

REALM OF DOOM
by Maxwell Grant

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The last "finger" falls from The Hand, as The Shadow cleaves wide open the
Realm of Doom.

CHAPTER I

CRIME'S APPOINTMENT

Two men were standing near the center of the hotel lobby, watching the bellboy bring their suitcases from the elevator. To all appearances, they were a pair of motorists ending their stay in Charleston, West Virginia.

The fact that they were checking out at six in the afternoon was not unusual. Many persons preferred to drive at night, and six o'clock was the time

when guests had to leave or pay for another night's lodging.

One man was tall, with light hair and eyes. His face was a friendly one, except for a disdainful smile that occasionally flexed his lips. The other, of average height, had dark hair and sallow complexion, plus an expression that showed shrewdness, even when he glanced at a road map.

It was the taller man who spoke, before the bellboy arrived. His words were undertoned.

"Have the bellhop stick the bags in the car," he told his companion. "We'll have chow before we scam. I'll take care of the bill, Clip."

The man called Clip was turning away, when he remembered something. There was still time to ask about it, for the bellboy was having trouble with the bags.

"What about that phone call, Rigger?" whispered Clip. "You're taking care of it, too?"

A nod from Rigger settled that question. Soon, Rigger was standing by the cashier's window, while Clip was strolling out through the lobby, preceded by the bag-burdened bellboy.

The bill came to eight dollars and sixty cents. With one of his curiously curved smiles, Rigger brought a fat wallet from his pocket, peeled off a twenty-dollar bank note and shoved it through the window. When he had received his change, he glanced about the lobby, then moved toward a large rack that held road maps and other circulars.

He had decided to stall around for a few minutes, before making the telephone call that Clip had mentioned. Haste didn't go along with Rigger's plan of action, when he was posing as a gentleman.

In that policy, Rigger evidently had the right idea; for the next man who approached the cashier's window was definitely a gentleman, and he possessed a most leisurely manner. He was attired in evening clothes that fitted him to perfection, and his arrival at the window brought a respectful bow from the cashier.

This gentleman was Lamont Cranston, a wealthy New Yorker who traveled much

and hunted big game, who had been in Charleston for several days. His evening attire indicated that he was to be a guest at the governor's reception, scheduled for this evening.

THERE was something in Cranston's mere approach that compelled the cashier's attention. The man behind the window stopped as he stood, not even

moving his hand to place Rigger's twenty-dollar bill in the till. Looking through the wicket, he met Cranston's eyes.

Calm eyes, those, as immobile as Cranston's face, with its hawkish profile and masklike look. When Cranston's lips moved, they retained their straightness; and his voice came with an even tone.

"Some change for this, please" - Cranston's fingers tendered a one-hundred-dollar bill - "in any denominations that are convenient."

The cashier acknowledged by placing Rigger's twenty on the counter, adding two more twenties, then three tens and two fives.

Holding the wad of bills in his left hand, Cranston reached his right to his vest pocket. Bringing out a monocle attached to a ribbon, he affixed the glass to his right eye.

Slowly, he counted off the bills, until he came to the twenty-dollar note at the bottom of the stack. He was turning away as he finished, and he stood for a half minute as though glancing across the lobby, before he placed the money in his pocket.

But in reality, he was intently studying the twenty-dollar bill that had come from Rigger. Seen through the monocle, the tiniest details of the bill were enlarged to immense proportions.

The monocle was a powerful magnifying lens.

What Cranston saw on the twenty-dollar bill must have pleased him, for a soft laugh, scarcely audible, came from his fixed lips. He folded the money into a wallet; let the monocle drop from his eye. Then, with another slight turn, Cranston was faced toward the direction of the rack that held the road maps.

Rigger had left that spot. Just beyond was a telephone booth, its door a trifle ajar. Glancing toward the exit of the lobby, Cranston saw that Clip and the bellboy had not yet returned. With that, Cranston took an immediate interest in the big map rack.

Strolling there, he was close enough to catch the final words of Rigger's phone conversation.

"So the dame's fallen for the hokum, huh?" Rigger's tone, though guarded, showed that he was greatly pleased. "Good enough... Yeah. Keep her kidded until

I show up... Don't worry. I'll be Mr. Fixit... Yeah, I'll be there in plenty of time for you to get her to the nine-thirty bus."

Despite his ease of motion, Cranston was at the news stand by the time Rigger had come from the telephone booth. Clip appeared at the lobby door, and the two went into the dining room.

FOR several minutes, Cranston scanned the columns of an evening newspaper.

Big type told of frenzied efforts to locate the abductors of recent kidnap victims. The search, so the newspapers said, was nation-wide.

Five victims, in all, were missing; and when last seen, they had been in places very far apart - such as Chicago, New York and Miami. True, most of them

had been starting on journeys, but their destinations had been quite as varied as their starting points.

In two cases, ransom money had been paid; but the victims had not been returned. That seemed to be a well-settled policy on the part of kidnapers, although it made their racket tougher, even for themselves. It had also produced the conclusion that the snatches were the work of different parties. Kidnapping, it seemed, came in waves - like other types of crime.

Whether or not Lamont Cranston agreed with those theories was something

difficult to tell; for he tucked the paper under his arm, inserted the monocle, and strolled into the dining room.

Rigger and Clip, at a table only a few feet away, had finished their soup when Cranston sat down.

With a nudge of Rigger's arm, Clip said, "Pipe the monocle the guy's using. The guy must be a duke or something!"

They watched Cranston in amusement, until he had finished with the bill of

fare. Then their grins increased, as the fastidious diner adjusted his monocle more carefully and began to study a card that he took from his inside pocket.

It was about the size of a postcard and was printed with tiny dots, arranged in rows. Those black dots, smaller than the head of a pencil, formed a

design that looked like a honeycomb. Engrossed in his study of the card, Cranston was tapping a finger from one dot to another.

"What is it?" Clip asked Rigger, with a grin. "Some game the guy is playing?"

"Looks like it," returned Rigger. "Say," he chuckled, "maybe it's a punch board. He'll be pushing those dots with a match stick, if we watch him long enough!"

Clip added a louder chuckle, and Cranston heard it. He looked about, removed his monocle and stared haughtily at the two. Suppressing their laughter, they resumed their meal.

The two men finished dinner and went from the dining room. With sidelong gaze, Cranston saw them go out through the lobby. A faint smile appeared upon his thin lips. Pushing aside his coffee cup, he again drew the card from his pocket and adjusted the monocle to his right eye.

Under the powerful microscope, that card underwent a remarkable transformation. Those dots, tiny blobs of black print to the naked eye, became the size of silver dollars. Thus enlarged, they were dots no longer.

They were photographs!

Upon that single card were more than one hundred and fifty portraits, depicting human faces in clear detail. Faces that were of many types, but all with a sordid touch that marked them as the countenances of crooks, despite the smooth expressions that many possessed.

Beneath each portrait, but inscribed within the printed circle, was a name identifying the owner of the face. The card that Cranston carried was a rogues' gallery in miniature!

UPON that card, Cranston found one face he wanted. It showed a man of light complexion, whose eyes were almost colorless and whose lips wore a twisty smile, caught to perfection by a timely click of the camera.

Beneath that portrait was the name: Rigger Bayne.

A few circles away, another photograph portrayed a sallow-faced subject whose eyes and hair were dark. It bore the name of Clip Rallin.

Those two members of Cranston's pocket rogues' gallery were the men who had watched him in the dining room. Crooks they were, as Cranston alone had suspected.

The lobby clock showed half past seven, as Cranston strolled past. Ascending to his fifth-floor room, Cranston stared out across the lighted streets of Charleston, toward the flowing blackness of the Kanawha River. That moving darkness, that seemed a portion of night itself, reminded him of a part that he himself could play.

Removing his coat and vest, Cranston pulled away the collar of his stiff

shirt and seated himself before a mirror. With deft fingers, he began to change his face. He molded it into a new shape, building its contours with dabs of a puttylike substance, until only a semblance of its hawkish look remained.

From changed lips came a whispered laugh that brought eerie echoes from surrounding walls. Neither Rigger Bayne nor Clip Rallin would have enjoyed that mirth. They would have identified it with a being cloaked in black, whose ways brought doom to persons of their ilk.

That tone was the laugh of The Shadow, master fighter who conquered men of crime!

CHAPTER II

THE SECOND MEETING

IN the dusk that The Shadow viewed from his hotel window, Rigger Bayne was driving through the side streets of Charleston, taking a circuitous course to a highway that led from the city. Rigger was riding alone; his pal, Clip Rallin, had dropped off soon after they left the hotel.

Rigger's car was an old one that thumped heavily when he crossed the tracks of a little-used railway line. The jolts made Rigger grin. He was thinking of another car, one that hadn't stood bumps so well; a car that he expected soon to view.

A few miles from the city limits, Rigger reached a rough stretch of road marked as being a detour. Another mile, his headlights glinted upon the gasoline standards of a small service station. There, a coupe was standing in front of a tiny shack close to the pumps.

Beside the coupe, a man in overalls was stooping to peer beneath the car, while a girl's face was visible at the window of the driver's seat. Rigger pulled up beside the coupe; the man in overalls turned a flashlight in his direction.

Rigger saw a blunt face above wide shoulders. He also caught the grin that was meant for him. But it was gone when the man turned to the girl.

