shadow. The thug pulled one hand free and jabbed the muzzle of his revolver against Crofton's forehead. His own face bobbed suddenly past Crofton's shoulder; The Shadow saw a leer of triumph.

A roar echoed through the hall. It did not come from the would-be murderer's gun; the ruffian failed to press the revolver's trigger. The Shadow, changing aim, was there to beat the thug's shot. The thunderous burst came from The Shadow's automatic; the flash that accompanied it was arrowlike in its direction toward the thug's leering countenance.

Shot through the brain, the thwarted murderer toppled in Miles Crofton's grasp. The Shadow's agent staggered free, to see his enemy sprawling on the floor, loaded revolver clattering from his useless hand.

Yet the leader of the killers was still due for luck. As The Shadow downed the thug, a clang sounded by the spot where Finger stood. The elevator door jerked open; a dumb-faced operator stared into the hall. Finger, half leaning against the door, was almost precipitated into the car.

The crook lost no opportunity. Jolting the astonished operator, he slammed the door shut just as The Shadow opened fire with both automatics. Zimming bullets thudded the steel barrier too late. Finger Lurbin was on his way below.

Within the elevator, the crook had jabbed his empty gun into the operator's ribs. The dumb fellow was dropping the car in obedience. Once the lobby was reached, Finger would have a free road for a dash to safety.

UP in the seventh-floor hall, The Shadow stood with lowered automatics. He knew that Finger Lurbin had made a get-away. There was no use to follow. Instead of taking up pursuit, The Shadow turned to Miles Crofton. The agent spoke tersely, telling what he had learned from Jolles, naming Finger Lurbin as the aid of unknown killers who had ridden with the aviator.

The Shadow whispered prompt instructions. Crofton understood. Swinging across the hall, he gripped Jolles, who had slumped half to the floor, completely bewildered at sight of the fray. Jolles braced as Crofton spoke. The Shadow saw the aviator nod; then both Crofton and Jolles scudded toward the stairway that offered departure before the police arrived.

One thug was dead; he was the rat who had grappled with Crofton. The other was gasping from the floor. The Shadow approached the man and stared into the ruffian's glazing eyes. In a cold, fierce whisper, he spoke commanding words. The thug heard and tried to reply.

"Finger – Finger Lurbin," gasped the dying killer. "He – he was working for – for –"

The thug coughed as he tried to gulp out the name of Foy Zullick. With a half-gasped groan, he rolled over on the floor, unable to complete his sentence. The second of Finger Lurbin's henchmen had paid the price of evil.

One clue only had remained. Newell Jolles had told all that he knew; the aviator had named Finger Lurbin, and the crook had shown up to corroborate the statement. Finger had escaped; he would have to be trailed again, should The Shadow hope to gain a further step to the identities of those men whose names he had not

yet learned: Foy Zullick and Soup Ramsted.

The Shadow's laugh was grim – a weird, whispered tone that quivered in that hall of doom. Rising from beside the dead thug's body, the cloaked avenger turned and swept toward the stairway that Crofton and Jolles had taken.

The Shadow, too, was on his way. Crofton and Jolles were flying to San Francisco; The Shadow's course would lead to New York. That was the city from which Finger Lurbin had come; The Shadow knew that cross-country crime must have been fostered in Manhattan. Eastward would be The Shadow's route – eastward, on a mission of grim vengeance.

CHAPTER IX. THREE ARE SUMMONED

AFTERNOON in Manhattan. A chubby-faced man was seated at a mahogany desk, staring morosely from the window of a high situated office. This complacent individual was Rutledge Mann, prosperous investment broker.

With Mann, business was always good, even when the market was lethargic. For Rutledge Mann was not dependent upon security sales as a sole means of income. He served also as secret representative of The Shadow.

Proof of Mann's special calling lay on the desk. Newspaper clippings, typewritten pages, mimeographed stock reports, printed bulletins – these were Mann's present tools. Through their use, the investment broker was seeking information for The Shadow.

Of all persons in New York, Rutledge Mann was best equipped to learn the facts that The Shadow wanted. The Shadow had arrived in New York this very morning; he had communicated with Mann and had given the investment broker the task of gaining certain names: those of the chief stockholders in Altamont Power.

At the end of a day's work, Mann found himself balked. Already early lights were beginning to glimmer in the windows of skyscrapers. Manhattan's sky line was becoming dim against the background of a hazy horizon. His investigation finished, Mann had learned nothing,

Clippings told a consecutive story. Fingering them, Mann studied the continuity. Thuggish raiders had attacked the home of Seton Hylap in San Francisco. Danning, Hylap's secretary, had died in the fray. Seton Hylap, himself, had been found dead aboard the Typhoon.

Whether the financier had committed suicide or been murdered was still a mystery to the law. No evidence had been gained to tell how or when the poison had been administered.

There had been an explosion at Altamont. Gifford Barbridge, president of the K and R Railway, had been a victim, presumably through accident. Posses were searching for a supposed dynamiter who had outdistanced pursuers aboard a gasoline rail car.

Last night, according to brief items in the newspapers, two toughs had participated in a gun fight in a Chicago hotel. They had remained on the field of battle while others had departed. The fray was classed as a chance gang feud.

Neither the law nor the newspapers had linked this cavalcade of events. But Mann had learned – through The Shadow – that the four episodes formed a sequence. Behind it lay an obvious plot to those who recognized the links.

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A plot had been fostered to gain control of the K and R Railway. With Barbridge's death following the demise of Hylap, nothing could prevent the K and R from falling into the possession of Altamont Power.

Mann's task had been to find the names of those who controlled the power company. That was the point on which the investment broker had encountered a stone wall. The unlisted securities of the Altamont Power Company had faded completely from the market. Mann had been calling brokers all day, offering to purchase available shares. There had been none obtainable.

Mann shook his head as he turned on the desk light and studied a list of names. He was going through a process of elimination, checking off persons whom brokerage firms had mentioned as possible shareholders. The only truth that Mann had guessed was that certain wealthy men must have acquired a corner on Altamont Power.

Unquestionably that unknown group held an abundance of proxies through straw men. But as to the identities of the actual men concerned, Mann had no clue. Nor could he guess the number in the group.

WHILE Rutledge Mann was engaged in studying his list, another New York broker was also occupied at a desk in a lavish office. Shrewd-faced, wrinkled of forehead, this individual was located in the fiftieth floor of a skyscraper in the financial district.

He was Hosea Selger, a man whose sharp sense of the security market had long been a source of envy to his competitors. At present, however, Selger was not concerned about the stock market. He was reading a telegram that had been delivered at his office. The telegram had come from Philadelphia. It stated merely that the required steamship reservations had been obtained.

Selger pressed a button on his desk. A weary-faced man appeared and stood waiting in the fashion of a patient secretary. Selger looked up from the desk. He lifted the telegram so that the secretary could see it.

"I am leaving for a cruise, Widdop," stated the shrewd-faced broker. "The Elite Travel Bureau obtained the accommodations that I required through their Philadelphia office."

"Yes, sir," acknowledged Widdop. "When do you intend to leave, Mr. Selger?"

"Tonight. My destination, Widdop, is unimportant. I shall be gone for several days. I do not wish to be annoyed by business details, so I am keeping the name of the ship to myself."

"Very well, sir."

Selger smiled dryly as he tore up the telegram and tossed the fragments into the wastebasket. This was not the first time that he had left on such a trip. Widdop was used to the procedure. The secretary, however, had something else to say.

"About Mr. Mann," stated Widdop. "He called again, sir. He wanted to make certain that we had no record of purchasers who might hold Altamont Power stock."

"What did you tell him, Widdop?" queried Selger, testily.

"That I had made a thorough search, sir," replied the secretary. "That our files showed nothing concerning the Altamont Power Company."

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"Quite right," acknowledged Selger, rising from his desk. "I was positive that I was correct about the matter, Widdop. I knew that your search would show nothing."

Obtaining hat and coat, Hosea Selger bade the secretary good night. He stalked through a large outer office and reached the hall. There the shrewd-faced broker descended by elevator. When he arrived upon the street, he walked eastward until he found a small coupe, conveniently parked.

Entering the car, Selger started the motor and headed in the direction of the Holland Tunnel. He was driving for a destination on the other side of the Hudson River.

AT the time of Hosea Selger's departure from the financial district, another episode was taking place in a gloomy office of a large uptown store. A stooped-shouldered, long-faced man was standing by a large desk reading a telegram that was similar to Selger's.

This individual was James Dulkan, prosperous merchant who had gone into semiretirement. The management of Dulkan's store was in the hands of younger men; as president of the concern, Dulkan found it necessary to be on hand only a few days each week.

Dulkan had finished reading the telegram from Philadelphia. A seated stenographer watched the merchant tear the yellow sheet and toss the fragments into a wastebasket. Dulkan smiled wearily.

"No answer, Miss Willis," announced Dulkan. "This merely means that I can leave for Florida tonight. I wanted reservations at hotels in various cities. They have been obtained; that means that I can arrange my itinerary after I reach the South."

"You are leaving tonight, Mr. Dulkan?" inquired the stenographer.

"Yes," nodded the merchant. "I have my Pullman reservations, and I shall go from here directly to the station."

Dulkan donned hat and coat. He left the gloomy office and descended to the ground floor of the store. His long face showed a troubled expression as he walked toward an outer door. The closing hour had passed; the store was like a mausoleum. Dulkan did not brighten until he had reached the street. Even then, the smile that he showed was indicative of forced effort.

Like Selger, Dulkan walked along the street. The merchant also stopped at a parked car; his vehicle, however, was a much larger one than Selger's. It was a long, heavily built coupe of expensive make. Dulkan entered the car and drove southward. He, too, was heading for the vehicular tunnel beneath the Hudson.

ABOUT this time, a third episode was forming into action. It concerned a tall, gray-haired man who was reading a telegram as he stood by the window of a sumptuous living room. A Filipino valet was in attendance.

The gray-haired man was Peter Widpath, a retired banker. His family was absent from New York; he was living alone in the apartment where he now stood. Finished with his reading of the telegram, Widpath tore up the paper and turned to the Filipino.

"Well, Jose," remarked the banker in a tone that lacked enthusiasm, "my plans are completed. A Philadelphia travel agency has arranged my reservations at a mountain hotel in Pennsylvania. I shall start out tonight; you can remain here."

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"Are you driving, sir?" inquired Jose.

"Yes," returned Widpath. "You may pack my luggage for a week's trip. Then summon Burrett; have him bring the sedan from the garage."

"Burrett is going with you, sir?"

"Yes. I prefer to have a chauffeur do the driving. Start packing, Jose."

The Filipino departed. Widpath plucked a panatela from a glass humidor; as he lighted the thin cigar his eyes stared thoughtfully from the window. In methodical fashion, he reached to the table and picked up the torn pieces of the telegram. He lighted the papers, watched them burn and finally dropped the flaming fragments into an ash tray.

Puffing his cigar as he studied the burnt residue of the telegram; Widpath continued his reverie. His meditation came to a sudden interruption when a telephone bell began to jangle. Widpath strolled over and obtained the telephone.

"Hello..." The banker spoke deliberately. "Mr. Mann? Rutledge Mann? The name is not familiar.

"Ah, yes, I recall you now... Rutledge Mann, who handles specialized investments. Yes, I remember. We did business not long ago..."

Widpath paused. As he listened, his face tightened. There was a distinct dignity to the banker's thin countenance; an expression that Widpath usually retained. On this occasion, tenseness caused a change; but despite his strained expression, Widpath, spoke easily as usual when he made reply.

"I have heard of the stock." Widpath gave an informative tone to his voice. "Yes, the Altamont Power Company was recognized as sound. An excellent concern, so I was told... No, I made no purchase, nor do I know of any actual buyers... Western utilities frequently become speculative no matter how soundly the companies are formed.

"Yes, State control boards are the trouble. Once they begin to bear down, profits are clipped. Some of the best companies prove hazardous... I see... Well, I wish you luck in supplying your customer. I would suggest negotiation with brokerage houses on the Pacific Coast... Yes, they are most likely to have shares available..."

Widpath hung up. He strolled across to the window; there, he enjoyed a smile as he puffed his panatela. Jose entered and put in a call for Burrett. Widpath walked to a hallway; there the Filipino helped him on with hat and coat. Widpath left the apartment, Jose following him with two large suitcases

They were going down to meet the sedan when Burrett arrived with it.

IN his office, Rutledge Mann was making a final check-up of his lists First, the names of brokers. From this list, Mann crossed out those which he felt sure could give him no facts regarding Altamont Power. Among those which he eliminated was the name of Hosea Selger.

Next, the list of individuals. James Dulkan did not appear thereon; but Peter Widpath did. Mann crossed out several names, among them Widpath's. He compiled a new list of remaining names; then wrote out an inked report and sealed it in an envelope. Darkness had settled over Manhattan. Lights were glowing everywhere when Rutledge Mann reached Broadway. The investment broker was carrying his sealed envelope; he was on his way to Twenty-third Street, to drop it in a special door box from which The Shadow collected such

reports.

Tomorrow, Mann would begin where he had left off this afternoon. There were other names to call, in search for holders of Altamont Power stock. Mann's quest, however, was already doomed to failure. The investment broker had already passed his only opportunities.

Hosea Selger – James Dulkan – Peter Widpath – these three alone could have told him who the hidden stockholders were. Of the trio, Mann had tested the broker and the banker; he had not guessed that the merchant might have belonged on the list.

Mann had been bluffed by the two whom he had called. Though both Selger and Widpath had believed that the investment man was actually working for a customer; they had taken no chances. The pair had covered themselves perfectly.

A trail had failed. While Mann speculated on the morrow, men who shared the secret of Altamont Power were already on their way to a hidden rendezvous there to discuss the fruits that could be plucked through crime.

CHAPTER X. DEATH ON THE SKYWAY

HIGH hills lay black beneath the thickened midnight sky. Rising winds were whistling through swaying tree tops, as low-scudding clouds left trails of whirling mist above the wooded slopes. Only the whine of the gathering gale gave life to the desolate stretches of the Watchung Mountains.

Though less than thirty miles from New York, though flanked by large towns and skirted by express highways, this double range of hills bore semblance to a wilderness.

Termed mountains because of their steep and rugged aspect, the Watchungs form a pair of separated ridges through New Jersey. To north and south lie populated districts; but the valley between the twin ranges has long formed a sparsely settled region.

Railroads swing wide to avoid the Watchungs. The one good road between the ridges had but occasional connections with the outer highways. The stretches between, heavy slopes and thickened woods, are reached only by rutted, rocky byways. In one such stretch of wilderness in miniature lay the focal point of this midnight scene.

Lights were glimmering from the windows of a flattened building perched high upon a mountainside. The place was an isolated lodge, supposedly vacant at this time of the year. Completely surrounded by a broad veranda, the building nestled against the edge of a ravine.

Visitors entered it from a level patch of clearing; but above one side of the house rose the mountainside, while the lower side and rear of the building stood high above the ground, propped by twenty-foot pilings.

WITHIN the lodge, a group of men were seated by a fireplace. The living room was on the upper side of the building; its windows were shuttered and barred, to avoid glimpses of entry from the slope above.

The lights that did show were those of windows on the lower side and rear; tall, intervening trees prevented sight of them from the valley.

The living room was comfortably furnished. The hearth was warm and inviting, thanks to the crackling fire. The occupants, however, had little thought of their surroundings. They were engaged in serious, low-toned

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discussion. There were three men seated. Hosea Selger, his shrewd lips set; James Dulkan, his long face haggard; Peter Widpath, dignified and meditative. Two other men were present, standing.

One was Foy Zullick, his countenance showing its wolfish leer. The other was Soup Ramsted, whose hard face wore a scowl. Apparently, Soup had just joined the group, for Zullick was speaking to him in a tone of explanation.

"It's time for you to listen in, Soup," stated Zullick. "I've been beefing with these bozos long enough. I'm going to get down to tacks, with you on hand to hear. How's everything outside?"

"Right enough," returned Soup. "The outfit's on-deck. Keeping watch like you ordered."

"And this chauffeur who came with Widpath?"

"He's asleep in his room. Jake's on duty outside."

Peter Widpath showed sudden interest at Soup's statement. The banker started to come to his feet. Zullick waved him down.

"Let me do the talking," purred the murderer. "I'm going over the facts that we've discussed. I've listened to all this batting back and forth; it's brought us nowhere. Let's see where we really stand.

"You fellows wanted the K and R. Since you controlled Altamont Power, the railroad was slated to be yours, unless Barbridge raised the dough. That's why you put me on the job; why I sent Soup and his crew to Altamont. To slow things up for Barbridge."

"That is true," agreed Widpath, in dignified tone. "We suggested, Zullick, that you use discretion in your actions."

"Which I did," inserted Zullick, smoothly, "until we got wind of it, through Soup, that Barbridge was trying to get dough from Hylap. That's when I hopped to Frisco and fixed Danning. You paid me the dough to line the guy up."

"To act as an informant only," reminded Widpath, "Such were our instructions, Zullick."

"Your instructions, yes," retorted the wolf-faced killer, "but your purpose was to keep Hylap from loaning dough to Barbridge. That was what I was out to stop. I did it."

"Through murder," objected Widpath, as spokesman for himself and his companions. "A terrible procedure, Zullick."

"I bumped Hylap because it was the only way to stop him," insisted Zullick. "The only guy who could have pinned it on me was Barbridge, after I'd talked to him. I thought a million buck offer would shut him up. It didn't."

"He's right," agreed Soup. "We had to croak Barbridge, too. It was the only out."

"And Soup covered it," grinned Zullick. "He was all set for the emergency when it hit. Nobody knows who we were, not even that dumb flier, Jolles. We had him slated for the spot, too. He was lucky to get away."

WIDPATH was on his feet. The banker began to storm indignantly.

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"All this proves premeditation, Zullick!" accused Widpath. "Wanton premeditation. Crime thought out and arranged – crime with which I, for one, deny all connection –"

"Trying to pass the buck?" snarled Zullick, his query showing the change of voice that he introduced when angry. "Crawling out of it, are you? Sit down, Widpath. Let me tell you what's what!" Then, as the banker subsided, he added to Selger and Dulkan: "This goes for you two as well."

Soup had stepped forward to Zullick's support; Zullick waved his fellow murderer back. Resuming his suave purr, he stated terms.

"You're going through with this deal," he told the three men before him, "just like you planned. Those office boys who pass as executives of the Altamont Power Company will get hold of the K and R just as you expected.

"When the Mountain Pacific wants to buy the line, those dummies will have to call for a shareholders' vote. You've got the lists of proxies, Widpath. The straw men will do what they're told.

"The three of you will have your split; but before you divvy, I get my cut. Ten percent was what you promised; but I'm counting on more than that. Just what belongs to me – the dough that you were ready to pass over to Barbridge if he'd played ball."

Zullick paused, expecting a protest. It came, from the logical man: Peter Widpath.

"Outrageous, Zullick!" exclaimed the banker. "Our offer to Barbridge was a legitimate transaction. You are asking us to make payment for a deed of murder! You –"

"I'm getting what I'm asking for," interrupted Zullick, maintaining his smooth tone. "No more argument, Widpath. You three had expected to buy out Barbridge and still have millions to split among you. I finished Barbridge. I'm riding on his ticket.

