

THE MUSEUM MURDERS

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. MANHATTAN MENACE

LIKE a crouched monster watching for its prey, the Argyle Museum squatted in its own gloom, surrounded by darkness that was itself a relic of departed years. No location could have been better suited to silence and seclusion than this spot in the very midst of Manhattan.

It was the vortex in the maelstrom of the metropolis, a calm center in a perpetual storm – this brownstone edifice once the residence of Henry Argyle. Living and dying in the days of plutocrats, Argyle had left the ornate mansion and its surrounding grounds as a museum, not only to bear his name but to contain the many art treasures on which he had spent much of his vast fortune.

The status of the Argyle Museum had never been quite fully established. It was open to the public, but only during brief periods of the day. This enabled it to go tax-free under the head of a public institution, but its destinies were controlled by a board of private directors, as ordained by Henry Argyle.

Men of wealth, all these, who cherished the memory of Henry Argyle and kept close watch upon the

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preserves over which they had been appointed guardians. In actuality, the museum was a fortress, policed by well-trained hirelings, a stronghold that no men of crime had ever dared invade.

Yet this was to be moving night for the Argyle Museum!

The reason? War! Old Argyle, in all his elaborate precautions to protect his treasures for posterity, had not foreseen the day when attacks would be possible from the air. His mansion had concrete foundations that matched the thickness of its walls; the windows were triple-barred; but the roof, though sheathed with a layer of metal and equipped with alarms, could never stand the strain of a high-explosive charge.

Should a lone air raider fly over Manhattan and drop a single demolition bomb in the blackened hollow where the Argyle Museum was flanked by towering skyscrapers, there would be utter devastation among the priceless antiquities that old Henry had accumulated.

Hence the directors were in session behind the drawn steel shutters of their conference room in the museum itself. Not a preliminary meeting this, but a final one. Long since, Ewell Darden, chairman of the directors, had ordained the transfer of irreplaceable treasures to somewhere outside the city.

Somewhere that even Darden did not know. The choice was to be made by lot. Various directors had individually investigated suitable places, in accordance with the strict requirements set by the board. On the table in front of them lay hollow wooden capsules – some directors had as many as four or five – in which they had written the names of remote strongholds where the treasures could be safely housed for the duration.

Ewell Darden was a gray-haired man, thin of features, but sharp of eye and strong of jaw. Himself an art collector, he had become the chairman of directors through dint of long service. Compared to him, the remaining directors, a dozen-odd, were a drab lot – with one notable exception.

The man who violated the rule was hawk-faced, his expression almost masklike. He looked younger than the rest, by far, yet it was impossible to determine the exact age of that calm, immobile countenance. Suffice it that he, too, was wealthy and appreciated art. His name was Lamont Cranston.

A name that symbolized The Shadow – to those allowed to know it!

As Cranston, The Shadow posed as a man of leisure, who hobnobbed with his friend the police commissioner and sought the company of the wealthy. For in his other self, The Shadow, his business was to crack down on crime. By knowing the moves of the law, by studying in advance the targets against which criminals might shoot, The Shadow, along with cleaning up crime, did marvels in preventing evil.

If ever crime could wish an opportunity, it had one – the priceless possessions of the Argyle Museum!

Recognizing that fact, Ewell Darden was admitting it in no mincing terms. Crisply, he was reading the list of items to be moved. There were jeweled crowns and other regalia from the palaces of rajahs; statuettes of gold, similarly gem-encrusted; even suits of armor inlaid with precious metals.

There were priceless paintings that certain unscrupulous collectors would purchase, had they the opportunity, even if they had to keep them hidden for years to come. There were rare porcelains, fabulous tapestries, which might by clever alteration be changed to pass as other specimens that were known to exist.

There was no hiding the value of the Argyle collection. Its rarities had been catalogued in a volume replete with illustrations. Artists and craftsmen had been allowed to make replicas of certain treasures for exhibit elsewhere, always with the edict that such imitations be later destroyed.

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Yes, the whole world – and particularly its lower strata – knew what the brownstone museum contained, though no item, not even the tiniest, had ever been stolen from these premises.

Those facts reviewed, Ewell Darden declared:

"Tonight, our most valued treasures are being packed. Within another hour, the armored vans will carry the precious crates and boxes to a destination unknown."

There was a buzz of approval among the directors when Darden ordered them to drop their capsules in a wooden collection box as it passed around the table. He stepped over to an ancient wooden wheel mounted on a creaky frame, a double wheel with an inner trough. It was a device once used in Roman lotteries, and from this a chosen capsule was to be taken.

"We shall deliver the selected lot to Carl Croom," declared Darden. "He alone will learn the destination and guide the vans there. The longer our new treasure house is kept secret, the more time Croom will have to add protective measures."

As he spoke, Darden looked to his right, where a stranger was seated. He was Clyde Burke, a self-possessed newspaper reporter who had chanced into the conference. However, the precautions were such that a member of the press was allowable, though none had been invited. Nevertheless, Burke was smart enough to act as though indifferent when directors glanced his way.

A telephone rang on the table at Clyde's elbow and the reporter answered it. The call was for Cranston, so Clyde handed it over. An interesting procedure, considering that Clyde Burke was secretly an agent of The Shadow, here by his chief's design! For The Shadow had expected a call that might necessitate his departure, and this happened to be it.

Most casually, Cranston strolled from the meeting. He had another appointment elsewhere, and since even the result of the lottery was to be a secret, he had no reason to remain.

Cranston moved through the exhibit rooms of the museums, where workers were finishing the crating job under direction of Carl Croom, the blunt, forceful man who had been selected to convey the treasures to their new citadel, wherever it might be.

Only the irreplaceable items were to go, hence the museum was still well stocked with exhibits. Likewise, Croom had personally selected the attendants who were to accompany him. The museum being overstaffed with elderly guards who dated back to Argyle's day, Croom showed preference for younger men, though some were newcomers. Those that he'd hand-picked were working with the stacks of crates.

And Cranston, in passing, noted a clean-cut chap among that select group whose presence was an excellent addition. The man in question was Harry Vincent, another of The Shadow's competent agents.

Yes, all were well within the museum, where The Shadow's aids were on duty. Cranston's impassive lips registered a very faint smile as he walked between two standing rows of antique armor that was to stay in the museum, since it was not of the inlaid-gold variety.

Then, through the outer door, Cranston passed two human sentinels in the form of private detectives. At the gate, another pair of such watchdogs eyed him as he entered a waiting limousine.

And then the big car was rolling around the corner, its observers little knowing that Cranston was already transforming himself into The Shadow, that cloaked fighter whose prowess could outmatch a horde!

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MEANWHILE, Clyde Burke was watching the progress of the lottery, ancient Roman style. Trying not to look too interested, he leaned his elbow on the table, plucked a rubber band from some that were loose in the drawer and idly looped it over forefinger and thumb, to trigger it at a bronze bust beyond the lottery wheel.

Darden was dropping his own capsules in the box with the others. He delegated one director to shake the box and pour the wooden pellets into the groove of the antique lottery wheel, which another man was directed to spin.

The wheel whirled and the capsules rattled around within its double rim, but none flew free. All that flew anywhere was another rubber band with which Clyde bopped the bronze bust in the nose.

About to reload, Clyde heard indignant buzzes from the directors near him and realized that the heroic bust represented old Henry Argyle, the presiding deity in these precincts. So Clyde guiltily tossed the rubber band to the floor and watched the lottery finish.

As the wheel slackened, its pellets subsiding toward the bottom, Ewell Darden ran his hand against the stream and plucked one with his fingers.

Clyde shifted for a closer look as Darden stepped forward. Again, directors gave him reproving glances, so Clyde pretended he was picking up the rubber band – which he did, because he found it promptly. It happened, however, that Darden wasn't going to open the capsule that he had picked at random. Instead, he called for Croom, who arrived immediately. Darden gave Croom the capsule.

"As supervisor of the new museum," declared Darden, "it will be your duty to convoy the trucks there, Croom. Out of two dozen possible places, the new museum has been chosen by lot. You will find your destination named in the paper within this capsule. Do not open it until the armored procession is safely under way."

Nodding, Croom shook the wooden capsule and heard the wadded paper rattle inside it. So he put the closed pill in his pocket, while Darden was adding that everything was in Croom's hands. Once established at the new goal, Croom was to inform the directors of his whereabouts, but not until he felt that all was secure.

As Croom left, Clyde took advantage of his reporter's privilege, putting questions straight to Darden.

"Would I be right," inquired Clyde, "if I stated that you've placed everything in the hands of this one man – Carl Croom?"

Directors broke in before Darden could reply. They had chosen Croom for this assignment by a majority vote, on the basis of his capability and service. While he had charge of the expedition, other responsible men would be with Croom, accountable for the welfare of the treasures quite as much as he.

"But this place where they're going" – Clyde spoke with a speculative note – "how can they move in on such short notice?"

Darden explained that every country stronghold picked by the directors had been taken on option, such being a necessary proviso. The options ran until the first of the month – which was a few days off – and after that date, all options expired – except on the one place where Croom and his caravan happened to arrive. Mere occupancy of the premises would automatically establish a five-year's lease.

While Darden stated this, the directors nodded to show they hadn't missed a trick. So Clyde put another question.

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"Wasn't it an oversight," he queried, "not notifying the police that this was moving night?"

Darden's reply was a confident smile.

"On the contrary," he replied, "it happens that we have notified the police. None are present because it would have been poor policy to advertise the time at which the collection was to be removed. The trucks will arrive, be loaded, and depart in due course very shortly, with no fanfare.

"But surrounding the nine city blocks, of which this is the center, will be police – chiefly plain–clothes men – who will close in as soon as the armored caravan has passed. We can all assure you, Mr. Burke, that no one will trail our vans to their destination."

Darden's stern smile intimated that reporters would be blocked off like any other trailers, a hint that Clyde would be wasting his time if he tried to follow the caravan. Meanwhile, one of the directors, peering from a shuttered window, turned to announce that the trucks had arrived.

Politely, Darden invited Clyde to come along and witness the loading, so the reporter did. On the way past the crates, Clyde sidled a shrug to Harry Vincent, a gesture that his fellow–agent understood. There wouldn't be any fireworks tonight; couldn't be, with all the precautions that Darden and the directors had taken.

Clyde took it that The Shadow had simply received last–hour information that the police were to be covering the shipment of rarities that totaled millions of dollars; hence, as Cranston, The Shadow had probably left to congratulate his friend the police commissioner on a duty well performed. In reaching that conclusion, Clyde didn't note the loophole in his own argument.

The situation at the Argyle Museum still offered a lure to crime. What seemed to be a double precaution could better be termed a baited trap. Like the museum directors, like the police commissioner, Clyde Burke was overlooking the prospect as men of crime might view it.

One person alone had seen the flaw: The Shadow.

Perhaps through ignorance, men of crime would not realize that the odds were heavily against them. But that was not the issue; the real point was that crime was due to strike.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER II. THRUSTS FROM THE DARK

OUTSIDE the Argyle Museum, the armored vans had slithered smoothly to a stop in front of the great stone gates. All was quiet on this secluded street – too quiet. This oasis in the midst of Manhattan's turmoil was just the spot for a surprise attack from the surrounding darkness.

In from a neighboring corner glided a figure of blackness, the cloaked shape of The Shadow. The nonchalant Mr. Cranston had not traveled more than a block before leaving his limousine in the guise of black that marked him as The Shadow. Hence Cranston had not learned of the police provisions to safeguard the vans that came from this vicinity. His call hadn't come from the commissioner.

It was a call from Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, notifying him that certain crooks were on the move. Reports from agents in the underworld attributed the mobilization of crime's hordes to a notorious malefactor named Wolf Lapine, whose ability at cracking into banks was equaled only by his skill at covering such

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operations.

In brief, Wolf's criminal listing was "known" rather than "wanted," where the law was concerned. But Wolf was wanted by The Shadow, who was quite as anxious to crack down on Mr. Lapine as the latter was to crack down on banks – or the Argyle Museum.

There was something that The Shadow noticed even before he left the limousine. Cars were sliding into this area to join a few others that were parked inconspicuously near the museum. Those cars were already established before The Shadow saw the armored trucks arrive, to be greeted by the private detectives outside of the museum.

Those private dicks were the giveaway!

They'd been here all day, easy for Wolf's spotters to observe and report that this was to be moving night. The cordon the police were forming, unknown to The Shadow, was geared to the arrival of the armored vans, no sooner. Hence it was too late for anyone to thwart the infiltration of Wolf's notorious criminal band.

Already, huddly figures were stealing from those parked cars, the rangy, stoop-shouldered figure of Wolf Lapine among them. On the outskirts, The Shadow paused by the last car that had rolled in place and suddenly made himself known to its occupants, two in number. Usually, The Shadow's process was to use his automatics as cudgels, thus silently chopping down the size of an invading mob.

This time, he gave a commanding whisper. The two men came about. One was brawny, blunt-faced; the other, a small, wizened man with sharp, quick eyes. Cliff Marsland was the blunt-faced chap; he was a strong-arm specialist who served The Shadow in the underworld. The wizened man was Hawkeye, craftiest spotter in the badlands, also an aid of The Shadow.

They'd sent the tip-off to Burbank regarding the moves of Wolf Lapine. True followers of The Shadow, Cliff and Hawkeye had trailed the motley crew, expecting contact with their chief – and they were getting it now.

Posting Cliff on the fringe, where he was at present, The Shadow started Hawkeye on a sneak along the street, to the opposite flank. Timing his own action to the wizened man's, The Shadow moved through streaky blackness across the street toward the Argyle Museum, intending to work into the very midst of Wolf's unsuspecting tribe. The crates were just beginning to come down the long front walk. Logically, Wolf would wait until all were out.

And then – the unexpected!

The fault lay with the drivers of the armored vans. Instructed to make a quick pickup of their cargo, they didn't wait for the crates to arrive. Like mechanical puppets pulled by a single string, four men popped from the bulletproof cabs of their individual vans, bounded to the back and flung wide the loading doors.

This happened just before The Shadow could reach Wolf's lurking mob. A commanding snarl broke the darkness: Wolf's word to go! He didn't have to specify the rest. As the truckers turned, startled, a dozen hoodlums came lunging from the darkness, brandishing guns in the glow of the gate lights that fronted the museum wall!

SHOTS didn't initiate the drive, otherwise The Shadow would have fired on his own. His restraint was for the benefit of the flat-footed truckers. Wolf Lapine, hat pulled down low over his eyes, was snarling for the trapped men to get away from the vans – a thing also ordered by the gestures of Wolf's followers. What Wolf intended was to take over the vans, grab the treasure crates and make an armored getaway!

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Not that Wolf knew about the police cordon; he simply wasn't leaving things to chance. Turning implements against their owners was a Lapine specialty, something he'd staged often in his bank robberies. And the men by the trucks, thinking they still might live if they obeyed, proved themselves suckers for Wolf's trick.

Still doing their puppet act, the truckers fled with one accord for the gateway to the museum, only to have Wolf's ugly snarl follow them. Having kidded these men into forgetting the security that their own vans afforded, Wolf didn't intend to let them remain at large to figure in a counterthrust or help protect the crates from the museum. His snarl was an order for his murderous followers to chop down the fleeing men as they ran!

That was where The Shadow had his say – with guns! Slashing down the nearest marksman, he delivered a fierce, challenging laugh that rose to a mighty, shivering crescendo, waking what seemed to be the echoes of gathered years from the vast gloom surrounding the Argyle Museum!

The battle laugh of The Shadow!

Few crooks could ignore that defy. On this occasion, none could. For The Shadow, slugging opponents from his path, not only wheeled to present gun muzzles in their direction; he was veering between them and the nearest armored van, indicating his full intent to take over the mobile stronghold that they sought as theirs!

They still had a way to stop him – with bullets that would more than match The Shadow's fire. Wolf's command came, but it wasn't needed, for it was drowned amid the burst of guns, Wolf's men supplying the fusillade of their own accord. And with that blast, The Shadow vanished!

Gunfire couldn't have eradicated him completely, nor would his laugh have mirthed a new taunt if any shots had reached him. Yet laugh The Shadow did, from blackness that blotted him. He'd thrown his foemen completely off their stride and aim!

A quick reverse spin was The Shadow's method. He'd abandoned his pretended drive to take over the van. Crooks were welcome to occupy the vans and drive them away, so long as those vehicles were empty. They hadn't guessed that while they fired, aiming ahead of The Shadow's well-faked drive, so as to clip him as he came into line – which he didn't.

Gone the other direction, The Shadow had accomplished his real motive. The fleeing truckers, forgotten by the men who would have massacred them, were safely through the gate and spreading to the inner shelter of the great wall surrounding the brownstone museum!

And now The Shadow's guns began to jab. Like echoes came the talk of other automatics at longer range, from both flanks. Cliff and Hawkeye were in the fray, herding Wolf's crowd into The Shadow's jurisdiction. Crime was set for a mop-up in reverse – for The Shadow, elusive in the darkness of the street, was the fighter who now controlled those gaping spaces that marked the ways of entry to the open vans.

Given brief opportunity, The Shadow would have thinned Wolf's ranks by half, with Cliff and Hawkeye chopping off all fugitives who tried to escape in flanking darkness. But Wolf, through accident rather than design, offset The Shadow's strategy. There still was escape from this untimely battleground, and Wolf took the route, howling for his crew to follow.

They dashed – except for a few who staggered – straight through the gate that led to the Argyle Museum!

Inside the wall, they scattered as the truckers had. Without wasting a moment, The Shadow followed, allowing his foemen no time to reorganize. Immediately, the old grounds of the Argyle mansion became the

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scene of a fray so incongruous that it seemed impossible that such could have happened in Manhattan.

OLD Henry Argyle hadn't been satisfied with collecting rarities solely for the interior of his mansion museum. He'd made a curio grounds outside. Roughly, the place resembled an Italian garden, with pillared bowers, marble benches, and small-sized bathing pools. To these he had added stone terraces, topped by granite statuary, a few monoliths, and even a pair of Egyptian sphinxes that flanked the entrance to a portico running along the house.

Amid this potpourri, van men and crooks dodged alike, while The Shadow in his turn picked a handy shelter. So bullets were chipping statuary and ricocheting from pillars and benches, with no appreciable effect. The occasional splashes that intervened indicated merely that some dodging fighter had tripped into a pool and was climbing out again.

The men from the vans had guns and were using them, but to no more effect than any others. It was battle hit or miss, practically all of the latter, but The Shadow preferred it that way. Wolf and his crew were putting themselves more on the spot the longer they toyed around these premises.

The Shadow's main purpose was to control the gate, outside which Cliff and Hawkeye would meet the crooks when they fled through and The Shadow would then lead others in a drive upon the pausing mob.

All this while, Carl Croom was showing himself boldly in the doorway of the museum, where Clyde Burke was cornered along with Ewell Darden and the other directors. Croom could afford to be bold, for four private detectives were flanking him, taking pot shots at the mobsters they couldn't even see. Meanwhile, Croom's workers, who included Harry Vincent, had rushed the crates back into the museum.

Now matters reached a crux. Croom wanted the detectives to make a sortie. They refused flatly; their guns were empty, for one thing. They'd be willing to defend the museum under Croom's command, but only if the battle surged into its heart. So Croom bluntly ordered them indoors as a reserve and gestured to Harry and the other picked attendants.

They had guns, too; unfired weapons that were ready. At Croom's urge, they sallied out through the wide doorway. Wolf howled for his tribe to "give it," but the command was wasted. Before more than a few scattered shots could respond, Harry and the other attendants were spread in the fancy garden. Half a dozen in number, they had fresh guns sufficient to turn the tide.

Wolf and his ruffians broke for the gate in keeping with The Shadow's expectations. All was set for a general roundup, when the sound of sirens formed a converging wail from opposite corners of the front street. The police cordon was manifesting itself in response to the prolonged outburst of gunnery from the Argyle's premises. The Shadow's trap was ruined.

Warned that police would block the desired outlet, Wolf Lapine again showed quick headwork. He'd brought his mob through the Argyle gate, and being still intact, he thought the outfit could survive another inward trip. Springing right to the center of the walk, he beckoned his cohorts into the brownstone museum itself!

Harry and others came hurtling through the Pompeian scenery, not without some mishaps around the swimming pools. Rather than risk having his allies block off his own fire, The Shadow launched on a short-cut toward the mansion to cut off the crooks and throw them back to the reception committee of the attendants, which included Harry.

In the doorway, The Shadow saw Croom taking a quick glance out. The blunt-faced man dodged swiftly from sight, shouting for the reserves – those private dicks who, by The Shadow's calculations, would by this

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time be crowding under tables, shoving out the directors already hiding there.

So The Shadow gave no further thought to the interior of the museum. Lunging from beside the brownstone building wall, he wheeled to meet the rush of Wolf and his thugs, planning to outslug them and then deliver bullets if sledging tactics didn't stop their surge.

He met them just below the steps and let them carry him upward with their drive, so that he could bash down from a vantage point against the wild swings of their guns.

Then The Shadow was stopped, hard. Stopped with the halting of the crooks themselves. More, he was flung downward along with those very foemen as they reeled back from a superior attack, a charge that carried more weight than The Shadow's!

Fresh fighters were in this strife, battlers who were immune to harm, powerful through their sheer inertia. Fighters launched by Croom, the dependable protector of the Argyle treasures. They came in a clanging avalanche, sweeping The Shadow into the wave of crooks before him – a mass of battlers in full armor, living relics of an ancient past!

CHAPTER III. BROKEN CRIME

IF The Shadow wanted advice on how to end a close-range struggle, he was getting it – a perfect demonstration. In one swoop, Croom had poured a flood of human tanks into a slugfest to produce immediate results. The armored men weren't knights of yore, they were the four private detectives acting on Croom's orders – and the reluctance they'd shown earlier was gone.

These four weren't bringing guns. They didn't need such weapons, considering that they were wearing metal gauntlets. They swung the mailed fists right and left, flailing heads that could not duck them. And the results they gained almost included The Shadow, who to them was just another fighter in the crowd that tried to block their way.

The Shadow had more than once conjectured on the fighting ability of such human ironclads and had passed the idea by, which was logical enough, considering that a fighter weighted down with armor would lose in mobility whatever he gained in strength. But Croom had saved the system for an ideal situation wherein it could prove its worth.

He'd pitched his metallic squad into a human tangle that hadn't time to escape the surprise attack. Furthermore, the term "pitched" was accurate. They came headlong because they couldn't help it, stumbling down the steps with gathering momentum that made them all the more formidable. Only by diving headlong and taking a swift sideward roll did The Shadow escape the battering power of these improvised Galahads.

Wolf Lapine managed to dive the other way while the toppling knights were flattening a few of his followers. Coming to hands and knees, The Shadow thought the drive was over, considering how the armored men had misjudged their footwork. But there came an element on which The Shadow hadn't calculated. One man in armor might have clattered helpless, but with four involved, there was a chance for cooperation.

They clanked against each other, stopping their own falls, even to the point of helping one another up, the weight of the mail adding the needed leverage. They were swinging those metal fists, with Croom goading them to action, and it went badly with more thugs who couldn't elude their path. A few of Wolf's men, who still had cartridges, tried some spasmodic shots from longer range, therewith proving something else.

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Armor wasn't bulletproof – not to a direct hit. But in dodging, marksmen couldn't shoot point-blank. Their shots were glancing ones that ricocheted from the plates of armor. Finding their footing on the level ground, and encouraged by their own prowess, Croom's crew of ironclads hurtled onward.

The Shadow gave them right of way.

Good policy, considering that they ruled the warpath, which happened to be the way to the gate. With Harry and the attendants flanking that route, crooks couldn't get clear of the boiler-plate brigade except by dashing out to the street, where police in uniform and plain clothes were coming through. Crime was broken in a way that should have proven permanent for Wolf Lapine.

Then was manifested the flaw in Croom's strategy. As police locked with the hemmed-in crooks, the armored troop came clanging down upon them, battering even harder than before. The visors of their ill-fitting helmets were down across their eyes; in the semidarkness, they couldn't tell friend from foe. They expected the former to keep out of their way; when the police failed to do so, they were promptly classified under the heading of enemies.

The whole walk was a melee, with Harry and the other flankers leaping over benches to drag the armored reserves from the necks of the police. Timely intervention, because a swarthy police inspector, Joe Cardona by name, was just deciding that the ironclads were crooks clad in stolen armor. The museum attendants managed to shove the imitation knights apart and sprawl them among the fringes of the garden, like so many junk heaps. But in the confusion, a few crooks broke away.

Wolf Lapine was among them. They were through the gate, while The Shadow was flanking the piled men along the walk. Outside, Cliff and Hawkeye ripped shots at the fugitives, but the range was long, for The Shadow's aids had dropped across the street when the police arrived.

Then The Shadow was with them, but a chase was futile. An odd crook crouched at the wheel of a waiting car had picked up Wolf, and the few thugs with him. They'd rounded the next corner before The Shadow could open fire.

Ordering Cliff and Hawkeye to track the fugitives, The Shadow resumed his guise of Cranston and returned to the museum premises. Challenged by officers at the gate, he identified himself as a director and was admitted. Inspector Cardona was in full charge, quizzing captured crooks, the remnants of Wolf's outfit. True to tradition, they wouldn't talk.

Croom was receiving congratulations for the victory that was rightfully The Shadow's. He took the praise in prosaic style while he ordered the attendants to resume the removal of the crates. Crooks hadn't even seen the Argyle treasures, hence had fallen far short of rifling the collection.

Some of the garden statuary was chipped; the suits of armor dented. But the trappings that the private detectives were shedding proved nothing more than common armor that was to be left in the museum. The finely inlaid specimens had all been packed beforehand.

Under police supervision, the vans were loaded, and Cardona assured Darden that the police would convoy the caravan to Manhattan's limits. The directors were looking on and it wasn't out of line that they should speak to the attendants.

Thus Lamont Cranston exchanged a few words with Harry Vincent and gave him an encouraging slap on the shoulder, during which Harry was conscious that something reached his pocket. When the trip began, Cranston did not follow. It wouldn't have been policy to walk out on the directors twice the same evening.

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RIDING in the van with Croom, Harry saw his taciturn companion open the wooden capsule from the lottery wheel. Learning the destination, Croom tore the slip of paper into very tiny shreds and turned away to consult a road map. The vans were heading north toward Westchester, but Croom did not alter their course. Which gave Harry an idea that he'd be able to trace the route from then on – an impression which he changed soon after they left the city limits.

Though the police were one hundred percent positive that no one had so far trailed the vans, Croom bluntly refused to believe it. He guided the caravan over a wandering course, which frequently seemed to double on itself. He preferred secondary roads that were difficult to recognize, and not only did Harry admit himself lost but he saw that the van driver was in the same dilemma.

