

THE MURDERING GHOST

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE MURDERING GHOST.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Maxwell Grant.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>CHAPTER I. OUT OF THE VOID.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>CHAPTER II. THE OUTER TRAIL.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>CHAPTER III. CRIME'S RIDDLE.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>CHAPTER IV. THOSE WHO BELIEVED.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>CHAPTER V. CRIME'S GREATER GOAL.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>CHAPTER VI. BIRDS OF A KIND.....</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW'S INTERVIEW.....</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>CHAPTER VIII. THE TRIPLE TRAP.....</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>CHAPTER IX. DEATH GOES ASTRAY.....</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>CHAPTER X. THE QUEST TO COME.....</u>	<u>30</u>
<u>CHAPTER XI. DEATH'S SEANCE.....</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>CHAPTER XII. THE CLOAKED GHOST.....</u>	<u>36</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIII. THE BARREN TRAIL.....</u>	<u>40</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE SECOND CLAIMANT.....</u>	<u>44</u>
<u>CHAPTER XV. HOUR OF DOOM.....</u>	<u>48</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVI. THE RIGHT CAMP.....</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVII. THE MUTUAL CHOICE.....</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE CHALLENGE FROM BEYOND.....</u>	<u>59</u>
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S ROUNDUP.....</u>	<u>63</u>
<u>CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL PROOF.....</u>	<u>66</u>
<u>CHAPTER XXI. CRIME'S AWARD.....</u>	<u>69</u>

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- [CHAPTER I. OUT OF THE VOID](#)
- [CHAPTER II. THE OUTER TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER III. CRIME'S RIDDLE](#)
- [CHAPTER IV. THOSE WHO BELIEVED](#)
- [CHAPTER V. CRIME'S GREATER GOAL](#)
- [CHAPTER VI. BIRDS OF A KIND](#)
- [CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW'S INTERVIEW](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII. THE TRIPLE TRAP](#)
- [CHAPTER IX. DEATH GOES ASTRAY](#)
- [CHAPTER X. THE QUEST TO COME](#)
- [CHAPTER XI. DEATH'S SEANCE](#)
- [CHAPTER XII. THE CLOAKED GHOST](#)
- [CHAPTER XIII. THE BARREN TRAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER XIV. THE SECOND CLAIMANT](#)
- [CHAPTER XV. HOUR OF DOOM](#)
- [CHAPTER XVI. THE RIGHT CAMP](#)
- [CHAPTER XVII. THE MUTUAL CHOICE](#)
- [CHAPTER XVIII. THE CHALLENGE FROM BEYOND](#)
- [CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S ROUNDUP](#)
- [CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL PROOF](#)
- [CHAPTER XXI. CRIME'S AWARD](#)

CHAPTER I. OUT OF THE VOID

IT was a silent group that sat in the square-walled room, and the circled throng was almost as singular as the room itself. Men and women formed a hand-linked circle around an oblong table upon which stood two silver spheres, each mounted on an insulated base.

Those silver globes were not the only peculiar equipment in the room. Elsewhere, and outside the circle, stood a large cabinet some five feet high and proportionately square, that kept up a steady hum from within itself. There were tall cylinders in a row along a wall shelf; in a corner, an odd-shaped board was mounted on a fulcrum with a pair of scales attached to one tilted end.

These pieces of apparatus and many more were part and parcel of the psychic laboratory conducted by Professor Hayne, a very dapper man who stood outside the circle looking anxiously about the group to see that all were settled for the test to come.

Hayne wasn't the only man who was free of the linking hands. Within the ring itself was a solitary chair which contained a stoop-shouldered gentleman who sat with folded arms. His face was thin, his watery eyes gave him a morose expression, which made people feel sorry for him at first glance. His white thin hair,

THE MURDERING GHOST

dangling about his forehead, added to the call for sympathy until those who met him learned who he was.

No one could feel very sorry for old Leander Hobgood.

Defaulter, embezzler, swindler he'd been called by all such terms, only to deny the implications. But matters had reached the point where they demanded more than mere denial. Leander Hobgood, who termed himself an inventor, nothing more, was seeking vindication. And he was hoping to find it in, of all places, a seance room!

These astounding facts were under present renew by a young man named Clyde Burke, who as a member of the press was attending the singular seance. Gripping hands with a portly millionaire on one side and an elderly lady on the other, Clyde was alternately glancing across his shoulder at fluttery Professor Hayne and turning a steady stare toward the bowed figure of the inventor, Hobgood.

For it was Hayne, a sincere but rather irrational individual, who had proposed the way to Hobgood's vindication. And Clyde was forced to admit that Hayne's theories regarding Hobgood were no more startling than the facts themselves.

Briefly, Leander Hobgood was the inventor of many queer devices that resembled perpetual-motion machines except that they worked. That was, they worked whenever Hobgood was around, but they had a way of bogging down when other people bought and took them over.

Curious, indeed, were Hobgood's statements as to the origin of his machines. He said that the ideas came to him from thin air, which was somewhat plausible, because that was where Hobgood's stock certificates and promissory notes vanished after he gave them to persons who invested in the inventions that wouldn't work.

Which greatly distressed Hobgood. Indeed, it worried him. He felt that he was under the control of an invisible creature called a daemon, that forced him into these strange ventures purely to experience devilish glee as only a daemon could when Hobgood found himself misunderstood because of his mentor's pranks.

Professor Hayne held a different theory. He believed that poor Hobgood was the victim of a force called psychodynamics. In simpler terms, Hayne believed that Hobgood unwittingly produced an astral energy which made the motors run when he was present and accounted for their failure whenever he was absent.

As for the vanished stock certificates and notes, Hayne hoped that their disappearance would prove the existence of the fourth dimension, since they had obviously been projected into space. But for the present, Hayne was concentrating on the subject of psychodynamics.

THE silver globes upon the center table were a special apparatus that Hayne had rigged for a psychodynamic test. They were the positive and negative poles of an electromagnetic current so feeble that it couldn't be observed unless a further flow of electricity were injected.

Should the added current be sufficient, sparks would issue from the sensitized spheres. So the sitters in the circle were here to see if Hobgood could make the apparatus function.

If the test succeeded, Hobgood, according to Hayne, would constitute a human dynamo quite capable of supplying the necessary energy to operate the intricate contrivances that he had invented.

Except for Clyde Burke, all the sitters were persons who had invested in Hobgood's machines and therefore interested parties in the coming experiment. Clyde was interested, too, ostensibly as a representative of the New York Classic, a sensational tabloid newspaper. But Clyde had another mission, a secret one.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Clyde Burke was here in the service of The Shadow!

Behind the weird career of Leander Hobgood, The Shadow scented crime, deeper, perhaps, than the swindles blamed on the inventor. Unlike Professor Hayne, The Shadow was chiefly interested in the tales of vanished securities which Hobgood had placed in other hands.

Those cases indicated hands that didn't necessarily issue from the fourth dimension. Should they depend upon unknown methods of untraceable theft, what a prize the knowledge of such systems would prove to certain figures of the underworld.

So Clyde, pinch-hitting until his chief arrived, was beginning to forget Hayne and Hobgood in order to watch the door instead, in the hope that The Shadow would soon appear.

Not that Clyde expected The Shadow to enter the seance laboratory cloaked in black, a visitor more ghostly than any spook that Hayne had ever managed to command. He was watching the door for a certain gentleman named Lamont Cranston, who happened to be The Shadow's other self.

As Cranston, The Shadow was a friend of the New York police commissioner, who had unfortunately detained him this evening. They were dining together at the Cobalt Club and Commissioner Weston wasn't coming to the seance. The commissioner had no use for spooks; he believed them to be myths, an opinion that he also expressed regarding The Shadow!

The sitters who formed the circle in the dimly lighted room were startled by a sudden rap.

It was Professor Hayne who calmed them, when he chirped the simple announcement:

"The electrician."

Opening the connecting door, Hayne admitted a man who wore a heavy Mackinaw and a pair of thick gloves. The electrician was turned half about as he uncoiled a wire which Hayne told him to connect to a transformer that supplied the current to the silver globes.

While the electrician stooped to perform the task, Clyde watched him, a bit puzzled.

There was something familiar about the fellow's actions, the way he bent to one knee, then brushed his rough trousers in fastidious style.

So interested was Clyde that he no longer watched the main door of the room. There, a real phenomenon was in occurrence. A key in the lock was turning of its own accord. As the key halted, the doorknob began a slow twist. Clyde would have known those symptoms had he observed them.

They symbolized The Shadow!

He was coming to the lab in his own guise rather than Cranston's, for such manipulation of key and doorknob was one of The Shadow's specialties.

Unnoticed, the door inched inward; an eye gazed through the crack. Yet no one could have possibly discerned the owner of that eye, for he was a shape of total blackness!

THE SHADOW saw the departing electrician slouch through the door to the connecting room. He moved his own door a trifle farther, for no one could have possibly noted it. All eyes, Clyde's included, were focused

THE MURDERING GHOST

upon Professor Hayne, who had placed one hand upon a light switch while he raised the other to command attention.

"And now," announced Hayne in his brisk chirp, "we shall darken the room except for the red light customary in seances. Let me caution everyone to remain seated. Should anyone attempt to leave the circle, the fact will be immediately detected."

Hayne pressed the switch. As the ordinary lights went off, a red bulb glowed automatically beneath the central table. In that ruddy gleam all seemed weird and unreal.

"We are ready," declared Hayne from outside the human circle. "The subject will approach the dynamograph with both his hands extended –"

Hayne meant Hobgood, not the cloaked being in black who had entered by the main door, to close it silently behind him the moment the red light replaced the other illumination. But no one was aware of The Shadow's invisible presence; even Hayne's measures of detection had so far failed to record it.

Furthermore, Hobgood had responded to Hayne's order. In the vague crimson light, the members of the circle could see the inventor's crouched form rising from its chair, his hands extended as the professor requested. For this was a vital moment to Leander Hobgood. The slightest response, the tiniest of sparks from those sensitized silver globes, and Hobgood would be on the road to vindication, provided the skeptics would accept the verdict of Hayne's dynamograph.

There was power in those hands of Leander Hobgood, the skillful hands that had dealt in intricate work. Power enough to produce the unexplainable, but certainly not the impossible result that happened as they came within range of the sensitized spheres.

Only out of the void could the stroke have come, a thing so titanic that it shattered the tension and the nerves of the witnesses as well.

Hobgood's hands were at the table. They gave a slow thrust forward. Like a maestro's hands directing a huge orchestra, they brought a crash that rocked the entire room. A crash like a tremendous thunderclap, which indeed it was. For with it came a huge burst of jagged lightning, leaping from one silver sphere to the other, forking to include old Hobgood in its path!

With the terrific jolt of blinding electricity, Leander Hobgood crumpled. The dazzle was supplanted by a cloud of bluish smoke that filled the laboratory with the odor of ozone, stifling in its strength. Women's shrieks drowned the shouts of startled men as chairs went tumbling backward, breaking the human circle.

Such was the stroke from the void that stretched Leander Hobgood on the floor beside the crimson light that gleamed like a welcoming eye of doom for the victim who had dared to seek his vindication by meddling with the mighty forces from the great beyond!

CHAPTER II. THE OUTER TRAIL

STRANGEST of all the sights that came with the crackling glare was the black-clad apparition beyond the seance circle. A sight that no one saw amid the vivid light, for eyes were far too dazzled.

At the moment of the stunning bolt of electricity, The Shadow seemed to swallow himself into darkness. What he actually did was fling his cloak folds across his eyes to ward off the blinding effect of the lightning burst.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Despite shrieks from the seance circle, The Shadow caught a sound that had significance. It was the scurry of footsteps beyond the door to the adjoining section of the lab. The electrician hadn't been able to close that door tight because of the wire that he had carried through. Therefore the footsteps were his and they were hurrying the other way!

The man's flight indicated that he held himself responsible; and that in turn implied that such responsibility could have been designed.

So The Shadow, without a moment's more delay, sprang across the side wall of the seance room to reach the connecting doorway.

Something howled as The Shadow passed it. The thing was the big contrivance that looked like a radio cabinet. Its strident wail drowned the convulsive screams that still came from the sitters, and the siren sound brought a cry from Hayne.

"Stay where you are!" shrilled the professor. "Someone is trying to leave this room! The detector is announcing it! Stay here, everybody, and don't let anyone else leave!"

By then, the whine of the detector cabinet had dwindled, for The Shadow was beyond its range and at the very door he wanted. As for Hayne blocking off The Shadow, the very thought was ludicrous. The professor didn't get far enough even to make the detector register his approach. His own orders were the cause.

Blindly, men among the seance circle sprang to stop any person who might leave their midst, and the first person they encountered was Hayne himself. His yells were too excited too incoherent to be understood and the dapper professor was flattened beneath the general pile-up, the rest thinking him the captive that Hayne wanted grabbed.

From the doorway, The Shadow heard the melee as it shifted to a corner of the room, but the only face he saw was Hobgood's, staring motionless from the floor, its wrinkly features reddened by the glow from beneath the table. Sight of a countenance so lifeless spurred The Shadow to the chase he had undertaken.

THE next room was dimly lit, and in the gloom The Shadow saw the man he wanted. The electrician had done a peculiar thing. Instead of darting straight through to a doorway on the other side, he'd rushed to a far corner of the room. From there, he was making toward the exit on the other side.

So The Shadow sped a halting challenge after the fugitive. He issued the challenge in the form of a sinister laugh as eerie as any a ghost might have uttered in this realm where spooks were reputed to dwell.

Hearing that creepy tone, the man in the Mackinaw faltered, throwing a quick look toward The Shadow's door. He saw The Shadow mostly as a blur of blackness, but he must have caught the burn of glowing eyes, and either sensed or seen the muzzle of an automatic that The Shadow had whipped from beneath his cloak.

In his turn, The Shadow saw only a rough-clad figure with a V of whiteness to represent a face between the sides of the upturned Mackinaw collar.

The man made a wild dodge, as though fearing recognition quite as much as capture. Then, amid a sudden clatter, he was gone from sight. He'd ducked beyond a table stacked with odd equipment, right into a pile of packing boxes between the table and the wall.

With a quick drive, The Shadow crossed the room, intending to trap the fugitive where he had fallen. A yard short of his goal, The Shadow was met by a great lurch of the table, driven his direction by the fallen man's

THE MURDERING GHOST

heaving feet.

Warding off the hurtling table, The Shadow was showered with portable apparatus, including glassware. He wheeled to escape the deluge, and before he could drive anew a packing case came flying at him.

Side-stepping the new missile, The Shadow saw the fugitive electrician making another dive through the exit. The fellow didn't wait to slam the door. He was across a hallway, dashing down the steps of an inclosed fire tower when The Shadow picked up the pursuit.

Near the bottom of the staircase, The Shadow managed to clutch the man's shoulder. The fugitive pulled free from the avenging clasp, but in a way that should have added to his own undoing. For in that lurch, the fellow stumbled. He was tripping headlong across the low step from the exit doorway, pitching to the sidewalk, where he would become The Shadow's easy prey.

As he went his arms flung wide, but with one hand the man managed a frantic gesture back across his shoulder. The Shadow saw the wave and wheeled instinctively from the middle of the sidewalk just as the fugitive spilled over the curb.

As timely as the man's gesture was The Shadow's spin. Without it, the undoing would have been his own.

From lurking spots on each side of the doorway sprang two thuggish fighters, brought by their comrade's wild appeal for aid. Drawn revolvers were in their fists, and the mad gesture of the fugitive had shown them right where to aim. They saw The Shadow stopping short, one hand reaching empty, the other holding an automatic doubled close against his cloak.

The pair blazed shots at blackness.

At blackness nothing more.

Where The Shadow had been, he was no longer. It was blank blackness, this target, empty space which The Shadow had vacated by turning what seemed a halt into a full roundabout fling!

But the gaping dark exit from the fire tower told too well that it must be The Shadow's refuge. These gunners had courage, and they surged into the doorway to get him.

They met The Shadow coming out. He didn't waste any time in gunfire. One hand was warding, the other swinging, bearing its automatic in its sweep. There was a clash as the big gun met uplifted revolvers and knocked them aside; groans as the sledging weapon glanced from heads and reeled the two attackers from the doorway.

Staggering dumbly, blindly, these thugs were even better prey than the man who had stumbled across the curb. For the fugitive was prey no longer; quite the opposite. On his feet, he'd gotten across the street to beckon in the direction of the corner.

From that spot came the rising whine of a car in low gear, cutting across the one-way street, making straight for the doorway from which The Shadow had issued for the second time. Turning, The Shadow saw the lines of a low-built, rakish sedan; then, as someone pulled a switch on the dash, the occupants of the car saw The Shadow.

For the cloaked fighter was flooded with the full glare of a pair of powerful headlamps that revealed him like a mammoth moth in the path of brilliant flame!

THE MURDERING GHOST

THE headlights caught The Shadow only because his first move wasn't quite complete. It didn't matter, because the move was far enough along to escape the next thing that came the bark of guns. This time, they blasted into light instead of darkness; but that fire from the car was useless.

The Shadow was gone again, finishing a fading dive that he had timed to the car's approach, delaying just long enough to pick the exact direction that he needed.

With The Shadow gone from the swath of light, the men in the car did the expected thing: they swung their guns around to rake the sidewalks, giving special attention to any doorways or basement steps where The Shadow might have gone. It didn't occur to them that The Shadow would reject such fox holes when they themselves had provided him with a better barricade their own car!

Up sprang The Shadow almost in their very midst, actually at the elbows of the astonished men who were seeking him at longer range. He was within the fringe of guns that jutted from his side of the car, and the things he did to those guns and their owners were more than plenty! His sweeping strokes drove revolvers over the heads of the men who gripped them, stopping at the heads themselves with solid thuds.

He was on the right side of the car, The Shadow, and before men from the left could swing around to reach him, he made provision for them.

The laugh The Shadow gave, the sudden gesture of his aiming gun were both directed toward the driver, who was looking scared across his shoulder. The driver did the thing to be expected. He lurched the car anew, and with the lift it gave across the curb The Shadow was gone from the running board on the right.

Gone while men stared blankly, all save the driver, who couldn't quite pass the building wall, and therefore had to give the car a quick reverse jog from its slanted position half across the sidewalk.

That backward jolt fitted right into The Shadow's planning. Before the sedan could spurt ahead again, his laugh shuddered anew, this time from the running board on the left.

Squarely into The Shadow's snare had men of crime reversed themselves, and this time the men who still could use their guns were turned the other way!

Thus was The Shadow set to complete his victory, suppressing crime at its very outset, when from the corner ahead swung another car, bearing a searchlight that picked out The Shadow on the running board of the beleaguered sedan, spotting his position for the benefit of the very foemen whose helpless plight was based solely on their inability to find The Shadow for themselves.

Again The Shadow acted on the instant. With a whirl from the running board, he was gone from that blinding glare, hurling back a chilling laugh as a reminder that his foemen still would hear from him when this menace of the moment had passed!

CHAPTER III. CRIME'S RIDDLE

IT was a police car, of course. Nothing else would have come the wrong way on a one-way street using a searchlight in such open, idiotic fashion. Crooks would have been too cagey to throw a spotlight on members of their own clan.

Away from the glaring light, The Shadow still had opportunity to carry the tide of battle the way that he had turned it. All in all, the thugs were in a sorry plight, which would have put them in an utter dilemma if the breaks hadn't come their way.

THE MURDERING GHOST

The reason was that other men in this vicinity were quite as desperate as the crooks in the sedan. These others were the pair that The Shadow had staggered when he came from the fire tower. Reasonably recuperated, those two asserted themselves again, and their new declaration came in the form of gunfire aimed hit or miss at the patrol car.

Spotting the gun spurts, The Shadow jabbed quick shots in their direction. He didn't need to drop the two men who fired from the sidewalk; close shots were good enough to make them quit and thus save the police from any chance of harm.

But the whole thing worked to the advantage of the crew in the fugitive sedan. The patrolmen mistook that crew for innocent men, intended victims of the gunfire from the sidewalk. So they let the sedan surge by and promptly sprang from the patrol car to go after the pair who had started shooting.

By then, those two weren't anywhere to be found. The Shadow's shots had completely discouraged them and they were on the run. All the police had to go by was the clatter of feet making off through an alley. So the officers took up the chase in a blundering fashion that gave the runners as good a start as the sedan.

The Shadow wasn't greatly disappointed by the way the opposition scattered. He had another score to settle, one that he hadn't forgotten during the chaos. The Shadow's score lay with the man who wore the Mackinaw, the fellow who had posed as an electrician to produce havoc in Hayne's seance room.

Whoever he was, wherever he had gone, that unknown was the man The Shadow wanted.

There was no sign of the wanted man. He had ducked somewhere during the fray. He couldn't have chosen the alley through which two of his pals had run, for he would have had to pass The Shadow to reach it. So The Shadow looked for the next likely place, and saw an immediate prospect.

Back across the street was a narrow passage leading in beside the building where the psychic lab was located. How far that passage went, was a question; but if it reached to the next street, it would be a perfect outlet for a smart fugitive to use, doubling his trail to throw off pursuers.

So The Shadow cut across the street and sped into the passage.

Blocked by a building wall, the passage turned at right angles and brought The Shadow into a blind courtyard. It was an inlet, not an outlet, and the fugitive hadn't come this way. For when The Shadow probed for signs of a lurker, his tiny flashlight disclosed no one.

As for the walls about the court, they reared sheer for two stories. The nearest window that The Shadow saw was a dim-lit opening on the third floor, which represented a side room of the extensive psychic laboratory. Its location proved the window as belonging to the lab, and the fact that no sounds were issuing from it indicated that it must be elsewhere than the seance room.

Satisfied that the man with the Mackinaw couldn't have chosen this route, The Shadow turned to retrace his course. He hadn't left the courtyard before he heard footsteps and voices coming along the passage and saw flashlights burnish the brick-red wall that marked the turn.

These weren't the hunted; they were the hunters, the cops from the patrol car!

Looking for crooks, they would find The Shadow instead, should he allow them.

BUT it wasn't the cloaked fighter's way to complicate matters, particularly where the law was concerned.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Speeding back across the darkened court, The Shadow thrust his gun beneath his cloak and stooped beside a cellar grating.

His cause seemed hopeless. The Shadow was removing a circular object from his cloak, but he could hardly hope to bomb his way into the cellar before the police appeared. Seemingly things went even worse when the circular object came apart in fours. But that was the thing it was supposed to do, as The Shadow promptly demonstrated.

Just as the flashlights began to probe in from the passage, The Shadow left the courtyard. His course led straight upward, as though the law of gravity had repealed itself at his mere wish. As a flashlight beamed along the ground and reached the courtyard wall, The Shadow climbed above its rising circle. A patrolman caught a glimpse of him but took the cloaked figure only for the fringe of darkness that was lifting from the flashlight's beam!

The most incredible feature of The Shadow's climb was its smooth, even speed. The thing that explained his system was a repeated sound, a squidgy noise that had the precision of clockwork. Those sounds came from the rounded objects which The Shadow operated with perfect precision. They were concave rubber disks that he had attached to his hands and feet!

Remarkable devices, those suction cups. Whenever The Shadow pressed their oiled edges home, they gripped the wall tightly. The release was quite as efficient; a mere twist of hand or foot opened a tiny hole that served as valve, admitting air to the interior of the disk. The vacuum gone, the cup came free, only to take hold again when The Shadow pressed it farther up the wall.

By the time the searching patrolmen turned their lights up the wall, The Shadow had merged with the window of the psychic lab. The cops saw only darkness there, and when it faded, they supposed that someone had turned on a light. It didn't occur to them that they had witnessed the passage of a cloaked climber from the outside wall into the room three floors above the courtyard!

Once inside the window, The Shadow detached the suction cups and nested them into a compact stack that took up comparatively little room beneath his cloak. He removed the cloak itself and wrapped it around the grippers, including his slouch hat in the bundle. There was a high bookcase, with ornamental frame, in the corner of the room, for this was Professor Hayne's library, where he kept his many volumes of psychic lore. The top of the bookcase afforded an excellent hiding place for the bundled cloak and its contents, so The Shadow planted his burden there.

The Shadow's transformation was indeed complete. No longer a shrouded creature of darkness, he had become a man in evening clothes; a calm-faced individual whose face showed just a trace of a hawkish profile. No longer The Shadow, he was now that most complacent and leisurely clubman, Lamont Cranston.

To a degree, he reverted to The Shadow's style when he opened the door from the little library, inching it at the start, then drawing it more steadily after seeing if the way happened to be clear.

The way was quite clear. Hayne had cut off the current from the silver globes and everyone was grouped about Hobgood, where one member of the circle, a physician, was trying his best to revive the hapless inventor. Even Clyde Burke had become an anxious onlooker and failed to witness Cranston's silent, yet very open, entry into the room.

