

MALMORDO

Maxwell Grant

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MALMORDO

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

LIKE some weird creature from the deep, the crawling fog enveloped the Steamship Santander as she lay at her North River pier. From the grimy blackness that represented the river came the deep-throated blares of steamship whistles and the shrill squeals of tug-boats, like voices urging the thick mist forward.

The fog was kind to the Santander.

For one thing, the fog hadn't arrived until the banana boat had docked, so now its hemming mass was harmless. And now, artistically speaking, the drizzling mist was giving this floating junk-pile both grace and proportions that had never belonged to such a ship.

The dim, dewy pier lights scarcely reached the side of the Santander. Her hulk, fog-painted a whitish gray, seemed to be undergoing the swathes of an invisible brush that produced a streamlined effect of motion. Magnified by that blanketing gray, the Santander literally towered out of sight, creating the illusion that this squatty tub had the bulk of a leviathan.

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Between the varied blasts of the frequent river whistles came silence, broken only by an occasional splash. An angler might have mistaken those sounds for jumping fish, except that fish didn't jump in the oily, ugly water flanking these piers.

Then, like a warning all its own, came a slow, flat beat of footsteps tramping inward from the pier end in slow, methodical rhythm. As those footsteps neared a light that was hanging from a post, they were accompanied by a creaking from dried, warped boards that formed the surface of the pier.

Out of the fog loomed a burly policeman who, like the Santander, looked three sizes bigger. His footbeats stopped as he heard a movement beside him; bringing his swinging club to his fist, the officer turned sharply. The stir had come from a batch of packing-cases stacked near the post. Hearing it again, the patrolman crouched and began a slow-motion approach to the pile of boxes.

Again the stack wobbled, to the accompaniment of a creak. The officer straightened with a short laugh. A loose plank had jiggled the packing-cases, that was all. After testing it a few times, the officer continued his patrol toward the shore.

Whistles sounded intermittently, punctuated by those curious, recurrent splashes from alongside the Santander. Then, from back where other lights formed glowing dots and nothing more, came the plodding beats of the patrolman's footsteps, making their return.

This time those beats halted at short intervals. Close to the post-light, the patrolman showed his face in the murky glow and his expression was troubled. He took a few more paces, stopped and listened. From behind him he heard a slow creak-creak like something governed by remote control. It couldn't be the echoes of his own footsteps; echoes didn't act that way, nor footsteps either.

He couldn't have been as clumsy as he looked, this cop, for at the end of half a dozen paces he made a neat, deft shift beyond the packing-cases. There, crouching, he put away his night-stick and drew a revolver instead. There wasn't any guessing about those creaking sounds, not any longer. They were approaching and with them bringing cautious foot-steps.

The crouching officer shifted upward, forward. He elbowed one of the packing-cases and then grabbed at it. The box didn't fall, although the cop's clutch was limited to his finger-nails. It must have struck a propping box beyond. But the sound was heard by that other man, approaching through the fog. The creaky shuffle did a sidestep and halted.

There was only one place where the newcomer could have located himself; that was behind the post, beyond the glare of the already muffled light. Pointing his revolver at the post, the patrolman demanded hoarsely:

"Who's there?"

A voice returned the challenge with, "So it's you, Moultrie!" and a stocky man edged into sight around the old wooden post. Moultrie, the patrolman, slid away his revolver and fumbled for the night-stick, trying to change his sheepish look to match the poker-faced expression that showed on the swarthy face of the stocky man.

"I didn't know who you were, Inspector -"

"That's all right, Moultrie," interposed the stocky arrival. "You're on duty to question people. I wasn't sure who you were, either, the way you kept halting your patrol. Notice anything special back there?"

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"Only – well, only that I must have heard you following me –?"

There was an interrupting nod. Inspector Joe Cardona, despite his dead–pan manner, could sympathize with a slight case of the jitters. In fact, though he didn't mention it publicly, his years of experience had convinced Cardona that a certain amount of nerves rendered a patrolman alert and therefore made him a good patrolman.

This applied to Moultrie. Cardona gestured to the stack of packing–cases.

"Think there's anything in there, Moultrie?"

"I don't think so, Inspector," returned the cop, glad that his shift behind the stack had been interpreted as a performance of duty. "Those boxes wobbled when I was going past, but it may have been on account of this."

To illustrate, Moultrie stepped over to the right board and pressed his foot on it. The boxes wobbled accordingly and the tilted one threatened to topple, but didn't. Then, approaching the boxes, Moultrie added:

"I looked through them earlier. Maybe I ought to do the same right now, Inspector, even though they're empty –"

By way of illustrating the final point, the patrolman thwacked one of the packing cases with his club and automatically modified his statement. Something bounced from beneath the empty box, scudded across the planking and disappeared between the pier edge and the moored Santander, concluding its trip with one of the sharp splashes that had been featuring the entire evening.

Even in the gloom, Cardona and Moultrie didn't fail to recognize the creature as a sizeable rat, which didn't require the magnifying effect of the fog to class it as an unusually large specimen.

"Whoof!" exclaimed Moultrie. "That was a big one!"

"Not as big as the kind we're looking for," returned Cardona, "nor as slimy. Human rats, those stowaways that have been slipping into port, from where and how we don't know."

Cardona's lips kept moving along that line of talk but Moultrie didn't hear him. The Queen Mary was speaking from somewhere in the fog, the grand diapason of her whistle threatening to rip the mist asunder. Even the planking of the old pier quivered under such vibration and the topmost packing case began toppling, only to tilt back the other way as though hoisted from within.

It would have taken a dozen rats to have accomplished that, but Cardona and Moultrie were both turned away, hence they failed to witness the phenomenon. Then, when the ear–shattering blares from the Queen Mary ended, Cardona managed to get some parting words across to Moultrie.

"The police boats take over at midnight," declared the inspector. "Until then" – Cardona's hand made a sweeping gesture meant to include the pier as far as its invisible outer end – "it's yours."

With that, Moultrie resumed his outbound patrol, much bolstered by Cardona's visit, plus the fact that there was less than a half hour remaining to midnight. Cardona watched the pacing patrolman disappear into the fog; then turned shoreward. But at the first post with its foggy light, the inspector halted. In mentioning the time limit of Moultrie's patrol, Cardona had brought to mind an appointment of his own.

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From his pocket, the inspector produced a folded piece of cardboard and opened it in the light. It was a half a menu card, which had measured about six by nine inches until someone had torn it across the middle, the short way. What Cardona held was the upper half.

The heading of the card read as follows:

MIDNIGHT REVEL

at the

CAFE DE LA MORTE

IN

Greenwich Village

MENU FOR MONDAY

Part of the menu list remained but most of it had been torn away, reducing the card chiefly to an announcement, accentuated by the upper portions of a pair of skeletons that stood at each side like heralds, pointing to the heading. But there was something else that interested Cardona more.

Three words of the heading were circled with a thick black ring, made by an artist's crayon. Those three words were "Midnight," "Morte," and "Monday." Right now, midnight was approaching, the word morte meant death, and today happened to be Monday.

Probably a hoax, this card, like many other such trophies that the police received, but Inspector Cardona wasn't passing it by. As an anonymous communication, it was terse and to the point; it showed intelligence behind it, which wasn't usual with a crank note.

And thinking further in terms of the unusual, Cardona had heard that the newly-opened Cafe de la Morte was a most unusual place, worthy of a visit during one of its midnight revels. Having intended to go there anyway, Cardona could think of no more fitting occasion than tonight.

Timed to the fading beat of Moultrie's plodding march, Cardona's creaky footsteps dwindling in the opposite direction, leaving only the thickening swirl of fog upon the gloom-laden pier.

CHAPTER II

MINUTES until midnight.

Slowly, those minutes were ticking by, broken as before by the weird whistle blasts and those maddening splashes which now meant rats. Choked more than ever by the fog, the light from the pier post failed even to reach the bulking side of the Santander. Glowing downward, that light barely disclosed the warped planking of the pier beneath it.

Then even those boards were obscured, but not by fog.

Something that swirled more fantastically than the mist was cutting off the gleam. A figure, shapeless at first, had moved up beside the post to appear only as a darkened smudge of enormous size. Then, momentarily

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revealed in a fog rift which its own arrival produced, the figure showed as a human form cloaked in black, with a slouch hat above.

Gathering as if by command, the fog shrouded the mysterious arrival, whose disappearance, as much as his brief disclosure, marked him as that legendary personage known as The Shadow.

At least it wasn't strange that The Shadow should have put in an appearance here. The setting was of his choice, the situation intriguing, particularly because it had already attracted the attention of the police, whose interests were The Shadow's also.

The uncanny part was that The Shadow should arrive, as usual, just as the situation was taking an important turn. Hardly was The Shadow at his chosen post, before the mass of packing-boxes stirred.

From that stack emerged a darkish man wearing old, ill-fitting clothes. His teeth gleamed white as he turned his grinning face and even the dull light produced the glitter of gold ear-rings from beneath the shaggy black hair that made the man's old straw hat appear two sizes small.

The Shadow observed that this man's baggy trousers, frayed jersey, even the straw hat, were all dark in color, giving him an advantage in the night fog. For when the darkish man completed a slink to the side of the Santander, he became quite inconspicuous against that background.

There was a sharp, low hiss, like a signal. It came from the grinning lips of the darkish man. A pause, then the signal was repeated. This time it brought a response. A man in the gray working clothes of a sailor appeared several feet above, like something floating in the fog, until a slight swirl revealed that he was leaning over the rail of a lower deck of the Santander.

The sailor spoke, in foreign accent:

"That you, Panjo?"

From below, the hiss turned to a snarl, then became words.

"Give no names, please." Panjo spoke it more like an order than a request. "You tell me, you bring birds?"

"Tried to bring them," replied the sailor, "but no luck this trip."

Panjo didn't seem to understand.

"I come for birds," he snarled. "You let me have them now, see? You let me have them quick."

"No luck, I tell you. They're all dead."

"You kill them? Why?"

The sailor laughed at Panjo's query.

"You want to know what killed them?" asked the sailor. "Listen, if you want to hear."

Whistles throated through the fog, then ceased. The sounds that supplanted them were those same, startling splashes from the water beside the ship.

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"That's what killed them," informed the sailor. "The rats. They flattened the cages to get at them. I mean it, Panjo."

Again, Panjo delivered a half-snarled hiss. It wasn't just a reminder that he didn't want his name mentioned. It was a warning, too, induced by the returning pound of Moultrie's footbeats. The sailor slid down behind the solid rail of the deck, while Panjo crouched low against the background of the ship. They remained that way while the patrolman passed, bound toward the shore end of the pier. The figures reappeared and the conversation was resumed.

"You bring no birds," rebuked Panjo, in an ugly tone, "so why do you bring rats?"

"Because we take food to Europe," the sailor explained. "The rats know it comes from the ship, so they come on board to get their share."

"But no food they find. So why they stay?"

"They want to get to the place where the food came from. Rats are smart that way."

Panjo thought that over. Then, sharply he asked:

"You bring birds from Europe?"

"Parrots, macaws and such?" queried the sailor. "We picked them up in South America, on the way back, where we unloaded surplus military supplies."

"If rats so smart," conjectured Panjo, "why they not go ashore then?"

"Because the South Americans were smarter. They took the supplies and left us the rats. We unloaded onto little boats – lighters they call them – outside the harbor!"

"And then you pick up birds?"

"That's right. We took on a cargo of mahogany logs that they towed out on barges, because they're too heavy to float by themselves." The sailor leaned well over the rail, as though to become confidential. "That's how I made the deal for the birds, Panjo. The men on the lighters fixed it with the barge men."

Panjo was still obdurate. There was something sullen in the darkish man's snarl:

"Maybe something more big than rat kill bird."

Their faces were sharply etched, Panjo's and the sailor's, for there wasn't much distance between them.

Panjo was glaring upward, the sailor staring downward, so neither noticed the shape that glided to the side of the Santander, somewhat toward the bow. In fact, the shape couldn't be seen at all, though it manifested its presence by the eddy it produced in the fog.

In a sense, The Shadow was surrounded by a ghostly wrapping that finally dissipated itself as he reached the ship's side and began an upward climb toward the higher bulwark near the bow.

Meanwhile, the sailor was parrying with Panjo.

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"Something bigger than rats?" The sailor's face scowled down at Panjo. "Like what for instance?"

Before Panjo could specify, there came a louder splash from near the ship, a sound which by comparison with those earlier plops could represent something of human size. The sailor turned quickly and Panjo, giving his head a quick tilt to make sure the patrolman wasn't near, traced a rapid course back toward the stacked packing cases.

Hardly had Panjo reached there, before another man-sized splash was heard off the bow of the Santander. It was then apparent that Panjo hadn't wheeled away just to hide. He was turning again, to get a better look at the Santander, to see what was happening on its upper decks.

Panjo made only one mistake. From this range, he couldn't hope to see much through the soupy fog. The sailor's plan was better; he was racing up a companionway, shouting for other crew members to join him and find out what was happening on board. Nevertheless, Panjo did see something, thanks to a brilliant light which suddenly arrived atop a stumpy mast near the bow of the Santander.

Some crew member had turned on the light just in time and at the wrong time.

What Panjo saw was a figure like a monstrous bat, rising above the bulwark of the Santander, spreading what seemed to be gigantic wings for a forward swoop. The thing was human-sized and Panjo, terror-stricken by the very sight of it, shrieked wild words that stabbed like a warning through the fog.

"Vourdalak!" screamed Panjo. "Vourdalak! Nosferadu! Vampyr! Vampyr!"

Those last words struck an echoing note. From the far side of the Santander, near the bow which none of the sailors had yet reached, came a high, frantic shout:

"Vampiro! Vampiro!"

Moultrie was arriving on the run. The patrolman saw the thing that Panjo mistook for a vampire and fired three shots at it, all much too late. The figure was gone, swallowed by blackness below the high rail of the upper deck. And Moultrie was glad that he had missed for he was realizing that the creature was more human than batlike.

To Moultrie came recollections of a strange personage that he had heard about, but never before had seen – The Shadow!

Savagely, the patrolman turned to deal with the malefactor who had led him into firing shots at the law's best friend. The malefactor that Moultrie had in mind was Panjo, who by now was diving deep into his nest of packing cases. The boxes were wobbling, toppling, and Moultrie used the remaining three cartridges in his police positive to riddle them. Then he scrambled on board the low deck of the Santander, dropping to shelter in order to reload his gun.

Panjo hadn't halted among the packing cases. Sounds of the first shots had spurred him right on through. The darkish man was speeding shoreward; all Moultrie had riddled was an empty nest.

What covered Panjo's flight completely was the excitement on that high deck of the Santander. Following the cry of "Vampiro!" there had been two loud smacking splashes from the water alongside, indicating that a pair of men had jumped there, rather than combat the formidable unknown.

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But there was another, who had taken a different route. He was scurrying down a companionway, heading for a hatch, dodging crew members in his wild flight. Rather than cross the deck and make himself a target in the light, The Shadow was following that last man, knowing that one stowaway, if captured, could give details concerning the rest.

When three sailors cut across The Shadow's path, he gave them precedence. They knew this ship better than The Shadow did and they were competent to make the capture. Nevertheless, The Shadow followed them, ready to remain in reserve. The chase proved as short as it was rapid.

The chase ended in the hold.

There, dull labored sounds told that the fugitive was seeking shelter among great piles of mahogany logs that banked clear to the ceiling at one end of the hold. Armed with improvised clubs, the sailors were moving in that general direction. Hearing the clang of arriving footsteps, The Shadow merged with the darkness at the fringe of the hold, just as Moultrie arrived.

The sailors were voicing admonitions:

"Don't let him out of there!"

"Watch him or he'll get out through the hatch over those logs!"

"He can't manage it. That hatchway is clamped on the deck!"

A fierce bellow came from among the logs, half challenge, half terror, a man's voice so strained and frantic that it was impossible to define. To settle the question, Moultrie fired above the heads of the sailors, ploughing his bullets deep into the mahogany.

The result was stupendous.

With a great heave, the huge pile of logs came tumbling, rolling, sending the sailors dodging along with Moultrie. Out of that melee, rolling like one of the logs, came the fugitive stowaway. Clambering over the logs, sailors and patrolman reached him, only to find him limp, almost lifeless.

The reason was plain when they turned him over. The man's body was contorted, crushed. It was horrible, but not surprising, considering that he'd been carried in the midst of that unexpected avalanche of huge logs, from the moment the pile had given away.

He was an ugly, rattish man, this stowaway, and his eyes glared up from beneath the twisted visor of his shabby cap. Then, with gasps that marked his death-throes, the man panted these singular words:

"Malmordo – morto – noktomezo –"

Those words were all. Having gasped them, the man sank back dead. Like the other listeners, The Shadow heard them, for he had drawn close. Now The Shadow was on the move again, to reach a layer of logs against the bulkhead, the only portion of the stack that had not toppled.

Swiftly, silently, The Shadow scaled that layer like a ladder, nor was his route interrupted at the top. The hatchway that the sailors had mentioned was wide open; its cover lying beside it, ripped from the big clamps that had held it. The top log gave way as The Shadow used it to propel himself up through the hatchway. It came banging down, bringing Moultrie and the sailors to the alert, leaving them wondering as they stared

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upward and saw the wide gap leading to the deck.

By then, The Shadow had reached the rail and his keen eyes were probing the blackened water below. No figures were visible there, but The Shadow could trace a thin, undulating line in the oily scum, fading off from the side of the Santander.

Crossing the deck, The Shadow dropped to the lower rail on the dock side, then to the dock itself. A low, whispered laugh stirred the hovering mist as the cloaked figure flitted past the hanging light and took the shoreward route that Panjo had so recently followed.

"Malmordo – morto – noktomezo –"

Unintelligible words to others, but to The Shadow they formed a link to something far more sinister than the chance death of a fugitive stowaway on board the Steamship Santander!

CHAPTER III

IT was nearly midnight when The Shadow left the North River pier and midnight was the hour for the usual revel that took place at the new but already popular Cafe de la Morte, Greenwich Village's latest screwball attraction.

With his head-start from the pier, Inspector Cardona had reached the cafe just before the appointed hour. He was reluctantly checking his hat and coat in a cloak room painted all about with imitation flames and presided over by a somewhat timeworn check girl who looked anything but cute in a devil-costume adorned with imitation horns.

The hell-fire motif persisted into the cafe itself, then gave way to walls painted to represent tombstones with hovering ghosts all about. The waiter who conducted Cardona to a table was dressed in an outfit decorated with skeleton ribs and over his head he wore a hood painted to represent a skull.

Cardona noted that the other waiters were similarly attired, which gave them excellent opportunity to cover their identity, a fact which the inspector intended to put in his notebook at an early moment. The one man who was not so disguised – and therefore worthy of a separate notation – was a stolid bartender over at one side of the cafe, behind the inevitable bar.

Maybe the barkeep objected to such a costume or was too busy to be encumbered by one. At any rate, he had nothing to conceal, for Cardona recognized him as a veteran bartender who had served at several Village spots. With a further eye to detail, Cardona noted that the bar was well-stocked, both in quantity and variety of liquors. Behind the barkeeper was a rack of shelves, divided in three vertical sections, all loaded to capacity with fancy bottles of imported goods.

The patrons next.

Studying the customers, Joe Cardona decided that they represented the usual sprinkling of Villagers and the customary majority of out-of-towners who would patronize a freakish place such as the Cafe de la Morte. Business was always good when such establishments opened and generally sustained itself until some other novelty supplanted it.

Many of the customers were drinking beer, the chief reason being that the beverage was served in big mugs shaped to resemble skulls. Quite a thrill, such sport, but it wasn't showing big profits for the house. The

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popularity of beer in skull–mugs could account for the untouched stock of much more expensive elixirs on the shelf behind old Jerry, the squatly bartender who looked as though he didn't have enough to do.

In Cardona's opinion, the Cafe de la Morte wouldn't begin to make profits until it stopped serving beer in bizarre mugs; and when it stopped that practice, people wouldn't come here any more.

But people were here tonight, that was the important thing. Moreover, the menu card lying on Cardona's table was a perfect match for the half–card, that Joe had in his pocket. If death happened to be due at Monday midnight, it was Cardona's business to pick the persons who might be involved.

So far, Cardona could only pick the waiters, with their disguising skull–hoods. Ordering a beer, Joe not only kept a close watch on his waiter, but all the others who came within his scope.

The policy brought results.

One waiter, passing another, whispered a word that Cardona overheard, a word that sounded like a name:

"Malmordo."

The second waiter repeated it to a third and Cardona caught the word "Malmordo" plainly. He also saw both waiters throw worried glances toward the rear of the cafe and when men in masking hoods could give the impression that they were worried, it was obvious that they must be worried indeed.

Joe's trouble was that he couldn't see the rear of the cafe at all. Ignoring his beer, he rose from his table and sauntered over toward the bar, then changed course and found a good observation spot along the same wall. The spot was particularly good because it was beneath a stretch of sloping ceiling, about four feet wide, that slanted down behind the bar and cut off old Jerry's view of the place that Cardona had chosen.

From his new vantage, Cardona saw that the rear of the restaurant opened into an outdoor garden and through the connecting door, the slight breeze wafted the strains of wild exotic music, played by a violin.

Wondering who the musician might be, Cardona took a casual stroll out to the garden.

From the moment that he made his advent into the al fresco setting, Joe Cardona was spotted. The man who pegged him was a rather handsome young chap named Harry Vincent. Parked at a rather obscure table alongside the green board fence that served as boundary to the garden, Harry immediately concerned himself with the remaining contents of a skull–mug, rather than have Cardona see his face.

As a rule, persons who didn't want to be noticed by Joe Cardona were fugitives from justice. Harry Vincent happened to be a rare exception.

Harry Vincent was an agent of The Shadow.

Through channels peculiarly his own, The Shadow had ways of finding out about things and places that aroused the suspicion of the police. There were times, too, when The Shadow anticipated a growing interest on the part of the law. Though The Shadow's data might be incomplete, he seldom let such a condition continue.