After hours of twisty driving, the vans might have been anywhere between the Hudson River and Long Island Sound; as for the air-line distance from Manhattan, Harry computed that as somewhere between twenty miles and one hundred, which was considerable range. At least, Croom was methodical; if anything, too much so – a point which made Harry wonder.

Inspector Cardona had attributed the assault on the museum to what seemed a logical source – spy work by the crooks themselves. The fact that the Argyle treasures were to be removed, had leaked to the public, though the time of such removal had remained a strict secret. Yet there was the possibility that criminals had acted on an inside tip.

Now Harry frankly conceded that any of the picked guards, like himself, might be responsible, but none of them had flashed anything unusual – except Carl Croom. Funny how Croom, in playing a valid hero's role, had actually paved the way for the escape of certain mobbies, including the leader of the motley horde.

Croom had launched his armored reserves after the real attack was over. The thrust crooks made into the museum was something more than desperate. They'd practically been boxing themselves in, without a chance of harming the scared directors who were barricaded in their conference room. As for the precious crates, the marauders wouldn't have time to even open them, let alone lug them to the vans that they'd failed to capture!

The net result of Croom's ironclad thrust, as Harry analyzed it, was the forestalling of The Shadow's triumph. Yet Croom's detailed description of the fray had not included mention of a cloaked fighter. Maybe Croom hadn't seen The Shadow, for no one else made such claim. Still, if Croom were hand in glove with Wolf Lapine, he had certainly done his partner an excellent turn!

Mistrusting Croom on that score, Harry likewise suspected that the man's meticulous handling of the journey could be a show to cover up his connection with crime. At least, the show was coming to its finish, for as the leading man jounced across a railway crossing, Croom announced that they were close to their journey's end.

The rest of the procession followed along a road beside the tracks, and shortly Harry heard the blare of a whistle, the rapid rattle of a train going the opposite direction.

Harry catalogued the train as a night mail bound for New York. Soon the van stopped, and Croom opened the back to clamber out. They were near a station that bore the name of Wilbury, and across the way Harry observed a darkened post office, along with a few houses of the town. Though he had never heard of Wilbury, the information was all that he needed.

While Croom was contacting the other vans, Harry opened The Shadow's note and read it by a hanging lantern above a crate. It was a code that Harry could read rapidly, which was necessary because the blue-inked lines faded rapidly, as was the way with communications between The Shadow and his agents.

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The vanishing ink having performed its trick, Harry moistened his thumb and dabbed it on an upper corner of the note, causing the brief appearance of the number "1," which marked this as the first message of a series.

Croom arrived suddenly from the direction of the post office. Harry had just time to toss the wadded sheet from the back of the van, while closing the door at Croom's direction. He stooped as he did it, and turned about to catch a flash of suspicion from Croom's eyes, but not a word was spoken.

Confident that Croom had not seen him toss away the blank paper, Harry took it that the man's glance had a different reason. It could be that Croom felt that Harry was watching him too closely; maybe checking on him when he contacted the other vans and came back from a different direction.

QUITE bland again, Croom was beckoning Harry through to the front of the van. There Croom bluntly told the driver that he and the other van men were to quarter their vehicles and stay with the museum hirelings until further notice.

The trucker didn't object; he was tired from the trip. Small wonder, considering that they had been on the road for hours, as evidenced by the Wilbury town clock, that was beating eleven muffled strokes.

Then, his roundabout tactics finished, Croom pointed a stubby finger toward the windshield. On a hill up which the van had begun to labor, Harry saw an object in the moonlight. It was a large building, odd of shape but smooth of walls, a structure built of concrete.

Dark, dismal, the curious heap of architecture offered no welcome to those who were to make it their abode. But at a glance, Harry could tell that it qualified for the preservation of the Argyle treasures, and was there as a residence for the men who had those priceless antiques under their protection.

"We'll unload the vans as soon as we arrive," Croom told Harry. "Afterward, each man will take his own belongings to whatever room I assign him. In case you'd like to know, Vincent" – again Croom's eyes gave a quick flash – "the place is called Glenwood Grange."

Maybe Croom was trying to learn if Harry linked the name with the town of Wilbury. But Harry's return glance was honestly blank. Not having heard of Wilbury, he knew nothing of the Grange, so he appeared to be quite ignorant of both. Inwardly, however, Harry was pleased, not just because he'd learned the location but because of Croom's orders concerning the luggage.

From The Shadow's note, Harry had learned something about the contents of his largest bag that he didn't want Croom to know about. Something that made it all the more important that Harry be acquainted with his whereabouts. In addition, the note had stated enough to prove that The Shadow intended to check along the lines of Harry's own theory regarding a possible tip-off as the reason behind crime's balked thrust.

Succinctly, The Shadow's message advised Harry to check on all members of the expedition. Since the first step would be to begin with the most important person in the group, Harry interpreted the word "all" to mean specifically Carl Croom!

CHAPTER IV. THE WAYS OF THE SHADOW

STRANGE was The Shadow's sanctum, that black-walled room hidden somewhere in Manhattan, a place where seclusion was absolute. Day or night, pitch-darkness reigned amid The Shadow's sanctum, save when its owner was present.

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At such times – and this was one of them – a bluish light glimmered its blue rays on the polished surface of a table; and there, hands like living things moved beneath the glow, sorting and arranging data that had to do with the crime.

Keen were the eyes above those hands. At moments they caught the reflection of the blue light and outmatched it with their glitter and their burn. Such were the eyes of The Shadow, strange orbs with a hypnotic power. Likewise symbolic of this master genius was another glowing token, the ring upon a finger of his left hand.

Furnished with a rare fire opal, termed a girasol, the ring scintillated in the light, flashing back a myriad of hues. Ever-changing, the color of that girasol. From the ruddy crimson of a Promethean eye, it would sparkle through the whole range of the spectrum, finishing with a royal purple that announced its owner's mastery over men.

Newspaper clippings, first. They contained a wealth of misinformation, but with a few kernels of fact amid the chaff. An attempt had been made to steal the principal treasures of the Argyle Museum at the hour of their shipment to parts unknown. The attack had failed and the ringleader of the thrust had escaped. Who he was, the press did not know.

There lay a false point.

It was fairly evident that the malefactor was Wolf Lapine, but Inspector Joe Cardona preferred to keep that fact unmentioned. So the newspapers weren't printing Wolf's name, for two reasons. First: they weren't sure, so they preferred not to commit themselves. Second: Cardona had promised them a bigger story if they would wait.

Cardona wanted to ensnare the big bad Wolf. Knowing the bank raider's penchant for covering his tracks, building alibis, finding loopholes in the law, Cardona intended to build his case first. Bits of evidence, batches of testimony, were all parts of the mesh. These were to be linked with threads from Wolf's past into a strong, tight net.

All this was known to The Shadow, because on his table lay duplicates of Cardona's reports to his superior, Police Commissioner Ralph Weston.

There was a whispered laugh from hidden lips as the Shadow's keen eyes finished their survey of Cardona's data, and the hand with the girasol stacked those papers to one side. These didn't represent the inspector's full load of ammunition. Something stronger would be needed toward the trapping of Wolf Lapine. What it was, The Shadow intended to learn this very afternoon.

Other reports were upon the table, reports from The Shadow's own agents, Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye. They'd progressed further than Cardona in one important phase: they'd actually run across Wolf Lapine since the thwarted robbery of the night before. Which wasn't at all surprising, considering that Cliff and Hawkeye had wised to Wolf's moves the night before and sent last-minute word to The Shadow.

Since the police did not want Wolf as yet, there was no reason why The Shadow should deliver him. On the contrary, it was better that he should remain at large. Meanwhile, The Shadow could add a stronger weave to Cardona's net; so he did, by a simple process.

Reaching for earphones beyond the table, The Shadow produced the glow of a tiny light from the wall. A voice sounded from the phone:

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"Burbank speaking."

"Instructions," announced The Shadow. "Marsland and Hawkeye to meet with Wolf Lapine. If possible, to join his crew, in keeping with their own suggestion."

"Report received."

THE earphones vanished with the tiny light. Again The Shadow's low-toned mirth stirred the darkness. There was recollection in that laugh, a memory of how well darkness had served The Shadow on the night before. Indeed, it had paved the way for things to come.

The Shadow wasn't thinking in terms of his own surprise attack; he was remembering how well he had kept such aids as Cliff and Hawkeye in the background. There wasn't the slightest chance that Wolf Lapine could identify them as the snipers who had tried to stop his getaway, along with the pitiful remnants of his crew.

Thinned ranks meant that Wolf would need new followers. None could qualify better than Cliff and Hawkeye. At least Wolf had seen The Shadow, and with fear of the cloaked avenger pressing him, Wolf would require more than ordinary mobbies. He would need specialists – and who could be better than Cliff and Hawkeye?

Cliff was noted as a strong-arm worker, a man of Wolf's own toughened caliber. Whereas Hawkeye was a spotter of the best degree. Last night, Wolf Lapine had needed a strong running mate; also someone sharp-eyed enough to pick out The Shadow. Yes, Cliff and Hawkeye would rate as top candidates with Wolf. Well should The Shadow know, for he was providing them!

The Shadow skimmed through other reports – some museum data that he had personally obtained as Cranston. Notes from Clyde Burke covering happenings after Cranston had left the museum, but they were inconsequential. Facts compiled by an investment broker named Rutledge Mann, another agent of The Shadow.

Mann covered the present status of the curio business from an investor's standpoint. He stated that there was a definite, though undercover, market for art treasures – something The Shadow was already planning to investigate.

Contrasted with the more voluminous reports was a thin slip of paper more important than all the rest. Stretching it between his long fingers, The Shadow read the terse message:

Roundabout trip. No trailers. Only incident brief stop at town

of Wilbury where Croom checked vans. Then to Glenwood Grange, approx.

3 miles. Treasure stored. Protection adequate. Watching Croom, while

awaiting contact.

Again, The Shadow's laugh throbbed through the sanctum. This message had come in response to the note that The Shadow had given Harry. The small thin paper, plus the brief message, indicated how it had reached The Shadow – by carrier pigeon. In turn, this explained The Shadow's own reference to Harry's luggage.

Having foreseen that he must promptly learn the destination of the Argyle art treasures, The Shadow had provided for sure and quick communication. Holes punched in the end of Harry's black suitcase, to

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correspond with those in a box that contained the bird – such was the preparation The Shadow had made without his agent's knowledge, until Harry found it mentioned in the note.

Following instructions, Harry had loosed the pigeon from his room in Glenwood Grange. Harry hadn't needed to guess in what county Wilbury was located, nor even in what State. Those were facts that The Shadow could learn, and did. Across the polished table, those deft hands spread a copious map that covered the territory northward of New York, in detail.

Having heard of Wilbury, The Shadow knew it to be in that area, and when he located the town he had no trouble finding Glenwood Grange. It showed on the map as a large block above the contour lines of a hillside, somewhat more than the distance from Wilbury that Harry had estimated.

Tracing roads through that terrain, The Shadow found the one that the trucks had doubtless followed, though Harry hadn't mentioned it. The road crossed a branch–line railway that veered in from a valley off in a different direction than Glenwood Grange. Harry hadn't tried to reckon the distance between New York and Wilbury, but The Shadow gauged it accurately on the map. The town near which the Argyle collection was stored lay within fifty miles of Manhattan.

Most important, though somewhat contradictory, were Harry's last two sentences; but The Shadow interpreted them correctly. Adequate protection meant, of course, that Glenwood Grange was a ready–made stronghold – which, in itself, would be good reason for watching Croom, if Harry suspected the fellow of double–dealing. A citadel immune to everything but treachery, such was the inference. Still, danger could not be imminent or Harry would have stated so.

This fitted with The Shadow's own analysis of Croom. The man was strictly an opportunist. He'd proven that when he'd used his armored squad, whether he'd sent those blundering helpers to squash Wolf Lapine – or The Shadow!

One thing was certain: Croom was a person who could bide his time, no matter what his purpose. Hence The Shadow could afford to spend another evening in Manhattan, before visiting the town of Wilbury and its showplace, Glenwood Grange. And it was nearly evening now by the curious clock that perched on a corner of The Shadow's table, a timepiece that registered from hours down to fractions of seconds.

The bluish light went off. In the utter gloom pervading the blackened sanctum, echoes pronounced the trailing notes of a departing laugh. The climax was an utter hush, symbolizing that The Shadow, master foe of crime, was gone to a new career of conquest!

CHAPTER V. THE MAN WHO COULD BE CROOKED

COMMISSIONER RALPH WESTON was doubly annoyed. He'd left his office early and had come to his favorite leisure spot, the exclusive Cobalt Club, expecting to find his friend Lamont Cranston. Weston had even summoned Inspector Joe Cardona for what might prove to be an important conference.

Weston hadn't found Cranston, which was one reason why the commissioner was annoyed. The other reason was Clyde Burke, who had shown up instead.

Weston could show reporters short shrift, particularly when they bothered him at his club. But Clyde was too smart to be here as a gentleman of the press. He classed himself as a witness present at the attempted robbery of the Argyle Museum, and talked along that line. But it became more and more apparent that Clyde was simply fishing for information, since the facts he provided were nothing but details already covered.

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There were times when Commissioner Weston could outsmart the best of pests. Twitching the points of his military mustache, Weston gave Clyde a bluff-faced stare, then turned abruptly to Cardona.

"What about those phone numbers, inspector? The ones you think may link with Wolf Lapine? Let's have them!"

Cardona hesitated in response to Weston's order, so Clyde appeared to be indifferent. He didn't guess why Joe hesitated. The reason was, there weren't any phone numbers. But that made Cardona's own bluff all the better. Drawing a report book from his pocket, Cardona thumbed through its pages, found a suitable blank and began to call off imaginary phone numbers.

Clyde had a memo book of his own, a small one, in which he'd made notes the night before. Opening it carelessly, he began to jot down the numbers as Cardona gave them. Instantly, Weston swung about and snapped the question:

"What are you doing, Burke?"

"Just doodling," returned Clyde quickly. "How about some more facts on last night, commissioner? I've got them all in this book, you know."

"Perhaps," remarked Weston dryly. "And I'd say that you've been adding further data. Show Burke that list of phone numbers, inspector, since he wants to copy them."

Cardona showed Clyde the blank page. Then to Clyde's further chagrin, Weston reached for the reporter's own notebook. Clyde managed to forestall the commissioner by closing the little book and turning from his chair.

Clyde's right hand went to the shallow section of his right coat pocket, found the rubber band he'd dropped there during the director's meeting at the Argyle Museum. Spreading the elastic between thumb and forefinger, he started to slip it over his little notebook.

The rubber band wouldn't make the grade. It snapped under too much strain and stung Clyde's fingers. Hurriedly, Clyde tucked the notebook into a vest pocket, while Commissioner Weston supplied a brusque laugh.

"A lesson for you, Burke!" Weston snorted. "You just can't stretch things too far, can you? Except when you write stories for your newspaper, the Classic. But some day" – the commissioner's tone was sharply significant – "you'll stretch facts too far, even there. When you do... look out!"

Clyde decided he'd better be leaving, which brought approving nods from both Weston and Cardona. So Clyde left, properly rebuked, and continued right out to the street, rather than wait until Weston ordered his ejection from the Cobalt Club.

Ten minutes later, Lamont Cranston arrived. He heard no mention of the Burke episode, because Weston was impatient to take up something else. He wanted Cranston to go with him to the Argyle Museum for a conference with Ewell Darden. So they left in the commissioner's official car, taking Cardona with them.

SURPRISE awaited them at the brownstone museum. Surprise in the person of Clyde Burke, who had gone there for another interview with Darden. Clyde was seated by the corner table where he'd been the evening before, while Darden, busy with the lists of the museum treasures, was stiffly ignoring the reporter.

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Clyde tried to be nonchalant when Weston entered. He'd plucked some rubber bands from the drawer and he let one travel, thumb-trigger fashion, right to the nose of the bronze bust that represented Henry Argyle. At least, Clyde was proving that all rubber bands didn't snap when he handled them, but Weston wasn't in a mood to admire the accurate aim of Clyde's forefinger. The commissioner simply thumbed toward the door and said:

"Good-by, Burke."

Clyde left without an argument. There was no need to stay while Cranston was present. With the reporter gone, Weston came directly to the matter that had brought him to the museum.

"We're looking for evidence against Wolf Lapine," he told Darden. "We've figured that Wolf was watching this museum to learn when the shipment left. Now tell us, Mr. Darden, would it be possible for Wolf to know where the collection went?"

"Absolutely impossible," returned Darden. He arose and stepped to the ancient lottery wheel. Spinning it, he produced a rattle of wooden capsules that lay between the flanges. "This is the way we decided upon the destination. By lot, using one of these pellets drawn at random."

Darden illustrated the process of scooping a chance capsule as it passed. He told how he had given the chosen pill to Croom, a point which Weston remembered from Clyde's report.

"But what about the remaining pills?" queried the commissioner. "Couldn't someone have opened them and learned the place where the treasures didn't go? Then, by a process of elimination –"

"We foresaw all that," interrupted Darden. He pointed across the room. "Immediately after the drawing, I had the directors open all the other capsules and dump the folded wads of paper in that fireplace, where they were burned. We'd completed the task just before the attack on the museum occurred.

"Burke was present as a witness. I supposed that he had told you all about it. I asked him to give you a complete report on all that happened hereabouts... that is, whatever he happened to observe. Being a newspaper man, he should have prepared an accurate description. If he hasn't left yet, commissioner, we might be able to call him back."

Weston shook his head. He could take Darden's words regarding the destruction of the unchosen pellets. It was just one of those details that Clyde had been keeping in reserve as an excuse to stay around and listen in on conferences. There was a slight smile on Cranston's face that Weston didn't notice.

Having received Clyde's report in full, The Shadow knew about the aftermath that Darden mentioned. As Cranston, The Shadow could have assured Commissioner Weston that every extra wad of paper had been burned unread. Since Weston was accepting Darden's statement, there was no need for Cranston to substantiate it.

"I can assure you most positively," declared Darden in a firm tone, "that no one knows where the treasures have gone except Carl Croom, the man we appointed as custodian to the collection. True, Croom has helpers with them, but the trip was made by night and it is unlikely that even they have learned their exact location.

"However it cannot be kept a permanent secret, much though we might wish it. After a due lapse of time – say in a week, or better still, a fortnight – Croom may see fit to communicate with us. We have left that to his judgment, dependent chiefly on the time he may require to properly fortify his premises.

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"When we do hear from Croom, I shall inform you, commissioner, but only with the understanding that the news be kept from the public. Every director of the Argyle Museum is under solemn oath to make no public mention of any such information after he receives it."

Weston looked at Cranston, who, as one of the museum directors, nodded in corroboration. The man most pleased was Cardona. To the veteran inspector, this meant that Wolf Lapine would not move for at least another week – more likely not for two weeks – and perhaps not even then! This would work finely in the weaving of Cardona's mesh, so it was Joe who put the next query to Darden.

"There's another angle on Wolf Lapine," expressed Cardona. "Suppose he had bagged a few million bucks in rare stuff last night. How would he have peddled it?"

Sadly, Darden shook his head.

"With all the danger threatening those valued treasures," stated Darden, "it is miserable to realize that we must also guard against human leeches, who happen to be more prevalent than ever before. But such, I regret, is the case."

FROM among his papers, Darden passed over duplicate lists of a sheet published by a collectors' association. It told of reported transactions in various foreign countries, all of which were questionable; though details had proven meager.

"Why have conquered European countries been ravished of their art treasures?" queried Darden. "The answer is very plain: there is a market for such rarities – and a large one. Many unscrupulous men of wealth foresaw what the trend of war would bring and secretly established themselves with the heads of enemy nations.

"Grateful for immunity, such rascals are investing in stolen art. After chaos ends, they will be the owners of rare treasures that will always be valued by the human race. Such knaves have only one regret: namely, that so much of European art reached America prior to the war's outbreak. So they are working through underground channels to claim the things they were too late to steal.

"These reports mention legitimate shipments of art treasures to South America. We definitely believe that many of those are the cover-up for the disposal of stolen goods, though statistics also indicate that there is a heavy trade in futures, rather than art works already pilfered. Certain legitimate art dealers are under suspicion, and one such is specifically mentioned in this bulletin."

Darden pointed out the name. It was Mark Jarratt, a well-known purchaser of auctioned works of art. Listed as a wholesale art dealer, Jarratt was unquestionably in such business, but many of his transactions – especially his sales – were matters still untraced. This wasn't a total surprise to Weston and Cardona, for they'd both heard of Jarratt; but until now, they'd classed him only as a shrewd dealer in antiques.

"This may be something big!" popped Cardona, unable to retain his usual poker-face attitude. "Say, commissioner, Mark Jarratt could be the fence that fellows like Wolf Lapine work through. Maybe his art business is just a blind!"

It was Darden who answered. He passed Cardona a file of correspondence, letters from Jarratt to persons associated with the Argyle Museum, offering to buy any items that the museum might want to sell if forced to move to smaller quarters. Reading the letters over Cardona's shoulder, Weston declared:

"We shall visit Mark Jarratt."

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Cardona rubbed his chin, then asked bluntly:

"On what pretext, commissioner?"

That was a real problem. Nothing could be gained through a direct attempt to make a slippery chap like Jarratt show his hand. Fortunately, the letters themselves provided the answer. They were profuse with invitations to Darden, asking him to call at Jarratt's if interested in any offer.

"There we have it!" exclaimed Weston. "You call on Jarratt, Darden, and we'll drop by. We can say we came here to see you, but found that you had left."

The idea appealed to Darden. He inquired how soon the visit should be made, and Weston replied that he'd like it to be done immediately. So Darden gathered hat, coat and cane. Departing, he told an attendant that he was going to Jarratt's, in case any one wanted to see him. Thus Darden was truthfully bolstering himself for the task that lay ahead.

"We'll give Darden a quarter-hour," declared Weston, "and then we'll drop by. You're coming, of course, Cranston. I'd like you to see how I handle a crook like Jarratt."

Slight was Cranston's smile, but deep its meaning, though Weston didn't catch it. As usual, the commissioner had overshot his mark by classing Jarratt as a crook prior to meeting the fellow. The Shadow had another definition for Mark Jarratt.

In The Shadow's estimate, Jarratt was a man who could be crooked. And that, by The Shadow's rule, might mean a man far more dangerous than one already steeped in crime!

CHAPTER VI. BRAIN JOINS BRAWN

JARRATT'S antique shop was located in a wholesale district which, perhaps as much by design as by chance, was near the fringes of a most disreputable area. If ever a man had opportunity to deal with respectable visitors through his front door and those of questionable variety by the back, such a man was Mark Jarratt. But there was nothing in his demeanor to prove that he handled a two-way racket; nor, for that matter, to disprove it.

He was a master of suavity, Mark Jarratt, a man who could be dapper or shrewd as the mood seized him, yet who was quick to show chameleon ability at sliding from one pose to the other.

In the second-floor office above and in back of his great ground-floor display room, Jarratt was rising politely, with a sallow-faced smile, when his night clerk introduced a trio of visitors headed by Commissioner Weston.

Beside the desk was Ewell Darden. His sharp eyes flashed a relieved welcome, backed by the determined thrust of his jaw. Fifteen minutes had been enough for Darden; in fact, too much. He was trying to hold the ground that he had gained. The proof lay in the fact that he had spread his hand upon a strew of papers on Jarratt's desk. Darden didn't want the antique dealer to put those documents away until Weston had gotten a look at them.

There was a squint of suspicion in Jarratt's thin-lidded eyes after the visitors were seated. He directed it at Darden, as if to ask if the latter had purposely arranged for the police commissioner to pay a visit, bringing along his ace inspector.

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In turn, Darden looked to Cranston for assistance. Taking the cue, Cranston obligingly accepted the blame for the intrusion.

"I was checking the records, Darden," spoke Cranston calmly. "I remembered some talk about selling certain items from the museum. Learning that you had come here –"

"I have sold nothing to Mr. Jarratt," interrupted Darden crisply. His follow-up to Cranston's lead was neat. "Here!" He took the strewn papers in a handful and delivered them with a glare. "See for yourself, Cranston! These are Jarratt's own records on the matter!"

Jarratt's sallow face looked none too pleasant while Cranston was sorting through the papers and handing them to Weston and Cardona in turn. All the while, Darden retained a pose of indignation, as though he belonged on Jarratt's side. At last, when the visitors had completed their survey, it was Weston who snapped before Cardona could stop him:

"You went to a lot of trouble, Jarratt, trying to acquire what you wanted from the Argyle Museum."

The word "acquire" went home to Jarratt and the sallow man did more than parry it. He knocked the props right from under the law's case.

"If you mean that I hired certain crooks to raid the museum," spoke Jarratt tartly, "you are defeating your own theory, commissioner. The manner of your visit proves that you do not regard me as a fool. Therefore, why contradict yourself?"

Weston emitted a startled porpoise grunt.

"When I buy art objects," continued Jarratt smoothly, "I make my purchases from persons forced to sell, a situation which I hoped existed at the Argyle Museum because of its removal plans. My profits in such cases are tremendous. In fact" – Jarratt's thin, brown lips gave a crafty smile – "my competitors have frequently defined my transactions as something worse than robbery."

In his duel of wits with Jarratt, Weston had assumed the proportions of a punching bag. Never had Cranston seen the commissioner so deflated.

"Go through those letters carefully," insisted Jarratt. "You will see that I corresponded not only with Darden, but with other directors and employees of the Argyle Museum. I even corresponded with Carl Croom, the trusted custodian, offering him a commission on any sales he could arrange."

"Darden will admit that my offers were ridiculously low, and Cranston will corroborate the fact. Indeed, I would say that they were lower than the prices that crooks would ask, if they stole such treasures. Still" – Jarratt rose with a shrug – "I am not in a position to judge. You should be able to answer better than I, commissioner, since you are acquainted with criminals and their methods."

Then, to complete the commissioner's frustration, the suave Mr. Jarratt tapped the papers as he took them, and concluded:

"My latest letters having been ignored, I took it that the deal was still possible. I have just now learned from Mr. Darden that there will be no sale. So should I deal with criminals, commissioner, it would be in the future, not the past. I advise you to watch me very closely from now on."

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WESTON was rising, dumbly. Cardona's swarthy face was purple. Only Cranston retained his calm composure, for Darden was trying to cover the retreat with a show of indignation.

"One thing, Jarratt!" blurted Darden. "Croom ignored your letters, too!"

"You are wrong," returned Jarratt smilingly. "I did receive a letter from Croom. He mailed it yesterday before he went away."

From a desk drawer, Jarratt produced the letter, dropping its envelope back in the drawer. Darden read the letter and showed it to the rest, but in a manner filled with pride. For the letter, though a parting shot at Jarratt, meant vindication for Croom.