With the first forward steps that Cranston took, the scene shifted as completely as though his arrival were the cause. From a scene that held the melancholy atmosphere of death, it became an occasion of sudden joy.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Leander Hobgood stirred. His eyes opened and his lips moved, and though they didn't utter sounds they were another symbol of revival. Pressing his hands against the floor, the inventor tried to rise, but failed until people helped him. He still couldn't speak and his manner seemed quite numb, but he was very much alive.

Persons gazed aghast, as though viewing a man from the dead. So amazed, so overjoyed were they because of Hobgood's return to the living, that they forgot all else. It didn't occur to them that a tall, calm-faced gentleman who was just joining the group had returned in a style quite as astonishing as Hobgood's or more so.

He was a being from the past; The Shadow, here in the guise of Cranston to probe crime's riddle and its relation to Leander Hobgood, the man who had defeated death!

CHAPTER IV. THOSE WHO BELIEVED

CLYDE BURKE was turning toward the telephone in the corner of the laboratory when he paused, blank-faced, at sight of Lamont Cranston. Sensing that Clyde had something to tell him, Cranston drew the reporter aside and gestured for him to speak in an undertone.

As Clyde started to relate the events in the lab, Cranston supplied another gesture, which carried Clyde beyond that portion of his tale.

"Right after it happened," said Clyde, recognizing that his chief must have been present, "I called the Cobalt Club to see if you were there. You weren't, but the police commissioner was."

Cranston undertoned the query: "He is on his way here?"

Clyde nodded. Then:

"I told him you said you'd be here," the reporter added. "So he was going to leave a message for you. Only –"

"Only, I didn't get it," smiled Cranston, "because I happened to be coming here instead of going to the club as you expected."

That was the way it stood, and when Commissioner Weston arrived he wasn't much surprised to learn that Cranston had reached the lab soon after Clyde's call to the club. Weston had too many things to think about.

He'd come here to investigate a murder that wasn't even a death, since Leander Hobgood was still alive. Outside, he had met his ace inspector, swarthy-faced Joe Cardona, who had come to investigate something else an attempted holdup of an automobile by two crooks who had slipped the patrolmen who prevented the crime.

Details on the attempted holdup were very scanty, but Weston couldn't do much criticizing, considering that the murder case was nonexistent. But when Weston pointed out the man who wasn't a victim and named him as Leander Hobgood, keen interest displayed itself in Cardona's dark, sharp eyes.

There had been much talk about Hobgood lately, the sort that called for close attention to the inventor's case. The law had simply been waiting for any of a dozen persons to come through with charges that would warrant Hobgood's arrest. So far, no one had delivered, because all were hopeful of regaining lost funds from Hobgood personally. And here, together in one room, was the man reputed to be a swindler, surrounded by all his dupes!

THE MURDERING GHOST

What it was all about, Hobgood couldn't tell them, for he hadn't recovered his voice. Hayne was equally useless; the professor could only talk about psychodynamic, astral forces, and the fourth dimension. The man who finally undertook to explain was the portly millionaire who had been holding hands with Clyde when a thunderbolt from nowhere had overwhelmed Hobgood and broken up the circle.

The millionaire was named Milton Suffolk. He was an imposing man, precise in tone, convincing in his manner, and a stickler for detail. The only oddity about Suffolk was that a man of his reputed wealth and known business caliber should be numbered among Hobgood's dupes.

But Suffolk settled that point early by stating that he had no charges to bring against Hobgood. In fact, Suffolk considered Hobgood as a person who had been badly misunderstood through causes quite beyond his control.

"Hobgood has interested all of us in his inventions," declared Suffolk, sweeping his hand around the group. "To some of us he gave securities in return for cash to finance his work. Quite unaccountably, so certain persons tell me" Suffolk was glancing from one face to another "some of those securities have disappeared.

"If we believed that Hobgood took them, we would not be here but in a court of law. There is nothing to prove that Hobgood participated in an actual theft. The matter is entirely beyond all normal understanding. At least, it was until tonight."

With that statement, Suffolk paused. When he spoke again, his face was solemn and his voice carried a sepulchral note that brought awed nods from listeners.

"Tonight," declared Suffolk, "we witnessed the proof of something more than mere human power. I must confess that I came here as a skeptic; but I am one no longer. The terrific energy that issued from the physical form of Leander Hobgood was proof conclusive of a psychodynamic force!"

NODS turned to murmurs, then to enthusiastic acclaim. Perhaps the only unimpressed witness was Lamont Cranston, and he didn't actually rate as one, not having been a member of the circle. Present as The Shadow, Cranston had been fairly distant from the shock. So distant, in fact, that he had witnessed something else: the hasty departure of the questionable electrician who had gone out through the other room.

Watching Hobgood, Cranston saw the inventor try to speak, only to fail, at first, because his vocal cords had not recovered from the shock. But as the enthusiasm grew, it became apparent that Hobgood's way of clutching his throat, the helpless headshakes that he gave were all an impromptu act.

The less that Hobgood said, the better, while these people were nullifying their own charges against him. It was only Cranston, with the keen gaze of The Shadow, who recognized the fakery in which Hobgood indulged.

The man who nearly wrecked Hobgood's hope was, of all persons, Professor Hayne.

It happened that Hayne was a man with an open mind. Honest, sincere, largely independent, he had instituted the psychic laboratory in a genuine search for truth. When he took the floor, he stated that fact emphatically. Much though he would like to prove his theory of psychodynamics, Hayne felt that the experiment had gone too far beyond his calculations.

"At most there should have been a sharp crackle," argued Hayne seriously. "Nothing so huge as an actual thunderbolt. I am afraid, very much afraid, that the answer lies in some fault of the apparatus. We try to guard against such chances, but there is always a chance of error."

THE MURDERING GHOST

Hayne went to examine the transformer, and Cranston noted that Weston and Cardona followed him. The transformer was more than faulty; it was a wreck. Hayne couldn't understand it; he didn't believe that transformers could go that bad, no matter what hit them. So he went to the other room to find the end of the wire, and on that expedition, Cranston kept pace with Weston and Cardona.

They found the wire plugged into an ordinary wall switch, a fact which made Hayne decide that Hobgood must have supplied the electric force. Absent-mindedly, the professor brought a key ring from his pocket, dangled a key and pointed to a switch box in another corner of the room.

"I was afraid that I might have plugged into the high-tension circuit by mistake," Hayne admitted. "But you notice, gentlemen, that its switch box is locked and that I have the key. Moreover, we find the wire plugged into the regular switch, right where it should be."

The statement satisfied Weston and Cardona, who were still looking for a complicated answer. Their satisfaction was excusable, of course, because they didn't know about the electrician. Hayne hadn't mentioned him, nor had any of the rest, which wasn't surprising in light of the excitement which had ruled later.

Studying Hayne, Cranston felt positive that the sincere professor shared the opinion of the others that the electrician was a negligible factor.

Hayne's discovery of the electric cord where it belonged was a convincing item, along with the locked switch box of the high-tension circuit. But Cranston didn't overlook the simple answer.

Having remained in this next room, the electrician could have changed the cord back and forth, and in removing it slapped the switch box shut to stay, because its lock was of the automatic type. Granting that Hayne had absent-mindedly left the switch box open, the thing was very obvious in terms of the unknown electrician.

To Cranston, this was more than speculation. As The Shadow, he had seen the electrician winding up his fiddling tactics. However, as Cranston he couldn't testify to matters that The Shadow had witnessed. So the silent Mr. Cranston reserved his own opinions and watched the law, as represented by Weston and Cardona, blow hot and cold.

CARDONA returned to the lab and asked Hobgood if he had any enemies. Glancing about the group, Hobgood saw sympathetic faces and gave his hand a shaky wave, to indicate that these persons, formerly his denouncers, were all his friends. He finished with a beaming smile, as though to ask, if these weren't his enemies, who could be?

Though Commissioner Weston wasn't sold on the psychodynamic theory, he was equally decided that crime had played no part in the laboratory proceedings. Inspector Cardona was reminding him that this neighborhood had furnished something definitely criminal: a gun fight on more than a meager scale.

So the two officials left abruptly, and Cranston, as the commissioner's friend, decided to accompany them. As for Clyde Burke, he'd gotten one story, and as a reporter he'd naturally go after another, so he went along, too.

They were on the street listening to the tale of two patrolmen, when people came down from the psychic laboratory. Milton Suffolk placed Leander Hobgood in a limousine and told him to wait there. Then Suffolk held an earnest conversation with Professor Hayne. Strolling over, Cranston caught the finish of the discussion.

No longer a skeptic, Suffolk was interested in the work of the psychic lab and willing to contribute to a fund

THE MURDERING GHOST

that Hayne had raised as an award for any person, spirit medium or otherwise, who could produce genuine psychic manifestations.

Then Suffolk was gone in his car, taking old Hobgood home, and Weston was learning that all weird things didn't happen in realms where spooks were supposed to dwell.

According to the patrolmen, the really uncanny happenings had been outdoors. They'd seen crooks scatter, but they'd kept close tabs on the one who was doing the most shooting and they'd followed his gun spurts into a three walled courtyard.

There he had vanished like a ghost! There wasn't a doubt about it. They'd show the spot to the commissioner if he wanted, but he decided they'd better get back to their patrol car and look for something more substantial than phantasms.

Later, while riding back to the Cobalt Club, Weston summed up his news for the benefit of his friend Cranston.

"What things fools will believe!" stormed Weston. "Those upstairs with Hayne believed that a superforce could come from nowhere and knock old Hobgood senseless! While the patrolmen down in the street believed that they had boxed in a man when they hadn't, and from that inferred that he disappeared. I'm sick of it, Cranston this business of listening to crazy things that people believe when every fact proves other wise!"

Weston's vehemence was such that Cranston wisely refrained from voicing his own beliefs. For Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, held to a theory that the commissioner had already rejected: namely, that events indoors and outside were connected in the terms of one individual, Leander Hobgood.

Why the old inventor, accused of crime himself, should be a target for others of that ilk, The Shadow would next determine on his own!

CHAPTER V. CRIME'S GREATER GOAL

IF such things as ghosts existed, there was one place where they should have flocked. It was a black-walled room hidden from the haunts of man, a place of utter darkness and deepest silence, far more secluded than the psychic laboratory of Professor Hayne.

But ghosts never entered that black-walled chamber, perhaps because the presence who dwelt there feared them no more than he did human enemies. For the room in question was The Shadow's sanctum.

At present, The Shadow was engaged in a prosaic task. Even the weird whisper of his reflective laugh could not alter the case. For the papers that The Shadow's fingers sorted were nothing more than duplicates of routine police reports that Inspector Cardona had heaped upon his superior, Commissioner Weston.

The police had managed to trace some of the gunners who had battled outside the psychic lab a few nights ago, only to draw a blank from that point. The few crooks questioned admitted they had been in the neighborhood, but only through curiosity, because they'd been tipped off from an unknown source that they might find The Shadow.

Cardona took it for granted that somebody had guessed that The Shadow would be interested in anything psychic; that the thugs had therefore been posted to keep the black-cloaked fighter from getting into the laboratory.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Personally, The Shadow regarded Cardona's reports as helpful. Knowing the inside angle as he did, he was interested in the outside phase of the case, and Cardona had bolstered his reports with some detailed speculation as to the person who had launched the attack upon The Shadow. Joe's list included the names of several ex-racketeers, and one in particular was a standout.

His name was Sheff Hassell, and he rated variously as a dealer in legitimate commodities to an owner of gambling joints. The reason the name interested The Shadow was because Sheff, alone of the men Cardona listed, had an ironclad alibi on a night when other crooks had difficulty proving their whereabouts.

The restrained tone of The Shadow's laugh was proof of further work ahead. Neither Sheff nor any of his familiar associates could be the man in the Mackinaw who had played the electrician game. Their alibis were all too good, which meant that the truth must be doubly tricky, the sort to be ferreted out by more than random method.

Laying the police reports aside, The Shadow dealt with those of his own secret agents, particularly a batch supplied by an investment broker named Rutledge Mann.

It happened that Mann was well acquainted with most of Hobgood's dupes, and the facts that he supplied were uniformly incredible. Stock in Hobgood's inventions, options on new devices, promissory notes, and even bank checks, had disappeared with uncanny regularity when handed out by the old inventor.

Though the individual losses were small, the aggregate proved large, but in no case could anyone pin the theft directly upon Hobgood. Documents had disappeared from desks in locked offices, from drawers, strong boxes, and even safes. It looked very much as though Hobgood's demonstration of psychodynamics would be followed by a proof of some fourth-dimensional process wherein hands from another world had played a part.

Evidently, Milton Suffolk thought so. He was becoming less and less a skeptic, and the final exhibit that came under The Shadow's bluish light was an invitation for Lamont Cranston to visit Suffolk's penthouse and join the conference on matters psychic.

CONTRASTED to the deep darkness of The Shadow's sanctum was the afternoon daylight spreading through Suffolk's penthouse when Cranston arrived there. Already the place was filled with a motley array of oddly assorted people, who wouldn't have gotten along at all, if Professor Hayne had not been present to keep them segregated.

Some were skeptics of the first water, psychic investigators who believed all spirit manifestations to be fraudulent. Others were mediums, both male and female, who claimed their ability to conjure up the inhabitants of the other world, under suitable conditions.

There were neutrals, too, though their trend varied one way or the other, and they insisted that the subject should be given a proper hearing. As Cranston entered, everyone was settling down to witness the trance ability of a darkish man who went under the name of Caglio.

Suffolk had invited Caglio to the penthouse because the man was more a seer than an actual medium. Hence, to both factions Caglio's work formed a middle ground.

The trance business proved interesting. Assuming a vacant stare, Caglio began to gain "impressions," describing faces, giving names, and other data that reached him in his trance.

The skeptics said politely that it was all fakery though perhaps not intentional, whereas the believers

THE MURDERING GHOST

concurred in the opinion that Caglio had projected his astral body to learn what went on elsewhere.

When Caglio finally came from his trance, Suffolk silenced the arguments as soon as they began.

"It is time that this question was really settled," asserted Suffolk emphatically. "It is not just a case of vindicating Hobgood" he gestured to a corner where the inventor was seated "which would be done if projection of the astral body could be proven where the removal of physical objects are concerned.

"Something greater is at stake: the whole matter of psychic manifestations, pro or con. Professor Hayne tells me that he has a fund of several thousand dollars, an offer to any medium who can produce genuine phenomena of a physical nature going beyond mere trance utterances. I for one am ready to add to that fund. Are there any others present who are willing?"

There were many others who could have increased the fund, but they sat back aloof. Cranston understood why: some declared that all spirit manifestations were such palpable fakes that there was no use giving credence to them; others were so convinced that such phenomena were genuine that they would not lower themselves to join in the offer.

Suffolk soon analyzed the situation in the way that Cranston did, and therewith met the issue.

"If you are risking nothing," spoke Suffolk to the skeptics, "why not increase the offer to a real amount? As for the rest of you" he turned to the believers "your hearts are in your cause. Certainly you can well afford to see your sincere beliefs proven."

Suffolk's viewpoint brought responses from both factions. For the first time the two began to agree on a single question, largely because its upshot would give the winning group the chance to gloat over the loser. No one, however, seemed willing to boost the fund until Suffolk, wearied of such hesitancy, came through with an offer of his own.

"As a man of open mind," asserted Suffolk, more emphatically than ever, "I see this from a broader viewpoint. To bring you all, whatever your opinions, from the narrow limitations which hold you, I shall double the total of any fund to which you all subscribe!"

The final words rang like a challenge, and the results were immediate. Men began to call off amounts like bidders at an auction, and Professor Hayne went racing back and forth gathering signatures that made the offers actual.

From ten thousand dollars the fund jumped to twenty-five, then to fifty thousand. When it stopped at that amount, Milton Suffolk, man of millions, gave the bidders a scathing stare that boosted the fund anew.

Flourishing the list, Hayne told Suffolk that the offers would eventually top a hundred thousand dollars, since there were more persons, not present, who would subscribe once they heard the terms. To which Suffolk returned the admonition:

"Keep it going, Hayne. As high as it rises, I shall double it. For a long while, I have planned to use much of my large fortune to the endowment of some worthy purpose. I can think of none worthier than this, the settling of the long-specified question of human survival."

Thereupon, the conclave ended.

THE various subscribers departed while Hayne was adding up the figures to the present total of seventy-one

THE MURDERING GHOST

thousand dollars, which was jotted down by Clyde Burke, who was on hand getting another exclusive story.

Cranston also remained, so that he could obligingly add a small four-thousand-dollar subscription to make the total an even seventy-five.

It also gave Cranston an excuse to go down in the elevator with Clyde. Hayne accompanied them, anxious to start the rounds of gathering further contributions. While Hayne was promising to inform Clyde of any additional sums, Cranston waved good-by to Suffolk from the elevator door.

Back in the penthouse living room, Cranston could still see old Hobgood, seated in a corner chair apparently deep in thought over his inventions and the unknown power that inspired them; while Caglio, the trance medium, was stretched on a couch recovering from the mental strain that his coma had induced.

It was sight of that pair that brought a smile to Cranston's lips as the elevator door went shut. Human enigmas both; fakers, perhaps, yet the sort who might not be fully conscious of their shams. They were factors to be heard from, Hobgood and Caglio. In fact, they had already been heard from, for it was their type of mental genius that had caused Milton Suffolk to make his grand gesture toward Hayne's fund.

In the lobby, Cranston had his chance to speak with Clyde as soon as Hayne was gone. It surprised Clyde, at first, to learn that his chief wanted him to drop the Suffolk story in order to garner facts about an ex-racketeer named Sheff Hassell. Nevertheless, Clyde did not dispute the point.

"I can get to Sheff, all right," grinned Clyde. "You know Rudy Burgaw, the free-lance writer who does feature stuff? He's in with all the big shots like Sheff Hassell. Anyway, Rudy has been hounding me to let him in on the real low-down on what happened up at the psychic lab.

"He'll go for this new angle in a big way, so I'll make a deal with him. I'll hand him the latest on the psychic biz if he'll slip me some inside slants on the other rackets. Leave it to me, chief, and I'll get some crime dope, past and present!"

They had reached the street while Clyde was speaking, and it was there that Cranston paused to add quietly:

"And future."

Clyde didn't quite understand. But the thing drilled home the moment that Cranston started to explain. That certain crooks, notably Sheff Hassell, had sought to harm Leander Hobgood was a definite fact. Granted that revenge might be their motive, money must also be involved. Assuming that Sheff Hassell was out to redeem past losses, he would be equally eager to acquire future gain.

The opportunity was ripe.

Right there, it dawned on Clyde what Cranston meant. The seventy-five thousand dollars to be doubled by Milton Suffolk, already represented a huge goal of crime!

If crooks who had meddled with matters at the psychic laboratory could repeat the business in a subtler way, they might be able somehow to take over the cash put up by Suffolk and the rest. This was the reason why The Shadow was deputing Clyde to seek crime's inside angle.

And the thing was to Clyde's liking. He was quite convinced that he could acquire the facts The Shadow wanted, and more.

THE MURDERING GHOST

How much more, was the only question and it was to prove a great deal more than Clyde himself would want, before this evening's venture ended!

CHAPTER VI. BIRDS OF A KIND

THEY looked a lot alike, Clyde Burke and Rudy Burgaw, as they sat in the back room of a hangout favored by gentlemen of the press. Clyde was a wiry type, Rudy a heavier sort, but they both had the sharp expression that belonged to the veteran news hawk.

The deal that Clyde outlined made sense to Rudy. In Clyde's opinion, spirit seances were a crackpot business that belonged to the feature writer, not to the straight news reporter. He'd be willing to swap assignments, Clyde would, giving Rudy the contact with such gentlemen as Hayne and Suffolk, if his friend would steer him to some timely crime news.

All of which suited Rudy so well, that Clyde put in phone calls to Hayne and Suffolk announcing Rudy as his successor to handle the seance stories exclusively. That done, the two reporters came to the question of Clyde's introduction to current crimedom circles. There, Clyde put terms that Cranston had suggested.

"Suppose you fix me with a square guy," said Clyde. "You know the kind, Rudy a fellow who knows what's going on but isn't worrying. For instance, Sheff Hassell. I understand the police were trying to pin something on Sheff the other night, but they didn't even get to the batter's box, let alone to first base."

Rudy thought it over a few minutes. Then:

"Right you are, Clyde," he said. "Sheff it is. Let's go over to see him."

Sheff's place was rather palatial. It consisted of a large and lavish apartment, with a living room containing several of Sheff's cronies, men who looked like racetrack touts and habitués of gambling clubs. They gave a warm greeting to Rudy, and extended the same to Clyde when they learned the two were pals. Since Sheff happened to be busy in a room he called his office, the crowd invited the visiting reporters to join a crap game while they were waiting.

Clyde excused himself on the grounds of some necessary phone calls. He watched Rudy join the group. While he made his routine calls, Clyde kept a steady eye on the crap game.

It was then, by a freak of chance, that Clyde witnessed a most startling occurrence, something that could have dented his memory alone.

Rudy had the dice and decided to take a final roll, for word had come that Hassell would see his visitors. He tossed a five-dollar bill on the floor, stooped to one knee, clicked the dice and said:

"Come seven!"

When the dice came to a stop, a "three" was turned up. The loss of the five dollars didn't ruffle Rudy. Rising, he brushed his trousers knee, flipped his hands together to indicate that he was finished. Folding his wallet, he thrust it nonchalantly into his hip pocket. So habitual was Rudy's routine, that it left Clyde agape.

Action for action, every move by Rudy Burgaw duplicated the motions of the unknown electrician who had fixed the high-tension circuit for Hobgood's benefit in the psychic laboratory!

Rudy was speaking in an undertone that Clyde heard in mechanical fashion.

THE MURDERING GHOST

"I'll go in and talk to Sheff," Rudy was saying. "Stick here until he sends for you. I can fix things better that way."

Fix things better!

How well they were fixed already! That point drilled home to Clyde as soon as Rudy had gone. The Shadow was right: Sheff Hassell had made the thrust at Leander Hobgood; but Sheff had been smart enough not to employ any of his usual tribe. Instead, he had commandeered the services of Rudy Burgaw, gentleman of the press!

Rudy wasn't the first renegade reporter who had teamed with men of crime, though the thing was quite uncommon. How deep he'd gone into it, and why, were both questions of paramount interest to Clyde. But behind it drummed another thought, one that concerned Clyde vitally.

In marring his deal with Rudy, Clyde had paved the way for the renegade to take a further hand, not only in Hobgood's case but in the matter of the increasing fund that The Shadow was sure would attract the interest of smart criminals!

The idea struck Clyde that it would be excellent to provide The Shadow with evidence stronger than guesswork. So he boldly sauntered through a short hallway leading from the living room, stopped at the office door and listened. Hearing nothing, Clyde tried the door and found it unlocked. Opening it a few inches, he peered into the office.

BEHIND a desk sat Sheff Hassell, a smooth, darkish man whose face, like his glossy black hair, looked oily. He was listening to Rudy, who was talking from across the desk, telling him of the deal with Clyde.

"Good enough," declared Sheff in a smooth tone. "You'll be handling the inside on the spook business, while I give Burke the run-around. It couldn't be better, Rudy."

Clyde noted that Rudy looked worried. So did Sheff, and his dark eyes became quizzical as he growled:

"Spill it, Rudy."

"I owe you a chunk of dough, Sheff," stated Rudy, "but knocking off somebody in the same boat isn't my idea of how to pay it."

Sheff purred a smooth chuckle.

"You mean the other night?" he queried. "That was all in fun. I only wanted you to jolt old Hobgood, not to croak him."

"Hooking into that high-tension circuit was your suggestion," reminded Rudy. "From Burke's description, Hobgood was mighty near a goner. You made me play it too strong, Sheff."

"Maybe," conceded Sheff. Then, in a snarling tone, he added: "And maybe not! Hobgood went too strong when he played me for a sucker! Figure me, Sheff Hassell, buying an option on an invention and having the papers disappear right out of this desk!"

Rudy nodded as though he'd heard that story often before. Sheff continued his beef in the same snarling tone.

"I'd like to know Hobgood's system," said Sheff. "There would be a lot of ways I could use it. But there's

THE MURDERING GHOST

something I'd like even more. That's to get the machine he sold me. It's the best thing he ever rigged."

There was a shrug from Rudy.

"All of Hobgood's machines are phony," argued Rudy. "The most you could do would be to show up his racket and try a shakedown. But where's the advantage? He owes everybody dough. How could you cash in?"

A very confident smile appeared on Sheff's lips. He beckoned Rudy closer, a gesture that should have warned Clyde. It indicated that Sheff suspected an eavesdropper without fully realizing it. Sooner or later, Sheff might guess the reason for his own caution; but Clyde was too interested in present matters to look that far ahead.

"I'm the only guy who has seen that new machine," confided Sheff to Rudy. "Common sense told me that it couldn't work, but my eyes said that it did. That's why I wanted it, but I was stalling for a chance to learn what made it tick. Now I want it more than ever."