The Shadow had ways of building up his own statistics. One of those ways was Harry Vincent.

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This evening Harry had been told to cover the Cafe de la Morte. He had picked the outdoor garden as the best area, because it had attracted the majority of the patrons. The weather was warm and the garden was therefore cooler than the cramped indoors. Though the high board fence cut off passing breezes, there was compensation in the fact that the garden had no roof.

Running from the building to the fence were a series of well-spaced iron rods intended as a support for a huge canvas canopy that served in rainy weather. At present the canopy was rolled up and parked against the building wall, above the down-slanting rods.

The garden's chief attraction was the violinist, who answered to the name of Gregor. He wore a Hungarian costume of boots, baggy trousers, fancy sash and ruffled shirt. He was a good-looking chap despite his frequent scowls which seemed the result of concentration on his music, which constantly approached a tumultuous staccato and always ended unexpectedly. However, it had taken Harry less than an hour to observe that Gregor's gripe concerned something other than his music; namely, Madame Thalla.

According to the little cards that she distributed at tables, Madame Thalla was a gypsy palmist and she certainly looked the part. Though young, Thalla had a wise face that befitted her colorful gypsy costume. It wasn't always possible to see her face, because the brilliant handkerchief that she wore as a head-dress drooped down beside her cheeks like the blinders on a horse.

At least those blinders helped Madame Thalla concentrate on the person whose fortune she was telling. There was another point that interested Harry quite as much. Though she advertised herself as a palmist, Madame Thalla told fortunes by playing cards instead. The particular type of cards she used were the old-fashioned tarots, with curious pictures embellishing their faces.

At present, Madame Thalla was dealing the tarots for a blonde young lady who wore a white dress. Since Cardona was noticing Gregor, Harry decided to look at the blonde instead. In fact, he shifted his chair so he particularly gained a ringside seat to the conference between Madame Thalla and the girl in white.

What Harry heard made him forget the hazard of being observed by Cardona.

"Your name," Madame Thalla was saying, in a low, sharp tone. "I can read it here in the cards."

"My name?" exclaimed the girl. "But that's impossible."

"It is not impossible," declared Thalla. "It is Janice. Wait, I can read the rest! Your full name is Janice Bradford."

From the way the girl drew her breath, Harry knew that Madame Thalla had scored a ten-strike. Then:

"That is my name," the girl admitted, soberly. "But surely, the cards could not tell you."

"The cards tell everything," asserted Thalla. "Most of all, they warn of danger. The danger that comes to those who wear the yellow flower."

Janice Bradford went tense. Harry Vincent saw her hand creep to the lapel of her jacket, where a daffodil was pinned. A rather unusual flower, thought Harry, and apparently Thalla was of the same opinion.

"Three nights now you have worn it," the gypsy told the girl, "and each night brings more danger. I warn you, it is not safe to come here!"

"But I have come here safely –"

"And you may not find it safe to stay." Thalla pointed a shapely finger to one of the tarot cards. "This is the sign that tells your future."

Janice stared at the card, much puzzled.

"But that card is blank!" she exclaimed. "How did it come to be among the others?"

Thalla shrugged as though she didn't know.

"But since it is blank," persisted Janice, "how can you read it? What does it tell?"

"Your future." Thalla intoned the words solemnly. "No future. Blank, like the card!"

Thalla could say no more, for Gregor was drowning all sounds with the maddened shriek of his fiddle. Then, with a burst that seemed to strain the violin's strings, the wild music ended.

The sudden silence seemed sharp. It made ears keen, too, for Harry could hear a peculiar sound from somewhere along the wooden fence. The more he listened, the more that sound reminded him of something gnawing at the wood. Immediately the thought of rats sprang to Harry's mind, though it seemed unlikely that rats would try to chew their way into as populated a spot as this outdoor garden.

And then, from within the Cafe de la Morte came the strokes of a strange gong, announcing the beginning of the midnight revel.

A revel that tonight spelled death!

CHAPTER IV

JANICE BRADFORD was rising before the gong strokes ended. Madame Thalla was saying something to the girl and again Harry Vincent caught the words, when the gypsy repeated the admonition.

"Your future will be blank," Thalla stated, "unless you heed my warning. Go, before the message of the tarots can be fulfilled. The blank is one that allows you another choice." Sweeping the cards from the table, Thalla held them as though about to deal, then shook her head. "But tonight, we have not time to continue. Go!"

Deciding to go, Janice was nevertheless reluctant. As she left the table, she looked for her waiter in order to pay the check and was rather bewildered when two skull-hooded men ignored her as they passed. Finding your waiter wasn't easy at the Cafe de la Morte.

As yet Cardona hadn't noticed Janice, nor was it likely that he would. The inspector was concentrated upon Thalla as the gypsy woman strolled past his table. Watching Thalla, Cardona picked up one of her table cards without letting his eyes leave the fortune teller.

Shuffling her tarot cards, Thalla was moving past Gregor and the wise look she gave him brought a fresh scowl from the violinist. This time, Cardona didn't miss it and if he had, Gregor's action would have been enough to declare the spite that existed between him and the fortune teller.

Tossing his head, Gregor brought his chin down upon the violin and immediately broke forth with a fanfare

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of barbaric music that denoted anger in every chord. So fierce, so frenzied was the music that it drowned every other sound. Among those sounds was an unheard clatter that came from the wooden fence.

A portion of that fence, approximately three feet square, opened like a thing of cardboard and through it writhed a loathsome creature so far from human that any resemblance seemed completely coincidental.

The thing that twisted itself into sight looked like a rat of man-sized proportions that had borrowed somebody's clothes simply to disguise the fact that it was a rodent, not a human.

It was the creature's face that made the impression most convincing.

No face could possibly have been so ugly, so vicious in its own right alone. Its owner must have purposely misshapen it, or practiced facial contortions to the limit, in order to acquire such grotesque, inhuman features.

If the arrival looked like a rat, he was even quicker.

With a snarl that drowned the high notes of the violin, the thing from the fence reached Gregor. In its course, the contorted creature flung tables right and left; their crashing froze Gregor in the midst of his wild rhapsody. Recoiling, the musician flung his arms, violin, bow and all, in warding fashion as he tried to crouch for shelter.

From Gregor's lips came a shriek of higher pitch than his violin had ever reached, as he screeched the name:

"Malmordo!"

In his effort to escape the terrible creature he called Malmordo, Gregor made one great mistake. It was a natural thing, to go diving away from a huddly creature that had launched itself from a self-made man-sized rat-hole. Natural too, for both Joe Cardona and Harry Vincent to lunge toward Malmordo, stretching as they drew guns, intent upon aiming downward. But they were as mistaken as was Gregor.

The thing called Malmordo unlimbered, lengthening itself in an astounding fashion. With his left hand, the unkempt creature flung a light table sideward, sending a shower of skull-mugs with it. Cardona dodged the missile; it skimmed him and forced Harry to duck it too. By then, all was up with Gregor.

Malmordo's right hand had whipped out a long, thin-bladed knife and was overtaking Gregor with it. The long, hooking thrust of the knife point seemed to carry Malmordo after it. If Gregor had turned or straightened, he could have at least coped with his attacker, but his instinctive crouch and mad effort to escape were his undoing.

The thin knife buried itself in Gregor's back and stayed there. The musician sprawled, his violin and bow flying ahead of him, while Malmordo, now unarmed, wheeled to meet other foemen.

Cardona and Harry were aiming their guns upward, straight at the leering face that was Malmordo's. Even the intensity of the moment could not lessen the hideous impression that those grotesque features gave. Indeed, the situation accentuated the appearance of Malmordo.

A livid face, all out of shape, from its bulging teeth to beady eyes, a face that seemed uglier than the snarl that spat from a mouth that looked lipless. Above the face was shaggy hair, strewing down upon a forehead whose lines seemed continuations of the misshapen grimace which was fixed on Malmordo's visage.

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Again, this human monstrosity showed the cunning that went with Malmordo's rattish looks. From his stretched position, Malmordo telescoped into his former pose, dwindling so suddenly that for the moment he appeared to be plunging himself, corkscrew fashion, down through the flagstone paving of the garden.

This was illusion, nothing more, but it completely fooled both men who were trying to drop Malmordo in his tracks. Two guns blasted in unison, their shots whizzing high. Then, before Harry or Cardona had a chance to fire again, Malmordo was flaying them with a new deluge of tables that he scooped up during his flinging whirl.

And now Malmordo was a gone rat indeed, a rat scampering in maddened flight. He was cutting a swath among tables and chairs, apparently in search of some outlet. He couldn't regain the hole that he had literally gnawed through the fence, for from hands and knees, Harry and Cardona were starting over to block that outlet. Nor could he scoot into the cafe itself, for the skull-hooded waiters were coming from that direction, some of them with revolvers. They were the ones who dodged the next tables that Malmordo threw, until he found another use for the furniture.

Feinting with a table, Malmordo suddenly planked it on top of another table that was standing by. Grabbing a chair with his other hand, he sprang upon the first table, planting the chair on the table above. At the same time, his free hand deftly whipped a clasp knife from a pocket of his baggy trousers, flipped it open, and cut a taut rope that slanted by his shoulder.

That rope was the control line for the canopy that sheltered the patrons of the garden on rainy days. With a sudden rumble, the canvas came rolling down along the metal rods that formed a track above Malmordo's head. Even before the canvas reached him, Malmordo was clambering to the chair above the upper table and his long-bladed clasp knife gave another slash that met the canopy when it arrived.

Guns roared upward, too late. Everybody was aiming for the chair, but Malmordo was no longer there.

He'd gone, with a leap, right through the opening in the canvas that his handy knife had ripped, using the nearest slanted rod to help him complete the rapid hoist. In a trice, Malmordo had staged as spectacular a getaway as The Shadow's departure from the hold of the Santander, and under conditions far more pressing.

Except that here, Malmordo lacked the benefit of a solid shield like a ship's deck. Beneath him was canvas, nothing more. As he went through the slit in the canvas, he flung his clasp knife at one waiter who was aiming a revolver and the man in the skull-hood had to dodge. But there were others with guns, who were shifting to drill the canvas and ferret out the rattish Malmordo with bullets.

Malmordo must have expected it, for hardly had the first guns talked before a roundish figure came rolling down above the canopy, marking its progress by the way it sagged the canvas. A clever trick, this, rolling straight for the back alley behind the green fence. It explained why Malmordo had gone to such exaggerated measures in the first place. Here he was slipping the men who had tried to round him up, gaining the very outlet from which they had blocked him off!

It was a long chance though, taking a roller coaster trip above the heads of the very men who sought to stop him. Before the trip was over, guns were blasting at the traveling bulge that followed down the canvas and although they were again belated, it was largely luck that caused them to miss the object they sought.

Over the edge of the canopy, just ahead of frantic bullets, even then, Malmordo wasn't out of danger. There was a terrific clatter of a landing in the rear alley, indicating that Malmordo must have overturned a waiting ash-can and before the clangor ended, Cardona was through the gap in the rear fence, aiming for Malmordo in the darkness.

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The alley ran parallel to the fence and shots responded from both directions, shots fired by distant, crouchy men, who were obviously leagued with Malmordo. But the killer himself couldn't have headed in either direction. There was only one place where Malmordo could have gone, into a deep, dark courtyard across the narrow alley.

That space represented a connection between two sections of a storage building that rose windowless above. Cardona knew that Malmordo must have gone there, because he heard the ash-can rolling that direction; therefore, it followed that Malmordo must have taken it along to serve as an improvised pill-box.

Putting a whistle to his lips, Joe Cardona blew a signal that would bring all the police from blocks around, for on the way here, he had instructed various patrolmen to be on the alert.

Whoever this Malmordo was, whatever his purpose in Manhattan, the law was prepared to eliminate him on the scene of his first crime!

CHAPTER V

THE shrill of Cardona's whistle roused Harry Vincent from the excitement of the chase. Abruptly, Harry put away his gun, realizing it wasn't good policy to be brandishing one unofficially, even after siding in behalf of the law.

Looking about at the waiters, Harry saw that they had already adopted the same notion. They were not only gunless, some of them had peeled away their skull-hoods to reveal their faces. A few looked tough, but most of them appeared to be scared. This left Harry wondering as to how many had been in on the gun work.

Cardona at least was giving the waiters benefit of doubt, for he was ordering them to quiet the customers, to keep the place closed, and to admit only arriving police. Since Malmordo had chosen to play rat, Cardona right now was acting the cat, for he was watching the hole where the murderer had gone and did not want to be disturbed.

Dropping back, Harry crossed to the doorway that led into the cafe proper and halted there beside some black-draped curtains. A hand emerged suddenly from the darkness and gripped his arm; before Harry could take action, a voice intoned for silence.

It was The Shadow, just arrived, for from his hidden lips came the one word: "Report."

Before Harry could do more than point out Gregor's body and name Malmordo as the murderer, there were voices from the front of the cafe. The first of the police were arriving and taking over in characteristic style. The Shadow pressed Harry in among the black curtains and blotted himself against another wall. Observation at this moment was more important than a report. But Harry noted to his satisfaction that the spot The Shadow had chosen, slightly away from that slanted roof leading down to the side of the bar, offered a good outlook to the rear garden where Cardona was still playing pussy cat at Malmordo's rat-hole.

It took the police only a few minutes to learn that no one had fled the Cafe de la Morte by way of the front door, or for that matter, by any route other than the garden. They learned this from the stammering red-devil who minded the cloak room and from a helpless looking manager. Old Jerry, the bartender, corroborated everything with nods while he calmly polished the bar-glasses and Jerry, being a well-known character of unimpeachable quality, was the sort whose word would stand.

Then, brushing past the curtains where Harry was hidden, and totally failing to notice The Shadow

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blacked-out against the opposite wall, the police reached the garden to find Inspector Cardona. By that time, Cardona was already gaining further aid, consisting of a few detectives who had come in from the side alleys.

These men were reporting that several ratty looking characters had scurried away as soon as they appeared, which to Cardona meant that Malmordo's followers had been forced to abandon their chief. Nevertheless, Cardona wasn't taking chances on a counter-thrust.

"Don't come through here," Joe warned the detectives, referring to the hole in the fence. "We've got a rat trapped in the court across the way and he might start shooting. Go around to the front of the place, where you'll find a patrolman on duty. He'll let you in.

"Then round up all the customers and the waiters, so I can quiz them. Nobody is to come in or go out. As for you fellows" – this was to a pair of patrolmen who were in the garden, crowding up to Cardona's shoulders – "keep watching that courtyard. I'll send for some tear gas and tommy-guns. They'll be good rat poison."

Harry could hear all this, though it was around the corner from him. At the same time, he was watching blackness glide out to the garden. The Shadow was on his way to study the Malmordo situation at close range, which left it to Harry to check on matters inside the café proper.

Waiting until the detectives appeared at the front door and talked to the brawny patrolman stationed there, Harry did a quick shift among the curtains to see how the customers and hired help reacted. First, the police were lining up the waiters, listing their names; then, having tallied them, they told the waiters to assemble the customers.

For a few moments, the waiters were moving here and there; during that period Harry noticed that one of them had put on his skull-hood. Harry was shifting to watch where the waiter went, when something else attracted his attention. Hearing whispered voices nearby, Harry leaned among the curtains to eavesdrop.

The voices belonged to Madame Thalla and Janice Bradford. Apparently the gypsy fortune teller had discovered the blonde girl crouched in an alcove.

"You must go from here!" Thalla was telling Janice. "You believe me, when I say there is danger!"

"I did believe you," began Janice, "but I should be safe, now that the police are here."

"They will ask you questions," asserted Thalla. "They will not tell you answers, like I did. Do you want to answer questions?"

"No," admitted Janice, "but if the police merely consider me a regular customer –"

"It is not what the police think! It is what Malmordo will think. You understand?"

"In a way, yes –"

"And in a way is enough. Even the police can not protect you if Malmordo knows where you are! Come!"

Footsteps shuffled away and when Harry managed to peer from beside a curtain, he saw Thalla, stooped beside a counter in the corner, lifting a trap door. The gypsy woman gestured Janice down into the cellar, spoke some reassuring words, then lowered the trap.

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Did this mean that Thalla was double-crossing Janice? The idea struck hard through Harry mind, particularly when he saw the fierce, vengeful expression that registered itself on Thalla's wise features. Then, the gypsy woman was stalking along the wall, peering everywhere, as though looking for someone else.

Perhaps Thalla was seeking that lone waiter who had put on the death-hood. But now, for some reason, others were doing the same. It was impossible to tell which was which and Harry gained the sudden impression that some new trouble was about to start.

Then, from the other side of the curtains came The Shadow's low tone. Harry shifted over to report to his chief. Instead, it was The Shadow who opened the discussion.

"The wall above the canopy," stated The Shadow. "You saw it before the curtain rolled down. Describe it."

"It was just a building wall," expressed Harry, "with two small windows."

The Shadow undertoned a laugh.

"The ceiling over there," he spoke. "Part of it is slanted, ending down in back of the bar."

Harry had noticed that stretch of ceiling before. It was the slant four feet wide, that hadn't much impressed him at the time. Now suddenly, he realized what it meant.

"An inside stairway!" Harry's whisper was excited. "Coming down from the second floor. If that rack of bottle shelves could open, it would bring you out right behind the bar!"

At that same moment, Harry was noticing that the bar was singularly empty. Old Jerry, the bartender, had disappeared. As Harry still stared, Cardona came stalking into the cafe and the place the inspector looked first was toward the bar. Striding over, Cardona took a look across the bar, then turned and bellowed at his men.

"Who let this happen?" demanded Cardona. "Here's old Jerry slugged and unconscious, down in back of the bar!"

"The hooded waiter!" Harry told The Shadow. "He came from that direction. I didn't watch him, the only man who was still wearing his hood, because I was listening to Madame Thalla and Janice Bradford. Thalla was steering Janice down into the cellar, through a trap door over there!"

As Harry pointed from the curtains, he saw Thalla again. The excitement over finding Jerry had caused the gypsy woman to change her mind about remaining in the cafe. Thalla was at the trap again, this time using it for her own departure.

The trap was dropping above Thalla, just as Harry pointed, and before The Shadow could do a thing about it, Cardona heard the trap door slam. Instantly, the inspector was on the pounce, calling upon the detectives to follow him.

A singular circumstance, this. True to police practice, Inspector Cardona was accepting the situation close at hand, forgetting the greater issue of Malmordo, trapped in the courtyard behind the alleyway. Yet by that freakish shift of judgment, the law was actually on Malmordo's trail.

Such was The Shadow's analysis, and once again The Shadow was right!

CHAPTER VI

THE rush for the trap door brought with it three of the hooded waiters and Cardona did not order them to stay behind. In fact, he gave them precedence over his detectives, because they knew these premises and would therefore be helpful in the pursuit of the unknown who had gone into the cellar.

Madame Thalla knew that cellar too.

There wasn't a trace of the gypsy woman when Cardona and his human blood-hounds reached the cellar. All they saw were crates, casks and other impedimenta of the sort commonly found in the cellar of a restaurant.

Standing beside a door that he had flung wide, Cardona ordered the searchers to fan out and find the person who had fled by this route. The waiters were to shift the crates and casks, while the detectives stood by with ready guns.

Upstairs, The Shadow was profiting by the changed situation. In drawing men to the cellar, Cardona had left the cafe guarded, so far as the door was concerned, but the men there were so occupied with such duty that they were unable to watch elsewhere.

Telling Harry to join the other patrons and glean any details that might arise, The Shadow started on a foray of his own. Even if the police at the door had been looking The Shadow's way, it was unlikely that they could have seen him. For Harry, who could guess what his chief was about, found it difficult to trace The Shadow's progress.

Gliding blackness seemed to fold itself fantastically as it streaked along the slanting width of ceiling that marked the blocked-off stairway down from the second floor. Yet only eyes like Harry's, looking for such a token, could have observed it, for the background itself was dark and absorbed the moving silhouette.

Somebody had propped old Jerry in a chair behind the bar to give him air and he was showing signs of recovery. It might have been Jerry's own shadow that moved along the bottle-racked wall behind him, to be swallowed by darkness further on.

Then came the ticklish portion of The Shadow's expedition. Slowly, blackness moved upward, until it obscured the center row of shelves. Next, those shelves moved outward, door-fashion. Harry saw the motion, but realized that the very fact he could discern it meant that The Shadow was cutting off the line of vision from the front of the cafe.

The shelved door closed and the blackness was gone. The Shadow was using the hidden route to the second floor.

From those little windows at the rear of the building it was easy to look down above the slanted canopy and study the rear courtyard where a clumpy shape awaited the attack by the police. The Shadow could make out the form that represented Malmordo, something impossible for the men at the hole in the fence, due to the lack of visibility at that lower altitude.

Waiting for tear-gas and tommy-guns seemed a wasteful delay to The Shadow. He preferred to settle the question of Malmordo by a rapid probe with bullets. Drawing a .45 automatic, The Shadow planted bullets into the huddly object.

Every bullet brought a clang.

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There were echoes from the courtyard, as sharp as shots themselves. The patrolmen at the fence thought that Malmordo was shooting back at the unknown marksman up above. They opened fire at the courtyard, too, whereupon The Shadow ceased his fire and declared himself with a weird, challenging laugh, which the men below recognized. Realizing that The Shadow was on their side, confident that his taunt represented triumph, the patrolmen charged through the fence shooting as they went, intent upon taking the courtyard by storm.

The Shadow saw the blue-coated cluster surge into the court. Thrusting himself through the window, he rolled himself down the canopy at an angle, his feet reaching the lower edge first. There, The Shadow dropped adroitly to the now-deserted alley and landed cleanly in its darkness. Instead of joining the attack, he moved swiftly toward the street at the alley's end.

Having found his own means of departure from the Cafe de la Morte. The Shadow was taking his own measures toward the capture of Malmordo. Not only was The Shadow undeceived by Malmordo's methods; he was informing the police that they had chosen a blind trail.