Tersely worded, it stated that Croom was not interested in anything that Jarratt might offer; that henceforth, Croom would be where letters would not reach him and that further correspondence was therefore useless.

Showing his visitors downstairs and out through the front door, Jarratt watched their departure and waited. He'd shown those busybodies exactly where and how they stood. His sallow lips grinned at recollection of his preliminary interview with Darden. He laughed aloud at the way he'd nonplused Weston and Cardona. As for Cranston, Jarratt regarded him as nothing more than part of the scenery.

Jarratt was more right than he knew. Cranston had literally merged with the scene outdoors. He'd gone neither with Weston nor Darden; each supposed that Cranston had left in the other's car. Actually, Cranston had strolled around the corner, there to stop beside a waiting taxicab which happened to be The Shadow's own, piloted by an agent named Moe Shrevnitz. Moe, or Shrevvy, as some friends called him, was here at The Shadow's order.

Stepping in one door and out the other, Lamont Cranston became The Shadow. His pause between doors was very brief, just long enough for him to gather black cloak and hat from a special drawer beneath the cab's rear seat. That was how Cranston happened to join the scenery as The Shadow. For there was blackness all along the street on which Jarratt's show windows fronted and The Shadow blended absolutely with the inky gloom.

Across the very sidewalk where Jarratt stood, past the man himself and into the doorway, The Shadow glided like a segment of night itself. The shop lights revealed the cloaked entrant, but Jarratt's back was turned, for he was watching departing cars.

The night clerk stared at the sight of drifting blackness, but didn't define it as a living being. The clerk saw the doorway only from an angle; by the time he came around from behind the counter, the fleeting figure had evaporated like a dissipating cloud of smoke.

Off through Jarratt's shop, deftly avoiding stacks of knickknacks in the gloom, The Shadow trailed a zigzag course unseen, finally reaching the steps to Jarratt's upstairs office. As he made the turn in the steps, The Shadow glanced back and saw Jarratt coming indoors. So The Shadow sped his ascent to the office.

The Shadow needed only half a minute alone. In less than that period, he whipped open the desk drawer and found the envelope that had contained Croom's letter. The typing on the envelope matched that of the letter, but there was one point amiss – enough to assure The Shadow that he'd guessed the truth beforehand.

The envelope bore the postmark: "Wilbury." It hadn't been mailed from Manhattan the night before. Instead, it had been mailed from the town where Croom had conveyed the Argyle treasures. Leaving Wilbury on the very evening of Croom's arrival, the envelope itself gave the vital information that Croom had been instructed to preserve a strict secret!

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Clever, this! That the very letter exonerating Croom should have carried evidence of the fellow's treachery, through the envelope, not the letter!

Dropping the envelope back into the drawer, The Shadow reached the window and loosened its catch so he could make a speedy exit. Then, moving across to the door, he looked for Jarratt and saw him.

The curio dealer had just finished a phone call downstairs; in putting aside the telephone, he seemed in no hurry to come up. So The Shadow waited several minutes, until the sound of a muffled buzzer announced visitors. Then Jarratt did an unusual thing. He turned and came upstairs.

When the sallow man reached the office, The Shadow was gone. Oddly, though still visible, he couldn't be seen. For The Shadow was beyond the window and had drawn it almost shut behind him. What appeared to be solid night was actually a cloaked observer whose burning eyes were concealed by a down-turned hat brim.

Locking the office door, Jarratt crossed to a huge safe. Opening its massive front, he stepped back. From the interior stepped two new visitors: Wolf Lapine and Cliff Marsland!

"I THOUGHT you'd get here quickly," said Jarratt to Wolf. "I knew that telephone number of yours must belong to a place close by. There are many good hide-outs in this vicinity."

"You're telling me," returned Wolf. "That's why I took the dump I'm at, so I'd be able to move the Argyle stuff in here without any trouble."

From behind his desk, Jarratt gave Wolf a cold-eyed stare.

"But you didn't get the stuff," declared Jarratt. "And you were a fool to go after it without first telling me!"

"But you said you'd fence any good stuff that I grabbed –"

"Only if you did a clean job, Wolf. You should have told me you were going after the Argyle collection beforehand."

An interesting situation! Wolf Lapine, operating on his own, had hoped to unload his swag through Mark Jarratt. Actually, Jarratt had played no part in crime, but he was equally truthful in telling Commissioner Weston to watch him in the future. For sheer audacity, Jarratt matched any schemer that The Shadow had ever met.

Wolf still wanted to argue. He'd take on any job, he told Jarratt, but the Argyle proposition had looked bigger than anything else. To all of which Jarratt nodded, finally showing Wolf the correspondence that he, Jarratt, had conducted with the private museum.

"You couldn't get far with this," sneered Wolf.

"Farther than you did," returned Jarratt suavely. "I built myself a perfect alibi with the police, along with paving a path to future operations outside of their jurisdiction."

He showed Wolf the Croom letter with the envelope that matched it, and Wolf's yellow teeth showed in a fanglike grin.

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"Say!" he exclaimed. "You'd already primed that Croom guy! No wonder he was so tough last night. If he'd only known I was a friend of yours it might have been different. Anyway, he helped us shake The Shadow."

"Nothing should have happened last night," asserted Jarratt. "Can't you understand, Wolf? The place for robbery was not where the treasures left from. The right spot is where they went!"

Wolf nodded glumly. "If I'd had sense enough to tag that caravan, instead of cracking down!"

"You'd have done even worse," argued Jarratt. "As it now stands, we know where the Argyle collection went, but nobody suspects that we do. Your destination is the town of Wilbury. Establish yourself there, Wolf, but wait until I give the go signal."

Wolf nodded and beckoned Cliff back into the safe, remarking that it was a neat gadget – a safe with an elevator to the basement. Smiling at the compliment, Jarratt added that it was another thing he'd willingly disclose to the police. He could explain it as a secret exit intended for the removal of his own valuables in emergency; not as a port of entry for the kind of goods that Wolf might bring.

The elevator descended without the slightest noise, its thrum totally muffled by the heavy safe front. Jarratt strolled to the window to make sure his visitors didn't reveal themselves below. He could see the street, for his view was now unobstructed by living blackness. All Jarratt noticed was a passing taxicab, but such vehicles were common everywhere in Manhattan.

It was Hawkeye in an alleyway below who had noted the cab actually pull out from sheltered darkness below Jarratt's building. When Cliff arrived with Wolf, Hawkeye, serving as lookout, gave them the all-clear signal. But as they sneaked off through the dark, with Wolf in the lead, Hawkeye plucked Cliff's sleeve and his fellow agent understood.

They'd report this visit through Burbank, as a matter of course, though it wasn't really necessary. The Shadow already knew!

CHAPTER VII. LOST AND FOUND

VIEWED against a starlit sky, Glenwood Grange formed a most peculiar landmark. To persons moving along the borders of its grounds, the mansion seemed to blot out at moments, only to reappear. It also had a habit of dwindling unexpectedly, to loom anew upon a surprisingly large scale.

The reason was the irregular terrain. The Grange was built on rolling ground that could be termed a combination of several hillsides. Little knolls, hardly discernible even in daylight, could rise up strangely at night, completely changing the perspective of the slope.

There were trees on the hillsides but they, too, were in irregular clusters, and there were clearings that represented abandoned farmland. Thus the strangers who patrolled these boundaries found it difficult to choose a perfect observation point. There was one good lookout spot on a slope a quarter mile from the Grange, but the experts disagreed on its merits.

Wolf Lapine was the chief expert. He was pacing the cramped quarters that some of his scouts had found, a little shack among bordering trees that were off the Glenwood Grange premises. From the doorway, Wolf was tilting his head from one side to another, trying to spot the big building that loomed beyond the woods.

"That's the joint, all right," assured Wolf. "We've covered enough back roads to know there ain't another

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dump that would do to hold that Argyle stuff. Trouble is, you can't see enough of the place from here, but there's some parts of it from which they might spot us."

Wolf's followers, an assortment of new but experienced ruffians, offered their expert opinions with the opposite verdict. They said the trees hid the shack almost completely; that it was too small to attract any notice from the mansion. So Wolf looked to his chief lieutenant.

"Guess I'm outvoted, Cliff."

"I'd say yours was the vote that counted," returned Cliff bluntly. "Maybe this shack is hard to see, but it leaks light like a sieve. Unless you're going to operate on a blackout basis, it's no good."

Stepping into the shack, Wolf glared at the hanging lantern, then at the walls. Cliff was right: the place wouldn't do for a headquarters. Wolf wasn't worried though, because he'd seen only some high windows of the Grange and none of them were lighted. He gruffed that they couldn't have been spotted; not yet.

"We'll use this for a lookout shack," decided Wolf. "And remember: go easy on the glim when you're around here nights. The old farmhouse is where we'll make headquarters. I know it's a mile or more toward town, but I figure we can find a short-cut. However, we might as well take more of a gander while we're around here."

Wolf beckoned his men from the shack and they brought the lantern with them, keeping it turned low and holding it close to the ground as they did with their flashlights. A wind was whispering amid the trees and perhaps it was the cluster of their swaying boughs that made darkness encroach so closely to the lowered lights.

But Cliff and Hawkeye held a different theory. In the sigh of the wind, they fancied a sibilant laugh. The rustle of leaves could denote the swish of a black cloak. Blackness, sweeping away from the moving, spreading lights, represented the gliding departure of a mysterious cloaked figure – The Shadow!

THEY were right in theory, Cliff and Hawkeye. Such a shape was at large, though more distant than they thought. Already, The Shadow was clear of the fringing woods and circling toward Glenwood Grange itself. There was no swish from his cloak and his whispery laugh was too subdued for any but his own ears to hear it, even had others been close by.

Glenwood Grange was indeed a stronghold. Its builder had sunk a fortune in a home that he had destined for posterity by creating a structure of solid concrete, the wonder substance of its day. The passage of years had brought cracks in the walls, but they were negligible as yet; merely indications that the place would not survive the centuries that its constructor had hoped.

Windows were deep-set and fitted with bars on the lower floor, which meant that the Glenwood who built it had also stocked the house with elaborate furnishings. When The Shadow reached the wall and looked upward, he observed that the higher windows were similarly reinforced, but in more artistic style. Their bars were the thick metal divisions that separated the small, square windowpanes.

Most of the lights were on the ground floor, as Wolf and his outfit had observed. Close by the house, The Shadow could see flickers from certain windows, indicating a burning log fire in a ground-floor great hall. But the window that intrigued him most was one a floor or so up.

It was difficult to exactly classify it, since most of the windows seemed to be on different levels. However, this one had a light burning beneath a tilted shade, which cast a curved streak of blackness half across the window.

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It was obviously the room belonging to Harry Vincent; its peculiar mode of illumination, though seemingly accidental, was intended as a signal to The Shadow.

To scale the wall, The Shadow used his suction cups. They were a nest of four rubber disks, which he took apart to fit to his hands and feet. The oiled disks gripped hard when twisted against the concrete wall; to detach one, The Shadow merely exerted a forward pressure that let air through a tiny hole. Thus he was able to climb straight upward, three grippers holding while he advanced the fourth.

Reaching the window, The Shadow stayed to the side that Harry had so obligingly shaded with darkness. It was Harry's room, all right, for The Shadow recognized the luggage, particularly the large black bag that was lying open on a chair. A table was standing quite close to the window and there was another chair beside it. The double discovery brought a whispered laugh from The Shadow.

Harry must have used the chair and table as a ladder in launching the carrier pigeon. Climbing up beside the window and hanging partly from above it, The Shadow found what he expected, a small loose pane which served as a ventilator. It pivoted horizontally when The Shadow pressed it, and below he could see the clamp that actuated a lower section of the window. A strong clamp with a padlock, beneath the window sill where no one could reach it. Breaking a window pane wouldn't help, for the clamp was fitted to the floor, far beyond an arm's reach.

No means of entry by that window, so long as the padlock remained closed, as Croom had probably ordered that it should always be. The barred panes of the lower window section came right flush with others, forming solid frames. Perhaps a smashed window and an hour's work with a file would have sufficed in the old days, but no longer would the rule apply. The present windowpanes were of bulletproof glass.

So The Shadow had to be content with the one hinged pane that served as ventilator. It was all that he required to complete his present mission.

Bringing a stiff envelope from beneath his cloak, he used his one free hand to reach through the pane and send the flat missile skimming through the air. A difficult trick, considering the odd angle, but The Shadow had practiced it with such variations. The envelope skimmed right into Harry's bag, slicing like a knife's edge in between loose objects that were packed therein.

His message delivered, The Shadow applied the fourth suction cup again, descended the wall and began his own survey of the mansion's irregular walls from a proximity that he knew none of Wolf's men would dare approach.

It wasn't long before Harry arrived in his room. His cue to The Shadow's visit was the little windowpane set at a new tilt. Harry looked about the room and was puzzled for a while, until he saw a whitened corner sticking from between two colored shirts in his suitcase. Finding it to be an envelope, Harry soon was reading another of The Shadow's disappearing messages.

Here were details of happenings in Manhattan, that had carried to Wilbury: mention of Wolf Lapine and his mob, with Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye members. Right up to date, this message, for The Shadow had written it under the walls of Glenwood Grange. It told of the shack that Wolf's outfit was abandoning except for lookout purposes.

Turning off the light, Harry mounted the table, tore the blank sheet to shreds and fluttered the pieces into the breeze that whistled past the ventilator pane.

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All the while, the final words of the message kept drilling through Harry's mind. They were simply a reiteration of a certain policy, but The Shadow had stressed them with new import. Those words were:

"Watch Carl Croom."

Harry's chance to watch his present boss arrived the moment that he went from his room. He'd last seen Croom downstairs, but the blunt-faced man was there no longer. Hearing cautious footsteps on a curved stairway leading up, Harry stole through a dim hall and took a look. He saw Croom peering from a window fully a floor above, a spot from which, by Harry's calculation, Croom could be noting any glimmers – particularly signal flashes – from the direction of the shack mentioned by The Shadow!

Croom was coming down again, so Harry paced him, sure that the other man's footfalls would drown his own. Reaching the great hall, where two men were chatting by the fire, Harry turned unnoticed into a gloomy passage. Watching for Croom, he saw the blunt man arrive and guessed by his manner that Croom was coming the same direction.

So Harry slid into a side passage until Croom went by. Croom opened an outside door and stole out. After a brief hesitation, Harry followed. After all, the word was to watch Croom. The outside terrain was The Shadow's province; still, it was large territory. Not only was Harry following instructions to the letter; he foresaw a chance to contact his chief.

As Harry surmised he would, Croom turned in the direction of the shack. The starlight was sufficient for a lawn free of pitfalls, so Croom moved through the darkness and Harry did the same. It wasn't until they neared the woods that Harry heard any stumbles from Croom; then came brief glints from a flashlight close to the ground.

Guiding by it, Harry followed without stumbling and saw Croom's light enter the shack. There it blanked like an imprisoned firefly and suddenly went out – to stay.

It couldn't be that Croom had contacted anyone in the deserted shack. He might have picked up a message from Wolf; but if so, how could he be reading it in darkness? Debating such points, Harry moved close to the shack, feeling his way carefully, and stopped by the door. There wasn't a sound except the creak of the door itself, a swaying produced by the wind.

Gingerly, Harry caught the door as it swung slightly open and eased inside. Then he realized why the door swayed: a breeze was coming from a window opposite. Croom, finished with his survey of the shack, had crawled out by the window route, not bothering to close the flimsy sash again.

As proof of Harry's theory, there was a gleam from the woods – Croom's flashlight back at the lawn again. The light vanished suddenly, proving that Croom had reached the clear.

A lost trail that Harry would have to find again by a process that seemed quite simple, that of returning to the Grange by the shortest possible route. To save time, Harry turned to the door, which thumped hard from the wind just as he reached it.

Pushing the door, Harry heard its hinges groan louder than before. Unfortunate, that sound, for it drowned the snap of brush from the ground close by. Just too late did Harry catch that warning crackle.

And then – disaster.

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In from the darkness lunged a pair of foemen, striking blindly but hard. They met Harry at the bottom of the door step, tripped him back across it. His head hit with a thump that forced a groan from him, like an echo of the door hinge. A grab, a smash from driving hands, and Harry's head took another thud that put him out like Croom's light.

Croom's trail was lost, but Harry's was found by hard hitting foemen who now held him a senseless prisoner!

CHAPTER VIII. THE WRONG BLUFF

WHEN thoughts returned to Harry's aching head, they were inspired by a lantern's glow quite close to his eyes. In it, Harry saw the outlines of faces, and he heard gruff voices. He knew that they must belong to workers for Wolf Lapine.

A real dilemma this, one for which Harry could blame himself. He'd crossed everything by trailing Croom from the house. Indeed, Harry's own stealth, on which he had prided himself, was the worse fault of all. Singularly, facts came clearly with Harry's brain throbs.

Assuming that The Shadow had remained close by the mansion, Harry's chief would certainly have picked up the blinks of Croom's flashlight near the woods. If Harry had only given a few guarded blinks of his own, The Shadow would have known that his agent was on the trail.

But Harry hadn't, so the chances were that The Shadow had simply trailed Croom back to the mansion and seeing no sign of Harry, would take it that his agent hadn't come out doors.

Logical enough, since Croom had left the Grange so soon, that Harry would have needed luck in plenty to have spotted Croom's sneak. The long chance had come Harry's way, only to put him in his present trouble – from which The Shadow, through with investigating the shack, could hardly be expected to rescue him.

At that point, Harry's reflections ceased. His captors were responsible for his change of thought. Thrusting forward in the light, they began to jolt Harry's jaw with the heels of their hands and he rolled backward on the floor. It was then that Harry realized his arms and legs weren't just cramped. They were bound, tightly.

Gathered up again by his tough captors, Harry was propped into a corner. This wasn't a charitable service; they wanted to keep him upright so they could pommel him more. As one hand poked him, Harry winced, but not from the jaw jolt. He'd gotten a jab from the sharp edge of a nail head projecting from the corner wall. It punched his wrist like a prong.

"Listen, lug," growled a captor, pushing the lantern so close that its heat nearly singed Harry's eyebrows. "What was the idea sneaking out of that house and coming over here?"

Harry blinked, only to receive another blow, at which he grinned, since it put his face away from the heat. He pressed his hands against the wall to avoid the nail head and felt the spike wedged between his wrists. Then into the light wagged a rubber hose, a much stouter threat than jolts from horny hands.

Therewith, Harry found his voice:

"I'll... I'll talk!"

To talk as these crooks wanted could prove fatal, and Harry recognized it well. To admit he'd trailed Croom would be very bad, if these captors, working for Wolf, knew that Croom was in any way linked to their

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leader. To claim that Croom had sent him here would be giving away everything that Harry knew, even though it might produce a respite. There would have to be something different, bolder, that would really surprise these thugs.

Every agent of The Shadow was trained to act on his own when occasion demanded – trained by the greatest master of them all, The Shadow himself. The rule that Harry had learned was to meet an issue simply, point by point, and let one step lead to another. It wasn't hard to apply it in this case.

One thing Harry couldn't admit – that he had come from Glenwood Grange. That settled firmly in his mind, Harry saw immediately that he could spring almost anything on these fellows. Even while he licked his lips, he began to see a panorama open ahead. Each time he started to speak, he caught himself, looking for a way to worry these captors as an opening. And it came, very simply. Blinking into the light, Harry settled back again and gruffed:

"You guys are with Wolf Lapine, I take it."

SHARP oaths came from the two men, but they were definitely startled. Then one demanded what gave Harry that idea.

"We figured Wolf would be around," said Harry coolly. "Why not? The cops didn't nail him after he fluked that New York job, did they? We doped it that he'd make another try."

The term "nail" reminded Harry of the one between his wrists. As he pressed his hands lower, he could feel the nail head work between the ropes, which was a help.

"So you've figured Wolf Lapine," came a sneer. "What else do you birds in the house find to talk about?"

That was the question Harry wanted, and expected. He was back to the house matter, the very thing he was determined to deny. Which he did, quite coolly.

"Ask the clucks who live there," suggested Harry. "I've never been in the place. We're glomming the lay, like Wolf is."

Who "we" were, Harry didn't specify. He simply knew that his statements would bring dividends. It did, for the thugs turned to each other instead of Harry.

"So there's another outfit casing the joint!"

"Sounds like it... and why not?"

"They must have tailed the trucks out here!"

"Yeah, like Wolf ought to have!"

Then both were back at Harry again, wanting to know the name of the big-shot he worked for, which Harry naturally wouldn't tell. As crook to crook, he put it to the pair – would they blab about Wolf Lapine if they ran into other mobbies who were looking over the same lay?

It wasn't that Harry had anything against Wolf or the guys who worked for him. He'd have signed up with Wolf himself, if he'd known how to reach him. Once sworn in to serve a rival big-shot, Harry couldn't help it. He'd talked, as he promised he would, but he couldn't say any more – except maybe to Wolf Lapine in

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person.

All that made logic to Harry's captors, who didn't realize the hope their prisoner held. They could picture Wolf making this palooka talk, in plenty. What they didn't guess was that Harry had two friends in Wolf's own gang.

If taken to Wolf, he'd meet with Cliff and Hawkeye. Which was better than a slugging from these lesser crooks, a thing they'd certainly have dished out if Harry had admitted that he belonged to the guardians of Glenwood Grange. Indeed, his captors might have decided to rub him out and report it to Wolf afterward.

Very neatly, Harry had sold himself a ticket to Wolf's headquarters, meanwhile stalling for valuable time which might, by a long chance, bring The Shadow. Even if it didn't Harry would be seeing Cliff, or Hawkeye

—

The second of those two names was more than an added reflection. It was brought to reality by a wizened face that poked through the door. Then came Hawkeye's voice, hoarsely criticizing the men who held the lantern, reminding them that Wolf had put a taboo on lights in this lookout shack. In response to beckons, Hawkeye came over for a look at Harry and learned that the prisoner belonged to another faction.

"Get rid of the lantern," suggested Hawkeye, "while I go and find Wolf."

Five minutes later, Hawkeye returned, not with Wolf but with Cliff — as Harry expected. All the while in darkness, Harry had worked at the wrist ropes, digging them against the nail head. The bonds were frayed, nearing the breaking point, when Cliff appeared and arranged a properly shaded light to focus on the prisoner's face.

Cliff gave weight to Harry's bluff by taking it for granted. Bluntly, he quizzed the prisoner and considered Harry's case. He didn't demand the name of Harry's big-shot. Instead, Cliff showed the harshly threatening style that Wolf customarily used.

"You're in a tight spot, guy," Cliff told Harry. "Has that gotten through that head of yours?"

"Not so tight as it looks," returned Harry. "I've found ways out from worse than this."

He was telling Cliff in so many words that he'd worked the wrist ropes loose, and Cliff understood it, knowing Harry. But the statement almost proved itself a boomerang.

"Say!" hoarsed a thug. "Maybe this guy's with The Shadow!"

Such suggestions could bring trouble. Fortunately, the men who had captured Harry weren't part of the few who had escaped during the museum fracas. Cliff spiked their theory with a snort.

"If The Shadow was wise to things," assured Cliff, "he'd be around himself, instead of using stooges. We'll get Wolf and let him make this guy sing. How good are those ropes?"

The thugs assured Cliff that the bonds were perfect; when they tied prisoners, they did it right. Which, with Hawkeye as a witness, was the sort of statement that would square Cliff and toss the blame for Harry's coming escape on the original captors. So Cliff told the two to snoop around with Hawkeye and make sure that the prisoner didn't have any friends in the offing.

Out went the light, and with it departed the servers of Wolf Lapine.

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HARRY made short work of the frayed wrist bonds. He dropped them on the floor as testimony in Cliff's behalf, and soon had the ropes off his ankles. Leaving them as further evidence of a valid escape, Harry stole from the shack.

There were no lights outside, but he heard Hawkeye's hoarse voice maintaining a contact with the lurking thugs and it told Harry the direction that he wasn't to take. Crawling the other way, careful not to make any noise that would cause him to be mistaken for one of his own imaginary friends, Harry reached the edge of the woods.

There the thought struck him that if anyone chanced to see him stealing toward the Grange, his whole bluff would be ruined. So Harry skirted the woods and followed the lawn on a long circuit around to the other side of the house. There, from a vantage spot where Glenwood Grange loomed high above a rising knoll, Harry turned for a straight cut across the lawn.

Close by was something that looked like a crouched figure; so black and motionless that, if alive, it could only be The Shadow. As Harry approached, the shape resolved into a tree stump, the terminus of a cluster of wild bushes that formed an encroaching salient into the lawn.

Considering the stump to be a good lookout spot, Harry decided to test it. He pushed through the bushes, disregarding their crackle. Noise didn't matter, for all of Wolf's tribe were on the far side of the mansion, fully a half mile distant.

Harry was recalling how well he'd bluffed that crowd, by telling them that he was a member of a rival mob that didn't exist. Maybe they'd be just silly enough to start looking for that product of Harry's imagination. That a rival faction could exist seemed quite impossible to Harry, until events proved it.

Up from the bushes beside the stump sprang two men, so suddenly that the ground seemed to deliver them!

They couldn't be members of Wolf's outfit, which Harry had outdistanced; nor could they belong to Croom's contingent, which was definitely in the mansion.

Therefore, these were interlopers, members of a rival party that even The Shadow hadn't heard about!

Who they were, why they were here, how they had come to learn about Glenwood Grange, Harry couldn't understand. Nor did he have an immediate opportunity to inquire.

These persons unknown were as tough as they were mysterious. Under their savage drive, Harry was completely ambushed. Sagging from the effect of hard-slugged blows, Harry Vincent again became a prisoner.

As his senses left him, Harry was overwhelmed by the horrible conviction that even The Shadow could not nullify this capture, accomplished as it was by men whose very presence had escaped the observation of the cloaked investigator!

CHAPTER IX. DEATH'S TRAIL

WHILE Harry was falling into the hands of thugs who seemed the impossible made real, The Shadow was peering through barred windows into the great hall of Glenwood Grange. Having trailed Carl Croom back from the shack, The Shadow was studying the man along with the interior of the ground floor.

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Inlaid armor was on display; rare tapestries hung from the walls. Framed paintings were carefully set in a corner, waiting to be hung. An old safe, showing from another room, was probably the place where Croom had put the much-prized royal jewels. The safe didn't have to be strong in this well-fortified mansion.

Visible treasures were but a modicum of those still in their special crates, all listed as to contents. Yet Croom looked worried as he stared about the great hall. He spoke gruffly to the two men at the fireplace, gesturing them to the door to make an outside patrol.

Dropping from the window, The Shadow crossed the lawn and was sufficiently distant in its darkness when the guards came out by the side door and started opposite circuits of the house, Croom waiting at the door itself.

