

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

THE last act was coming to its close.

Back stage, Jan Kranda was pacing a small circle, his eyes fixed on the floor. His hands were deep in the pockets of his ragged coat, his shoulders thrown forward in a habitual stoop. There was a twitch to Kranda's lips and his eyes showed an ugly glare.

Over by the switchboard, the electrician nudged the stage manager and gestured toward Kranda:

"Look at the guy working up for his big scene. You wouldn't think he'd been playing it for a solid year."

"That's why he's good," retorted the stage manager. "Give him a part and he lives it. He ought to be out there right now."

The manager thumbed toward the stage, where Rex Troy, the leading man in "The Impostor," was hamming in the gorgeous costume of the Prince Regent. Popular though Troy was with audiences, his fame didn't carry back stage.

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"He's supposed to be tossing woo at the Crown Princess," sneered the stage manager. "Instead, he's checking on the dames in the audience. Now he's getting back to business. There goes the old 'Come hither' gesture to the princess."

"Pretty near time for Kranda's cue," reminded the electrician. "You'd better tell him."

The stage manager walked over and stopped Kranda's pacing with a shoulder tap.

"Prince Charming is waiting," said the stage manager. "Ready to be shot at, in his pretty red uniform with the brass buttons and gold braid. Give him an extra one for me tonight, will you?"

Kranda blinked momentarily, then ended his lip twitch with a grin. He began to move his hands in his coat pockets.

"Forgotten the gun again?" grinned the stage manager. "Well, the show closes tonight. Why don't you choke Troy for a change. I'll tell the guards to hold back until I cue them."

Kranda shook his head and gave a short, tense laugh.

"I'll get the gun," he said. "I left it on the table in my dressing room. The blanks are in it, so I won't hold the show long enough to matter."

Hurrying to his dressing room, where the door was open, Kranda plucked up an old-fashion Colt that was lying on the table. Turning, he came back at a rapid pace. As Kranda passed, the stage manager noticed that he was tense again, his eyes showing a determined glint, but all that went with Kranda's part as Heinrich, the mad assassin.

On stage, Rex Troy was going through the ordeal of a prolonged clinch with Claire Winthrop, who played the part of the Crown Princess. Across Claire's shoulder, Troy was watching the wing where Kranda was to appear.

"Jan is late again," muttered Troy. "He delights in being late. He knows it annoys me."

"Thanks for the sweet words," murmured Claire. "But don't flatter yourself. I detest this love scene worse than you do."

At that moment, Kranda appeared at the wing, brandishing his revolver. The "book" called for the Prince Regent to drop the Crown Princess at sight of the mad assassin. Rex dropped Claire fairly enough, with a fling that brought snickers from the audience; then confronting Kranda, Rex exclaimed:

"Heinrich!"

Aiming between the brass buttons of Rex's scarlet uniform, Kranda fired point blank. At the second shot, Rex gave a dramatic backward stagger, but Kranda kept on shooting. He put in more than the one extra that the stage manager had requested, for he fired until the hammer was clicking on empty chambers.

By then, Claire had begun to shriek. The palace guards swooped on stage, seized Kranda and dragged him off through a doorway. His stagger turning to a sag, Rex Troy was finishing with a realistic sprawl that left him prone upon the stage. Turning to the crumpled form in scarlet, Claire stooped and tried vainly to rouse the victim.

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Off stage, the guards were releasing Kranda. As he turned and stalked to his dressing room, one called after him:

"Don't forget the party tonight, Jan. It won't be a party unless you show up."

Inside the dressing room, Kranda swung the door shut behind him. Planking the revolver on the table, he sank into a chair and stared at his reflection in the mirror. For the moment, Kranda was wild-eyed, as though viewing the face of an actual assassin. Then, as his face relaxed, he tilted back his head and began to laugh.

"A surprise party," cackled Kranda. "A surprise party for me – the only real actor in this show!"

Leaning forward, Kranda spoke to himself in the mirror, giving a gesture below the level of the dressing table, so that it wouldn't show in the reflection.

"The surprise is out there," Kranda told himself. "Only they won't know it until the curtain falls. Rex Troy had his surprise first, only it didn't last long. A funny thing, when those bullets dented him, he acted as phony as he always did with the blanks.

"That scarlet uniform is a help. The blood won't show until after the curtain falls – maybe not even then. I'd like to see what happens out there, but it wouldn't be good judgment. I'd better wait and be myself" – with a smile, Kranda reached for a jar of cold cream – "yes, I'll remove my make-up and be myself –"

His fingers dipping the cold cream, Kranda halted in alarm and stared sharply at his mirrored image.

"I can't be myself, just yet!" he exclaimed. "I almost forgot! I have to take a final bow – as Heinrich! What a fool I was, not to remember. But you reminded me" – with a smile, Kranda bowed to his reflection which politely returned the nod – "and I thank you for it. I must go out, before they come for me."

About to rise from his chair, Kranda gave a nervous blink. He wasn't staring at his lone reflection; two other faces had moved into the mirror. Both were men who wore tuxedos: one, a dark-eyed chap whose hair was sleek and black; the other a long-faced fellow whose hair had a reddish tinge too reminiscent of Troy's scarlet uniform.

It was the dark-eyed man who spoke first. His face, smooth but sallow, showed a gloat.

"We've come for you already, Kranda." The speaker drew back his coat and showed a badge on his tuxedo vest. "Now you're coming along with us."

Kranda tried to stammer, but couldn't.

"My name is Graff," announced the man with the badge. "I'm from headquarters. Come along."

As Graff's hand clamped Kranda's shoulder, the actor made a snatch for the revolver on the dressing table. He didn't find it, for Graff's red-haired assistant was already picking it up, in the folds of a handkerchief.

"Nice work, Melvin," complimented Graff. "That rod is evidence and so are any finger-prints we find on it. And this gun" – Graff exhibited a stubby revolver of his own – "is loaded like yours was, Kranda. So let's go – quietly."

Brought to his feet, Kranda finally managed to stammer the question that was coming to his mind:

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"But how – but why – why didn't you –"

"Don't ask questions," snapped Graff. "Right now we want to get you out of here."

"Yeah," put in Melvin. "There's liable to be a panic when they find that Troy is croaked."

"And you're the guy responsible, Kranda," reminded Graff. "Troy's friends might try to lynch you. We've got to protect you."

"Troy's friends," sneered Kranda. "He hasn't any."

Graff shoved his stubby gun into his pocket and thrust the muzzle through the cloth, pressing it against Kranda's ribs. The move silenced Kranda instantly and Graff nodded for Melvin to open the door. Between the two tuxedoed men, Kranda found himself marching toward the stage door; as he passed the wing, he managed a brief glance toward the stage.

Claire Winthrop was facing the audience across the body of Rex Troy. Dramatically, she was beginning her closing lines:

"Dead! He is dead – and all my hopes have died with him –"

Two minutes more, by Kranda's calculation, and the facts of murder would be known. Maybe Graff and Melvin were right, getting him away to headquarters before chaos followed the discovery of Troy's death.

His own part as Heinrich kept drilling home to Kranda. Having played the assassin for a solid year on Broadway, it wasn't surprising that he should stay in character. Heinrich hadn't fought or argued with the palace guards; he'd contented himself with the satisfaction of a deed well done. It behooved Kranda to do the same.

There was a car parked just outside the stage alley. With a nudge of the pocketed gun, Graff thrust Kranda into the front seat while Melvin was clambering in from the other side to take the wheel. In less than Kranda's estimated two minutes, the car was on its way, carrying the captors and their prisoner.

Something was lacking in Kranda's whirling thoughts. He realized suddenly what it was – a siren. There wasn't any on this car, or at least Melvin wasn't using it, though he should have been, considering that he and Graff were in a hurry to take a murderer to headquarters.

Out of that mental whirl, Kranda suddenly remembered the question that Graff had cut short earlier. Abruptly, Kranda put it:

"Why did you let me kill Troy? You wouldn't have been there, waiting for me, if you hadn't guessed what I was going to do."

"We didn't guess," returned Graff. "We knew."

"He means we found out," added Melvin, "while we were waiting to talk to you."

"We saw the gun," explained Graff. "Rods are kind of our specialty" – in emphasis, Graff gave a nudge through his pocket – "so we took a look to see if you'd already loaded the blanks."

"And we found the real slugs," completed Melvin, "so we left them to see what happened."

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Amazement spread across Kranda's made-up face. As he turned his head from side to side, he saw that his captors were responding with wise but friendly smiles. The thing was like a dream, to find these headquarters detectives treating Kranda – an actual killer – the way the palace guards did with Heinrich after dragging him off stage.

Very suddenly, the answer dawned on Kranda.

"You mean – you aren't detectives?"

"That's right," returned Graff. "We aren't. I'm Brodie Graff and this is Red Melvin – to make the introduction complete. We came around to talk to you about a deal that means dough to everybody."

"And when Brodie found you were pulling a deal of your own," put in Melvin, "he decided to let you go through with it. If you wanted to rub out this guy Troy, why should we care?"

"That's it," snapped Brodie. "We figured you for a pal so we did the right thing by you. I was rigged for the headquarters gag in case I had to convince the door man to let us inside. I pulled it on you rather than waste time getting into the clear."

As Kranda received the hand that Brodie thrust toward him, Red spoke a reminder:

"Tell Jan about your proposition, Brodie. Being a pal, he'll want to hear it."

There wasn't a doubt that Jan Kranda wanted to hear whatever Brodie Graff offered. Luck had tossed Kranda with the very friends he wanted, gentlemen of crime. Back at the theater, death could take its bow; Kranda no longer feared the consequences.

In the opinion of Jan Kranda, these men who had so deftly whisked him from a scene of murder were just the sort who could plan a way whereby he would escape the penalty of crime!

CHAPTER II

THE curtain struck the stage and rose again to show Claire Winthrop gazing sadly beyond the prone form of Rex Troy. Impressed with the realism of the scene, the audience furnished waves of applause that brought a smile from Lamont Cranston.

It was seldom that Cranston smiled, but at present he had good reason. In the box where he sat with Tracy Singledon, he had wondered how an intelligent audience could enjoy Troy's exaggerated portrayal of a mid-Victorian hero. Perhaps at last, Troy was receiving his just due. Lying silent on the stage, he was getting more applause than when he had strutted through his part as Prince Regent.

The humor of the thing was lost on Singledon. He was all business and always business. Singledon was beckoning for Cranston to leave the box.

"Let's get back stage," suggested Singledon in a brisk tone. "Troy will be coming off by the time we get there. He will probably want to go along and meet Professor Bartlett. Troy is buying an interest in Bartlett's invention, like the rest of us –"

There was a sudden interruption as a girl came through the curtains of the box and thrust a note into Cranston's hand with the exclamation:

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"Lamont! Read this!"

The girl was Margo Lane, who had promised to meet Cranston back stage after the show. A brunette of the calmer type, Margo seldom displayed her present excitement. Tilting the note so that the box lights fell upon it, Cranston read these lines:

Dear Claire:

Forgive the shock that I have caused you. It was not hatred but the misery of injustice that made me kill Troy. If you are blamed, use this note to exonerate yourself.

Jan Kranda

The curtain had fallen again upon the final tableau. As Cranston gazed toward the stage, Margo explained how she had received the note.

"An usher handed it to me," said Margo. "He said it was left for Claire. Don't you understand, Lamont? Rex Troy is dead! Jan Kranda used bullets in the gun to-night!"

Singledon snatched the note from Cranston's hand. His face, usually bluff and expressionless, had become a study in mixed emotions.

"Not a word about this note!" exclaimed Singledon. "We must make sure that Kranda really wrote it. It may be a forgery. Perhaps someone else killed Troy –"

"Nobody killed Troy," interposed Cranston. "Look!"

He waved toward the stage where the curtain was beginning another rise. As it came above the level of the actors, both Margo and Singledon stared in amazement. There stood Rex Troy, hand in hand with Claire Winthrop. Both were bowing, but Troy was acting as though accepting the applause as entirely for him.

Taking the note from Singledon, Cranston folded it and put it in his pocket. Somewhat chagrined, Singledon led the way backstage. Following with Cranston, Margo queried:

"How did you know Troy wasn't dead, Lamont?"

"I have seen too many men stop bullets," replied Cranston, calmly. "I would have recognized the symptoms, Margo. Troy faked his fall in his usual poor style."

"Then the note was just a hoax?"

"I'm not sure, Margo. Kranda didn't come on stage to take a final bow along with the rest of the cast. Rather odd, considering this is closing night."

All was hubbub back stage with everyone exchanging mutual congratulations except Kranda, who was scarcely missed amid the excitement. Rex Troy was surrounded by a knot of actors who were burying their past animosity toward the leading man by offering him hearty hand-shakes. Margo suddenly found herself alone and wondered what had become of Cranston and Singledon.

The first to rejoin her was Singledon. He had stopped to make a call from the backstage phone. Pushing his way through to Troy, Singledon shook hands and drew the actor aside.

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"I just phoned Rupert Suffolk," stated Singledon. "He says that Bartlett won't be ready for another hour."

"But the party will be starting by that time!" exclaimed Troy. He gave a gesture toward the actors as if they were now his audience. "I can't disappoint these people."

"I'm sorry," apologized Singledon, "but you know how Bartlett is. Still, this is only to be a preliminary demonstration of the cathodoscope. There will be others later."

"I certainly hope so," snapped Troy. "For an invention that is supposed to be a finished product, the cathodoscope has hardly lived up to its advance notices."

"Bartlett is anxious to have it work perfectly, Troy."

"He should be. Frankly, Singledon, I am beginning to lose interest. However, I shall be guided by your opinion of tonight's demonstration. Give me a call tomorrow."

As Troy stepped away, Singledon turned to Margo. With a shrug of his broad shoulders, Singledon let his worried features relax into a smile.

"You never can tell about actors," observed Singledon. "However I can't blame Troy for being temperamental on a night like this. Tell Cranston I've left to pick up Suffolk and the other investors. He can meet us at Bartlett's – but not for another hour."

Hardly had Singledon left before Cranston returned. Margo gave him the message and Cranston received it with a nonchalant nod. Stepping to the telephone Cranston put in a brief call of his own, then ushered Margo out through the stage door. As they went, Margo noticed that Cranston looked back with a parting glance at Troy who was still the center of congratulations.

"Do you think it's safe to leave Troy?" bantered Margo as they walked down the stage alley. "Aren't you afraid that Kranda may be lurking in his dressing room, ready to make good his death threat – if there really was one?"

"Kranda isn't in his dressing room," returned Cranston, calmly. "But he may have meant what he said in the note."

"You found something in the dressing room?"

"I found these." Cranston opened his hand and Margo saw six cartridges, all with bullets. "They were in a box with a lot of blanks. These were on top."

"Do they fit Kranda's gun?"

"I don't know. The gun wasn't there. Kranda must have taken it when he went out with his friends."

"His friends?" echoed Margo. "What friends?"

"Two gentlemen in tuxedos," defined Cranston. "The stage manager saw Kranda go out with them, arm in arm. Don't try to figure it out, because I haven't, except that I'm sure Kranda intended to deliver more than smoke with his fire."

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The mystery deepened for Margo. She could appreciate that the discarded bullets tallied somewhat with the note, but Kranda's departure in the company of persuasive friends was a puzzling factor, particularly if Kranda had changed his mind about murdering Troy. Margo was still debating the question mentally when Cranston halted her at a corner.

"Shrevvy will be here in a few minutes," remarked Cranston. "He's bringing Vincent in the cab."

To Margo the news spelled action. When Cranston traveled in Shrevvy's cab, he usually did so as his other self – The Shadow. That tonight might mark the beginning of another of The Shadow's strange adventures was emphasized by the fact that he had summoned Vincent also. Among the tried and trusted agents who served The Shadow, Harry Vincent rated tops.

Before Margo could express enthusiasm over the coming expedition, Cranston's quiet tone intervened.

"It's all a hunch, Margo," he said, "but I have an idea that all trails may lead to Bartlett's. We may learn more if we arrive there first."

"What is this invention of Bartlett's?" queried Margo. "The thing Singledon called a cathodoscope?"

"It can best be termed an amplified x-ray," explained Cranston, "so intensified that it gives clear vision of objects on the far side of a solid obstruction. If it lives up to Bartlett's claims it should be worth a million dollars to the right people – or the wrong."

The pause before the final words drove its full emphasis upon Margo.

"By the wrong people," queried Margo, "do you mean criminals?"

"Exactly," returned Cranston. "I'm willing to invest in the cathodoscope on the chance that it may really work, just so I can keep it under the proper auspices. Tonight's demonstration was to be the test. But this delay that Singledon mentioned, coming right after the Kranda incident, produces an uncertainty."

"You mean crooks may be after the cathodoscope already?"

"Yes, even though they are taking a long way around. One thing at least is certain. Professor Bartlett needs the special protection that I can best give him as The Shadow."

A cab wheeled up to the corner, its door opening as it arrived. Cranston helped Margo in with Harry and closed the door as he followed. From the empty seat he plucked a black cloak and a slouch hat that awaited him. By the time the cab had swung the next corner, Lamont Cranston had faded into an invisible passenger, whose sable-hued form blended with the interior of the cab.

The whispered laugh that Harry and Margo heard was an anticipation of events to come. Seldom did The Shadow's hunches fail; rather they grew, with uncanny precision that he was evidencing on this occasion. Singledon, Suffolk and the others who were due at Bartlett's would be preceded by a mysterious visitor in the person of The Shadow.

Along with anticipation there was an added significance to The Shadow's whispered mirth. It told that his keen brain had already analyzed the possible reasons for the sudden disappearance of Jan Kranda, the character actor whose scheme of murder had somehow gone astray!

CHAPTER III

IN HIS uptown apartment, Professor Lucien Bartlett was saying goodnight to his daughter Elaine and a small group of friends. The evening's party was something of a brief farewell, since Elaine was leaving on a late train for a vacation in New England.

An elderly man whose sharp eyes contrasted with his wrinkled face, Lucien Bartlett was of a type commonly classified as peculiar. For months he had never left the apartment except to visit his laboratory, a single room on the same floor. Only on rare occasions did Elaine bring visitors to the apartment and she was very careful to pick the limited few that she knew her father would trust.

The curious feature on this occasion was that Bartlett lacked his usual worry. On the contrary, Elaine, usually the brightening influence, was definitely troubled. Elaine was an attractive blonde with a genuine smile that sparkled like her clear blue eyes, but tonight her attempts to be cheerful were obviously forced.

From Elaine's glances toward the clock it was plain that time was on her mind. Noting those glances, Bartlett nodded.

"Nearly midnight," he remarked. "You'd better be starting, Elaine. Only half an hour until train time."

"But I can't leave you alone," protested Elaine. "I thought your visitors would be here before this —"

"They will come," assured Bartlett, "and my demonstration will convince them. Come, Elaine, bring your friends to the laboratory and let them see how safe I will be."

Bartlett led the group down the hall to a door opposite the elevator. The door had two locks, both intricate, that Bartlett opened with special keys. As he swung the door outward he pointed to a huge inner bolt that gave triple security; then, as the professor stepped across the threshold, Elaine's friends peered curiously at the cathodoscope.

The famous invention stood on the rear half of a large table that occupied the center of a windowless room. The device was about three feet square and resembled a complicated x-ray camera. In front of it was a large skeleton frame from which Bartlett drew down a metallic curtain. Further in front he placed a little stand on which he set a few odd objects: a book, a vase and a wine glass.

With a crablike gait, Bartlett started toward the rear of the room, then halted and gave a wheezy laugh as he returned.

"I forgot myself," he chuckled. "I was about to begin my demonstration, thinking you were the visitors who are to witness it. Good-bye, Elaine, and have a good vacation. Hurry now and catch that train."

The three young friends who stood beside Elaine noticed the anxious glance that the girl gave through the doorway. Apparently Elaine wanted to make sure that all was as secure as her father claimed it was. One glance was enough, for the room was utterly devoid of hiding places.