This latter point was proven when Inspector Cardona reached the yard, attracted up from the cellar and out through the garden fence by the sounds of repeated gunfire. In the courtyard, Cardona found the patrolmen staring stupidly at an ash-can which was lying on its side, the contents of said ash-can being a pair of baggy trousers and an oversized blouse which had been Malmordo's costume.

Then did Cardona guess Malmordo's ruse.

"That's what rolled down the canopy!" The inspector kicked the bullet-riddled ash-can. "Malmordo must have had it rolled up in the canvas. We thought it was Malmordo and when it landed, we thought it was something he'd knocked over!"

Turning, Cardona stared up at the little windows above the canopy.

"There's where Malmordo went!" Joe added. "He came down in back of the bar and slugged old Jerry! Then he must have ducked down through the trap door to the cellar. That was his trail, so let's follow it!"

Speedily, Cardona led the chase back through the cafe, down to the cellar, past the open door at the bottom, and through to a deep corner where the detectives and the hooded waiters were lifting a grating beyond a stack of crates. They had found the final exit, an outlet leading up to the front street.

With one accord, the group poured up through, to resume the belated rat-hunt.

There were others beside Malmordo who knew of that front street outlet. One person was Janice Bradford and she had learned about it from Madame Thalla. Already, Janice was well away from the Cafe de la Morte, but her escape was by no means complete.

In fact, Janice was fearful that she had not escaped at all. At least there had been security in a place that the police dominated, Thalla's arguments to the contrary; but here, among the helter-skelter streets of Greenwich Village, danger seemed very rife.

In her dash from the cafe, Janice had lost her sense of direction and now the streets were not only unfamiliar, they all seemed to lead into darkness, perhaps back to the Cafe de la Morte itself. The blocks were brief, the streets crossed at diagonals, and their silence made Janice think of lurkers in every doorway. Nowhere could she spy the distant glimmer of an avenue, where she might find a cab.

Then, as if Janice's own fears had hatched it, the menace became real.

MALMORDO

From somewhere came a snarled hiss, like a vicious command. Doorways showed the very figures that Janice had imagined would be there; slinky, dark-clad men who moved into sight like whiskered rats, boldly showing themselves in the open.

Each way Janice turned, a lurker blocked her off and despite the darkness, the girl could see the ugly grins they gave her.

They numbered at least half a dozen, these rat-men, and all seemed lesser editions of the murderer, Malmordo, who had slain Gregor while Janice watched. They moved in crouching fashion and Janice could tell from the way their hands were buried in their jackets that they, like their monstrous overlord, preferred the knife as a quick and silent death weapon.

Again, that snarly voice, repeating a strange, unintelligible command, at least unintelligible to Janice, though her stalkers seemed to understand it.

With a shrill, desperate scream, Janice darted for the nearest corner, realizing that doom would probably overtake her on the way, which well it might, but for the fact her terrified cry brought immediate results.

Janice's shriek was answered by a mocking laugh, but its taunt was meant for the slinky men, not for Janice. The street seemed to fill with snarls as the rat-men whipped back into their doorways, putting away their knives and drawing guns instead. Looking across her shoulder as she reached the corner, Janice saw a cloaked figure weaving into sight, purposely choosing a street-light as a background.

Guns spoke from the doorways, all aimed in the direction of The Shadow. Those hasty shots were wide and they were answered by a rising laugh that echoed eerily from surrounding windows as though The Shadow were everywhere. With that peal came the staccato bursts of The Shadow's own guns, his shots probing the doorways, too close for the comfort of the occupants.

In picking revolver spurts as targets, The Shadow could come closer than his opponents, when they had his shifting form to aim at. And as he fired, The Shadow was no longer there. He had faded into darkness so swiftly, so surprisingly, that his blending with that element had all the effect of an instantaneous vanish.

Malmordo's tribe didn't wait to argue further. They scattered amazingly, traveling every direction except toward The Shadow. Janice was traveling too, her high heels clattering the sidewalks, until she found herself blocked anew. Other shooters were entering the general fray, Cardona and his detectives, but Janice didn't recognize them as such for with them were men who wore the skeleton jackets that featured the waiters at the Cafe de la Morte.

Instinctively, Janice turned toward the shelter of a corner doorway, set in the narrow angle of the junction of two diagonal streets. She recoiled suddenly as she saw a man step out; then, his hand was gripping her arm, and he was pressing her into the shelter that he had just left.

The man was tall and in the slight light, Janice could see his face, blunt, square-jawed and quite unperturbed. The man was wearing a dark-gray suit, which was a helpful contrast to Janice's white attire.

"Stay in the doorway," the man ordered, in a low but forceful tone.

"Those fools will shoot at anything they can see." His eyes, a clear gray in the darkness, studied Janice intently. Then he added: "What are you doing around here, anyway?"

MALMORDO

Janice started to say something, then tightened her lips. The gray man's eyes fixed on the yellow flower that sprouted from Janice's dress.

"You came from the Cafe de la Morte?"

Again, Janice decided not to answer. The man, quite unalarmed by the shots that were echoing around this very corner, drew a notebook from his pocket, wrote something on the lower portion of a page, tore off the half sheet and handed it to the girl.

"There is the best clue to Malmordo," the man said, coolly, "but be careful when you follow it. Now go straight down this street" – he thrust Janice out the other side of the doorway – "and you will reach the avenue."

Crumpling the unread note in her hand, Janice turned in the direction indicated and saw the lights of the avenue, only half a block ahead. This street was silent, but Janice wasn't taking chances that it would remain so. She headed for the avenue on the run.

As for the man in gray, he turned in another direction and walked along a street where shots still echoed, but did not perturb him, because they were moving away. Within half a block he turned into a side street where all was quiet.

Complete silence soon gripped that little corner doorway where Janice had met the man who knew about Malmordo. It was then that another figure arrived there, emerging so suddenly that he seemed to come from nowhere.

The new arrival was The Shadow. He saw the lights of the avenue and seemed to know that they must have spelled safety to Janice Bradford.

With a low, strange laugh which seemed to link the future with the past, The Shadow glided into the all-enveloping night.

CHAPTER VII

POLICE COMMISSIONER WESTON was staring at the exhibits that lay upon his desk. They formed a mass of evidence, those exhibits, even though they had the symptoms of a hodge-podge.

The exhibits tallied as follows:

A long, thin knife, defined as a Borgia stiletto.

A large, crude clasp-knife of the variety preferred by Parisian Apaches.

A man's costume consisting of a pair of baggy trousers and an oversized blouse.

A waiter's costume from the Cafe de la Morte, comprising a skeleton-painted jacket and a skull-hood.

A wallet and its contents, formerly the property of a Hungarian violinist, one Gregor Shaksha, deceased.

Several tarot cards of European manufacture, including one blank.

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Announcements bearing the name of Madame Thalla.

A sample menu card from the Cafe de la Morte.

The top half of a menu card, with crayon circles around three words, producing the message: "Midnight – Morte – Monday."

Along with these were copious reports provided by Inspector Joe Cardona, who was present in person to amplify them. Arms folded, stolid as usual, Cardona was watching Weston mull over the items on the desk in what the commissioner probably considered to be an official style.

Commissioner Weston was a broad-faced gentleman with a short-clipped but pointed mustache. For years he had carried a military bearing which he had acquired during the First World War. Just when Weston had been about to forget that he'd once been an army officer, the Second World War had come along to remind him of the fact. Since then, Weston's manner had been more military than ever.

Finished with his survey, Commissioner Weston leaned back in his big swivel chair, waved his hand brusquely at the exhibits and ordered:

"Add them up, Inspector!"

"All right, Commissioner," said Cardona, "but there are some loose facts that go with them." He gestured to the report sheets. "Facts mentioned in there."

"Include them as you proceed."

Cardona proceeded.

"The case seems to revolve around a character named Malmordo," the inspector declared. "He has a face like a rat and he acts like one. He murdered Gregor. I saw him. He used that stiletto."

Weston eyed the Borgia dagger with its wicked blade of ice-pick proportions. It was the kind of weapon that could deal sure death with a single stab. Then the commissioner gestured to the Apache knife.

"And this?"

"Malmordo cut the canopy rope with it," returned Cardona, "and slashed his way through the canvas. He slung the knife at somebody and found time to dump these things" – Joe was gesturing to the baggy costume – "into an ash-can that was parked up above the canopy. It rolled down to the back alley and we thought it was Malmordo."

Weston set his chin in his hand.

"About that costume," he inquired. "Why did Malmordo get rid of it?"

"So he could double as a waiter," replied Cardona, promptly, pointing to the skeleton jacket and the skull hood.

"Malmordo doubled down through the cafe, by means of a blocked off stairway. He'd been wearing the jacket under the blouse he'd discarded, so all he had to do was put on the hood. He slugged old Jerry the barkeep and slid across to a trap door leading down cellar. That's how he got out to the front street."

MALMORDO

"And all the while," put in Weston, crisply, "you thought he was a waiter."

"I did," acknowledged Cardona, "until I found the outfit afterwards, parked behind a crate in the cellar."

Weston picked up Cardona's report and riffled its pages. Then:

"Your report mentions some other waiters," remarked Weston, "who helped you hunt for Malmordo."

"Three of them," Cardona admitted. "They went out through the front grating with us."

"Wearing their hoods?"

"Yes."

"Didn't that strike you as suspicious?"

"No. We thought they didn't want Malmordo to recognize them if they ran into him."

"And what became of them?"

Cardona drew a long breath before answering Weston's question. This part of the story bothered him.

"We spotted some ratty looking characters," explained Joe, "not far from the cafe. They looked like second-rate editions of Malmordo and we naturally linked them with him, particularly when they started shooting. So we opened fire on them, and next thing the waiters who were with us pulled guns and began shooting too."

"You should have placed them under immediate arrest," chided Weston. "They had no right to be carrying guns."

"We were glad they had guns, right then," returned Cardona. "They helped us send those rats to cover. Except that would probably have happened anyway. Because when the shooting kept on, we kind of realized that the waiters and the rats weren't shooting at each other."

Weston gave a stiff stare.

"At whom were they shooting?"

"Take it or leave it, Commissioner," replied Cardona, "they were shooting at The Shadow."

Cardona expected an outburst, but none arrived. Officially, The Shadow was not supposed to be mentioned in police reports because an identity such as his, based on the evidence of a cloak and hat, might technically be assumed by anyone. In this instance, however, there was a counter-balancing factor in Malmordo, whose own attire, trousers and blouse, were about the only proof that he existed as a personality.

So Weston let the question ride.

"And then, Inspector?"

"Next thing, the waiters were gone," declared Cardona, "hoods and all. They'd scattered just like the rats in the baggy clothes."

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"You checked on them at the cafe?"

"Yes. There were half a dozen legitimate waiters still there. The ones who had helped us chase Malmordo and then skipped, were trading under phony names."

"Any good descriptions of them?"

"None. But it's a safe bet they were an inside mob planted there by Malmordo."

Weston raised his eyebrows at the word "bet" and then lowered them. The word that Weston really regarded as horrid, whenever Cardona used it, was "hunch" because the commissioner didn't believe in hunches.

"Malmordo had another plant back at the cafe," continued Cardona. "A gypsy fortune-teller named Madame Thalla. We haven't been able to find her since."

"And how," inquired Weston, "did Madame Thalla slip away?"

"By the cellar route," explained Cardona, ruefully. "We found out later that she'd ducked down there. She must have hidden until we went through; then she was free to follow."

"But where could she have hidden? You searched the place, didn't you?"

"Everywhere except behind the door. I didn't remember until later that hiding behind a door is an old gypsy trick. But we weren't looking for Thalla at the time."

Cardona paused, awaiting questions, but none came, so he brought up another factor.

"There was a girl mixed in the thing," declared Joe. "A girl in a white dress, wearing a yellow flower. Some of the waiters remembered her. She'd been at the Cafe de la Morte for the last three evenings."

"Her name?"

"Nobody knew it." Joe scowled. "Nobody, except maybe Madame Thalla. Or Gregor."

"Why would they have known?"

"Because Gregor had his eye on the girl," explained Cardona, "and Thalla didn't like it. People at the cafe think Thalla was sweet on Gregor and therefore jealous, the way gypsies are."

"Gregor was a gypsy too?"

"No. Hungarian. We checked over the cards in his wallet."

"Then you think Madame Thalla was working with Malmordo?"

"Very likely. She spoke to Gregor several times and acted rather angrily. Only Malmordo wouldn't have killed Gregor just to please Thalla. Unless Thalla trumped up something against Gregor, to make Malmordo think he was dangerous."

"Thalla would have preferred to make trouble for the girl, wouldn't she, Inspector?"

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"You can't tell," concluded Cardona. "Nobody can figure out gypsies. Thalla was telling the girl's fortune, though, and she may have threatened her then. The girl certainly disappeared in a hurry."

"How?"

"We don't know, unless she skipped through the cellar too."

"That might link her with Malmordo."

"Yes, Commissioner, it might."

The discussion having reached a temporary impasse, Weston began drumming the desk as though it might bring him an idea. Finally he reached for a slender report that lay at hand.

"The stowaway on the Santander," recalled Weston. "Patrolman Moultrie reports that he said something about Malmordo just before the logs fell and crushed him."

"Malmordo and morto," nodded Cardona. "Whether morto meant death or the cafe, we don't know. There was another word, but we aren't sure what it was. The important thing, though" – Cardona was becoming emphatic – "is that there were other stowaways on board that ship. There's been a lot of stowaways coming into port lately, human rats we call them, and they tally with the tribe that Malmordo had around last night."

More drumming from Weston, but it produced no new opinions. So Cardona supplied one.

"Our best clue is this." Joe picked up the half menu from the Cafe de la Morte. "This was a tip-off, Commissioner. Somebody is working on our side and whoever it is, wanted us to block what happened last night."

Hesitating a moment, Weston inquired:

"The Shadow?"

"I don't think so," replied Cardona. "He was with us, one hundred percent, but this isn't the kind of message The Shadow would send. If I could only –"

A knock interrupted at the door. Weston recognized it as belonging to his secretary and pressed a buzzer, giving the word to enter. The secretary, a dapper man, reached the desk and turned apologetically from Weston to Cardona.

"Beg pardon, Commissioner," the secretary said, "but there's a gentleman outside who says he must speak to Inspector Cardona."

"If he's a gentleman," blustered Weston, "tell him to send in his card!"

"He did," began the secretary, "but it's a most unusual card –"

The card was unusual. Cardona snatched it the moment the secretary showed it. The card was the lower half of a menu from the Cafe de la Morte.

Eagerly Cardona matched it with the half-card he already held. The two fitted, proving that the visitor was the unknown informant who had tipped off the law to impending murder at the Cafe de la Morte!

CHAPTER VIII

THE visitor was shown in promptly.

He was a blunt-faced man with square, solid jaw, short-clipped hair with a trend toward iron gray, about the same color as his dark suit.

This was the same man who had been blocked off from the Cafe de la Morte the night before, after bullets had begun to dominate the streets nearby. The same man, in fact, who had met Janice Bradford, drawn her to shelter, and then pointed her to the avenue.

However, Cardona was not thinking in terms of subsequent events, particularly as he knew nothing about them. Joe was still concerned with the tip-off. Separating the halves of the menu card, he gestured the top portion and demanded:

"You sent me this?"

The visitor supplied a short, stiff bow, then declared in a precise tone:

"That fact should be apparent."

"Good enough," snapped Cardona. "Now tell us who you are and what you know about Malmordo."

Quite unperturbed, the visitor seated himself and looked slowly from Cardona to Weston. The gray man had a deliberate way that impressed his viewers. Cardona, for one, was ready to concede that this stranger would be a tough nut to crack.

Coolly, the visitor announced:

"I must request your absolute confidence before I speak. No word of this conference can be given to anyone."

Terms like that went against Cardona's grain, but before Joe could protest, Commissioner Weston gave the nod. For once, Cardona realized that the commissioner was right.

If the visitor preferred to remain silent, there would be no way of making him talk. Charges against the gray man would be very slender on the mere strength of the menu card. Indeed, he could rest on his dignity, with the fact that he had really aided the law being something in his behalf. It was best to hear him out.

At Weston's nod, the gray man ran his thumb-nail down the lapel of his coat. The cloth spread apart and from between, the visitor drew out some thin papers, which he unfolded on the desk. In matter-of-fact tone, he stated:

"My credentials."

The credentials bore an official stamp from Scotland Yard. They named the gray man as Trent Stacey, of the C.I.D., or Criminal Investigation Department. A thin photograph was with them; it tallied with Stacey's features. In routine style, he matched his approved signature, as shown on a document, using Weston's desk pen. Finally, he called special attention to a brief order accompanying his credentials.

This order was from Scotland Yard, informing all law enforcement officers throughout the British Empire

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that they were to maintain strict secrecy regarding Stacey's presence, wherever he might be.

"I am aware," put Stacey bluntly, "that your jurisdiction is outside of such limitations, Commissioner. But I trust in your judgment to honor this request so long as we both deem it expedient."

"Quite right," agreed Weston, only to add sharply: "Provided you can prove the existence of such expediency." A bow from Stacey. Then:

"I can," he declared, "and in a single word. That word is the name – Malmordo."

Weston and Cardona sat right back to listen. Their visitor needed no further go sign.

"Malmordo is a notorious criminal," asserted Stacey. "In fact, until recently, he was the most notorious criminal on the European scene. He would still be – if he happened to be in Europe."

"His name would indicate that," stated Weston. "I take it that the name is derived from mal and morte, words signifying "evil death" or its equivalent."

Slowly, Stacey shook his head.

"You are wrong," the gray man declared.. "The term mal means opposite and mordo means something that gnaws or bites. Hence the term is a corruption –"

"In what language?" put in Weston. "Spanish?"

"In Esperanto," replied Stacey, "an international language. Malmordo's activities were so far flung, that before the war, the police officials in various countries used Esperanto in their interchangeable reports, in order to puzzle Malmordo's followers."

"And did it work?" asked Weston.

"It worked well at first," replied Stacey. "Quite a few of Malmordo's workers were trapped. But then they began using Esperanto too. At that time, Malmordo was known to the police in European countries as "Mordetbesto" which in Esperanto means a rodent. That angered his followers who called him "Malmordetbesto" meaning just the opposite of a rat. They shortened it to "Malmordo" and there it stands." Stacey gave a shrug. "So we accepted the term too."

By "we" Stacey obviously meant more than just Scotland Yard. He was including all the law enforcement agencies of Europe.

"If Malmordo made such a stir in Europe," inquired Cardona, "how come we never heard of him in America?"

"The war intervened," explained Stacey. "The Nazis hired Malmordo and his fellow-rats to squirm into every occupied country. There, they not only fomented vicious trouble; they destroyed all records pertaining to themselves."

"But why have they come here now?" inquired Cardona.

Stacey took that question blandly and put another as its answer.

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"Why have other rats come to America?"

"Because it's the only place where they can find what they want," conceded Cardona. "They're after food and Europe has gone short of it."

"And Malmordo's rats are after loot," specified Stacey. "Europe has gone short on that commodity too."

It made sense to Cardona and with it, the inspector remembered something. He plucked up Moultrie's report and read the words of the dying stowaway:

"Malmordo – morto – noktomezo –!"

"That's Esperanto," acknowledged Stacey. "It means Malmordo – death – midnight. I heard those words spoken yesterday afternoon, Inspector. That's why I sent you the marked menu card."

"And a patrolman heard them just before midnight," declared Cardona, "spoken by a dying stowaway in the hold of the Steamship Santander. I get it now: the fellow must have thought Malmordo double-crossed him."

The news interested Stacey.

"There is your link," he declared. "Malmordo has been bringing his riff-raff into port. Until yesterday they were around the Black Star Warehouse, but today they are gone."

Cardona gave Stacey a sharp eye.

"Why didn't you let us in on that?"

"Because I had too much consideration for your very fine police," returned Stacey, coolly. "It would be suicide to invade a fortress belonging to Malmordo unless you first stopped every human rat-hole connected with the place. I was still checking on the place when I saw some of Malmordo's rats slink away and I followed them to the Cafe de la Morte."

Weston was taking time out to call the Black Star Warehouse. He held a brief conversation, then hung up abruptly.

"That's odd," announced the commissioner, "but it fits. At the Black Star they say they were going crazy on account of rats – they meant the usual kind – but today, they've begun to disappear."

"Because Malmordo's men are gone," nodded Stacey. "They are no longer there to feed the rats."

"Why should they feed the rats?" Cardona demanded.

"So the rats won't feed on them," Stacey explained. "They could never hope to drive the rats from the miserable places that both breeds prefer, so they befriended them. Then they get along comfortably together."

Such solid knowledge of Malmordo and his ways was giving Trent Stacey an invaluable status in the eyes of Commissioner Weston. Folding the credentials, Weston returned them to the C.I.D. man and announced:

"We shall give you full cooperation, Mr. Stacey. In return, I want you to tell us everything else you know about Malmordo. Tell us what crimes you think he intends to attempt, what measures you believe he will employ, and most of all –"

The commissioner paused; then repeated himself for emphasis:

"And most of all, tell us how we can trap him!"

CHAPTER IX

IT took Trent Stacey half an hour to cover the full subject of Malmordo, though it wasn't all continuous talking on Stacey's part. Weston and Cardona had numerous questions, all apt ones, that they inserted at intervals.

Stacey's summary was this:

Before the war, Malmordo had adopted aggressor tactics of his own, including the Fifth Column system. He and his ratty followers slipped into countries, established themselves in the most detestable of hide-outs, which were therefore the most difficult to search, and from such headquarters, made deals with local criminals.

Crimes were accomplished and the greater percentage of the stolen goods reached Malmordo and his followers, like water seeking the lowest level. Malmordo preferred objects such as rare paintings and famous jewels, because he disposed of them in other countries. Always, Malmordo and his tribe filtered out as remarkably as they had arrived.

Stacey had the explanation for this: Malmordo and his human rats used gypsies as accomplices. Traveling gypsy tribes were common throughout Europe. In going from country to country, their wagons were thoroughly inspected, but customs men seldom cared if gypsies carried odd items through, particularly as the gypsies could get away with it, anyway.

