

THE FOUR SIGNETS

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. ONE BIRD FLIES

TAP TAP TAP

The point of a heavy cane was clicking upon the cracked pavement. Bent forward, a man with black spectacles was finding his way along the sidewalk beneath the looming structure of an East Side elevated.

It was night; the dull lights of cheap shop windows cast their glow upon the street. But the man with the cane seemed oblivious of the illumination. His right hand was feeling its way with the cane, while his left clutched a tin cup in which coins were jingling. From pockets bristled the ends of unsharpened pencils.

A blind peddler, returning to some hovel. Not an unusual sight in this district. For the other passers who slouched along the grimy sidewalk were fellows of his ilk. Unshaven bums were shambling by, clutching the money that they had begged for a night's lodging.

Ahead lay a lighted corner, where a wide cross-street passed beneath the elevated. This seemed to be the spot

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that lured the passers of the night, even though they approached it in suspicious fashion. That corner was a focal point on the fringe of Manhattan's underworld.

The blind peddler was headed toward the corner; but before he reached it, his course took a sudden change. With an uncanny precision, he swung from the sidewalk and headed out into the thoroughfare. Whether by chance or intuition, he picked a moment when the block was free from traffic. With quickened hobble, the man gained the opposite sidewalk and made straight for the darkness of an alleyway.

Hardly had the blind man disappeared before a crouched figure arose from the cover of a darkened doorway. Furtive eyes watched until a bum had passed; then a wiry, scrawny figure stepped out to the sidewalk. Yellowish light showed a pasty, wizened face. This man crossed the street, but avoided the alleyway. He slouched into a lighted cigar store, where a group of smoking loungers eyed him.

"Hello, Dopey!" growled a big man who stood behind the battered counter. "What you back again for? There ain't been nobody call and ask for you."

"Lemme use your phone, Jake," whined the pasty-faced arrival. "I gotta call up de guy. He ain't never stood me up like dis before."

"All right," decided Jake. "Your nickel's as good as anybody else's. But when you get through phoning, scram. This ain't no hangout for hop-heads."

"DOPEY" nodded as he shambled toward the rear room. Idlers grinned as they saw his hand rise pitifully for a sniff of imaginary snow. They knew the reason for Dopey's whine; they also understood why Jake was anxious to get rid of the intruder.

Dopey had run short on coke. He had been counting on the arrival of a dope peddler. The man with the supply had not shown up. Dopey had put in two calls without result. He had come in to plead indulgence for a third. He was trying to locate the promised supply.

Such was the unanimous opinion of the loungers. But had they followed the hop-head into the rear room, they would have been surprised at his conversation. Dopey had straightened up. His whining tones had changed to a quick and coherent whisper.

"Dat you, Joe? Dis is Dopey... Yeah. Dopey Roogan... Yeah, I spotted him... Creeper Trigg... Headin' for de hide-out... Maybe de mugs are still dere..."

"Yeah... I getcha... You'll see me by de alley... Like I was waitin' for somebody to show up... Yeah, de sixt' house, dat's de one..."

His call ended, Dopey Roogan grinned. Then his expression changed. Worried of face. Slouchy of manner, the fake hop-head was ready to pass out through the cigar store. Pretense was necessary in the presence of those loungers. For Dopey Roogan was a spy in the underworld. He had just put in a call to Detective Joe Cardona. Dopey was a stool pigeon, passing information to the police.

MEANWHILE, the blind peddler had reached the destination that Dopey had given to Cardona. Shambling into a space between two crumbling houses, he had unlocked a side door that gave him entrance into a darkened passage. Through a second doorway, the man stopped and turned on a light. He locked the door behind him.

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Standing in the center of a room that contained a chair and battered desk, this arrival lost no time in dropping his part of "Creeper" Trigg, the blind peddler. He placed his cane in a corner. He removed his dark spectacles and placed them on the desk. He pulled off his tattered coat and trousers to reveal a smooth, well-fitted business suit beneath.

Opening a drawer in the desk, the ex-peddler produced a mirror and a jar of cold cream. Blind no longer, he grinned as he smeared away the yellowish make-up that gave his face an aged appearance. He brought out a neatly folded towel, wiped away the cold cream and stood erect. His face showed him to be a man of keenness.

There were other doors in the room; one to the right, the other straight ahead. It was from the second of these barriers that short raps came with a sudden impulse. The man approached and spoke in a whisper:

"Who's there?"

"Hoot Shelling," came a cautious response. "That you, Doc?"

"Yes." The fake peddler paused. "Wait a minute. I'll let you in."

Hastily, the speaker pulled out a bag from beneath the desk. He piled away the articles that had formed his peddler's attire; then kicked the bag out of sight. He stepped to the further door, opened it and admitted a husky, square-faced ruffian, who showed his teeth in a wolfish grin.

"Hello, Doc," greeted "Hoot" Shelling, closing the door behind him. "Thought I'd drop in to see you through that back way you told me about. How's the peddling business?"

The pretended blind man stared. His eyes flashed angrily; his fist half clenched. Hoot grinned.

"Don't get sore, Doc," he remarked. "I just guessed it that's all. I've seen old Creeper Trigg heading this way but I never figured it was you. Doc Ralder, passing as Creeper Trigg. Say that's neat!"

"How did you figure it to-night?" demanded Ralder.

Hoot Shelling nudged his thumb toward the corner. Doc Ralder turned, saw the cane. He had forgotten to hide it. The heavy stick accounted for Hoot's guess. Thick, heavy and knob-headed, it was one portion of Creeper Trigg's make-up that no one could have failed to recognize.

"Don't get sore, Doc," suggested Hoot. "I wised up all of a sudden. Best I should tell you, wasn't it? Listen. I got something to tell you about. But first, you tell me. Are those three mugs still upstairs?"

"You mean Zarby's gorillas? Yes."

"When are they going out?"

"To-night. After Zarby shows up."

"He's going to pay you when he gets here?"

"No. He's already paid me."

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HOOT SHELLING grinned. This seemed to his liking. Doc Ralder watched wisely; he saw Hoot's face become sober. Ralder wondered at the change of expression. Hoot Shelling was a thug who seldom became solemn.

"Doc," declared Hoot, "I've got a real bet for you. A new hide-out. One that's got this place licked. How'd you like to take it over?"

"Right away," returned Ralder, promptly. "You ought to know that, Hoot. I made a mistake, letting Zarby bring those gorillas here after they cracked that bank in the Bronx."

"I know that," nodded Hoot. "That's why I hopped down here in a hurry. I figured you could use the new place."

"What is it? Your own hide-out?"

"No. I got a place of my own. This one will be yours."

"And what's the catch?"

"I thought you'd ask that," returned Hoot, with a grin. "Listen, Doc, I'm in on a new racket. A soft one with a smart guy backing it. Looks like it's going to be easy, but there might be some hitch. Some shooting —"

"And you might need a sawbones."

"That's it. I'm giving you the new joint that you need. You'd be a sap to stick here with the bulls hot to get Zarby and his outfit. Well, the new place is yours. It's a hundred-to-one shot that none of my outfit will get into a jam. But if any of them do —"

"I'm to patch them up?"

"That's it."

Doc Ralder considered. Hoot Shelling eyed the man's keen face. At last, Ralder turned to the front door of the room. For a moment Hoot thought the deal was off. Then Ralder spoke.

"I'm going up to see the gorillas," he told his visitor. "Just to tell them I'm going out and won't be back. They can tell Zarby when he gets here. The four of them can leave together."

"You're not going to wait for Zarby?"

"Why should I? He knows the way in. I'll leave the doors unlocked and he'll go straight upstairs when he doesn't find me here."

"What about your equipment?"

Ralder laughed as he turned the knob of the door. This question amused him.

"What do you think this is?" he questioned. "A hospital? A punk could lug the bag I carry. I'm always ready for a quick getaway. Where's your car?"

"Out back. First street down, away from the avenue."

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"Good! Pull that bag out from under the desk. Open the drawers and throw in towels and anything else you see. I'll be back by the time you're ready."

DOC RALDER went through the front door. He lived up to his word. By the time that Hoot Shelling had accumulated towels and other odd items, Ralder reappeared. He was carrying a square shaped suitcase. Hoot picked up the other bag. Ralder went to the corner and lifted the cane that belonged with the disguise of Creeper Trigg.

"Let's go," said the sawbones. "Out through the back way. I'll lock that door behind me; but I'll leave the light burning for Zarby."

The ex-peddler and his visitor departed. A click sounded as the door was locked from the other side. The dilapidated office remained silent. Doc Ralder, sawbones for whom police were searching, had flown the nest that Dopey Roogan had spotted.

CHAPTER II. GANGLAND'S MENACE

DOPEY ROOGAN was at his post. Huddled against the wall, his pasty face registering anxiety, the little stoolie was looking across the thoroughfare beneath the elevated. Dopey was playing a game to which he had been accustomed. He was feigning that he was on the lookout for an imaginary dope peddler.

All the while, Dopey was taking in the faces of the passers. He watched shambling bums and bearded peddlers as they shifted along the street. But he did not, as yet, spy the persons whom he expected: Detective Joe Cardona and a squad of raiders.

Dopey knew well that Joe Cardona would be artful. No bluecoats would approach this spot, although some might be near at hand, ready for a call. Moreover, Dopey was sure that the plainclothes men who accompanied Cardona would be few in number and that they would form a chosen crew. Other sleuths might herald a trip to the underworld by the tramp of ponderous flat feet; but Joe Cardona was too wise for that.

Intent upon his view across the street, Dopey Roogan did not observe a man who was coming up from the lighted corner below. This fellow was on the same side of the street as Dopey. Broad shoulders bulked beneath his heavy overcoat. His face was bent downward toward the sidewalk. With derby hat tilted over his face, the approaching man kept his features unnoticed as he puffed at a cigar.

At times, he paused to stare at tawdry shop windows. He seemed in no hurry to get anywhere. Yet all the while, his cautious course was bringing him closer to the near side of the alleyway. Pauses puffs pauses. Unnoticed by Dopey, the big fellow was edging toward his goal.

FROM across the street, unseen eyes were watching. A new figure had entered the strange scene. Yet this arrival had escaped all notice. Singularly, he had chosen the very doorway which Dopey had used as a spring spot to cover Creeper Trigg. Yet Dopey, staring up and down the street, had not the slightest inkling that his former post was occupied.

The big man, lounging from shop to shop, made a final pause as he neared the alley. His face came up; a rough, heavy-chinned countenance was revealed as the fellow stared across the street. But though he looked straight toward the doorway, he saw no signs of a living presence there. Edging a few steps more, the big man ducked into the alley.

The eyes saw. They glowed from the darkness like blazing coals. Blackness moved upward from the

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doorway. A solid mass detached itself from the front of the building and glided across the sidewalk. It joined the darkness of an elevated pillar.

A slouching drunk paused to stare. His bleary eyes had seen that semblance of life. The man had caught one fleeting glimpse of a strange, ghostly figure. Then he had lost it.

The bum shambled on, staring over his shoulder as he went. But he had picked the wrong spot. He did not see the repetition of the weird phenomenon as blackness moved once more.

The being from the doorway had reached the pillar on the side toward the entrance of the alley. Keen eyes were watching Dopey Roogan, the only person who was about. The brilliant gaze read the expression on the fake hop-head's face. Then Dopey turned his anxious gaze in another direction. The lurking figure moved with swiftness.

For one brief second, the phantom shape was revealed by the dull lights that flickered on the sidewalk. A long cloak, inky in hue, swept back from the shoulders that wore it. A slouch hat showed beneath the light; its brim, however, concealed the features under it. Then the apparition was gone. The visitor from the night merged with the darkness of the alley.

Had Dopey Roogan turned to view the passage of that amazing form, the stoolie would have registered real terror. For the swift flight from darkness to darkness had marked the passage of gangdom's menace. Out of blackness into blackness: such was the course of The Shadow.

Master sleuth who moved by night; unknown battler who waged war with forces of the underworld, The Shadow had spied upon the man who had edged into the alley. For The Shadow had taken up the trail of that arrival. He knew the identity of the man whom Dopey Roogan had failed to notice. The Shadow was on the trail of Luke Zarby, notorious leader of a bank-robbing band.

Somewhere in the underworld, The Shadow had gained track of Zarby. Where police had failed to find the crook, The Shadow had gained success.

The Shadow's uncanny skill was evidenced in the darkness of the alley. Though the man ahead was practically out of sight, The Shadow, approaching, picked the very spot where Zarby had gone. That was the passage beside the sixth house.

BACK at the entrance of the alley, Dopey Roogan had ceased his vigil. Across the street, the stool pigeon spied the men he was awaiting. They had seen him also Joe Cardona and two others from headquarters.

Dopey Roogan shuffled away past Jake's cigar store. His part of the job was done.

Dopey Roogan had identified Creeper Trigg as Doc Ralder, a man of medical training who aided crippled crooks. He had tipped off the police to Ralder's hide-out; moreover, Dopey believed that wounded members of Luke Zarby's gang might be there. But Dopey had no inking to the fact that Doc Ralder had left the hide-out; nor did he know that Luke Zarby had edged into that alleyway.

Least of all, did Dopey suspect that The Shadow had entered the kaleidoscopic picture. The squeamish stoolie would have been stunned had he been able to view the interior of the little room that Doc Ralder, alias Creeper Trigg, had used for a downstairs office.

There, revealed in the glow of the single light, was the tall figure of The Shadow. The cloaked visitor had just arrived to find the room empty. But The Shadow knew that Luke Zarby had preceded him. Two doors offered

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possible courses that the bank robber might have taken.

The door to the right was unlocked. The one straight ahead was locked. The Shadow probed it with a thin, black metal pick. The instrument encountered a key in the lock. This meant that some one perhaps Zarby had gone in that direction and locked the door behind him. The other doors had been unlocked; but The Shadow did not always trust the obvious. His soft laugh indicated that he wanted to know what was beyond this barrier before he tried the open one at the right.

A gloved hand came from the black cloak. It had another instrument, shaped like a pair of pointed pliers. This device entered the lock; it clipped the key. Fingers turned; the door unlocked.

The Shadow opened the barrier and stepped into a dark passage. Before him lay the route that Ralder and Hoot had taken.

Keenly, The Shadow analyzed the fact that this was merely an exit. He turned to go back into the office. His keen ears caught the sound of an opening door. The Shadow stepped back into the passage and locked the door behind him.

He was none too soon. Another door opened! Joe Cardona and his two followers stepped into the office.

Short and stocky, his swarthy face firm beneath the light, Cardona surveyed the two doors. He approached the one through which The Shadow had gone. He found it locked. A detective tried the other door and whispered hoarsely that it was open. Cardona nodded. He decided to take the open route.

The detectives followed their leader. Beyond the opened door, Joe found a darkened passage that led to a flight of stairs. He motioned his companions to come along. Cautiously, the detective crept upward. Near the top, he paused as he spied a trickle of light from beneath a closed door. He stopped his men to listen. They caught the mumble of voices. But they did not hear the unlocking and opening of a door in the office below.

INSIDE the room on the second floor, Luke Zarby was talking to three men who sat about in wicker chairs. Coarse-featured in the light of the room, Zarby was noting the fact that his three gorillas looked in good condition. But he seemed annoyed by the report that Doc Ralder had departed.

"You say the sawbones walked out, eh?" growled Zarby. "Took a bag with him? Where did he dig it up?"

"Out of that room," responded one of the henchmen, pointing to a door.

"Did he leave any of his truck?" quizzed Zarby.

"Don't know," came the response. "We didn't look around. Just told us to wait here for you. Said he had to go out."

"I figured he was goin' out to help some guy," put in another crook.

"Looked like he was takin' his tools with him. Maybe some mug got plugged."

"I'll find out quick enough," retorted Zarby. "Wait'll I take a squint in that other room."

The big leader opened the door and stepped from view. He left the door ajar. The gorillas stared, expecting to see a light come on. Then a sound attracted their attention. They swung toward the outer door. Two of the three came to their feet. Then all stopped short.

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The door had opened inward. Stepping forward was Joe Cardona, a flashing revolver in his hand. Before any of the gorillas could make a move, the detective was inside the door. His two companions followed him. Joe motioned them to cover the gorillas.

"Some of Zarby's mob, eh?" quizzed the detective. "Well, you're the birds we've been looking for. Where's Doc Ralder? We want him, too."

No response. Cardona chuckled sourly as he studied the defiant faces of the crooks. The detective spied the other door. Satisfied that his men had the gorillas helpless, Cardona strode in that direction. He was figuring that if Doc Ralder was in another room, he would be hiding or trying for a getaway. Joe did not credit the sawbones with being a man of nerve.

Hence, when Cardona yanked open the door, he was totally unprepared for the surprise that he received. Instinctively, the detective dropped back as he came face to face with Luke Zarby. The bank robber had heard the detective enter. He was waiting, ready.

Cardona's gun hand was down. He had no chance to raise it.

Zarby's guttural command was issued to the other detectives. Turning in astonishment, they found themselves in a line with the crook's gun. They lowered their revolvers. Like Cardona, they were covered by the gat that Zarby moved back and forth in businesslike fashion.

The three gorillas came to their feet. All were armed. They flashed their revolvers and each picked a man. Zarby, standing in the doorway, grinned as he kept his own revolver moving back and forth.

"So that's it, eh?" jeered the bank robber. "Doc Ralder ducked out of here and squealed. Got the dough from me for putting these fellows on their feet. Then pulled a double cross. Well he'll get his. But before he does we –"

Zarby paused to nod to his gorillas. The men understood the signal. It was one that their chief had used before. It meant to give the works, as soon as Zarby opened fire.

The detectives caught the meaning. They were helpless.

Zarby swung back toward Joe Cardona. As the leader of the crooks, he intended to shoot the chief of the dicks. But before Zarby gained his aim, a sound made him pause. Instinctively, the bank robber faced the outer door, which the detectives had left open. With a wild cry, Zarby aimed in that direction and pressed finger to the trigger of his gun.

He was too late. The thundering report that sounded was not from the revolver. An automatic barked its message from the doorway. With it came the fierce mirth of a sinister laugh.

Luke Zarby staggered. He had seen the menace, but not in time to avert disaster. The Shadow, close on the heels of the detectives, had stepped in to save their lives.

STARTLED gorillas stood stupefied as their leader crumpled to the floor. Wild eyes turned toward the door, where they saw the dread figure of the cloaked avenger.

Then, while no crook dared meet the threat of looming automatics, Joe Cardona acted. Springing forward, the detective launched himself upon the crook who had him covered.

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A second sleuth followed Joe's example. Gorillas fired; but their shots went wide. The third detective was caught flat-footed. Before he could spring, the man in front of him pressed finger to trigger. Again an automatic spoke.

A cry. The gorilla's hand unclenched. His revolver fell to the floor as blood spurted from a wound. Then the detective raised his gun and fired. His bullet doomed the crook. The crook clasped hands to his chest and doubled upon the floor.

Two shots from a revolver. Joe Cardona, struggling, had gotten his man. At the same instant, the second detective received a slugging blow upon the head. The dick rolled helpless. The last gorilla aimed for the door and fired wildly.

One bullet zipped into the woodwork beside The Shadow's head. Then came the response of an automatic. The mobster rolled upon the floor.

Joe Cardona, rising, knew that the crooks were done. He was about to turn toward the door, when a harsh voice stopped him.

It was Luke Zarby speaking. Mortally wounded, the bank robber had half risen from the floor. With a final effort, he was gasping out dying words. Venomously, he snarled forth an accusation for Cardona's ears.

"A double-crosser," coughed Zarby. "Doc Ralder he squealed but he's phony. Don't don't let him get away with it. He's he's got a pal a pal Hoot Shelling –"

Slumping, Zarby sprawled grotesquely on the floor. A mocking laugh came as a knell. Weird mirth from the doorway a taunt that trailed, then faded with surprising suddenness. Joe Cardona swung away from Zarby's body. Staring, the detective saw nothing but the blackness of the hall.

The Shadow had departed. He had dealt with men of crime. He had heard Luke Zarby's accusation. It had given him a clue that he had sought. For The Shadow, when he spied from darkness, saw with uncanny intuition.

The Shadow had watched Dopey Roogan. He had picked the furtive fellow as a stool pigeon. The Shadow knew now that Dopey had brought this raid; not by trailing Luke Zarby, but by watching Doc Ralder, the owner of this hide-out.

THE proof of this conclusion came later, when a light clicked in a darkened room. Bluish rays upon a polished table denoted the presence of The Shadow in his hidden sanctum. A hand took pen and inscribed two names upon a sheet of paper:

Doc Ralder

Hoot Shelling

Luke Zarby had betrayed the connection between the two, hoping to get back at Ralder, whom he thought was a double-crosser. The Shadow had heard of both men. Doc Ralder, the elusive sawbones; Hoot Shelling, a crafty mobleader.

They were hiding out, this pair. They must be traced. The Shadow's laugh crept through the sanctum as the names faded from the paper. The hand of The Shadow inscribed another name:

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Dopey Roogan

The stool had traced Doc Ralder before. He might find the trail again. That meant three who were concerned not two. Of the three, there was one who would be engaged in crime: Hoot Shelling.

There were two ways in which the crook might be found. First, through members of his mob the course that The Shadow would ordinarily follow. Second, through this clue that Zarby had given; plus The Shadow's keen discovery. Dopey Roogan Doc Ralder Hoot Shelling. Through the stool pigeon, the sawbones; through the sawbones, the crook.

A tiny light gleamed on the further wall as The Shadow brought earphones beneath the bluish light. Then came a voice across the wire:

"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions to Marsland," came The Shadow's whisper. "Report all movements of Hoot Shelling's mob. Watch Dopey Roogan. He is a stool. Report his actions."

"Instructions received," came the response.

Through Burbank, his contact man, The Shadow had sent word to Cliff Marsland, his agent in the underworld. Working in the heart of the underworld, Cliff would seek information that might bring the trail to Hoot Shelling.

The bluish light went out. A weird laugh rose in the solid darkness. Its crescendo ended; followed by shuddering echoes. Then came silence. The sanctum was empty.

Dealing with men of evil, The Shadow had scented the approach of new crime. Hoot Shelling was to be his quarry. The Shadow knew the criminal as a crook of prowess; one who had engaged in crafty, undercover methods.

Yet even with his insight into ways of crime, The Shadow had gained no foreknowledge of the amazing events in which Hoot Shelling was to play a part.

CHAPTER III. OUT OF THE PAST

IT was the next afternoon. A gaunt, gray-haired man was seated in a little office, reading an evening newspaper. One column carried a lengthy story of a police raid: the fray that had resulted in the death of four bank robbers. But this story did not interest him.

The gray-haired man was studying another column giving the account of an estate that had been settled. Blinking perplexedly through his heavy, tortoise-shell spectacles, he was learning that the estate of Tobias Dolger had come to less than fifty thousand dollars.

A knock at the door. The gray-haired man looked up. He laid the newspaper aside and issued a summons to enter. The door opened and two young men stepped into the room. The visitors looked much alike, and the man in the chair blinked as he surveyed them.

Both were tall and well-built. Each had aristocratic features. A high-bridged nose, brown eyes and black hair the description answered one as well as the other. The sole difference lay in the ages of the pair. One

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man appeared to be in his thirties; the other not more than twenty-five.

"You are Philip Lyken?"

The question came from the elder of the two visitors. The gray-haired man stared dumfounded. The voice, like the features, seemed an echo from the past. Finding himself, Lyken nodded as he arose from his chair.

"I am Perry Dolger," announced the older visitor. "A grandson of Tobias Dolger. Allow me to introduce my cousin, Zane Dolger."

"My word!" exclaimed Lyken. "I knew the two of you the moment that you came in. That is, I recognized you, but I could not believe my eyes. Sit down, gentlemen, sit down. Oddly, I was just this minute reading about your grandfather's estate."

"A matter which we have come to discuss with you, Mr. Lyken," responded Perry Dolger, with a slight smile.

"To discuss with me?" Lyken stared suddenly as he heard the statement. "You mean your grandfather's estate the amount of it –"

"Exactly," put in Zane Dolger, in a tone that resembled his cousin's. "We inquired for you in the store downstairs. The clerk sent us up here. You have guessed it, Mr. Lyken. We are interested in our grandfather's estate."

"But but" Lyken paused "I don't quite understand. I am a jeweler not a lawyer. I knew your grandfather only as a customer."

"Let me explain," stated Perry Dolger. "Be seated, Mr. Lyken. After I have told the story, perhaps you will agree that you can aid us."

THE jeweler took his chair by the desk and clasped both hands across one knee. He seemed perplexed, yet his blinking eyes looked troubled as well.

"We two," declared Perry Dolger, "are grandsons of Tobias Dolger. We are the only heirs to his estate and our legacy, Mr. Lyken, should amount to a few millions. Do you agree?"

"Why yes," admitted Lyken. "But the newspaper –"

"The newspaper says that the estate does not exceed fifty thousand dollars. It includes the old brownstone house in which our grandfather lived. The house in which we are now residing, my cousin Zane and myself. But it is due to our residence there, Mr. Lyken, that we feel sure our estate should amount to more than a trifling fifty thousand."

"How so?"

"Because we have searched through the house. By chance, we uncovered a secret room; in it, an old desk. In a drawer, my cousin Zane found the rough draft of a letter that our grandfather had written. The letter is incomplete; but it states –"

Perry Dolger paused to bring a sheet of paper from his pocket. He unfolded it and read this statement:

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"Unless I should make a new proviso concerning my estate, the same to be done by will and testament, the secret of the wealth will rest with those to whom I choose to give the rings. It will be their duty to see that the funds are properly divided."

"Go on," said Lyken, cautiously.

"That is all," stated Perry.

"I see." Lyken nodded in owlish fashion. "So, since I happened to be a jeweler, you decided that I must know something about rings. I do; but not about the rings you mention."

"The signet rings?" questioned Perry.

"Signet rings?" echoed Lyken. "My word! You said nothing about signet rings. I know nothing, I tell you!"

"Unfortunately," responded Perry, with a smile, "you do. Perhaps I should say it is fortunate that you do. Here, Mr. Lyken" he drew an envelope from his pocket "is a letter that we found in the old desk. It was written by yourself, to our grandfather, Tobias Dolger. It states that the four signet rings are ready for delivery."

Philip Lyken sank back in his chair. His hands trembled. He chewed at his lips and blinked in dismay. His voice quavered a bit as he spoke.

"I know nothing," persisted Lyken. "Nothing, gentlemen, nothing whatever about –"

"You mean," interposed Perry, "that you do not care to speak. Come, Lyken. Some one has paid you to preserve silence. Am I right?"

Lyken made no response. Perry Dolger surveyed him calmly; then, turning to his cousin, he remarked:

"You were in the store below, Zane. It's only a small business. Don't you think that Mr. Lyken would do well to put some more capital in it?"

"I think so," nodded Zane.

"Perhaps he has already invested," resumed Perry, looking straight at the jeweler. "Possibly he was paid to preserve some secret. If so, I should think that he would be willing to sell the secret also."

"No!" exclaimed Lyken. "No!"

"Of course, Mr. Lyken" Perry was talking directly to the jeweler – "if my grandfather paid you to keep silent, Zane and I should not ask you to speak. But if some one other than my grandfather –"

"It was your grandfather," broke in Lyken. "He paid me. That was it. I cannot betray your grandfather's secret –"

"How much did he pay you?" asked Zane.

"One thousand dollars," returned Lyken. "That was all. Your grandfather wanted –"

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"My grandfather paid you?" interposed Perry. "He gave you cash to preserve a secret, yet left those papers where they might be found. Come, Lyken. It does not hold water. I grant that you received a thousand dollars. I have money of my own and I am willing to duplicate the sum. But I must know who paid you for silence, and why."