"But that's not all. I'm not taking chances on any of you getting cold feet. No run-outs, get me? I was working for the three of you; you're all staying in the game. Take a look at these papers that I've fixed up for you."

ZULLICK produced three typewritten sheets from his pocket. He passed them out among the three men, who stared at the unsigned statements. A gasp came from Dulkan, an oath from Selger. It was Widpath who spoke.

"You mean," demanded the banker, "that each of us must sign a statement admitting responsibility for the murders of Seton Hylap and Gifford Barbridge?"

I do," purred Zullick. "Those sheets are waiting for your monikers."

"And suppose we refuse?"

"You'll wait here until you decide to sign. Those long vacations you told people about will make it just right. You've all pulled that stall every time you've come out here. This trip, I'm getting my innings."

Widpath glared indignantly.

"You have tricked us, Zullick," he denounced. "You led us to believe that Hylap and Barbridge were victims of misadventure, not of murder. That fact alone brought us here –"

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"And when you showed up," supplied Zullick, "I spilled the real lay. Well, that was shooting straight, wasn't it? I wanted to see how you birds took it. I thought you'd welsh and I was ready to handle it.

"We've got plenty of time to sit here. That K and R deal won't ripen for a month or more. Meanwhile, Hylap and Barbridge will be forgotten – so far as we're concerned, anyway. I've got nice quarters here for all of you; and Soup has brought on his strong-arm workers. You'll sit tight, all of you, until you sign those papers."

"I shall never sign," stormed Widpath, rising. "Here, Zullick, take back your paper. I prefer to remain a prisoner rather than acknowledge connection with this dirty business!"

"Good enough," smirked Zullick, receiving the statement. "I'll keep it for you, Widpath. You'll change your mind later. Meanwhile, I'm bunking you in the big room with your chauffeur. He'll stay here, too, since he happened to come with you."

Widpath stood glaring, fists clenched. Zullick nodded to Soup; the lieutenant produced a revolver and brandished it in threatening fashion. Widpath winced at the sight of the gun; Zullick extended the paper with a questioning glance. Widpath shook his head defiantly; Soup nudged the banker with the revolver and forced him to the door of his room.

After bestowing Widpath in his temporary prison, Soup returned. He had pocketed the revolver; nevertheless, both Dulkan and Selger looked restless. They could hear the pacing of men on the outer verandas. They knew that armed ruffians were on duty. Escape would be impossible.

"Well, Dulkan?" quizzed Zullick.

The long-faced merchant was quaking. He lacked the dignity that Widpath had maintained; nevertheless, he showed courage as he rallied. There was decision in his tone, despite the stammer that he could not control.

"I – I cannot sign," announced Dulkan. "It would be – be a falsity. I was not party – not at all a party – to the murders that you committed. No, I shall not sign."

Lips twitching, Dulkan passed the paper to Zullick. For a moment, the murderer showed signs of anger; then his suavity returned. He shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of indifference; then motioned to Soup. The lieutenant brought out his revolver.

Nervously, Dulkan backed away as Soup forced him to a second room. On the threshold, he paused, gasping, and Soup waited, expecting the merchant to change his mind. Again Dulkan rallied and shook his head emphatically. Soup pushed him into the room, closed the door and returned.

"Well?" queried Zullick. "What about it, Selger?"

THE broker smiled weakly; yet his expression showed his natural shrewdness. Bringing the paper into the light of the table lamp, he read it carefully; then put a question.

"Why do you ask that I admit full responsibility?" he queried. "Dulkan and Widpath are in on it, too. Why are they not named?"

"Their statements read the same as yours," growled Zullick. "That covers them."

"Granted," admitted Selger, after a moment's thought. "But what about yourself, Zullick? You are not named – nor are any of those who worked for you."

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"Why should I be named!" purred Zullick. "The three of you hold the Altamont Power Company. I've got to have something, don't I? All I want is my cut, after you've swung the deal. If I hold your statements, signed, I know you'll cash in with what you owe me.

"If I mentioned myself in the statements, I'd nullify them. After all, I did the bumping, didn't I? Suppose you gave me the go-by – where would I be if I threatened to make statements public, with those statements pinning the jobs on me?

"What's more, I'd be a fool to ever use those statements against any of you unless you tried to double-cross me. You've all got alibis covering the actual killings. You'd all name me – and I'd have to take it on the lam.

"Stands to reason, doesn't it, that when I get my dough I'll prefer to take life easy? Why should I spring any phony business after I'm in a million bucks?"

Selger smiled and nodded. His qualms were ended. The avaricious gleam that appeared upon his shrewd face was a match for Zullick's wolfish leer.

"We can't bring back Hylap and Barbridge," observed Selger, his voice a partial sneer. "They are dead; and that fact does not alter the situation so far as we are concerned. I am inclined to sign this document, Zullick. I am calculating the effect that my signing would have on Dulkan and Widpath."

"It would have plenty," assured Zullick, suavely. "Come on, Selger; sign up. I'll show the paper to those bozos in the morning."

"You mean I shall be free to go at once? Before they sign?"

"Certainly. Provided you go straight back to New York. I'll have to keep in touch with you."

AN evil chortle came from Selger's lips. It was plain that he was willing to compromise with the murderer, once Zullick had explained himself. The broker appeared to have none of the abhorrence that both Widpath and Dulkan had evidenced. Drawing a fountain pen from his pocket; Selger signed the paper and handed it to Zullick. The wolf-faced rogue turned to Soup Ramsted.

"How about Selger's car?" questioned Zullick. "Is it ready for him?"

"Sure thing, Foy," grinned Soup. "I parked it for him when he came in. Here's the key. The gas is kind of low, I noticed, but there's a couple of gallons, I guess."

"All right, Selger," said Zullick, passing the key to the broker. "On your way. Don't fill the tank, though, until you've gotten close to the Lincoln Highway. We don't want anybody to notice people who come from up here."

"Very well," assured Selger. "But what of Dulkan and Widpath?"

"You'll hear from them soon enough. Don't worry about them. They'll sign. Nothing out here for them – no newspapers, no radio, no telephone – they'll get itchy soon enough. Particularly after they see this."

He flourished Selger's signed statement. The broker grinned; then shook hands, almost with admiration at Zullick's cleverness. Accompanied by Soup, Selger left by the front door. The two followed a path down to the rocky road.

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Selger's car was parked in a clearing. He entered it and turned on lights and ignition. Soup remarked again that the gasoline was low. Selger nodded and drove away.

KNOWING the way out to the isolated lodge in the Watchung Mountains, Hosea Selger had no difficulty in retracing his route along the valley road and over to the express highway. Half an hour after his departure from the lodge, the broker drove beneath the bridge of the Lincoln Highway and came on to the main artery that led into Manhattan.

He stopped at a filling station, cutting across the road to do so. Traffic was light at this hour; Selger lost very little time in getting gasoline. Waiting until a few trucks rumbled past, he drove back on to the highway and headed east.

He passed the turn by the Newark Airport; traveling at forty, he covered the few miles between that point and the exit where trucks were forced to take the down-grade from the bridged highway. Bearing right, Selger began the ascent of the great high-level viaduct. He was on the celebrated Pulaski Skyway, swinging into New York.

Glimmering lights of lower ground dwindled far beneath. From a few miles ahead came the glare of Manhattan, a man-made aureole against the mist of night. Sight of that distant radiance was pleasing to the returning broker. His chuckle was a scheming tone as he drove his light coupe under the superstructure of the bridge that spanned the Passaic River.

A mile ahead lay the bridge across the Hackensack, twin of this great structure, with the dipping surface of the Skyway between. High, concrete curbs, massive rails of steel gave security to the sides of the matchless highway.

Glittering lights fought enveloping blackness. On this clouded night, the cars on the Skyway seemed actually to be riding in the upper reaches of the air. Yet to Selger, at the wheel of his coupe, this stretch of high-bridged boulevard seemed the least hazardous of any spot along the route.

The speedometer clicked past a thousand mark as the car neared the midpoint of the one-mile stretch between the bridges. Again, Selger chuckled, as he thought of the warmth awaiting in Manhattan, a much more comforting habitat than the chill of the wind-swept Watchungs.

Then, while the chuckle was still on the broker's lips, catastrophe came with fell swiftness. The speeding coupe gave a sudden jolt upward and forward. With that bounce, a mighty blast resounded through the night. A huge flare of flame ripped up in volcanic fury as the rear of the coupe split with the explosion.

AS the wheel jolted from Selger's hands, the front of the car dived at a crazy angle; the whole rear shattered; the radiator drove hard into the rail, steel posts twisted; wheels jarred against them and went rolling free. The bulk of the car, still hurtled by the impetus of that thunderous explosion, lopped off a portion of the rail and plunged, a mass of flaming wreckage, toward the ground below.

The steel structure of the Skyway scarcely quivered from the tremendous blast, but cars, approaching, came to quick halts as their drivers applied screaming brakes. A cloud of smoke had come with the explosion; it was settling, a dingy pall, about the spot where the coupe had been.

Terrified observers stared, believing that they had witnessed the crash of an airplane making a forced landing on the Skyway. Then, as the thick smoke faded, cars came into motion. Three vehicles arrived at the spot; soon, swift motorcycles whirled into view, ridden by patrolling troopers.

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Wheels, fenders, fragments of glass and steel – these were the only relics of the crash that remained upon the Skyway beside the twisted rail. Peering below, those on the viaduct could see the flattened bulk of the coupe. A truck had stopped upon a road below; from its toylike front, pygmy men were dashing over to view the wreck.

The burst of flames had died when they arrived; but those above could make them out by the fading glare. The troopers saw the truckmen examining something that looked like a human form; then they observed the men look up to beckon for assistance.

Hosea Selger had taken his last ride. First of the three men to sign Foy Zullick's required statement, the broker had headed forth to doom. That object that the truckmen had found upon the ground was the broken, mangled body of the coupe's driver.

Hosea Selger, inspired by avarice, had placed himself on written record as a sponsor of crime. He had hoped, thereby, to gain a fortune; instead, he had merely played into the hands of a supercrook. Plotters had been through with Hosea Selger. Death had accompanied him along that Skyway ride.

CHAPTER XI. CARDONA SEEKS FACTS

"EIGHT o'clock, Joe."

A brawny detective sergeant spoke the news from the doorway of an office. Acting Inspector Joe Cardona looked up from his headquarters desk. He folded some report sheets and arose.

"All right, Markham," acknowledged Cardona. "Ready to start, are you?"

"Can't make it, Joe. Just going out on special duty. I came by to tell you. How about getting Casey to go with you?"

"I'll go alone. It won't take me long. I'm going out to Selger's home when I get back. But it don't look like I'll find anything new out there."

"You think this gasoline station fellow is the best bet?"

"He may give me something. It's worth a chance, anyway."

Cardona paused to sit down on the edge of the desk. Stocky of build, swarthy of countenance, the acting inspector appeared to be a man of both purpose and action. Long known as the ace of New York's detectives, Cardona was famous for his hunches. On this evening he intended to follow one.

"Here's the layout, Markham," explained the ace. "We know that Selger was supposed to have gone on a cruise. Booking passage from some Philadelphia travel bureau that doesn't even exist. We got that by quizzing his secretary.

"What we want to know is: Where was Selger and what it was about. He had his own car. It bore the proper New York license plates and he had his licenses and all that. The explosion came from the back of the car. It may have been the gasoline tank, but gas tanks don't just bust and blow up."

Markham nodded wisely.

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"That fellow Caulkens at the gas station," resumed Cardona, "filled the tank. He remembered the car and told the Jersey State police about it. They let it go at that; they had already guessed that Selger came in by the Lincoln Highway. Caulkens only told them what they already knew.

"But I've been thinking it over. I'd like to talk to Caulkens and see if he remembers anything else. It's all dead at this end; and even though it happened in Jersey, Selger was a New Yorker, coming home. That's why I'm going out to see Caulkens. Since you can't come along, I'll go alone."

"Why don't you take Burke?" questioned Markham, with a slight grin. "You know – the Classic reporter. He was in here while you were talking with me."

"Burke wasn't interested. Anyway, I don't want a newshawk tagging along when I'm going over to Jersey. I told the troopers I'd like to talk to Caulkens. They said to go ahead, but they might be sore if they saw me bringing a New York reporter."

Cardona strolled over toward the door; he and Markham walked together through the hall. Outside of headquarters, they parted. Cardona climbed into his parked car and started his trip to New Jersey.

The ace had dismissed the matter of Clyde Burke. As Joe had stated to Markham, the reporter had appeared disinterested at the time when Caulkens had been mentioned. That, however, was simply proof that Cardona's hunches were sometimes lacking. Clyde Burke had actually seen important possibilities in Cardona's proposed trip to New Jersey.

For Clyde Burke was secretly an agent of The Shadow; Clyde's real job for the present was the tracing of information that concerned Hosea Selger. The Shadow had recognized that the broker could well have had a connection with the Altamont Power Company, despite Rutledge Mann's contrary guess.

OUT on the Lincoln Highway, a car was stopping upon the wide-shouldered road on the near side of the filling station that Hosea Selger had visited the night before. The figure that alighted was not that of Joe Cardona. Instead, it was a phantom shape that lingered close beside the trim coupe, out of the glare of passing lights.

The Shadow had learned Cardona's plans from Burke. He had arrived ahead of the ace. His purpose, however, was not to interview Caulkens. The Shadow intended to leave that to Cardona. His own plan was to listen in on the discussion; an easy task when one considered the terrain.

The highway here was built along a stretch of meadow, with low embankment on each side. The filling station occupied a square of ground that also stood above the lowland. Its lights fronted on the highway; at the rear of the space was the service station itself, fringing upon the darkness of the meadow.

Fading away from his car, The Shadow descended the embankment and approached the rear of the filling station. Arriving at the back of the house, he edged past the corner and peered through an opened window. Away from the lights of automobiles, The Shadow had gained a perfect observation post.

He had not long to wait. A roadster rolled up and stopped by an obscure gasoline standard. A stocky man alighted; in the light, The Shadow recognized the arrival as Joe Cardona. The New York sleuth walked to the service station and met an attendant just within the door.

"Your name Caulkens?" queried Cardona, loud enough for The Shadow to hear.

"Yeah," replied the attendant, briskly. "Anything I can do for you?"

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"Let your pal out there attend to the customers for a minute. I want to talk to you inside here. I'm Inspector Cardona, from New York."

"I talked to the Jersey police, inspector –"

"I know that. I'm not here officially. I just want to hear your whole story. My job is to find out all I can about Selger. He was a New Yorker; and I'm trying to get a line on where he was last night."

Caulkens nodded; then shrugged his shoulders.

"Wish I could help you," he stated. "All I know was that the guy was low on gas and sort of sore about it. Said he'd thought he'd had enough to get into New York; but found he hadn't."

"He didn't say where he had filled up last, did he?" quizzed Cardona.

CAULKENS shook his head.

"I thought maybe his tank was leaky," explained the attendant, "but I found it wasn't after I filled it. Leastwise, it didn't seem to be."

"Was it nicked or anything?"

"Yeah. In one end, high up. Looked like somebody had cut out a chunk of the tank, then patched it up. But that couldn't have accounted for a leak, because it was at the top of the tank. Good repair job – painted over; I got some of the paint on my fingers when I was looking for a hole –"

Caulkens stopped. A man was rapping at the half-opened door of the service station. His face half muffled, Caulkens could not make out the fellow's features. Nor could The Shadow, for the door blocked his view through the window.

"What you want bud?" queried Caulkens.

"Out of gas," replied a thick voice. "Fellow brought me in with him to get some. Only thing is, I may have trouble startin' my old boat. Thought I could make it worth while if you'd come along with me."

"I don't think I can," returned Caulkens. "Two of us are supposed to be on duty right now. Anyway, I can give you a couple of gallons and a funnel."

With a nod to Cardona, indicating that he would return immediately, Caulkens walked out front. The car that the man had come from was at the far end of the filling station space, almost on the edge of the road.

Cardona strolled to the door and watched Caulkens fill a two-gallon can for the stranger. The two walked to the car; there the can was passed into the rear seat. Caulkens started to turn away. Cardona saw the stranger speak to him; Caulkens apparently decided to get aboard.

Joe Cardona was not the only observer of that scene. The Shadow had deserted his place by the window; he had rounded the little house and was peering from the farther side. From his position, he could witness something that Cardona failed to see. The Shadow had spied the reason why Caulkens was stepping aboard the old touring car that was waiting.

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The man who had spoken through the service station door had turned so that Joe Cardona could not spot the glimmer in his hand. That glimmer was a revolver; with firm fist, the stranger had jammed the gun against Caulkens' ribs. He was growling a low command for his victim to get aboard the car.

Caulkens had talked too much. His memory of a repaired gasoline tank was proving his undoing. Men in this cruising car had recognized Joe Cardona. They had rolled up to deal with Caulkens before the innocent attendant could gain a chance to complete his descriptive remarks.

The Shadow edged forward from darkness. He was skirting the embankment, crouching low as he neared the touring car. The man with the gun was pushing Caulkens aboard. A moment more and the intended victim would be in the toils of killers.

IT was then that The Shadow rose from darkness. With a mighty spring, he shot forward into the light. With one terrific swing, he sent the armed thug sprawling, before the rogue realized that an attack had come. With his other arm, The Shadow seized Caulkens and dragged him from the car.

Whirling about toward the darkness that he had left, The Shadow sent the rescued man spilling down the embankment to a spot of safety. Completing his twist, he pulled two automatics from beneath the folds of his enveloping cloak.

Delayed action had terminated none too soon. The sprawled thug was coming to his feet, rasping a command to those aboard the touring car. New revolvers flashed into view. Quick shots spat into the darkness as snarling fighters sought to stop the attacker who had wrested a victim from their grasp.

In reply to those wide stabs of flame came the sudden boom of automatics. In answer to fierce snarls, the armed thugs heard the strident tone of a mocking laugh. From darkness, The Shadow was delivering his challenge to men of crime; his taunt was a weird tone that told those skullcaps who their foeman was.

From his vantage place beside the highway, The Shadow had gained new opportunity. Once again, he was dealing with hired assassins, minions of murder who had come from their lair to kill.

CHAPTER XII. THE HALTED CHASE

TO Joe Cardona, just outside the door of the service station, the blaze of shots was a signal for action. His attention momentarily misdirected, the ace detective had been startled at the sound of scuffling by the touring car.

Joe had looked up just in time to see the sprawling form of the thug who had threatened Caulkens. He had caught a glimpse of the filling station attendant toppling over the edge of the embankment.

For the moment, Cardona had not realized that The Shadow was present. Instinctively, Joe had yanked a stub-nosed revolver from his pocket. The weapon was in Cardona's hand at the instant when shots began to boom. Amid the bark of guns, the sleuth heard the challenge of The Shadow's laugh.

Spurts of flame from the touring car were answered with jabs of fire from the edge of the embankment. Cardona leaped forward to lend The Shadow aid. One man saw him coming; that was the thug whom The Shadow had flattened. The fellow was on his feet, revolver ready.

Cardona aimed for the standing crook. Hasty in his fire, Joe sent two bullets wide. The thug blazed back; Cardona dropped away as bullets whistled past his ear. Stumbling over the concrete base of a gasoline standard, Joe lost his footing. Before the ace detective could arise, his lone antagonist aimed point-blank.