There were thieves among gypsies, but they were an individual clan and they strictly avoided local criminals. Therefore nobody looked upon them as carriers of highly valued property; indeed, no criminal of any sense would have entrusted such stolen goods to gypsies in the first place. So Malmordo had instituted something novel and unexpected, when he mingled his followers among gypsy troupes. Malmordo's rats had carried their own loot with them.

Then war struck.

Instantly Malmordo and his despicable followers commanded high premiums from the Nazis. No longer were gypsies fronting for the human rats; now, refugees were the cover up. Poland, France, the Balkans all suffered from the same infiltration process. According to Stacey, they were responsible, Malmordo's men, for many of the most outrageous robberies that brought the treasures of occupied countries into Nazidom.

Stacey's descriptions sounded like a digest of a case-book. When he had finished, he delivered added facts that gave still higher value to his account.

"Malmordo came to England," stated Stacey, "at the time of the blitz. In fact, we are sure that some of his tribe, perhaps Malmordo himself, mingled with the troops that were rescued from Dunkirk. Malmordo started operations in London, expecting the Nazis to arrive. They never did, and Malmordo gave his game away.

"Unfortunately, Malmordo and most of his rats escaped in fishing boats across the Channel before we had time to unearth them. We discovered, though, that they had plans for supercrime and that they intended to use pressure upon important men who had been engaged in subversive dealings with the Nazis.

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"When the war ended, we expected them to filter back into England. They failed to appear, so we decided to look for them in various British dominions. I was assigned to Canada and began my search in Montreal. There was no sign of Malmordo in that city, but I gained a lead that brought me to New York."

That summed Stacey's account. He sat back, ready for questions and received some. "This Malmordo," asked Cardona. "What does he look like, or haven't you ever seen him?"

"I have seen him," replied Stacey, solemnly. "He is so hideous, so grotesque, that it would seem impossible for any human face to be so contorted. In appearance, he is twisted and deformed, yet singularly agile."

Cardona nodded. That fitted his impression of Malmordo.

"How did you happen to see him?" inquired Weston. "And where?"

"I was born, raised and educated in Canada," explained Stacey, "but I lived in Montreal and learned French along with English. I spent three years among German settlers in Canada and learned their language too. Among other languages" – for the first time Stacey smiled, but barely – "I learned Esperanto."

"Which made you useful in trailing Malmordo," suggested Weston.

"Exactly," acknowledged Stacey. "That was why Scotland Yard took me on."

"And what would you suggest now?"

"That you give me a few days to trace Malmordo" requested Stacey. "It is imperative that I operate on my own, as I always have, but I can report at stated intervals directly to Inspector Cardona."

Weston pondered, then agreed.

"Until you have actual facts as to the whereabouts of wanted criminals," decided the commissioner, "there can be no reason why you should not act in unofficial – or I might say individual – capacity. Meanwhile, Stacey, rest assured that we shall mention this visit to no one."

With that promise, Trent Stacey left.

When Commissioner Weston made a promise he kept it, but he also had an innate curiosity for things unusual. That was why, a few hours later, Weston walked into the Cobalt Club, his regular off-hour habitat, reading a pocket-sized book that interested him so intently that he almost stumbled over a chair containing a friend of his, Lamont Cranston.

Few persons could take matters more calmly, almost indifferently, than did Cranston. He was a man with an impassive face that impressed some observers as masklike and his features, viewed at certain angles, gave a hawkish appearance. Cranston's eyes were easy, but steady, a fact which characterized them now. Indeed, only by gaze did Cranston imply that he was interested in anything that could so preoccupy Weston.

The commissioner seemed to realize it, for he became apologetic, then enthusiastic.

"Sorry, Cranston," began Weston. "I should have remembered I was to meet you here. But you see, I've run across something quite fascinating. Did you ever hear of Esperanto?"

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"I have made a few trips around the world," responded Cranston. "Do you think I would have started without equipping myself with an auxiliary language that is known everywhere?"

Weston hadn't thought of that. "Then you speak Esperanto, Cranston?"

"Mi parolas Esperante," replied Cranston, "Mi trovas la elparoladon tre facila."

Weston began looking through the book, so Cranston saved him the trouble by translating for him.

"I said that I speak Esperanto," stated Cranston. "I added that I find the pronunciations very easy."

"Do you know the meaning of the word noktomezo?"

"That would mean midnight."

"And what would Malmordo mean?"

"Something that doesn't bite. It sounds more like a name, though, than a word commonly used in Esperanto."

"You are right, Cranston," conceded Weston. "It is a name. The name of the world's most desperate criminal."

With that beginning, Weston reeled off all the data that he had gained from Trent Stacey, excepting of course any mention of the C.I.D. man himself. All the while, Cranston listened intently, without showing it. Behind that impassive face of Cranston's lay a keen mind, the mind of The Shadow, for the guise of Cranston was one that The Shadow adopted in the more ordinary stages of his career.

It was palpable to Cranston that Weston had acquired all this information very recently. The reason: if Weston had known all this last night, Malmordo would not have cavorted in such murderous style at the Cafe de la Morte. In his casual way, Cranston decided to seek the source.

"I suppose you learned all this at the Cafe de la Morte," remarked Cranston. "I read about a mysterious murder at that place last night."

"Malmordo was involved," admitted Weston, "but they know nothing about him at the cafe."

"Then you captured some of Malmordo's men?"

"Those rats? Impossible! They have even abandoned their hideaway at the Black Star Warehouse, they and their pets, the ordinary type of rats."

Cranston could have raised his eye-brows, but didn't. Weston hadn't mentioned the Black Star Warehouse in his run-up on the Malmordo question. He regarded it as too closely associated with Stacey. So Cranston was getting somewhere with his casual inquiry.

"I didn't mean Malmordo's regulars," corrected Cranston. "You say he enlists local malefactors wherever he goes. I supposed you might have captured some of the Manhattan contingent that was working with him."

"Some were on the job last night," declared Weston, "but they got away before we could identify them."

"I have it, then," expressed Cranston. "You've been questioning the local gypsies."

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"You can't quiz gypsies," declared Weston. "They never tell the same story twice. They have a king who acts as spokesman, but he's out of town at present. King Dakar, they call him, and every gypsy we've asked says he's away. None of them ever heard of Madame Thalla, the fortune teller at the Cafe de la Morte. They'd say the same about Malmordo."

There were a number of inconsistencies in Weston's speech, but Cranston didn't suggest that the commissioner might be something of a gypsy himself. Instead, Cranston broached a last query.

"The customers down at the Cafe de la Morte," mused Cranston. "There weren't any missing later, were there?"

"One was," recalled Weston. "A girl in white, who wore a yellow flower and had her fortune told. We don't know her name though, or anything else about her. Maybe I should have asked –"

There Weston cut himself off in his own brusque style and threw a challenging glare at Cranston. When Cranston became persistent, he made people tell things they didn't mean to say and Weston had come near mentioning Stacey. Of course Cranston couldn't have been fishing for information; he was just helpful, that was all – or so Weston thought.

Anyway, the commissioner didn't want that kind of help.

"Sorry, Cranston, but I have an appointment." That was Weston's best way to relieve the pressure of this conversation. "I'll be seeing you later."

Remembering that he too had an appointment, Lamont Cranston strolled from the Cobalt Club and out into the gathering dusk.

There Cranston became The Shadow.

CHAPTER X

JANICE BRADFORD wasn't wearing white tonight. Instead she'd chosen a dark blue sweater dress with a beret to match. Janice wasn't taking chances on dodging bullets this evening.

Or knives for that matter.

That was the part that bothered Janice, the way the slinky men seemed to be around again. What they were doing here, away from the docks and warehouses, away from the Village and the Cafe de la Morte, was something that wasn't too hard to guess.

Like Janice, they were probably looking for Madame Thalla.

Regarding Thalla as a friend, Janice was trying to find her somewhere along Gypsy Row and that was just the trouble. Thalla wasn't around, but the human rats were; at least Janice fancied that she could see them poking their imaginary whiskers out of practically every cranny.

Silent houses here, with no signs on the windows denoting fortune tellers as Janice had supposed there might be. She realized now that gypsies wouldn't advertise such talents in their own neighborhood, just as she recognized they wouldn't talk about each other. The best thing Janice could do would be to find a cab. She'd stopped in too many stores to inquire about Madame Thalla. The people who had given her dumb looks and

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head-shakes might not be so dumb as they looked.

It was thought of Malmordo however, that worried Janice most. And again, she made the mistake of thinking that obscurity would shield her from that Master Rat.

Turning into a side street, Janice hadn't gone a dozen paces before she saw a slinker move from a doorway, as though to sidle across the street and cut off her retreat. There was a doorway on this side and instinctively, Janice turned toward it, then shied away, only to have a firm hand emerge as on the night before and draw her into shelter.

The girl gasped; then, thinking she recognized the clasp, she breathed:

"It's you again! I thought it wasn't until tomorrow night –"

Janice interrupted herself when she saw that her present friend wasn't the blunt-faced man in gray, whose name, though she didn't know it, had today been disclosed as Trent Stacey, but only to Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona.

Oddly though, Janice had found another friend, a rather handsome and self-assured young man whom she remembered from the Cafe de la Morte. In the light that slanted into the doorway, Janice was looking at Harry Vincent, who in turn was getting another and more detailed impression of the girl herself.

However, it wasn't wise to stare too long, because the process required light and light was dangerous with lurkers about. Satisfied that Janice regarded him as a friend, due to his lack of resemblance to any of Malmordo's clan, Harry drew the girl deeper into the doorway.

"Speaking of tomorrow night," undertoned Harry, "I was worried about last night. I saw Thalla steer you out of the cafe, but what happened after that?"

"Why – why" – Janice stammered a moment. "I – I managed to get away, that was all."

"Somebody else helped you?"

"Well – yes."

"Somebody you were to meet near here," defined Harry, "and tomorrow night. You mistook me for him."

There was silence for a moment. Janice gave a slight shudder, worrying about the slinkers.

"Whoever he was," suggested Harry, "he found a cab for you, probably over on the avenue."

Janice remained silent.

"There will be a cab here shortly," promised Harry. "I can get you away in it, if you tell me about this other chap. After all, he and I are working toward the same purpose, to trap Malmordo."

At the name "Malmordo" Janice supplied a really appreciable shudder. Then quickly she said:

"I don't know who he was. I promised to meet him tomorrow night, but not here. Unless I know more about you, I don't think I should tell you more."

"My name is Harry Vincent," was Harry's reply. "Now who was your other friend?"

"I don't know," expressed Janice truthfully. "He didn't have time to tell me his name."

"Did you tell him yours?"

Janice tightened her lips, then said:

"No."

From the way she said it, Harry decided that the girl wasn't going to give her name now. Nevertheless, he waited patiently, confident that Janice's interest in the expected cab would make her talk. The process worked. Fumbling in her purse, Janice brought out a folded slip of paper; with a little pencil, she wrote something on it.

"There's the message," she undertoned, "and I've written my name on the back. You can have the paper when you give me the cab."

Lights were coming around the corner and lurkers were scooting for cover. Stepping out boldly, Harry flagged the cab. As it stopped, he opened the door and beckoned to Janice; as the girl hurried into the cab, Harry reminded her of the paper and Janice planted it in his hand.

Then the cab was off with Janice as a passenger and Harry was making a quick dart, openly, toward the corner, to draw attention his way. At that, Harry couldn't feel that he was taking much risk because he'd been expecting a cab piloted by a driver named Shrevvy who was to drop off The Shadow at this very corner. If any lurkers had taken pot-shots at Harry, they'd have received plenty more virulent bullets in return.

Apparently the lurkers had been smart enough to be on their way, but at that they'd outsmarted themselves. For Harry was scarcely past the corner before another cab pulled up and this time it was Shrevvy's. Not until then did Harry realize that he'd flagged a chance cab that had happened to swing into that side street just before Shrevvy's scheduled arrival.

A whispered voice sounded almost at Harry's elbow, out of darkness that seemed vacant. It ordered:

"Report."

Briefing his report to The Shadow, Harry finished by extending the folded paper. A hand took it and moved into the light, where Harry saw another hand join it. It was a rather astonishing effect, watching those gloved hands unfold the slip of paper and turn it over, for the hands seemed like independent creatures floating in mid-air.

Even more startling in a way was the slip of paper itself. Staring eagerly, Harry blinked when he saw that it was blank.

"That's the message somebody gave the girl," Harry was saying, "and she wrote her name on back of it —"

Only it wasn't the message and Janice hadn't written her name and she hadn't gone away in Shrevvy's cab. So far as The Shadow was concerned, the girl was still Miss X, which represented an unknown quantity.

Nevertheless, The Shadow's laugh came softly as though he appreciated the humor of the thing. Then, leaving Harry to figure some way of redeeming himself, The Shadow glided off into the darkness.

Better luck was waiting a few blocks away. There, The Shadow stopped in front of a dimly lighted store which proved to be a pet-shop. Inside was a customer, a wizened little man, who looked normal enough for this neighborhood. The proprietor, a squatty, sleek-haired man, was warning the customer not to bother the pets and particularly the little green love birds.

The customer answered to the name of Hawkeye and he worked for The Shadow, but of course he hadn't stated either of those facts. What intrigued him about the love birds was that they would peck at odd things, like the cover of a match pack, something that the average parrot would ignore, at least after the first taste.

"Those birds not for sale," the squatty storekeeper was saying. "Customer already buy them. Closing shop now. Come back tomorrow."

The storekeeper was brushing Hawkeye away from the cage, where one of the green birds was reclaiming the piece of cardboard that had dropped between the bars. Wrapping a cloth around the cage, the squatty man took it to the back of the shop, then returned to pull down the shades in the show window.

Shambling out in slow fashion, Hawkeye would have sped his pace the moment that he turned past the window, if The Shadow had not stopped him with a whispered signal. The result was that Hawkeye paused, then shuffled across the street in careless fashion while the blackness that represented The Shadow continued the swift glide in the original direction.

Through an alley and around to the back street, The Shadow was waiting when the squatty man came from his darkened shop bearing the covered cage that contained the green birds. After a hurried look from right to left, the storekeeper headed for an opposite alley.

The Shadow took up the trail.

That trail ended after a zigzag route through several back streets. The squatty man tapped at an obscure door which opened cautiously. A few words passed through the crack, then the door widened enough for the cage to follow. His order delivered, the owner of the pet shop waddled away.

A few moments later, The Shadow, invisible in the shrouding darkness of the doorway, was opening the door itself to cross the threshold of a new adventure.

CHAPTER XI

THE narrow hallway was pitch-black, its floor so old and creaky that it responded, though ever so slightly, to The Shadow's usually noiseless glide.

At the end was another door, which The Shadow found by a careful probe. His gloved hand muffled the rattle of the loose knob; even the groan of the rusted hinges was suppressed as The Shadow pressed the door inward.

A dim light issued from within, showing a tawdry room furnished with battered chairs and table, a turkey-red curtain hanging across a doorway beyond. If eyes behind that curtain could notice the door's motion, The Shadow's gaze was even keener. He observed the curtain's quiver.

Inching the door slowly inward, The Shadow literally baited the watcher beyond the curtain. He could sense when someone there was ready to surge; then, boldly, suddenly, The Shadow flung the door fully open and whirled through.

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As he twisted, The Shadow produced an automatic from beneath his cloak. He completed a full turn that not only carried him away from the wide-open doorway, but brought him back against the door itself, clattering it against the side wall of the room so it formed the long side of a triangle which included the brief stretch of front wall between the corner and the doorway.

This peculiar double process completely fooled the man beyond the curtain. He came charging through, only to halt blankly and bewildered, not knowing how or where to aim the old-fashioned pistol that he clutched in his tawny hand. Then, as The Shadow delivered a shuddery, whispered laugh, the man's face enlarged in terror.

His face was the darkish face of Panjo, the man who had contacted the sailor on the Santander.

The Shadow's whisper phrased the name "Panjo." As the darkish man quivered, he saw blackness stretch to a table near the door and whip away the cloth covering of an object standing there, to reveal a cage containing two green birds. Then the whisper formed words, in accusing tone:

"Panjo! Avakle avnas tut chirikla!"

In gypsy dialect, The Shadow was saying: "Panjo! These were your birds," to which Panjo could only nod. Then came The Shadow's sharp query:

"Ti romni?"

Panjo broke into a wild babble.

"Mri romni odoi geyas," he pleaded, "oi n'avel pale. Na janav so pes lake talindyas."

The Shadow had asked about Panjo's wife and in reply Panjo was saying that his wife had gone away and not come back; that he did not know what had happened to her.

In gypsy talk The Shadow ordered Panjo to give him the gun, which Panjo did, quaking the while. Then, in sinister tone, The Shadow suggested that perhaps Panjo's missing wife might be responsible for Gregor's death. Before Panjo could chatter a denial, The Shadow wheeled, flinging the door shut to reveal a trembling woman in the space represented by the corner.

The woman was Madame Thalla. Quivering, she dropped the knife she held. The Shadow had been ready for the trick that Thalla had used to elude Cardona and had imprisoned the woman behind the door where she had hidden. And now Thalla was chattering wildly:

"Me na chinghiom les! Me na chinghion les!"

Thalla was repeating "I did not kill him!" in reference to Gregor and The Shadow's laugh eased to a tone that made Thalla realize he believed her. The Shadow had accomplished what he wanted; he had linked Panjo with Thalla.

And now, in a sterner tone, The Shadow demanded:

"Kai baro kralis th'arakas?"

The Shadow was asking where he could find their great leader, which to Panjo and Thalla meant King Dakar, so lately reported out of the city. Eagerly, Panjo and Thalla conducted him past the turkey red curtain, where

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Panjo rapped at a door beyond. The door opened and The Shadow found himself facing King Dakar, a gentleman whose surprise diminished rapidly when Panjo, and Thalla chattered to him in gypsy talk.

"Yek Ushalyin!" Panjo exclaimed. "Laskoro Romesker!"

"Ov hin Rom!" added Thalla. "Na gajo!"

The title 'Yek Ushalyin' was Panjo's way of saying "The Shadow." Translated literally it meant 'a shadow' but in Romany, the indefinite article 'a' also meant 'one'. In defining the visitor as 'One Shadow', Panjo was seeking to confer a distinction upon so notable a guest.

Also, Panjo had added that Yek Ushalyin was of the gypsies and Thalla had supplemented the claim by declaring: "He is gypsy, not a foreigner," for the term Rom meant someone of the gypsy race, while gajo signified any non-gypsy.

From there on, The Shadow took up the conversation and King Dakar, hearing his speech, bowed low. To term Dakar a 'king' seemed ludicrous, for he was a drab, sunken sort of man, whose broad, droopy face was so weather-beaten that it had lost its natural color. Nevertheless, if The Shadow deserved a title, so did King Dakar.

For after he heard The Shadow declaim in pure Romany, Dakar did likewise. The language that they talked showed that Panjo and Thalla were limited in gypsy-speech to a hodge-podge of varied dialects.

It was a pleasure, Dakar told The Shadow, to hear some one speak the lacho romano chib, or pure gypsy, and not the posh romani toward which so many of Dakar's people trended. They were even forgetting their romnipen, or gypsy ways.

The Shadow inquired if that applied to a Rom named Gregor and Dakar was startled. When The Shadow wanted to learn the connection between Gregor and Malmordo, Thalla became terrified and even Panjo was shaken. Then, Dakar standing speechless, The Shadow calmly expressed himself in English, interspersed with gypsy terms, to clarify the purpose of his visit and how he had arrived here.

"At the pier, I learned that Panjo was Rom," declared The Shadow. "When he saw me, he cried 'Vourdalak' and 'Nosferadu' meaning he mistook me for a vampire, which any Rom might. Yek Rom, seeking birds, such was Panjo. Why should he want chirikla? Because birds are used for telling fortunes. Bring your chirikla, Panjo."

Panjo went to get the birds.

"On the boat was a gajo who died very suddenly," The Shadow told Dakar. "He said three words: 'Malmordo – morto – noktomezo.' Do you understand those words, Dakar?"

Dakar's expression had gone rigid. As it relaxed, he nodded slowly.

"I know who Malmordo is," said Dakar. "But those other words" – he shook his head – "they are in the language that we do not understand."

"The words meant death and midnight," declared The Shadow. "I knew of the Cafe de la Morte and assumed that the man might refer to it. I went there and saw Madame Thalla, a fortune teller. A romni who tells fortunes" – The Shadow gestured to Thalla – "would not her husband be a Rom who would buy chirikla like these?"

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The Shadow completed another gesture, toward the green love birds which had just arrived in their cage, carried by Panjo. Then, as if to acknowledge The Shadow's skill at deduction, Panjo took the birds from the cage while Thalla brought a little box containing rows of small cards, about the size of place cards used at a dinner party. At a signal from Panjo, one of the birds flew to the box, picked up a card with its beak, fluttered over to The Shadow and deposited the card in the visitor's gloved hand.

"Chirikli dela take, Yek Ushalyin," said Thalla. "He is giving you the card, the bird is, that you may read your fortune. So kamavela?" Thalla gave a professional shrug. "What will come? Kon janalo? Who knows?"

A quaint custom this, of having birds pluck cards and deliver them to customers, so that each could read an individual fortune. Traveling gypsies had trained such birds for centuries, but in recent years, palm reading and interpretations of the tarots had superceded this picturesque type of divination.

"Panjo and Thalla went in hiding," explained King Dakar. "It was then that Panjo remembered his trained birds. He sent word for them to be brought here so that no one could find him through them. But you were very wise, Yek Ushalyin."

The Shadow put a sharp question to Dakar.

"As wise as Malmordo?"

"Wiser, Yek Ushalyin. So we hope!"

"Perhaps Malmordo already knows where to find you!"

"No, no!" Dakar spoke excitedly. "That is why I am in hiding too! So Malmordo can not find me."

"Nor have the police managed to find you," declared The Shadow. "It is curious you do not wish to talk to them."

"They could not protect us against Malmordo!" exclaimed Dakar. "That is why we can not talk to them."