Rudy queried why.

"Because of this whacky spirit business," explained Sheff. "You've just told me that there's a hundred and fifty grand waiting for somebody to collect it. Now, if I had that new machine of Hobgood's, the one that nobody else has seen –"

"I get it!" broke in Rudy. "With some fake medium to handle it, you could prove that the thing operated by a spirit force, and claim the cash. But" Rudy's enthusiasm suddenly waned "but you'd have to handle Hobgood, too."

"I intend to handle Hobgood," informed Sheff. "Since he didn't take the hint you gave him, I'll do this job personally."

Sheff's hand moved toward a corner of the desk, then stopped, still in full view. The reason: Sheff's eyes, glancing beyond Rudy, had spotted the partly open door. Always an opportunist, ever on the alert, Sheff Hassell proved his competency in an emergency situation. It was the heel of his hand, not his telltale thumb, that eased below the desk edge and gave three unseen jabs to a push button located there.

Smoothly, Sheff was resuming his conversation with Rudy when Clyde decided it would be good policy to return to the living room. But before Clyde could work the door shut, others decided that he was going to stay. They arrived in a flock, the crap shooters from the living room, overwhelming Clyde in a five-to-one surge.

The door smashing open ahead of him, Clyde wheeled in wiry style as they drove him toward the desk. Before Clyde could begin to break free, Sheff picked up the telephone.

Sheff wasn't summoning more help. He didn't need it. He simply brought the telephone straight down to Clyde's head in a fashion that laid the reporter senseless.

TURNING to Rudy, who was staring with startled eyes, Sheff remarked coolly:

"So this is your friend Burke, the fall guy who wanted to swap jobs. Kind of a fast worker, I'd say!"

Rudy gulped and nodded.

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Take care of him!" Sheff snarled. "Fix it with his office so they'll think he's gone out of town. You're handling his job, anyway. That's been all arranged."

Rudy finished his gulp.

"You're going to croak him, Sheff?"

"Not yet," sneered Sheff. "why should I?" His voice smoothed to a purr. "I haven't croaked anybody not yet. We'll keep Burke on ice until after we've finished our business. When we're in a hundred and fifty grand or more we'll decide if Burke knows enough to hurt him – permanently!"

Whatever might happen, Clyde Burke wouldn't find a friend in Rudy Burgaw, not while the latter held a stake in the hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar prize that Sheff Hassell had chosen as his goal. As for the facts that Clyde had hoped to deliver to The Shadow, those were scheduled to work in strict reverse.

Clyde's original status simply the business of a reporter getting acquainted with a smooth character like Sheff Hassell was not the sort of thing that should have placed Clyde in jeopardy. Furthermore, Clyde had met Sheff under the auspices of Rudy Burgaw, whose rating still stood high.

Only Clyde's own report could have tipped off The Shadow to Rudy's dual role. In the hands of enemies, Clyde was slated to remain in this dilemma until his chief, The Shadow, should find some other facts to prove his missing agent's plight!

CHAPTER VII. THE SHADOW'S INTERVIEW

No more than an hour after Clyde's misadventure, a big car stopped in front of an old, grimly walled house in a very dingy section of Manhattan. The man who alighted was Leander Hobgood, and he was followed promptly by Milton Suffolk, who gave the house a disapproving stare.

The house was Hobgood's residence, and it was the first time he had returned there since his shocking experience in the psychic laboratory.

To Suffolk, the place looked anything but safe for an old man of Hobgood's caliber. The very neighborhood was dangerous, its crannies and alleyways offering lurking spots for any doubtful characters of the sort that such districts were apt to breed.

Suffolk was insisting upon Hobgood's safety. As Hobgood was entering the front door, Suffolk reminded:

"You'll be welcome at my place as soon as you can come there. Bring anything you want, and stay as long as you like."

Hobgood nodded his thanks and closed the door. Suffolk heard a bolt grate from within and turned back to his limousine. But the solemn-faced millionaire could not resist another troubled glance about this neighborhood that seemed so ripe for the presence of anything from prowling crooks to wandering ghouls.

Hardly had the car pulled away before Suffolk's apprehensions over the unknown were realized.

From across the street glided a spectral shape, the same black-cloaked figure that had moved into other scenes. The Shadow was bound upon a firsthand investigation of the singular devices created by Leander Hobgood. If certain features of Hobgood's machines were lacking, The Shadow intended to learn about them from Hobgood.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Low-toned, almost whimsical was The Shadow's laugh as he reached the shelter of the house wall. He would be giving Hobgood full chance to prove that his inventions worked. Hobgood could even turn on the "dynamic power" if he had any. Which was rather humorous, considering that The Shadow knew that the "dynamic force" of the seance room had been supplied by a high-tension circuit!

To enter Hobgood's, The Shadow picked the roof. He climbed up there by use of the rubber suction cups. On the roof he found the weakest of Hobgood's barriers, a trapdoor that was clamped from inside. Attaching a short lever to the barrel of an automatic, The Shadow put the pressure on the gun handle and jimmied the trapdoor right out of place.

Gliding downstairs, The Shadow began to find exhibits when he reached the second floor. Every room was like a storeroom, containing shrouded tables where apparatus lay under protecting folds of white cloth. Using a tiny flashlight, The Shadow lifted these shrouds and looked at some of Hobgood's rare machines.

Curious contrivances, all. Most of them were perpetual-motion machines, devices that wouldn't work except that these machines had worked when Hobgood demonstrated them to the persons who formed his sucker list.

The Shadow continued to the ground floor, intending to interview the inventor. Sounds brought The Shadow to a halt as he reached the bottom of the stairs. Only Hobgood could have made those sounds the creak of sly footsteps moving here and there. They were coming from the cellar, until they finally paused near the side of the ground floor.

There, The Shadow heard Hobgood test the bolts of a door and move away again. The creeping footsteps did an odd vanishing act, only to be heard again from deep along the hall. The Shadow moved in that direction, only to have the sounds fade again.

Using his flashlight, The Shadow looked for a doorway, but found none.

Hobgood had apparently creaked his way through a solid wall in back of the stairs!

It occurred to The Shadow that Hobgood might be preparing a future demonstration for Suffolk, the man who had befriended him. From all accounts, Hobgood hadn't yet swindled Suffolk as he had others. Which, in Hobgood's terms, could mean that Suffolk hadn't fully ripened.

SUCH was immaterial, for the present. The Shadow still wanted a personal interview with Hobgood, so instead of tapping the wall beneath the stairs and wasting time in learning its secret, he listened for further sounds from the old inventor.

They came near the front of the house: the creaky noise of a door being opened.

Moving frontward through the darkness, The Shadow felt a musty draft that he hadn't noticed before and from it located the door in question. As he moved silently through the opening, The Shadow heard Hobgood creeping the other way. A door gave a slight slam and immediately betrayed itself by a crack of light. Hobgood had turned on a lamp in the room beyond.

Reaching the door, The Shadow tried it and found it unlocked. Working the door inward, he was greeted by a crackly sound that proved to be a fire which Hobgood was lighting in a fireplace on the other side of a sparsely furnished room. Between the glow of a floor lamp and the rising glare from the hearth, Hobgood formed a stooped, grotesque figure, with all the mystic manner of an ancient alchemist.

He was warming his hands by rubbing them before the fire, and the cackle that came from his dry lips rivaled

THE MURDERING GHOST

the tune of the flames that licked the equally dry logs. As darty as the flames was Hobgood's tongue, as it ran along his withery mouth and seemed to moisten the lips into a grin that gained a demoniac crimson from the ruddy fire.

Either Hobgood was in a conniving mood, or an inventive one; whichever it might be, The Shadow was here to learn. So he waited, that spectral figure in black, to see what Hobgood would do next.

The Shadow's wait was short. Toddling to a corner of the room, Hobgood stooped double and raised a portion of the baseboard. From a cache within he brought a metal box, which he carried to a table and unlocked with an odd-shaped key.

Hearing a crackle from the fire, Hobgood noticed the increasing warmth and moved the table farther away. Then from the box he brought stacks of papers that he began to sort in various piles.

From the doorway, The Shadow could identify the documents. Some were promissory notes, others contracts, while the remainder seemed to be entirely stock certificates, until Hobgood brought out a pile of currency which he sorted slowly, shaking his head as he did. A curious drama, all in pantomime!

Apparently Hobgood was going over the papers that he had somehow reclaimed from his dupes, and at the same time counting the cash that they had paid him! Yet the old man seemed much disappointed, as though the currency thus gained was not equal to the trouble that his tricky ventures had brought upon him.

Still bent so far over that he needed one supporting hand upon the shaky table, Hobgood used his other hand to stroke his chin, while his eyes showed a sparkle through their watery mist. He was looking across the room to another corner, where a shrouded bulk of a cloth-covered machine loomed upon a squarish block of polished marble.

His smile was definitely twofold now; it proved him both conniving and inventive. With a crisp laugh that drowned the fire's crackle, Hobgood went back to his sorting of securities and cash.

The time for The Shadow's interview had come. His back at an angle toward the door, Leander Hobgood was too concerned in his work of self-betrayal to sense the proximity of the cloaked visitor who was about to challenge him.

Yet, on the threshold, The Shadow paused to prepare for the coming showdown. In dealing with a warped genius like Hobgood, anything might happen. The Shadow knew from past experience with others who had tried to trick him.

And The Shadow had more to learn from Leander Hobgood!

CHAPTER VIII. THE TRIPLE TRAP

WATCHING intently from the doorway, The Shadow used his left hand to peel a thin black glove from his right. With the same move in which he deftly cloaked the glove, he brought out a small round metal box that had two caps. Lifting one lid, he dipped his second finger into a grayish paste; lowering the lid below, he took a dab of whitish substance upon the ball of his thumb.

His left hand cloaking the closed box, The Shadow brought out an automatic instead. Keeping his right hand lowered, finger and thumb apart, he advanced with leveled gun.

There were two rectangular rugs on the floor of the room and The Shadow crossed the first one silently. The

THE MURDERING GHOST

second was close to Hobgood's table and The Shadow had taken but a single step upon it, when he felt a slight yielding of the floor beneath.

Withdrawing his foot, The Shadow moved back a pace and delivered a whispered laugh that actually crept upon Hobgood's ears.

The old inventor wheeled; for a moment, the grin still flickered on his lips. Then it was gone, while Hobgood, his hands clenched close to his body, gave a glare that could be mildly described by the word "venomous." He half betrayed the fact that he was expecting a visitor, but certainly not the one who loomed before him.

Now there was this about Hobgood, that The Shadow analyzed instantly: if the inventor had a gun, he might snatch it out with either of those doubled hands. Should he do so, he would shoot with definite intent to kill. Beating Hobgood to the shot would be the only way to deal with him something which The Shadow was not inclined to do, since Hobgood's record showed no taint of murder.

So The Shadow used the opposite policy. Very gradually, he let his own gun lower, and with every inch he noted that Hobgood's hands relaxed farther. A good beginning, this, with weapons going to the discard. As soon as Hobgood's hands were open and away from his coat, The Shadow put his own gun away. Hobgood gave a cheerful laugh, as though he had won an initial victory.

"So you sought me out!" Hobgood's tone was a dry snarl, like the sharp rustle of leaves. "I have heard of you, Shadow, and I expected you so long, that I had given you up. But I have never omitted you in my calculations, hence I am still prepared for you.

"Would you like to go up there, Shadow?" Hobgood wagged a bony forefinger toward the cross-beamed ceiling. "Or down there?" The same finger tipped straight to the floor. "Or perhaps" the old man gave a broad gesture with both hands "you would prefer to remain right here?"

Hobgood put the accent on the word "remain" as though the process would prove permanent.

Meanwhile, The Shadow had watched Hobgood's watery eyes, rather than the wagging forefinger. He saw the place in the ceiling toward which the inventor looked. Between the rough-hewn beams was the square outline of a trapdoor. And when Hobgood glanced downward, it was definitely toward the rug between himself and The Shadow the one the cloaked visitor had first tested to detect the yielding floor beneath.

The Shadow answered with a casual gesture of his ungloved hand toward the table where Hobgood's papers lay. In sibilant tone, The Shadow decreed:

"Our business first, Hobgood."

It was especially disarming, that open-handed gesture of The Shadow's. But this hand, unknown to Hobgood, carried as potent a threat as any gun. Those drying dabs upon The Shadow's thumb and forefinger, too trifling to be observed, represented powerful chemicals that would react with a mere finger snap. Such a snap and Hobgood would be staggered by a blast that would bewilder him at the close range of a small rug's breadth.

Though he didn't know what might be coming, Hobgood showed worryment. He reached for the table and drew it past him, as though to shift it to the fireplace, where he could grab the papers and fling them into the flames, thus disposing of incriminating evidence.

Instantly, The Shadow's forefinger pointed just beyond the rug edge, as he issued the commanding words:

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Stop there, Hobgood!"

Hobgood stopped, his hands lifting from the table. He was close to the heat of the leaping fire, but not quite within the range where he could dump the papers as fuel for the flames. The Shadow had halted him with at least a foot to go, and again Hobgood snarled his disappointment.

There was a slight gesture of The Shadow's hand moving Hobgood to the right. The old man went a double arm's length from the table, then turned to show venom in his glare, now that his voice was failing him.

Confident came The Shadow's laugh, for the rug was just narrow enough to reach across, which meant that The Shadow could pluck the papers with his left hand, while his right was ready to snap its blast if Hobgood made a despairing dart from that side.

Once The Shadow gripped those papers, Hobgood would have to come to terms, which meant in brief a full confession of his guilt, with details of all swindling tactics. A perfect situation, this, with a surprise explosion ready to bewilder a foe.

Perfect for Leander Hobgood. Luck was with the old inventor. His blast came first!

Hobgood's hands were empty; he was too far away to use them. The table was simple a rickety contraption that couldn't contain a trick. The only things left were the piled-up papers, securities and currency. Evidence not only of Hobgood's guilt, but of his ingenuity.

Those papers were the snare. Hobgood hadn't needed to toss them into the fire. Getting them close to the heat was good enough. For the papers, documents and cash alike, were the source of the terrific flash that burst upward in a mighty puff of searing flame as The Shadow's hand was about to touch them!

BLINDING was the effect of that huge flash; blinding and no more, but it was quite enough. For the unexpected burst threw The Shadow into an immediate defensive and a severe one. His eyes completely dazzled, he couldn't see Hobgood; hence it wasn't safe to remain within reach of a rapid lunge.

Remembering the creaky floor beneath the rug ahead of him, The Shadow dropped back to the first rug, near the door, gauging it as the best base for operation. From there he could wheel to right or left, even spin out through the door itself if he couldn't locate Hobgood.

Good logic on The Shadow's part, but only because he had not yet discovered that all of Hobgood's methods were tricks within tricks. Hobgood wanted The Shadow to go backward, not forward, and his cloaked prey obliged him. For Hobgood had reached the mantel above the fireplace, and there he pressed a switch beneath.

The rug opened like a trapdoor, exactly as The Shadow had expected. But it wasn't the rug that The Shadow thought was tricked. That yielding floor was just a loose-board gag, one of Hobgood's little pets. The rug that was fitted with a trap a very fine one with a solid feel was the first rug that The Shadow had crossed; the very rug to which he made his blind retreat!

So fast that it actually seemed to melt, the floor gave beneath The Shadow and dropped him into Hobgood's cellar. His left hand was after a gun and couldn't grab the floor edge, as his right did; but that right hand got nothing but a crack on the knuckles that threw its fingers hard against the thumb. (Note: Because The Shadow's explosive powder used in this instance is too dangerous for any but the most experienced to use we do not reveal the nature of its formula, so that the inexperienced might not attempt this experiment and thereby suffer harm. Maxwell Grant.)

THE MURDERING GHOST

The Shadow's blast went off below the floor edge and Hobgood mistook it for a gunshot that ended abruptly because the trapdoor, snapping up again, muffled the echoes of the useless and accidental explosion.

It took Hobgood a full minute to finish the rollicking laughter that seized him. He'd given The Shadow his choice of where to go, and since his visitor had refused, Hobgood had chosen for him. And now, his long laugh ended, Hobgood showed plainly that his ways of crime were dyed to the full. His glare became murderous as he crossed before the fireplace to reach a switch on the other side.

Hobgood was going to take another route to where The Shadow lay, and top off his preliminary triumph by dealing death to a senseless adversary. The Shadow hadn't marked Hobgood as a man of murder; the inventor himself intended to prove his indulgence in that pastime.

A gloating cackle coming from his throat, Hobgood paused just long enough to look at the clock on the mantel, as though timing the exact minute of The Shadow's coming death.

Fortunately, Hobgood's plans were limited to seconds instead of minutes. Before he could press the switch beside the mantel, a smooth voice interceded from the doorway. Beneath the velvet purr was the trace of a rasp that Hobgood recognized too well.

Sheff Hassell!

"Get away from there, Hobgood!" Sheff backed the order with a revolver. "One poke at that mantel and you'll get something faster a .38 slug, the way I serve it!"

Hobgood's hands relaxed. He turned from the mantel to face Sheff, who promptly crossed the room, treading on the same rug that had dropped The Shadow.

Folding his arms, Hobgood glared peevishly. He wasn't at the switch that would have bagged Sheff; what was more, it couldn't have helped out Hobgood. For Sheff wasn't alone.

Two of his dice-rolling pals were with him, waiting just within the doorway, where they were safe from Hobgood's snare.

Crossing the second rug, Sheff felt the floor's slight give and made a quick hop beyond, knocking over the table that no longer bore a trace of any paper, not even in the form of ashes. At the solid hearth, Sheff gave an indulgent laugh.

"So that's the gag," he said. "Press the switch and the floor drops. Pretty crude stuff, Hobgood!"

To prove it, Sheff pressed the switch and turned to witness the result. It came in a fashion most surprising. This wasn't the switch that had dropped The Shadow; it was on a different side of the mantel. And it did something that brought amazement even to Sheff's hard eyes.

There was a rattle from above as the crude trapdoor turned between the ceiling beams. Down lashed a double rope, whipping with the speed of a flying lariat. It slashed across the room from hearth to door, scooping up the only thing in its path, which happened to be the overturned table.

The whipping loop missed Sheff and Hobgood because they happened to be to one side of it. Sheff's pals escaped it because they were almost in the doorway and therefore short of the lashing coil. But the rope took the captive table with it, carrying the thing right up through the ceiling as the trapdoor finished its revolution.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Sheff and his companions heard the table smash. They knew what would have been their individual lot had any one of them gone instead. With all the force of a cracking whip, the whistling loop of rope would have bashed a victim against the wall of the room above the ceiling just as it did the table.

SHEFF whistled softly, as though echoing the tune of the rope that had come and gone with lightning speed.

"Pretty neat," he approved. "As good as the jolt I handed you the other night, Hobgood. Even better. But then, inventing things is your business. Which reminds me: we came here to collect that new machine you sold me."

Dryly, Hobgood inquired: "Have you brought your option, Hassell?"

"A funny thing," sneered Sheff. "You know" his eyes stared hard at Hobgood "I put it in a desk drawer and forgot to look for it. But naturally it would still be there or would it?"

Hobgood merely shrugged, so Sheff answered his own question.

"This will do for an option." He gestured his gun. "It's even better; it's a contract with six clauses. Want me to prove it?"

Hobgood shook his head. Raising one hand, he pointed across the room to the marble stand with the cloth that covered a mounted machine. Wearily, Hobgood said:

"There it is, Hassell. You came for it, and you are quite free to take it with you."

Motioning his men to stay right where they were, Sheff crossed the room to view his prize. Still wary, Hobgood glanced at the clock on the mantel, as though to resume his counting of the minutes. His face was turned away, hence Sheff's helpers did not see the smile that returned to Hobgood's crinkly lips.

Hobgood was counting the minutes again. Minutes of death that he had applied to The Shadow, but now he was thinking in terms of Sheff Hassell. For Leander Hobgood had offered The Shadow three choices when he entered this room: to go up, go down or remain. The Shadow had gone down. Sheff hadn't gone up. Two options were eliminated, but there was still a third.

And the third was final in more ways than one. It would do for Sheff, that third snare of the triple trap, though Hobgood wished he had reserved it for The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX. DEATH GOES ASTRAY

THE plunge to Hobgood's cellar was a mean one, but it hadn't been as hard as its designer intended it at least, not for The Shadow. He'd taken plenty of falls before, longer drops than the one Hobgood gave him. Missing his grab at the closing trapdoor, he'd tried to soften the jar of landing and had managed it without too serious a jolt.

When Hobgood didn't appear immediately, The Shadow limped around the cellar and probed it with his flashlight. He came across a little printing press and found some sheets of paper beside it. Noting that the cellar was damp and musty like the room above, The Shadow gave a reflective laugh. Taking a sheet of paper, he lighted a match and held it close.

The heat did the rest. The paper ignited spontaneously and went up in a quick puff that left no trace of ash. Here was the answer to the riddle of Hobgood's swindles.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Flash paper!

The stuff that photographers used before the days of flash bulbs. Well saturated with the proper chemicals, such paper would not only burn instantly without leaving a trace; it was always liable to spontaneous combustion. Hobgood had made his paper as highly spontaneous as was possible.

Options, stocks all documents he'd given his dupes were printed on this paper. The drier the place they put such trophies, the quicker the things would vanish, burning so swiftly that they hadn't time to ignite anything else!

The papers that The Shadow had found Hobgood sorting were not documents regained from the past. The old ones had vanished permanently. The Shadow had found Hobgood sorting a new stock! And the deceptive feature had been the supply of nice new bank notes that The Shadow mistook for money that Hobgood had collected.

Those bills were something quite different. Alongside the printing press were some neatly engraved plates for the manufacture of spurious money of which Hobgood had run off a supply. So that was to be his next step, passing counterfeit currency printed on the same flash paper that vanished of its own accord.

Just one flaw: the paper wasn't right. Which explained why Hobgood had been shaking his head when The Shadow saw him. Ingenious, this new scheme of Hobgood's, but it just wouldn't stand the gaff. Flash paper made queer money look too queer.

WHILE The Shadow was probing Hobgood's cellar, Sheff Hassell was taking a look at the machine in the room upstairs. It was a very beautiful machine, made of brass and nickel and with all sorts of cogwheels and springs that formed a contrivance two feet square. The works rested on a sheet of glass, which in turn was mounted on four glass legs that stood upon the marble base.

After admiring the mechanism for a full five minutes, Sheff turned and beckoned to Hobgood, who approached obediently. In his smooth tone, Sheff commented:

"All right, Hobgood. Show me the gaff."

When Hobgood hesitated, Sheff nudged him with the revolver muzzle, whereupon the inventor began to talk in a wheezy undertone. Listening, Sheff kept looking at the machine, his eyebrows lifting higher and higher. When Hobgood reached toward the machine, Sheff stopped him.

"Never mind," said Sheff. "It's sure to work, the way you explained it. Why should I let these lugs in on it?" He gestured toward his henchmen at the door. "I'd rather try it on them and watch it fool them –"

Summoning the pair, Sheff told them to bring the machine and to handle it with care. All the while, Sheff was keeping Hobgood covered, and he added to the threat by informing the inventor:

"You're coming along, too, Hobgood.

"Why, I don't understand!" bleated Hobgood plaintively. "You paid for the machine and I've delivered it –"

"A phony!" interrupted Sheff. "Don't forget that part."

"But you've expressed your satisfaction –"

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Of course!" Sheff turned to voice his sneer. "That's just it. I've got a job that a gaffed machine can do, but I don't want anybody to queer it. And you could queer it, Hobgood, if I left you at large. So you're going to be my guest until the job's done.

Hobgood turned to look around the room, as though the mere thought of leaving it would tear his heart out. In the same plaintive bleat, he queried:

"For how long, Hassell?"

"A couple of days," was Sheff's noncommittal reply. "Or maybe a few more. Don't worry, Hobby. We'll treat you just swell."

Hobgood gestured across the room.

"Could I wind my clock?" he asked. "It ought to be kept running." His watery eyes narrowed. "It's an eight-day clock."

Obviously, Hobgood was trying to guess if his stay with Sheff would last more than a week. It certainly would, but Sheff didn't care to say so. Hence, to humor Hobgood, Sheff gave an indifferent nod.

Hobgood went over to wind the clock, but Sheff didn't stop watching him. The men were just getting the precious machine out to the hall when Hobgood finished winding, and Sheff called for him to come along.

Through the doorway, Hobgood overtook Sheff's men and started a hurried protest about the way they were handling the machine.

"No, no! Don't tilt it!" he exclaimed. "Set it on that table by the door. Now move back I want Mr. Hassell to see why you were carrying it wrong!"

So natural was Hobgood's manner, that he had the men through the doorway before they guessed what was coming next. Hobgood grabbed the door to close it with a slam, and if he'd been dealing only with the "lugs," as Sheff termed them, he would have succeeded. But Hobgood was dealing with Sheff, too. And Sheff Hassell was as quick as his own trigger finger.