"This is my partner," said the blunt-faced man. "The fellow who called up a while ago. I gotta talk to him. We'll be right out."

Had The Shadow been present, he could have identified the blunt-faced man by another consultation of the microscopic rogues' gallery. The fellow's name was Uke Flenn, and he teamed excellently with Rigger and Clip. All three were specialists in crime who had managed to keep well clear of the law.

Like the others, Uke had no idea that he had ever been "mugged" for future reference. It happened that The Shadow's records listed many crooks not included in police archives.

In the shack, Uke and Rigger held a brisk, but pointed, conference.

"That feed line broke," gruffed Uke, "just like we figured it would when she hit this detour. I loosened it before I left Richmond, last night."

"Got it fixed how?" questioned Rigger.

"Yeah. Only, the dame don't know it. She don't know either that I lifted the dough she had in her handbag. I snagged it one-handed" - Uke made a deft motion with thumb and fingers - "when I picked it off the floor of the car. She

dropped the bag getting out here. Now, she thinks she lost it."

Rigger gave his leery grin. His colorless eyes stared reflectively from

the grimy window of the shack.

"She's the dame we're after," he mused. "Loretta Wyndon, whose old man owns about half the copper in the State of Utah. Last seen in Richmond, Virginia -"

"Driving to the South," added Uke. "Because nobody knows that she got that phony telegram asking her to visit friends in Knoxville, Tennessee. A trip out of the way of her regular route South, and one that took her over this detour."

Rigger seemed satisfied on that point; but he had another important question.

"How about this joint?" he asked. "Did anybody look it over close, or stop for gas?"

"Nobody," returned Uke. "There's been cars along, but the detour worried 'em too much to stop. The most anybody could figure is that I was one of the guys that used to run the dump, come back to see how business looked."

FROM the conversation, the two crooks revealed the clever measures by which they were covering the trail of Loretta Wyndon, next candidate in the growing list of kidnap victims. Once the girl disappeared, the hunt would go astray somewhere in Virginia.

Even, by chance, if searchers did come to the neighborhood of Charleston, they would again meet with a broken trail; for Uke and Rigger were adding another tricky move.

Together, they stepped from the shack and approached the car where the anxious girl awaited. By the glow of the dome light, Rigger gained his first close look at Loretta Wyndon. He recognized her from photographs that he had seen.

Those pictures, though excellent, had not done the girl justice. No camera could have caught the trusting gaze of those lovely hazel eyes. No posed photo could have shown the stray wisps of light-brown hair that peeked cutely from beneath her tan beret. Even the tilt of that headgear had an angle that added to Loretta's charm.

Anxiety seemed to make the girl more lovely. When she looked at Uke, she smiled; and he responded in a tone no longer gruff, but pleasant.

"Looks like we can help you out, lady." Uke was slowing his voice to a drawl such as he had heard in West Virginia. "This here is my podner" - he gestured toward Rigger - "and he's scared up some money while he was in town."

"Enough for bus fare, lady," added Rigger, stepping forward, hat in hand. "We reckon it will see you clear to Knoxville, where you're going." Then shyly:

"I'm sorry you lost your handbag."

Loretta's smile became a troubled one.

"I've never traveled by bus," she admitted. "Isn't there a train that I could take from Charleston?"

There were headshakes from Uke and Rigger. Railroads ran from Charleston, but not direct to Knoxville. Just when the trains left, the pretended natives didn't know. People around these parts didn't travel by train any more.

Trains cost too much to ride. That was particularly applicable in Loretta's case, Uke and Rigger argued. They'd scraped up just enough for her to

make the bus trip; and to go by train, even if it could be arranged, would require more cash than they had.

Both men were so apologetic that Loretta capitulated and hastened to express her thanks, with a sincerity that would have softened almost anyone except such criminals as Uke Flenn and Rigger Bayne. They merely counted out the money, in one-dollar bills and change. They gave the cash to Loretta,

telling her that she could repay them when they delivered her car to her in Knoxville, after they repaired it.

Uke invited Loretta into the car that Rigger had come in. They were scarcely out of sight before Rigger drove the girl's coupe in the opposite direction. Totally unconscious of that fraud, Loretta chatted lightly with Uke, until they reached the Charleston bus depot.

"I can't imagine where I lost my money," said Loretta, in parting. "But I'll keep tight hold of this" - she gripped the cash that the crooks had given her - "until I get my bus ticket."

"And hold onto the ticket," chuckled Uke. "Don't forget that, lady."

AS soon as Loretta had entered the bus depot, Uke drove the car to a parking space. Strolling back along the street, he saw Loretta in the waiting room; then he looked into the window of a modernistic lunchroom. There, past the chromium-plated tables, Uke saw the man he wanted, seated at the lunch counter. The fellow was the swaggery bus driver who drove the nine-thirty trip.

Uke entered the lunchroom and sat beside the uniformed driver, who gave him a somewhat friendly nod. The two had become acquainted within the past week. Folding his elbows on the counter, Uke called for a cup of coffee. The fingers of his right hand, sneaking from beneath his left elbow, meanwhile performed a crawl.

Deftly, they reached the cup of coffee that the bus driver had half finished. Raising, Uke's first two fingers let a grayish pill drop into the cup. The bus driver didn't notice that occurrence. He was taking another gulp of coffee when Uke's order arrived.

Uke began a conversation that kept the bus driver interested. All the while, he sidled glances toward the fellow's face. That knockout drop wouldn't be long in accomplishing its work.

Gradually, the victim's face took on a grayish tinge that resembled the color of the dissolved pills. His head was nodding slowly; he was scarcely hearing what Uke said, until the crook drew him from his stool and started him toward the rear door that led to the space where the busses were parked.

"You're looking kind of sick," undertoned Uke. "Maybe some air would do you good."

The bus driver managed a nod.

"Uh-huh," he grunted. "I'm feeling sort of -"

His voice ended with a gulp as Uke guided him behind an empty bus. The fellow stumbled in the darkness; the shove that Uke added was almost useless. Within five seconds another man was beside Uke; together, they were lifting the stupefied victim into the empty bus.

Back in the terminal a loud-speaker was bawling the destinations of the nine-thirty bus. Loretta caught a mention of the name "Knoxville." Picking up a small bag that she had brought with her, she followed a small group of travelers who were starting out to the bus.

Loretta didn't notice a stranger who was seated in the waiting room, his calm eyes fixed upon her. His face was as immobile as his gaze, and it carried a very slight trace of the hawkish features that characterized Lamont Cranston.

Steady lips, fuller than those of Cranston, formed the slightest of smiles as Loretta passed. The steady eyes showed a momentary gleam. Of all the passengers going on the nine-thirty bus, The Shadow had found the proper one to watch.

Rising he followed Loretta out to the platform. There, both were delayed before they could board the bus. Two men, one rough-clad, the other in a bus driver's uniform, were piloting a passenger between them, urging him in through the bus door.

Whether drunk or half asleep, the man was almost helpless. Once he was in his seat, the two who had aided him came out together. The rough-clad man was wiping his forehead with a big handkerchief, half obscuring his face. That was why Loretta Wyndon failed to recognize the blunt features of Uke Flenn.

Politely, the bus driver helped the girl aboard then turned about as The Shadow came up the step. Eyes met in a second meeting, but the man in driver's uniform did not recognize the face of this final passenger. He had no idea that

he had seen him before in the dining room of a Charleston hotel.

Small wonder. The Shadow's attire, like his face, was totally changed. No longer did he wear evening clothes nor sport a monocle. But he recognized the face of the man who wore a bus-driver's outfit; recognized those sallow features topped by dark hair.

Whatever the man's ability, he didn't belong at the wheel of this bus. He was an impostor who had acquired his uniform from the back of a helpless man who had been thrust into a bus seat as a groggy passenger.

The Shadow's lips formed a smile as he took a seat halfway along the aisle

and watched the fake bus driver close the door and take the wheel.

The Shadow was bound on an adventure that offered a first-hand study of the methods used by crooks whose further trail he sought.

The driver of this over-mountain bus was Clip Rallin!

CHAPTER III

HIGH IN THE HILLS

How long the bus had traveled, Loretta couldn't guess. She had forgotten to wind her wrist watch and the bus driver seemed too busy for her to even ask the time. It was certainly past midnight, and during the passing hours of the trip, the man at the big wheel had been piloting the bus over roads that Loretta would not have liked to travel even in daylight.

Sometimes there were stretches of paved road that the bus seemed to swallow as it rumbled ahead. Again there would be chunks of rocky cliffs that loomed like threatening icebergs, until this "ship of the road" swung past them.

Then the lights would blaze off into nowhere, over the depths of great ravines where the bus seemed destined to finish its precarious trip. Each time, however, the huddled driver turned the big wheel, to curve the bus along a roadway that the girl could not see.

Traffic, fortunately, was light among these West Virginia mountains. At moments, pygmy headlights of automobiles met the glare from the bus. Each time,

the great vehicle threatened to crush the midgets that so annoyed it, but, somehow, they managed to scurry from its path and get by.

The other passengers - about a dozen of them - had gone to sleep. They looked like veteran bus riders who were accustomed to leaving their worries to the driver, along with their fate.