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Sudden shots ripped from the edge of the embankment. Hot bullets from The Shadow's automatics staggered the thug who sought to slay Cardona. Coming up to one knee, the detective delivered two quick shots into the toppling rowdy's body. Joe had found the range; but his bullets were unnecessary.

Cardona's blunder was due to cause misfortune. It had come hard upon the opening shots between The Shadow and the occupants of the touring car. In that preliminary fire, The Shadow had sought to draw the aim of his opponents; then to deceive them as to his own position.

He wanted to send crippling shots, aimed at flashing revolvers, to wound these enemies and thereby hold them for the law. For through these marauders could be learned facts concerning those higher up; facts that The Shadow had been unable to gain from the dying underling in Chicago.

To save Cardona, The Shadow had diverted his aim. That deed had ended the career of the would-be killer who stood beside the touring car; but it gave a momentary respite to those who were still in the automobile. The driver was quick to take advantage. He jammed the car in gear; the vehicle leaped forward to the highway.

Traffic had stopped all along. A clear path lay ahead for thwarted killers. Cardona saw the situation and blazed wide shots at the departing car. The detective's effort was useless. Only The Shadow could have stopped that fleeing automobile. Swift in aim, sure with the trigger, The Shadow had that opportunity.

Yet the Shadow never fired after the departing car. He was facing toward Cardona as the thugs started their getaway. To aim, The Shadow would have been forced to wheel in darkness. Before he could perform a swinging action, The Shadow saw an arriving menace; one that meant more than the flight of defeated skullcaps.

JOE CARDONA was squarely in front of the service station, a conspicuous figure. Twenty feet beyond the stalwart sleuth was the other service station attendant; this fellow was wisely diving for the far embankment, getting into safety like that which Caulkens had obtained.

Still farther on, from a mass of halted traffic, The Shadow saw a speeding touring car. It was the mate of the one that had fled, an automobile manned by thugs. A cover-up squad was coming in to back up the departing group.

Danger lurked in that approaching car. The men in the first machine had been picked merely to take Caulkens for a ride. Yellow in the face of fire, they had sped away once their game was challenged.

But these newcomers would be shock troops, killers equipped for massacre. Directly in their path, oblivious to the coming threat, stood Joe Cardona, finishing his futile fire toward the car that had fled.

A surging mass of blackness, The Shadow sprang forward from the embankment. With long, bounding strides, he reached Cardona; with incredible swiftness, The Shadow hurled a long, cloaked arm about the startled detective's body. Unhalting in his stride, The Shadow swept on toward the farther embankment, whirling Cardona with him.

Shouts from the touring car as it swung in from the highway. A clatter, like that of a riveting machine, accompanied by rapid jabs of flame, aimed too late for the two who were hurtling toward the embankment. Cardona, carried away by The Shadow's swift sweep, realized that he had been jerked from the path of a machine gun.

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Coming out from the direction of the city, the gunners in the cover-up car had pointed their "typewriter" at a forward angle, intending to blaze away as they approached. The Shadow's quick endeavor had not only beaten the opening clatter of the machine gun; it had carried Cardona away from the path of death.

Snarling gunners swung their weapons, hoping to loose a deluge of bullets back toward the embankment which they had passed. Their effort was too late. Already, their would-be victims had reached the edge. Flinging headlong, The Shadow and Joe Cardona were rolling to the mushy soil below the embankment.

The machine gun clattered a useless rat-tat-tat; its bullets, aimed for the embankment, were sizzling high. Some of the shots struck the gravelly edge and ricocheted; those bullets, too, went over the heads of The Shadow and Cardona. The two had rolled apart; but both were lying low in darkness.

A growl came from the leader of those aboard the touring car. The voice was that of Soup Ramsted, in the front seat beside the driver. The man at the wheel responded; he had applied the brakes to aid the machine gunners; now he released them and gave the car the gas.

Soup's brawny fist shot out from the side of the car. It bulged with a bulbous object that the driving paw released. As the touring car cut back toward the highway, a blackened spheroid curved through the air and struck between the gasoline standards.

A TERRIFIC roar sounded; bursting flames rent the night as the bomb exploded. Soup had chucked a pineapple in hope of producing havoc. He succeeded in that effort. The blast completely wrecked the standards and penetrated to the tanks beneath. Like answering echoes came the muffled explosions of stored gasoline.

A heavier blast shivered upward. With it, the ground shook as the vacated service station was hoisted into fragments. Flames roared upward as gallons of spattered gasoline produced a holocaust. Huge flames threw their glare along a mile stretch of highway.

Joe Cardona took to the meadow, fleeing from the scorching edge of the embankment. Beside him ran the attendant who had dived for shelter. Over beyond was Caulkens, scrambling to his feet and getting away across the softened ground. Long lines of automobiles had halted, all far enough away for safety.

The stretch of highway in front of the filling station was completely deserted; and luckily so. It was covered with pools of spreading fuel that had ignited to form sheets of rising flame.

Up ahead, continuing its path from New York, was the second touring car commanded by Soup Ramsted. The stopping of traffic had given the crew an open path along the right side of the highway. Joe Cardona fumed as he clutched his useless revolver, while he stared at that speeding car a half a mile away.

Then, from the side of the highway, came the grind of a starting car. Joe Cardona stared as he saw a coupe leap forward from the shoulder of the road, to cut in front of halted traffic. It was on the near side of the burning filling station; Cardona gasped in amazement as he saw the car dart forward toward the flames.

The Shadow! He was taking up the chase. In that pursuit, he was risking death. The coupe sped forward in silent second; it had attained a speed of forty miles an hour as it shot into the scorching sector of the highway.

Broad pools of flaming gasoline seemed like living things as they flared up in challenge. The coupe drove into the blaze; for a moment it was enveloped by a furnace of furious fire. Then it emerged, still speeding, beyond the roaring sheets of burning fuel. The Shadow had run the gantlet of the mighty conflagration. He was on the trail of evildoers, his objective that car that carried the second band of malefactors.

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Devouring flames died down; the spattered fuel had been rapidly consumed. Still, the fire resembled a living thing; its flaring tongues might well have been acknowledging defeat in their effort to thwart The Shadow's chase. Up ahead, the coupe was driving along beneath the subsiding glare, cutting down the space between The Shadow and the men whom he sought to stop.

IN high gear, hitting eighty-five miles an hour, The Shadow could see the car ahead. It had stayed on the Lincoln Highway, doing close to seventy as it sped on past ranks of stopped cars. It was reaching a place where traffic was still moving in toward Manhattan, where vehicles were slowly piling into a farther jam along the road.

The Shadow saw the touring car swerve, skid at the side of the road and resume its course. A moment later, he saw the reason for the action. A large truck had swung out from the opposite traffic; its impatient driver had decided to pass the double line of cars.

The Shadow's speed had exceeded ninety. He was cutting down the space as the truck continued out into the road, its driver thinking the way was cleared with the passage of the touring car. A cloaked shape above the wheel, The Shadow held the coupe at top speed, counting upon the truck to press toward the center of the road and allow him clearance.

But as the distance dwindled, The Shadow saw a sedan shoot out in front of the truck. Its driver, too, had been struck with the idea of bucking traffic. The truck was lumbering down upon the sedan; the driver of the car jammed his brakes. So did the truck driver, as he swung the wheel. The vehicles sideswiped with a jolting crash; both veered to a stop, blocking the road.

The Shadow gave the brakes to his coupe. The car swayed wildly as he slackened its terrific speed. The Shadow was hurtling down upon the locked vehicles. Another crash seemed imminent. To the right lay a steep embankment, the shoulder offering space for nothing wider than a motorcycle. To the left was the double line of cars bound toward Manhattan.

Just as his coupe was almost on the blockers, The Shadow saw opportunity. The inbound cars had halted at sound of the crash between truck and sedan. A few ahead had been moving slowly; a twelve-foot gap had widened in the double line.

The Shadow swung hard to the left. Tires whined as the coupe raised on its two right wheels. Releasing the brake momentarily, The Shadow piloted the car through the opening, his speed cut to below thirty miles an hour. Then, with a terrific pull of the wheel, he skidded right, to gain the far shoulder of the road.

The embankment there was lower; moreover, the shoulder was not crowded by the widened bulk of a crashed truck. The right wheels of the coupe hung to the road, while the left tires pounded along sloping ground. Controlling the coupe despite its crazy tilt, the indomitable driver brought the car to a safe stop.

The left rear tire had blown at the finish, taking the final strain of the swift-twisting maneuver. Startled inbound drivers were staring from behind their wheels. Traffic here had gapped as well as up ahead. The Shadow did not choose to linger.

He started the coupe forward, slowly; then, reaching an opening, he pulled the edge-clinging car in from the side of the road. Cutting between cars, he regained the outward traffic lanes.

The chase was off. The murderous vandals who had wrecked the filling station had gained a full two miles through The Shadow's forced delay. With flattened tire, the coupe was useless for further pursuit. The Shadow spied an obscure road that led off a hundred feet ahead. Piloting his limping car along the outbound

highway, he reached the turn and veered off to the right.

DARKNESS huddled over the jouncing coupe as The Shadow watched for a secluded space where he could stop to change the tire and begin a return trip to Manhattan. He knew that he would not be troubled during his stay on this isolated byway; excitement back on the highway would be concentrated on the damaged truck and the half-wrecked sedan.

Circumstances had once again blocked The Shadow in his search for murderers. He knew that those fiends of the road had come out from hiding at the order of an evil chief. The trail of crime had centered near New York, as The Shadow had expected.

As in Chicago, the necessity of rescue had forced The Shadow to give enemies a chance to make their get-away. Meanwhile, another well-planned murder had been accomplished. Like Seton Hylap and Gifford Barbridge, Hosea Selger had been slain.

Last night's murder on the highway had brought The Shadow to this present quest. Balked in pursuit, he was ready to seek new trails. For The Shadow could see further murder in the offing. To prevent new crime, he must press hard upon his task.

CHAPTER XIII. CROOKS CONFER

TWENTY-FOUR hours had elapsed since The Shadow's fight against the attackers of the filling station. New cloud banks scudded low above the Watchung Mountains. The whistling of outside winds made the living room of Zullick's lodge a place of desirable occupancy.

Foy Zullick was seated alone before the fire. His wolfish face was sour; his eyes showed an impatient glitter as they watched the crackle of sizzling logs within the fireplace. At odd moments, the murderer glanced toward the outer door; then, at last, he paused to listen. He had caught the sound of footsteps on the veranda.

The door opened. Soup Ramsted entered. The dynamiter doffed a rain-soaked overcoat; he grinned as he came over to enjoy the warmth of the fire. Zullick snorted angrily; Soup maintained his grin as he pulled a newspaper from his pocket.

"Lamp that," suggested Soup. "All the latest news about last night. I was right, Foy. Nobody got on our trail."

"Maybe not," grumbled Zullick, as he scanned the headlines, "but it wasn't brains that pulled you out of a tight one. It was luck."

"Yeah? Well, if I hadn't have throwed that pineapple, the story might have been different. It was the only out, Foy."

"You didn't get Caulkens, did you?"

"No. He dived out of sight too quick."

"Well, then, what was the use? You only messed it worse by heaving the pineapple."

"It covered the get-away, Foy."

Zullick shrugged his shoulders. He began to read the details in the newspapers. Soup put a query:

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"Where's Dulkan and Widpath?"

"In Dulkan's room," returned Zullick, "talking things over."

"About this?"

"No, you sap. Do you think I'd let them know what's been going on? They're talking about Selger."

"They know he's dead?"

"Say, Soup, you are dumb." Zullick folded up the newspaper and pitched it to a table. "All they know is that Selger signed the paper. I've been grinding that into them, so's they'll weaken."

"And are they?"

"Not yet. It's just as well to give them time."

ZULLICK arose and stalked to the door of Dulkan's room. He listened a few minutes; then returned.

"You've muffed things, Soup," declared Zullick, reverting to the theme of last night's attack. "Just because it's blowing over is no reason to think you pulled a smooth job. Look at it this way. First there was Hylap. I croaked him so neat that they aren't sure yet it wasn't suicide."

"Yeah?" queried Soup. "What about Danning? Things went haywire there, didn't they?"

"No. It was a strong-arm job. The crew was to have snatched Danning in a pinch; instead, they must have bumped him by accident. Anyway, Danning isn't around to squawk. Now take it with Barbridge. You fixed things good there, Soup. That explosion was a real pay-off. We rubbed out the guy we wanted; we covered it."

"What about Chicago? Finger Lurbin muffed that job of his, didn't he?"

"Yeah. He should have gotten Jolles; but he didn't. Anyway, Jolles has scammed and won't show his nose. If he does, it'll be tough for him."

"Seems like you're stretching things, Foy, when you figure I pulled a muff last night. I didn't do no worse than others did in Frisco and Chicago –"

"You don't see the difference yet? Well, I'll make it clear to you. First off, Selger was handled right. I figured he'd be the first to sign up. That's why I had you drain his gas tank and cut it open. That was a good stunt of yours, planting the phosphorous capsule."

"Glad you're giving me credit for something, Foy. I knew it would work. After I soldered up the tank, the capsule was stuck up there near the top. It wouldn't work until the gas came up close to the patch. That's why I only put a couple of gallons back in the car."

"Yeah, the capsule melted nice enough after Selger filled up on gas. The phosphorous mixture got working at the right spot, too – between those big bridges. An explosion in a full gas tank does the trick, with a light car like Selger's. But we're getting away from the point."

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ZULLICK eyed Soup steadily; then picked up the newspaper and glanced at it for a moment. He shook his head and resumed:

"We heard that the guy at the filling station remembered Selger," stated Zullick. "We knew which bozo it was – Caulkens – and there was a chance that Selger might have said something to him. That's why I staged last night's job. Jake to pull in and invite Caulkens for a ride. You to cover up just in case you were needed.

"Jake flivved. Of all times to pull into that joint, he picked the worst – when Joe Cardona was there. Joe plugged him and the bunch with him used their noodle when they forgot Caulkens and traveled.

"Then you came along. First you try to chop down Cardona; then you heave a pineapple, with no chance of getting either Joe or Caulkens. Then you come blowing in here to tell me all about it."

"Nobody tailed us, Foy," insisted Soup. "We didn't use the regular road, neither. We must have rode over half of Jersey before we blew in here. Then you told us to scam."

"Sure – to that Trenton hide-out. I said to let it cool for twenty-four hours. Well, it looks like we've had a break. This newspaper says that Caulkens thinks Selger's gas tank was tampered with; but he don't know where Selger was coming from."

Zullick sat down. His scowling face looked somewhat relieved. This time it was Soup who showed signs of anxiety.

"I brought the crew in with me," remarked the pineapple thrower. "Left Jake's outfit up in Trenton. I've been talking with 'em, though. They've wised me up to something."

"What's that?" demanded Zullick.

"Who it was that queered the job," returned Soup, "and from what I saw of Joe Cardona when he was diving for that bank, I think they're right."

"You mean somebody was helping out?"

"Sure. The Shadow!"

ZULLICK swung about; his fanglike teeth were set. The murderer's breath came with a harsh hiss, followed by a sharp oath.

"It was The Shadow who started it," assured Soup. "He snatched Caulkens away from Jake. It was him that plugged Jake afterward, not Cardona. He grabbed Joe and hauled him to the bank when I was coming up. I didn't think much about it then; but afterward, I –"

"Never mind, Soup. You're right. It fits in with what Finger wrote me, to the Trenton hide-out. It was The Shadow, he thinks, who pulled Jolles out of that jam in Chi."

"Say – maybe he was the bird the newspapers talked about at Altamont – the guy that beat it on a rail car –"

"Yeah – and he could have figured at Frisco, too, Soup. Well, with The Shadow in it, the lay looks bad. Mighty bad, if he's been in it all along."

"How's he going to spot this joint up here?"

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"How?" Zullick snorted. "Say – if The Shadow hit Frisco, Altamont, Chi, then New York right on our heels, there's no telling how close he'll be within a couple of days. Look here." Zullick snatched up the newspaper. "Read this about a daring motorist running through that fire! Who do you think it was?"

"The Shadow?"

"Sure. He was after your buggy."

"But he didn't catch us."

"No – if he had, maybe you wouldn't be here. I'll tell you why you outdistanced him. He was blocked by that smash on the highway that's mentioned right here."

Zullick pointed to a paragraph; then scowled and tossed the newspaper back on the table. He produced a cigarette, lighted it and puffed nervously while Soup watched. Whining winds whooped weirdly from the mountainside. They seemed to portend disaster, even to such an unimaginative brute as Soup Ramsted. The dynamiter began to evidence nervousness.

THEN Zullick spoke. The wolfish crook had regained his sang-froid. His nervousness ended, Zullick was resuming his smooth purr, the tone that gave confidence to the rogues who served him.

"It means a smooth job, that's all," assured Zullick. "Different from any we've tried before; yet near enough to make The Shadow hook it up with what's happened previous. A job with a new trail, leading away from here.

"What's more, the sooner we pull it the better. Maybe not too soon; but at the first opportunity. It's got to be timed right on schedule. Well, that's the way we'll handle it. Keep them guessing."

"If you're getting rid of Dulkan and Widpath," suggested Soup, "why don't you croak 'em here and be done with it? Of course, you'd have to get 'em both to sign at once."

Zullick eyed Soup coldly; then repressed a toothy smile. He followed with a smooth-toned objection.

"First of all," he stated, "they both won't sign. Not together. Dulkan will be the first to weaken. He'll go out of here like Selger. After that, I can handle Widpath differently."

"That's right," admitted Soup. "You've got the chauffeur, too, to think about. But if you rubbed 'em all out here –"

"If any crime is done here, it would mean a cover-up. With The Shadow in it, that's bad stuff. He's smeared the cover-up jobs three times now. That's something I'm not forgetting."

Zullick sat down before the fire. He pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and began to make notations with a pencil. He nodded to himself; then spoke to Soup.

"We'll be hearing from Dulkan and Widpath soon," assured Zullick, smoothly. "They'll be finished with their confab. Then we'll know what's what. Meanwhile, don't disturb me. I've got an idea that'll beat The Shadow and keep him off us afterward. I'm doping it out right now."

Soup nodded. He picked up the newspaper and began to read the sporting page. Zullick continued his calculations, marking the sheet with diagrams as he proceeded. The fire flickered intermittently as wailing winds drove fierce gusts down the chimney.

As minutes passed, Foy Zullick's grin increased. It became an evil leer; the crook's lips delivered subdued chuckles.

In his mapping of new murder, this killer was developing a scheme which he believed would outmatch the offsetting prowess of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIV. THE DECISION

WHILE FOY Zullick was completing plans for crime, two men who figured in his calculations were engaged in conference. James Dulkan and Peter Widpath, companions in plight, were seated in the chill of Dulkan's room. Outside they could hear the muffled pacing of a guard on the veranda.

"We've heard nothing from Selger," Dulkan was declaring. Wearing overcoat and muffler to offset the chill, the merchant was huddled pitifully in his chair. "Nothing from Selger, Widpath. I had thought surely that he would aid us."

"Hardly," returned Widpath. The banker's tone was calm. "Do not forget that Selger has signed an incriminating document. He is now in an unenviable position – one from which he can make no thrust against Zullick."