Bowling right between his two followers, Sheff jammed his foot into the door in time to stop it. Wrenching the door wide, he grabbed Hobgood and brought him back into the room. The two were reeling over the rugs together when Sheff's men tried to help their leader, only to hear his snarl:

"Outside, bums! I'll handle this! It's got something to do with that clock!"

As the two thugs went through the doorway, Sheff hurled Hobgood's frail form half across the room. Sprawling in a funny heap, Hobgood lay bewildered, while Sheff went through the door instead, slamming it and turning a key that he found in the outside lock. He told his men to start along with the machine, while he awaited events.

"This is the only way out," added Sheff. "If Hobgood is pulling any funny business, he'll have to say so to save his own hide. I'll give him a couple of minutes."

Sheff set the time too long. He waited only a minute for Hobgood to recover from his daze and rap humbly at the door. At the end of the minute something more formidable than a rap arrived. Something that made the exchange of blasts between Hobgood and The Shadow seem like little firecrackers.

THE MURDERING GHOST

This explosion, originating in the room where Sheff had left Hobgood, shook the entire house!

There was a roar, a titanic burst of flame, and the door came smashing outward to fling Sheff at the feet of the staggered men who were carrying Hobgood's invention. Coming to his feet, Sheff reeled back to the doorway. Through a haze of writhing smoke, he saw the devastating result.

It was the clock, all right. The thing had a bomb in it, set off by the clockwork. It had blown the fireplace apart and half the wall with it. Debris was falling everywhere, and the outflung flames from the fireplace were taking hold on the wreckage.

As for Hobgood, there wasn't a trace of him. He had vanished with the clock that had blasted to atoms!

DOWN in the cellar, The Shadow not only heard the blast; he felt the building shake and was half buried in chunks of loosening foundations. He knew he hadn't any time to lose in getting out of Hobgood's cellar. A way was open, for the blast revealed it.

At a spot in the wall just below Hobgood's fireplace, a cement slab had toppled away to disclose the entrance to an upright air shaft!

Through that entrance The Shadow found a ladder up the narrow air shaft. Some of its rungs were gone; even the wall was crumbling about it, but The Shadow made the ascent. The shaft was deep in the wall behind the fireplace, for it took The Shadow two stories up.

He finally arrived in the tiny compartment on the floor above Hobgood's room, and from there The Shadow looked through gashes in the ceiling to view a sea of flame.

The whole house was afire and The Shadow was trapped in a snare much more horrible than any that Hobgood had purposely designed. To drop into the room below was impossible; the place was like a furnace. Here it was simply a case of waiting for the consuming fire to arrive. A retreat to the cellar would have meant another wait for suffocation!

Amid that dilemma The Shadow saw, by those ruddy waves of gorging flame, the curious revolving trap with its curled loop of rope. Sight of the wrecked table was the clue to the thing's operation. The volcanic fury of the mighty flames was stirred by The Shadow's laugh as the cloaked master looped his wrists to the rope, then flung his weight upon the trap.

It happened like something in a book. Down dropped the near end of the trap, hurtling The Shadow into the mass of flames. But he didn't stop there; he was whipped clear through by the lashing rope, as though riding a giant swing. And as The Shadow whizzed through that inferno, so fast that the flames could do no more than barely lick him, he wrenched his wrists from the coils where he had looped them.

Instead of being carried up again, The Shadow was released like a plummet from the missile holder of an old-fashioned slingshot. He sailed straight through the curtain of flame that represented the shattered doorway from which Sheff and his two men had fled a few minutes before.

Bouncing along the hallway where beams and plaster were tumbling in fiery heaps, The Shadow reached the front door of the house. Curtains of flame were behind him, though they were sweeping his direction, for the old house was just a giant tinderbox.

Groggy from his slingshot flight, half suffocated from the noxious flames, The Shadow came to his feet determined to wrench loose the last barrier and gain the reviving security of the outside air.

THE MURDERING GHOST

No wrench was necessary. The front door was open wide. Sheff and his cronies hadn't bothered to slam it after escaping with Hobgood's last, and greatest, invention. So The Shadow reeled forth, his route unblocked.

Bystanders in the street, horrified by the sight of a house that had turned itself into a huge torch, were further amazed to see a human shape come spinning forth like a salamander from the flames, and vanish in a ghostly style into the darkness across the street!

CHAPTER X. THE QUEST TO COME

MARGO LANE was finishing her third Mirage. Now, the Mirage was a very innocent cocktail, and happened to be Margo's preference. Actually, it contained nothing of anything that would go to a person's head, which was why Margo drank it.

But this evening Margo felt herself much bewildered, and the Mirages had nothing to do with it. What dazed Margo was the story that Lamont Cranston was telling her.

From across the table, Cranston gave one of his slight smiles that carried so much reassurance. Convinced at last that her reason hadn't left her, Margo listened to his quiet summary.

"We have classed Leander Hobgood for precisely what he was," affirmed Cranston. "A defaulter, an embezzler, a swindler, yet in every part he played, a man of inventive genius. He faked his inventions, took money for them and in return gave out stocks, options, promissory notes that were printed on a flash paper that vanished with a puff, never to be traced."

Margo nodded. Hearing the whole of Hobgood's methods at one time, she could understand the part he played.

"Naturally, Hobgood's customers annoyed him," continued The Shadow. "He handed them a lot of bunk about forces from the beyond. Professor Hayne took it seriously and wanted to test Hobgood for a psychodynamic force."

"But why did Hobgood agree?" queried Margo. "He knew he was a fake —"

"And he knew that to refuse the test would be an admission of fakery," interposed Cranston. "So Hobgood went through with the thing, hoping he could claim some out."

"Sheff Hassell cleared town last night," continued Cranston, "right after the big fire. He had an alibi the time he tried to electrocute Hobgood, because he feared the thing might work too strong. Last night, he didn't bother with an alibi. He thought that things would go easy."

"But they didn't. You see, Margo, Hobgood was waiting for Sheff. I know, because I arrived there first. I took the initiation that was meant for Sheff. It ruined Hobgood's plans for Sheff, because we know that Sheff escaped, whereas the police have pretty well established that Hobgood perished in the fire that consumed his own house and his many inventions."

Margo's forehead wrinkled as she asked:

"You're sure that Sheff escaped?"

For answer, Cranston spread a copy of the New York Classic, a tabloid newspaper that Margo seldom read. It carried a signed article by Clyde Burke, wired in from Baltimore. In that city, the Classic reporter was

THE MURDERING GHOST

checking up on gentry of the underworld who had arrived in town, only to leave in a hurry. The article specifically mentioned Sheff Hassell.

"That covers Sheff," explained Cranston. "Burke will hound him wherever he goes. A rather ingenious chap, Burke. When he starts off with a new idea, it is good to let him follow it."

That cleared the Sheff angle for Margo. She didn't realize that, for once, Cranston was wrong where Clyde was concerned. And Cranston really thought that he was right, for he gave a reflective chuckle.

"Odd, how one thing leads to another," spoke Cranston. "Hobgood swindled a lot of people, including Sheff, of all persons. Apparently, he hadn't quite gotten around to tricking Milton Suffolk, who is therefore very unhappy because of Hobgood's death.

"So Suffolk, more than ever, is anxious to prove that psychic forces exist, in order to vindicate Hobgood. That fund of his has passed two hundred thousand dollars of which half is Suffolk's own. Spell 'money' in five letters, Margo."

Margo laughed, and said:

"M-O-N-E-Y."

"Wrong," returned Cranston. "You should have spelled C-R-I-M-E. That is what will come when easy money paves the way. Crime!"

"You mean that Sheff Hassell will move into the seance room again, for cash rather than revenge?"

"Not while he is hedge-hopping around the country. But there will be plenty besides Sheff, Margo. That's why I want you to attend those seances. Burke won't be here to handle them. He's swapped assignments with a reporter named Rudy Burgaw."

ELSEWHERE, two other people were discussing the subject of the forthcoming seances. Their conference room didn't happen to be a gaudy cafe; it was a coal bunker in a cellar. Nor was their table supplied with fancy drinks. It held nothing but a tumbler and a bottle, from which one man was drinking quite liberally, while the other looked on, cold sober.

The man who liked the bottle was Rudy Burgaw. The one who didn't was Clyde Burke.

"Look at it this way, Clyde," argued Rudy thickly. "We've got to lay our cards right on the table."

Rudy laid down his glass and thwacked the table. He pounded it so hard that the glass bounced off and smashed on the stone floor. It didn't nonplus Rudy. He simply picked up the bottle and drank from it direct.

"I'm telling you, I didn't try to kill Hobgood!" argued Rudy. "And neither did Sheff. If he had, he would have fixed an alibi last night. It was Hobgood who tried to kill Sheff –"

"But Sheff got away with the invention that belonged to him. You've told me all that, Rudy."

Rudy nodded; then with a shrug he laid down the bottle. He seemed to feel that everything was settled.

"Sheff was going to bring Hobgood here to stay with you," declared Rudy in a surprisingly sober tone. "That's the straight dope, Clyde. If it wasn't, I wouldn't be sticking with the racket. Anyway, it fluked, so

THE MURDERING GHOST

you're here alone."

"But I'm supposed to be in Baltimore," put in Clyde. "Next I go to Cleveland; then to Chicago."

"You can stay a long while in Chi," inserted Rudy. "It would make sense, because it's a place where Sheff would stick a while if he wasn't here. So show sense, Clyde, and bat out stories like I want. I'll ship them to the right towns and have them wired back."

Clyde decided to agree. He knew the game only too well. Rudy wanted to attend the coming seances in Clyde's place as ordered by Sheff. Meanwhile, it was necessary to account for Clyde's own whereabouts, which in itself was a good sign. It meant that Clyde was to live a while; that he might even survive after the present game was over. But Clyde wasn't worrying about his own security. He was thinking of The Shadow.

The more Clyde played along, the better his chances to contact his chief. The longer he waited, the more he might learn to tell The Shadow when communication was opened. So Clyde leaned back and told Rudy in so many words that he would play along.

At that moment, the door of the bunker room opened and Sheff Hassell entered. Clyde was actually surprised, for he thought that Sheff was really jumping from city to city ahead of the slow-moving law that hadn't yet defined him as the murderer of Hobgood if Sheff could honestly be termed such.

"You can move this guy upstairs again," Sheff told Rudy, referring to Clyde. "Put him in the nice room I fixed for Hobgood when I thought the old gent would use the bean and be my guest awhile."

"But remember" Sheff directed these words at Clyde "we'll be watching you. I know the way you news hounds figure; anything to get a story. If you try to go the limit, I'll do the same."

Sheff purred that threat in a very significant way. He still wouldn't blame himself for Hobgood's death, but he was letting Clyde form his own conclusions. If Clyde took it that Sheff had actually murdered Hobgood, it would follow that Sheff would do the same to a prisoner like Clyde, should exigencies require. So Clyde repeated that he'd play along.

THE guest room in Sheff's apartment had the appearance of an enlarged clothes closet, its only window being too high to reach and too small to squeeze through. After piloting Clyde there, Sheff took the key from the lock and handed it to Rudy.

"Lock Burke in after you leave," reminded Sheff. "If he tries anything while you're here, give a yell. The boys are outside."

Rudy hadn't much more to say to Clyde. He simply handed Clyde a story that he, Rudy, had written about the psychic award and the series of test seances that would be given by contestants for the two-hundred-thousand-dollar prize, which still promised to increase itself by further contributions. Reading the story, Clyde gave a quick look at Rudy.

"Winning won't be easy," declared Clyde. "I see by your story that Don Tarkingham will be on the committee. He's the smartest psychic investigator in the business. Tarkingham is death on rats. Pardon me, I mean fakers."

"Don't worry about Tarkingham," returned Rudy. "Sheff knows how to get around such fellows. And remember: I'll be helping."

THE MURDERING GHOST

Clyde handed the story back to Rudy, remarking that it had a few rough spots that Clyde would be glad to smooth if Rudy wanted. Gruffly, Rudy said he could handle everything himself, and with that he left, locking the door behind him.

Alone, Clyde reflected on things to come. He knew the game that was due. Sheff Hassell would simply hire some very phony medium to enter the contest, using Hobgood's final invention as an apparatus that would produce phenomena seemingly psychic.

A clever idea, the sort that Sheff would go the limit to put across. But the payoff wouldn't be coming, not for a while. Sheff would first have to hire a faker, and said faker would have to await his or her turn to give a seance. Moreover, Sheff wouldn't want to hurry things while the award was still showing signs of increase.

So Clyde decided not to get foolish. Playing along was the best course, since crime was far in the offing. So far, there was no immediate danger; at least, none that Clyde could foresee.

It simply happened that Clyde Burke was lacking in proper foresight. From the moment when the first of those test seances began, crime was to be present. Strange, mysterious crime that could strike with an unseen hand, despite even The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. DEATH'S SEANCE

ARRANGEMENTS were finished in the psychic laboratory and Lamont Cranston was on hand to view them. In the center of the room was a portable cabinet that looked like an election booth, except that its cloth sides and top were black. The cabinet stood on a little platform, and in it was a single chair which was reserved for the medium who happened to be a lady named Tanya Yonina.

Professor Hayne was very proud of the cabinet, and with good reason. He pointed out the fact that the chair was firmly fixed in place; not to the platform, but to rods that ran down through. He pressed the chair and it moved slightly downward. Then putting one foot on the platform, he showed that it also had a give, but that the chair did not sag with it.

Beckoning Cranston across the room, Hayne showed him two weighing scales, each with a luminous dial. When Hayne explained the purpose of those scales, Cranston conceded that it was very clever. One scale registered the weight of the rod-supported chair; the other, the weight of the platform.

The purpose was plain. When Tanya Yonina was strapped in the chair, its scales would register a given weight. Should the medium work free from the chair, the balance would fluctuate and prove that fakery was under way. Thus Tanya, who was a materializing medium, couldn't pull the old stuff of getting free and posing as a ghost.

For the second scales that registered the platform's weight would serve as a double check. It would show the shift of Tanya's poundage if she went from chair to platform. Similarly, if Tanya managed to smuggle in an accomplice to play the ghost, the platform would increase in weight, even though the chair would remain the same. Which made everything lovely for everybody except Madame Tanya Yonina.

Present at this preview were Milton Suffolk and Don Tarkingham. Suffolk had advanced the money for Hayne's special cabinet platform, and Tarkingham had approved the apparatus. But the two men didn't think alike on the psychic question.

Suffolk, in his solemn, earnest way, was hoping that manifestations could be produced. He was particularly anxious to hear from the beyond, now that poor Leander Hobgood had gone there. Convinced that Hobgood

THE MURDERING GHOST

had owned psychodynamic powers in life, Suffolk believed that he could talk after death; that Hobgood might reveal the name of the enemy who had slain him if his death had been murder.

Such talk annoyed Don Tarkingham. The famed psychic investigator was a man who could be easily annoyed. He was a lean, gawky man with a high, bulbous forehead and a long chin. He had a hatchet profile and hands that looked as though they were used to swinging meat cleavers. Tarkingham's favorite pastime was rushing cabinets and grabbing ghosts by the neck until they squawked that they were not ghosts but fake mediums, who were willing to call quits.

"You won't get any messages from Madame Yonina," sneered Tarkingham. "Not while I'm around. I'd be doing her credit if I termed her a second-class fake. She rates about fifth class."

Tarkingham began a gawky stride around the seance room. Each time he went past the cabinet, a howl greeted him. The howls came from Hayne's detectors. There were two of them tonight, those bulky contrivances that looked like five-foot juke boxes, loaded with cogs that whined when anyone approached too close.

The night of Hobgood's test, there had only been one detector, and it wasn't enough. The things were costly and Hayne didn't have the funds to provide a second, so Suffolk had furnished the cash and the detector had been delivered. After all, with a hundred thousand dollars or more at stake, Suffolk could charge such expenditures off to insurance. For there was one thing that Suffolk emphasized quite to the approval of Tarkingham.

Though inclined to believe in things psychic and anxious to have them proven, Suffolk was equally determined that any fraud should be thoroughly exposed. He felt that Tarkingham was probably right in classing Tanya Yonina as an utter fake; hence Suffolk expected very little from this evening's seance.

ASKING Hayne for the list of applicants, Suffolk showed it to Cranston.

"Madame Yonina," read Suffolk, shaking his head. "Not much good, I'm afraid. Now some of these others –"

"Are all fakes!" broke in Tarkingham, across Suffolk's shoulder. "Including the best one, whose name is crossed off!"

Suffolk looked for the eliminated name and found it. Hayne had drawn a pencil line through the name of Kalvah.

"Why, I've heard of Kalvah!" exclaimed Suffolk. "He knows Caglio, the man who does the trances."

"And Kalvah knows me," chuckled Tarkingham. "That's why he withdrew from the list. I am the one investigator who could expose him for the fraud he is. By the way, when you see Caglio, tell him that I can do the same for him if he tries anything stronger than those trances, which don't count in this league."

Professor Hayne was telling Lamont Cranston why trances didn't count; something that Cranston already knew, but listened patiently while Hayne repeated it. The award would be given only for the production of physical manifestations: namely, something that proved the presence of a disembodied spirit capable of moving objects, producing things from nowhere, or even materializing itself, as Madame Yonina hoped she could encourage a spirit to do at this evening's seance.

"Kalah claims he can produce such manifestations," added Hayne, "but he doesn't like Tarkingham. He calls Tarkingham a hostile presence who causes spirits to shun the seance room. So we had to cross Kalvah off the

THE MURDERING GHOST

list as long as Tarkingham remains on the investigating committee."

With seance time very close at hand, Milton Suffolk was much surprised and a trifle hurt to learn that Lamont Cranston did not intend to stay.

Cranston explained that he had an appointment with his friend Commissioner Weston, and that the latter felt himself too important to bother with such foolish things as seances. So Cranston had given his invitation card to a friend named Harry Vincent. Since the card was good for two admissions, Harry was bringing a girl named Margo Lane.

Suffolk would like them both, Cranston assured. He would find Vincent a man of open mind, like himself, while Miss Lane was definitely inclined to the theory that spirits could rove at large and hence would be a most friendly presence in the seance room.

Tarkingham gave a sneer at that comment, but Professor Hayne seemed pleased. As a strict neutral, a man who was examining spiritism in a purely scientific fashion, Hayne felt it necessary to cater to both factions.

Soon after Cranston left, the sitters began to arrive. Suffolk met Harry Vincent and classed him as an estimable young man, as most persons did, for Harry's clean-cut appearance was tempered with an easy reserve. As The Shadow's ace agent, Harry was experienced in meeting almost any situation, and he'd aided in other cases where seance rooms were involved.

As for Margo Lane, the smile she received from Suffolk proved that he liked her very much. She was so earnest and eager for the seance to begin that she became doubly attractive, because she didn't realize that she was making herself so.

Others arrived, including Rudy Burgaw, whose air was very wise. So wise, that it completely covered the fact that he was doing undercover work. He seemed exactly what he pretended to be: a valid pinch hitter for Clyde Burke. Smart business on Clyde's part, thought Harry, to swap jobs with a chap like Rudy on the chance of picking up a hot trail like that of Sheff Hassell. The Shadow always approved such headwork by his agents.

Then Madame Tanya Yonina arrived.

At first sight, she threatened to break both the chair in the seance cabinet and the scales on which it rested, for Madame Yonina was so gifted with girth that she had trouble getting through the door.

But Professor Hayne had made due provision for the lady's bulk. When she stepped on the platform, it sank appreciably, but the big scale was gauged to five hundred pounds, which gave it plenty to spare.

The chair was wider than it looked and Tanya just managed to squeeze into it. Its scale ran up to three hundred and fifty, which was just about twenty pounds over Tanya's weight. Don Tarkingham stepped to the platform and strapped Madame Yonina to the chair with long strips of wide adhesive tape.

When she glared and protested that such binding was both insulting and unnecessary, Tarkingham gave a choppy smile and agreed. He said that the chair was almost tight enough to hold Madame Yonina without the aid of the adhesive bands; nevertheless, these were the conditions of the seance and had to be included.

The sitters were in the circle, each gripping the arm of the person on the left. Tarkingham preferred that method. He claimed that it prevented shifts of hands, should the medium have planted accomplices in the circle. This novel grip would give trouble to confederates who had practiced slipping out of the conventional

THE MURDERING GHOST

hand holds. Tarkingham wasn't missing any tricks.

The hatchet-faced man lowered the front curtain of the cabinet and called for lights off. Professor Hayne complied; the only lights that remained were two red ones at the front corners of the cabinet and the luminous dials of the two scales that Hayne watched.

The red lamps didn't pierce the darkness very far. The faces and figures of the sitters were blotted out completely; only Tarkingham was visible as he moved within the circle, occasionally blocking a red light when he crossed in front of the cabinet.

Harry's left hand was gripping Margo's right arm. He could feel the girl quiver, tense in the darkness. On Harry's own right arm was a firm clamp: that of Rudy Burgaw. If the reporter felt tense, he was certainly controlling it. How Suffolk and the others took the situation, Harry couldn't reckon, for they were farther around the circle. As for Harry, he was quite collected.

Fat Tanya Yonina clamped in her chair; sober Professor Hayne over at his scales; Don Tarkingham patrolling like a scarecrow in a corn field those elements gave this seance a comic angle that Harry Vincent couldn't overlook. Harry wasn't surprised that his chief, The Shadow, should have found more important business elsewhere.

It happened that Harry was falling into Clyde Burke's error of belittling circumstances because of their superficial surface. Grim events were already in the making. Those events would prove that if this seance could be classed as comedy, so should death deserve that term.

Death's seance was under way and the one person who could have stayed its outcome was absent.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XII. THE CLOAKED GHOST

THE SHADOW wasn't far distant from the seance room. He was in the little courtyard below the window of the tiny library that connected with the seance room. The Shadow was watching that courtyard for any tokens of outside marauders, for it was the only possible way whereby they could enter the psychic lab this evening. Professor Hayne had recognized that he was lax on former occasions, and he had barred all doors tonight.

But Hayne hadn't locked the library window. It needed to be open slightly for fresh air. With a sheer drop of twenty feet to the court, Hayne didn't calculate on trouble from that quarter. Maybe Hayne's mind was so filled with such terms as psychodynamics, that he'd never heard of ladders. So The Shadow was on hand to see that something so mundane as a ladder wasn't brought here by very unghostly people who had no invitations to the seance.

So far, The Shadow had met no lurkers, though in his ventures from the courtyard he had glimpsed shifty passers on the rear street. Now the seance had begun; The Shadow could tell because he caught the faintest of red glints from the window of the library where the door to the seance room was ajar, and a transom helped carry the reflection.

So The Shadow moved deep into the courtyard, put on the rubber suction cups and started a routine trip up to the third floor.

What stopped The Shadow were slight shuffles from below. He could tell that men were creeping into the courtyard; probably they'd spotted the red reflection, too. But they weren't bringing a ladder; otherwise, The

THE MURDERING GHOST

Shadow would have heard scraping sounds. So he stayed right where he was, like a mammoth bat clinging to the wall just below the ledge of the third-floor window. Betwixt and between, he was where he could handle anything on reasonably short order, indoors or outside.

But this short order wasn't to prove reasonable!

In the seance room, Madame Yonina was moaning in the cabinet and the chair weight was showing a ten-pound wobble on its luminous scales.

Professor Hayne didn't consider that too great a variation, considering Tanya's poundage. He knew that mediums went into fits and bounced around when the spirit seized them, whether that spirit was fake or not. But Tarkingham, who saw fakery in everything, had stopped his patrol in order to snoop in front of the cabinet.

The chair weight gradually stopped its fluctuations. After a slight pause, there was a quick call from Hayne, saying that the chair weight had dropped twenty pounds, while the platform weight had proportionately risen. Immediately, both weights returned to normal, which satisfied Hayne, but not Tarkingham. He chuckled that Tanya had probably heard Hayne's call and was getting back where she belonged.

"No more comments, professor," suggested Tarkingham sharply. "Henceforth, call the weights only when I request them."

Despite himself, Harry was becoming tense, though the seance still seemed rather funny. During the next few minutes, everything returned to normal. And then

The curtain of the cabinet flashed wide. Vaguely, the red light showed Tanya Yonina in her chair. She couldn't have ripped the curtain open; rather, it was the shape beside her. The luminous shape of a materialized spirit!

As such, the form appeared to many, but not to Harry Vincent. He regarded it as a travesty in cheesecloth dyed with luminous paint. Don Tarkingham must have viewed it in the same light, for above the gasps that Margo and others provided came Tarkingham's sharp query:

"The scales, professor how do they register?"

"Both exact," returned Hayne. "The chair shows Tanya's full weight. The platform is at zero."

Now, inasmuch as Tanya was in the chair and the ghost was standing on the platform, Hayne's statement indicated that the medium was playing fair and the ghost was genuine, lacking any physical weight, as all ghosts should.