Across the aisle, a few seats behind the bus driver, was a man who had solved the riddle of traveling comfortably by bus. He was slanted across the double seat, his head tucked out of sight of everyone except Loretta. With one hand tilted up behind his shoulder, his arm formed a buffer between his head and the curtained window.

He looked to be asleep, yet his face was alert. In the dimmed lights, his features had a hawkish aspect that would not have shown in a sharper glow. Indeed, Loretta might not have noticed that characteristic, except for the silhouette that the man's profile cast against the pillow's whiteness that backed the reclining seat.

The silhouette, more than the face itself, produced the hawklike effect. Interested in that passenger, Loretta looked toward his right hand, that lay beside his knee. She saw long, tapered fingers that rested loosely about the handle of a black briefcase. That added to the impression that the man was vigilant even in sleep.

Five hours from Charleston to Bluefield, a matter of some hundred and thirty miles. That didn't seem so very slow, however, when Loretta considered the road that the bus was traveling.

Somewhere past Bluefield was a town that served as a junction point. There, at a time when people ought to be asleep, Loretta would leave this bus and wait for another that would carry her to Knoxville.

She had spent all her dollar bills on the bus ticket, but her handbag contained a collection of quarters and dimes that the kindly men who ran the detour service station had given her. Loretta decided that she could afford to buy a breakfast when they reached the junction point.

SINCE no one else was awake, Loretta glanced at the bus driver. For the first time, she noticed that his face wore traces of worry that, she wondered why, he had not previously shown during this over-mountain journey.

Clip Rallin had caught the girl's glance in the mirror. In his role of bus driver, he had placed Loretta where he could watch her whenever he chose. Had Loretta gone to sleep, Clip would somehow have managed to awaken her; for that was part of his game. Loretta had obligingly remained awake for the climax that was almost due.

Clip began to apply the brakes. The bus swung past a jagged cliff edge, which Clip identified by the white-painted remnants of an advertisement plastered against a smooth surface of rock. Swinging the curve, Clip coasted the bus to a stop on a downward slope.

Turning about, he looked at Loretta and grinned as though pleased to find someone else awake. He leaned over and confided the trouble in a low, purr tone that didn't rouse the other passengers.

"Pulling too hard to the right," he told Loretta. "Maybe a tire is going flat. I hate to trouble you, miss, but if you'd hold this flashlight while I take a look -"

Clip didn't have to finish. Loretta obliged by taking the flashlight. The fake bus driver opened the door, helped the girl to the ground. It was foggy here, not drizzly, as it had been a while back. To the right was a high embankment; from the left, across the road, Loretta could hear the faint roar of a stream deep in a mountain gorge.

Loretta picked her way beside the bus, following Clip toward the front wheel. She found she couldn't make the flashlight work. Clip took it, pressed the button.

"The bulb's burned out," he grunted. "Lucky I got a spare one in the bus. If you want to get it for me -"

Turning, for a moment the girl couldn't make out the lighted door of the bus, for it seemed blurred by a blackness that faded outward. She blinked; the door was clear again. That was when Clip plucked her sleeve.

"I'd better get the bulb," he decided, smoothly. "It won't take me long to find it."

He moved toward the step; Loretta followed slowly, not liking the darkness

around her. Clip stepped briskly through the door, took a quick shrewd glance along the aisle. He counted heads that he had noted before; the ones that stuck above the seat tops.

Those passengers were still asleep. With a twist, Clip dropped behind the wheel, yanking the lever that controlled the door. The motor was still throbbing; a yank of the gear shift, a foot on the throttle, the bus was away down the slope.

TO Loretta, the whole thing happened before she could even gasp. The bus whipped clear almost with the closing of the door, and she found herself staring at an array of tail-lights below the dim rear windows, as the big vehicle took the next bend.

She was in utter darkness, thicker than any that she had ever realized could exist, so black that even the white wraiths of drifting fog were lost. It

was fearful here, alone on a forgotten mountainside, with nothing but that steady roar of the creek that pounded through the deep gorge below.

Despite the nerve that she possessed, Loretta was gripped with real horror

at her plight. The action of the treacherous bus driver stirred her with vague fears of something more to come. Then, for a moment, her terror was forgotten, as a light swept from the upper bend. Another car was coming down the lonely highway, feeling its way past the curve.

With a glad cry, Loretta sprang out to the middle of the road and waved her arms, just as the automobile rounded the bend.

The car came to a sudden stop. Even that didn't surprise Loretta; she simply thought that the driver had caught her signal. What did puzzle her, was the clatter of three doors opening at once. The noise was explained when a trio of men sprang suddenly into the path of the headlights, bound in Loretta's direction.

With a gasp, the girl understood. This car hadn't arrived by chance. It had been lurking somewhere, waiting for the bus to pass. These men had known that the bus driver was going to strand her; it was their job to grab her before she recovered from her bewilderment.

Loretta gave a frantic look in one direction, then the other. She saw the guard rail of the ravine, with uncertain depths beyond it; then the embankment.

studded with scraggly bushes and trees that offered opportunity for a frenzied climb. She ran for the steep-pitched slope.

On the way, she stumbled, rolling into a tiny gully that she hadn't noticed. The black ditch seemed to enfold her as she fell. Her head glanced a mossy stone; with the daze that gripped her, Loretta heard the murmur of the mountain creek fade.

Prone in the gully, the helpless girl could not hear the clatter of footsteps upon the highway. Her would-be captors were almost at the spot where Loretta had fallen. A few seconds more, they would have had her in their clutch. It seemed that only the impossible could intervene.

The impossible came - a note of fierce challenge that rose strident above the roar from the ravine. A peal of fierce laughter that reached Loretta in her stupor; mirth so weird that it seemed the culmination of all her fears. But that sardonic mirth foretold no ill to Loretta Wyndon.

The challenge was meant for the girl's persecutors; and with it, hardened men of crime stopped short, trying blankly to locate the source of that mighty mockery.

It was their turn to meet the unexpected in the midst of these forsaken hills. They screamed out their challenger's name. They had heard the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV

THE NEEDED LINK

LIKE moving pistons, grimy hands sped to hip pockets as three gunmen reached for their revolvers. Where The Shadow was, how he had arrived here, these thugs couldn't guess; but they knew they were in for battle. Given a break, they'd get The Shadow. So, at least, they thought.

One of the three was leader of the mob. He shouted a raucous command to two others, who had remained in the halted car. Immediately, a spotlight burned; it began a long sweep back and forth across the road, to finish at a spot near the embankment.

Shots came from the crooks, as they aimed their ready guns. There, caught like a mammoth moth in the lights of a brilliant flame, was the figure that they wanted. It was The Shadow, cloaked in black garb that he had brought from his briefcase.

Crooks saw the outline of a slouch hat above the cloaked shoulders. They didn't sight the guns that were, in The Shadow's fists. Those automatics, like the thin gloves that he wore, were black. But the guns made themselves evident an instant later.

Timed to the spurts from thuggish revolvers came answering tongues of flame. But The Shadow's gun stabs had a feature that the other lacked. The Shadow's shots were accurate. He had aimed before the spotlight revealed him. He was shooting straight, while crooks were opening a hasty, ill-aimed fire.

One mobster hit the highway. Another took a stagger; made a frenzied dive back toward the halted car. Only the leader stood intact, for he had been behind the others. His gun had swung straight for the cloaked fighter ahead. He

intended to do more than shoot it out with The Shadow; he expected to drop that being in black.

Guns spoke together. Singularly, both shots were wide. The mobleader's bullet pinged through space, for The Shadow had faded a split second before the fellow fired. The Shadow's shot happened to be wide because he was starting a rapid move.

The fade that he made was more than a mere drop. It turned to a long leap across the little ditch; transformed from that into a whirl that carried him to the other side of the road. During that speedy spin, guns gave staccato barks. The men in the car were firing along with their leader, who stood in the road; but all their shots were belated.

The Shadow ended his swift whirl by a stop against the guard rail. With it, he came squarely into position. His left hand jabbed a shot straight for the aiming mobleader. The slug from the .45 jolted the crook like a blow of a sledge hammer.

The men in the car were shooting beyond their mark, for they hadn't expected The Shadow's sudden halt. Before they could aim again, he was coming their direction, seeking the shelter of the car front below the level of their guns.

There were three men in that car: the driver, a marksman beside him, and the crippled thug who had crawled in from the road. It was the last named who screamed a warning to the other two:

"Get him! Get The Shadow before he climbs over the front and gets you!"

THE words brought an instant response, though the two men in front chose different measures. The driver lurched the car forward, starting it down the

slope in second gear, hoping to crush The Shadow in its path. The marksman stretched from the window on his side of the sedan, hoping for a shot at the black-clad foe.

As the car took its leap, something whirled from in front of it. That something was The Shadow, launched in a reverse spin. He was out of danger, with several feet to spare, and he took the path that offered the most space; the area in the direction of the guard rail.

Madly, the crooks tried to get him before he could aim. The persistent driver yanked the wheel to the left, again heading the car straight for The Shadow. The marksman shoved his gun across in front of the driver, poking the muzzle from the window on the left.

From the sedan the gun was barking its rapid fire, when The Shadow spliced a shot of his own from the guard rail.

His target was the stabbing gun itself. The bullet skimmed the marksman's knuckles, took him in the chest. His last shots were spasmodic, as he slumped into the driver's arms.