Closets were lacking, likewise windows. In one corner stood a workbench but there was nothing underneath it. On the bench were spare parts for the cathodoscope along with a supply of tools. In another corner was a small table stacked with boxes containing special electric bulbs. A wheeled stand supported a dictaphone which Bartlett used when making notes that Elaine typed for him. The shelf under the stand had a supply of cylinder records.

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Except for a few folding chairs the room had no other furnishings. The filing cabinet where Elaine kept the notes was in the apartment along with the typewriter. Though he made copious notes Bartlett never included any data vital to his great invention, hence he did not need to keep the filing cabinet in this strong room that served him as a laboratory.

Approaching Elaine, Bartlett gave her a good-bye kiss and urged her gently into the hall. He drew the door shut and the locks operated automatically. There was another clatter as Bartlett thrust home the heavy bolt, closing himself tightly in his stronghold. With a sigh of relief, Elaine turned to the elevator where one of her friends was vainly pushing the button.

"Out of order again!" exclaimed Elaine. "That's the one trouble with this apartment house. Well, there's no use waiting for the elevator to make up its mind, which it does most unexpectedly. We'll have to use the stairway."

There were four flights down to the ground floor and Elaine took them on the run, her friends following with her bags. As luck had it, a taxicab was parked in front of the apartment house, which was unusual at this hour. Elaine didn't waste time cheering over her good fortune. Her fears for her father forgotten, she sprang gladly into the cab, grabbed the bags that her friends tossed after her, and told the driver to hurry her to Grand Central Station.

As the cab swung the corner, Elaine looked back at the six-story apartment building. She saw the lights on the fifth floor that represented her father's apartment, for she had left them on in expectation of his visitors. Even more assuring than those lights was the blank area of solid wall that represented Bartlett's strong room, where he would remain secure until those visitors arrived. They were men who could be trusted.

One of them, Tracy Singledon, was the man who had promised to promote Bartlett's invention. He had been friendly from the start, the big bluff man whose ability at interesting other investors was unquestioned. If anything, Singledon was too gullible. He believed whatever they told him and often they failed to live up to their claims. Yet Singledon took all disappointments in his stride; as he put it, they simply taught him to be more careful.

A direct contrast to Singledon was Rupert Suffolk.

Careful from the start, Suffolk had at first impressed Elaine unfavorably. He was a suave man, wise in manner, noted for his foresight in financial matters. Until recently Suffolk had specialized in real estate, but finding himself overloaded, had decided on other ventures, hence his sudden interest in the cathodoscope. Once convinced that Bartlett had a real invention in the making, Suffolk had become more than cooperative.

Learning that Bartlett needed a combination strong room and laboratory, Suffolk had provided one in this apartment house which he owned. Since the place was being remodeled, the room was fixed to Bartlett's specifications. Elaine's father had been allowed to provide his own locks, products of his inventive skill. The door, equipped with pivot hinges built into the frame, was the final word in burglar-proof equipment.

Other faces came to Elaine's mind as she settled back reflectively.

Rex Troy, beau ideal of the matinee trade, wanted stock in the Cathodoscope Corporation. Elaine had seen Troy perform in "The Impostor" and had met him back stage with her father. She hadn't liked him as an actor or an individual, but perhaps the contrast with Jan Kranda was the reason.

As a character actor, Kranda was perfection. His portrayal of Heinrich had greatly impressed Bartlett.

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Quickly these recollections swept through Elaine's mind. The cab had covered a mere five blocks during her mental process. And now Elaine was thinking of another man, a newcomer in the group of investors. His name was Lamont Cranston, and there was something in his very silence that had struck Elaine as impressive.

In the smoke of the cigarette she had lighted, Elaine could picture a face that was moderately hawklike. She could see two eyes that gazed from an impassive countenance; eyes that were hypnotic in their steadiness.

Suddenly her cab stopped with a jolt. Half turned about, Elaine stared through the window and caught a glimpse of Cranston!

A moment later the illusion was gone.

Though Elaine didn't realize it, the eyes had recognized her. They had simply changed direction to study the driver of Elaine's cab. The Shadow's new survey was inspired by an undertone from the front seat of his own cab.

"Take a look at that hackie, boss," Shrevvy was saying. "He's a phony, one hundred proof. Even the boys from Brooklyn know the lights around this triangle. And that hack of his is non-McCoy. It's an Indy with a repaint to make it look like a company job."

To The Shadow, the face behind the wheel of the other cab was as familiar as Elaine's. It looked like a pop-up from a rogue's gallery photo. It belonged to a denizen of wrong places known as "Creep" Crawley who was very much wanted on a dozen minor counts.

The far door of Shrevvy's cab flipped open. Harry Vincent hunched out into the darkness to cover the remaining ground to Bartlett's. As Harry responded to The Shadow's whispered order, Margo crouched back in the seat. She was obscured by The Shadow as he reached to close the door while Shrevvy was easing his cab back into the traffic lane to swing around the triangular intersection.

The tail-lights of Creep's pirate cab had vanished along a side street when Shrevvy completed his tour of the triangle, but the trail was as good as closed. The Shadow's cab was a special in more than paint, geared for the high speed and turn-table twists in which Shrevvy, its hand-picked driver, starred.

CHAPTER IV

FROM the moment that he triple-locked his laboratory door, Professor Bartlett had concerned himself with the cathodoscope. All day he had been rehearsing for the coming demonstration but his interest was not jaded. Indeed, Bartlett relished the short time yet at his disposal. It appealed to his precise mind as an opportunity to establish his invention by word as well as deed.

The interior of the lab disclosed a very curious scene.

Standing behind the cathodoscope, Bartlett looked like a cross between an ostrich and an old-time photographer. His head was buried in side flaps and hood that extended back from the machine. Down from those flaps ran a hose that ended on the dictaphone, where the running cylinder carried a record that was perpetuating Bartlett's comments.

The cathodoscope was buzzing steadily and from its projector a flood of brilliant but flickering light was bearing steadily upon the metallic screen. The glow produced a peculiar scintillation of colors that formed a whirling pattern but there was no perceptible change in the texture of the screen itself.

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From within the observation box the effect must have been different, or Professor Bartlett was exercising his imagination for the old man's voice wheezed a joyful monologue.

"Screen structure fading," spoke Bartlett into the dictaphone tube. "Registration four projection units. Begin time record from here and check at six."

The buzzing continued and so did the revolutions of the dictaphone cylinder. Bartlett didn't need a stop watch because the running time of the record could itself be checked later. However he disliked wasting any of the record for he filled in time with minor comments.

"Fading effect continues... Screen now appearing to actually dissolve..." A short pause then Bartlett exclaimed hurriedly: "Objects shaping beyond the screen... Usual blur greatly lessened, probably because of improved polychromatic regulator... All objects clearly visible. Step-up to six and check time..."

There was a click beneath the flaps as Bartlett pressed the button adding the projection units. Immediately the buzzing of the cathodoscope increased. Next Bartlett's hands moved out from under the flaps and began to reach for gadgets on the side of the machine proper.

"Stereometer adjusted," announced Bartlett briskly. "Check seconds until three dimensional effect registers... Now!" Another pressure of a little lever and a peculiar whirring rose above the buzz of the machine. "Kaleidograph increased to double norm. Colors appearing but blurred... Red cover of book registers... Blue design on vase still indistinguishable..."

Under went the hands again and the pressure of a button caused the buzz to drown the whirring sound. Bartlett's voice came excitedly:

"Eight projection units! Check time!"

On the screen, the whirl of many colors was actually taking forms that resembled the objects on the other side. That was the effect that a bystander would have gained, but to Bartlett, looking squarely through the cathodoscope, the sight must have been greatly intensified. He was forgetting all about the time checks in the enthusiasm that swept him.

"Colors of objects plain!" Bartlett was fairly shouting into the dictaphone... "Bad blur due to loss of focus... Ready for focus change – no, hold to full! Fault lies in objects being too close to screen. The range of the cathodoscope has automatically increased!"

"The door of the room is visible as background... Actual range is probably double previous estimate... Holding all units on full for final observation representing maximum intensity..."

As described by Bartlett the scene through the cathodoscope was something of a triumph. The screen had literally obliterated itself. The objects that first had commanded full attention could now be forgotten, since the locked door though dimly registered was forcing itself into the finished picture. But there was more to come, enough more to astound professor Bartlett.

"Objects are showing beyond the door!" Bartlett's voice shrilled above the thrum of the machine. "Moving objects... Human figures... They must be coming from the elevator! They are coming closer and the door is fading. One – two – three men – and they appear to be on this side of the door which is impossible because I bolted it!"

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Two are moving aside. I can see them through the solid wall, but it now forms a background. Wait! The door I see must belong to the elevator, the walls part of the hall... No, the single figure is enlarging which means it is coming closer. Its face is just above the blurred objects on the table –"

Bartlett broke off with a high-pitched gasp that carried a triumphant note.

"The face is mine!" he shouted. "The cathodoscope has developed powers of reflection which are unexplainable. This may mean that it is fourth dimensional!"

That ended Bartlett's observations. In his excitement over viewing his own image through the solid screen that intervened the professor had forgotten the two figures that had sidled away from the revealing rays of the cathodoscope. But the men in question had not forgotten him, as they proved.

They were closer than Bartlett imagined, so much closer that they were behind him. They clamped their hands on the professor's frail shoulders and whipped him out from the observation box so heartily that his head thwacked the cross-bar that supported the top flap. Reeling from the impact, Bartlett slumped into the heavy hands that gripped him.

"Out like a light."

The man who made the comment evidently referred to Bartlett, but he could have meant the cathodoscope as well, for his companion had just turned off the instrument. A singular hush filled the room as the whirling colors vanished from the screen obliterating the outline of a human head and shoulders that had formed amid the dazzle, like the smaller objects on the other side.

Vaguely, Bartlett heard a voice that droned through the layers of his fading consciousness:

"Make it fast. Somebody is buzzing the prof's apartment. We figured three minutes for the switch but maybe we can clip it."

Downstairs Harry Vincent was ringing the apartment bell. Getting no response from the telephone beside it, he knew that Bartlett must be in his lab for The Shadow had informed him of the inventor's habits. There was no bell for the locked room so Harry rang the janitor's instead, which was the recognized procedure. It was half a minute before a sleepy voice inquired from the receiver:

"Who's there?"

"I came to see Professor Bartlett," answered Harry. "He's expecting me."

"Who else is with you?"

"Nobody else."

Apparently that was the wrong answer, because the janitor hedged for a few moments. At last, he spoke in a suspicious tone:

"Professor Bartlett was expecting a party."

"I'm the party," volunteered Harry, promptly. "How about letting me in to see him?"

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

The janitor clattered the phone receiver without saying whether he would or wouldn't grant Harry's request. That left two ways of getting into the apartment house, the choice depending upon how rapid an entry was necessary. The first way was to smash the glass pane of the front door and operate the knob from the other side, but before taking such a violent course Harry decided to study the situation better. Stepping out to the sidewalk he looked up at the windows of Bartlett's apartment, having learned its location from The Shadow during the cab trip.

All looked serene. There were no signs of moving figures beyond the half-drawn window shades. In all probability Bartlett had gone to the strong room. Forcible entry to the building seemed unwise compared to a practical but slower expedient, so Harry took the second way. He simply stepped into the entry and pressed all the buttons that he saw.

Chances were that some apartment dweller would buzz for a visitor to come up without inquiring who it was. It worked as Harry hoped; as he repeated the rings, a clicking came from the door lock. Shoving the door open, Harry entered the apartment house and made straight for the elevator. He was pushing its button when the janitor appeared from a door that led up from the basement.

The janitor looked true to type, the sort who would put up a hot argument with strangers belonging to the lower intelligence brackets. A brief look at Harry stirred the fellow's inferiority complex. Recognizing a visitor who rated in the class that called on Professor Bartlett, the janitor became apologetic. Without inquiring how Harry had gotten this far, the janitor cocked his head and looked at the elevator door.

"Guess it ain't running," he said. "It kind of quits every now and then."

"Very convenient," observed Harry. "Usually with passengers in it, I suppose?"

The janitor shook his head.

"Only when it's empty," he said. "Trouble seems to be in the push buttons on the different floors; short-circuit or something. That's why we haven't been able to get it fixed right. Keep pushing and she'll work."

Harry morsed the button with combinations of dots and dashes while the janitor nodded approvingly. After a minute he decided to quit and use the stairs, but as he turned away, the elevator rumbled in its shaft. Facing the door he waited expectantly only to hear the rumbling stop.

"Sounded like it went up," remarked Harry. "What does it do, go to the top when you push the button here at the bottom?"

"Yeah," replied the janitor. "That's what it does, only don't ask me why. It just went from the fifth to the sixth, but anyway it's working again. You'll see."

The janitor took over the button business with such an air of confidence that Harry waited for results. At the end of three wasted minutes, the elevator began a downward rumble, but before it had quite reached the ground floor, there was a heavy banging at the door of the building. Turning, Harry recognized Tracy Singledon, having met the promoter a few times with Cranston.

Past Singledon's broad, bluff face was another, peering across a shoulder. It belonged to Rupert Suffolk, fitting a description given by The Shadow. Suffolk was an easy man to describe, with his sharp thin features tending toward the sallow. He was about Singledon's age, but lacked the gray hair that characterized the other man. Still, there was suspicion of dye in the gloss of Suffolk's crop and his black mustache, clipped

eyebrow–thin, looked as though it had undergone a tweezer treatment to dispose of any stray gray.

Behind that pair were other faces representing more investors. Whatever their comparative importance, Suffolk rated tops at present because he owned the building. Seeing him, the janitor gave instant service, admitting the visitors while Harry was opening the elevator door.

Nodding to Singledon, Harry announced:

"Mr. Cranston asked me here. He's been delayed but he'll be along later. Maybe we'll need him to help us out of the elevator if it flukes half way up. Something's wrong with it."

Suffolk thrust himself to the fore.

"Don't worry about the elevator," he snapped. "It has been properly inspected. I own this building so I ought to know. Get in and we'll go up."

Inside, Suffolk pressed the automatic button and the elevator took them smoothly to the fifth floor. The first to step out, Suffolk strode across the hall and banged hard at the door of the strong room. A faint buzzing sound subsided; shortly there came the clatter of opening locks and bolts.

The door thrust wide. As Harry and the rest stepped from its swinging path they were greeted by a thin–faced man with birdlike eyes, whose head gave a prompt bow from between unevenly stooped shoulders. With the wheezy greeting that characterized Professor Bartlett, he sidled in crablike fashion to reach the door and close it after the others passed through.

Here again, Harry Vincent was relying on The Shadow's description and Professor Bartlett fitted it to a dot. One look at the room with its smooth, windowless walls, satisfied Harry that any qualms regarding the professor and his famous invention belonged in the realm of imagination.

Whatever crime's purpose, it lay elsewhere, along the trail that Elaine Bartlett had taken and which The Shadow had so promptly followed. Such at least was Harry's opinion, and his judgment was stiffened by long experience in The Shadow's service. What the future might hold was uncertain, but Harry could see no immediate menace for Professor Lucien Bartlett.

If Harry Vincent had thought in terms of past instead of present he might have formed a different conclusion.

CHAPTER V

THIS wasn't Grand Central.

Elaine Bartlett was convinced of it as the cab swung into the doorway of what looked to be an old garage. Worried about catching her train, she leaned to the front window and demanded:

"Where are you taking me, driver?"

"Grand Central, lady," Creep Crawley tried to make it sound convincing. "This is the entrance to the lower level. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"Why, no –"

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Elaine wrinkled her forehead, puzzled. She was trying to visualize Grand Central Station and this didn't fit at all. Suddenly the answer sprang to mind and she blurted it all in one breath.

"There isn't any entrance to the lower level. Cabs can't get down there at all. If this is a hoax it's gone far enough –"

It had gone too far.

Veering the cab sharply, Creep adroitly placed it between two cars that were parked at the side of the narrow garage. Elaine, seeing two men in overalls washing and polishing the car on the right, sprang from the door on that side, hoping to attract their notice.

She did. The man who was polishing the windshield flipped aside the cloth and revealed a gun. At sight of the menacing weapon, Elaine darted past the rear of the car only to encounter the washer, who flipped his sponge back into its pail and likewise displayed a handy revolver.

Elaine found herself boxed from two directions, surrounded.

There was something professional about the set-up that made it all the more appalling. It wasn't the cat-and-mouse technique that vicious characters would ordinarily use; rather, it was smooth team-work that bordered almost on indifference. No haste, no worry, just a case of someone being ahead of Elaine's next jump. The deliberate hesitation by the man who was closing the door was a definite invitation for Elaine to waste her breath and energy in a mad dash that would lead her nowhere.

A feeling of utter horror swept Elaine. She felt more at the mercy of these captors than if they had already laid hands upon her. Rooted, the girl watched the man at the door as he tantalizingly inched it with a pausing hand. He was leaving an eight foot loop-hole that wouldn't be there if Elaine tried to reach it.

Out of darkness came the high-pitched shriek of tires, bright headlights flashed from a wheeling cab that twisted in from the street. Before the man at the door turned, the vehicle took a flying lurch down the ramp.

To Elaine, this seemed the climax of a death-plot in which she was the target. Frozen in the path of the hurtling cab, she hadn't a chance to escape it. The men dove away panic stricken. The cab swerved enough to let Elaine's abductors get clear. Then, with a jolt that nearly lifted it from the concrete floor, the cab came to a stop, sudden and short. Only by inches did it fail to reach her, but the cab's spectacular halt wasn't intended as another mode of terrifying the helpless girl.

A rear door flew open on the side toward the men who brandished guns. Thanks to the momentum the cab had given him, a cloaked figure was catapulted through the door in a flying leap that turned him into a streak of blackness. With that amazing figure came a laugh that must have started a few moments before, for its shivering echoes followed in his wake.

The men who heard it knew that laugh. Desperately they tried to bring their guns in play, but they hadn't time. Elaine saw the black streak materialize into a cloaked shape with a pair of gloved hands that flayed heavy automatics down from the level of a slouch hat.

Those strokes drove Elaine's two captors back to their knees, then flat on the floor where they coiled with guns falling from their hands unfired. The Shadow kicked the weapons under the car all in the same stride that he used to reach Elaine. Lifted from her feet by the swift sweep of a cloaked arm, Elaine landed inside the cab's open door.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Having literally hurled Elaine from danger, The Shadow was gone as quickly as he had arrived, off in another whirl as important as his first mission.

The Shadow's next job was to handle Creep Crawley.

From the moment that he recognized The Shadow, the fake cabby began thinking in terms of his own security. Wise as well as dangerous, Creep Crawley was making the most of his handiest weapon, the cab itself.

While The Shadow was battering down the crooked garage hands, Creep whipped the cab back, making a sharp turn as he did. Another twist of the wheel and he was starting the cab forward in the general direction of the outer door, a maneuver which prompted The Shadow to toss Elaine into Shrevvy's cab and make a quick fade of his own.

To ram Shrevvy's cab would have been fatal for Creep. Instead, he risked spurting through the narrow gap between Shrevvy's cab and the parked line of cars. Maybe Creep hoped he'd run down The Shadow in the process, but the cloaked battler was already gone. So Creep put his all into the getaway.

Slicing through an opening that was half a foot shy, Creep won his point through stubborn folly. In allowing too much on Shrevvy's side he hooked the jutting front of a sedan with his own rear fender. Instead of trying a back and forth maneuver, Creep smacked his foot right to the floorboard, burying the accelerator. His fender took two yards of bumper from the big sedan, but the cab was away. It climbed the ramp like a squirrel taking to a tree and made a wild veer out into the street. Seeing the cab coming, the frantic door tender jumped the running board and rode away with it.

Quick stabs from The Shadow's gun shattered the air. If the ripping fender had delayed Creep a few mere seconds, his flight would have been halted. Instead, the luck was all with Creep.