"No worse a position than the one we occupy," affirmed Dulkan, in a miserable tone. "Look at us, Widpath. We are prisoners, half frozen, likely to be starved."

Widpath smiled. He, too, was wearing his overcoat; but he did not mind the slight chill of the room. Moreover, he knew that Dulkan's second reference was an exaggeration. The merchant was a dyspeptic; finicky about food. He had objected to the simple fare that Zullick had provided his forced guests. Yet the quantity had been ample.

"Our choice of this room," remarked Widpath, "was our own preference. We wanted to talk matters over, without Zullick hearing. He told us to go in either of our rooms; we chose this one so as to avoid Burrett, who was in my room.

"Once we have come to some decision, Dulkan, we shall be free to return to the comfortable fire. Therefore, I propose that we settle upon our plan."

"We've already settled it, Widpath."

"I have definitely decided what I shall do. I have told you, Dulkan, that I shall not compromise. But at the same time, I am cherishing no false hopes. I do not think that we shall hear from Selger. I entertain no hope that Zullick will weaken in his determination to keep us here."

"Then what will be the climax, Widpath? Are we to remain here forever? To see our plans forestalled, while a murderer stays free?"

"You can answer that as well as I, Dulkan."

THE merchant nodded, in troubled fashion. His long face looked peaked; his hands rubbed together nervously. When he spoke again, his voice carried a quaver.

"We had our test, Widpath," affirmed Dulkan, soberly. "You and I and Selger. In a sense, I was the only one who really faced a test. You and Selger, simply responded according to your natures. It was a revelation,

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Widpath, a revelation.

"Fancy it, the three of us engaged upon a speculative enterprise. An enterprise, I may add, that was questionable. Suddenly we were faced by the truth; we learned that our plans had produced murder. We were confronted by a horrible fact.

"Frankly, I was torn between two phases of my nature. I had a choice to make; I saw two examples before me. Selger, avaricious, was willing to condone crime since it had been done. He was as bad as the murderers themselves.

"But you, Widpath, showed nobleness. You feel remorse because of what has happened. You preferred forced imprisonment to any admission that you had to do with crime. And I, Widpath, have come to the same decision.

"The choice has been a difficult one. I have heard Zullick's persuasive arguments. I know that he will not produce the incriminating paper should I sign it – not if I 'play ball,' as he expresses it. Wealth will be mine, Widpath, but I, like you, do not want it. It would be blood money."

Widpath nodded; his dignified face was serious. The banker lacked the elation which he had shown before starting on this trip. Dulkan eyed Widpath's countenance and observed an expression of firmness and decision.

"I wish that I had your courage, Widpath," declared Dulkan, rising. "You have met facts and have accepted them. You have held no illusions concerning our present plight. But I am weak and miserable. Like a fool, I have counted on Selger; all along I should have realized that he is a complete scoundrel. You have driven that fact home, Widpath. I believe you.

"Yet something must be done. I am losing my courage, despite the inspiration that you supply. Therefore, I intend to do a drastic thing; but before I take the step, I want to convince you of my true intention."

"You intend to sign the paper?" questioned Widpath, in a reproving tone.

"Yes," returned Dulkan, "but only because it will mean freedom. Once I am clear of here, like Selger, I can take steps to free you."

"But you will incriminate yourself! Zullick will hold your actual confession!"

"It may not matter, Widpath. Once you are free, you can testify to this present conversation. You can assure my jury that I acted under forced circumstances."

WIDPATH nodded his solemn agreement. Yet his face showed worry over Dulkan's position. The merchant observed the fact and spoke again. This time his voice carried firmness.

"I shall bring the law upon Foy Zullick," he affirmed. "With Zullick's capture, your rescue will be made. You deserve such assistance, Widpath. If one of us must suffer unjust accusations, I should be the person. I wavered, Widpath; you did not.

"But, after all, it would not be unjust if I gained punishment. Some amends must be made for the deaths of Hylap and Barbridge. So I am going through with it, Widpath. I shall sign the paper that Zullick is holding for me."

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Dulkin was rising wearily. Widpath arose also; he clapped his left hand on the merchant's shoulder; then extended his right to deliver a warm handclasp.

"You are the one who has shown courage, Dulkin," commended Widpath. "Because of it, my qualms are ended. Your plan is a sound one; it is up to one of us to agree to Zullick's terms. Let me be the one to pretend such choice. Allow me to sign –"

Dulkin shook his head in emphatic interruption. He spoke with firmness.

"The duty is mine, Widpath," he maintained. "I intend to take it. Your place is here, where you can maintain your decision in spite of all the arguments that Zullick can marshal. Come – we shall go out and speak to Zullick. Stand by me, Widpath."

"One moment, Dulkin," pleaded the banker, cautiously. "In going through with this, use great discretion. Do not show too much willingness. Offer to sign – but set a time interval."

"You think that Selger might actually aid us?"

"There is that possibility. Your own change has convinced me that Selger might also undergo a mental process that would make him realize the value of justice."

"Very well, Widpath. Stand by me."

The two men went to the door of the room. As they opened the barrier, they were met by the warmth of the living room fire. Foy Zullick looked up from his diagrams; he thrust paper and pencil in his pocket.

"Take off your coats," he purred. "Make yourselves at home, gentlemen. Well, I hope your long conference has brought you to your senses?"

"I am still maintaining mine," declared Widpath in a tone of dignity. "I do not intend to sign that paper, Zullick."

"Suit yourself, Widpath," sneered the crook. "Well, Dulkin, what's your verdict?"

"I feel differently," returned Dulkin. "If you give me time, Zullick, I may accede to your terms. Suppose – suppose that I should sign it later – say tomorrow night –"

"Well?"

"Would I then be free? Like Selger?"

"Certainly. Why not? All I want is my own protection. Selger wised up to that quick enough. What's been eating you mugs, anyway? But say, just a minute" – Zullick eyed Dulkin sharply – "how do I know you're not going to be thinking different tomorrow? Maybe you'd better sign the paper now."

DURKIN looked to Widpath, who gave an imperceptible nod; the dignified man spoke coolly to Zullick.

"Dulkin and I have both made our decisions," informed Widpath. "He intends to sign; I do not. That will be final, Zullick. You have my word for it."

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"And that's good enough for me," snorted Zullick, convinced. "One thing about you, Widpath, you aren't jumpy. If you're so sure about what Dulkan intends to do, I'll take your word for it. Sit down, the two of you. I'm going out with Soup."

As the prisoners divested themselves of coats and took the chairs by the fireplace, Zullick edged Soup to the outer door. They stepped out to the veranda; Zullick closed the door and spoke in a harsh whisper, that Soup could hear despite the howling wind.

"Stick around tonight Soup," ordered Zullick. "In the morning, I'll spill you all the dope. I'm going to do some talking to Dulkan, alone; I'll talk to Widpath, alone, too, so's to make it look like I'm putting pressure on one of them.

"But it's Dulkan I want to make sure of, so's he won't back out on signing. No use in working on Widpath; his mind's made-up. But it will have an effect on Dulkan. Maybe he'll sign up tonight even."

Zullick paused; his chuckle was harsh as he added:

"But if he does sign up tonight, it won't make any difference about when he leaves. He's not going to pull away from here until tomorrow."

"You'll fix his bus?" queried Soup. "Want me to gimmick the gas tank, like I did with Selger's?"

"Not a chance, Soup. This is going to be different. Dulkan will have a clear route on the way in – until he reaches a certain point. There he's going to get his – but from the other direction."

"You're bringing Finger into it? From New York?"

"Sure. You can reach him by long distance. But you'll have to go to Trenton first. I've got something waiting there for you to use. And you'll need that crew of Jake's, from the hide-out."

"What's the lay, Foy?"

"You'll know that tomorrow. Take one of those rooms downstairs for the night. I'm going in to chin with Dulkan and Widpath, each by each. But I'll tell you this much, Soup. I'm going to make this new job look enough like the last one to drive the bulls goofy – and The Shadow, too."

"You mean you're going to have Dulkan rubbed out when he hits the Skyway?"

Zullick chuckled his corroboration.

"You guessed it, Soup," affirmed the murderer. "And the cover-up will be on deck when the job is pulled. And whoever muscles in will get what Dulkan gets."

WITH that, Zullick turned about and entered the lodge, leaving Soup standing open-mouthed. It was a full minute before the dynamiter moved away; when he did, he snarled an unpleasant laugh. For Soup Ramsted had confidence in the methods used by Foy Zullick.

To Soup, the murder of James Dulkan was already a foregone conclusion. He could picture it only imperfectly at present; but he knew that tomorrow would bring his full enlightenment. Soup would have bet his bottom dollar against Dulkan's survival.

There was a further reason, however, for Soup's harsh laughter. He could see beyond the elimination of Dulkan, to the conquest of a foeman who had risen more formidably than the law. That enemy was the one whom Zullick had meant when he had mentioned plans to deal with any muscler.

Foy Zullick had not forgotten The Shadow. The henchmen who set forth tomorrow night would be prepared to deal with that cloaked avenger should The Shadow, grim hunter of crime, be on hand to interfere with men of evil.

CHAPTER XV. A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

WITHIN the confines of Manhattan lay a spot as secluded as the Watchung wilderness. A room that harbored Stygian darkness, that caught no sound of the city's tumult. A place that held the stillness of a tomb, save when a living presence chose to make it his temporary abode. Such was The Shadow's sanctum.

Here, on this night when crooks had conferred, a single light was gleaming. Bluish rays cast their eerie glow upon the surface of a polished table. White hands moved beneath the focused rays; from the finger of one glimmered a weirdly sparkling gem, The Shadow's girasol.

Clippings, reports from agents – these were the papers that The Shadow studied. No trace had been gained of the broken trail left by Soup Ramsted's squad. Not even the identities of the marauders had been learned. Jake, the lone fighter left on the field of battle, had been scorched to a crisp by the ravaging flames from the leveled service station.

The Shadow had not forgotten other possible trails. Miles Crofton was still busy in San Francisco, seeking facts concerning the ruffraff who had battled there. Nothing of value had been learned on the Coast. Meanwhile, agents in New York were seeking Finger Lurbin. Two capable aids were at work: "Hawkeye," clever spotter who knew Manhattan's underworld; Cliff Marsland, who had acquaintances in the bad lands.

Clyde Burke was also on the job. Frequently the reporter had gathered tips of consequence. Clyde had contacts with headquarters; he rated high with Joe Cardona. Yet Clyde, like the others, had gained no results. One course alone seemed open.

The Shadow must scour districts also; he must contact the police commissioner to learn if facts had been gained higher up. In the feigned guise of Lamont Cranston, millionaire globe-trotter, The Shadow numbered Commissioner Ralph Weston among his friends.

Rutledge Mann had slipped up in his first investigation. He had failed to fathom Hosea Selger's possible connection with Altamont Power. But Mann had used his lists again; this time, he had learned an important fact.

Peter Widpath, retired banker and heavy investor in various stocks, had taken a journey from New York. Yet neither Mann nor Harry Vincent, an agent deputed to visit Widpath's apartment, had gained an inkling of where the banker might be.

From this, however, The Shadow knew that a second man might be in the same circumstances that had gripped Selger. The facts of Widpath's departure from Manhattan resembled those of Selger's. The Filipino valet, talking to Harry Vincent, had stated that his master had engaged reservations somewhere out of town; that was all that Jose knew.

Selger – Widpath – were there others? If so, were they due to meet a fate similar to the broker's? Those were the problems that confronted The Shadow; and as he studied them, he found no satisfactory answer. Further

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search for men connected with crime was the only course that could bring results.

THE bluish light clicked off; a signal of The Shadow's immediate departure. But on this occasion, The Shadow lingered in the thick blackness of the sanctum. An instant after he had extinguished the light, a tiny bulb glittered from the wall beyond the table. In the dark, The Shadow produced earphones. He spoke in a whisper. A quiet voice replied:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report."

"Report from Marsland. Facts regarding Finger Lurbin. Formerly engaged in racketeering with Duke Harley, present proprietor of the Club Diabolo."

"Other associates."

"Tony Pascini linked with the racket. It ended when Tony left New York, wanted for murder. Finger and Duke never linked with the crime. Still allied, but not actively."

"Report received."

The Shadow hung up the earphones. The little bulb went out. Moving through darkness, The Shadow reached a corner of the sanctum; there he turned on another light that revealed a jet-black filing cabinet. A drawer glided outward; The Shadow referred to a folder that bore the name of Tony Pascini.

Police officials would have been amazed had they seen the information that The Shadow's file contained. Along with enlarged photographs of Tony Pascini were typewritten facts that covered numerous details of the racketeer's career, Minute points of information that made police records no more than a condensed version.

Despite that fact, The Shadow's file was not complete. Though it told of Tony's quirks and numerous activities, though it named dozens of the fellow's friends, it did not mention the racketeer's brief association with "Duke" Harley and Finger Lurbin; that was one connection that had escaped The Shadow.

To offset the lack, however, were facts of Tony's subsequent career following his abrupt departure from New York. The Shadow had gained news of him through informants; and those latest details were points that not even Tony's former pals had heard about. That discovery suited The Shadow. His laugh whispered strangely through the sanctum as he retained the file and closed the drawer. The light clicked off.

It was not surprising that The Shadow's information had failed to link Tony Pascini with Duke Harley. Of all the poker-faced rascals in New York the proprietor of the Club Diabolo was the smoothest. Duke's criminal connections were few and well spaced. He avoided such alliances, except when they promised large gain with little risk.

ON this night, Duke was standing at the entrance of the Club Diabolo, a secluded bright spot that he had opened on the twentieth story of a Manhattan office building. Duke gained his clientele from former patrons of speakeasies that he had managed. His customers liked the thrill of coming to a place that others did not know existed.

Midnight had arrived; some fifty guests were enthusiastically applauding a team of dancers who provided a floor show. Waiters were scurrying back and forth between the tables and the bar. The cash was rolling in; Duke felt satisfaction, even though his face did not express it. It took a real jolt to change the apathetic air

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that Duke's phlegmatic visage continually registered.

Satisfied that business was being properly handled, Duke turned to cross the hall to his office on the other side. As he did, the door of an elevator clanged open; the proprietor turned to see who was arriving. A solitary passenger alighted; at sight of the newcomer's face, Duke forgot himself. For once a gasp came from the night-club proprietor's firm lips.

With a hasty glance over his shoulder, Duke saw that no one was watching. He turned to the arrival, whose sallow, pock-marked face displayed a twisted grin. Duke nudged his thumb toward the office door; the arrival nodded and went in that direction. Duke followed.

Once in the lighted office, Duke thrust out his hand. As he did, he uttered a low-voiced exclamation that indicated concern as well as surprise.

"Tony!" gasped the proprietor. "Tony Pascini. Say – I might have taken you for a ghost!"

"Thought I was dead, eh?" snorted Tony; then, in a grating tone: "Well, I've been gone long enough to be. But I ain't the only mug who's come back to the big town. Whatta they been saying about me?"

"Some thought you'd been croaked," returned Duke. "Other wisenheimers had it that you'd taken a rap somewhere; that you were doing a stretch under a phony moniker. But I didn't figure you were in a big house."

"I wasn't. I'll tell you where I've been, Duke, Saint Looie for a while; after that I headed for Mexico. I picked a spot called Ensenada, a town below the California border. I'm going back there to clean up."

"What's the racket?"

"Anything. Ensenada draws a lot of chumps from Tia Juana and Agua Caliente – you know, Americans who think it's grand stuff to take a drive down into Lower California. Most of 'em have dough. Soft pickings for me."

"Squared yourself there, have you?"

"Sure. I look like a Mex. I talk the lingo; the good old Espanol. The greasers don't count me as a gringo. But what I need down there is a guy to work the front, while I take care of the inside. Finger is the bozo I want."

DUKE nodded wisely. He had a hunch that Tony was hinting at a snatch racket, a game in which Finger Lurbin had figured in the past; from which, in fact, Finger had gained his nickname. After he had finished nodding, Duke became serious.

"Sounds good, Tony," he declared. "Trouble is, I don't know how to get hold of Finger. He's hiding out, here in New York; but I haven't seen him. He calls up, though."

"How often?" demanded the sallow-faced visitor.

"Couple of times a day," responded Duke. "Keeps asking me if anybody wants to call him. He's waiting to hear from somebody; when that other guy calls, I'm to put Finger wise when he asks me."

"So the other bloke can call him at some special place?"

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"That's the idea of it, Tony. But I don't know who the other bird is. It's none of my business, anyway. I'll get paid off by Finger after they've finished whatever job they're working."

"Maybe Finger will tell you where I can get hold of him."

"I doubt it, Tony. Not until this job's finished. It wouldn't be good for him and you to get together – both wanted by the bulls. Not just yet, anyway. Finger is playing them close. He's even finicky about getting guys to work for him."

"Torpedoes?"

"Yes. Wanted me to dig up a couple. Said he'd tell me what they were to do. But I couldn't think of any that were a safe bet."

A broad grin showed on the sallow face of Tony Pascini. Reaching forward, the visitor picked up pad and paper from Duke's desk. He scrawled a telephone number on the paper.

"Tell Finger to call there," he suggested. "Have him ask for Jack. Tell him what he wants, when he wants it."

"Jack's working for you?"

"Sure. Him and another guy. Both aces. Jack ain't the fellow's real name; but that don't matter. It's the moniker he's using an' it's good enough."

"Sounds O.K., Tony."

"You bet it is. These bozos are heading West with me. I lined 'em up, soon as I landed in town. Just tell Finger I was here; that I know the guys. That'll be enough for him."

"Say – have they got a car?"

"Sure. An' they know how to handle their rods. They can swing a typewriter if they need to. You know the kind of torpedoes I handle, Duke. No punks on my pay roll."

DUKE nodded. He tucked the sheet of paper under a corner of the desk blotter. Rising, he nudged his thumb toward a cabinet, where liquor bottles were in evidence.

"Help yourself to a slug, Tony," proffered the proprietor of the Club Diabolo. "After that you'd better scam. The harness bull on the beat blows in here every night, off and on. I don't want him to spot you. He might wonder who you were."

"I'm moving, Duke," grinned the visitor, rising. "Never mind the drink. I don't need it."

"Always did lay off the hooch, didn't you, Tony? I just remembered it."

"Booze does for the saps, Duke. Not for the guy that's handlin' the racket."

Duke accompanied his visitor to the hall. He watched Tony enter the elevator; then went back into the office. Though his poker face did not express it, Duke Harley felt relief. He was glad to work with Tony Pascini, as he was with Finger Lurbin. He saw profit through the possibility of bringing the two ex-partners together again; but he preferred not to have either of them visit the Club Diabolo in person.

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DOWN on the street, Duke's visitor was entering a taxi. A slight grin still showed upon the sallow features of Tony Pascini; it faded as the cab rolled from the curb. Lips changed their contour; they delivered a whispered laugh that carried a weird, chilling tone.

Duke Harley would have been troubled had he been there to hear that laugh. Tony Pascini could never have delivered such mirth as that. Duke Harley had been deceived by his midnight visitor. The supposed Tony Pascini was none other than The Shadow.

Master of disguise, The Shadow had made up to represent the ex-racketeer. From his file he had taken photographs, descriptive data, points of information that had depicted Tony Pascini to a "T." Moreover, The Shadow had recited facts of the past that had properly impressed Duke Harley.