"But but –"

"Remember, you are selling the secret to the heirs of Tobias Dolger."

LYKEN nodded weakly. This was an effective argument. The jeweler's eyes gleamed as Perry Dolger produced a sheaf of crisp bills and counted off twenty, each of fifty-dollar denomination. He reached forth to grasp the money. Perry retained it.

"Tell us your story, Mr. Lyken," suggested the heir. "Then the money will be yours."

"I shall do so." The jeweler was trying to down his reluctance. "After all back at the time it happened I wondered whether or not I was right. I never did understand all about those signet rings. The engraving –"

"Start at the beginning," suggested Perry.

"Very well," decided Lyken. "Your grandfather came to me and asked me to make up four signet rings. They were to be of plain gold, of slightly varying sizes. But they possessed a feature which was most unusual.

"The signets, themselves, were loose. Hollow beneath. You understand?" The jeweler paused to make a twisting motion with his finger. "Hollow rings, with signets that screwed into place. So" again the motion "with no trace to be seen once the rings were closed.

"Moreover, the screws were to operate in left-hand fashion, so that any one trying to unscrew them would be deceived. That was the cleverest part of the work. I labored long with those rings. When I had finished my task, I wrote the letter to your grandfather."

"And he replied?"

"Yes. He told me to mail the rings to an engraver. But the address he gave me was simply General Delivery, Utica, New York. I forget the name of the supposed engraver, but I took it to be fictitious, because of the address. My work was done. I mailed the bill to your grandfather."

"Why do you think he mentioned that the rings were going to an engraver?"

"Because of the specifications. You see, the signets were left smooth; and the spaces beneath them also. Both surfaces, the false one and the solid gold beneath, were left blank, suitable for engraving. I asked your grandfather about that when he placed the order. He told me that he would have me mail the rings to the engraver."

"I understand." Perry Dolger nodded. "What happened to the rings after that?"

"Your grandfather was ill," explained Lyken. "He had become an invalid. That long sickness from which he recently died. The bill had been unpaid for more than a month when" Lyken hesitated "when a friend of his stopped in."

"Who was the friend?"

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"Elwood Phraytag. An elderly man. A philanthropist, who still lives in New York. But he is very ill, at present. Ill and blind."

"I have heard of him," remarked Zane Dolger. "Go ahead with the story, Mr. Lyken."

"Elwood Phraytag had the bill that I sent your grandfather," stated the jeweler. "He paid it. Then he gave me one thousand dollars. He said that it was in appreciation of my work: and that in return, I must promise to say nothing about the rings."

"Where were the rings?"

PHILIP LYKEN hesitated. He shifted in his chair; then gazed toward the money that Perry Dolger was holding. The jeweler seemed burdened by a final secret. He leaned forward and spoke in a voice that was no louder than a whisper.

"When Phraytag came here," confided Lyken, "I do not believe that he intended to pay me a cent more than the actual bill. But there was something I saw, something I discovered, that made him give me one thousand dollars on a pretext.

"Phraytag paid me cash. I receipted the bill and gave him your grandfather's correspondence, which he requested. He reached out his left hand and I saw" the jeweler made a gesture "I saw one of the rings upon his finger!"

"One of the rings that you had sent to the engraver?" inquired Perry. "With the blank signet?"

"One of the rings," responded Lyken, "but no longer blank. It was engraved on the outer signet!"

"With whose initials?" questioned Zane.

"I do not know," returned Lyken. "Phraytag covered it immediately; but he knew that I had seen. It was then that he decided to give me the one thousand dollars. How he came to get the ring, how he obtained the bill, why he wanted the correspondence I do not know."

There was a pause. The jeweler stared from one young man to the other. Zane Dolger arose from his chair.

"Why didn't you communicate with my grandfather?" he demanded. "If you suspected that all was not well, you should have gone to him at once."

"He was very ill," explained Lyken. "I thought I would wait to hear from him. But he did not write me. I never saw Tobias Dolger again."

"No wonder!" accused Zane, hotly. "Phraytag had paid you one thousand dollars. It was good business on your part to keep quiet –"

"Wait a moment, Zane," interrupted Perry, also rising. "It is not our purpose to find fault with Mr. Lyken's past methods. All that I want to know" he turned to Lyken, who had shrunk back in his chair "are the facts concerning the rings. Have you told us everything, Mr. Lyken?"

"All," nodded the jeweler. "Positively all!"

"You have no idea where the other rings might be?"

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"None. Elwood Phraytag has one. That is all I know."

"Very well." Perry extended the money that he held. "Here is the thousand dollars, Mr. Lyken. We have bought your secret. Our transaction is completed."

Turning on his heel, Perry motioned to Zane. The two young men departed, leaving Philip Lyken silent in his chair. Weakly, the jeweler was crinkling the bank notes that he had received; but his eyes were staring unblinking, through his shell-rimmed spectacles.

For in this visit, Philip Lyken saw retribution. Like ghosts of the past, these heirs these men who looked like Tobias Dolger had come to claim the secret that had weighed heavily upon the jeweler's conscience.

CHAPTER IV. THREE OF THE FOUR

EARLY that evening, a tall, ungainly man ascended the high steps of an uptown residence. He rang the old-fashioned bell and waited until a tall, dry-faced servant answered it. The caller laughed as he entered the vestibule.

"Hello there, Timothy!" he greeted, with a poke at the servant's liveried ribs. "How's tricks? The boss waiting to see you?"

"Mr. Zurick is in his study, sir," replied Timothy, with dignity. "He said that you should wait in the parlor, Mr. Mallan. You may read the evening paper during the interim. I placed it upon the parlor table."

"Thanks, Timothy," responded Mallan, dryly. "Here's the hat and coat. See you later."

With this expression, the ungainly visitor walked in to the parlor and sprawled himself in an old-fashioned chair. He picked up the newspaper. His eyes fell upon the same two paragraphs that Philip Lyken had read that afternoon.

A smile appeared upon his broad lips as Mallan read the brief comment about the Dolger estate. Then the fellow began to peruse the account of the police raid that had marked the death of Luke Zarby and his bank-robbing crew. The story seemed to please Mallan. He chuckled as he reached the end of the paragraph and read the statement that no one had escaped Joe Cardona's raiders. The chuckle ended in a guffaw just as Timothy reappeared.

"Hello, Tim," laughed Mallan, rising. "Boss ready?"

"Yes, sir," stated the servant, coldly. "Mr. Zurick will see you. And my name, sir" the servant seemed severe "is Timothy."

"That's right," chuckled Mallan, as he followed the servant, "and my name's Edmund. But I'm not proud of it. So you're Tim to me and I'm Ed to you. How about it?"

Timothy made no reply. He merely opened a heavy, paneled door and ushered the visitor into the study. Ed Mallan walked into the room; Timothy closed the door and departed.

The room had a sobering effect upon Ed Mallan. It was not the somber fittings that produced the change; the occupants of the study were the ones who made the ungainly visitor stand in gawky silence.

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SEATED at a long table were three men. Mallan knew the one at the head; he was Lucius Zurick. Old, with face like parchment, yet keen of eye and possessed of vigor, Zurick had always impressed Mallan.

The others Mallan had never seen them before were suitable companions. One was a long-faced chap with a bald head who sat bolt upright in solemn dignity. The other was weary-faced and stoop-shouldered; but his eyes, like Zurick's, were stern and searching.

"Sit down, Mr. Mallan." The order came in a crackly tone from Lucius Zurick. "Take the chair there at the end of the table. These gentlemen are my associates. Guy Laverock" he indicated the long-faced man "of whom you have heard me speak. And this gentleman" – Zurick waved a scrawny hand toward the weary-faced individual "is Harbrook Kent, whom you have also heard me mention."

Mallan bowed abruptly. He took the chair and sat silent. Laverock and Kent were studying him as one might inspect an object in a museum. Mallan felt nervous as he watched them. Finally, the two seemed satisfied. They turned to Lucius Zurick.

"This is an important occasion, Mallan," stated Zurick, in abrupt fashion. "I have informed my associates of your report. I thought it best, however, that you should repeat the information. And by the way, Mallan" there was dryness in Zurick's crackle "I think it would be best if you began by telling my friends a bit about yourself. Tell them about your first interview with me; the night I hired you to work for me."

Ed Mallan shifted up in his chair. His chest swelled and a smile appeared upon his face. Mallan considered himself imposing when he adopted this attitude. Though middle-aged, with bushy brows and gray-tinged hair, he took pride in his youthful appearance. As a matter of fact, his long-jawed countenance was not unhandsome, but his sophisticated grin, with its flash of gold teeth, destroyed much of the effect that Mallan was anxious to create.

"I CAME out here three weeks ago," began Mallan, in a bluff, but methodical tone. "Response to a special inquiry from Mr. Zurick here. First question he asked me what cases I handled. I told him anything and everything.

"What I told Mr. Zurick then goes for you other gentlemen now. I said: 'I'm Ed Mallan. D'you know what that means?' Mr. Zurick says: 'I'd like to know.' So I told him. I said: 'Ed Mallan ain't no cheap dick. When you're hiring him, you're getting the equal of the best.'"

Mallan paused emphatically. His gold teeth sparkled. They showed well in this light. Mallan knew it, because he caught similar flashes from the hands of the three men whom he faced.

Zurick, Laverock, Kent all were wearing heavy gold signet rings that threw a glitter every time a hand turned beneath the light.

"I leave it to you," resumed Mallan, noting the signets only in terms of his own gold teeth. "Was that a brag? I'll say it wasn't! I don't claim to be the best private detective that any one could hire. All I say is, I'm equal to the best. The other guy can say the same. If he can prove it, I'll grant it."

"Very well, Mallan," interposed Zurick. "Just proceed with a brief resume of some of your past activities."

"You want to hear 'em again?" Mallan seemed pleased. "Well, I ain't mentioning no names. I'm just telling what I told Mr. Zurick. I got one motto. That's told in a single word: Results."

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"If I got to get something, I get it! One case I told Mr. Zurick about. Fellow been getting blackmail threats from a good-for-nothing friend of his. But this blackmailer wouldn't send no letters, see? What's more, he'd never talk without making sure there was nobody around.

"So we invited him up one night. I was there. My client raised a howl; says he's being blackmailed and calls the police. They show up. The blackmailer laughs; says we've got nothing on him. I says to search him. They do and they find a gat. That meant the cooler for the wise guy.

"Well, I'll make the story short. The guy didn't make no trouble after that. He's still wondering how he came to have the gun. Never wised up that I planted it on him in the elevator.

"Take out-and-out crooks. I know lots of them. If I've got a job that they can do, I hand it out to them. Plenty of mugs would go to jail if I said the word; but I don't squawk. They've got their business; I've got mine. Suppose I've got to get evidence out of some office. D'you think I'd crawl in there myself? No. But there's plenty of second-story men ready to take the job. Fifty bucks and up.

"And about frame-ups. Some guys are clumsy. I ain't. My frame-ups count. Take in hotels, for instance. To begin with, the ordinary hotel dick is a guy –"

"That is sufficient, Mallan," interrupted Zurick. "I merely wanted my associates to gain a first-hand acquaintance with your method. Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

"Yes," replied Laverock, in a rumbling tone. "Mr. Mallan appears to be a trifle unethical, but –"

"He follows one admirable formula," chimed in Kent, with a wheezy drawl. "Live and let live so far as his acquaintances are concerned."

"Let us say," crackled Zurick, "that he believes that the end justifies the means."

ED MALLAN watched the signet rings glimmer. He felt pleased. He took these dry remarks as compliments. Hunched back in his chair, he heard Zurick ask for his report. Mallan's grin broadened.

"Mr. Zurick here," stated the private detective, "told me to cover Philip Lyken, the jeweler. I've been doing it. He said in particular to watch out for any visit by a man named Dolger. Well, I hit double luck to-day.

"Two Dolgers came to see Lyken. One was Perry Dolger; the other was Zane Dolger. The guys looked phony from the time they showed up. So I slid in to look at some jewelry and heard them tell their names to the clerk.

"He sent them up to see Lyken. They were there about fifteen minutes. Then they came down. Went away. My opinion is this. Whatever they had to say to Lyken, it wasn't much. Couldn't have been, because they weren't there long. But maybe they'll be back."

The faces of the three listeners had sobered. They began to buzz among themselves. Zurick was questioning the others; they were nodding approval as he made suggestions that Mallan could not hear. The detective sat back and watched the gold rings glimmer. At last, Zurick spoke.

"Mallan," he said, "we three men are philanthropists. We have devoted our lives to aiding those who are in want. Our motives are of the highest. The very highest. There is one other man who was formerly associated with us. He, too, is a philanthropist. His name is Elwood Phraytag."

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"I've heard of him," nodded Mallan. "Blind fellow, ain't he? Gave some dough to an institute. Wanted to help others like himself."

"That is correct," stated Zurick. "However, Phraytag has now retired from active pursuits. He no longer attends the meeting of our group. He is one of us; but" Zurick pondered, then added "we may say that his period of usefulness is ended."

"I get you," returned Mallan.

"Some time ago," resumed Zurick, "we acquired certain funds that once belonged to Tobias Dolger. Those funds must be protected. We do not care to have any one know of them, particularly the heirs to the estate."

"That's simple enough," agreed Mallan. "There ain't much dough for those Dolger boys, is there?"

"No," stated Zurick, coldly, "but that is our concern, not yours. The point, Mallan, is that we do not care to have any one trace the funds in question. We three Laverock, Kent and myself can not be directly traced. But there is one man whose part in the acquisition of the funds might be learned."

"Who's that? Phraytag?"

"Yes. He conducted the actual negotiations. What is more, he committed an indiscretion. He gave a certain clue to the jeweler, Philip Lyken. Hence Phraytag might be traced through Lyken."

"And you fellows through Phraytag."

"Yes. Therefore" Zurick wagged a finger "we must see to it that the Dolgers learn nothing from Lyken. Your report, Mallan, indicates that they are on the trail but that they have not yet learned what they want to know. We are leaving it to you to see that they get no further."

MALLAN pondered. He scratched his head as he began to picture the jewelry store. He had seen Lyken; he had learned much about the man and his shop. He was considering just what methods the three philanthropists would accept.

"There are various measures," stated Zurick, in his harsh crackle, "that might be used to deal with Lyken. One is bribery. That has already been used, in a sense, to keep him silent.

"The second is to approach him; either through offers of cash or through the direct threat to make him yield his secret. You could do that, Mallan. If Lyken would refuse to talk to you, even under pressure, it would stand that he would not talk to the Dolgers.

"Should that test be undesirable, or should it fail, there is a third alternative. We could adopt some measure that would prevent Lyken from again meeting the Dolgers. That, in the final analysis, would be the most effective. However, it presents certain problems. My experience, nevertheless" Zurick's tone was withering "has taught me that the most difficult problems can invariably be solved."

Guy Laverock arose. The others became silent. Laverock nodded to Kent, who also prepared for his departure. As spokesman for the two, Laverock turned to Zurick.

"Suppose, Lucius," rumbled Laverock, "that we leave you with Mallan. Alone, the two of you can certainly strike upon the proper method to deal with Lyken."

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"We can rely upon your discretion, Lucius," wheezed Kent, "and Mallan, by his past history, certainly appears to be a man well-fitted to accomplish whatever is required of him."

"Spare no expense," added Laverock, as he reached the door and opened it.

"Much is at stake," reminded Kent.

The two departed, closing the door behind them. Timothy appeared and helped the two philanthropists into their hats and coats. He showed them to the door; then went into the parlor and sat sedately in a chair to await a call from his master.

TWENTY minutes later, Timothy heard the study door open. He arose and hurried in that direction. Lucius Zurick had finished his conference with Ed Mallan. He was making a final statement to the detective.

"It is only half past eight," said Zurick. "It is early, Mallan. I advise you to act to-night."

"Sure thing!" grinned Mallan.

Zurick smiled dryly as he watched Timothy show the detective to the door. When the pair reached the vestibule, the philanthropist went back into his study. Hence he did not see the friendly punch that Mallan gave the servant on departing.

"Good night, Tim," chuckled the detective. "See you later, old socks."

There was reason for Mallan's jocularly. The detective was still grinning when he hailed a cab. Mallan was ready for the task that lay before him; and he had a right to be. For his left hand, thrust deep in the pocket of his coat, was crinkling a thick wad of bank notes. Cash that he had received from Lucius Zurick.

CHAPTER V. IN THE DARK

PHILIP LYKEN'S jewelry store was located in a secluded neighborhood. It occupied a two-story building; its windows were fitted with bars. This feature applied to basement and second story, as well as ground floor.

The building formed a portion of a solid row of houses; in back was a cement passage that separated the row from the houses on the next street. The buildings in back were more pretentious. They were detached structures, with side passages between them.

Although Ed Mallan had been advised to pay an early visit to Lyken's place, it was after ten o'clock when the private detective arrived in the vicinity. Darkness pervaded the street in front of Lyken's. Mallan, strolling along the opposite side of the thoroughfare, came to a stop as he studied the jeweler's abode.

All the front windows were dark. That fact did not trouble Ed Mallan. The jewelry shop was closed; the front room, upstairs, was Lyken's office. The fact that the second story was unlighted proved that the jeweler had no visitors. Lyken, if he had not yet retired, would be in the rear room.

Mallan finished a half-smoked cigar, then sauntered in the direction of the corner. He crossed the street and sidled along toward the next block.

Mallan had adopted the inconspicuous manner of a chance passer; but his eyes were busy. Across the side street, the dick noted a rakish touring car parked by the curb.

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Reaching the rear street, the dick walked swiftly for one block; then came to a stop as he neared the corner. On the other side street he noted a second car, very much like the first.

Mallan turned about and walked along until he reached a space between two houses, almost directly in back of Lyken's. He entered the passage and moved inward. He reached a spot, halfway along, from which he could view the rear windows of the jeweler's second story. Those windows, like the front ones, were dark. Lyken had retired. Mallan waited.

DIRECTLY beneath the windows that the detective had observed from a distance of fifty feet, two men were at work in the darkness. One was shielding the rays of a flashlight while the other used a sharp saw upon the bars of a basement window.

The rays of the light showed the square features of the man who held it. An evil smile played upon twisted lips. The man with the flashlight was Hoot Shelling. The crook's grin showed admiration for the work that his companion was performing.

"How's that, Hoot?" came a whispered question, as the saw edged through another bar. "There ain't many guys can say they saw Greasy Karn chisel his way into a joint. Keep that light close, Hoot. This is the last bar."

"It's neat work, Greasy," complimented Hoot, also in a whisper. "Neat and quick. Say it's lucky I got hold of you before you blew town."

"You ought to have looked me up earlier, Hoot."

"I didn't know I'd need you. The word didn't come along until an hour ago that is, the tip-off that this job was to be done. I told the chief I'd need the right guy to carve his way into the joint. I sent Dorry out to look you up; then I ran into you myself, on the way here."

"Where's Dorry now?"

"Still looking for you, I guess. Going the rounds of the joints. He'll be due here before we scam."

The saw was biting steadily. The last bar came loose. "Greasy" lifted away the entire grating. Hoot edged through the opening and disappeared, while his companion waited in the darkness. Several minutes passed. Then came a soft scraping as Hoot came up out of the cellar.

"Any trouble?" whispered Greasy. "I thought maybe you'd need me to cut through the door."

"Nothing to it," returned Hoot. "I got up on the first floor all right. It would have been tough, though, if I'd had to get through the door from the hall into the store. But I didn't bother with that. Fixed it so a match'll start the fuse and blow the works."

"I don't get the lay, Hoot."

The two were edging toward the passage where Ed Mallan lurked. Hoot drew his companion into the darkness and spoke words of warning. The detective, crouched twenty feet away, could catch their mumbles.

"Just say nothing, Greasy," ordered Hoot. "This ain't a job it's a stall. See? But the mob don't know it. We opened the way; the rest is up to the guy that's paying us. He can get into the first floor; from there, it's a cinch for him, to go up to the second. What's more, the fuse is ready to blow the door into the store."

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"But what's the game?" quizzed Greasy. "I don't get the lay. Blowing the door when nobody's going after the swag."

"That's to make it look like a job," explained Hoot. "I'm getting mine; you're getting yours. So why should we holler?"

"I ain't hollering."

"All right. Now listen. The mob thinks it's a straight job. See? I'm going to one car; you're going to the other. When the door blows, it's going to make plenty of noise. I fixed that. Then's when I say to my crew that the job is off. Scram that's what I'll tell them. You pull the same gag with your bunch."

"O.K., Hoot. Shoot for your new hide-out, eh?"

"That's it. I'm giving the signal that it's clear. Then we slide back through this alley and split when we get to the next street. Savvy?"

IN the course of their whispered conversation, Hoot and Greasy had not detected a slight noise from the passage. Ed Mallan, instead of moving closer, was drawing away. Quiet, despite his ungainliness, the dick was nearing the far end of the passage. He was almost to the rear street when he turned.

Blink blink Hoot's flashlight was signaling at the inner end of the passage between the houses. Mallan eased to the sidewalk and crouched beside a flight of high steps. He waited there until Hoot and Greasy arrived and separated with whispers.

Coming from his hiding place, Mallan looked in each direction and waited until each crook had turned a corner.

They were going back to their cars. The way was clear to Lyken's. With cautious steps, Mallan crept forward through the long passage that led to the rear of the jeweler's abode. He was slow and stealthy in his approach.

HOOT had reached the touring car on the side street. He entered it and spoke to the trio of mobsters who awaited him. His first words were a question:

"Where's Dorry?"

"Ain't showed up yet," returned a henchman.

"No?" Hoot's whisper was a snarl. "A fine palooka! He was to be here by now whether he found Greasy or not. Well he ought to have brains enough to stay away if he's late. We ain't waitin' for him."

"Maybe he'll show up before we go into the joolry joint," suggested one of the crooks. "That'd be all right, wouldn't it, Hoot?"

"Maybe we ain't going in," growled the leader.

"Ain't going in?" came a question.

"I had to soup that inside door," explained Hoot. "What's more, I had to do it plenty. If the thing makes too much noise when it blows, we'll have to chuck the job –"

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The crook leader broke off. A sound had come to the ears of the mobsters. It was like the muffled report of a revolver a shot from somewhere within a house.

"Hear that?" came a whispered question. "Say maybe it was from inside that joint."

"Keep quiet!" ordered Hoot. "Listen for what happens. That wasn't the door blowing."

"Yeah, but –"

Hoot hissed for silence. It came. Nothing disturbed the stillness of the neighborhood. The muffled shot had evidently failed to arouse the sleepers in these quiet, half-deserted blocks.

The crooks waited. They figured that Hoot must have put a time fuse on the charge that he had set. They did not know that he had prepared it for some one else.

Two minutes three then, of a sudden came a thunderous roar that seemed to rock the neighborhood. Staring criminals saw the curl of white smoke that came in volcanic fashion from shattered windows at the rear of the jewelry store.

Cries from houses, excited calls the shock had awakened the district.

There was no need for the command that Hoot uttered. The crook at the wheel was already shoving into gear when the leader snarled:

"Scram!"

The touring car shot toward the corner. Into the glare of its headlights came an arm-waving figure. The driver blurted his recognition:

"It's Dorry!"

"Slow down!" ordered Hoot, flinging open the rear door of the car. "We'll drag the goof along with us. Get ready."

As the car slowed momentarily, Dorry jumped aboard. He clung to the running board beside the door. The car was almost at the corner of the next street. That was the spot from which Dorry had arrived.

Out into the path of the machine came a policeman, revolver in hand.

"I'll get him!" barked Dorry.

Hanging to the side of the car, the belated crook aimed point-blank for the bluecoat. But before his finger could press the trigger, a shot sounded from the darkness of the side street. The flash of an automatic; Dorry crumpled and nearly fell from the running board.

Another crook was leaning out to plug the policeman, who had leaped back to the curb. Again, flame flashed from the darkness. The second gorilla slumped into the car as hands yanked Dorry's sagging form aboard. Then the car had passed the corner.

The policeman, miraculously rescued, was firing wild shots at the fleeing machine. He started on the run, following as he saw the car make its escape.

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INTO the light that glimmered on the corner came a strange, cloaked form. Burning eyes watched the spurts of the policeman's hopeless shots. A soft laugh sounded in the gloom. It was The Shadow.

He had trailed Dorry from the underworld. Cliff Marsland had spotted the man as a member of Hoot Shelling's mob. But The Shadow had kept well behind. He had divined that Dorry was on his way to participate in crime.

Dorry's lateness had been Hoot's salvation. Had the tardy crook arrived before the explosion, The Shadow would have trapped Hoot and his half of the crew. As it was, Dorry had leaped from the corner to join the men in the escaping car.

Even then, The Shadow would have ended the flight but for the appearance of the patrolman. To save the officer's life, The Shadow had been forced to pick off Dorry and the second mobster, instead of aiming for the driver of the touring car. Fortune had favored men of crime.

From the adjacent block, The Shadow had guessed the direction of the explosion. His tall form merged with darkness. His footsteps led him toward the passage behind the row of houses in which Lyken's jewelry store was located.

At that particular moment, another figure was moving along a street two blocks to the rear of Lyken's house. Gold teeth glittered from a grimly grinning mouth as Ed Mallan stepped into the light close by the steps to an elevated station.

The detective took to the steps, chuckling as he went. He joined a group of waiting passengers who were speculating upon where the muffled explosion had occurred. The dick heard the whine of a police siren from the avenue beneath the elevated.

Then a downtown train rumbled into the station. Passengers stepped aboard; the dick was with them. The private detective, like the crooks, was decamping from the scene of crime.

CHAPTER VI. THE SHADOW HEARS

WHEN Detective Joe Cardona arrived at Philip Lyken's, he found a solemn-faced policeman stationed at the front entrance to the jewelry store. The door had been broken open; Joe entered to find a scene of chaos.

The hallway led to the inner door that formed the entrance to the jewelry shop. It was this door that had been blown. Though strong and sheathed with metal, the barrier had been ripped to pieces by the terrific explosion.

More than that, the blast had left its mark on other places. Huge portions of the wall had cracked and tumbled to the floor. A gaping break showed through a rear room behind the jewelry shop. The banister of the stairway had broken from its moorings. The steps themselves were tilted at a crazy angle.

Two policemen were in the jewelry shop. Cases and shelves had tumbled; the place was strewn with glass. Yet Joe could see that robbery had failed. Glittering rings were scattered on the floor. A safe doubtless the depositor for items of real value was obviously untouched.

Voices from the second floor. Cardona turned and ascended the crazy steps. He reached the top and entered a little office, where a sagging floor indicated that beams had yielded beneath. A light showed through an opened doorway; Cardona entered the rear room.

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Two men were standing in Philip Lyken's bedroom. Both were uniformed; one was a patrolman, the other the lieutenant of the precinct. The latter looked up and nodded to Cardona.

The detective had come here in the capacity of acting inspector. Then the lieutenant pointed to the bed.

There, clad in nightgown and wearing slippers, was the body of Philip Lyken. The jeweler was sprawled upon the bed; a splotch of blood upon the nightgown was token of his fate. Lyken had been shot through the heart.

"LOOKS like he never had a chance," commented the lieutenant. "Somebody walked in on him and shoved the gun against his ribs. Look close, inspector. You can see the singe from the shot."

Cardona nodded. He studied Lyken's body and listened to the other statements that the lieutenant had to make.

"You saw what they did to the door downstairs," declared the lieutenant. "They got in through a cellar window, out in back. Sawed away the bars. That's how they made it. Then some of the bunch made a getaway from the side street."