Seeing Creep make the grade, Shrevvy went into quick maneuvers. He was turning toward the ramp when The Shadow boarded the cab and dropped in beside the driver's seat, leaving Elaine in back with Margo. Out of her whirl of surprise Elaine was even more befuddled to find another girl involved, but she settled back with the full assurance that Margo must be a friend. Where the chase might lead or how long it would last, Elaine didn't care. She knew she was in good hands.

Rounding a corner that Creep might have swung, Shrevvy veered and stopped at sight of a strew of luggage lying in the middle of a darkened street. Elaine's bags, chucked from Creep's cab. Creep wouldn't have tossed out the baggage simply to lighten ballast. The bags proved that he had taken another course, probably down the secluded avenue that Shrevvy had just left.

Supporting his theory, The Shadow saw heavy traffic on the next avenue, marking it as a corner which Creep would avoid. Also visible was a subway entrance which fitted nicely with The Shadow's plans. Turning to the rear seat he gave brief instructions with the result that Margo hurriedly clambered out taking Elaine with her. While the girls were gathering the bags and starting for the subway, Shrevvy reversed his cab back to Creep's logical trail. With The Shadow riding in the rear seat, the pursuit was on again.

Within five blocks, Shrevvy spotted the cab he wanted. It was pulling away from a lunch room on a side street as though its driver had been innocently engaged for the past half hour, the cab bearing the company emblem and license tag that Shrevvy had mentally identified with Creep. Since he was staging a sneak, Shrevvy went into one of his own with The Shadow's approval.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Apparently Creep was reversing the trail for it was leading back in the direction of the apartment where Professor Bartlett lived. But it wasn't until the other cab neared the final corner that it made a left turn in sufficient light for Shrevvy to observe the thing that startled him.

"Say, boss," said Shrevvy through the connecting window, "Didn't Creep clip that bumper on the other side?"

"I heard it," responded Cranston. "From the clatter, I don't think it improved Creep's fender."

"That's what's bothering me," declared Shrevvy. "Look at that left rear on the hack ahead. It ain't even scratched!"

"It looks like new," was Cranston's comment, "and so does the cab."

"Say –"

Shrevvy cut off with a string of expletives as the other cab swung to a stop in front of Bartlett's. This was a genuine company cab which explained why Creep had been handling a repainted Independent. Shrevvy hadn't figured that Creep's license plate was as phony as his cab but it evidently was, because it was identical with the number on this one.

The driver was getting out as Shrevvy pulled to a stop. He was an honest looking fellow who stared inquiringly at Cranston when the latter stepped from Shrevvy's cab.

"Say, mister," the cabby asked, "D'you know who wanted a cab here? I got a call over at the hash room where I eat saying he'd be waiting here, but he ain't."

Cranston nodded nonchalantly.

"An acquaintance of mine," he said. "An impetuous chap who was in a great hurry this evening. He must have taken another cab right after he phoned you."

The cabby grimaced, then turned around to deliver his tale of woe to Shrevvy who looked sympathetic, particularly when he caught a nod from Cranston. It wasn't The Shadow's policy to pass up the slightest clue, and this driver, whose cab had been duplicated, might provide one. At least he had been under observation by certain men of crime to become a victim of vehicular imposture.

Cranston had come a long way around to reach his original goal where he had at first expected crime to strike. Though Creep Crawley had managed to trick the trail he had done The Shadow a favor in decoying Shrevvy back here.

As for any pride that Creep might feel, it was more than offset by The Shadow's rescue of Elaine, whose kidnapping was Creep's real assignment. Where clues were concerned, there would be others when the police took the fake garage men into custody. The Shadow's shots could not have passed unnoticed, nor the finding of two unconscious men with revolvers lying by their loosened hands.

Thus Lamont Cranston could proceed to his appointment with Professor Bartlett.

CHAPTER VI

CRANSTON'S knocks at Bartlett's strong room door produced the usual clatter of receding locks and bolts. When the door swung open, Cranston was greeted by the bowing figure of Professor Bartlett as polite as ever.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

But the real greeting came from Singledon who called triumphantly above the buzz of the cathodoscope.

"It works, Cranston!" Singledon shouted. "Come see for yourself! How about it, professor? Can you step up the projection units for another demonstration?"

"Of course," acknowledged the stoop-shouldered man as he sidled back into the room. "Let me arrange it first and I shall show Mr. Cranston everything he wants to see."

The arrangements required Bartlett's usual ostrich act. The others looked on with interest, Harry included, but Cranston's eyes roved elsewhere. He was taking in the details of this room, studying its security. If ever a strong room deserved its reputation, this one did, with its smooth crackless walls and solid unscathed door.

The dictaphone interested Cranston with its record on the cylinder. Evidently Professor Bartlett had been using the dictaphone this evening. Noting that Rupert Suffolk was fully engaged in conversation with Tracy Singledon and that everyone else was watching Bartlett, Cranston stooped to the shelf below the dictaphone and picked out an unused record. Next he was drawing the record from the disk itself to compare it with the unused one.

Only Harry Vincent observed this action, and he saw the finish only. Harry chanced to glance in that direction just in time to see Cranston slide a record back on the cylinder of the dictaphone.

Shortly afterward, Bartlett's face emerged from the flaps behind the cathodoscope. The professor's voice proceeded with a crackly announcement:

"As you know, the cathodoscope is an amplification of the cathode ray. I have so intensified it that this device gives a clear view of objects on the other side of a solid barrier. It has been my ambition however to show such objects in three-dimensional form with color, the two features being inter-related.

"I have accomplished this through experiments with a simple instrument known as the kaleidoscope, which for years has been regarded as a simple toy wherein glass particles fall into myriad patterns. My first step was to employ particles of metal so thin as to be transparent instead of the customary bits of glass. My next was to ionize those particles on the theory that so treated they would show differentiations according to color.

"The result fulfilled my expectations. Where the cathodoscope differs from the usual x-ray machine is wholly in this discovery. Literally the colors fall in line under the proper ratio of projection units and kaleidograph norm. Of course there is the stereometer, which I designed to insure the three dimensional effect and the polychromatic regulation which governs the ionized metallic particles.

"But results speak better than technicalities" – thin lips registered a dry smile – "so if you will first study the arrangement of the objects beyond the screen and then look through the cathodoscope, you will see for yourself, Mr. Cranston."

Cranston looked at the objects beyond the screen, the red book, the blue vase and the empty wine glass. As he turned toward the front of the cathodoscope, he heard Bartlett's voice again:

"While you watch you will see me change the positions of the objects. Be ready for it, Mr. Cranston, but on no account touch any of the regulators."

Cranston's response was a single word, which he undertoned without moving his lips. The only person who caught it was the man for whom it was intended, Harry Vincent. The word was:

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Count."

Pressing the various buttons, Bartlett stepped away. Cranston was looking through the instrument, his hands below the flaps. All eyes were on Bartlett except Harry's, his were watching Cranston's fingers. Silently both Cranston and Harry were counting from one to ten in perfect unison, a trick they had often practiced. What Cranston's fingers were doing were marking off the tens so that Harry could check any slight deviation.

Through the cathodoscope, Cranston could clearly see the objects in full color with three dimensional effect. Then, without warning, a hand came into the scene and moved the objects to new positions. It was at that moment that Cranston's thumb raised itself and lowered when Bartlett's operation had finished. Shortly afterward the professor came back to the controls and turned them off.

A smile and a gesture signified that Bartlett wanted Cranston to check the new position of the actual objects. Cranston did so and nodded that they corresponded with the changes that Bartlett's hand had made.

Passing Harry, Cranston raised his eyebrows in silent inquiry. Harry undertoned:

"Three to seven."

The reply that Cranston gave was something of a jolt to Harry though he did not show it. What Cranston said was:

"Five to eleven."

In brief, the cathodoscope was a fake.

The experiment had missed on two counts when checked by one man through the cathodoscope with another watching Bartlett's shifting of the objects. Harry had seen the professor's hand move into action two seconds before Cranston witnessed it through the machine and Bartlett had shifted the objects in four seconds while Cranston was tallying six!

Of the others present only one man looked dubious. That man was Suffolk whose sallow face habitually wore a "show-me" expression. Tonight however Suffolk's manner was intensified to use one of Bartlett's pet terms. Suffolk wanted to see what others thought for he was watching other faces closely. Meeting Suffolk's glance, Singledon became troubled.

"Anything wrong, Suffolk?"

"Nothing at all," returned Suffolk, suavely, "except that I'd hoped to see a more practical demonstration. Suppose I wrote something and sealed it in an envelope. If I held that envelope in front of the cathodoscope could somebody look through and read the message?"

Suffolk finished by turning to Bartlett whose face promptly became troubled. Then:

"It would not be a good test," wheezed Bartlett. "I prefer three dimensional objects. An envelope is flat."

"But could you read the message?"

"With proper adjustments, yes," replied Bartlett. "It would take a long while though to arrange it. Of course" – he cast a close look at Suffolk – "you can make tests of your own if you prefer, provided they come within the proper range."

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Just what is the proper range?"

"The present adjustment of the cathodoscope. For instance" – Bartlett's smile came happily – "why not pour some wine into the glass and study the effect through the cathodoscope? I have some wine here" – he went to a corner and picked up a bottle – "so let Mr. Singledon fill the glass –"

Bartlett stopped suddenly as he glanced at the label on the bottle. He muttered the word "Sauterne" and put the bottle back on the table.

"That bottle is empty," apologized Bartlett. "This one is full. Here you are, Mr. Singledon, but wait until I adjust the cathodoscope to suit the molecular activities of liquids."

Stepping to the machine, Bartlett pressed a button on the side, then glanced at the dictograph. He paused to draw the record from the cylinder and place it carefully in a box.

"I made some important notes tonight," explained Bartlett. "I must put this record in the filing cabinet in the apartment. Go right ahead with the wine experiment. Everything is ready."

Bartlett ambled from the strong room while Singledon was uncorking the wine bottle. With a troubled air, Singledon looked toward Suffolk.

"You're a shrewder man than I am, Suffolk," declared Singledon. "I mean that as a compliment of course. I must admit that I have invested unwisely in certain inventions whereas you have been successful in your real estate transactions."

"Inventions are less certain," returned Suffolk. "At least you are more experienced in judging them than I am."

"But I feel responsible, Suffolk. I interested most of these gentlemen in the cathodoscope. Besides, I promised a full report to Rex Troy. I want him to be satisfied."

"If Troy wants to be satisfied he could have come here. He will take your word for it, Singledon."

"Our word might be a better way to put it."

"Of course." Suffolk nodded emphatically. "If anyone is unconvinced, I think he should say so."

Reassured, Singledon started to pour the wine, but none came from the bottle.

"Poor Bartlett is so absentminded," smiled Singledon. "He gave us the wrong bottle. The other must be the full one."

Suffolk picked up the bottle that Bartlett had laid aside and discovered that it contained wine. He raised his thin eyebrows as he glanced at the Sauterne label, then reached for the empty bottle. Its label bore the word "Port".

"Bartlett expects us to use a dark wine," observed Suffolk, "but there isn't any Port. I suppose we shall have to use Sauterne, which is a white wine. It shouldn't make any difference."

Stepping over to the glass, Suffolk filled it with Sauterne. He pressed the switch that started the cathodoscope and stooped to look through the projector. A moment later, Suffolk was snapping his fingers excitedly.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Come here, all of you!" he exclaimed. "Look through and tell me what you see."

Singledon was the first to look. He popped out again, in consternation.

"Why, the wine is dark! It looks like Port instead of Sauterne. What do you suppose is wrong?"

For answer, Suffolk removed the glass from beyond the screen. He gestured for Singledon to take another look, which Singledon did. This time, Singledon's face emerged with anger written across its entire breadth.

"The glass of wine is still there!" bellowed Singledon. "I'll find Bartlett and hold him to account for this! It's an imposture, an absolute fraud!"

Singledon was starting toward the door but he waited for others to verify his claim. Along with the rest, Cranston and Harry were looking through the cathodoscope and seeing the glass that wasn't there, when Singledon returned and found the catch that lifted the top of the machine.

It was Suffolk who saw the inside first.

"A movie projector," he ejaculated, "with a colored film – no, several of them. It throws the images on the screen, that's all. No wonder Bartlett had to set the things the way he wanted to make us think we were looking through!"

The device was understandable at a glance. The reels that Suffolk pointed out were interchangeable and controlled by the buttons of the fake cathodoscope, which could be shifted to whatever picture was required. The flickers of the films supplied the illusion of the cathodoscope in question, that was all.

Not all so far as Bartlett was concerned. Singledon led the squad of angered men who hurried out to apprehend the swindling professor. From far down the stairs they heard the clatter of departing footsteps followed by the slam of the front door. Bartlett hadn't trusted to the unreliable elevator to outdistance the crowd that had detected the imposture.

From a hallway window, Suffolk pointed to the street five floors below where Bartlett was making a mad scramble into a waiting taxicab. Cranston likewise saw the last stages of the professor's agile dash. As Suffolk hustled to the stairs to shout that a chase was useless, Cranston turned to Harry.

"Bartlett forgot himself," observed Cranston, dryly. "That rheumatic gait of his couldn't be shaken off at a few moments' notice. I would say that Professor Bartlett is just about as real as his cathodoscope."

By then the cab had swerved the corner, but Harry had seen enough to understand Cranston's comment. The fraud of the fake cathodoscope had been outdone by another. The man who had fled in the cab was an impostor masquerading as Professor Bartlett.

It wasn't necessary to name the impostor once the fact was known. Only one actor in New York could have done so creditable a job, from the pure dramatic standpoint. At least the departure of the false Professor Bartlett afforded a partial solution to the disappearance of another missing man.

It told what had become of Jan Kranda!

CHAPTER VII

ATTIRED in a gaudy dressing gown, Brodie Graff was lounging in a luxurious apartment, reading the morning newspaper. His dark eyes flashed a satisfied sparkle as they alternated between two columns on the front page.

"Nice work, Red," approved Brodie. "Did you leave one of these with Kranda?"

"I'll say," returned Red Melvin, from an easy chair. "The guy needed a quick convincer after what happened last night at Bartlett's."

"You mean after we left?"

"Yeah. When Kranda was staging his act."

Brodie's eyes hardened as they narrowed. Sharply, he demanded:

"What did happen?"

"Nothing happened," explained Red. "That was the trouble. You know the sweat Kranda was in when he began thinking about Troy. Well, the least he expected was to hear some crack about Broadway's Beauty Boy being bumped off. Only there wasn't any."

"I thought Kranda would figure the news hadn't spread and let it go at that."

"He would have, Brodie, if Singledon and Cranston hadn't come to Bartlett's. Kranda saw both of them in a box at the theater. He thought sure they'd mention it."

"How did you handle it?"

"You mean when Kranda got back last night? I told him they'd left the theater before the final curtain. That kind of quieted him, but he began another yip this morning. I was glad when the fake sheet showed up with this."

By the "fake sheet" Red referred to the newspaper. He emphasized the word "this" with a gesture to the column at the left of the front page. There, big headlines announced the tragic death of Rex Troy which the police classed as a grudge murder engineered by a fellow-actor, Jan Kranda. Well down the column the story stated that the police had been unable to pick up the killer's trail.

"That part was a real help," stated Red. "Kranda wanted me to go out and buy copies of all the other newspapers, like he was going to keep a scrap-book or something. I couldn't tell him that Nicky's press was only geared to turn out this one."

"So what did you tell him?"

"I told him it wouldn't be safe to go mooching around a lot of newsstands – not even for me. I said I'd bring another sheet as soon as something new develops. That means to-morrow, don't it?"

Brodie nodded.

"We'll have a fresh one every day," he assured. "Not on account of Kranda, but because of this."

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Brodie pointed to the scareheading on the opposite side of the page. It announced the kidnapping of Elaine Bartlett, who had been spirited away while riding to Grand Central Station. According to this account, police were already investigating ransom notes that had been received by friends of the girl's father who had also left town.

"I said that guys like Singledon were hushing up the fake invention," explained Red, "not wanting it to be generally known that they had fallen for a sucker game. Kranda didn't argue that one."

An angry glare spread over Brodie's face. He started to crumple the newspaper. Then remembering that he had a special use for it, he smoothed the front page and his manner as well. Only his voice remained testy.

"The kidnap story didn't have to be a phony," snarled Brodie. "The way we had it greased for Creep, the job was slated for a cinch."

"It couldn't be a cinch," argued Red, "not with The Shadow busting into it."

"Yeah," admitted Brodie. "I guess Creep was lucky to get clear. Those guys at the garage don't matter; they were just stooging and Creep is wanted anyway. It was lucky Creep got clear though, so he could bring Kranda back where he belonged."

Red eyed Brodie steadily as though to weigh the effect of a coming statement. Then, coolly, Red put it:

"Creep didn't bring back Kranda."

Brodie vaulted up from his chair. His hands began by shoving the chair-arms and finished with a sweep that carried them to the lapels of Red's coat. So tight was Brodie's clutch that Red could picture its effect if transferred to his throat. Red was trying to rise from his own chair but couldn't because Brodie shoved him back. However Brodie didn't switch to throttling tactics because he wanted Red to talk.

"You mean Kranda took a cab himself?" demanded Brodie. "Right from Bartlett's to his hide-away?"

"It wasn't Kranda's fault," explained Red. "He thought it was Creep's cab. Only Creep hadn't gone back to Bartlett's like he was supposed to."

"And why not?"

"He thought The Shadow would tag him. He needed a decoy, so he stopped off and phoned the lunch room and gave the other guy a call to Bartlett's --"

"You mean the guy that owns the cab that Creep's was rigged to look like?"

"That's right. Creep figured he was using the old noggin and it struck me he was pretty smart."

It didn't impress Brodie the same way.

"Smart for Creep," sneered Brodie, "but not for us -- or Kranda. Suppose The Shadow had caught up with that bona fide cab and found Kranda in it? Where would we be?"

"Right here, I guess," returned Red. "Where else?"

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"I'll tell you where else," snapped Brodie. He began tallying on his fingers as he made his points. "First The Shadow would have marked Kranda as a phony and started to make him talk. Next Kranda would have talked when he found out he hadn't knocked off Rex Troy after all. He'd have named you and me and The Shadow would have shown up at the hide-away where you were expecting Kranda."

Brodie's picture was so graphic and logical that Red began to wince at thought of it. Noting Red's reaction, Brodie pressed home his conclusion.

"If The Shadow had given you the heat," declared Brodie, "you'd have brought him right here, Red. Guys do that when The Shadow turns it on. If he'd said: 'Where will I find Brodie Graff?'" – Brodie yanked Red to his feet as a slight imitation of The Shadow – "you would have said: 'In Apartment 2–D at the Amarillo Arms, right back of the Hercules Warehouse.' Now wouldn't you, Red?"

"I guess I would have, Brodie."

"So you're asking where we'd be right now. One place we wouldn't be is here, because The Shadow would have taken this joint over."

Straight-arming Red back into his chair, Brodie whipped off his fancy dressing gown and went to the closet to get his coat and vest. Uneasiness flickered in Red's watery eyes as he watched the process.

"You wouldn't be going over to talk to Kranda, would you, Brodie?"

"And why not? Somebody's got to talk to him."

"That's just the trouble. The Shadow may be hep by now. He might be going there too."

"You locked Kranda in his furnished room, didn't you?"

"Yeah and here's the key." Red produced the item mentioned and handed it to Brodie. "Only locked doors don't bother The Shadow – least so I've heard."

"You're beginning to use judgment," complimented Brodie. "Still, somebody has got to talk to Kranda and I know just the guy." Brodie paused and his gaze became reflective, like his smile. "I should say, just the guys."

Instead of reaching for his hat as Red expected, Brodie stepped over to a mirror and smoothed his coat. In the looking glass he saw the fake newspaper that he had tossed aside, so he turned, picked up the paper and folded it under his arm.

"Kranda can wait a while," decided Brodie. "If The Shadow does get hep, he'll case that rooming house until dark, because that's the time The Shadow moves in on guys like Kranda and scares their guts green. Anyway, Kranda don't know where you went, Red."