"It has given them a singular impression," stated The Shadow. "The police believe that you are friendly to Malmordo."

That brought a storm of indignant denial from Dakar, with Panjo and Thalla joining in the protest. Every curse that could be invoked in the gypsy language was uttered and all were directed against Malmordo. To another visitor, it would have seemed that the gypsies were overdoing it, but not to The Shadow. They had called him Rom; they had termed him Yek Ushalyin. To him they would only tell the truth.

"We Rom have suffered much from Malmordo," asserted Dakar when the hubbub ended. "We have been called many names in many lands, such names as heathen and outcasts. But in only one land, Egypt, were we called robbers. They gave us the name Harami there. And now today, Malmordo would have us called Harami everywhere."

"I have heard," affirmed The Shadow, "that Malmordo and his gaje traveled with your comrades in Europe."

"Because we thought them poor strangers," argued Dakar. "Malmordo! Bah! The other name they called him, Mordetbesto, was a better name for him. It sounds like the beast he was. So low did he sink that he was taken as a freak to be exhibited for copper money by the foolish Rom he deceived. A divio gajo, a wild man they thought he was and others of his kind posed as the same. They learned our customs, romnipen, to help them

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on their way."

"You should have learned more about them," reproved The Shadow. "You avoided the criminals with whom they dealt. Why did you not avoid them?"

"But Malmordo and his gaje never dealt with others!" protested Dakar. "We would surely have known if they had."

King Dakar meant it, but as a gypsy leader it was his part to claim he knew everything. His statements did not tally with what The Shadow had learned from Commissioner Weston. Dakar might give the gypsies benefit of doubt where connections with Malmordo were concerned, but he would not extend the courtesy to common criminals. However, The Shadow had a way to test King Dakar further.

"You have said that Gregor once was Rom," The Shadow asserted. "But Gregor called himself a gajo and he was at the Cafe de la Morte –"

Madame Thalla babbled an interruption and King Dakar halted her. With all the dignity of his office, Dakar declared:

"As Rom, we both hate and fear Malmordo. But I have ordered my people that if they do neither, Malmordo may not harm us. None were to speak to Malmordo once he arrived here, nor to watch him. Gregor was one who would not obey and when I chided him, he said he was no longer Rom, but gajo.

"What Gregor learned about Malmordo, we do not know. How he learned it also puzzles us. But since Gregor was watching for Malmordo, it was necessary that we watch Gregor. I chose Thalla for that duty because she could tell fortunes at the Cafe de la Morte. Because her husband, Panjo, often bought birds from the sailors, I told him to watch the ships. That is all."

Dakar had put it well. The Shadow could have queried what the gypsy king intended next, but such a question was unnecessary. The Shadow simply waited, knowing that Dakar would declare himself. And Dakar did.

Across Dakar's weather-beaten face came a vengeful expression inspired by the demand for justice.

"Gregor was Rom." There was finality in Dakar's tone. "Gregor was murdered by Malmordo. Whoever may ask me to help destroy Malmordo will have the services of any Rom I can supply. I, King Dakar, have so sworn, and I can be found here whenever I am needed."

That promise was meant for The Shadow and it ended the interview. Turning, the cloaked master, whom the gypsies styled Yek Ushalyin made his exit through the red curtain. Only the whispered echoes of a parting laugh remained, as The Shadow went out into the night.

The Shadow needed no further pledge from King Dakar. Already the gypsy leader had provided him with a trail, through Madame Thalla. The card that the trained bird had given The Shadow was not inscribed with some trivial fortune.

Instead it bore a name, one which Madame Thalla had learned and knew that The Shadow would want.

The card read: Janice Bradford.

CHAPTER XII

IT was late the next afternoon when Inspector Cardona looked up from his desk to meet the steady gray eyes of Trent Stacey. It was rather startling, the way this visitor had arrived, though Cardona's office wasn't difficult to enter unannounced.

However, whatever annoyance Cardona might have felt he instantly suppressed. Stacey was a special case, by mutual agreement. This was the right way for him to appear here.

In his cool style, Stacey inquired:

"Any reports on rats, Inspector?"

"Plenty," assured Cardona, "but not the sort we want, though they may be a lead. I've been checking with the warehouses around the waterfront to learn how badly they are infested by rats. I haven't forgotten what you said about Malmordo's gang making pets of the pests."

Stacey's straight forehead formed a frown.

"You may arouse Malmordo's suspicions –"

"Not the way I'm handling it," interposed Cardona. "I'm working through the health department. The trouble is the rats are bad news everywhere, big fighting rats, so big they kill some of the cats that are planted to kill them."

"The boldest rats would be where Malmordo is. His men would see to it that they spread out from ordinary hiding places."

"I figured that. You were right about Black Star. It's really free of rats, that warehouse, so we're no longer bothering with it."

Stacey gave a short, pleased nod. His gray eyes were reflective for a moment; then he brought up another subject. Spreading a sheet of paper on the desk, Stacey pointed to a rough diagram that he had drawn.

"Malmordo's present headquarters," he declared. "There is a chance we may trap him there tonight."

"This isn't a warehouse," remarked Cardona, studying the chart. "It looks more like some old residence."

"Malmordo never stays with his tribe," explained Stacey. "He doesn't want them to know too much about him."

"Then how did you find out about this place?" demanded Cardona. "By staying away from Malmordo's mob?"

Stacey smiled and nodded.

"In a sense, yes," he stated. "I overheard a few roustabouts talking in that doggerel form of Esperanto that Malmordo's followers use. They mentioned his headquarters, because naturally they have to contact him. He will probably go there tonight."

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Cardona began to study the chart more intently.

"At dusk, I can go in there," suggested Stacey. "Give me at least a half hour's leeway before any of your men even approach that area."

"But suppose you meet Malmordo, in the meantime?"

"I should like to meet Malmordo," replied Stacey, grimly. "It would be a pleasure to take him by surprise. However, I don't expect him there that soon."

"What if some of his men are on guard?"

"I talk their language. I can pose as a representative of the local talent that Malmordo is lining up. But I don't expect them either. What I want to do is get at any loose evidence that may be lying around."

That part pleased Cardona immensely. He could foresee that some sort of a case would have to be built against Malmordo to make the public believe that such a vicious and fabulous criminal existed. So Joe asked:

"After I post my men – what then?"

"If Malmordo appears," returned Stacey, "let him through. Then close in and box him. I can work from the inside and drive him right back into your hands."

Cardona thought that over. Then:

"We might nail him going in."

"Malmordo won't come within a block of that house," objected Stacey, "if you are any nearer. You are dealing with a Master Rat and don't forget it. Outdoors, Malmordo has a way of keeping just beyond a good marksman's range. You can sight him, but never hit him."

"You're right," Cardona agreed, remembering how elusive Malmordo had been, even in the restricted area of the dining garden at the Cafe de la Morte. "The only game is to turn that house into a rat-trap, which judging from the address, it probably is already."

Methodically, Cardona made a brief time-sheet with a carbon copy which he gave to Stacey. Then, as the C.I.D. man was about to leave, the inspector asked:

"One matter I meant to mention yesterday – were you in the Cafe de la Morte before Malmordo appeared there?"

"Not on the night he murdered Gregor," replied Stacey. "I was on my way there at the time. But I was in the place on previous evenings."

"Did you see a girl in white, wearing a yellow flower? The blonde who talked to Madame Thalla?"

"Yes. I saw her after the murder, too."

"Where?"

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"A few blocks from the cafe. She was dodging the shooting. I realized that something must have happened at the Cafe de la Morte and I took it that she had fled with other patrons. I directed her to the avenue."

"And did you learn her name?"

"Unfortunately no, but I would recognize her again."

"That's what everybody else says," declared Cardona, grimly, "but we haven't been able to find her. If you should see her anywhere again, be sure and let me know."

Pausing at the door, Stacey gave a slow, emphatic nod and said:

"I shall."

Though it wasn't dusk yet, Cardona's office was getting dark because it had an eastern exposure through a none-too-ample window. Several minutes after Stacey left, Joe decided to turn on the lights. When he did, a new surprise was staring him in the face.

The surprise was a gentleman named Lamont Cranston.

And a real surprise this.

Cranston's usual contact with the law was Commissioner Weston. Though he knew Cardona well, Cranston had rarely visited the inspector's office, at least not as himself.

There was a special reason for Cranston's visit. He hadn't been able to find Weston. The commissioner had slipped away somewhere to study his Esperanto. This in turn meant there was little use in trying to interview him, because when Weston concentrated on one thing, he dropped others. Cranston had gotten the hint that Weston was leaving the case of the Cafe de la Morte to Inspector Cardona.

There was someone else that Cranston hadn't been able to locate: Janice Bradford. That was why Cranston had come here, to sound out the law as represented by Joe Cardona.

Almost immediately Cranston discovered something; namely, that Cardona was fidgety. This was so unusual that it showed, even though Joe managed to keep his usual deadpan expression. So Cranston, ever calm, immediately became calmer than ever. He had something to chat about, he said, but it could wait. So Cardona's eyes went to the rough chart on the desk and Joe decided to act as Weston had in Cranston's presence the day before.

Cardona simply said as much as he could without saying too much.

Using his phone, Cardona called a couple of special men and told them to bring certain others. He summoned one detective to his office, showed him the rough chart and drew a larger plan, pointing out where all hands would be stationed. All the while, Joe tried to make it look like mere routine.

"There's been a little trouble in that neighborhood," the inspector told the detective. "I'll make the rounds after you're all posted."

All the while, Cranston was sitting by indifferently, getting occasional glimpses at the chart and hearing the detective's queries. He took in something that the detective didn't; namely, that a certain house marked on the diagram could well be the center of the whole thing.

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Next, Cardona glanced at his brief time-chart, then turned it over and pushed it to one side, among some loose papers. Here Cardona copied a bit of Cranston's indifference.

"Don't post yourselves too soon," Cardona told the detective. "You might be noticed. It will be dusk about seven o'clock, so make it seven thirty."

Glancing at his watch, Cranston remarked that it was already seven o'clock, which pleased Cardona.

"Get started," Cardona told the detective, "and take the others along." Then, as the detective left, Joe added: "Sorry, I'll have to be leaving in a few minutes, Mr. Cranston."

"Very well." Cranston arose in leisurely style then paused. "I just wanted to ask about a girl named Janice Bradford."

"Never heard of her."

"She seems to be missing," continued Cranston. "Maybe she just went away for a rest."

Cardona shrugged as though that didn't belong in his department.

"She might need a rest," decided Cranston, "after experiencing a lot of excitement. Some of her friends say that she was very fond of the Cafe de la Morte."

That brought Cardona around.

"What does she look like?" Joe demanded. "Is she a blonde?"

"I didn't think to ask," replied Cranston. "I simply thought you might be interested. Only her friends know nothing more."

"What about her family?"

"She has a father, but he is missing, too, which is the oddest part. They seem to have moved from one hotel to another and stopped giving forwarding addresses. The father's name is Andrew Bradford and the hotels —"

Pausing, Cranston reached for a loose sheet of paper and added: "Here, I'll write out the data for you."

Cranston wrote the names of the persons and the hotels, folded the sheet of paper and laid it back upon the desk. Cardona didn't observe what happened during the folding process for he was on the wrong side of the desk. In folding the paper toward himself, Cranston brought a smaller slip into view, his own view. It was Cardona's time chart and it automatically came with its writing side up.

The list was as follows:

Stacey — 7:00 p.m.

Cardona — 7:30 p.m.

Malmordo — ???

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In putting the folded paper on the desk, Cranston turned it downward so that the list dropped beneath it, writing side also down. He gave the folded paper a slight slide, so it glided toward Cardona, who picked it up and creased it again as he put it in his pocket. Seeing the blank side of the sheet that bore his list, Cardona picked it up too, keeping the writing away from Cranston's sight. Poker-faced, Joe hid the grim satisfaction that he felt at thus out-witting the astute Mr. Cranston.

Cardona didn't know that Cranston had swapped one name for another, that of Janice Bradford in return for Trent Stacey or at least the Stacey part of it. Nor did Cardona begin to guess what Cranston would do about those other facts he had learned, once he discovered their importance.

In the dusk that was heavy outside police headquarters, the departing Mr. Cranston hailed a waiting cab and once inside it merged with darkness. For the cab was Shrevvy's and from a secret drawer beneath its rear seat, Cranston produced and put on the regalia of The Shadow.

The address that Shrevvy heard his chief give was very close to the old house that Trent Stacey had defined as the probable headquarters of a supercriminal called Malmordo.

CHAPTER XIII

SIGHT-SEERS wishing to view the house that Malmordo used as his headquarters can find it by looking for the most decrepit house in the most dilapidated section of Manhattan south of Forty-second Street and west of Fifth Avenue.

The house had to be about that bad because it was empty and during the housing shortage in New York practically any house that still stood of its own accord was remodeled in some fashion or another so that it could be occupied.

To say that this house was standing of its own accord at first sight seemed an exaggeration. Its brick front was falling apart in such chunks that it looked as though it were propped between the two adjacent houses that formed part of the solid block. But those houses were so ramshackle that they couldn't have supported more than their own weight, therefore Malmordo's house must have been standing on whatever trifling merit it still possessed.

This block and those surrounding it were gloomy and quiet when Cardona's men put in an appearance on the fringes. They managed to keep out of sight without trouble, taking advantage of the very gloom which had probably attracted Malmordo to this area. There was one fault, however, which worked against Malmordo and pleased Cardona immensely as he began his rounds to tell his detectives what this was all about.

A grimy street light stood directly opposite the empty house, making the building perhaps the most conspicuous in the block. It probably annoyed Malmordo, that light, but since this was the only empty house in the neighborhood, or for that matter about any neighborhood, he had to make the best of it.

Cardona now understood why Trent Stacey had chosen dusk as the right time to enter and had also wanted a reasonable leeway. Stacey had probably waited while it grew dark, until just the time when street lamps began to flicker. That was his cue to get into the house in a hurry, before the glow appeared from across the street.

How long Stacey had been inside was a question but a rather important one. The really important question was how soon Malmordo would arrive, if at all.

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It happened sooner than the ace inspector had hoped.

Out of the surrounding gloom that might have harbored a few dozen lurkers came as grotesque and distorted a figure as any freak show ever boasted.

The term human rat was hardly adequate for Malmordo. He had the writhe of a human snake.

Malmordo's figure, clad baggily as at the Cafe de la Morte, seemed to grow right out of the grimy sidewalk and coil itself up the front steps. Watching from nearly a block away, Cardona started to move in, his men copying his example, but as he did, Joe realized how right Stacey was in saying that long range fire couldn't reach Malmordo. The human monstrosity was safely in the shelter of his own doorway before anyone could have aimed a gun.

And then, as if to tantalize anyone who happened to be watching, Malmordo poked his head and shoulders into sight. The street lamp opposite gave a full but fleeting view of those misshapen, vicious features that were so unmistakable. Only one man could have displayed such an ugly, twisted visage: Malmordo.

He fitted the rat definition as he peered up and down the street, in a quick double-take. Then, rat fashion he was gone again, into the house itself.

There was proof that Malmordo had really gone.

A long streak of blackness that sliced from across the street began to take on line. A shadowy stretch, that was all, and its waver could have been due to a flicker of the street lamp. But there was solid blackness moving in the streaky gloom that shrouded it.

Solid blackness called The Shadow.

At the steps, The Shadow did a curious sidle, up toward the edge of the doorway.

Malmordo had been misshapen; The Shadow was shapeless.

Growing blackness, that was all, like something unreal, which evaporated, smoke-fashion before anyone could define it. The fade took place when The Shadow deftly twisted himself into the doorway, from which, unlike Malmordo, he did not take a last quick look.

Even Inspector Cardona was deceived. On the move, he thought that the rise of darkness and its curious fadeaway were due to the changing angle of his vision. Besides, Cardona couldn't picture even The Shadow as part of a scene which had been unearthed exclusively by Trent Stacey, a man whose own ways were exceptionally under-cover.

Inside the house, The Shadow was hearing creaks.

The house was a three story affair, by this time the creaks were going up beyond the second. They represented footsteps, though they were not distinguishable as such. Rather they were a cross between a creep and a snaky progress which defined them as Malmordo's. What The Shadow was hearing were the transcribed sounds of Malmordo's ascent as reproduced by the old beams and shaky flooring.

A tiny flashlight spotted its glow along the hall, shrouded by the folds of The Shadow's cloak. With that light The Shadow picked out the stairs and began a climb of his own, a trifle slower than Malmordo's but considerably more efficient. For as he reached the second floor, The Shadow could hear the creaks upon the

third, which wouldn't have been possible had The Shadow been producing such sounds himself.

As near noiseless as was possible in this old house, The Shadow was betraying no token of his presence. But now, hearing a pause in the sounds that meant Malmordo, The Shadow slackened his climb to the third floor, practically feeling each step ahead, shifting his weight by degrees, so that not even the slightest token of his approach could be sensed.

Almost at the third floor, The Shadow heard the muffled closing of a door. He was conscious next of creaks that must have come from a hallway, moving toward the rear. It was as if some eavesdropper were stealing away, eager for haste, yet anxious for silence. The closing of the door, however, indicated that Malmordo had isolated himself in a room; therefore whoever was sneaking along the third floor could do so without too much risk of being heard, at least by Malmordo.

In turn, The Shadow increased his speed, knowing that Malmordo could not hear him and recognizing that the interloper was making enough sounds of his own to drown any that The Shadow made. That interloper, of course, would be a man named Stacey, who had been listed at seven o'clock on Cardona's schedule. Right now, The Shadow was summing the whole arrangement between Stacey and Cardona, though he had already assumed that it might be something of this sort.

Had Stacey boxed Malmordo?

Hardly, not in so short a time space. Rather, Malmordo had boxed himself, though certainly not too solidly. As The Shadow reached the third floor he could hear creaks in the rear of the house and below, indicating that Stacey had found a back stairway as a better way down.

What Stacey should do was obvious. By promptly summoning Cardona and the detectives, Stacey could lead them up to the room where Malmordo was, with little chance of being heard. Then Malmordo would be really trapped, provided he remained in that room.

There was another proviso.

Could half a dozen men or more come up the front stairs and the back without multiplying those creaks to such a degree that Malmordo would surely hear them? The Shadow doubted that such a mass invasion could be muffled; yet he knew Cardona well enough to realize that the inspector would attempt it. Cardona believed in using men when he had them and tonight he had them.

The solution was simply for The Shadow to trap Malmordo first and hold him until the police arrived.

Licking along the hall, the flashlight picked out a closed door half way to the back of the house. It fitted with the location of Malmordo's final creaks and the muffled sound of a closing door; it also explained why Stacey would have taken the back way down. The back stairs were nearer and toward them was an open doorway from which Stacey might have watched Malmordo enter the room which now was closed.

Silently, swiftly, The Shadow reached the closed door. He placed one hand on the knob while his other drew an automatic. Expertly, The Shadow turned the knob with a squeeze. He eased the door inward and saw a room with a tiny, shaded window; a room lighted by a single candle that was burning on a table beside an old trunk.

The trunk was opened and its tray was strewn with envelopes and papers. More important, in front of the trunk was the crouched figure of Malmordo, huddled as though reading something by the candlelight. There were no chairs in the room, but its floor was covered with a frayed carpet, which came clear to the door.

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In fact, the door, in opening inward, had lifted the edge of the rug, scruffing it just enough to show the glint of a wire that ran beneath. The Shadow, ever alert for detail, was quick to note that item. For already, as he lunged across the threshold, The Shadow had sensed something wrong with the bunched figure of Malmordo.

It seemed to be swaying, that crouched form, but the reason was the waver of the candle-light. In order to produce such an illusion, the figure had been set between the light and the trunk, therefore Malmordo couldn't be reading anything at all. The figure itself wasn't Malmordo, it was a dummy. The lack of chairs in the room was an indication of the structure on which the dummy was formed.

Malmordo had simply planted his baggy garb upon a chair. The wire, running straight toward the trunk, was obviously connected with a booby-trap. Half into the room, The Shadow could lose more time by turning than he would in completing his surge. So he turned his drive into a dive, hitting the chair shoulder first.

It was a cushioned armchair, the kind it had to be to give sufficient bulk to the improvised dummy. Taking the chair with him, The Shadow somersaulted at an angle past the trunk, to a corner of the room, where he landed, chair uppermost.

And just in time.

As the chair legs kicked toward the ceiling, the trunk exploded with a sullen blast that filled the room with a pungent white smoke which echoed with the rattle of flying metal fragments, ricocheting from the walls!

CHAPTER XIV

VIEWED from the street, the old brick house seemed to jolt and shake itself under the force of the blast. If the charge had been planted in the cellar, the structure might have given way, but as it was, the building settled back to normal, except for a flying shower of broken windows that burst from every floor.

Curiously, the crash of the windows was like a sequel to the explosion and another follow-up occurred a dozen seconds later. The front door came flying open, disgorging a plunging figure that righted itself at the bottom of the steps and arose to reveal itself as Trent Stacey.

At least Cardona recognized the man as Stacey, though the detectives didn't know who he was. Except that they were sure the man couldn't be Malmordo, the writhy thing that had entered the house only a short while before.

Stacey looked bewildered for the moment, then hearing the pound of approaching feet, he knew that they must mean Cardona's squad. With an eager wave of his arm, Stacey gestured the detectives into the house and led them in a rush up the front stairs, with Cardona pressing to the fore.

Meanwhile, the smoke was clearing in the third floor room that Malmordo had designed as a death-trap. From the corner came a whispered laugh, a battered chair came flinging through the air to land where the trunk had been. Enveloped in the remnants of the smoke, The Shadow appeared as a ghost as he arose and surveyed the damage all about him.

The room was really wrecked. Chunks of plaster had fallen from the walls, along with portions of the ceiling. On the floor lay a broken square of wood; above it, a similar hole in the ceiling, indicating that the thing was a trap door. Malmordo's papers had vanished in a puff of brilliant flame, accompanying the blast. If The Shadow had been caught unshielded in the midst of that explosion, he would have been hurt badly and perhaps permanently.