In trailing Croom back to the mansion, The Shadow had lost all track of doings at the shack, due to the contour of the ground, which by its rises, cut off a view of those particular woods, at least from ground level. But The Shadow, though he hadn't traced Harry along with Croom, was thinking in terms of the forgotten shack. One of The Shadow's marked abilities was that of piecing two negative facts to form a positive.

One negative factor was Harry's absence from his room, which The Shadow had viewed from a knoll; the other, the fact that he wasn't in the meeting hall. Positively, these spelled some other business on Harry's part, and in keeping with instructions to "Watch Croom," it was plausible that he had trailed his boss from the house.

So The Shadow headed for the shack on the definite possibility that Croom might have turned it into a trap for some unwary trailer of Harry's ilk. Again, the time element was playing tricks, for when The Shadow reached his goal it was vacant. Returning after their prowl, Wolf's men – Cliff and Marsland and Hawkeye included – had taken the ropes and departed after finding out that Harry had escaped.

But the open window, marking Croom's two-way route, was a clue for The Shadow. Maybe Croom had preferred a different exit for his own protection, but it had the earmarks of a trap – enough to decide The Shadow's next course. With a low-toned laugh, he started off in another direction.

The night mail was chugging out of Wilbury when The Shadow started across a stretch of farmland. In the woods, then out again; as he neared an old farmhouse, The Shadow heard the town clock gonging eleven. Then, through the farmhouse window, he was viewing Wolf Lapine, whose hat was tilted back to reveal his surly face as he listened to accounts of men who had only just arrived, because their route had been longer than The Shadow's.

They were the pair from the shack, bringing the frayed rope as evidence of their lost prisoner. Standing by was Cliff, bluntly taking blame for the oversight, which won the admiration of Wolf's tribe but didn't convince the fang-faced leader.

The facts, in Wolf's opinion, put the blame on Harry's captors, not Cliff. If they had tied their prisoner properly, Wolf argued, he wouldn't have slipped them.

Wolf then snapped to something more important.

"So the guy said he belonged to another outfit," he snarled. "All right, we'll keep an eye out for them. Next time, hang on to any guy you grab, even if you have to croak him! Sometimes a dead guy is all I've got to see, to know whose outfit is around!"

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Off through the night, The Shadow moved back toward Glenwood Grange. He was debating a moot point: had Harry's yarn been sheer bluff, or had he by some chance actually spotted other prowlers hereabout?

Such speculation stimulated The Shadow's calculations. He worked from the basis that Harry could have run into trouble from an unknown mob. Since The Shadow himself dealt in the incredible, he was willing to credit the imaginary as real. The who, where and how of a mystery mob, did not alter its possibility.

Thus did The Shadow build conjecture into fact!

Calculating Harry's course as a circuit, The Shadow soon found the lookout stump, which rivaled the shack as a vantage point. Under The Shadow's probing flashlight, which kept its tiny gleam concealed by cloak folds, The Shadow discovered trampled underbrush, broad by the stump, narrower as it led away into the woods. Again, the wind that stirred the trees caught The Shadow's whispered laugh and enveloped it just as night itself enfolded the cloaked figure who employed that mirth!

UNDER a blaze of light, Harry Vincent opened his eyes. This time his thoughts suffered a lapse, for he'd taken some brutal treatment from his present captors. He thought a pair of huge lanterns were glaring at him. Instead, he was in the focus of automobile headlights. Harry muttered half aloud:

"Working... for another outfit. So... what? Same as you guys... I'd join up with anybody... like Wolf Lapine --"

It was just a continuation of Harry's talk at the shack, for he supposed that Wolf's tribe still held him. He couldn't remember how they'd grabbed him again, but he did recall his bluff and stuck to it. His words happened to be ambiguous enough to let his present listeners form their own interpretation. A man with a sharp, yet smooth-looking, face pushed those features into the light and let Harry see them.

"So you're working for Wolf Lapine," came the buzz-saw tone. "Maybe you know who I am?"

Harry blinked. The action cleared the film from his brain. He realized that this wasn't Wolf, and back to mind sprang the battle at the stump. The fight that had proved his bluff was real. Groggily eyeing his new captor, Harry didn't recognize him.

"Don't know me, huh?" The man rasped a chuckle. "That's because I don't show my mug too many places, the way Wolf does. Nobody has a good idea of what I look like, the bulls in particular. But they've heard my name. It's Kip Reddick."

The name buzzed deep into Harry's whirling brain and repeated itself like a rasped echo:

"Kip Reddick... Kip Reddick... Kip Reddick --"

It was impossible! Kip Reddick was supposed to be dead. A chameleon among crooks, he had gone from one type of outlawry to another, until he had finally disappeared. Rumors of his death had mingled with reports that Kip had chosen to have his face lifted instead; but the death rumor persisted when Kip failed to return to circulation.

"You figured I'd been croaked," taunted Kip. "But I had a better reason for laying low. They never mugged me, but they took my fingerprints. So I've been playing smart, waiting for a big job. I've found it. This lay is mine, not Wolf's. Get it?"

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Groggily, Harry muttered that he'd be glad to tell Wolf Lapine. Whereupon Kip gave a raspy snarl and drove the heel of his hand against Harry's jaw. Going backward, Harry's head hit a table leg and he rolled to the floor.

"Tough you're working for Wolf," sneered Kip. "We thought you belonged in the Grange. They can't spare guys, but Wolf can. He's going to lose a lot before he's through, because he's the fall guy in this proposition. It's me that's pulling the real job, and Wolf is only the blind."

"The whole thing was set, when Wolf barged into it on his own. After that, it looked like a good idea to play ball with him. Why not? It's giving me a better out if anything goes wrong, and Wolf deserves to be a sucker because he nearly queered the setup."

"Maybe you're wondering why I'm telling you this. If you are, you're plain dumb. It's because you won't be telling Wolf or anybody else anything I've said. You think this Glenwood proposition is an inside job. It is, only it's a smarter kind of inside than you ever heard of! So smart, that Wolf will never wise –"

KIP cut off with a snarl as he realized that Harry hadn't heard a word. The jolt against the table had knocked him cold. Kip made a gesture and two members of his compact crew hooked Harry's arms and brought him to his feet. Receiving hard slaps against the face, Harry opened his eyes and gazed about, wondering where he was.

Guns began to prod Harry's ribs. They were starting him on a death march. Seeing Kip again, Harry remembered who his captor was. Through Harry's thoughts throbbed the fact that Kip Reddick was writing him off because he'd been foolish enough to claim that he worked for Wolf Lapine. But all that Kip had said was blank to Harry.

Captors were binding Harry's hands behind him as they shoved him off a low road and up a brambly path, that the prisoner recognized. It led to a quarry that Harry had seen from his window.

The view from the mansion had shown the upper portion of the quarry, a sheer cliff jutting amid overhanging trees. The road where Kip's cars were parked was evidently in a small gully that skirted to the lower reaches of the Glenwood premises. Harry was trying to think of such things, to shake off the horror of his coming fate.

And then, ahead – the quarry! Something for Harry to remember as long as he lived – a point which one of his executioners jested in his ear. A white surface of rock, ghostly amid overhanging trees, a stretch of natural pavement that chopped off to nowhere!

Blackness lay beyond, thick engulfing gloom, its inky mass a symbol of looming death. Yet blackness could inspire hope in Harry. Such solid dark could represent The Shadow!

Then hope vanished. Rescue could never come from that gaping dark. It represented space that soon would echo with the crash of Harry's death plunge. And the grim forethought of that sound to be banished all else from Harry's mind – even the whispers of the brooding wind that a strained imagination could transform into The Shadow's mirth!

CHAPTER X. BLASTED BLACKNESS

ONLY when his feet struck the uneven rock that marked the final stretch in his parade of doom, did Harry Vincent yield to the mad impulse of speeding his death sentence by a hopeless struggle. It was better to die

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fighting than be dumped to doom like a loaded sack – even though there wasn't a chance to win.

Fifty feet to go on the horizontal. He'd show some action in that space before taking a vertical trip of twice the distance! Maybe imagination would help; at least it would be some solace, dying while he still fancied The Shadow's laugh close by.

Or was it fancy?

A thing that gripped you, halting a mad deed, must be something more than mere imagination! And something did grip Harry, clamping his arms, with an illusion of a whisper almost in his ear. Funny his captors didn't note it as they prodded with their guns, one from each side, and growled that they'd drag their prisoner if he kept holding back.

Those gruff voices drowned the whisper. It was purposely low, so the speakers couldn't hear it. The words it delivered were the proof that this was no illusion. Seemingly far away, yet very near, the voice of The Shadow was telling Harry to keep steady.

Those gripping hands from in back of Harry, they were The Shadow's too. They relaxed as soon as Harry mumbled something to let his chief know he understood. And on went the death march, the captors gripping Harry's elbows as he faked a wearied stumble along the cracked surface of the rock. A strange march, that included four figures – not three!

For The Shadow was close in the background, so close that Harry's captors almost gripped him, too. Close, but unseen, in this pitch-darkness, a phantom of night became a corporeal form. Cool was The Shadow's action, steady his hand, uncanny his precision, as he inserted a keen knife blade between Harry's wrists and found the binding rope.

It was done in a jog.

Harry felt a slight jerk as he stumbled. Coming up with the pull his growling captors gave him, he was tripping forward again, amazed to realize that his hands were free. He kept shifting them back and forth just beyond the limits of the rope, had it still been there. But he didn't try the break he'd hoped for earlier. Harry was still taking orders from The Shadow.

Or was he?

There wasn't any token of The Shadow in the darkness. No whisper, no grip of hands. Only the severed rope which Harry was beginning to think might have broken of its own accord. Indeed, he was beginning to wonder why The Shadow should have released him at all, for Harry's captors were only two in number, a setup for The Shadow in the dark.

Still, the voice had ordered Harry to keep steady – and to wait. But it was difficult to wait in motion with a quarry brink coming closer with every step.

And then, with the whitish stone curving downward like a cataract of rock descending at his very feet, Harry faltered. Only for an instant; then he was lunging forward, snatched by something that seemed to pluck him from the very darkness that he knew was void.

Harry made a wild spin on the quarry edge, slipping one foot first down through a fringe of brambles as a pair of guns stabbed angrily from behind him, whining their bullets just above his head.

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The answer rang home amid that horrifying hover on the brink. Those shots were meant for the moment of Harry's falter. Against his body, their reports would have been muffled – the proper send-off to the victim.

Foreseeing just that, The Shadow had moved swiftly ahead; crouched and waiting; he'd snatched Harry from the prodding guns in what the killers had taken for a crazed lurch by their victim!

Harry's hover had become a slide. Full across the brink, he was going, going... almost gone, while new bullets ricocheted upon the fringe of the yawning pit. Those bullets couldn't clip Harry, for he was below the brink. Nor could they find The Shadow, who wasn't in the path of fire. He was to one side, his legs hooked in a crevice, while his hands, from their angle, were carrying Harry in a pendulum swing along the sheer rock itself!

UNABLE to claw for the surface, Harry tried for a foothold and found it. The rock was chunky, which helped, though differently than Harry supposed it would. One foot placed at a far angle, Harry started to shove upward to ease the strain on The Shadow, whose gloved hands had an iron grip on Harry's wrists.

The clutch relaxed and immediately Harry was flying wide again, back in the opposite direction, this time really launched for doom!

For the jagged rock along the quarry's surface could not hold. It had been blasted so often that it was full of cracks, and the knob on which Harry so depended had given way, once his weight was full upon it. One hand flying wide, Harry was clawing for nothing, while new shots ripped downward, almost searing him. Ridiculous for killers to be blasting blackness for a victim already doomed.

Then Harry was whirling full about, wrenched by a mighty twist that shook the shoulder socket of his other arm! The Shadow had dropped one grip to clamp a double, so that he could walk hand over hand right down the length of Harry's arm, but in a fashion that brought the spinning man upward to the cloaked human anchor on the brink!

It all happened in the course of seconds that were marked by a thumping clatter down the quarry edge, a tumble that ended in a resounding splash, followed by those echoes that Harry had pictured earlier. What smashed the water was the chunk of rock that Harry's foot had literally kicked, to hit where crooks had destined him – only to be overruled by The Shadow!

The splash sufficed. Killers thought their duty accomplished. They could tell Kip Reddick that pot shots in the dark had jolted a bound victim who was crawling on the rocky edge, sending him to a fate that had been subject to only a trifling delay.

They'd come closer to something very much bigger, that pair who were hurrying back across the broad expanse of rock. If they'd spread their field of fire they might have found an unseen target in The Shadow, the superfoe so feared by crimedom. But The Shadow had timed things well, even calculating that Harry's wild pendulum swing would send debris down into the chasm, thus completing an intended deception of death without rescue. Why The Shadow had acted thus, Harry began to learn as his chief hurried him along the path that crooks had taken. The Shadow was asking Harry what he'd learned, and the agent was naming Kip Reddick as the leader of the rival mob. There were moments when The Shadow's laugh came low and sibilant; then Harry understood.

The Shadow wasn't merely interested in thinning down a batch of crooks. He wanted to deal crime a complete knockout. So far, he'd been handling events at Glenwood Grange both inside and outside. Links between Carl Croom and Wolf Lapine would have to be proven solidly, in order to become a chain that would gather in Mark Jarratt.

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And now the appearance of a rival faction headed by Kip Reddick had become a thing to make or break The Shadow's cause. All for the better, if this tribe stayed on the job, revealing its connection with the case and serving as a foil. All for the worse, should Kip and his followers think that their game had gone awoul through the survival of a victim – namely, Harry Vincent – whom they had destined for destruction.

Hence The Shadow's daring strategy, culminating in an amazing rescue of his doomed agent without disclosing his unseen hand! One life saved, yet marked as gone on the calendar of Kip Reddick's crimes!

The pair who thought they'd disposed of Harry were reaching Kip's car. Telling Harry to wait, The Shadow moved rapidly ahead to learn what else he could about this rival faction.

The self-styled killers were in the car when The Shadow neared it, but they weren't receiving congratulations from Kip. He was telling them that they'd wakened half the county with their wild, unmuffled fire; that there was nothing to do but scam and talk about it later.

Kip's car sped away with its quota of thugs. As the taillight took a turn in the gully road, The Shadow's low laugh reached Harry as a signal. Approaching, Harry was impressed by the confident tone of The Shadow's mirth. It meant that The Shadow's ruse had worked, despite Kip's hasty departure.

"They will return," assured The Shadow. "By tomorrow night at latest. Once Kip hears that you are dead, his worry will pass. He may wait to make sure that no one heard the shots and visited the quarry to find a body. But no one will find your body, Vincent."

Harry was glad that no one would. He was saying so, when The Shadow laughed again in a tone of further satisfaction. Following his chief's point, Harry saw lights spreading out from Glenwood Grange. Croom had heard the distant gunfire and had brought his men outside. Telling Harry to follow, The Shadow led his agent on a straight route toward the mansion.

ON the way, they passed a tumbling mass of ruins on the verge of the estate. Keeping Harry wide of that pitfall, The Shadow hurried him across the lawn, almost into the range of the spreading flashlights. A few brief instructions, then The Shadow was gone.

Harry saw him soon after, when The Shadow deliberately cut across a beam of light. One man gave a yell that brought another. Again The Shadow was caught in a streak of light, but he reversed his trail, back toward the house. He was between the men who waved the flashlight, and they found no one but each other.

Then Harry was cutting in among them, swinging a flashlight of his own, pointing them along an imaginary course. He'd become the leader of this batch, giving them the impression that he, too, had hurried from the house at Croom's command. Knowing the direction that The Shadow intended to take, Harry was swinging his light toward the other side of the house, when a shout came from the opposite direction.

It was Croom. Coming around a corner, another man with him, Croom had run right into a lunge of living blackness. He hadn't time to distinguish his adversary; he simply shoved a gun ahead of him and tried to fire point-blank.

That bullet must have nicked one of the gables atop the Grange, for Croom was somersaulting when he pulled his trigger. He landed hard, Croom did, while his companion, seeking to stem the human avalanche, was overtaken by the same disaster, losing his flashlight and his gun as he did a flying spin.

Closest at hand, Harry saw the gun and grabbed it, his own having gone to Wolf's men when they captured him. Sweeping his light along the corner, Harry caught a fleeting glimpse of The Shadow, so he wheeled in

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another direction and blasted a few shots at blackness that wasn't cloaked. Then he was leading a mad foray across the lawn, which finally ended with a few of Croom's men shooting valiantly at the old dead stump where Harry had met his second capture.

Back to the mansion, Harry was at the side door calling for the distant marksmen to return, when Croom came around the corner of the house, still trying to get his wind back. From the corner of his eye, Harry studied Croom to see how the bluff had worked. It was difficult to tell.

Croom's blunt face was purplish; his heavy fists, drawn tight, were signs of repressed anger, which was also evident in his glare. Whether he meant that look for Harry, or for the others whom he had gone on a wild-goose chase, was something Croom did not specify. Finding his breath, he shouted for the guards to return to the house.

Inside the mansion, Croom bolted the door and told two men to stay on duty, while the rest turned in for the night. Croom's manner was more blunt than ever; he hadn't another word for anyone, which made Harry think – and hope – that Croom's anger was due to his own mishap rather than anything else.

From the window of his room, Harry watched a while for any glimmer from The Shadow's light. There was none, but that was no surprise. The Shadow's work was finished for tonight. He had gone his mysterious way into his favorite habitat, darkness. The same blackness that guns galore had blasted, to find The Shadow missing!

CHAPTER XI. HARRY TRIES AGAIN

DAWN brought a knock at Harry's door. His sleepy answer brought the announcement that it was time for him to go on guard duty. So Harry got out of bed, dug in his suitcase for a shirt, and came across another wedged envelope with a message from The Shadow.

As with the others, Harry thumbed a corner after the writing vanished, and produced the number "3." This being the third message from The Shadow, it tallied as it should.

For Harry's information, the coded message stated that the shooting had been heard in Wolf's camp, but had apparently not disturbed the town of Wilbury. Not the shooting from the quarry – it was too distant for Wolf's tribe to hear – but the fusillade around the mansion when Croom's men were gunning for The Shadow.

Wolf had sent Hawkeye to spot what he could. Contacting The Shadow, Hawkeye had brought back the simple story that Croom's men had gotten excited on patrol and had wound up pumping bullets into a tree stump.

So Wolf Lapine had resolved to stay, though he expressed the hunch that Croom's crowd must have seen some member of the rival crowd that had muscled into what Wolf regarded as his own territory. However, that didn't bother Wolf, who felt that he could depend on Croom when Mark Jarratt gave the word to go.

Harry finished his guard duty that afternoon. It was boring work, going here and there about the house, checking on the crates in the cellar as well as the art objects that had been placed about the mansion. There was a side trip to the huge garage where the vans were stored.

No ordinary garage would have held them, but this one had an unfinished gymnasium alongside it and the removal of a partition had allowed space for the vans.

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The van men were still around, getting paid on an overtime basis, so they didn't care how long they stayed, provided it wasn't much more than a week. But Harry couldn't inform them on that point, nor did he discuss the shooting of the night before, except to intimate that it was largely a mistake.

Later in the afternoon, Harry was dozing by the fireplace when Croom came in and sat down at the other side. Harry could see his boss watching him, but there wasn't a betrayal of any emotion in that stolid stare. No wonder Croom had been chosen for this assignment; the fellow had everything that went with self-sufficiency. On the surface, Croom looked as incorruptible as a machine, and that was doubtless what had impressed Ewell Darden and the other directors of the Argyle Museum.

Only a sharpshooter like Mark Jarratt could have thought of reaching Croom. But there wasn't a thing in Croom's demeanor to show that his conscience bothered him. A tough nut, this chap, and Harry couldn't figure a way to crack him. In fact, it was Harry who began to feel uneasy, wondering if Croom had guessed he was awake. So Harry stirred, shook himself, and returned Croom's stare openly.

"I thought you'd soon wake up," spoke Croom in that blunt tone of his. "I want you to go into town with me, Vincent. We'd better get started, so as to be back by dark."

They went to the garage and took out a car that was parked in a corner beside a van. During the ride into Wilbury, Harry kept wondering why he had been thus favored. But Croom hadn't a word to say until he'd parked near the station. Then, in a confidential tone:

"Keep your eyes open, Vincent," Croom suggested, "so we can both hear what's being said around here. Let's start with the post office, if there is one."

The post office was just across the street, though the railroad depot partly obscured a view of it. Croom certainly should know just where it was – not because the vans had stopped nearby, for Croom might have failed to see everything in the dark, but because of the letter that he had sent to Jarratt bearing the Wilbury postmark.

A neat trick, this, professing ignorance regarding the local post office. It showed that Croom was subtle as well as blunt, two opposite traits seldom found in one individual.

So Harry played the perfect sucker and found the post office for Croom, who went to the general-delivery window and inquired for mail. He came back empty-handed to find Harry casually studying a bulletin board. When Croom asked where the letter slots were, Harry didn't know.

Whereat, Croom smiled in a way that seemed genuine. He thwacked a friendly hand on Harry's back.

"Glad to hear that, Vincent," he said. "One thing we can't send out of here – that's letters. Not for a while, anyway. I brought you along because I was sure you weren't a man to break a rule. I need somebody like you: a man who's reliable."

AGAIN, Croom was bolstering the impression that he personally would not have mailed anything from Wilbury. Next he took Harry into local stores, where they bought food and other supplies in quantities that occasioned pleased surprise.

Storekeepers put leading questions, of course, as though presuming that these were the new residents of Glenwood Grange, but Croom furnished them no information, nor did Harry. Altogether, Croom became more and more convinced that Harry was a good man.

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They wound up in the local hotel, where Croom suggested dinner instead of returning immediately to the Grange. He'd provided for about everything, Croom had, except a good cook. Glenwood Grange needed a real chef, but Croom didn't care to advertise for one. If Harry knew of one who could be trusted, Croom would appreciate the information.

Pondering, Harry decided that he would get just such a man, but Croom decided to postpone the subject, for the waiter was coming with the dinner.

The hotel meal proved good, a welcome change from the poor cooking at the Grange. While Harry and Croom were dining, a frail-looking young man with light hair came into the dining room and took another table. He gave Harry and Croom a few curious looks, then ordered his dinner. Croom didn't seem to notice him at first.

"About last night," began Croom. "If anyone really knew what we are doing at Glenwood Grange, we might be in for real trouble, Vincent. We should have looked up the sheriff today, but what he won't know can't hurt him... or us. Now, if –"

Harry interrupted with a warning gesture. He didn't want the frail chap to hear. So Croom, after a side look over his shoulder, went on in lowered tone.

"We didn't just meet with an ordinary prowler." Croom was referring to The Shadow. "That fellow in the dark was smart... too smart. I'll tell you something else, Vincent. I think I know where he came from. Early last evening –"

Again Croom paused to make sure the other dinner guest was hearing nothing. Leaning well across the table, Croom told how he'd gone out of the mansion secretly, to check on lights he'd seen in the woods. He mentioned the shack he'd found there, and while Croom talked, the dying sunlight from the dining-room window gave a flicker to his eyes that Harry could well liken to the glitter of a snake's gaze.

Purely accidental, that glint, but timely. It simply emphasized Harry's opinion that Croom was sounding him out, trying to learn if he, too, had roamed from the mansion earlier, and if perchance Harry was in any wise associated with the mysterious prowler.

It would be very important for Croom to learn this while working for a double-dealer like Mark Jarratt. Certainly the crooked antique wholesaler would want his lieutenants to be on lookout not only for The Shadow, but any of the latter's agents.

So Harry matched Croom's poker-faced attitude and became an excellent listener. Suddenly noting that the sun had set, Croom decided to get back to the Grange. While he was calling for the check, he had another idea, which he expressed to Harry on the way outside.

"I'm going back alone, Vincent," decided Croom. "Stay around here until your dinner settles, then come back. The walk will do you good. You have your gun and flashlight?"

Harry nodded. His gun was an extra that he'd brought along in the suitcase, but he didn't add that fact.

"Anything you notice, let me know," concluded Croom. "You're sort of an outside man for tonight. Unless –"

He didn't finish. His eyes simply watched to see if Harry showed objection, either in expression or manner. But Harry didn't object, so Croom turned to the hotel desk, drew a wad of fresh new currency supplied by the museum directors and peeled off the dinner money in the same way that he'd made purchases at the local

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stores.

Outside, Harry watched Croom speed away in his car in an effort to reach the Grange before dark settled. Figuring out Croom was quite a problem, so Harry tried first to tackle it in simple terms. Rejecting Croom's own claims, there could be hidden angles behind each.

First, the trip to town: that was to throw suspicion from Croom's own shoulders, the post-office gag as a sample. Next, the need for a new chef was obviously to sound out Harry's contacts, if any. Finally, this business of outside duty – what was its answer?

Harry suddenly had it.

Croom had guessed that Harry was watching him. By putting Harry outside, all that was ended, for this evening, anyway. Which could mean, most definitely, that Croom intended to contact someone outside of Glenwood Grange.

It was too early for Harry to seek contact with his own chief, The Shadow. But the time was ripe to spike Croom's game. Remembering Croom's suggestion to stay at the hotel a while, Harry promptly discarded it. Leaving the hostelry, he strolled through the little town, quickened his pace on the outskirts and took a short route to Glenwood Grange.

Thickening dusk became darkness, but Harry used his flashlight sparingly. He kept mostly to the road, and when he reached the grounds around the Grange he didn't use his light at all. From the hillside, the sky showed faint traces of afterglow, so Harry was cautious as he approached the mansion, where he wanted to watch the side door to see if Croom came out.

Reaching a house corner by a circuit, Harry decided on a better angle. So he moved away, but as he did, he glanced back.

Another figure shifted from the shelter of the wall. It wasn't The Shadow; he wouldn't have been visible in such darkness. Nor Hawkeye, for the figure wasn't huddly enough. No other man of Wolf's crew would have dared approach the house so closely; nor none of Kip's, if they'd returned.

Sneaking around the house, Harry glanced backward and saw the other man still on the trail. That settled it. The fellow was Carl Croom.

Clever of Croom, not only to stop Harry from watching him but to reverse the situation. Good guesswork, too, his figuring that Harry would return to the Grange. But Croom couldn't be sure that this was Harry; at least, not yet. Nor would he learn, the way that Harry led him. For The Shadow's agent was picking the downward slope toward the rear of the grounds, where there wasn't any background of sky to let his trailer get a clear look at him.

The old ruins down below; they were the perfect objective. Toward the quarry, they would link with the shots of the night before, thus bothering Croom, who didn't know about Kip's faction. Moreover, the ruins would be dark, a perfect place for Harry to slip Croom and double back to the mansion, where he could arrive innocently, with no report of anything amiss.