Not only had The Shadow dropped remarks that had brought back Duke's recollections of Tony Pascini; he had also given points concerning Tony's actual journeying after the sallow crook had fled New York. Tony Pascini had gone to St. Louis; from there to Ensenada.

But The Shadow had topped those statements with his story of why he, supposedly Tony, had come back to New York. He had taken no risk in doing so, for the final fact which The Shadow knew concerning Tony Pascini was one that Duke Harley had never learned. It was a point that Finger Lurbin, likewise, did not know. Something that only The Shadow had uncovered.

Tony Pascini had started a racket in Ensenada, lining up a crew of bandits from the mountains of Lower California. A troop of Mexican cavalry had annihilated the budding outlaws in a short-lived fray. They had buried the slain men without troubling themselves as to their individual identities.

The Shadow had taken no chances in his visit to Duke Harley. The nightclub proprietor could not have heard from the former racketeer within the past twelve months. The Shadow, in posing as Tony Pascini, had played the part of a man who had been dead one year.

CHAPTER XVI. THE NEXT NIGHT

"BURBANK speaking."

"Report."

The Shadow was in his sanctum, earphones clamped to head. Twenty hours had passed since his visit to the Club Diabolo. During that interval he had awaited reports from agents. One had come in mid-afternoon.

Hawkeye, answering to the name of "Jack," had received a call from Finger Lurbin at a hang-out called the Black Ship. The telephone number of that scumland dive was the one that The Shadow had given to Duke Harley.

Finger had told Hawkeye that he and his pal would be needed. That was all that the crook had stated; but Hawkeye had lingered at the Black Ship for another call. It had come with early evening; Burbank was relaying it to The Shadow, prompt upon Hawkeye's contact report.

"Finger calls for two men," came Burbank's monotone. "To be at a restaurant called the Knife and Fork, one block north of the Holland Tube. Telephone number is Dorset 6-3811. Both to be there by half past eleven, with their car outside.

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"Someone will call after that time, asking for Jack. That will mean to be ready in the car. Watch for a sedan with green stop-lights. Follow it into the Holland Tube. Tail it through to the Skyway.

"Hawkeye and Marsland to hold back traffic, allowing front car to gain distance, until it has passed the first large bridge. Then to speed up, come in as cover-up crew between the two bridges. Follow the sedan through to a getaway."

Burbank's monotone ended. The Shadow spoke:

"Report received. Instructions: Shrevnitz and Vincent to cruise in taxicab near the Knife and Fork. Vincent to have suitcase, also airplane tickets for all ships leaving Newark Airport between twelve o'clock and two. Duty: To cover Hawkeye and Marsland, with airport as alibi. Inform Marsland."

"Instructions received."

The light on the wall went out after Burbank's statement. The Shadow removed the earphones; his whispered laugh sounded foreboding amid the black-walled sanctum. Into the bluish light, his long-fingered hands drew a detailed map of the Pulaski Skyway.

The Shadow had not located Finger Lurbin. The crook whom he had thwarted in Chicago was still safe in some New York hide-out. But Finger had fallen for The Shadow's game. Something was up; Finger was ready to use the aids whom he thought Tony Pascini was providing through Duke Harley.

A sedan with green stop-lights. The size of the car indicated that Finger must have some men of his own. The Shadow had disposed of the two torpedoes in Chicago; evidently Finger had managed to acquire a few in New York. He had needed others to man a second car if needed. That was why he had put in a request to Duke Harley.

STUDYING his map, The Shadow gained inklings of deep strategy. He knew that Finger Lurbin was simply a piece upon the board. The real brain was the man who had planned and executed the murders of Hylap, Barbridge and Selger.

There had been cover-ups in San Francisco, in Altamont, in Chicago. Another had been that wild attack upon the Lincoln Highway, when thugs had tried to silence Caulkens. New murder was due; the problem had been to pick the spot for crime. Particularly since by this time, the master crook knew that The Shadow was carving into the game.

Of all places, the most unlikely one had been chosen. That was the spot where Hosea Selger had died. It was merely by chance that the broker's coupe had been wrecked between the two great bridges of the Skyway. The gas tank had been fixed to explode after filling; it had blown up at the middle of the high-level viaduct only by coincidence.

By rights, that spot should be avoided by men of crime. Instead, they were to use it for new murder. A daring ruse to trick The Shadow and the law; more than that, a scheme that would throw doubt upon the correct theories that had been formed concerning the death of Selger.

Joe Cardona had advanced the claim that Selger had died through a prearranged explosion. It was already conceded that the broker could not have started his inbound trip from a point very far outside Manhattan. New Jersey State police were working on that assumption. It would be a smart move by a master crook could he throw them off the search.

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New crime on the Skyway would produce that very result, particularly if it involved the presence of murderous men, fleeing to a getaway. Selger's death would be likened to this coming one; moreover, crooks would be ready to eliminate any witnesses who might make future trouble. They had missed a bet in not trailing Selger in along the Skyway. Had they done so, they could have rubbed out Caulkens immediately after Selger's death.

A break had come in The Shadow's favor. It was not just luck, however, that he had gained this opportunity to deal with men of crime. His own indomitable persistence; his rescue of Jolles; his stroke in behalf of Caulkens and Cardona – these had forced a hidden enemy to concentrate full force upon tonight's event.

Though The Shadow had lost certain trails, he had maintained diligent search for Finger Lurbin, knowing that the man might be used again. The Shadow had gained news that he wanted. He had used it to advantage in his visit to Duke Harley. He was reaping the reward of perseverance.

Time was short for The Shadow. He needed to map a quick campaign. Studying his diagram of the Skyway, he made notations beside it, in ink of vivid blue. Written words, tiny arrows and other indicators that faded after their inscription. These were visible expressions of The Shadow's thoughts.

Someone was slated to die tonight; someone whose position resembled that of Hosea Selger. Perhaps it would be Peter Widpath; possibly it would be another also in the web. Whoever it might be, that man would be driving into New York over the Skyway route.

FINGER LURBIN'S time of departure was as yet unstated. That meant that Finger was still awaiting word from someone outside New York. The victim would be driving in about midnight. Finger would know when to start out and meet him.

At midnight or thereafter, traffic would be light on the Skyway. Cars would hold to the established maximum of forty miles an hour. It would be an easy matter for Finger to reach the one-mile stretch between the giant bridges at the same time as a car coming from the opposite direction.

Would crooks be heading inward as well? The Shadow, drawing arrows that came points together, delivered a whispered laugh that spelled the answer. His finding was in the affirmative. Tonight's crime was one of concentration; a victim was due to be trapped completely.

The whole game could be stopped by a tip-off to the law. But The Shadow knew that such an action would merely mean postponement of crime. In all probability, cars of innocent appearance would first ride over the Skyway. Presence of patrolling troopers would be met by change of method.

Death for the victim elsewhere. Lost opportunity for The Shadow. Again, the whispered laugh sounded; its sinister tones betokened that the task of thwarting murder would be The Shadow's own. Already he possessed an advantage that would serve him. Hawkeye and Cliff, designated to hold back traffic, could arrive at the vital moment. It was plain that they were supposed to shift from one traffic lane to another, keeping down to thirty, thereby blocking impatient motorists should any be close behind them. But they were also to speed up as they neared the bridges.

They would do just that. Moreover, a second car would travel up close behind them, bringing two more of The Shadow's agents: Moe and Harry. These four could nullify Finger's crew, by striking unexpectedly. Keeping on, they would then be free to encounter the inbound thugs whom The Shadow anticipated.

The Shadow's pen moved outward along the line that showed the Skyway on the map. The pen stopped as it reached the space between the bridges. Stretching forth his hand, The Shadow made another line inward;

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again he stopped at the spot where crime was due.

He was forming his own plan; his whispered laugh was sinister as he observed the high-level stretch upon the map. With that tone of sardonic mockery, The Shadow's plan was formed. He folded the map and brought forth the earphones. To Burbank, he gave new instructions, final word to waiting agents.

Crime was due to click in clockwork fashion, timed to the minute. That factor was to The Shadow's liking. It would enable him to estimate when crime would be due and to act accordingly. The Shadow had full details of the Skyway and its terrain; moreover, he would be able to supplement that knowledge through later contact with Burbank.

Vital to The Shadow's plan would be the action of his agents. Through those trusted aids, The Shadow could gain the opportunity he needed. Men of crime were concentrating strength, to give battle to The Shadow should he attempt to stop their murderous deeds.

Tonight, their hope would be to eliminate their superfoe. At the same time, the crooks would feel surety as well as hope; surety that they would be able to do as they had done before – prevent The Shadow from following a trail should he be fortunate enough to survive the fray.

THE SHADOW knew the surety that crooks must feel. That was why his laugh resounded after he had given final instructions to Burbank; it was also the reason for the persistence of his sardonic mirth after he had extinguished the blue light of the sanctum.

In tonight's counterstroke, The Shadow could leave battle to his agents. Supposedly cover-up men for Finger Lurbin, Cliff and Hawkeye would be able to strike from within the ranks. They, in turn, would be backed by Moe and Harry. With surprise as their advantage, The Shadow's agents would hold the odds.

The Shadow, himself, would be free – clear to take up the chase, ready to handle the aftermath of frustrated crime. His indirect contact with Finger Lurbin had given him sufficient knowledge to form a workable plan that would confound the schemes of murderers.

Shortly after The Shadow's departure from his sanctum, a speedy coupe appeared on a Manhattan avenue, en route to the Holland Tube. It was the same machine that had chased Soup Ramsted's car along the Lincoln Highway, two nights before. At the wheel of his swift automobile, The Shadow was Jersey bound, aiming for a contact point where he could await word from Burbank.

The Shadow's purpose was established. His counterstroke was ready; crooks would not suspect it. As circumstances stood, all was in The Shadow's favor. Yet even as The Shadow traveled westward, events were rising to obstruct his well-formed plans.

Chance was bringing a new factor into the Skyway game. Unknown to crooks, unreported to The Shadow, an eleventh-hour entrant was joining the contest. A freak of luck, arriving on the eve of conflict, was bringing into action the forces of the law.

CHAPTER XVII. CARDONA'S TRAIL

THE SHADOW, in his survey of the coming situation, had definitely chosen his course. Murder was in the making; prevention of crime, not mere postponement, had become The Shadow's aim.

A swift counterstroke; a rapid follow-up; after those accomplishments, the law's cooperation would be welcome. It would come soon enough, as a matter of natural course. Too early an intervention would be

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dangerous.

The crooks, themselves, evidently had confidence in their ability to avoid suspicion of New Jersey highway patrols, at least up to, and including the time that crime would strike. That left Joe Cardona as the one remaining factor; and The Shadow had been wise enough not to underestimate Cardona's ability.

As detective and as acting inspector, Cardona had frequently shown skill in tracking down deep-set crime. To keep tabs on the stocky sleuth's findings, The Shadow had deputed Clyde Burke to visit headquarters,

On this evening, Clyde had sent in a positive report that Cardona had temporarily dropped the matter of Hosea Selger's murder. Finding no new evidence in New York, Joe had left the case in the hands of the New Jersey authorities.

Not long after The Shadow's departure from Manhattan, Joe Cardona strolled into his office at headquarters. The ace went to his desk, opened a drawer and began to study a stack of report sheets. They, together with accompanying documents, concerned a series of warehouse robberies. Cardona was deep in his task when he looked up to see Clyde Burke standing in the doorway.

"Hello, Burke," growled Joe. "What do you want?"

"A story," responded Clyde. "Looks like you might have one in that pile of junk."

CARDONA chuckled. He studied the wise-faced reporter; then held out the batch of papers. Clyde had been lounging in the doorway; at Cardona's gesture, the reporter's indolence ended. His slender, wiry frame became active as Clyde stepped forward eagerly. Then a look of chagrin appeared upon the reporter's face.

"This stuff!" ejaculated Clyde. "Say – I thought you'd finished with this investigation, Joe! Just a bunch of petty thievery, these warehouse jobs."

"I know," nodded Cardona, "but there's still a few points to be cleared. The commissioner wants a completely summarized report by morning. It may take me until two in the morning to finish it. But he'll get it, provided that fellows like you don't barge in here to disturb me."

Clyde took the hint. With a slight grin, he handed the papers back to Cardona; then strolled from the office. Clyde knew Cardona well enough to know that the detective was not bluffing. On his way back to the newspaper office, the reporter intended to put in a final report to Burbank.

Joe Cardona had not bluffed. At the time of Clyde Burke's departure, nothing could have been further from the ace detective's mind than the matter of Hosea Selger's recent death upon the Skyway. It was not until two unexpected visitors came suddenly into his office that Cardona's mind reverted to that theme.

Hearing footsteps, Cardona looked up angrily, thinking that another reporter had arrived. Instead, he saw the bulky figure of Detective Sergeant Markham; with Markham was a scrawny, pasty-faced fellow whom Cardona recognized as "Coffer" Wolich, a small-fry pickpocket.

COFFER looked nervous. From his pasty lips hung the unlighted stub of a hand-rolled cigarette. His face was twitching; his ragged attire indicated that his recent luck had been bad. The dip tried to make a protest as Markham shoved him into the office. Cardona silenced Coffer with a growl.

"What's Coffer been doing, Markham?" queried the acting inspector, brusquely.

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"Found this on him," informed the detective sergeant, producing a wallet. "Got about forty bucks in it; Coffey was counting the dough on a street corner when I ran into him."

"It's my own kale, Joe," whined Coffey. "Markham didn't see me doin' nothin'. The leather's mine, too."

Cardona examined the wallet. It was a shabby one, more likely to have been picked from an ash can than from a person's pocket. Joe shrugged his shoulders.

"What else, Markham?"

The detective produced a large, old-fashioned watch. Cardona grunted as he received it. The silver case was in battered condition; Joe marveled at the fact that the timepiece was still running. Coffey managed a grin as he fumbled for a match to light the remains of the cigarette.

"The turnip's mine, too," informed the dip, nudging a thumb toward the watch. "I been tryin' to soak it; but couldn't get nothin' for it."

"How does it happen you've got forty dollars?" queried Cardona.

"Been savin' it," returned Coffey. "It's gettin' cold out, Joe. I was goin' to blow myself to a new benny."

"You need an overcoat, all right," admitted Cardona. "Well, Markham, it looks like the pinch was a bum bet."

"I'd have thought so, too," agreed the detective sergeant, "if it hadn't been for the way that Coffey took it. He's got something on his chest, Joe."

"Spill it, Coffey," ordered Cardona,

The dip eyed his inquisitor. He saw that he was on the verge of freedom. He knew also that Markham had his number. Coffey had had a reason for trying to duck the detective sergeant. After a moment's consideration, the dip spoke.

"I ain't no stoolie, Joe," he whined, "an' that's why I was leery when Markham grabbed me. There was somethin' I knew about – wasn't none of my business – an' I thought maybe he was wise. I didn't want to get shoved on no parade along with a bunch of other mugs. Maybe it wouldn't have been good for me."

"You'll be in the line-up if you don't talk."

"I ain't said I won't talk. Listen, Joe. I was down at the Black Ship, see? I was on the Erie – listenin' in to what some guys was sayin' – but not meanin' to? Get me?"

Cardona nodded.

"Well, they was talkin' about Finger Lurbin," resumed Coffey. "One guy figured Finger was in town. Said maybe Finger could have been in on that rub-out over in Jersey, It started like it was goin' to be a snatch – an' that was one of Finger's rackets.

"Then another guy spilled somethin' none of 'em knowed. Said Finger used to be partners with Duke Harley, who's runnin' some ritzy joint uptown. Well, Joe, figurin' that you nearly got bumped over in Jersey, I was afraid you'd have it in for any mug like me that knowed maybe Finger was mixed in it."

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CARDONA eyed the dip steadily. Coffey had steadied; his tone was truthful. Slowly, the detective handed the pickpocket his wallet and watch. Then Joe turned to Markham.

"Anybody see you pick up Coffey?" inquired Cardona.

Markham shook his head.

"All right, Coffey," ordered Cardona. "Scram. Ease him out by the side, Markham, so nobody will see him leaving. Just keep this to yourself, Coffey. It won't be healthy if you talk."

Coffey nodded as he went out with Markham. The pickpocket knew that silence was his only course; for he feared both the underworld and the law. Cardona had wisely counted on that fact. Knowing that Coffey had told his whole story, he had decided it best to leave the dip at large.

When Markham returned, he found Cardona ready with hat and overcoat. Joe had bundled away the warehouse reports. Markham nodded as Cardona beckoned toward the door. The detective sergeant needed no information regarding their destination. He knew that they were starting forth on a surprise visit to Duke Harley, at the Club Diabolo.

IT was close to eleven o'clock when Cardona and Markham left headquarters. At approximately half past, Duke Harley was seated at the desk in his office when the telephone bell rang. Answering the call, the night-club proprietor heard a harsh voice that he recognized as Finger Lurbin's.

Cautiously, Duke spoke. His end of the conversation told the entire story:

"All set, eh, Finger? Good... Sure, I'll put in a call there for you... Knife and Fork Restaurant... Ask for Jack... Tell him to be outside at ten minutes of twelve... Wait a minute, I'll write down the number..."

Duke reached for the piece of paper that was under the corner of his blotter. There, with the number that The Shadow had given him, he wrote Dorset 6-3811. Then: "Sure, I understand, Finger... It's a bum idea for you to stop anywhere and telephone, once you get started... Yeah, it's better not to tip Jack off for ten minutes yet... Sure, I'll remind him..."

Duke hung up the receiver. He strolled from the office and wandered into the night club, where midnight hilarity was just beginning. The proprietor held a short chat with the barkeeper; then walked back into his office. No one was in the hall when Duke went by; just seven minutes had elapsed since Finger's call.

Approaching the desk from in front, Duke pulled out the paper that bore the telephone numbers. He picked up the telephone, waited for a full minute; then raised the receiver and dialed the Dorset number. A cautious voice responded promptly.

"Fellow named Jack there?" queried Duke. Then, in return to an affirmative reply he added: "So you're Jack, eh? Well, fellow, the time's set... Ten minutes of twelve, on the dot... That's right, outside, you and your buddy, in your bus... And don't forget – follow the buggy with the green stop-lights..."

Duke's lips formed a half smile as the night-club proprietor hung up the telephone. Then the expression faded suddenly from the night club proprietor's face. Bluff in countenance, Duke swung about and dropped his right hand to the pocket of his tuxedo. His fingers froze as he looked toward the door.

Duke had sensed that someone had entered the room. He was right. While his own voice had been drowning sounds, an intruder had cautiously invaded Duke's office. The poker-faced proprietor was staring into the

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muzzle of a blunt-nosed revolver, held by a man whom he recognized: Detective Joe Cardona.

"All right, Markham." Cardona opened the door with his left hand as he spoke. Markham shouldered into view. "Frisk Harley while I keep him covered. Meanwhile, Harley, you can tell me what that phone call was about."

DUKE raised his hands but made no comment. Cardona advanced and picked up the piece of paper that lay on the desk. He grunted as he noted one number, the first that had been written.

"So you were calling the Black Ship, eh?" queried Joe. "Well, that fits in with what we're here about. But it's not the Black Ship that this fellow Jack is going to be outside. Cars don't hang around there. More likely it's this second number that you called last. What about it, Duke?"

