

DEATH ABOUT TOWN

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. DEATH AROUND THE CORNER

WHEN Dana Orvill stepped from the elevator in the Avenue Club, an attendant approached and handed him a message. It was the sort of message that caused Orvill to lift his eyebrows and give his cane a casual twirl.

The message stated, simply:

Hotel Bayberry. Seven thirty. Side door.

That was all, and it was quite enough. Orvill did not expect people to add their names to telephone messages that they sent him. For Dana Orvill, dapper to the waxed points of his mustache, was the perfect man—about—town, and preferred blind dates.

Not only was Orvill a member of the swanky Avenue Club and vice chairman of its governing committee; he also belonged to an elite social set, which, like all such sets, had its petty ways and jealousies. Preposterous though it might be, certain men in that group mistrusted Dana Orvill. They regarded him as a ladies' man – a middle-aged Lothario who thrived on feminine sighs.

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Hence, rather than run into trouble from the male contingent, Orvill always advised his lady friends – past, present, and future – to choose a quiet out-of-the-way meeting place whenever they felt that life was becoming unendurable without the company of Dana Orvill.

Inasmuch as the trysting spots varied, Orvill always managed to avoid one girl friend while meeting another, which made it all the better. This was the first time that anyone had suggested the side door of the Hotel Bayberry, but Orvill approved it. The hotel was only a few blocks down the avenue, and there was a florist's shop on the way.

It was after seven o'clock, so Orvill was already wearing evening clothes. He frowned a trifle as he crossed the palatial foyer of the club, for he remembered an appointment that might detain him. Pausing at the door, he spoke to the attendant at the desk:

"When Mr. Cranston arrives, ask him to wait until I phone him. I shall do so within a half hour."

Outside the Avenue Club, Orvill strolled jauntily away, and the doorman watched his departure. Few men of Manhattan had the boulevard manner of Dana Orvill, and the doorman always liked to watch him stroll along the avenue.

This, however, was to be Orvill's final stroll. He was on his way to a date with death!

In the florist's shop, Orvill ordered a dozen jonquils and a gardenia for his overcoat lapel. While waiting for the flowers, his thoughts reverted to his appointment with Cranston, and Orvill became a trifle annoyed. He wanted to talk to Cranston, very badly.

Matters weren't just right at the Avenue Club. The members of the governing committee couldn't quite agree on certain matters. It was all very troublesome, not only to Orvill but to Rudolph Delmot, chairman of the governing committee. A fine chap, Delmot, but too inclined to heed everyone's opinion.

Delmot never tiffed with other committee members, as Orvill did. If a chap behaved like a bounder, Orvill did not mind telling him so. Sometimes they became angry, such chaps, almost threatening; but when they did, they simply proved themselves to be bounders. Which meant that Dana Orvill, in his opinion, was always the winner of an argument.

The jonquils wrapped and the gardenia in his buttonhole, Orvill strolled along to the Bayberry. He did not enter the hotel; instead, he went past it and strolled to the side door, just around the corner. There, Orvill took up a convenient stance and waited.

A nice spot, this. The street was comparatively dark, and the light was not strong beneath the side marquee of the hotel. Behind Orvill was a doorway into the lobby, but very few people used it. The door was of the revolving type, and made a sweeping noise whenever anyone came out.

At those times, Orvill strolled over toward the curb and remained there, except when people came along the street, at which times he stationed himself at the side of the revolving door and remained there.

Orvill's chief annoyance was his half-hour time limit. He didn't want his call to Cranston to interfere with his date. Still, he would have to make the call, for Orvill was very precise in such matters.

Glancing at his watch, Orvill remembered that he hadn't checked it by the club clock. So he looked across the street, hoping he might see a clock above the door of the office building opposite.

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INSTEAD of a clock, Orvill saw the building's name, and he did not like it. It happened to be the Galba Building, where James Laverock had his office. In turn, James Laverock happened to be the biggest bouncer on the governing committee of the Avenue Club.

His gaze lowering, Orvill saw Laverock's car, parked beside the Galba Building. You couldn't miss Laverock's car. It was red and shiny, and it looked just as hideous here as it did whenever Laverock parked it outside the Avenue Club.

Maybe broad-minded men like Delmot could excuse Laverock for owning such a car, but Orvill couldn't. It simply proved that Laverock had no taste, and shouldn't be a member of the Avenue Club. Nor would he be, if Orvill could have prevented it. The trouble was that Laverock already belonged to the Avenue Club when Orvill joined it.

Turning away, Orvill decided to ignore the garish car. He kept pacing a circle under the marquee, from the curb, past the revolving door, and back again. A box of flowers under one arm, a walking stick hanging from the other, Orvill was attracting more notice than he supposed from passers-by. In fact, such pedestrians were too interested in watching Orvill to observe what happened across the street.

A short-built man came briskly from the Galba Building and thrust himself into the garish red coupe. His manner marked him as the owner of the car, which he was. But James Laverock seemed far too interested in starting his car to pay any attention to Dana Orvill across the street. He twisted the key in the ignition lock, pressed the starter, and yanked the coupe in gear, as he turned the wheel to pull out from the curb.

That was when it happened.

Dana Orvill swung about as he heard the car start. He saw James Laverock staring from the window, and their eyes met in a mutual glare. Laverock's right hand was swinging up across the steering wheel.

From there on, witnesses were to tell it.

With the roar of the car motor came, sharp reports that echoed loud along the narrow street. Witnesses might have mistaken those repeated bangs for backfires from the car, if they hadn't seen the immediate result. Amid the bursts, Dana Orvill wilted.

Recoiling queerly, he struck the sidewalk, losing the box of flowers, which broke open, to strew the yellow jonquils beside him. As witnesses dashed up beside the stricken man, they saw Orvill clamping his hands to his side and caught his dying gasp:

"Laverock... he... he shot me!"

The red car was swinging the corner when the pack went after it. One man yelled to a cop across the avenue. Another shouted to the doorman in front of the Hotel Bayberry.

Others were waving excitedly at passing cars and cabs. In surprisingly swift time, a chase was being organized. But in that interim came a pursuer who was to outstrip the rest.

A cab was cruising down the avenue. From its window a keen-eyed passenger with hawkish face observed the commotion and all that lay beyond it. He saw Orvill, prone amid the jonquils; he spotted Laverock's car, picking up speed, as though the blares of a police whistle were giving it new impetus.

Calmly the hawk-faced passenger told his cabby:

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"Overtake the red car."

The cab's passenger was Lamont Cranston. The driver was Moe Shrevnitz, the speediest hackie in Manhattan. Shrevvy knew how to overtake wayward cars like Laverock's. It was part of his business, because he was working for The Shadow.

And it happened that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow.

Cranston demonstrated that point as the chase was getting under way. Reaching beneath the rear seat, he drew out a hidden drawer. From it he whisked a slouch hat and a black cloak, garments which seemed to slide on his head and over his shoulders of their own accord. His hands slipped into thin black gloves, and with the same sweep one hand tightened in a fist that brought an automatic from a hidden holster.

Aiming the .45 from the window, The Shadow was prepared to halt Laverock's car the moment Moe overhauled it, which promised to be at the next corner. Already a strange, weird laugh was phrasing itself upon The Shadow's hidden lips. Suddenly The Shadow halted that mirth, rather than laugh too soon.

More things happened at the corner.

A CAR, starting from a side street, made a wide veer to avoid Laverock's flying coupe. The veering car crossed the path of a truck, which promptly skewed across the avenue. Moe slung his cab about, sideswiped another car that heaved in from somewhere. The cab took a jounce across the curb, heading the wrong way on a one-way street.

Someone, lurking in a parked car, either saw The Shadow or guessed that his cab was pursuing Laverock's car, for shots rang out and bullets clanged the car. There were more shots from another direction, and The Shadow returned the fire.

He was gripping the handle of the cab door, ready to spring out and fade into darkness, from which he could deal with those lurkers who favored Laverock's getaway, when the chase came roaring up.

Shouts from the drivers of stalled cars, bellows from truckmen were accompanied by pointing gestures, all toward The Shadow's cab. These people, who hadn't seen Orvill's death, nor recognized Laverock's flight, were taking it for granted that the police were after the cab from which the gunshots spurted.

In their turn, the new pursuers assumed that Laverock had left his red car and transferred to the cab. A police car, spouting gunfire, became the spearhead of a drive for the cab, with other cars wheeling in to flank the hapless vehicle and its occupants.

Dropping low, The Shadow spoke a word to Moe. Crouched behind the wheel, the cabby let ride. He was zimming down the side street like an arrow, zigzagging from one side to the other, using the curbs as buffers, as he weaved his way through traffic coming the opposite direction.

Looking back, The Shadow saw the police car threading its way through stalling cars. It was losing ground in the pursuit, and once Moe reached the next avenue he could begin a twisting course that would eventually shake all followers off the trail. On that account, The Shadow laughed.

Nevertheless, his mirth was grim.

The Shadow was thinking of Dana Orvill, who had kept a date with death. He was also considering James Laverock, the man who had escaped. Though The Shadow, at present, was busy shaking mistaken pursuers

from his trail, he was thinking of another trail that he personally intended to follow.

It might be long before The Shadow found that trail, but when he did, he would see it to the finish and bring Orvill's murderer to justice!

CHAPTER II. THE LAW DECIDES

THE startling murder of Dana Orvill brought very swift results. So swift that they actually outraced The Shadow in his routine task of shaking off the cars that had pursued him by mistake. By the time The Shadow arrived back at the Hotel Bayberry, other investigators were on the scene ahead of him.

Naturally, The Shadow did not return in guise of black, nor did he come in Moe's cab. He arrived as Cranston, in a chauffeured limousine. Stepping from the big car, the leisurely Mr. Cranston immediately found himself shaking hands with his friend the police commissioner, Ralph Weston.

"Glad to see you, Cranston," spoke Weston briskly. "You've heard about poor Orvill, of course. We just removed his body. I hear you had an appointment this evening. Tell me, what was it about?"

"Something to do with the Avenue Club," replied Cranston. "Orvill wasn't satisfied with the governing committee. He said its members were not in harmony."

"Did he mention any committee members by name?"

"No. I think he intended to cover that this evening. He said that some members refused to co-operate with the chairman, Rudolph Delmot. That was the part Orvill didn't like."

As Cranston mentioned Delmot's name, Weston turned and gestured. Looking that direction, Cranston saw Delmot approaching in company with a police inspector, Joe Cardona.

Delmot was a tall, broad-shouldered man, of late middle age. He had a long, solemn face, that Cranston had never seen so firmly set as upon this occasion. Delmot was carrying his hat in his hands in respect for his dead friend, Orvill. Above his set face, Delmot's gray hair was spreading in the evening breeze.

Usually Delmot wore a kindly look; at present he lacked it. His whole countenance bespoke a grim determination to avenge the death of Dana Orvill.

Cardona looked grim, too, but that was Joe's way. The stocky police inspector had a swarthy countenance that always wore a pokerfaced expression. While Delmot was shaking hands with Cranston, Cardona turned to Weston.

"We're going across the street, commissioner," said Joe. "We want to have a look in Laverock's office. The shots came from his car, all right. We've got half a dozen witnesses to prove it."

Weston nodded. But when Cardona started off with Delmot, the commissioner decided to remain a few minutes, and gestured for Cranston to do the same. Weston wanted to know what else his friend knew about the Avenue Club, but there was comparatively little that Cranston could tell him.

"I haven't been there in months," Cranston explained. "In fact, hardly in years. I bought a life membership largely because of an insurance benefit that went with it. Orvill was going over the list of charter members, and found my name. He thought I would agree with some of his ideas regarding the club, so he looked me up."

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Finding that he could learn no more from Cranston, Weston decided to go across the street. He and Cranston entered the lobby of the Galba Building and looked at the name board, to find that Laverock's office was on the fifth floor. While they were buzzing the elevator button, Delmot came up a stairway from the basement.

"It's no use, commissioner," declared Delmot. "We'll have to use the stairs, like Inspector Cardona did. The elevator operator has left, and I can't find the janitor anywhere."

While the three were turning toward the stairway, a rumble came from the elevator shaft. They waited, and soon the elevator arrived, piloted by a man in overalls who turned out to be the janitor. He said that Cardona had met him on the third floor and had sent him down to get the rest of the party.

The janitor took the group by elevator to the fifth floor, where they found Cardona in Laverock's office, which he had opened with the janitor's keys. Laverock's office was small and unimposing, but it represented a profitable business, according to Delmot.

"Laverock handles investments," Delmot explained. "His clientele is small, but select, and I understand that his customers are well satisfied with the purchases that he suggests. Quite a few of his customers belong to the Avenue Club."

Weston asked if Orvill belonged to that group, and Delmot gave a sad headshake.

"Laverock and Orvill never did get along," said Delmot. "But I can't understand how personal animosity would allow Laverock to go so far as to murder Orvill. Perhaps it was impulse, seeing the man he hated just across the street; or he might have supposed that Orvill was spying on him."

Delmot finished with a shrug of his shoulders, as if to inquire: "Who knows?"

At least, Laverock's desk and filing cabinets offered some chance of a clue, so Cardona began to dig through them, though results were small at first. Most of Laverock's files consisted of printed matter, pertaining to stocks and bonds.

Joe came across some letters that Laverock had received from customers, and took down the names of the senders, but such letters were comparatively few and, according to Delmot, could represent only a fraction of the persons who dealt with Laverock.

Then came a real find – a folder marked with Orvill's name. It contained several letters from Orville, with Laverock's carbon replies. The letters had nothing to do with investments; instead, they pertained to the Avenue Club.

In one, Orvill suggested bluntly that Laverock resign from the club. Laverock's pointed reply stated that he would continue to be a member long after Orville was forgotten around the Avenue Club. This, in the light of Orvill's sudden death, could be interpreted as a murder threat on Laverock's part.

Next, in Laverock's desk drawer, Cardona came across another piece of evidence. It was a permit for a revolver, listing the make and serial number of the weapon in question. Since the permit had been issued by the police, Cardona promptly pocketed it, but he left everything else as he had found it.

"I'll put a couple of men on watch outside," declared Cardona, "just in case Laverock decides to come back here. Meanwhile" – he gestured toward the janitor – "this fellow can keep his eyes open, inside the building."

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The janitor remarked that he would be leaving in another hour and that the building would be closed, with a night watchman on duty. Cardona decided that would make it all the better. He said he'd stay around and talk to the watchman when he arrived.

Cardona came to that decision while riding down in the elevator. Outside the building, he stood by while Weston and Delmot discussed their next step.

They decided to go to the Avenue Club and investigate the phone call that had brought Orvill to the side door of the Hotel Bayberry. In light of what had happened, Laverock could very easily have faked that call. The test would be to check on all of Orvill's acquaintances, and find out if any one was responsible, thus reaching Laverock by a course of elimination.

Cranston was smiling during the discussion. Not only were Weston and Delmot taking on a wearisome task; they were seeking negative evidence, only. If someone had merely played a practical joke, hoaxing Orvill to the Hotel Bayberry on an imaginary date, the person in question probably would not admit it. No one would care to be classed as an accomplice in murder, whether rightly or wrongly.

So Cranston merely shook his head when Weston inquired if he intended to go along to the Avenue Club. At that moment, Delmot was steering Weston up the street toward a taxicab, and the commissioner, looking back at Cranston, stumbled across a grating close to the wall of the Galba Building.

Even as Weston stumbled, Cranston's keen eyes caught a glimmer from below the grating. But, seeing Cardona spring forward to save the commissioner from a spill, Cranston let the inspector do the rest. Cardona saw the gleam, too, for he was looking straight down at it when he grabbed Weston's arm.

"Look, commissioner!"

Cardona jabbed a finger downward. Five feet below the grating lay the glittering object, a revolver!

BY the time Weston was through looking, Cardona was tugging at the grating. It was set too tightly in the cement to be hauled loose by such tactics. Cardona called the janitor, who produced a length of thin iron pipe, which just managed to fit between two bars of the grating.

With some bricks serving as a fulcrum, Cardona and the janitor managed to pry the grating loose.

Dropping down into the pit, Cardona came up with the gun on the end of a pencil inserted in its muzzle. Joe was using the right technique to avoid smudging any fingerprints. He held his prize into the light, noted its make, and read the serial number stamped on the gun.

There wasn't any mistake about it. The weapon was Laverock's revolver, and two of its chambers contained empty cartridges.

"So he took two shots at Orvill," announced Cardona, "and then chucked the gun right out the other window, down the grating, so we wouldn't find it on him if we caught him. Laverock brought Orvill here, all right, with that fake phone message, and thinking about the grating was more than just quick headwork. Laverock had it all doped out beforehand!"

Cardona's summary impressed Weston and Delmot, but it made their trip to the Avenue Club all the more imperative. Even negative evidence might count, with Laverock so clearly labeled as Orvill's killer.

But Cranston still declined to go along. He had a dinner engagement, so he said.

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The statement was true enough. Cranston did have an engagement, though he hadn't yet informed the persons with whom he intended to dine. He waited until the cab left with Weston and Delmot; then, in leisurely style, Cranston strolled around the corner. His trip proved a short one; when he reached the front door of the Hotel Bayberry, he entered it.

In a telephone booth, Cranston dialed a number. A methodical voice responded with the words:

"Burbank speaking."

No longer did Cranston use his calm tone. In the confines of the telephone booth, his was the whispered voice of The Shadow, as he gave instructions to his contact man, Burbank, telling him to send two competent agents who would be useful in cracking the Orvill case.

For The Shadow was by no means satisfied with the law's decision. Just as complex cases usually had a simple solution, so were simple cases apt to prove complex. The Shadow held to the definite idea that the quest for a murderer might travel farther than James Laverock.

How far farther it would carry, The Shadow had not yet surmised. Facts were too few to point to further crime. The death of Dana Orvill, man about town, had the aspects of an isolated murder, nothing more. Strange, however, were the circumstances that The Shadow would encounter while on this case.

It wasn't just a matter of a man about town who had met with a violent end. It was to be death about town, with The Shadow on the trail!

CHAPTER III. THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

CRANSTON'S dinner guests at the Hotel Bayberry were Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke. Choice of those two agents indicated that The Shadow might have gained an inkling of a long campaign ahead. He had picked men specially qualified for the coming investigation.

Harry Vincent was a clean-cut chap who would be welcomed anywhere. Cranston's first act was to supply him with a guest card and a membership application to the Avenue Club, thus making it possible for Harry to introduce himself to the very environment wherein Orvill and Laverock had voiced their disagreement.

As for Clyde Burke, he already had a card that would admit him to the Avenue Club. Clyde's was a reporter's card, for he was a newspaper man on the staff of the New York Classic.

Clyde nodded when Cranston told him what he had to do. It wouldn't take much argument for Clyde to convince his editor that there might be a good story at the Avenue Club for anyone who sought the inside angle. While getting his story for the Classic, Clyde would have plenty of opportunity to pick up data for The Shadow.

All that lay in the future. For the present, The Shadow, in Cranston's quiet style, outlined the case for the benefit of Harry and Clyde. Finished, he awaited their reactions. They gave them without hesitation.

"It's Laverock, all right," asserted Harry. "So much has piled up against him, that there is not much chance to dispute it."

"When Joe Cardona hits a lucky streak," commented Clyde, "he doesn't have to crack a case. It just splits itself wide open for him!"

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Both were surprised when Cranston shook his head in disagreement.

"This case is too pat," he analyzed calmly. "Besides, there are points that dispute each other. Take, for instance, the hoaxing of Orvill, the disposal of the gun, and Laverock's rapid getaway. All those indicate thorough premeditation."

There were nods from Harry and Clyde. Cranston promptly ended them.

"With all so smoothly planned," continued Cranston, "Laverock proceeded to commit two grievous blunders. First, he left incriminating correspondence in his filing cabinet. Second, and far worse, he forgot the permit that proved the death gun to be his own. I can assure you" – Cranston's lips wore a smile – "that the bullet in Orvill's body will prove to be one from Laverock's gun, which will be just another reason to suspect another hand."

The listening agents began to grasp The Shadow's logic. It did look as though Laverock's stupidity was far too great for a man who had plotted a crime intelligently. Both Harry and Clyde were trying to find some solid fact, for a beginning, so their chief supplied one.

"We must give Cardona credit," declared Cranston, with another smile. "He expects Laverock to return to his office. So do I. Even an innocent man wouldn't want the police to find the evidence that was lying there."

Dinner finished, Cranston led the way to the side door of the hotel. He stopped before they reached the revolving door and pointed to two opposite spaces, one on each side. Those were solid doors that could be used when the revolving door was out of order.

At present, they were loosely barred, and formed small, dark pockets. Cranston motioned Harry into one and Clyde into the other. When they were nicely tucked away, he went out through the revolving door.

Neither agent saw him reappear. Cranston had been carrying a cloak across his arm, a slouch hat beneath it. He'd put them on during the trip through the revolving door; hence he emerged as The Shadow.

In the dim light beneath the marquee, his cloaked shape escaped the eye. But Harry heard his chief's whisper, when The Shadow stopped near the narrow barrier beside the revolving door. The Shadow was asking Harry how far the little door could open.

"A couple of inches," Harry reported. "Enough so I can look across the street."

Receiving a similar report from Clyde, on the other side of the central door, The Shadow told both agents to watch the Galba Building. Should they see anyone enter it, they were to call Laverock's office, for that was to be The Shadow's next destination.

Therewith, The Shadow glided across the street, so elusively that Harry and Clyde caught only a fleeting glimpse of fading blackness.

NEITHER agent saw The Shadow enter the Galba Building, because he didn't use the door that led in from the street. The Shadow chose a better route, one that Joe Cardona had unwittingly provided.

Close against the darkened wall of the building, The Shadow squeezed his fingers between the slats of the grating that Joe had pried loose earlier. Lifting it, he slid to the space beneath and let the grating lower silently into position.

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Noiseless, too, was The Shadow's attack upon the cellar window. It was held by a catch, but The Shadow soon worked it open. Clanking sounds came from above: a detective tramping across the grating. There was a pause as the detective inspected the space with a flashlight.

By then, The Shadow was through the window, fixing the catch from within. The patrolling detective gained no glimpse of the human shape in black.

From there, The Shadow went directly to Laverock's office. Since it opened on a court, and the building was deserted except for the night watchman; who was keeping to the hallways, The Shadow turned on a light. He began an inspection of Laverock's files, hoping to find some clue that Cardona had missed.

All the while, The Shadow listened for footsteps, and finally heard their beat: the heavy tread of the night watchman. He turned out the light, waited until the tramping sound reached a stairway, and then restored the light, to resume his search. His ears tuned to the situation, The Shadow kept close tabs on the distant sound of the watchman's departing footfalls.

Sometimes, The Shadow's very faculty at distant concentration could trick him. This was one of those occasions. A creeping sound, much closer, was subdued enough to escape The Shadow's detection, until it was too late. The creep was outside the door of Laverock's office. It ended when the door suddenly slapped inward.