So much did this please Harry, that he was at the ruins before he realized it, and there his footsteps clattered on old chunks of masonry. Bad business, this, but he could rectify it as long as Croom merely heard, but did not see him. So Harry shifted along a low wall only two feet above ground. Pausing, he listened for sounds of Croom. They came, from a short distance to the right.

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With his foot, Harry found some planking that creaked, but not too badly. He shifted again and listened; his hand slid to his gun pocket as he heard a clamber just in front of him. Puffed breath, like Croom's the night before; the fellow was groping almost to Harry's position, which called for another shift. Harry made it; again a board creaked. A hand made a grab from somewhere and brushed Harry's coat, waist high.

No need for a gun. Instead, Harry lunged, thrusting his hands ahead, intending to fling Croom back from the wall before the fellow was fully on his feet. But Harry's lunge was met head on by an attack much nimbler than he supposed Croom could supply. No grapple this, but a full-fledged flay with fists!

Harry was dodging as he swung. He felt his blows land home, though his opponent's punches were riding past him. Nice to know that his fists were pommeling Croom, as the fellow's staggers proved. Hearing a stumble to his left, Harry wheeled across the planks to meet Croom coming up. But things changed very suddenly.

A punch met Harry going down! Old boards were splitting with a sudden crackle, and Harry, chopping through them to his knees, was grabbing with one hand and waving the other uselessly when a fist took him in the jaw.

Reeled sideward, Harry didn't have to worry about the cracking boards. There wasn't any planking where he went; nothing but space, which came up to swallow him like the depths of the dreaded quarry!

Fortunately, the fall was shorter – less than a dozen feet to the cellar of the old ruins. But the jolt that ended it was unpleasant, enough so that Harry felt it very briefly. Stunned by his crash, Harry Vincent was again a victim of his overzeal, this time before either The Shadow or his fellow-agents could be on hand to aid him!

CHAPTER XII. THE WAY OF A FRIEND

HARRY'S own flashlight was glowing on his face, but he thought it was Croom's. Anyway, coming out of his daze wasn't as bad as the others – not at first. But in his maze of jumbled recollections, Harry recalled that he'd found shorter shrift from Kip's crowd than from Wolf's. Maybe Croom would go them both one better, now that he'd defined Harry as a phony.

Still, Croom would probably let Harry talk. Otherwise, Harry wouldn't be waking up at all. So, with a sickly grin, Harry propped himself into the light, stopping as a face entered the glow. The face wasn't Croom's, nor did it belong to anybody that Harry expected to see.

The man in the light, whose hand was juggling the gun from Harry's pocket, happened to be the frail young chap who had dined at the Hotel Wilbury!

"All right, let's hear it," said the light-haired man, quite firmly. "What you're doing here and why? The whole truth and nothing else. I'm tired of all this mystery!"

Truth seemed as good as anything, so Harry fed it in a minor dose by stating that he belonged at Glenwood Grange. That brought a snort from Harry's captor, who retorted that he knew as much already. He wanted to know what was going on in the Grange, to which Harry, with a lurking idea that this chap might be teamed with Croom, stated frankly that he was under obligation not to tell. The young man promptly tightened his gun grip.

"Come along, then," he said. "We'll talk to the sheriff. Unless you'd prefer the Feds, without a lot of wasted time between."

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Harry was puzzled.

"The Feds?"

"I saw that cash your friend was passing out," the young man replied. "It's all over town and it looks good enough to be real. Except that people don't take over a house like the Grange and begin spending new money on a wholesale basis."

At that, Harry really laughed. This chap was obviously sincere and he had it all so sure that Croom and Harry were a brace of counterfeiters.

"If I'm wrong, stop me," the fellow said. "But I still will feel I'm right until I've heard a sound reason why you're stopping at the Grange. Particularly" – he added this with emphasis – "when I already know that you're contacting an outside crowd, who were here at Lower Glenwood a day before you arrived."

By Lower Glenwood, the speaker meant the ruins. But the crowd to which he referred could only be Kip's outfit. This was the sort of information Harry wanted for The Shadow. It would be worthwhile to feed out facts in return for more. Still, Harry was cagey.

"Tell me who you are," he suggested. "Maybe you're crooked like you think I am, but you don't look that way, any more than I do."

It was a good thrust, even with Harry's present unkempt appearance. The young chap took it right to heart.

"I'm Phil Glenwood," he declared soberly. "Last of the family and all that. Out of luck with the rest of them when my grandfather blew his fortune building the new house on the hill. But I didn't blame the old man; his heart was really in it. I always wanted to buy back Glenwood Grange."

"Right now I can... or could. I'm worth a lot more money than you'd think. Just a run-of-the-mill success. Went into chemical research because I liked it, and came through with some formulas the big companies liked even better. I found a new explosive, enough of it to blow me out of the lab and into a fortune."

"What it's made from is classed as a government secret at present. The main thing is, I'm still alive and in the money. I came to Wilbury hoping to buy Glenwood Grange and keep it as is, except for the gym my grandfather didn't finish. That's to be my new lab, or it would be" – Phil's tone became rueful – "if somebody hadn't slapped a five-year lease on the Grange before I had a chance to buy!"

HARRY came to his feet unsteadily and began to introduce himself, with proper amplifications. He gave his name and Croom's, stating that the latter was the custodian of the Argyle Museum collection, now installed at Glenwood Grange. At mention of the name Argyle, Phil's eyes went wide.

"I've gone further than you did," said Harry. "I've revealed the secret that I shouldn't. The money you saw was new because it came fresh from the bank. Ewell Darden, chairman of the museum board, gave it to Croom for running expenses, and they're likely to run a long while."

Obligingly, Phil Glenwood returned Harry's gun and extended his hand instead. Phil proved quick at putting things together.

"Then that crowd that was around here... they're after the Argyle treasures?"

"Probably," replied Harry.

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"But with all the secrecy," queried Phil, "how did they find out?"

"That's what we're trying to find out."

Harry included Croom in the specifications, and truthfully, since he connected Croom with Wolf's enterprise, not with Kip's. Then Harry noted that Phil's face was furrowed deep with thought.

"That bunch made their headquarters right here in Lower Glenwood," declared Phil. "That's what the old house was called, you know, after the big mansion was built."

Harry didn't know and admitted so, at which Phil reflected for a while.

"Maybe it's just a coincidence," he declared, "their choosing these old ruins. Or maybe –"

He halted suddenly. Then:

"Tell me, Vincent," he asked frankly, "do you think there's any chance of my buying the Grange before that lease ends?"

"I'd say yes," returned Harry helpfully. "The lease may be dropped in five weeks instead of five years, the way things look now. Considering how crooks spotted it so quickly –"

"I understand," Phil interrupted. "Suppose we go back to the hotel, Vincent. I have my car here."

Harry looked blankly about the ruined cellar. All that he saw were foundation walls, deep with debris and passages. Charred wood was among the remnants indicating that Lower Glenwood must have been a wooden building that was destroyed by fire.

"The car is over near the road," explained Phil. "I drove here, then went up to the house to watch for you. From things I overheard Croom say, I thought it was a good idea. Whatever I could get on crooks would be helpful to the public, though I must confess a personal interest, too. I wanted to see you out of Glenwood Grange."

Phil led the way to the car, which was some distance up the gully road. As they stood there in the darkness, Phil said suddenly:

"You've been frank with me, Vincent, so I'll be fair with you. Keep this confidential. Don't even tell Croom if you can help it. You'll promise that?"

Harry promised it with pleasure. The less he could tell Croom of anything, the better. Phil hadn't learned that yet, for if Harry had accused Croom of double-dealing, he would have confused the issue and perhaps forced himself into mentioning The Shadow.

"It's about those crooks who came here," said Phil slowly. "If they really chose Lower Glenwood with a purpose, it would mean –"

Phil stopped abruptly. Lights were coming along the gully road, dim lights of cars that swung in toward the abandoned foundations of Lower Glenwood. They passed the deep turnout where Harry and Phil were standing, and to Harry they could only represent Kip Reddick, returned with a more sizable outfit. They meant the same to Phil, except that he didn't know Kip's name. Phil swung to Harry savagely.

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"So you were expecting them!"

"Easy, Phil," began Harry. "I told you I belong at the Grange –"

"As a traitor!" inserted Phil. "The inside man, I suppose you'd call it. Otherwise, why would you be sneaking down to Lower Glenwood?"

It was a tough question. To answer it thoroughly, Harry would have to accuse Croom of being the traitor. And that just wouldn't wash, on top of Phil's accusation. To define the word "dilemma," just call on Harry Vincent! He could get into two-way jams with the greatest of ease. And this dilemma was the jackpot of dilemmas.

"Let's get back to the hotel," argued Harry. "We can go over the whole thing when we're there. We don't want a run-in with Kip –"

"So you know the big-shot!" broke in Phil, before Harry could cover his slip. "And I, a sap, gave you back your gun! Only you won't have a chance to use it. I slugged you once –"

Instead of adding that he could do it again, Phil tried it. He wasn't bad with his fists, so he could be excused for taking credit for Harry's downfall. Probably Phil thought he'd landed the deciding wallop before the wooden planking splintered. His fists came jabbing one-two style, and one blow landed, but it hadn't the needed beef behind it.

It was Harry who supplied the beef, with the one punch that counted for a dozen. He folded Phil like a jackknife, landing him so far from the car that he had to look around to find him.

Phil was limp when Harry picked him up, but his heart was still beating, though Harry was inclined to think it was in the wrong place. Anyway, Harry tumbled Phil into the seat on the right, fished his keys from his pocket, and coasted the car out to the road.

KIP and his caravan were by that time too far along to be even of nuisance value. The gully road curved away from the ruins, and it had ruts so deep that there was no need even to touch the steering wheel. After a quarter mile it ran into a better road, and there Harry jogged the motor into gear. He drove toward Wilbury, then compromised, and stopped where he could take a quick cross-cut to Glenwood Grange, where he was overdue.

Phil was moving around, pressing both hands to one side of his jaw. He was waking all right; Harry knew the symptoms from personal experience. So Harry slid from the door on his side, pulling Phil over to the wheel, which Phil gripped and nodded. He was awake, and it pleased Harry. He preferred to regard Phil Glenwood as a friend.

It was the way of a friend, to fight it out and then be decent afterward. Phil had shown that style with Harry, who was now returning the favor. They'd meet again and have a laugh about it, but how soon they'd meet wouldn't really matter. Whatever Phil had been going to say about the ruins of Lower Glenwood was probably quite unimportant compared to the fact that Kip Reddick had returned there.

Reaching Glenwood Grange, Harry banged at the side door. It was Croom who answered, a look of honest inquiry on his flat but friendly face as he drew Harry into the great hall. On the way, Croom inquired in an undertone:

"Learn anything, Vincent?"

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"Only that some cars were easing along the gully road," replied Harry. "Down in back, over toward the old quarry."

"Too far away to worry us," decided Croom. "But I'll tell the men on patrol duty to keep special lookout. If you're hungry, you'll find sardines and crackers in the kitchen. They're all that's worth eating until we get a decent chef. Like the one you said you knew about."

Harry nodded. He'd be pleased to introduce the new chef. Very pleased, considering the man he had in mind. If Croom thought he'd learn anything through that channel, he'd be wrong. So wrong, that Harry was grinning all the way up to his room. All he needed now was a message from The Shadow, one bearing the number "4."

There wasn't any message from The Shadow.

Only briefly, was Harry puzzled. Then he had the answer. In arriving, The Shadow must have spotted the approach of Kip Reddick. Naturally, he'd have gone to the ruins of Lower Glenwood for a closer look. Such business, and the fact that The Shadow was keeping contact with Cliff and Hawkeye, to check up on Wolf Lapine, would naturally restrict The Shadow's communication with Harry.

Harry was right. His chief was very busy. What Harry overlooked was the fact that his own absence from Glenwood Grange might be known to The Shadow. In fact, The Shadow's own acquaintance with matters in the town of Wilbury would indicate that he had learned of Harry's trip there. In which case, The Shadow would certainly have found time to send instructions to his inside man.

It just happened that in finding one reason, Harry forgot another. A reason that was a name: Carl Croom. It wouldn't be long before Harry would learn much more regarding Croom and his particular brand of treachery.

As would The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIII. SHOWDOWN AT MIDNIGHT

So dark was the night that the ruins of Lower Glenwood had turned black, to the degree that the men who clustered there were as hidden as the stumpy walls themselves. So, in due proportion, was The Shadow. He was as invisible as night itself as he listened to the low tones of Kip Reddick, the man who could boast himself a murderer returned to his scene of crime – and still be wrong.

"We're all set," Kip was saying. "The trucks are stowed where nobody will find them. So let's scam, the way we did last night, only we'll do it before we need to croak another of Wolf's outfit. We don't want to discourage Wolf. We need him in our business."

Kip didn't add further details. His statement, as it stood, contained enough significance. That Kip was after the Argyle treasures, went without saying; there wouldn't be any other reason for him to visit this terrain in company with a picked band of murderous followers. His problem, of course, was how to attack Glenwood Grange and make away with its contents.

The same problem confronted Wolf Lapine, and therein lay an answer. Since Kip "needed" Wolf without the latter knowing it, Kip's scheme, apparently, was to use Wolf's efforts to cover up his own. In turn, Wolf was waiting for the "go" signal from Mark Jarratt, who was too smart to be working on a blind basis. Indeed, by final analysis, the answer seemed to lie with Carl Croom.

For Croom was the "inside man" at Glenwood Grange. He held full control there, and his only reason for

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biding his time would seemingly be the building of an alibi, a process which Jarratt considered very valuable. But The Shadow, for the present, was more interested in learning the status of Kip Reddick and his relation to Wolf Lapine.

Down in the cellar ruins which had once been Lower Glenwood, Kip's men were digging into side passages, as if to firmly entrench themselves. The Shadow could see flashlights moving from those depths of debris, coming back to the central spot where Kip stood.

It was an excellent setup for a surprise attack, but The Shadow preferred to forego such opportunity. Whenever he found crooks in opposition, it was better to play them against each other. The rivalry between Kip and Wolf would develop if let alone.

So The Shadow moved away from the ruins where Kip's men were entrenching themselves, and found the trucks that Kip had mentioned. The way The Shadow found them was by following a single light that blinked like a wayward firefly. One of Kip's half dozen men was retracing the route to as neat a hiding place as could be wanted. The light moved through a split between two rocks some distance from the gully road, and there it disappeared.

Reaching the crevice, The Shadow decided not to follow through. Instead, he took a grip on one rock wall and started upward. No suction cups were required for this climb; indeed, they would have proven useless against the rough-hewn rock. It happened that The Shadow's test of when to use the disks was simple.

Any surface too smooth to scale without them meant that the cups were needed. This rock wasn't too smooth. It allowed finger clutches, toe holds, and by such measures The Shadow reached a brink that looked like a miniature of the great quarry from which he had rescued Harry Vincent.

Here The Shadow found a perfect vantage spot from which he could view the trucks. They were parked some twenty feet below, in a natural pit shaped like a horseshoe. The crevice from which The Shadow scaled was a split in the horseshoe itself; wide enough for men to go through two abreast and to carry burdens with them, but it wouldn't admit the trucks.

The route the trucks had used was between the prongs of the rocky horseshoe, a gap worn smooth by water draining from the flat-bottomed pit. Trees leaning from the sloping rock formed an archway clearly discernible by the increasing moonlight, and two more of Kip's followers were busy camouflaging the space with clusters of brushwood. That done, people could pass the outlet, even in full daylight, without guessing of the hidden cache where three trucks were stored.

There was no sign of the cars that had come with the trucks. They were still somewhere on the gully road. And now The Shadow saw the flashlight glimmer again, indicating that the messenger from Lower Glenwood was contacting the workers who were on the camouflage job. So The Shadow began a circuit of the rocky fringe, taking care not to dislodge loose stones.

Had any of Kip's men turned around and looked upward, they would have observed what looked to be a giant beetle making a circular crawl. For against the gray stone, The Shadow was plainly discernible as a blotch of black in motion. The risk of such discovery was slight, however, as The Shadow proved when he merged with the darkness of the trees that overhung the rocky prong.

There, quite invisible again, The Shadow was close enough to hear the voices of the workers, less than twenty feet below him.

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THE messenger was growling for the others to hurry up, that Kip wanted them back at the cars. In reply, one worker expressed surprise that no one was to stay and guard the trucks.

"Why should anybody stay?" demanded the messenger. "Who's going to find the trucks... and what if they do? The trucks are empty, ain't they? Kip says we've done all we need to do for tonight."

The workers chucked the last few stacks of brush and started back toward the trucks with the man who had summoned them. Obviously, they intended to go out through the little crevice and rejoin Kip.

Hopeful of gleaning more information, The Shadow was about to retrace his course along the curving rock brim, when he heard a scuffling noise in the dark.

Someone was getting past the brushwood, not by crashing through the camouflage but by drawing himself up and around it, using a grip on the overhanging saplings. A figure plopped to the ground on the inner side of the barrier; a moment later, another landed beside it.

From where they were, these newcomers could see the outline of the trucks, because Kip's three men, returned there, were using flashlights without sufficient caution. The Shadow promptly calculated that the newcomers belonged to Wolf's tribe, and the fact was proven a moment later when a hoarse voice whispered down from beside the saplings:

"Listen, you guys! Lay off until we've slipped the word to Wolf. He won't want us to queer this set-up."

It was Hawkeye's voice. He was appealing to the pair who had been doing scout work with him. But they weren't listening to his advice. Looking straight down at the two crouched figures, The Shadow saw that the two were drawing guns. They were going to put the blast on those fellows by the trucks, who even now had turned their back and were moving away with flashlights that transformed them into easy targets.

The Shadow held no advance regrets for the fate that threatened Kip's three henchmen. All had been party to the attempted murder of Harry Vincent and deserved all that might be coming to them. But if it came to them right now, delivered by Wolf's equally vicious killers, The Shadow's plans would be blasted, too. He wanted crime to reach its culmination in an attempt on the Argyle treasures; not to end in a mere gang fight that would cause the real brains of crime to draw in among themselves and scheme a new campaign.

There was a simple way to end this premature thrust, though it outmatched simplicity with daring. Leaning outward from the brink, The Shadow clutched two saplings. Poising, he suddenly let go in a wide-armed dive toward the rocky floor below!

Hawkeye saw the swoop of living blackness, hurtling into its reckless plunge. Wolf's gunners didn't; they were too intent upon aiming at the flashlights of Kip's departing trio. Then blackness landed, a mass of substance hurled from nowhere, striking silently but hard upon the two crouched marksmen!

Caught by the sweep of widespread arms, the pair were flattened beside the tangled brushwood. Still clutching their guns, they struck out savagely, but wide. Solid was the fist that smashed one gunner's chin, jarring him to the limit of his gun hand, loosening the fingers that gripped their revolver.

Tight was the clutch that caught the other's throat, the thumb below the gripping fist pressing a neck nerve with a paralyzing effect. Numbed, the second killer lost his gun, too, and before he could recuperate The Shadow hurled him against the slowly rising figure of his pal.

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Another form was landing close by. It was Hawkeye, identifying himself with an unneeded whisper. The Shadow simply caught his arm and thrust him toward the groggy pair who were grappling weakly with each other.

Close to Hawkeye's ear came a whispered laugh, telling that all was clear. Kip's men and their lights had disappeared through the opposite crevice, quite unaware that they owed their existence to their archenemy, The Shadow!

LEAVING the stupefied pair to Hawkeye, The Shadow moved past the trucks and found them empty, as Kip's men had stated. Reaching the crevice, he heard motors start, caught glimpses of lights moving up the gully road. In bringing the trucks and visiting the ruins, Kip and his tribe had accomplished their mission for tonight. Now The Shadow's job was to check on Wolf's crew further.

That proved immediate and easy. There were sounds from the brushwood tangle at the mouth of the horseshoe pit, then Hawkeye's voice, still reasonably cautious, stating how to get past the barrier. The Shadow moved to the shelter of the trucks and watched.

The first man to arrive was Cliff Marsland, who turned a flashlight on Hawkeye and the little man's half-dazed companions. Then more were climbing around the brushwood camouflage, until finally Wolf Lapine arrived in person. By then, the scene was well aglow with lights.

Already, Cliff was handling matters, bluntly complimenting Hawkeye on having induced his companions to restrain their fire. Cannily, Hawkeye passed the credit to the men themselves, saying that each had "wised up" in time to grab the other.

Both gunners nodded when they heard this statement, but they exchanged sidelong glances. Knowing that Hawkeye couldn't have downed them both, they took his story for granted, but each thought the other deserved the credit for having first accepted Hawkeye's advice.

Thus from the minds of both vanished a hazy recollection of blotting blackness that began the struggle. If either suspected that The Shadow was the primary cause, the idea didn't jell. It wasn't The Shadow's usual way to swoop on enemies, daze them, and promptly disappear while they recuperated. What banished the impression completely was the fact that Wolf was glad that his gunners hadn't opened fire on Kip's men. Hence the pair couldn't see how The Shadow would have benefited, too, his purposes naturally being the opposite of Wolf's.

It was Hawkeye who mentioned what he and his companions had heard while lurking outside the brushwood barricade. Mention of "Kip" was all that Wolf needed to supply the rest of the name.

"So Kip Reddick is the muscler!" snarled Wolf. "He always was a rat, that guy, doing a mooch when somebody else found the lay. Got his trucks all stashed and waiting where he thinks we won't spot them. He'll find he made a bum guess when he gets back!"

Flashlight ahead of him, Wolf was advancing toward the trucks. The blackness that faded toward the crevice looked like nothing more than dispelling darkness. Wolf was far too concerned about the trucks to guess that The Shadow formed a portion of the fading gloom. Furthermore, Wolf's attention was diverted by a man who overtook him: Cliff Marsland.

"Maybe we can use these wheelers," suggested Cliff, noting that Wolf intended to riddle the truck tires with bullets. "All we got to do is keep Hawkeye posted to let us know when Kip's crew comes back. They won't be suspicious if they find everything like they left it."

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"That makes sense, Cliff," approved Wolf. Then, reluctantly, he added: "Only we can't take chances on Kip cracking the Grange first. He's wise that we're around here, because we let one of his mob slip us."

Cliff nodded at the reference to Harry. Then:

"That just makes it even up," said Cliff. "Kip won't be back tonight, or he wouldn't have stashed the trucks. That gives you all day tomorrow to tip off Mark Jarratt and see what he thinks about it."

This time, it was Wolf who nodded as he played his flashlight away from the trucks and found the crevice into which The Shadow had glided off beyond, when Wolf moved toward it. Silently, The Shadow was taking his own course through the night when Wolf's tribe used the narrow exit to leave the hidden pit.

Already the night mail had rattled out of Wilbury. The town clock was donging eleven as The Shadow moved toward the ruins of Lower Glenwood. There for a short while, he turned his flashlight on the piles of wreckage that Kip and his crowd had shifted to make crannies that would be helpful in case of battle.

Then, seeing other lights approaching, The Shadow knew that Wolf and his outfit were coming to take a look at this improvised stronghold.

Again The Shadow faded into night, taking a skirting route among the knolls that led up to Glenwood Grange, where he had a routine call to make. Strange that this trivial detail could prove of more consequence than the important things that had gone before.

The Shadow was on his way, to a midnight showdown which even his keen mind had not foreseen!

CHAPTER XIV. CRIME'S CROOKED TWIST

FROM the window of his room, Harry Vincent had been keeping watch in the direction of Lower Glenwood, hoping for some trace of Kip Reddick. He had seen none, for the simple reason that Kip's men had confined their flashlights to the depths of the ruins. When lights did appear, a long while later, they marked the advent of Wolf Lapine and his faction, who were less wary than the previous visitors.

Calculating the time factor, Harry came to a correct conclusion. He'd encountered Phil Glenwood some time between eight and nine, so Kip must have arrived soon after the latter hour. Now it was getting close to midnight, too long a while for Kip to have waited before showing lights – if he intended to show them at all.

So, to Harry, the lights meant that Kip had left and that Wolf Lapine was in that neighborhood accompanied by clumsier followers than those who worked for Kip.

Or were Wolf's men clumsy? Maybe those lights were meant for benefit of Carl Croom! A chance for him, as inside man, to contact the outside mob. Which, if true, would be of great importance to The Shadow, who through some unexplainable oversight had not yet favored Harry with a coded message covering this evening's moves. So Harry, seeking some answer to the riddle, thought of crackers and sardines.

Nice of Croom to have mentioned them. A midnight snack would be sufficient excuse for Harry to slide downstairs and learn what was happening in Glenwood Grange. Acting on the thought, Harry tilted his lamp so that it shaded half the window, and therewith went from the room. There was a back stairs leading to the kitchen, so he used that route.

At the bottom of the stairs, the trip brought dividends. Peering into the passage that led to the side door,

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Harry was sure he spotted motion there. Halting the creak of a door behind him, Harry stole along the concrete floor, listening for sounds ahead. He heard them, footsteps less guarded than his own, and when he stopped by a turn in the passage, his luck increased.

Harry saw Croom against the firelight from the great hall, pausing to chat with a guard on duty there. But he wasn't sure whether Croom had postponed an outward trip or had just returned from an outdoor excursion.

While Harry debated the question, Croom took a chair beside the fire and the guard arose to start his rounds, coming straight toward the passage where Harry watched. So Harry retreated rapidly and went up by the back stairway to have another look toward Lower Glenwood. He felt rather sure that Croom had already completed a clandestine excursion, if the fellow planned one at all. Those distant lights at least would be an index.

There were no longer any lights when Harry peered from the window. Wolf's crowd had come and gone, so that was that. But there was something here, in this very room, that meant much more to Harry. It was a message from The Shadow, sticking out from a corner of the open suitcase.

Rapidly, Harry opened the message, read the coded lines, and learned of his chief's excursion to the ruins and the hidden stone pit. As the message faded, Harry moistened his thumb and ran it across the corner of the blank sheet.

The usual routine, this. Into sight came the number "5," marking the sequence of the message in the present series. Methodically, Harry started to tear the paper, and then –

The thought struck him like a shot! This was the fourth of The Shadow's messages, not the fifth. Somewhere, Harry had missed a number and the logical time must have been early this evening, when he had first expected word from The Shadow. When and how message number "4" had gone astray, were important questions. More imperative, however, was the need for quick communication with The Shadow.

Inasmuch as message "5" must have arrived within the last dozen minutes, Harry decided upon a quick signal flash from his window. That was why he shoved his left hand to his pocket for a flashlight, instead of using his right to draw a gun.

A quick choice, and a wrong one. From behind Harry came a hard-toned voice. He turned to see Croom standing in the doorway, giving a cold eye over an equally frigid revolver muzzle. Croom meant business, so Harry's hands came up, the torn note fluttering from his fingers.