Duke gave no response. Cardona picked up the telephone and put in a call to headquarters. He called for immediate information regarding the Dorset number. The man at the other end consulted a reversed telephone directory. He gave Joe the name of the Knife and Fork, together with the address.

Clicking the receiver, Cardona gained another connection and snapped emergency orders. Duke Harley glared helplessly as he heard the acting inspector's instructions.

"Patrol car to the Knife and Fork Restaurant," ordered Cardona. "Investigate car parked there; two men, one named Jack. Waiting to tail a car with green lights. Stop that car, too, after making arrest."

Hanging up, Cardona grinned at Duke. Pocketing his revolver, the acting inspector strode toward the door; there he stopped and gave a final statement to Markham.

"If Duke knows what's best for him," jeered Joe, "he'll do some talking. If he does, Markham, take it down. Keep him here until you hear from me, anyway. As far as I'm concerned, he's talked enough already."

"It's quarter of twelve. The boys will queer that bunch down by the Knife and Fork. I'll be there in a hurry, to find out what it's all about. Two of them in a car outside, ready to chase a buggy with green stop-lights. I haven't forgotten that, Harley."

Still grinning, Cardona left the Club Diabolo, confident that he had wrecked the hopes of crooks. Like Duke Harley, the ace had no inkling of the real identities of the men whose arrest he had ordered.

Cardona had instructed concentration upon the car parked outside the Knife and Fork, thinking that it threatened ill to an automobile that was due to pass that spot. He had mentioned stopping the car with the green stop-lights only as an afterthought.

Following a lucky break, Joe Cardona had entered the game just before the zero hour. Speeding a radio patrol to a hurried task, he was following up another stroke of luck – his chance overhearing of Duke Harley's second telephone call.

In these quick-timed efforts, Joe Cardona thought that he was blocking men of crime. Instead, he was putting a crimp into a well-planned counterstroke. Those whom Joe Cardona was out to get were agents of The Shadow – men upon whose aid the superfighter had depended in a battle soon due upon the Skyway!

CHAPTER XVIII. FIFTEEN MINUTES

IT was Hawkeye who had answered Duke Harley's call. A huddled, wizened-faced little man, Hawkeye had stationed himself in the rear corner of the hashhouse known as the Knife and Fork. He had been close beside the telephone; he had answered it almost unnoticed, the moment that it had begun to ring.

After that, Hawkeye had promptly shambled to the front counter and paid his check. From there he had shuffled to the street, to join a man who was waiting in a parked coupe: Cliff Marsland. A short interval, then Cliff had entered the Knife and Fork.

A clock on the wall showed quarter of twelve as Cliff dropped a nickel in the pay telephone. Husky and broad-shouldered, Cliff kept his back to the few patrons in the cafe as he dialed a number and gained Burbank on the wire.

"Eleven-fifty," informed Cliff in a muffled voice. "Zero from the Knife and Fork."

"Report received," came Burbank's quiet reply.

Cliff walked out to the street and boarded the car. Seated at the wheel, he started the motor and waited while Hawkeye, beside him, peered backward along the street. Three minutes passed; a taxi coasted to the curb a block behind. Hawkeye whispered to Cliff. "Moe's ready."

Cliff knew that Moe Shrevnitz must have been near by, awaiting a call from Burbank. He knew also that the same information must have been forwarded to The Shadow, wherever the chief might be. Then Cliff began to calculate.

Fifteen minutes was his guess regarding the time that it would take to reach the bridges on the Skyway. Eleven-fifty was zero; twelve-five would be the crucial minute.

A HISS from Hawkeye. Cliff peered from the window of the driver's seat. A car was swinging down the avenue, cutting over toward the curb. It looked like a patrol car. Worried, Cliff shoved his own car into gear. He started slowly forward.

A uniformed officer leaped from the car. Yanking a gun, he bounded forward; at that moment, another machine swung from a corner and sped past Cliff's coupe. As Cliff took a glance at it, the car jolted slightly with the application of brakes. Green stop-lights blinked from the rear of the large sedan.

Cliff shoved the accelerator pedal, just as the officer from the patrol car barked a command to halt. The coupe shot forward in pursuit of the sedan, as green stop-lights blinked a new signal from half a block ahead. The officer on the curb paused, about to fire after Cliff's car; then stopped as he heard a shout from his patrol companion.

The patrol car was already speeding to the chase. The cop with the revolver sprang to the running board as it passed. As the driver shifted from second into high, the officer with the revolver opened fire, blazing wild bullets after the coupe.

The sedan had swung from view a block ahead. A chase was on, Cliff and Hawkeye fleeing in the sedan, pursued by cops in the patrol car. Behind them came a third car, following; it was Moe's taxicab, with Harry Vincent as its passenger.

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Driving grimly, Cliff Marsland recognized his dilemma. His original duty had been to follow the sedan. To do that would be to spoil The Shadow's plans. Once the sedan had dipped into the Holland Tube with the coupe after it, the law would be on the trail. Moreover, Cliff, pursued by a patrol car, could not get by the toll officer at the entrance of the tube.

To abandon the original plan would be to shift a hopeless burden to The Shadow. Well did Cliff know that his chief was relying upon the aid of his agents. In those tense moments, Cliff struck upon the only scheme that seemed feasible. As he arrived at the nearest corner, he swung right.

He must escape the patrol car; that was most pressing at present. By leading the police away, he could still aid The Shadow's scheme and see to it that his chief gained aid. For Cliff knew that Moe's taxi could keep on. Two men, at least, would be on hand atop the Skyway.

Moreover, Cliff had the quick hope that he could elude the patrol car by a twisting course; that given a break he could bob back and head for the tube. It would mean that he and Hawkeye would arrive after Harry and Moe – provided, of course, that the wild effort worked.

Bullets whined close as Cliff managed the sharp turn. The patrol car was close; its siren was whining furiously. Cliff pressed the accelerator to the floorboard as he reached the side street. The coupe roared its response, speeding up in high gear. More shots sounded from in back. The cop on the running board of the patrol car was a poor shot.

BACK on the avenue, Moe Shrevnitz was keeping on. He was doing so in response to a quick order from Harry Vincent, in the back seat. Harry had guessed Cliff's game. The present job was to take after the sedan.

But Moe was due for trouble. As he shoved the brakes for the next corner, planning to veer left and approach the tubes, a policeman came dashing from the curb to commandeer the cab.

"Hold it, there!" roared the officer. "Pull over – I'm coming aboard!"

Moe looked back quickly at Harry, who gave a nod. The taxi driver slowed the cab, the cop leaped to the running board and gave a quick glance into the back. He saw Harry. "Better jump out, fellow –"

As Harry shook his head, Moe jerked the car into gear. He swung right and sped along a side street, the direction which the officer wanted, for the chase had gone that way. At the next avenue, Moe swung right again; as he neared the next side street, he veered suddenly to the left, without warning.

The officer had picked the running board on the right, to be ready with his revolver. He was looking straight ahead when Moe curved left. The swing sent him lunging out to the middle of the avenue. Harry had been leaning forward, ready to loose the cop's hold on the door. The action had not proven necessary.

The policeman sprawled unhurt in the middle of the crossing, his revolver clattering upon the asphalt. Moe had reduced speed; it was the suddenness of the jolt that had enabled him to get rid of this unwelcome passenger. As the cop sailed clear, Moe rammed the accelerator. The cab whizzed down the side street to the left.

Moe was grinning shrewdly. He would have a swell story, if ever called to task. This was the street that the patrol car had taken; his turn here had been a natural one, despite the fact that the cop, a bit bewildered, had decided to keep up the avenue. Moe could explain later that he had thought the officer was still aboard. Harry could testify the same.

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There was no sign of coupe or patrol car as they neared the next avenue. Moe swung left again, his purpose to travel south a street, then head back for the Holland Tube. But as they neared the crossing, a car cut in from the right, skidding straight across their path. Moe jammed the brakes as he recognized Cliff's coupe.

One tire flapped completely off its rim as the coupe climbed the curb. The patrol officer had winged it at long range, firing down the street from which the coupe had come. The siren of the patrol car was whining wildly as Moe made the crossing. As the taxi driver stopped, Cliff and Hawkeye came tumbling from their wrecked car.

Harry Vincent had thrust open the door. Cliff dived into the cab, Hawkeye just behind him. Moe stepped on the gas as the patrol car shrilled its arrival. As they turned the corner, the policemen saw the abandoned coupe and took up the chase after the speeding cab.

ANOTHER siren was blaring, coming in from the direction of the tube entrance. Police cars were converging; an attempt to gain the tunnel would be hopeless. Moe sped southward, his taxi showing amazing speed. He picked a street to the left and negotiated a quick turn that enabled him to increase the space between his vehicle and the pursuers.

In the exciting minutes that followed, Moe Shrevnitz displayed the driving skill that had caused The Shadow to choose him as an aid. Three patrol cars had entered the pursuit; they were taking varied courses to block off the fleeing cab. But Moe knew every crisscrossed thoroughfare of this downtown area. He whirled along beneath elevated structure; he yanked the cab about between the dangerous pillars.

He chose side streets that seemed to open as he aimed for them. He threaded a zigzag course that had his three passengers rolling, sprawling and floundering in the back seat. At last he reached the vicinity of Brooklyn Bridge and swung into a mass of traffic. Following northward, Moe cut over to another avenue and chose an open route.

In a dozen minutes, he had eluded his pursuers. Outdistancing them, Moe had lost himself in the shuffle and had come out again, free from the chase. His cab was just one of the thousands rolling uptown in Manhattan. His three passengers, settled in the back seat, were silent.

Moe had done all that was possible in the pinch. They had landed in too deep. The loss of the coupe did not matter; it was not registered by either Cliff or Hawkeye. Escape had been paramount in the emergency; The Shadow himself would have ordered it. But there was no chance now for these agents to aid The Shadow. A report to Burbank was all that could be done.

DOWN by the Knife and Fork, a fuming man was standing by the curb. It was Joe Cardona; the acting inspector had just arrived to learn that his plan had failed. The coupe had been spotted; its occupants had made a get-away by grabbing a taxicab.

Moreover, Joe had received a negative report regarding the sedan with the green stop-lights. The first patrol car had taken after the coupe; the others had not even seen the sedan. To add to Cardona's disgruntled feelings came an arrival whom the ace had not expected. It was Clyde Burke, stepping from a taxi.

"Hello, Joe," greeted the reporter. "Say – you pulled a fast one on me, didn't you? Telling me nothing was up –"

"Can it, Burke," interposed Cardona, angrily. "This is no time for a lot of gab. Some tough gorillas just staged a get-away, and I'd like to know who was in that other car. I'm betting now that it was the main outfit. Those mugs we chased were nothing more but decoys."

"What's the story, Joe?"

"Don't bother me. Say, Burke, how did you climb in on this, anyway?"

"We heard the row up in the newspaper office. Sirens – shots – the Classic office isn't far from here. That's why I chased out after the story."

Clyde said no more. He could have added that he had known what must have happened; for Burbank had informed the reporter of the situation at the Knife and Fork, prior to the excitement. Clyde was tensely anxious to get information.

"Ten minutes of twelve," growled Cardona. "That's the time the car with the green stop-lights went by. It's five after twelve now. Say – I'd like to know where that car went to. We chased the coupe and the taxi –"

"How about the. Holland Tube?" queried Clyde. "Maybe the car you're talking about beat it for Jersey. If it did, you ought to be able to nab it."

Cardona spun about, his dark eyes agleam. The detective whacked an approving hand upon Clyde's shoulders. Then Joe began to bark orders.

"Come On!" Joe nudged toward a police car. "We're going through to Jersey. Get the other side of the tube on the wire. Notify the Jersey patrol. Maybe that car's going out by the high level stretch.

"We're going in two cars – you can come along, Burke. Join up with the Jersey police when we hit the other side. Tell them to come in from the other end of the Skyway. Make it snappy. You, Leighton."

AS a detective scurried into the Knife and Fork to make the telephone calls, Cardona bounded into the first car. Clyde jumped in beside him. Officers joined the pair; others sprang aboard the second car. Sirens bellowed as the vehicles roared from the curb.

Clyde Burke had acted well in a pinch. He knew that The Shadow was bereft of aids. Clyde had given the suggestion that would bring the law into the game with promptness, coming as The Shadow had been willing it should, soon after the stroke of crime.

Yet Clyde was tense and unelated, for he could see the grim danger that circumstance had produced. Fifteen minutes had elapsed; the climax of crime was due. The Shadow, unaided, would have to deal with murderous men alone.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW SURROUNDED

WHILE wild chase had carried scouring patrol cars through lower Manhattan, all had been quiet along the Skyway. It was a light night for traffic; the four lanes of the high-level viaduct had been singularly clear of speeding cars. Yet one man, inward bound, had encountered an unusual obstacle.

That driver was James Dulkan. The long-faced merchant had signed his confession of complicity. Foy Zullick had returned him his big coupe; Dulkan had said good-bye to Peter Widpath and had started in from the Watchung Mountains.

Dulkan had followed a route as advised by Zullick. He had found driving easy until he had reached the Lincoln Highway. At that point, a large truck had started up from the side of the road. It had lumbered ahead of Dulkan to the airport; there it had turned left.

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It had been impossible to pass that truck. Not only was the old vehicle bulky; it was also dragging a trailer that equaled it in size. The truck was traveling at thirty–five miles an hour; it was staying half in each traffic lane. Dulkan could not blame the driver; he knew that the fellow was worrying about the sway of the trailer and wanted to keep well out from the curb.

But the situation was annoying, for Dulkan was anxious to reach New York and did not like the thirty–five mile an hour pace when he knew that he could do forty – and perhaps above – without being halted by patrollers on the high–level roadway.

As Dulkan recalled the Skyway regulations – and his surmise was correct – trucks were allowed to follow it only as far as the Skyway proper. Just before the Passaic River, there was a tunneled ramp in the center of the viaduct. That was where trucks were forced to descend; conspicuous signs acquainted the drivers with that fact.

So Dulkan had restrained his temper, thinking that the truck would soon be gone. He had noticed that there were few patrollers on the viaduct; that was natural, since traffic was so light. But when the truck reached that last exit, Dulkan had found cause to fume.

INSTEAD Of descending by the ramp, the truck and its trailer had taken the lane to the right. Following the curve, the driver of the truck was disobeying regulations. He was deliberately routing himself over the Skyway.

The truck was slowing on the incline as it neared the Passaic, first of the two rivers. Dulkan, noting that it would still be difficult to pass the swaying trailer, looked from the window of his coupe in hope of spying a motorcycle patrolman. He saw none; moreover, he noticed that no other cars were close to him.

The nearest lights of automobiles were far behind, almost back by the turn at the airport. Evidently some other vehicles were clogging traffic, an oddity on this night when few drivers were coming into New York.

The truck rumbled beneath the massive girders of the Passaic Bridge, Dulkan keeping a reasonable distance behind it. The merchant chuckled half sourly, half hopefully. He felt sure that when the truck reached the other end of the high–level Skyway, it would be spotted and the driver arrested. He decided that he would stop and give his testimony as to the driver's road–hogging methods.

Distance widened as the truck took the easy, downward dip between the bridges. Dulkan thought for a moment of passing it; then noted a troublesome spot in the center of the road. It was the rail that fenced off another ramp, coming up into the center of the Skyway, a little more than midway between the two immense bridges.

Dulkan, like many who travel the Skyway, had forgotten about the existence of that ramp. He had fancied that the stretch was absolutely clear along the mile space between the rivers. He realized now that he had seen the ramp before.

It opened westward and served as an exit for westbound traffic as well as an entrance for eastbound. Dulkan, going east, was encountering the point of the V–shaped fence.

The truck passed the ramp. It took the upgrade to the bridge across the Hackensack. Dulkan went by the ramp also, slowing the speed of his car, for the truck, veering oddly to the left, was blocking the Skyway worse than it had before. Moreover, it was stopping. Dulkan brought his coupe to a halt and stared in puzzlement as the truck stopped sharply, just as it reached the Hackensack bridge.

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UP ahead, a hard-faced driver was peering from the wheel of the truck. Another rowdy was beside him. The driver had the truck in gear, the front wheels were swung to the left so that he could shove the big vehicle straight across the road if occasion demanded. But these two were not the only men aboard.

There were others, at the rear of the truck. They were yanking at the big pin that held the trailer. The connection came loose. Slowly, the trailer slid backward. A man aboard it cut away a rope and yanked a lever. As curtained sides flapped loose, a motor chugged beneath the front of the trailer. The loosened vehicle began to swing about. Dulkan, at the wheel of his car, saw it coast, then jolt backward as it skidded down the slope. The lights from railings revealed the contents of the transformed trailer.

It was a machine of death. Motorized to give it impetus, the trailer was also equipped with eccentric wheels, a fact which had accounted for its constant swaying while in tow of the truck. That was why it skidded about as it came, floundering from one curb to the other, covering the full width of the Skyway.

That was not all. The contents of the bulking trailer formed the sight that made Dulkan gasp, aghast. Dropped curtains had revealed a load of heavy, crushed stone, bulging against tipsy posts and loosened cross-braces that threatened to collapse once the trailer crashed.

A mighty Jagannath was swaying down upon a doomed car – Dulkan's coupe. Frozen at the wheel, the startled merchant had been singled as a victim for an overwhelming death.

Dulkan had no chance to swing about and flee; the crashing monstrosity would arrive too soon. Nor could leaping save him while that huge device was still in motion. He would be overtaken before his legs could carry him from its path.

Up ahead, a sedan, westward bound, had swung into view upon the Hackensack bridge. It was the car with the green stop-light. Finger Lurbin driving with another thug beside him. As the sedan stopped beside the truck, the men on the bridge scurried to join it. The fake truck driver, the men who had loosed the trailer – all were prepared to make their get-away with Finger.

Crime had struck on schedule, timed to the exact minute. Men of murder were on hand to witness the death of James Dulkan, hopeless in the path of that descending load of stone. His motor stalled in his excitement; his hands trembling as they tried vainly to open a door of the coupe, Dulkan seemed totally doomed.

But crooks, like their victim, had forgotten that one avenue in the center of the Skyway. That ramp led up from Kearny, the district between the Passaic and the Hackensack.

Though Dulkan was unable to wheel his car about and seek the ramp as an exit to safety, the incoming incline was still destined to serve him. As the wheeling trailer rumbled with a mammoth skid, the wail of a car in gear came from that opening in the center of the viaduct.

OUT from the depths sped a powerful coupe, driving upward at forced speed. Behind its wheel was a blackened shape that drove with fury, a figure invisible in the confines of the car. Grim in the face of disaster, The Shadow, too, had arrived on timely schedule for this important move.

Wisely had he kept from the Skyway, to avoid the observation of spying crooks. He was making his entrance at the crucial moment, timing his arrival to a perfect estimate after receiving a call from Burbank at a waiting spot below the Skyway.

The Shadow had expected a mass attack of murderers. Instead, he came hurtling into the path of the death that the killers had prepared for Dulkan. As his car whizzed past the merchant's stalled coupe, The Shadow

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saw the stone-laden trailer performing the last of its eccentric skids.

The truck was wheeling toward the high curbing at The Shadow's left. Half spinning, it was due to jounce back and pitch straight toward Dulkan's coupe, no more than fifty feet from its oncoming path. Its work would be done within brief seconds, at the speed which the trailer had gained.