Wheeling from behind the desk, The Shadow saw the man who lunged through the doorway. There was no mistaking his short build and his blunt face, which showed a glare approaching fury. The man who had thrust himself into the office was James Laverock.

Though the police had appropriated Laverock's revolver, the man was still armed. He was carrying a weapon that could be classed as an antique, a Sharps four-barreled pistol that dated back to the '60s.

Such a weapon, the final development of the "pepper box" style of gun, was noted for its lack of accuracy, but at this close range, it could hardly fail to miss a target of human size.

Laverock voiced a triumphant snarl, pleased by the luck which had enabled him to trap an intruder in his office. It happened, however, that Laverock was luckier than he knew. The Shadow's hand, sweeping to his cloak, was actually gripping an automatic, ready to flip its muzzle in Laverock's direction – when something caused the cloaked figure to relax.

That something was Laverock's glare. In the man's eyes, The Shadow saw more than a murderous glint; he caught a calculating flash which told him that Laverock would go easy with a trigger, if such policy promised results. Playing a sudden hunch, The Shadow let his hands move away from his cloak and come up toward his shoulders.

It was a better plan, on The Shadow's part, than shooting it through with Laverock in a quick fray that might bring bullets to both. A long risk, in a sense, for The Shadow was placing himself in Laverock's power; but the cloaked fighter was playing a chance that in a game of wits he could outmatch his opponent sufficiently to make up the lost margin, and more.

Indeed, giving Laverock the full advantage helped throw the fellow off his guard, as Laverock promptly evidenced by a harsh chuckle.

"I THOUGHT as much," clucked Laverock. "Whoever murdered Orvill would have reason to come here, too."

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The Shadow responded with a whispered laugh.

"Your supposition supports the police theory," spoke The Shadow, in sibilant tone. "With this difference, Laverock: They foresaw your return – not my visit."

"You accuse me of murder?" Laverock was drawing closer to the desk, thrusting the gun ahead of him, so that the four muzzles nearly reached The Shadow. "On what grounds, may I ask?"

"On better grounds than could be applied to my own case," parried The Shadow. "I had no quarrel with Orvill, as you did."

Laverock's hard smile showed that he was unimpressed.

"Let us assume that a murderer has returned," suggested Laverock. "I don't need to prove that I didn't kill Orvill. I know I didn't. Eliminating myself, that leaves only you."

Squinting upward, Laverock was trying to probe the face beneath The Shadow's slouch hat, but the brim cut off the light. All that Laverock observed was the burn of keen eyes, a glow that should have warned him of The Shadow's mettle.

But Laverock was too anxious to identify the man that he accused of murder to be impressed by the burning gaze. Nor did The Shadow's whispered words change Laverock's purpose.

"By the same logic," The Shadow began, "I could eliminate myself and declare you to be the killer –"

"You murdered Orvill!" accused Laverock harshly. "If you want to live, you will write a full confession!" He waved his four-muzzled gun toward pen and paper that were lying on the desk. "Write – and sign!"

Briefly, The Shadow hesitated. Then, slowly, he reached for pen and paper. Under Laverock's close scrutiny, The Shadow wrote, direct and to the point:

I, the undersigned, hereby admit my full guilt, in the murder of Dana Orvill –

Small wonder that Laverock's features were triumphant as The Shadow's pen moved onward. Often had men of crime sought victory over The Shadow, but never on such a scale as this. Totally at bay, the master of justice was confessing to a murder committed by another, under the inflexible insistence of the very man upon whom the law blamed the crime in question!

CHAPTER IV. ACCEPTED TERMS

THE SHADOW'S hand paused wearily, as though the writing of a single, fateful paragraph had robbed him of all strength. There, in glistening blue, lay words that could mean the death chair. All that the confession needed was the signature, to render it complete.

Laverock's voice came sharply:

"Sign!"

The Shadow's hand swerved from the paper, dropping the pen beside it, both within Laverock's easy reach. There was a trace of mockery in The Shadow's response.

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"I have done my part, Laverock," he said. "It is your turn. There is the pen."

For answer, Laverock seized the pen with his free hand and thrust it The Shadow's way. To emphasize his action, he jabbed his antique gun toward the cloaked figure. Laverock wasn't ready to shoot; he wanted the confession signed. But it was policy for The Shadow to recoil from the gun thrust, and he did.

He went back from the desk, his hands dropping to its edge, as though to halt their tremble. Laverock let his own hands thrust farther, which was what The Shadow wanted.

Like a missile unleashed from a catapult, The Shadow drove forward, sending the desk ahead of him. His hands began to drive, but his knees supplied the follow-through. Half across the desk, Laverock was on a balance point, and the swift shove caught him totally unawares.

His feet flipping from under him, Laverock took an involuntary lunge across the desk, making a grab for the far edge, only to find it gone before he reached it. The desk was under him, and gone; Laverock was clawing air, in his headlong trip to the floor beyond. All that saved him from a hard landing was the hand of The Shadow.

That hand took Laverock's wrist with a viselike twist that doubled it. Laverock's arm and body followed, spinning in midair, to be stopped by The Shadow's upthrust knee. Rolling sideward as The Shadow released him, Laverock reached the floor. His fall was broken, but his head took something of a thump as it fell back against the filing cabinet. No wonder Laverock was dazed. His whirl had included a somersault, which left him staring back at the desk across which he had come. Badly muddled, Laverock couldn't even locate The Shadow when he looked for him; further, when Laverock raised his gun hand, hoping, at least, to have a weapon ready, he found himself staring at empty fingers.

The Shadow's wrench had numbed Laverock's hand along with his brain. Somewhere during the spin, the gun had dropped from nerveless fingers. Where it had landed, Laverock learned when he heard a strange, sinister laugh off to his right. Looking, Laverock saw The Shadow holding the four-barreled Sharps on the palm of a gloved hand.

Having neatly plucked the gun as Laverock dropped it, The Shadow was examining it as a curio. He laid it on the desk, and as he did, he drew a .45 automatic, compared to which the Sharps looked like a toy. Then, with the big gun as a persuader, The Shadow stooped and hauled Laverock up to a chair, where the man stared, stupefied, wondering what was coming next.

Producing the unsigned confession, The Shadow extended it to Laverock, along with the pen. His wits returning, Laverock folded his arms and stared grimly, shaking his head. He wasn't going to sign that confession, not even under The Shadow's competent persuasion.

WITH a low-toned laugh that worried Laverock, The Shadow crumpled the sheet of paper and thrust it beneath his cloak. Then came The Shadow's sibilant tone:

"Scarcely necessary, your signature, considering the evidence that the police have already discovered against you, Laverock."

Nervously, Laverock lifted his gaze to meet The Shadow's steady eyes.

"They found your revolver, Laverock," The Shadow continued. "Under the grating, where you dropped it. Your permit turned up here, in your desk."

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Laverock came half up in his chair.

"That revolver was stolen!" he exclaimed. "Stolen, I tell you! I kept it in my locker at the Avenue Club. If they found it anywhere else, someone must have taken it first!"

"And the permit?"

"It was here," admitted Laverock. "I came to get it, along with the correspondence that I had with Orvill. But I wasn't going back to the club. I was afraid they'd be looking for me there."

The Shadow gestured to the antique pistol that was lying on the desk.

"Why did you bring this, Laverock?"

"I thought I might need it," Laverock replied. "It belongs to a friend of mine, who collects old firearms. He is away, so I stopped at his apartment and found it there."

"You are staying at that apartment?"

Laverock hesitated, then nodded. The Shadow's voice had taken on a tone which struck Laverock as friendly. Tension suddenly ending, Laverock began a verbal outpour, and his words carried the ring of sincerity.

First, he admitted that, while pulling his car out from the curb, he had seen Orvill across the street. Next, there had been sounds like shots, which Laverock took for the backfire of his own car, which had been acting queerly ever since he had taken it from the garage, at noon.

Seeing Orvill fall, Laverock realized that the man might have been shot. By then, Laverock was almost to the corner, and a panic seized him when he heard a hue and cry behind him. It had occurred to him that people might be blaming him for the shots, but he was also stricken with the fear that whoever had shot Orvill might be after him, too, since he had witnessed the affair.

So Laverock had fled, abandoning his car later. Reaching the apartment of his absent and unnamed friend, he had listened to meager radio reports that blamed him for Orvill's death.

There, in sum total, was Laverock's story. Concluding it, Laverock added a determined statement.

"I'm not giving myself up," Laverock announced. "I've been framed, and I'd be playing right into the hands of the enemy. I'd rather stay at large until this blows over."

There was a pleading note in Laverock's final words, and his eyes lighted when he saw that The Shadow was giving them due consideration. At length, came The Shadow's query:

"You have friends who might help you?"

Laverock nodded.

"Rudolph Delmot would," he said. "He's an impartial chap, Delmot. Still, I wouldn't want to let him know where I am staying, because he might feel honor-bound to tell the police. I have another friend, though, at the Avenue Club –"

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There, Laverock halted, fearful that he was saying too much. Singularly, The Shadow picked up the very thoughts in Laverock's mind and put them into words.

"You would like to go back to the place where you are staying," spoke The Shadow, "and remain there until you receive the all-clear signal. Should you be allowed to do so, you will co-operate, as far as you are able, in tracking down the actual murderer of Dana Orvill."

While The Shadow spoke, Laverock was nodding with increased eagerness. After a brief pause, The Shadow added:

"Your terms are accepted, Laverock. You may leave."

Half doubtful, Laverock arose from his chair and walked around the desk. Forgotten was the antique gun that he had brought; nor did Laverock care about the Orvill correspondence.

Halfway to the door, he was looking back over his shoulder, still amazed by the fact that The Shadow was calmly letting him leave. If ever The Shadow had built confidence into the mind of a hunted man, he was doing it with James Laverock.

Then, at the most critical juncture, came the interruption that spelled near ruin to The Shadow's purpose.

THE door of the office swung inward. On the threshold stood the building watchman, a tough-faced man who held a flashlight in one hand, a revolver in the other. He'd seen the light in Laverock's office while making a return trip, and was stopping in to find out what it meant.

He found out, very suddenly.

Unleashed blackness launched across the office. The astonished watchman was caught in its swirl. Under the forceful drive of The Shadow, the watchman took a headlong pitch, his flashlight flying one way, his gun the other. Like Laverock before him, the watchman hadn't time to fire a single shot before his gun was gone.

The Shadow was abiding by his terms. He was giving Laverock safe conduct. Here was Laverock's opportunity to dash from the office and out of the building, while The Shadow was keeping the watchman occupied. But Laverock, frantic, felt that he, too, should play a hand.

Springing back to the desk, Laverock grabbed his antique gun. He wheeled toward the corner, where the watchman, coming up on hands and knees, was groping for his lost revolver. For the first time, the watchman saw Laverock, and gave a bellow. On impulse, Laverock aimed the Sharps and pulled the trigger.

With the first cough from the pepperbox gun, The Shadow reached Laverock with a long lunge. He wasn't close enough to grab the gun, but he jarred Laverock so that the shot went wild.

Suddenly mistrusting The Shadow, Laverock sprang for the door, with the cloaked fighter after him. There was a spurt from another muzzle of the four-cornered gun, but this shot went high, for The Shadow was jogging Laverock's hand upward.

The two whirled out through the door, into the gloomy hall, their running grapple punctuated by two more blasts from the Sharps, shots which exhausted the weapon. Those bullets found their mark in the ceiling, and Laverock, flinging the empty gun at The Shadow, suddenly found himself staggering clear.

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He thought that he had crippled the cloaked fighter, but he hadn't. Actually, The Shadow was sending Laverock along his way. From The Shadow's viewpoint, Laverock's folly did not nullify their agreement.

Laverock reached the hallway window opening on the court. Wrenching it open, he sprang out to a low roof, to retrace the route by which he had arrived. By then, the watchman was coming out into the hallway, and The Shadow swooped to meet him in the gloom. Again, the watchman found himself spinning from wall to wall, before he had a chance to look for Laverock.

From a front window, The Shadow saw flashlights blinking below. At the same time, Laverock's telephone began to ring furiously. The lights meant that detectives had heard the shots from Laverock's old gun and were coming into the building. The ringing telephone told that The Shadow's agents had spotted the invaders and were passing the word to their chief.

Starting downstairs, three steps at a clip, The Shadow heard the watchman coming after him. The watchman couldn't see the figure in black, but he heard the clatter that The Shadow purposely made. By the time The Shadow reached the second floor, The Shadow heard detectives coming up. From above, the watchman was bellowing for them to stop the fugitive.

Perhaps the detectives expected to see Laverock. Certainly, they weren't looking for blackness to materialize itself into a human shape, which it did. As they sprang around a corner from the stairs, The Shadow met them with a low charge, so sudden and surprising, that it seemed as though he grew from the floor itself.

The dicks went sprawling, their guns spurting high and wide. From past the corner, they heard the taunt of a departing laugh. They were coming to their feet when the watchman overtook them. All three charged down the stairs, aiming their revolvers for splotched blackness in the gloomy lobby.

A trio of guns ripped in unison. Their bullets found the blackness and what it represented. There were sharp crackles as the slugs smashed the tiled floor. That inky path wasn't The Shadow; it was merely a corner of the lobby, where the light was cut-off. Like a living ghost, The Shadow had disappeared.

THE pursuers hurried to the street, but couldn't find the fugitive there. They guessed correctly that The Shadow must have doubled his trail and gone down to the basement, so they raced back through the lobby, hoping to box in The Shadow below.

Hardly had they dashed into the building, before the grating lifted itself from the sidewalk beside the darkened wall. Out from that space emerged The Shadow, unseen in the gloom.

Setting the grating back in place, he glided across the street and blended with the revolving door that led into the Hotel Bayberry. That was the last appearance of The Shadow upon this eventful evening – if it could be termed an appearance at all.

Five minutes later, Lamont Cranston strolled from the side door of the Bayberry, accompanied by Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke. Cranston waved for a cab, and Shrevvy's arrived from the next corner. As the three passengers entered the cab, they gazed curiously from the window at two detectives, who were climbing out of a grating alongside the Galba Building.

Already puzzled, the detectives were baffled further by the vague, trailing laugh that reached them after the cab had swung the corner. They didn't connect it with the cab; the tone was too elusive for its source to be traced.

To the men who heard it, that mirth came from the thin air into which The Shadow had so mysteriously vanished!

CHAPTER V. AT THE AVENUE CLUB

IT was another evening, and the police were still hunting for James Laverock. So was The Shadow, although he was making no visible effort in that direction. At present, The Shadow preferred to be Lamont Cranston, for it gave him the scope he needed. As a member of the Avenue Club, Cranston was seeking clues to the death of Dana Orvill as the surest way to gain new contact with James Laverock.

The conference of the other evening, in Laverock's office, had been all too brief. The Shadow had learned two points: first, that Laverock was staying at a friend's apartment; second, that Laverock especially trusted a certain member of the Avenue Club other than Rudolph Delmot, the man whom everybody trusted.

Whether those two friends were the same, Laverock had not specified. Until The Shadow found out who one, or both, might be, it was impossible to reach Laverock at the place where he had gone.

As Cranston, The Shadow didn't seem to be bothering much about his problem. He was more interested in pointing out the merits of the Avenue Club to a friend named Harry Vincent, who had a guest card and who seemed very anxious to become an active member. After all, the Avenue Club offered many advantages.

The lavish foyer, the club library, the dining room, its spacious lounges and its billiard room were merely the surface evidences of prosperity. Across the foyer were elevators that led to the upper floors, and those floors consisted of hotel rooms that members could occupy at surprisingly low rates.

On the top floor was one of the finest gymnasiums in Manhattan, equipped with everything from fencing rooms to squash courts. The only thing lacking on the gym floor was a swimming pool, and there was one of those in the basement, so the Avenue Club, from an athletic standpoint, was absolutely complete.

The personnel also rated highly. During a trip to the gymnasium, Cranston introduced Harry to the physical director, a chunky, affable man named Tom Rydal, who had done wonders with his job. Rydal had formerly owned his own gymnasium and had trained many boxers, until the Avenue Club had made him a better offer, to become its physical director.

As he showed the visitors about the gym, Rydal gave a pleased grin.

"Do you know, Mr. Cranston," he said, "I'm glad I sold out that place of mine. I wasn't, at first, even though I made a profit, because one of my hobbies was teaching fellows how to punch and I didn't think you Avenue Clubbers would take to it.

"But it's surprising how boxing instruction has picked up. The membership drive is bringing in lots of fellows who like to use their fists. Take Vincent here" – Rydal looked approvingly at Harry – "he'd make a boxer. Maybe he's one already."

Rydal took a stance, and Harry immediately responded with instinctive footwork, that brought another nod of approval from Rydal. As the two lowered their fists, Rydal clapped Harry on the back, then swung around.

"How about it, Mr. Cranston?"

Rydal's fists were up again, but Cranston was standing, flat-footed, his own hands lowered. Rydal swished a fist past Cranston's chin, purposely missing by a fraction of an inch. Cranston dropped away, bringing his

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hands up, wide apart.

"You'd better join a boxing club," suggested Rydal critically. "Any palooka could finish you with a single punch. I thought you knew something about self-defense, Mr. Cranston.

"I do, where fencing is concerned," returned Cranston stiffly. "I prefer the foils, because they allow better range than fists."

"You'd better carry a cane then," advised Rydal. "Still" – the physical director gave a headshake – "I don't know how you'd make out, if somebody grabbed the stick and came in with a punch. You ought to learn to box."

"I might," said Cranston indifferently, "when I find time to get around to it. For the present, you can confine your instruction to Vincent."

CRANSTON strolled about while Rydal was assigning a locker to Harry. He wanted a look at Laverock's locker, and managed a glimpse, but it offered no clues. If Laverock had spoken correctly, in saying that his revolver had been taken from his locker, it would be very difficult to learn who was responsible.

Members weren't supposed to keep anything valuable in their lockers, and a lot of them had a habit of forgetting their keys. While Cranston was still in the locker room, he heard one member shouting for a passkey, asking why it wasn't hanging on the hook inside the locker-room door. Someone finally produced the master key, remarking that it had been left in the door of another member's locker.

By that token, almost anyone could have sneaked into the locker room and stolen Laverock's gun, if it had been in his locker at all.

This slipshod situation certainly wouldn't help Laverock's alibi, if he talked to the police. They would take it that Laverock was simply bluffing his way out. He would have to prove, first, that the gun had been in his locker; otherwise, his story would sound thin. However, The Shadow was still inclined to give Laverock the benefit of the existing doubt.

Downstairs again, The Shadow continued his Cranston pose by introducing Harry to Rudolph Delmot. The three retired to a committee room on the mezzanine floor, where Delmot, at Cranston's request, acquainted Harry with the terms of membership in the Avenue Club.

To aid the drive for new members, initiation fees had been discarded. The club depended entirely upon annual dues, which ran to approximately one hundred dollars, plus a few minor charges. There was a special feature, however, that Delmot took care to emphasize.

Membership in the Avenue Club carried an insurance benefit of five thousand dollars, payable upon the death of a member, regardless of cause, with a double indemnity of ten thousand dollars in the event of accidental death.

"That's quite a benefit!" exclaimed Harry, in surprise. "Why, I should think that the premiums on the life insurance would take up all the membership dues!"

"They did, originally," stated Delmot. "In fact the club lost heavily on life memberships, which cost only fifteen hundred dollars, but gave the same benefits, so we had to discontinue them. However, we soon learned that the insurance feature could be handled profitably.

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"A separate corporation was formed, known as the Allied Benefit Association. Though the Avenue Club directs the affairs of the A.B.A., the latter has extended its work to other cities. There are approximately a dozen clubs on the subscribing list, and Allied Benefit has accumulated a strong reserve to tide it over any difficulty."

While Delmot was still speaking, someone knocked on the door. Delmot finally called for the person to come in, and a tall, stoop-shouldered man entered. Harry noted a sharp, hatchet face and quick eyes that were thorough in their rapid scrutiny. Then Delmot was introducing the newcomer. He was Louis Buram, manager of the Allied Benefit Association, subsidiary of the Avenue Club.

Buram had met Cranston before, and gave him an affable nod. When Delmot stated that Harry was a prospective club member, who wanted to know facts about A.B.A., Buram's eyes showed a pleased gleam. He shook hands with Harry, sat down and gave a brief sketch of the A.B.A. and its functions, reeling off facts from his fingertips.

It was quite simple, as Buram elucidated it.

Members of the Avenue Club, and similar societies, were insured on a group basis, at a cost much less than ordinary life insurance. Buram's figures showed that the cost per member was under forty dollars a year, including the double-indemnity proviso. One reason was that the club members were all good risks, for the Avenue Club laid emphasis upon athletics and physical training.

"Of course, we require a large number of policy holders," said Buram, in conclusion. "The more, the better, because numbers protect us against sudden losses. For instance" – Buram drew a check from his pocket and handed it to Delmot – "here is ten thousand dollars, payable to the estate of Dana Orvill because of his unfortunate death, which comes in the accidental class.

"Ten thousand is a mere trifle to the A.B.A., but we do need more members. That is why we are selling the idea to clubs in other cities. When we have fifty or a hundred subscribing organizations like the Avenue Club, instead of a mere dozen, our policy holders will total many thousands."

Buram was looking at Delmot, who nodded approvingly. Apparently, the two had business to discuss, so Cranston suggested that he and Vincent would leave, but Delmot shook his head.

"No need to go," he said. "This matter can wait. The executive committee will have to reorganize, now that Orvill is dead and Laverock has left for parts unknown."

CRANSTON still insisted upon leaving, taking Harry with him to see more of the club. But Buram decided to stay with Delmot. It wasn't that Buram particularly wanted to talk business; rather, he was anxious to avoid a pesky reporter who had camped in the foyer of the Avenue Club and wanted an interview.

As they left the committee room, Cranston and Harry exchanged smiles. The reporter to whom Buram referred was Clyde Burke. When they reached the foyer, they saw Clyde, and Harry heard Cranston undertone:

"Stay around awhile, Vincent, and get acquainted with the members. But don't recognize Burke. Ignore him completely, for the present."

When Cranston rode away from the Avenue Club, he was alone in his limousine. From a pocket of his evening clothes, he drew a small gun, quite unlike the famous automatics which he carried as The Shadow. The gun was the four-barreled Sharps that Laverock had carried.

Following the fray in the Galba Building, The Shadow had scooped that empty weapon from the hallway floor, to prevent either the watchman or the detectives from finding it. He was glad that he had done so, for the antique shooting iron was a lead to James Laverock, a man whom The Shadow wanted to interview again, under less pressing circumstances.

So far, the lead was barren, but with Harry Vincent installed at the Avenue Club, and Clyde Burke also on the job, The Shadow, as Cranston, was free to push the trail that the gun afforded.