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As it was, he remained unscratched, thanks to the protecting chair which had taken the brunt of the blast.

And now, with footbeats pounding on the stairs, The Shadow needed the quickest exit that would keep him in active circulation. One loomed above, the gaping hole where the trap-door had been. Using the now unsteady chair, The Shadow reached the hole with his hands and chinned himself through, fading like the drifting smoke, just as Stacey arrived with Cardona and the crew of detectives.

The devastation amazed them, so much that Cardona's men weren't surprised to see the inspector talking things over with a total stranger, which was what they regarded Stacey to be.

"Malmordo was here!" asserted Stacey. "I was looking at some papers in the tray of a trunk that was right in the center of the room, when I heard him coming up the front stairs. So I sneaked down the back way."

"You saw him come in here?" queried Cardona.

"Yes," replied Stacey, "and he closed the door. It was open when I first came here."

"What about the papers?"

"I snatched a few that looked important." Stacey tapped his inside pocket. "I didn't want to disturb too many, not after I heard Malmordo coming. He might have noticed it."

"Looks like he did notice it," gruffed Cardona. He was looking along the carpet, scorched by the blast, and now showing the line of the wire. "That's why he rigged this room into a trap. Unless —"

Joe had glanced up. He saw the open gap above the rickety chair.

"That's where Malmordo went!" exclaimed Cardona. "Out through that trap door! We'll go after him!"

On the theory that what goes up must come down, Cardona was too smart to take his whole squad to the roof. He sent men to the ground floor to cover the front door and the back, gesturing Stacey along with them. The detectives were to spread, while Stacey was to stay across the street and watch the front door. From there, he could signal up to the roof as needed.

This was decided amid the sweep of flashlights, for the explosion had snuffed Malmordo's candle. It was during one of those sweeps that Cardona had spotted the open trap-door, but now Joe was using a flashlight to bore straight up through that space as two detectives gave him a hoist and then prepared to follow.

Sweeping the flashlight around the flat roof, Cardona saw only blackness, so he turned off the light and laid low while one detective boosted the other, who promptly leaned back through the opening and helped his companion up to join him. Then, as the three men spread, they began to slice everywhere with their flashlights, producing prompt results.

From behind a chimney, where only blackness seemed to dwell, an automatic opened fire.

Those shots weren't directed at Cardona and the detectives. They stabbed toward the roof of one adjoining house, then at the other, in quick, alternating precision. They brought wild yells and even wilder fire.

The Shadow fired those initial shots. He was aiming at crouched gunners who were entrenched on each side of the empty house. Catching them unaware, The Shadow had broken up an ambush that would have been ruinous to Cardona and his men. As it was, the return fire was hasty and most of it directed at the chimney.

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This gave Cardona and his two companions time to flatten and start jabbing at the ambushed crooks.

Those gunners were ambushed no longer. They heard a fierce, strident laugh from behind the chimney, a taunt that mocked their futile gun fire. Recognizing that laugh as The Shadow's, the crooks turned and fled down through trap-doors in the adjoining houses, peppered by gunfire as they went.

From their appearance and the fact they shouted in English, it was apparent that these were hired hoodlums of the breed that had served as waiters at the Cafe de la Morte. Since Malmordo was gone, it seemed obvious that he was using this crew to cover up his flight instead of employing his own band of slinky rats. This fitted with Stacey's data regarding Malmordo and the alliances he formed with local criminals wherever he operated.

The Shadow wasted no time in going after one batch of fleeing hoodlums. Hearing the laugh trail in that direction, Cardona recognized the fact and motioned his men to pursue the other half of the fugitive tribe. People living in the houses adjoining the empty were startled and cowed by what seemed human stampedes coming down the stairways.

All was quiet on the street until suddenly two doorways gushed a divided human tide. Three men poured from each exit; those from the house where The Shadow had headed were staggering, the reason being that two were literally carrying along a third. He was coughing his last, that thug, so they dropped him on the steps.

Across the street, Trent Stacey dropped away from the light and into shelter just as a rakish car came roaring from the corner. Five hoodlums should have hopped on its running board, but only four did. The fifth man had a wounded arm that dangled so that its hand couldn't grab, so he dived for shelter in the darkness in front of Malmordo's house.

In the wake of the rakish car came a speeding cab and as it passed the doorway just beyond Malmordo's, a cloaked figure whirled down the steps, cleared the dead thug lying there, and sprang into the cab as it briefly slackened speed. All with one twist, The Shadow opened the cab door and closed it with himself inside; then was off to the chase.

There was an interval between; in fact, the car had turned the corner before the cab arrived. During that interval, Stacey emptied his revolver after the fleeing car, but its speed carried it beyond range. By then, Cardona and his two detectives were piling from the other house; from both corners came other headquarters men who had spread themselves too far.

Stacey shouted to them that one of the thugs was still at large; then, looking up, he waved his arms in a mad warning. The detectives looked up to the roof of the empty house, as Stacey sprang into the shelter of its doorway.

The shout that Stacey gave was this:

"Look out! Malmordo is still up there!"

Cardona bellowed for his detectives to dive to cover instead of standing flat-footed in the middle of the street. They did and thereby cleared the way for the crippled thug to make a rush for it. The fellow popped from the darkness of an area way in front of the empty house, but that lunge was his last. Hardly across the sidewalk, he sprawled as something overtook him and planted itself between his shoulders.

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The thing was a long-bladed throwing knife that had whizzed down from the dark. Its glinting handle told what it was and instantly Stacey leaped down the high steps from the doorway of the empty house and turned to aim his replenished revolver straight upward.

Stacey's stream of bullets did nothing more than nick the cornice along the roof-front and the same applied to the leaden deluge that spurted from the guns of Cardona's squad as they sprang out to copy Stacey's example. Cardona bawled for some of them to race up through the empty house again and find Malmordo on the roof, but Joe didn't go along; he knew it would be useless.

With dozens of adjoining houses to choose from, in this block and the next, Malmordo would be sure to reach the ground. The only thing was to spread out through the neighborhood and try to spot him, but knowing the elusive qualities of the Master Rat, Cardona doubted that he could be snared.

More imperative at the moment was the questioning of the dying thug who had received the blade of Malmordo's uncannily thrown knife. With Stacey, Cardona stooped above the man and recognized him as a free-lance thug named Kirky Schleer. Seeing that Kirky was nearly gone, Cardona lost no time in trying to make Kirky talk.

"Hello, Kirky," put Cardona. "We know you were working for Malmordo. He double-crossed you when he saw you couldn't get away. We'll square it for you if you tell us all you know about Malmordo."

"Malmordo." Kirky repeated the name parrot-style, with a spread of ugly, leathery lips, "Double-cross. You want to know about Malmordo. I'll tell you —"

That sentence ended with a grimace, Kirky's last. Kirky Schleer sagged back and the facts that were on his lips died with him in an unintelligible groan.

CHAPTER XV

SHREVVY'S cab pulled over to let a patrol car shriek by with its siren going full blast. There was no use in going further. The carload of crooks had made its getaway, despite Shrevvy's efforts to overtake it.

Inspector Cardona had calculated too well. In hope of trapping Malmordo, he had brought in police from everywhere. With its head start, the rakish car that had made away with a load of gunzels had found the clear, while The Shadow's cab in hot pursuit had been snarled by the incoming traffic.

If Shrevvy expected criticism, he didn't get it. Instead, a low, whispered laugh sounded from the darkened back seat of the cab. Low spoken orders; then the slight slam of a door. The Shadow had left, after telling Shrevvy to report in order to be available later, if needed.

This was over on the East Side, well-remote from the house where Malmordo had stirred up so much chaos. In a slight way, however, Malmordo had done The Shadow a favor, or rather the fugitive car had. The Shadow was in a vicinity where certain information awaited him, information which the pressure of other business had prevented him from gaining earlier.

On foot, The Shadow covered several blocks in rapid, phantom style. He reached an obscure doorway in a row of silent houses and paused there. From his lips, came an unexpected sound, a chirp much like a bird's.

The signal was answered.

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From a darkened window beside the door came an answering chirp, a genuine one. Then, barely discernible in the darkness, a green love bird fluttered from a slightly opened window and placed a fortune card in The Shadow's hand. The bird flew away and The Shadow focused his concentrated flashlight upon the card.

Instead of a name, this card bore a drawing. It was simple and hand-colored in crayon. The sketch showed a tiny yellow lantern.

The Shadow's whispered laugh was whimsical. He had come a long way to learn where he could have gone immediately after leaving Malmordo's house. The Yellow Lantern was the name of a small, obscure cafe over on the West Side. It had taken a trip to the East Side to acquire the necessary facts.

So The Shadow set out upon what was a trail in reverse, confident that the gypsies had learned something about the Yellow Lantern which would develop when he arrived there.

Something was already developing at the Yellow Lantern.

The little restaurant was quiet and not too crowded. Nobody seemed to notice the girl who had slipped in from the side street. She was wearing dark clothes again tonight, but just for luck – good or bad – she was wearing a yellow daffodil.

The girl was Janice Bradford.

Quiet though the place was, Janice felt nervous.

From her purse, the girl had taken a folded slip of paper, half of a larger sheet. She kept reading the brief message that was written on it. The message said:

"The Yellow Lantern, Wednesday evening, eight o'clock."

A yellow lantern – a yellow flower.

The connection was enough to bring Janice here. She felt no danger, rather a sense of assurance. However this message might relate to Malmordo, it had been given to her by someone who had helped her, the gray man with the blunt square features whom she had encountered after her flight from the Cafe de la Morte.

That was why Janice kept looking up from her table, hoping that the gray man would arrive. Suddenly her hopes were realized. Strolling in from the front door came the very man she wanted to meet again.

The man was Trent Stacey.

In his bland fashion, Stacey came over to Janice's table and sat down. From his pocket he produced a batch of papers and glanced through them. Then, looking at Janice, Stacey smiled slightly and said:

"These belong to the police, but I won't have to deliver them until later. Meanwhile, suppose we introduce ourselves. My name is Trent Stacey. And yours?"

"Janice Bradford."

Stacey's gray eyes fixed steadily.

"You are Andrew Bradford's daughter?"

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The girl nodded.

Putting away the papers that he had brought from Malmordo's, Stacey produced the compact credentials that he carried in his lapel and presented them to Janice. The girl's eyes widened when she saw their reference to Scotland Yard.

"We nearly trapped Malmordo tonight," stated Stacey. "The police are searching for him now. I couldn't help, so I excused myself, because I remembered my appointment with you. I should like to hear your story."

"Very well," Janice decided. "My father had a partner named Lucien Thorneau, who handled business here while my father and I were in Mexico."

"I know," nodded Stacey. "An oil business."

"Correct," said Janice. "Then Thorneau died and we came to New York. Everything was wonderful until a man named Malmordo sent word to father that he wanted a mere quarter of a million dollars to hush up a slight scandal that involved the business."

"And your father told you about it?"

"No. I found out for myself. I saw the letters that came and I overheard some phone calls. It seems that Thorneau faked a deal with some Nazi agents and wrote off a half a million dollars profit as loss."

"Your father knew about it?"

"Of course not!" Janice's tone was indignant. "Now Malmordo is trying to collect half of that money. He said he would suggest a way that would be mutually satisfactory."

"What way was that?"

"I don't know. Father was to meet Malmordo at the Cafe de la Morte, wearing a yellow flower to identify himself. He decided not to go, so I went there instead."

"Were others to do the same?"

"I think so. But since father, an innocent man, refused to go there, it's not surprising that guilty parties wouldn't. I was just foolish enough to want to see what would happen. I waited three nights for Malmordo to arrive and when he did come, he murdered Gregor."

Stacey gave a slow, understanding nod.

"Gregor was the reason," he decided. "Malmordo must have known he was on the watch for him. That was why Malmordo wouldn't talk to you. Has your father heard anything since?"

"Not yet."

For a while, Stacey pondered. As he did, he brought a half-sheet of paper from his pocket and matched it with the torn note he had given Janice.

"Just my way of positive identification," explained Stacey. Then he added, emphatically: "I think, Miss Bradford, that you should await further word from Malmordo."

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"But I can't!" Janice objected. "You see, father, has been moving from hotel to hotel, so there is no way of tracing us. I'm not afraid of Malmordo." The girl set her chin defiantly. "In fact, I want to meet him. If you know where he is, tell me!"

Stacey pointed from the window. Across the street, Janice saw the looming bulk of an old warehouse that bore a huge black star painted on its wall.

"That's where he was," expressed Stacey. "In the Black Star Warehouse, living with the rats he called his followers. That's why I wanted you to come here."

"So I could meet Malmordo!"

"Quite the contrary," declared Stacey, coolly. "I knew that Malmordo would be avoiding this neighborhood. By present calculations, his human rats are now infesting the building owned by the La Plata Grain Storage Company, four blocks north of here. I intend to report that to the police tonight."

Still wearing that determined expression, Janice opened her lips, then closed them. What she was about to say, she didn't say, but it would have been another defiance of Malmordo. Perhaps Stacey realized it, because his tone was serious when he said:

"Believe me, Miss Bradford, you must avoid Malmordo. Whatever I can do to help your cause, I shall. If you will tell me where I can reach you –"

"At the Azalea Plaza," interposed Janice. "Any time you care to call there, Mr. Stacey. Father is registered under the name of Howard Gantry."

Stacey arose with a bow.

"It would be better if we left separately," he decided. "If the coast is clear, as I am sure it will be, there will be no reason for me to return. Allow about five minutes and if I do not come back, you can go" – he paused and gave Janice a steady look – "directly home to the Azalea Plaza."

Janice nodded that she understood. She watched Stacey leave and waited the full five minutes in accordance with his instructions. But from then on, Janice decided to act upon her own. Instead of leaving by the front door, as Stacey had, she went out the side way. Then, instead of hailing a cab, Janice turned directly north for a four block walk.

Despite Stacey's advice, Janice was determined to meet Malmordo, the arch-fiend who would at least recognize the token of the yellow flower.

Or would he?

Debating it, Janice could see no reason why he wouldn't. Yet as she walked bravely northward, Janice felt worried. Looking back to see if anyone were following her, the girl saw only blackness.

There were wavers in that blackness as though some phantom figure had picked up the trail that Janice Bradford hoped would bring her to Malmordo.

Such wavers could not be real. In forced fashion, Janice laughed them off as she trudged onward.

CHAPTER XVI

FINDING a way into the La Plata Storage Building was a problem in itself. The place appeared to have only one door, big enough to drive the biggest truck through, and blocked by a steel barrier that would have stopped a Sherman tank.

Going around the building, Janice looked in vain for other entrances and in her hunt, she was annoyed when her high heels caught in a steel grating that looked like the opening of a culvert. Stumbling onward, Janice decided to be more careful, so she looked back at the grating to check it in case she encountered another like it.

That was when footsteps shuffled up beside her. Turning, much startled, Janice found herself confronted by a pair of leering faces that looked yellow and apish in the dim light. Instantly, she knew that these two men must belong to Malmordo.

They proved it by the deft quick way they laid their slimy hands upon Janice's arms. So tight was the grip that the girl was afraid to resist. She felt that if she did, those hands would go to her neck and strangle her on the instant.

Now, swiftly, these fiends were sweeping Janice back to the broad grating. They lifted it, slid her through, and the bars dropped with a clang, against the sidewalk above. Bent forward by the gripping arms, Janice was rushed through a low, pitch-black tunnel, where she heard things scurrying ahead.

Those things were rats and big ones.

Janice saw the rats when she emerged into the dim light of a lower cellar that they reached by a downward slope. But the rats – and there were dozens of them – were not the worst sight that Janice faced. In fact, the rats were scurrying for cover, as though they dreaded something.

That something could well have been Malmordo.

He was standing there beyond the brink of a slimy pool that ebbed in a corner of the slanted cellar. The pool was composed of stagnant water that had accumulated as the result of a stopped drain and it looked deep and sullen.

So deep that Janice shuddered. Somehow, she felt as though that Stygian pool had been gathered to receive her. For at sight of Malmordo, Janice found herself wishing that she had never wanted to meet him.

The other night, Janice had no more than glimpsed Malmordo's face. He had been in action and murderous, but he had seemed more like a fighter finishing a feud than something belonging to an actual realm of fiends. Now, snakish, his body practically coiled, his face as twisted as his contorted frame, Malmordo was his most terrible self.

The words that Malmordo mouthed were unintelligible to Janice, but the fiend's followers understood them. Dragging Janice along, they brought her past the far end of the pool, to a ledge that ran along its brink. As they passed Malmordo, he whipped a knife from a frayed jacket that he wore and Janice, her gasp stifling the scream she wanted to give, found herself staring at the deadly blade, raised to the level of the ugly fangs that were Malmordo's bared teeth.

All this was by wavery light, the glow from ship's lanterns hanging along the low ceiling. The recoil that

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Janice gave brought a happy snarl from Malmordo and it was echoed by similar glee from other ratty throats. For now, as Janice's two captors pressed her against the wall at the ledge, the girl could see a dozen or more of Malmordo's ugly clan, peering from niches and other openings in the cellar wall.

Small wonder the rats had scurried away, when this fiendish assemblage was about to hold court! This was no feeding time for the pets kept by Malmordo's followers. Malmordo, champion of injustice, was about to deliver some evil verdict.

It dawned on Janice then what Malmordo intended. The two men were starting Janice along the ledge, dragging her between them in what could best be described as a sideward single file. From further along came a sucking sound and as Janice turned her head, mostly so she wouldn't have to look at Malmordo, she saw where the sound came from.

There was a gap in the ledge, crossed by a plank, which was at the mouth of a small, low archway, no more than waist high. The sound came from that arch; it was an outlet that sucked the overflow from the stagnant pool which was being gradually replenished by water seeping from the walls about.

And it was down through that black, forbidding arch that Malmordo's two followers intended to thrust Janice!

"Ni mortigos la malliberulo senpere!" announced Malmordo. "Morgau la laboro estos finita!"

Those final words echoed: "La laboro estos finita" as if uttered by the leering lips that showed from every crevice. Yet it was not Malmordo's men who added that shout. The echoes were from Malmordo's voice alone.

The very tone made Janice shudder. If she could have translated that statement, she would have realized that it was her epitaph. What Malmordo had announced was this:

"We shall kill the prisoner immediately! Tomorrow the work will be finished!"

The pair who were working Janice along the ledge understood what Malmordo meant. The man on her left was already on the plank that bridged the open arch, hauling at Janice to bring her along, while the man on her right was pushing from his side. A few feet more and Janice would be on the plank alone, ready for a tilt that would carry her back and down into that flowing depth that emptied into some pit from which there would be no return.

And then, as if picking up the echoes of Malmordo's pronouncement came a shivery laugh that rose to a sharp crescendo which ended in these words:

"Mi estas malgusta, Malmordo! La laboro komincegas nuntempe!"

That pronouncement was The Shadow's. He was saying, "You are wrong Malmordo! The work is beginning at this moment!" Those words, understood by Malmordo's followers, produced a consternation that proved his statement. Whatever Malmordo's idea of work, The Shadow's was rapid action. Instinctively, Malmordo's men swung into it thereby playing into The Shadow's hands, since they were complying with his wish.

Guns sputtered everywhere – at echoes.

The Shadow's tone, caught up by the walls, was quite as elusive as Malmordo's. The shots that were fired at him never found him, but they formed a camouflage for his own. For among the numerous gun-bursts, there was no way of identifying which The Shadow supplied. Malmordo's men began to reel among their niches,

but which shots produced that result, nobody knew.

Not even Malmordo.

At least the Master Rat realized the futility of combating The Shadow.

"Zorge!" came Malmordo's shout. "Venu! Rapidu!"

He was telling his followers to look out, to come along, and to hurry. Like the rats they were, they dived among the crannies. They fired parting shots at the only targets they could see, the lanterns, hoping to black out The Shadow's marksmanship with them.

Only two remained, deserted by their fellow rats. They were the pair who held Janice captive. One lantern had been missed in the general barrage; it was the lantern hanging near the planked ledge. Its glow showed one man hauling, the other shoving, in a last effort to get Janice on the plank; to hold her fate in their own hands as a threat to The Shadow, or at least a compromise.

But already, blackness was gliding into that lamplight, along the ledge itself, like an encroaching mass of doom; not for Janice but her captors. And with it came The Shadow's sinister tone telling Malmordo's stranded malefactors that they were too late:

"Tro malfrue!"

The man on the near side of the plank let go of Janice, whipped out a knife and flung it into blackness, shrieking: "Prenu la ponardo, Ombrajo!" but The Shadow did not take the knife as the hurler hoped. The blade flicked into blackness only and from below its line of flight came well-placed gun stabs that toppled the chunk of human scum into the shallow slime of the unsightly pool that flanked the ledge.

Next, The Shadow was gripping Janice's arm as he sidestepped as far as he could to aim at the man still on the plank. But before The Shadow could fire what would have been a certain shot, Janice's other captor released his hold.

The plank swayed and heaved as Janice left it, hauled to safety by The Shadow. The girl heard a wild, incoherent shriek behind her and turning, she saw her late captor writhing in a strange fantastic twist that carried him away from sight, down through the arched opening. With him went the plank, crackling as it disappeared, as though some superhuman force had carried it along with its occupant.

The walls quivered with solemn echoes. This time, The Shadow's laugh was like a knell, in appreciation of justice singularly delivered. Whatever it was that produced that sudden climax, snatching a foe from the very muzzle of his gun, The Shadow seemed to know its source.

But now The Shadow was rushing Janice up through the grating, where on the sidewalk, he paused long enough to deliver bullets, turret-style, at scattering creatures who represented some of Malmordo's human rats, fleeing their underground lair. Next, police cars, with whining sirens and slicing searchlights, were roaring into the scene, but by then, The Shadow had rushed Janice well away.

There was a cab around the corner and The Shadow pointed Janice to it. Stumbling ahead, the girl was sure that her cloaked friend was in the background, ready to aid her in case of last minute complications. She thought she was meeting such when a man sprang suddenly from the curb and gripped her arm. Then she recognized his voice:

"Miss Bradford! Why did you come here?"