Blazing eyes saw the situation in an instant. His own car traveling at forty-five, The Shadow possessed the opportunity to cover the intervening space between himself and the trailer before it made that last drive against the curb on the left. Already chunks of stone had fallen with each jar; those blocks of evidence gave The Shadow knowledge of what he could accomplish.

Straight for the twisting trailer. The Shadow, too, was aiming for the curb. His hand flung the right door open; as his car drove head on for the trailer, The Shadow dived from the driver's seat. The gear-shift lever was forward; it offered no obstruction. Moreover, the fact that the car was in second gear served as additional service to The Shadow's leap.

The accelerator pedal bobbed up as The Shadow's foot deserted it. In gear and on the climb, the motor responded like a brake. The speed of the car was lessening as The Shadow's cloaked form emerged headlong from the opened door. Yet the coupe still possessed the force of a battering ram as it covered the last twenty feet between its bumper and the trailer.

The impact was amazing. As prelude, The Shadow's diving form struck the surface of the Skyway and rolled over in acrobatic fashion. At the same instant the lunging car rammed the hurtling trailer at an angle as the two vehicles reached the curb. What the car lacked in size and weight, it possessed in speed and impetus.

The trailer could not have toppled from its own force when it struck the curb; but the smash of The Shadow's car gave it the required urge. The coupe mashed as completely as if it had struck a stone wall; the trailer, moving, yielded despite its weight.

STOPPED dead by the shattered car, the massive vehicle careened. Balanced on two wheels it wavered; beneath its bulk, The Shadow lay crouching, barely recovered from his fall. Had the big trailer resisted the impact; had it come back to all four wheels, it would have sprayed blocks of stone upon this being who had dared molest its course.

But The Shadow's quick-gauged estimate had been a good one. The wrecking of his car had accomplished what he hoped. As the trailer balanced over the curb, its loose-packed burden shifted in the right direction. Stays burst; a deluge of rock smashed down upon the Skyway rail. Huge steel guards had been built to stop the wildest driven car. But they could not resist this downpour of loosed tonnage. Battering blocks crashed a pathway through the thick-set rail. Carried along with the huge release, the trailer clattered sidewise over the curb.

A flood of pouring stone roared from the Skyway level. The trailer, overturning, struck the opening that the rock had cleared. It turned turtle, like a toy tossed from a child's haphazard hand. Its lowest layer of stone followed the torrent that had ruined the guard rail; then, like an unwilling monster, the trailer itself went over the edge.

Wheels still spinning from their motor, the trailer plunged downward to the Kearny flats. A terrific crash announced its arrival upon the shattering heap of stone that had once formed the death machine's own contents. All that remained within the flattened guardrail was the pitifully mashed ruin of The Shadow's car. That and a few chunks of stone that lay just above the shattered curb.

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The Shadow had conquered the Jagannath. With a supreme endeavor, he had prevented death upon the Skyway by a counter-drive against the killing messenger that crooks had launched. No longer in the danger zone that he had eliminated, The Shadow came to his feet with a mocking cry of defiant triumph.

He had disposed of a mighty instrument designed for cruel slaughter. He had saved James Dulkan, intended victim of the killers who had set loose that driving monster. The Shadow was ready to deal with the evil perpetrators whose method he had thwarted.

CHAPTER XX. DOUBLE BATTLE

JAMES DULKIN was staring, stupefied, from his coupe. His dull eyes saw that cloaked figure on the Skyway. His ears could catch the unreal peal of The Shadow's challenging mirth. Looking beyond; the merchant could see the stalled truck; beside it the glaring headlights of a stopped sedan.

Men of crime still lingered; headed toward their prey. But blocking them was the same fierce fighter whose craft had foiled them once. The Shadow had pitted the frail structure of his automobile against the towering bulk of the death-designed trailer. He had won; now, a lone fighter, he was ready to match his prowess against the strength of an entire crew.

Like Dulkan, crooks were stunned. They knew that odds meant nothing to The Shadow. For a moment, their thoughts were those of fear. Then came the growled assurance of their leader, Finger Lurbin.

"We're here to get Dulkan," snarled Finger. "To rub him out anyway, if the trailer flivved. An' we're figuring for a get-away, ain't we? An' not back through New York, where the coppers nailed our cover-up crew. Well – what's stopping us?"

"The Shadow," protested a henchman. "That's him – it couldn't be no other!"

"Yeah?" jeered Finger. "Well, he goes first. Gats ready, you bimboes. We're going."

Finger drove the sedan in gear. The car jolted forward as thugs flourished their revolvers. Pulling the lever into high gear, Finger coolly yanked forth a gun of his own, ready to join in the coming fray. Stepping on the accelerator, he sped the sedan straight forward toward that lone figure on the Skyway.

THE SHADOW had produced two automatics. Ready with raised weapons, he stared beyond the driving car. He had expected to see two others – a coupe and a taxi – bringing in the agents upon whom he had counted. No headlights gleamed from beneath the blackened outline of the Hackensack bridge.

The Shadow's laugh rose fiercely above the roar of the oncoming motor. As thugs fired wild, opening shots, leaning from the windows of the sedan, The Shadow's leveled automatics flashed their answer, each with deliberate aim.

Simultaneously the sedan's headlamps shattered. The Shadow had picked those glaring targets for his first bullets. His perfect aim gained its result. The sedan swerved as Finger Lurbin emitted a hoarse oath. No longer did thuggish marksmen have their cloaked enemy in a spotlight.

Instead, they saw The Shadow only by the lights along the Skyway. The sudden contrast showed him as an evasive, whirling figure, sweeping toward the curb beyond the opening that the crashed trailer had cleaved in the rail

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Finger Lurbin, still hoping to run down The Shadow, responded instinctively by jolting the wheel to the right. The Shadow had expected that act; he had purposely stayed his fire. But as the sedan veered, he opened a ripping volley with one automatic, his target the tire of the right, front wheel.

The tire flattened as the bullets ploughed it. The car swung from Finger's control. Wild shouts from frenzied mobsters. Their car was hurtling straight for that broad gap in the Skyway rail.

It was unlikely that the sedan would climb the curb; but that fact did not occur to the maddened occupants – not even to Finger Lurbin. As their leader jammed the brakes, his henchmen thrust open doors and dived out in hope of safety. As they came to hands and knees, they aimed wildly for The Shadow. Automatics volleyed while fingers were seeking revolver triggers.

Two thugs sprawled wounded. They were the ones on the near side of the sedan, which had twisted about as Finger stopped it. A crook bobbed up from behind the hood of the sedan; The Shadow's next shot dropped the man while he was aiming. He was the torpedo who had come with Finger.

Three were left, all beyond the sedan. That spot of security was not sufficient. Yellow in the pinch, no longer hopeful of a get-away in the sedan, these three who had left the truck turned heel and fled, dashing back up the slope toward the bridge that they had left.

The Shadow's next shots quickened the scurry of those rats. Fight was gone from them; The Shadow was willing to let them flee. They would find no lurking spots upon the bridge. Already distant sirens were sounding the approach of troopers from the inner end of the Skyway.

The Shadow had wheeled away from the curb. Swinging across the traffic lanes, he was looking for Finger Lurbin. He knew that the chief foeman was still in the fight. Finger had dropped low in the front seat when his crew had bolted.

The door on the left was closed. No head or hand appeared there. The Shadow stopped short; he looked beyond the front of the stalled sedan. His hunch was a timely one. It located Finger Lurbin.

Crouching low, the dangerous crook had slipped through the door which his torpedo had opened on the right. He was coming over the hood, aiming for The Shadow.

A CLOAKED form whirled. An automatic pumped quick shots that skimmed the polished hood of the sedan, just as a revolver spoke twice from Finger's fist. Two bullets whistled through the folds of The Shadow's cloak as it flung wide from his turning body.

But Finger Lurbin gained no such respite. Snarling, crippled by The Shadow's quick shots, he staggered backward to the curb. There, with an effort, he came up beside the broken rail.

Towering, with left hand clutched against his chest, Finger aimed again, his frenzy carrying him to superhuman effort. Had he loosed another shot, it would have clipped The Shadow, for the cloaked marksman was plainly outlined against a rail light on the other side. But Finger gained no opportunity. The Shadow beat him to the final shot.

An automatic spoke its just message. Finger Lurbin blurted a sharp cry. Staggering backward, he dropped his revolver and clutched both hands to his chest. Slumping, the crook rolled to the edge by the broken rail; there his hands clawed wildly for a hold that they could not clutch.

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Slipping backward, Finger sprawled from the brink. His body spun like a tiny pinwheel as it whirled to the stony bed upon the flats.

Motorcycles had reached the bridge; this was the vanguard of the law. Troopers were stopping, to level revolvers at the surrendering trio who had fled The Shadow's wrath. Turning away. The Shadow saw the glare of approaching headlights, driving down from the westward bridge across the Passaic.

JAMES DULKIN had seen them also. Frantically, the merchant had leaped from his coupe. He was running toward The Shadow, crying out his dread. Instinctively, Dulkan had guessed the meaning of those oncoming cars. They were the ones that had been following so far behind. Dulkan knew that they must mean belated pursuers.

The Shadow knew it also. As Dulkan scurried up the incline, The Shadow swept forward with swift stride. He dashed past the coupe; he reached the rail of the ramp by which he had reached the Skyway. Dropping behind the steel barricade, he opened fire on the first car.

Wild shots answered. Bullets flattened against steel posts. Cowering crooks emerged from their car, only to hear the fierce burst of The Shadow's challenging laugh. Too late did they realize the identity of their foe. They had come on because they had not seen Finger heading outward.

Ruffians dropped as The Shadow's quick shots clipped them. Writhing wounded on the bridge, they served as examples of what would happen to the others. Two men dived beyond the car and dashed back to a second automobile that had stopped many yards behind. Out of range, they clambered aboard. The car swung about and sped away.

Soup Ramsted was one of those who had fled from the first car. In charge of the inbound cars, he had been deputed to head the reserves. With chaos on the Skyway, Soup chose flight. His guess was not a bad one. Already sirens were raising tumult from the direction of the airport.

Madly, Soup and his henchmen were heading back across the Passaic, to reach a westbound exit just beyond the bridge before the summoned police could cut them off.

Dulkan was still running for the Hackensack bridge. He could see the troopers; he wanted their protection. The Shadow, lingering, saw the glare of motorcycle lights bob up from beneath the superstructure that towered over the Passaic.

Soup's band had made a lucky getaway. Perhaps some troopers had pursued them; but others were certainly coming on. New motorcycles were arriving from the east; two groups were converging toward The Shadow. From now on, the law would hold this area where strife had ended. The Shadow had other tasks to consider. The intended victim saved, there was no need to linger.

The Shadow sprang to Dulkan's coupe. He had it in reverse as he pressed the starter. He swung the car backward; then forward. With a burst of speed, he shot the car straight down the center ramp of Kearny. The taillight blinked from the view of approaching men on motorcycles.

As he arrived, so did The Shadow leave, by that center ramp that he had chosen as his avenue of action. He had come in one car; he was leaving in another. He had come to conquer crooks and leave the law in charge. He had succeeded.

UP from the ramp came the last echoes of a departing laugh; a cry of mirth that carried a note of triumph. Though he had gained no new trail, The Shadow had deprived villains of their victim. With an informant

saved and in their hands, the law could learn which way to move.

State troopers made no chase of that departing car. It had left at terrific speed; there was no sign of it when they reached the ramp. Moreover they knew – without the need of telling – that the fighter in that car had battled and won for right.

Dulkin's blurted statements; the gaping space along the rail; the surrender of three cringing crooks – those factors ended guesswork.

Victory for The Shadow meant triumph for the law. The hardest thrust of crime had been stopped and broken. Yet a supercrook was still at large. Other victims might be in his grasp. The law would learn; the law would move. If possible, The Shadow would move also.

After that tremendous battle atop the skyway, any task to come would lie within the range of possibility. For The Shadow, bound from a scene of triumph, had become supreme.

CHAPTER XXI. THE CAPTURE

A PANTING man was scrambling up a narrow path. Stumbling over underbrush, he faltered; then regained his footing. He blinked a flashlight, then continued onward. After him followed others. The leader stopped as he struck the flooring of a veranda. He managed a laugh as he noted the glow of dull windows.

The laugh was Soup Ramsted's. The dynamiter paused for breath then blinked his flashlight on a watch that he had drawn from his pocket. The time was half past one. Soup had returned to the lodge in the Watchung Mountains.

Faint winds produced subdued whistles. Storms had passed; though the air was still, a calmness was settling over the lonely retreat. Soup showed confidence in his voice as he growled to his men.

"Come in with me, you fellows," he ordered. "Foy's liable to be sore when he hears how things turned out. Back me up in my story. Get it?"

Affirmative growls from the others. One man flashed a light along the veranda. Soup snatched it from the henchman's hand. His tone was angry.

"No glims," he reminded. "Use your brains, all of you. There's nobody around here, Foy is doing duty himself tonight. He's watching those two mugs on his own."

SOUP opened the door and strode into the living room of the lodge. Zullick was seated at the fireplace; he looked up puzzled at the entrance of several men. A glower showed on the murderer's face; but when Zullick spoke, he used his acquired purr.

"Well, well," he remarked smoothly. "Bringing them all in, eh, Soup? That's a new wrinkle. Where's the others? Did they take it on the lam along with Finger?"

"These are all that's left," returned Soup abruptly. "The breaks went against us, Foy."

Zullick came angrily to his feet. He stared at his lieutenant, expecting an explanation. Soup gave it.

"The Shadow muscled in," stated the lieutenant, uneasily. "Took a crack at Finger and his outfit – after they'd cut loose the trailer that I'd sent in from Trenton."

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"And where were you?"

"Laying back, like I was supposed to be. We had the two cars side by side, so's to block off other cars; but there weren't any coming."

"So you let The shadow shoot it out with Finger?"

"Yeah. But we didn't know it at the time. It was when Finger didn't come along that we breezed up to learn the lay. That's when The Shadow gunned for us."

"You saw him? The Shadow?"

"We didn't lamp him; but we heard him. He handed us the ha-ha and opened up with those gats of his. Sharpshooters from behind some steel pillars. We had to scam."

"Yellow, eh?"

"The cops was on us, Foy. We only had time for a get-away. The Shadow had crippled one buggy – we couldn't take no chances."

Mumbles of approval came from Soup's companions. Zullick eyed the hard faces; then forgot his suave tone as he rasped a sharp question.

"What about Dulkan?" demanded the crook. "Finger got him all right? Pulled the rub-out, even with The Shadow there?"

"Sure," returned Soup, with an attempt at bravado. "Finger must have plugged Dulkan. That's why The Shadow was so tough. Trying to get even –"

"Wait a minute," interposed Zullick. "What about the trailer? Did it ride down on Dulkan?"

"It must have. We saw the truck, way up on the Hackensack bridge, when we was coming across the Passaic. The trailer wasn't on it. There was a car wrecked at the edge of the viaduct. Looked like the trailer must have rammed it. Of course, it was from a distance that we saw it –"

"Where was the trailer?"

"Must have gone through the fence. Big hole there past the busted car. Then there was another bus, sitting in the middle of the road"

"Wrecked?"

"No. Didn't look it."

"Which was Dulkan's car?"

"I figured the one that had been in the smash. Both of the cars were coupes, though –"

A SNARL was Zullick's final interruption. The murderer had heard enough. Glowering at Soup and the others, Zullick issued a torrent of condemnatory words.

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"Palookas, the pack of you," stormed the wolfish crook. "You don't get close enough to see anything. You know the job's been queered; yet you take it for granted that Dulkan was rubbed out. What if he's still alive? Where do we stand?"

"We had to beat it, Foy," pleaded Soup, while his companions stood silent. "We made a get-away in time to shake the cops. I was foxy enough not to come straight here. I went clear past the hills and doubled back through the valley after I was sure nobody was tailing us."

"What's this you're telling me?" demanded Zullick. "You didn't come straight here?"

"Sure not, Foy. Dulkan wasn't losing no time going into the city. When I spotted him on the express highway, I put in that call to Finger; then took after Dulkan, knowing the truck would be on the look-out. But it was a grind catching up."

"What time did you tell Finger to hit the Skyway?"

"Twelve-five. I figured his speed from where he passed us on the express highway. The truck was posted to hold him back. Finger must have got there, all right, Foy. Even if the trailer didn't crack Dulkan's buggy, you can bet that Finger chopped the guy down."

"With The Shadow there? Listen, you dumbbell, suppose Dulkan wasn't bumped! Don't you get it? He'll be bringing the coppers here!"

"I figured that, Foy. I was thinking of heading straight here; but I was worried for fear somebody was close to us. That's why I cut around the mountains. I wasn't counting on any trouble from Dulkan, anyhow. You've got the signed paper. Dulkan would be afraid to squawk."

Foy Zullick was shaking both fists, maddened to a heat of fury. The murderer could no longer restrain his intensity. Oaths spat from his ugly lips as he cursed his lieutenant's folly.

"How do you know Dulkan won't squawk?" stormed Zullick. "Now that he knows we tried to bump him, things are different. He's been on the spot, Dulkan has. He can swear that signature of his is phony – or that he signed the paper under threat – and the bulls will believe him. Particularly if he says we put on the heat."

"He'll be thinking of Widpath, too. Telling them that Widpath's in a jam and needs to be helped out of it. Meanwhile, you've been chasing all around the county. Say – they've had an hour to listen to Dulkan and get on the move besides! They're likely to be in here any minute!"

"We'd better take it on the lam, Foy," suggested Soup, weakly. "Bump Widpath and that chauffeur of his, or snatch them along with us. Say" – hoping to defend his own mistakes, Soup shot a criticism at Zullick – "are you sure you've still got Widpath and the other bozo? You've been here alone, Foy – that window of theirs opens out to the veranda."

"I've got both of them," snarled Zullick. "They still think there's watchers posted outside. I'm getting the pair of them right now, to drag them along with us." He turned toward Widpath's door but stopped as he reached for the knob.

"Meanwhile, you sap, do something!" Zullick's tone was hoarse with fury. "Get outside – talk to any of the mugs you posted down the path! See if they've spotted anyone!"

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"I didn't leave anybody down there," protested Soup. "This is all of us that's left, Foy. I told you that already –"

Soup broke off as Zullick bounded away from Widpath's door. Angrily, Zullick dashed across the living room and grabbed the knob of the outer door. He faced the crew that stood in front of the fireplace.

"Outside, all of you!" shouted Zullick. "Beat it down where we keep the cars! Get ready while I bring Widpath and Burrett!"

ZULLICK was drawing a revolver as he spoke. He turned the doorknob as he delivered furious epithets. Then, snarling, he added:

"You've shown yourself a dim-wit, Soup! Get busy and make up for your dumbness! Nobody outside – say, the cops could be here already, without our even guessing it! Maybe they're driving up the hill with Dulkan showing them the way. Get going – be ready to shoot it out with anyone you see –"

Zullick had opened the door. He was still facing his henchmen. He stopped his command abruptly as he saw a change come over the group. Hands had already started for gats, copying Zullick's example. Those hands had stopped; they were rising mechanically while faces stared sullenly.