Sooner or later, the trail would lead to Laverock. The whispered laugh that came from Cranston's lips was token of that fact.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER VI. THE DOUBLE TRAIL

A BLUISH light was glistening upon the surface of a polished table. Beneath that glow, long-fingered hands moved like separate creatures that crept from blackness. Upon a finger of the left hand gleamed a rare gem of ever-changing hue, a matchless fire opal called a girasol.

That stone was the symbol of The Shadow, and its fire compared with the burn of his amazing eyes. As for the blue light and the surrounding blackness, those denoted The Shadow's sanctum, the hushed headquarters in the heart of Manhattan where he formulated his plans against crime.

The hands crinkled a sheet of paper. It contained a long list of names, some typed in blue, others in red. All were names of persons who knew James Laverock; those in red type stood for the men who were members of the Avenue Club. This list had been compiled for The Shadow by an agent named Rutledge Mann.

Like Laverock, Mann was in the investment business, and had been able to tally the persons with whom Laverock was acquainted, both as friends and customers. So far, however, Mann had been unable to trace anyone – club member or otherwise – who made a hobby of collecting old guns. Thus, The Shadow's main lead to Laverock was still blank.

So was the bluish light, when The Shadow turned it off. A whispered laugh crept through the Stygian depths of the blackened sanctum, announcing that The Shadow was leaving, to pursue his own investigation. That, in turn, told that his destination would be the Avenue Club, where new clues might be in evidence.

IN the gym at the Avenue Club, Harry Vincent was finishing a workout under the approving eye of Tom Rydal. As Harry started toward the locker room, Rydal suggested that he stay around a while.

"We're going to have some exhibition bouts," said Rydal. "Not by club members, but by employees. I've been letting the boys use the gym in their off hours. Some of them are very nice scrappers."

"Sorry, but I have an appointment," returned Harry. "Let me know in advance, the next time, and I'll make it a point to be around."

In the locker room, Harry reflected on his appointment. It was to be with Cranston, and Harry hadn't a thing to tell. As his acquaintance with the Avenue Club grew, the less likely it seemed that any of the members could be involved in the feud that seemingly had laid between Dana Orvill and James Laverock.

There was just one club member that Harry mistrusted, and the man was Louis Buram. The fellow impressed Harry as an upstart, who had crashed the exclusive Avenue Club for reasons that were definitely commercial.

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But Buram, in his way, had just as much at stake as Rudolph Delmot, the much-liked gentleman who was the controlling figure in the club itself.

To both Delmot and Buram, the death of Orvill had meant a cash loss of ten thousand dollars at a time when they were seeking to expand the funds belonging to the Avenue Club and the Allied Benefit Association. Hence Harry, despite himself, was inclining more and more to the theory that some personal grudge lay behind the murder of Orvill.

It looked as though some unknown person, secretly an enemy of Orvill, had committed the crime and tossed the brunt on Laverock.

In the foyer of the Avenue Club, Clyde Burke was getting the interview that he had missed on a previous evening. Clyde had cornered Louis Buram and was battering him with questions, that the quick man tried to parry.

"What about the A.B.A.?" demanded Clyde. "How about its expansion program? How many more cities are coming in on the proposition?"

Wearily, Buram shrugged. Then:

"Here is the whole story, Burke," he declared. "In order to establish a branch in any city, we must first guarantee a given fund, enough to provide for an unexpected run of sudden deaths. Is that clear?"

Clyde nodded.

"On that account," continued Buram, "we are drawing in the reserve funds from clubs already on our lists, so that we can establish the required minimum for each new club that subscribes to our service."

"And what will the total be, Buram?"

"That's why I can't tell you, Burke," replied Buram frankly, "because I don't know. The decision rests with the executive committee of the Avenue Club. It must pass on the stability and general worthiness of the various local clubs that would like to affiliate themselves with Allied Benefit."

"And when will the committee do that?"

"After it reorganizes. It lacks two members. One, Orvill, is dead; the other, Laverock, is missing. See for yourself, Burke" – Buram gestured across the foyer – "there goes the committee up to the meeting room. Until it has decided, I am as much in the dark as you are."

Despite Harry's sentiments to the contrary, Clyde was beginning to like Buram, now that the chap had opened up. So Clyde gave a nod to show that he understood Buram's problem, and proceeded to watch the committee file by.

Among the group, Clyde saw a few keen faces, but the rest were very drab. They looked like men who would simply vote "yes" to any required measure. That fact took Clyde back to the matter of Orvill and Laverock.

It was easy to understand how those two could have come to odds, considering that they were both aggressive. Probably the sight of dull and stodgy faces among the rest of the committee had been enough to drive Orvill and Laverock to extreme notions.

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Clyde was considering that point, when he suddenly realized that Rudolph Delmot was not with the passing parade. Turning, Clyde saw Delmot near the foyer desk, shaking hands with two newcomers.

Those arrivals happened to be Police Commissioner Weston and his capable ace, Inspector Joe Cardona.

Clyde tossed a glance at Buram, and received a quick nod in return.

"There you are, Burke," remarked Buram. "The bloodhounds are still bothered about Laverock. They're going to take up all of Delmot's time, and the committee meeting will go right to pot. Which means that my business, important though it is, will get nowhere fast."

With a shrug, Buram settled back in his chair. Drawing two cigars from his pocket, he handed one to Clyde, suggesting, with a tired smile, that they might as well sit it out, to which Clyde agreed.

Delmot was turning, to invite Weston and Cardona up to the executive office, when another arrival entered the foyer. The newcomer was Lamont Cranston; he seemed quite surprised to see his friend the police commissioner. After a short exchange of greetings, Cranston went along with the group to the office, which was also on the mezzanine.

ONCE in the office, Commissioner Weston came directly to business.

"I won't keep you from your committee meeting very long," Weston told Delmot. "What we're here for, is to make a final try at locating James Laverock."

"I wish you could locate him," returned Delmot ruefully. "We don't know what to do about his case. He's still a member of our executive committee, and we can't do business without him."

"Why don't you expel him?" demanded Weston. "He's wanted for murder, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he hasn't been convicted," reminded Delmot. "If he should be tried, and found innocent, the Avenue Club would be in for a huge lawsuit for defaming Laverock's character. However" – Delmot's eyes showed a beam of hope – "to remain on the committee, Laverock must attend meetings or else give a suitable excuse."

"You mean he may come here tonight?"

"Hardly, commissioner, but it is quite possible that we shall hear from him. If we do" – Delmot was glancing at his watch – "it should be shortly, because the meeting time is almost at hand."

Weston began to rap the arm of his chair, impatiently. Then, to kill time, he said:

"That call to Orvill the other night, the one that decoyed him to the Hotel Bayberry – you haven't been able to trace it, have you?"

"Only to the point that a man made the call," replied Delmot. "A man – not a woman, as might have been expected. Who the man was, we don't know –"

The phone bell interrupted. Weston looked as though he wanted to pounce for the instrument, but he waited and let Delmot lift the instrument instead. As a voice came from the receiver, Delmot placed his hand over the mouthpiece, and said calmly:

"It's Laverock."

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From then on, all were listening, for Laverock's voice was sharp and easily heard. Cranston was standing back, so that Weston and Cardona could crowd close, but he caught everything and recognized Laverock's tone.

Laverock was excusing himself from the committee meeting, and Delmot was handling it very coolly, suggesting that he meet Laverock privately and talk things over. The suggestion did not register.

"I like you, Delmot," came Laverock's voice, abruptly, "but you're too hide-bound. If I told you where I am, you might let it slip to the police. There's only one man I'd be willing to meet. That's Wilfred Secane."

"Secane hasn't arrived yet," informed Delmot. "He's coming in from Washington, by plane."

"I'll call him later, then." Laverock's words were hurried. "Good-by, Delmot."

The receiver clicked, and immediately Weston and Cardona began to talk about tracing the call. Delmot went out to see if Secane had arrived in the committee room. Meanwhile, Cranston idly fingered the list of names that he had received from Rutledge Mann.

Secane's name was on that list. Obviously, the man must be the club member in whom Laverock had expressed trust when talking to The Shadow. But that didn't mean that Laverock was staying at Secane's apartment. On the contrary, it indicated that Laverock must be somewhere else. Again, The Shadow was up against the problem of the antique gun.

Several minutes later, Delmot returned, to state that Secane hadn't yet arrived. Delmot's advice was to wait, and Weston and Cardona decided upon that policy. But neither of them – nor, for that matter, Cranston – realized what complications the short delay was to produce.

DOWN in the foyer of the club, a tall, brisk man entered and was flagged by the attendant at the desk. Clyde Burke didn't see the arrival, for the reporter was busy talking with Louis Buram. It was Harry Vincent, coming from an elevator, who spied the tall man and observed all that happened.

"A message for you, Mr. Secane," said the attendant. "It just arrived."

Secane took the message, read it, crumpled it and threw it into the wastebasket. Turning abruptly, he strode out to the street. There was a buzz from the switchboard behind the desk; the attendant turned to answer it. Harry heard him say:

"But I can't tell Mr. Secane that you want him, Mr. Delmot. Because Mr. Secane just came and left... On account of a message, I believe. One that was phoned to him, a few minutes ago... Yes, I have a copy –"

Harry was already reading that message, having filched the crumpled sheet from the wastebasket while the attendant was turned the other way. The message was brief but pointed. It read:

Meet me at Bill's apartment at once.

JIM.

In the mezzanine office, Cranston was hearing Delmot read that same message aloud. Weston and Cardona both recognized that "Jim" must be Laverock, but who "Bill" was, they hadn't an idea. Cranston's problem was a contrast. He had two ideas.

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On the sheet of names, which he was opening deftly from his pocket, Cranston read two, both in blue, that began with William. One was William Denkel; the other, William Candrew. One or the other must represent the man who collected guns, and in whose apartment James Laverock was staying.

Eager to find Laverock and witness his interview with his trusted friend, Secane, The Shadow was confronted with a double trail!

CHAPTER VII. DEATH ON THE MARCH

STILL clutching the crumpled message that he had thrust in his pocket, Harry Vincent turned toward the mezzanine stairs and saw Lamont Cranston coming down them. Relaxing, Harry waited until Cranston joined him.

It was Cranston who spoke first, and his words were as apt as if, by X-ray vision, he had spotted the paper in Harry's pocket.

"Bill is one of two men," undertoned Cranston. "Either a chap named Denkel or one named Candrew. Both happen to be out of town, otherwise Mann would not have included them on his list. Unfortunately, most of Laverock's customers are out of town at this season."

Harry nodded, wondering what came next. Promptly Cranston told him.

"I shall go to Denkel's first," came the steady tone, "because it is closer. Your destination will be Candrew's. Here is the address." Imperceptibly, Cranston edged a slip of paper into Harry's hand. "Keep watch there until I arrive."

Cranston was gone with that swift though leisurely stride of his, and Harry was about to start on his own mission when he heard an attendant's voice paging him. It appeared that Mr. Vincent was wanted on the telephone, so Harry had to take time out to answer.

The call was from Rutledge Mann. He'd been unable to reach Cranston on the phone. Mann had just found out something important. A friend of Laverock's, named Candrew, collected old guns. It happened that Candrew kept his guns in Florida – where he was at present. Very few persons in New York knew of Candrew's hobby, which was why Mann had been so slow in finding out about it.

Mann's information furnished Harry with the grim realization that he, and not The Shadow, was going to the place where Laverock actually was. True, The Shadow would arrive later, but the detour to Denkel's would delay him.

Coming from the phone booth, Harry saw Clyde shaking hands with Buram, who was going up to talk to the committee members. So Harry slid out front and paced there anxiously, knowing that Clyde would shortly be along.

Since Secane had already gained a head start, all the haste in the world would not overtake him. To Harry, the loss of a few minutes would be offset by having Clyde as a teammate.

Meanwhile Delmot and Cardona were coming down to the foyer. They were on their way to the main office to weed through the long list of club members in hope of learning who "Bill" was. They'd left Weston in Delmot's office at the commissioner's own insistence, on the chance that there might be another call from Laverock.

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The main office was at the rear of the foyer. There, while Cardona was checking the long list, Delmot began to thumb through recent membership applications. In that process he came across a real find.

"Here's something, inspector!" exclaimed Delmot. "An application from a man named William Candrew, with James Laverock listed as the member who proposed him!"

Cardona grabbed the application, read Candrew's name and address, and came to an immediate decision.

"I have some men out front," declared Joe. "I'll send a squad to Candrew's place. Call the commissioner and tell him."

Delmot lost no time. He was ringing his upstairs office while Cardona was going out through the foyer. Getting Weston on the wire, Delmot heard a disappointed grunt when the commissioner learned that the caller wasn't Laverock. But Delmot promptly changed Weston's mood.

Giving the commissioner the brief facts on Candrew, Delmot stated that Cardona was going to the man's apartment in hope of finding Laverock there with Secane. Inasmuch as Cardona had already started, Weston decided that the plan was a good one and that he would follow to Candrew's in his official car.

Meanwhile Clyde had joined Harry out front. Both were getting into Moe's cab when they saw Cardona come from the club to gather together his squad members. This placed The Shadow's agents in a quandary. As they rode along, they agreed that their only course was to wait outside of the apartment house and notify The Shadow when he arrived.

If there proved to be a way of getting in to see Laverock, with the police practically on the scene, The Shadow would find it. Of that the agents were sure.

It so happened that The Shadow was faring better than his agents supposed. Given good traffic conditions, his limousine could cover ground rapidly, and his detour around by Denkel's didn't take him long.

During the ride, The Shadow changed from Cranston into his black-clad self, for the limousine, like Moe's cab, was equipped with a hidden drawer that contained a cloak, a hat, and other accouterments.

From his car, The Shadow spotted Denkel's apartment, saw that it was dark and that the window shades were not drawn. So he kept on to Candrew's, reaching the place only a few minutes after Harry and Clyde.

However, it chanced that The Shadow came from the opposite direction and dismissed the limousine in back of the apartment house. The Shadow planned to enter from the rear and contact Harry, who would be coming through the front.

Thus The Shadow did not learn that Moe's cab was parked around the corner, with Clyde and Harry keeping sharp lookout for the limousine, which, in its turn, failed to appear within their range of observation.

Coming up through a fire tower, The Shadow found a back door to the apartment that he wanted. He tried the door but discovered that it was bolted. Listening there, he caught the faint buzz of voices from within. Though indistinguishable, they seemed to be coming closer, so The Shadow waited and listened.

Those voices belonged to James Laverock and Wilfred Secane. The two were standing in a small living room, not far from the door to the kitchen. At present The Shadow did not see them, but he was later to picture matters very accurately, almost as precisely as if he had been upon the scene itself.

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The living room had a door which led out to a front hall on the third floor of the small apartment building. It was through that door that Laverock had admitted Secane. The door itself was bolted by means of a chain bolt, which Laverock had replaced after admitting his friend.

Laverock's face was strained, and its unshaven condition added to its haggard look. In turn, Secane was very solemn and exceedingly blunt in what he said.

"You're doing the worst thing possible, Jim," Secane was telling Laverock. "Hiding out this way is only making your case look bad."

"It's all right for you to talk that way," retorted Laverock bitterly, "but if you found yourself in the same sort of jam you'd do much the same."

Secane gave an unconvinced stare.

"Suppose you heard some shots and saw a man fall dead," argued Laverock. "You'd clear out, wouldn't you? Well, that's what I did, otherwise the killer might have bagged me, too. You don't think I murdered Orvill, do you, Wilfred?"

Bluntly, Secane parried the question by putting one of his own.

"Who did kill him, Jim?"

"Frankly, I don't know," replied Laverock slowly. His eyes took on a stare that was suddenly suspicious. "Tell me this: how did you happen to come here?"

"I received your message at the club," Secane replied. "Naturally, I wanted to help you –"

"My message?" interrupted Laverock. His voice had become noticeably thick. "Oh, yes, the message." Then, with a new stare of suspicion, he added: "Delmot doesn't know where I am, does he?"

"I didn't talk to Delmot."

"Then... how" – Laverock swayed unsteadily – "how did you find out? Still, I didn't tell Delmot –"

Secane eased Laverock into a chair and gave a reproving headshake.

"You've been drinking too much, Jim," said Secane. "Better steady a bit, and get rid of the fog. Then we can talk sensibly."

Raising a shaky hand, Laverock gestured toward the kitchen.

"Get me another drink," he suggested. "It's what I need to get rid of these jitters. Pour yourself one, too. Maybe you could use it."

THOUGH The Shadow could not catch that conversation, he clearly heard Secane come into the kitchen. The clink of glasses followed, with the gurgle of liquid. Secane took a tray of ice cubes from the refrigerator and The Shadow followed his actions by the sounds. Then Secane was going back into the living room, for The Shadow could trace his receding footsteps.

Only a few footfalls; then it came.

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The thing that came was a gunshot, muffled by the kitchen door. There was the thud of a fading body, a startled cry that must have been Secane's, for it was accompanied by the smash of falling glasses. It sounded much as though Laverock had shot Secane, but The Shadow detected factors which indicated that it could be the other way about.

First, the thud seemed more distant than the cry, and it preceded the clatter of glasses by a full second. If Secane had taken the bullet, he must have clung to the glasses, even after he collapsed. Hence The Shadow's conjecture that Laverock, not Secane, was the victim.

That question could be settled later. It was The Shadow's job to prevent a killer from leaving the apartment. It wouldn't do to stand by the kitchen door while someone went out through the front. So The Shadow started rapidly along the long hallway, looking for the corner that would give him a view of the apartment's front door.

Reaching the turn, The Shadow wheeled abruptly, a drawn automatic in his fist. The hallway here was well lighted, but it didn't show the door The Shadow wanted, for a stairway blocked the view. Those stairs led downward, but the men upon the steps were coming up.

They, too, had heard the muffled shot. They were dashing up with drawn revolvers. Against the light, they saw the black shape of The Shadow and took him to be the intruder that they sought.

Only by a quick swerve and a drop to the floor did The Shadow avoid the fire that tongued from ready guns. Thinking that they had blasted their opponent, the attackers lunged from the steps, shouting as they came.

Of all the times for The Shadow to precipitate himself into an unexpected fray, this was the worst. New murder had been done. Death was again on the march. And now The Shadow, the one being who could have trapped the killer, was confronted with problems of his own in the form of two brawny assailants who were seeking him with guns.

Forgotten for the moment were Laverock and Secane. The Shadow was in for trouble of his own!

CHAPTER VIII. THE MISSING KILLER

SO rapid was The Shadow's fade that he lacked time in which to identify his foemen. They were coming from the gloom of the stairway, while The Shadow was in the light, and his immediate purpose was to reverse that situation.

As he struck the floor, The Shadow heard bullets pound the wall above him, then he was rolling for the rear wall, past the corner, coming deftly to his feet to meet the attackers when they turned his way.

Recalling Laverock's flight after Orvill's death, The Shadow remembered the tangle of automobiles, with snipers in the offing. This looked like a similar circumstance. Murder had been done again, and here were reserves on hand to cover a killer's getaway.

Those reserves were asking trouble for themselves as they swung the corner of the hallway, brandishing their smoking guns. Rising to meet them was a black-cloaked fighter who had found his habitat, darkness. The Shadow was one against two, but the odds favored him. The intrepid fighter in black could have taken on half a dozen without inconvenience under these conditions.

The Shadow caught flashes of gleaming metal as his assailants wheeled blindly his way. Four gleams, not just two. At quick glance it might have been supposed that those four sparkles meant that each opponent was

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carrying a pair of guns.

Not to The Shadow. With him, a quick glance could mean a thorough survey. He understood the gleams and acted accordingly. Instead of leveling his automatic, The Shadow drove forward, shoulders first, with his arms spread wide to grapple with his foemen.

Guns ripped loud above The Shadow's shoulders. Only two guns spoke, for the other gleams were badges!

These men were the advance members of Cardona's squad, men who had headed here without The Shadow's knowledge. Lucky it was for them that The Shadow recognized them when he did, for they had thrown themselves into a trap. The Shadow could have withered both of them with his own gun while they were delivering those wild shots, and would have done so had he still mistaken the pair for crooks.

As it was, The Shadow dealt differently with his opponents, though it meant hazard to himself. Hooking the headquarters men, he spun them against each other, rolling them to the floor while their guns, flying upward, were barking wilder than before. In their ears, the detectives heard the low mirth of a whispered laugh, which should have told them that resistance was futile.

But this pair had never before encountered The Shadow. They had been fed too fully with the theory that The Shadow was a myth, an official attitude on which Commissioner Weston insisted, despite evidence to the contrary. Finding that their shots weren't reaching their assailant in black, the detectives tried to sledge him with their revolvers.

The result was a clash of metal as The Shadow battered back, parrying every stroke so skillfully that, before they realized it, the detectives were hammering at each other with every third stroke and missing The Shadow completely with the blows that came between.

Meanwhile, Inspector Joe Cardona had reached the top of the stairs. He heard the struggle in the rear hall, and the clash of metal led him to believe that his men were suppressing some antagonist, particularly as the clatter drowned The Shadow's low-toned taunts. So Joe kept to his original objective – the apartment where Secane had gone to meet Laverock.

The apartment was along the front hall, just short of a continuation of the stairway that led up to floors above. Reaching the door, Cardona saw Candrew's name on it.

The knob was at the right, so Joe grabbed it with his left hand, taking his gun in his right.

The door yielded, but only for a few inches, then the chain bolt stopped it from going farther inward.

Through the aperture thus formed, Cardona, viewed a singular sight.

ON the floor lay James Laverock, a very gory figure. A single shot had sufficed to kill him, for it had been delivered right between the eyes with results as quick as they were ugly.

Beside Laverock lay the death gun, a most unusual weapon for a murder. It was an automatic of very old style, a long-handled thing that appeared to have a .45 frame. The barrel, however, was thin and very lengthy. It looked like a .22 job rigged on a heavier frame, a weapon designed for long-range target practice.

Only briefly did Cardona study the gun. He was more interested in the man who was stooping beside Laverock's body.

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That man was obviously Wilfred Secane. His features looked as harried as Laverock's bloodstained face. Hearing the clatter of the door as Cardona shouldered it against the resisting chain bolt, Secane looked up, saw Joe's swarthy visage, and made a reach for the exaggerated automatic that lay on the floor beside the body.

Cardona stopped that move.

Simple was the system that Joe used. He poked his own gun, a Police Positive, through the crack of the door. It was easy enough to get the muzzle through, though Joe's fist couldn't follow.

A few inches to the right of the door was a wall extending straight inward about two feet, evidently the side wall of a closet. Cardona turned his hand to aim along the wall in question, for Laverock's body lay beyond the corner, and Secane was just on the other side of the dead man.

Seeing the threat, Secane didn't wait to snatch the obsolete automatic that had brought death to Laverock. Though suitable for cold murder, the clumsy weapon couldn't compete with Cardona's modern revolver. Seized by an urge for self-preservation, Secane made a leap beyond the short corner of the wall along which Cardona aimed.

Joe blasted two belated shots, then gave a savage growl. Secane took the growl as a signal that Cardona wasn't ready to shoot again, and the guess was right. Springing out into the open, Secane leaped across the path of fire so unexpectedly that Cardona was again behind time when he pulled his trigger.