"But he knows who we are, Brodie."

"So do a lot of other dopes," argued Brodie. "We won't be silent partners in this set-up much longer. The Shadow's specialty is calling them a couple of rolls ahead. It's bum stuff worrying if he's finding out about you when you ought to be concentrated on keeping him from finding you. Sometimes the best bet is to find The Shadow first."

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"You mean we're going to try to spot The Shadow before he spots us?"

"That's right." Brodie beckoned Red to an alcove at the rear of the room and lifted a picture from the wall. "Creep's idea of using a decoy duck isn't so bad after all. I think we can go it one better and we'll go The Shadow one better on that invisible hokum. We'll show him how it can really work."

Under the picture was a nail-head which Brodie pressed four times. A rumble sounded and the entire wall moved slowly upward on hidden grooves deep in the corners. Raising the picture, Brodie held it so the nail caught the cord and carried the picture up with the wall. There were other pictures hanging in the alcove along with an ornamental mirror and an Oriental prayer rug, but none of them encountered any obstruction because the wall was topped by an ornate molding which had a decided bulge. Most of the molding traveled upward too, except for a thin outer edge that was permanently fixed to the ceiling. As a result there was a decided gap through which the hanging objects passed.

Even more interesting was the gap that lay directly behind the rising wall. A doorway yawned in a mass of brick, revealing a shaft from which the rumble came. From that shaft descended an elevator which stopped at the opening. Entering the car, Brodie and Red rode down one floor and stepped out from the other side into a narrow, concrete-lined passage. They were in the Hercules warehouse which adjoined the Amarillo Arms; the secret elevator shaft was built in the wall of the warehouse itself.

Brodie pressed a button and the elevator went up to its regular place, two floors above. As the car rose, the wall of Brodie's empty apartment descended from its groove between walls. The timing of the elevator and the wall were perfect for a very simple reason.

The wall of the alcove was actually the counter-weight for the secret elevator!

A clever device this; too clever to have been designed by either Brodie Graff or Red Melvin.

CHAPTER VIII

PROFESSOR LUCIEN BARTLETT gave his head a sudden tilt and listened. He could hear sounds from the door of the stone-walled room where he had been a prisoner since the night before. Those sounds represented the manipulation of locks very much like those in Bartlett's own strong room, but the only trouble here was that the locks were on the other side.

The door opened and two men entered. One was Brodie Graff, the other Red Melvin, and Bartlett recognized them as the captors who had brought him to this square-walled cell. But it was obvious from the quick darts of the professor's eyes that he was hoping to see a third man who wasn't present.

Brodie and Red exchanged grins that made Bartlett dubious. He was almost ready to believe that his cathodoscope did have mirror qualities, because only through the machine had he seen the approach of a face so like his own, the face that he was looking for again. Then, forgetting his private mystery, Bartlett drew himself erect and met Brodie and Red with a glare of defiance.

"Read this, professor," suggested Brodie, suavely. "Maybe you'll quit being stubborn."

Brodie handed over the fake newspaper, indicating the paragraph that told of Elaine's disappearance. The glare faded from Bartlett's eyes as he read the headline:

INVENTOR'S DAUGHTER KIDNAPPED

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"Don't let it worry you, prof," suggested Brodie in a friendly tone. "It isn't worrying us." Brodie's chuckle was echoed by Red. "What is worrying us" – the suave voice went hard – "is that routine you've handed us about not working any more on your invention. We've been afraid to shut you up with it for fear you'd smash it.

"Only I don't think you will." Brodie timed his words to the moment when Bartlett finished reading the column. "I've got an idea you'll play ball just on account of your darling daughter. What do you think?"

Bartlett's answer was a slow, prolonged nod that gradually lost its reluctance.

"Bring him along, Red," ordered Brodie. "We'll put him in the big room and let him get to work."

The big room was similar to the little one from which they brought Bartlett. It had a door that locked from the outside; its interior consisted of bare walls with no windows. The chief difference lay in the furnishings. Whereas the little room contained merely a cot, a table, and chair, the big room was stocked with Bartlett's cathodoscope and its spare parts, plus tools, work-bench and other equipment that meticulously duplicated the contents of his own strong room.

Clutching the newspaper in one hand, Bartlett rubbed his chin with the other, as he looked about in that quick, birdlike way of his.

"Don't worry where you are, prof," remarked Brodie. "It's what's here that counts."

"So I was thinking," observed Bartlett, dryly. "It was very obliging of Rupert Suffolk to supply me with a strong room for a workshop in that apartment house of his. Is it possible that he has gone into the business on a wholesale scale?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" Brodie put the question smoothly; then his voice gone harsh, "Or would you?"

Bartlett gave an indifferent shrug. Then, as though accepting his surroundings along with the terms, he stepped over to a table and began to tinker with the cathodoscope. Again, Brodie inserted a suggestion.

"Better get that thing working right," Brodie advised. "Red and I may be taking it along for a very special job."

Only momentarily did defiance return to Bartlett's eyes; then, realizing the possible consequences to Elaine, he wilted. There was a crackle of appeal in his voice:

"I can't promise you results. The cathodoscope is not a portable instrument, nor is it perfected. As a matter of fact it is very delicate –"

"And so is your daughter," put in Brodie. "So you'd better get it working – by tonight."

"If you will only let me talk to Suffolk! He would understand. I've often told him the limitations of the cathodoscope and its problems."

"I'll do all the talking that's needed," argued Brodie. "In fact, I've already done it. Your job is to deliver, so get busy."

"It's impossible. It would take you hours to adjust the cathodoscope. It might save time if you took me along and if the machine didn't work, I could explain why."

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"No dice, prof. Get that thing in operation and we'll do the rest."

"I might be able to improve one of the earlier models." Bartlett cast a hopeful eye toward the work-bench. "They're portable and easier to operate, though I can't guarantee full results."

"Will they give a look-see through a solid wall?"

"Yes, but they lack the polychromatic feature, which forced me to enlarge the apparatus. You will obtain images but only in black and white, not in color."

Brodie's eyes narrowed wisely.

"Black and white will do," he decided. "It will show us just what we want to see. But remember, prof, you've got to deliver!"

"I'll do my best."

"It had better be good!"

With that, Brodie left, beckoning for Red to follow. The last that Bartlett heard from them was the clatter of locks and bolts outside his prison work-shop. With a worried glance at the newspaper, Bartlett laid it aside and set to work at his bench. But there were moments when a peculiar glitter came to the professor's eyes indicating that his mind was on more than the improvement of his portable cathodoscope.

Though Professor Bartlett had been cut off from the world, he still was able to speak for himself. In fact he had been doing so for the last ten minutes, through the medium of the dictaphone statement that he had recorded the night before.

The record was running on a machine in the corner of a private office, which obviously belonged to Tracy Singledon for he was sitting behind the big desk in the middle of the room. Lamont Cranston was in charge of operations; it was he who had brought the record to Singledon's office.

"Most amazing!" exclaimed Singledon, the moment that the record was completed. "Why, to hear this, I would suppose that Bartlett had built a genuine cathodoscope. Wait though" – Singledon's broad face became perturbed – "I begin to see the answer. Bartlett made this record simply to aid his build up. It was just another of his cute convincers."

"In that case," remarked Cranston, "he wouldn't have wanted to take it along with him."

"But he left it where you would find it – somewhere in his apartment."

"He never took it to his apartment." Cranston's lips flickered a smile. "What Bartlett took to his apartment was a blank record that I placed on the dictaphone after I removed this one. When I say Bartlett" – Cranston emphasized the afterthought – "I mean his double, of course."

"His double?"

"Yes. It wasn't Bartlett who gave us that demonstration. I suspected that fact almost from the start. What I didn't quite anticipate was the impostor's sudden departure."

"Bartlett's double!" exclaimed Singledon. "I can't believe it possible!"

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"You should have seen him get into the cab. He shed about twenty years from Bartlett's life."

"But who in the world could have passed himself as Bartlett well enough to fool all of us – that is all except you, Cranston?"

"A man we know," replied Cranston. "He just happened to be on my mind at the time, so the connection was something of a coincidence."

"Jan Kranda!"

Singledon thumped the desk as he uttered the name. It was characteristic of Singledon to be slow to grasp a point, sudden to accept one when it did drive home.

"Play that record again," insisted Singledon. "I want to check it carefully for intonation and compare it with my recollection of Bartlett's voice – or Kranda's – last night."

Cranston started the record over. Behind the desk Singledon sat with eyes half-closed, nodding as he pictured the scene in Bartlett's strong room. There were moments when he raised a finger, checking some slight deviation that he noticed. The record was half way through when the telephone bell rang. Opening his eyes, Singledon reached for the phone but at the same time made a revolving motion with his other hand indicating for Cranston to keep the record going. As he talked over the phone, Singledon kept one ear cocked, still listening to Bartlett's voice from the amplifier connected with the dictaphone.

Singledon's phone conversation was brief, mostly a matter of answering questions yes and no. While he talked he made notes on a pad. When he finished he turned and gestured for Cranston to turn off the dictaphone.

"That's enough," asserted Singledon. "I am convinced. Check my notes Cranston and you'll agree. I caught at least a dozen differences between Bartlett's voice and Kranda's. That's why I told Suffolk not to call in the police."

Cranston's raising eyebrows requested an explanation which Singledon promptly gave.

"That was Suffolk on the phone," said Singledon. "He thinks we ought to have the police arrest Bartlett as a swindler – if they can find him. But when he asked if I thought we'd better wait, I said yes."

Cranston nodded approval.

"This might clear Bartlett," declared Singledon, "unless he personally hired Kranda to go through with the final test that he was afraid to try himself. But that is hardly logical, since Bartlett knew us better than Kranda did."

"Don't forget the note that Kranda wrote," reminded Cranston. "It might have a bearing on the case."

"An excellent point, Cranston! I see the game. The note was a forgery, planned to put Kranda into difficulty so that he would go through with his impersonation of Bartlett."

"Unfortunately I have had the note checked by several handwriting experts. They compared it with specimens of Kranda's writing and all agree that the note is genuine."

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Cranston didn't add that the several handwriting experts consisted entirely of himself and his other personality, The Shadow. That fact however merely added to the assurance in his tone and Singledon took it all for granted.

"That gives us a double mystery," affirmed Singledon, "and we can hardly afford to be unfair to Bartlett or Kranda – or both. Suppose we wait a few days and see what develops. I am sure that Suffolk and the others will agree."

It suited Cranston. He shook hands with Singledon and left, taking along the precious dictaphone record that at least gave indication of Bartlett's innocence in what so far seemed a swindle scheme. Outside the office building, Cranston called for a cab and one wheeled promptly from the other side of the street.

Shrevvy was the driver and he had a report.

"I found that guy who drives the company hack," informed Shrevvy. "He's not such a dope after all. He figured there was something phony about Kranda."

"Did he say why?"

"Yeah." Shrevvy went into his most descriptive style. "I says he didn't make out so bad on that bum call after all. So he reminds me it was my idea saying for him to stick around a while. So I says I hope he got a long haul out of the deal and he says yeah, only the old geezer couldn't make up his mind about it."

"Kranda hops into the cab and says to hurry up and take him there. The hackie asks where and Kranda says not to bother with putting on an act; that's his job. Anyway, Kranda puts across the notion that the big idea is to get going somewhere, so this company coot figures he's got nothing to lose so long as he remembers to start the meter, which he does."

Shrevvy paused to take a breath.

"Of course Kranda was thinking it was Creep at the wheel," resumed Shrevvy, "so he keeps on getting annoyed when the guy insists on being inquisitive about where the ride is supposed to conclude. At last Kranda must have wised that Creep isn't handling the helm, but Kranda don't know his own address."

"So he gets the company character to drive him around an unseemly neighborhood where all the houses look alike except that most of them have been torn down about fifty years ago to make room for obsolete office buildings. Finally Kranda recognizes a brownstone job that he says is it, and that's where he terminates."

Shrevvy shoved a slip of paper through the connecting window and Cranston read the address as relayed by Kranda's cab driver. In casual tone, Cranston remarked:

"You've notified Burbank of course."

"Yeah," returned Shrevvy, "and he's putting Hawkeye on. That means the joint is being satisfactorily cased in the parlance of the guys who reap the weed of bitter fruit."

CHAPTER IX

AT DUSK, a light truck pulled up in front of an old office building and two men alighted from it. The truck bore the name of a company that dealt in office supplies, hence it wasn't surprising that the pair should unload a squatty filing cabinet that they carried into the building, whereupon the truck immediately pulled away. Nor

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was it odd that after carrying the cabinet up two flights of stairs, the men should take it into an empty office far down the hall at the very rear of the building.

Once inside the office, however, the men pulled down the shades of the side-wall windows and turned on the lights. The pretended truckers stood revealed as Brodie Graff and his side-kick Red Melvin. From the bottom drawer of the two-tier filing cabinet, they brought Bartlett's portable cathodoscope; from the top drawer, a square-shaped carrying case containing items that went with it.

Using the file cabinet as a stand, Brodie aimed the cathodoscope toward the back wall while Red brought items from the carrying case as called for. Red plugged it into a floor socket. He then proceeded to hand over items as Brodie called them from a list provided by Bartlett. Red became puzzled when Brodie finished by asking for the filter screen.

"Guess it isn't here," declared Red. "The only thing left is a picture frame with a hunk of newspaper glued onto it."

"That's it," informed Brodie. "The prof told me about it. The thing is an improvement. The paper is coated with a special powder. Hold it in the light and you'll see it glisten."

"Why didn't he give us the screen off the super-doooper?"

"It's too big for this rig. The regular screen has a sheet of thin parchment."

"Why didn't he use the same on this?"

"Because he didn't have any. It isn't the paper that counts, it's the powder coating. Any piece of paper will do, so the prof used the first thing he found."

Putting the frame in place, Brodie turned on the cathodoscope. As the instrument buzzed, it projected an enlarged image of the half-page of newspaper against the wall, but gradually that picture faded. As Red turned out the room lights, the rear wall showed a vague pattern representing bricks.

"It's working all right," confirmed Brodie. "The wall won't show anything except outlines, the way we're looking at it now. What you've got to do is look through the cathodoscope and get the focus."

Brodie was beginning the operation as he described it. In a few minutes, he gave a pleased chuckle.

"There it is, Red. See for yourself."

Looking through the cathodoscope, Red was almost startled. Instead of the wall, he saw the interior of a room he recognized. It was a room in an old house that backed against this office building, the very room occupied by Jan Kranda.

As Professor Bartlett had stated, the view through the portable cathodoscope lacked color and depth, but it was quite the equivalent of the average motion picture. The scene even had an actor; Jan Kranda in person, pacing back and forth between the door and a window on the opposite side of the furnished room. Red was staring fascinated when Brodie tapped him on the shoulder.

"The guy's restless," said Brodie. "It's time to phone him. I'll watch while you give the two-three."

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With Brodie back at the cathodoscope, Red went to the office phone and dialed a number. He listened while it rang twice; then hung up and dialed again. Watching, Brodie saw Kranda become alert; when Red gave three rings and another hang-up, the actor pounced over to his own phone and stood ready to snatch it. Again, Red dialed and Kranda was on the wire instantly.

"What'll I tell him?" whispered Red.

"Tell him he's going to move," returned Brodie. "Have him put on the Bartlett make-up so he can travel with you."

Red passed the word along and through the cathodoscope, Brodie saw Kranda gesture as he answered. Apparently Kranda had some objection and Brodie promptly guessed it.

"Tell him the prof isn't wanted," ordered Brodie, "so he'll be safe enough. If Kranda don't believe you, have him read the newspaper that's lying on his table. And by the way" – Brodie paused while Red was relaying the order – "have him tear that front page up and burn it in the metal waste basket over by the door. Don't bother to say why – just tell him."

Brodie had analyzed Kranda correctly. The actor had become fear-haunted and was in a mood to cooperate without question. He burned the paper as ordered, then opened a small suit-case and began to put on his make-up. Brodie watched for a few minutes, then popped up from the cathodoscope with a satisfied chuckle.

"He'll take twenty minutes easy for that job," declared Brodie, "He was a half hour last night and he's not working much faster. Our plan is in the bag."

"Yeah," agreed Red, "only you haven't given me all the dope on our plan. I was busy when you phoned Suffolk and spilled it."

Brodie gave a disapproving glance when Red mentioned Suffolk's name. Hastily Red corrected himself.

"Call him Mr. Big then," said Red. "Only the way we've been working, doing contract jobs for Suff – I mean for Mr. Big – there's not much use in trying to cover among friends."

"It's a question who to call friends," reminded Brodie. "Take Creep Crawley for instance. If he knew anything about the set-up, that we've been running a contract business as a front, we couldn't be using him right now. Or could we?"

"I guess we couldn't," conceded Red. "Say, though – if Kranda is expecting me, what's he going to say when Creep shows up instead?"

"He isn't going to see Creep. When I phoned Creep I told him to sneak in by the side alley and come up through the window. That's partly in case The Shadow shows up."

"But The Shadow will pick up Creep's trail for sure!"

"That's the idea. He won't stop Creep because he'll figure Creep is pals with Kranda."

"But when Kranda spots Creep coming in the window –"

"Kranda won't spot him, Red. Creep will wait for the rap at the door. When Kranda goes to answer it, thinking it's you, Creep comes in the window."

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"You mean somebody's coming up to see Kranda?"

"Of course. It's part of Creep's job to decoy The Shadow around through the side alley – only Creep don't know it. Then The Shadow won't spot the other guy?"

"Who is the other guy?"

For answer, Brodie gave a Machiavelian chuckle and gestured Red to the cathodoscope which was keeping up its steady buzz and producing vague blurs amid the brick pattern.

"You watch it, Red," suggested Brodie in a tone of assurance. "Tell me everything that happens – only maybe I'll call the shots first. This is one job that can't lose."

Crime's drama had begun to unfold. Over the sill of Kranda's window appeared a pair of hands accompanied by a shrewd face. Seen through the cathodoscope, the hands were grotesque, the face distorted, like things from a nightmare. But that was due to the limitations of the machine; it registered the window like a picture on a movie screen observed from a bad angle. Nevertheless, the newcomer was menacing enough.

The man at the window was Creep Crawley. Greedily he eyed Kranda, as would some jungle creature on the stalk for prey. Busy with his make-up, Kranda did not guess the presence of this unexpected visitor who kept darting glances toward the door beyond.

"Creep is on the job," Red informed Brodie. "He's watching the door, like he's expecting somebody, the way you said –"

The somebody must have knocked, for Red saw Kranda get up and go to the door, like a character in a silent movie. Simultaneously, Creep wormed across the window-sill and came into full view. Creep was wearing a sweater and a slouchy cap instead of a cab-driver's regalia. He looked what he was, a lurking, deadly thug, as he slid his hand to his hip and drew a revolver.

By then, Kranda had opened the door. What happened there was enough to make Red forget Creep. Naturally Red was anxious to see the arrival who was substituting for himself, but he wasn't at all prepared for the denouement that came. Red thought the cathodoscope was tricking him, when he ejaculated:

"Rex Troy!"

"That's right," declared Brodie, with a chuckle. "I phoned Creep and told him to call Troy. Creep said he was a cabby and that he brought Kranda here last night; that if Troy wanted to find out what it was all about, he'd better drop around."

Red Melvin wasn't listening. What he saw intrigued him more. Kranda was backing in from the door, followed by Troy, whose amazement had turned to indignation. Though he knew this must be Kranda, Troy recognized the face of Bartlett, its make-up nearly complete. In Kranda, Troy saw a master of duplicity who had been using his actor's skill to further a swindle scheme.

As for Kranda, he mistook Troy for a ghost of a murdered man, come to wreak vengeance on his slayer. It wasn't until Troy began mouthing accusations on the swindle score that the frozen terror relaxed from Kranda's face.

Noting it, Red piped to Brodie:

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"Kranda is wise! Next he'll be guessing we found his gun and put blanks in place of those slugs! We gotta do something, Brodie –"

"We have done something," interposed Brodie. "What do you suppose Creep is there for?"