Zullick swung toward the door, snarling as he aimed his revolver. Dropping back, he let the weapon fall as he, too, shoved his hands upward. There was no chance for fight. Crooks had been trapped in their lair.

Bristling from the doorway was a quartet of revolvers; the weapons were held by Joe Cardona and a trio of New Jersey troopers. The law had done what Foy Zullick had feared. James Dulkan had told of Peter Widpath's plight. Rescuers had arrived; they had captured the lodge by surprise.

CHAPTER XXII. THE FINAL TRIUMPH

"NO use, Zullick."

Joe Cardona delivered the ultimatum as he shouldered in through that doorway. Beside him was a lieutenant of New Jersey troopers; behind them a pair of State policemen. The four spread out; motioning with their revolvers they forced Zullick and the other crooks to line up in surrender along the walls.

The State officer took charge. This was his job, although he had allowed Cardona equal share in staging the surprise arrival. A fifth man had entered behind the others, brought in by the call that all was well. This was James Dulkan, brought to identify all prisoners.

"The building is surrounded," spoke the State police lieutenant. "If you try a break for it, my men will shoot to kill."

Like Cardona, the officer addressed his remarks to Zullick. Dulkan had given a good description of the murderer. There was no mistaking that wolf-faced rogue.

"Where's Widpath?"

Zullick heard the next demand. He shrugged his shoulders; then nudged an uplifted thumb toward the door that he had first approached.

"In there," informed the crook, "with his chauffeur. They're guests – not prisoners."

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A trooper strode across and opened the door. He spied two haggard-faced men and beckoned. Peter Widpath came out into the living room, followed by Burrett. The gray-haired man smiled happily as he saw Dulkan with the officers. Burrett, blocky and droop-faced, managed to give a pleased grin.

Dulkan nodded to the troopers, to indicate that these were the men whom they had come to rescue. The uniformed lieutenant was prompt with explanation.

"Mr. Widpath," he stated, "a few nights ago, a man named Hosea Selger was killed on the Skyway while driving into New York. Tonight, an attempt at murder was made on James Dulkan. He told us that both he and Selger had been prisoners here."

"That is correct," acknowledged Widpath. "We were held by this man, Foy Zullick, who is a self-admitted murderer. Zullick is responsible for the deaths of Seton Hylap and Gifford Barbridge."

"These men with him?"

"Are former members of a blasting crew that worked for the K and R Railroad. Zullick enlisted them to serve him in crime. They were under the command of Soup Ramsted, the prisoner beyond the fireplace."

There was a pause; then Widpath advanced toward the uniformed lieutenant. With a gleam of satisfaction on his face, Widpath spoke again.

"I have proof of their perfidy," he announced. "Documentary evidence which these scoundrels did not know was in my possession. I have been holding it in hope that I could deliver it to the law."

From his inside pocket, Widpath produced a long envelope. He handed it to the officer; then stepped back. Instructing the troopers to keep the prisoners covered, the police lieutenant opened the envelope and drew forth a wad of folded papers. As he uncreased the documents, Joe Cardona stepped forward to view them.

"These papers are blank!"

As he ejaculated the words, the officer looked up. At that instant, he heard a fierce, triumphant snarl. The troopers behind him became rigid, unable to move despite the fact that they held loaded revolvers.

TWO men had acted as one: Widpath and Burrett. Stepping back to rejoin his chauffeur, Widpath had yanked a gleaming .38 while Burrett had produced a similar weapon. They were aiming straight for the armed pair of troopers; and their guns also covered Cardona and the Jersey lieutenant, caught flat-footed in the foreground.

Only Dulkan was out of range; but the astonished merchant was too startled to make a move. Widpath, his face betraying venom, was brisk with a snarled command. The troopers let their revolvers clatter, knowing that they had no chance. Their lieutenant dropped his lowered gun; Cardona did the same.

"Hold it, chief," purred Zullick, lowering his arms and stooping to pick up his revolver. "There's a bunch of cops outside. They'll barge in here if they hear a blow-off. Better make a deal with these mugs before we start any fireworks.

"We shall let Dulkan talk," decided Widpath, in biting tones. "Come, Dulkan, speak. We know that you were rescued. You can admit that part of it. What did you tell the police?"

"I – I told them to come here," stammered Dulkan, his voice weak and pitiful. "I trusted you, Widpath; I – I thought you were in danger. I was taken to a State patrol headquarters. That's where – where I talked."

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"To whom?"

"To – to the lieutenant; and to Cardona. There was a reporter there, too, from the New York Classic. His name – I think – was Burke."

"Where is he now?"

"He went back into New York, to write a story about the fight on the Skyway. He had to go in order to get it into the newspaper. But – well, he knew we were coming here."

"You arranged this expedition?"

"I came to show the way. We were careful coming up the road. We were all on foot; and I pointed out the path when we reached it."

"How many troopers are outside?"

"A dozen – all back in the woods watching. They – I told them that maybe guards would be on the veranda."

Widpath delivered an insidious chuckle. While he, Burrett and Zullick still covered their quickly taken prisoners, Widpath calmed his tone and spoke in dry, careful words.

"Zullick has suggested that we make terms," stated Widpath. "In order that we do so, I must explain the circumstances. Three of us: Selger; you, Dulkan; and myself were a group that expected to acquire the K and R Railroad through our proxy holdings in Altamont Power.

"Zullick notified me privately that murder might be necessary. I told him to proceed with it in case of emergency; that if he chose to commit crime, I would deal with my squeamish associates.

"Zullick chose murder. We followed by holding a conference here. Zullick handled it for me, treating me as one of the trio, simply to curb all doubts. It was quite apparent that Selger was undesirable; and you also, Dulkan. So Zullick and I, in private conference, arranged to dispose of the two of you."

WIDPATH paused. His face showed a reminiscent expression, tinged with evil. His voice was cutting in its harshness as he resumed his discourse.

"Signed confessions of complicity!" snorted the self-admitted master of crime. "Bah! What would they have meant with their signers still living to blame Zullick as the actual murderer?"

"You failed to see that, Dulkan, just as Selger did. Perhaps, to put it the other way about, you did see that the confessions lacked value, because both of you expected to live. But there was something that you failed utterly to realize: That was Zullick's inability to handle the sale of the K and R Railway should he be compelled to do so if we refused.

"Only one of us could do that, Dulkan. Zullick was no financier, no dealer in big business. He was a bluffer, though, and he fooled you as I thought he would. Those confessions could not serve him, a murderer; but they were all that I needed to proceed and reap full profits."

Again Widpath paused. Understanding was dawning on Dulkan's terrified face. Cardona and the State policemen were grasping the elements of the scheme, despite the fact that they lacked knowledge of the details.

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"With you and Selger gone, Dulkan," remarked Widpath, "I alone would have access to the straw names of shareholders in Altamont Power. I could swing the entire sale of K and R to the Mountain Pacific. All profits would be mine.

"Did I say 'would be'?" Widpath chuckled. "I should have said 'will be'; for my game is still safe. Should I be subjected to investigation later, I shall let those confessions come to light through some unsuspected source.

"It will never be known that I was associated with Hosea Selger and James Dulkan. They will be marked as men whom I blocked in a transaction; they will be the ones upon whom the law will place the charge of hiring murderers when they saw a chance for millions fading.

"I do not need all the proxies that I now hold. I shall leave some planted, to be pinned on my supposed rivals, Selger and Dulkan, should I be forced to bring the confessions into light. But I doubt that such heroics will ever be necessary.

"Full profit will be mine. I shall pay off these henchmen who have supported me. You, Zullick and Ramsted, with the men who have served you. You also, Burrett."

Foy Zullick's wolfish face showed a troubled look. The murderer spoke as Widpath paused.

"Don't tell them too much, chief," purred Zullick. "Maybe you've done it already. How can you make terms, with what you've said?"

"Terms?" Widpath's query showed sarcasm. "Why make terms, Zullick? There is only one course – a break for safety by you and your companions. There are less than a dozen men outside. They are scattered; and they think that they will have none to handle except stragglers.

"Drive through them. Gain the cars and take to flight. Some of you may fall; but the risk is worth it. Remember, Zullick, your own share will be great; as for your men, they will gain half a million to divide among them.

"Large portions each" – Widpath was smiling dryly as he glanced at Soup and the others – "for there are but few remaining to share. The stake is worth the battle, Zullick."

FOY ZULLICK nodded as he gave a wolfish grin. The others grunted their willingness for conflict. Then Zullick spoke a quick question.

"What about you and Burrett, chief?"

"We shall remain here," replied Widpath, calmly. "To be rescued by the troopers who escape your bullets. Some of them will probably survive your drive."

"But what about these mugs?" Zullick spoke savagely as he indicated the prisoners. "You've told them the works, chief. They'll squawk – unless you –"

Zullick paused. His grin was fiendish. The murderer saw the answer; but Widpath proceeded to give it aloud for the benefit of Zullick's henchmen.

"The fight will begin here," explained the gray-haired chief of crime. "It will be quick and effective, with no survivors among those who represent the law. Which, I may mention, include James Dulkan."

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The gray-haired fiend had delivered his final terms. To Joe Cardona and the troopers, it meant one lone chance; to dive for their guns and go down shooting. That, despite the fact that Widpath had been calculating when he had said that there would be no survivors.

Widpath saw the sudden tension that gripped the helpless prisoners. He knew that a wild break was due to start; he was prepared to end it as it budded. In a quick, sharp tone of command, the crook snapped the word:

"Prepare!"

At that instant, a startling sound broke free in weird crescendo. Above the supercrook's sharp order rose a burst of strident mockery that chilled the rogues who heard it.

Peter Widpath, swinging toward the direction from which the laugh had issued, was the first to view its author. The supercrook stared toward the room wherein he and Burrett had faked imprisonment.

On the threshold stood The Shadow, his cloak a flowing shroud. From beneath his hat-brim gazed eyes burned with challenge. Looming from his gloved fists were mammoth automatics, their muzzles cannonlike as they covered startled crooks.

The Shadow had arrived to claim the final triumph.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SHADOW REWARDS

INTO the last scene had stepped The Shadow, as weirdly present as before. As he had been on the Skyway to prevent the scheduled murder, so was he here to stop wholesale slaughter.

Systematized method had marked The Shadow's quest. Departing the Skyway, he had headed westward, knowing that he must take that direction to find the headquarters of crime. Reaching a secluded New Jersey town, The Shadow had contacted Burbank. He had learned that Clyde Burke had called shortly before.

The reporter had served his chief well. Once he had heard James Dulkan's statement to the State police, Clyde had faked a reason for returning to New York. He had told Joe Cardona that he wanted to make the last edition with a story of the Skyway fray.

Actually, Clyde had wanted to relay word to Burbank. He had heard Dulkan locate the lodge in the Watchungs. He knew where the law was heading. That news reached The Shadow, nearer the goal than the starting State police. The Shadow had set forth, to arrive ahead of the invading squad of State officers.

Finding the lodge, The Shadow had scaled the veranda. Through Widpath's window, he had seen two unguarded men. Knowing through Clyde that he rescued a man named Dulkan, The Shadow had guessed that he was viewing Peter Widpath; for Dulkan had also mentioned Widpath as a fellow prisoner.

The lack of guards told The Shadow that Widpath was no prisoner. Burrett, friendly with his master, had answered the description of Widpath's missing chauffeur.

Moreover, The Shadow had seen a deep game behind the dealings between Altamont Power and the K and R. He had known that someone more brainy than Foy Zullick – a hidden murderer – would be necessary in the swinging of the final deal. The Shadow had bided his time so as to allow the law's arrival.

After Widpath had left his room, The Shadow had entered by the window. Delayed in such action, he had been just in time to see the tables turn. Knowing that Widpath would gloat in evil triumph, The Shadow had

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lingered while the arch-crook spoke

Evil schemes had been revealed by their maker. Threats of death had been delivered, bringing prospective victims to a pitch of tension. With the crisis imminent, The Shadow had made his entry. Once again he had chosen the vital moment to deal with would-be murderers.

With one exception, crooks faltered momentarily as they heard The Shadow's taunt of challenge. The one who did not waver was the master rogue of all.

PETER WIDPATH, wheeling, pressed the trigger of his revolver as a signal for the fray.

Widpath's shot was first; but the bullet found the frame of the doorway. Widpath was still spinning, lunging toward The Shadow. The crook's shot was too quick.

Automatics roared. One bullet caught Widpath in his surge. A shot from the other .45 clipped Zullick as the murderer aimed. Burrett was slower than the pair. As The Shadow's next shot crippled the chauffeur, Joe Cardona piled upon the fellow and bore him to the floor.

The troopers, led by their lieutenant, were hurling themselves upon Soup Ramsted and the men by the fireplace. Those rogues were snatching their revolvers from their pockets; but they had no chance against the uniformed huskies.

With bare fists the fighting troopers smashed down rising gun arms. They drove hard punches to unshaven jaws, flattening the murder squad before it came to action.

Peter Widpath had reached The Shadow. Though mortally wounded, the fiend had still charged onward. A gloved fist swung; an automatic knocked away Widpath's revolver. The gray-haired crook lunged forward and grappled with his cloaked adversary.

Flinging Widpath about, The Shadow swung inward to the living-room. With his right hand free, he took quick aim beyond the fireplace, where one lone crook had ducked a trooper's punch. Soup Ramsted, back to the wall, was swinging his gun, aiming for The Shadow.

A trooper leaped up to grab the murderer's gun arm. The officer was too late; Soup's finger was already on the trigger. But The Shadow's automatic boomed as Soup tried to fire. The crook sagged, his trigger finger wavering; then collapsed as the trooper bore him to the door.

Joe Cardona had grabbed Burrett's revolver. He had easily subdued the crippled chauffeur; Joe found Burrett's gun nearer than his own. Swinging up, Cardona saw Foy Zullick, wounded, on hands and knees. Savagely, the killer aimed for Joe.

Two guns roared simultaneously. One was The Shadow's; the other was the revolver that Cardona had grabbed from the floor. Both bullets found their target. Zullick floundered, dying. Credit for that able deed was shared by The Shadow and the law.

JAMES DULKIN had dived for the outer door. Opening it, the merchant stopped on the veranda as a flood of reserve troopers came bounding to the lodge. The Shadow heard the shouts of the arriving officers. Wheeling, he swung back into the inner room, with Peter Widpath still clinging to his cloak.

The supercrook's hands were rigid in a death grip. They loosened as The Shadow broke their clutch. Widpath's body rolled face upward on the floor. The Shadow saw the white edges of folded papers,

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projecting from the inside pocket where Widpath had kept the dummy envelope.

With a quick move, The Shadow gained the creased sheets. Swinging about, he placed the papers beneath his cloak as he took long strides toward the open window. Vaulting the sill, The Shadow reached the veranda. He was lost in darkness when Cardona arrived with troopers to view Widpath's body.

Chaos had ended in the captured lodge. An evil chief had perished; with Peter Widpath's body lay the remains of the murderer who had served as his lieutenants: Foy Zullick and Soup Ramsted. One had paid for the killing of Seton Hylap; the other for the slaying of Clifford Barbridge.

Like Finger Lurbin, they had met the end that they deserved. Of lesser henchmen, some were dead; others wounded – and all who lived were in the hands of the law. Like those pretended truckmen who had fled pell–mell along the Skyway.

Rising winds sighed from the wooded slope of the Watchung mountainside. Even the elements had found a paean of victory. But to listeners in the lodge came a note that was more triumphant than the moaning of the wind. It was a cry that sounded from the darkness; an eerie gibe that might well have been uttered by some unearthly banshee of the hills.

A long, trailing laugh; mirth that rose to a fierce crescendo, then shivered into startling echoes that persisted with the whining winds. Such was the sound that finally faded into nothingness, leaving only the vivid memory of its chilling notes. The Shadow, departing, had delivered his triumph laugh as knell to men of crime.

THERE was a sequel yet to follow. It came days afterward – within that abode where intervals of time seemed meaningless, where darkness enshrouded the passage of events: The Shadow's sanctum. There; beneath the glow of the blue light, the victorious master was making his final summary of the crime that he had conquered.

Authenticated clippings told of James Dulkan, the sole survivor of a grasping trio. The merchant, tested in the crucible of honor, had proven himself a man of worth. He was different from Hosea Selger, who would willingly have reaped his share from crime; different from Peter Widpath, the archplotter whom The Shadow had eliminated.

James Dulkan had recognized and certified a list of straw men found in Widpath's suitcase at the lodge. Dulkan had handled the proxies to openly call a meeting of stockholders in the Altamont Power Company. The debt of the K and R Railroad had been written off. The stockholders whom Gifford Barbridge had sought to protect were due to receive their rightful shares from fair sale of the K and R to the Mountain Pacific.

Dulkan had been cleared of complicity in crime. His truthful story placed the blame where it belonged: on Peter Widpath. No evidence had been produced to blemish the name of James Dulkan, nor that of his murdered associate, Hosea Selger. The law had not found the confessions which the two had signed for Foy Zullick.

Into the light of The Shadow's lamp came folded papers; long fingers uncreased the documents. Beneath the paragraphed statements were signatures. On one paper was Dulkan's on the other, Selger's.

The Shadow's hands brought the papers together. The girasol gleamed in the light as long, white fingers tore the documents. One hand struck a match; the other held the fragments while the tiny flame ignited them. Increasing fire consumed the papers; they were ashes when The Shadow let them flutter to the table.

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Hosea Selger had been slain by vicious enemies; he had paid for his avarice. James Dulkan had been saved through The Shadow's prowess; he had shown his appreciation of his rescue. In return, The Shadow was clearing both names forever.

Those ashes represented the remains of the documents which The Shadow had taken from Peter Widpath's body; they had been turned over to the master crook by his underling, Foy Zullick. Incriminating documents, from now on to be forgotten; not even to exist among the secret archives of The Shadow.

THE END

"The greatest highway project in the United States today," and "the most outstanding highway-engineering achievement in history," are but two of the phrases descriptive of the world-famous Pulaski Skyway, that high-level roadway which takes the never-ending stream of cars which leave New York City through the Holland Tunnel, or come south from the George Washington Bridge or the many ferries, and carries it above homes, factories, rivers, drawbridges, railroads and cross-streets, past Jersey City, out toward Newark Airport, over a section of Newark, on to Elizabeth and points south.

Twenty million cars may travel over this superhighway each year and still not overjam it. Two lanes in each direction, with an extra lane for emergency. Continuous traffic, without a stop light or cross-traffic to interfere. Ramps or right-turn elbows take care of traffic getting on or off the Skyway in such a way that it does not interfere with the forward movement of cars.

The viaduct section of the Skyway was constructed at a cost of seven million dollars a mile! But even that tremendous cost has been found justified in the time and trouble it has saved for traffic. It is fine vindication of the judgment and foresight of those who planned this great structure.

Although at places it is necessary to bring the road level up high enough to give an under-clearance of 135 feet, at no point on the skyway is the grade more than 3.5 per cent. All curves are so constructed as to offer absolutely no danger. The viaduct is built upon pairs of reinforced concrete shafts linked together with reinforced concrete and capped by steel "shoes" which support arched spans of lattice steel. A record depth for pneumatic drilling was established in the excavations for the foundations which were carried, 147 feet below mean-high-water level for the bridge piers. In order to speed the construction of the highway, more than a score of contractors were working simultaneously on the project, making record construction time.