Then came tragedy that The Shadow had not intended; for on this occasion, he would have preferred to take at least one foemen alive. The result of The Shadow's shot prevented that outcome. Tangled with the withered marksman, the driver lost his grip on the wheel at the moment when he needed it most.

Before he could slew the car around to the right, it clipped the guard rail. Under the powerful drive of the accelerated second gear, traveling downhill, the car supplied a battering force beyond any for which the rail was intended.

Posts ripped from their moorings. There was a splintering of wood, punctuated by the frantic cries of the driver and the thug in the back seat. Then, in a flash, the car was gone, its lights with it. Trailing shrieks were lost in a clatter far below. A final crash woke echoes from the ravine; echoes that soon subsided, to blend with the dull roar of the creek below.

That crook-manned car had taken a hundred-foot plunge, wiping out the last members of the defeated mob.

A tiny flashlight blinked across the highway. It centered upon one dead crook, then the other. It was the second man, the leader of the mob, whose face came under The Shadow's closest scrutiny.

That face was one that The Shadow recalled. It was choppy, big-lipped, with a scar that ran from one glassy eye to the hatchet-jaw below. A face that could be remembered in death, as well as life.

A search of pockets brought nothing of importance. Finished with the fallen mobsters, The Shadow beamed his light along the ditch on the upper side of the road. Among the slanted rocks, he found Loretta Wyndon.

The girl gave a low moan as The Shadow reached her. The Shadow saw the lump where her head had struck the stones.

Loretta wasn't badly hurt, but the blow had given her a slight brain concussion, accounting for her bewildered state. Lifting the girl across his shoulders, The Shadow began an upward trek along the road. He seemed confident of finding something important, once he was past the bend.

Two hundred yards brought him to a bridge across the ravine. The roar of the creek loudened as he crossed. Thirty paces onward, The Shadow came to an old dirt road. It was the route of an old mountain highway that stayed on the left side of the ravine and paralleled both the new highway and the descending creek.

Blinking his flashlight upward, The Shadow discovered an old road sign, pointing down the valley, with the faded legend: ROCK HILL, ONE HALF MILE.

The Shadow followed the dirt road. With Loretta as a burden, the plod was tedious. At last, his flashlight showed a building. Resting Loretta on the ground, The Shadow made a further survey.

ROCK HILL was a hamlet of not more than half a dozen houses, all recently abandoned. Its inhabitants, like those of other tiny hill settlements, had deserted their decayed homes to move into new houses provided through a Federal building project.

After a short investigation, The Shadow returned and carried Loretta up the rickety steps of the largest structure, placed her upon an old cot in the corner of a room. Finding a broken chair, The Shadow set it in front of an ancient table.

Probing another corner, he found an old kerosene lamp and lighted it. Once

set on the table, the lamp revealed The Shadow's next action. From beneath his cloak, he brought an object that girded him like a sheet of armor. It was the flexible briefcase that he had carried on the bus.

From the briefcase came a thin folder that bore a printed symbol of a hand. Across the front, The Shadow wrote a single name: "Thumb Gaudrey."

Once there had been five members of the crooked band that called itself The Hand. Five "fingers" - who had worked together, then had turned to lone-wolf methods. One by one, The Shadow had chopped off those "fingers." (Note: See "The Hand," Vol. XXV., No. 6, "Murder for Sale," Vol. XXVI., No. 3, "Chicago Crime," Vol. XXVII., No. 6, "Crime Rides the Sea," Vol. XXVIII., No. 4.) He had finished blackmail, murder, insurance rackets, theft -

Now, kidnapping was the issue.

For tonight, The Shadow had gained conclusive evidence that Thumb Gaudrey, last member of The Hand, was the mastermind behind the snatch racket that had listed Loretta Wyndon as the next victim.

The proof lay in the dead face that The Shadow had seen beside the highway.

Out came the card of many dots; also the monocle that magnified those tiny circles into faces. Beneath the lamplight, The Shadow studied a picture that portrayed a man with choppy, big-lipped features, marred by a scar from eye to chin. The name beneath the portrait completed the identification. It identified him as Curley Schaffel.

There was no doubt almost it, Curley Schaffel was the leader of the snatch crew that had waited until the bus went past; probably on the dirt road across the bridge. Curley had followed, knowing that Clip Rallin controlled the bus.

But Clip Rallin provided no link to the head of the kidnap racket, whereas Curley Schaffel did.

Opening the folder that bore the symbol of The Hand, The Shadow studied facts that concerned Thumb Gaudrey, missing mastermind of crime. There, he found data that fitted with his recollections. Among a small list of lesser crooks, all missing, who served Thumb Gaudrey and Thumb alone, was the name of Curley Schaffel.

Though long tasks lay ahead, The Shadow's ultimate search was no longer a blind one. He knew the man that he would find at the end of the kidnapping trail: Thumb Gaudrey.

Folding the file sheets, The Shadow replaced them in the briefcase. He puffed out the lamp flame. Instant darkness made the room a solid mass of black.

Through that room passed the whisper of a low-tone laugh; a chilling tone that mingled weirdly with Loretta Wyndon's dreams.

THE SHADOW EXPLAINS

IT was morning, and Loretta Wyndon was propped up on her cot staring wonderingly at the scene about her. She was in an old storeroom furnished with junky chairs and tables, plus a multitude of empty boxes.

Her mental haze had ended, but when Loretta tried to review past events, she ran into a blank. She could remember nothing of the night before, from the time she had fallen into the ditch.

Something had happened on that road; she had met with danger that should have placed her in a hopeless plight. Yet here she seemed safe; free to leave whenever she chose.

By the light that streamed through little windows, Loretta saw a stairway that led to liberty. Rising from the cot, she rubbed her forehead, then started

for the stairs. Hearing footsteps, she shrank back cautiously.

A man appeared from the stairway. Loretta seemed to recognize him. In the slight light near the stairs, his face had a hawkish look. She placed him suddenly: the man on the bus!

Other faces flashed to recollection - those of vicious foemen who had driven toward her in the glare of a sedan's headlights. The man from the bus hadn't been one of those; therefore, the truth hit Loretta suddenly. He was the

rescuer who must have stopped that mob!

Calmly, the hawk-faced man invited Loretta to the table by the window. There, he placed an opened can of fruit juice, a box of cereal, evaporated milk

and sugar. He went down the stairs; when he returned again, he brought dishes, cups and silverware, with a pot of steaming coffee.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Miss Wyndon," he said, in an even-toned voice. "My name is Henry Arnaud. We are in an old store in the deserted village

of Rock Hill. Fortunately" - Arnaud's lips showed the slightest touch of a smile

- "some of the supplies were left here. That accounts for this breakfast."

Loretta began to eat. She was on her second cup of coffee, when she decided to question her new friend regarding last night's adventure.

Quietly, The Shadow told her what had happened; but his version of the battle seemed anything but spectacular. He had been awake, he said, when Loretta and the driver had stepped from the bus. He had done the same, and had remained with Loretta.

The girl nodded. She remembered that streak of blackness that had faded when she looked at the bus door. She was connecting it with later recollections; dreams, perhaps, that involved a formidable fighter cloaked in black. She decided suddenly that Henry Arnaud was a man of greater prowess than

he cared to claim.

"Thugs arrived," stated The Shadow, calmly. "They tried to kidnap you. I was fighting them off, when they made the fortunate mistake of ditching their car in the ravine."

He stepped to the window and pointed. The daylight gave Loretta a long view up the gorge. It was deeper than she had supposed. High above its depths was the brink of the main highway.

There, men were at work beside a broken guard rail. They were using cables

and derricks; Loretta could see the toylike object that they were drawing up from the gorge. It was the twisted wreckage of an automobile.

"From all the circumstances," came Arnaud's steady tone, "the police will class that tragedy as a clash between the mobsters who manned the car. Such battles sometimes happen, in remote spots like this."

Loretta nodded agreement. The words of Henry Arnaud had all the tone of a prediction. Then his voice reached her ears again, asking quiet questions. The Shadow wanted an account of Loretta's adventures before she reached Charleston. The girl gave her detailed story.

A FEW minutes later, Loretta was looking through the monocle that served as microscope, gasping as she saw the enlarged faces beneath the lens.

"This man - Clip Rallin!" she exclaimed. "He was the driver of the bus! And this one - Rigger Bayne - pretended that he was the service-station man's partner!"

"See if you can find the third man," suggested The Shadow, in Arnaud's tone. "The one that you first met at the service station."

Loretta ran the microscope from face to face, then placed her finger on a dot. She handed the monocle to The Shadow. Looking through the glass, he saw the picture of Uke Flenn.

"It was all prearranged!" gasped Loretta, "Why, no one in the world would ever guess what had become of me! Unless the telegram would tell."

"Are you sure," questioned The Shadow, "that the telegram was genuine?"

Loretta reflected; then shook her head. She had found the telegram thrust under the door of her Richmond hotel room. Anyone could have placed it there.

"A fake telegram!" she exclaimed. "But how" - she looked at her rescuer - "how did you know that I was coming to Charleston?"

For answer, The Shadow spread a large map on the table. He pointed out various cities, all wide apart; then drew a large circle in among them.