There was a smash from the far side of the living room as Secane hurled a metal ash stand through a windowpane. Cardona didn't see it happen, for the door blocked his view. But he heard the crash and the scramble that followed. Secane was making a mad and rapid exit through the broken window.

All the while, more footsteps had been pounding up from the stairs below. Stepping back from the door, Cardona heard an excited voice beside him; he turned and saw Delmot, halted half way from the stairs. Delmot was breathless, for a man of his age could be easily winded by a dash up three flights of steps.

"What... what's happened, inspector?" Delmot panted. "Was that Laverock... shooting it out with you?"

"Laverock is dead," snapped Cardona. "Secane just murdered him! Come on and we'll try to head him off!"

Grabbing Delmot, Cardona steered him for the stairs, where another man came storming upward. The new arrival was Commissioner Weston, as much out of breath as Delmot. Behind the commissioner were the other members of Cardona's squad. Joe had left them outside, but Weston had ordered them to come along.

It was Delmot who blurted the news of Laverock's death and Secane's flight, for Cardona was looking for the detectives in the rear hall. Joe found them, sitting on each side of the passage, staring groggily at each other. They were realizing for the first time that they had finished by slugging it out together, for there was no longer any sign of the cloaked adversary who had first engaged them.

The thing was a momentary mystery to Cardona until he heard the departing tone of a vague, grim laugh that trailed back from the fire tower. Therewith Cardona knew who it was that his men had encountered in the hallway. But that wasn't all that Cardona garnered from The Shadow's fading mirth.

Unquestionably, The Shadow, too, had heard the crash of Secane's exit from the living room where Laverock lay dead, for the sound was loud enough to carry through closed doors. The Shadow's laugh was a call to Cardona, an invitation to join in a chase that might result in the capture of a missing murderer!

CHAPTER IX. CRIME'S PROOF

BY the time he reached the street below the fire tower, The Shadow could hear the thump of following footsteps. From their number, he assumed that Cardona had divided his squad, for the foot thumps were not many. The rest of the inspector's men must have gone out by the front; and it was good judgment for Cardona to send them in that direction, because Secane could easily double his course if he so decided.

From the street, The Shadow saw the route that had furnished Secane with immediate escape. The brisk man had dropped to a low roof less than a floor below the living-room window. It was the roof of an old garage, and it probably had a skylight in the top, one that Secane could easily have smashed or pried open.

There was a rear door to the garage, so The Shadow cut in through it. He came upon a mass of cars, all of which looked as though they had been left in the place on a dead-storage basis. There were no attendants in the garage, but the place certainly had an occupant, for The Shadow heard a clatter near the front.

Hurrying through, he saw a little door come slapping shut and knew that Secane must have fled by that exit. Why Secane had gone out through the front instead of the back was a riddle that explained itself as soon as The Shadow followed through to the front street.

A car was scooting around the corner, and from its hurry, The Shadow knew that Secane must be in it. Evidently Secane had come by car to call on Laverock and had left his vehicle in front of the apartment house.

Thus had Secane nullified The Shadow's effort to block his escape. Had the fellow been fleeing on foot, he would doubtless have taken the garage's rear exit, right into The Shadow's clutch.

As for pursuit, The Shadow had a means at his disposal. A cab wheeled up from another corner to begin a chase. The Shadow flagged it with the blinks of a tiny flashlight that gleamed red from its colored lens. Then The Shadow was springing into the cab, Moe Shrevnitz's cab, and both Harry and Clyde were hopping out the other side at their chief's order.

In a few words The Shadow was telling them what to do. He wanted them to take cover and keep watch on the smashed window of the upstairs apartment to make sure that no one else went in or out of it. Seeing Secane in flight, The Shadow was quite sure that Laverock was the victim, but he hadn't forgotten Laverock's original status.

Laverock had been wanted for Orvill's death, a point on which The Shadow still differed with the law. Now Secane was wanted for killing Laverock, and the similarity of the cases forced The Shadow to keep an open mind until he learned more.

History was repeating itself in more ways than one.

As Moe's cab whirled the corner, with The Shadow as a passenger, the whir of police sirens sounded from in back. It was like the pursuit of Laverock, this chase of Secane. The Shadow was leading the van, with the law close behind. Then, as before, disaster loomed.

CARS were jerking to a stop at a crossing just ahead to let Secane's car whiz through, which it did. A truck, mixed in the traffic, went partly out of control. To dodge other cars, it swung broadside, directly in the path of The Shadow's cab.

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Moe slapped the brake so hard that the rear of the cab hopped. With a yank of the wheel, Moe had the cab swerving full about, as shots rang out.

This time there was no question where the shots came from. They barked from within the truck, with the cab as the target. Had the gunners been equipped with a machine gun, they might have riddled the cab before The Shadow could have dragged Moe from it; but they didn't have so devastating a weapon.

The reason: this was supposed to be a neat cover-up, one that the police wouldn't suspect. Revolver shots were preferable, for witnesses wouldn't be able to tell where they came from, and the police would probably think that Secane had done some shooting during his getaway. But in trying to be clever, these men who staged the cover-up were rendering themselves quite inefficient.

Before they could get the proper range on The Shadow's cab, his automatics talked. Slugs of .45 caliber began to chop their way through the blank sides of the truck. The driver didn't wait for the gunners to receive theirs, with interest, from The Shadow. Bawling for them to lie low, the trucker roared the big vehicle for the nearest side street to escape The Shadow's fire.

The taunting laugh that followed the fleeing truck was the promise of a chase to come. If only Moe could have gotten his cab around, The Shadow would have gone through with such pursuit. By then, however, police cars were pouring into the confusion, with Weston's official limousine among them. To avoid denting the big car's precious fenders, the chauffeur banked it across the street where the truck had gone.

Only The Shadow realized that pursuit of the truck was vital, now that Secane's car was away. In fact, he would have preferred the truck's trail, but it was no longer open.

With a low word to Moe, The Shadow slid from the cab and merged with the blackness of a sidewalk. When police began to investigate the traffic tangle, the cab was just part of it. Like the drivers of other cars, Moe argued that he'd gotten into the mix-up through sheer accident.

Returning to the apartment house, Commissioner Weston found his friend, Cranston, waiting there. Cranston's mood was a rather chiding one. He wanted to know why Weston and Delmot had left the Avenue Club without him. Certainly they should have taken him along, since he had been a party to their conference.

"I'd have brought you, Cranston, if you'd been around," snapped Weston brusquely. "Apparently things happened too rapidly for your wits to keep up with them. Inspector Cardona left first, and Delmot went with him. They were both gone when I reached the foyer, and when I looked around and failed to see you, I simply couldn't wait."

Cranston gave a rueful nod, remarking that he was sorry he'd been out of things. To which Weston shot the retort that Cranston was no worse off than the rest of them. All that remained was the investigation of the apartment where Secane had slain Laverock, and Cranston could be present during that procedure.

To reach the apartment, they went up through the garage next door – at the suggestion of Cardona, who had returned with Delmot. The last to take the stairs to the garage's skylight, Cranston paused to light a cigarette near the door. As he did, a man slid up from between two of the close-crammed cars. He was Harry Vincent, reporting in an undertone.

"Burke and I kept watch," Harry informed, "until the police returned; then we slipped in here. No sign of anyone up by the apartment window."

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In The Shadow's whisper, Cranston told Harry that he could return to the Avenue Club, and that Clyde was to go off duty for the evening. Instructions given, The Shadow went up to the garage roof in the leisurely manner so typical of Lamont Cranston.

DETECTIVES had found a short ladder, and were using it to climb into the apartment through the window that Secane had smashed. Weston and Delmot were inside when Cranston joined them through the window route, but the commissioner was leaving the details of investigation to Inspector Cardona, who proceeded in his competent style.

Cardona's first task was to make sure that no one, other than Secane, could have been in the apartment with Laverock. Having left two men in the upstairs hall, to listen at the chain-bolted door, Cardona – like The Shadow – was convinced that no one else could have left the place.

The kitchen door was bolted on the inside. The windows were tightly locked, including the one that Secane had smashed, rather than waste time with the catch. As for the door to the hallway, Cardona proceeded to prove that it could not have been used as an exit by some person unknown, granted that such a person had murdered Laverock and made a quick departure to put the blame on Secane.

Opening the door, Cardona stepped through. From the hallway side, he closed the door, until only his fingers showed past the edge. Cardona made valiant efforts to pull the chain bolt into place, but failed. His hand, itself, defeated the attempt.

In order to get the chain bolt into the end of the grooved socket, the door had to be closed, and Cardona, couldn't close the door because he had to use his fingers to try to put the chain bolt where he wanted it.

As Cranston, The Shadow watched the process as though quite disinterested. He already knew the difficulties of chain bolts, and recognized that no one could possibly have managed the thing in question. But there was another angle to this case, that Cranston would soon have mentioned if Weston hadn't suddenly expressed it.

"One moment, inspector," asserted the commissioner. "You say that you fired shots at Secane through the partly opened door. Perhaps someone other than Secane could have shot Laverock through the doorway."

"You've struck it, commissioner!" exclaimed Delmot, with enthusiasm. "I've felt, all along that it was preposterous to accuse Secane of murdering Laverock. Why, the two were good friends! Suppose we test the thing, commissioner."

Delmot put the chain bolt in place and then pulled back the door, so Cardona could get the few-inch leeway. From the other side, Joe demonstrated how he had aimed his gun through. By then, Weston was as enthusiastic as Delmot. The commissioner entered the demonstration.

"I'm Laverock," he said. "I hear someone at the door. I open it and peer through. You're the party unknown, inspector. Your gun is ready, so you shoot me right between the eyes."

Cardona, didn't furnish the last part of the demonstration. Instead, he simply withdrew his revolver and spoke from the other side of the door.

"All right, commissioner," said the inspector. "I've shot you. What do I do next?"

"You toss the gun in here," informed Weston. "That's what the killer would have done."

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With some difficulty, Cardona managed to squeeze his police revolver through the door and let it fall to the floor beyond, where it fell beside the death gun. It was Joe, himself, who mentioned the thing that everyone promptly noticed: namely, that the revolver looked like a mere toy beside the old-fashioned automatic that had blasted Laverock's brains.

"Hand me the big bun, commissioner," suggested Cardona. "I'll have to see if it will squeeze through, too."

Weston tried to comply, but couldn't. The long-barreled automatic simply wouldn't go through the door; at least, not from Weston's side. So the commissioner unbolted the door; he and Cranston stepped into the hallway, while Delmot obligingly remained inside to bolt the door again.

TRY as he could, Cardona couldn't get the long gun through the door space. It would have been easy enough to fire a shot from it, right through the crack, but tossing the gun itself was quite another proposition.

Like the barrel, the handle was long. Any way that Cardona, shoved the gun, lengthwise or point upward, either the barrel or the handle encountered the wall that was no more than four inches to the right of the door. Laverock could have poked his face into that space, but the bulky automatic wouldn't work through.

Cardona tried to shove it in V fashion, with muzzle and handle at angles to the right, but he had no luck. Joe finally conceded that there could only be one way to accomplish the task: that would be to take the gun apart and thrust the barrel and the handle separately through the door.

Naturally, no killer could have used that method, for Secane, within the room, would have had to obligingly assemble the gun for him.

Weston made some tries, but with no more luck than Cardona. He was about to pass the clumsy gun to Cranston, when Delmot unbolted the door and came out. He had an idea and wanted to test it, so Cranston went inside and threw the chain bolt.

First, Delmot made some thrusts with the gun at the door edge, just to learn how Weston and Cardona had failed. Then, from within the room, Cranston heard the big man voice his idea.

"I'm going to try it over the top," explained Delmot. "That's the only way it could possibly have gone through. I still think that Secane is innocent."

Cranston saw the long muzzle of the gun come poking over the door top, but the handle didn't follow, for the angle was too sharp. Delmot tried it handle first, but the system also failed when reversed. He tried to work the gun over the door top in V fashion, and still it wouldn't make the grade.

Then Delmot made his final attempt. He worked the gun sideward, its barrel on a line with the door top. Cardona had tried the same system at the side of the door, where the wall had stopped it. In this case, there was nothing inside the room to stop the gun's progress; nevertheless, it failed to come through.

The reason was simply. The handle was too thick. The space at the top of the door was narrower than at the side, because the door, like all hinged doors, opened at an angle. The slight dearth of space was just enough to ruin Delmot's experiment. Reluctantly, Delmot returned the gun to Weston, who asked Cranston to unbolt the door.

Watching casually, Cranston saw Cardona wrap up the odd automatic as "Exhibit A" in the case against Wilfred Secane. The verdict was as good as final. Since Secane had been in the apartment alone with Laverock, only Secane could have killed the hunted man, inasmuch as the death gun must have been in the

room, too.

True, Secane might claim that Laverock had committed suicide in his presence, but such an argument would not carry far. Had Laverock decided to end his own life, he would logically have done so long before Secane's visit. If ever circumstantial evidence of murder bulked large against a man, it was true in the case of Wilfred Secane.

It was odd, therefore, that when Lamont Cranston left the apartment, alone, his lips should phrase a whispered laugh that carried a prophetic note. Usually, when The Shadow undertoned that strange mirth, it meant that he – and he alone – had discovered something of singular moment.

Nevertheless, The Shadow laughed, as though his lips were thereby expressing something that he, for reasons of his own, preferred to put in mirth, not words!

CHAPTER X. CRIME'S INTERLUDE

ON the next evening, assembled members of the Avenue Club went through the motions of electing two new candidates to the executive committee. As usual with such elections, the procedure was cut and dried. It was customary for the committee to suggest the candidates, and there being no objections, the suggested men were voted into office.

All during the meeting, Rudolph Delmot presided with bowed shoulders, his face set in a strained expression. Those close by could detect the droop of sadness in his eyes, steady though they tried to be.

It was easy to understand Delmot's mood. These men who were being voted into office were replacements for two of Delmot's closest friends: Dana Orvill and James Laverock.

The meeting over, Delmot talked a short while with the new committee members, then went up to his office. He found Lamont Cranston waiting there and greeted him with a nod. Then, closing the door, Delmot sank into the chair behind his desk and gave way to his pent-up feelings.

"It's horrible, Cranston!" he exclaimed. "You were at the meeting, and you saw it. This business of filling the shoes of dead men! It's too horrible for words!"

Cranston's opinion didn't quite coincide with Delmot's, for he had some words to say about it.

"It struck me as rather unimpressive," spoke Cranston. "Those two candidates are not established members, like Orvill and Laverock. They are newcomers, who know little about the Avenue Club."

"Like all the rest of the committee," groaned Delmot. "There were only three capable men on it: Orvill, Laverock and Secane. Now, two of them are gone, and the third –"

Delmot halted, shook his head. He was wondering about Secane. Understanding, Cranston put the question:

"What will Secane do? Resign?"

"I don't know," replied Delmot. "Laverock should have resigned, but he didn't. I hope that Secane will show more sense. All that I can do is call a committee meeting for tomorrow night and have the commissioner announce it in the newspapers. Secane may see it, and respond."

"And then?"

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"And then," repeated Delmot seriously, "we shall have another election. The committee members will propose some new man, as stupid as themselves, and he will accept the honor. After all, what else can we expect? We had a good committee once, but some of its members dropped out, through various causes, until only three capable men were left."

"Four, Delmot. You should include yourself."

"Thanks for the compliment, Cranston. At least, I've done my best to keep the committee active. The trouble was, Orvill and Laverock were too active. They never seemed to trust anyone, each other least of all."

Pondering for the moment, Delmot added, almost musingly:

"I wonder, could Secane have been the same way? He's a close-mouthed chap, Secane, and he could have been keeping a lot to himself. If we could only get to the bottom of it, Cranston!"

It so happened that Cranston was digging for the bottom of it, perhaps more deeply than Delmot recognized. The fact was evidenced, later the same evening, when Cranston met with Harry Vincent in a secluded corner of the club dining room, where they indulged in a midnight snack.

Harry had been reading over the bylaws of the Avenue Club, preparatory toward applying for membership.

Taking the little book, Cranston glanced through its pages, and remarked dryly:

"Study this carefully, Vincent. Perhaps you may some day become eligible for the executive committee."

"That won't take much study," returned Harry, "considering the caliber of the two who were elected tonight. From what I've seen around this place, the employees are a smarter lot than the members."

"You saw some of Rydal's amateur bouts?"

"Yes, and the boys have been doing a lot of work-outs in the gym. They go in for the toughest sort of acrobatics. One fellow nearly broke his neck on the horizontal bars, last night, but managed to get by with only a dislocated shoulder. They've given him a week off."

Cranston smiled. Harry was learning more about the Avenue Club than his chief knew. So Harry proceeded with further information. Most of the hired help lived at the club, taking up the slack in rooms that the members didn't use. Those rooms were on the third floor, where the club wall banked against a row of old, unoccupied houses.

The personnel was large, for the club had taken on many new attendants in anticipation of the coming membership drive. Harry regarded that as good policy, because plenty of hired help meant a well-managed organization. However, new members weren't coming in very rapidly, and the trouble seemed to be with the executive committee.

"It doesn't seem to matter who the members are," stated Harry, "so long as the committee functions. Even with Orvill and Laverock replaced, things can't move until something is done about Secane."

Again, Cranston smiled. The Shadow knew what Harry was driving at. Harry was anxious to know what his chief thought of the Secane situation, so The Shadow proceeded to tell him.

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"It is a duplicate of the former case," came Cranston's analysis. "Laverock was accused of murdering Orvill; now, Secane is supposed to have killed Laverock. The law thinks it has solid evidence in both cases."

"Has it?" queried Harry.

"Only as far as the law knows," returned Cranston, with a steady gaze. "One step farther in each case, and the whole theory may be reversed. Of course, there is another factor that the police have entirely overlooked. In each case, a similar band of men covered the getaway of the supposed murderer – a most illogical procedure."

Harry understood. It wasn't likely that men who worked for Laverock would switch to Secane. Therefore, it followed that they hadn't worked for either. But that inference was the last that Cranston expressed to Harry. If he had other points in mind, The Shadow intended to hold them until some later occasion.

LATE the next afternoon, The Shadow met Clyde Burke, the other agent who was working on the cases of death about town. The meeting took place outside the Avenue Club, since it wouldn't do for Lamont Cranston, as a reputable member, to be seen chatting with an upstart reporter like Clyde Burke.

"I've been hounding Louis Buram all day," informed Clyde, "but he just won't talk to me. Buram says he doesn't want anything printed, right now, about the Allied Benefit Association."

"Why not?" queried Cranston.

"He says it would mean undue publicity," returned Clyde, "which is Buram's term for notoriety. But it doesn't make sense to me. The A.B.A. paid off double when Orvill died, and it's going to do the same on Laverock's account. I should think that Buram would be proud to have people know that his concern is solvent."

Cranston's eyes showed keen interest in Clyde's findings, so the reporter explained that he had learned about the Laverock payment while sitting around the office of the A.B.A. waiting for an interview with Buram. Clyde was more than ever anxious for that interview, and he asked if he should persist in getting it, to which Cranston nodded.

"All right, then," assured Clyde. "I'll crash the sacred gates of the Avenue Club again. Buram is coming there this evening with Laverock's ten-thousand-dollar pay check. I'll flag him, and get my story."

With evening, Cranston was at the Avenue Club ahead of both Clyde and Buram. He found Weston in conference with Delmot, but Cardona wasn't present. Weston explained that his ace inspector was scouring town, seeking some trace of Secane. It appeared that Secane was a man of many parts, and many friends, though little could be learned about either. However, Weston had picked up some interesting data.

"We communicated with Candrew," stated Weston. "He's in Florida, and he remembered that Laverock had a key to his apartment, one that he loaned him once, but which never was returned. Another thing: Candrew collects old guns."

"An important point!" exclaimed Delmot. "Perhaps Laverock found that odd automatic in the apartment. Secane might have been taking it away from him."

"All of Candrew's guns are in Florida," declared Weston, "except for a four-barreled Sharps that should have been in the apartment. It may have been the gun that Laverock brought to his office when he met up with the watchman. What became of it, we don't know. What is more important, Candrew didn't own the big automatic that killed Laverock. He says he never even saw such a gun."

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Glumly, Delmot shook his head. His efforts to whitewash Secane were thinning badly. Weston decided that it was time to squash Secane's defense entirely.

"We found letters from both Orvill and Laverock at Secane's hotel," stated Weston. "Each has been trying to enlist him against the other. Even if we assume that Secane felt impartially about it, he would naturally have veered to Orvill's side, once Laverock was accused of murdering Orvill."

Delmont looked surprised.

"Do you mean Secane had a vengeance motive?"

"Nothing less," returned Weston. "I'd say he gave Laverock a fair chance to talk, but that Laverock did not convince him. Secane had that old target automatic with him, probably the only gun he could pick up. So he squared things for Orvill by killing Laverock."

It was so concisely put, that Delmot couldn't disagree. He was about to speak again, however, when a knock came at the door. It was Buram; the representative of the A.B.A. was bringing Laverock's check.

He produced it from a brief case that he carried, and, for a moment, Buram was flustered when the others saw stacks of cash inside the opened brief case.

Then, realizing that the witnesses were the police commissioner and a trusted friend, Buram smiled wanly. He brought the bundles of bills from the brief case and handed them to Delmot.

"I was taking this cash to the A.B.A. office," stated Buram. "It's money that came in from out-of-town clubs toward our new sinking fund. Maybe I'd better not carry so much cash at night. Suppose you keep it in your safe, Delmot. Let me have a receipt, just to keep the books straight."

Delmot took the cash, and obliged with the receipt. Actually, the funds belonged to the Avenue Club, since the A.B.A. was its subsidiary, but since the cash was earmarked for insurance, a proper record was necessary.

Tucking the brief case under his arm, Buram showed a relieved look on his hatchet features, and lighted a cigar. As he left, he threw back a quick, darting glance.

Compared to Buram's rapid look, Cranston's actions were painfully slow. Rising in his most leisurely fashion, he announced that he was going up to the gym for some exercise, which brought smiles from both Weston and Delmot. Neither guessed what was in Cranston's mind, for his slow motions completely concealed it.

Indeed, Cranston couldn't have analyzed his own thoughts at the moment. He was simply following one of those mental flashes that came to him as The Shadow. Buram, of course, had supplied the spark. His insistence that Delmot keep his cash, the darting look he gave in parting, combined to form the flint and steel.

With that flash, The Shadow knew that crime's interlude had ended. Another stroke was on the way. It was time for a gentleman named Lamont Cranston to drop his identity and become that master of mystery, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. WAYS IN THE DARK

ONE man watched Louis Buram when he strode across the foyer of the Avenue Club; that watcher was Harry Vincent. He noticed that Buram seemed in quite a hurry, and that he was clutching his brief case very tightly.

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What worried Harry was the fact that Clyde Burke wasn't around. According to plan, Clyde should have been tagging Buram very closely.