Cardona wheeled. This was information that had not come into headquarters. The lieutenant indicated the patrolman.

"Tell him about it, Casey," he ordered.

"I heard the explosion," stated the patrolman. "I came up to the corner on the run. Just then the car shoots out and I was going to fire when I saw a tough bird hanging from the side door.

"I was spotted where I was, so I jumped back to the curb. There was a couple of shots come from down the street. One clips the guy on the side of the car; another pots the next fellow that was aiming at me."

"Shots from down the street?" inquired Cardona.

"Yeah," replied Case, with a nod. "I don't know who fired 'em. The car whizzes by and I open up, plastering the rear of it. Thought maybe I'd stopped 'em, so I followed on the run. But they got away."

"These shots from down the street," queried Joe. "Who fired them?"

"That's what I don't know," admitted Casey. "I thought some other cop had come up. That's why I chased after the touring car. When I got back, there wasn't nobody around, until the patrol car showed up."

"Looks to me like somebody was gunning for the crooks," put in the lieutenant. "That's the only way I can explain it, inspector."

Cardona nodded. He was sober. His thoughts had reverted to the preceding night. He remembered the shots that had served so well in the battle with Luke Zarby. Joe knew the hand that had delivered those shots. Often before, this star sleuth had gained The Shadow's aid.

Keenly, Joe was piecing this new event with the old. Luke Zarby's dying words a statement concerning Hoot Shelling new crime in the making. Had The Shadow heard those words as well?

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Cardona knew that The Shadow must have picked up Zarby's trail last night. In so doing, The Shadow had scored in a task where police had failed. It seemed logical that The Shadow had again moved ahead of the law. He had been near here to-night, tracking Hoot Shelling.

"How about those two guys in the car?" questioned the detective, suddenly. "Are you sure they were clipped?"

"You bet they were!" responded Casey. "But it wasn't curtains. The one guy would have fallen off if he'd been killed. He managed to hang on until the rest of the bunch yanked him in."

Cardona smiled. He was about to make another statement when footsteps sounded in the outer office. The police surgeon had arrived; in his wake were two reporters.

During the examination, Cardona spoke to the newspaper men. One was a man toward whom the detective was most friendly: Clyde Burke, of the Classic.

Joe accompanied the reporters to the ground floor. After they had looked into the jewelry shop, they descended the rickety cellar steps and found the window at the back. A policeman, stationed there, brought the sawed-off grating into view.

Leaving the reporters in the cellar, Cardona clambered through the opening and began an inspection of the rear alleyway. While he was engaged in this examination, a call came from the cellar. Cardona went back. Burke informed him that the police commissioner had arrived and was upstairs.

THREE minutes later, Cardona arrived in the second-floor office to find a tall, crane-necked man awaiting him. This was Wainwright Barth, police commissioner in the absence of Ralph Weston. With eyes that gleamed through pince-nez spectacles, beneath a high bald head, Barth stared in expectant fashion.

"Not much of a case, commissioner," stated Cardona. "Plenty bad enough murder and burglary but it doesn't come up to the reports that we got at headquarters. First rumor was a dynamiting outrage."

"How do you account for that report?" questioned Barth.

"Too much soup," responded Cardona, laconically. "The crooks wanted to cripple a door; instead, they nearly brought down the house."

Producing a sheet of notations, the detective gave the details to the commissioner. Then, at Barth's request, Cardona formed his summary. Burke and the other reporter listened.

"Experienced workers," explained Joe. "They sawed the grating neatly. The explosive charge must have been well planted. They probably sent one man up here to cover Lyken; it looks like he was keeping the jeweler quiet when the blast went off."

"Too big a charge. The fellow covering Lyken must have known it when the house shook. So he plugged Lyken and ran after the others. Officer Casey retarded their getaway. Two of the mobsmen were wounded."

"Tell me this, Cardona," insisted Barth. "What clues have you found concerning the identity of the criminals?"

"None," returned Joe.

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"None?" echoed Barth, testily. "Then your investigation has revealed no more than the obvious."

Cardona shrugged his shoulders. Barth prepared to leave and Joe nudged the reporters toward the door. Soon after they had left, the commissioner and the detective descended the stairs. Barth seemed disgruntled. He walked to his car, which was parked close by, then noticed that Cardona had followed him.

"Just a minute, commissioner," said the detective. "I've got something more to tell you. I didn't want the reporters to hear it, that's all."

Barth's eyes glistened.

"I'm going to work on what I learned last night," said Cardona. "Hoot Shelling's mob may be in back of this. Hoot's tied up with Doc Ralder, the sawbones who had that hide-out."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Barth. "The bullet from Lyken's body can furnish the evidence when you find the gun that fired it. The bullet, Cardona!"

"One bullet?" returned the detective, with a smile. "Two bullets, commissioner. That's what I'm counting on."

"Two bullets? Was Lyken shot twice?"

"No. The bullet that got Lyken can wait. I'm thinking of other bullets, commissioner."

"You mean –"

"The ones that wounded those escaping crooks."

"But how –"

"Listen, commissioner." Cardona leaned forward. "Hoot Shelling's in with Doc Ralder. Two of Hoot's mob got it to-night with bullets and the pair of them are wounded."

"Yes," agreed Barth, "but those men have escaped."

"They can't go far," laughed Cardona. "They'll have to travel to a sawbones, won't they?"

"Doc Ralder?"

"Yes."

"But he escaped last night."

"I know it" despite the statement, Cardona paused triumphantly "and that's what I'm counting on! It's made to order, commissioner. Do you know why? I'll tell you. I've got the bird who knows who Ralder is."

"Knows who he is?"

"Yes. A stool pigeon named Dopey Roogan is wise to the fake get-up that Doc Ralder uses in the underworld. Ralder's got a hide-out, but that won't keep him off the streets. He'll be around, disguised as a blind peddler called Creeper Trigg."

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BARTH'S eyes popped in astonishment. The commissioner saw the force of Joe Cardona's reasoning. Doc Ralder, still at large, was the asset that the police required. Sometime to-night perhaps even at this present moment two crippled mobsters would be placed in his charge.

Dopey Roogan had turned the trick before. He could do it again. Barth realized that last night's raid, apparently directed against Luke Zarby, had probably deceived Doc Ralder. There was every reason why the sawbones should believe that Zarby not himself had been traced to the hide-out.

"When Dopey picks up Creeper's trail," concluded Cardona, in a confidential tone, "we'll have another chance to nab Doc Ralder. And with him, we'll get those two mugs from the mob that pulled this job at Lyken's."

Barth nodded. He stepped into his car. The automobile pulled away; Joe Cardona strolled back into the house.

The street was deserted, save for the patrolman who was stationed by the door. The officer did not see the shape of blackness that detached itself from a wall close by the spot where the commissioner's car had been.

The Shadow had lingered near the scene of crime. He had heard Cardona's statement to the police commissioner. A soft laugh whispered as The Shadow moved away into the darkness. The Shadow had expected that Cardona might plan to trail Doc Ralder through Dopey Roogan. He had learned the fact that he wanted; the identity of the person whom Dopey would trail; the disguise which Ralder used in the underworld.

The Shadow had not heard the details of the investigation held at Lyken's. They, however, were to come later, at the sanctum.

WHEN he reached his hidden abode, The Shadow found the wall bulb burning. He obtained the earphones. Burbank's voice spoke:

"Report from Burke –"

The Classic reporter was an agent of The Shadow. He had supplied Burbank with full details. The report included a statement of Cardona's theory concerning the crime. Lurking crooks; too large a blast; a forced getaway.

The Shadow's laugh sounded when the report was ended. Hands moved beneath the bluish glow of the sanctum light. For the Shadow was forming a theory of his own. His keen brain saw that Cardona had erred.

The Shadow was considering the time element. The crooks had made their getaway immediately after the explosion. They could not have gained the car so quickly if they had been in the house.

Another factor concerned The Shadow. The entry to the house had been a matter of skilled accomplishment. Why had it been followed by the blunder of an explosion great enough to rock the neighborhood?

If a crook had remained to murder Lyken, how had the man managed to escape? The fume-filled hall would not have permitted a prompt exit. The killer would have been trapped.

Lyken must have been slain before the blast. If the raiders had decided to flee after that deed, why had they let the charge go off? The facts did not jibe.

Again the whispered laugh. The Shadow could see the meaning behind the chaos at Lyken's. Skilled crooks had made an entry. They had deliberately set an over-sized charge.

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They had waited, as a cover-up squad, for a signal to send them on their way.

The signal? The blast itself. Some intruder had entered after all was ready. He had murdered Lyken in cold blood. That accomplished, he had departed, igniting the fuse on the way. Had he encountered trouble, the covering crooks could have remained to aid him.

Behind to-night's crime. The Shadow saw the secret purpose of a hidden killer. He knew that the blown door was a blind. The Shadow, like Joe Cardona, would be relentless in his search for Hoot Shelling. But The Shadow's quest would not end with the capture of the crook leader.

For The Shadow was sure that behind Hoot Shelling lay the hand of an insidious murderer, whose purpose had been accomplished when Philip Lyken had died.

What had Philip Lyken known? Why had he been slain? These were questions for which The Shadow sought an answer. In them, he saw the approach of further crime.

Yet, for the present, The Shadow must follow the same quest that the law was seeking. Trails in the underworld afforded the best steps toward the solution of crime that might threaten outside of the realm of the underworld.

Earphones from the wall. Burbank's voice across the wire. Then came the shuddering whisper of The Shadow, as the enemy of crime issued new instructions for Cliff Marsland.

CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW'S SNARE

IT was early the next evening. Darkness had brought a sinister touch to the realm of the underworld. Streets that had been merely unsightly in the daylight had become black-blotched lurking spots where crime seemed to linger.

Slouching men who, in sunlight, would have passed for harmless bums, had undergone a change as noticeable as that of the district. Grimy yellow lights made faces appear wolfish. Every straggler in the bad lands looked like a potential murderer.

Chance visitors might have shuddered at passing through this section of Manhattan. But sharp-eyed patrolmen, parading their beats, were undeceived by the change that gloom had wrought. They could analyze the faces that they saw. They knew the folk who needed watching.

Yet even the bluecoats, familiar with their routes, were not entirely infallible. One officer, standing at a secluded corner, let three passers go by without realizing that each was playing a hidden role.

The first was a blind peddler, clicking his way along with the aid of a heavy cane. The cop had seen this fellow before. Creeper Trigg, they called him. A blind pencil seller, who probably worked on some respectable avenue. Plenty like him, down here in the slums. Little did the cop realize that the peddler was the notorious sawbones, Doc Ralder.

The next was a harmless hop-head; he had been on this beat before. Dopey Roogan. The fellow was sniffing when the patrolman spied him. But there was no snow on the hand that Dopey raised to his nostrils. The cop had fallen for another stall. He never dreamed that Dopey was, at present, the prize stool pigeon of the underworld. Only Joe Cardona knew the part that the phony doper was playing.

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A third stroller passed unchallenged. Again, the cop recognized a face. This was Cliff Marsland, a fellow who needed watching, for he had a rep in the bad lands. But Cliff so the cop had heard on the authority of stoolies was taking things easy at present. No need to watch him until the stoolies brought a tip. That was why the patrolman passed up The Shadow's agent, totally ignorant of Cliff's real purpose in the underworld.

As the patrolman resumed his beat, he completely failed to observe a fourth figure that had entered into the picture. The moment that the cop turned away, watching eyes left him. The figure emerged from the front of an abandoned store. It took a course along the opposite side of the street.

The Shadow had come into being. He was working with Cliff Marsland. Alternately, he had kept his agent on the trail of Dopey Roogan. He had hissed a sibilant signal the moment that Dopey had picked up the path of Creeper Trigg. From now on, The Shadow and Cliff had different trails.

MOVING swiftly forward, The Shadow was gaining a vantage point. He knew the man that Dopey was watching. The Shadow intended to trail Creeper without the stoolie's aid. But Cliff, loitering further in the rear, had retained the original task. He was still tracking Dopey.

The wisdom of this procedure became apparent when Creeper came clicking across the street. The Shadow paused by the entrance to an alleyway and let the pretended peddler pass by. Dopey stopped short, without crossing the street.

For Dopey knew that Creeper was not blind. Once covered by darkness, the fake peddler would look around to see if he was being followed. Dopey dared follow no further for the present. Not so The Shadow. He was merged with darkness by the alleyway. His course was unseen when he moved into the blackness that had sheltered Creeper Trigg.

The clicks of the cane ended. Creeper was hurrying forward, making as little noise as possible. He reached a spot where a circle of dull lamplight showed upon the sidewalk. There, he paused to look about. Satisfied, he moved forward; then ducked off into a blackened space beside a dilapidated house.

Creeper found a basement door. He unlocked it and entered. The door closed behind him. Solid darkness reigned at that spot. Yet, already, the gloom enveloped a hidden form. Silently, The Shadow had approached to within three yards of the basement entrance.

Up above, a chink of light showed through the blind of a rear window. The Shadow skirted the house. He discovered a low-roofed back porch; above it, another light-chinked window. Silently, The Shadow moved upward. The roof offered the access that he needed.

MEANWHILE, Cliff Marsland had lingered back on the street which The Shadow had left. He was pretending to examine brassware displayed in the poorly lighted window of an old shop. Actually, Cliff was watching Dopey. He expected to see the stool move away. Instead, Dopey headed for the alley.

Cliff followed. The path led on to the house near the street lamp. There, Dopey stopped and looked at the front steps. Cliff gained a sudden inkling. He realized that Dopey had gained a stroke of luck.

Watching from the corner, Dopey must have caught a flash of Creeper here by the lamp light. Thus Dopey knew more than he might ordinarily have discovered. He had spotted Creeper's alley; he was on the point of locating the actual house which formed Doc Ralder's new hide-out.

But Dopey was not quite certain. He hesitated; then ascended the steps. He fumbled in his pocket while he crouched in the darkness. He must have produced some skeleton keys; for a series of clicks came to Cliff's

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ears. Then a door whined on its hinges. Dopey moved inward.

Cliff was forced to admire the stoolie's nerve. The little fellow had guessed that Doc would not use the front entrance; moreover he had surmised that the door would be easy to open, for the very reason that a poorly locked entrance would excite no suspicion. So Dopey had decided to look inside to make sure that this was the place that he must report to the police.

That meant a job for Cliff. Carefully, The Shadow's agent moved to the steps. He ascended and crept into the entrance that Dopey had used. Crouched within a darkened hallway, Cliff listened to creaks at the top of a stairway, just ahead. The creaks ended.

Dopey had gone upstairs to spy. If he found that this was Ralder's place, he would come out in a hurry. But he would make no prompt report to the police. That was why Cliff was here to prevent such a measure.

For The Shadow, anxious to deal without interference, had deputed his agent to stop Dopey. By delaying the stool pigeon, frightening him, then letting him go after pretended threats, Cliff could keep the cops off the job until The Shadow was done.

Crooks like those who worked for Hoot Shelling would not talk to the police. Even the third degree would not loose their tongues. Cliff knew that; but he also knew the power of The Shadow. Dreaded by all the underworld, the cloaked master could force words to the most reluctant lips.

WHILE his agent lurked on the trail of Dopey Roogan, The Shadow had gained the commanding spot that he desired. From atop the porch roof, he had worked upon the window sash. A thin wedge of steel, pressed between the woodwork sections, had done a silent job with the lock.

The sash moved upward slowly by inches. A gloved hand reached for the lowered shade. It, too, came up imperceptibly. Eyes from the dark peered into the lighted room. There, The Shadow saw what he expected.

Two crooks, both bandaged, were lying on cots. These were the birds whom The Shadow had winged on the preceding night. Quick shots had been effective; but neither man appeared seriously wounded. The crooks seemed chipper as they lay propped on pillows.

A door opened at the front of the room. A solemn, keen-faced man entered. Doc Ralder. He had ditched his peddler's disguise. With professional air, he had come to examine his patients.

Halfway across the room, Ralder stopped. He had evidently forgotten something, for he went back through the door and closed the barrier behind him.

The Shadow lingered, waiting for the crooks to speak to each other. This was a time of opportunity. A chance word, heard by The Shadow's keen ears, might mean a real clue. The mobsters, however, were silent, waiting for Ralder's return.

The door opened suddenly. Crooks stared with astonished eyes as the sawbones entered the room dragging a limp form by the neck. With a swift swing of his arm, Doc sent the pitiful figure sprawling on the floor. The man rolled over and lay face upward. It was Dopey Roogan, stunned.

"You know the guy?" questioned Ralder, turning to the first gorilla. "Know him, do you, Lefty?"

The crook shook his head.

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"How about you, Dorry?" asked Ralder.

"I've seen him, Doc," returned the second gorilla. "But I ain't sure who he is. Looks like a hop-head."

"His name's Dopey Roogan," informed Ralder, sourly. "Just found him outside the door of the front room. I slugged him and brought him in. I've got his number, now that I've seen his mug. He's a stoolie."

Growls from the crooks.

"Been sort of sticking close to me, now that I remember it," went on Ralder. "Used to be around my old hide-out; but I didn't worry myself about him. Now I know why the bulls raided the joint. This gazebo put them wise."

"Hold him until Hoot shows up," suggested Dorry. "He'll take care of the louse."

"Not a chance," laughed Ralder. "Do you think Hoot's coming back here? Guess again. He don't want anybody to know you fellows were with his outfit. No I've got something better for this phony. Watch him a minute."

The sawbones turned and went back into the front room. When he reappeared, he was carrying a hypodermic syringe. He held up the glittering object and chuckled.

"Triple loaded," commented Ralder. "One shot would snow a guy under; this holds three full doses. That means curtains for Dopey Roogan. He'll never come back to life after he gets it."

"Coney Laxter is coming up here tonight. He'll take care of the body. So that settles it. A fake hop-head, eh?" Ralder chuckled as he stooped above Dopey's body. "Well, he'll get a shot of dynamite that he'll never know about."

WITH this remark, the sawbones pulled up the stool pigeon's sweated sleeve. Dorry and "Lefty" leaned forward, grinning, as they saw murder in the making. They did not see the window shade that rose behind him; nor did they hear the sound of The Shadow's entry.

Like a portion of the night, The Shadow had materialized into a living being. An automatic loomed from his right hand as his left hand brought a second gun out from beneath the cloak.

It was at that instant that Doc Ralder paused. The sawbones sensed that eyes were watching him. He stopped, holding the needle point just above Dopey's arm. The sawbones looked up. His gaze froze with terror.

The crook's stared at the change on Ralder's face. Then, together, they pivoted on their cots to see what had brought the transformation. Like Ralder, they became rigid as they stared into a pair of burning eyes that peered above the barrels of the leveled automatics.

Men of crime were too astonished to make move or outcry. The capture of Dopey Roogan had ended thoughts of police intrusion. It had given these men a feeling of confidence. They had been elated by the expectation of Dopey's death.

But now the stool pigeon's plight was a matter of the past. The present was all that concerned these cowering fiends. Three of a kind, Doc Ralder and his patients, they were quivering before the menace of The Shadow.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SHADOW DEPARTS

A WHISPERED laugh hissed through the room. Its echoes were sibilant responses that dwelt within the walls.

Gasps came from trembling lips. Stark terror gripped the crooks who faced The Shadow. They knew the repute of this unyielding master. No quarter to men who deserved to die.

The laugh died. Then came words, uttered in a sneering tone that sounded like notes of doom. There was stern justice in The Shadow's statement; but it brought no hope as the trapped men listened.

"Creeper Trigg" Ralder stared as The Shadow called him by his alias "I have heard your plan. In your hand you hold the weapon that I shall use against you and these others. Rise. Do as I command."

Ralder came up from the floor. The hand that held the hypodermic syringe was quivering. Dorry and Lefty trembled. They knew what was coming. One of them would be the first to receive the death-giving shot intended for Dopey Roogan.

Both knew that Ralder must have replenishment for the syringe. That would mean a second injection, so they thought. Ralder, as he trembled, could see further than that. He was sure that The Shadow would force him to jab the needle in his own arm after he had served the other two.

"Wait!" The Shadow had created the effect that he desired. "The contents of that syringe will do for three. Be sparing with it, Ralder. I may decide that sleep, not death, is suited to your needs."

Sudden hope glowed on scared faces. Both crooks remembered what Ralder had said. Apportioned among them that dosage would mean only temporary oblivion. After that

"The police," hissed The Shadow, "have need of your testimonies. So I shall reserve you for their arrival. They will find you doped, here in this room. But on one condition only. Each of you must speak."

That was the condition. Life or death. The three men sensed the firmness of The Shadow's decision. Stubbornly, they would have fought against a third degree; but this challenge offered no chance for bluff.

"I'll talk!" blurted Dorry. "I ain't done nothing! It was Hoot Shelling who pulled that job last night. I was only coming up to meet him. I jumped on the car. I got clipped. Honest I don't know nothing more!"

"Hoot pulled it," added Lefty, eager to curry The Shadow's favor. "I was in the outfit. Waiting in the car. He went back of the jewelry shop and got in. He planted the soup. Then he came out with us."

"One man was murdered," hissed The Shadow. "State the name of the killer who slew him."

"I don't know," pleaded Dorry. "Honest –"

"We heard a shot," broke in Lefty. "But it wasn't Hoot who did it. He was in the car with us."

The Shadow laughed. The mobsters trembled. The Shadow knew that they had spoken the truth. But he was not finished.

"Tell me where Hoot Shelling is at present," came the sinister order of the hidden lips.

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"I don't know."

Two men made the same reply, almost simultaneously. Dorry and Lefty were almost pitiful as they blurted the words. The Shadow's gaze centered on Doc Ralder. The sawbones cringed.

"Speak!" ordered The Shadow.

"I heard Hoot on the phone," gasped Ralder. "He was talking about a job to-night. But the gang's not going with him. It's – up on Eighty-eighth Street."

"The address."

"I didn't hear it. The old house with the shutters. Third from the corner but I don't know the corner. Somewhere on the East Side –"

Ralder was trembling. He had given his jerky statements without need of further prompting. The Shadow knew that the sawbones was telling all that he had heard.

"He's he's working for somebody," added Ralder. "Some fellow with dough that was who called him here. But but he didn't give the name. I'd tell if I knew. I'd tell!"

Silence. The Shadow's eyes were glowing. The crooks were anxious to tell more. They were clutching at new straws of hope. But their wits were numbed. It took The Shadow's order to bring words to their lips.

"You have been to Hoot Shelling's hide-out," sneered The Shadow. "Name its exact location."

"I don't know it," pleaded Ralder, quaking before the burning eyes. "I don't know it!"

The gaze turned toward Dorry. With trembling hands upraised, the cowered criminal spoke beggingly.

"I ain't been there," said Dorry. "I was going there last night for the first time. But Hoot he brought me here. I got clipped."

The eyes had turned toward Lefty. The second crook faded before the threat. His head, raised up from the pillows, began to nod.

"I know the place," affirmed the cowed gorilla. "I was there with Hoot. I'll tell you I'll tell you where it is –"

As Lefty stared, he saw The Shadow make a sudden move. Hands before his face, the crook dropped to the pillows, fearing that the thrust was coming toward him. Ralder and Dorry sank back as they saw the black cloak swish. There was a flash of a crimson lining as The Shadow wheeled toward a door at the side of the room.

At that instant, the barrier swung open. With it came a powerful figure, hurtling inward with a gun. A vicious face that of Coney Laxter. The expected gorilla had arrived. Outside the door, he had heard the voice of The Shadow. He was charging in, to meet the menace.

Coney had gauged his entry by the sound of The Shadow's voice. His gun was ready as he hurled himself through the door, then straight toward the window. His quick finger pressed the trigger of the revolver. But The Shadow had acted as swiftly as had Coney.

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With the fling of the door, The Shadow had whirled forward and downward. Half sprawling in the direction of Doc Ralder, he had taken the one measure that could save him from Coney's aim. The mobster's bullet whistled inches past The Shadow's dropping head. It sped through window shade and shattered the pane beyond. As the glass clattered, an automatic barked.

The Shadow had fired from the floor. Coney's hand, swinging downward for new aim, came to an instantaneous halt. But the revolver, loosed by quivering fingers, clattered to the floor. Coney's hands went to his chest. With a groan, the invader sagged.

It was Doc Ralder who acted in his place. With a savage cry, the sawbones sprang upon the cloaked form that had come to the floor beside him. Had he sought to draw a gun, Ralder would have been doomed upon the instant. Had his purpose been to grapple only, he would have failed again.

But Ralder, as he leaped upon The Shadow, was quick to utilize a deadly weapon that he held in ready grasp. With left hand clawing for The Shadow's throat, he brought his right fist downward, aiming the hypodermic needle straight for The Shadow's back.

The Shadow lunged. Ralder's arm shot forward. His fist went beyond its aim, as The Shadow, prostrate on the floor, knocked his knees from under him. Clutching with his left hand, the sawbones twisted and tried to make another jab at the body beneath him. Then came the muffled boom of an automatic.

The syringe clattered from Ralder's grasp. The needle pricked the floor; then the instrument rolled away, useless. The Shadow, one gun shoved up against the crook's stomach, had fired a second death shot.

Dorry and Lefty were wounded men. But, as The Shadow had discerned upon his arrival, they were by no means helpless. The pair of gorillas had not held the advantages possessed by Laxter and Ralder; but The Shadow's dilemma had given them their chance.

The wounded crooks had gats beneath their pillows. Revolvers flashed as they yanked them into view. As The Shadow freed one automatic from beneath Ralder's body, the crooks were ready with their weapons.

The one automatic swung toward Dorry, in the inner corner of the room. Three guns, aiming simultaneously. Two to one against The Shadow. Even though he beat Dorry to the shot, he could not deal with Lefty.

The automatic barked; and with its boom came the report of a second automatic. It was not The Shadow's other weapon, that was still clamped by Ralder's body. The shot that had chimed with The Shadow's had come from the door of the room.

Like puppets, Dorry and Lefty wobbled on their cots. Dorry's right hand loosened. Lefty's left fist unclenched. Both gorillas had been beaten to the shot. Dorry by The Shadow, Lefty by Cliff Marsland, standing grimly at the door.

THE SHADOW'S agent had heard Laxter enter by the side door. He had followed the thug up the stairs. Cliff had reached the top just as Laxter had broken through the door. Dashing forward, Cliff had arrived just in time for the final stroke.

Cliff's shot had come with The Shadow's. Bullets had sped upon a cross-fire flight. Dorry and Lefty were done. The former had sagged back upon the pillows. The latter, who had reached far in his aim, was toppling on the edge of his cot. As The Shadow came up from the floor, disentangling his cloak from Doc Ralder's body, Lefty's form rolled from the cot and sprawled motionless upon the floor.

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With Lefty died the chance of learning more. The location of Hoot Shelling's hide-out could not be gained. But The Shadow had work already scheduled for to-night. The house on East Eighty-eighth Street was his present goal.

Silence had followed the last echoes of the shots. From a distance came the shrill sound of a police whistle. The cop on the beat. The Shadow laughed softly as he swung toward the shattered window. He raised the sash; turning, he motioned to Cliff Marsland.

The agent nodded. He hurried forward and scrambled through the window. As Cliff dropped from the roof to the ground below, The Shadow followed, closing the sash behind him. Then he, like his agent, dropped noiselessly to the ground.

A hissed command in the darkness. Obeying it, Cliff took off through a space between houses at the rear. His job was to remain in the underworld. He had time to get away before the police arrived; to drop into some hangout and mingle with the mobsters there.

The whistle sounded from in front of the house. There were voices; other whistles; hammering on doors. Men were coming to the back.