Red had forgotten Creep. Staring anew, he saw the lurking man come to action. Angrily, Troy was attacking Kranda who was fighting back with a surge of his old hatred, but the balance lay with Creep. Lunging forward he was thrusting his gun straight at the struggling pair, while Red voiced the details to Brodie.

"Creep's aiming at Troy! No, it's Kranda he's after! Say – he's going to croak Kranda!"

"That's right," announced Brodie, blandly. "He doesn't want Kranda to blab any more than we do. Creep will knock off Kranda and pin the job on Troy."

Before Red could express his admiration, he saw Creep reach Kranda. Keeping behind the victim so that Troy couldn't see him, Creep shoved his revolver up beneath Kranda's arm. A few more seconds and crime would have delivered the verdict in the struggle. But before Creep could fire, another arbiter swept into the fray.

So suddenly that Red thought the cathodoscope had lost its focus, a wave of blackness poured in from the window and whirled across the room, enveloping the group near the door. As it finished its fling that swirl developed into a human form cloaked in black.

The Shadow had arrived just in time!

CHAPTER X

WHEN The Shadow lashed into the human tangle, the effect was like a miniature tornado. Under the swing of gun-weighted fists, three men flew apart like puppets. Troy and Kranda landed in opposite corners, wondering what had heaved them there, which left Creep to bear the brunt of The Shadow's full fury.

With a back-hand swing, The Shadow drove Creep's gun hand upward carrying it right to the fellow's chin. The effect was odd, for it happened just as Creep started to pull the trigger. First, the gun popped at the ceiling; next, Creep staggered under the punch from his own fist; finally, the gun dropped from Creep's loosening hand as he reeled groggily around the room.

Creep still maintained some portion of his scattered wits, for he was groping toward his other hip, as if to draw another gun. Red was reporting this to Brodie who became so excited that he snatched Red away from the cathodoscope and took a look himself.

"The guy is slap-happy!" exclaimed Brodie. "Sure he has another gun, but he's giving it away! I told him to go heeled with an extra in case he ran into trouble."

"You mean you counted on Creep fixing The Shadow?"

"Kind of," snapped Brodie. "Or on The Shadow fixing Creep after Kranda was finished. Only this way it's all off. If The Shadow croaks Creep, Kranda will still be around to talk!"

It wasn't all off.

That was just what happened now.

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Creep Crawley, crook by trade, was reeling right into The Shadow's hands. Meanwhile, Jan Kranda, a victim rescued by The Shadow, was stirred with a sudden yen for crime that put gratitude from his mind.

Maybe Kranda didn't realize he'd been crime's target. Possibly he wanted to prove that he was good enough to belong to a crooked set-up. Or it might have been that Kranda wanted another crack at Troy and considered The Shadow as an obstacle. Whatever his thoughts, Kranda was never to reveal them.

As the first folly in the chain that led to his doom, Kranda snatched up the gun that Creep had lost. Kranda's snarl was the only warning that The Shadow received, but it came in time. About to clutch Creep, The Shadow wheeled to see Kranda charging straight at him brandishing the revolver that he had grabbed from the floor.

With The Shadow's turn, Kranda started shooting. It wasn't Kranda's fault that he didn't clip The Shadow. Before he could fire another, The Shadow reached him. Up went Kranda's gun-hand, the muzzle of the weapon spouting flame.

Those bursts of gunfire rallied Creep Crawley. Halting his blind stagger, the crook saw blackness tangled with Kranda. That blackness represented The Shadow, the target that Creep now wanted, but even when the figures twisted, Creep didn't care. Using his extra gun, Creep jabbed two shots; one for Kranda, the other for The Shadow.

Kranda took both bullets.

Like a man stabbed in the back, Kranda buckled from The Shadow's clutch. Having lost his human shield, The Shadow did a quick whirl under Creep's gun and caught the assassin with a twisty drive that hoisted him screaming toward the ceiling. The jolt sent the gun from Creep's paw, and he clawed frantically at space as The Shadow revolved him in a dizzy whirl.

Just then Troy gave a warning shout, the first sign of life he'd shown since the break-up.

The Shadow saw why.

Close to the window was Kranda, one hand pressed to the small of his back, bracing it, while the other still gripped the revolver that The Shadow had let him keep, rather than delay a meeting with Creep. Still ruled by his frenzy, Kranda was determined to finish his feud with The Shadow. His gun-hand was steadying for the trigger pull, his face wore a gloat of confidence. Backed by the belief that The Shadow could not reach him before he fired.

Again Kranda was wrong.

The Shadow had an excellent missile right at hand in the form of Creep Crawley. Already in momentum, Creep needed to be aimed, that was all. So The Shadow released him straight at Kranda, with a force that should have knocked out one and flattened the other.

Only by firing at that instant could Kranda have outmatched The Shadow, but Kranda didn't fire at all.

Kranda was through, more so than even The Shadow supposed. As Creep scaled from The Shadow's flinging hands, Kranda sagged suddenly to the floor and coiled there dead. He wasn't on hand to stop Creep's arrowing body, so the open window received it instead. Out into night went Creep Crawley sending back a trailing scream that ended with an echoing smash on the cement of the alley, three floors below.

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Out of this maze of incidents, The Shadow grasped the major factor, Rex Troy had been framed. Before Troy knew what was happening, he was in the grip of a cloaked friend who was hurrying him out through the door and downstairs to the street, where The Shadow's own cab was waiting just around the corner.

IN the office that they temporarily occupied, Brodie and Red were packing the portable cathodoscope. Between them they had witnessed everything that happened in Kranda's room. As Brodie put it, Troy wasn't important enough to matter, now that both Kranda and Creep were permanently silenced. He'd been necessary to start the ball rolling and it had finished its trip.

The Shadow had become the pressing problem. Having witnessed his rapid arrival at Kranda's, both Brodie and Red were wondering how long it would take him to cover the rest of the neighborhood. So they weren't wasting time in making their exodus.

Brodie simply pulled a cloth cover over the cathodoscope while Red packed the lesser appliances, including the powdered filter screen into the box. Going down a flight of back stairs, they reached a blind alley that led away from the rooming house on the next street.

It was only a block to a subway station, so they made for it. The rumble of a train greeted them as they reached the platform. A minute later the pair were on board congratulating themselves on having completely slipped The Shadow.

That guess was wrong.

The Shadow had other eyes in this vicinity. The proof lay in The Shadow's early but timely entry into Kranda's window. Someone must have spotted Troy's arrival at the rooming house and hurriedly flashed word to The Shadow while he was climbing the wall from the alley.

Around the corner from the old house, The Shadow was sending the cab away with Troy. Bewildered, Troy was repeating instructions aloud.

"I was home all evening..." Troy said it as if he meant it. "It amazes me, to hear this about Kranda... It seems impossible that he could pose as Bartlett..."

Police sirens were shrieking in the distance, on the approach. Word of the shooting had been phoned into headquarters. Nevertheless The Shadow remained near the corner until a stooped man with a wise, wizened face arrived with quick pace. The man was Hawkeye who trod tipped off The Shadow to Troy's arrival.

"Two guys ducked for the subway," reported Hawkeye. "Spotted them while I was rounding the block. They were carrying a couple of bundles and they must have come from the office building in back of Kranda's."

The Shadow ordered Hawkeye to clear the neighborhood before the patrol cars arrived. Merging with darkness, The Shadow took his own course to the building that Hawkeye mentioned. It wasn't long before a flashlight was blinking in an office which contained a single item of furniture in the shape of a brand-new file cabinet.

Through long training, The Shadow had developed two senses: those of distance and direction. Almost to the foot, he could have given the location of this office in reference to Kranda's room.

Already confident that Bartlett's cathodoscope was an actual invention and not the fake that it had been branded, The Shadow recognized that this could have been an observation post despite the solid wall that intervened.

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Turning to the wall in question, he saw emblazoned on the wall was a tribute to the ingenuity of Professor Bartlett.

Like a projected lantern slide, The Shadow saw an enlarged replica of a quarter-sheet of newspaper. It was the result of Bartlett's so-called "filter screen." The frame with the piece of newspaper hadn't been necessary with the portable cathodoscope. Bartlett had sent it as a clue for someone like The Shadow.

The powder which Bartlett used was a luminous substance. Unnoticed while the cathodoscope was in operation, the glow remained now that the office was in total darkness. But that wasn't the limit of the professor's ingenuity. He had traced circles in the luminous coating.

The Shadow saw the headline:

INVENTOR'S DAUGHTER KIDNAPPED

A ring was traced around the word "inventor" eliminating the apostrophe and the "s" that followed. There was another ring around the word "kidnapped."

In two words, Professor Bartlett was telling the world that his plight was the same as Elaine's. What The Shadow wanted was a trail to Bartlett. The professor managed it unwittingly.

For The Shadow recognized that this was not a bona fide newspaper account. Those glowing headlines on the wall told him that Bartlett was being fed with the delusion that his daughter was in criminal hands. It was clever, this stunt of faking front page news, but it was a system that could be worked two ways, now that The Shadow knew of it.

The luminous print was fading as a departing laugh sounded in the darkness.

CHAPTER XI

LATE the next afternoon a group of men were gathered in the lounge of the Cobalt Club discussing the fate of Jan Kranda. They were the men who had planned to invest in the cathodoscope; they had been invited here by Lamont Cranston for a final conference.

Formerly, Tracy Singledon had carried the most weight. It was he who had really organized the plan to further Bartlett's invention, back at the time when it had been nothing more than an idea. In fact Singledon more than anyone else had seemed confident of the cathodoscope's success until the night when the machine had been branded as a hoax.

Since then, Rupert Suffolk had taken over, though his business consisted merely in clearing up loose ends. At present, Suffolk was speaking in a tone of final authority as he described an interview that he had held that afternoon with the police commissioner.

"Of course the hoax will have to be made public," decided Suffolk, as though speaking for the entire group. "The police have established the fact that Jan Kranda and Lucien Bartlett were one and the same. They were puzzled why Kranda was posing as the professor, so I had to tell them that he was leading his double life in order to swindle us."

Suffolk looked around the group as though expecting objections. Stopping upon Troy, Suffolk's eyes made a keen survey of the actor's face. Troy's own eyes were fixed as though controlled by some hypnotic force and, when Suffolk followed the direction of Troy's gaze, he saw that it went straight to Cranston. If Troy had

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something to say on the Kranda matter but was keeping silent, Cranston could well be the cause.

Another moment and Suffolk might have tried to break the peculiar spell by a sharp remark addressed to Troy. Suffolk's lips were actually opening when Singledon interjected a query:

"Didn't the police say something about Kranda being murdered by an accomplice?"

"Yes." Suffolk decided to forget Troy for the moment. "A fellow named Creep Crawley, a wanted criminal. They think he visited Kranda to get money, which Kranda naturally didn't have. Their argument developed into a fight and they canceled each other off."

"You mean Kranda shot Crawley too?"

"No, Kranda was pitching Crawley from the window when the fellow managed to shoot him. But Crawley wasn't the only accomplice Kranda used."

Singledon's eyes showed surprise along with interest as he inquired:

"Who else was?"

"The girl who posed as Bartlett's daughter," returned Suffolk. "But the police don't consider her a party to the murder. I'd like to find her though" – Suffolk's tone went bitter – "because she helped talk me into providing that strong room to serve as part of Kranda's sham theatricals. It cost me a lot of money, that job."

Most of the listeners looked sympathetic. Noting it, Singledon made a prompt offer in Suffolk's favor.

"We have a small sinking fund," reminded Singledon, "that we can use toward reimbursing you, Suffolk. It won't be sufficient, but I know a way to add to it."

Suffolk's expression, briefly indifferent, turned to one of polite expectation, but as he noticed Singledon's narrowed glance, Suffolk showed a sudden but belated tendency to become wary. Already Singledon was putting the proposition:

"We can sell that movie equipment that Bartlett – I mean Kranda – used in perpetrating the hoax. If you will let me have the keys, Suffolk, I shall be glad to go over there this evening and remove the apparatus. I can take it to my office and keep it there for appraisal."

Again Suffolk showed talent in switching words while they were almost coming from his mouth. About to decline Singledon's offer, he detected that it wouldn't go well with the others who had taken Suffolk's cash loss quite to heart. So Suffolk became effusive in his thanks and in the course of things handed over a well-stocked key-ring that belonged to Bartlett and which Kranda had left behind when he fled as the false professor. The keys were jingling into Singledon's pocket when Suffolk took another look for Cranston.

By then Cranston was gone and Troy with him. They were proceeding out through the foyer of the Cobalt Club with Troy walking stiffly, mechanically, his eyes fixed straight ahead. As they reached the street, Shrevvy's cab pulled up and Cranston opened the door for Troy who entered.

There was a snap of Cranston's fingers through the window as the cab pulled away. With it, Troy lost his stare and looked around surprised. Suffolk was right; Cranston had thrown a hypnotic grip on Troy from the moment that the meeting began. It was a follow-up of last night's effort, which had first clouded Troy's mind as to his visit to Kranda.

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This second treatment had about obliterated Troy's recollections. It was better that way than having the issue clouded instead. The Shadow wanted Troy out of the picture entirely and he would be from now on, as was indicated by Cranston's confident expression as he walked back into the club.

Stopping at the desk, Cranston picked up a telegram that had just arrived. It was from Margo Lane and it read:

HE LIKES SAUERKRAUT AND HE HAD A DOG NAMED ROLLO.

The telegram should have been mirth-provoking but it wasn't. Cranston's expression became serious as he stepped to a phone booth and called the city room of the New York Classic. Soon a reporter named Clyde Burke was on the wire. Combining two thoughts into one, Cranston gave the result to Clyde.

"It makes a good story," acknowledged Clyde. "But it won't make the front page of the Classic. You know what a tabloid front page is like, chief. If we don't have a good picture we just spread a few big headlines and let it ride."

"It isn't for the Classic," declared Cranston. "It's to go in a box on the front page of the New York Leader. You know somebody there who would snap it up?"

"Sure thing," agreed Clyde. "A conservative sheet like the Leader is always a sucker for human interest stuff. Only where will I tell them this piece came from?"

"Phone Vincent," ordered Cranston. "Have him make a long distance call to his home town out in Michigan and tell the police chief to corroborate it."

"Suppose they wire the mayor instead of the police chief?"

"It won't matter. One man holds both jobs. But he wouldn't have either if Vincent hadn't refused to run against him at the last election."

Stepping from the phone booth, Cranston saw Suffolk and the rest coming out to the foyer. Singledon was with the group but he was glancing around eagerly, apparently looking for Cranston whom he suddenly saw. Coming over, Singledon beckoned Cranston into the club library and motioned him past some curtains in the doorway. Keeping watch toward the foyer, Singledon broached in a hushed tone:

"I still think Professor Bartlett is an actual person, don't you, Cranston?"

"I could hardly think otherwise," replied Cranston, "considering the evidence on the dictaphone record."

Singledon nodded; then:

"There is more to it than that, Cranston. Once Bartlett took his daughter to the theater to see 'The Impostor.' I was there that day and I think you were too, Cranston. Wasn't Kranda playing his usual part?"

"I believe he was."

"And afterward Troy introduced Bartlett to Kranda, when the professor came back stage. That should settle the question."

"I would say it does."

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"But it brings up something else. Why didn't Troy remember it and say something tonight?"

"He may have forgotten the incident," speculated Cranston. "So many people come back stage to see him, you know. But you didn't forget it, Singledon." Cranston's eyes fixed on the man. "Why didn't you speak up?"

In reply, Singledon gripped Cranston's arm while with his other hand he produced the keys that Suffolk had given him.

"Because I think that Suffolk knows all about Bartlett," declared Singledon in a tense undertone. "I think he knows where Bartlett is – and the girl too. The man who controls Bartlett controls the cathodoscope!"

There was an accusing note in the final sentence that Cranston couldn't fail to catch because it was intended. Nevertheless he made his query casual:

"You mean Suffolk?"

"I mean Suffolk," affirmed Singledon. "I believe he built the strong room as a weak link. It is the only place from which Bartlett could have disappeared – yet it is the last place that anyone would suspect."

Cranston was visibly impressed by Singledon's logic. Though he already had analyzed the strong room as a weak link, he was pleased to have the suggestion come from some one else. Similarly it was good policy to let Singledon carry the theme that was the natural sequel.

"This business of a dead crook being found with Kranda brings the game into the light," argued Singledon. "Think of what criminals could do if they owned the cathodoscope!"

"They could look in on anything," agreed Cranston, "including the most private conferences."

"More than that, they could use the cathodoscope to study the mechanism of a bank vault and its combination!"

"So they could!" The idea seemed to startle Cranston. "Why they could even count the funds and see if the robbery would prove worthwhile!"

"Burglar alarms would be easy for them," added Singledon. "All the criminals need is a commanding brain –"

Breaking off suddenly, Singledon muffled the jingling keys as he thrust Cranston deeper beyond the curtain. Over his shoulder, Singledon had spotted someone coming toward the library. Quickly he whispered:

"It's Suffolk! I think he's looking for us!"

Cranston gave a nod as he glimpsed Suffolk through the narrow space between the curtain and the doorway. Singledon was right; Suffolk was glancing around with an expression more shrewd than perplexed. But he didn't come further toward the library, which looked gloomy and empty. Instead, Suffolk stepped suddenly into a phone booth. Singledon heard the nickel plunk as Suffolk rattled the door shut.

"I guess he's calling the commissioner," said Singledon in a relieved tone. "It would all be part of his bluff, you know."

This time Cranston's nod was slower. It was like a balance scale, weighing something, in this case Singledon's words. But it was evident from the nod's gradual halt that Cranston might be forming a different

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opinion regarding Suffolk's call. Cranston's eyes were calculating in their coldness and they had a probing power that made Singledon eager. His voice carrying a low quaver of excitement, Singledon opened his broad hand and tapped the keys he held.

"Suppose you come to Bartlett's strong room with me, Cranston! We'll do more than appraise that fake cathodoscope. We'll look around and see what we can learn."

"An excellent suggestion, Singledon."

"But hadn't you better say goodnight to Suffolk when he leaves? You can go around through the other door and meet him when he comes out through the foyer. I'll join you later, only don't tell him that you talked to me."

"Of course not. I'll be waiting for you, Singledon."

Going around through the front of the long library, Cranston was at the outside door when Suffolk arrived. Abruptly, Suffolk remarked that he had called the commissioner's office but had received no reply. He added that the matter could wait until morning now that everyone was satisfied – including Singledon.

With the words "including Singledon" Suffolk scanned the lobby and finished with a straight, slit-eyed stare at Cranston. Then, turning on his heel he left the club. Cranston watched casually until Suffolk's big limousine had pulled away, then turned about expecting to see Singledon. Singledon had come out the other way, not daring to venture past the phone booths until Cranston had finished his five-minute chat with Suffolk.

There was a muffled clink as Singledon shoved his hand into the pocket where he had planted Bartlett's keys. His voice was still tense, but it carried confidence:

"The sooner we move, the better."

"Let us say the soonest," corrected the nonchalant Mr. Cranston, "and the soonest is right now."

Shrevvy's cab, making a timely return from a rapid delivery of its recent passenger, Rex Troy, was sweeping the curb ahead of the doorman's whistle when Lamont Cranston and Tracy Singledon stepped from the Cobalt Club to start their mutual adventure.

CHAPTER XII

BRODIE GRAFF tossed Red Melvin a stub-nosed revolver as he pocketed a similar shooting iron of his own. Red gestured toward the telephone table where Brodie had tossed his fancy dressing gown after discarding it in favor of coat and vest.

Only one person was likely to phone Brodie and Red knew for certain that only that one person could induce Brodie to leave these premises. But that didn't answer all that Red wanted to know, so he asked the rest:

"Where is Mr. Big sending us?"

"Over to Bartlett's strong room," replied Brodie. "We'll go in through the house next door, as usual."

"Why should we go there?" demanded Red. "We don't want that fake cathodoscope, do we?"