It was Trent Stacey, chiding Janice on the fact that she had come to this vicinity against his advice. In her turn, Janice was stammering that she was all right, that she was sorry, that all she wanted was to get away. They were at the cab door; the driver was opening it, and Stacey saw that the cab was empty. He helped Janice inside and closed the door.

Then to the driver, Stacey said:

"Take this young lady wherever she wants to go – and forget where you took her."

To remind the driver to forget, Stacey handed him a five dollar bill and the cab wheeled swiftly away. Turning, Stacey went to look for Inspector Cardona, who by now had probably reached this area.

If Trent Stacey thought that he was really Janice's rescuer, he was wrong. He was mistaken, too, if he thought that the cabby would purposely forget the address the girl gave him. For the cab driver happened to be Shrevvy, The Shadow's stand-by.

Back by the corner a whispered laugh denoted The Shadow's satisfaction as Janice's real rescuer faded into the thickness of night.

CHAPTER XVII

"Kion vi demandis?"

"Nenio."

"Pri kio estas?"

"Me tute ne scias."

"Kion vi volas?"

"Parolu pli laute."

The little man who had been asking the questions gave a nod and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief. Commissioner Weston, who had given the answers, leaned back in his chair and beamed across the desk.

As a chance visitor, Lamont Cranston looked puzzled. The Commissioner gave a gesture to the little man.

"This is my Esperanto teacher," defined Weston. "He has been giving me questions and I have answered them."

As proof, Weston handed Cranston a list of questions and answers. The first three, which were checked, ran thus:

What did you ask?

Nothing.

What is it about?

I haven't an idea.

What do you want?

Speak louder.

"A few more lessons," decided Weston, "and I can question any of Malmordo's men we capture. In fact, we nearly captured some last night."

Cranston's expression remained unchanged, so Weston decided he was interested.

"They had a quarrel among themselves," explained Weston, "in the cellar of a warehouse where they made their headquarters. One of them was killed."

"Too bad you didn't have a chance to quiz him," remarked Cranston. "Where did the rest go?"

"To some other warehouse," returned Weston. Then, glumly, he added: "We don't know which. We shall have to wait until we learn where the rats are the thickest."

Cranston gave a nod as though he understood and Weston in turn was quite surprised. Then Weston demanded:

"How would you know, Cranston?"

"The same as you would, Commissioner" Cranston replied. "From our mutual friend Mr. Stacey."

"You mean you know Trent Stacey?"

"Of course I know Trent," returned Cranston, picking up the first name instantly. "I met him in Europe."

The Shadow was playing a good hunch that Stacey had recently come from Europe in order to know so much about Malmordo. Weston, nodded, then said dubiously:

"Odd that Stacey didn't tell me you were a friend of his."

"Not odd at all," declared Cranston. "He doesn't know you are a friend of mine. He wrote me he was coming here on business and would look me up later. I assume he is still busy."

"He is," said Weston. "How long ago did he write you?"

Cranston pondered, as though trying to recall the exact time. Weston put a prompting question:

"Was it after he came back to Canada?"

"It was" replied Cranston. "Not more than a week or two ago."

The Esperanto teacher having left before this conversation started, Commissioner Weston decided he could speak quite freely. And since Cranston, in whom Weston usually confided important matters, knew so much about Stacey already, it wasn't long before the commissioner detailed the remaining facts.

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All those details interested Cranston. Stacey's Canadian background, the fact that he had gone to school there, the way he had acquired other languages, gone out to see the world, and finally become invaluable to Scotland Yard in the widespread search for Malmordo – all marked Stacey as the one important key to quick results.

Which in turn meant that the sooner Cranston contacted Stacey, the better. Indeed, Cranston expressed that point in a calm, casual way, when he spoke:

"Morgaula laboro estos finita."

"What's that, Cranston?" Weston looked up to see his friend glancing at some of the language sheets. "Did I hear you saying something in Esperanto?"

"I was trying to pronounce the words in this lesson." Cranston laid one of the sheets aside. He stared at some papers Weston had taken from the desk drawer. "But what do you have there, Commissioner?"

"Some odd papers Stacey picked in Malmordo's place," Weston declared. "They give something of an insight to Malmordo's ways, but not enough. Here is evidence that Malmordo was recently in Algeria, under the name of Pierre Dubroc. More references to certain notorious New York criminals, at present in Sing Sing Prison. Apparently Malmordo wanted them to operate with him here, so I have sent some detectives to Ossining to question them.

"This European police report" – Weston tossed another paper across the desk – "proves that some of the gypsies there were leagued with Malmordo. The same may be true here" – Weston gave a frown – "because that local leader of theirs, King Dakar, has been dodging me consistently."

Gathering the incomplete papers, Weston thrust them back in the drawer and brought out a large-scale street map. While he was doing this, the phone bell rang; Weston lifted the receiver, found that the call was for Cranston, so passed him the receiver and continued to open the map.

Cranston's call was brief. He spoke in monosyllables, then finished the call abruptly. By then, the map was spread and Cranston was watching Weston point out certain buildings, each marked with an X.

"We have checked this map with Stacey," stated the commissioner. "All these are warehouses where Malmordo's band may be hiding, but there are too many of them."

"Of which, Commissioner? Warehouses or rats?"

"Of both," affirmed Weston. "Now we have learned this: there are underground connections between some of the warehouses. Stacey suggested that fact, through having observed the way Malmordo's men appeared in various unexpected places. We made a brief check to prove the fact, but it would have been suicide to send men probing further or deeper."

Remembering the arched pit that had swallowed one of Malmordo's men as substitute for Janice, Cranston could have certified the commissioner's statement, but didn't. Instead he broached a theory of his own.

"There could be other passages," suggested Cranston, "leading to the river. They would account for the fact that stowaways disappeared so remarkably along the waterfront."

Cranston was harking back to that first night when, as The Shadow, he had witnessed the disappearance of stowaways plopping overboard from the Santander. However, Weston, though he approved Cranston's theory

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with a nod, also found reason to smile.

"Stacey has already analyzed that situation," declared the commissioner. "But he added a point to prove it."

"I can do the same," declared Cranston. "There must be connections between the river and the warehouses because of the rats. They wouldn't have traveled above ground as Malmordo's men might."

"You've struck it exactly!" exclaimed the commissioner. "Stacey's proof to the dot. But you see what would happen, don't you, if we invaded the warehouses wholesale, to capture Malmordo's human rats?"

"They would take the quickest route out to the river."

"Precisely. But where would that outlet be?" Weston shrugged hopelessly. "We would need all the available men to stage the warehouse raids, but that leaves too few to watch the piers. Nor do we have enough police boats to do more than patrol the water front. However, we are ready, because if we drive those human rats from the warehouses, we will have accomplished half the job and can then concentrate on the rest."

Cranston let the discussion end there, since he had an appointment elsewhere. But as he left the commissioner's office, Cranston did something rather rare for him. He smiled.

Doing things by halves did not satisfy Cranston, either as himself or The Shadow. He could foresee that if Malmordo's men were driven from some warehouse out to the river, only to be allowed to scatter, they would assemble again and reoccupy a warehouse as soon as the police had left it.

However, there could be a way of finding the right warehouse and, after that, the outlet which belonged to it. But first, the person to find was Malmordo. Cranston had hinted that to Weston by saying "Morgau la laboro estos finita" which Weston, if he'd progressed enough in Esperanto, would have interpreted as "Tomorrow the work will be finished."

Malmordo's words, and today was the tomorrow that Malmordo had meant!

Yet there was still time for Lamont Cranston to act as The Shadow. Like Trent Stacey, The Shadow had a single lead that could prove vital. That lead was Janice Bradford.

Like Stacey, Cranston was following the lead. The call that Cranston had received in Weston's office was from Burbank, his contact man. Hawkeye had just reported seeing a man who looked like Stacey entering the Azalea Plaza, the hotel where Janice and her father, Andrew Bradford, were living incognito. Hawkeye had been watching the Azalea Plaza ever since Shrevvy took Janice there last night.

Whatever Trent Stacey learned from Andrew Bradford, The Shadow intended to be on hand to learn it too!

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was only afternoon, but the day was rainy and the low clouds made it as gloomy as dusk.

And such gloom made Janice shudder, even though she was safe in a hotel suite, in the company of her father, Andrew Bradford, and her good friend, Stacey Trent.

Andrew Bradford was a man of elderly appearance but Janice could testify that his age had begun to show only recently. Even his broad, rugged features were sagging through worry and his eyes, usually keen, had

become hunted when not listless.

It had taken Janice half an hour to convince her father that he should meet Trent Stacey. Once Bradford had agreed and had seen Stacey face to face, the result was like a tonic. They had come right to business, these two, and Stacey's blunt insistence on settling the Malmordo question once for all, had given Bradford the real lift he needed.

"The situation is plain," declared Stacey. "Obviously, Mr. Bradford, you are not to blame because your business partner, Lucien Thorneau, wrote off half a million dollars to business losses on account of South American shipments which were purchased but never delivered."

"Those shipments were to come from Nazi firms," declared Bradford, seriously. "Thorneau gave the orders just before the firms were blacklisted."

"Which left the whole case legal —"

"Except that Thorneau knew the inside facts," inserted Bradford. "The shipments were never even planned. Thorneau paid a quarter million to a Nazi agent who represented those firms and received a receipt for a half million. Each profited equally. Thorneau thought the deal ended there."

"You found evidence of this among Thorneau's papers?"

"Not enough to matter. Here is the real evidence." Bradford brought some sheets of photostats from his pocket. "Exact copies of papers that the Nazis kept. The originals are in the hands of Malmordo; he sent me these to prove it."

Stacey nodded.

"Quite simple," Stacey decided. "Now Malmordo wants the other quarter million for the originals."

This time it was Bradford who nodded and Janice gave another shiver, but not from repressed fright or harrowing recollections. It happened that Janice was seated by the door to a connecting room and she felt a draft from an open window.

This was odd in itself, because she was sure the window was closed. Getting up from her chair, Janice went into the other room to see and found that the window really was closed. What she didn't observe was the blackness that glided away from that window just before she arrived. In the dusk of the room, the blackness followed unnoticed around the wall and stationed itself behind the open door through which Janice had come.

There the blackness stayed while Janice went back to join Stacey and her father; living, shrouded blackness that Janice would have welcomed had she seen it. For the arrival was her cloaked rescuer of the night before, The Shadow.

"My dilemma is this," Bradford was telling Stacey. "Malmordo wants to pin Thorneau's guilt on me. Given time, I can assemble facts that will uphold my innocence. Then I can turn all the data over to the government and let them decide the case."

"At a cost of a quarter million dollars," put in Janice, as she resumed her chair. "They will probably demand its repayment."

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"The government may demand a half a million," declared Bradford, "but Thorneau's estate will be forced to pay it, once I can prove that the claim belongs to his account, not mine. I believe, however, that Malmordo's original documents, which include some that he did not copy, will clear me completely. But I can not gain them without paying Malmordo for them."

From his listening post, The Shadow could well appreciate the dilemma which confronted Bradford. It was up to Stacey to provide a solution and Stacey set to work.

"About the yellow flower," said Stacey. "Malmordo wanted you to wear one to identify yourself."

"Yes," replied Bradford. "I was to come to the Cafe de la Morte and bring the money with me in cash or securities."

Janice gasped at that and Stacey heard her.

"That must have been your mistake," Stacey told the girl. "Malmordo picked you as a substitute or a decoy. He was sure you wouldn't have the money."

"But why," asked Janice, "did he kill Gregor instead of me?"

"Because Gregor was watching for him. Maybe Malmordo was tipped off by Madame Thalla. He uses gypsies, Malmordo does, and Gregor was no gypsy."

Stacey's analysis was good, a good one hundred percent wrong, since it was based on the mistaken notion that the gypsies were leagued with Malmordo. The Shadow made a mental note of that and waited to check Stacey's further theories.

"Since you did not contact Malmordo," Stacey told Bradford, "it is obvious that he needed some stronger threat against you. When Janice acted against my advice and fell into his hands last night, Malmordo must have decided that by holding her a prisoner, he could make you come to terms."

"Janice is always acting against people's advice," declared Bradford. "That is why I didn't want her mixed in this situation at all. You see, Janice?" Bradford turned to the girl. "Where would I be now, if you were Malmordo's prisoner?"

"You mean where would I be!" exclaimed Janice. She swung to Stacey. "You're wrong about Malmordo wanting to hold me as a hostage. His men were trying to kill me!"

"Dead or alive," stated Stacey, coolly, "you would still have been a hostage, or a garantiulo in Malmordo's language. Did you hear him use any word like that?"

"No. He called me a malliberulo or something of the sort."

"That means a prisoner. But whether he intended to keep you as such or kill you, he would have told your father that you were still alive and redeemable at a cost of a quarter million dollars. Since you managed to escape, you can be sure that Malmordo will attempt some new move."

Stacey's statement brought a worried look from Bradford who inquired:

"How soon?"

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"Very soon," replied Stacey in a positive tone. "The police are pressing Malmordo hard and from the way his scurrying rats were shouting 'Ombrajo' they were unquestionably having trouble from an enemy called The Shadow."

"I'll say they were!" expressed Janice. "So that's what Ombrajo meant!"

"And in your case, Mr. Bradford," continued Stacey, "Malmordo must know that any delay is in your favor, which is not true where the others are concerned."

Bradford's expression went surprised.

"What others?"

In reply, Stacey reached to the right lapel of his coat and zipped it open, to produce some thin papers from a hidden pocket, much as he had once brought his own credentials from the other lapel. Going through the papers, Stacey queried:

"Did you ever hear of Jerome Ghent?"

"The rubber wholesaler!" exclaimed Bradford. "Why, Ghent had a regular black market in that commodity. We even heard about his operations in Mexico, but nobody could prove anything against him."

"Malmordo could," declared Stacey, "at least where dealings with Nazi agents were concerned. Next" – Stacey thumbed to another paper – "we have Clinton Waybrook."

"An exporter." Bradford nodded slowly. "With a reputation beyond reproach. That is why he could have covered any Nazi dealings, but it is not for me to judge. Waybrook may be as innocent as I am."

"I don't think so," declared Stacey. He came to the third paper. "Felix Kelfert, the jeweler is most certainly involved. We have already traced false sales of diamonds that were shipped from Amsterdam and they lead to Kelfert through Nazi channels."

"Who has traced all this?" inquired Bradford.

"Scotland Yard," explained Stacey. "You see, there were British black-lists of firms with Nazi inclinations, differing from the American. This is confidential data, not final evidence. Unless certain facts are admitted by the persons involved, I have no right to make such cases an international matter."

"But why should guilty men admit anything?"

"Because by now they must fear Malmordo. The fact that they were afraid to contact him is proof. They are even afraid to contact each other, but if one man were bold enough to suggest it, I believe the others would agree."

Even before Stacey finished, Janice caught the logical conclusion. She turned to Bradford and exclaimed:

"You, father!"

Half-bewildered, Bradford stared at his daughter, then turned to Stacey, who nodded.

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"She is right," Stacey declared. "Your position is enviable, Mr. Bradford. Since you are innocent, you would be inclined to regard others as the same. If you called any of these men, told them your predicament and said that you had heard them mentioned in the same connection, they would be only too glad to come here for a conference."

Rising, Bradford became his old strong self, as he announced with ringing emphasis:

"I shall call all of them!"

Call them Bradford did and with the result that Stacey had predicted. The very mention of the dread name Malmordo was enough to make men like Ghent, Waybrook and Kelfert listen. Bradford, a man of strict integrity, whose very tone expressed his indignation, was the perfect man for such a mission. Through his whole discourse ran a challenge that he wanted others to accept and in one brief speech he expressed it thus:

"Together we shall find a way to end the menace of Malmordo, once and for all!"

Grandly though Bradford handled it, the effect was a strain. Finished with the phone calls he sank back in his chair, turned to Stacey and said wearily:

"They will all be here at nine o'clock. But what shall we do then?"

For answer, Stacey picked up the telephone and made a call of his own. The call was to Inspector Cardona.

"Hello, Inspector," said Stacey. "Yes... This is Stacey... I've arranged for another try tonight... Yes, we'll need a squad and a cordon... No, not too tight... We can go over the details together and profit by previous mistakes.

"I can tell you the location now, so you can check the neighborhood... It's a hotel, the Azalea Plaza... No, not Aurelia. It's Azalea... A-Z-A-L-E-A... Not C... Z as in Zenith... P-L-A-Z-A... That's right... Azalea Plaza..."

The phone call finished, Stacey turned to find both Bradford and his daughter facing him in amazement and Janice, for one was quite pale.

"Do you mean" – Bradford's voice came with a falter – "do you mean you expect Malmordo here tonight?"

"I do," returned Stacey, in a positive tone. "He had local criminals covering for him last night, but the police lost track of them. You can be sure that Malmordo is using some of those crooks to keep tabs on Ghent and other men whose names the police don't even know."

"Then when Ghent and the rest come here –"

"Malmordo will show up, expecting it to be the pay-off; and it will be, but not in the way Malmordo expects. Don't worry" – Stacey was putting on his hat and opening the door – "I'll be here before nine o'clock."

As the door closed behind Trent Stacey, Janice Bradford thought she felt a draft of air from the hallway. She was wrong; it came from the window in the other room. That window had opened and closed again, to let a cloaked figure slide out and find a rubber-soled footing on the rain-drenched cornice.

Obscured by the settling dusk, The Shadow delivered a whispered laugh that was anything but a parting token. It meant as much as Stacey's stated words, that mirth.

The Shadow, too, would be here by nine o'clock, prepared to deal with Malmordo!

CHAPTER XIX

IT was really pouring rain when nine o'clock approached. From the doorway where Inspector Cardona had posted them, the detectives could scarcely see the dim lights that represented the windows of the sizeable Azalea Plaza. It was a bad night for the police, which made it a good night for Malmordo. Perhaps Stacey had taken that into consequence when predicting that Malmordo would appear.

Cardona had compromised by moving the cordon in a trifle closer, but it still wasn't close enough. Joe could see better hiding spots nearer to the hotel, but decided not to use them. They were the sorts of places that might be noticed by any one entering the hotel. Remembering how well Malmordo had taken the bait the night before and realizing how capably Stacey had functioned as the inside man, Cardona was resolved to play the game as Stacey wanted it.

Cars were stopping in front of the hotel and some had the lights of taxicabs. Which was bringing whom, Cardona didn't know, except that Stacey was among the visitors. If Joe had let his men move to closer posts, they might have identified some of the arrivals, but it didn't seem important.

Perhaps it was more important than Cardona supposed. At any rate, watchers were at those posts, having reached them easily in the rain, by keeping clear of the hotel lights. Those watchers were the crooks who had fled from Malmordo's roof the night before, hoodlums like Kirky Schleer and the other thug who had been left dead on the battleground in front of Malmordo's house.

Again, those hoods were here to cover, without the knowledge of the police!

Tonight, however, there were others.

Figures were snaking into the Azalea Plaza right through the outer cordon of detectives and the inner circle of crooks. Figures that emerged from culverts and man-holes, wriggled to the gutters and gave the effect of swimmers as they moved through the torrents that flowed there. That was, they would have looked like swimmers, if anyone had seen them, but no one did.

They were Malmordo's own breed of human water-rats. They'd left the warehouses that the police were watching, to infest this fancy hotel. Arrived beside the Azalea Plaza, they wiggled in by side passages and delivery entrances, found cellar windows to their liking and plopped into the preserves of the hotel itself.

Whether he noticed any of these snaky figures when he stepped from Shrevvy's cab, Lamont Cranston gave no sign. At least he had provided for future developments, because over his arm he carried what looked like an opera cape but wasn't. It happened to be a black cloak, neatly folded, with a slouch hat beneath.

Crossing the lobby, Cranston didn't go to the fifth floor by elevator. The fifth was Bradford's floor but Cranston preferred to use the stairway. Hardly past the first turn, he paused, put on his cloak and hat and became The Shadow. From the hat, he removed a small, waterproof bundle which he tucked beneath his cloak.

Cranston's guns, the automatics which were The Shadow's, were already packed beneath his well-fitted evening clothes in special holsters. So now, in the evasive, almost invisible style that characterized his black clad self, The Shadow continued up to Bradford's apartment. Choosing a side hall, The Shadow paused outside a door which had a lighted, half open transom above it. From a small box that he produced from a

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fold of his cloak, The Shadow released a little green bird that promptly flew through the transom.

In her own room, Janice Bradford gave a sharp start and a little cry as a bird fluttered to her hand and dropped a fortune card from its beak. On that card was a silhouetted profile of a hawkish face topped by a black hat, with cloaked shoulders beneath. Looking toward the door, noting the open transom, Janice hurried there and admitted The Shadow.

It was hardly necessary, this form of entrance, for The Shadow could have easily unlocked that door, but he was sparing Janice's well-shaken nerves. Besides, he had instructions to give the girl and along with those instructions, a revolver.

"Stay here," The Shadow undertoned to Janice. "If anything happens, go there" – he gestured to a closet in the corner – "and if you need to use the gun, do so. I can assure you that any danger will be brief."

Then, moving to a far door, The Shadow inched it open. There was a short passage beyond so he went through to the next door and handled it in the same style. This time, however, The Shadow halted the door after the first few inches. He was looking into the main room of the suite, where Andrew Bradford was receiving his guests.

Ghent, Waybrook, Kelfert – all three could be defined by their faces as men of guilt.

They had no reason to hide that guilt, rather they were proud of it, although their situation made them tense. But it was plain that Ghent, a man with a big-jawed, overbearing face; Waybrook, of bloated visage with a triple chin; Kelfert, sallow and scheming in expression, regarded themselves as comrades in a cause that included Andrew Bradford. In fact, this was their way of congratulating Bradford for his smart work in arranging a rendezvous with Malmordo on a common meeting ground.