The Shadow's cloak swished in darkness; his lips whispered an echoed laugh as he followed the course that his agent had taken.

TEN minutes later, Joe Cardona was standing in the room where death had struck. The ace had stationed himself in this vicinity, to be close at hand when word came from Dopey Roogan. Joe had heard the shots; he had joined the policeman who had headed here.

Dopey Roogan had come to his senses. Bewildered, the stool pigeon was staring about him. Doc Ralder Coney Laxter two gorillas all lay sprawled in death. Dopey could not understand it.

For the stoolie, unscathed, had been out cold from the time that Ralder had dragged him in this room. Senseless throughout the Shadow's conquering fray, Dopey was as useless a witness as the corpses on the floor!

CHAPTER IX. DEATH DELIVERED

AT the very time when The Shadow was departing from the underworld, two figures were crouched by the rear door of a house on Eighty-eighth Street. Above them reared old-fashioned, brownstone walls. Steel-shuttered windows jutted in the darkness. This was the East Side residence of which Dr. Ralder had spoken.

One man was holding a guarded flashlight; while the other worked upon the door itself. The lock had yielded, the problem now was to loosen a chainbolt on the inside of the door. The task was coming to a slow conclusion as the worker probed through an inch-wide space, using a jimmy. Each twist of his wrist brought the chain-bolt closer to the dropping point.

"Take it easy," whispered the man with the light. The voice was that of Hoot Shelling. "Any noise will queer the stunt. Got it, Greasy?"

"Yeah," growled the worker. "There it goes."

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The chain swung free and clicked against the door frame. Shoving his hand through the space, Greasy caught the chain and steadied it. He pushed the door further inward; then closed it carefully and turned to Hoot.

"O.K.," said Greasy.

"Come on, then," urged the leader. "We'll scam. You did a neat job, Greasy. That lock won't show any signs of what you did to it."

"Yeah, but what about the chain-bolt? The chief won't be able to shoot it when he comes out."

"Don't worry about that." Hoot was leading a course away from the house. Flashlight out, he was pressing through the darkness. "The servant will think he forgot to lock the door that's all. Just so long as nobody can prove that we worked on the door, it's all jake."

"I don't get it, though," stated Greasy, as they sneaked across the street. "We blew the door at Lyken's place. You had the gang along, too. But here —"

"You don't have to get it," whispered Hoot, harshly. "But I might as well give you the lay as much as I know of it. Lyken had to be bumped with a gat. See? That's why we made it look like a burglary. But this old gent that lives here Elwood Phraytag well, he's on his last legs."

"If it looks like he just passed out, there's going to be no trouble. So we needed a neat job, without the gang. That's what the chief told me. Leave it to him, Greasy."

Silence as the two slouched up to a spot where a touring car was parked. Hoot had picked a place in front of an abandoned house. He and Greasy entered the car. Hoot slouched at the wheel, waiting to make sure that no one was coming along the deserted sidewalk.

"What about a signal, Hoot," questioned Greasy. "You blinked the light last night."

"No need for it this trip," responded Hoot. "The chief's on the job. May have been watching us from the back of the house. Plenty of hiding places round there."

"He must be a smart guy."

"He is." Hoot laughed shortly. "For one thing, he's smart enough to keep himself covered. I'm the only guy who knows who he is, and I'm telling nobody."

"That's all right by me," growled Greasy. "But what are you waiting for?"

"He said to stick around about five minutes," informed Hoot. "Just in case we are needed. Going to make sure everything's still quiet. Then we'll scam."

"Down to Ralder's?"

"No. Over to Zemo's. That Brooklyn hide-out is where we're going to stay."

"Suits me. If the bulls come looking for us, they won't figure we're laying upstairs over a hock shop."

Conversation ended. The five minute period was up. Hoot let off the handbrake; the car coasted down a slight incline, then the crook leader let it into gear as they neared the corner. The touring car rolled out of sight.

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A chuckle sounded from the steps of the abandoned house. Footsteps scuffled; a figure appeared and moved across the street. The dim light of the thoroughfare showed the ungainly form of Ed Mallan. Then the private dick cut through toward the rear of Phraytag's old house.

UPSTAIRS, in a second-story room, an elderly man was lying in bed. His face, like his frame, told its story of a vigorous past. The man Elwood Phraytag had been powerful and energetic until the passage of time had withered him.

Though his dried lips were firm, the hollows of his cheeks showed the ravages of old age. His eyes, though open, were unseeing. His arms were scrawny; his thin hands had become long claws that quivered occasionally as they plucked at the bed-spread.

At intervals, Phraytag's lips opened to emit a sighing sound. There was a rattle to that wheeze; and it signified the hopelessness of the old man's existence. Elwood Phraytag, the blind philanthropist, was one whose days were numbered. Yet he was holding tightly to life, striving by sheer force of will to hold himself from the grave that yawned before him.

Beside the bed was a table stacked with bottles. A pitcher of water stood beside a tumbler. Here were the medicines and prescriptions that had aided Phraytag to stave off approaching death. With skilled physicians at his beck, Phraytag might live for months before he succumbed.

A footstep sounded from the doorway. Elwood Phraytag turned his sightless eyes in that direction. He spoke and his voice was a strange whir like the mechanism of a striking clock.

"Who is it?" demanded the old philanthropist.

"The doctor," came in a low, half-whispered voice.

"Not Doctor MacCallert," whirred Phraytag, sharply. "I have never heard your voice before."

"I am Doctor Torrig." The voice seemed to be feigning a professional tone. "Doctor MacCallert was detained at the hospital. He asked me to come here, with the new prescription."

Phraytag's lips were compressed suspiciously. He felt a hand stretch forward to feel his pulse. The philanthropist shifted uneasily.

"The new prescription?" he questioned.

"Yes." The tone, though still low, had steadied. "Doctor MacCallert is coming later. He wants to see what effect the medicine will have. Rest quietly, Mr. Phraytag."

The hand moved from the blind man's pulse. Phraytag heard the soft pop of a cork. A liquid trickled into a glass; then came the splash of water from the pitcher. After that the stirring of a spoon.

"Here." The voice, though still artificial, carried a brusque order. "Drink this, Mr. Phraytag. All of it, please."

Phraytag's claws touched the tumbler. The philanthropist gulped the liquid. He made a wry face as a hand removed the glass from his talons. He did not like the taste. He sank back upon the pillows and gasped in whirring fashion.

"Good night, Mr. Phraytag."

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CAUTIOUS footsteps stalked toward the door. The barrier closed softly. After that, Elwood Phraytag's ears could hear no sound. The philanthropist remained motionless; then, of a sudden, he pressed his clawlike hands against his breast.

"Worthington!" The philanthropist whirred. "Worthington!"

No response. A spasm shook Phraytag's frame. Sweeping one withered arm, the old man sent glasses and bottles scattering from the table. The clatter was loud as glassware broke upon the floor beside the rug.

"Worthington!"

Pounding footsteps from the stairway. The door burst open and an old, stooped servant stopped upon the threshold. Worthington's startled eyes saw the wreckage on the floor. Then they observed Phraytag, writhing in the bed.

"What is the matter, sir?" questioned the servant.

"The doctor!" whirred Phraytag. "Where did he go? Bring him back bring him back –"

"Doctor MacCallert has not yet arrived, sir."

"I mean the other doctor the one who –"

The whirl ended. In a final convulsion, Phraytag came half out of bed; then fell back with outstretched arms. His form became motionless. His lips ceased quivering. Whirring gasps ended as sightless eyes stared straight up to the ceiling.

Worthington stood gazing in a frightened manner. Then, with maddened impulse, he turned and hurried crablike from the room, leaving the door open behind him. His footsteps clattered on the stairway.

There was a back passage to the second-floor hall. That space was dark. From it stepped Ed Mallan. The dick paused at the door of Phraytag's room; then entered. He approached the bed and placed his finger tips upon Phraytag's forehead. He could feel the coldness of death upon the philanthropist's brow.

Gold teeth glistened in the light. The detective turned and moved from the room. He reached the front stairs; the flight that Worthington had taken. He descended cautiously into the dimly lighted hall below.

Worthington was talking over the telephone; Mallan could hear the servant's voice from a little room beyond the hall. As he edged toward a door that led to the kitchen, Mallan listened to the servant's words.

"Yes..." Worthington's tone was a gasp... "At Mr. Phraytag's... Right away... What's that? Doctor MacCallert has left? On his way here... I understand... Any minute.... Yes, I shall expect him..."

Mallan had opened the kitchen door. The portal closed. Softly, the dick crossed the kitchen, opened the back door and stepped out into the night.

Gloom surrounded the mansion of death. Upstairs, Elwood Phraytag lay pitifully upon the bed, his last gasp ended. Below, Worthington was pacing back and forth in the hallway. The servant was wondering whether he should return upstairs or whether he should wait here to give Doctor MacCallert prompt admittance. The latter course held him.

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FIVE minutes passed. Out on the front street, a swift, fleeting figure stopped by the opposite sidewalk. Keen eyes looked upward. They spied the shuttered windows of the tomblike mansion. A soft laugh the whisper of The Shadow. The figure crossed the street and merged with the darkness that surrounded the house.

A soft swish by the back door. A gloved hand opened the unlocked barrier. Motion within the darkened kitchen; then soft, almost inaudible footsteps upon the back stairway. Out of the darkened passage on the second floor came the ghostly, shrouded figure of The Shadow.

Into the room of death. There, like a spectral being, The Shadow stood above the bed where Elwood Phraytag lay. Keen eyes saw that the old philanthropist was dead. The Shadow's gaze turned toward the little table.

The water pitcher had not fallen from Phraytag's puny sweep. The Shadow noted that the lip of the pitcher was wet. Water had been poured from that pitcher. Into what?

The Shadow stooped. He found the broken portions of a drinking tumbler. The fragments of glass were entirely dry. There was but one answer. Some one had poured water into a different glass and had taken the other tumbler from the room.

A bell rang from below. The Shadow turned. He stopped at the doorway and listened. Worthington's excited voice was being followed by the rumble of a visitor. Then came footsteps on the stairway. The Shadow moved toward the darkness of the passage.

Worthington arrived followed by a portly, middle-aged man Doctor MacCallert. The servant conducted the physician into the room. MacCallert made a prompt examination. Then, with a shake of his head, he spoke to Worthington, who was standing with staring eyes.

"This," declared MacCallert, in a sober tone, "was to be expected. Human aid could go no further, Worthington. Your master is dead."

Worthington dropped beside the bed. He choked as he tried to speak. The physician could understand the servant's sorrow. Reaching out, MacCallert lifted a coverlet and drew it over the features of Elwood Phraytag.

Eyes from the doorway saw the action. The Shadow had come from the passage. The raising of the coverlet revealed Phraytag's left hand, which had been thrust out of sight. From the third finger, The Shadow caught the sparkle of a gold signet ring. Then MacCallert's body intervened.

SILENTLY, The Shadow moved into the passage. He descended the rear stairway and reached the outer door. A tiny flashlight blinked, to show the dangling chain-bolt; then the lock. There, The Shadow paused. A small lens appeared in his right hand; through it, he studied the lock.

Tiny scratches were seen not noticeable to the naked eye, but plain when beneath the magnifying lens. The Shadow knew that this door had not been left open. Some one a craftsman at this work had made an entry to the house.

The flashlight went out. The Shadow swished into darkness. His form stalked silently along the street. Only the grim echo of a laugh announced his passage. Again, crime had preceded The Shadow.

For The Shadow knew by testimony of drinking glass and lock that subtle murder had been performed to-night. Doctor MacCallert, expecting Phraytag's death, might well attribute the philanthropist's demise to natural causes.

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To The Shadow, that verdict was merely new proof of the murderer's skill. A killer had changed tactics. Burglary, the blast that rocked a neighborhood, a bullet fired into a victim's heart those had been the features of Philip Lyken's death.

But with Elwood Phraytag's finish had come silence. Cold, brutal craft had replaced strenuous attack. The hidden hand of crime was versatile. Its work was a challenge to The Shadow.

Twice, crime had won the verdict, while The Shadow, fighting underlings, had been diverted from the master of evil. Yet, to-night, The Shadow had scored a stroke that his enemy would not suspect.

Some fiend was chortling over the death of Elwood Phraytag a murder that the law would never suspect. While the monster chuckled, The Shadow laughed. For he The Shadow was still upon the trail of crime.

CHAPTER X. NEWS OF DEATH

THE East Side Eighties were not the only streets of Manhattan that harbored houses of an ancient past. Over on the West Side, a few miles distant from Elwood Phraytag's home, was a mansion as quaint and secluded as the residence in which the old philanthropist had died.

This was the house in which Tobias Dolger had lived. It stood four stories high, between a pair of smaller buildings. All three houses had been built in the nineteenth century. The flanking homesteads, however, were vacant; while Tobias Dolger's house had become the temporary residence of his heirs.

Inside, the Dolger mansion was as gloomy as without. Long halls, high-ceilinged rooms predominated. Walls were paneled in old-fashioned style; huge chandeliers hung in every apartment. Once fitted with gas jets, these massive objects had been converted into electric brackets.

The house boasted a spacious library. Within this book-walled room, Perry Dolger was seated by a table, reading a massive volume that dealt with campaigns of the Civil War. It was a book that he had chosen at random from one of the heavily stocked shelves.

A doorbell tinkled. Perry looked up from his book. The ring was repeated. Perry laid the book aside and arose from his chair. As he reached the hallway, he heard footsteps on the stairs. A tall, obsequious-looking servant was coming down from the second floor.

"All right, Rowland," said Perry. "I'll answer the door. It's probably Zane, without his key."

The servant paused while Perry crossed the hall and unbolted a door to step into the vestibule. Then the young man unlocked the outer door. Rowland saw Zane Dolger step into the light. The solemn-faced servant returned upstairs.

Perry and Zane walked into the library. The younger heir seemed anxious to say something; but he restrained himself until his cousin had closed the door from the hall. Then, unsuppressed, Zane burst forth.

"I've been talking to our lawyer," he exclaimed. "Over at his apartment. I think we're going to find out something about old Elwood Phraytag. Listen, Perry. Jackling, our lawyer, says —"

"One moment, Zane," interrupted Perry. "Do not refer to James Jackling as our lawyer. He was attorney for our grandfather's estate. He does not represent us. Before you go further, let me say that you made a mistake in going to see Jackling."

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"A mistake?" echoed Zane. "Why you went to see him yourself. Only last night, Perry. Of course you didn't see him, because he was out of town. But you called at his apartment –"

"That was last night," interposed Perry, quietly. "Before we knew that this had happened."

Perry picked up a newspaper that was lying on the table. He pointed to a headline that told of the explosion at Philip Lyken's. A picture of the dead jeweler was on the front page.

"Sit down, Zane," ordered Perry. "I've been thinking things over very carefully. I see some hidden purpose behind the death of Philip Lyken."

"You mean –"

"That clever crooks would not have tried to rob so small a shop as his. I think that burglary was planned for another purpose. The deliberate murder of Philip Lyken."

"What!"

"Let's analyze it," decided Perry, in methodical manner. "Philip Lyken had a secret. He was paid to keep it quiet. The time that the secret became most important was after the news broke concerning our grandfather's estate. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Yesterday afternoon, we went to see Lyken. We bought his secret from him. We did it in prompt fashion. If any one had been watching Lyken's place, that person would have assumed that we accomplished nothing."

"Unless the watcher came around later and talked to Lyken himself."

"That's a point. But it fits with my theory. Any one watching Lyken – any one who saw us call there would have known that we either suspected Lyken had a secret or that we found out the actual secret itself."

"That's logical."

"And that watcher, if he wanted the secret to be preserved, would know that the best way to keep Lyken silent would be to put him out of the way."

"You're right, Perry. But suppose Lyken confessed that he had told the secret last night, to the men who entered his place."

"Then revenge would have been the murderer's motive. Punishment to Lyken, because he talked. Making sure that he would say nothing more."

Zane Dolger nodded. His cousin's words had sobered him. A more pressing thought came to the young fellow's mind.

"PERRY," said Zane, in a serious tone, "suppose Lyken confessed that he had told the secret to us. We hold the secret now. I hope –"

"I'll get to that later," broke in Perry. "Wait until I have finished with what I have in mind. Lyken gave us a clue to Elwood Phraytag. We are sure that Phraytag knows what became of our grandfather's wealth. The

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heritage that belongs to us."

"Yes. The secret lies in the ring."

"In the ring. Remember what Lyken said? Suitable for engraving on the inner surface? That's why the ring was sent to some special engraver."

"There were four rings, Perry."

"Yes, but we are concerned with only one. After seeing Lyken, we decided that we should inquire into Phraytag's affairs. Last night, I went to see Jackling, the attorney, while you went to the public library. I found that Jackling was out of town; but the back files of the newspapers told you much about Phraytag."

"I know it. We went over all the facts that I learned. There were still a few points though, that we thought Jackling might supply."

"That was last night," again reminded Perry, "but this morning, we learned of Lyken's death. I've been thinking it over all day. It made me realize we must be careful."

"Regarding our secret?"

"Yes. We must pretend that we learned nothing from Lyken. To support that pretext, we must talk to no one concerning Elwood Phraytag; and we must be very cautious about making any contact with the old philanthropist himself."

"I agree with you on that. If Lyken was killed because of that secret, the murder was probably performed at Phraytag's bidding."

"You've struck it exactly, Zane. Phraytag may be old, infirm and blind; but that does not prevent him from being an insidious schemer. His deal with Lyken stands as apparent proof that he was crooked."

"That's right, Perry. We'd better be cautious until we're sure that no move will be made against us. I had an idea that our best plan would be to talk straight to Phraytag. But if he's the kind of a fellow who backs murder, we'd be putting ourselves squarely into a trap."

PERRY nodded. He was considering the situation in a careful manner. His face was serious, yet steady.

Zane, however was highly troubled. He began to pace the floor in worried fashion. Perry observed his cousin's air and spoke calming words.

"Listen, Zane," said the elder heir. "You've spent most of your life in the cities of the Pacific coast, dealing in ordinary business affairs. You have every right to be perturbed, for threats are new to you.

"But I've been in some pretty tight jams in my time. I've always liked danger; in fact I've welcomed it. I've been places here and abroad. I've made money, but I've done it through adventure.

"So I'm not worried at least, not yet. With Lyken out of the way, these hired killers of Phraytag's won't bother us, so long as we play a careful hand. We won't go to see Phraytag right away. We'll hold our secret and spring it when the time is ripe.

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"The old man was prominent enough in his day. We learned a lot about him at the library. That recent interview, when the reporter went to his home and talked about Phraytag's donation to the blind home, was the best information of all. It gave us a mighty good idea of Phraytag's present set-up. Alone, in a house with shuttered windows. That's how he lives."

Zane nodded. He recalled another detail from the newspaper files.

"With his faithful servant," added the younger man, "Worthington. In Phraytag's employ for twenty years. I wonder how much the servant knows about the master?"

"That is a matter of speculation," replied Perry. "What is most important right now is the visit that you paid to James Jackling this evening. I hope you used discretion in speaking of Elwood Phraytag. Tell me, Zane, why did you go to Jackling's without informing me?"

"He called here," explained Zane. "Shortly after you went to the library, earlier this evening. He wanted to know which of us had called to see him last night. I said that you had stopped by his apartment."

"Jackling said that he was at home and suggested that I come over to see him. I thought it a good opportunity, so I went there. We chatted a bit about details on the settlement of the estate. Then the talk turned to people whom grandfather had known."

Perry listened keenly when Zane paused. This statement predicted a reference to Elwood Phraytag. Zane smiled as he noted his cousin's interest.

"Jackling said that grandfather had few friends," resumed Zane. "He added that a number of odd characters came here during grandfather's last illness. Odd characters in the sense that they were persons whom grandfather had not seen for many years."

"Did Jackling have any explanation for these unusual visits?"

"Only that grandfather was in a peculiar mental state. Grandfather evidently knew that he was going to die; and his reaction was to cease all discussion of legal affairs. He had made his will; that seemed to be sufficient."

"Apparently, according to Jackling, grandfather wanted to see persons whom he had known years before. Dying, he was ready to talk with the friends of his youth. They seemed to have precedence over all others."

"This seems important. Did Jackling mention any names?"

"Not at first; then he happened to recall one man who paid several visits here. He said that the man seemed very mysterious and acted in a very cagey manner. That puzzled Jackling, for ordinarily, this particular man was of a quiet, friendly nature. I asked the name of the man. Jackling told me —"

"Elwood Phraytag?"

"Yes."

Perry began to nod in slow, methodical fashion. Zane paused for a few moments; then added:

"I told Jackling that I was interested in knowing more about grandfather's last days. That suggestion was sufficient. Jackling said that he would arrange for me to meet Phraytag."

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"When?"

"Jackling said that he would call Phraytag by telephone. Perhaps tonight. To arrange for us to pay a visit to the old man. Jackling mentioned that Phraytag is a blind recluse; and said that he would probably welcome a visit from us."

"This changes matters," mused Perry. "I don't know what to think of it, Zane. Perhaps you have driven a wedge that may help us. It is obvious that Jackling knows nothing about those rings. At the same time, Phraytag may become suspicious if Jackling suggests a visit from us."

"Zane, it would be best for you to call Jackling. Tell him that you are going out of town. Ask him to postpone his call to Phraytag –"

PERRY stopped. His hand was indicating the telephone. At that instant, the bell began to ring. Zane stared with troubled eyes. His cousin nodded.

"Answer it," said Perry.

Zane picked up the receiver. He gave a hello; then listened. A voice clicked over the wire; Zane's only responses were intermittent words. Then, as the call ended, the younger heir let the receiver clatter on the hook. His face had whitened.

"What is it?" questioned Perry, anxiously. "Who was talking to you?"

"Jackling," responded Zane, his lips trembling. "It was Jackling speaking about Phraytag."

"Did Jackling call Phraytag?"

"He called Phraytag's home, just ten minutes ago, to talk to Phraytag –"

"And what did Phraytag say?"

"Nothing." Zane's voice was solemn. "It was the servant, Worthington, who answered. He told Jackling that that Elwood Phraytag died one hour ago. Died at ten o'clock tonight."

Silence dominated the room, Perry Dolger was rigid as a statue; Zane had slumped in his chair, completely shaken by this unexpected news. Yet it was he who first found his voice.

"Jackling said that Phraytag died," repeated Zane, in a hollow tone. "He did not say that Phraytag was killed. And yet coming so soon after Lyken's death –"

"It looks like murder!" interposed Perry, quietly.

"It does," decided Zane. "But Perry, it was Phraytag who paid Lyken to keep silent. Phraytag could have desired Lyken's death; but who could have wanted to kill Phraytag? There is no explanation!"

"You are wrong, Zane," responded Perry, in a tone of understanding. "Wrong just as I was. We must look further for the secret of this intrigue. Beyond Elwood Phraytag."

"But he owns the signet ring –"

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"He owned one ring. That was the one that Lyken saw after it had been engraved. But remember, Zane, there were four rings."

"Then you mean –"

"That the secret is deeper than we suspected. Lyken was the first step. He was eliminated. Elwood Phraytag, old and weakened, a man who might yield to pressure, was the second step. He, too, has been eliminated."

"And beyond?"

"Three others," replied Perry, emphatically. "Three whose names we do not know; three who once were partners with Elwood Phraytag. They had no further use for him. Blind and infirm, he had become as great a liability as Philip Lyken."

"I see it," nodded Zane. "Three hidden schemers, who have blocked the trail. They are the ones who hold the secret of our grandfather's wealth. We can not trace them now. They have balked us."

"Perhaps," declared Perry, "and perhaps not. We still may have an opportunity to beat their hidden game. The fact that we formed no contact with Phraytag may lead us to success."

"You mean," inquired Zane, "that they will think their work has been accomplished? That they may feel entirely secure, now that both Lyken and Phraytag are dead?"

"Exactly!" responded Perry, nodding wisely. "Let us wait until to-morrow, Zane; until the newspapers tell us more concerning Phraytag's death. Then I believe" a quiet smile accompanied the young man's pause "that we may find a way to gain the wealth that is our heritage."

CHAPTER XI. THE THREE ORDAIN

THE next evening found Ed Mallan within the portals of Lucius Zurick's home. Timothy, as dignified as ever, was informing the private dick that he must wait in the little parlor. As usual, Mallan found a newspaper there.

An obituary notice was all that concerned the death of Elwood Phraytag. So far as the public knew, the blind philanthropist had died a natural death. Because of his reputation, Phraytag had gained front page notice. Mallan grinned as he read the account of the old man's demise.

Timothy returned and conducted the detective into the study. Mallan's face became solemn as he entered. Hard-boiled though he was, the dick felt in awe of the trio whom he was to meet.

He nodded awkwardly as he reached the long table. Zurick was at the head; Laverock and Kent at either side.

A motion of Zurick's hand caused Mallan to take the unoccupied chair. A stern smile showed upon the philanthropist's face. Mallan said nothing; he waited for Zurick to speak. At last the crackly voice sounded.

"Mallan," declared Zurick, "I have shown my associates your two reports. First, the one you brought here yesterday, concerning the death of Philip Lyken. Second, to-day's report in the matter of Elwood Phraytag."

Mallan nodded. He shifted uneasily in his chair. Zurick's gaze gave him the jitters. Moreover, Laverock and Kent had focused their eyes upon him.

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"The reports have been read," resumed Zurick, "but I can not say that they have been approved. When I suggested your course of action: first, concerning Lyken and later, in regard to Phraytag, I deemed that you would exercise discretion."

Zurick's crackle voice carried a peculiar subtlety. Mallan had noticed it in the past; it was most apparent when the philanthropist was speaking in the presence of his associates. Zurick had a way of making statements that could be taken as orders, yet his manner of speech was in itself an indication that he assumed no responsibility.

"I am not in accord with your methods, Mallan," came Laverock's rumble. "As Zurick says, you received suggestions. But you were not authorized to act in the fashion that you chose."

"The deaths of Philip Lyken and Elwood Phraytag," added Kent, in his wheezy fashion, "were entirely unnecessary. Therefore, Mallan, I can not approve your reports."

"Wait a minute," growled the detective, finding his voice. "If you fellows think that you can hang anything on me, you're wrong! I got it straight from Mr. Zurick here that what I was hired for was to keep Lyken or Phraytag from talking. Well neither of 'em can do talking now, can they?"

"That's what you wanted, wasn't it? All right. That's why I came out with a complete report. I could have dodged certain facts. But I didn't. All I left out was the names of certain persons and those names don't matter."

"One moment, Mallan," crackled Zurick. "You must not resent this criticism. Laverock and Kent have merely given you their opinion. For them to approve your reports would place them on record as finding your methods acceptable. Is that quite plain?"

"Yes," agreed the detective, doubtfully. "But just the same Mr. Zurick. You told me –"

"Just what did I tell you? quizzed Zurick, narrowly. "Repeat any actual orders that I gave you, Mallan."

"Well, you said –"

"My only definite instructions were in the form of a reminder. When you and I were alone in this room, Mallan, I said these words: 'Remember, Mallan, you have been employed by three men. Whatever you do must be acceptable to Laverock and Kent. Anything that would not merit their approval must be avoided.' Those were my words, Mallan."

"You did say something like that," admitted the detective. "But I figured that I was working in the interests of all three."

"That is what you supposed," asserted Zurick, dryly. "But you should realize now that the mistake was yours. In brief, Mallan, you are entirely responsible for your own actions."

"Yeah?" Mallan was hot. "Well, who hired me to watch Lyken? Who told me to cover Phraytag? You did, didn't you?"