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"A couple of other fellows do," informed Brodie. "Their names are Singledon and Cranston. They're going to look it over."

"So what?"

"They'll be looking over the strong room too."

"And what will they find? I'll tell you in one word: Nothing."

Brodie gave an unconvinced smile.

"When two smart guys get working together," he declared, "they sometimes manage to build up a hunch. We're going to be on deck in case these two smart guys turn out to be – too smart."

Despite the importance of the mission, Brodie wasn't in a hurry. Red discovered that when they started off on foot instead of by car. But it wasn't overly far to Bartlett's old apartment, so Red approved of Brodie's policy. On foot they could use alleys that a car couldn't navigate. As for Cranston and Singledon, however much they guessed, they couldn't do it all at once.

Red's analysis was right.

Already at the apartment house, Singledon was unlocking the strong room door, but in stepping across the threshold, his interest – like Cranston's – was first concerned with a fancy junk-pile in the corner. That pile consisted of the fake cathodoscope which at least had salvage value. After about ten minutes of appraisal, Singledon suggested a check-up of the room itself.

Walls, floor and ceiling all showed solid characteristics, even under Cranston's expert scrutiny. All bore the same composition, a plaster finish that had the consistency of cement. The finish was new and perfect, without even a crack at the corners or along the lines where walls met floor and ceiling.

Since the room had no windows the only weak spot had to be the door but it proved as solid as they came. When Singledon pulled the door shut and thrust the heavy bolt, there wasn't the slightest sign of a crack. The door frame was literally welded to the wall with the same composition material that lined the entire room.

"That door opens outward," said Singledon, suddenly. "The hinges must be on the outside. Maybe they're the weak spot. Let's look!"

Unbolting the door Singledon and Cranston stepped into the hall to find that another hope was exploded. The door had pivot hinges, upright rods fitting into deep sockets in the top of the door frame and the sill beneath. The only way to get at the hinges would be to batter the door apart.

Singledon gave a helpless shrug:

"What next?"

"We might find the workmen who did this job," suggested Cranston. "They would know the answer if there is one."

"Suffolk farmed the job to some small contracting company," recalled Singledon. "A fly-by-night outfit operating under the name of Nuway Constructors."

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"Did they do business the new way?"

"No. They did it the old way. They went broke. One reason Suffolk shows profits when he remodels an apartment house is because he makes contractors underbid each other. The lowest man gets the job and loses his shirt – to Suffolk."

Cranston was mentally noting the name "Nuway Constructors" for future reference, when Singledon began to muse aloud:

"I feel positive, Cranston, that Bartlett could help us solve this mystery if we could only locate him. He must have seen things happen here – or maybe his daughter did!"

"I don't think Elaine could have," said Cranston. "She left early with some friends. I had Margo call them the next day, but they were merely acquaintances of the past few months."

"If Margo Lane knows Elaine Bartlett," exclaimed Singledon hopefully, "she might be hearing from her – unless" – Singledon's enthusiasm went off-key – "unless Elaine was kidnapped as we fear."

"Margo didn't know Elaine," stated Cranston. "I merely told her to say she did. But there was something Vincent mentioned, about the elevator being out of order before I arrived."

Singledon nodded.

"So it was," he said, "except when it went from the fifth floor up to the sixth and then quit again."

"Who would have been using it from the fifth floor to the sixth?"

"Why, nobody –"

Singledon paused, catching the point of Cranston's query. What had seemed a mere freak action by the elevator began to have a significance more potent. An idea struck Singledon.

"Let's try the elevator," he suggested, gesturing Cranston into the car. "We'll go up and see what happens."

Nothing happened except that the car gave a slight jolt as it reached the top of the shaft; but Cranston, looking upward, pointed to the grilled top of the elevator cage.

"Look at that glow," he said. "There's a skylight above the back half of the elevator. The top of the cage looks as though it will open. Let's try it."

The top of the elevator loosened when Cranston found the catch that held it. Down it came like a trap door on a rear hinge, allowing direct access to the skylight which yielded in turn when Cranston pressed it. Next, Cranston and Singledon were climbing up through the double aperture and out to the roof.

Adjoining the roof of the apartment house was that of an empty building only four stories high. When the two men looked over the edge of their roof they saw a ladder lying on the other.

"That's it!" exclaimed Singledon. "They took Bartlett out this way, cathodoscope and all. The skylight is large enough and so is the opening in the elevator top!"

"Quite plausible," agreed Cranston, "but we still haven't learned how they reached Bartlett in the first place."

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"Let's go back and have another look." Singledon's tone was grimly determined. "Maybe we'll stumble across the answer."

Singledon did stumble across it. He nearly lost his footing going down through the trap door; wildly he grabbed the skylight with one hand and managed to get a foot between it and the elevator. Hanging like a comedy acrobat, Singledon's head was poked across the top of the elevator when Cranston gave him a helping hand. But instead of letting Cranston haul him out, Singledon gave a tug.

"Look, Cranston!"

Singledon gestured over the top of the elevator and Cranston wormed his head and shoulders down through the skylight to gain the same view. What they saw was a curious but simple arrangement atop the elevator itself.

The cable that drew up the counterweight came across a pulley to reach the top of the elevator. But instead of being bolted permanently, it ended in a hook that fitted into a ring in the elevator top. Next to the regulation pulley was an extra one, with a second cable bearing a loose hook.

"That's peculiar," declared Singledon. "Who ever heard of an extra counterweight on an elevator?"

"It doesn't look like a counterweight," returned Cranston. "The cable runs clear out of the elevator shaft. I can see another pulley off among the beams."

"Let's change those hooks," suggested Singledon. "Apparently that's what they're made for."

"Good enough," decided Cranston, "but hang on up here. Only the brake will be holding the elevator."

They switched the hooks and Singledon dropped down into the elevator. Cranston followed and Singledon gingerly pressed the button for the fifth floor. The elevator descended normally and they opened the door.

There, across the hall, they saw the answer to the riddle of the strong room.

The door of the strong room had vanished. So for that matter had a section of the hallway wall. Instead of a stretch of wall paper, Cranston and Singledon viewed the bricks and plaster that lay beneath.

"How did that happen?" queried Singledon as he blinked. "Why it looks as though something sliced the surface off the wall and the door with it!"

Cranston pointed upward. From a slit in the ceiling hung the bottom of the door, flanked by the outer surface of the door frame, while on each side stretched the thin shell that formed the normal wall of the hallway. That surface was composed of plywood coated with wall-paper.

By being in the outer half of the door frame, the door was able to go upward with that section of the frame, all on line with the papered veneer of the hallway. In brief, the sealed room operated in reverse. People who knew the secret could enter it, but once closed it became intact on the inside.

The arrangement was identical with the trick wall in Brodie Graff's apartment at the Amarillo Arms, the wall acting as a counterweight for an elevator heavy enough to operate it. That added a clever angle, since the wall itself had too much weight for investigators to budge it by themselves. Two men wouldn't ordinarily have been enough to crack this riddle.

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Two men had done it.

Conversely two men were ready to nullify the find. Attracted by the rumble of the elevator, Brodie Graff and Red Melvin were sneaking across the roof to reach the top of the shaft. One look was all Brodie needed to discover that the counterweight had been switched.

Telling Red to grip him, Brodie leaned down into the shaft and caught hold of the pulley through which the cable ran. This cable, of course, was the one that had the wall as its counterweight since the elevator was at present one floor below. Looking past Brodie's hanging figure, Red questioned:

"What're you doing, Brodie?"

"Setting the gaff," was Brodie's answer. "We didn't have time to fix it the other night and it's better that we didn't."

"How come?"

"Because we wouldn't have had any customers – at least not the sort we wanted."

"You mean the two wise guys?"

"Check. Now lay off the chit–chat and save your breath to haul me out of here."

Down on the fifth floor, Singledon was still admiring the amazing wall when he noticed that Cranston had turned toward the elevator. Though the door was closed, there was a slight space between its sections. Apparently Cranston had heard something for his head was tilted at a listening angle.

Singledon listened too, but heard nothing. At last there came a creeping sound, but it seemed remote. Singledon turned and looked toward the end of the hallway where the stairs were out of sight beyond a turn. Cranston did the same for the sound did give the illusion of coming from that direction.

"What could it be?" queried Singledon. "Somebody going upstairs?"

"It might be from the roof," returned Cranston. "A sound would carry down the stairs just as it would come down an elevator shaft."

"Let's go up in the elevator," suggested Singledon. "That will put the wall back where it belongs and if somebody is sneaking up to the sixth floor, we'll be there ahead of him."

Singledon opened the elevator door and it gave its customary clank. As Cranston was stepping through, Singledon shook his head.

"Better hold it," said Singledon, "until I can get over to the stairs. The rumble of the elevator will be a sure give–away. Anyone on the stairs would start right down again."

At Cranston's approving nod, Singledon started for the stairs. It wasn't until Singledon had passed the turn that Cranston slammed the door of the elevator and started up. As he rode, he kept looking up toward the dull glow from the skylight, which grew in size until the elevator stopped with a heavy jolt.

All that while the wall of the fifth floor hall was coming down into place, door and frame with it. There was no one present to witness its descent, since Cranston was in the elevator while Singledon was on the stairway.

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But there were things that Singledon heard as a lone witness to a stalking tragedy that reached a sudden climax.

First, the jolt that marked the end of the elevator's ascending rumble. Next, a clang of the elevator door as it opened on the sixth floor. Only a few moments later – and this occurred as Singledon neared the top of the steps – there was a huge clack from within the elevator. By then, it was too late for human aid.

Rounding the turn on the sixth floor, Singledon saw the horrendous finish. To the tune of a sharp clatter from the elevator shaft, a hand made a frantic grab for the partly opened door. That hand and the arm with it were suddenly slashed from sight by the top of the elevator as it came ripping down, car and all.

Such was Singledon's last glimpse of Cranston.

Carried with the plunging elevator, the lone passenger was dropped to a fatal journey. Gaining speed, the rattling sound trailed to a finish six floors below where it struck the concrete of the basement level with a crash that shook the building.

Dashing down the stairs, Singledon fairly shrieked the news of tragedy as tenants opened their doors to learn the cause of the crash. He became the leader of a throng that reached the basement pell-mell and flung themselves at the door of the shaft, to hurl it open. But that couldn't help Cranston.

The elevator was a jam of twisted wreckage in which no one could possibly have survived. Through the battered and broken metal, Singledon saw an equally distorted body so grotesquely out of shape that he wondered how he could identify the mangled remains, once they were removed from their crushed prison.

People who stared with Singledon termed the crash an accident; since they knew that the elevator had faults. Singledon was too aghast to state what he had learned about that elevator; in fact, he suddenly went silent, his broad face grim with an expression that boded vengeance for someone in return for Cranston's death.

In contrast were the reactions of two men who were loping through an alley a few blocks away. Brodie and Red had gained ample leeway; they were almost at the ground floor of the empty building next door when they had heard the clamor of the fatal smash and they hadn't stopped to talk it over.

For the first time now they were exchanging words. It was Red who spoke first.

"That's the end of two wise guys," said Red. "They got what was coming."

"At least one of them did," assured Brodie. "I hope it was both, but you can't be sure. Maybe only one was in the elevator."

"Supposing one then. Which one?"

"I've got ten bucks says Singledon," puffed Brodie, as they jogged through another alley. "Are you on, Red?"

"Why not? Sure, I'll take Cranston. It's a fifty-fifty any way you look at it – unless it was both of them."

"Bet's off if it turns out to be both," decided Brodie. "This is one time double is nothing."

Out of the alley, Brodie and Red settled into a normal pace, their problem of murder reduced to a ten-dollar bet with settlement reserved until tomorrow.

CHAPTER XIII

RED MELVIN was in a cheery mood when he sauntered into Brodie's apartment the next morning. The first thing that Red produced was a fresh copy of the faked newspaper with its special front page. He spread the Leader so that Brodie could see its headlines.

"Nicky did another good job," said Red. "He says it's a cinch now that we only have to fool the prof instead of him and Kranda too. It only means faking one column."

Brodie snatched the newspaper from Red's hands. Scanning the front page hurriedly he began to paw further through until Red stopped him. What Red handed Brodie was a small clipping cut from a genuine copy of the Leader.

"Here's what you're looking for, Brodie. It was at the bottom of the column that Nicky killed. I told him to chuck it until he heard more from you."

The clipping which had made the front page had a small head which read:

CRASH KILLS CLUBMAN

Under that ran a brief account of an elevator accident in an apartment house, naming Lamont Cranston as the victim and stating that his body had not yet been extricated from the wreckage. Red supplied an added bit of information when he said:

"You owe me ten smackers, Brodie."

"It's worth it," declared Brodie, "just to know that the gaff came through one hundred per. It was fixed to slap the extra pulley right out of sight for keeps, cable and all. The way we used it last night was working it strong. It wasn't meant to drop the elevator, even though it could."

"I get it. You mean Suffolk figured the cops might look around too much and spot it anyway."

Brodie gave a short nod and reached for the newspaper again. He studied the front page story that Nicky had substituted for actual news. It told that an intensive search was under way for Elaine Bartlett, missing daughter of the notorious Professor Bartlett who in turn was wanted as a big-time swindler.

"Nice work," complimented Brodie, "cutting out the Kranda item and putting this in its place. Let's show it to the prof and watch him sweat the way I've been doing for the last half hour."

Bartlett was in his laboratory working on the cathodoscope. The professor looked both worried and weary, so Brodie decided that pressure on one score would relieve the other. He handed the fake newspaper to Bartlett, pointing out the column that concerned Elaine.

"Read it over, prof," urged Brodie. "I'll give you ten minutes to loaf and after that I'll look in to see if you're really working. It's a good cure for worry, work is, and I'll tell you why."

"Your daughter isn't having too tough a time just yet, but she may begin to find it different if you don't play ball. We want that big cathodoscope made portable and workable because it's time we were raking in some profits."

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

With Red in his wake, Brodie left the lab, confident that his ultimatum would produce the required effect on Bartlett. So it would have if the professor had confined his reading to the column that Brodie indicated. But Bartlett couldn't miss the boldfaced stick of news that occupied a box near the top of the front page.

It was the type of item that delighted the frock-coat editor of the Near York Leader and it found one reader who appreciated it. The paragraph read:

WHAT – NO MUSTARD?

Hot dogs go with sauerkraut, but not in Michigan. There the sauerkraut goes to the dogs, according to a certain mayor who prefers to remain anonymous rather than be laughed out of town before his term of office expires. The mayor who is fond of sauerkraut left a gallon of it in his office in charge of his dog Rollo. When he came back he found Rollo finishing the last of the sauerkraut and looking around for more. Rollo's master admits that when a dog eats sauerkraut it's news, but he also says: "If you print this story, nobody will believe anything they read in your newspaper." Do you?

Professor Bartlett tilted his head to the level of his lower shoulder. He was the gentleman to whom Margo had referred in terms of sauerkraut and Rollo in her telegram to Cranston. Margo had gained those facts from Elaine after receiving a request for personal data on Professor Bartlett.

The story pleased the professor.

It was too strong to class as a mere coincidence, particularly with the reference to "Rollo's master" rather than the mayor. Having once been master of a dog named Rollo and being personally fond of sauerkraut, Bartlett studied the final statement. He particularly liked the challenge: "Do you?"

Professor Bartlett didn't. His eyes went back to the story about Elaine. Carefully he compared its typography with that of the other columns. Immediately, Bartlett began to notice minor differences, enough of them to convince him of the fake. The chuckle that Bartlett gave was proof that he had fully grasped The Shadow's message.

Something was brewing in Bartlett's mind. Ingenuity pleased the old professor and stirred him to ideas of his own. Convinced that Elaine was safe, Bartlett might have loitered at his work in defiance of Brodie, but that wasn't Bartlett's way. He was calculating that anyone who could nullify one fake story with another – as The Shadow had – would be ready to gather in a reply from any source. In fact, Bartlett was quite sure that his unknown friend had received his first appeal in the shape of that luminous enlargement of the kidnap story.

So Bartlett did the unexpected. He set to work upon his cathodoscope without a moment's delay. When Brodie looked into the lab, a few minutes later, he heard the buzz of the machine and saw the professor stooped behind it. Brodie departed feeling that Bartlett had taken a hint to heart.

As soon as Bartlett heard the locks click, he poked his head from cover. Wheeling the machine to the opposite wall, he started it full blast. Gradually the wall disappeared and in its place, the professor saw a street scene. He noted a bus going by and checked its number. Across the street was a sign reading "Delicatessen" with a cigar store next door. Bartlett added these details to his sheet of paper.

Professor Bartlett was accumulating valuable data for The Shadow, the sort that Brodie would consider impossible. Facts that could lead The Shadow to this neighborhood if and when he received them.

If and when!

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

How little chance The Shadow had of getting any further information was right then a subject of discussion between Tracy Singledon and Harry Vincent. They were talking it over in Singledon's office, Harry having come there at Singledon's request.

"I'm pretty sure it was an accident," Singledon was saying, "but it was just as bad as if it had been planned. We were looking for something, Cranston and I. What's more, somebody else knew it."

Harry maintained a discreet silence, signifying that he wanted to hear more.

"I haven't told the police," continued Singledon, "because if I did, I would be playing into the enemy's hands. It is better for me to say little – in fact nothing – until I learn if my suspicions are well rounded. Do you agree?"

Harry agreed with a nod.

"I'll see you later then," concluded Singledon. "At the morgue probably, when we go there to identify the body. Up to an hour ago they were still prying the elevator apart to get at it."

Leaving Singledon's, Harry took a roundabout trip to an old office building where he eventually stopped at a door that bore the legend:

NUWAY CONSTRUCTORS

There, Harry gave a scheduled series of raps and the door opened to reveal an office that must have been recently abandoned. The place was in considerable disorder, befitting the term "fly-by-night" which Singledon had used to describe the defunct company. The chaos had been furthered by a man who was burrowing through piles of papers that the Nuway crowd had left behind and it was this man who gestured for Harry to close the door and help him with the task.

Harry did close the door, without diving out through it, as would be customary upon meeting a ghost.

The man who had taken over the Nuway office was Lamont Cranston!

Knowing where Harry had been, Cranston put an opening query:

"Has Singledon found out yet?"

"Not yet," replied Harry. "They're just getting the body free. Meanwhile Singledon isn't saying much."

"That's to be expected," Cranston acknowledged. "If he told of our discovery, Suffolk would simply act amazed, and next thing Singledon would be blamed for not going in the elevator with me. As a matter of fact I'm not going to do much talking myself when I get back in circulation."

"You mean they'd blame you because the janitor was killed?"

"That's right. He must have been sneaking up the stairs to see what was going on. Singledon thought he heard sounds from the stairway. Of course I'd heard voices from the shaft, so I took it the creeping sounds were from the roof. That's where the men sneaked after they fixed the elevator."

Cranston gave a reminiscent pause. There was regret in his tone as he proceeded.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"I had a hunch what was going to happen. While I was riding up that one floor, I pulled down the trap in the elevator top and hoisted myself right through. Just as the jolt came I grabbed the sides of the skylight."

"And the elevator peeled right away and left you hanging there!"

"Not quite that quickly, Vincent. Just as the elevator stopped, the door slapped open and somebody hopped inside. I thought it was Singleton until he made a grab for my legs. I tried to kick him right out of the car, but I couldn't quite send him to the door. Right then the elevator dropped. He tried to go out through the door but couldn't make it."

Cranston resumed his sorting of the Nuway papers and Harry helped. Most of the papers were circulars or letters from other concerns that were ignorant of Nuway's nearness to the state of bankruptcy. Soon, however, Cranston and Harry were working through form letters that were part of Nuway's own propaganda. One thing was definitely lacking on all such sheets; there was no mention of individual names. Nuway Constructors weren't people, they were a company.

Cranston was carefully examining the printed matter that Nuway had shipped to its slim clientele. He was identifying type by point and style. Turning to the stack of unpaid bills, he looked to see if a printer was among them, but any such bills were conspicuously absent. In fact, the search had narrowed down to all but a single desk drawer, when Harry gave a sudden laugh.