Loretta noted that New York, Chicago, Miami, even Richmond, lay outside the circle.

"In investigating these kidnap cases" - from The Shadow's easy tone, Loretta decided that Henry Arnaud must be a government agent - "I preferred the

little-accepted theory that one man was responsible. From that, it appeared logical that there could be a danger zone, or circle, into which the victims were either drawn or carried.

"All were traveling somewhere, when they disappeared. Their destinations, like yours, were not positively known. That fitted with my theory. I could picture those victims converging toward the zone."

The Shadow's finger traced southeastward from Chicago; southwestward from New York; northward from Miami.

"That zone," he continued, "became my base of operations. In searching for clues, I found - these!"

From his pocket, The Shadow produced a small batch of twenty-dollar bills.

He spread them on the table, watched Loretta eye them. A question popped suddenly to the girl's mind.

"They're counterfeits?"

"Yes," replied The Shadow. "But so finely executed that their faults are visible only under the powerful lens, which I had with me for another purpose. That is why it is not yet generally known that fraudulent bills of this type are in circulation. However, that is not the most important feature. I discovered something else."

He gave the lens to Loretta, along with a twenty-dollar bill. The girl looked through the monocle, then exclaimed:

"Why, there is a message on this bill! Printed in tiny letters -"

"Printed by hand," interposed The Shadow. "Done under a microscope, in green ink. Read the message."

Loretta made out the words; they were very small, even through the glass.

"It's about me!" she ejaculated. "Why, it says that I'll be leaving Richmond for Charleston - that I'm to be the next person abducted! It gives

the
date - yesterday!"

That was all that the girl could gasp. The Shadow gathered the twenty-dollar bill along with the others.

"The rest," he said, "bear messages concerning previous victims. Unfortunately, I found them too late. In your case, I came across several bills in advance. That was why I happened to be in Charleston.

"Those previous messages, however, were not entirely useless. From them, I learned of cities where other persons had gone before they vanished. Places like Portsmouth, Ohio; Roanoke, Virginia; Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

"As a result, I have reduced the danger zone" - The Shadow was drawing a smaller circle on his map - "until it covers a comparatively small area, although it crosses the borders of several States. Somewhere within that circle
_"

THE SHADOW said no more. Loretta understood the rest. She knew that this friend who chose to call himself Henry Arnaud was seeking a newer and greater duel with a master criminal who ruled many mobs like the one that had failed last night.

Somehow, before Loretta's eyes the map took on the semblance of a web fashioned by some human spider. In that mesh lay the creature's lair but his threads stretched everywhere throughout the terrain.

Could her rescuer reach that lair and bring aid to victims already held there? Perhaps - if he could lessen the load and gain new leads by checking on the crooks that he traced or battled. In her eagerness to aid The Shadow Loretta blurted:

"I'll tell my story! I'll do anything -"

"Anything except tell your story," interposed The Shadow. "You are anxious to aid; but that would be the worst way."

Loretta didn't understand until The Shadow provided the simple explanation.

"You can help best," he explained, "by remaining vanished. The head of these crimes - a man whose name I know - will be highly anxious to find you. If you returned among your friends he would spare no effort to seize you."

"I'll take the chance," began Loretta. "If I can make him betray himself
_"

"You can," inserted The Shadow, "but you can do it more safely, and more effectively by remaining in this territory. It is better that he should show his hand on his home grounds."

Loretta saw the logic. It meant her own security, as well as trouble for the master crook. Best of all - as she explained to The Shadow - her disappearance would not be known to the public for a long while to come. Her parents were in Europe and would not return for another month.

The news pleased Loretta's rescuer. Looking from the window, The Shadow saw that the derrick crew had finished their work of raising the smashed sedan.

A discussion was under way over there on the paved road and The Shadow could see the uniforms of State police.

"Very soon," he predicted to Loretta, "they will be searching around here to find out if crooks used these houses for a hideaway. By that time, we shall be gone."

"Where?" asked Loretta, eagerly.

"Southward," replied The Shadow. "Over the hills to a town on another road. It's a good day for a hike; we can carry provisions with us and arrive by dusk."

State police who visited Rock Hill a half hour later found nothing that denoted recent human occupancy. Canned goods, borrowed from odd shelves, were the only clues that could have helped them.

Such clues however were no longer visible. They had vanished with Loretta Wyndon and The Shadow.

CHAPTER VI

CROOKS REPORT

LATE that same night a car with dimmed lights pulled up in front of a barrier that loomed up like the large doors of a garage. The car was a rattletrap that bore a West Virginia license, but its three occupants hailed from other States.

The men in that car were the assembled lieutenants who served Thumb Gaudrey. Each having played a part in crime, Uke Flenn, Rigger Bayne and Clip Rallin had come to report to their chief.

The dim lamps flicked a signal. Big doors slid apart. The car coasted into a short, wide-built tunnel to stop at another door, a barrier of steel. When that portal had opened, the car rolled into an underground garage.

The place was a great vault with sloping ceiling that dwindled into shortened walls. There was space, however, for at least two dozen cars, and nearly half that number of automobiles were quartered there.

Hard-looking thugs, attendants in this improvised garage, gave grinned greeting to the three who had arrived. Leaving their car, Uke, Rigger and Clip entered a maze of narrow passages that eventually brought them to a higher level. They were met there by a burly tough-faced guard who stood outside an iron-sheeted door.

It was Clip Rallin, acting as spokesman for the trio, who announced that they had come to see the chief. Evidently the guard had orders to admit them, for he rapped a signal at the door, and it opened promptly.

The three stepped into a room that looked like an office. It differed from the underground passages, in that its walls were carefully hewn. Moreover, they were draped with deep-red curtains which bulged at spots, as though a jagged wall lay behind them. On the rough floor were garish rugs that overlapped in such extravagant fashion that no more than half of any rug was visible.

This room, like the garage and the connecting passages, was illuminated by electric lights that hung from wires running along the ceiling. But the lights of this office were supplied with shades, and the big desk in the corner had a standing lamp that connected with an overhead wire.

Behind the desk was a man who did not have to proclaim his identity. Every man in crookdom knew Thumb Gaudrey, once the leader of the group called The Hand.

Driven from Manhattan's underworld, Thumb Gaudrey had gone the law one better. He had created an underworld of his own - a literal one, wherein daylight never shone. In this secluded office, that served him as a veritable throne room, Thumb Gaudrey ruled supreme.

Against the lamplight, Thumb's face formed a saturnine countenance. It was large, pudgy, yet a mass of muscle that could contort into many ugly shapes.

Below Thumb's gray-streaked hair was a bulgy forehead; beneath it, heavy brows.

His heavy-lidded eyes had a penetrating effect upon all who met them.

Thumb's nose was bulbous. So was his chin, which looked overlarge, despite the thickness of his lips. Through whitish teeth boomed a bass voice.

One other feature added to Thumb's supreme ugliness. His hands, as they rested on the desk top, looked massive, even when compared to his considerable bulk. They were proportioned to his body like a lobster's claws; great bulgy fists half the size of hams, and of the same smoky color. There was terrible strength in them.

Visiting crooks agreed that Thumb kept bodyguards merely for a show. No wonder those husky hoodlums obeyed the big-shot's slightest whim. Single-handed, Thumb could have chucked the lot of them from his presence, guns and all.

But with his prowess, Thumb boasted craft. He wouldn't thrust himself into a noose, not even to meet The Shadow. He preferred to let The Shadow come to him, as others had been unwise enough to do. So far, The Shadow had not arrived. He couldn't seem to find Thumb Gaudrey.

And that, as Thumb was wont to brag, was very lucky - for The Shadow!

FACING his three lieutenants, Thumb Gaudrey saw that they were worried.

They watched Thumb pick up a fat cigar, bite off the end of it with a single champ of his sharp teeth. Then:

"Let's hear it," growled Thumb. "If you guys bungled, you'd better admit it. You couldn't have done worse than Curley Schaffel did."

Relieved expressions showed on three faces. The lieutenants hastened to declare that they hadn't bungled. Uke had handled the service-station stunt to perfection, and had taken care of the bus driver at the depot.

As for Rigger Bayne, he had disposed of Loretta Wyndon's coupe, leaving no trace of the girl's trip to Charleston. His job, he declared, had been one-hundred percent perfect.

Clip Rallin heard those reports; then licked his dried lips and recovered his usual suavity.

"I dumped the dame, like I was told to," he asserted. "When I finished the bus run, I got the bus driver off to a hotel. He thinks a pal covered for him on the trip. The coppers think the trouble happened on the road a long while after the bus had passed.

"So they haven't questioned him. What's more, he's being transferred North. There's not a chance that the guy will blab that he went to sleep in Charleston. Why should he? When he woke up, he was back in uniform."

Thumb Gaudrey grunted. His thickish lips were pumping furiously at the cigar between them. At last, he brought a big fist downward with a thwack that quivered the desk beneath it.

"The Shadow's in it!" boomed Thumb. "Nobody else could have mopped up Curley and that mob. He let the girl make her getaway; and he'll be watching for the next snatch we try to spring.

"The question is - how did The Shadow get into it? Did any of you fellows see him, or anybody that looked like him? Out with it, if you did!"

Uke Flenn, thinking in terms of the service station near the Charleston detour, supplied a negative headshake. In a few moments, both Rigger Bayne and Clip Rallin had joined in an expression of the same ignorance.