"Quite so," crackled Zurick. "But neither I nor my associates supposed that we would be placed in the position of having to countenance murder. That, Mallan, was something that you yourself assumed."

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"Yeah?" The detective's gold teeth glittered as he forced a sour smile. "Well, suppose the police get wind of this. Suppose they started to quiz me on these two deaths just on Lyken's say, because they've got that listed as murder and suppose I talked –"

"Well?"

"They'd figure you three in the game, wouldn't they?"

"Perhaps," observed Zurick, with a smile upon his parchment features. "But first of all, they would charge Ed Mallan with the murder of Philip Lyken."

"How could they?" growled Mallan. "There's nothing they could hang on me. Not even that report you've got there" he nudged toward a sheet that Zurick was holding "because all it tells about is how Lyken was bumped, not who did it."

"Mallan," informed Zurick, seriously, "there is such a thing as circumstantial evidence. You should be acquainted with that fact. I believe you told us" he paused reminiscently "about a gun planted in a blackmailer's pocket which –"

"We had the goods on that guy," blurted Mallan. "He was crooked. But I'm straight. Get that?"

"Associations of a criminal nature," resumed Zurick, "are usually sufficient to blacken the reputation of a man who is supposedly straight. This report of yours" he fingered the paper "in fact, both reports, mention the activities of certain criminals. You are right, Mallan; you did not include the names of those persons. But in your reports, you state that you knew the identity of the parties concerned."

"What are you going to do then?" demanded the detective, suddenly. "Turn those reports over to the police? Try to make a goat out of me? Just because a couple of guys got killed guys that might have made trouble for you guys you didn't want to live –"

MALLAN stopped short as Laverock and Kent came to their feet in angry protest. Zurick waved the philanthropists down; with the same gesture, he silenced the detective's outburst. Then, in his dry tone, Zurick became the arbiter.

"Let us consider present circumstances," decided the spokesman for the three philanthropists. "Philip Lyken is dead. The man, apparently, was ready to betray a trust. I can scarcely say that I regret his death; although, by giving him the benefit of a doubt, I am inclined to do so. But Lyken's death can not be rectified."

"Elwood Phraytag was associated with Laverock, Kent and myself. Had he not retired from active pursuits, he would have been present at our conferences. True, Phraytag had become a burden in our plans. But he was rendered so by blindness and infirmity. Poor Phraytag!" Zurick's grief seemed real as the philanthropist shook his head. "In a sense, his death was fortunate. Life held no more for him."

"Then why beef about it?" queried Mallan. "Say you might think I had some personal grudge against the guys. Looks like you're coming to my way of figuring it. When they're dead, they can't talk."

"A poor philosophy," crackled Zurick, shaking his head reproachfully. "It is one, Mallan, to which I can not subscribe. I merely feel that, since murder has been done, there is nothing that we can do to offset it."

"True it is that when the knowledge we now possess" he tapped the report sheet that he was holding "we could make public certain facts that the police are anxious to learn about. But to do so" he was turning to

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Laverock and Kent "we would be forced to jeopardize our own interests.

"We chose, some time ago, to protect certain funds that had come into our possession. That trust has priority. It is not proper that we should deliberately sacrifice it by performing the present duty of turning Mallan's report over to the law."

ZURICK paused smugly. Laverock and Kent nodded in reluctant fashion. Zurick turned his smiling, crinkled face toward Ed Mallan. A gold signet ring sparkled as the philanthropist thrust forth his left hand, shoving the reports in the detective's direction.

"What what are you doing?" stammered Mallan. "Giving those reports back to me? You mean you're not going to –"

"We have refused to accept the reports," interposed Zurick, calmly. "We recognize the fact that you gave them to us in confidence. Therefore, since they are not acceptable, we intend to forget them altogether."

"But you hired me –"

"We employed you for a specific purpose: to watch Philip Lyken and Elwood Phraytag. While thus occupied, it was your duty to see that no harm came to either. One moment, Mallan" the detective paused as Zurick raised a silencing hand "I admit that our arrangement with you did not call for the protection of Lyken and Phraytag. But it was your duty, being close at hand when their lives were threatened, to see that they were not slain. That was your duty to society, not to us."

"But I was working for you –"

"Granted. And before we received your reports, we learned that both Lyken and Phraytag had died. Therefore, we assumed that you had not been watching those men. We came to the natural conclusion that you could not possibly have been on the job. If you had, you might have prevented their deaths.

"So we doubt the authenticity of your reports. To a man, the three of us agree that your statements must be incorrect. Take back your reports. Destroy them. They mean nothing to us. Consider that you have retracted them."

"All right," growled Mallan. "I'll do that. I'm beginning to get the idea. I was a fool to hand these things to you anyway. I'm lucky to get 'em back. I suppose I'm fired. Is that it?"

"Yes," assured Zurick, while Laverock and Kent chimed their agreement. "You were paid recently for work that you actually did. We accepted your report concerning the visit of Perry and Zane Dolger, when they called on Philip Lyken. But since then, Mallan, you have been guilty of gross negligence of duty."

"I'm satisfied," said the detective, rising. "You paid me enough the other night. I guess we're happy all around, in a way. With Lyken and Phraytag dead, you've got no more work for me to do."

"Your conjecture is correct," asserted Zurick. "Nevertheless, Mallan, you were technically in our employ, even though" Zurick was rising as he spoke "even though you neglected the work. Therefore, I and my associates feel that you are entitled to some small emolument."

So saying, Zurick strolled past the table and accompanied Mallan to the door. There, while Laverock and Kent watched steadily, Zurick drew an envelope from his pocket and passed it to the detective.

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As Mallan smiled and took the envelope, Zurick calmly drew the report sheets from the detective's grasp. He tore them into pieces, applied a match and let them fall, blazing, into a metal wastebasket.

"Good night, Mallan," said Zurick, opening the door. "Should I require your services that is in a capacity where I deem you competent I shall not hesitate to call upon you in the future.

"Timothy" this to the servant, who had arrived from the parlor "get Mr. Mallan's hat and coat. He is leaving."

The philanthropist stepped back into the study. The door closed, leaving him in new conference with his two associates.

Mallan stared blankly at the door. Beyond it, he could picture those three faces, Zurick, Laverock and Kent. Those were three names that Mallan intended to remember; but they were also names that he never expected to mention.

"Well, Tim," said the detective, as the servant helped him on with his coat. "I guess I won't be seeing you again very soon. But keep on the job, old socks. Some day you'll be old. And boy, when you get old, you get smart!"

Timothy made no comment. He did not seem to appreciate the tact that Mallan had reference to the three philanthropists. The servant opened the door; Mallan stepped to the sidewalk and strolled along, looking for a taxi.

"Maybe I'm dumb," mumbled the detective. "Ought to have hollered for a thousand bucks to-night. But, boy! I was lucky to get out with my shirt! Foxy! Say that's nothing to what those guys are —"

Mallan stopped muttering as he hailed a cab. As he stepped into the taxi, still thinking about money, the detective remembered the envelope that Zurick had given him. Mallan tried to remember the word 'emolument' that he had heard the philanthropist use.

"Can't recall it," he grumbled, as he pulled the envelope from his pocket. "Anyway, the word sounded good enough for a hundred-buck tip."

Turning on the dome light of the rolling cab, Ed Mallan opened the envelope. A sheaf of bank notes came out in his hand. The bills spread between the private detective's fingers. A gasp came from Mallan's lips.

In his hand, the detective was holding twenty certificates. All were of the same denomination; and Mallan was fingering bills of this sort for the first time. Each slip of currency bore the magic figures "500."

Lucius Zurick had paid for silence concerning himself and his associates: Guy Laverock and Harbrook Kent. So far as Ed Mallan was concerned, they could have silence forever. Ten thousand dollars!

CHAPTER XII. THEFT AFTER DEATH

LATE afternoon. Elwood Phraytag's shuttered mansion loomed dark against a dulling sky. Cars were parked along the secluded block. Among them stood a hearse. Death services were being held for the deceased philanthropist.

The newspapers had carried an announcement of the funeral. Brief services to which friends were invited;

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then private interment. The final statement was significant. It meant that no mourners would follow the hearse to the Sky Line Cemetery in New Jersey.

For Elwood Phraytag left no living relatives. He was the last of the family who would be buried in the mausoleum that he had built many years before. There was a tragic story in Elwood Phraytag's death.

Though he had possessed a fair-sized fortune, Phraytag was rated as almost penniless. His life so the newspapers declared had been one of giving. He had retained only enough funds to provide for his last days; the house was to be sold and the proceeds donated to the blind.

Only Worthington was to receive a legacy. That gift, in itself, was charity. For Phraytag had chosen a servant who, like himself, had no kin. Worthington would never serve another master; but he would be free from want, thanks to Phraytag's provisions.

Though there was to be no procession, there were mourners in plenty at the old mansion. Elwood Phraytag had been a benefactor to many. They paid their tribute by coming to the philanthropist's home to view the body.

They were of all classes, these people, and few knew any whom they saw there. Besides, the recipients of Phraytag's charitable gifts, there were numerous persons who had been friends of the old philanthropist.

Most of the visitors came and departed before the services. There were probably three dozen persons present when the rites were said. Among them was a tall, calm-faced individual who stood in a gloomy corner of the room where Phraytag's body lay.

Many people who came and left would have noticed this personage, had they known his name. But none were acquainted with him; for he associated chiefly with a class that did not attend the funeral. Elwood Phraytag had few wealthy acquaintances; and this mourner was Lamont Cranston, reputedly a multimillionaire.

Those who viewed the visitor's solemn, steady features presumed that he had been a friend of Elwood Phraytag's. In this they were wrong. The dead philanthropist had never met Lamont Cranston. Hence the millionaire's presence might have been unexplainable, but for another factor in the case.

Actually, the quiet stranger was The Shadow. He had adopted the guise of Lamont Cranston one which he frequently used that he might be present when the services were ended. For The Shadow knew that mystery had enshrouded the death of Elwood Phraytag.

BY the time the services had been completed, this silent visitor had noted every face present. Most of those who had remained here were elderly men. Their countenances, solemn with grief, had given no sign of interests other than those of mourners. Yet The Shadow waited.

Pall bearers were entering. The Shadow's eyes turned toward the corpse. Elwood Phraytag's thin hands rested crossed upon his breast. The left lay upon the right. The third finger wore a heavy signet ring. Lamont Cranston had noted that ornament closely when he had viewed the body. He had observed the initials "E P" upon the surface of the ring.

A few of the mourners were approaching the bier. One was an erect man who let one hand rest beside Phraytag's body. The Shadow noted that the man's eyes had steadied upon the ring which glimmered on Phraytag's finger.

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He saw more. The living hand that rested close to the corpse was wearing a signet ring that matched the one on Phraytag's bony claw. The tall figure of Lamont Cranston had moved forward from the corner. Sharp eyes glowed downward from almost beside the erect mourner. On the signet, The Shadow saw the initials "G L."

The mourner moved away. Edging into the place that he had left was a stooped fellow whose breath came wheezily. A limp hand dropped upon the side of the coffin as this newcomer leaned forward above Phraytag's body.

Again, a gaze noted the ring on the dead man's hand. The Shadow, looking downward, saw its counterpart upon the stooped man's finger. The initials were "H K."

Others were moving away; only one man remained at the center of the bier. His face was like parchment; his crafty profile showed plainly against the lights upon the wall. The Shadow caught the glimmer of cunning eyes; he also saw the flash of a gold signet ring. As the mourner's hand was about to draw away from the lighted area, The Shadow spied the engraved initials: "L. Z."

All the while, Worthington had been standing solemnly in the background. The old servant noted all of the dozen-odd persons who had approached for a last glimpse of the deceased. He saw Lamont Cranston's figure move away.

Then came the pall bearers. The coffin was closed; then raised and carried forth.

The last of the mourners followed. Worthington went to the front door and closed it, after the hearse rolled away. The servant returned into the house of gloom. His steps were slow and faltering. They paused in the rear of the hallway; then came into the room where the body had been resting.

Worthington was carrying a long rod that contained a lighted wick. It was an old-fashioned lighter; with it, the servant proceeded to light the huge chandelier that hung from the center of the room.

Phraytag's house had never been wired with electricity. This task that Worthington was performing seemed to be a duty that the servant had made a formula.

When the illumination was complete, Worthington sighed. He looked about the room, as though trying to picture scenes of the past. His eyes were moist and dim as they became suddenly fixed upon a corner of the room.

Worthington had suddenly discovered that he was not alone. Standing in the corner was a mourner who had not been recognized; the very person whom Worthington had last seen beside the casket. The startled servant was staring at the steady features of Lamont Cranston.

"Who who are you?" gasped Worthington. "I thought that I thought —"

"You believed that every one had gone." The quiet interruption came in an even tone. "You did not expect to see any one here; least of all a person whose face you did not recognize."

"That is true, sir."

"My name is Lamont Cranston. I remained here, Worthington, to speak with you."

"Yes, sir. You knew my master?"

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"I was one of the first to learn of his death."

The cryptic answer satisfied Worthington. The servant took it to mean that Cranston had been a friend of Phraytag's. Worthington nodded in an understanding fashion.

"Elwood Phraytag had many friends," stated The Shadow. "I feel an interest in them. Your master, Worthington, was a unique man, whose life was one of accomplishment. I should like to know which of his friends were most like him.

"That, Worthington, is why I remained here in the house. You served Elwood Phraytag for many years. I believed that your opinion could be my best guide regarding his friends."

The quiet tone, as rich as the words, had a marked effect upon the old servant. Half choking, Worthington began to speak.

"It was good of you, sir," said the servant. "I served Mr. Phraytag for many years. Just as you have said, sir. I was with him actually with him, sir when he died. I well, it's good, sir, to feel that some one understands."

Cranston's features were immobile, almost masklike. Yet Worthington caught a sympathetic gleam from eyes that showed on either side of a hawklike nose.

"You you were here, sir," stammered Worthington. "You saw those persons the ones who came for a last glimpse of the master. They well, sir they were his real friends."

"One was Mr. Tromlin Donald Tromlin, the banker. Then there was Doctor MacCallert; of course he would be here, sir. And Mr. Laverock —"

"Mr. Laverock?"

"Yes, sir. Guy Laverock. He used to see the master often, a few years ago. There were two other men here, sir. I think of them with Mr. Laverock, because they came here with him. Mr. Kent Harbrook Kent. Mr. Zurick; his first name was Lucius, sir. Lucius Zurick."

WORTHINGTON paused. He seemed to be recalling times when the four had met. A sad smile played upon the servant's lips.

"They were four alike," mused Worthington. "The four philanthropists, they called themselves. They met here some months ago, sir. But that was the last time. The master was weary. Very weary, sir.

"I recall that he spoke about them several times, to me, sir. He told me that they were still together. That he was one of them, in spirit."

"They still meet?"

"Yes, sir. At Mr. Zurick's. One would not have known that they were here together when they stood beside Mr. Phraytag, there in his coffin. But that was the way they always were, sir. Like Mr. Phraytag. Very much to themselves. Only when they met with no one else about only then would they speak.

"At least that is what I believed, sir. They always came here separately. Silent men. They were grieved. I could see it, sir, in their eyes."

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Again, Worthington paused. This time, the servant felt that he had spoken too much. Elwood Phraytag had trained Worthington to silence. From habit, the servitor looked toward Lamont Cranston as though expecting an order.

"Thank you, Worthington," came the quiet tones. "I am pleased to have heard your opinion. I shall remember those three of whom you have spoken."

The visitor was moving toward the door. Worthington accompanied him and bowed as he left. He saw Lamont Cranston stroll across the street, toward a limousine that was parked there. The old servant watched the car roll away.

THE limousine was heading toward the Holland Tunnel, under the guidance of Stanley, the chauffeur. In the rear seat, the form of Lamont Cranston was almost unseen in the darkness. A soft laugh came from steady lips. Its whispered tones were those of The Shadow.

This trip had not been the first that The Shadow had made to the old mansion since the death of Elwood Phraytag. Hours after he had first viewed the body of the deceased philanthropist, the mysterious visitor had entered the old mansion.

In a ghostly tour of inspection, The Shadow had assured himself that murder alone had been the motive of the person who had entered before him. Nothing, so far as The Shadow could determine, had been removed from the house.

The Shadow had assured himself of Worthington's faithfulness. The servant had been on hand when Phraytag had died. So few objects of value were in the house that Worthington would certainly have spoken if he had found that anything was missing.

The house, though old and rambling, lacked secret places. Therefore, The Shadow had limited his theories to two! One, that Phraytag had been murdered because of something that he knew; the other, that some one intended to perform a theft after the old man's death.

The first theory was plausible, following the death of Philip Lyken. Therefore, The Shadow had accepted it as a sufficient motive. But he had also kept the second theory under consideration and had come to the funeral intending to remain within the mansion.

Then had come the episode by the bier. First, The Shadow had observed that a certain object an engraved signet ring was to leave the house with the body of Elwood Phraytag. That was natural; such pieces of jewelry would usually go to the grave with the dead owner.

But into the picture had stepped three other men, each with a signet that matched Phraytag's. Three philanthropists had come to view the body of the fourth; and all had assured themselves of one fact: that Phraytag's ring was actually going to accompany the body to the tomb.

As plainly as if the three had spoken, The Shadow knew the answer. It began with Philip Lyken a jeweler who could well have known something about those four rings. The three had been friends of Phraytag's. All could have shared a common secret. Possession of one of those signet rings perhaps the ring itself was obviously an important talisman.

Zurick. Laverock. Kent. The Shadow had checked their names by their initials. Each knew that the other two were present; it appeared that they had come by mutual agreement. No one of the three could have coveted the ring on Phraytag's finger.

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That made their purpose plain. The three philanthropists had come to make sure that the fourth was carrying his secret with him. The last of those to view the body, close watchers while the coffin was being closed, they had satisfied themselves that their secret was being buried with Phraytag's corpse.

No need to remove the ring. Within a coffin in a mausoleum, it would lie unknown. The three men must have thought of the remote possibility of grave robbers. That proved that the ring, to any one who did not know its secret, would be nothing more than a mass of gold to be melted down.

THE limousine drew up in front of a large mansion. Lamont Cranston's tall form alighted. His quiet tones ordered Stanley to bring the coupe from the garage. Five minutes later, the coupe rolled from the driveway.

The Shadow was taking a cross-country route to the Sky Line Cemetery. Darkness had set in; night, The Shadow's shroud, had descended with foggy thickness.

Minutes passed. A tiny light glimmered upon the door of a whitened mausoleum. The name "Phraytag" was carved above the doorway. Steel worked within the deep lock of the door. The heavy barrier came open, smoothly; then closed.

Within the vault, the blinking light revealed the stone sarcophagus that bore the name of Elwood Phraytag. The lid swung upward. Gloved hands unscrewed the top of the inner casket.

The Shadow had come here in search of some clue to Elwood Phraytag's death. He knew that the old philanthropist had been murdered. He had divined that Phraytag possessed an important secret. That was sufficient reason for the old man's sudden end.

Only by examination of the signet ring could The Shadow gain the clue he needed without giving the other three philanthropists an inkling that he was on the trail. Whatever their purpose, whether true friends or secret enemies of the murdered man, The Shadow must work without their knowledge.

The flashlight shone within the opened coffin. It rested upon the dead, drawn features of Elwood Phraytag. It moved to the withered hand that still lay crossed upon the dead man's breast.

There the light stopped. Keen, burning eyes stared. Phraytag's left hand still lay upon his right. But the clawlike fingers were without an ornament. The engraved signet ring was gone!

THE light went out. Lids closed. The Shadow appeared, a blackened splotch, against the outside of the mausoleum. The door closed silently; The Shadow's hand locked the tomb. Then, swiftly, the dark-cloaked figure moved away.

Theft after death. Such had been accomplished. It could only have been done after the coffin had been placed within the mausoleum. The Shadow knew that none of the three philanthropists would have performed this deed.

Some one a seeker after Elwood Phraytag's secret had been waiting in the cemetery until the body had been placed within its tomb. That person sought the secret that had belonged to four men now to three.

Crime had played its part in Phraytag's death. Crime would arrive again when the paths of living men had crossed. Such was inevitable. But this time, The Shadow would be present before crime could strike.

CHAPTER XIII. MILLIONS REGAINED

"HELLO, Perry. Did you get it?"

Zane Dolger spoke the words. He was standing in the center of the library when his cousin entered. Perry's response was a nod. From his pocket, he produced an object that shone in the light. It was Elwood Phraytag's signet ring.

Perry placed the ring upon the table. He spoke, half breathlessly, as he began an examination. Zane listened, fully as tense as the speaker.

"You did your part, Zane," assured Perry. "Sliding into Phraytag's house early in the afternoon. When you called me over in New Jersey, I was on pins and needles until the hearse showed up."

"Why? I told you the ring was on Phraytag's finger."

"Sure; and I knew it would stay there. But I wanted to be positive that I'd get it; and the longer I waited, the more nervous I became."

"Did you have to wait long after the hearse arrived?"

"No. It didn't get there until dusk."

"Then you had a chance to work quickly."

"Yes. But it took a while."

Perry was working at the ring, trying to unscrew the signet. He remembered what Lyken had said that the ring would turn to the left, not to the right. But he was experiencing difficulty, nevertheless.

"How did you get into the mausoleum?" questioned Zane, still interested in Perry's story.

There was no reply. Perry was twisting at the ring. Zane repeated the question; Perry stopped work to look up.

"How did I get in?" he repeated.

"Yes," said Zane. "The door was locked, wasn't it?"

"Of course. That's where I might have had a lot of trouble. But I watched the fellow who locked up. He went along a driveway and I followed him. Into a caretaker's house. Then he went away again. I entered and was lucky enough to find the key lying on a table. So I took it."

"And simply opened the mausoleum?"

"Yes."

"How about afterward? What did you do with the key?"

"Sneaked over and put it back on the table. The caretaker must have gone out to dinner. He won't know I ever

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had the key."

ZANE smiled. When Perry, that morning, had proposed his daring scheme of getting Phraytag's ring, Zane had finally consented to aid. The job was a grave robbery; that had gone against Zane's grain. But he had been ready to admit that their position, as sole heirs of their grandfather's estate, gave himself and his cousin a certain right to reclaim their secret.

Zane had reasoned it out. Philip Lyken had been murdered because of this ring. It was probable that Elwood Phraytag also, had been killed because of the secret which he knew. Certain persons unknown had sought to thwart the heirs. By gaining the ring, Perry and Zane were working against those ambushed foes.

Perry had settled everything by taking the cemetery job as his own. He had been confident that he would be able to enter the mausoleum. He had gained the success that he had anticipated. Here was the ring, with its hidden secret

The signet had begun to twist under Perry's persistent pressure. Zane was agog. He was thinking only of what might be beneath that surface of turning gold.

The signet came free. In the bright light of the table lamp, Perry and Zane were staring at the inner surface. It was scored with tiny marks.

"Nothing!" exclaimed Perry. "Lyken was right about the ring; but there's no secret here —"

"Wait!" interjected Zane. "Those look like microscopic marks a special engraving job. There've been fifty or more words put on the head of a pin by some of those engraving fellows."

"That's it! There's a microscope somewhere around here. Look in the desk."

Zane hurried across the room. He found a high-powered reading glass. He handed it to Perry. The two stared through the lens. Tiny words appeared as if by magic. Zane, helping steady the glass, read them aloud:

THE

ENTRANCE

TO THE STRONG

ROOM LIES BENEATH

THE DUMMY ELEVATOR SHAFT

IN THE APARTMENT BUILDING

KEY WORD IS JETTY

COMBINATION IS

3-7-2-1

TURN

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"Hold the glass," ordered Perry. "I'll write this down, Zane. We can figure it out afterward."

Perry wrote down the required copy. Zane laid the magnifier and the ring aside. Then the cousins prepared to study the information that they had gained.

"The apartment building," growled Perry. "That's not much of a help. What apartment building? Where?"

"I think I know!" exclaimed Zane. "Don't you remember that statement of assets that we received from Jackling? There was a mention in it of an apartment house."

"That's right," recalled Perry. "The place was mortgaged up to the hilt, wasn't it? With a special fund money we couldn't get to handle the carrying charges for the next five years."

"That's the one." Zane was on his way to the desk. He picked up a sheaf of papers when he reached there. "Here is the name of the place. Ajax Apartments –"

"Let's see the address." Perry took the paper from Zane's hand. "Say the place is only about a dozen blocks away. Zane, this is a two-man job. Get your hat and coat; we're starting."

"What about Rowland?"

"Where is he?"

"I told him to turn in; I guess he's gone up to bed. I saw him start upstairs before you came back."

"He's in bed then. That chap likes to sleep. Come along; out by the side door. I've got a key to it."

"Why the side door?"

"Because we may be bringing something back with us."

TWENTY minutes later, the cousins stepped from a taxicab upon a secluded street. They walked along together until they reached a narrow, four-story building that bore a title over the doorway:

AJAX APARTMENTS

The place had a gloomy lobby. The inner door yielded when Perry opened it. The heirs stepped into a deserted hallway and found the elevator. It was one of an automatic type. Perry pressed the button. Machinery began to buzz as a car descended.

"Look!" whispered Zane. "See the shaft. Perry? It's double as if there should be two cars –"

"But there's only one door," interposed Perry.

"Yes." Zane supplied the added comment. "The other shaft is the dummy one."

The car had arrived on the ground floor. Perry opened the door. The cousins entered. As Perry closed the door, Zane placed his finger on a button marked "B." He pressed.

"Going down," remarked Zane, with a grin.

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The car stopped at the basement level. The two stepped out into an unlighted passage; Zane held the door open while Perry found a hanging light and pulled the cord. The elevator door went shut as Zane joined Perry. The cousins stared at the second shaft.

Like the first, it had a sliding door; this was held closed by a heavy metal bar. Apparently the house had been designed with two shafts; this one had not been extended for service.

Perry pulled the bar loose; it swung beside the door and hung there. He pushed back the sliding barrier.

The space inside looked like a storeroom. The shaft went high up; a flashlight, turned on by Perry, showed the walls above. This shaft was separate from the other. As they clambered into the unused shaft, the cousins discovered that it had a solid floor of wood, fitted into the bottom space.

At Perry's suggestion, they moved back into the passage. Leaning downward while Zane played the light, Perry found two small holes in the flooring. As he lifted, the wooden surface came upward in hinged fashion.

"Look there!" exclaimed Perry, in a whisper. "See it? A stone slab fitted in the floor! It has an iron ring in it!"

Springing into the shaft, Perry raised the slab and set it aside. He motioned Zane to turn out the light in the passage; then to close the door of the shaft.

Zane obeyed; he entered with the flashlight. The rays revealed a short iron ladder going down to a floor beneath the basement.

The young men descended. They found a narrow, stone-walled passage. At the end was a wooden door, which Perry opened. This revealed an iron barrier; a heavy blocking door that seemed to have no opening, save for a place where a doorknob should have been. There, revealed by the light, were five turning tumblers, evidently part of an unique lock, each bearing the letters of the alphabet. The tumblers were set so that they read:

A A A A A

"Jetty," said Zane, in a low voice that was hollow in the cramped confines. "Turn the tumblers so they read 'Jetty,' Perry."

Perry complied. Each tumbler revolved as he worked it with his finger. The required word came into place. Nothing happened, however, until Perry thought to press the barrier. Then the huge door groaned inward on its heavy hinges.

The next space that they entered was two feet deeper than the width of the door. They could have closed the barrier behind them, but they decided not to do so. The further wall was furnished with a cut-out space. Set in that cranny was a steel safe.