Yet honest Mr. Bradford hadn't tumbled to a thing. He wasn't even surprised by the fact that these visitors had brought well-padded brief cases with them. Charitable at heart, Bradford was hoping that they, too, were innocent and he felt the brief cases might contain documents to prove it.

A knock sounded at the door of the apartment and the visitors became alert, Ghent's hand, for one, going to a pocket of his coat. Bradford stepped over, opened the door and admitted Stacey, who stepped into sight wearing evening clothes. At sight of such a visitor, Ghent relaxed, thinking perhaps that Stacey was another member of the subversive brotherhood, come here to discuss terms with Malmordo.

Then Bradford made the introduction:

"Gentlemen, this is Mr. Trent Stacey of Scotland Yard. He has data that I think will interest all of you."

Stacey did have. From his pockets he produced it, separate bundles, small ones, yet much larger than those tissue paper reports he had shown to Bradford that afternoon. Stepping behind a table, Stacey laid the packets in a row and his viewers noticed that his right hand had gone to his hip.

And Stacey's eyes were watching Ghent so coldly, so steadily, that the big-jawed man let his own hand move free from his pocket. Then, in a blunt tone that carried the hardness of flint, Stacey said:

"Let me see what you have brought."

Three men opened their brief cases and brought out the contents.

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"Securities," said Ghent. "All negotiable."

"Cash," declared Waybrook. "Large denominations, but I suppose you can find a way to pass them."

"Diamonds." Kelfert presented a square package. "Good anywhere."

There was still suspicion in their eyes and noting it, Stacey laughed. With his free hand he picked out a packet from the four that he had laid on the table and tossed it to Bradford.

"I have already settled with Bradford," declared Stacey. "His case was rather special. He will assure you that he is receiving the documents he wants."

Beyond the door, The Shadow was removing his hat and cloak. Hanging them on a hook in the passage, he stepped into the conference room quite calmly, just as Bradford gave an amazed exclamation.

"Why, these are the originals of Thorneau's papers!" exclaimed Bradford. "They clear my case entirely. Why – why, you must be –"

Bradford was looking up at Stacey, ending the sentence in a gasp. It was Cranston's calm tone that completed the statement.

"Yes," announced Cranston. "Stacey is Malmordo."

Although ready to admit the fact himself, Stacey couldn't repress a snarl at hearing it from this unexpected quarter. He was drawing his revolver as he wheeled back from the table, but he stopped the draw half way. Cranston was already covering him with a very convincing .45.

"I heard about you from my friend the Police Commissioner," Cranston told Stacey, in an even tone. "You knew a great deal about Malmordo, so much that you should have been right on all the facts. For instance, such points as Malmordo using local criminals and inducing gypsies to serve as his accomplices. I was quite sure that Malmordo did neither."

The snarl that Stacey gave in reply belonged distinctly to Malmordo.

"It was remarkable how well you set the stage," continued Cranston. "Too well in fact. As Malmordo you slipped from the Cafe de la Morte; as Stacey you met Janice soon after. When you told the police to give you leeway in order to enter the empty house, you did not go there at all, until you arrived as Malmordo. Then you came out as Stacey."

This time Stacey's snarl became an off-key laugh.

"Very well," he conceded. "I fooled the police, didn't I? Particularly when I knifed that crook, Kirky Schleer, from the doorway and then took pot shots at the roof, claiming Malmordo was still up there. They were making trouble for me, that gang, and Gregor was spying for them. I had to make the police think they were part of the Malmordo set-up."

These statements were bringing a narrowed look from Ghent, the most aggressive of Stacey's victims. Ghent's left hand was moving now, not to his coat pocket, but to his vest, and only the forefinger and thumb were on the creep.

"I warned Bradford's daughter about a trap," added Stacey, "because I knew that would make her walk into it. I was in and out of it, acting as Malmordo in between. I suppose The Shadow guessed it and told you, whoever you are."

"You told me yourself," stated Cranston calmly. "I happened to overhear the phone call you made to Inspector Cardona this afternoon." From the way he spoke, Cranston gave the impression he had heard it from Cardona's end. "You had told Commissioner Weston that you were educated in Canada. Your phone call disproved that you were a Canadian."

Stacey, his face showing an ugly scowl that suited Malmordo, was staring at Cranston, puzzled.

"In Canada," declared Cranston, "the letter Z is called Zed. When you spelled Azalea Plaza, you used the letter Z twice, even terming it 'Z as in Zenith' – an odd thing for a person who would hardly know that Zed is sometimes called Z."

It was Jerome Ghent who supplied a short laugh of approval. He turned to Cranston with a bow.

"Very good," asserted Ghent. "The little details are the sort that crack big cases. But what about these local criminals you mention? Who could have hired them?"

"You did," returned Cranston. "They fit with your black market operations. You were using them to trap Malmordo. He called in the police to counteract them."

"Correct," acknowledged Ghent, "and the police are always prompt to respond to a whistle. That is a little detail which also could work two ways."

With a sudden twist behind Waybrook and Kelfert so that their bodies shielded him from Cranston's gun, Jerome Ghent flipped a whistle from his vest pocket and gave it a shrill blast that could be heard for blocks around.

It was Ghent's summons for his waiting mobsmen to appear and deal with both The Shadow and Malmordo!

CHAPTER XX

GHENT'S act produced chaos.

Before Cranston could shift and produce a second gun to cover the black marketer, Bradford made a spring to grab Ghent and inadvertently blocked Cranston's drawn gun, which was aimed at the man who called himself Stacey. Already Malmordo had begun to drop the Stacey pose, now he was acting in full Malmordo style. Hurling the table ahead of him, Malmordo sent its papers and its wealth scattering everywhere, then dropping behind it with a writhe, he swung his gun upward, and blasted at where he thought Cranston was. Except that Cranston was no longer there; he had wheeled back through the door to become The Shadow.

Outside, whistles were blaring everywhere and guns were barking in response, which left Jerome Ghent frozen in horrified surprise. Ghent's great stunt had backfired the moment he staged it, for his cordon of crooks had been surrounded by a larger cordon of police.

The moment Ghent's men had risen from cover and surged toward the hotel, Cardona's sharpshooters had sprung out to chop them down. Even Malmordo couldn't have figured out a better trap for Ghent's doomed crew.

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Tonight, Malmordo had figured out a device all for his own immediate benefit.

Just as blackness swung from the connecting passage, skirted the group of men and came with a surprise lunge toward Malmordo, doors buckled everywhere and slinky men with baggy clothes and drawn knives took over the apartment.

Malmordo had lost sight of Cranston and was receiving The Shadow instead. The Shadow, in his turn, was to become the focal center of a mass drive delivered by this tribe of murderers who, as humans, did the term 'rat' an injustice.

Janice's gun was popping from the closet in the other room, but Malmordo's men weren't stopping on account of it. Bradford was flinging Waybrook and Kelfert to an isolated corner of the big room and both were taking the hint, thoroughly willing to escape with their lives and take whatever other consequences followed.

Ghent, hauling out his gun, was lunging at Malmordo, who was now completely his writhing distorted self, his evening clothes rendering him the uglier and more incongruous than ever. All Ghent gained for his effort was a deluge of knives that came in response to Malmordo's snarled order:

"Mortigu!"

And then, as Ghent sprawled, Malmordo, twisting half to his feet, met the cloaked figure of The Shadow in a sudden surprising grapple. In all that chaos, Malmordo's arriving followers had scarcely seen The Shadow's launching form until the tangle came. Now from the whirl that followed, they heard Malmordo's call:

"La Ombrajo! Mortigu lin!"

The Shadow! Kill him! Unnecessary orders to these fiends. Their question was how to manage it as The Shadow spun about with Malmordo in his clutch. All they could really see were snatches of Malmordo himself, in the midst of a kaleidoscopic whirl, his hands and face disappearing and reappearing like a blinking light.

The Shadow held the upper hand in that grapple, but to finish Malmordo would have been suicidal. Any let-up in the struggle would define The Shadow clearly enough for Malmordo's men to strike with their regained knives. In fact, some were already preparing to hack at The Shadow as he whirled past them with Malmordo in his grip.

Whatever The Shadow might have done on his own account – and he had turned the tables on enemies like these more than once before – delay was imperative to protect Bradford and the two men who had now become his willing prisoners: Waybrook and Kelfert. Janice too would be in danger if any of Malmordo's crowd returned, to seek her. Right now, all of Malmordo's followers were in a sense immobilized, since they were concentrated on the question of The Shadow.

And The Shadow himself settled that question by changing it, producing a new bewilderment among his foemen.

A slouch hat scaled across the room; next, a black cloak went flapping after it, as two fighters sprawled apart, then came to hands and knees, facing each other. Somehow, The Shadow had lost his identifying garb and was now unmasked. To pick him from Malmordo would be easy, so it seemed. Ready to spring with their knives, Malmordo's followers paused briefly, then retained their pose like statues.

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Writhing from the floor were two Malmordos, each contorted and vicious. They were pointing at each other and their faces registered all the venom that belonged with their snakish postures. And from each pair of lips came the selfsame snarl:

"La Ombrajo! Mortigu lin!"

The man who was known as Malmordo had encountered an actor whose skill was equal to his own. That actor was The Shadow. He was able to distort his features, those of Cranston, as capably as Malmordo could twist the face he used when he styled himself Stacey. As they were now, there was no choice between them.

How could Malmordo's followers kill when they saw no one to be slain except Malmordo?

Both figures were in disheveled evening clothes. Each spoke the language that the murderous rat-men understood. If Malmordo had straightened and let his features snap back into joint, he would have identified himself as Stacey, whereas The Shadow, doing the same, would have answered to Cranston.

Still there would have been no choice.

There lay Malmordo's weakness. His followers knew him only by that forced appearance which made his features hideous. To show any other face would have been a symbol of weakness on Malmordo's part. As Stacey, he would be accepted as the false Malmordo, just as The Shadow would if he reverted to the looks of Cranston.

Snarls passed back and forth and the listeners understood them. Accusations, but always in the language that Malmordo had taught his followers to use. All was at a standstill and the longer it remained so, the more to The Shadow's advantage it would be. And so it remained.

As moments turned to minutes, the time limit ended. Footsteps came pounding from the hallway, announcing the arrival of the law. One Malmordo snarled "Foriru!" telling his followers to go away and the other gave the same word in the next breath. With that, the police appeared.

It was then and only then, that the situation broke. One of the writhing figures turned, scooped up the slouch hat and the black cloak and made a dive straight for the window. As the window crashed, knives followed, but they flew wide, for the police were pumping shots at the men who threw them.

Half-cloaked, the Malmordo who had thus declared himself The Shadow, made a landing on an adjoining roof a floor below. His rival, left on the scene as the real Malmordo, straightened in a swift lunge for the door, reaching it despite the grabs of the detectives, shouting "Venu!" as a call for his men to follow, which a few managed to do.

Down the stairs and out to the street went the man in tattered evening clothes, the last of the rat men dashing with him. Swallowed by the rain, they were on their way to the warehouse area, with a slender chance of beating the round-up planned by the law. Elsewhere, his course unknown, a figure garbed in black was bound for the same destination.

So far at least, The Shadow had scored. For up in Bradford's apartment, the law was taking over in a thorough way. Bradford was safe, so was his daughter Janice; while two men who had traded with foreign enemies, Waybrook and Kelfert, were prisoners, along with their funds and the papers that proved their guilt, all abandoned by Malmordo.

They were glad to give up, that pair, rather than share the fate of Ghent, who lay dead on the floor, with the evidence of his transactions spread about him.

The Shadow had cracked Malmordo's game. The next task was to settle scores with the Master Rat himself!

CHAPTER XXI

POLICE whistles were shrilling in the warehouse sector when a little cluster of men came tearing from a side street toward a bulky brick building that bore a big sign saying:

WESTERN CORN EXCHANGE

Sweeping searchlights picked out those fugitives, scrawny men in baggy clothes followed by a loping figure that wore the remnants of a dress suit. Police guns barked, but as they did, a grating came flying up and the fugitives dropped through it with all the speed that characterized Malmordo's rats.

By the time police reached the grating it was clamped and guns were shooting up from among its slats. If the police intended to enter the corn warehouse, they would have to find some other way.

There were other ways. Around the corner, a cloaked figure was already using one. He was climbing the fire escape of an adjoining building to reach a little window that led into the warehouse. He was gone by the time the police came around the corner.

Sirens screeched announcing the arrival of more police cars. From one sprang Inspector Cardona, ready to take command. Informed that Malmordo had gone into the corn warehouse, Cardona urged his men to continue their present plan of invasion and hunt crooks down to the last rat.

The police were smashing doors leading into the warehouse when someone thrust an envelope into Cardona's hand. By the time the inspector looked around, the donor was gone; all Cardona saw was a quick, shambling figure making off through the heavy rain. Tearing the envelope open, Cardona read its contents by the scanty light about him.

That note, delivered by Hawkeye, was a message from The Shadow, who had posted Hawkeye in this area to give it to the right man at the right time. What Cardona read was something that caused a complete change in his personal plans. Leaving the capture of the warehouse to his subordinates, the ace inspector sprang into the nearest police car and ordered it to take him straight to the waterfront.

Deep beneath the corn warehouse was a scene even more extravagant than the one that Janice had viewed the night before. Here was no mere cellar with a shallow, slimy pool. Malmordo's men had reached a sub-cellar consisting of a succession of low brick arches through which gushed a broad stream of water flanked by stone paths that looked like shelves.

At the last arch in the line, four of Malmordo's reserves were prying at a huge grating that looked like a prison entrance. Once loose, that would give them exit to a channel leading out to the river. They would have to swim for it, because past the arch the outlet became no more than a rounded pipe, filled almost to capacity. But these human water-rats were used to such methods of transit.

From somewhere far above came clangs and pounding sounds, indicating that police were crashing their way into the warehouse. Then, louder than those muffled beatings, the clatter of footsteps sounded on stone. From narrow openings on either side of the sullen stream, men appeared, arriving from old stairways that led down from the cellar.

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These were the rest of Malmordo's depleted horde, the survivors from the lopsided fray at the Azalea Plaza, less a few who had been clipped by police bullets during flight, but plus a quota of reserves that had been stationed upstairs in the warehouse.

As the big grating wavered, Malmordo appeared from one pair of steps and snaked his way along the ledge, shouting to his men above the gush of the swollen stream. As they turned, the slinky men saw Malmordo point across the channel. There on the other side, another figure had arrived.

The Shadow!

If Malmordo's men could have found a better footing on the ledges, they would have blasted their cloaked foe before he could have opened fire. But the slime handicapped even these creatures who loved it and being men who were quick with knives, they were naturally slower with guns. By the time they were taking aim, a snarl came from The Shadow's side and with it, he peeled off his cloak and hat, flinging them across the torrent.

The black regalia landed squarely at the feet of the other Malmordo!

Facts dawned suddenly in the ratty minds of the ugly men who saw this new change of affairs. They had been tricked at so many turns that they were ready to accept things in reverse.

There had been two Malmordos up at Bradford's. One had seized upon The Shadow's garb just as the police arrived.

Why not the real Malmordo?

As for the other, the one who had called upon surviving rats to follow him, why could he not be The Shadow? He had let the fugitives outrun him and in doing so, they had led him straight to Malmordo's own stronghold, the place that the real Malmordo could reach more swiftly as The Shadow!

And such was the real answer!

Two men were straightening on their respective ledges. The one who had come here as Malmordo revealed himself as Cranston. The other, who had just flung the hat and cloak to their real owner, showed the blunt, square-jawed features that went under the name of Stacey, Dubroc, or any of a dozen names that Malmordo chose to call himself, according to whatever nationality he needed to adopt.

And yet the question of identity was still in doubt among members of Malmordo's tribe who still had no way of telling their real chief from the false. The doubt might have persisted had The Shadow cared to let it. But, knowing the frantic mood of Malmordo's men, he foresaw a serious problem.

Malmordo was drawing a gun and The Shadow, as Cranston, would have to do the same. Whichever fired first and surest would have the satisfaction of spilling his adversary into the flood. But in the minds of half the witnesses, the victim would be the real Malmordo. They would aim at the victor the moment that the vanquished fell.

Whatever the case, justice would be the winner, for Malmordo would perish. But The Shadow would be a loser too, from a personal standpoint. It would be better to declare himself and shoot it out with Malmordo's crew at large, before they had a chance to aim his way. It would mean avoiding Malmordo's own fire meanwhile, but that was the risk The Shadow took.

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There were factors that decided The Shadow's choice. One was the topple of the grating, down there at the lower arch; a few more tugs and it would fall. The other was a peculiar swirl in the stream itself, a sign for which The Shadow looked and saw in the vague light of lanterns that Malmordo's men had brought with them.

Twisting skillfully along the slippery ledge, The Shadow scooped up the black hat and cloak, planting one upon his head, the other over his shoulders. With a challenging laugh that hurled back separate echoes from every arch, The Shadow opened rapid fire with his automatics.

Malmordo made a quick writhe along the opposite shelf and his men did the same to avoid the ricocheting bullets. The Shadow found it both hard to aim and difficult to tell if he scored a hit, the way his enemies acted. They were shooting back and wildly, but every blast was helpful to The Shadow.

For those shots, with their deafening detonation in these cramped quarters, were producing what The Shadow wanted, a strange, twisty commotion in the stream as though the water itself had begun to rise in protest. Then, from beneath his cloak, The Shadow flung the packet that he carried, ripping its end as it left his hand.

The missile struck the water down toward the final arch. There was a terrific burst of flame, for the packet contained a chunk of potassium. The rest of its contents consisted of a reddish dye, that spread like a gushing blot of blood amid the water. But the flame was the feature that counted at the moment.

Heaving itself from the water came a great shape more than twenty feet in length, a thing that outwitted even Malmordo. The creature was an anaconda, a giant snake of the constrictor class, recently a dweller among the coastal lagoons of the South American jungle. As it swept its great head along the ledges, lashing its coils as if to encircle its tormentors, the anaconda created terror among Malmordo's crew.

The grating fell with a loud clang and toward the wide opening rushed the human rats, their leader Malmordo among them, all anxious to reach that outlet and escape the anaconda. After them trailed The Shadow's laugh, bidding them a bon voyage as they slipped and slid into the water, just as some of them had splashed overboard from the Santander.

This scene linked with that night.

It was then that The Shadow had recognized the presence of the anaconda. Only such a creature could have crushed the unlucky stowaway who had fled to the hold to hide among the mahogany logs. The giant snake had come aboard with that shipment in search of rats and birds as food.

Only something as powerful as an anaconda could have broken the hatch above the hold of the Santander. Once on deck, the snake had slithered overboard like the rats and stowaways that preceded it, finding the same pipeline that they used, leading in from the river to one of the warehouses.

The anaconda was the reason why rats vanished from each warehouse that Malmordo picked for his men to use as temporary headquarters. It went where they went, because they coaxed more rats to become their pets, which in turn meant more food for the snake.

And this anaconda was the thing that The Shadow alone had seen pluck one of Malmordo's men off the plank from which The Shadow had rescued Janice Bradford. That was the reason why The Shadow had expected the monstrous reptile to be around tonight, ready to act again if bothered.

It was turning now, this massive writhing foe that Malmordo's followers had so unwittingly harbored, and what disturbed it was the echoing clang from the grating. By then, Malmordo and his companions had been

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carried into the pipe beyond the final archway, so The Shadow had no reason to remain.

Blackness faded from the lantern light as The Shadow went up the stone steps leading from the ledge on his side of the underground channel.

Out in the river, Inspector Cardona had taken command of a police boat and had sent orders to all others to sweep their searchlights in among the piers. Finding human figures would have been difficult, almost impossible, in such sweeping style, but the police were looking for something else.

They saw it.

From beneath a pier came a great, spreading splotch of dark crimson that seemed to be reaching for the boats themselves. It was the dye that The Shadow had flung into the stream beneath the warehouse, the type of dye used by planes to mark large spots in the ocean.

The tremendous potency of that dye was proving itself as usual, but tonight its purpose was unique. Having preceded Malmordo's men in their last flight, it was marking their outlet into the river. Instead of continuing a blind search, the police boats were converging upon one spot.

This was Cardona's follow-up of the instructions he had received from The Shadow.

And now, as heads began to bob from beneath the fringes of a pier, revolver shots peppered at them while machine guns raked the bottom of the pier itself. Malmordo's water-rats came out, waving their hands in wild surrender from amid the red-stained water. Some of them didn't wave, they merely floated, indicating that they had stopped some of the bullets. Nevertheless, the police hauled them into the boats too, just to make sure that they were dead.

Among the faces that he saw, Cardona was looking for one that would answer to either description of Malmordo, his twisted features or the blunt visage that enabled him to pose as Trent Stacey, the man with credentials that Cardona now knew had been forged.

Malmordo was not among any of the prisoners or dead men that Cardona's boat took on board.

Then came a shout from another police boat. Men were pointing out a figure that was doing a swift twist back toward shore, hoping to reach the concrete buttress of the pier, where bullets wouldn't count.

It was Malmordo, clear of The Shadow's vengeance and now eluding that of the law. Yet his fate was already sealed.

Something curled around the frantic swimmer. A horrible scream came from Malmordo's twisty lips as huge coils embraced him. Hoisted there, he was a struggling thing in the grip of the great anaconda, which had fled the warehouse last of all and had overtaken the one man who had made an effort to retrace his path.

Cardona could almost hear Malmordo's body crunch as it went beneath the surface, warped more grotesquely than Malmordo had ever managed to twist himself when faking the part of a human freak. Such was the fate of the evil genius who had followed the ruin of war to perpetrate crime and had met his match in a new land where he had dared defy the power of The Shadow.

Silence settled above the murky water where the great ruddy spread upon the surface was thinning, as though its work were done. Silence, except for the beat of rain, the lap of waves, and something else that seemed to blend amid those natural sounds.

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That something else was a weird laugh that Cardona heard from the shore beside the pier, telling that its author had arrived to witness the climax that he had arranged as an end to monstrous crime.

It faded into shivering echoes that the blanketing night absorbed, The Shadow's laugh of triumph!

THE END