Neither linked the man at the Charleston hotel with The Shadow. Rigger

couldn't remember anything that had happened afterward in which The Shadow might have been concerned.

As for Clip, he had not noticed one less passenger on the bus, when it had reached its destination. He had checked on the passengers simply by counting them, while at the driver's seat. The Shadow, slumped low in the cushions, had been out of sight when Clip made his check-up before and after leaving Loretta on the mountain road.

"All right," decided Thumb. "You birds are safe enough. The Shadow must have picked up Curley's trail somewhere along the road. Let's forget The Shadow

for a while. We'll talk about the Wyndon girl. If she -"

Thumb interrupted himself, another thought in mind. With a fangish grin, he pulled open a desk drawer, brought out a clipping and laid it in front of him.

"We'll get back to the girl later," decided Thumb. "She can make more trouble than The Shadow, if we give her time. But we won't let that happen. We're going to stage something big!

"This snatch racket means dough; big dough. But it isn't fast enough to suit me. Each guy we grab is like plugging a stone into another hornet's nest. Why waste our shots?"

There were nods from the listeners, although they didn't fully understand what Thumb meant. The big-shot grated an ugly laugh.

"We're going into this racket wholesale," he announced. "We're going to stage it on a scale that nobody ever dreamed about! I've got the set-up" - Thumb was wagging the clipping, as he spoke - "made right to our order!

"We'll spring it before The Shadow can get wise. Before anybody finds that

dame, who's probably wandering somewhere in the hills. When we've pulled this one job, we won't have to worry about any more snatches. After that, we'll specialize in collecting ransoms.

"We'll sit tight right here, while the dough rolls in. The Feds will be as helpless as a bunch of boy scouts, when it comes tracing us. If you don't believe me" - Thumb was glowering at the wondering faces - "take a look at this!"

He passed the clipping to Clip Rallin, whose sallow face became suddenly shrewd again as his eyes scanned the printed lines. Clip handed the slip to Rigger Bayne, who read a few lines then showed his peculiar smile. Uke Flenn took the clipping, read it, and began to gloat.

Three of a kind, those crooks understood the stroke that the mastermind had planned.

The greatest snatch in history!

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN BELOW

"THE kidnap business," observed Thumb Gaudrey, leaning back in his chair until it creaked, "has given us a lot of grief. It's not only moved too slow; we haven't been able to demand big-enough ransoms, for fear we'd give away the size of our outfit.

"Besides, we haven't sent home the guys whose ransoms were paid. Fifty grand apiece we got for them, but no delivery, because it was safer for us to keep them here. That hasn't created public confidence" - Thumb's fat lips spread in a grin - "so I figure to eliminate that system."

There were nods from the others.

They understood the measures that Thumb proposed: wholesale kidnapping, with the payment of a huge blanket ransom. They liked that idea.

Clip Rallin had a query: "How much do you think this big job will clear?"

"A couple of million," replied Thumb, coolly. "Of course, we'll collect a few hundred grand besides on the guys we haven't asked a price for yet. We can spring them along with the new customers."

"Why not croak the lot of them," suggested Uke Flenn, "after you get the mazuma?"

"We might," returned Thumb. Then, with a glower: "One thing sure, I'll rub out any stuffed bozo whose looks I don't like! I always have."

More nods of acknowledgment. Then Rigger Bayne spread his twisty smile a trifle, and asked:

"What about old Felix Dort? Is he paying any real dividends yet?"

Thumb Gaudrey laid back in his chair and laughed. His mirth quaked his entire bulk, bringing spasmodic raps on the desk from his huge hands. Clip and Rigger appreciated the joke, but Uke didn't understand. He'd never heard of Felix Dort.

"The guy's an inventor," explained Rigger. "We snatched him early in the game; then we found out that he didn't have any dough."

"Except what comes from his royalties," corrected Clip. "Close to a grand a month, and Thumb fixed it so the cash comes here."

"And Thumb pays it over to Dort," chuckled Rigger, "just to keep the boob happy. After that, Dort hands it back again. He's paying off his own ransom, in installments."

"In the meantime," added Clip, "Dort is working on what he calls an efficiency motor. We brought in his laboratory equipment, and Thumb had it set up for him" - Clip pointed toward the floor - "down below."

Thumb Gaudrey had finished his huge laugh. He was leaning forward on the desk, nodding as he propped his big chin in his hands.

"Dort has got something," assured Thumb, seriously. "When he gets it perfected, I'm going to take it over. That motor of his is going to be my alibi for all the dough that I'll flash afterward. Only, Dort will be croaked by that time."

There was a rap at the metal-sheeted door. Thumb motioned for silence; gave a rumbly call. An outer guard opened the door, and upon the threshold appeared the very man that the crooks had mentioned.

FELIX DORT was a scrawny specimen of humanity. Old and withery, he had a thin face topped by eyeglasses and a shock of white hair. His eyes were bird-like, tiny little beads that glanced quickly from face to face. His lips, however, wore a simple, trustful smile.

"Come in, professor," spoke Thumb, in a soothing tone. "Tell me - how is the motor coming along?"

"Very well indeed," replied Dort, in a crackly tone. Then, in plaintive voice: "But I must remind you. Mr. Gaudrey, that my royalty money is due."

"That's right," agreed Thumb. He reached into the desk drawer, brought out

a stack of currency and papers that were circled by a rubber band. "I had forgotten that we were working on a weekly payment system."

He gave the money to Dort, who hobbled to a table in the corner. Counting the cash with shaky hands, the inventor kept looking at the royalty statements.

Thumb gave a gesture, to indicate that Dort's presence didn't matter.

"Let's get back to the girl," suggested the big-shot. "While we're waiting

to stage this big snatch, we might as well be finding her. She's worth dough, just like the rest."

"It's going to be tough," remarked Clip. "Looking for her in those hills. We'd need a big crew, chief."

Thumb considered that awhile, then supplied a well-chosen suggestion.

"Talk to some of the guys that live there," he said. "The hillbillies. Tell them you're private dicks looking for a dame that was mixed in some New York murder. They'll fall for that gag and do your hunting for you."

Clip pondered over the possible response of the hill dwellers. Finally, he gave sound advice.

"They're lazy," he declared. "They'll lay down on the job unless we grease them with some dough."

"Go to it," ordered Thumb. "Pass out some of those twenties that you carry." Then, swinging toward Dort. he added: "By the way, professor, you owe some more money on your ransom installments."

Dort gave a nod to indicate that he had not forgotten the fact. Then, half turning his head, he cackled:

"I'll settle that later, Mr. Gaudrey."

By that time, Thumb was listening to objections from Clip. Twenty-dollar bills would not do, Clip said. They were too uncommon among the hillbillies.

"A twenty is big dough up there," declared Clip. "We'd better hand out one-spots to those fellows. A couple of hundred dollars ought to be enough; but make it all in ones, chief."

Thumb pulled open a drawer that contained bundles of cash. Looking through

the money, he grimaced when he noted a shortage of one-dollar bills. He was shaking his head, when Dort came over from the table.

"The royalties are correct, Mr. Gaudrey," declared the wizened inventor. "When I have gone over my own records. I shall return and pay the ransom installment. How do you wish the money - in twenty-dollar bills, as usual?"

Thumb tilted his big head.

"How about one-dollar bills?" he inquired. "Have you any of those, professor?"

"I believe so." Dort rubbed his dryish chin. "Yes, I believe so."

His lips were moving, as though he were trying to make sure about the matter. His head was lowered; but all the while that he mumbled, Dort's tiny eyes were squinting toward Thumb's desk. There lay the clipping that Thumb had shown to his lieutenants. Unnoticed by the crooks, Dort was taking in its import.

"Look and see," suggested Thumb. "If you've got any one-dollar bills, I'd prefer them. I tell you what, professor: Bring me a hundred dollars in ones and I'll give you a two-per-cent discount. That goes for every hundred bucks you bring me."

DORT'S eyes lifted. They showed eagerness. Mumbling his thanks, the inventor hobbled hurriedly from the room.

Outside Thumb's underground office, he moved hastily along corridors, muttering as he went. His absentminded manner brought chuckly snorts from guards who saw him pass. They were used to Dort; he had the run of the premises, to a certain limit.

Reaching a side passage, Dort took a downward slope that brought him to a lower corridor. Tracing his way through a miniature labyrinth, he came to a wooden door and opened it. He stepped at once into a circular, dome-roofed cavern that served him as a laboratory.

Only the center of the cave was lighted. Beyond that, the walls tapered into blackness. Standing near the center was a large motor with many pipes and

odd-shaped gadgets. It was Dort's unfinished invention.

There were other mechanical contrivances in the room. One was a smaller motor, that looked like a model for a larger device. It was buzzing rhythmically, fed from an electric current, Dort chuckled to himself as he stared at the small machine. After that, he stumbled toward the blackness near a slanting wall.

Into a tin box set between two stones, Dort placed the money and the papers that he had brought from Thumb's office. Then, after a shrewd glance toward the door of the laboratory, he began to dig among loose stones. One came

free; Dort uncovered a sheet of tin that served as a slab for a large crevice.

From that hole, Dort brought flat heavy packages wrapped in newspaper. When he opened them, the parcels revealed an interesting sight.