"The combination!" exclaimed Zane, his voice hollow in the tiny room. "Try it, Perry. Begin with the left. Three seven two one —"

Perry complied. His hand dropped to the safe handle as Zane repeated the final instruction from the signet:

"Turn!"

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The door came open. The flashlight showed an arrangement of compartments at the back of the safe—all empty. But there was one object, squarely in the center, that gained the instant attention of the cousins. This was an iron coffer, bound with heavy bands of metal clamped in place.

THE box was nearly three feet in width; its height and depth were each about two feet. Perry gripped a handle at one end. The box came up, heavily. Perry told Zane to take the other handle. Together, they lugged the box back into the passage.

While Zane waited beside the coffer, Perry closed the safe and turned the combination. Then he pulled the big door and hurriedly replaced the letters so they formed a series of five A's. He went to the ladder, ascended it, and hissed to Zane to start the box upward.

This was no small task. Zane got the coffer on end and by shifting it from rung to rung, managed to move it part way up the ladder. Then Perry, leaning into the shaft, caught the end above. The heavy box came to the floor of the dummy elevator shaft.

"There's plenty in it," whispered Perry, as Zane joined him. "But we're not going to open the coffer here. We'll get it back into our house."

"We can put it in the secret room," added Zane. "Open it there, get a look at the contents. This may mean millions, Perry!"

"You bet. In gilt-edged securities or bank notes, too, if our grandfather knew his business. It's ours, by possession, when we get it in the house. That's where we'll keep it. Under cover until we find the right time to unload whatever we've got."

"That's the idea. But what about right now? Can we chance it, Perry, lugging this box out of the apartment house?"

"Why not? It looks enough like a trunk not to excite suspicion. Up the elevator into the hallway. There's a back door that I saw when I came in. Let's go."

The cousins moved the box into the passage. Perry clamped the door of the dummy shaft. The elevator was still at the basement level. They took the coffer up to the ground floor. The hall was empty. The back door revealed an open space to the rear street.

Perry and Zane carried the box and set it down by the steps of a house. Perry walked quickly to the corner and found a cab. He came up in the taxi, alighted, and helped Zane lift the box into the rear of the car.

The cabby made no comment. To him, the coffer looked like a trunk; these young claps appeared to be respectable fellows who were probably moving from the house at which he had stopped.

The cab rolled off on its trip to the Dolger mansion. The heirs had recovered the fortune that they sought; soon they would be in the secret room that they had chosen for the hiding place. There they would learn the contents of the coffer. They had left no trace of their visit to the hidden strong room beneath the old apartment house.

YET the removal of the coffer was not to pass undetected. One hour after the visit of the cousins, another arrival moved from the elevator into the basement level of the Ajax Apartments.

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This visitor had extinguished the light in the car. He was using a flashlight to blink his way to the door of the dummy shaft.

With methodical precision, the man in the dark raised the wooden flooring; then the iron slab. He descended the ladder. His light shone upon the letters on the metal door as his long fingers turned the tumblers to spell the word Jetty.

The heavy door swung inward. The light blinked on the safe. The same hand manipulated the combination. The door of the safe came open; the light swung to the floor. It stopped there. The new visitor stared; and his breath came in short, fierce gasps.

The removal of the coffer had been discovered by some one who knew the secret that the Dolgers had learned. The newcomer saw proof that the message in the signets had been gained. His hissed breathing ended. His voice fumed imprecations. The incoherent words that came from this visitor's lips were proof of his identity.

For the utterances were phrased in the harsh crackle that belonged to Lucius Zurick. He the chief of the three living philanthropists had come here to make sure that the hidden wealth was safe.

The crackles died. The light blinked out. Lucius Zurick worked in total darkness as he closed the rifled safe and the metal door. His footsteps clicked in the underground passage. Again, low epithets were muttered by his parchment lips.

Hollow tones; fierce, crackled words. Those were foreboding. They stood as unheard proof that Lucius Zurick was planning drastic measures to regain the wealth that the three philanthropists had lost.

CHAPTER XIV. THE PHILANTHROPISTS MOVE

THE next evening, Lucius Zurick came down the stairs of his house at precisely eight o'clock. He stopped as he neared the ground floor. He stared at Timothy, who was standing in livery at the doorway of the parlor.

"What are you doing here, Timothy?" quizzed Zurick, harshly. "I told you that you could have this evening off. Why are you on duty?"

"It was inconvenient, sir," came the response. "I decided to stay here at the house; but I did not wish to disturb you, sir."

"Very well," snorted Zurick. "But do not count upon another evening free instead of this one. I am receiving visitors to-night; I intended to let them in myself. But since you are on duty, you may answer the door as usual."

"Very well, sir."

"I am going into my study. Usher Mr. Laverock and Mr. Kent in there. Mallan goes in the parlor when he comes."

"Yes, sir."

Ten minutes later, Guy Laverock arrived. Timothy conducted him to the study. Harbrook Kent put in an appearance a short while afterward. He joined the other philanthropists.

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Then came Mallan. The detective kidded Timothy as usual; and the servant withdrew in dignity. He went to announce Mallan's arrival. At Zurick's order, he brought Mallan in with the others.

When he had closed the door of the study, Timothy returned to the parlor as he had on previous nights. But when he had seated himself in a corner of the room, the servant performed an action that would have astonished Lucius Zurick. He reached beneath a radiator and produced a pair of earphones. He clamped them to his head.

Timothy was at the listening end of a wire that ran from study into parlor. His action indicated that this was a dictograph hook-up. A microphone was catching all that was said in conference. Timothy was listening to all that occurred.

IN the study, Zurick was talking to Mallan. There was no hostility, no uncertainty to-night. Laverock and Kent were wearing expressions that showed anxiety. Zurick was coming straight to the point of what he had to say.

"We need your services again, Mallan," declared the chief of the three. "We thought the other night that all was well. We assured ourselves later that our secret had been preserved. But we were wrong. Our treasure has been stolen!"

Mallan grinned sourly. He felt an equality, almost a superiority, where these men were concerned. The egotistical detective was somewhat pleased to learn that the philanthropists had encountered trouble after dispensing with his services.

"Although I destroyed your reports," resumed Zurick, in a harsh tone, "I have not forgotten certain facts. It is obvious that Philip Lyken must have spoken to the Dolgers. They, in turn, decided to make use of his information.

"Death did not eliminate Elwood Phraytag. He carried his secret to the grave. Literally, I mean. Phraytag" Zurick was giving Mallan the full information for the first time "was the owner of a signet ring, like mine."

Pausing, the philanthropist raised his left hand. Mallan stared as he noted the sparkle of gold. Turning his head left, then right, he saw Laverock and Kent raise similar rings to view.

"The signet," crackled Zurick, "held our secret. We thought it safe, buried with Phraytag. But we have discovered I, at least have learned that the ring was taken from the mausoleum where Phraytag's body lies."

"You have been there?" questioned Mallan.

"Not to the mausoleum," returned Zurick. "But I know that the ring must have been stolen. For I have visited the secret strong room where our wealth was kept. There, I found evidence of robbery. So I have assumed that the information came from Phraytag's coffin."

"Humph!" grunted Mallan. He stared at the three philanthropists. "Well I figured you were headed for something like this. Why didn't you wise me up to the whole business? I thought you fellows were smart. I'm finding out that you're dubs."

The comment passed without argument. The three philanthropists were willing to take it without resentment. Mallan grinned and spoke further.

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"I could have snagged that ring off Phraytag," he assured them. "But you hadn't told me about it. I thought that with the guy dead, that was enough to keep your secret buried. Now you're talking about a hiding place.

"Say why didn't you put me there to cover it? I'd have looked after the dough for you. Guess you thought I knew too many crooks, eh? Well I only tell birds like that as much as is good for them. I do the real work myself. I only use birds from the underworld to help me out when I need them.

"Now I suppose you want me to get the dough back, eh? Calling in Ed Mallan as a pinch hitter. Well the set-up don't look bad. It's a sure bet the Dolger boys grabbed the swag. Probably stowed it in that old house where they're living."

"We have assumed all that," stated Zurick. "What we want, Mallan, is a suggestion of procedure. How can we regain those funds? Possession is a strong point."

"Yeah? Maybe. Maybe not. You had the dough, didn't you? Well, you lost it. The Dolgers have got it now. That don't mean they're going to keep it."

"But if –"

"The 'ifs' don't matter. I know what you're going to say. Let it drop. You want the dough. Well, we'll go and get it."

"We?"

"Sure! It's your dough, ain't it? You dropped me out of it, last trip, because you didn't like the way I worked. This time there won't be any squawk. When I go after the dough, you'll be right on hand the three of you."

THE philanthropists exchanged uneasy glances. Mallan grinned. He was getting the kind of revenge that pleased him. He waited for objections. Zurick put one.

"We can not attack the Dolgers," crackled the old philanthropist. "If stealth is concerned, four are a burden compared to one. You have boasted, Mallan, of your ability –"

"And I'm bragging some more," interrupted the detective. "I'm telling you that the easy way to grab back that swag is to walk in and get it."

"But the Dolgers may prove dangerous –"

"Not after I've fixed things so they won't be. That's the only catch. Clearing the way. That's what I'll do to-night, while you bozos sit back and stay out of it.

"Whatever happens between now and to-morrow well, I won't be in it. When to-morrow night comes, I'll be able to walk right into that Dolger nest with you gents following. And if the Dolgers are still there" Mallan paused to deliver a gleaming grin "we won't have any trouble with them."

"You are talking cagily, Mallan," observed Zurick, in a tone that seemed commending. "I can divine that you have certain plans that you believe will work. Very well. This time, we shall rely upon you to the full. I assume that you wish to proceed in your own fashion."

"That's it," chuckled the detective. "You're a good guesser, Mr. Zurick. Well are you three on? Do I go ahead, the way I want, leaving it up to you to follow –"

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"This is a crisis," nodded Zurick. "Under the circumstances, Mallan, I am willing to obey your lead."

"I agree," rumbled Laverock.

"And I," coughed Kent.

"That part's settled then," decided Mallan. "Now let's get to the point about money. What's it worth to you in cash for me to take this new job?"

"Ten thousand dollars," declared Zurick.

"How soon do I get the dough?" inquired Mallan.

"To-night," assured Zurick. "We are willing to pay you the sum in advance, as proof that we intend to back you to the limit."

"Make it twenty grand," said Mallan, decisively.

Laverock and Kent were about to make a protest. Zurick motioned them to be quiet. He studied the detective narrowly. Then, without a word, Zurick arose and went to a safe in a corner of the room. He opened the steel door, found a large cash box and counted out stacks of currency.

"Here you are, Mallan," cackled the philanthropist, placing a large stack of bills in the detective's hands. "I am sorry that I must ask you to take some fifties and twenties in order to make up the total."

"That's all right." The detective ginned and rolled the bills into several wads that he stowed in different pockets.

"I've got the dough; I'll deliver the goods. It's a sure bet the Dolgers are laying low with that swag they grabbed. I'll give them the surprise of their young lives. Leave it to Ed Mallan. So long, gentlemen. You'll hear from me later."

With that, the dick turned and swaggered from the room. When he reached the hall, Timothy appeared carrying his coat and hat. The detective still wore his grin as he departed from the house. Timothy closed the door.

OUTSIDE, Ed Mallan strolled a half block, then hailed a cab. He spoke to the driver, using a wise-voiced growl. He asked if the taximan knew anything about Brooklyn. The fellow nodded.

"Ever hear of Zemo's hock shop?" questioned Mallan.

"Yeah," returned the cabby. "Over near the Whitelight Theater, ain't it?"

"That's the place," replied Mallan. "Well that's where I want to go. Zemo's hock shop. In a hurry. Got some junk I want to take out of hock before he closes."

Back in the house, the three philanthropists were still in conference. Their discussion ended. Laverock and Kent left; Timothy saw them out of the door. Zurick said good-night to his servant and went upstairs.

Timothy's actions then became brisk. In quick, efficient fashion, the servant gathered up the wire that connected the ends of the dictograph hook-up. He moved out into the kitchen, opened a closet door and

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stowed the apparatus in a small bag.

Turning out the light, Timothy rustled in the dark. A few minutes passed; then a tiny flashlight blinked. It showed the servant's livery hanging in the closet. A whispered laugh sounded. Something swished in darkness. A figure departed from the house.

This was the aftermath of the strange spying on the part of Lucius Zurick's old servant. It proved that the house had harbored an impostor. A mysterious visitor had deceived Zurick as well as the philanthropist's guests.

The real Timothy had gone off duty. Some one lurking here had heard Zurick's order to the servant. That mysterious some one had been The Shadow.

A master of disguise, the secret interloper had borrowed Timothy's discarded livery after the servant had left. He had made himself up to pass as the servant. In the dull illumination of Zurick's home, the disguise had proven undetectable.

Before the conference, The Shadow had planted his dictograph. He had heard every word. He had listened to Mallan's hinted plans and had also caught the comments of the philanthropists before and after the dick's arrival.

The Shadow had no need to trail Ed Mallan. Nor did he require the aid of agents. He had learned the turn that crime had taken. He knew the one place where new action would be due. The Shadow was on his way to the old mansion wherein the Dolger cousins harbored the treasure that they had gained.

CHAPTER XV. THE SHADOW ENTERS

DULL lights from high curtained windows. The Shadow had arrived at the Dolger mansion. Shrouded in the gloom that surrounded the old building, the silent investigator was making a circuit of the house.

The Dolger home had three entrances; all heavy, well-locked doors. The Shadow found one at the front; a second at the side; a third at the rear. But he chose none of them as a means of entry. Instead, he picked a darkened spot at the back of the house and began a stealthy ascent toward a darkened window on the second floor.

This proved an excellent choice. The Shadow had no difficulty entering and he gained a room that seemed to be seldom used. Stalking out into the gloomy second-story hall, he noted the front stairway that stretched broadly to the floor below. This did not offer a good path for descent. The Shadow looked for a rear stairway and found it.

The flight led to a front kitchen. The room was dark; but a light showed in the rear kitchen which adjoined it. Ghostly in his approach, The Shadow peered through the half-opened door. He saw Rowland, the old retainer, seated at a table reading a magazine. The Shadow studied the servant's face. He could see that Rowland was a simple-mannered fellow, whose mentality was limited to obedience of orders.

The Shadow moved through the front kitchen; he reached a pantry; then picked a door that led into a long hall behind the front stairs. He reached a closed door on the left.

There, he paused and produced a peculiar device, like an ear phone fitted to a suction cup. He attached this close to the edge of the door, by the keyhole. Voices became audible as The Shadow listened.

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PERRY DOLGER and his cousin Zane were talking together in the library. This room was on the same side of the house as the side entrance; though he could not see into the library, The Shadow had a fair idea of its proportions.

"When I talked to Jackling on the phone" Perry Dolger was speaking "he said that he would stop by to-night and take us over to his apartment. I liked the idea, because a chat with him might prove useful to our plans."

"You mean in reference to leaving town?" questioned Zane.

"Yes," replied Perry. "That statement concerning the estate speaks of some Florida property on which grandfather had an option. We have sufficient money" he paused to chuckle "to buy the Florida place. It would be natural for us to move down there."

"That's right," agreed Zane. "Our known funds money that Jackling actually turned over to us are beyond what we need to exercise the option. Your idea, I take it, is to remove our new wealth to Florida."

"Yes. But there's a hitch regarding to-night. I asked Jackling to stay here when he came; he said he would be unable to do so. He is expecting a long-distance call at his apartment. He insisted that we would have to come over there."

"But we can't go out and leave no one here but Rowland. It wouldn't be safe, Perry –"

"That's just it. One of us must stay here. Suppose you go along with Jackling, Zane. I can stay here and see that nothing goes wrong. Of course, you will have to be careful of what you say to him."

"But what excuse will you give for staying here, Perry?"

"Not feeling well. That's simple enough. Except" Perry paused doubtfully "except that I didn't say anything about being indisposed when I talked to Jackling on the phone."

"Did you say anything about me?"

"No."

"Then I'd better stay here," decided Zane. "I've got a slight cold to begin with; I can fake a thick voice easily enough. It's raw out to-night, anyway."

"I guess that's best," agreed Perry. "We'll work it that way, Zane. After all, Jackling knows I came to see him a couple of nights ago. So I can bring up the Florida plan as though it were an idea that I had not discussed with you. Wanted to get Jackling's opinion on the option, to begin with."

"That the best stunt, Perry –"

ZANE'S comment ended. The clangor of a bell announced some one at the front door. The Shadow quickly removed the apparatus from the library door. He moved back into the pantry and edged into the dining room just as Rowland's footsteps came from the inner kitchen.

Passing through the dining room, The Shadow peered into the hall in time to see the servant admit a pleasant-faced, gray-haired man. This was James Jackling, the attorney who had represented the estate of Tobias Dolger.

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Perry and Zane arrived in the hallway, coming from a front door of the library. The Shadow heard them greet the attorney; the three strolled back to the library. From the brief conversation, it was plain that Perry was going along with Jackling, while Zane would remain here.

Rowland showed signs of returning to the kitchen. Anticipating this, The Shadow moved across the dining room, through the pantry and gained the rear stairway. He went up to the secluded room that he had first entered. There, he opened the small bag that he had brought with him from Zurick's.

The Shadow's flashlight showed the dictograph equipment; also the make-up appliances that he had used to counterfeit the appearance of Timothy. This material, although compact, could enable The Shadow to alter his features in any fashion that he chose.

Finding a large closet, The Shadow stowed his bag behind a high stack of light bundles. These evidently contained blankets and linens that had been stored in the closet.

Unencumbered, The Shadow moved out into the hall. He reached the front stairs in time to see Perry Dolger leaving with James Jackling.

Zane was not in evidence; he had evidently remained in the library. Nor was Rowland present. The Shadow assumed that the servant was back in the outer kitchen.

Here was opportunity. The Shadow had taken advantage of the time lapse to make ready for an investigation of the house. He began an inspection of the second floor, going from room to room, blinking the tiny flashlight as he required it.

Fifteen minutes passed. Suddenly, The Shadow came to a stop in the second-floor hall. His ears had detected a slight sound from somewhere below. The rear stairway was close at hand. The Shadow knew that a sound had carried up that twisted shaft.

Swiftly, The Shadow headed for the back stairs. He descended to the front kitchen. The door to the rear was open. Rowland was not in the back room, although a light still burned there.

The Shadow cut through to the hallway. He stopped as he stepped from the pantry. His flashlight glimmered on the floor.

Lying at the top of the three steps that led to the side door was Rowland, the old servant. The man was motionless, slumped in a twisted position.

The Shadow knew immediately that some intruders had entered the side door. Perhaps Rowland had heard their entry; possibly the servant had merely chanced to be passing by.

In either event, the result had been the same. The old retainer had been dropped by a blow from a blackjack. How serious had the stroke been? That was a question which The Shadow could not answer for the present.

There was no way of aiding Rowland; but there still was time to rescue Zane Dolger if the young man had been confronted by danger. The Shadow swept toward the library.

The door from the passage was ajar. Peering through the opening, The Shadow witnessed the scene within.

Zane Dolger was standing, white-faced, with hands uplifted. Three men were covering him. The Shadow recognized their leader as Steve Lagrin, one of the gorillas whom Cliff Marsland had listed as an underling of

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Hoot Shelling.

"SO you're alone, huh?" Steve was questioning. "Well that don't change things much. You'll do for a starter. Come along, bozo! You're going for a nice ride."

"What have you done to Rowland?" demanded Zane.

"The old mug that works here?" Steve laughed hoarsely. "Tapped him behind the ear same way we'll do to you if you don't come quiet."

"Where are you taking me?"

"You'll find out." Steve jockeyed with his revolver. "Start moving toward the side door. We'll follow you."

The Shadow could see a grimness on Zane's tense face. The young man knew the purpose of these mobsters. They intended to remove both himself and Rowland; after that, they could easily return and set a trap for Perry.

With the occupants of the house eliminated, Zane knew, any one would be free to search it thoroughly. Death stared Zane in the eyes; but his thoughts were of Perry's safety. How could he save his cousin from doom?

The invitation to walk out through the side door was one which Zane knew might bring prompt disaster. These ruffians had slugged Rowland. As soon as he headed from the library, Zane could expect a similar treatment.

He was picturing himself and the servant unconscious or dead being carried from the house. After that, the river. He thought of Perry, returning alone, into an ambush. That was what Zane felt he must prevent. He saw a way to do it.

These men had revolvers; but it was plain that they carried them as threats. They wanted to kill Zane silently. The young man saw the game. Death was certain; Zane's fighting instinct demanded that he go out in the midst of a fray. Shots might bring people here, even though the house stood isolated. A battle even though hopeless could prove a means of saving Perry.

No one not even his cousin Perry knew of the courage that lay beneath Zane Dolger's cautious demeanor. Apparently retiring by nature, Zane had real fortitude when emergencies appeared.

Steve Lagrin, scowling, saw a quaver come to Zane's uplifted hands. He thought the fellow yellow. So did the other gorillas.

But The Shadow, keen-eyed, knew what that tremor meant. Zane was steeling himself for conflict. Automatics were steady in The Shadow's hands. One covered each of the lesser crooks. The Shadow was leaving Steve to Zane; but he had another weapon which was to aid the young man in the struggle.

As Steve was growling again, ordering Zane to move, The Shadow saw the crisis. Zane was ready for a futile spring; his muscles were tightening.

It was then that The Shadow used the weapon other than his automatics. He delivered a sinister, whispered laugh.

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INSTINCTIVELY, the three criminals whirled toward the door. At that instant, Zane launched himself on Steve Lagrin. As the chief crook went down, the others, snarling, aimed to kill The Shadow. Their purpose was useless.

The automatics had them covered. The big weapons thundered before either gangster could pull a trigger. The Shadow gave the two crooks the fate that they would gladly have delivered to him. Snarls turned to chokes. The gorillas sprawled.

Zane had hurled Steve to the floor. The husky gorilla had swung to aim at The Shadow; Zane had grabbed Steve's wrist. Zane was atop his foe; Steve's hand was pointing upward, the gun muzzle toward the ceiling.

But Zane had overshot his spring. He had expected resistance from Steve; the gorilla's twist had proven Zane's undoing. Down came the raised hand; the revolver barrel glanced from Zane's head. The young man rolled, half-stunned, upon the floor.

Steve, coming automatically to knees and left hand, fired one quick shot toward The Shadow.

All had happened with swiftness. Luck had given Steve a break. Had the gorilla paused an instant to make sure of his aim, he might have clipped The Shadow. As it was, his first bullet whistled a scant inch above the slouch hat as The Shadow's head came forward. Steve dropped his hand to fire again.

One shot a quarter second then another. Such was Steve's method of combat.

But The Shadow dealt in finer time spaces. Between the first pull of the trigger and the second, he gave his answer at the finish of an already moving aim. An automatic barked.

Steve's right hand quivered, as his left wrist sagged. His trigger finger wavered; at last it pulled. But that was reflex effort, like the writhing of a slain snake. The gun muzzle had dropped. Steve's last bullet found the floor. The gorilla rolled upon the carpet.

The Shadow advanced and looked closely at Zane Dolger. The young man was moving; Steve's blow had but half-stunned him. The criminals, however, were motionless. The Shadow had dealt them death.

Half-measures; crippling shots such would not have sufficed while Zane's life lay at stake. Mirthlessly, The Shadow laughed, his whisper a knell for villains who had deserved their fate.

The black-clad avenger turned. The lining of his cloak showed crimson as the garment swished. The Shadow reached the hallway, returning to the spot where Rowland, the old servant, was lying on the floor.

CHAPTER XVI. ZANE'S STORY

DETECTIVE JOE CARDONA was standing in the library of the Dolger home. With uniformed policemen beside him, the detective was quizzing two men who sat before him.

One was Zane Dolger, steady now that the ordeal had ended. The other was Rowland, white-faced and quivering.

The dead bodies had been removed.

Cardona, summoned from detective headquarters, was again acting as inspector as he gained the details of the

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fray.

"I was seated here reading," explained Zane, pointing to an opened book and pipe that lay on the table. "I heard a sound at the door and thought that it must be Rowland. As I came to my feet, the door opened. I was covered by the three crooks."

"What did they say to you?"

"One did all the talking. He was the fellow that you say is Steve Lagrin. He stated that they had knocked out Rowland; that I was to come along. I knew that if they got me in the hall, it would be my finish."

"No doubt about that. They'd have slugged you like they did Rowland. So you put up a fight, eh?"

"Yes. From what Steve said, I figured they had come to get my cousin Perry as well as myself. Fortunately, he had gone out. I realized that if the thugs dragged me out quietly, they could come back and get Perry when he returned."

Cardona nodded.

"So I started the fight," resumed Zane. "I grabbed the big fellow Steve and struggled with him. Then came shots and I saw Steve's hand coming down. I tried to duck, but I guess his revolver hit me."

Zane rubbed the side of his head as he finished speaking. Cardona looked thoughtful.

"Who fired the shots?" he asked.

"I don't know," admitted Zane. "It was like a nightmare. As I pounced on Steve, I heard what seemed like a ghostly laugh. Then the shots then I was out. I seemed to be groping about. When I realized that I was still alive, I saw the bodies on the floor."

"And after that?"

"I went to look for Rowland. I found him, half-dazed, by the side door. Right after that, the door came open and these officers appeared."

"All right." Cardona had been making notes. "Your testimony is satisfactory, Mr. Dolger. It's plain that somebody helped you out. Probably other crooks who had it in for these fellows men who trailed them here."

"But that unearthly laugh –"

"You probably imagined it. Let's stick to the fact that you heard shots. In your excited state, Mr. Dolger, you might have imagined the laugh; but not the shots."

"That's true," agreed Zane, with a wan smile. "Then that's my story, inspector. I heard shots; but I can't say how many."

JOE CARDONA smiled also. But the detective had a different reason. He could guess the author of that laugh. The Shadow. Again, the invisible menace of the underworld had stepped in to intervene against men of crime. Joe had figured that The Shadow was on Hoot Shelling's trail.

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But Joe had decided to keep his theory to himself. This report would undoubtedly go to Commissioner Wainwright Barth.

That high official had tabooed mention of The Shadow. He had defined the existence of such a personage as "poppycock" and "balderdash." Barth, in classing The Shadow as a myth, had followed the course of his predecessor, Commissioner Ralph Weston.

Weston had learned his error. But Weston had temporarily relinquished his post as police commissioner. So Joe Cardona had gone back to his former practice: that of covering all mention of The Shadow. Wars between crooks were a sufficient explanation when criminals were plucked off while engaged in deeds of evil.

"Let's hear your story," suggested Cardona, turning to Rowland.

Before the servant could speak, Zane Dolger interrupted. Something had occurred to the young man. His tone was anxious as he addressed Cardona.

"My cousin knows nothing about what has happened here," put in Zane. "Wouldn't it be wise to inform him at once? He is over at the apartment of James Jackling."

"What's the address?"

Zane gave it.

"And the phone number?"

Zane added that information; Cardona jotted it down. Briskly, the detective took the telephone and put in calls. By the time he had completed them, all was arranged.

"That was Jackling that I talked to," Joe explained to Zane, who had caught but one half of the conversations. "He'll keep your cousin Perry there until Detective Sergeant Markham arrives from headquarters. You heard me call Markham. He's on his way. He'll accompany your cousin back here."

"Good!" commended Zane.

"Ready for your statement," said Joe to Rowland, the butler. "Give it in detail."

"I WAS seated in the kitchen, sir," explained Rowland, wearily, "reading a book, sir one which I had taken from here in the library. I believe the volume is still in the outer kitchen, sir. It is the third of a set 'The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire' –"

"Never mind the name of the book," interrupted Joe Cardona. "Go ahead with the story. I want your statement of what happened after that."