In fact, Clyde was.

Outside the door of the club, Buram stopped. Walking over toward the attendant's desk, Harry saw the reason. Clyde was outside, too, and he was halting Buram. It looked as though the two were due for an argument, for the doorman was joining them.

One hand on the door, the man in uniform was pushing it open, as though to summon aid if an altercation followed. Thanks to the doorman, Harry heard what happened.

Buram took the situation with a smile. Removing his cigar from his lips, he said to Clyde:

"All right, Burke. You win. What do you want?"

"I still want a story," returned Clyde. He gestured toward the doorman. "If you chase this fellow, we can go inside and have a pleasant chat, Buram."

Buram shook his head.

"Can't do, Burke," he said. "The club has orders to keep reporters out."

"Then how about going somewhere else?"

"Very well," decided Buram. "You can come over to my office. I'll have to make a few stops on the way, but I don't suppose you'll mind. Let's take a cab."

The two moved away, quite amicable, and the doorman went back to his post. By then, the attendant at the desk was eyeing Harry quizzically, wondering what he wanted. So Harry asked for paper and envelope. Receiving them, he wrote a brief note, sealed it, and told the attendant to deliver it to Mr. Cranston.

Cranston was strolling down from the mezzanine when the note reached him. Harry had just gone out the door, but the note disclosed the fact that his departure was very recent. The reason Harry hadn't addressed the note was because he had written it in a special ink which The Shadow and all his agents carried in their fountain pens – a quick-drying fluid that vanished rapidly when exposed to air.

To prevent any chance pryer from learning the note's contents, Harry had to put it in code, which Cranston read rapidly. The note stated that Clyde had met Buram, and that the two were going on a roundabout trip that would finally land them in the Zenith Building, where the A.B.A. offices were located.

Thinking that Cranston was tied up with the commissioner, Harry was going directly to the Zenith Building to be there when they arrived. Crumpling the note, as though it were quite unimportant, Cranston tossed it into a wastebasket.

Had anyone picked up that sheet of paper, they would have wondered why Cranston had bothered to study it at all. By then, the sheet was quite blank.

It was remarkable, the way in which Cranston retained his leisurely manner at a time that required action. Things had happened with a rapidity that fully established The Shadow's conjecture regarding imminent trouble.

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Buram's about-face, where Clyde was concerned, fitted perfectly with the situation. Harry had sensed it; otherwise, he wouldn't have been in such a hurry, taking off to the Zenith Building.

But The Shadow, as Cranston, showed no hurry at all. Passing the front windows of the foyer, he saw something – or, rather, the absence of it – which satisfied him for the time.

Moe's cab should have been out front, but wasn't. It was certain, therefore, that Clyde had gone in that cab, with Buram. Harry certainly would not have commandeered Moe for a direct trip to a known destination. So Cranston's manner became even slower than before.

Crossing the foyer, he took a chair near the telephone booths, and would have remained there if Delmot hadn't appeared from the mezzanine.

To avoid him, Cranston stepped into a booth and put in a call to the person he was waiting to hear from – his contact man, Burbank. When Burbank responded, The Shadow's whisper informed him to keep the line open. Meanwhile, in the placid fashion of Cranston, The Shadow watched Delmot enter the downstairs office.

Delmot was carrying the money that Buram had left in his custody, because the safe was in the downstairs office. He must have taken time to count it, for it was several minutes before he reappeared and went up to rejoin Weston. By then, Burbank was announcing that he had gained the contact that The Shadow wanted.

Moe had just reported. His cab was parked near Times Square. Buram and Clyde had gone into a hotel to pick up some bundles, and had a few more stops to make. Moe calculated that they would reach the Zenith Building in about half an hour. In fact, he could see to it that they didn't get there any sooner. So The Shadow left it that way.

THIS was getting to be a curious game, combining blind-man's buff with hide and seek. As Cranston left the phone booth, he heard himself being paged. Probably Weston and Delmot wanted him to rejoin them, and had called the gym, only to learn that Cranston wasn't there. Nor was he in the foyer when attendants began looking for him.

Though he lacked his black hat and cloak, The Shadow did a perfect glide across the foyer to a very convenient door, the one leading into the lower office. He was through the door, closing it behind him, before anyone came in that direction.

In the darkness of the office, he was more The Shadow than Cranston, even in the way he blinked a tiny flashlight to pick another outlet.

The Shadow found one that suited him. It was a bolted door at the rear of the office. Unbolting it, he stepped into a storeroom, which, in turn, had a bolted door that opened into a small passage leading down into the basement kitchen.

There was a delivery door a few steps down, and The Shadow used it to reach an ally behind the building.

There wasn't time to bother about the unbolted doors. Anyone who found them could worry over them. The Shadow's problem – or it could have been termed Cranston's – was to reach his limousine, which was in a garage a few blocks away, and there get started on his journey.

Ordinarily, he could have summoned the limousine, but not while he was being paged in the foyer of the Avenue Club.

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Meanwhile, Clyde Burke was continuing his delayed trip to the Zenith Building, and was finding Louis Buram in a confiding mood as they rode along in Moe's cab. The packages that they had picked up were application sheets that a printer had left at the hotel.

"You want a story, Burke," stated Buram, "so I'm going to give you one. Only, it isn't to be a personal interview."

"Very well," agreed Clyde, "provided you'll stand for the facts."

"Others will stand for them," assured Buram. "When we reach my office, I'll show you correspondence from the out-of-town clubs that are going to sign up with the A.B.A., and that will give you an idea of how huge the proposition is."

"You're talking sense," said Clyde. "If this expansion is the million-dollar proposition that you claim, why worry about small matters like ten-thousand-dollar payments that might mean notoriety? Orvill and Laverock will soon be forgotten. After all, your association has paid out –"

"Don't say that, Burke!" Buram clutched Clyde's arm nervously. "It worries me!"

Clyde stared. Buram's face, usually shrewd, had changed to one that bore a frightened expression. The man was staring from the cab window, and when Moe began to pull up for the next stop, Buram leaned forward and waved him on.

Then, turning to Clyde; Buram spoke in a hoarse voice, so frantic in its tone that Moe could also hear it.

"I don't want to give you a story, Burke," Buram confessed. "It's poor policy, that's all. The insurance business, handled as a private benefit, requires no advertising to the public. But I'll give you a story, because you've been decent enough to come along with me."

Even then, Clyde didn't quite understand.

"Can't you see?" persisted Buram. "I'm in danger! It began before I reached the Avenue Club, but I tried to laugh it off. They were following me, but I thought I'd shaken them!"

"Who?"

"I don't know," groaned Buram. "They must have spotted me when I drew fifty thousand from the bank!"

Clyde threw a look at the brief case.

"That's where I put the money," nodded Buram. "But I was smart enough to leave it with Delmot. The cash is safe, but maybe I'm not. That thought struck me when I came out of the club."

"So you figured you ought to have company," laughed Clyde. "O.K., Buram, I'm game. But what's given you the jitters all over again?"

BURAM explained. He'd seen suspicious-looking persons at the hotel where they stopped; men who had given close looks at the bundles that Buram picked up. True enough, the bundles contained nothing but application blanks for out-of-town distribution, but the spotters couldn't have known that. The printer had left the blanks in the hotel office, which made it seem that the bundles might be valuable.

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"They probably think I'm loaded with cash," moaned Buram. "Not just fifty thousand, but a whole lot more! They're after us, Burke! I know it... I know it –"

Clyde was looking back through the rear window. He saw some cars on the same street, but couldn't tell whether they were trailing or not. Clyde decided to end Buram's worries. Leaning to the front seat, he spoke to Moe.

"This fellow with me has the heebies," said Clyde. "Thinks a couple of snoops are tagging him on an alimony job. Gets the jitters every time he ducks into town. Shake it up a bit, before he gets to seeing little men peeking from in back of fire plugs!"

Moe shook it up. He zigzagged the cab in and around side streets in a fashion that would have lost a troop of police–patrol cars. Sliding back and forth across the rear seat, Buram kept chattering gratefully to Clyde.

"Thanks lots, Burke," said Buram. "I'm glad you didn't tell the cabby what was really worrying me. Here have a cigar. Take a pocketful. I'll give you all the story you want."

Clyde grinned to himself. He hadn't needed to tell Moe what was really worrying Buram. Moe had heard the man's own worried whines. So Clyde accepted the cigars and was actually trying to light one, when the cab screeched to a stop in front of the Zenith Building.

As they tumbled out, with brief case and bundles, Buram thrust a few dollars into Moe's hand, then said to Clyde:

"Around by the side door, Burke. Nobody will see us going in there. It's too dark."

The door was dark, as Buram said. So dark, that Clyde could hardly see it. He finally groped his way through with Buram, and they reached a turn that showed them the lighted lobby where the elevators were located. There, Clyde spoke congratulations.

"Well, Buram," he said, "you're out of the jungle. You're back where you belong, safe and sound."

Buram turned to answer, and stood stock–still, voicing a frightened gasp. Clyde swung, too, under a prod that reached his ribs. Backing into the light with Buram, Clyde saw the realization of the other man's fears.

Out of the gloom behind them had emerged six masked and muffled men, all armed with revolvers. Lurking along the very route that Buram had chosen, these men of crime were intent on robbery and, if need be, death.

In the glint of revolvers, and of eyes above the masks, Clyde Burke saw the threat of doom. In that moment of menace, Clyde could only hope that The Shadow had foreseen this thrust of crime!

CHAPTER XII. CHARGED BATTLE

TO Buram's credit, Clyde noted that he didn't wilt under the strain of facing masked men with their guns. The strain seemed over, where Buram was concerned. He'd been imagining things for hours, and the arrival of the crisis furnished him with a reality that offset his dread.

Slowly, Buram backed away from men who confronted him, eyeing them as though for future reference. In fact, Buram was somewhat cooler than Clyde, who was more anxious to find an avenue of escape than to waste time studying faces that he could only partially see.

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Clyde wondered why he and Buram were being backed out into the light. It didn't seem good policy on the part of the masked gunners, until Clyde noted that there were other persons in the same fix as himself and Buram.

One was evidently the night man of the Zenith Building, for he wore a badge. The other was an elevator operator staring from his car, both standing with their hands raised, and in that feature they differed from Clyde and Buram, who were carrying burdens in the form of the packages that they had brought from the cab.

Not long did they keep those burdens.

Masked raiders approached and snatched the packages. While four kept their guns aimed, the other two ripped the bundles open, only to find what Buram had told Clyde was inside – batches of application sheets.

Snarls sounded through the handkerchiefs that served as masks, but those tones were forced. The crooks were angry enough, but they were taking pains to keep their voices disguised.

One robber thrust forward and made a snatch at Buram's brief case. It was then that the stooped man showed his mettle. He wrenched away, snatching the brief case open of his own accord. Contemptuously, he flung its contents pell-mell on the floor. Only papers fluttered out. There wasn't a sign of a bank note in the flurry.

Then, while Clyde, forgetful of his own plight, was staring in real admiration, Buram demonstrated further how well he had foiled robbery. Raising the brief case, he shook it in the light; showing it to be quite empty. It was a fine display of bravado on Buram's part, but he carried it too far.

Their chance of robbery ended, men of crime naturally veered to thoughts of murder. There wasn't a doubt that these men were the tribe that had been on hand covering the respective flights of Laverock and Secane. Death had played a hand on these occasions, and these ruffians were prepared to see that it was dealt again.

Hearing the snarls that came his way, Buram recognized their threat. His panic returned, but he still retained the vestiges of his forced courage. With a sudden sweep, Buram swung the empty brief case at the masked face of the nearest man. As the fellow dodged, Buram leaped for the elevator, yelling for Clyde to come along.

Masked men were pouncing after Buram, but he flung the brief case at them and dodged farther. Clyde was shouldering to Buram's aid, and the elevator door was starting shut, ready to receive him and cut off the opposition. The night man was diving for the front door of the lobby, intending to call in aid. For a moment, it seemed that crooks were to be thoroughly foiled; but that was asking too much.

With one accord, the whole group wheeled on Clyde, who, at that moment, was the only person offering hand to hand battle. Clyde was drawing a gun that he carried, and some of the masked men must have seen it. From the way they jabbed their guns in Clyde's direction, it looked as though he had about two seconds left to live.

The clang of the elevator door, slammed by the excited operator, was like a tocsin bell of final doom. It meant that there could be no more aid from Buram, whatever little he might be able to supply.

Other aid was arriving, however, of a more potent sort. Guns suddenly swung from Clyde, toward another man who was hurtling in from the front door.

CLYDE'S rescuer was Harry Vincent. His automatic was already drawn, and he was using all the lessons that he had learned from The Shadow. The trick in this case was to carry the fight into the middle of the

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opposition, and Harry managed it.

He came in slugging, so hard that the opposition had to scatter in order to open gunfire. Furnished with a needed respite, Clyde found his wits and started slugging, too. Guns spoke, wildly, and their shots were music to Harry and Clyde. They intended to show this masked outfit how battle should be conducted at close range.

The trouble was, it had no longer become close range. The lobby was large, and the masked men spread like chaff. While Harry and Clyde were looking for someone to slug, guns spoke anew, this time with an approach to accuracy. Harry saw Clyde stagger and clutch his gun arm.

Springing for the man who had winged his fellow agent, Harry fired in return. But the crook was dodging, and other guns were aiming Harry's way, promising him a more serious dose than Clyde had received.

It was Clyde who saw the blackened shape that seemed to form itself in the gloom of the side passage behind the aiming killers. So swiftly did it come, that it could be likened only to the approach of a tremendous storm. That blackness gave an announcement of its approach in the form of a fierce, challenging laugh that impelled the men who heard it to swing in its direction.

The sweeping mass materialized. It came like a living cloudburst, in the person of The Shadow! A cloudburst that delivered hail in the form of metal. Its lightning was the spurt of guns, its thunder their echoes.

Sweeping in from the side passage, The Shadow was raking the lobby with bullets, and masked men were diving to escape his fury. Their own guns, answering frantically, were too hurried even to annoy the intrepid fighter, whose attack had all the power and motion of a cyclone. The masked foemen could never have escaped that deluge, but for the presence of Harry and Clyde. The Shadow was shooting high, rather than include his agents in the distribution of the bullets, and crooks, dropping low, were under the path of fire.

Like a horde of rats, they made for the front door. Four went first; the other two grabbed Harry and Clyde, not only to stop them from joining the gunfire but to keep them as shields against The Shadow's attack. That process didn't help the masked men long.

A cloaked catapult, The Shadow precipitated himself across the lobby, reached the grappling group and landed full force. Harry rolled one way, Clyde the other, and the last two thugs went scurrying through the door.

As they went, The Shadow aimed, and the taunt he gave was a promise of doom more sudden than any that the masked band had hoped to deal.

Again, a freak of chance favored men of crime.

This freak was personified by the night man of the Zenith Building. He'd yelled for help outside, and he was coming back. Caught in the whirl of fleeing bandits, he was thrown back through the door as their last peace offering to The Shadow. By the time the fellow had reeled out of the way, the last of the masked men were in the clear.

The Shadow paused only to shove Clyde in Harry's direction. In brief words, he ordered Harry to rush his crippled comrade out through the side door, to Moe's cab. Then The Shadow was gone through the front, flinging that same laugh that had terrified crooks before.

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Masked men were scrambling into two cars with waiting drivers. In his turn, The Shadow spied the cab that brought Harry from the Avenue Club. Springing into the handy vehicle, The Shadow ordered its scared driver to chase the other cars. The fellow obeyed, for The Shadow's commands were voiced in a fashion that brooked no refusal.

Reaching Moe's cab with Clyde, Harry ordered the cabby to take them to Dr. Rupert Sayre's. This was the rule whenever agents were wounded, for Sayre was Cranston's own physician.

MOE started off, and as he wheeled along the streets, Harry, with Clyde propped beside him, could hear the ebb and flow of gunfire on other thoroughfares.

The Shadow was doing more than pursue the masked men. He was giving them a running battle, and from what Harry had seen of such frays, he knew that if anyone was hurt, it would not be The Shadow. There was just one handicap: The Shadow should have been using Moe's cab.

There wasn't a better hackie in all Manhattan than Shrevvy, and he was trained to handle the wheel, while The Shadow dealt with guns.

Nor had Moe forgotten that point. Harry could see him cocking his head behind the wheel, as though smelling out the gun smoke. When the shooting finally faded, Moe gave a disappointed shrug. He thought this was one fray in which he would play no part.

There, Moe guessed wrong.

Things happened out of nothing, so it seemed. Sayre's office was on the Avenue, and Moe, in taking the shortest course to his objective, swung through familiar terrain. He came to the very neighborhood where the Avenue Club was located, and as he crossed a street, two cars came roaring right at him.

They were the mobster-manned cars. They'd slipped the chase, due to the laxity of The Shadow's second-rate driver. Seeing Moe's cab, they mistook it for the other and began to blast away. The cab scudded a corner, but the cars were gaining, due to their hurtling speed. It was then that Harry, on a mad hunch, did the heroic thing.

Without a word to Moe, Harry flung a door open, and slammed it shut as he dived for the curb. He was letting Moe take Clyde on to Sayre's. To himself, Harry was assigning the task of slowing the chase in order that the cab would get away. Coming to his feet, Harry staggered for the building wall, turning to fire as he went.

Somehow, his own shots seemed very distant. He didn't realize that he had taken a very heavy fall. He'd caught his foot on the curb and had wrenched his ankle, which accounted for his stumbles. He'd thumped his head against a parking sign, and that was responsible for his daze.

Cars were stopping; that much, Harry knew. Shots were answering his wild fire, and he wanted better cover. Jabbing away with the ammunition remaining in his automatic, Harry dropped back against the wall; only to find that it was missing.

Hitting flat on cement, Harry lost his gun as he fell. He rolled over twice, tried to come to hands and knees, only to sprawl again. From somewhere in the darkness, guns were pumping, and over Harry's head bullets whistled. The whole thing was coming closer, and this time it spelled doom.

This was to be a finish fight, with Harry on the receiving end. That thought was drilling through Harry's head, along with the blast of guns and the whine of slugs. Like Clyde not long before, Harry was wishing that The

Shadow would arrive, but his brain was pounding with the realization that his chief had lost the trail and couldn't aid him.

All that remained to Harry as solace during those last few moments was his imagination. Strained to the utmost pitch, it gave him the illusion of a weird laugh echoing amid the batter of murderous guns.

With that last happy impression, Harry Vincent felt his senses swim into a gulf of oblivion!

CHAPTER XIII. AFTER THE BATTLE

SPRINGING from their cars, shooting as they came, masked men were intent upon disposing of their human prey. If Harry Vincent had stopped against the wall he expected to find, he would have been a perfect target. But he'd gone farther, despite himself, and the men who sought his life knew why.

What Harry had stumbled into was the entrance of an alley, and it was there that his enemies expected to find and riddle him. So far, they were still shooting at random, on the chance that such fire would reach their target and save them time. But haste, even when dealing with a helpless foe, was never a sound policy.

In this case, it prevented the marksmen from hearing the sound that Harry thought he had imagined. Their own guns crashing loud in their ears, masked men didn't catch the tone of an arriving laugh. It took something more to tell them that they weren't the victims of imagination, too.

The "something more" came in the form of bullets.

Slugs smacked the pavement underfoot. One crook howled as a ricocheting bullet nicked his leg. Another, turning, caught a shot that was aimed higher and took an immediate sprawl. Then all the rest were full about, shooting for blackness that outlined itself at the corner against the headlamps of a halted cab.

Harry had actually heard The Shadow's laugh. Now, other ears were listening to its sinister knell. Men of crime were learning that The Shadow had picked up their trail anew. He was giving them all the odds they wanted, to draw their fire his way.

The life of an agent was at stake, and The Shadow intended that it should be saved.

The crooks were dropping into darkness, dragging their wounded with them. The Shadow was daring them too far, and this was the opportunity they had long desired. Forgotten in the alleyway, Harry could escape for all that they cared. Sharpshooters saw a perfect target – the silhouetted figure of The Shadow, so plainly in the open, that it could not possibly elude them.

Vicious gunners blasted with all the bullets they could give. Not for an instant did the black shape of The Shadow waver. Even if clad with steel, The Shadow couldn't have taken the barrage in such style; at least, the leaden slugs would have jolted him.

Rather, it seemed that the whistling pellets had gone right through The Shadow, as through a ghostly shape. Seemingly, marksmen had fired at a target made of thin air!

There were sharp pock-pocks as the bullets smacked a wall beyond The Shadow. Those sounds, and the recoils of their guns, told the marksmen that they were shooting real slugs, not blanks that might have somehow gotten into their revolvers. Such evidence, however, only proved that the rapid fire must have gone right through The Shadow without hurting him in the least.

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Strident was the laugh that responded to the echoes of the useless gunfire. The tone announced that The Shadow relished the bullets which the opposition had fired at him. Having heard that mockery before, The Shadow's foemen had an idea of what was coming next.

Bullets from The Shadow's guns!

Not being equipped to laugh off gunfire the way The Shadow had, crooks scattered, rather than have their ghostly foe pick them off by shooting at the spots where their guns had sputtered. Those who were looking back across their shoulders expected to see the tonguing flame of The Shadow's guns. Instead, another amazing thing took place.

The Shadow vanished.

One instant, his shape was plain against the focused headlights; the next, it was gone. A dozen bullets, aimed straight at him, had failed to fell The Shadow, yet he had erased himself in a twinkling. All that remained was his laugh, coming from nowhere, bringing new startlement to the men who were fleeing from his wrath.

IN their haste, those enemies failed utterly to guess The Shadow's ruse. They hadn't been shooting at the cloaked fighter, at all. The headlights of the halted cab were slanted in the other direction, with The Shadow off at an angle. Gunmen hadn't noticed that The Shadow was crouched close to the headlights, themselves, blocking off the glare.

In turn, The Shadow had cut off that light from a wall some twenty feet away. There, projected like an image on the screen, was the phantom silhouette that marksmen had chosen as their target. True, it was enlarged by the spread of the lights, but The Shadow had allowed for that factor by his crouch.

Only a trifle larger than life size, that false image of The Shadow had deluded foemen who saw it. No wonder that The Shadow had been immune to the concentrated fire. Nor was it any wonder that he had responded only with a laugh, not with gunfire of his own.

His taunt was too evasive to disclose his actual position, but the spurts of his automatics would have. So The Shadow simply vanished, instead, by the expedient of dropping below the level of the headlights. Such action, transcribed to the false image against the illuminated wall, gave the effect of a sudden vanish from the midst of glaring light!

Beside the cab, The Shadow was telling its scared driver to get started. The fellow obeyed with alacrity. Alone in the darkness behind the swift-darting taillamps, The Shadow was weaving toward a new objective, the alley where Harry lay helpless. His weave was swift amid the gloom. He wanted to reach that spot before his foemen got there.

Curiously, the scattered men returned The Shadow's compliments by tricking him in their own fashion.