There was a stir around the circle; excited shifts as some persons leaned forward and others shrank back, according to whether they regarded a ghost with curiosity or fear.

Harry was rather puzzled, so he sat steady. He noted that Margo wavered back and forth, whereas Rudy showed a forward urge with no retreat. But Tarkingham was neither puzzled nor indecisive. He called to Hayne:

"Watch the platform weight, professor!"

With that, Tarkingham sprang to the platform to grab the ghost. He couldn't have revealed himself more

THE MURDERING GHOST

plainly. Tarkingham's gawky figure blotted out the luminous specter, which meant that he was squarely in front of it. Finding Tarkingham was just as easy as looking for the full moon during a total eclipse.

And someone found him violently!

FROM Harry's right came the roar of a gun. A stab of flame cleaved the darkness, arrowing straight at Tarkingham. The report drowned Hayne's call that the platform scales had gone to one hundred and sixty pounds, Tarkingham's exact weight. That announcement was nullified a few seconds later. The scale dropped down to zero as Tarkingham reeled back from the platform and hit the floor with the hard thud that only a dead body could make.

Utter confusion swept the seance room. The circle broke apart, some of its members springing toward the cabinet, others rushing for exits from the room. The big boxlike detectors howled with strident notes while people shoved past them, blundering into one another, stumbling everywhere.

All those doors were firmly locked save one, the door to the little library. Through it went a few of the scared throng, only to turn back when they learned that the room was a blind one, with no further exit.

Harry was neither with the brave few who surged to the cabinet, nor among the lot who scattered. He was knifing through the chaos, trying to locate the person who had used the gun, which Harry was sure had stabbed from somewhere in the ring of sitters.

One other man had the same idea: Professor Hayne. Forgetting his dials, Hayne was charging from the other direction, hoping to grab a murderer. He and Harry met head on and locked in a very solid tangle that nullified their mutual efforts to discover the killer. Both wanted to find a man who had a gun, but neither had a chance.

The person who almost trapped a man with a gun was The Shadow!

Below the ledge of the library window, The Shadow had started a quick upward move the moment he heard the shot of death. Ridding himself of one suction cup, he was planting a gloved hand on the ledge itself, when people came flinging into the little library.

The Shadow's head was just coming over the ledge when keen eyes spotted the swing of a glittering gun, slashing his direction. Ducking his head, The Shadow performed a remarkable gyration on the surface of the wall, using three of the rubber suckers, while his free hand whipped an automatic from his cloak.

If the man with the revolver had tried a downward swing at The Shadow, he'd have taken a gun stab in return. But the man in question wasn't trying to slug The Shadow. He hadn't even seen the cloaked invader. He was trying to get rid of his revolver, rather than use it.

The shiny gun went scaling over The Shadow's head and down into the courtyard, as the hand that tossed it disappeared back into the library.

The Shadow was about to go through the window and seek the man who had disposed of the incriminating gun, when rapid footsteps sounded in the courtyard. Swinging on the wall, The Shadow saw a huddly figure scoop up the thrown gun and make away with it. From the wall, The Shadow gave a warning laugh and supplemented it with shots from his automatic.

The mirth, the sizzling fire would have stopped a lone fugitive, but the man below had friends. Hearing The Shadow's challenge, they began a quick fire from cover.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Only by answering those shots could The Shadow offset his present predicament. Answer them he did, with slugs that ricocheted from courtyard walls, too close for the comfort of his foemen. The man who had grabbed the thrown gun fired back with it, but like the others who were running with him, he thought The Shadow was in the window; hence all the shots from below went high.

Keeping up his leaden hail, The Shadow didn't give his adversaries time to correct their error. They were gone, glad to be clear of his devastating fire, by the time The Shadow had finished emptying his automatic.

There was no use wasting further time on those outsiders. Coming over the window sill, The Shadow detached his remaining suction cups as he arrived. With a fresh automatic ready, he made for the seance room, since there was no one remaining in the little library.

Order was being restored when The Shadow arrived. Harry and Hayne had disentangled, and the latter was finding the light switch. On came the lights, and The Shadow halted in the doorway to view the scene.

NO one was looking The Shadow's way, hence he didn't need darkness as a shelter. All eyes were toward the medium, Madame Yonina, and every gaze carried accusation, for she was completely free of the chair and its bonds. From her wrists were dangling the lengths of adhesive tape that Tarkingham applied. Nor was the sight of Tanya at large the only proof of her fraud.

Lying on the floor beside Tarkingham's body was the "ghost" that he had grabbed, a bundle of fluffy material on the end of a pliable reaching rod. In full light, the ghost looked definitely like the cheesecloth that Harry had guessed it to be.

Among those who were dragging Tanya from the platform was a dapper man named Aulander, who had worked often with Tarkingham. Considering it his job to take over where the dead investigator had left off, Aulander made a prompt examination of Tanya's arms and wrists, to find them well greased with cold cream, which explained how she had managed to slip her bonds.

Next, Aulander stooped to pick up the cheesecloth, hoping to find the death gun in the ghost.

At that point, Tanya went into a spasm that showed she had plenty of power, even though it wasn't psychic. She started to wrench from the captors who gripped her, and when they wouldn't let go, she flung her fleshy bulk among them. That shook them off, but there were still too many. Frantically, Tanya threw her arms about and suddenly stiffened, with one hand pointing as she shrieked:

"Look!"

They looked and saw The Shadow! In floundering across the floor, Tanya had reached an angle from which the cloaked visitor was visible, for he was just away from the dark background of the library doorway.

Quickly, The Shadow whirled across the seance room, so swiftly that observers caught only a fleeting glimpse of him with the exception of Tanya Yonina.

She had eyes like a cat, the medium, and she was tracing The Shadow with them, pointing after him as she continued her shrieks.

"There goes the ghost!" howled Tanya. "The real ghost... the black one... who betrayed me! Find him... seize him... the fault is his! He murdered Tarkingham!"

Finding a black ghost in blackness was impossible. For the room was black again by that time. The Shadow

THE MURDERING GHOST

had flipped the light switch as he passed it. People were blundering to the chase amid a new confusion, wherein Tanya's howls were drowned by those of the huge box detectors that flanked the seance cabinet.

Professor Hayne was shouting for people to spread and cover the various doors, which they did with one exception. They forgot the door that led through the adjacent library, or rather they remembered that it was a dead-end passage.

Not to The Shadow. Rather than complicate the situation further he decided on a rapid disappearance. Through the unguarded library, he cleared the window sill in a twisting leap wherein his hands caught the ledge and turned his spring into a delayed drop.

Only momentarily did he hang from outside; then, releasing his grip, he spread his arms and literally parachuted the dozen-odd feet to the court. His cloak slowed his fall; he landed in a springy, cross-legged fashion which enabled him to pivot about and speed out from the courtyard.

Fugitives of the night were gone. The Shadow, cloaked ghost of the seance room, became another figure in flight. Unlike the actual fugitives, he did not intend to travel far. His business was to reverse his trail and arrive back at the seance room.

There, no longer a ghost, The Shadow would appear in the complacent guise of Lamont Cranston, to hear at first hand the details of the murder that had ruined the proceedings that involved the spirit world!

CHAPTER XIII. THE BARREN TRAIL

MILTON SUFFOLK was in command of the psychic laboratory when Lamont Cranston arrived there with his friend, Commissioner Weston. Inspector Cardona arrived, too, and it was like Old Home Week with Joe Cardona on the job. All that Cranston had to do was sit back and watch Cardona reconstruct.

Joe was really good at such work. He could build up a case until it was as solid as a doughnut, and The Shadow always admired such workmanship, particularly the hole.

Tonight, Cardona took everything into consequence. Don Tarkingham was dead, shot through the back at a time when he had been about to expose the spook trickery of the medium, Tanya Yonina. She claimed that she couldn't have shot him, because she didn't have a gun and he was facing her at the time the shot was fired.

Against Madame Yonina was the fact that she was loose from the bonds at the time; but she refuted that by stating that she couldn't have been outside the cabinet, else Hayne's scales would have revealed the fact. This brought up the question of where the shot was fired from, a thing on which everybody disagreed because they agreed.

Everybody said that it had been fired "from the right," which didn't help Cardona, since the group had been seated in a circle. Except for Madame Yonina, who had been at large but definitely cramped, the only person on the loose was Professor Hayne, but he was far outside the circle and the fatal shot had certainly been fired from closer range.

Tarkingham had been loose, too, but he couldn't have committed suicide by shooting himself in the back. Which left only the ghost that had appeared after the lights came on. The ghost that only two persons present, Harry Vincent and Margo Lane, had identified as The Shadow.

There were times when Inspector Cardona played hunches in the style of old King Solomon. He did just that on two occasions. This wasn't a case of two women claiming one child. It was a matter of ghosts, two of

THE MURDERING GHOST

them, with a lady present who had a reputation as a ghost caller.

Madame Yonina had produced one ghost and spied the other. One remained a contrivance faked from cheesecloth, the other had dematerialized into darkness. Since the fake ghost had brought Tarkingham to the spot and the real ghost according to Tanya had slain him, Cardona held Tanya Yonina responsible for both and decided to arrest her.

Nor did Madame Yonina have a comeback. She'd talked herself right into it, so far that she couldn't talk herself out. While she babbled useless protests, Cardona searched the other parties present, and finding no gun; made another hunt through the seance room. He hoped to find a gun tangled in the cheesecloth, but there was none.

Suppressing Tanya's comments with the remark that the gun had probably dematerialized with her pet ghost, the black sheep of the spirit world, Cardona summoned a taxicab with strong springs and took the medium on the long ride to headquarters.

Such was Cardona's doughnut, a big one, for it took in Madame Yonina. Cranston saw the hole; it consisted of the missing gun. As The Shadow, Cranston knew of a gun that had been tossed away after Tarkingham's death, but Cardona knew nothing of that gun. So The Shadow was looking forward to Cardona's further theory; meanwhile, however, he could question his own agents.

BECKONING Harry and Margo along, Cranston took them to a little cafe, where they found a secluded booth. A passing waiter stared when he saw two gentlemen and a lady holding hands in three-cornered fashion. The waiter decided it must be one of those triangles he'd heard people talk about.

Cranston and his two companions were simply trying out the holding system that had been used at the seance. Each had a left hand clamped on the other's right arm. With the waiter out of sight, Cranston tried another experiment. With Margo clutching his right arm tightly, he simply twisted his wrist toward his coat, dipped his hand within and brought out a .45 automatic, which he aimed at Harry with a mere flip of his fist.

Both Harry and Margo heard the soft-toned laugh that came from Cranston's lips as he flipped the gun back beneath his coat. In The Shadow's style, Cranston had ably demonstrated that any member of the circle could have drawn a gun and given Tarkingham a farewell blast.

But why?

Cranston had that answer, too. He wanted to know if it had occurred to Joe Cardona. So he left Harry and Margo to talk over the case while he went to Suffolk's penthouse, where Cardona had promised to meet Weston and Suffolk; after finding a cell large enough to hold Tanya Yonina.

Reaching the penthouse, Cranston found that Cardona had arrived just ahead of him. Weston was there, too, and Suffolk had a third visitor, the darkish trance medium who called himself Caglio. Caglio was listening with avid interest to all that Cardona had to say, for Joe was explaining the hole in his own doughnut.

"The dame was a fake," insisted Cardona, referring to Madame Yonina. "That was sufficient cause to arrest her, commissioner. We can push it to a murder charge on the ground that Tarkingham was killed during the commission of a crime, this fake-medium stuff coming under the penal code."

Weston's nod encouraged Cardona to proceed further.

"The motive is there plain enough," added Joe. "This fellow Tarkingham was the one guy who could put the

THE MURDERING GHOST

skids under any fake medium. So Madame Yonina would naturally have motive to put him out of the way."

It was there that Cranston inserted an amendment, as he often did to stimulate Cardona's hunches.

"Madame Yonina was after the award," Cranston reminded. "She might therefore have eliminated Tarkingham beforehand. But to dispose of him after he had practically shown up the fraud, would change the motive to revenge."

"That's just it," put in Cardona smartly. "Do you think this Yonina freak killed Tarkingham? I don't! Somebody else bumped Tarkingham and chucked the blame on her. Somebody who is after the award and knew they'd have to get rid of Tarkingham in order to collect it!"

Now Cardona was voicing Cranston's own theory, though it wasn't good policy to let him know it. So Cranston objected on the ground that Cardona hadn't found the gun which a murderer of the type under discussion would logically have planted on Tanya Yonina, probably by stuffing the gun in the fake ghost.

To that, Joe said that the gun plant might have worked out badly if the witnesses agreed that Tanya couldn't have fired the fatal shot. Joe believed that the murderer had either chucked the gun somewhere else, or had cleared out and taken it with him.

This was so sensible that it brought a nod from Cranston. Whereupon, Cardona admitted that he was holding Tanya just to bluff the real killer. The original motive still stood. Somebody wanted to eliminate Tarkingham in order to collect the award later on.

"Either some medium did it," argued Joe, "or he had a friend on hand who staged the kill for him. But there's a medium mixed in it and I'm telling you this: to my way of thinking, any medium in New York is a suspect!"

As he finished, Cardona noticed Caglio. The dark-faced seer drew himself up in a proud, haughty fashion.

"I am not a medium," spoke Caglio. "I am an adept. My power lies here" he tapped his forehead "and not through the control of earthbound spirits that would kill!"

"Caglio is right," agreed Suffolk. "He projects himself into the beyond. It is his astral self that views the spirit world."

"And only the higher plane of that world," added Caglio. "The spirits of that realm have often agreed to manifest themselves in any way that I might ask. But I have never felt that I should so impose upon them. Too often" Caglio's tone was sorrowful "I have met mediums who did not agree with my ideals. Tonight –"

Caglio cut himself off, but Cardona was quick to demand more. Joe put it bluntly:

"Tell us about tonight, Caglio."

"Tonight I dined with Kalvah," said Caglio slowly. "He would like to try for the award, but he said he could not tolerate Tarkingham –"

"Kalah was with you all evening?" interrupted Cardona.

"No," replied Caglio reluctantly. "We merely dined together before I went to Long Island to fill a society engagement."

THE MURDERING GHOST

"I think I'll have a chat with Kalvah," Cardona decided. "Meanwhile, I'm holding Madame Yonina. But remember, Caglio: you're not to talk about this to anybody. At no time, understand? And that includes while you're in a trance. You come under the head of a material witness, and when people like that blab, they wind up in our big bastille."

WHILE Cardona was delivering that ultimatum in Cranston's presence an equally important phase of crime was being discussed in the living room of the fancy apartment maintained by Sheff Hassell.

Clyde Burke had been called in from the clothes closet to deliver the articles that he had written with a Cleveland date line, since he was supposed to be hunting Sheff out there.

Sheff read the article and approved it. Hence Clyde was quite surprised, and more, when Sheff drew a .32 revolver from his pocket. However, Sheff made no threat with the gun. He simply flipped it on the table and said to Rudy Burgaw:

"Tell Burke about the rod."

"It was this way, Clyde," declared Rudy. "I thought I ought to have a gun with me. You know, being a pal of Sheff's and all that. Anyway, I took it to the seance. Right in the middle of the affair somebody knocked off that guy Tarkingham, the medium baiter."

Clyde showed real surprise at the information, but said nothing, hoping he would hear more, which he did.

"It wouldn't have made sense to be found with a gun on me," continued Rudy. "So I heaved the .32 out the window, knowing that some of Sheff's friends were around."

"Yeah, they were around," put in Sheff. "They were there just in case, Burke. Quickie was the guy who picked up the rod... Tell Burke about it, Quickie."

Sheff nudged his thumb toward a small man with darty eyes, whose shoulders seemed bent from long sessions at rolling dice. When he spoke, Quickie's tone was nervous and rapid.

"Yeah, I grabbed it," began Quickie. "I didn't know whose gat it was, at first. Then I started using it --"

"Hold it," snapped Sheff. "How many slugs were in that rod?"

"All of 'em," assured Quickie. "But I had to get busy. There was The Shadow shooting right at me. Did I get rid of those slugs in a hurry! If I hadn't kept banging at him, he'd have winged me sure."

"But you fired six shots," put in Sheff. "You can swear to that, Quickie?"

"Yeah, six shots."

Quickie's reply was glib, but it didn't convince Clyde. He knew what happened when crooks emptied guns The Shadow's direction. They kept pulling triggers even after their revolvers were doing nothing more than click. In Clyde's estimate, Quickie's testimony wasn't worth the price of the sixth bullet that he probably didn't fire. Nevertheless, Clyde decided to take Quickie's word for it.

After Clyde had gone back to his coop of a room, Sheff turned to Rudy and said:

"I don't think Burke believed you, Rudy."

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Maybe he did," returned Rudy. "What I want to know is: Do you believe me?"

"Sure I do!" Sheff slapped his hand to Rudy's back. "When a guy tells a story, I like to hear him stick to it. You're learning things, Rudy, the hard way and that's what counts. Don't worry about Burke. We can still get slugs that will fit that .32, if we need to shut him up to stay!"

Back in his miniature room, Clyde was wishing for space in which to kick himself. If he'd only written something into his last article, the Cleveland story, that would tip off The Shadow to the fact that things weren't right! Clyde hadn't bothered because he hadn't recognized that matters were as hot as they were.

Murder in the seance room! It was something Clyde had not anticipated. His only solace was the fact that his chief could not have expected it either; otherwise it wouldn't have happened. But that didn't help matters. If The Shadow only knew that Sheff Hassell was still in New York! But he couldn't know, because Clyde was stating just the opposite in print.

Clyde Burke was sure that he had found tonight's murderer in the person of Rudy Burgaw. Ordinarily, The Shadow could have picked up a lead to such a killer. But The Shadow's trail was barren and Clyde's own oversight was the reason!

Crime was on the march, a triumphant parade that could continue, with Clyde to blame because he had failed to send the vital facts to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIV. THE SECOND CLAIMANT

OF all the mediums in Manhattan, none was more mysterious than Kalvah. Most cryptic of Kalvah's expressions was his smile. He was generous with that smile because it told people that he did not like them; and that, in the opinion of Kalvah, was the best way of furthering an unpleasant acquaintance. He was a man utterly without friends except himself, and he liked it.

This was the second day after the death of Don Tarkingham. There had been no seances since, though the psychic award had jumped considerably because of the sensational news concerning it. The fund was over a quarter million, of which half was Suffolk's offer, but no one was worrying about it, not with the way Tanya Yonina had been shown up as fraudulent. The general consensus was that nobody could ever collect that fund.

Now, Kalvah thought differently, but he wasn't saying so not yet. At present, he was being quizzed by Inspector Joe Cardona, who had chosen Hayne's psychic laboratory as the proper place.

Joe still had a hunch that there had been a prowling murderer and Kalvah fitted the bill, for the medium had no alibi following the dinner with Caglio. But if Cardona had any thought that he could shake Kalvah's nerves by bringing the medium to the scene of crime, he was badly mistaken.

Kalvah lacked nerves in the plural sense. What he had was nerve, most singularly. His roundish face, with its creamy waxwork complexion, wore only that upturned crescent smile which looked like something graven on his features.

His dark eyes were no index to his thoughts. At moments they seemed distant, dreamy in their gaze; at other times they focused sharply, staring hard at persons with whom Kalvah talked. But always, the medium's eyes did those things at the wrong time. When he should have been direct, he was dreamy; given a chance for reflection, he would come suddenly to a point, instead.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Present at this quiz were Commissioner Weston and his friend Lamont Cranston. Both Professor Hayne and Milton Suffolk were in the psychic laboratory, also. Caglio had managed to be present by accompanying Suffolk, and Rudy Burgaw was on hand to represent the press. Last but not least was Roy Aulander, the dapper psychic investigator who felt himself the proper successor to his friend Don Tarkingham.

"We've established one thing, Kalvah," Cardona was saying. "You admit that you regarded Tarkingham as an enemy."

"Most certainly," replied Kalvah in a slow, modulated tone. "Every medium regarded Tarkingham as an enemy."

"But you wanted to get rid of him," put in Aulander. "He was the one man who could prevent you from collecting that award."

"If I had intended to dispose of Tarkingham," speculated Kalvah dreamily, "why should I have insisted that my name be taken from the list of contestants who sought the prize?"

Cardona pondered over that one, and finally conceded that it was a strong point in Kalvah's favor. Indeed, Joe went further. Switching his tactics, he decided that it cleared Kalvah of all suspicion. Cardona wanted to get Kalvah's reaction, and did.

Turning to Professor Hayne, Kalvah retained his open-faced smile while he remarked:

"Since the question has at last been settled, professor, you can replace my name on the list. I also request that I be given opportunity to demonstrate my psychic powers in my original turn."

Whether or not he used trickery in his seances, Kalvah had employed it in Cardona's case. He'd turned Joe's decision full about. Cleared by the fact that it was off the list, Kalvah's name was on again! He was disclosing a motive that could mark him as Tarkingham's murderer after proving that the motive didn't exist!

Fuming inwardly, Cardona glared at Aulander, as though to blame him for the slip that had largely been Joe's own fault.

"And now, Professor Hayne," said Kalvah in the dreamiest of tones, "how long will I have to wait before I can demonstrate my psychic powers under test conditions?"

Hayne referred to the list.

"You're next, Kalvah," he replied. "There were three mediums ahead of you, but they have all resigned from the contest."

Kalvah's smile retained its crescent spread. The other mediums had obviously been scared off by the police investigation. They wanted to prove they didn't have a motive for killing Tarkingham. Kalvah had neatly prepared for that beforehand; whether by luck or intent, the result was the same.

A clever chap, this Kalvah. He'd regained Cardona's full suspicion, and Aulander was giving him an ugly stare, but his thoughts were on the spirit world and he couldn't be bothered by such mundane impressions. Staring distantly, Kalvah didn't recognize that other eyes were fixed upon him; eyes that could focus quite as steadily as his own.

They were the eyes of Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow. They foresaw curious events to come.

THE MURDERING GHOST

RESULTS came earlier than The Shadow anticipated. They began within an hour, when Rudy Burgaw arrived at Sheff Hassell's apartment. In Sheff's office, where old Hobgood's queer machine stood in a corner, Rudy broke loose with his theme.

"Kalvah is in again," asserted Rudy. "That makes it bad for us, Sheff. What dopes we are! Here we were, glad that Tarkingham was croaked, because he was the one guy who might have figured the gimmick on that Triple A Plus machine that you inherited from old Hobgood.

"And now, while we're still looking for some stooge medium who will work for a reasonable cut, Kalvah is out to grab the quarter million, with only Aulander to stop him. And Aulander can't; he's a twenty-four-carat gold-filled boob! He thinks he's as smart as Tarkingham was, which makes it all the worse."

Sheff sat back to drum the desk. He kept glancing from Rudy to the machine and back again. At last, he reached a decision:

"You've got to gum up that seance, Rudy."

"Gum it?" demanded Rudy. "How?"

"Any way you want," purred Sheff. "A lot of things could happen like they did when Madame Yonina was in the chair. And right now, Yonina is in the clink, which shows how far along the police haven't gotten."

Rudy arose and began to stalk the room, his manner so nervous that Sheff warned him not to blunder against Hobgood's all-important invention. At last, Rudy turned and addressed Sheff vehemently.

"Listen, Sheff! You know I'm a guy that will go the limit when I'm needed. If what we're doing ever gets out, you'll take the rap for Hobgood and I'll get the same for Tarkingham. We can both argue we're harmless, independently, but put us together we make nitroglycerin!"

Rudy didn't put the analogy in happy style. He was worried, and badly. But his manner pleased Sheff, for the racketeer had long hoped to work the renegade reporter into just this mood. So Sheff took advantage of it.

"Now you're talking, Rudy," purred Sheff. "Gum the works, boy, and use your noodle, like you did when you chucked that gat to Quickie."

Rudy shook his head.

"I'm toting no rod," he told Sheff. "They might frisk us all beforehand. Cardona will be at that seance. You know what he thinks? I'll tell you. Joe has a hunch that Kalvah sneaked in there the other night and knocked off Tarkingham. Fatty Yonina yelled that she saw a real ghost. It could have been Kalvah."

"All the better," argued Sheff. "If you start something, Joe will crack down on the seance."

"But Kalvah will take another try," returned Rudy. "We've got to gum things right. I can't do it alone, Sheff."

"Quickie will be handy –"

"To take a powder if he sees The Shadow? Listen, Sheff, if Kalvah could sneak in and out the way Cardona thinks, so could The Shadow. My hunch is that he was the ghost that Tanya spotted!"

Rudy's latest theory brought a steady stare from Sheff. Then he nodded slowly and said:

THE MURDERING GHOST

"I'll take over instead of Quickie. Frame a way for me to be on tap, Rudy, and whatever you have to do, you won't need to worry. We'll handle this Kalvah guy the way we have others. Which reminds me: Burke wants to see you."