Zane Dolger smiled. He had allowed Rowland to take the book from the library when the servant had apologetically entered, earlier in the evening. What amused Zane was Rowland's preciseness. The servant seldom had much to say; evidently his anxiety to give every detail had made him loquacious.

"It was after Mr. Perry had gone," resumed Rowland. "I was in the lower hall when he departed with Mr. Jackling. I went back into the kitchen, sir, to resume my reading. It was then that a slight noise attracted my attention."

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"What kind of a noise?"

"It seemed like a door opening, sir. The side door. I went to investigate. Something struck me from the dark" Rowland paused to touch the back of his head "and I remembered nothing for a time.

"Then I seemed to come to my senses when Mr. Zane found me. I actually wondered what had happened, sir. It was a surprise, indeed it was."

"You did not see the intruders?"

"No, sir."

"All right." Cardona arose. "We'll have two men on duty outside the house, Mr. Dolger. That's for to-night. To-morrow we can decide if further protection is needed. But I doubt that you will require it."

"Why not?" inquired Zane.

"Because," replied Cardona. "Those gorillas looked like they were here for a burglary job. They tried threats when they encountered you. Tried to make it look like they had it in for you and your cousin. Unless you expected threats from —"

"Not at all," broke in Zane, promptly. "I think you are right, Mr. Cardona. Burglary must have been their motive."

"That being the case," decided Joe, "their pals will stay clear of here. They'd be dubs to come back to a spot where some of the gang hit trouble. Give me a call to-morrow."

"Very well."

Cardona was about to leave; then, as an afterthought, he decided to await the arrival of Perry and Markham. The two came in about fifteen minutes later. Perry listened while he heard Zane's story.

"My cousin is right," declared Perry, emphatically. "We have no enemies. He was in business in California; I have come from abroad. Those thugs were here for robbery nothing else."

"Then I can take the men off duty in the morning," decided Joe. "But you'd better give me a call at headquarters."

FIVE minutes later, Perry and Zane were alone. Cardona and Markham had gone back to headquarters. The policemen had taken up outside duty. Rowland had retired to the kitchen. The two heirs began a conversation in an undertone.

"You did great work, Zane," commended Perry. "That was the first thrust. If we had expected it so soon, I would never have left this house to-night."

"Do you think they have learned that we gained the coffer?" asked Zane, anxiously. "By murdering the two of us, those unknown schemers might have had a clear path to regain our grandfather's wealth."

"I don't know, Zane. Maybe our three enemies we are assuming there are three decided that we might know too much. Maybe they wanted to eliminate us to be sure. At the same time, if their signets bear the secret like Phraytag's they may have visited the hiding place, to learn that the coffer was gone."

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"Perhaps they got into Phraytag's tomb."

"Like I did? Possibly. Well, we'd better slide up to the secret room and make sure the box is safe."

"We'll hold it there, Perry?"

"Of course! That's the only place. We'll keep low for a while, Zane. Ready for another thrust. We're within our rights to put up a fight."

"But we got the money in illegal fashion."

"How so? Once we had the ring, we knew that the cash was once our grandfather's. Possession is nine points, Zane. You saw the answer. To-night's attack wasn't legal, was it?"

"No."

"That settles it. We know that the people who had the coffer before us must have been crooks. They got it illegally, or they wouldn't have sent this flock of thugs."

Zane nodded.

"You used your head, Zane," complimented Perry, "when you told this chap Cardona that we had no enemies. That made him decide that the police won't be needed after to-night."

"Yes," agreed Zane, "I spoke quickly when the subject came up. But there's another angle to it. I'm not sure but that it's a good idea to have the police around. Suppose there's another thrust? It won't come while the house is guarded. We hold an advantage a stalemate while the police are here."

"A stalemate is correct," objected Perry. "That's just where we would injure our own plans. If we keep the police watching here, Cardona is going to know that we must have enemies."

"That's true."

"And we can't slide out to Florida with the box. The police would stop us, knowing that something might be up."

"Yes. They might do that."

"But if we sit tight, our enemies are going to think that we intend to stay here. They'll hold back before another thrust. In the meantime, we can find a chance to sneak away."

"You arranged about the Florida property?"

"Yes, with Jackling. Let's hold it about three days, Zane. Then make it our business to move out before the crooks strike again."

"That is best. We can stick here together. And Rowland will be more wary than before."

Perry was walking toward the door as Zane made this comment. Stopping short, Perry turned to his cousin.

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"Say!" he explained. "I'd almost forgotten Rowland. I was just starting up to the secret room to make sure the coffer was still safe. Where is Rowland? Still in the kitchen?"

"I'll look."

ZANE went to the side door. As he opened it, he heard footsteps. Rowland was already approaching from the hall. He was carrying the book that he had borrowed from the library.

"Just about to retire, sir," stated the servant. "Shall I replace the book? Are there any orders, Mr. Zane?"

"No," replied Zane. "Give me the book. I'll put it where it belongs. You can turn in, Rowland."

The servant moved away toward the back stairs. Zane came into the library with the book. Perry beckoned and whispered.

"You don't think Rowland was snooping, do you?" questioned Perry. "He showed up pretty quick when you went into the hall."

"I don't think so," returned Zane. "He was about midway in the passage."

"He could have been sliding away from the door. Maybe he turned about to fool you."

"Possibly."

As Zane spoke, Perry was moving stealthily toward the door that his cousin had just closed. With a sudden leap, Perry gained the barrier and yanked it open. There was no one in the hall.

"That settles it," declared Zane, with a smile. "If Rowland had been listening, he would have come back to learn whether or not we suspected him."

"Maybe," rejoined Perry. "Maybe not. The fellow may be a bit foxy, even though he doesn't look it. Come on, Zane, let's go up. We'll keep our eyes open on the way."

The cousins left the library. They passed Rowland's room on their way upstairs. A light was shining from beneath the door. They could hear the old servant moving about.

Zane seemed satisfied as they resumed their progress. But Perry remained doubtful. The older cousin still held the suspicion that Rowland had listened to the conversation in the library.

But when they returned after making sure that the coffer was safe with all its wealth, they saw that Rowland's light was out. They went down to the library, chatted a while longer and finally went to bed.

SILENCE came to the old house. An hour passed. Then, through empty, darkened rooms moved a swishing shape. The Shadow was again investigating the mansion. Stealthily, he ascended a staircase.

Searching with his blinking light, The Shadow discovered an oddly made bookcase in an abandoned upstairs study. He noted its position against the wall. He tested its fastenings. A slight click sounded as the bookcase opened. The Shadow stepped into the secret room.

The iron coffer showed beneath the flashlight's glare. Gloved hands unbound the clamps. The lid came up. Stacks of currency, bundles of security, property deeds and other forms of wealth came beneath The

Shadow's view.

Later, the light went out. The lid descended; the clamps were pressed back in place. Empty-handed, The Shadow left the secret room. He had discovered the contested wealth. He had chosen to leave it in the spot where he had found it.

CHAPTER XVII. VISITORS BY NIGHT

EARLY the next evening, Timothy ushered Ed Mallan into Lucius Zurick's study. When the servant had closed the door and departed, Mallan sat down to face the three philanthropists. They had assembled here at Mallan's request. Their faces were sour.

Mallan supplied the only grin a glitter of gold that matched the sparkles from the three signets. He wanted Zurick to start the conversation; for Mallan was anxious to learn what the conference might have produced before his arrival.

Seeing this, Zurick began:

"We expect explanations, Mallan," rasped the old philanthropist. "After reading the newspaper accounts of what happened at the Dolger house, I was not surprised at your request that we should meet. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Take it easy," suggested Mallan. "I've been fixing everything."

"I suppose," stated Zurick, "that you followed the same policy last night that you used when Lyken was eliminated. The policy that you repeated in the case of Phraytag."

"Not at all," said Mallan, still grinning. "Not at all. I didn't figure on what happened last night."

"Apparently not," wheezed Kent. "I suppose you were sure that Zane Dolger was going to be killed. It must have surprised you when the crooks were slain."

"You've got it wrong," objected Mallan. "Say are you going back to the old line? Let me tell you one thing. I wasn't anywhere near that Dolger house last night."

"So Kent has intimated," rumbled Laverock. "Had you been close at hand, Zane Dolger would probably have died. Like Philip Lyken and Elwood Phraytag."

"Maybe I should have been there," decided the detective, souring. "So that's your kick, eh? Sorry they didn't get young Dolger and his cousin, too. Well, maybe you've got cause for complaint. I guess those young fellows should have been rubbed out."

"We agree on that point," crackled Zurick. "The Dolgers have committed robbery. They have stolen the funds that we held. They are criminals, and therefore" the philanthropist paused, smugly "they deserve misfortune."

Mallan grinned again. This point was to his liking. The other philanthropists were nodding in accord with Zurick's statement. The time was propitious for Mallan to declare what he had in mind.

"Last night was a bad break," asserted Mallan. "I went out of here with a real idea. It didn't turn out the way I

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expected. On account of what happened at the Dolger house. That knocked spots out of my plans.

"But sometimes a bad break fixes things right. I wised up to a lot last night. Never mind how. That's my business. Anyway, that fracas that you read about in the newspapers turned things the way I wanted them. All I had to do was change my game and do it smart."

"You mean that you still have a solution for our problems?" inquired Zurick. "That you are ready with a plan to regain that treasure?"

"You bet I am!" Mallan was emphatic. "Listen! Last night's mess didn't worry me. It was something I could talk about, because nobody could come across any evidence to prove I was near the Dolger place.

"See? I was leery about Lyken's and Phraytag's because I was at those places. You never can tell who might have spotted you when you've been around a scene of crime. But last night well, I was miles away.

"This morning, I began to figure what could be done. There were things I wanted to know. So I went to the right joint to find out about them. Can you guess where that was?"

"We give up," crackled Zurick, sarcastically. "You have stated your riddle, Mallan. Let us have the answer."

"All right," grinned Mallan. "I went to detective headquarters, to see Joe Cardona, the inspector who went up to the Dolger house."

AMAZEMENT showed on the faces of the philanthropists. Mallan had astonished them.

His teeth gleaming, the private detective followed up his statement.

"I'm a dick, ain't I?" he queried. "I know Cardona. Well why shouldn't I go to see him?"

No answers. The philanthropists seemed puzzled. Mallan grinned, because he knew why. They were trying to connect events and failing.

"Don't try to figure things out," said Mallan. "I know what's biting the three of you. You've got the wrong slant on last night. I'm not going to give you the lowdown until later. What I've got to talk about is to-day. Let's start from the time I went to headquarters.

"I talked with Joe Cardona. Asked him about last night. Said I wanted to know more about the Dolgers; wanted to know if Joe intended to keep policemen on duty around their place. I found out that the cops were taken off this morning."

"What explanation did you give?" queried Zurick, as Mallan paused. "You must have had some pretext for asking all those questions."

"The best in the world," chuckled Mallan. "I told Cardona that I came to see him because it looked like a case for a private detective. I said to him: 'Say, Joe, do those Dolger boys want cops hanging around their place?'"

"Cardona says to me: 'No. Why should they have them? They've got no enemies. It was a straight case of attempted burglary.' Then I said: 'Listen, Joe. That kind of a case is my meat. Guys like them might figure it wouldn't be bad business to have a private dick on their pay roll for a few days. How about giving me a recommendation?' So Joe agreed to do just that."

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MALLAN paused triumphantly. He settled back in his chair and viewed the philanthropists. They seemed half bewildered by this new turn in affairs.

"I'm a cagey bozo," bragged Mallan. "I figured the Dolgers wouldn't want cops around there while they had the dough. What's more" the detective assumed a wise grin "I knew which one of the pair to deal with. This boy Zane. He was in plenty of trouble last night."

"That's what I can't understand," put in Zurick. "I could see no reason for the attack at the Dolgers. That was why, Mallan, that I and my associates decided that you had –"

"Hold it!" interrupted the detective. "There's a twist to this that you don't get. I found out something; but I'm running things my own way. See? If you're afraid there'll be a come-back on account of last night, forget it. I keep my hands clean, don't I?"

"In your own way."

"Well, you said I could have my way in order to get the cash back. So I'm taking it. Well, let's get back to what really counts. I called Zane Dolger. Told him I was coming up there tonight. Had information for him; that he'd hear from Cardona about me.

"The gag worked. I knew Zane would get the jitters. Of course, all Cardona did was call him some time later, telling him that he recommended me as a private detective. I called Joe to make sure he'd given me the boost.

"Well, young Zane couldn't very well squawk about my coming up. I didn't give him the chance. I left him kind of puzzled. He won't refuse to let me in; because he'll figure I'll ask Cardona what the two Dolger boys are covering up.

"By now he's talked it over with his cousin. When I get there nine o'clock they'll be waiting for me. They'll want to know whether I'm a guy that's bluffing to get some easy money or whether I've actually got something."

"If they suspect the latter," crackled Zurick, "you may be sure that they will have some plan to deal with you."

"Perry Dolger will," assured Mallan. "I've got him slated as the brains of the pair. But don't worry about that. Anything he tries to pull and he'll try something will be spiked. So it's going to be absolutely safe for all of us."

"All of us?" echoed Zurick.

"All of us," repeated Mallan, with a grin. "You bozos are going right into that Dolger dump in back of me. Better call Timothy. You'll need your hats and coats. And say bring your gats along. We're going to make a flash when we walk in."

OBJECTIONS came from Laverock and Kent. Zurick sat silent as a statue. A thin smile played upon his dry lips.

Zurick was picturing the near future. His two associates were appealing to him. While Mallan watched, Zurick shook his head. The gesture was meant for Laverock and Kent.

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"Mallan is right," decided Zurick. "We must not forget the agreement that we made with him last night. He stated that he would require our cooperation when he was ready to reclaim the stolen funds. We must abide by our arrangement."

"But that," objected Kent, "was before the attack occurred at the Dolgers. Last night there was nothing that might have implicated us in our dealings with the Dolgers. To-night –"

"There won't be any come-back," put in Mallan. "Say if you're so squeamish, maybe I ought to have told you more. Take my word for it –"

"He does," interposed Zurick, dryly. "Come, Kent. We are going."

"I object!" protested Laverock. "There is danger ahead of us. Whatever Mallan has to say, he can not alter the fact that last night's trouble may mean real danger from the Dolgers. We are walking into their camp. We –"

"Don't worry," interrupted Mallan. "I tell you, I've fixed everything. I had it fixed before that mess; and after those three gorillas got rubbed out, I clinched the proposition. Say I've got –"

"Never mind, Mallan." Zurick had urged Laverock and Kent to their feet. "As you stated previously, we promised to follow where you chose to lead. Explanations are superfluous at present. We have just time to reach our destination before nine o'clock."

Zurick's voice was the deciding one. Laverock and Kent followed the dry-faced arbiter. With Mallan bringing up the rear, the philanthropists moved out into the hall. Timothy saw them into their hats and coats.

Then, almost as if by an afterthought, Zurick returned to his study. He came back to the hall, dismissed Timothy, then smiled dryly as he passed out two revolvers: one to Laverock; the other to Kent.

"I have one of my own," observed Zurick to Mallan. "You, I presume are similarly equipped. Come. Let us set forth."

Thus, headed by Ed Mallan, the three philanthropists went forth into the night. Whatever might befall when they encountered Perry and Zane Dolger, one fact was certain: The three philanthropists were ready to act in person when the climax came.

Though they had left the planning to Mallan; though they were accepting his leadership, their schemes regarding the millions of Tobias Dolger had at last required them to come from under cover.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHOWDOWN

"PRETTY near time for that private detective to show up. He said he'd be here at nine o'clock."

The comment came from Zane Dolger. He was pacing back and forth across the library floor. His statement brought a nod from Perry, who was seated in a corner of the room.

"Wonder what he's got on his mind?" queried Zane. "Cardona recommended him. I couldn't do anything but say he could come here."

Zane paused to puff furiously at his pipe. Perry was unconcerned. He smiled as he noted his cousin's anxiety. He added a comment of his own.

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"Don't worry, Zane," Perry advised. "Probably the fellow's putting up a bluff. I got a line on him after you mentioned his name. He's hard-boiled, but pretty much of a hokum artist."

"You found out something about Ed Mallan?" Zane seemed surprised by the statement. "From whom, Perry?"

"From Jackling," returned Perry. "Called him up at his office late this afternoon. He had heard of the fellow. Mallan runs a small-time detective agency. That reminds me" Perry glanced at his watch "there're two things we'd better do before Mallan gets here."

"What are those?"

"Upstairs" Perry made a nudge with his thumb, indicating a trip to the secret room "to make sure all's right. And another call to Jackling. That's my job."

"You mean Jackling may know more?"

"Yes. I told him we were thinking of hiring Mallan as sort of a bodyguard, on account of last night's experience. He said he would get more data on the fellow."

Perry beckoned, strolling toward the front door of the library as he spoke. Zane followed. They reached the front hall. Perry looked about for Rowland. Not seeing the servant, he pointed to the stairs, indicating that Perry should make the trip to the third floor.

In staring, Perry had looked straight toward the rear passage. Had Rowland been standing by the side door of the living room. Perry would have spotted him. But Perry did not see the form that actually was present.

Shrouded in the gloom, a part of the hazy passage, The Shadow was standing silent. Keenly though Perry gazed, he did not sight the cloaked intruder. Perry watched Zane go up stairs.

TAKING advantage of the heir's brief lack of watchfulness, The Shadow opened the door of the library and entered.

Hardly had the black-clad visitant closed the door behind him before he heard footsteps coming from the front hall. Perry was returning to the library.

Instead of returning to the passage, The Shadow chose another door. This led to a small, windowless room in a corner of the library.

The space to which The Shadow took had probably once been used for the storage of books. Its door opened inward against the wall. A molding ran about the small room; this was fitted with hooks, set at intervals of several inches.

Inside, The Shadow swung the door shut just before Perry arrived. Listening from the passage, he had heard Perry's statement regarding a call to Jackling. Peering from his new place of concealment, The Shadow saw Perry pick up the telephone and dial a number. The young man stood waiting for a response. None came.

Perry's back was toward The Shadow. The heir did not turn until after he had hung up the receiver, ending the useless call. At that instant, there was a sharp ring of the front doorbell. Perry stood waiting; the ring was repeated. Angry because Rowland had not responded, the young man strode out through the front door of the library.

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Perry did not answer the door. Instead, he walked to the main stairway and called for Rowland. The servant did not respond; but Zane appeared at the top of the steps.

"Where's Rowland?" demanded Perry, as the door bell rang for a third time.

"Not up here," replied Zane. "In the kitchen, I guess. That must be Mallan."

"I'd like to know –"

Perry stopped as footsteps padded from the rear passage. Rowland appeared and delivered a sheepish grin as he saw Perry's wrathful face.

"Sorry, sir," said the servant. "I was dozing. In the kitchen –"

"Answer the door," broke in Perry. "If it's Mr. Mallan, usher him into the library."

Motioning to Zane, Perry walked into the library. His cousin followed. Perry, about to speak, glanced suspiciously toward the door of the little room. He opened it, pressing the barrier flat against the wall. He saw that the room was empty.

The Shadow had departed his hiding place during Perry's absence.

"What's the matter?" queried Zane.

"Just wanted to make sure this room was empty," responded Perry. "We've got to play our hands close. Listen. We'll stall this dick. Find out what he knows."

"You lead, Perry. I'll follow."

"You've got your gun?"

"Yes. Right here."

Perry tapped his pocket; he nudged Zane to act naturally. Already, footsteps were coming through the outer hall. Evidently Rowland was bringing the visitors in by the side door of the library.

The door swung open as the heirs turned. In stepped Rowland, his face staring. The servant's arms were half upraised. At a gruff command given before Perry or Zane could make a move Rowland stepped aside and backed to the wall.

Stalking rangily inward, with long arm thrust forward, came Ed Mallan.

The detective was pointing a revolver, moving it to cover both the Dolgers. Behind him, spreading out to form a row, followed the three philanthropists. Each of the trio also had a weapon.

"Stick 'em up!" growled Mallan. "Stick 'em up and keep 'em up!"

The heirs obeyed; as they did, Zane uttered a gasp. His deep breath formed a single word, addressed to his cousin:

"Look!"

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PERRY stared. Like Zane he saw the gleam of gold, as conspicuous as the shine of nickel-plated revolvers. The glistening flashes came from the left hands of the men who had entered with Mallan.

The cousins were staring at the signets worn by the three philanthropists. They were in the power of the unknown enemies who held the very secret that they had gained!

"Foxy birds, eh?" quizzed Mallan, in a snarling tone. "Well you pulled a boner this trip. I'm the guy you were waiting for: Ed Mallan. That's me. Coming here to talk things over. Guess you thought I was a dick with a bluff.

"Well, I've got more than bluff. I've got three bozos with me who came along just to hear you little boys speak your piece. Sent the old flunky out to let me in, did you? Well, I covered him the moment I walked in. Brought my friends in after me.

"Know who they are? Well I'll tell you. They're the gents who want the stuff you swiped. Come here to get it and I'm here to see that they do. We're here for a showdown!"

Perry shot a look toward Zane. It commanded silence. Mallan grinned as he saw the glance. The detective lowered his revolver while the philanthropists covered the heirs.

"Not going to talk, eh?" quizzed the dick. "Going to keep mum, are you, big boy?" He stared at Perry; then looked toward Zane. "What about you, Little Rollo?"

No response. The philanthropists appeared anxious, despite their stern expressions. Mallan, however, was unperturbed. He began to talk in a harsh, challenging tone.

"Listen, you mugs," he barked, "you're crooks! What's more, you know it! You committed robbery. We've got plenty on you. But all these fellows want is what belongs to them. Savvy? Come on! Spill it! Where's that box-load of dough?"

Perry stared defiantly, and Zane copied his cousin's example. Mallan's tone became a fierce snarl. The detective was breaking forth with threats.

"I could plug you rats full of lead!" he snarled. "I'd be thanked for it if I did. But I'm going to make you talk. If you don't –"

MALLAN did not complete the statement. He heard a frightened gasp. He turned to note Rowland. The servant was quaking, ready to speak.

"Keep the wise guys covered," said Mallan to the philanthropists. "All right, flunky. You know something, eh? Spill it."

"The box" Rowland's voice came fitfully "the box it's up-stairs. I think. In the secret room that was used by my old master –"

"Have you seen it?" quizzed Mallan.

"No, sir," blurted the servant, "but it must be there. Don't don't shoot the young masters, sir. I can show you the room. They they've been there –"

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Perry hissed an interruption. Rowland quavered. Mallan laughed. Deliberately, he pocketed his revolver. He motioned Rowland toward the door.

"Keep these mugs covered," said Mallan to the philanthropists. He pointed to Perry and Zane. "They've got a hide-out. That's why they're playing dumb. But old faithful here knows about it. I won't need a rod to handle him. Come on, bozo. Say what's your name?"

"Rowland, sir."

"Better than Timothy" Mallan paused to flash a gleaming grin at Lucius Zurick "so come along, whiteface. Let's see this secret room you've been talking about. If the box is there, I'll let you help me lug it downstairs."

Rowland preceded the detective to the door. The servant seemed completely cowed.

Perry, grim-faced, glared at the three philanthropists. He was wondering what stuff they were made of. He saw.

Zurick's parchmentlike features were unyielding. Laverock's upright form bespoke determination. Kent, though slouched, was as stern as the others. Perry made no move; nor did Zane.

But the elder heir began to speak. His words became scoffing. He took advantage of the interim while all were waiting to hurl accusing words at the captors.

"Smug fellows," he challenged. "Coming here for what you call your rights. Actually defying the law. Trying to get back cash that never belonged to you. I can tell by your faces what you are.

"Hypocrites!" Perry hurled the denunciation. "Hypocrites! No the term is too good for you. Thieves! That's what you are. Well, you've played your game. You think you've won it. But you're wrong. All wrong! Listen" Perry's tone was a harsh growl "and take my advice. Drop those guns that you are holding. Pay heed to what lies close behind you. Do you understand?"

The last words were slow. Zane knew their meaning, for he was staring at the door behind the three philanthropists. Zurick, Laverock and Kent they understood also; for their guns dropped from their numbed fingers.

Seven creeping men had come in from behind. Uncouth ruffians had sneaked upon the philanthropists while the three were listening to Perry's sarcastic accusations. Each of the three signet wearers could feel the muzzle of a revolver thrust against his back.

Hands came up as the three dropped their guns. In response to jeering orders, the philanthropists backed against the wall. Zane stared bewildered. Perry laughed coarsely as he made an ironical introduction.

"Allow me," said Perry, indicating two of the ruffians, then bowing to the philanthropists. "I wish to introduce my friends Hoot Shelling and Greasy Karn. They have aided me in the past; and they have come to assist me once again.

CHAPTER XIX. TABLES TURN

OF all the astonished persons in that room. Zane Dolger was the most bewildered. The three philanthropists had been surprised; but their faces showed a certain understanding. To Zane, however, this denouement had

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come as a startling revelation.

Rescuers had arrived; but they were crooks. An evil crew had aligned itself with his cousin. For the first time, Zane realized that Perry had played a double game. Perry a crook. The thought was numbing. But Zane was due for another stroke of treachery.

"Keep them covered" Perry, sneering, was pointing to the philanthropists "and as for this guy" a chuckle as Perry pointed to Zane "keep a rod on him as well. The sap!"

Zane's hands went up automatically. Other gorillas had entered. Nearly a full dozen had assembled. Leading them, ready at Perry's beck, were the two who had been introduced as Hoot Shelling and Greasy Karn.

"You wanted a showdown," declared Perry. "You've got it! I was figuring something might happen to-night. This bunch came from the hide-out. I called them" he paused to turn toward Zane "when I pretended I was phoning Jackling. I told them to be here soon after nine. I called again to make sure they were on their way.

"Well, gang" this was to the crooks in general "we've come to the last job. It's a cinch, boys! Just keep those gats ready. Spread out around the room. We've got a little while to wait.

"In the meantime" he turned to the philanthropists "I'll tell you something. I don't know how you three grabbed my grandfather's dough along with Phraytag but I take it that you're honest. You're too dumb looking to be otherwise."

Perry paused. Having revealed himself as a crook, he seemed to relish the act. He had tired of the part that he had played to dupe Zane.

"As for me," stated Perry, proudly, "I've been crooked all along. Got out of France because I'm wanted for murder there. Under the name of Jacques Duross. That won't do you any good. You won't live to tell it.

"I've been everywhere always crooked and I came here to pick up soft dough. My grandfather's heritage. It didn't look so hot after I got it. Then this fool cousin of mine" a nudge toward Zane "found a secret room. Spotted clues that led to Philip Lyken and was sap enough to tell me.

"I knew the dough was somewhere. I followed the clue, with Zane trailing along with me. Lyken told us about Phraytag. He told us all he knew. That meant curtains for Lyken."

Perry paused again to survey the crew of thugs who were stationed about the room. To a man, they would serve Hoot Shelling; yet Perry saw need of caution. He smiled as he proceeded.

"I KNOW the underworld of every big city," boasted Perry. "I located Hoot in New York. Phraytag had to be bumped. I could do the job myself. But I let Hoot and his mob cover it."

"That fellow there Greasy Karn did his part in the game by sawing into Lyken's place. He and Hoot opened the way. I entered, shot Lyken, touched off the fuse. Then the explosion."

Another laugh. It became more evil as Perry Dolger saw the contempt that had appeared on the face of his cousin, Zane.