"Here's something the mayor would appreciate," said Harry. "One of those gags for impressing your home-town friends. Here's a fellow who prints headlines at a dollar a dozen, across the top of a regulation newspaper."

"I remember when that stunt began at the World's Fair. They've run it since in print shops along Broadway. You get a big headline that says: 'Joe Doak Cheered by Broadway Crowd' – only that's all there is to it. No story goes with it."

Harry stopped to look at the advertising card that he had found in the desk. It was gone; Cranston had taken it from his hand. What Cranston was looking for was the name of the printer and he found it.

"The one link we wanted," announced Cranston. "This printer worked for the phony gentry who were operating Nuway Constructors. I think he may still be working for them, but not with headlines, only."

"You mean he's faking front page stories!" exclaimed Harry. "The sort that Bartlett flashed to you."

Cranston nodded.

"We'll work on this," he decided. "It may prove our best lead. But we'll handle it cautiously, Vincent, until we're sure that we've drawn danger away from Bartlett."

Cranston left the rest for Harry's own interpretation. Realizing that Bartlett must be in the very danger that Cranston was defining, Harry could foresee more problems than the picking up of a single trail.

What those problems were and what they might produce, only The Shadow knew.

Or did he?

CHAPTER XIV

RUPERT SUFFOLK sat at the lunch table and looked across at the two men who were with him. Suffolk's eye was as cold as that belonging to the fish-head which glared up from his blue-plate special. Lunch being finished, Suffolk was ready to discuss the theme that had inspired this get-together.

The other two men were Tracy Singledon and Lamont Cranston. From Suffolk's manner, his companions were persons who deserved suspicion rather than himself. Suffolk was one of those high-pressure characters who always forced the issue on someone else.

"Let's get to the point," broached Suffolk, crisply. "Just why did you two go around to Bartlett's place without telling me about it?"

"Bartlett's place?" inquired Cranston, blandly. "I thought there wasn't any Professor Bartlett."

"Krand's place then," snapped Suffolk. "There wasn't anything that you could learn there. By tinkering with that elevator, you caused me a lot of trouble."

"We didn't tinker with the elevator," put in Singledon, promptly. "We were using it in normal fashion, at least Cranston was, when the cable snapped."

Suffolk turned his fishy stare toward Cranston.

"So you were in the elevator?" queried Suffolk. "How come you didn't take the plunge with it?"

"The elevator had a door," explained Cranston. "When I heard something go snap, I opened the door and stepped out. What would you have done?"

"The same thing, I suppose. But where did the janitor come into it?"

"When I was getting out. I suppose he thought he could stop the thing from falling. He shoved me out of the way and sprang in before I could stop him."

Whether Suffolk believed Cranston's synthetic version was a question. At least it had Singledon's support, for he had listened to it with nods when Cranston had dropped around to see him soon after the janitor's body had been identified. So Suffolk finally shrugged.

"Since it was an accident, we may as well call it closed," decided Suffolk. "The janitor's death was fully covered by insurance so there won't be any lawsuits. Otherwise I'd have to subpoena both of you when the case came to court."

"Maybe you wouldn't be held responsible anyway," put in Singledon. "What about the contractors who installed the elevator?"

"Nobody installed it. The elevator was there when I bought the building. I had it inspected, that was all."

"But you remodeled the apartment house –"

Suffolk shook his head.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"I gave out a contract for building the strong room," he said, "and since the strong room has nothing to do with the elevator, your argument is eliminated, Singledon."

Rising, Suffolk reached to another chair to get his hat. As he was turning away, he remarked:

"I'll be home all evening in case you want to reach me. If you really think we missed anything in this Kranda business, it would be nice to let me know."

With Suffolk gone, Singledon took a long draw on his cigar and turned to Cranston.

"He knows we suspect something." Singledon gestured his cigar hand toward the door to indicate Suffolk. "He's trying to coax out what we really know about Bartlett."

"Or Bartlett's daughter," amplified Cranston. "Assuming that Suffolk already has the professor in protective custody, he'd be more anxious to learn where the girl is."

"If we only knew ourselves!"

"I do know." Cranston reached into his pocket. "You were a good guesser, Singledon. Elaine Bartlett is with Margo Lane."

Singledon's eyes almost popped as Cranston brought out a telegram.

"You mean they really knew each other after all?"

"I introduced them," replied Cranston with a smile. "I told Margo to meet Elaine that night we went to Bartlett's."

"But – why?"

"Because I suspected trouble. I was playing a hunch, Singledon. That note of Kranda's mentioned Troy, who in turn linked with Bartlett, since Troy was one of the investors."

Singledon nodded slowly. Then:

"But why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"I was waiting to hear from Margo," explained Cranston. "I told her to change Elaine's vacation plans, which Margo did. They went to New Jersey instead of New England, but I left the rest to Margo. Now she's coming back, with Elaine."

Cranston handed the telegram to Singledon. It had been sent from Atlantic City and it stated:

FRIEND WORRIED ABOUT PARENT. ARRIVING MY APARTMENT FIVE THIS AFTERNOON.

Folding the telegram, Singledon clamped it back in Cranston's hand.

"Put it away," urged Singledon. "It would be terribly serious if Suffolk should learn that the girl is coming back."

"I think he should learn," objected Cranston. "It would be the one way to make Suffolk show his hand."

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

The idea astonished Singledon at first, but gradually he nodded. Still, there was doubt on his face, particularly when he saw Cranston produce a picture post-card and a fountain pen.

"What are you doing, Cranston?"

"Sending a post-card to Suffolk – from Elaine."

"Saying that she's coming back?"

"Telling him that she is back and where he can find her."

"But you know what that will mean, Cranston!" Singledon's tone was horrified. "Suffolk will send his strong-arm men to Margo's apartment. They will grab Elaine at five o'clock!"

"At six o'clock," corrected Cranston methodically. "I checked on the mail deliveries along the route where Suffolk lives. This post-card won't reach him until almost six."

Cranston had finished the postcard, printing it in small-letter imitation of a feminine style. The blue ink was still wet when Singledon read the lines. The card was addressed to Singledon at his home and it stated:

"Am in New York and must see you. Am sure I can explain what happened and I believe you are the one person who should understand. Please come to the address below as soon as possible... Elaine B."

Under Elaine's abbreviated name, Cranston had meticulously added Margo's address and apartment number. Taking the card from Singledon, Cranston affixed a stamp and reached for his hat. He gestured for Singledon to come along, which Singledon did. Walking from the restaurant, they reached the nearest mail-box. Showing the card to Singledon again, Cranston asked if there should be any addition. Singledon shook his head, still puzzled, so Cranston dropped the card in the slot.

"Don't worry about Elaine," confided Cranston. "We can get there ahead of Suffolk or his crew."

"So we can!" exclaimed Singledon. "Why, we can be there at five o'clock!"

"Five thirty will be soon enough," decided Cranston. "I'll phone Margo and tell her to expect you. I may be detained until after six."

"But that might put me on the spot, Cranston."

"You can stay out of sight until I get there. If Suffolk does kidnap Elaine, we'll have a trail to Bartlett for one thing and proof against Suffolk for another."

"Provided nothing happens until after six o'clock!"

"You've caught the idea," complimented Cranston. "Our statements to the time we mailed the post-card will prove just how and when Suffolk learned that Elaine was back in town. That is, he can't know until he gets the card."

"And this will counteract Suffolk's only hold over us," added Singledon. "He would press that elevator accident as something to our discredit if he saw fit. But it won't count – not against this convincer of yours, Cranston."

As they parted, Cranston mentally summed the situation and saw a variety of prospects. He was depending much on Bartlett's delaying tactics with the cathodoscope as a way to force another kidnap threat against Elaine as the earliest opportunity. Of Bartlett's cooperation The Shadow felt quite certain along with his analysis of how the professor would perform.

Sometimes even The Shadow could be wrong!

CHAPTER XV

BRODIE GRAFF was hanging up the telephone after a very illuminating chat when he heard a knock at the apartment door. It resembled the familiar rat-tat that Red Melvin usually gave, and since Red had been getting careless of late, Brodie didn't suspect another visitor. His surprise came when he opened the door and a sharp-faced man bowed himself right through. Brodie's eyes sparkled hot for a moment, then his manner turned bland, as he spoke, with only a trace of surprise:

"Wibby Taggart! Am I glad to see you!"

"Same to you, minus the baloney," rejoined Wibby. "Sit down, Brother Bones, and tell me what's been cooking since we tried to go legit and found out why better men go broke."

There was a cheery expression on Wibby's roundish face, as pleasant as his conversation. He had the manner of a first-class salesman and a middle-aged appearance that gave his words weight. But Brodie didn't fail to notice the quick movement of Wibby's eyes as they appraised the sumptuous furnishings of the apartment.

"I guess it was bum stuff, our trying the contracting dodge," said Brodie, in a rueful tone. "They say a confidence worker always takes a trim when he tries to level a deal. I figured you were one exception –"

"Lay off the you-know-what," interrupted Wibby. "Let's dish turkey, without the stuffing. My trouble was taking another con man for a partner, meaning you."

"But you said it was smart to underbid."

"I didn't tell you to fold Nuway, did I? We'd already let one company flop, and found it didn't help. We needed Nuway to play the low bids while we developed that new outfit, Integrity Contractors Incorporated, that we were talking about."

Brodie tilted back in his big armchair and gave a long, genuine laugh. Quick to sense a point, Wibby suddenly joined with a chuckle.

"I guess that was pretty strong," said Wibby. "For us to start a company called Integrity. Still, we were only using the double-talk that the honest guys do – and their methods."

"That's why we were licked," returned Brodie, ending his laugh. "I saw it, but how could I tell you? You were sold heavily on the idea of becoming a respectable citizen."

"Weren't you?"

"Sure thing," rejoined Brodie, glibly. "But I wasn't dope enough to pass up a ten-strike when a big guy propositioned me, one day in the office."

Shrewdly, Wibby studied Brodie's face and then demanded sharply:

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Rupert Suffolk?"

Brodie nodded. As Wibby pondered, Brodie added:

"Ask Red Melvin if you don't believe me. He's due here any minute, Red is. Anyway, you ought to know that it was Suffolk. We did most of our work for him, so we ought to be on his steady pay-roll."

Wibby's face brightened instantly.

"You're counting me in?"

"I have been all along," replied Brodie. "Only I couldn't spill it, while you were in a goody-goody mood. You're over that, aren't you?"

"I guess I never really meant it, Brodie. You know the way I am. I can stand for anything except a double-cross. If you give me the real low-down, and nothing but the low-down, I'm with you from now on. But if you hold out on anything –"

Brodie waved his hand in interruption. Rising from his chair he beckoned Wibby into the alcove and pressed the picture nail that raised the wall. Wibby stared, quite amazed, as the elevator came down. As they stepped into the car, Brodie laughed.

"Neat job, isn't it?" inquired Brodie. "Suffolk had me do a better one on Bartlett's strong room. It took the door right up with it. That's how we grabbed the prof."

"So that was it," said Wibby. "I wondered why you were so anxious to handle that contract. You know, though, what was in my mind?"

"No, but I'd like to."

"When I read about that elevator crash, I thought you'd taken it on as an extra job without telling me. What's more, I figured maybe you'd been showing some profit for yourself by ringing in cheap materials."

"Without telling you?" Brodie's tone was grieved. "I wouldn't do that, Wibby. With you I've always been on the up."

They were on the down at that moment, arriving on the ground floor of the warehouse. To prove his sincerity, Brodie took Wibby directly to the improvised lab where Professor Bartlett was at work. They didn't disturb the old inventor because he was busy powdering the parchment screen that belonged to the full-sized cathodoscope. All Brodie did was pick up the newspaper that Bartlett had discarded. Carrying the faked Leader out with him, Brodie spread it for Wibby's benefit as they arrived back in the apartment.

"A neat fake, isn't it, Wibby?"

"I'll say!" Wibby read the lines in admiration. "Who's doing it for you?"

"A printer named Nicky, that Red knows."

"I mean who's writing the stories?"

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"I am," boasted Brodie. Digging in his pocket he brought out some typewritten sheets. "Here's tomorrow's copy. The hunt for the girl is spreading without result. That's the sort of fuel that powers Professor Bartlett."

"A neat cover, since you haven't managed to grab the dame. Any idea where she is?"

"Back here in town," chuckled Brodie, "or she will be at five o'clock. She's parked with a girl friend named Margo Lane."

"Now would be the time to put the grab on her."

"She can wait," decided Brodie. "This stuff" – he gestured his typewritten copy – "will hold the prof for a while. Wait a minute, here's Red."

Answering a rap at the door, Brodie admitted Red, who was a trifle astonished to see Wibby back in the clan. When Brodie explained that going straight no longer appealed to Wibby, Red gave an appreciative grin, then asked:

"You told Suffolk that Wibby is in?"

"I'm going to call him now," replied Brodie. "It will be jake like everything else I suggest. Meanwhile, Red, hustle this copy over to Nicky's print shop and get back here."

"What's the hurry?"

"The prof has rigged the superdooper. We're taking it with us at five o'clock, so we can be on the job at half-past."

Red seemed to understand, but Wibby didn't. A bit puzzled, he remarked:

"I thought you were postponing the dame proposition, Brodie."

"That's right, Wibby. This is a different job, and a big one. Malbray's Fifth Avenue jewelry shop, right after it closes at five thirty."

"Maybe you're too ambitious, Brodie. The alarm wires in that place must look like the inside of a radio set."

"The cathodoscope will pick them out," assured Brodie, "and give us the safe combination too. Go along with Red, Wibby, and he'll drop you wherever you're staying. Stop back around seven bells and you can help appraise Malbray's stock. Lucky you showed up today, Wibby. You're in time to be counted in on the first profits."

Leaving with Red, Wibby rode by car until he reached a corner of Eighth Avenue, where he decided to drop off. As soon as Red had driven out of sight, Wibby entered a drug store and went to a phone booth. Dialing a number, he held a sustained conversation which he confined to a confidential undertone. When Wibby left the phone booth, his round face showed satisfaction in its perpetual smile. Apparently Wibby agreed with Brodie's statement that he was having luck today.

Wibby Taggart was luckier than he realized. If he had stayed with Red Melvin, he would have been riding straight for trouble.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

Not that Red diagnosed the symptoms when he got out of his sedan near Nicky's print shop, which was just off Broadway. There was another car parked across the street, but the day was gloomy and it was getting too near dusk for Red to notice that the other car had occupants.

Nor was it odd that when Red left Nicky's he should fail to notice that the other car started shortly after he pulled away. Traffic, like the gloom, was too thick to give it much attention. After a few blocks, Red did look back and notice that a car was following him, but it swung away at the next corner. It didn't occur to Red that a cab which immediately came into the street behind him was working a relay system with the trailing car.

What worried Red most was that it was after five o'clock and Brodie would probably be sore if he showed up late. Accepting the lesser of two evils, Red decided to be a little later, but save time in the long run by stopping at the garage where the truck was kept, a few blocks this side of the Amarillo Arms.

As Red pulled in he saw the truck pulling out. It stopped to pick him up and Red joined Brodie and a picked crew hired for the coming foray. Brodie had simply decided not to wait, but he wasn't irked because of Red's delay. In the truck was the cathodoscope, the full-sized job, all in working shape. That was enough to keep Brodie in a happy humor.

When the truck swung from the garage, the tenacious cab trailed it, only to slide away after several blocks to let the original car cut in and resume the relay. The dusk was really thick and dimmed-out headlights weren't easily discerned along these streets.

The Shadow's agents, requesting samples from various printing shops, had brought in evidence that fitted with the printed matter found in the Nuway office. The Shadow had picked Nicky's as the place.

Off on the first big crime in which the cathodoscope was to function as a profit-maker, Brodie Graff and his crew were inviting an unwelcome guest:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVI

THE knock at Margo's door sounded patient and sincere, but it really startled Elaine. Not that the blonde was normally a startly type. She'd simply begun to gather the jitters from the time when Margo had first suggested a return to New York. Arriving at Penn Station, the five o'clock rush had swallowed the girls like an octopus gathering fodder with its tentacles. It had finally disgorged them at Margo's apartment and now, while Elaine was changing her traveling dress for something more comfortable, someone was already at the door.

"Slide into a dressing gown," suggested Margo. "I'll see who it is. Lamont said Mr. Singledon might call at half past five, but it isn't that late yet."

"Wait a minute." Elaine was slipping into the dressing gown. "I'd better be on hand. It might be Mr. Suffolk."

"No," said Margo, with a smile. "We aren't expecting Mr. Suffolk – at least not yet. But since you're decent, you may as well stand by and share whatever surprise there is."

Margo opened the door and admitted a bowing man, whose face was mostly curves including its smile. From his appearance he might have been anything from a vacuum cleaner salesman to a census taker. Wibby Taggart prided himself on the fact that he had never looked like a con man during his long career as such. Indeed, it was his deep-dyed appearance of respectability that had given him the idea of going into legitimate business.

SYNDICATE OF DEATH

"Whatever it is, keep it," asserted Margo. "We're bad insurance risks, the credit companies have blacklisted us, we don't need kitchen utensils because we eat out, and if you're collecting for charity, mark us down among the needy cases. Besides, we're expecting a visitor."

"Of course you are." Wibby was turning his hat between his hands as he stepped across the threshold. "I am he."

"That's a good opening line," conceded Margo. "Most salesmen would have said that they were him. So don't tell us you're working your way through college. You're educated already, well enough to recognize a hint."

Wibby ignored the hand that Margo flourished toward the door.

Sitting down in a chair, he let his hat fall in his lap as he tilted his head and looked from girl to girl.

"Which one of you is Miss Bartlett?"

Elaine gave a slight gasp that Margo covered with a quick remark.

"Neither of us," said Margo. "Didn't you see the name Lane on the door? Step right out and read it."

Patently Wibby transferred his hat from his lap to the table and raised his other hand. In the same tone he repeated:

"I asked which of you was Miss Bartlett?"

This time the gasp included Margo. In his raised hand, the smiling gentleman held a stubby revolver, which had dropped from his hat. His hand waved very carelessly, but in its arc the moving gun muzzle kept covering both girls very efficiently. Wibby's tone sharpened to a pointed word:

"Which?"

Margo caught her breath.

"I am Elaine Bartlett," she affirmed. "Tell me what you want."

"How forgetful of me," said Wibby, rising. "I just remembered that Miss Bartlett is a blonde. So I'll take her instead." He gestured the gun toward Elaine and kept it pointed. "You're coming with me, Miss Bartlett."

"But I'm not dressed –"

"Get dressed then." Wibby swung to cover Margo, "and make it fast if you have any regard for Miss Lane."

Elaine took the hint and shuffled from the dressing gown into the dress that she had taken from her suit-case. All the while Wibby politely paid strict attention to Margo, though she didn't appreciate it. Wibby's eyes, when steady, had a glint too much like his gun.

"I'm ready," gasped Elaine, suddenly. Then, in a defiant tone, she added: "But I'm not coming if you do anything to Margo."

"I'll leave that to you," returned Wibby. "Put her right in that chair and bind her with those suit-case straps. Tightly, you understand – and promptly."

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Receiving a nod from Margo, Elaine complied. The strapping completed, Wibby suggested that Margo's neckerchief would make an excellent gag. He approached to make sure that Elaine really tied the knots. Finding them satisfactory, Wibby picked his hat up with his gun hand.

"Come on, Miss Bartlett." Gently, Wibby grazed Elaine's elbow with his hat, giving the blonde a sudden shiver. "Our car is waiting downstairs."

Wibby wasn't joking about the car. It was waiting out front, a big limousine with a chauffeur. There was another man in back and Elaine recognized him as she settled between him and Wibby, whose gun gave a prod through the hat.

The waiting man was Rupert Suffolk!

Without the slightest nod to Elaine, Suffolk leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur in a crisp tone:

"Amarillo Arms. And hurry, it's already half-past five!"