By rights, they should have headed for the alley, too, because it was the one spot that afforded shelter. Instead, their footsteps broke out with rapid clatter from a position some fifty yards away. With one accord, masked men had sneaked off to the next corner and were starting a sudden dash around it.

At the same time, two automobiles snorted into motion. The cars swung the corner, and in the passing headlights The Shadow saw the running crooks, lugging two staggery men with them. Evidently, they were trying to round the corner and let the cars pick them up where The Shadow couldn't reach them.

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Instead of wasting a few wild shots, The Shadow sped for the corner to prevent the rendezvous between the cars and the masked gunners.

Much happened while The Shadow was covering those fifty yards. From the corner, he expected to see cars halted midway along the block, with men clambering on board. Instead, he witnessed the aftermath of a job as rapid as any that he himself could have accomplished.

The masked men were gone. Ahead, the two cars were veering another corner, a full block away. It was a getaway so thorough and so rapid, that The Shadow hadn't a chance to take up pursuit. As for the speeding cars, they were past the corner and out of range while The Shadow was leveling his guns.

The Shadow's laugh throbbed sinisterly in the darkness. Where the masked raiders had gone, was something to be determined later. For the present, The Shadow was remembering the plight of his agent, Harry Vincent.

RETURNING to the alley, The Shadow flicked a flashlight and saw Harry lying there.

Harry stirred as The Shadow gripped his shoulders. He was coming back to his senses, Harry was, though his ears still fancied that they heard the boom of guns, and he couldn't believe that The Shadow's low-throbbled laugh was real. No shots had reached Harry while he was lying in the alley. The Shadow's intervention had come just in time.

On his feet, Harry felt The Shadow guiding him deeper into the alley. Again a whispered laugh, and its note was significant. The Shadow recognized this alley. He'd been here not long before.

Steering Harry straight ahead, The Shadow worked him through a doorway, then left him to find his own way.

Taking the line of least resistance, Harry groped down a flight of steps, reached a door and stumbled through. From above, The Shadow heard the exclamations of excited voices when Harry precipitated himself into a lighted room.

Harry Vincent had arrived in the basement kitchen of the Avenue Club. Chefs and waiters were crowding forward to pick him up. The Shadow, crouching on the darkened steps, heard someone use the telephone to make a call upstairs. Harry was in good hands, so The Shadow retired.

Entering the storeroom, The Shadow bolted the door behind him and parked his cloak and hat upon a high shelf. Going through the lower office, he bolted the door connecting with the storeroom; then made his way to the foyer.

Appearing there as Cranston, The Shadow witnessed considerable excitement that terminated when Tom Rydal appeared from an elevator, summoned by a call to the gymnasium.

The physical director beckoned when he saw Cranston. They entered an elevator, that dropped promptly to the basement. In that brief interval, Rydal explained matters, so far as he was able.

"It's your friend Vincent," stated Rydal. "He ran into some sort of trouble on the street and staggered in the back way; to the kitchen. I hope he isn't badly hurt."

Harry wasn't badly hurt. He was sitting up, talking in dazed fashion, when Rydal and Cranston arrived. What had happened, Harry couldn't quite remember. Catching a nod of approval from Cranston, Harry stuck to his dazed story.

On the telephone, Rydal was summoning Delmot and Weston from their conference room on the mezzanine. Meanwhile, the kitchen help were telling Harry that he needn't worry. They were sure that the police would trace the men responsible for Harry's misadventure.

No wonder a smile showed on the lips of Lamont Cranston. The Shadow did not have to worry about tracing missing thugs. He had an idea that he could find them when he wanted them.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XIV. THE FORCED CHOICE

THE next day, Clyde Burke found himself an accepted person at the Avenue Club. Orders to admit no reporters had been rescinded in his case. To make it all quite ethical, Clyde was provided with a guest card, like the one that Harry held.

The one that Harry had held, was the preferable term. For Harry Vincent was now a full-fledged member of the Avenue Club.

His bandaged right arm hanging in a sling, Clyde was lounging about the foyer of the club, when a polite attendant approached and said that his presence was requested in the conference room on the mezzanine. Going there, Clyde found Rudolph Delmot and Louis Buram.

Rising, Delmot extended his hand, then smiled when he realize that Clyde couldn't return the shake. Instead, Delmot sat down and gestured to Buram, who had something to say.

"Well, Burke," began Buram, "I gave you the story that you wanted, but you don't have to thank me for it. I'd say the thanks should be the other way about."

"You did well enough," Clyde complimented. "It was my own fault that I couldn't get into the elevator with you."

"If the operator hadn't slammed the door –"

"You'd have been killed, Buram. You were the man they really wanted. So it all worked out for the best."

Clyde didn't give the details of his own escape, which Buram hadn't seen through the closed door. It would have involved mention of Harry, whose own trouble was supposed to have happened in back of the Avenue Club, and nowhere else.

It would have meant mention of The Shadow, too, though that didn't matter. The night man at the Zenith Building had testified that a black-cloaked avalanche had finally scattered the masked horde that had tried to hold up Buram and Clyde.

"About the insurance story, Burke," resumed Buram. "I'd rather wait a week or so, before going into it. The statistics are still incomplete, and would give only a partial idea of the expansion which the A.B.A. has undergone.

"There are letters today from more clubs that want to join. That, in turn, entails the creation of a larger sinking fund, by drawing from the clubs that already belong."

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Clyde nodded, signifying that the story could wait. Delmot seemed quite as pleased as Buram. In fact, Delmot showed his appreciation, when he declared:

"Here is a better story, Burke."

The thing that Delmot handed Clyde was a letter. It was dated the day before, and it was addressed to Rudolph Delmot as chairman of the executive committee. The letter was from Wilfred Secane, announcing his resignation not only from the committee, but from the Avenue Club as well.

"This is something!" exclaimed Clyde. "Say – can I print this Mr. Delmot?"

"I think so," returned Delmot. "But first, I must get permission from Commissioner Weston. He is coming here shortly, with Cranston."

"Note the postmark on the letter," put in Buram. "Ten o'clock last night. That was after those thugs attacked us, Burke!"

"You think that Secane set them on us, Buram?"

"It sounds probable, Burke."

Delmot intervened with a headshake. He said that the question was something for the law to decide. As for Delmot, his proper step was to call a prompt meeting of the Avenue Club members and have them elect another man for the executive committee, to fill its roster. As usual, there would be a committee meeting first, so that the group itself could select the candidate that it preferred.

LEAVING the conference room, Clyde went up to the gymnasium, and there met Harry. As two men who had both undergone serious experiences, it was quite natural that they should get together. Further, as a reporter, Clyde could logically be seeking an interview with Harry.

Rydal was in the gym, and Harry introduced him to Clyde. The physical director smiled broadly when he saw Clyde's bandaged arm. "You look like you belong in one of my gym classes," chuckled Rydal. "They've been banging themselves up badly, missing mats when they somersault over horses and losing their holds on the horizontal bars. I'm trying to curb the epidemic by limiting them to exercises."

Clyde wasn't interested in such minor casualties. As soon as Rydal had gone away, Clyde told Harry about Secane's resignation. Harry stared reflectively, and Clyde thought he understood.

"Secane could have been in back of that mess last night," asserted Clyde. "It's time a profit motive was cropping up among those deaths about town. Secane could have learned that Buram left the bank with a bundle of cash. But he wouldn't have known that Buram left the money with Delmot."

Harry shook his head.

"I'm thinking of something else," he said. "The election that's coming off tonight. Get into the meeting, if you can, Clyde. There may be fun."

Between that time and the meeting hour, Clyde saw Harry meet Cranston in a corner of the foyer. Cranston, of course, had already talked with Delmot. Watching the two separate, Clyde couldn't learn a thing from Cranston's impassive face, but something in Harry's unguarded expression assured Clyde that things were really to happen at the meeting. So Clyde bided his time.

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Just before the meeting, the members of the executive committee came from their own conference. Their entrance to the assembly room was a signal for the ordinary members to follow, and Clyde joined the throng. He went through on his guest card, though a man at the door reminded him that he had no voting privilege.

Rudolph Delmot was seated on the platform. Behind him, in a row, were the members of the executive committee. Seeing them together, Clyde realized what a drab lot they were. Clyde didn't wonder that Delmot looked disappointed.

A keen man like Delmot appreciated brains. He wouldn't be finding any among the executive committee. They were the sort who would leave everything to Delmot, while they basked in the glory of their self-importance.

Hopefully, Delmot opened the nomination slip that was handed to him, as though wishing it contained a name like Orvill, Laverock, or Secane. Whatever their demerits, those three had been aggressive. They'd kept a sharp check on the affairs of the Avenue Club.

Then, the slip opened, Delmot frowned. His tone was dull as he read the nomination:

"Simon Jorfer. Stand up, please."

Simon Jorfer stood up. At least, he was capable of that much, though two men had to prop him so he wouldn't fall. Jorfer had come from the club bar, where he had been drinking to his coming election as a member of the executive committee.

Like the others on the platform, Jorfer appeared to have the intelligence of a stooge; no more. But the committee men beamed at sight of him. They were pleased at having another dullard join their select group.

Wearily, Rudolph Delmot went through the necessary routine.

"Simon Jorfer has been nominated," he announced. "If there are no other candidates, we are ready for a motion that the nominations be closed. I shall then instruct the secretary to cast a single ballot."

Before anyone could close the nominations, a bombshell struck. Harry Vincent supplied it, when he sprang to his feet and called:

"I nominate Lamont Cranston!"

INSTANTLY, there was a hubbub. From a dozen spots came voices seconding the nomination. Those tones were cultured; they belonged to the long-term members of the Avenue Club, the thinning few who represented the early days, when the club had been the most select organization in New York.

Though Delmot was supposed to be impartial, he showed enthusiasm, too. He wasn't interested in Cranston's social status; rather, he admired the candidate's keen thinking. When Cranston arose and quietly announced that he would accept the nomination, Delmot almost began to clap his hands.

Then, pounding his gavel, Delmot restored order. The nominations were promptly closed, and ballots were passed for the election.

In his corner, Clyde settled back, studying the faces about him. Just why Cranston was going through with this, Clyde couldn't understand. There wasn't a chance of his election.

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In recent months, the Avenue Club had taken in scores of new members, who were treated like upstarts by the old guard. Those upstarts weren't interested in the merits of the executive committee; they merely wanted to slap back at the ritzy crowd. Outnumbering the old conservatives by five to one, the newcomers would swing the election overwhelmingly in favor of Jorfer. Clyde could hear voices buzzing everywhere, all saying to ignore Cranston's candidacy.

Harry was on his feet again, asking to be heard. Delmot pounded his gavel to gain quiet. Harry produced the little book that had come with his membership application. The paragraph that he proceeded to read was one that he had skipped over, only to have Cranston tell him to give it closer attention. Harry was reading from Bylaw 8.

"In nominations for the executive committee," quoted Harry, "preference must be given to charter members of the Avenue Club, should any such accept the candidacy. Should only one nominee be a charter member, all others must be stricken from the list and the election of said nominee must be declared unanimous."

Other persons were snatching out the books, which they had so constantly overlooked. Even Delmot showed surprise when he found the small-print paragraph in question. The proviso was one of those rare rules that had never before been a point of issue, and had therefore been completely forgotten, until The Shadow rediscovered it.

Decision rested with Delmot, and he had but one choice. For the moment, his face was meditative; then it spread into a smile. His gavel swung down and struck the table with a decisive thump.

"The nomination of Simon Jorfer is withdrawn," announced Delmot. "Since the nominations are closed, the only remaining candidate is Lamont Cranston. The secretary will cast the single ballot confirming his election to the executive committee."

As the meeting finished, Delmot was the first to congratulate Cranston. Then, the old guard swept away their candidate for a celebration.

Harry and Clyde saw Cranston when his friends were taking him across the foyer. The group was on the way to the bar, where the corks of champagne bottles were already popping for the coming celebration. The look that their chief gave them conjured something in the minds of The Shadow's agents, as plainly as though they had heard spoken words.

Those popping bottle corks were a faint impression of louder sounds to come. They represented the blast of guns that would pop in the near future. For Cranston's acceptance of executive membership linked the past with the future.

Guns had entered the careers of Orvill, Laverock, and Secane, all charter members of the Avenue Club. Chances were that guns would be figuring in Cranston's affairs, too. But Cranston differed from the other three. He was The Shadow.

And The Shadow thrived on gunfire. To him, it would be the stepping-stone to solving the riddle of death about town!

CHAPTER XV. THE NEEDED TRAIL

IT was singular, how much of a sensation was created by the election of Lamont Cranston to the executive committee of the Avenue Club. People read about it who had never heard of the Avenue Club before. Hitherto, the newspapers had soft-pedaled mention of the club in connection with the deaths of Orvill and

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Laverock, and the mystery of the missing murderer, Secane. Those three had simply been defined as "clubmen," without further specification.

Now, however, the facts were out. Naturally, Clyde Burke couldn't be blamed. He had a guest card at the Avenue Club, and wouldn't have let matters be known. Indeed, Clyde's paper, the Classic, was the last to mention the Avenue Club.

Nevertheless, it was Clyde who had let the story ride or, rather, slip. He'd mentioned it casually to reporters on other sheets, who had promptly scooped him on his own story.

However, Clyde wasn't worrying. Those other papers were merely trying to make up for Clyde's own exclusive yarn on the holdup at the Zenith Building. More scoops would be coming, bigger ones, and Clyde had assured his city editor that the Classic would get them. As Clyde defined it, the story of Cranston's election was just a build-up for something that would really count.

What that something was, Clyde honestly did not know. Nor did Harry, when Clyde talked it over with him. To them, the mystery was simply deepening, particularly when they received strict orders to stay around the Avenue Club and not to leave it after dark.

As a result, Harry had taken a room at the club, and Clyde was sharing it with him. Clyde spent some of his time in the gym, carefully exercising his recuperating arm, and the only other amusement in which he and Harry indulged was shooting pool, since Clyde's hand was sufficiently strong for such a pastime.

The two were in the billiard room on a certain evening when Inspector Cardona called to see Rudolph Delmot. As soon as Cardona stated his business, Delmot called the foyer and told the clerk to page Cranston. Soon, Cranston arrived, and Delmot promptly informed him of the subject under discussion.

"It's about Secane," Delmot declared. "We'll have to find him, Cranston. All this scandal is making it harder for both ourselves and the police."

Cranston nodded his understanding.

"Secane trusts me," continued Delmot, "but he knows that the police trust me, too, and that's the trouble. You might be the man to hear from him."

"I?" Cranston's tone was one of mild surprise. "Why, I'm a friend of the police commissioner!"

"No longer," put in Cardona. "Take a look at this, Mr. Cranston."

It was a copy of the Classic, carrying a story of a dispute between Commissioner Weston and his old friend, Lamont Cranston. According to the account, the two had quarreled over matters concerning the Avenue Club.

"Was the commish boiled!" expressed Cardona. "He was going to raise an awful squawk, when I said to lay off. This thing might help, Mr. Cranston. Maybe you'll hear from Secane. The way Secane heard from Laverock."

Cranston wasn't paying attention. The story annoyed him. He told Cardona to come along, while he talked with Burke. They went down to the billiard room, to find Buram joining the pool game with Harry and Clyde. When Cranston showed Clyde the story, the reporter stared, amazed.

"I didn't phone this in," said Clyde. "It looks like a gossip job. Suppose I call the office."

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"Never mind," returned Cranston. "I believe you, Burke." He turned to Cardona. "While you're back with Delmot, I'll phone the commissioner and try to straighten things."

Clyde thought hard after Cranston left, and began to understand. Clyde had been sending his copy in from the Avenue Club. He'd been using one of the club's typewriters, and somebody could have included a spurious sheet, done on the same machine. Nodding to himself, Clyde decided that The Shadow was the person responsible.

Whatever The Shadow's opinions on the subject, he wasn't expressing them. As Cranston, The Shadow was running into something more important. Before he could put in his call to Weston, he was notified that he was wanted on the telephone.

Taking the call in a foyer booth, Cranston heard a suave tone over the wire.

"This is Rick Stanner," said the voice. "You've met me, Mr. Cranston."

"Certainly, Rick," was Cranston's calm-toned reply. "How is business at your place, the Galaxy Cafe?"

"The Cafe Galaxy," corrected Rick, putting the title in reverse. "That way, it brings a better class of trade. I'd been hoping to see you soon, Mr. Cranston."

"Anything important, Rick?"

"A little matter that I think would interest you. Nothing to do with cash. A personal matter, that I'd prefer to discuss here. Could you see me this evening?"

"Within half an hour, Rick."

Leaving the phone booth, Cranston postponed his call to Weston. Instead, he decided to ride in Moe's cab over to the Cafe Galaxy.

Things were popping, and they weren't champagne corks. That squib in the Classic was bringing results. Almost as good results as if The Shadow had framed the story himself, which he hadn't. But he hadn't been surprised when Cardona displayed it.

The Shadow had been retaining the Cranston pose, rather than rush an issue which he was sure others would push of their own accord. The piece in the Classic was a definite build toward a meeting between Lamont Cranston and Wilfred Secane. Unless the Shadow's guess was miles wrong, Rick Stanner, owner of the Cafe Galaxy, was to serve as intermediary in that meeting.

Scarcely had Cranston left the Avenue Club, before another call came through for him. It must have been an urgent one, for the message was sent up to Rudolph Delmot, inasmuch as Cranston wasn't there to receive it.

Laying the memo on his desk, Delmot read it aloud to Cardona.

"It's for Cranston," stated Delmot, in a puzzled tone. "It says: 'Must see you. Urgent. 618 Westbury Court. Same room. Second floor front. W. S.' Quite an odd message, inspector."

"W. S.!" exclaimed Cardona. "Those initials stand for Wilfred Secane!"

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"But Cranston couldn't have seen Secane before this," expressed Delmot, "and the note refers to the same room. So it can't mean Secane."

"You don't know Cranston," assured Cardona. "He tries neat things, now and then. Sometimes he coaxes people into things – particularly his friend, Commissioner Weston."

"You can't mean that Cranston could have sent that story to the Classic, too!"

"I mean just that, Mr. Delmot!" Cardona gave a decisive nod, "This looks like another squad job for me. I've got some men out front, so I'll go out and join them while you're calling the commissioner. Tell him to meet us outside of 618 Westbury Court."

IT wasn't far to Westbury Court, which was a short street tucked between two avenues. When the squad cars stopped out front, Cardona alighted alone and went up the house steps of 618.

The house was an old-fashioned one, narrow, but very tall, and Cardona could count five stories, all with unlighted windows. Indeed, the house looked quite deserted, as did the similar mansions which adjoined it.

The front door was unlocked, so Joe entered. He found himself in a dimly lit hall, where a steep staircase led upward. It was one of those old-style stairways that formed an oval-shaped spiral clear to the top floor, with a well space in between.

Cardona went to the second floor and looked over the banister, down to the space below.

There, Joe saw a table, a telephone on it. Beside the phone was a directory. The telephone was something for future reference, though Cardona didn't think he'd have to use it, not with a squad outside.

Reaching the front room, Cardona found the door unlocked. Entering cautiously, he went to the window and blinked his flashlight, to tell the outside watchers that he had safely reached his goal.

When he made a further survey with his flashlight, Cardona wished that he had brought Delmot to this room. For Joe immediately uncovered letters and personal effects which indicated that the room belonged to Secane. But Joe finally decided that this was a job that should be handled alone.

It was better that Delmot should stay outside, to keep Weston occupied, for the commissioner would certainly be in an impatient mood, which wouldn't help the plan that Cardona had in mind.

For, Joe was playing the hunch that Wilfred Secane might soon return to this room of his, and therewith place himself in a snare. All that Joe would have to do was wait, and become the jaws of the closing trap. It seemed very simple, and that was why Cardona liked it, for simple plans were always the best.

It should have occurred to Joe Cardona that there might be other factors in the case. There usually were, when a pathway cleared itself as easily as this one had. Factors that would bode ill, rather than good, unless something powerful should offset them.

Had Joe Cardona realized that Lamont Cranston was The Shadow, and that he had already been led along a different trail, Joe's confidence of capturing Secane would have vanished, hunch and all!

CHAPTER XVI. DROPS OF BLOOD

IN his own way, The Shadow was quite as confident as Joe Cardona, and with better reason. At least, there was nothing phony about the trail that The Shadow had taken, as Lamont Cranston. That was, nothing phony on the surface, though The Shadow still needed to learn what lay beneath.

Men like Rick Stanner were apt to be "in the know" on certain matters that pertained to crime, constituting as they did a halfway post between the underworld and society's upper crust.

So when Cranston sauntered into the Cafe Galaxy, his manner was both leisurely and impassive. From the way he looked about the place, he seemed to be just another guest, seeking a table in the extravagant night club that Rick Stanner managed.

It wasn't long before Cranston was recognized. Instead of being conducted to a table, he was ushered to Rick's office, on the far side of the large and well-populated dining floor.

A hat-check girl, waiting to take the hat and overcoat which Cranston was carrying on his arm, received a smile, instead. Visitors didn't check their hats and coats when going to Rick's office. Rick let his business acquaintances park their garments free.

Rick Stanner was a tall, sleek man, with a sallow face topped by a sloping forehead. He looked quite as smooth as his voice had sounded over the telephone. Receiving Cranston, Rick's handshake seemed to balance between firm and flabby, ready to veer either way at a moment's decision. He offered to take Cranston's hat and coat, but by then his visitor had laid them on a chair, so Rick proffered cigars, instead.

Supplying a light across the desk, Rick let the flame reveal Cranston's eyes. Their expression struck him as receptive, for Rick came to business immediately after he withdrew the light. As bluntly as his smooth tone could put it, Rick said:

"I phoned you about Wilfred Secane."

Cranston's eyes gave just a flicker of surprise.

"Here's why." Rick produced a copy of the Classic. "From this story about you being at odds with the commissioner, I'd say that you didn't fully agree with him on the Secane question."

"Hardly that," returned Cranston calmly. "The evidence certainly points to Secane as Laverock's murderer."

"But Laverock asked Secane to come and see him," put in Rick. "What would you have done in that case, Mr. Cranston?"

For a short while, Cranston reflected. Then:

"I believe I should have gone," came the quiet tone. "Every man, who is hunted as Laverock was, is certainly entitled to speak in confidence to a friend. The law recognizes it; otherwise, attorneys would not be allowed the privilege of withholding information given them by clients."

"But you aren't a lawyer, Mr. Cranston."

"The human element still exists." Cranston's tone had taken a serious note. "If I had talked to Laverock, I would have retained discreet silence, unless questioned, and if no one knew that I had seen him, no one

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would have questioned me."

Rick took his cigar from his mouth, so that he could properly display a gleaming smile. He didn't realize that Cranston was stating an actual case, from his experience as The Shadow. Rick was simply fishing for an opinion, and had hooked the very one he wanted.