ENTERING Clyde's tiny room, Rudy found his fellow journalist in a most disgruntled mood. Clyde threw a batch of type-hashed copy paper in Rudy's lap, with the comment:

"I don't know Chicago like you do, Rudy. How can I put any local color in my story? I can't even mention a jive dive without it sounding stupid. Gun my typewriter and knock out a piece for me, just for a sample."

Rudy shook his head. He wasn't in a helpful mood.

"You're having trouble?" he queried. "What about me? I've got to spin a yarn about the guy who's topnotch in the spook dodge, and I can't find a line on him."

A quick light struck Clyde.

"You mean Kalvah?"

"Nobody else," returned Rudy. "He showed Cardona for a sap and mooched into the game again. You know" Rudy's tone was emphatic "it was Kalvah, not me, who sent Tarkingham on his expedition to study the spirit world firsthand. That's what Cardona says; so if you have any ideas on tripping Kalvah, you'll be doing the right thing."

Rudy gave a sly look as he finished. For the first time, he was giving Clyde a valid reason for helping the crooked game that Sheff and Rudy were playing for quarter-million stakes. But Clyde was reluctant to consider it, which was very wise on his part. For this happened to be the very break that Clyde had counted on. He'd been building up to the thing.

"So Kalvah is in it," mused Clyde. "Say, Rudy! That makes sense! Why, the way I could go to town on the Kalvah set-up would be terrific! I've followed his career for months no, for years! One point here, another there; what a case I could rig against the fellow! If his seance should go sour, people would refer back to my article for the facts that really counted. But I'm not covering that beat any more, Rudy."

"Yes, you are, Clyde," snapped Rudy. "On this story, anyway. I'll knock out the Chicago yarn and you do the Kalvah stuff in return. We'll switch names on the articles and smooth them to the proper style. They'll both break tomorrow night, in the Classic."

AT that very moment, Lamont Cranston was reading today's edition of the Classic in the quiet of the Cobalt Club. He had chosen a secluded nook because sight of the tabloid horrified the more austere members of the swanky club. The edition that Cranston was reading happened to be the bulldog extra, which appeared at nine in the evening.

It carried two articles: one by Clyde, the other by Rudy. Both were obviously authentic. Clyde's story concerned the hunt for Sheff Hassell and had been wired in from Indianapolis, thanks to a pal of Sheff's, though the fact wasn't detectable. Rudy's article was a bona fide summary of the psychic situation prior to Cardona's quiz of Kalvah.

No clue, as yet, for The Shadow. But there would be a double one to-morrow night, when Clyde and Rudy swapped assignments by proxy. Until then, The Shadow's trail to crime would remain barren, for his own agent, Clyde Burke, had caused him to reject any connection between Sheff Hassell and the death of Don

Tarkingham.

Twenty-four hours to go! Should crime remain that long in abeyance, The Shadow would be prepared to solve it before he could strike anew!

CHAPTER XV. HOUR OF DOOM

IT was the next evening, and the presses were slapping finished copies of the Classic into great piles that were soon to reach the street. Within an hour, newsstands would have copies waiting for such regular buyers as Lamont Cranston. Just one hour more!

One hour, in contrast to days that had preceded it. Yet that hour was to sway the balance between right and wrong. Had The Shadow gained the benefit of that hour, he could have won a long race against crime. But fate was throwing further hazards in The Shadow's path.

Fate and a mystic named Kalvah, who claimed that he could control the hand of destiny.

Having regained the right to appear as a claimant for the award offered by Suffolk and others, Kalvah had further demanded the privilege of an early test. He intimated that his reputation was at stake now that Inspector Cardona had again begun to doubt him. He wanted to prove his psychic ability and thus clear his name from all stigma.

For it was obvious that if Kalvah possessed genuine psychic powers, he wouldn't have had any motive for killing Tarkingham. But Kalvah didn't mention the other factor that was equally true.

Should Kalvah be a fake, the sooner he gave a seance, the better his chance to win the award. His only obstacle was Aulander, and Tarkingham's successor hadn't yet found time to enlist the services of other psychic investigators. Meanwhile, Aulander was talking in a confident style, and Kalvah took advantage of it. Calling for a seance this very night, he had won his argument.

So here was the throng in the psychic lab again, while the Classic was still pounding through the presses. Tonight the seance circle included Lamont Cranston. He hadn't been able to get out of it, for Commissioner Weston had taken an interest in things psychic and was also among those present.

So they'd come to the lab together, with Cranston bringing along a brief case filled with a lot of scientific articles on fake mediums, in case the commissioner wanted to refer to them.

Harry Vincent and Margo Lane were present as legitimate sitters, and they would prove handy should The Shadow need them. Milton Suffolk had brought along other people, who had pledged themselves to pay large portions of the award should it be won; but Caglio wasn't with him. As usual, Caglio was doing a trance seance for a group of society people, this time somewhere in Westchester.

There were two persons who held Cranston's closest attention: Professor Hayne and Rudy Burgaw.

One fact could not be discounted. Hayne had been connected with everything from the very outset. Oddly, the thing in Hayne's favor wasn't the way in which he had covered his activities. On the contrary, he had laid himself right open to many things that persons like Inspector Cardona had overlooked. So The Shadow had given Hayne a clean bill, from a negative viewpoint.

That might be the very flaw. Perhaps Hayne had played stupid in order to look innocent. So this evening, Hayne was to gain his share of The Shadow's secret observation.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Rudy's case was different. He carried the best of passports: his swap of jobs with Clyde. The fact that Clyde was touring the Midwest as a crime reporter made it look as though he had rigged the deal putting Rudy on the seance assignment.

And tonight, Rudy was living up to what a smart reporter should be. He looked worried, as if he not Milton Suffolk was the man who stood to lose the half share of a quarter million dollars. Moreover, Rudy was checking to see that the seance room remained undisturbed. He was particularly anxious to watch the outer door.

All this would have explained itself the other way about, if the seance had been postponed until after Cranston could read the forthcoming issue of the *New York Classic*, due on the street within the hour!

FROM the center of the circle, Kalvah was addressing the group, describing the sort of phenomena that he intended to produce. A cabinet was set there, but it wasn't on balance scales. They weren't necessary, since Kalvah intended to produce his phenomena in the light, keeping only himself in the darkened cabinet.

In front of the cabinet was a table, and upon it rested three objects. One was a human skull, or a fairly good imitation; the second object was a long, sharp-pointed dagger; while the third was a large glove with a broad wristband attached.

Kalvah suggested that the sitters examine these items, adding that if the objects felt clammy, it was because they had a thick coating of luminous paint.

While the inspection was under way, Kalvah dramatically named the props in question. The death's-head was the Skull of Cagliostro, famed mystic of two centuries ago; the knife was the Dagger of Macbeth; while the glove was the Gauntlet of Galahad. Very solemn was the tone of Kalvah, when he gave these definitions.

"Any of three things may happen," he declared. "The skull may speak; the dagger may float in air; while the gauntlet may become imbued with an invisible hand. Such manifestations will begin in darkness, but they will continue after I have called for lights!"

It was agreed that the continuance of any one of such manifestations under full test conditions would entitle Kalvah to the award. So the medium entered the cabinet, folded his arms and asked that the curtain be lowered. His eyes already fixed in a dreamy stare, Kalvah added that it wouldn't be necessary for the sitters to grip hands. Everybody's position would be perfectly established after the lights came on.

Even before the seance room was darkened, Cranston came to definite conclusions regarding Kalvah. The brain of The Shadow was probing into the possible methods whereby Kalvah might produce the things he claimed. It would be easy for Kalvah to operate the skull, making it wiggle its jaw with the aid of a looped thread.

The gauntlet was very rubbery; a mere coating of luminous paint did not explain its feel. A thin tube would suffice to fill it with compressed air. As for the dagger, Kalvah could handle it with a reaching rod, particularly one of a telescopic type which might be hidden in a fountain pen that Kalvah wore in his vest pocket.

Kalvah needed darkness to rig things the way he wanted. How far his act could continue after the lights came on depended much upon his ingenuity. Certainly the skull could continue to work its jaw, though the glove might deflate and the knife drop with a quick jerk.

However, Kalvah was as bold as he was clever, and he might be able to make such manifestations very

THE MURDERING GHOST

convincing. That part remained to be seen.

The lights went off except for the red bulbs, and they showed nothing. They were farther apart tonight and at the sides of the cabinet, which fitted The Shadow's belief that Kalvah intended to rig things. He didn't want to be spotted moving in front of the lights, and he wouldn't be, the way the lights were located.

Thus judged The Shadow, for he was Cranston no longer. Turning his brief case upside down, he was opening a hidden zipper in its bottom. The brief case had two compartments, each shaped like a V. Between the W thus formed was an inverted V like the Greek letter A. It was from that secret section that The Shadow removed the folded cloak and flattened hat that he used to obliterate his guise of Cranston.

A gun came from the cloak. The Shadow was using only one tonight, and he doubted that he would have to fire it. A neat tap with a heavy automatic could put Kalvah into a genuine trance, should The Shadow so require. Or it would stop any person like Professor Hayne, should the latter be working with the medium.

For The Shadow was certain that complicity would creep into any game where a quarter million dollars stood at stake. That sum was sufficient to be split between two conspirators, with a profit for each, or even to be divided among three or more.

Knowing that Kalvah would remain quiet for a while, The Shadow decided to look for Hayne first. Clad in black, the unseen investigator was moving out and around the circle, keeping clear of the big box detectors, when a sudden gasp passed through the group. Only a few feet from the spot where he had last seen Hayne, The Shadow paused to look toward the cabinet.

Manifestations were already under way!

Half a minute ago, three luminous objects had been resting on that table: a skull, a dagger and a gauntlet. No longer were they there. All three were in motion!

The skull had lifted to a height of six feet, as though it were the head of an otherwise invisible figure. An unseen hand had filled the empty gauntlet. Spreading its fingers, that gloved hand had wrapped itself about the handle of the dagger and was raising the blade to brandish it above the skull!

HAND on his gun, The Shadow resisted the urge to draw and plant a shot in the imaginary body that revealed only its head and hand. It was too likely that the form would be real, the very solid shape of Kalvah, who could easily have sneaked from the cabinet to try this business with his luminous props.

So The Shadow let the gun slide beneath his cloak. Forgetting Hayne for the moment, he picked the right spot in the circle and startled two members by laying his invisible hands upon their shoulders.

Fortunately, Harry's grunt and Margo's heartfelt gasp were drowned by other murmurs from the circle. Both heard The Shadow's whisper, telling them to spread their chairs apart and let him through.

The shining skull and the glowing hand that gripped the luminous knife were starting a trip around the far side of the cabinet, as though to show themselves off to other members of the circle. By skirting the near side of the cabinet, The Shadow could meet the ghost and prove it corporeal by means of a grapple, rather than a bullet.

As he started that tour, The Shadow heard a stir within the circle. Someone else was on the prowl to overtake the ghost. It might be Hayne, if he had started ahead of The Shadow. It could be Aulander, who was so anxious to fill the shoes of Tarkingham. Whoever it was, The Shadow let him shift for himself.

THE MURDERING GHOST

The Shadow was after the ghost and was copying its tactics. In skirting one side of the cabinet, the ghost was cutting in between the curtains and the red light, so as not to block off the crimson glow. The Shadow did exactly the same on his side of the cabinet. The only difference was that the ghost as represented by skull, glove and dagger was farther along than The Shadow. It was at the rear of the cabinet, while the cloaked challenger was moving in past the red bulb that glowed on the near side.

Until now, an hour had been important. Things were changed; this was a matter of seconds. Grim seconds, wherein the whole scene turned itself inside out.

The cabinet trembled as though something had jarred it from the rear. The Shadow paused, thinking that the circumnavigating ghost had simply tripped over the bottom of the back curtain. Another moment, and The Shadow sensed the thing that was due. He made a quick, circling sweep to prevent it. Too late!

Something hurtled into the cabinet. There was a cry from in back that the luminous objects had disappeared. Hard on that cry came a shriek from within the cabinet itself: Kalvah's voice, screaming:

"Lights!"

The Shadow didn't wait for lights. He hurled himself against the back curtain of the cabinet, to grab the figure that had gone through and dropped the rear curtain behind it. The whole cabinet came flying backward, burying The Shadow within its black cloth folds. At that moment, lights came on.

The overturned cabinet was forgotten by all who saw the figure that issued from it. The figure of Kalvah, sprawling forward to strike the floor. It looked as though Kalvah had played the ghost, for the skull was bouncing ahead of him and the gauntlet slapping down beside him. From all appearances, he might have dropped those objects.

But Kalvah didn't drop the dagger. He couldn't, for the Blade of Macbeth was where he couldn't reach it planted squarely between Kalvah's shoulders, clear to its hilt. It was the stabbing of that knife that produced the medium's scream for lights, that last call he was ever to utter.

Hitting the floor, Kalvah spread there, his face still wearing its crescent grin as it twisted to peer across his shoulder, its dead eyes bulging as though unable to find the killer who had thrust home that murderous blade!

CHAPTER XVI. THE RIGHT CAMP

THE light that came on was a floor lamp near the door, where Cardona had stationed himself with the double purpose of watching the seance and guarding against outside interference. Since everything was happening in the seance room, Joe forgot the door and sprang toward Kalvah's body.

He regretted his move immediately, for before he could reach the cabinet, the floor lamp tipped with a crash that extinguished its light.

Only someone from the door could have done that to the lamp, and Cardona wheeled to learn who was to blame. Finding the culprit was impossible in the darkness, so Cardona bawled for other lights and received an answer from Hayne, who said he would supply them.

The spot from which Hayne gave his call was easily located by Harry and Margo, for it was right between their chairs. The professor was getting through the human circle by means of the opening The Shadow had used.

THE MURDERING GHOST

The trouble was that Hayne couldn't find his way back again in the dark; at least, not as speedily as Cardona wanted. Tumult was raging around the overturned cabinet and Cardona pitched himself into the chaos, rather than wait for the lights. Joe's arrival didn't help the situation.

The Shadow had almost grabbed the murderer, and would have trapped him among the cloth folds but for the intervention. It wasn't all Cardona's fault; others were in the mix-up, too. But Joe's inimitable way of bashing into things turned the affray into a free-for-all.

Rudy was in the tangle, coming from the back, while Harry was lunging from the opposite direction. Other voices rose: Commissioner Weston and Milton Suffolk were both making the most of their individual authority, while they added their weight to the struggle.

Their cry was, "Grab the ghost!" by which they meant the unidentified person who had struck down Kalvah. So everybody naturally pounced for the vortex of the whirl and found The Shadow. They didn't know who he was, but the feel of his cloak was enough like a robe that a fake ghost would have worn, so the grabbers were all quite satisfied.

Being classed a ghost didn't ruffle The Shadow. He'd been termed a ghost before and knew how to live up to the reputation. In this case, he made an eccentric whirl which sent the grabbers spilling against one another, much to their annoyance.

One man, at least, had the wits to get clear: Harry Vincent. Recognizing that The Shadow was in a jam, Harry saw a better way to help him than remaining in the struggle.

Harry went for the corner where Professor Hayne had gone, and on the way he grabbed Margo. Dragging the girl along, Harry quickly told her what had to be done. They couldn't let Hayne put on the lights until The Shadow was clear.

The lights did come on, right afterward, but it was only a few feet to Hayne's corner, so Harry bowled the professor aside and clicked them off again.

Savagely, Hayne jabbed the switch again and Harry flipped it off. They grappled, but Hayne managed to slap the switch as Harry was twisting him aside. It was Margo's turn, and she was right on hand to douse the lights. Those clicks of the switch followed in such quick succession that lights were barely on before they were off again, and the result was a kaleidoscopic effect throughout the seance room.

No one really saw The Shadow. His cloaked figure blended with the dark so perfectly that in those instants of light it seemed no more than an afterimage. Besides, The Shadow was still doing his rapid whirl. Amid the spin, he glimpsed other people and vaguely identified them: Weston, Cardona, Suffolk, Rudy all those around the cabinet.

All those and one more, who couldn't be placed because his back was turned. He certainly didn't belong to the seance circle, for his actions didn't fit. The reason his back was turned was because he was scudding toward the door, and it was open wide, proving that this interloper must have sneaked in during the seance!

CARDONA spied the fleeing man but couldn't go after him. At that moment, Joe was in the combined grip of Weston and Suffolk, who had grabbed him in lieu of a better ghost. But Cardona had a gun and was managing to aim it, while he bellowed for the fugitive to halt.

Joe's shout forced The Shadow to a change of pace; he took an angle to the wall to avoid Cardona's path of aim. But the police inspector didn't fire after all.

THE MURDERING GHOST

There was a call from Rudy Burgaw telling that he was after the fleeing man. Hearing it, Weston grabbed Cardona's gun hand. The Shadow zigzagged for the doorway and met up squarely with Rudy, who made a hard tackle, only to be flung aside. On his knees, Rudy was making another effort to grab The Shadow, when the rest surged up to help.

Whipping through the doorway, The Shadow continued on the fugitive's trail with the whole pack howling behind him. Around corners, down stairways, the running man was always far enough ahead to be clear of gunfire or recognition. As he reached the street, a car came wheeling up and he dived right into it, giving the news that The Shadow was after him.

It was much like that first night, when Rudy had played the electrician a part that The Shadow had not yet uncovered. Very much like that first episode, because in this case the unidentified fugitive happened to be Sheff Hassell. Tonight, Sheff was using his real pals Quickie and those others who liked to shoot guns as much as they did craps.

Things broke fast. The Shadow's laugh was a mighty challenge that informed crooks of the worst. So they did their worst, which was what The Shadow wanted. They aimed for where they heard the laugh, and its echoes completely deceived them. The Shadow was out of the doorway and half across the street when they fired. His responding shots came from a surprise angle.

The neatest of traps, this one if The Shadow hadn't relied on the wrong people. He expected Weston and Cardona to spot the car and give it a fusillade while its occupants were vainly firing in The Shadow's own direction. But the only things that the commissioner and his ace inspector saw were The Shadow's own gun jabs. So they banged away at those, and the crooks used their respite to whip their car around the corner and away.

Stationed near was a cab belonging to The Shadow. Its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, had two of The Shadow's secret agents with him. One was Cliff Marsland, who knew the underworld like a book. His companion, a sharp eyed fellow called Hawkeye, had indexed that same volume.

But when Moe's cab drew up, it simply took the place of the car that had escaped. Weston and Cardona mistook it for a crook-manned cab and fired with alacrity, forcing Moe to whip around a different corner as he caught a flashlight signal from The Shadow.

It was a getaway for the crooks The Shadow sought, and he felt it fortunate that his agents had managed the same. And now The Shadow was having his own troubles, for Weston, Cardona and the rest from the seance room were boxing him in.

The Shadow let them close in on him while he chose his favorite spot the little courtyard from which he had disappeared before.

The Shadow had his suction cups. He wouldn't be without that compact bundle, not in this vicinity. That nest of disks was the real reason why he was carrying only a single gun. Having only one automatic, The Shadow had been sparing with his shots, which he regretted; but, after all, the suction cups were worth it.

Putting them on in swift fashion, The Shadow walked right up the wall and rolled through the window of the psychic laboratory while the men who hunted him were arriving in the courtyard.

The lights were on again in the seance room when Cranston strolled in to join a group who were too busy apologizing to one another to notice that he had entered from the library. When attention focused on Kalvah's body, everyone thought it natural enough that Cranston should remove his brief case, which was somewhat in

THE MURDERING GHOST

the way.

Of course, he took it to the library, which was where he found time to pack away the cloak and hat that he had left there, along with suction cups and gun.

COMING back upstairs by the conventional route, Commissioner Weston ordered Inspector Cardona to take charge of the case. Cardona did, and this was one murder he had little trouble reconstructing.

Sheer nerve had made the killer's task a simple one. People were watching for phenomena, so the murderer had provided it by putting on the gauntlet and gripping the knife with it. A perfect way to surprise Kalvah and kill him, while he was stalling in the cabinet. The skull, Cardona explained, had been carried in the killer's other hand simply for a bluff.

Using a handkerchief to lift the knife by its point, Cardona glowered at the handle and grumbled:

"No fingerprints. The glove took care of those. Whoever pulled this job was smart." With that, Cardona looked around the group and added: "I'm not so sure he was the fellow from the hall. That bird could have been a decoy or maybe just a snooper."

Cardona's gaze suddenly centered on the skull. His countenance took on its poker-face expression. Spreading the handkerchief atop the skull, Joe gripped through the cloth and turned the whole thing over. Producing a brush and a little bottle of graphite, Cardona made the test for fingerprints and they appeared on the base of the skull!

"We all handled this skull," reminded Cardona, "but there was only one man who would have held it this way. I mean the murderer, and he left some very clean evidence. So clean, that I'm going to play a hunch!"

Laying the skull on its side, Cardona buttonholed Roy Aulander and made the dapper investigator plant fingertip impressions on a sheet of paper. Aulander complied, but he argued all the while.

"Maybe they are my fingerprints," said Aulander. "I picked up the skull and put it on the table after the murder, while you were chasing the real killer. I had the same theory as you, inspector, so I held the skull in one hand –"

"The left hand," interrupted Cardona, "because its fingerprints tally with those on the skull base. Only, it happened earlier, Aulander, while you were sneaking around the cabinet with the skull in one hand, the glove on the other. You were carrying the dagger and you drove it into Kalvah's back.

"I'll tell you why you did it. You believed that Kalvah killed your friend Tarkingham. Yes, you figured he sneaked in here and tried to pin the job on Madame Yonina. So you murdered Kalvah for revenge, and you fixed it with some cheap crook to play the decoy. That's why we chased out of here. But we came back to find the right man!"

The arm of the law had clamped on Aulander, exactly as it had on Madame Yonina. First a medium, then a skeptic a suspect for each murder, evening the score for each camp!

As Cardona left, taking along his protesting prisoner, a convinced buzz went through the group. One person, however, was strictly silent: Lamont Cranston.

The Shadow still felt that crime carried a future motive: the collection of a huge reward for a successful seance. By that rule, Tarkingham had to be eliminated, being the one man who could expose any fraud.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Similarly, Kalvah's death was necessary, because with Tarkingham gone Kalvah could prove clever enough to produce phenomena that such second-raters as Aulander would be unable to detect.

A strange business, that of spiritism! It produced two camps those of believers and skeptics. But there was still a third camp, that of those who didn't care about the vital question of human survival. A camp controlled by men of outright crime. It was the right camp for The Shadow to investigate.

He had investigated it, to pick Sheff Hassell. But Sheff's part, at most, seemed nothing more than a brief feud with the old inventor, Leander Hobgood.

Leaving the psychic lab with the police commissioner, Cranston didn't bother to buy a copy of the Classic. He knew it would carry the same old stuff: Clyde's talk of minor crime in other cities; Rudy's very trivial chatter on questions psychic.

After leaving the Cobalt Club at midnight, The Shadow started for his sanctum. Still Cranston, he'd just stepped into his limousine when a newsboy waved a batch of pink-sheeted tabloids, yelling news of murder. The Classic had pulled a stop-press job to lift its front page and run a special story of Kalvah's death. It had scooped the town and Cranston with it. For Cranston bought a copy.

There wasn't much on the front page, so as the limousine rolled along Cranston turned casually to the inner pages and glanced at the columns bearing the names of Clyde Burke and Rudy Burgaw. A few minutes later, he was holding the paper under the dome light, reading first one column, then the other.

The whispered laugh that came from Cranston's lips was rightfully The Shadow's mirth. It was an answer to the question that The Shadow wanted; his original answer, suddenly made plain. The Shadow was right about the camp of crime.

Its ruler was Sheff Hassell, and the facts now on display gave proof that the crook in question was still in New York, where The Shadow could find him on short notice!

CHAPTER XVII. THE MUTUAL CHOICE

SOMETHING was astir at Sheff's. Something that Clyde Burke intended to find out about, despite the risk. His door was unlocked, for Rudy had left it that way. Rudy had come in to talk with Clyde, only to be summoned to Sheff's office by the little crook called Quickie. So Clyde decided to play his old trick again.

He sneaked from his tiny quarters, dodged past the living room, reached Sheff's door and peered through, more carefully than he had the other time.

Sheff and Rudy were in conference. The room was unchanged, except for a peculiar machine that stood on a table in the corner. The machine was mounted on glass legs that topped a marble slab, and it looked like a conglomeration of clockwork. But the machine was unimportant compared with what Sheff and Rudy had to say.

"So Aulander is going to take the rap," spoke Sheff in a purring chuckle. "Good enough. Smart work on your part, Rudy."

"I'd say you pulled the smart stuff," complimented Rudy. "Getting rid of Kalvah was your idea, not mine."

"We can both take credit, Rudy. One for covering while the other pulled the job. It puts us in the same boat, so let it go at that."

THE MURDERING GHOST

Rudy hesitated; then said casually: "All right, Sheff."

That settled, Sheff came to other business, which involved the strange machine on the corner table.