The time was more significant than Elaine knew. It also represented the closing of Malbray's Jewelry Shop. Clustered in a small rear alley, Brodie Graff and his companions were using the cathodoscope on a heavy steel door.

Things were working faster than Brodie hoped.

"That's enough," declared Brodie, as he shut off the power from a box of batteries. "Drill right through there, Red. That will fix the lock."

"What about the burglar alarm?"

"There isn't any," chuckled Brodie. "Not on this door. You know, Red, this cathodoscope is too good. It faded the door right out, so I could hardly see it."

"What about my mitt?"

"It looked like something through an x-ray, what I saw of it. Now let's see you use it with that drill."

The drill bit right through. A few minutes later, Brodie and company were moving into the dim-lit hollow of the jewelry emporium, wheeling the cathodoscope with them. Behind them loomed the blackness of the alley, showing through the open doorway.

Shifting blackness, had anyone looked back to notice it.

Wheeling the cathodoscope in among the counters, Brodie's crew finally brought it in front of the large vault that held a wealth of rare gems. Here there was no need to shield the glare that flickered out from beside the parchment filter screen that fronted the cathodoscope. Plugged to a floor socket, the machine began to buzz and in half a minute, Brodie's voice was speaking, awed:

"Say – look!"

Like Brodie, Red and the rest weren't the sort to appreciate the beauty. They thought in terms of wealth, but the sight was gorgeous nevertheless. Caught by the cathode rays, tinted by the ionized fragments in the kaleidoscopic attachment, brought to full effect by the three-dimensional projector, the contents of the safe

displayed a glitter that seemed something from another world.

The cathodoscope was probing into the gems themselves, producing results that went beyond the ordinary limits of the spectrum. It was a galaxy dwarf the wildest technicolor dreams. Noting the effect, Brodie brushed the others aside; poking his head beneath the flaps, he began to check on tumblers that floated in the foreground.

Those tumblers represented the combination of the safe.

"Three to the left – five to the right –"

Brodie was calling it off mechanically as he watched the tumblers fall.

"Hold it, Red! It's open!"

Brodie's followers, four in all, were crowding closer, eager to get their paws on the trophies within the vault, when something interrupted the procedure.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII

THE SHADOW was among them.

They learned it when something very solid spun among them, driving down their lifting gun hands with hard, cracking blows from a brace of swinging automatics.

Flung out to the flanks, members of the crew came up to hands and knees, hoping to aim at The Shadow before he used his favorite stratagem of rushing one batch at the expense of the other. Often, The Shadow would grapple foemen and turn them as human shields against a group of their friends.

This time it was different.

All that remained of The Shadow was his laugh!

The thing was incredible. It made a literal fact out of The Shadow's famed invisibility.

Bolder men than Brodie's hirelings would have scattered rapidly under similar circumstances, which was just what The Shadow wanted this tribe to do. They were slow because they were too dumbfounded to move, a thing which worked peculiarly to their advantage. For in that moment's lull when crooks should already have been in flight, Brodie shouted something that spurred them to new battle.

"He's still there!" voiced Brodie. "You can't see him because of the cathodoscope. Pile into it, all of you, and get him!"

Brodie set the example by charging in from his flank, while Red led the drive from the opposite side. But The Shadow, actually invisible in the bewildering polychromic dazzle from the cathodoscope, was quick to prove that he had other ways of dividing an attacking force.

Something slashed across the glittering maze of light. Brodie and two thugs met head on by the vault door, swinging hard in their direction. Continuing the twirl with which he slung the door wide open, The Shadow

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wheeled in among the other trio which included Red.

Guns spurted and with quick results. The Shadow's shots came first and sent two men reeling, their guns spouting wild. Only Red managed to get clear, with a dive past the cathodoscope. Immediately he was picked up by a wild stampede led by Brodie.

But Brodie wasn't waiting, nor were the men with him. They were on their way to the rear door, taking Red along.

As Brodie and the others clattered by, The Shadow swung to follow them, ready to drop them like a scoting flock of shooting-gallery ducks. All The Shadow needed was the proper angle and he was wheeling to it, when lights suddenly flooded the jewelry store.

In from the front surged a covey of police headed by that pride of the Manhattan force, Inspector Joe Cardona. Somebody had tipped off the constabulary regarding this unlawful event, and Cardona had arrived with a picked headquarters squad sooner than usual. Too soon in fact for The Shadow.

Brodie's swirl of terror-stricken crooks had almost reached the rear door, whereas The Shadow was an open target for police guns. Plainly visible in the strong light, he was mistaken for the chief malefactor and shots began to whistle his way. His only course was to follow Brodie's throng, which he did with a long, tripping dive out to the alley, just as Brodie turned to slam the steel door. Fear did for Brodie what brains wouldn't have. He gave a frenzied howl:

"The Shadow!"

Crooks staged the rat act. Thinking themselves completely trapped, they piled on the blackened figure that had plunged into their midst. The Shadow's guns, coming upward, managed a few stabs before they were slashed from his hands. Then crooks were shooting at anything black, which included most everything around them, while they grabbed for The Shadow's cloak.

Twisting, The Shadow managed to rip loose from the cloak as he came half to his feet. Even without guns, he might have routed this fear-insane tribe if he hadn't tripped across a sprawled form. The Shadow took a crash landing that must have jarred him badly, but it wasn't enough to satisfy the fear-crazed brain of Brodie Graff.

Continuing his maddened sequence, Brodie kept jabbing with his gun and encountered unexpected luck. He didn't have an actual target until a rolling figure propped upon an elbow and inadvertently came into Brodie's path of fire. Brodie's last two shots were delivered with crazed accuracy and they found their mark. The elbows caved as the lifeless form sagged back.

Then, with police whistles blaring everywhere, Brodie and Red were making for their well-stashed truck, taking one man, the last left from the fray, along between them. Their companion was staggering badly, but they managed to shove him into the rear of the darkened truck before they climbed into the front and sped away.

Cardona and his squad never did take up that chase. They had to shoot it out with two wounded crooks near the vault and do some alley work on another, since these were the breed of thugs who died hard and insisted upon finishing up the hard way. Finding suddenly that there wasn't anyone left to tell where the rest had gone, Cardona went to look at the vault.

The first thing was to turn off the cathodoscope, which Cardona did, by trying all the buttons that he found. No longer blinded by the preternatural brilliance of the gems, Cardona looked inside the vault. What he saw

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brought surprise to his swarthy face.

Traced on the rear of the vault was a pattern that Joe found duplicated on the door front. It was an excellent sketch of a street scene, showing a delicatessen, a cigar store, a truck with the name of a dry cleaner and a passing bus marked with a number. Pointing across the street to a spot marked X was an arrow, which bore the written words:

"Use the cathodoscope here."

Though Joe Cardona didn't know it, this explained why Professor Bartlett had hurried his invention. Bartlett had cooked up his own idea of cooperation with The Shadow. Confident that his mysterious friend would show up at the scene of crime, Bartlett had traced a more potent message on the luminous powdered front of the unnecessary parchment screen.

A graphic message for The Shadow, who figured in it after all, for as Cardona stared at the diagram he noted that a dimmed silhouette was imprinted across it in life size! At first Cardona took it that The Shadow had sent the message; then it dawned on him that the cloaked mystery merchant must have been right here, blocking off the penetrating ray, which had thereby implanted his profile upon the message.

Somehow, it shook Cardona's confidence in The Shadow.

"Funny business," gruffed Cardona. "Looks like The Shadow tried to blot out somebody's message. Say, wasn't that The Shadow who chased out ahead of our shots? I wonder —"

Cardona's faith was further shattered when he reached the alley and found a cop training a flashlight on a huddled form beneath a tangled cloak with a slouch hat close beside it. Lifting the cloak, Cardona prodded the body over and stared at an ugly, unintelligent face.

"That couldn't be his nibs," decided Cardona. "It looks like The Shadow ditched this get-up for a bluff. He's used to clipping crooks, not bluffing them, so it must be meant to fool us. Well, the wise birds always said he'd go crooked himself some day, so this must be it."

Turning on his heel, Cardona went back for another check-up of the diagram which The Shadow had so nearly obliterated. Joe was sure he could soon identify the neighborhood; when he did, he intended to move quick.

Things were already moving at the X mark to which Bartlett's arrow pointed. Suffolk and Wibby had reached Brodie's apartment and had escorted Elaine into the alcove elevator. All the while, the girl had retained a stubborn silence whenever Suffolk tried to talk to her, so he had given it up. The break came after they reached the door of Bartlett's prison laboratory, which Wibby unbolted to admit Elaine.

Seeing her father, Elaine reached him with a happy bound, only to break into sobs as he put his arms around her. Elaine didn't try to tell her story; she simply bemoaned her failure.

"I had hoped I could help you," she choked, "because while I was free, there was a chance for you. But I only walked into another trap."

Bartlett was staring across Elaine's shoulder, his eyes considerably puzzled. The door was wide open and Wibby was putting his gun back in his hip pocket, while Suffolk was advancing very cordially, gesturing sympathetically toward Elaine.

"Let her have a little cry," said Suffolk. "I don't think she'd have come with us except under pressure. Besides, I've reached a state where I won't trust anybody, except Taggart here." Suffolk waved his hand at Wibby, then added: "He tells me he was double-crossed too."

"So I was," affirmed Wibby, "by Brodie Graff. He gypped me when I tried to run an honest business. I thought Suffolk was the brain behind it and when I went to have it out with him, I found he was being framed too. So I looked up Brodie –"

"And you found him," inserted a dry, cold voice from the doorway. "Yes, Brodie told me. He said you would be useful to us and maybe he was right."

Elaine turned with the rest and thought her tearful eyes were tricking her when she saw Margo Lane standing in the doorway. But it wasn't Margo who was talking; the voice came from behind her. That was proven when Margo landed suddenly on hands and knees, sprawled forward by a heavy hand that shoved her.

In the doorway, training a stub-nosed revolver squarely on the clustered group, stood Tracy Singledon, his face shaping an unpleasant gloat that marked him as the master hand of crime!

CHAPTER XVIII

THOUGH one man against three, Singledon held the edge. He guessed that Bartlett and Suffolk were unarmed, so he concentrated his aim on Wibby, whose hands came up automatically before he could think about the revolver on his hip. Looking for another face, Singledon chuckled when he didn't see it.

"So Cranston isn't here," remarked Singledon. "He said he had some business and, if it's where I think it is, it may be giving him trouble."

"If you mean Malbray's," put in Suffolk, boldly, "your crowd may find some trouble too. I phoned a tip-off to the police just before Taggart and I brought Elaine to find her father."

"Maybe the police won't arrive there soon enough," jeered Singledon. "Your fault was, you didn't leave here in time. The rule works two ways, you know. It was very helpful finding Miss Lane bound and gagged; you made a mistake in not trusting her."

From Suffolk's expression it was plain that he recognized the mistake, but Singledon continued:

"You weren't supposed to reach her apartment until after six o'clock, Suffolk. Cranston sent you a postcard just to test you out, thinking that you were behind this game. So when I found Elaine gone, I knew that Wibby must have talked, because otherwise you wouldn't have known. So I came here on a hunch, bringing the Lane girl."

Footsteps were sounding in the corridor, slow laboring steps, but Singledon gave them little attention, knowing whose they represented. In a few moments, Brodie and Red arrived, practically carrying a companion who was doubled up between them, his arms hanging down from his lowered head and shoulders.

"Lay him there," ordered Singledon, gesturing to a corner close to the men he held helpless. "Then cover these people for me. My arm is growing tired." Pausing, Singledon waited until Brodie and Red fulfilled the instructions. "From the looks of things, I take it you met up with the police."

"We met up with The Shadow first," returned Brodie. "If it hadn't been for the coppers, he'd have chopped us right down. Old reliable Cardona barged in and queered The Shadow's set-up."

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"Thank Suffolk for that," laughed Singledon, his mirth hitting a bitter note. "By the way, what happened to The Shadow?"

"He got his from us," affirmed Brodie. "Out in the alley. Only by then there wasn't anybody left but me and Red, along with one other guy."

Brodie gestured to the huddled man in the corner, whose grotesque sprawl made it doubtful that he could be counted among the survivors.

"I suppose the police have the cathodoscope," remarked Singledon. "Well, it doesn't matter, since they would soon have guessed we were using some such device. Since they have nothing that can neutralize its efficiency, we shall use another after Professor Bartlett builds it."

A gleam of hope flashed in Bartlett's eyes as he remembered his luminous diagram. But the hope died as Bartlett realized the police would be too late. The professor could foresee that he and Elaine would be allowed to live, but he saw little chance for the other prisoners.

Singledon must have caught that brief flash, for he said:

"You are right, professor. The others will die. Suffolk first, then Taggart –"

"Just for trusting a double-crosser," broke in Wibby. "That means you, Brodie. Telling me that Suffolk was the big-shot, like you told the other suckers – and that includes you, Red."

It had just dawned on Red Melvin that Singledon wasn't Suffolk and vice versa. Red's lone virtue was his dumbness and he didn't like being complimented on it. That was enough to convince him that there was merit in Wibby's argument, which in turn squared the man who gave it. Turning savagely, Red shoved his gun at Brodie, who wheeled in time to aim back.

Muzzle to muzzle, the pair were glaring like a couple of pugnacious wolves. But before any of Suffolk's group could move, Singledon had them covered with his own stubby gun. He was watching them, too, though he gave quick darty glances toward Brodie and Red.

There was just enough to keep Singledon fully occupied. He didn't notice the one man he had forgotten, that crumpled nobody brought in by Brodie and Red. Singledon didn't see that the pitiful figure had come to life and was creeping around in back of Suffolk's group. Nor did anyone else realize it until Wibby felt a hand clutch at his hip pocket.

A moment later, the figure was on its feet, reeling back against the wall, gripping a stubby revolver. Steadying, the man looked at the gun he had acquired from Wibby's pocket and in that moment gauged its possibilities. But before the reviving man could use the weapon, Singledon saw him.

"Cranston!"

From Singledon's half-startled shout, he recognized that Cranston must be The Shadow. That same thought might have occurred to Brodie, but certainly not to Red, who was by this time thoroughly confused. What handicapped Brodie was the belief that he had pumped bullets into The Shadow, back in the jewelry store alley. He couldn't realize that The Shadow had rolled right out of his cloak and left it draped on a wounded thug who had propped up to take Brodie's shots.

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Standing static in their amazement, Brodie and Red were out of things, each with his gun tenaciously fixed upon the other. The duel lay between Singledon and Cranston. It began without delay.

A quick shift from Singledon brought a prompt shot from Cranston. The bullet whizzed wide and Singledon promptly returned one from his own revolver, only to miss Cranston by inches. In the corner to which she scrambled, Margo felt a surge of hopeless horror. She knew that Lamont must still be as groggy as his blood-streaked face proclaimed, otherwise he wouldn't have missed.

At least Cranston was shifting for shelter behind Bartlett's work-bench which was well away from people, but his faltering gait told that he was very weak. Singledon saw it and gestured his gun, bringing another wild shot from Cranston. On the move, Singledon fired back, but missed again, thanks to a slight hesitation by Cranston that made his opponent overaim.

Reaching the work-bench, Cranston steadied slightly. By then, Singledon was behind Bartlett's portable cathodoscope against the opposite wall. Brodie and Red were watching the slow duel, each enough mistrustful of the other to keep their guns as they were.

"Try again, Cranston," baited Singledon. "You'll miss, as badly as you did when you picked Suffolk as the man who stole the cathodoscope."

Cranston's gun stabbed – and missed.

There was a quick jab from Singledon's revolver and Margo saw Cranston slump. But his drop was intentional, ahead of Singledon's aim. It put Cranston down behind the work-bench with his aiming hand propped on the top.

"I picked you, Singledon." Cranston's tone was slow but steady. "Almost from the start."

"At the theater, I suppose," gibed Singledon. "When we thought that Kranda murdered Troy."

"Yes, you really gave yourself away right then, though I didn't connect it until later. You did some phoning right afterward, probably to Brodie."

Singledon didn't answer. Cranston's shrewd guess annoyed him. Brodie was equally embarrassed, but Red popped out with it, unexpectedly.

"Yeah, so he did!" exclaimed Red. "Only I thought it was Suffolk who called Brodie. We were going to proposition Kranda, but when we found what he was planning, we played it strong."

"Shut up!" snapped Brodie. "Let Singledon talk."

What talked was Cranston's gun, delivering its fourth shot. As before, Singledon tallied a quick response. Both shots were misses.

"I tested you all along, Singledon." Cranston's tone was slow, but calm. "I watched you when I ran Bartlett's record. I listened to your arguments against Suffolk. I baited you into that trip to Bartlett's strong room."

Singledon tried some baiting of his own. He shoved his shoulder into sight but ducked it just as Cranston fired a fifth shot. As usual, Singledon jabbed a bullet in reply, but Cranston had eased back to shelter.

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"You discovered everything too easily," continued Cranston. "And why not – since you were pinning it on Suffolk? But that wasn't the only reason you revealed the secret of the strong room. You wanted to gain my confidence, to get rid of me. That elevator didn't drop by accident. Your stooges fixed the pulley."

Singledon's face was livid, as Margo saw it, though he was keeping it from Cranston's sight. Angrily, Singledon tried to dispute Cranston's claim.

"If you had me marked," sneered Singledon, "why did you send that post-card to Suffolk to make him show his hand tonight?"

"The card didn't go to Suffolk," returned Cranston. "I wrote it in a favorite ink of mine that disappears. All the mail-man found was a blank card. I was eliminating Suffolk, though you didn't know it. I was making you show your hand, Singledon."

Singledon showed his hand right then. Like a man gone berserk he popped out from cover and charged across the room, veering so that Cranston's aim would be blocked by his own shelter, the work-bench. Jerkily, Cranston shifted clear of his barricade to take advantage of Singledon's rush, but his aim was still too slow. Watching for it, Singledon made a quick sidestep as Cranston fired.

One inch wide, that shot, and it left Cranston in the open. He was standing flat-footed with his gun hand aiming again, while Singledon approached, his own revolver lifting slowly.

"Six shots for you, Cranston," reminded Singledon, "but only five for me. That's what I've been working toward all during this duel. One shot left and it's mine. I am going to kill you with it."

Singledon's gun was level when the stab came. It was amazing to all but one witness, that fatal shot. Amazing because it spurted from the wrong direction. The shot was from Cranston's gun!

A seventh shot for Cranston to nullify the sixth that Singledon never fired. For with it, Singledon curled to the floor, his revolver dropping from his hand. With a bullet through his heart, the man of crime could hardly hope to hold his gun.

With that blast, Brodie and Red forgot their unfinished dispute. It was Brodie who wheeled first, hoping to avenge Singledon's death. It was simple enough to Brodie. Singledon must have counted wrong. Seven shots were one too many in Brodie's league.

Cranston was still one ahead. Brodie was charging forward and he wasn't aiming in a hurry. Coolly, Cranston topped one surprise with another, by delivering an eighth shot that pitched Brodie face-flat on the cement. As Brodie struck, Cranston aimed at Red.

There wasn't any challenge from Red Melvin. He wasn't taking chances with an inexhaustible gun. Frantically, Red flung his revolver at Cranston's feet and reached as high as he could stretch. Scooping Red's bouncing gun, Cranston turned to Wibby and handed back the miracle weapon.

"I recognized the model," said Cranston. "Fairly common, these eight-shot specials, but very few people know about them."

"It fooled me when I bought it," admitted Wibby. "I picked it up in a hock-shop."

A huge crash sounded from the corridor. It was followed by the sound of rushing feet which ended when Inspector Cardona appeared with the cream of his special squad.

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"We saw the start of it," explained Cardona. "We were looking right through the wall with that crazy machine. We thought they were going to get you sure, Mr. Cranston. That's why we hopped around and busted through a partition in the warehouse. I'd like to know the rest of it."

Inspector Cardona heard the rest. The laugh of The Shadow!

THE END