"Laverock is dead," declared Rick. "Secane is the fellow who is on the spot at present. Would you be willing to talk to him? To hear his own story – privately?"

Slowly, Cranston nodded.

"Secane owns a chunk of this night club," explained Rick, rising. "Silent-partner stuff, you know. When he landed in his jam, he was headed here. I've been hiding him out, and if you'll wait a few minutes, Mr. Cranston, I'll ask him if he'll see you."

THE moment that Rick stepped from the office and closed the door behind him, Cranston was in action. He scooped up his gray overcoat and turned it inside out.

The overcoat had a lining which happened to be black. One sharp tug, and the lining was free; more than that, it shaped itself as a cloak, which Cranston swept across his shoulders.

Cranston's hat was also gray. It underwent a real transformation. It had a light-colored lining, which Cranston pulled out and stuffed in a pocket of the overcoat. The interior of the hat was black, so Cranston turned it inside out. Only the brim remained gray, but not long.

The hat had two bands, one around the outside; the other within the brim. Their positions were reversed when the hat turned inside out, but that point proved trifling. Cranston simply flattened both bands, so that they covered separate sides of the hat brim, and adhered there under pressure, because the gray brim was slightly sticky. Both bands were black, so the brim's color became that hue.

When the slouch hat settled on his head, Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow in the space of less than half a minute. Opening Rick's door, he glided from the office, covering the light by raising a cloaked arm. A few moments later, the door was closed and The Shadow was moving along the wall of the night club.

Though tables were close, The Shadow's glide was quite invisible. Only dim light reached the wall, and the hangings were dark, furnishing The Shadow with a perfect blend.

At moments, The Shadow paused, rather than elbow his way through passing waiters. They didn't see him when they walked by, and The Shadow was further pleased when he observed a man in a Tuxedo near a corner of the night-club floor.

The fellow was a lookout, and he was keeping watch on the office door. It was plain, from his carefree stare, that he hadn't seen The Shadow emerge.

The Shadow was playing the hunch that Rick Stanner had gone to the deepest corner of the night club. It proved correct, for when The Shadow turned a darkened corner, he saw Rick at a telephone beyond the end of the bar. To Rick's left was a curtained doorway, and The Shadow moved to that objective.

Easing between the curtains, he found a heavy door. Waiting there, he listened while Rick pressed a buzzer beside the telephone.

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Unwittingly, Rick Stanner had roused the suspicion of his visitor, Lamont Cranston.

By rights, Rick should have discussed matters with Secane beforehand, but it was obvious that he hadn't. His excuse that he would have to talk with Secane, was the sour note that betrayed him. It meant that having Cranston meet with Secane was Rick's own idea. So The Shadow was going to that meeting beforehand, in his own way.

While listening to hear what Rick might say, The Shadow was trying the doorknob. It yielded, so The Shadow opened the door, to note a darkened passage beyond.

MEANWHILE, Rick's buzz was sounding in the house on Westbury Court, but not where Cardona could hear it. The buzz was happening in a small parlor, which had its windows covered with blackout cloth.

There, Wilfred Secane, in shirt sleeves, was reading the latest copy of the Classic. Hearing the buzzer, he pressed a switch that cut it off. Then, laying the newspaper aside, Secane went to the door, opened it gingerly, and peered out into the hall.

Satisfied that no one was about, he went to the telephone table, by the stairs, and sat down in a chair.

Secane's voice was guarded, as he spoke across the telephone:

"Hello... Is that you, Rick?"

Evidently, Rick answered, for Secane's expression became reassured as he crouched down above the telephone. So intent was Secane, that he didn't notice a strange thing that happened close beside him.

A drop of liquid splashed the edge of the stairs. Another drop followed, just missing the table edge. The third drop landed on the telephone book, which was lying open at Secane's elbow. Against the white page of the book, the color of the dripping liquid revealed itself.

Those drops were red!

Red drops, like blobs of blood! Tiny crimson pools, that stood for death! Falling from somewhere above, those splashes could have been evidence of murder already done. But, singularly enough, those crimson drops were promise of a death to come!

Secane did not see them. Nor could he hear the pygmy splashes when they fell. He was talking again to Rick.

"Certainly, I'll see you, Rick," Secane was saying. "Come right through, of course... What's that? You have to go back to the office first?... Why?"

Whatever Rick's reply, it kept Secane too concentrated for him to notice the blood-hued drops that were creeping closer. One crimson blob flicked Secane's elbow as he pushed the telephone book aside, dumping it to the floor beneath the table. Another struck Secane's shoulder, but the only sign that he felt it came when he gave an involuntary twitch.

"You're coming alone, aren't you, Rick?" voiced Secane. "All right; I'll wait... Yes, hurry. If you don't have to go to the office, so much the better... I'll listen for the bell when you come through –"

The reference to "coming through" indicated that 618 Westbury Court was directly behind the Cafe Galaxy, and could be reached from the night club by a connecting door. That might have had something to do with the

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mysterious drops of blood that fell without Secane's knowledge.

A crimson splash struck the lower edge of Secane's collar, which deadened it. The next was lower, toward the center of Secane's back, but it fell while he was hanging up the phone, so he didn't notice it.

A third drop splashed, its tiny crimson dye in the very center of Secane's back, as he stiffened, to stare toward a door at the rear of the hall.

That drop was repeated. Seconds seemed to linger, while others dripped slowly to the same spot, enlarging the crimson blot that Secane was too strained to know about. From the door at the rear of the hall came the ring of a bell, a sharper, more penetrating sound than Secane expected.

Still crouched in his chair, Secane was looking for Rick. Instead, he saw a swirl of blackness – that of a cloaked figure sweeping toward him.

No longer were the drops of blood trickling upon Secane's back. As the hunted man voiced an inarticulate cry, something else arrived to sully his white shirt. As though from nowhere, as remarkable in its materialization as the figure in black that came from the hallway's gloom, a knife flashed home to the middle of Secane's back.

Driven as if hurled by a powerful hand, the long, thin-bladed dirk stabbed clear to its hilt. Secane's sharp cry became a hideous shriek as he sprawled forward, arms stretched, toward the grasp of an arriving being who was too late to grip him. Headlong, Secane struck the floor at The Shadow's feet.

No longer were mysterious drops of crimson flecking the whiteness of Secane's shirt. His whole back was stained with the red gush of his own lifeblood, produced by the knife with which an unseen hand had delivered death in the very presence of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. ELECTED: A KILLER

THE dong of the bell had produced a stir from the front room on the floor above. Secane's death shriek turned that stir into the pound of footsteps, coupled with the shrill blast of a police whistle. Then Inspector Joe Cardona was hanging over the banister of the second floor, totally amazed at what he saw below.

On the floor by the telephone table lay Wilfred Secane, a knife handle sticking from his back, his shirt stained with gore. Half crouched above him, a hand extended toward the murder weapon, was a figure cloaked in black who could only be The Shadow.

Or could he be?

If ever murder lay on full display, with a killer gloating over his handiwork, this was such a time. It seemed incredible to Cardona that The Shadow could have dealt death in cold blood. Reaching for his revolver, Cardona was struck with the grim thought that the man in black must be an impostor.

A laugh trailed upward. It was a grim, reflective tone, the sort that The Shadow gave when inspired by ideas of vengeance. Inimitable mirth, that could only be The Shadow's. There had been times when that strange taunt gladdened Joe Cardona. This time, the sinister whisper gave the ace inspector a thing he didn't think that he could feel: a chill of horror.

The Shadow's head tilted upward, delivering the burn of steady eyes. Those eyes spied Cardona and caught the swarthy inspector's frozen expression. With a sudden bound, The Shadow wheeled away from beside

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Secane's body.

Instantly, Cardona lunged down the stairs, hoping to box him in the hall below. As he came, Joe blared the whistle again.

The shrill note was unneeded. Already, the front door was slashing open, with Joe's detectives springing through. Cardona howled for them to grab The Shadow, and they made an awkward lunge. Instead of driving for the back of the hall, the fools were heading for the stairs. Cardona paused, to point his gun across the banister.

Then Cardona learned that his men were right, and he was wrong. The Shadow wasn't heading back; he was coming up. Ahead of aiming guns, he met Cardona midway on the steps, and before Joe could wheel around, The Shadow spilled him.

Cardona tumbled into the arms of detectives who lunged up to stop him. Catching his balance, Joe bawled for them to stop The Shadow.

That was quite another thing.

Guns blazed at blackness atop the steps, only to prove that The Shadow wasn't in the gloom. He'd made the turn on the second floor and was throwing back a taunt, as though inviting pursuit. Cardona and the rest took the invitation, but by the time they reached the second floor, The Shadow was on his way to the third, still gibing back at them with his incessant mockery.

Floor by floor the chase continued, with The Shadow gaining all the way. He needed a larger lead when he reached the fifth story, as was proven when the pursuers took the last flight of stairs.

There, they saw The Shadow in a dim-lit hall, where he had just finished stacking a chair on a table, and was mounting the chair, to smash up through a clamped trapdoor.

There was a roar as the clamp gave under a ripping spurt from an automatic; then, as if the jolt of the .45 had turned him into a cloaked catapult, The Shadow vaulted through the opening to the roof, with police guns peppering only the ceiling around the space where he had gone.

Boldly, Cardona and his men took the same route. As they emerged on the roof, they heard The Shadow's laugh again and saw the spurting tongues of two big guns. Thinking the shots were meant for them, they scattered, some of them tripping over a short ladder that lay upon the roof. Then, seeing that The Shadow was shooting along the roof itself, they opened fire.

THAT ended The Shadow's battle with a foe that no one saw. Cardona wasn't falling for any bluff, nor were his men.

Police guns rattled so defiantly, that The Shadow had to take notice in a hurry. He took to the shelter of a chimney, with bullets battering away chunks of brick the moment he arrived.

From that chimney, The Shadow dodged to another. Detectives glimpsed his silhouetted outline as he went, and changed their aim. Then The Shadow became more elusive. He began to stage his famous vanishing act in a truly baffling style.

Out from behind a chimney, he blended with a parapet, and was gone from the low wall before the police could rake it with their fire.

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He reappeared upon the next-door roof, and led the pursuers a merry chase along it, until they suddenly found that they were on a barren trail. By then, The Shadow had dropped to a lower roof, in back. There, Cardona spotted him making a long, desperate leap across to another parapet.

At least, Cardona thought it was a desperate leap, but he was amazed at the way The Shadow cleared the twenty-foot gap. Spreading his arms, the cloaked catapult made a batlike swoop through air, and landed with plenty to spare.

What revealed The Shadow was the dim light from the slanted window of a studio. Getting through one window, The Shadow was gone when Cardona began to shatter the panes of the other windows with bullets. Pursuing, the police found they couldn't bridge the gap. There was a long board lying on the other roof, but it was out of reach.

So Cardona shouted from the roof top down to patrolmen who were with a crowd that was gathering in the street, ordering them to head off The Shadow. While he shouted, Cardona kept seeing the flickers of a light that blinked from the front of a building where The Shadow had gone.

That light was the electric sign of the Cafe Galaxy. The Shadow had taken a short cut back to the night club.

Patrolmen were piling in from the street when The Shadow reached the ground floor. Coming from a stairway, the cloaked fugitive was caught in a spotlight that a helpful electrician turned his way.

With a laugh, The Shadow fired one shot, purposely high, to scare the fellow from his post. The electrician scampered away, and in his hurry he knocked the release of a revolving blinker device.

Across the floor went The Shadow, amid the flickering lights that cut from red to green to orange, running the entire gamut of the spectrum. Men were shouting, women screeching, while The Shadow, changing from one hue to another, made for the door of Stanner's office. He was out of the spotlight's colorful glow when he reached the door he wanted – and he saw Rick springing from it.

Savagely, Rick tried to stop The Shadow, only to be caught and flung as a shield against the aiming patrolmen who were coming The Shadow's way. Rick had started this, and The Shadow intended to have him play a further part.

Dodging away as guns began to shoot, The Shadow grabbed tables and flung them at the patrolmen who dropped back. However, Rich was in action, coming at the head of surging men – patrons and employees of the Cafe Galaxy.

Guns spoke again. The patrolmen weren't the only ones who fired. Some shots came from amid the charging throng. Rick, in his hurry, was too far ahead. He overtook the barrage that was directed toward The Shadow and sprawled flat, a bullet in his back. Other men were stumbling over Rick, and in the confusion The Shadow weaved among them and was gone.

In from a side door came Cardona and his detectives. Passing a pair of patrolmen, Cardona ran into Commissioner Weston, who had just arrived. Near Weston was Rudolph Delmot, who was gesturing the commissioner over toward Rick Stanner.

They reached the night-club owner just in time to hear his dying coughs. Rick tried to point upward; he finished with a sideward gesture toward the office.

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Then, as Rick succumbed, the office door opened and Lamont Cranston stepped into sight. Though no one realized it, his appearance accounted for the vanish of The Shadow. By side-stepping into Rick's empty office, The Shadow had gained time to change his cloak into a coat lining and twist his black hat inside out, flipping the bands back in place.

As Cranston, The Shadow was more puzzled than anyone else present. He explained how he'd come to see Rick, and had waited in the office. Rick had said something about meeting a friend, but the night-club owner hadn't returned until the commotion started.

Cranston didn't add that he hadn't been in the office when Rick came back; on the contrary, he gave the opposite impression. With Rick dead, there was no one to testify otherwise. Instead, witnesses substantiated Cranston's story. They had seen Cranston go into the office, some time before, and he hadn't come out until the present.

So Cranston joined the investigators who went through to the other house. When they found Secane's body, Cardona gave the details of the murder, glumly admitting that The Shadow must be the guilty party. No other killer could possibly have fled the place with Joe atop the stairs and detectives coming through the door.

The windows of Secane's little parlor were all locked from the inside. When Weston tried the door at the rear of the hallway, to find out if anyone could have gone back to the Cafe Galaxy, he found that the door was latched from the other side. This was another case of established guilt.

Just as the law was positive that Laverock had murdered Orvill, because of the gun beneath the grating; just as Secane must have killed Laverock, because no one else could have carried the unwieldy automatic into the apartment; so was the knife in Secane's back sure evidence that only the hand of The Shadow could have planted it there.

Commissioner Weston was bringing up the fact that The Shadow had mixed in affairs before. He was even inclined to argue that The Shadow had made the thrust at Buram, using masked hirelings to help him, then scattering them purely as an alibi for himself.

The upshot of it all was that The Shadow, for some reason known only to himself, had slain Wilfred Secane. While Weston chattered thus, his friend Cranston was quietly watching Cardona's men remove Secane's body from its resting spot.

Odd, those tiny splashes of blood upon Secane's collar and his shoulder. Such flecks could hardly have splattered from the knife wound in Secane's back. When the body was carried away, Cranston noted the telephone book, where Secane had shoved it from the table.

Stooping, Cranston lifted it carefully, so that the directory remained open at the same pages where it had fallen.

On one page, Cranston saw another crimson drop. He studied the blob carefully; then, making sure that no one watched, he tore the page from the directory and closed the book, as he folded the torn sheet into his pocket.

Hat and coat across his arm, Lamont Cranston strolled outdoors to rejoin his friend, the police commissioner.

Only a few nights ago, Lamont Cranston had been elected to the executive committee of the Avenue Club. This evening, The Shadow, by unanimous vote, had been elected a killer. Quite a contrast, those two offices. Perhaps Cranston should think it an honor to belong to the executive committee. Similarly, The Shadow

might deem it a disgrace to be wanted as a murderer.

Yet, between those two degrees there might be a very little difference. It was possible, in fact, that both had been meant for the same man. Fortunately, Cranston and The Shadow passed as two personalities; therefore, the scheme had slipped its cog.

Between them, Lamont Cranston and The Shadow were figuring it all out, very nicely.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE GAME THAT TURNED

"WANTED for murder: The Shadow!"

The hue and cry was everywhere, except in the one place where The Shadow could be found. That happened to be a hideaway so perfect that no one could hope to unearth it, as they had the refuges where Laverock and Secane had gone.

The Shadow was in his sanctum, making a test with an ultraviolet lamp on little drops that showed ruddy under normal glow, but which did strange things when the ultraviolet rays struck them. It was very easy to identify blood from other fluids, under that queer light.

A whispered laugh throbbed amid blackened walls, as The Shadow extinguished the light and departed. Finished with his experiments, he was leaving his snug sanctum.

When he reappeared, The Shadow had become Lamont Cranston, and was stepping from his limousine in front of the Avenue Club.

It was evening, so Cranston found Harry Vincent and Clyde Burke at the club. They called their pool game when their chief arrived, and Cranston drew them to a quiet corner for a brief conference. What he had to say, surprised them utterly.

"I knew that you both would be safe, here at the club," declared Cranston. "Nothing startling ever happens at the Avenue Club. When its members are murdered, they always die outside the place. I think it is time that something happened inside, for a change."

Pausing, Cranston noted the expectant looks on the faces of his listeners. Then:

"I am going to make something happen," he proceeded. "To do so, a reason must be established, and an issue must be forced. Those things, combined, can work marvels. Ten minutes from now, I want you both to meet me publicly in the foyer, and take every cue I give you."

Ten minutes later, Cranston was coming from a phone booth, where he had just called Commissioner Weston. The first persons he encountered were Harry and Clyde. Thrusting Harry aside, Cranston caught Clyde by the coat collar.

There weren't many members in the foyer, to hear the dispute that followed, but plenty of attendants gathered around. The thing was so unusual to see the complacent Mr. Cranston, distinguished member of the executive committee, letting forth a vituperation that carried vitriolic threat.

Of course, Cranston had good reason.

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He'd found out, so he claimed, that Clyde was responsible for the slander published by the Classic: the statement that Cranston and his friend the commissioner were at odds. Cranston challenged Clyde to deny it, so, taking the cue, Clyde did. Whereupon Cranston voiced threats of physical violence and dared Clyde to equal them. Again, Clyde responded.

By then, Harry was drawn into it, and Cranston was accusing him of taking Clyde's side. When such friends as Cranston and Vincent lost their heads, matters could get hot indeed. The pair nearly came to blows, before attendants separated them.

Turning away, Cranston contemptuously suggested that Vincent take Burke to the gym and get him into condition for the beating that he soon would take. To that, Harry answered that he, personally, was in proper shape to handle Cranston's case.

Going up to the mezzanine, Cranston found Delmot in conference with Buram. Giving Cranston a reproving look, Delmot inquired what all the trouble was about. When he heard, Delmot shook his head.

"Why not forget Burke?" he inquired. "After all, you and Weston are still friends –"

"I'll forget neither Burke nor Vincent!" Something in Cranston's steady tone made it all the more dangerous. "When Weston arrives, I'm going up to the gym and bring them down. That is, I'll bring Burke down. Vincent may have to stay there!"

Delmot reached for phone, as though to call the gym and tell Rydal to warn Harry. Cranston's hand shot across the desk and removed Delmot's grip from the telephone.

"Let's attend to our own business, Delmot," spoke Cranston, in that hard, firm tone. "As a member of the executive committee, I want to go over the financial reports. The other committee men have been leaving too much to you."

WITH a shrug, Delmot produced the reports, hoping that they would make Cranston forget his feud with Vincent. It was plain that his threat was one of violence, when he had stated that Vincent might have to remain where Cranston met him. Upon reading the reports, Cranston did forget Harry for the time.

"These mean nothing," stated Cranston coldly. "They do not include the statistics on the Allied Benefit Association."

"Buram handles the A.B.A.," explained Delmot, with a gesture. "He can furnish you with those reports."

"They're over in my office," explained Buram nervously. "I can have them here tomorrow, Cranston."

Fury blazed from Cranston's eyes. His voice, though even, carried a sharp, accusing bite.

"Tomorrow will not do," Cranston declared. "Nor will the reports suffice alone. I must see the funds they represent. This expansion program is a huge thing. You have spread the A.B.A. to at least twenty cities.

"Averaging a hundred members each, that makes a total of two thousand. With each man insured for ten thousand dollars, in case of accidental death, you need a sinking fund of twenty million dollars!"

Buram began an ardent protest. He explained that nothing like the absolute total was needed to guarantee insurance benefits. He was quoting the figures compiled by insurance actuaries, as proof of how matters really stood. But in the course of it, Buram admitted two things.

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First, he inadvertently stated that Cranston's estimate of insured members was very much below the actual number. Then, in speaking of funds, he let slip that the A.B.A. had already drawn in the reserves from the original clubs that belonged to the association.

By the time Buram finished, he found that Delmot had swung to Cranston's way of thinking.

"You have gone farther than I supposed," stated Delmot. "I must compliment you upon your industry, Buram, but you should have reported the facts."

"I intended to," returned Buram, "but you were too busy with matters here at the club."

"No longer," rejoined Delmot. "With Cranston to help me, I shall have no further trouble. We shall go to your office later, Buram, and examine the books. Tomorrow, we can check the funds that you have in the bank."

Cranston gave a satisfied nod. But his eyes showed another flash as he rose from his chair. Turning to the door, he told Delmot to notify him when Weston arrived. Cranston was going to the gymnasium, to settle matters up there.

Rydal was just finishing a telephone call when Cranston reached the gym. Cheerily, the physical director gave greeting and asked what Cranston wanted. When he learned that Cranston was looking for Harry and Clyde, Rydal nodded.

"I think they're in the locker room," said Rydal. "If they aren't, I'll find them for you."

Clyde was in the locker room, where he had just changed to a gym suit. His locker door was open, and before Clyde could close it, Cranston stopped him. From the look that his chief gave him, Clyde knew that Cranston wanted the argument to begin again, for the benefit of listeners about the locker room.

Their voices had just started, and they were bringing Vincent's name into the dispute, when Harry entered, swinging a pair of Indian clubs. Seeing what was up, as he turned the corner of the lockers, Harry laid the clubs down on a bench.

Cranston was backing Clyde against the inner corner of the locker door as Harry stepped forward. Hence, Clyde only had a partial view of Harry's approach.

What Clyde saw was the thing that came whizzing from Harry's direction, so suddenly that Clyde could have sworn that Harry had thrown it, but for the fact that Clyde knew that Harry's quarrel with Cranston was purely an act.

The whirling thing was an Indian club, flung in expert style. Skilled club throwers could hurl those objects with tremendous speed, with an aim that would drive a nail home. But the heavy Indian club, flying at full force, wasn't directed at a nail head. It was driving straight for Cranston's skull!

FORGETTING the bluff that he was supposed to play, Clyde voiced a warning, that didn't leave his lips until the club had actually arrived.

"Look out!"

Cranston's action was ahead of Clyde's words. He'd been watching Harry's arrival, in the mirror on the locker door. Cranston was full about and shifting to the left when the murderous missile reached him, but he didn't let it ride on past. Instead, with the skill of an expert juggler, Cranston plucked the Indian club from midair.

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In that brief space, Harry did a natural thing. The club was past him before he could shout, and he saw The Shadow grab it. But Harry performed the same action that he would have if the club had felled Cranston.