"I've got the stooge we need," declared Sheff. "He's due here any time, now. He's a mind reader who calls himself Swami Benares. One of those guys with whiskers, but he's got a special reason for wearing them. They hide his real mug."

"You mean he's wanted?" inquired Rudy.

"I'll say he is," chuckled Shed. "About everywhere except in New York! I could press any one of about seventeen buttons that would send him right up. So he'll play ball."

"For a three-way cut?"

"Yeah. A cut for you and a cut for me, with Swami cut out! We'll keep him happy, however. We'll give him ten percent of the forty you're taking, Rudy."

There wasn't any objection from Rudy. He'd be getting more than the third that he hadn't expected, though he'd talked as if he did. Clyde, outside, was mulling over the figures, when he caught himself. It wouldn't do to stand here mooning at Sheff's very door.

That thought occurred to Clyde too late. Already there were footsteps from the living room. Quickie was bringing someone to see Sheff Hassell, probably Swami Benares!

Easing the door shut, Clyde turned and started back. At the turn of the passage, he saw Quickie on the way, talking to a bearded man who accompanied him. Clyde dropped back, then decided on a lunge. If he could get by Quickie, he might run the gauntlet of the living room. It was his only out!

There was a quicker out, that Clyde didn't know about. Before he could even start his lunge, hands gripped him from in back, catching his neck in a throttling hold. Everything went black as Clyde landed through a door that had opened just behind him. It was something he hadn't even guessed about a hidden watcher posted in a side room of the hallway leading to Sheff's office!

So solid was Clyde's jolt, that his head swam. He'd played a long shot, and with it played the fool. His captor hauled him to his feet and started him out through the door that Quickie and the swami had passed. Clyde had lost his sense of direction, but it didn't matter. There was only one place where his captor would take him; that was to Sheff's office.

Next Clyde found himself in a chair, squinting weakly into the light. His eyes suddenly began to blink. He wasn't in Sheff's office; he was in his own handbox of a room! And the captor who stood before him wasn't one of Sheff's huskies.

Clyde was facing his own chief, The Shadow!

WITH a warning whisper, The Shadow told Clyde to stay where he was. Then the cloaked figure was gone silently through the door, while Clyde was feeling a breeze from the open window. In choosing the best way to reach Sheff Hassell, The Shadow had come through the very room where his agent was a prisoner! The best route by The Shadow's way of calculation, for it meant climbing a sheer wall and squeezing through a space too narrow to need bars. Both of those systems, the climb and the squeeze, were specialties with The Shadow.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Quite soon The Shadow returned. He'd taken a look into Sheff's office, to see the racketeer operating a curious clockwork mechanism that greatly interested a bearded visitor. Inasmuch as Sheff had shown no signs of explaining the contrivance, The Shadow had returned to hear what information Clyde could offer. So Clyde poured facts in plenty.

Clyde told how beautifully he had trapped himself on his first visit to Sheff. He explained that Sheff had obtained Hobgood's last invention, claiming that it was rightfully his, but disclaiming any hand in the inventor's death. Of course, that brought out the point that Rudy Burgaw was the electrician who had jolted Hobgood, though it was doubtful that Rudy had intended to injure Hobgood at that time.

Sheff Hassell was the instigator of the present enterprise. He held a tight grip over Rudy Burgaw and Swami Benares and was using them as tools. Rudy's part was already accomplished: Don Tarkingham and Kalvah were dead.

That left the field wide for Swami Benares, who could try for the award and probably collect it, since Tarkingham wouldn't be on hand to expose the swami's trickery, nor would Kalvah be there to produce more startling phenomena. No set-up could have been simpler.

The only complexities lay in the past actions of two individuals:

Sheff and Rudy. Just as Sheff claimed he hadn't murdered Hobgood, so did Rudy swear innocence in Tarkingham's death. Both cases puzzled Clyde, though he was inclined to consider each man guilty. As for this evening's episode the murder of Kalvah the blame looked like a toss-up between Sheff and Rudy.

Such past speculations scarcely seemed to interest The Shadow. He gave a reflective laugh as Clyde discussed them; then referred to the copy of the Classic that had brought him here. The Shadow complimented Clyde on the printed tip-off, for it was an excellent job. The article on Chicago crime, written by Rudy under Clyde's name, mentioned places and brought up facts that couldn't have been known to Clyde, for he wasn't acquainted with the Chicago scene the way Rudy was.

The other article, though, had been a better tip. Using Rudy's byline, Clyde had delved into data regarding Kalvah that Rudy couldn't possibly have learned on such short notice. In reading it, The Shadow had known that no reporter other than Clyde could have ranged so far in the psychic field. So the combination had worked as Clyde wanted. It brought The Shadow sooner than Clyde expected much to Clyde's good fortune.

"As for the future," spoke The Shadow, "your best policy is to sit tight, Burke. Avoid foolish action such as you performed tonight, until Sheff's game is completed."

"That's what I'm afraid of," inserted Clyde. "After the payoff, what then? Sheff seems to figure that I'm worth something alive, but he won't feel that way after he collects the cash, through Swami Benares. Nor will Rudy!"

The Shadow's laugh instilled sudden doubts in Clyde. No doubts regarding The Shadow's future plans; but doubts of Sheff and Rudy. Clyde began to feel there wouldn't be a payoff of the sort that the conspirators and their swami friend expected. The business of sitting tight might, in that case, prove even more dangerous for Clyde. It would be like embracing a powder keg with both arms and daring someone to light the fuse.

Again, Clyde heard The Shadow's whispered laugh. Low, meditative, it earned reassurance. The Shadow didn't intend to leave his plans half formed. Clyde's case, in particular, would have his attention.

But just as Clyde's confidence restored itself, The Shadow's laugh ended with a quick note of warning. His

THE MURDERING GHOST

keen hearing had caught footsteps outside Clyde's door. His gesture indicated for Clyde to be ready to answer any knock.

Nonchalantly, Clyde stepped across the room. The knock came, and Clyde threw a glance at the window to make sure that The Shadow had left. The narrow block of blackness looked very solid, and Clyde couldn't tell if it still included a cloaked figure. If Clyde couldn't, Rudy wouldn't, so Clyde called: "Come in."

Rudy entered, looking more cheerful than before. He wanted Clyde to help him with the next article in the psychic series; in turn, Rudy agreed to spill some more dope on Chicago. So the two sat down to work, mutually forgetting other matters.

IN Sheff's office, Hobgood's peculiar machine was resting on the desk, its wheels operating in rhythmic fashion while Swami Benares stared in pleased fascination.

From behind the desk, Sheff purred satisfied words while he gestured toward Quickie, who was standing by, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

"I'll have Quickie talk to the janitor," stated Sheff. "He can hire some friend of his to lug this over to your place, without knowing what it is. You can use regular truckers after that, Swami. Have them take the gadget to Professor Hayne's joint."

Swami Benares shook his head.

"I shall carry it personally, in a cab," he declared. "So precious a thing as a psychic motor should never leave my possession!"

"O.K., then," agreed Sheff. "Use your own judgment after I ship it to your place... Now scram, Quickie, while I show Swami the gaff. And by the way" Sheff stopped Quickie before he reached the door "I want you to look up a couple of right guys to handle the Burke proposition. Have them handy right after the blow-off."

Quickie nodded while looking back at Sheff. As a result, the little mobbie didn't see the blackness that receded from the door, nor did he note the silent turn of the closing knob. Sheff couldn't see those things because Quickie blocked his view of them.

Blackness moved ahead of Quickie into the living room, where the rest of Sheff's cronies were rolling dice. An argument was under way when Quickie arrived.

"Shove out of the light," one gambler was telling another. "I can't see what the bones read!"

"Shove over yourself," the other retorted. "I ain't in the light."

Both looked around and saw Quickie, who glanced at a floor lamp as though he were to blame. It rather puzzled the little crook, how he could have blocked the light from that angle. With a shrug, Quickie pulled some money from his pocket to join the crap game. It was too late to talk to the janitor tonight. Morning would do.

Blackness by then had gone through the outer door of Sheff's apartment. In the hallway outside, the cloaked form of The Shadow materialized as if from nowhere. The Shadow was pleased because he had paid a return trip to Sheff's office, instead of going out Clyde's window. He'd simply waited behind Clyde's door while Rudy opened it, and with the two reporters in conference, The Shadow had left Clyde's room.

THE MURDERING GHOST

For The Shadow had learned enough to complete his plans. He intended to leave Clyde where he was even after the blow-off, as Sheff termed it. Until then, The Shadow's plans and those of Sheff Hassell would be mutual.

Both were counting upon Swami Benares to produce the climax, with Hobgood's machine as the instrument involved. Whatever the merits of that device, it could be used either way: to demonstrate the existence of a psychodynamic force, or to prove fraud.

Swami Benares was picking up where Kalvah had left off. All else that was needed was someone to fill the capacity of the fraud exposé, Don Tarkingham.

And such a person would be present at the coming seance: The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE CHALLENGE FROM BEYOND

MILTON SUFFOLK was losing interest in the proof of human survival. He sat in the psychic laboratory and said so, not only to Professor Hayne but Commissioner Weston and Lamont Cranston, who were also present for this conference.

Caglio had also come to the laboratory, but he was in the little library looking through Hayne's books.

"We started with a sincere quest," declared Suffolk seriously, "and what resulted? Fraud, chicanery, and murder! I regret my connection with the cause, if it can be called such. I feel almost responsible for the horrible things that have occurred."

Professor Hayne started a protest, but Suffolk cut him short.

"This fund of ours encouraged crime," insisted Suffolk. "Perhaps I should say this fund of mine, for it has reached three hundred thousand dollars and I am responsible for half that sum. In these times, no one can afford to tie up a hundred and fifty thousand dollars indefinitely. I have many interests, but cash is vital."

What Suffolk said was true. He was a man of reputed wealth, but he had gone a long way beyond his original offer. Twenty-five, even fifty thousand dollars would have been a handsome amount to offer anyone who could solve the psychic riddle. The affairs of Milton Suffolk, like those of many reputed millionaires, were dependent upon industries that might at any time close down.

Matters of current finance were beyond the ken of Professor Hayne. He thought of wealthy men as people who plucked dollars from trees. For the first time in its career, his psychic laboratory had been receiving proper financial aid, and he didn't want to lose it.

"You can't withdraw, Mr. Suffolk!" exclaimed Hayne. "Not while there are mediums who are still willing to compete for the fund!"

"What mediums?" demanded Suffolk. "Look at your own list, Hayne. Every name has been crossed off. I have come to one conclusion" Suffolk put this in emphatic style "regarding mediums in general. All those who will degrade their talents in quest of wealth, are frauds. Sincere psychics, such as Caglio, pay no attention to this award. They accept cash for their services only that they may live. So I felt that we should call off the offer."

Hayne showed his disappointment in a most unusual way.

THE MURDERING GHOST

"I am a sincere searcher for the truth," he declared, very solemnly. "Therefore, you should believe me when I declare that genuine manifestations have occurred in this very laboratory. Only two nights ago, I had proof of such. Here in this very room I heard the creep of footsteps, the whisper of a voice. I turned on the lights the room was empty. Proof, Mr. Suffolk, that a spirit had come and gone!"

Hayne's words were so dramatic that Commissioner Weston gave a sudden start, particularly when he heard footsteps right beside him and a voice in his very ear! Jumping about in real alarm, Weston saw Caglio, who had come from the library during Hayne's discourse.

"I believe you, professor," assured Caglio. "I, too, have received such impressions in this atmosphere. Your laboratory is laden with psychic influences. Since Mr. Suffolk believes that I am sincere, I hope my statement will convince him."

"Very well," conceded Suffolk. "You can keep the offer open for another week, professor. That is, if Commissioner Weston agrees."

The commissioner did agree. He came out with his reason. Inspector Cardona had proven nothing against either Madame Yonina or Roy Aulander in the murders which the two had presumably committed. But Cardona was still holding them in custody, for a purpose.

"There may be a criminal hand behind both murders," asserted Weston. "Suppose some clever crook employed a tool to do those killings? What would his next step be? Inspector Cardona believes that the master crook would hire some fake medium to seek the award. If we could trap such a medium in trickery, we would have the answer to the two murders!"

It seemed that Cardona had come around to The Shadow's theory, for which Joe deserved due credit, though Cranston did not express it. As for Suffolk, he did not think much of the idea.

"If that is the case, commissioner," queried Suffolk, "why are the lists still open? Someone should certainly be seeking the prize."

"Someone is," put in Hayne. "I had a call today from a medium who wants to enter the context His name is Swami Benares, and he claims he can produce psychic manifestations in full light. He is willing to submit to the test at once."

"Make it this evening, then!" exclaimed Weston eagerly. "Call the usual circle together, and I shall have Inspector Cardona join us!"

SEVERAL hours later, the usual group of sitters was gathered in the seance room. The room was reasonably dim, but not reduced to the red-light stage. In the center of the circle was the bearded medium, Swami Benares, and in front of him stood the peculiar contrivance with which he intended to demonstrate the existence of psychodynamic force.

Everyone was free to examine the machine, so they did. Cogwheels, sprockets, levers and the rest were lifted from the glass plate on which they rested, except for a few parts that were firmly affixed to the glass to steady the rest. Swami Benares carefully assembled the various parts and was ready to begin.

"Let me again call attention to the most essential fact," declared Benares smoothly. "The entire apparatus is mounted upon a sheet of glass, which in turn stands on four glass posts, thus making any connection with the marble base a physical impossibility, inasmuch as wires or other devices would be visible."

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Your examination of the various parts proves that there is nothing in the way of a radio receiver. No magnetic control of an electric sort would be possible. Professor Hayne has provided against such."

In proof, Benares arose and walked to one side of the circle, then across to the other. Each time he approached one of the huge detectors that looked like juke boxes, the thing wailed. They were sensitive devices that would pick up any electrical interference, so the swami's claim was justified.

Returning to the center, Swami Benares took the square glass lid that was used to cover the strange psychic motor. He was about to put it over the machine, when Caglio stepped forward.

This was the first test seance that Caglio had been able to attend, and being a medium who dealt in trances only, he was here in the capacity of an investigator. After a final look at the glass-mounted machine, Caglio nodded that it satisfied him.

"With this machine," asserted Benares, "I shall give a demonstration of telekinesis the production of motion in objects without contact or other physical means. This, I understand, comes within the requirements of the psychic award."

Benares looked at Suffolk, who nodded. There was a gleam of gold teeth as the swami grinned, and he threw that smile at Caglio, too, for Benares regarded the rival medium as a skeptic.

Caglio's darkish lips opened as he returned the smile, but his teeth showed no golden flash. Caglio owned a set of perfect teeth, a full set of matched uppers and lowers, bestowed by a prominent dentist who believed in Caglio's trance powers.

Covering the intricate motor with the glass lid, Benares sat back and gave the device a steady stare. So did Caglio, whose eyes soon gained a fixed bulge resembling his trance condition. As for the rest of the group, they were strongly intrigued.

Like Suffolk, Weston was watching the motor closely. Such onlookers as Harry and Margo felt that they were about to view something phenomenal. Even Inspector Cardona found it difficult to check on the group, because he was fascinated by the motor, too.

The only person quite at ease was Lamont Cranston, and he was watching the man directly opposite him: Rudy Burgaw. The reporter's wise manner couldn't mask the tension that he felt.

To Rudy, this seance was the culmination of a long, dangerous adventure wherein he had gone far out of character to aid the schemes of Sheff Hassell. What Rudy feared was that someone would recognize the psychic motor as a creation of the dead inventor, Leander Hobgood.

So far, no one had except, perhaps, Cranston, who already knew but did not choose to tell. For this motor was quite different from the bulky, oversize products that Hobgood had sold to his average dupes. He'd built it specially to trim Sheff Hassell, and had shown it to no one else.

Watching Rudy, The Shadow saw the reporter's bluff face relax. At the same moment, a stir swept the circle. Looking at the glass covered machine on its crystal mounting, Cranston saw the reason. The psychic motor had begun to operate!

Smoothly, beautifully, every cogwheel, sprocket and piston was in motion. The machine was picking up power from somewhere, and the force could only come from another sphere!

THE MURDERING GHOST

BLANDLY Swami Benares arose and stepped well away from the table upon which stood the marble pedestal and the glass-mounted motor. With folded arms, the bearded mystic smiled.

"It will run for hours," assured the swami softly. "For days... months... years! As long as the forces of the world beyond choose to manifest themselves!"

Most happy of the group was Professor Hayne. Here was the proof of his fourth-dimensional theory! Only through such could a force reach a sealed device and operate it. Glass-mounted, glass-covered, free from connections, immune to remote control, the psychic motor was proving its claims!

Minutes grew and with them the strange machine kept up its steady action, the very motion of its parts casting a hypnotic sway upon the eyes that beheld it. This was the incredible brought to reality, the sure claim for the vast award that had been promised in ready cash!

Watches were out and Professor Hayne was whispering to Milton Suffolk that five minutes more of this should suffice, to which Suffolk agreed with a nod.

Commissioner Weston was glancing at Inspector Cardona, to receive a blank stare in return. This was no crook trap; it was proof of the impossible. Crime was out of mind, ruled off the books by a power beyond human ken!

And then came further evidence.

Caglio was speaking, but it wasn't Caglio. The darkish medium had gone into a trance. He was uttering things in strange inarticulate voices which Swami Benares approved.

"The spirits are present," declared Benares. "They are taking control of Caglio, along with the motor."

Head tilted back, Caglio's darkish face was lifted upward. His mouth was open but his lips were scarcely moving, yet the voice within him began to be coherent. Caglio, the skeptic, was becoming a living proof of the forces claimed by Swami Benares.

Suffolk and others had seen Caglio in that state before, but never to such a marvelous extent. They hoped they could recognize the voice that issued from the trance medium's throat; and suddenly they did.

A voice from the beyond the crisp tone of the dead inventor, Leander Hobgood!

"I am here in the spirit!" declared that tone. "Here to prove that there are forces in the world wherein I now dwell that can influence the earthly sphere. But being of the spirit realm, I am willing to confess the faults of my earthly self!"

A glower came over the bearded face of Benares as he paused to stare at Caglio, whose lips were moving as though quivered by the voice that had seized command of his vocal cords.

"On earth I lacked that spirit force!" The tone was still a replica of Hobgood's. "So I faked it, not once, but often! I swindled people with my inventions! The proof of my evil deeds is before you in the shape of my final creation, the motor which Swami Benares claims as his own –"

Caglio went no further. It wasn't that the spirit of Hobgood left him. Something else was on his throat, a pair of hands flung by a wild-eyed attacker who sprang across the circle, hoping to throttle the trance medium before his voice went further.

THE MURDERING GHOST

The attacker wasn't Swami Benares; the bearded man was ducking the other direction. The individual who had given away to violence was Rudy Burgaw, the reporter!

Two rescuers came to Caglio's aid: Cranston from one side, Cardona from the other. They hauled Rudy from Caglio's throat and flattened the reporter on the floor where Cranston left him to Cardona. For Cranston had another man to handle: Swami Benares.

Already the bearded faker was spilling from a flying tackle delivered by Harry Vincent. He was up again, Benares, striking savagely in hope that he could reach the door, when Cranston, arriving with a dive, placed a low-driven uppercut into the center of the tangled beard. Like Rudy, the swami subsided.

Crime's truth was out, the men behind it captured, while the very evidence of their guilt kept clicking on and on. That running motor, product of Hobgood's ingenuity, was more than a demonstration of a psychic force. It was the power that was to convict these accomplices in crime and their leader, Sheff Hassell!

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S ROUNDUP

GATHERED into custody, Rudy Burgaw and Swami Benares could only fume and argue. Pressing his bearded jaw, the swami put up a weak claim that the mystic motor was his own creation. Rudy was trying to say that he had simply wanted to stop Caglio from interfering with the swami's seance.

Nobody listened to him. Caglio's story was more important.

Rudy's attack had ended Caglio's trance utterances. Jarred from his hypnotic mood, Caglio was stroking his choked throat and talking in his own voice. He could only vaguely remember the visions that had seized him; he hoped that his recollections would soon clear. They had something to do with the motor and its operation, but he couldn't understand just what.

It was Cranston who delved into the motor's working, with immediate success. First, he raised the glass cover and the motor stopped. When he replaced the lid, the machinery started again. But that wasn't the full answer to the puzzling proposition. Cranston had to analyze it further.

"This machine is obviously self-contained," asserted Cranston calmly. "It is equally apparent that the trick does not lie in the mechanism itself. Therefore we shall have to look elsewhere, and the only place is the marble base –"

"But that won't help!" put in Weston. "Those glass legs make any connection between the base and the machine impossible!"

Cranston paid no attention. He tapped the base at different spots, finally found a crack at one corner, and borrowed a screwdriver from Hayne to pry into the opening.

After due time, the base came apart and Cranston lifted its upper portion. Within the marble base was the very thing he expected a small electric motor hitched to a row of dry-cell batteries!

"There is the motive power, commissioner," declared Cranston. "A motor connected to a shaft that rotated the machinery on the glass plate."

"A shaft?" queried Weston. "But a shaft would be visible, Cranston!"

"Not this one," smiled Cranston. "It is a glass shaft, commissioner, operating upright through a hollow glass

THE MURDERING GHOST

tube that served as a supporting leg of the glass mounting for the motor. Glass moving within glass, invisibly!

In a few minutes, Cranston had the whole contrivance apart as proof of his statement. There it was, the neatest of old Hobgood's brain children. Three of the legs that topped the hollow marble slab were solid cylinders of glass. The fourth was hollow and through it ran a thinner glass rod, connected with the motor in the base.

Among the parts that were fixed on the glass plate was a flat cogwheel, which happened to be connected to the thin glass rod that came up through the one tubular leg.

When the glass cover was placed over the visible machinery, its weight started the hidden motor in the marble base. Thus started, the secret motor revolved the glass shaft that ran up through the hollow leg. That shaft turned the cogwheel above it, and the visible mechanism was operated throughout by its links of pistons and sprockets.

As long as the batteries lasted, the motor would run, which was longer than Swami Benares would have needed to collect the fund that Suffolk and others had offered!

Caglio didn't have to return into his trance. The ingenious Mr. Cranston had solved the remainder of the riddle. Rudy Burgaw and Swami Benares were exposed as the crooked accomplices in a swindle game far larger than old Leander Hobgood had ever perpetrated!

It was Cardona's turn to step into the limelight. Facts fitted perfectly with Cardona's theory. One man had paved the way for another to collect. The chap who did the preliminary dirt was Rudy Burgaw; the clean-up gentleman was Swami Benares. So Cardona intended to go the rest of the way and learn the name of the real brain behind the racket.

Joe put the heat on Rudy first. He accused the reporter of murdering both Tarkingham and Kalvah, charges which Rudy frantically denied. So Cardona demanded the name of the real killer, which Rudy wouldn't give, claiming that he knew nothing about those deaths. Whereupon, Cardona concentrated on Swami Benares.

He mentioned that tonight marked the swami's first appearance on the scene, so it could be assumed that Benares wasn't implicated in the murders. In fact, as Joe put it, the swami was something of a dupe himself. It might go very easy with Swami Benares, if he named the real brain behind the crimes.

So Swami Benares named Sheff Hassell.

Ten minutes later, a squadron of police cars were roaring toward the apartment house where Sheff lived. They were followed by a big official car containing Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona. One thing annoyed Weston: his friend Lamont Cranston wasn't with him.

Cardona's prolonged quiz of Rudy and Benares must have bored Cranston, for he had walked out of the psychic laboratory while Joe was still questioning the prisoners.

SEATED in his office, Sheff Hassell looked up when Quickie entered. Sheff didn't wait for Quickie to tell him what was wrong. He simply grabbed a revolver from his desk drawer, cocked his head to hear the wails of the approaching sirens, and ordered:

"Tell those guys to get rid of Burke!"

Quickie started out through the hall, with Sheff close behind him. In the living room, the crap game was

THE MURDERING GHOST

permanently finished. Thugs were on their feet with drawn guns, while Quickie was telling two new members of the tribe just what they were supposed to do.

"I'll ring for the service elevator," said Quickie. "The janitor will send his friend up. The guy is just a big dope who owns a truck. He took a load out of here before, and we told him there would be a bigger one, so he'll have a crate with him. Croak Burke and roll him in the crate, then make the big guy take you where you want to go."

The assassins hurried to their task, while Quickie joined Sheff and the other thugs in the outer hallway. Already police were on the stairs. Sheff's men fired a few shots to keep them worried. That accomplished, Sheff said to the half dozen men about him:

"Keep shooting a while. Then we'll hop up to the next floor and over into the building next door. I never roosted anywhere without figuring a way out first."

Clyde's captors appeared from the apartment, shoving their prisoner along with guns. They were a tough pair who meant business, and they had hardly reached the service elevator before its door slid open.

Over his shoulder, Sheff saw the janitor's friend, a huge African who was standing beside the crate that Quickie had mentioned.