Each packet contained engraved plates suited for the printing of counterfeit money. There were plates for bills of four denominations: twenties,

tens, fives and ones. With each plate were batches of crisp bills that looked quite genuine.

The stack of twenties was depleted. With a pleased chuckle, Dort placed it

back in the cache. Next, he hid the tens and fives; finally the ones, but not until he had helped himself to two wads of the crisp notes.

Covering the hiding place, Dort went to a bulky machine in another outer edge of the room. It looked like nothing more than a metal lathe, but when Dort

lifted it, he disclosed a large space beneath. In that cavity were the compact parts of a small crude printing press.

DORT found a microscope, a pen, a bottle of green ink. Taking them to a square box that stood beneath the light, the inventor crouched on hands and knees. Feverishly, he began to work beneath the microscope.

On each of the dollar bills he printed tiny words, so minute that their letters looked like mere dots whenever he lifted the microscope away.

With many bills to mark, Dort made his messages brief, allowing no more than ten seconds for each inscription. He had finished more than a hundred and fifty of the bills, when he heard footsteps stumbling along the rocky passage outside his door.

Dort whipped the microscope into his pocket. He corked the bottle of green ink and shoved it from sight, along with the pen.

With trembling hands, the inventor was counting his cash in miserly fashion, when a guard thrust his head through the doorway and growled:

"Say, stupid! The chief wants to know what's keeping you. He says he's waiting for you in the office, and you'd better make it swift!"

When Dort reached the office, he heard Thumb Gaudrey growling a new complaint. The big-shot was telling his lieutenants that this underground hideaway had one flaw: No radio set would give proper reception in these depths. Thumb dropped that discussion, to rumble a question at Dort:

"Well? What about those one-buck bills?"

"Here they are, Mr. Gaudrey," replied Dort. "Two hundred dollars, all in ones. I found that I had quite a number of them, for there's been no way that I could spend them."

Thumb Gaudrey took the money. Solemnly, he handed four dollars back to Dort; then he divided the rest among Clip, Rigger, and Uke. While doing that, Thumb told Dort that he could leave.

Outside the office, Dort could hear the guffaws of Thumb Gaudrey and his lieutenants while the big door was swinging shut. Farther along the corridor, Dort muttered a chuckle of his own.

Felix Dort, the mouselike prisoner who lived in the labyrinth below, had again done his bit to provide future trouble for Thumb Gaudrey, the master of this hidden realm!

Nor did Dort lack reason for his chuckle. Tonight, he had learned news that gave him confidence. Thumb Gaudrey had failed in a recent kidnap attempt

-
the capture of Loretta Wyndon; and Felix Dort took credit for producing that failure.

If Dort's measure worked again, they would provide an obstacle for Thumb's new scheme, the most gigantic kidnap attempt that crooks had ever planned.

Yet Dort's endeavor, clever though it was, provided nothing more than a preliminary step.

Much more would depend upon the power of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VIII

THE THIRD NIGHT

LORETTA WYNDON stared at the West Virginia hills and hated the sight of them. She had been looking at those same slopes for three days, and they were all alike; identical with the other hills that she had climbed during her long tramp with The Shadow.

The girl was in an upstairs room of a little farmhouse on the outskirts of a village. Since she had been here, her sole entertainment had been short walks among those wooded slopes.

Now, settling dusk ended the tedious view. Loretta lighted a lamp and tried to read a book. But her mind wandered from the pages. She began to think of The Shadow.

For three days, she had not seen that mysterious personage who called himself Henry Arnaud. That fact, in its turn, indicated that The Shadow was having difficulties of his own.

His chief clues to the activities of the kidnap ring had been the discovery of counterfeit twenty-dollar bills circulated in cities like Charleston. For some reason, those bills carried microscopic messages that gave information of coming crime.

Obviously, the big-shot of the kidnap racket would not stop his efforts merely because his crew had failed to capture Loretta. Contrarily, his policy would probably be to step up his campaign of crime. Coincident with that might come new messages: more clues for The Shadow.

That was why The Shadow, otherwise Henry Arnaud, had left the little village where Loretta was at present. He was going the rounds of cities like Charleston and Bluefield, making a new collection of twenty-dollar bills in hopes of finding telltale counterfeits among them.

From her window, Loretta saw a sudden glow of lights. They came from a big barn that stood down the road; and as Loretta watched, she saw signs of activity there.

This was the night of the village barn dance, a weekly event that drew folk from everywhere along the countryside.

Her elbows propped on the window sill, Loretta watched with interest. People were coming to town in plenty - some on foot, a few with horses and buggies, others in ancient-looking automobiles.

There were musicians among them, carrying violins, banjos, and other instruments, that Loretta could not identify. The rest of the throng looked

gay, some wearing informal attire such as flannel shirts; others dressed in clothes that had long been in storage, as Loretta could tell from high stiff collars, fancy bow ties, and antiquated straw hats.

The women's clothes were likewise well-assorted, but many of their frocks had a more modern touch. In these days of automobiles, women of the hill region could often visit towns and pick up bargains in exchange for long-saved pennies.

That crowd around the old barn interested Loretta. They had come here for a gala night, and Loretta caught the spirit of it. She wanted to be with the crowd.

Why not?

No one but natives were in the throng; of that, Loretta was sure. Men like

Uke, Rigger, and Clip would not be wasting their time at a barn dance in the hills. Loretta was sure that she would be as safe over there as in this room.

SOON, Loretta was mingling with the throng that was entering the barn. A good many strangers came to town on nights like this, so Loretta's arrival did not attract much undue attention. Those persons who recognized that she wasn't from the hill region apparently made no comment over the fact.

The dance had been in progress for half an hour when a coupe swung along the road. It was an old car, but in better shape than most of those parked around the barn. It pulled up in the drive in front of the farmhouse and a tall driver alighted. When he knocked at the farmhouse door, Loretta's landlady answered.

She recognized Henry Arnaud, the man that she supposed was Loretta's physician; for Loretta's story to the landlady had been that she was staying in the mountains for her health's sake.

"Good evening, doctor," said the woman. "The young lady is over at the dance. This country air has made her chipper, I reckon, and the music done the rest."

The Shadow strolled in the direction of the barn. Through the big wide door, he saw the merrymakers in the midst of a square dance. He was looking for

Loretta, when a woman seated at a table just inside the door, asked:

"Want a ticket, mister?"

The Shadow nodded. He saw an admission card that stated "Twenty-five Cents," and laid a quarter on the table. The woman looked pleased.

"Kinda short on change tonight," she said. "Folks here usually bring in dimes and nickels, sometimes pennies. But tonight" - she pointed to a green pile beside her and shook her head in wonder - "it's been mostly dollar bills!"

"Who brought them?" queried The Shadow, in the casual tone of Arnaud. "Strangers?"

"No, the reg'lar folks." The woman shook her head. "I can't reckon; though, where they all got them."

A new expression flickered on The Shadow's maskish features. Methodically,

he tendered a twenty-dollar bill across the table. It was a genuine bank note; the only kind that he had encountered during the past few days.

"I could use some one-dollar bills," he remarked. "How about letting me have twenty for this?"

The ticket seller was agreeable. Taking the note, she began to count.

As the last bill was counted out, The Shadow suddenly whisked the batch away and shoved the cash into his coat pocket. Turning, he dived between a group of dancers just inside the barn door.

He had witnessed a brisk commotion clear across the dance floor, near a small door in the most distant corner. That door had been yanked open, showing a patch of moonlight; a cluster of men were trying to shove someone out into the night.

In one momentary flash. The Shadow had seen the face of a young woman: Loretta Wyndon.

As The Shadow sped across the dance floor, he heard a woman's shriek above the tumult and the music. Despite its call for aid, there was bravery in that cry. It came from Loretta, as she struggled with a new crew of would-be abductors.

SIGHT of a well-dressed stranger driving full speed across the barn was sufficient to halt the dance. Who The Shadow was, local huskies didn't care. He was here to make some trouble, so it seemed. Dropping their partners, a flock of brawny hill men tried to block The Shadow's drive.

As Henry Arnaud, The Shadow inspired none of the awe that he created when cloaked in black. His present attire marked him as anything from a revenue officer to a city slicker visiting the hills. These strong-armed chaps from the mountain slopes thought they would have an easy time stifling such a troublemaker. They were wrong.

The Shadow met the oncomers with fists driving like pistons. He cleared a path ahead, then changed direction to save a few moments of time. Twisting from

another surge of adversaries, The Shadow sprang upon the orchestra platform.

Squeaks of violins ended; so did the twanging of banjos. The players gripped those instruments by the neck, wielded them like cudgels, at arm's length.

Warding off those slashes, The Shadow grabbed up a chair and whirled it in

a mighty circle that sent the orchestra members diving to the dance floor. He flung the chair into the faces of others who were jumping for the platform; then twisted, took long, rapid strides toward the door where Loretta had been struggling.

Save for the moonlight, the portal was blank. Loretta's captors had managed to drag her outside. A muffled cry, however, told The Shadow that they hadn't gotten her to a car. He leaped through the door.

There, by the moonlight that reflected from the hills, he saw five men beside a parked touring car that had its motor running. Three were trying to shove Loretta into the automobile, stifling her while they did.