Swinging around to learn who had thrown the missile, Harry saw the other club lying on the bench. Grabbing it for a weapon, he turned the corner of the lockers, hoping to find the culprit.

Harry ran right into Rydal, who shouted for all to hear:

"Stop him! He's killed Cranston!"

What a frame-up it was! Men, turning from their lockers, saw Harry swinging one club, where, only a few moments before, he'd entered with a pair. They didn't guess that Rydal had snatched up one club, the moment that Harry had laid both aside; that it was Rydal who had made the expert throw.

Harry's one club, instinctively regained, marked him as the culprit. Not a single witness would testify in his behalf – with the possible exception of Clyde, who was already prejudiced in Harry's favor.

It would have been a murder charge for Harry Vincent, if the ghost of the dead man hadn't suddenly appeared. At least, Rydal thought it was a ghost that came around the corner, until he saw that Lamont Cranston was carrying the deadly Indian club.

Rydal gestured frantically at Harry, but Cranston didn't stop. He came for Rydal instead, and with a wild shout, the stocky man plunged among the lockers.

Rydal's shout started things. Others lunged in from the gym. They were Rydal's amateur boxers, employees of the Avenue Club. They weren't wearing boxing gloves; instead, they were digging for guns.

But their attack broke when a pair of Indian clubs flew their way. Cranston and Harry let go together and felled a pair of attackers, while the rest were diving out into the gym.

Battle was on. The Shadow had disclosed the truth. The Avenue Club, with all its pretense, was a habitat of thugs! As Cranston, The Shadow was breaking up this house of evil, starting from its core!

But Cranston's action was only the beginning. As The Shadow, he would finish his combat in crime's stronghold!

CHAPTER XIX. DEATH AMONG FRIENDS

BEFORE Rydal's crew could rally, Cranston was steering Harry down the alley of lockers, and turning to follow on his own. Cranston threw a look for Rydal and saw the stocky man coming.

Rydal had a gun, but there wasn't time to draw it. He thought he wouldn't need it, dealing with a gentleman named Cranston, who preferred fencing to fisticuffs.

Rydal took a roundhouse swing at Cranston, the long type of punch that was sure disaster for those who didn't know how to ward it off. The blow never landed. Instead, Rydal received on the jaw what he mistook for a mule's kick.

Slammed back against a row of lockers, Rydal slumped to the floor, too blank to realize that Cranston had been kidding when he said he couldn't punch.

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Overtaking Harry and Clyde, Cranston beckoned them to a corner locker, the only one in its row that had a special lock. Opened, the locker revealed itself as an arsenal. Cranston shoved automatics into the hands of his companions, and took a double brace for himself. Then, thrusting his shoulders into the locker, Cranston emerged with a cloak upon them. His hand was adding a slouch hat to his head.

Lamont Cranston, staid member of the Avenue Club, was dropping out of the picture. The Shadow was taking over!

When the black-cloaked fighter appeared from among the lockers, Rydal was on his feet again. Rydal put his feet to use, as did the rest of his crowd. They fled out through the gymnasium, toward elevators and the stairway, pursued by The Shadow's gunshots.

Waving for Harry and Clyde to take over another elevator, The Shadow chose the stairs. All the way down, his laugh and the occasional blasts of his guns spurred his opponents to faster flight.

On the third floor, The Shadow turned along a hallway which the fleeing men hadn't found time to follow. He heard the clang of an elevator door, and came upon half a dozen crooks who were speeding for the quarters where the employees lived. Blocking off their course with rapid gunfire, The Shadow dropped a pair of them and herded the rest down the stairs.

He'd proven one point, The Shadow had: namely, that the third floor had an exit to an old house next door. He'd guessed that fact the night of Harry's plight, when masked men had so suddenly disappeared.

Cars had fled from the vicinity of the Avenue Club, but they had gone empty. For the hired help that trained around Rydal's gym were the cover-up men who had blocked off pursuits of Laverock and Secane, and had later staged the holdup of Buram. They hadn't wanted The Shadow to know that they belonged here, so they had sent the cars away as decoys.

Continuing down the stairway, The Shadow heard shooting in the foyer, and when he came in sight, he saw men sprawling on the marble floor. Harry and Clyde were in the other elevator, using it as a pillbox to cut off the escape of Rydal and the rest of his gun-toting athletes.

Things were getting hot for The Shadow's agents. Clerks, other attendants, even the fancy-dressed doorman, were drawing guns to reinforce Rydal's tribe. The Shadow put a quick stop to that process.

His big guns talked. With their bursts came his mighty laugh. The Shadow's devastating aim spilled every foeman who waited long enough to become a human target. There was only one other way out: up to the mezzanine by a different flight of steps than those The Shadow occupied. So Rydal and the remainder of his tribe took that route.

Again, they met with opposition. Two men appeared with revolvers: Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona. Both had been waiting with Delmot and Buram, until Cranston returned from the gym. Their gunfire stopped the rush, and more shots roared from the front door of the club, winging the thugs who were halting on the broad stairs.

Cardona hadn't forgotten to post a squad outside. He'd been making a habit of taking along a flock of detectives wherever he went.

IN the midst of all that, Rydal was huddled on the stairs, shooting at a target of his own. He saw The Shadow, down from the side steps, helping mop up in the lobby. But Rydal, jabbing the few shots left in his gun, couldn't clip The Shadow with any of them.

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Expecting just such a fire, the cloaked fighter was weaving; in a fashion too elusive for Rydal's aim.

Then Rydal saw The Shadow coming his way. Low in his crouch, Rydal sidled up the stairs, using the forms of his sinking followers as shields to help him reach the top. There, passing Weston and Cardona, Rydal ran into Delmot, who grappled with him. The two were sidling along the rail of the mezzanine as The Shadow hurried up the steps.

Weston and Cardona saw the cloaked fighter coming and displayed their guns. They hadn't forgotten that they wanted The Shadow for Secane's death. The laugh that they received was more significant than words. As he gave it, The Shadow gestured down the stairway.

Sight of detectives gathering guns from wounded crooks was convincing indeed. The fact that the majority of the Avenue Club's hirelings were armed men, engaged in crime, spoke for itself.

It was The Shadow who had unmasked the hidden business and rounded up Rydal's horde. From that fact, Weston and Cardona reasoned that The Shadow could disclose other things as well, among them, proof that he hadn't murdered Secane.

So Weston and Cardona stepped aside to let The Shadow pass. Noting the direction that he took, they saw for the first time that Delmot was grappling with Rydal. Deciding that they would be needed, too, Weston and Cardona followed The Shadow.

Another man took quick advantage of their departure. That man was Buram. So far, he'd kept quite in the background. Now, he was stealing down the stairs, looking back furtively, hoping he wouldn't be spotted.

But he was, by Rydal. Breaking away from Delmot, Rydal made for the stairs, escaping The Shadow when Cardona blundered in front of the cloaked fighter. After Rydal went Delmot, so close behind him that it wasn't safe to take a shot at Rydal.

Seeing Rydal brandishing a gun, Buram cut across the foyer, into the lower office, which was dark. Rydal was next, and Delmot just behind the two, as The Shadow reached the door. From within came the muffled report of a gun, followed by a man's dying moan.

The Shadow reached inside and pressed the light switch, revealing the scene within. Across the cloaked shoulders, Weston and Cardona took survey.

Buram was lying dead upon the floor. Staring from beside him was Rydal, holding his gun. Delmot was stooping, wrenching a revolver from Buram's unresisting hand. Turning, Delmot displayed the weapon.

"Buram drew this gun," stated Delmot solemnly. "I suppose we can say that Rydal killed him in self-defense." Swinging to Rydal, Delmot added: "But I can't see how that will help you, Rydal. You'll find it difficult to explain the things that have happened here."

Rydal didn't try to explain. He stared savagely at Delmot, who thereupon demanded:

"What was Buram's part in this? If you talk, Rydal, it may prove better for you!"

The Shadow's laugh toned from the doorway, as though supporting Delmot's statement.

WITH a frantic glare, Rydal broke suddenly away and made for the deep door of the office, the one leading to the storeroom where The Shadow had once left his cloak and hat for a short period.

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Sometimes that door was bolted; this night, it happened to be open. Rydal yanked it wide and dived through.

Delmot was close after him, so close that, as before, it wasn't possible to shoot Rydal without hitting Delmot, too. This time, however, Delmot was properly equipped for the pursuit, for he was carrying the gun that he had taken from Buram's dead hand.

The Shadow was following, urged on by Weston and Cardona, who were coming right behind him.

There was a scuffle in the darkness, the clash of swinging guns, followed by a hard, resounding thwack. A slumping sound came out, then Delmot's voice:

"I've caught him!"

Then Delmot reappeared, dragging Rydal along. Cardona helped him with his burden, and they dropped Rydal into a chair. The stocky man was using one hand to rub his head, where Delmot had slugged him. In his other fist he was holding his gun, quite loosely.

"There is your man, commissioner," declared Delmot, "and here is Buram's revolver. Fortunately, I was able to slug Rydal before he could shoot me, as he did Buram. Probably his anxiety to escape was the thing that saved me."

His own guns away, The Shadow stood with folded arms, looking from man to man. He saw Delmot's solemn expression and Rydal's stupefied look. A strange finish to crime, this. Not quite in keeping with The Shadow's expectations, though he understood the situation fully. With a little priming, perhaps more results could be produced.

So The Shadow primed it with a laugh.

Weirdly, his throbbing tone jarred ears that feared it. That mirth was the sort that could drive men to madness, particularly those who dealt in evil. It made them do things against their better judgment, for the laugh declared The Shadow's knowledge of hidden facts – facts that he might disclose at will.

The Shadow wasn't to be tricked, as the law might be. That was the message behind his mirth. When The Shadow finished crime, he did it thoroughly, never with halfway measures. Nor could such measures suffice against him.

Crime's game was over. The Shadow knew! So did those who heard his sinister taunt!

CHAPTER XX. PROOF OF MURDER

COMING from his chair, Tom Rydal took a tightened grip upon his gun, swinging it The Shadow's way. At that moment, Rudolph Delmot sprang forward, with the same verve that he had shown before. Delmot still had the gun that he had taken from Buram, and he aimed it for Rydal.

Though groggy, Rydal acted fairly swiftly. He saw that The Shadow's arms were folded, and therefore took Delmot for the immediate menace. Rydal flung his chair at Weston and Cardona and turned to meet Delmot's attack. Rydal's revolver was coming up, but Delmot's was already aimed.

Delmot tugged the trigger twice. Then came a blast from Rydal's gun. It was Delmot who struck the floor, his finger still pulling away, with only clicks responding. He'd tried to down Rydal with an empty gun, only to receive a point-blank shot in return.

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Delmot's wound was mortal. His face showed a dying look. As for Rydal, his bluff features were displaying a puzzled expression as he stared at the gun in his hand. It seemed that the sound of the shot had awakened Rydal's dazed memory. Dropping the revolver, as though its very touch burned him, Rydal turned to stammer:

"I... I couldn't have killed him! This... my gun... was empty!"

Rydal was blurting those words to The Shadow. All that came in answer was a parting laugh. Rydal's staring eyes saw only a blur of blackness, that cleared so suddenly that he wondered whether his own gaze had tricked him. For the storeroom, where The Shadow had gone, was empty. The cloaked avenger was leaving by the door beyond it, his own route from the Avenue Club.

A dying snarl sounded from the floor.

"Yes, empty, Rydal," voiced Delmot. "I was a fool not to guess it! But The Shadow knew –"

There was no compliment to the final phrase. Delmot spat it viciously, as though longing for a return of strength and life, that would enable him to settle scores with the cloaked fighter.

What little effort Delmot still had left was exhausted by the words he uttered. The shudder that his shoulders gave was purely the result of a convulsive spasm; with that shiver, his life was gone.

Rydal turned pleadingly to Cardona.

"Don't you see, inspector?" Rydal queried, pointing to the gun he had just dropped. "This is Delmot's revolver. He killed Buram with it, here in the dark. He only pretended to be taking the gun from Buram. When Delmot slugged me, he took my gun and planted the other on me.

Cardona caught on. He was wondering why he hadn't seen it before, as The Shadow had. Rydal's gun was larger than Delmot's; it didn't have the snug pocket fit that Delmot's needed, to be carried unnoticed.

"I get it," Cardona told Rydal. "Delmot wanted to stay out of it, like he didn't even own a gun. He had to switch, after he'd killed Buram, so the slug would tally with the gun we took from you. But when the pinch came, he decided he'd better kill you, too."

Rydal nodded.

"He was certainly making it look justified," added Cardona, as he studied Delmot's body. "But he forgot that you'd have used up all your bullets fighting The Shadow. You forgot it, too, so you clipped Delmot with the wrong gun, while he was handling the empty."

That settled, Cardona came to other business.

"O.K., Rydal," gruffed Joe. "Tell us what you know about his whole business."

RYDAL poured forth his story. Delmot was the big-shot of the entire racket. Once the hidden brain of a lawless ring, he had seen his chance to take over the Avenue Club with tremendous profit: the money drawn from outlying clubs through the Allied Benefit Association.

He was managing that end of the job through his tool, Buram. Rydal's business was to build up an organization of trigger-men, who could use the Avenue Club as their headquarters through the simple

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expedient of posing as employees. Rydal, himself, had been a fake fight fixer, and had found his business slipping. So he had signed up with Delmot.

Not only had Delmot undermined the club, he had honeycombed it with criminals. It was to be the future citadel for as powerful and hidden a gang as had ever marauded Manhattan. How long Delmot expected it to last, how far he intended to go with it, only the dead ringleader could have told.

At that point, Rydal paused.

Standing in the doorway from the foyer was Lamont Cranston, the club member who had paved the way to The Shadow's triumph. Remembering that Cranston packed a punch of his own, Rydal shifted back in his chair. He needed no prompting to continue his story.

"Delmot packed the executive committee with stooges," said Rydal, "so they wouldn't get wise to his game. He pretended he wanted somebody smarter, but he really didn't. Everybody took orders from Delmot, like I did tonight, when he phoned me to knock off Cranston and see that it was blamed on Vincent."

"One thing I don't get," put in Cardona. "How could Delmot have afforded to let you live, Rydal, after he'd pinned Buram's death on you."

Rydal was at a loss for a reply, so Cranston calmly supplied it.

"From what I have just heard," said Cranston, "I am sure that Delmot was building to his climax, all along. He was waiting until Rydal came from his daze, so he could start him off to an escape and shoot him on the way."

"But The Shadow forced it!" expressed Weston. "That is the answer, Cranston! Yes, with Buram dead, we'd have blamed him for missing A.B.A. funds, which must be here in Delmot's safe. All the thuggery would have been pinned on Rydal here, once he was dead, like Buram."

Weston's ability at analysis was improving, in The Shadow's estimation. It was too bad, however, that the commissioner didn't carry his reasoning further. So it devolved upon Cranston to prompt him.

"Since Delmot's strong point was placing guilt on dead men," spoke Cranston coolly, "we may be able to prove him as the murderer who delivered death about town."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Weston. "Why, those cases were proven – and I haven't forgotten something." Weston's face stiffened grimly. "The Shadow was responsible for the last death in the chain!"

With one hand lowered to his side, Cranston was wigwagging a signal across the foyer. Harry Vincent saw it from a phone booth, and acted promptly. The phone on the office desk began to ring. Cranston answered it, and listened with lifted brows. Hanging up, he spoke quietly:

"It was The Shadow. He has given us the clues we need. Get ready, commissioner; we are going on a tour. As for you, inspector" – Cranston turned to Cardona – "you will oblige us by bringing along the exhibits in the earlier murders."

ON their way to the Galba Building, Cranston brought up the point that Delmot, in taking over the Avenue Club, must have found it quite necessary to dispose of capable committee men. Hence, the chain of deaths could logically have been delivered personally by Delmot. The first murder was that of Dana Orvill.

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When they stopped at the Hotel Bayberry, Cranston studied the revolving door, and nodded.

"Suppose that Delmot was posted alongside one of those little side doors," suggested Cranston. "He could easily have killed Orvill when Laverock's car pulled away, across the street. If Laverock's carburetor had been tampered with beforehand, it would have delivered the needed backfires."

It was Cardona who supplied the objection.

"We'll grant that much," said Joe. "But what about this gun of Laverock's? The one he chucked down the grating."

Cranston smiled.

"We'll test The Shadow's theory," he said. "Give me the gun, inspector."

They walked across the street. There, Cranston held the revolver, muzzle first, and tried to drop it down the grating. It stopped with a clang. The bars were too close together for the gun to pass between them!

"I'll be –" began Cardona, "Say – that's something I never thought about! Laverock couldn't have murdered Orvill and gotten rid of the gun the way we thought he did. Delmot planted it, and I'm beginning to see how! When he went downstairs to find the janitor, he opened a basement window and shoved the gun in the space below the grating!"

Nodding, Cranston suggested:

"Let's go over to the apartment where Laverock was killed."

They went there, and Cardona produced the clumsy automatic responsible for Laverock's death. They sent a detective inside to throw the chain bolt. Cardona opened the door as far as it would go, and went through his previous motions, to prove that the gun wouldn't go through.

"It won't do," said Cardona. "Between the barrel and the handle, it's too big to go around the side or over the top. Delmot couldn't have knocked on the door and then plugged Laverock when he answered it. Not from this side."

Cranston took the bulky automatic.

"Barrel and handle," he mused. "Too large for side or top. Let me see. What did The Shadow say about it? Ah, I remember. He said to try the side and top."

Holding the gun with its handle upright and the barrel level, pointing to the left, Cranston carried it up the side of the door. When it reached the upper corner, the rest was very simple.

The gun was shaped exactly like the corner. Hence, the upright handle went through at the side of the door; the level barrel found space along the top. Releasing the weapon, Cranston let it thud the floor inside the apartment.

"Our next stop," he said calmly, "is No. 618 Westbury Court."

En route, Cranston explained that he had a personal interest in the final investigation. It was becoming quite apparent that Delmot, in disposing of Orvill, Laverock, and Secane, had been playing a doubly smart game.

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When he reached the end of his run, one man would still be alive, but wanted for murder, which was enough to remove him from the affairs of the Avenue Club.

"When I was elected to the executive committee," declared Cranston, "I became one more link in the chain. Unquestionably, Delmot had bought up Secane's friend, Rick Stanner, and ordered him to frame me. Fortunately, The Shadow moved in ahead of me. This bit of evidence that he supplied may help in clearing The Shadow of the blame which he accepted in my behalf."

CRANSTON, produced a folded sheet from a telephone book. Cardona was still staring at it when they reached 618 Westbury Court. As they entered, Joe said:

"This blot looks like blood."

"Red ink always does," assured Cranston cryptically. "I brought a bottle of it along, for our test. Give me the knife, inspector, and while I'm on my way upstairs, see if that torn page fits in Secane's phone book."

Cranston reached the fifth floor and leaned across the rail of the stairway well. Cardona called up that the page fitted. Cranston nodded, and told Cardona to keep looking up; that he wanted Weston to do the same.

Dipping the point of the long, thin blade in the ink bottle, Cranston held the very top of the knife handle, so that it dangled at his fingertips. A drop of ink dripped from the knife point and fell straight downward, to strike the ground floor with a tiny splash.

"We'll call the table Secane's back," decided Cranston. "Watch me find the mark, the way Delmot did with the white shirt. Very conspicuous, these red blobs against white."

Cranston proved it when a drop hit the opened telephone book. Carrying his hand a trifle farther, he landed a red marker on the table itself. The next was very close to the table center. A slight move of Cranston's hand, and a drop found the very middle.

Drip – drip – drip –

Every splash of red fluid plummeted to the selfsame spot, thanks to the unerring law of gravitation. Then, as a climax, Cranston warned:

"Don't move an inch, either of you!"

He let his fingers leave the dangling knife. Perfectly weighted, it followed the exact course that the blood–red drops had taken.

Like a thing from nowhere, striking with the powerful momentum gained by a full drop from the fifth floor, the knife drove deep into the very center of the table and quivered there, between the astonished faces of Weston and Cardona.

Such was the explanation to the riddle of the third death about town, the final in a chain that the law had mistaken for perfect crimes, but which The Shadow had analyzed otherwise.

Weston and Cardona were talking excitedly when Cranston joined them. They were cracking Delmot's alibis. He hadn't actually had an alibi for the time when he murdered Orvill, but he had used some fake ones later.

"I thought that Delmot went with you to find Laverock," said Weston to Cardona. "He said he did."

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"He told me he'd come with you," returned Cardona. "He must have beaten us both there by using the back way from the club. I guess, after he shot Laverock, he ducked to the stairs up to the next floor, then slid back past me while I was banging at the door."

Much the same was true in Secane's death. Delmot had pulled the same dodge, letting Weston and Cardona each think he had gone with the other. Cranston added a point.

"Delmot went out by the roof," he analyzed. "He used a ladder and a plank, drawing them after him, thus reaching the Cafe Galaxy. He was there when The Shadow arrived, and in the shooting Delmot put a bullet in Rick Stanner. Being a double-crosser himself, Delmot didn't trust the breed."

What Cranston didn't add, was that Delmot must first have ducked into Rick's office, where Cranston's absence had given him a clue to The Shadow's double identity. No wonder Delmot had decided to clear house, beginning with Rick, and later trying to dispose of Cranston at any cost!

BACK at the Avenue Club, they opened Delmot's safe. It was stacked with vast bundles of cash and securities, totaling the very round sum of two million dollars, all pillaged from the heavy treasuries of trusting clubs that were helping in the expansion of the A.B.A.

While the wealth was being loaded into an armored truck in the alley behind the Avenue Club, Weston and Cranston discussed a final, and vital, phase of Delmot's far-reaching schemes.

The point was this: through planted aids, all about the Avenue Club, Delmot had learned every habit of his victims. He knew how, and where, each would flee under stress. He used fake messages to send them along paths that would lead into planned and tested traps.

"Only one thing more," mused Weston. "Why did Delmot send Rydal to murder Buram, at the Zenith Building?"

"Ask Rydal," returned Cranston. "He'll tell you he wasn't after Buram. The victim was to be Clyde Burke."

"Because Burke was delving into the affairs of the A.B.A.?"

"Exactly! I think Buram slipped Delmot a hurry-up note with the fifty thousand dollars. So Delmot pressed the button, to get rid of Burke. Quite a show, Buram leaving that cash with Delmot. We were witnesses, commissioner, and we'd hardly have blamed Delmot for an attempted robbery of funds he already had!"

Commissioner Weston wondered if The Shadow had told that to Cranston, too. Weston was still thinking it over as he rode away in his big official car, behind the armored truck. It was then that Weston heard an answer to his thoughts, seemingly from nowhere.

The answer was a strange, distant laugh, a floating tone that Weston didn't couple with the alley where Cranston had remained. It was always so with that weird, trailing mirth. Though near, it gave the effect of being far away.

The triumph laugh of The Shadow, marking the end of death about town, symbolizing another conquest over hidden crime!

THE END