"All right, you guys," called Sheff. "Give Burke the works and make that big dope play along."

With a combined lunge the four came Sheff's way before he could even turn to aim his gun or shout commands to Quickie and his other henchmen. No longer was Clyde in the clutch of two assassins who intended to intimidate the janitor's friend.

The killers hired by Quickie were Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye, agents of The Shadow, who had told them to go after the assignment. They had guns, and Clyde was armed, too, for they had brought an extra weapon for him.

As for the janitor's friend, the giant African who had played stupid, he worked for The Shadow, too. His name was Jericho Druke, and though he didn't have a gun, he was right behind the agents, ready to help them in the coming battle.

Sheff and his crowd responded to the shots The Shadow's men delivered. Crooks alone were clipped by that first exchange, but they still had benefit of numbers. They were locking with their foemen, threatening to outslug The Shadow's three gunners, when Jericho stepped into it.

Jericho's system was as unique as it was terrific. He didn't bother with guns, because he didn't need them. He had a method of putting two crooks out of action at a time. His way was to pick up one and use him as a bludgeon to clout the other. It worked specially well, because Jericho used heads both for hitting and receiving.

The big African bashed one pair while the agents were battling the rest. Wading into the slugfest, he took a thug who was trying to sledge Cliff and used the fellow to knock down a gunner who was aiming at Clyde. One thug, Quickie, managed to break loose from Hawkeye and run after Sheff, who was cutting through the apartment.

Both stopped, Sheff and his little crony, before they were across the living room. They were faced by the latest entrant in the fray, a black-cloaked avenger whose burning eyes and aimed automatics brooked no

THE MURDERING GHOST

argument.

The Shadow!

BACKWARD, out through the hall, went Sheff and Quickie. Past Clyde and the two assassins who had transformed themselves into rescuers. Past Jericho who had returned to the elevator and was giving the helpless crooks a broad farewell grin.

Then, at The Shadow's order, Sheff and Quickie turned about. Gulping words of surrender, they went down the stairs into the receiving toils of Cardona's squad, while from behind them came the sinister laugh of The Shadow, master of this climax!

Turning about, The Shadow motioned his agents to join Jericho in the service elevator. As soon as the car descended, The Shadow went back through the apartment, stepping past the crumpled figures of senseless thugs who would soon be gathered in by the arriving police.

His work completed, The Shadow was choosing his own pet exit from the scene through the window of the room that was no longer a prison cell with Clyde Burke as its occupant. As he took that route, The Shadow delivered a parting laugh that carried to the hallway where Inspector Cardona and his men had just arrived from the stairs.

This was The Shadow's roundup, but he was turning it over to the law as represented by Inspector Joe Cardona. The triumph was one that Cardona deserved, for he had worked hard on this case, actually duplicating The Shadow's theory.

There was more to come than this, for crime's web was intricate and facts would have to be proven against the persons involved. The Shadow was reserving that task for himself.

Strange, the ways of crime! With methods recognized, the guilty men identified, even with crooks in custody much could still remain to be accomplished.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XX. THE FINAL PROOF

NEVER had stranger crime occurred in Manhattan than this plot to acquire wealth through ghostly manifestations, with murder merely its necessary by-product. Strange in every detail, the strangest feature of crime's chain was the mode of its discovery. It wasn't a case of dividing credit between The Shadow and the law. The real acclaim went to another party, a gentleman named Caglio!

He was the real hero Caglio.

Amid the tangle of fakery, Caglio stood out as a mystic both genuine and sincere. He couldn't explain the thing himself, for when Caglio spoke with "voices," his subconscious was at work.

Unfortunately, Caglio's trance had been interrupted when Rudy's attack wrenched him from his psychic mood. He'd exposed the theft of Hobgood's invention, but the spirit of the old inventor had failed to furnish further details regarding the men responsible. Hence the law had two crooks in its clutch, Sheff Hassell and Rudy Burgaw, but couldn't decide between them.

Sheff coolly averred that Hobgood had delivered his wonderful machine prior to the night when the old house

THE MURDERING GHOST

had gone up in flames, carrying Hobgood with it. Thus Sheff defined Hobgood's death a suicide, the inventor's only way out of his financial troubles. As for the things that had happened in the seance room, Rudy was the man to question. He'd been there, while Sheff hadn't.

Not that Sheff went so far as to accuse Rudy of killing Tarkingham and Kalvah. Such an accusation would have implicated Sheff, too. Instead, Sheff smoothly suggested that the law already held the real murderers: namely, Madame Yonina and Roy Aulander. Thus Cardona's arrest of that pair was turning from a bluff into a boomerang.

As for Rudy, he hotly accused Sheff of everything. He declared that Sheff had gone to Hobgood's and murdered the old inventor; that Sheff had sneaked into the Yonina seance and shot Tarkingham. Rudy admitted that he'd carried a gun himself on that occasion, but that he had chucked it from the window unfired. He also confessed that he had opened the door for Sheff at the Kalvah seance, and that it was Sheff who must have buried the knife in the medium's back.

Until then, Rudy hadn't believed that Sheff was actually engaged in murder. It had taken Kalvah's death to open Rudy's eyes.

When Inspector Cardona summed up all this, he found that he had plenty of goods on Rudy, but not enough on Sheff. The fact that Swami Benares had turned State's evidence was not enough.

The bearded swami hadn't entered the case until after the murders. His testimony simply bore out Cardona's theory that Sheff Hassell was the brain behind the murder as well as fraud, but did not supply a vital fact to prove the case.

ON the third day after The Shadow's roundup, Cardona received a phone call from the police commissioner summoning him to a conference in the psychic laboratory.

Cardona arrived there in a glum mood, to find both Weston and Cranston chatting with Professor Hayne. There were two other visitors, however, though Joe hadn't expected them. One was Caglio, the other Suffolk.

It was Caglio who had something to say. He was experiencing a return of his psychic powers, they were building up to a remarkable degree. He felt that in the favorable setting of this laboratory, he could project his astral self and again communicate with the spirit of Leander Hobgood. This suggestion brought an eager exclamation from Professor Hayne.

"Perhaps you could materialize Hobgood's spirit!" expressed Hayne. "If you could produce such phenomena, Caglio, you would win the psychic award!"

"I am not a materializing medium," objected Caglio, a frown upon his darkish face. "Indeed, I doubt that genuine materializations are possible. In my trances I visit strange realms; whether they are actual or imaginary, I have never been sure. But to bring the inhabitants of those realms of this earthly plane would seem far beyond the meager powers with which I am gifted."

Milton Suffolk was listening intently to all that Caglio said. Troubled at first, Suffolk's expression brightened when he learned that Caglio did not intend to produce physical manifestations at his forthcoming seance. Turning to Hayne, Suffolk said:

"You may enter Caglio's name as a contestant, professor. We owe him the courtesy, and the award is still open. I would further suggest that the seance be held this evening."

THE MURDERING GHOST

With evening, a strange group gathered, composing the most remarkable circle that had ever adorned a seance room. For they were linked alternately with hands and handcuffs! To make this seance count to the full, Inspector Cardona had brought his whole collection of suspects to the psychic laboratory!

They were arranged in pairs, those sitters. For example, Cardona sat with Sheff Hassell on his left, the handcuffs hooking Joe's left wrist to Sheff's right. With his right hand, Cardona gripped the left hand of Rudy Burgaw, whose right wrist was hooked with a handcuff that connected with the left wrist of Clyde Burke. So they alternated, each prisoner to the left of a captor.

Commissioner Weston had charge of Swami Benares. Milton Suffolk was hooked to Roy Aulander. Harry Vincent held Quickie with a handcuff, while Margo Lane was custodian of Madame Yonina, a very curious arrangement, considering the comparative sizes of their wrists.

There was one left over: Lamont Cranston. So he took his place between Margo and Sheff, to complete the circle. The arrangement suited Cardona perfectly. He was glad that Sheff's free hand was in the grip of so competent a person as Cranston. For the one man who might try to make trouble was Sheff Hassell.

Professor Hayne was at large, because he was the master of ceremonies. Likewise, Caglio was free, because he was to be the medium. Caglio's range was limited, however, to a cabinet in the center of the circle.

It was a plain cabinet, made of black cloth, but it had no front curtain, because Caglio preferred to face the sitters when he went into his trance.

In order to make the circle large enough, the sitters were forced to extend their arms. Fortunately, the chairs had arms, too, so that people could rest their elbows and readily support the weight of the alternating handcuffs.

Cranston had to keep getting up and down again to let Hayne in and out of the circle, for the professor was placing various objects in front of the cabinet, such as a bowl of melted paraffin, a bell, a tambourine, and a slate with a piece of chalk.

As a final preparation, Hayne stepped outside the circle and moved the big detectors that looked like juke boxes. They were as heavy as they were bulky, but they had rollers which made them easy to shift. Hayne left them just close enough so that they would whine should anyone try to leave the circle, which was a rather laughable precaution, considering that most of the sitters were handcuffed.

From outside the circle, Hayne dimmed the lights. In the cabinet, Caglio fixed his eyes in a hypnotic stare but couldn't seem to go into his trance, because the sight of so many faces disturbed him. So Hayne dimmed the lights further and finally extinguished them entirely, turning on the two red bulbs instead.

Caglio's voice began its inarticulate utterances. At times it shrilled, again it babbled, and at moments it became a deep, hoarse basso that represented an earthbound spirit as completely shackled by invisible bonds as were the sitters with their handcuffs. Then came the voice that Caglio sought the dry, precise tone of the dead inventor, Leander Hobgood!

"You have summoned me," it said. "Summoned me again from my distant abode. I came because I have a duty to perform. I must make amends for my faults on earth, that I may reach a higher plane than the limbo wherein I now dwell!

"I spoke before, only to be interrupted. Tonight, I shall do more than speak. I shall tax the strength of this friendly medium to the utmost, so that I may appear among you and point out men responsible for murder.

THE MURDERING GHOST

Quiet, everyone, until I have joined your circle!"

THE high tone broke off. Caglio seemed to shrink in his cabinet, moaning as though undergoing a great ordeal. He wasn't visible in the red lights, but his moans located his precise position.

It couldn't possibly be Caglio who was making the little patch of luminous glow that moved about the solid floor in front of the cabinet. A glow that grew, coming upward like a spreading mushroom, swelling to human size, until it stood in the very center of the circle, revealed for what it was.

Everyone recognized the thin, morose face that shone in the dark above a pair of stooped shoulders that were draped with a whitened robe. Even the motions of the scrawny hands below those shoulders were characteristic of the man who had owned them while alive.

The shape that had materialized itself was more than a mere wandering shade from the beyond. It was the ghost of Leander Hobgood, present in the spirit instead of the flesh, prepared to point out men of murder that the law might hold them for their crimes!

CHAPTER XXI. CRIME'S AWARD

WEIRD though they were, the previous happenings in this seance room seemed trivial compared to the present scene.

At other seances, victims like Tarkingham and Kalvah had been consigned to the great beyond. Tonight, an inhabitant of that other sphere had retraced his way to this room where death had ruled. Belonging to the dead, the spirit of Leander Hobgood was ready, through deed as well as word, to clear the mystery of murder!

Margo's reactions were a sample of those that swept the circle. She quivered helplessly, gaining little solace from the mighty quaking that was occurring on her left, where Madame Yonina was trembling in elephantine style.

Sight of a real spirit was a real horror to the lady who faked them, and when the avenging ghost turned her way, Madame Yonina shrieked and wallowed deep in her chair. Heaved by the fat lady's contortions, Margo was catching some of the same terror, when Cranston's firm hand tightened with a grip that calmed her.

As Hobgood's ghost swung around the circle, Yonina quieted. A spirit hand had lifted and was pointing an accusing finger in another direction. As though its eyes could penetrate the darkness, Hobgood's wraith was singling out one man: Sheff Hassell.

On his right, Cranston could feel Sheff go tense. He'd baited the living Hobgood, Sheff had, and this reversal of the process, by a ghost, was something that really scared him.

"You were responsible for the death of my physical self," accused the voice of Hobgood. "You, Sheff Hassell, who also murdered Don Tarkingham –"

"No, no!" interrupted Sheff. "Burgaw did it!"

"And likewise Kalvah," continued the ghostly tone. "Three murders, all the work of one man. You, Sheff Hassell!"

Sheff was on his feet, only to be dragged down by Weston's yank of the handcuffs. Having closed Sheff's case, the ghost of Hobgood turned his gaze over the group.

THE MURDERING GHOST

"To prove those charges," announced the spirit, "I shall leave proof of my actual return. Such things as these are trivial!" The ghost picked up the bell and tambourine, tossing them to the floor. "But here is something that will show as evidence!"

The ghost dipped its hand into the bowl of paraffin and brought it out dripping with melted wax. Its hand then moved back and forth to cool the heated substance, finally dipping it into a pitcher of water that had been provided in case Caglio needed a drink between trance utterances.

With its other hand, the ghostly form drew away the paraffin mold like a glove and placed it on the table. Then taking chalk, Hobgood's spirit rubbed it upon the slate to cover the surface with a whitish layer.

Margo could hear Cranston's calming tone close to her ear. He was reminding her that these were common events at spirit seances. Fake ghosts often formed paraffin molds in the fashion that Hobgood's had. Slate-writing was a customary process, too. The whole thing could be trickery on Caglio's part. Smart business, calling himself a trance medium, then faking a materialization.

Cranston was drawing Margo closer as he whispered these details; he finally released her hand to let it rest on the chair arm. Margo scarcely realized the fact, for she was intently watching the actions of the ghost.

The spirit that looked like Hobgood, but which could be Caglio in masquerade, was doing something quite unusual. It was pressing its fingertips upon the white layer of chalk which spread over the surface of the slate. Finishing that process, the bowed shape doubled. As though drawing a black hood across itself, the shining wraith diminished and was gone!

Even before the ghost had vanished, Caglio's moans renewed from within the cabinet. While spectators sat numb and silent, wondering what would happen next, Caglio's voice became a violent shriek, delivered in a tone that was definitely his own.

"Lights!" called Caglio. "Quickly, professor! The lights!"

THE lights came on instantly, Hayne in his distant corner snapping the switch. Margo was gripping Cranston's hand again; she had grabbed for it during Caglio's shrieks.

And now Caglio was rolling from his chair inside the cabinet, only to land on hands and knees and rise shakily, as though recuperating from the effects of some powerful force that had gripped him during the materialization.

There wasn't a trace of Hobgood's ghost. Caglio's cabinet was black and empty. But the evidence of the specter's visit remained in the shape of the paraffin mold and the fingerprints on the slate!

Professor Hayne was ducking under a pair of arms to get inside the circle and examine those exhibits. Caglio didn't seem to understand what they were all about, having been deep in his trance, so Hayne was explaining matters. His eyes brightening suddenly, Caglio picked up the mold and the slate.

"I've proven it!" exclaimed Caglio. "I've proven everything!"

"I'll say you have," assured Cardona, from his chair. "Whether that ghost was real or not, it talked sense. I should have known that the big-shot in the racket would do the heavy work." Joe turned to glare at Sheff. "I'd say that proves it!"

Sheff returned a snarl.

THE MURDERING GHOST

"Proves what?" he demanded. "You haven't learned anything you didn't know already. If you think I'm going to break down and say I killed Tarkingham and Kalvah, you've got another guess!"

Caglio interrupted Cardona before the latter could answer Sheff.

"This mold!" exclaimed Caglio. "It looks like Hobgood's hand. But these fingerprints are more important. If they match Hobgood's, they prove that I materialized his ghost!"

Caglio waved the slate in front of Cardona's eyes, and Joe suddenly realized that the medium wasn't interested in proof of murder. Caglio wanted to prove that he had met the terms of the award provided by Suffolk and others. So Joe fished in his pocket and brought out a batch of documents, which he handed to Hayne.

"You'll find Hobgood's fingerprints with those, professor," informed Cardona. "We took them back when people were talking about bringing swindle charges against him. Look them over."

Hayne looked them over, as did Caglio. Both exclaimed over the discovery that they made. The fingerprints on Cardona's sheet were identical with the impressions that the ghost had left on the chalk-marked slate!

"I've won!" shouted Caglio. "What about it, Mr. Suffolk? Can you ask for more evidence than this?"

Suffolk took the slate and the fingerprint samples, holding both in his right hand, as his left was still clamped to Aulander's wrist. Peering across, Aulander checked the fingerprints, too, and stared in real amazement. Turning, Suffolk saw Aulander's expression and realized that if such a skeptic accepted this evidence, it would have to stand.

"You win," Suffolk told Caglio. "It will cost me a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, half of the entire offer. But I can guarantee you the entire amount, Caglio, because the other contributors have placed their funds with me. So come to my penthouse and I shall give you a check for the full sum."

Before Caglio could express his thanks in his own persuasive voice, a strange quiver filled the room. It was the weird note of a sinister laugh that carried a mockery more ghostly than any voice that Caglio had produced.

Hearing that mirth, Margo looked to her right, wondering why Lamont had chosen to use The Shadow's tone. For the first time, Margo saw that she was no longer gripping Cranston's hand. The one she'd found in the dark belonged to Sheff Hassell!

Cranston had left the circle before the lights came on! And now, as The Shadow, he was making his location known. Repeated, with a stronger accent on the shudder, his laugh was coming from the cabinet that Caglio had deserted. As startled sitters stared, they saw a shape more ghostly than any ghost, for it was materializing in full light.

The cloaked shape of The Shadow!

"YOUR theory stands proven, inspector," spoke The Shadow, addressing Cardona in a sibilant tone. "A master mind, seeking wealth, resorted to the use of accomplices to gain his cause. This man is one" – The Shadow clamped a gloved hand on Caglio "because it was he who produced the ghost!"

Cardona stared, but not dumbly. It was dawning on Joe that Caglio had played the very part that Swami Benares had tried without success. But Caglio had won, which proved that he was working for a smarter

THE MURDERING GHOST

brain than Sheff Hassell!

"And the other accomplice" The Shadow's tone carried its same taunt "could only have been the ghost. Tell me, professor" The Shadow was swinging to Hayne "which of those detectors is your original model?"

In his dapper, half-puzzled style, Hayne looked from one big box to the other. He finally pointed to the blocky contrivance that was standing on the right. A whispered laugh issuing from his hidden lips, The Shadow stepped to the other detector, dragging Caglio with him.

When Caglio started a frantic struggle, The Shadow doubled his arm behind him and spun him into the grasp of Commissioner Weston, who found Swami Benares only too eager to help him clutch the prisoner.

By then, The Shadow had reached the detector at the left. His automatic drawn, he stepped to its side and leaned his head to whisper through the front:

"You can come out... before I blow you out!"

The front of the five-foot contrivance bashed open, disgorging a stooped figure that thrust a gun ahead of it. From The Shadow's tone, the man inside the detector thought that the cloaked fighter was in his path; hence his sudden surge.

Not meeting The Shadow, the stooped man plunged headlong, losing his revolver. Before he could grab for the weapon, The Shadow had reached him and had picked him up by the scruff of his neck. With his foot, The Shadow kicked the lost revolver to one side.

Great was the gasp that swept the astonished circle. The Shadow had produced something more remarkable in full light than Caglio had in the dark. Which was very odd, considering that their production was identical. Under existing circumstances, however, The Shadow's production of a living man in the flesh outdid the materialization of a ghost.

The man from the cabinet, now cringing in The Shadow's clutch, was Leander Hobgood!

HE was very much alive, old Hobgood, a fact that The Shadow had guessed even before Caglio did the ghost production. For The Shadow remembered that night when Hobgood had prowled his own house, moving through trick panels instead of doors. The Shadow knew something that Sheff Hassell hadn't guessed: namely, that Hobgood's room had an exit other than its lone door.

It didn't stand to reason that Hobgood would have stayed in his little room to let himself be blown to atoms by an explosion he intended for an enemy. Hobgood had wanted to get rid of Sheff, but had failed. However, it didn't matter, for Sheff had become very useful as a person to blame for crime to come.

The Shadow was gripping Hobgood with one hand; putting his automatic away, he grasped Caglio with the other hand. Displaying them as a pair of rats, he repeated his earlier accusations:

"Two accomplices, these. Caglio, the medium; Hobgood, the ghost of himself. Working hand in hand with the real brain of the game!"

Professor Hayne suddenly found himself the center of attention. Most vehement of his accusers was Milton Suffolk, who sprang to his feet, dragging Aulander along.

"You talked me into this, Hayne!" stormed Suffolk. "You, with your talk of a fund for genuine phenomena –"

THE MURDERING GHOST

The Shadow's laugh interrupted. Suffolk turned to face three pairs of accusing eyes. Not only the eyes of The Shadow, but those of Caglio and Hobgood. Already exposed as crooks, they could gain nothing by Suffolk's false charge against Hayne.

"Yours was the master brain, Suffolk," expressed The Shadow. "It was you, not Hayne, who cultivated both Hobgood and Caglio. You knew Hobgood for a crook because he had actually tried to swindle you, though you did not publicize the fact. As for Caglio, you probably picked him as Sheff Hassell chose Swami Benares because you had looked into his record."

Both Hobgood and Caglio nodded, as admission that Suffolk had forced them to become his accomplices under threat. Suffolk was still protesting innocence, arguing that he'd be a fool to rob himself. Again The Shadow's tone silenced him.

"You were playing for half stakes, Suffolk," declared The Shadow. "Not your own money, but the funds that others furnished. Half the cash that Sheff hoped to gain by his crude imitation of your game; but in playing for half, you were doubling your security which made it quite worth while. You could pose as the big loser in a swindle where your supposed loss would represent your actual gain."

Again there were nods from Hobgood and Caglio, proving that their share was to be nothing. Hobgood was to keep the profits of his own swindles; Caglio would have a future business as the marvelous medium who had won the psychic award.

Of the two, Hobgood had played the harder part. He'd lived in the psychic lab ever since his "death," smuggled into the place inside the new detector box that Suffolk had furnished Hayne.

The original detector was filled with coils, but this one had a compact hookup, confined to the top. Its front open, the interior showed a gaping space wherein Hobgood had hidden during every seance, and from which he had sneaked tonight to play the ghost of himself!

MATTERS of murder were automatically solved. Hobgood couldn't have killed Tarkingham or Kalvah while cramped in the detector, whereas Caglio had been absent from those seances. Hence Suffolk was the twofold murderer, though Hobgood had received the death gun after Suffolk used it, and kept it in the detector box.

Suffolk was saying that much in so many wards, while he berated his accomplices for having deserted him.

Then, with a vicious lunge, Suffolk was up from his chair, dragging Aulander like a helpless puppy on a leash. Catching the same mad desire for escape, Hobgood and Caglio sprang upon The Shadow, who shook them off while Suffolk was snatching for the revolver that was lying on the floor.

Another hand beat Suffolk to the grab the left hand of Sheff Hassell. Jabbing the muzzle against Suffolk's chest, Sheff tugged the trigger. Such was Sheff's murderous answer to the rival who had let him take the blame for crime. For his next target, Sheff wanted The Shadow.

Sheff was still linked to Joe Cardona. His own gun drawn, Joe tried to slash the revolver from Sheff's hand. With a quick fling, Sheff sent Cardona reeling to the handcuffs end, and as his left hand came around, Sheff found his gun muzzle pointing straight in Joe's direction. Sheff's raucous laugh was a prelude to another trigger tug.

A prelude with no act to follow. The Shadow's .45 was looming from between the struggling forms of Hobgood and Caglio. Its muzzle spoke with a tongue of flame that scorched a bullet straight to Sheff's heart. As Sheff slumped beside his dead rival, Suffolk, eager hands snatched Hobgood and Caglio as The Shadow

THE MURDERING GHOST

flung them to the circle.

Commissioner Weston grabbed Hobgood, with Swami Benares aiding. Clyde Burke suppressed Caglio, with Rudy Burgaw a willing helper. Like an overtone above the scene of strife came a strange laugh, solemn as a knell. It marked the departure of The Shadow.

He was gone, that cloaked victor whose keen brain had probed the facts of crime, into the blackness of the cabinet. Remarkable indeed was that vanish.

While Professor Hayne was staring into the darkness, Lamont Cranston stepped up beside him and suggested that they take the cabinet apart. They did so, rolling its curtains into little bundles, leaving nothing but the cabinet's skeleton frame!

All that the cabinet contained when they demolished it were the black garments that Cranston had discarded after his shadowy disappearance, and it was Cranston who calmly rolled the coat and hat into one of the curtained walls, from which he could reclaim them later!

The Shadow's disappearance went unnoticed by Joe Cardona, who was busy unlocking handcuffs from the wrists of two dead master minds. Joe was muttering to himself as he looked from Sheff Hassell to Milton Suffolk.

"I knew there was a brain behind it," mumbled Joe. "I should have guessed that Sheff's wasn't big enough. And Suffolk was a bigger brain –"

There Cardona paused, for comparisons were useless. Brains of crime, whatever their size or craft, could not compete with the master mind of justice The Shadow!

THE END