IF that paper had only fallen close by Harry's feet! It would have been good bait to draw Croom off guard. But a breeze from the little ventilator pane at the top of Harry's window caught the sheet and fluttered it halfway to Croom, who scooped it up without relenting with his gun aim.

"Gone blank," grunted Croom. "I thought it would. I found the one that came earlier, Vincent. It blew in while you were out meeting some of your friends."

"You mean while I was out following your orders," returned Harry coolly. "The whole thing happened to be your idea, Croom."

"Yes, my idea, and a good one. I knew I could bluff you, Vincent. And now" – Croom waved the torn paper – "you're going to tell me what this message said."

"It's blank," parried Harry. "See for yourself –"

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"I saw for myself," interrupted Croom, "when I picked up that other cockeyed message. It was in code, and the writing disappeared. But I saw you reading this one, which means you know what was in it. So let's have it... or –"

The word "or" meant Croom's gun, which he gestured very understandingly. Harry's raised fists clenched, as he wished Croom would come within reach. A good wish, that one, for it gave Harry an idea.

"You win, Croom," spoke Harry dejectedly. "But I ought to see the other note first. What did you do with it?"

Croom produced it from his pocket, but drew back suspiciously when Harry reached for the blank paper.

"All right, then," continued Harry, "develop it for yourself, Croom. All you have to do is hold it close to the light and the heat will make the message reappear."

Harry was hoping that Croom hadn't already tried such a system. Once faded, The Shadow's messages never would reappear. If Croom had found that out, Harry's bluff was through. But Croom, to Harry's relief, approached the lamp and held the paper up against it, at the same time keeping a wary eye Harry's way, along with the gun muzzle.

"I knew you were phony, Vincent," spoke Croom. "Knew it the first night we arrived here. I saw you open a note and read it when the vans stopped in Wilbury. Whatever the message was, you couldn't have answered it that night, because the late mail train pulled out while we were coming into town, and there wasn't another until the next noon. But you must have answered it, or you wouldn't have gotten this message –"

"Never mind," broke in Harry. "Hold the sheet still and I'll read it for you. There's the message, back again."

Croom turned to look and saw the same blank sheet! Only for half a second did the ruse surprise him, but that was long enough. A side step, a lunge, and Harry was clear of the gun muzzle, springing for Croom's throat with one hand, swinging the other for a grab at the blocky man's gun!

Surprising himself by his own speed, Harry had Croom reeling to a corner the moment he completed the drive. That was just the trouble – the corner. Hitting it back first, Croom went into reverse, or rather Harry did. For Croom gave an imitation of a bull coming up from its haunches into a terrific charge.

It was his turn to send Harry ahead of him, each with a hand on the other's neck and both wrangling for the gun. But Croom's chunky bulk was enough to telescope Harry when they reached the opposite corner.

It was then that Harry saw blackness come to life. In from the little ventilator pane shoved a cloaked arm that disgorged a gloved hand which in turn wangled an automatic. A twist of the gun and it was aiming toward the strugglers, only to divert itself when Harry, by a lucky foot thrust, tripped Croom short of the corner.

They were reeling sideward now, those two, and Harry was vainly trying to twist Croom about so that the fellow could be in The Shadow's path of fire when the automatic blasted.

Strange, the direction of that shot. The Shadow didn't direct it toward the grapplers. He fired it straight downward, at the floor. For a moment, Harry thought it was intended to draw Croom's attention; then the real answer came.

The Shadow had aimed at the padlock which held the heavy window clamp. The result, a mashed bullet – but it had split the padlock with it!

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Like a black lash, The Shadow whipped downward from outside the window, flinging his cloaked form into the light. He'd abandoned his suction cups and was swinging by one hand only, which gripped the edge of the open ventilator pane. His other hand was weighted with an automatic, but his feet flying wide were carrying him so fast that his gripping hand lost its hold on the space above. He'd lost control, The Shadow had – but purposely!

At the very instant when Harry thought The Shadow's swing had turned into a hopeless plunge, those flying feet kicked the lower section of the window and drove it inward, thanks to the released clamp. Then did the force of The Shadow's mighty heave prove its worth, for it carried the cloaked fighter right through the inswinging sash, to the floor of the room.

Harry, inspired by his chief's terrific arrival, did his proper part by twisting as Croom charged anew. It was Croom who banged the wall again, his gun hand hitting first, so hard that the weapon popped from his clutch and he staggered as his head took a thump.

Harry slapped wildly as the gun clattered the wall just overhead. A lucky pluck and the weapon was in his own fist. Croom was jabbing blindly to regain it, and Harry saw fit to let him have it, on the head. Down came Harry's swing, only to be met by a slash that crisscrossed upward: an intervening blow from The Shadow's gun. As the weapons clanged, it seemed hard to tell for whom The Shadow fought – for Harry or for Croom.

Then came the answer.

The Shadow was fighting for Croom! He took Harry in the midst of a stagger, sent him on a spin that carried him across his cot to the floor beyond, where Harry landed gunless, never more astonished in his life.

COMING to hands and knees, he stared at The Shadow, who was helping Croom to his feet. Right then, Harry would have classed his chief as an impostor, but for the fact that no other fighter could have maneuvered that whirlwind entry through the window.

Low, sibilant was The Shadow's laugh, as though he appreciated the sudden mystery. Hardly had it died before a hammering sounded at Harry's door. Croom looked toward The Shadow, who promptly covered Harry with his gun, using his other hand to gesture toward the door, while he ordered:

"Answer it. Say that everything is well."

Croom obeyed. Through the crack of the door, he spoke to a guard who had heard the gunshot. Croom simply stated that he and Harry had been testing the range of a revolver from the window. The guard went away and Croom turned about, to meet with a surprise of his own.

No longer was The Shadow holding Harry covered. He'd gestured his agent to the middle of the room, and there Harry met Croom with extended hand. It wasn't that The Shadow had deserted Harry; he'd simply learned that they had both been mistaken on the Croom question. The man wasn't a traitor, as Mark Jarratt had declared!

To win Croom over, The Shadow had sided with him long enough to gain his confidence. Now meeting Harry under The Shadow's own auspices, Croom was finding out that Harry was honest, too. It was Harry who explained the situation at The Shadow's nod.

"We had you wrong, Croom," declared Harry. "On account of the letter you sent to Jarratt."

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"But why?" Croom's eyes were puzzled. "I told Jarratt I wasn't interested in his deal. There was nothing in that letter –"

"It was the envelope," supplied Harry. "It bore the Wilbury postmark."

"But I didn't send it from here!" Croom exclaimed. "I left it at the museum, to go out with the rest of the mail. That was in the morning, before we began to pack the crates."

There was honesty in Croom's expression and his tone. To certify it came The Shadow's laugh, supplying the last link that Harry needed. To Croom, Harry expressed suddenly:

"Remember what you said to me, Croom? Just before we went at each other? You said I couldn't have sent a letter from Wilbury the night we arrived here, because the last mail train passed us when we were coming into town."

Croom nodded.

"Your own statement cleared you," explained Harry. "Because your letter couldn't have reached Jarratt the next day if you had mailed it yourself. Somebody brought that letter here ahead of you, Croom, and mailed it to frame you!"

The words were Harry's, but he spoke them only as The Shadow's proxy. For The Shadow had recognized the point the moment that Croom had uttered it. Again came the sibilant laugh, this time with a final note of approval. For when Harry and Croom turned, they saw no trace of The Shadow. He was gone, past the blackness of the window, his mirth a token of departure.

The Shadow had gone to find crime's answer outside of Glenwood Grange. Between them, Harry and Croom could handle matters within that citadel, now that their mutual suspicions had been cleared. Two honest men, both alert and working in accord, would prove a solid safeguard against crime's coming thrust.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XV. CRIME'S BOMBSHELL

EARLY the next evening, the directors of the Argyle Museum gathered there at the request of Ewell Darden. They were surprised, when they arrived, to find reporters present; in fact, some of the directors were badly worried. Daily they'd been wondering if the museum's priceless treasures had reached their proper destination, wherever it might be, and sight of reporters smacked of a calamity.

One smile from Darden put the directors at ease. Seated at the head of the long table, Darden announced dryly:

"I have heard from Croom. The shipment arrived safely and is properly installed on premises suitable for its protection."

Immediately, the directors wanted to know where the treasures had gone. Darden could only shake his head, because he didn't know. He'd learned the news by telephone from one of Croom's assistants, named Vincent, who had come into New York on an errand. Pursuant to instructions, Croom intended to keep his present whereabouts a secret for another week, at least.

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The reporters present were rather disappointed at such a slim story. Hoping for a clue, one of them asked about Vincent's errand. With another of his dry smiles, Darden explained that Vincent had come to get a new chef, because Croom's men weren't satisfied with their meals. Outside of that, everything was perfect.

"That is all, gentlemen," declared Darden, in a final tone. "Where the Argyle treasures may be at present, is a subject on which you may speculate as you choose. I can assure you only that the really valuable rarities are no longer in this museum. Here are some catalogues in which all the items were checked, when shipped. If you wish to look around and make sure that they are gone, you are welcome to do so."

Most of the reporters decided to look around. As the directors left, Cranston strolled with them and found a chance to chat with Darden by the outer gate. He asked if Darden had heard further from Jarratt, to which Darden replied in the negative.

"I believe our rebuff totally discouraged the fellow," declared Darden. "Still, Mark Jarratt is persistent. I am holding a reception at my home tomorrow night – I mailed you an invitation, Cranston – and I wouldn't be surprised if Jarratt had the cheek to come there. As a dealer in antiques, he seems to feel himself a privileged party."

Other directors were getting into Darden's limousine, for he was dropping them at their homes. His own car being handy, Cranston declined an invitation to go along. So Darden entered his limousine, rapped at the window to rouse his dozing chauffeur, and the group rode away.

As soon as the car had left, Cranston returned into the museum. There he found Clyde Burke demonstrating the ancient lottery wheel for the benefit of the other reporters. Tired of watching the thing, they picked up catalogues and went out to check the exhibits, as Darden had suggested. Catching a glance from Cranston, Clyde remained beside the wheel until they were alone.

"Sit over by the table, Burke," suggested Cranston, "as you were the other night."

Clyde nodded and took his proper place, while Cranston stood by the wheel, as Darden had. He asked about the other directors and Clyde explained how one had shaken the wooden capsules into the groove, while another was delegated to spin the wheel. Playing both parts, Cranston came to the final action, that of removing a pellet, as Darden had.

"This was the whole process?" he queried. "Nothing else... up to the time Darden summoned Croom?"

"Only this." Clyde gave a sheepish grin as he plucked some rubber bands from the table drawer. "I took a few pot shots at the bronze bust of old Henry Argyle."

To illustrate, Clyde triggered a rubber band to the statue's nose; then brought another from the drawer. He insisted he'd been watching the wheel despite the byplay with the rubber bands; in fact, had turned that feature to advantage. Clyde demonstrated by flipping the elastic to the floor, then reaching to pick it up as Cranston stepped from the lottery wheel, capsule in hand.

"That's where I tried to peek," said Clyde. "But there wasn't a chance. Darden didn't open the capsule; he gave it to Croom, who shook it" – Clyde acted Croom's part by reaching for the pill – "like this."

CRANSTON gestured for Clyde to toss the pill back into the wheel, which Clyde did, remarking as an afterthought that he'd dropped the rubber band in his pocket. Then:

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"I still had it there," Clyde added, "when I stopped at the Cobalt Club. The commissioner tricked me into writing down some fake phone numbers" – Clyde brought the little memo book from his vest pocket – "so I tried to be nonchalant. This way."

Clyde illustrated by doubling the rubber band around the little booklet, which brought the comment from Cranston:

"Nonchalant enough, Burke."

"Not the other night," returned Clyde ruefully. "The rubber band wasn't big enough. It snapped."

"You should remember such things," remarked Cranston in a tone of mock criticism. "So much hinges on the tiniest details." Then, with one of his slight smiles, he added: "I suppose that was why the commissioner wasn't glad when he ran into you later."

Clyde flavored his nod with a grin, whereupon Cranston swung the conversation to a more serious turn.

"Go out and join the other reporters," he told Clyde. "Find out two things: first, when Mark Jarratt was last here; second, how often the mail is sent out from this museum and who carries it."

When Clyde returned, Cranston was still spinning the old lottery wheel and idly plucking wooden pills from its groove. On both counts, Clyde had something to report. He had chatted with one of the old-time attendants who'd been at the Argyle Museum ever since it was first open.

"The old chap says he hasn't seen Jarratt for a couple of weeks," informed Clyde, "and he says everybody takes the mail out. They just pile the letters on the catalogue desk and whoever goes off duty at noon or five o'clock takes the mail along."

Cranston nodded, then inquired how the other reporters were making out. Clyde said they weren't. They'd hoped to find some slip-up in the catalogue markings, but there was none. Everything listed as shipped was gone from the museum.

"If they could just find one odd item," declared Clyde, "some real rarity that didn't go along, they could shoot pictures of it and run some sort of a story about a forgotten curio. As it stands, they have nothing."

They were walking down to the gate, Cranston and Clyde. There, Cranston invited the reporter into the limousine. As they rode away, Cranston remarked very casually:

"I think Darden gave you a good story lead, Burke. He said you could speculate as you wanted as to where treasures went. I can substantiate that statement, if need be."

Clyde's eyes widened. As an agent of The Shadow, he'd already learned the actual destination of the Argyle treasures, but he couldn't crack that story unless his chief said so. And it almost seemed that The Shadow wanted him to do just that!

"You mean" – Clyde was really puzzled – "that I'm to give the Classic the whole thing on Glenwood Grange?"

"Quite the contrary," returned Cranston. "I said you were to speculate. To begin with, you take it for granted that Darden, as chairman of the museum directors, knows where the treasures really are."

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"But how could he, when he gave the pill to Croom unopened?"

"He might have told Croom to disregard whatever was in the pill," rejoined Cranston. "We know he didn't, but suppose he had –"

"Then Darden would be solely responsible," interjected Clyde. "Say, that's a good point, chief, considering that Jarratt is trying to frame Croom!"

"Confine your thoughts to Darden," smiled Cranston. "Yes, he would be responsible. And so –"

"And so" – Clyde pondered – "so he'd have to keep his own eye on the treasures, Darden would. Say, that means he'd have shipped the whole works to that big house of his in Westchester, where he has a young museum of his own!"

"And where Darden is holding a reception tomorrow night," added Cranston. "I think you have a story, Burke."

They were at the Classic office. Clyde hopped out in a hurry. He wanted to get that story through to meet the deadline for the early edition. Hurrying up the steps, Clyde saw Cranston's big car starting, and above the pound of presses in the Classic building, Clyde was sure he heard the departing laugh of The Shadow!

Perhaps that laugh was merely an illusion, considering that The Shadow was not his cloaked self at the time. But even when guised in black, The Shadow dealt in illusions, as he proved at Jarratt's wholesale shop, a short while later.

THERE, as on a previous evening, The Shadow sifted in through the doorway as though a fragment of night had loosed itself to travel of its own accord.

Past the counter where the clerk was busy with some late customers, in among the knickknacks, up the stairway that led to Jarratt's office – there, The Shadow materialized on the very threshold as his gloved hand turned the knob.

Inch by inch, the door moved inward, until The Shadow could see Mark Jarratt at his desk. Across from Jarratt sat a visitor whose presence was an actual surprise. The caller was Cliff Marsland.

Just as Croom had sent Harry into town, Wolf must have done the same with Cliff. But Harry had reported to Burbank, whereas Cliff had not. Which meant that Wolf must have sent a few others along with Cliff, while keeping Hawkeye out at the farmhouse headquarters near Glenwood Grange.

"So Wolf Lapine is worried," Jarratt was saying. "You say he wrote me a letter? When?"

"Last night," replied Cliff. "He sent it from the post office at Wilbury."

"Funny I didn't get it yet." Jarratt gave a wary look at Cliff. "Well, it won't matter, now that you're here, Marsland."

The delay on Wolf's letter was actually a vindication of Croom, as analyzed by The Shadow, one night ago. Cliff recognized it, but didn't say so. Instead, he concentrated on the matter that had brought him.

"Wolf is getting restless," argued Cliff. "I don't blame him. When a guy like Kip Reddick stashes trucks near a place, he puts them there for something. Wolf wants to know why you didn't happen to think about trucks

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for us."

"No trucks are necessary," declared Jarratt. "The vans are still out at Glenwood Grange. You could take them over."

"Like Wolf tried to, once," Cliff retorted. "Anyway, let it ride. We'll use Kip's trucks, if he doesn't show up too soon. But here's another night wasted. When do we move... and how?"

"Tomorrow night, if I hear from Croom," returned Jarratt. "If not tomorrow... well, the next night."

"Or the next?"

Cliff's blunt question brought an indulgent smile from Jarratt, who had regained his usual suave composure.

"Don't worry, Marsland," he declared. "Whoever this Kip Reddick is, he hasn't a single chance! Tell Wolf to forget him; and the trucks, too. There won't be any trouble taking the vans, because Croom will have everything fixed. For instance –"

Jarratt paused to draw a diagram on a sheet of paper. It showed the interior of Glenwood Grange, which Cliff couldn't dispute when Jarratt explained what it was. From the doorway, the Shadow could see the diagram, too, and having learned such details from Harry, he knew that they were correct. Which proved that Jarratt had somehow learned a lot he shouldn't know.

"The garage is the best point of attack," declared Jarratt. "That will enable you to capture the vans before you raid the house. But remember: Croom will put up a strong fight in order to give himself an alibi later. By the way" – Jarratt's eyes went shrewd – "does Wolf have enough men?"

"Just about," replied Cliff. "One guy deserted on us, but a few more are joining up. All right, Jarratt... what do we do tomorrow night? Phone you?"

Jarratt hesitated, then wrote down a number, saying he could be reached there. So Cliff went out by the special elevator, while The Shadow took his own route down through the shop, where the clerk had disposed of the customers and was half asleep behind the counter.

Outside, The Shadow heard a car pull away and knew that Cliff and his companions were starting back to rejoin Wolf.

If ever The Shadow had viewed an ace of double-crossers, that man was Mark Jarratt, whose interview with Cliff Marsland had told The Shadow all he came to learn – and more. Crime's machinery was ticking so loud that The Shadow could not only hear it; he could see the works.

All that it needed was a bombshell to explode it, and The Shadow had already provided one. Whatever had so far escaped The Shadow's probe, would fly into sight when that big blast came!

CHAPTER XVI. CROOKS GO ASTRAY

THE SHADOW'S bombshell was the Classic story, as written by Clyde Burke. It was a masterpiece, that yarn – a whole fabric of speculation woven around a few threads of fact. It was amplified by photographs that told a story in themselves. Old Henry Argyle, with the home that he had transformed into a museum; Ewell Darden and his palatial residence in Westchester, suitable storehouse for the Argyle Museum treasures –

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these were simply the dominant pictures.

To them, Clyde added more. He kicked over the traces on the question of Wolf Lapine, letting out the fact that the police were after the notorious bank robber who had so far slipped the law. In another column appeared a photograph of Mark Jarratt, but Clyde handled his case very subtly, stating only that Jarratt had tried through honest purchase to obtain what Wolf sought through crime.

Of course, there was a lot about the Argyle treasures, old stuff that Clyde dug from the files in the newspaper morgue, but it all seemed new when given this timely twist. Just to spice the story, Clyde added a picture of Commissioner Weston, one of the invited guests to Darden's reception.

Clyde completed the story by leaving it in the air, asking the pointed question: Would Ewell Darden surprise his guests this evening by showing them the choicest treasures of the Argyle Museum collection, housed beneath the same roof where Darden kept his own rare prizes?

By noon, the Classic had heard from everybody mentioned in the story, with the exception of Wolf Lapine. Absolute was Darden's denial that he had the Argyle treasures in custody; great was Weston's indignation at having been included in what he chose to class as an "unwarranted hoax." The Classic plastered these objections on its front page and sold more copies as a result.

Even Jarratt was much annoyed and asked that his name be stricken from the records, on the grounds that he had merely wanted to buy any left-overs from the Argyle Museum and not the rare items that formed the basis of the story. But the Classic didn't change a line of Clyde's original description.

By afternoon, the biggest of all coming events was the reception due at Darden's house, and the local authorities were busy dispersing the curious throngs that wanted to trample all over Darden's estate and peer through the windows of the house.

But the real smash happened even later, almost at dusk, when Cliff Marsland strolled into the farmhouse near Glenwood Grange and handed Wolf Lapine a copy of the Classic bought in a neighboring town.

Wolf took one look at his own portrait, a rogues gallery shot, and read the incriminating caption beneath it. Casting his eye across the page, he saw the smug face of Mark Jarratt, the gentleman who wanted to acquire the Argyle treasures by legitimate purchase. Thereupon, Wolf began to bounce the furniture.

"Why, the double-crossing rat!" bawled Wolf, after running out of more expressive epithets that he felt summed up Jarratt's case. "So that's why he sent me out here... so he'd be rid of me. He's got us playing a phony steer!"

"Ease up, Wolf," suggested Cliff. "Maybe Jarratt didn't know the goods went to Darden's."

"Didn't know!" sneered Wolf. "Hasn't he got this guy Croom on the inside? So what?"

"Maybe he hasn't heard from Croom yet. And besides" – Cliff reflected – "there's Kip Reddick to think about."

"I've thought about Kip Reddick," snarled Wolf. "I'll tell you how it all adds up. Kip brings a lot of trucks here and leaves them. What does that mean?"

TO Cliff it meant that Kip was playing the same game as Wolf. When Cliff so stated, Wolf broke loose. Wolf didn't see it that way any longer. In his opinion, the trucks were just a blind, the sort that a double-crosser

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like Jarratt would order.

"Jarratt never figured on cutting me in on this deal," argued Wolf. "It was after I'd made my own try that he sent for me. He had the lay all doped, with Kip working for him. Once he got me planted here, Jarratt hands Kip the word to give me the run-around. Am I right, Cliff... or are you wrong?"

Cliff happened to know that Wolf was more than halfway right. Last night, Jarratt had made two slips: one, proving that he had no hold on Croom; the other, that he did have contact with Kip. The angle on Kip had come up when Jarratt queried about Wolf's mob, trying to learn if any of its members were missing. In stating that one man had deserted, Cliff covered the question of Harry Vincent, the prisoner that Kip thought belonged to Wolf's outfit.

So Wolf was right, assuming that Kip was linked with Jarratt. Right, too, in supposing that Kip was staging some sort of bluff which wasn't to Wolf's own advantage. Where Wolf went wrong was on the final point: that of supposing that the Argyle treasures weren't at Glenwood Grange.

"Get the mob together," ordered Wolf. "We're going to crash that party at Darden's. We won't worry about trucks or vans. We'll pile the stuff in cars we find there and get going with it."

Cliff still wasn't quite convinced.

"Suppose you've doped it wrong, Wolf," he argued. "You'll be leaving things wide open here for Kip, if he shows up."

It wasn't the sort of argument Wolf liked; nevertheless, he couldn't entirely ignore it.

"You handle this end, Cliff," decided Wolf. "Keep Hawkeye posted as a lookout. I'll leave a couple of gunzels with you."

"Why a couple?"

"Three, then, Cliff. But I can't spare any more –"

"I mean, why any?" put in Cliff. "It won't take more than two of us, Hawkeye and myself, to put those trucks on the fritz."

"But what about Kip's crew?"

"We'll leave them to Croom and the guys in the house. It ought to be about an even show. And suppose Kip does win out? He loses when he finds he hasn't any trucks."

Wolf brightened at the thought.

"So Kip will lam," continued Cliff, "and you won't have to convince Jarratt that you're a bigger shot than Kip. I'm not too sure that Jarratt has given you the two-way X." Cliff picked up the Classic; glanced at it and chucked it in the corner. "I wouldn't take this paper's say-so on it."

There was this about Wolf Lapine. He liked to cover every angle. Maybe it was ten to one that he was right, but he wasn't willing to ignore the long shot. He could insure that bet by following Cliff's suggestion, so he did. Ten minutes later, Wolf and his outfit pulled out, leaving Cliff and Hawkeye to handle whatever might happen around Glenwood Grange.

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ONLY an hour's ride away, the guests were arriving at the suburban home of Ewell Darden. By this time, the local police had solved the question of the curiosity seekers by blocking off the entire area around Darden's. The only cars permitted to come within a quarter mile of the palatial residence were those that contained Darden's invited guests.

Darden's house occupied an elevation in the midst of lawns that were thick with flower beds and amply supplied with towering oaks. As the guests arrived, they were ushered to verandas that opened from a large reception room. There, servants supplied them with refreshments while they awaited the important announcement of the evening – the question of the Argyle treasures.

At last the time had come. Guests flooded in from the verandas and grouped themselves in doorways, watching Darden, who was flanked by the directors of the Argyle Museum. Darden's keen eye surveyed the throng; his thin face took on a firm look. In decisive tone, Darden declared:

"This evening I shall shatter an outrageous hoax. The claim has been advanced that this house holds the priceless treasures that were shipped from the Argyle Museum. I declare that such a rumor is entirely untrue. To prove my statement, I shall conduct you through every room in the entire house. These gentlemen can tell you" – he gestured to the directors – "if there is a single item present from the Argyle collection."

The directors began to huddle around Darden, some of them speaking excitedly, though in undertones. Brushing them away, Darden amplified his previous announcement.

"There is the question of replicas," he stated. "Many of the Argyle rarities have been duplicated for purposes of special exhibition, but always with the proviso that they be destroyed to prevent any one from passing imitations as originals. In most instances, those replicas were shipped back to me, as a matter of good faith.

"My fellow-directors are asking if I still have any of those reproductions. They think that some of the reporters present" – Darden looked toward a group of newspaper men that included Clyde Burke – "might seize upon that circumstance to back their absurd idea that the Argyle treasures are housed here. My answer is that you will not find a single replica upon these premises. I scrapped every such imitation as soon as it was returned to me.

With that, Darden waved his guests on the tour and they thronged through the house in batches, with bowing servants opening doors ahead. During their trip, they saw many of Darden's own curios, but none resembled the priceless possessions of the Argyle Museum. The tour carried from cellar to attic, ending with a side trip to Darden's garage, the last possible place where anything could be stored.

The garage was large, but totally empty, because Darden's chauffeur had moved the cars out to the driveway, allowing room for the guests to enter.

First to congratulate Darden, on completion of the trip, was Commissioner Weston. As the two shook hands, they both looked for Clyde, who had wisely drifted away when he saw the vacant garage. Instead of Clyde, they saw Jarratt, who, true to form, had crashed the party just in time to join the tour.

Worriment was written on the face of Mark Jarratt, but only one person observed it. That was Lamont Cranston, and he knew what troubled Jarratt. The crooked art dealer had waited somewhere for a phone call that didn't come. Jarratt must have finally realized that Wolf Lapine had gotten out of hand; hence to preserve his own alibi, Jarratt had hastened to Darden's.