"Greasy picked the locks at Phraytag's. I got in there, poisoned the old fellow. That ought to interest you old chaps" Perry turned to the philanthropists "because he was probably one of your bunch. Well, after Phraytag was croaked, I had Greasy waiting out at the cemetery the day that old Phraytag was buried.

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"It was a cinch for Greasy to open the mausoleum. I went in and got the ring. Told cousin Zane I used the caretakers key. Zane helped get the swag I wanted. From you you three dried-up peanuts out of your shells."

Perry paused. His eyes were fierce. He motioned for silence as his henchmen shifted. Listening, he heard no sounds. He completed his story in a low, mean voice.

"Last night" Perry scowled "Hoot sent three gorillas here to bump off Zane and Rowland. I intended to return. Later, I could have taken all the swag for myself. But Hoot's gorillas failed."

"To-night, it's different. I brought the full squad. Made a big catch, didn't I? You three old fools! My sap cousin, Zane! There's two more walking into it. One is Rowland. Humph! He means nothing. But the other" Perry grinned "well, he's a wise guy –"

The speaker paused. Footsteps were clumping down the front stairway. It sounded like two men with a heavy load. Perry Dolger, self-confessed master of crime, knew that Ed Mallan was returning with Rowland.

The footsteps moved into the front room between the hall and the library.

There was a sound of a burden being lowered. Then came louder footsteps.

Mallan was bringing Rowland back to the library.

Perry suppressed a chuckle as he motioned to his men. Gorillas covered the doorway with their gats.

Their purpose was obvious. Mallan and Rowland would be helpless the instant they entered.

Perry watched. The first to appear was the detective. He had let Rowland follow, not worrying about the docile servant. As Perry stared, he saw Mallan stop short, the moment that he entered the room.

There was a tense pause. Perry chuckled. He had Mallan. Rowland was nothing. Then Perry's chuckle ended as a grin appeared upon the face of Ed Mallan.

The detective was not startled. To him, this was a huge joke. Mallan turned to Hoot Shelling.

"All right," said the detective quietly. "Put 'em up. Cover this one guy that's all. He's the prize boob."

Revolvers disappeared some of them. But others remained in view. Those that still flashed in the fist of mobsters were pointed toward a common goal: the figure of Perry Dolger!

ED MALLAN had turned the tables. The detective's gold grin gleamed. Zane Dolger stood astounded. So did the three philanthropists. Hoot Shelling laughed roughly and Greasy Karn followed suit.

"A showdown," declared Mallan. "That's what it is! A surprise for this wise guy" a nudge toward Perry Dolger "who thought he was mighty smart. You want the story?"

Mallan, still ginning, swung to the philanthropists. "All right. I'll spring it."

The private detective paused. Ed Mallan enjoyed a triumphant climax. He had gained one. He was making the most of it.

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"You know part of it to begin with," explained Mallan, addressing Zurick, Laverock and Kent. "I saw these Dolger boys visit Lyken. So I stuck around the jeweler's place. That night, a couple of guys cut their way in."

"I knew the pair. Hoot Shelling and Greasy Karn. I waited. I wanted to see what happened. Well it came. A long wait; then a big explosion. I beat it. The next day I read the newspapers. Lyken had been bumped.

"Hoot didn't rub him out. Neither did Greasy. I knew that. They were cover-up men. Well who did? I had an idea it was one of these Dolger fellows. Nobody else could have had a reason. One of them could have sneaked in easy after Greasy sawed those bars.

"The next night, I went around to Phraytag's. Saw a touring car near the house, so I watched it. Out came Hoot and Greasy. They climbed aboard. I shoved into Phraytag's place and found the old guy dead.

"Who killed him? Same guy that bumped Lyken. One of the Dolger boys. So I put in my report. When you got it" Mallan grinned at the philanthropists "you didn't like it. So you fired me. Then" the dick paused cautiously "well, something went hoey and you had to bring me back.

"Somebody pulled a fast one on you. This guy" a nudge at the cowering Perry "crawled into a mausoleum and grabbed a ring. It was Greasy opened the door for him. Eh, Greasy?"

"Yeah," answered the lock-picking expert. "But I didn't know what he wanted."

"Let it pass," chuckled Mallan. "Anyway, there was a swipe after that. You gents" he nodded to the philanthropists "said Dolger. And I said the same. So I went out to get the swag. I'd heard Hoot and Greasy talking about a hide-out over at Zemo's hock shop in Brooklyn. So that's where I went. I found they'd already sent three gorillas to bump off Zane Dolger.

"Then I knew that Perry was crooked but Zane wasn't. It was too late to stop the gang. I was sorry for this guy Zane, like I was for Lyken and Phraytag, especially because I didn't save Lyken and Phraytag.

"But Zane Dolger got out of it. That made the rest easy. I fixed it with Hoot and Greasy to pull a fast one on Perry. 'Do what he says,' I told them, 'but hold it until I walk in. Then spring the fast one on the guy.

"So you've got him, Mr. Zurick. There he is Perry Dolger. Hoot and Greasy have come over with me. Tell 'em what to do with Perry. They're waiting for orders."

LUCIUS ZURICK was smiling. The other two philanthropists were still amazed; but their chief was ready to act. Tersely, in commanding tones, Zurick gave his orders.

"I have shipping connections," he announced. "Take this man" a contemptuous wave toward Perry Dolger "to Pier E 16, on the East River. Turn him over to Captain La Greve, of the tramp steamer, Lille.

"Tell them that your prisoner has admitted that he is Jacques Duross. Let La Greve carry him to France and collect whatever reward is waiting the delivery. Go."

Hoot and Greasy hesitated. Ed Mallan growled his approval of Zurick's order.

"You heard him," asserted the dick. "Get going!"

Thugs moved. Gun muzzles jabbed Perry Dolger's back. The crew of gorillas filed from the library. Footsteps faded. The side door closed.

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IT was then that Rowland appeared. Mallan chuckled. The servant had wisely kept behind. He had heard the events within the library.

"Come on," suggested Mallan. "We've got rid of the bad egg. Give me a hand, Rowland. We're bringing in the box."

The servant looked toward Zane Dolger. The younger heir nodded. Zane was still half-stunned by the amazing sequence of events. He watched Mallan and Rowland bring in the metal coffer. The detective prepared to unclamp the iron bands. He was stopped by Lucius Zurick.

"Just a moment, Mallan" the philanthropist's tone was one of dry humor "before you open the coffer. I know that you were acquainted with Hoot and Greasy. Your rejected report told us that. I suspected, to-night, that you had made some arrangement to counteract Perry Dolger. But how did you manage it?"

"Easy," replied the detective, as he undid the clamps of the coffer. "Hoot and Greasy were crooks, weren't they? Working for dough, weren't they?"

"Yes," replied Zurick.

"Well," asserted Mallan. "I blew in on them at Zemo's. Asked 'em what they'd been paid. Five grand, they said, from Perry Dolger. That made it a cinch for me."

"You paid them –"

"The extra ten grand that I got from you. When you said ten, I hollered for twenty. I'm no chiseler. I didn't want it for myself. I wanted that extra dough to buy off the bunch."

Zurick nodded his understanding. He was lost in admiration of Mallan's cleverness. The lid of the box was coming open; but Zurick was not impressed by the regained millions. He was still thinking of Mallan's ruse.

"You know the criminal mind, Mallan," decided Zurick. "That much is certain."

"Maybe," returned Mallan. "Maybe not. I know one thing, though. Guys like Hoot Shelling and Greasy Karn will always sell out to the bird that shows the most dough. That's why they switched from Perry Dolger to Ed Mallan."

That was the detective's final comment. Lucius Zurick, like Guy Laverock and Harbrook Kent, had become concerned with the funds that lay intact within the coffer. Zane Dolger, still half stunned by all that occurred, was staring helplessly.

Only Rowland was standing by. A change had come over his face. His thin lips formed a smile. Within the brain behind Rowland's face, a single thought was uppermost. That was the final statement that Ed Mallan had made: that crooks like Hoot and Greasy will sell out to the highest bidder.

That statement had referred to the past. Mallan's impressions had stopped there. But that which had held in the past might hold in the future, also!

CHAPTER XX. THE LAST RECKONING

THREE chuckling men. Such were the philanthropists as they fumbled the wealth within the iron coffer.

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Zane Dolger watched them. He saw the glitter of their signets. Again, he realized that these were the other holders of the rings that Philip Lyken had prepared at his grandfather's order.

They were men of Phraytag's ilk. That thought came suddenly to Zane. Stunned by the revelation that his cousin Perry was a self-confessed crook, Zane had forgotten all else. But Perry belonged to the past. This was the present. These three invaders, through their tool Ed Mallan had dealt with crooks.

It was not justice, to Zane's belief, this regaining of the wealth in the coffer. It was a double cross. Crooks against crooks. True that Perry had delivered murder and had lulled Zane with the belief that hidden enemies were in back of the deaths. But did that clear the philanthropists?

No! Zane eyed the gloating men who wore the signets. They were chuckling over their recovery of wealth that had been his grandfather's. Perry dealing in treachery had wanted that pelf for himself. Perry had been double-crossed. But Zane thought of himself. He had played on the level. The funds were still here, in his own house. The philanthropists not he were in the wrong.

Coming to action, Zane thrust a hand to a pocket of his coat. He was about to pull his revolver, ready to battle with these enemies. Counting on Rowland's support in the pinch, the young heir was as determined as he had been in his situation on the night preceding. He was about to cover the philanthropists. His gun was coming into view.

"Lay off!" came a growl.

Zane's fingers opened. The revolver dropped back into his pocket. He had forgotten Ed Mallan. The philanthropists had turned their full concern to the funds in the coffer; but the dick had kept his eyes open. He had acted more swiftly than Zane. The heir was staring into the mouth of the detective's gat.

Zane's hands came up. His eyes turned toward Rowland. The servant was standing helplessly, near the door to the little windowless room in the corner of the library. Zane saw no help from Rowland.

The philanthropists raised their heads. They arose from the coffer. Their guns came into view. Backing Mallan, they let the detective speak. Mallan was emphatic when he addressed Zane Dolger.

"YOU'RE in luck, guy," growled the dick. "I had you figured as a pal of that phony cousin of yours. But it looks like he was double-crossing you. So that lets you out if you don't make trouble.

"These gents" Mallan waved toward the philanthropists "are taking this box out with them. Get that? And you're going to let them do it. There's a lot of dough here; it don't matter how they got it. Wherever they put it, the stuff is theirs.

"When they've moved out, I'm staying here. Keeping you on good behavior, little Fauntleroy. This flunky of yours, too. Then, when I get a call from my bosses when they tell me that they've tucked the dough away then I'll let you off. After you promise to stay good. Get it?"

"This is robbery!" exclaimed Zane. "You are crooks the lot of you. I am in my home. You have entered unlawfully. The contents of that box are mine by possession. You are here in a criminal capacity all of you!"

Zane's voice had risen almost to a shout when he finished. The heir was staring squarely at Mallan and the philanthropists. The detective chuckled.

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"Maybe we are busting the law right now," admitted Mallan. "But we won't be, after we're out of this house. And who's going to find us while we're here?"

Zane's sober face suddenly displayed a broad grin. Mallan stared. He noted that Zane was looking past him. The detective wheeled. His gun arm dropped.

The philanthropists turned; like Mallan, they lowered their revolvers.

Standing just within the doorway was Detective Joe Cardona. The acting inspector was holding a leveled revolver. With him was detective Sergeant Markham, also ready with a weapon. Entering the house, these exponents of the law had heard sounds in the library.

"A NEW game, eh?" quizzed Joe, as he motioned with his left hand. Mallan and the philanthropists dropped their weapons to the floor. "So that's why you wanted to get in here, eh, Mallan? I wondered about you when you nosed down to headquarters. Knew you were coming up here; thought I'd drop in later on and find out what you were trying to pull.

"I didn't figure you for rough stuff. I had a hunch you might be going to pull some flimflam on the Dolger boys. That was all. So Markham and I strolled in; and this is what we found. You and these three" Cardona paused to study the philanthropists "well, they don't look any too good to me."

Joe motioned with his gun. He backed the philanthropists up against the wall, along with Ed Mallan. Then, without turning his vigilance from the prisoners, Joe put a question to Zane Dolger.

"Where's your cousin?" questioned the sleuth. "They didn't get him, did they?"

"Yes," blurted Zane, "but he deserved it! I'll tell you the story, Cardona. My cousin Perry was a crook. He killed Lyken and Phraytag. He admitted it tonight. He had crooks with him Hoot Shelling and Greasy Karn and after the murders, Perry stole a signet ring from the body of Elwood Phraytag. After the corpse was in the mausoleum.

"A signet like those three" Zane motioned toward the hands of the philanthropists "and it told us the hiding place of my grandfather's lost millions. I didn't know that Perry was a crook. I helped him get that coffer, with all the wealth that it contains. We hid it here, in the house.

"Perry sent those crooks here last night. Steve Lagrin and the other two gorillas. They came to murder me, but they failed. To-night, Mallan brought these three men with him and made Rowland tell where the coffer was hidden. Then Hoot and Greasy showed up with their mob."

"To help your cousin?" demanded Joe.

"Yes." It was Mallan who growled the answer. "But they took Perry Dolger away. Shipping him to France, where he's wanted for murder."

"They turned against him?" Cardona's voice was incredulous.

"Sure!" chuckled Mallan. "I bought them out! But it looks like I bungled" the dick's voice became sour "when it came to the finish. Well, it's just a bad break, your coming in here, Joe."

"Not at all." It was Lucius Zurick who spoke, in his dry chuckle. "After all, this young man Zane Dolger is honest. Therefore, it is fortunate that the law has intervened. Had you come sooner" this to Cardona "I

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should have let you take Perry Dolger; and it might have been possible to capture the mobsters as well. But circumstances forced us to let Hoot and Greasy depart.

"Allow me" gingerly, the old philanthropist drew back his coat lapel and plucked a folded paper from his inside pocket "to show this document to Zane Dolger. I intended to produce it later; my interest in the recovery of the coffer forced me to postpone that task."

ZURICK handed the document to Zane. The young man began to read it. His face changed. He turned to Cardona and motioned the detective to lower his gun. Joe complied. He sensed that the paper had altered the situation.

"This is addressed to Elwood Phraytag," explained Zane. "It is signed by my grandfather. It gives full possession of these funds to Phraytag and three others. Their names" Zane read them: "Lucius Zurick; Guy Laverock; Harbrook Kent."

"These three men?" questioned Joe, turning to Mallan.

"Yeah," replied the lanky dick. "But I didn't know Mr. Zurick had a paper like that."

"Certain business concerned ourselves," crackled Zurick, with a smile. "I and my associates had our affairs to handle. Just as you had yours, Mallan."

"Here's the paper," said Zane, passing it to Cardona. "It was signed by my grandfather properly attested during his lifetime. He had the right to dispose of his possessions."

"He wanted us," explained Zurick, "to hold his funds for philanthropic purposes. To begin with gifts anonymous ones one year after his death. He ordered the signet rings; one for each of us.

"Tobias Dolger had led a grasping life. He made amends for it before he died. The rings, after the engraving had been completed, were delivered directly to Phraytag. Lyken's bill came in while Tobias Dolger was ill. He requested Phraytag to take care of it.

"Phraytag paid Lyken for silence. But we mistrusted the jeweler. We had Mallan watch him. Then Perry Dolger entered. We knew that some one – possibly Perry was responsible for the deaths of Lyken and Phraytag. But the preservation of our funds was essential. Believing them safe, we waited.

"When they were removed, we suspected that they were here. We hired Mallan again even though we had not approved his negligence in letting Lyken and Phraytag be slain while he was close at hand. We felt that we were dealing with murderers, so we gave Mallan carte blanche. To act as he might choose.

"He bought out Perry's evil crew. We did not know it at the time. But Mallan was sure that we would have the upper hand here to-night. So we accompanied him. Perry proved his perfidy. You, Zane, have shown yourself honest.

"None of us ever visited your grandfather, with the exception of Elwood Phraytag. He conducted all negotiations regarding the funds. James Jackling knew that he visited here. Perhaps Rowland could make a statement to that effect –"

ZURICK paused. He was looking for the old servant. But Rowland had moved away. There was only one course that he could have taken. He must have entered the little room in the corner of the library, while the others were talking.

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Puzzled, Zurick stepped toward the closed door in the corner. He stopped short. Like the others, he whirled at the sound of a vicious, snarling voice.

New intruders had entered the house. Men who had been here before. Hoot Shelling was at one door, backed by gorillas; Greasy Karn at the other, with a crew. Leveled revolvers covered all within the library excepting one man who had stepped into the room. It was he who had snarled.

This man was Perry Dolger.

The chief of the crooks had returned; his minions were once more at his heels. Revolver in hand, Perry had come back with the horde that had captured him. He had won back the men whom Ed Mallan had bought over.

Into a scene of fairness and justice had stepped the evil genius whose ways had been thwarted. Perry Dolger's eyes were upon the open coffer which contained the treasure of the philanthropists.

A final reckoning had been in the making. Wealth had been properly claimed. That was ended. Once again, a fiendish adventurer was prepared to pluck ill-gotten funds from the hands of the philanthropists.

CHAPTER XXI. THE SHADOW'S PART

"FOOLS!" snarled Perry Dolger. "This will be your finish! You three old clucks" he leered at the philanthropists "and this dud my cousin who was going to pass up his chance for millions!"

"You fellows" he sneered at Cardona and Markham, who were standing with lowered revolvers "are out of luck. You'll get the works along with the rest. But the prize dummy of the lot is this guy Ed Mallan!"

Perry was relishing his triumph over the private detective. Mallan was standing with mouth half open. His gawky figure was ridiculous, with its upraised arms.

"Crooks sell out to the highest bidder," chuckled Perry. "You found that out, Mallan, when you paid Hoot ten grand to raise the five grand that I gave him. But you were too dumb to figure that I could raise the ante.

"I did it, when they were carrying me to the boat. They gave me a chance to talk. I told them what was behind the game. Not murder no mausoleums not signet rings but real swag and plenty of it.

"They were wise enough to know that there was something worth while getting from this house. But they didn't guess the size of the swag until I told them. Millions! Fifty-fifty between me and the crowd. That makes ten thousand look like chicken feed."

Perry strode across the room, straight to the little door in the corner. The door was ajar; Perry placed his hand upon the barrier, preparing to push it inward. He turned to Hoot and Greasy.

"Rowland ducked in here," Perry told the crooks. "I'll cover him; then we'll hand the works to the whole crowd. Rub them out when I give the word. Then the getaway with the swag."

Swinging to the door, Perry pushed it inward. Hoot, Greasy and the gorillas could not see into the little room; but Perry Dolger did. Snarling, the chief of crime dropped back.

Quickly, he tried to fire. He was too late.

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An automatic thundered from the little room. Perry sprawled upon the floor.

The author of the shot stepped forth from blackness. It was not Rowland. The old servant could never have masked himself in cloak and hat of blackness; nor could he have delivered the laugh that came with the timely shot.

The Shadow! Eyes blazing, fists extended, looming automatics ready, the master avenger had come to play his part.

HIS spreading hands were on the way to two objectives: those doorways where armed thugs stood awaiting the word to deliver slaughter.

Revolvers flashed as wild lips snarled. Gorillas were swinging away from those whom they had covered. A dozen revolvers were aiming for The Shadow. But the automatics were already busy.

Mammoth muzzles belched their cannonade. Straight into the two groups of clustered crooks The Shadow delivered burning bullets. Men sprawled as the leaden slugs found human flesh. From perfect ambush, The Shadow was dispatching messages of death.

The flashes of the automatics came in machinelike rapidity. Revolvers barked hopelessly amid the tattoo of The Shadow's .45s. Wild shots ripped splinters from the doorway close beside The Shadow. But they came on the heels of the automatic fire.

Backing with the recoil of his guns, The Shadow was fading into the little room. His volleys had thinned the ranks of the enemies. But this was the chance for the remaining crew. The Shadow had loosed the entire contents of his guns.

Hoot Shelling had slumped to the floor. Greasy Karn, protected by the body of a dying thug, remained unwounded. With a fierce cry for others to follow, Greasy pounced forward with frenzied gorillas at his heels.

At that instant, Cardona and Markham fired. Neglected when every mobster had sought The Shadow as a target, the headquarters men still had their revolvers. Zane Dolger yanked his gun. So did Ed Mallan. The mobsters behind Greasy found themselves engaged in a terrific brawl.

But Greasy had gained the door of the little room. His ready revolver was pointed inward. His finger was on the trigger, ready to fire a shot that was never due for delivery.

In front of Greasy was The Shadow, backed in the windowless room. He had dropped his brace of automatics. His gloved hands were sweeping new weapons into view.

A tongue of flame! Greasy coughed and sagged. The Shadow leaped forward, across the crook leader's drooping body. The Shadow's ruse had worked. He had drawn the attack. Whether or not the others had intervened, he would have been prepared.

THE intervention of Cardona and the others had demanded new effort on The Shadow's part. Cardona had dropped one gorilla; the others were grappling with Markham, Mallan and Zane Dolger. Even the three philanthropists were fighting with two crooks whom they had seized from behind.

One gorilla wrestled free. He aimed for Lucius Zurick. Then came a burst of The Shadow's left-hand automatic. The gorilla's shot remained unfired as the man toppled to the floor.

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Shots burst of a sudden. Markham went down, a bullet in his shoulder. A swinging gun-hand dealt a glancing blow to Cardona's hat-covered head. Zane Dolger went rolling on the floor with the mobster whom he was fighting. The crook came free, aiming to kill.

Again the roar of an automatic. Zane was saved. The quick shot dropped the aiming gorilla.

Others wheeled to meet the menace of The Shadow. Roars of the automatics gained the verdict. Cardona, though half stunned; Zane, though sprawled upon the floor both were timely in their aid. They fired their revolvers in accompaniment to The Shadow's automatics.

The last gorilla, battling with the philanthropists, managed a shot that crippled Guy Laverock. Centered among the three men, the crook had been safe from The Shadow's aim. He wriggled free as Laverock fell away; then aimed for Kent.

Two shots came at once. A flash from The Shadow's right-hand automatic. A puny burst from the revolver that Lucius Zurick wielded. Both bullets found their target. The last mobster collapsed.

THE SHADOW had reached the center of the room. Swinging, he swept through the side door of the library, passing over the huddled forms of crooks.

Joe Cardona, aided to his feet by Ed Mallan, looked upon the scene of chaos.

Crooks wounded, dying and dead were spread about the floor. In the last group were Hoot and Greasy. The Shadow had dealt death to them.

Perry Dolger's form was lying by the door to the little room. Zane hurried over and bent above his cousin. Perry looked up, and his eyes were evil as his lips formed a snarl that ended in a gasp.

First to encounter The Shadow, Perry had received a mortal wound. As Zane stood silent, his treacherous cousin delivered a dying cough. Perry Dolger, murderer and chief of crime, was among the dead.

Joe Cardona took charge. Markham and Laverock were wounded. They, like some of the crippled mobsters, needed prompt attention. Joe put in a call for aid.

It was after the ambulances had gone; after bodies had been loaded for shipment to the morgue that Joe Cardona stood in the library, listening to the final settlement.

Police Commissioner Wainwright Barth had arrived. He was talking to the men concerned.

Lucius Zurick and Harbrook Kent were seated with Ed Mallan standing beside them. Zane Dolger was opposite, with James Jackling for the attorney had been summoned to the scene.

Barth was standing in critical fashion, his long neck craned forward. His eyes were glittering through his pince-nez spectacles as the commissioner delivered his decision.

"The funds are yours," he said to the philanthropists. "Zane Dolger has waived all claim, in respect to his grandfather's wishes."

"You can put the coffer back where it belongs," assured Zane, producing the signet which had belonged to Phraytag. "Here, Mr. Zurick, is the missing ring. You may rest assured that I shall forget its secret."

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"Not at all," crackled Zurick, with a smile. He returned the ring to Zane. "You may keep it. You, too, shall have access to the funds. You may aid us in the coming philanthropies.

"But before we donate to charity, we shall make a more personal gift. Your grandfather, Zane, cut off his heirs, because he thought that there could be no good men among them. He was wrong.

"Therefore, a share of his wealth shall be yours. A generous portion. It is your right. The rest for charity. Do you agree, Kent?"

"I do," wheezed Kent, with a nod.

"That settles it," smiled Zurick. "We shall inform Laverock, at the hospital, regarding our decision. But already two of us have voted. Your share, Zane, is assured."

As Zane held the signet in his left hand, he stretched forth his right to receive Zurick's warm clap. Honesty had gained Zane Dolger wealth that he had deserved.

SHORTLY afterward, Joe Cardona stood alone. The two philanthropists had gone with Mallan. Zane Dolger had departed with Jackling. Commissioner Barth had followed, leaving Joe Cardona in full charge.

Recalling the hectic fight, Joe realized that few knew its important details. They had connected Rowland's disappearance with the arrival of The Shadow. But only Joe Cardona realized fully what had happened.

Rowland had disappeared completely. Joe knew the answer as he stepped into the little room. He saw the hook behind the inward-moving door. He knew that this cache could well have hidden The Shadow's garments and those deadly automatics which had appeared when needed.

Footsteps came from the hall. Smiling, yet half wondering, Cardona stepped from the little room. He saw a policeman entering. Then Joe stared grimly as the two other officers followed, carrying a body.

"Found him upstairs," explained an officer. "In a little room. Second floor."

Joe Cardona looked toward the corpse. The detective's breath came with a deep choke. The dead man whom the cops had lugged here was Rowland, the missing servant!

Joe was stunned. He remained motionless. He recalled Rowland's departure; The Shadow's appearance. Numbed, he believed that The Shadow was dead. A police surgeon had followed the officers into the library. As the bluecoats withdrew, the physician made a statement.

"Odd," he remarked. "This man has been dead for at least twenty-four hours!"

SUDDEN understanding came to Joe Cardona. He knew The Shadow's part at last. Crooks had come here one night ago. They had blackjacked Rowland. The Shadow had saved Zane Dolger by a swift fray.

Rowland had appeared afterward. Presumably, he had been knocked out but had recovered. For the first time Cardona had realized the truth. Rowland had been killed by Steve Lagrin's blackjack.

It had not been Rowland who had testified. The Shadow, after saving Zane, had gone back to aid the servant. Finding Rowland dead, he had stowed away the body. He had disguised himself as the dead man. The Shadow since last night had been the servant in this house!

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Joe saw the perfection of The Shadow's scheme. Crime was due here. He had been ready for it. At any time, The Shadow could have intervened. Dropping the part of Rowland, he could have frustrated any of the persons involved.

But The Shadow had bided his time. As Rowland, he had let one surprise follow another. Each new development had been but temporary. All the while, The Shadow was expecting the final climax.

After Cardona and Markham had arrived, The Shadow knew that a grim game still remained. He had anticipated that Perry Dolger would buy back the thugs who had sold out to Ed Mallan.

As Rowland, The Shadow had sensed the return of the crooked band. He had sidled into the living room. He had dropped the role of servant to assume his menacing guise of black. He had brought the final reckoning. Death to men of evil; wealth to men of honor.

ELSEWHERE, a bluish light was burning. Its rays shone upon the polished table of The Shadow's sanctum. A hand was writing, in ink that would not fade, inscribing lines of words upon to page of a huge book.

The writing ended. Long hands closed the massive volume. They lifted the bulky tome; the light clicked out. Then came a laugh sinister but triumphant that stirred up weird echoes from the tomblike walls.

Silence followed amid the solid blackness. The book was closed. Strife was finished. The story of the four philanthropists the strange tale of the four gold signets those facts had been recorded in the archives of The Shadow.

THE END