A fortunate break for Jarratt – too fortunate, in fact – because The Shadow had hoped to involve the double dealer in a real dilemma. Nevertheless, Cranston was not disappointed at seeing Jarratt.

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For Jarratt was an index to the crime situation, a danger signal that Cranston recognized. This was the reason why Lamont Cranston detached himself from the throng that was going to the house and stopped at his limousine which was parked on the driveway below the cluster of cars from Darden's garage. Beside the limousine, Cranston found Clyde, who anxiously asked what he was to do next.

"Stand by, Burke," said Cranston quietly. "You overdid yourself with that last story, but you can redeem yourself with the next. This may help" – from within the car, Cranston passed Clyde an automatic – "so do not hesitate to use it."

The last words came in a sibilant whisper which brought a stare from Clyde. No longer was he viewing Cranston; instead, he saw The Shadow, garbed in black, placing a brace of guns beneath his cloak. Posting Clyde beside the car, The Shadow moved away and was swallowed by the darkness of the driveway.

NOT even a streak of blackness betrayed The Shadow's hidden course. The streaks that came were from the oak trees and the patchy flowerbeds, where huddly men were using such cover to best advantage. Their sneak became more apparent when they neared a veranda. There, with quick bounds, three of them hopped up the steps and sprang to doors leading into Darden's reception room.

From the middle door one man voiced a savage snarl. Darden, Weston, all the rest turned in astonishment to see themselves covered by three masked raiders. The central man – he of the snarl – was the leader of the vanguard; his mask was hardly a disguise. For there was just one man of crime who would stage this foolhardy raid. He was Wolf Lapine, already branded as the outlaw who sought the Argyle Museum treasures.

There was murder in Wolf's ugly voice, as if he sought to vindicate himself through evil. Hatred glittered in the narrowed eyes above the handkerchief that crossed Wolf's face. Wolf didn't know as yet that he was seeking wealth that wasn't on these premises; he still was playing his own hunch against Cliff's. But he was glad he'd come, for he saw men that he detested.

First Weston, who represented law. Next Darden, whose precautions had spoiled Wolf's earlier thrust. Then the directors of the Argyle Museum, lacking but one member, Cranston, whose absence no one noticed. Finally Wolf spotted Jarratt, who was sidling behind the group to get out of reach.

Through his mask, Wolf spat words that only Jarratt understood. He'd blast a path with bullets, Wolf would, to reach the double-crosser. At that moment, Wolf Lapine thought that he'd reached the summit of his murderous career. Strange that such opportunity could be instantly forgotten!

The thing that made Wolf forget was the laugh that pealed from the porch behind him. Fierce, challenging, it rose to a pitch of mockery that could madden men of crime, particularly Wolf Lapine. All other scores, Jarratt's included, could wait until Wolf had settled with the enemy he hated most of all.

Wolf and his band of outlaws had wandered far astray on a mission that could be written off. Robbery, mass murder, those were trifling things when they could deal with crime's superfoe, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. VANISHED FOEMEN

CLYDE BURKE had his story – one that no one would believe. Rooted beside Cranston's limousine, the reporter viewed the horrifying sight of The Shadow pitting himself against odds that no lone fighter could hope to survive. Up past the edge of the veranda, The Shadow was in the glare from the living room, confronted by three men – Wolf and his lieutenants – who were wheeling from their doorways.

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Had three been all, Clyde would have given The Shadow a fighting chance; but there were others, nearly a dozen of them, all lurking in the lower darkness behind the shrubs and ornamental trees that flanked out from the broad porch.

How The Shadow expected to slip that noose of marksmen, was too much for Clyde. So much, that the thing itself was in transition before Clyde could realize that he, too, had a gun, though he couldn't have used it if he'd wanted. For there were just two fighters who counted in that onslaught: The Shadow and Wolf Lapine.

This was their duel. In seeking it, they left the others flat-footed. Clyde's case, as an aid of The Shadow, simply typified the status of Wolf's followers. The Shadow's first shot was needed to bring Clyde to action; similarly, Wolf was the mainspring of his entire outfit. By driving straight for Wolf, The Shadow was holding others in abeyance during the vital moments that he needed.

For The Shadow didn't fire as he launched for Wolf; he left that to his adversary. And Wolf, seeing blackness lunging with swinging gun, sidestepped to take better aim. The cloaked shape was almost on him when Wolf tugged the trigger, and at that instant, blackness spread. Wide went The Shadow's arms, and the spot that Wolf took for his cloaked opponent's heart proved to be space between The Shadow's cloak sleeve and his body.

Wolf's shot missed. A shot that hardly seemed to matter, considering that it was the signal for a dozen other guns to blaze. Some of those guns did spurt, but in the action crooks deliberately jerked away their aim, while others more wisely withheld their fire. For by then The Shadow had reached Wolf and was whirling him around to become a target for his own killers!

All the while, Wolf was swinging his gun at The Shadow, hoping to jab one point-blank shot. Each time his revolver was met by the clash of an automatic that stopped Wolf's weapon like a trip hammer. Wolf smashed panes from the glass door that opened into the reception room. He chipped chunks from the stone house wall. He ripped a huge stretch of flimsy trellis with a single shot. But he couldn't clip The Shadow.

In from the flanks came the two thugs who had taken the other doorways. They'd fix The Shadow so that Wolf could finish him. They came in slugging hard – so hard that when The Shadow suddenly released Wolf and wheeled away, the arriving pair met each other.

Wolf thrust his gun in between them, only to have The Shadow drive from the other side, reeling Wolf backward with the locked pair who had brought him the wrong sort of aid!

All was a tangle, with Wolf firing a shot that found the eaves of an overhanging roof. To distinguish The Shadow was impossible, now that the fight had rolled away from the door. He was blackness – nothing more – amid the three-man melee that lashed about the veranda. Only numbers in plenty, and at close range, could suppress The Shadow.

THE numbers came as Wolf's reserves billowed up across the porch edge, a wave that threatened to engulf The Shadow along with the three men he fought. Clyde began to fire, using his lone gun to snipe that flood of sluggers, but it seemed a pitiful attempt. He staggered one man; whether he'd winged another, he didn't know, for by then the pack had reached its goal. Or had it?

Away from the swirl of figures, Clyde saw a thug turn suddenly as though to shoot at something near the porch edge. Before Clyde could even aim, the fellow sagged. The report that Clyde heard didn't come from the thug's gun, which went flipping from its owner's fingers. That shot was a muffled stab from blackness.

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The Shadow was out of the tangle! He'd knifed right between the intruding reserves and only one man had spotted him. But in dealing with that lone foe, The Shadow had attracted the attention of the others. They were coming around with shouts, to begin another surge for the fighter in black who was cleaving into darkness to avoid them!

Clyde couldn't see The Shadow, but he saw crooks in plenty and he found his gun pumping of its own accord. Too late, it seemed, for the thugs were over the porch edge, flattening a tall form that blocked their path. Then they were sprawling with their victim, which came snapping up again from their midst. Flapping as it did, the thing identified itself as one of the ornamental cedars that fringed Darden's veranda.

Wolf and the smarter crooks weren't fooled by the intervening tree. What they drove for was the huddled shape of blackness that crouched beyond it, clear of the light. They landed with a crackle in the midst of a fancy privet hedge trimmed in boxlike pattern.

From somewhere – anywhere that might have been nowhere – came the taunting laugh of The Shadow, strident mockery that defied Wolf's tribe to find him in this terrain replete with shadows, of which only one had substance!

Clyde flattened as the maddened marksmen began to fire in all directions. Within a space of mere minutes The Shadow had turned their onslaught into a rout. They'd had him ambushed, so they thought, but he'd put the situation in reverse. A one-man ambush, this, with The Shadow in control!

He revealed himself, The Shadow, by tonguing shots from darkness. Shots that were always on the move from the direction of the oaks. Those huge trees were perfect barriers, but The Shadow favored no particular one. He was shifting to prevent the scattered crooks from flanking him.

All the while, his gibing laugh shuddered its tone amid the echo of guns, baiting enemies to efforts that could only result in their complete defeat. Once their ammunition was exhausted, Wolf's crew would be easy prey for a roundup party from Darden's house.

Then, totally unexpected, came a flood of powerful flashlights from the outskirts of the oaks – converging lights that picked out The Shadow's position from the other side. Clyde saw a cloaked figure wheel and weave suddenly away; then, from that opposite direction came the roar of guns.

Another tribe of killers had filtered into this terrain, a crowd that could only belong to one leader: Kip Reddick!

Caught between two deadly factions, The Shadow seemed doomed. Literally, he appeared to be dodging bullets among the useless oak trees. Then, in the very midst of all that light, The Shadow vanished as completely as if the ground had swallowed him!

Clyde understood, as his breath came back. The Shadow had simply shifted to the near side of an oak. That tree, like all the rest, was blocking off the brilliant glare. The oaks cast long lines of blackness in Wolf's direction and in one of those blots was The Shadow, on this side of an oaken pillar. It could be any of a dozen trees or more, and The Shadow's gun, now silent, was not betraying his position.

WOLF snarled for his men to find The Shadow. Short on ammunition, they drove for the oaks, each hoping that he wouldn't be the man to meet the cloaked fighter first. Then, from the midst of that excited crew, came a recurrence of The Shadow's laugh, its mockery a greater clarion than any of his previous taunts. This time the ground certainly disgorged him, for he was in open territory, yards this side of the trees!

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Only Clyde caught the answer. The Shadow hadn't stayed against an oak. He'd followed the long path of darkness representing the outline of the tree, using that invisible channel to leave the spot where Kip had trapped him and stage a surprise thrust against Wolf.

Surprise it was in plenty. Wolf's crowd scattered like a whirl of chaff when they saw The Shadow spin among them.

Guns ripped from the oaks. Kip's murderous shooters didn't care if they chopped down Wolf's tribe while getting at The Shadow. Wolf and his frenzied men scrambled for the oak trees, to crouch there, snarling and helpless, while Kip and his company drove through to hunt The Shadow.

Hardly past the oaks, Kip saw that finding The Shadow wasn't a game any longer except as the cloaked fighter might choose to play it. For The Shadow had reached his former stamping ground, the shrubbery beside the veranda. Better than tall oaks were squatty bushes by the dozens, any one of which might, or might not, be The Shadow!

Like a sinister welcome came The Shadow's laugh, an invitation to doom that Kip Reddick decided not to accept. His crew was better disciplined than Wolf's. At Kip's sharp command, all turned and sped back among the oaks, just as Commissioner Weston and Ewell Darden appeared upon the porch, heading a batch of guests who were armed with improvised weapons from pokers and fire tongs to sabers and muskets from Darden's curio collection.

At that moment, things happened among the oaks. Like Wolf's crew, Kip's men were masked, but they could tell each other apart because one group was clustered, the other scattered. Wolf owed no thanks to Kip, whose gunners hadn't cared who they clipped while going for The Shadow. At Wolf's snarl, his band sprang from their shelter, to attack Kip's followers.

It was what The Shadow wanted. Clyde saw him start from darkness, so the reporter followed. Both saw the encounter of the rival leaders, Wolf Lapine and Kip Reddick, as they snatched away their masks. Wolf's face, yellow and fangish, showed viciously from beneath his hat brim. Kip's features, hard, yet queerly smooth, were even uglier. They were set for a duel, not realizing that The Shadow was arriving to confront the victor.

Then, conscious of the shouts that were coming from the porch, each killer found his wits. Wolf darted away with the rest of his scattering tribe; Kip sprang to join his men as they raced off in a compact band.

The Shadow halted on the fringe of darkness, throwing out an arm to hold back Clyde. Too late now, for Weston, Darden and the rest were cutting in between The Shadow and the fleeing crooks.

Wolf's men disappeared in all directions, dodging the police who were coming in from blocks around. Some of them remained, those crippled by The Shadow, and it took police bullets to suppress them when they tried to rise and renew the battle. It wasn't surprising that Wolf managed a getaway with most of his followers, for they were going out while the cops were coming in.

Kip's outfit was a different matter. They'd run around the house and The Shadow took the opposite direction to head them off. Instead of meeting Kip's tribe, he ran into some of the pursuing guests, so The Shadow wheeled beside the house wall to watch developments.

Apparently, Kip's fighters had cut through a hedge that flanked the grounds, since there was no other place for them to flee. So Darden's guests went that direction to look for them.

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Returning back to his limousine, The Shadow became Cranston again and approached the veranda, accompanied by Clyde. Darden's servants were arriving from various parts of the house, where they had been straightening the rooms through which the guests had tramped.

Stolidly, the servants went to the lawn to carry away the bodies of Wolf's abandoned fighters who had forced the police to go the limit in suppressing them.

Only one man was on the porch: Mark Jarratt. He nodded a bit nervously when he saw Cranston, but he was suave again when Weston and Darden returned. For once, Jarratt could boast that he had been in the right camp, and he elaborated that point by suggesting that he, more than anyone else, had been Wolf's target.

Forced to agree, Weston asked testily if Jarratt wanted police protection, to which the suave man shook his head. He merely wanted to get back to New York as soon as convenient, so Darden arranged that detail. Darden's chauffeur was bringing a big car from the batch near the garage, to take some of the more jittery guests into town, so Darden told Jarratt to go along with them, which Jarratt did, most gratefully.

The scene had quieted completely when Cranston entered his own car, inviting Clyde to come along. Guests had returned from their futile search for Kip's crowd. The police were leaving and Darden's servants had gone indoors. All that remained was the mystery of vanished fighters: first, Wolf's shattered crew; next, Kip's intact aggregation; finally – The Shadow.

Where the others had gone, only The Shadow knew. Likewise, he could predict where they would meet again, those rival factions headed by Wolf Lapine and Kip Reddick. When that time came, The Shadow would be present.

For The Shadow was already on his way!

CHAPTER XVIII. CRIME'S SECRET

IN the great hall at Glenwood Grange, Carl Croom and Harry Vincent were seated at the fireplace awaiting word from The Shadow. So far, there had been no message, for The Shadow hadn't come to Wilbury. Nor was contact necessary as yet, because all Croom and Harry had to do was sit tight.

So they were sitting tight. Spread before them was a very tasty meal prepared by the new chef that Harry had brought back from New York. While Croom talked about the food, Harry thought about Cliff and Hawkeye. He was sure, at least, that they had heard from The Shadow. One or the other would certainly have opportunity to phone Burbank by long distance.

It happened that both had gained such opportunity since Wolf Lapine had left them in sole charge of the grounds around Glenwood Grange, but that was something that Harry hadn't yet learned.

"There is one thing worries me, Vincent," declared Croom suddenly. "It's the ease with which these crooks could seize our treasures if they once worked inside this place. So much of the collection is still crated down in the cellar.

"Those" – he gestured to a few sets of armor, the paintings in a corner – "they could be gathered in a single swoop. As for the old safe where I put the various jeweled pieces, its combination is very simple. Anybody could open it."

"But first," observed Harry, "they would have to get inside the mansion. And that would be difficult, the way

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we're guarding things. By the way, I'd better take a look outside and see how the men are handling their patrol."

Harry arose and turned in the direction of the side door. He took just four steps, then halted with half-raised hands, while Croom, swinging about at Harry's exclamation, paused just as suddenly, Glenwood Grange wasn't proving itself as invulnerable as they supposed!

Confronting Harry was a determined young man who held a leveled revolver. Harry recognized him instantly as Phil Glenwood, the would-be owner of the family mansion. Croom didn't remember Phil, for he hadn't noticed him that day at the hotel. But Phil remembered Croom and was including him with gun gestures, though his attitude toward him was friendly.

"Sorry to intrude this way," spoke Phil, meaning the words for Croom. "But I want you to wait right where you are... and listen." With that, Phil stared hard at Harry. "Because you're going to do the talking, Vincent. You're going to tell Croom how you double-crossed him!"

Apparently, Phil was more than much in earnest. He was nervous, too, hence his gun wasn't a pleasant thing to face. Nevertheless, Harry decided to parry for a while.

"You're all wrong, Phil," said Harry coolly. "I hadn't a thing to do with that crowd at Lower Glenwood."

"They are back again tonight," returned Phil steadily. "They've learned what I was going to tell you, Vincent... but didn't. That's why I came to talk to Croom. I knew you'd be lulling him with fancy talk while your friends were working on their job."

The return of Kip Reddick was a surprise to Harry. He threw an anxious look at Croom, whose face displayed a similar worry. Of course, Phil took it to fit with his own theme. In Harry's glance he saw proof of treachery; in Croom's, the conviction that he, Phil, must be right.

Slowly, Phil advanced, pushing his gun right for Harry's chest.

"You'll talk, Vincent," announced Phil. "I'm giving you just five seconds –"

Across Phil's shoulder, Harry saw a mammoth figure fill a doorway. It was the new chef, a huge African named Jericho Druke, coming for the dinner trays. Jericho happened to be more than a chef, though Harry hadn't stressed that point to Croom. Like Harry, Jericho had served The Shadow on more than one occasion.

With all his bulk, Jericho could be soft-footed when he chose, as he was proving now. Advancing with a reassuring grin to Harry, the giant was promising that he'd be heard from within the brief time stipulated by Phil.

"Five seconds," repeated Phil. "I'll count them –"

Counting them he was, while Harry stood stolid, silent. It was at the count of four that things happened, though not quite as Harry expected. Indeed, the call was very close, though blame could be equally divided.

Watching Phil, Croom wasn't faced the right way to observe Jericho. So Croom acted on his own when he made a sudden dive for Phil, grabbing for the young man's gun. And Phil, stepping quickly back, pressed the gun trigger without meaning it, while the weapon was still aimed at Harry!

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Those faults were bad enough, but Harry's was even worse. Thinking Croom would successfully grab Phil's gun, Harry didn't budge of his own accord. He'd have stopped that bullet if it hadn't been for Jericho.

Seeing Croom's lunge, Jericho forgot Phil and grabbed Harry with one hamlike hand. Yanked from his feet, Harry was flying headlong half across the great hall when Phil's gun stabbed, to flatten its bullet against the fireplace!

WITH that, Phil dropped the gun. Croom picked it up, while Jericho was helping Harry to his feet. Shaken by his own blunder, Phil was in a mood to listen when Croom assured him that Harry was all right. Finally, at Harry's nod, Croom returned the gun. Receiving it, Phil blurted:

"Then you don't know... none of you? You haven't an idea why those crooks picked Lower Glenwood as a place to work from?"

Headshakes responded. With a determined smile, Phil said he'd provide the answer. The one sure way was to make a trip to the ruins down the slope. So Harry and Croom produced their own guns and followed Phil out the side door, where Jericho, still in the background, watched their departure.

No lights showed from Lower Glenwood until the three men had reached the stone foundations. Then, deep from a passage once filled with debris, they caught the reflected gleam of flashlights. Carefully, Phil let himself down into the ruins, beckoning the other two to follow. As they did, he whispered:

"There can't be many of them. We can trap them easily. When we do, you'll learn the thing I came to tell you."

Phil was moving ahead, Croom almost beside him. But Harry lingered, looking up at the darkened parapet. Harry felt an uneasy sensation that someone else was present. Knowing the ways of Kip Reddick, he considered it likely that a lookout might be stationed above, while men were busy below.

Shaking off his worryment, Harry finally moved along to catch up with the two ahead, who were guiding by the flashlight beams.

They were at the very corner of the passage. There Harry paused again, to make sure that there was nothing in the darkness behind him. At that moment, there were sounds beyond the corner – sudden sounds, indicating that Kip's men were aware that others had approached. Harry wheeled to see Phil and Croom lunge forward with their guns. And then –

The whole passage seemed to lunge past Harry, until he realized that the mighty mass was Jericho, who had followed them from the Grange! The near tragedy in the great hall had convinced Jericho that he might be needed here, which he was.

Phil and Croom, both foolhardy, were about to jab a point-blank fire at those men beyond the corner, whose only recourse was to beat them to the shot. It was the sort of thing that could have meant death to all, but for Jericho.

The giant didn't bother to grab Phil and Croom. He brushed them aside, so hard that they smacked the walls of the passage and sagged with guns that spurted toward the floor.

As for the two men who were aiming back, Jericho's great hands grabbed them with a tremendous reach, hoisting them upward and backward as they fired. Their bullets cleaved the planking above the passage.

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Jericho could have cracked two heads together, settling their owners for a while, but he desisted. Instead, he shook the pair so hard they lost their guns; then shoved them into the light where Harry had arrived, coming past the stupefied forms of Phil and Croom. And in the glow, Harry recognized his fellow agents: Cliff Marsland and Hawkeye!

Helping Croom and Phil to their feet, Jericho brought them forward for Harry's introduction. When Harry explained that Cliff and Hawkeye were friends of his, Croom understood that they must be working for The Shadow, too. As for Phil, he was dazed enough to accept anything. Staring straight ahead, Phil blinked and pointed:

"They've found it!"

Both Harry and Croom saw what Phil meant. The passage didn't end here in the rums. Beyond the cleared debris it became a pitch-black tunnel, rising upward through the very slope that led to Glenwood Grange.

Phil, gaining his voice further, explained that this was what he'd wanted to tell Harry – how the old house, Lower Glenwood, had been linked underground with the newer mansion, Glenwood Grange!

Harry looked at Croom. Both had the same sinking thought, of how they'd been living in a stronghold that wasn't one at all. It was plain, now, how Wolf's crowd could be used to advantage by Kip's outfit. While Wolf was worrying about an open attack and keeping the guardians of Glenwood Grange quite busy, Kip could be using this secret route to enter the great-walled mansion!

Nor was that all. A bigger surprise was due. Turning their flashlights into the tunnel, Cliff and Hawkeye were revealing what else they had uncovered while following instructions from The Shadow.

Within the tunnel were rows of crates that Kip's men had carried here the night they brought the trucks. Crates identical with those in which the Argyle treasures had been shipped from the old museum. And when Cliff lifted the cover of an opened crate, amazement was complete.

Within the crate were tapestries, which to the naked eye were exact duplicates of those now in Glenwood Grange. Another opened crate disclosed armor, cunningly wrought yet inlaid with metal that was not gold, though it looked it. Gradually, crime's secret was dawning on these men who saw.

And then, as though created by the thoughts within their minds, came a token of the master investigator who had earlier divined the truth: the laugh of The Shadow!

Turning, all saw the black-cloaked being standing with them. Riding ahead of the crooks that he had scattered, The Shadow had arrived at Lower Glenwood to learn how Cliff and Hawkeye had fared.

Sight of the others pleased him, as his low-toned laugh declared. Then, in his commanding whisper, The Shadow was telling the parts that each were to play. Crime's secret known, The Shadow intended to use it to his own advantage – that of justice.

And those who listened knew that from this moment onward, The Shadow would be real master of the show!

CHAPTER XIX. THE DOUBLE MOVE

MORE than an hour later, Cliff and Hawkeye approached the farmhouse which formed Wolf Lapine's headquarters. It didn't matter whether or not Wolf had returned, because he wouldn't expect Cliff and

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Hawkeye to be back.

It turned out that Wolf hadn't returned, because Hawkeye pointed out that cars were coming through a wooded road, their headlights dim. That puzzled Cliff when he looked toward the farmhouse, for a lamp was burning in its window.

"We left the place dark," reminded Cliff. "You'd better take a look, Hawkeye. That's your specialty."

Hawkeye sneaked and made the peek. He came back and nudged Cliff toward the door, telling him to go inside. Why, Hawkeye did not specify; he seemed to prefer that Cliff should be surprised. So Cliff entered the farmhouse and stopped, very short. A nervous man was coming to his feet, only to relax. The man was Mark Jarratt.

"So it's you, Marsland," said Jarratt smoothly. "I'm just as glad, though I don't expect any difficulty from Wolf Lapine. He's learned through experience that I'm no double-crosser."

A car pulled up in front of the house. Jarratt motioned Cliff to a corner; apparently he wanted to prove his claim. Prove it Jarratt did, the moment that Wolf entered.

For a moment, Wolf's eyes glared the anger that his lips snarled, while his hand produced a ready gun. Thinking better of it, Wolf let the weapon drop back into his pocket.

"You win, Jarratt," he declared. "I shouldn't have gone to Darden's. I was a dope to think the Argyle stuff would be there!"

"No more a dope than Kip Reddick," assured Jarratt smoothly. "You took him on a blind lead that didn't do him any good. That is, I assume that Kip was the leader of that other outfit."

"He was," nodded Wolf. "I saw him. Now we've got to get busy here, before the coppers trace us."

"They won't," smiled Jarratt. "Those men you left behind are all dead. However, we shall move tonight, after I contact Croom."

Cliff had come from his corner and Hawkeye was entering the door. Neither had anything to report, but Wolf decided that he could use Hawkeye. He wanted him to go over and take another look at Kip's trucks. But Jarratt objected.

"Forget Kip," he insisted, "He can't be here yet, because the police were still chasing him the last I heard. We'll spring the fireworks before he knows it. But we can't risk him grabbing any of our men tonight. I'll take this chap with me" – Jarratt nudged at Hawkeye – "and post him where I can signal him from the Grange."

Jarratt didn't refer back to the previous "capture" that Kip's men had made. But he was playing safe on the Hawkeye question. If Wolf had insisted that Hawkeye go and watch the trucks, Jarratt would see to his actual capture later.

Cliff understood and flashed a warning look to Hawkeye, but it wasn't needed. Wolf decided to follow Jarratt's plan.

LEAVING with Hawkeye, Jarratt showed familiarity with this terrain by following the contour of a hill and stopping at a fringe of sloping woods.

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From there on, Jarratt could head to the Grange, but it happened that he was quite as close to the ruins of Lower Glenwood, where he actually intended to go. However, Hawkeye simply played dumb and waited, right where he was posted.

Skirting the woods a short distance, Jarratt cut in back of a knoll and hurried beneath the dim moonlight down to Lower Glenwood. Near the ruins, he blinked a flashlight along the ground. His signal was answered by voices, whose owners guided him down into the old foundations.

There was a wariness in Jarratt's manner as he came into the light beyond a corner passage where Kip Reddick awaited. Noting it, Kip supposed that this first visit to the depths of Lower Glenwood was worrying Jarratt. Kip showed a hard-faced grin as Jarratt peered back across his shoulder.

Kip was right; it was Jarratt's first trip here. But he wasn't nervous, he was merely sensing things more clearly than Kip did. To Jarratt, the encroaching darkness of the passage corner represented substance, and it took him a short while to decide that he was wrong. In such decision, Jarratt was wrong again.

A figure was lurking in that gloom. The Shadow had taken personal charge of this sector, so that no details of crime's double move would escape him. Jarratt's short-lived restlessness ending, The Shadow stayed where he was and watched proceedings.

"There's the tunnel," Kip told Jarratt. "We covered it up again after we planted the crates the other night. The boys are clearing it again. It's only a fifteen-minute job, and we've been here pretty near that long. How about Wolf... did he show up at his dump?"

Jarratt nodded.

"All right," decided Kip. "I'll start these crates going through, and we'll bring back the ones that have the real goods in them. That won't take long either, except for whatever stuff Croom has already unloaded. We'll have to look that over, so as to switch it proper. The safe won't give us any trouble, if Croom is using it. I have the combination."

"Good enough," declared Jarratt. "Now listen, Kip. When you sneak upstairs, get through to the garage first thing."

"That will be easy," Kip showed a floor plan of the Grange. "I know that place perfect. What do I do then: open up for Wolf?"

"That's right. Then get back and give me a flash from here. When Wolf attacks, you can start switching the loose stuff."

"And by that time," chuckled Kip, "everything else will be on the trucks. Handling those odds and ends will be a cinch while Croom's guards are all busy fighting. Wolf's mob in the garage. And the best of it is, we don't care what happens. Nobody will ever know the difference."

Blackness moved away, because Jarratt's visit was ending. Already the crates were going through to Glenwood Grange, and Kip was about to follow.

Leaving the ruins, Jarratt waited a while before going back to find Hawkeye. There were times when he glanced nervously about, as though suspecting something moving past him in the gloom.

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SOMETHING did move up the long slope to Glenwood Grange, where it paused, invisible in the night. There was a swish from the cloaked arm of The Shadow as his deft hand scaled an envelope through the tiny ventilator pane that topped a kitchen window.

Jericho saw the white missile strike a shelf near the stove and took the message into the great hall, where he gave it to Harry Vincent, who translated The Shadow's note for Croom to hear.

"We might as well pave the way for Kip," decided Croom, rising from the fire. "Though it would be easy enough for him to get past us through the side passages."

"Our real job will come later," returned Harry. "I think we can time it, though, letting Wolf through. He won't take it to be a trap, because Jarratt has fed him the bunk that you're the inside man."

They went out to the kitchen, but left a door ajar. It wasn't long before they heard a sound accompanying the crackle of the flames in the great fireplace. The sound identified itself as Kip Reddick sneaking through to the garage.

Kip wasn't alone; he'd left men in the hallway behind him. The footsteps returned, only to pause. Harry listened, then told Croom:

"Kip's at the safe. We'll let him finish that job. I'll let you know when he's through."

Footsteps again, barely audible. Harry rattled the kitchen door slightly as he signaled to Croom, who in turn stepped to a passage and called to men upstairs. He wanted to know what was keeping them; it was time to take over guard duty.

From his door, Harry could hear Kip and his companions sneaking for the cellar. They didn't want a run-in with Croom's men; not yet, or ever, if they could help it. That was being left to Wolf Lapine.

Over by the woods, Hawkeye edged from his position for a short sneak along the lawn edge. He saw Jarratt huddled, waiting; then came a blink, not from the Grange but from Lower Glenwood. Jarratt turned and came in Hawkeye's direction, the little man stealing ahead to be at his proper post.

The flash had been given: Wolf Lapine was to move. Already, Kip Reddick was in action; hence crime's move was double.

A dim hulk beneath the moonlight, Glenwood Grange looked like a citadel, if ever there was one. But how weak a fortress, considering the secret way that existed through its very foundations as an open road for crime! Despite that fault, no stronghold could have been more formidable. For Glenwood Grange was under the protection of The Shadow!

Strange were the ways of The Shadow, as his dealings with double crime would prove!

CHAPTER XX. CROOK VERSUS CROOK

ALL was deathly quiet in Glenwood Grange when the stroke came. Its signal was a sudden shot fired from a doorway leading down into the garage.

Carl Croom sprang to his feet from beside the fireplace, shouting for Harry Vincent, who promptly appeared. Together, they dashed to learn the cause of the alarm, calling for others as they went.

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Only Croom and Harry were in the know, for Phil had gone back to Wilbury. Of course, Jericho expected this, but he was staying in the kitchen on special duty. Together, Croom and Harry had agreed that the guards would work better if they didn't expect the thrust when it came. The guess was more than right.

Wolf Lapine and his followers had captured the garage first crack and were in full possession of the vans in which they expected to load the Argyle treasures. Stubbornly, arriving guards were shooting from within the house, retreating only when Croom called them back to stronger positions.

Nor were the guards doing this in fun. The first of Wolf's crowd showed themselves too openly and were nicked as a result. Wolf snarled that they had only themselves to blame; he'd told them that Croom's men would put up a real fight for a while. He advised the rest to copy the tactics of Cliff and Hawkeye, who poked their guns warily past door edges instead of shoving half their bodies into sight.

The retreat of Croom's men satisfied Wolf. It showed that they were acting as they should, and Wolf wished that Jarratt had stayed to witness it, instead of going back to town. Conversely, Cliff and Hawkeye were quite pleased that Jarratt had left. He might have decided that things were going too well to be right!

Sounds of spasmodic gunnery echoed through the entire house, the proper signal for Kip Reddick and his cellar crew. They piled into the great hall, bringing a rare assortment of items from the duplicate crates: inlaid helmets and armor, gorgeous tapestries woven in gold, fine paintings that exactly duplicated the stack in the corner of the huge room.

Amid the muffled gunfire, these crooks worked with rapid speed, simply gathering the treasures already on display and replacing them with the valueless imitations.

Calmly, Kip eyed the work, giving suggestions, particularly as to the hanging of the tapestries. At times, he tilted his head to check the stubborn battle. Plenty of time, Kip told his followers. Croom's crowd was holding out well.

Then, as Kip's men came down from chairs and tables to gather the heaped treasures that they were to take away, the whole situation changed, too suddenly for Kip to meet it.

It started in the kitchen, where Jericho's eye was watching through the long passage to the great hall. Hopping across the kitchen, Jericho banged a dishpan hard against a door. Croom and Harry heard it and gave both unexpected orders.

Croom yanked open a door that led upstairs! Harry shoved the one into the kitchen. Gesturing to the astonished guards, they brought them in two directions. Some guards grasped the idea. It seemed to be a double ambush. When the first guards responded to the beck, the others had no choice except to follow.

As the guards disappeared, Wolf's men drove through like a living deluge. Wolf might have stopped at the barricaded doors, if Cliff hadn't shouted that he'd take care of them. With Cliff staving off the guards, Wolf saw a clear path to the great hall just ahead. Whatever treasure was there, he'd grab; then find the way to the cellar and its store of priceless crates.

Wolf found something sooner than he expected. Reaching the great hall, he saw other men, burdened with tapestries and armor, staggering off through a passage with their swag, while a savage few turned with guns to cover the mad flight. And by the firelight, Wolf recognized the foremost of his foemen: Kip Reddick!

Guns roared wildly across the broad stretch of the huge room; then Kip and his gunners were racing for the cellar, too. Wolf didn't need blueprints to tell him what their game was. He saw that the standing armor and

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the hanging tapestries were perfect matches for the prizes that Kip's men carried. Yelling for his men to follow, Wolf reached the cellar stairs.

By then, Cliff had sent Hawkeye through, just to jog Wolf with any details that might slip him. But the cellar told its own story. There, past stacks of crates, mostly filled but with a few empties, Kip's harried men were diving down a flight of rough-hewn steps into the darkness of a tunnel.

The last to go, Kip dropped to the steps as bullets whistled past him. He jabbed a few shots that made Wolf's henchmen scatter; then, with a quick roll, Kip was in the tunnel. A huge door clanged shut, to cut off all pursuit.

Bullets thudded the barrier to no avail. Its front was a layer of concrete that matched the other sections of the solid wall. A perfect concealment for the tunnel above, which Wolf was smart enough to link with the ruins of Lower Glenwood.

Stopping, Wolf's men began to gesture toward the crates, thinking they'd found some of the Argyle collection. Hawkeye edged up to suggest just the opposite, but Wolf was already convinced on the point in question.

"You mean Kip has the stuff!" he snarled. "I knew Jarratt was a double-crosser. He's been collecting phony stuff to switch for the real. He's taken the right crates out through, leaving us the wrong ones! Come on... we're getting to those trucks!"

UP from the cellar, Wolf led the reverse charge. He yelled at Cliff when he saw him, telling him to hold off Croom's crowd for a few minutes more.

Half of Wolf's men followed him out through the garage; the rest remained with Cliff. By then, Croom and Harry couldn't hold back the guards. Flinging the doors open, they sprang on Wolf's reserves.

It was fortunate that Cliff was present, otherwise there would have been a few dead guards, for the attack was foolhardy. Cliff snapped an order for a quick retreat, which the thugs started to obey. Then, with the guards actually among them, the killers turned in spite of Cliff. At that point, Jericho took over.

Coming along with the surge of guards, Jericho brushed them aside in his convincing way and waded right into the gunners. In the narrow hall, they hadn't a chance to dodge him, as his great arms jabbed like pistons. With each grab Jericho snatched one thug and flung him against another, spoiling the aim of all concerned. Since Jericho had two hands, he settled four men at a clip.

Some scurried around through side passages to reach the great hall. There two of them swung about beside the fireplace to duel with Harry and Croom, who were shooting from a stairway.

Jericho settled that stalemate when he arrived by the kitchen route. He picked up a suite of armor and heaved it at the thugs, who turned when they heard it clattering in air, only to receive it full abreast. That stroke flattened the final opposition.

Croom's men had suffered only minor wounds, but Wolf's reserves were finished, except for Cliff. Harry found him in the garage, waiting to learn the outcome. Hearing that all was under full control, Cliff continued on his way.

Down by Lower Glenwood, Kip and the final burden bearers were scudding from the ruins to reach the trucks. There they chucked the loose treasures with the crates that held the whole collection. The trucks

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roared out from the horseshoe stone pit, ripping through the brushwood camouflage.

Ahead lay the gully road. Far off to the flank, lights were coming down the slope from Glenwood Grange, revealing Wolf's main band in a belated chase to cut off Kip's escape. By the time Wolf's crew arrived, the trucks would be far away – or so Kip thought, until he saw a barricade ahead. It lay across the road, a pile of logs too high and heavy for the trucks to crash.

Above the barrier, silhouetted in the lights from the first truck, was the cloaked figure of The Shadow! As guns spoke wildly from the trucks, The Shadow delivered a long, taunting laugh, with which he disappeared. But with the echoes of his mirth came the blast of his big guns from behind the barricade!

Other marksmen aided The Shadow's barrage. He had Clyde Burke and Phil Glenwood with him, to give them some experience in first-class target practice. But the targets didn't stay around.

Savagely, Kip turned his truck the other way and hurled it into low gear, to take a steep road up past the quarry. The other trucks did the same.

Again came The Shadow's laugh, its tone a prophecy of trouble. He'd timed his action to the dot and it was bringing the climax that he wanted: crook versus crook, a fitting finish to a run of crime. For the delay the trucks had met, their forced change of direction, plus the hard climb up the rough grade, were the very elements required by Wolf Lapine and his vengeance seekers from the slope!

They came piling from the roadside as the trucks went past, anxious to settle scores with Kip Reddick and his double-crossers. They climbed the running boards into the trucks, where battle raged with fury. Below, The Shadow put away his automatics and pointed up to the quarry brink, where Clyde and Phil watched, as did two new arrivals.

One newcomer was Hawkeye, who had detached himself from Wolf's wild tribe; the other was Cliff, just come from Glenwood Grange to report on happenings there. But Cliff was keeping his report until later, while he, too, watched the drama on the quarry edge.

Three trucks had reached that high level, toy vehicles against the moonlit sky. The first was Kip's, and from it rolled tiny figures – Wolf and a few of his followers. They'd been outnumbered in that attack, and Kip's truck was away, but it was carrying only a third of the loot that Wolf and his frenzied fighters wanted for their own.

Bouncing up like rubber men, Wolf and his cast-offs boarded the next two trucks as they came along.

ALREADY, those two trucks were filled with fighters. These newcomers turned the tide. Wolf and his company were putting the slug to all, drivers included. The first truck skewed and took a crazy tilt, its front nosing toward the quarry, its rear blocking the last truck, which promptly rammed it.

Trucks, rather than men, became living things that writhed, for the human fighters looked like insects brawling on the backs of stricken beasts. Taking an overweighted slide, the first truck brought the other with it, for the crash had locked them tightly. Amid the howls of tangled men who saw their fate too late, the linked trucks tumbled from the quarry brink.

One man jumped and caught himself on the same crevice that The Shadow had used as a mooring spot for Harry's rescue. That man was Wolf Lapine, distinguishable by the long-peaked cap he always wore. He was the only one who managed to spring free.

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Down came the trucks, twisting slowly, grotesquely against the whiteness of the hewn cliff. Crates were dumping lazily, in contrast to the wild flinging figures of the thugs who clawed the air instead of one another. Trucks, crates, crooks – all disappeared in a hodgepodge beneath a line of scrubby trees.

One mighty splash accounted for them all. Water sprayed high above the trees; with it came the sound of the engulfing crash – a great roar followed by echoes and re-echoes, that seemed to be tolling off the evil lives that the quarry pit had swallowed. After that, long silence, a hush broken by The Shadow's laugh, mirthless like a knell.

That strange tone carried to the quarry top where Wolf Lapine scrambled upward and away. Like Kip and a few others, Wolf had survived the catastrophe, but he had witnessed the fate of crook versus crook. A fate that seemed designed by The Shadow and approved by that conqueror of crime, even though his hand had not been needed for the climax which a dozen men of crime had personally produced by wiping themselves out!

Strange were the echoes of The Shadow's laugh. They carried an unfinished note that foretold a mission still to come: The Shadow's final conquest over crime!

CHAPTER XXI. DEATH'S TREASURES

COMMISSIONER WESTON was still at Darden's a few hours after the excitement there. More than that, he'd sent for his ace inspector, Joe Cardona, to bring all data available on Wolf Lapine, so they could go over it with the local police chief in the suburb where Darden lived.

What puzzled Weston and Cardona both was the matter of the rival faction that had met Wolf's tribe in a grudge combat, for ordinarily such groups would have concentrated solely on The Shadow. But the records hadn't a thing to show. The name of Kip Reddick didn't even come to mind when Weston and Cardona discussed the case.

They were ready to call it quits, when a big car pulled into the driveway. It proved to be Darden's limousine, and it contained a passenger: Mark Jarratt. When Darden expressed surprise that Jarratt had returned from Manhattan, Jarratt gave a look toward Weston, then threw a side glance at Cardona.

"I'm worried about Wolf Lapine," declared Jarratt. "I thought it all over, for a whole hour, while I was riding into town. It's that story that appeared in the Classic. It said I was trying to buy the Argyle Museum collection."

In bringing up the Classic story, Jarratt was appealing to Weston and Darden, for the thing was a sore point with both. Cardona hadn't liked the story either, but he couldn't see Jarratt's angle.

"So what?" demanded Joe. "Wolf wanted to steal the Argyle stuff, while you wanted to buy it. That ought to make a difference... or does it?"

"Perhaps not to Wolf," argued Jarratt cagily. "He saw me here, and right afterward he ran into trouble with some enemies of his. Wouldn't it be like Wolf to blame me for setting that crowd on him?"

Cardona conceded the point. Meanwhile, Darden was ordering his chauffeur to move the extra cars that were still outside the garage. Rejoining the group, Darden heard Jarratt's tale of woe and shrugged. Darden spoke severely:

"When even criminals mistrust you, Jarratt, it reflects on your character... or your conscience."

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"I'd like to get away from it," pleaded Jarratt. He turned to Weston. "I'm glad I found you here, commissioner. Suppose I took a plane trip to South America, starting tonight. Would you object?"

Weston said he wouldn't. No one had brought any charges against Jarratt. To implicate him in the gun fray between Wolf's faction and another would be absurd. So Jarratt swung to Darden.

"Would you take charge of my wholesale business, Mr. Darden? Or choose the proper person for it? You know the values of my stock –"

"The real values, Jarratt? Or the prices you paid to people who couldn't afford to refuse?"

Jarratt winced at that one, which satisfied Darden, who said that he would give Jarratt's wares a proper appraisal. Then, in kindlier tone, Darden added:

"As soon as the cars are moved, I shall have my chauffeur take you to the airport. You won't even have to stop at your office."

Jarratt looked quite relieved. Darden called indoors and when a servant appeared, he told the man to notify the chauffeur that the limousine would soon be needed. They could hear the cars being moved out by the garage, when another motor sounded from the main driveway.

The car that wheeled up was Cranston's. But it wasn't Cranston who stepped forth. One of the passengers was Clyde Burke; the other, Carl Croom.

"I'm working on a real story tonight," asserted Clyde. "Mr. Cranston told me to bring Croom out here. He came in from a place called Wilbury, where the Argyle treasures happened to be."

"Come inside," suggested Darden anxiously. "We can talk over matters better there... Ah, here comes my car. Good night, Jarratt."

Cranston's car was pulling over to allow space for Darden's. Only Clyde saw the black-cloaked shape that was moving into view. The Shadow would certainly have his say before Jarratt left. Maybe he'd hold his talk with Jarratt privately, since the others were going into the house. In fact, they'd almost forgotten Jarratt, when a sudden thing happened before even The Shadow could intervene.

From beside a corner of the house sprang a man with drawn revolver, whose hat was pulled down across his eyes. The brim, however, didn't hide the vicious leer that came with the fellow's snarl, both traits of Wolf Lapine.

"Here's yours, Jarratt!" spat Wolf. "For the double cross you gave me!"

WOLF'S gun blasted twice, as Jarratt tried to dive into the car. Both bullets were straight to the double-crosser's heart. With only the beginning of a gasp, Mark Jarratt struck the running board and sprawled to the ground, dead.

It wasn't odd, in a way, that The Shadow should let such vengeance take its course. For The Shadow, halfway to the car, had wheeled very suddenly to escape a gun thrust coming his direction. The chauffeur, on the point of giving aid to Jarratt, had suddenly directed a drawn revolver toward The Shadow.

And now, as the chauffeur's shot went wide because of The Shadow's sudden whirl, another cry of recognition came from Wolf. He was snarling another name and aiming with it, when the chauffeur dropped

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back from the car window and tried to beat Wolf's gun jab.

"Kip Reddick!"

It was Wolf who scored again, for Kip couldn't twist around in time. Reaching the car's front door, Wolf yanked it open to make sure he'd finished his rival. Wolf had, again with two bullets. As he swung the door, Kip's body tumbled out, his chauffeur's hat falling from his head.

And then, the lust of murder upon him, Wolf remembered that he had two more bullets in his gun. Two bullets... for The Shadow! Turning to look for that superfoe, Wolf used the car door as a shield. He heard The Shadow's laugh from somewhere and took a chance stab in the darkness.

Empty darkness – The Shadow wasn't there! He was coming in from the front, ready to thrust his automatic through the window of the swinging door, to cover Wolf and capture him when the crook swung about.

Never could Wolf Lapine have beaten The Shadow to that shot. The frame of the car window stopped his gun as he tried to swing it inward. That, however, was the limit of Wolf's try. Another gun ripped from the house steps, burrowing bullets in Wolf's back.

As the crook sagged, The Shadow wheeled back into darkness as men dashed down to make sure that Wolf was dead.

On the steps of the house stood Ewell Darden, holding a smoking revolver. He was the marksman who had felled Wolf Lapine after the murderer had scored two kills and was trying for a third!

Inspector Cardona pocketed a gun that he hadn't found a chance to use. Finding Wolf dead, he shoved the killer's body aside. He wanted a look at Darden's chauffeur. A long look at a face that Cardona had often heard described, though he'd never seen it. Finished with that look, Cardona nodded.

"It's Kip Reddick, all right!"

"Kip Reddick?" echoed Darden. "Why, this man's name is Fendler! At least, that's the name he went by when I hired him. He had the best of recommendations."

"Kip Reddick would have," put in Cardona. "He was one of the smartest crooks in the business."

"So smart," put in Croom, who was standing by, "that tonight he raided Glenwood Grange, where we had the Argyle treasures. Not openly, you understand, but underground. For every item that he took, he left a replica, hoping that we wouldn't even detect the robbery."

"But there are no replicas!" exclaimed Darden. "I mentioned before that they were all destroyed." He paused, then pointed toward the ground beside the limousine. "Unless –"

Darden didn't complete the statement. He was pointing straight at Jarratt.

Remembering the cagey methods of the crooked art dealer, Commissioner Weston nodded. If any schemer could somehow have managed to steal those replicas from under Darden's nose, or somehow duplicate them, Jarratt was the logical candidate. But Jarratt was dead, like Kip and Wolf. Three of a kind, whose full stories never would be told.

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It was Clyde Burke who prodded the next surprise, by calling from the direction of Darden's garage. They went there and found a truck loaded with crates from the Argyle collection. Springing on board the truck, Croom discovered a square box, which contained the princely jewels that he had placed in the safe at Glenwood Grange. Then, staring at the back, Croom said ruefully:

"But this is only one load, Mr. Darden. There must be two more trucks, at least."

"Bring the jewels into the house," suggested Darden. "We can start a hunt for the missing trucks. All this amazes me, Croom! Tell me more about it."

CROOM was telling one thing as they entered the reception room. He'd learned – he didn't specify how – that his letter to Jarratt had been picked up at the museum and taken to Wilbury, where it was mailed to serve as future evidence against Croom.

"But the letter went too soon," explained Croom. "Wolf Lapine couldn't have mailed it. He didn't find out where we went until later –"

"I have it!" put in Darden, with a sudden finger snap. "Kip Reddick! Why, he's the key to the whole business! Working here as my chauffeur, he could be responsible for everything. He must have taken Jarratt to Wilbury and back, this evening."

"And that letter of yours, Croom! Reddick drove me to the museum every day. He used to go in and browse around. I always wondered why Fendler – I mean Reddick – took such an interest in art. He didn't look the type. Yes, that explains all –"

A laugh interrupted. Its tone was strangely weird, like a past echo, amplified. Startled, Darden almost dropped the square box as he was setting it on a table; then, with others, he turned to stare as the laugh was repeated, this time with a significant throb, the sort that only The Shadow could voice.

There stood The Shadow, blackness come to life. But it wasn't his laugh that they heard now. It was the clatter of wooden pellets bouncing in an ancient lottery wheel that had come from the Argyle Museum in Cranston's car!

"Yes, all is explained," declared The Shadow, fixing his burning eyes upon the astonished group. "All things but one. Kip Reddick could not have gone to Wilbury, nor could plans have been made for secret robbery, unless the chosen pill contained the name of Glenwood Grange!"

Again The Shadow's gloved hand stroked the wheel to keep it spinning, while the capsules jounced and rattled.

"Mark Jarratt was on it, too," expressed The Shadow. "He was to dispose of the stolen treasures on his coming trip to South America. He brought in Wolf Lapine after Wolf had failed at robbery on his own. Wolf was the one feature needed, a scapegoat to cover Kip's hidden work. But still, we have the question of the chosen pill!"

Spreading one hand wide, The Shadow dipped it into the traveling groove and let the capsules rattle past. Suddenly, his fingers closed and came out with their prize. Holding the pill between his thumb and forefinger, The Shadow showed that it was girded with a tight rubber band!

"A modern trick," declared The Shadow, "applied to an ancient device. The trick you used, Darden, to pick the capsule in which you had placed the name of Glenwood Grange!"

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The truth drove home to Clyde Burke. He remembered how Darden had let the pills bounce past. How simple it was to tell the right one when it came along; how easy to push off the rubber band and let it drop unnoticed to the floor. The rubber band that Clyde had picked up by mistake, the one so small that it had snapped when he had tried to gird it around his vest-pocket notebook!

YES, the truth was out, and Darden himself admitted it when he drew back with a snarl, as if to clamp his hands upon the box that contained the most valued items of the Argyle collection. Then Darden shrank still farther as The Shadow approached to claim that very prize.

"Too bad about the other trucks," spoke The Shadow. "They went to the bottom of a quarry, their cargo with them. Two trucks containing treasures such as these!"

With a laugh, The Shadow opened the square box, picked out a jeweled coronet and bent it between his hands. Sparkling beads went flying from their flimsy settings, losing their luster as they left the light. These weren't the real Argyle treasures; they were the replicas that Darden himself had saved, along with all the rest, for his master stroke of failure!

"You see, Darden," spoke The Shadow, "we learned exactly what was coming. Croom and some friends of mine switched the crates beforehand, even changing the exhibits set up in Glenwood Grange and exchanging the imitation gems for the true ones in the safe. When Kip and his men arrived, they did the work all over, putting back the real and taking away the false. The real treasures are all where they belong – in Glenwood Grange!"

Utter fury seized Ewell Darden. With a mad fling, he sent the table flying toward The Shadow, the box of false treasures with it. Wildly, he broke through the clutching hands of Weston and Cardona and yanked the door open with a shout. In sprang a handful of Darden's servants, men who had been oddly absent the last few hours.

For they were the remnants of Kip's vanished gang, planted here in Darden's own home along with their leader. No wonder they had been on hand to fight off Wolf and his crowd, nor that they had disappeared so quickly. They'd simply ducked into the house, to leave with Kip later. But only a third of them had come back, bringing one truckload of worthless treasures. The rest were in the bottom of the quarry with the majority of Wolf's band!

They were rallying now at Darden's summons, hoping to help him eliminate their archenemy, The Shadow. But with the rise of The Shadow's strident laugh, doors cracked open all along the veranda. Cliff, Harry, Hawkeye – all three were jabbing with their guns before Kip's remnants could furnish a single shot.

And the automatic that whipped from The Shadow's cloak was swifter than the revolver that Darden yanked from his pocket. The big .45 spoke first, under the squeeze of a gloved finger as steady in its draw as the burning eye above it was in aim.

Darden reeled, his own gun jouncing from his grasp. And then came settling blasts from other guns. Weston, Cardona, Croom, all fired together at the human target staggered by The Shadow.

Dead on the floor sprawled Ewell Darden, master mind of crime, who for years had cunningly created confidence and trust that he might stage a master stroke to obtain a priceless fortune. A man whose hidden opportunity, contrived and executed to the greatest degree, had foundered when it struck one obstacle – The Shadow!

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When the crippled servants had been properly suppressed, Commissioner Weston turned to look for the real master of this drama, The Shadow. No longer was the cloaked fighter present. He'd gone through the middle door, departing with his agents, with the lone exception of Clyde Burke, who was here to get his story.

And what a story, this tale of death's treasures for which men of crime had striven and died while the very wealth they sought was no longer in their grasp. And strange as the tale itself was the departing laugh that floated back from the outer reaches of the night, to fade in a shiver of uncanny echoes.

The weird mirth of The Shadow, registering another of his mighty conquests over crime!

THE END