The other two were ready with double-barreled shotguns, which they aimed at him the moment The Shadow appeared. Their harsh voices warned the stranger to stop where he stood or take a load of lead. They meant it, that pair, with their itchy fingers on the gun triggers; but in another instant, they stood riveted, jaws gaping.

From the lips of Henry Arnaud had pealed an amazing burst of mockery; a tone so chilling that the listeners could not believe it came from a human throat. It was a fearful challenge which, in that spectral moonlight, filled them with a superstitious awe.

Strident, sinister, that sardonic taunt brought echoes from the hillsides,

as though a horde of ghouls had risen from woodland nooks to join in the challenge. It carried a menace that impressed those rustic marksmen.

They feared neither man nor beast, but they couldn't face a being whose mockery roused thoughts of supernatural creatures - ghosts and hobgoblins - that were the legendary relics of these hills.

Shotguns slipped from arms. Hands that gripped Loretta lost their hold. In the moments that followed, even the passage of time seemed halted - stayed by the laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX

DATED CRIME

To The Shadow, those lapsing moments offered the slimmest of opportunity; but opportunity it was. He had startled the hillbillies who faced him, thereby lessening their vigilance. But it wouldn't be long before the spell was broken.

Tightening every muscle, The Shadow suddenly hurtled forward in the moonlight, straight for the men who held the shotguns. They wheeled apart, swinging their guns with alacrity, ready to down an opponent who they at last realized must be human. They were not quick enough, however, to bag The Shadow before he reached them.

With a twisty dive beneath the barrels of the nearer gun, The Shadow grabbed for the farther weapon and shoved its muzzle upward. One shotgun belched a blast above his head; the other roared its charge past his shoulder. Swinging one man full about, The Shadow flung him against the other before either could discharge a second barrel.

Completing a swift whirl, he was among the men beside the touring car, wrestling with them for the possession of Loretta. In that close-gripped fray, The Shadow was no longer a target for the men with the shotguns. They didn't want to risk shooting their pals.

That forced him to continue the grapple. During it, the hillbillies were trying to shove Loretta into the car. The girl resisted, until The Shadow suddenly joined sides with his foemen - so far as handling Loretta was concerned. Headlong, the girl was pitched through the open door into the dilapidated back seat.

An instant later, The Shadow was squirming into the car himself. Flat on the floor, he doubled his knees and drove his feet for the nearest hillbilly, sending the fellow outward from the step. Thrusting a hand above his head, The Shadow yanked open the door on the other side.

Twisting up to the seat, he grabbed Loretta with one arm and took a long, flinging dive through the other side of the car. They hit the turf together, but Loretta's fall was broken by The Shadow's warding arm.

It was amazing, the speed with which the strange fighter came to his feet.

In the same move, he yanked an automatic from beneath his coat and jabbed shots through the space between the car doors. Those shots were aimed high; The Shadow had no wish to cripple any of the misguided hillbillies. His purpose was to rout them.

Those shots from The Shadow's .45 had stirred a hornets' nest. What the quarrel, nobody cared much, except that a stranger was involved in it. Everyone

at the barn dance was siding with the five who had grabbed Loretta. Men were dashing to their cars, shouting for others to bring their shooting irons.

Had The Shadow and Loretta taken to the woods, they would have been tracked down in rapid fashion. Instead, they skirted bushes that fringed the barnyard and reached the car that The Shadow had parked in front of Loretta's farmhouse residence.

Instead of following the driveway from the farmhouse, he took a short, sudden detour across rough ground through a clump of trees.

That move was wise, for a blast of shotguns sounded as the car cut

through
the tiny grove. Tree trunks took that hail, except for one slug that struck
the
back of the coupe; but it did no other damage.

Loretta took a bold look back, saw men at the open door of the farmhouse.
One was at the hallway telephone. Then, Loretta was looking straight ahead,
watching the road spring up in front of the headlights. She heard a whispered
tone beside her: the grim laugh of The Shadow.

TWO old cars had started down the road. Both drivers had the same idea:
to
block the path of the fleeing coupe before it left the farm property. They
were
trying to converge, to form the point of a V directly in The Shadow's course.

Loretta expected The Shadow to apply the brakes; to seek some other route
of escape. She didn't realize at that moment that such a move would have meant
disaster, for there was no other way except the road.

The Shadow didn't touch the brake pedal.

Instead, he gave the car the gas. It sprang into the road like a startled
whippet, boring squarely between the converging cars. It reached them before
they could close the gap, although their fenders were less than a car's width
apart.

There was a triple crash, wherein The Shadow literally sliced his car
between the other two. The coupe's momentum carried it through like an
avalanche of steel. It ripped fenders from the rattletraps, as it flung them
to
either side. The smashing sound still echoed in Loretta's ears as she looked
back again, this time to see two battered cars wobbling crazily on the sides
of
the road.

Shotguns throated their farewell as The Shadow piloted the coupe around a
bend. Then Loretta could hear the chugs of other motors, that became fainter
as
the coupe kept up its rapid pace. She settled back in the seat with a grateful
sigh, tried to fasten her torn frock together. From this point onward, Loretta
was sure, The Shadow could outdistance all pursuers.

They had gone fully two miles before Loretta was seized with new alarm.
She remembered that she had seen a man at the telephone in the farmhouse.
Perhaps he had been calling someone at the crossroads a half mile ahead.

Gripping The Shadow's arm, Loretta blurted the news. She saw him reach
beneath his coat and produce another loaded automatic. A few seconds later,
the
lights of the crossroads were ahead.

How The Shadow picked out the car that lurked in the darkness beside an
old store, Loretta never guessed. But he found it, and proclaimed the fact
with
bullets. From his sweeping gun came bullets that brought frantic shouts from
the
darkness. The Shadow was probing the ambush, as he approached it at fifty
miles
an hour.

The coupe took a swerve - an intended one, as Loretta realized afterward.
By that swing, The Shadow sent his headlights pouring into the space beside
the
building. Loretta saw men dive frantically for shelter.

From the cut of their clothes, the revolvers in their fists, she knew
that
they weren't hillbillies. They were thugs who had happened to be at this
crossroad.

FROM then on, Loretta watched the speedometer needle waver around the eighty mark, until they had left any pursuers miles behind. After that, The Shadow slackened speed, as he took a new route to a fair-sized city that was near the border of West Virginia and Kentucky.

When they stopped in front of a small hotel, The Shadow furnished Loretta with a light overcoat to cover her torn frock. When Loretta registered there, she carried The Shadow's briefcase, instead of a valise. He had given her money also. Coming from the hotel, she found Henry Arnaud seated quietly in a little cafe a few doors down the street.

Loretta couldn't say that Arnaud had become himself again, because she had come to the definite conclusion that there was no actual Henry Arnaud. Through her mind ran recollections of hoarse, excited voices shouting a name that night on the mountain highway. She could remember the cry:

"The Shadow!"

The title suited the amazing fighter who had twice rescued Loretta. He was not Henry Arnaud; he was The Shadow!

Nevertheless, in his role of Arnaud, The Shadow was a most genial personality; a man with whom Loretta felt exceedingly at ease. They were alone in their corner of the restaurant, so Loretta asked:

"What about the counterfeit twenty-dollar bills? Did you find any more with messages for the crooks?"

The Shadow shook his head.

"Those messages did not come from the head criminal," he told Loretta. "They were prepared by someone who is anxious to defeat the crooked game. Someone at crime's headquarters, who has managed to learn each new move in advance.

"That theory has impressed me all along. Tonight, I proved it to my satisfaction. Our unknown informant found no chance to put twenties into circulation, so he switched to ones. He marked the cash that was paid to natives in the hill region to search for you."

Loretta began to understand. During the ride, The Shadow had asserted that the hillbillies must be dupes; that was why he had dealt so lightly with them. Right now, he was bringing out a stack of one-dollar bills that Loretta realized he must have acquired at the barn dance.

"Our unknown friend," declared The Shadow, "hoped that these would circulate far enough to reach the right hands - my own. His hope was realized."

From the bills, The Shadow picked a few, passed them to Loretta with the monocle microscope, and added: "Look at these."

Again Loretta was examining currency that looked good enough to be genuine. She was chiefly interested, though, in the green-inked inscriptions that appeared in the thin border beneath the words "One Dollar" on the reverse of the bills. All were the same:

N. Y. C. - Th. p 3 - c 5.

After short perplexity, Loretta decided that "N. Y." meant New York; but the letter "C" seemed superfluous. The Shadow, however, did not regard it so.

"The reference is to a newspaper," he declared. "The letter 'C' must mean the Classic, which has a very wide circulation throughout the country. I took the rest of the abbreviation to mean 'Thursday, page three, column five;' and my supposition was correct."

From the chair beside him, The Shadow brought a copy of the Classic for the previous Thursday. He had been fortunate enough to pick up the newspaper at a local magazine stand, while waiting for Loretta to come from the hotel.

When he opened the sheet to the third page, and pointed out the fifth column, Loretta scanned it with eagerness. A small headline struck her eye; she

hadn't read a single paragraph before her expression became one of horror.

"It couldn't be!" she exclaimed. "Why, all the people mentioned here -"

"Are the very sort," interposed The Shadow, "who could be held for a huge ransom."

"But there are so many of them -"

"All will be traveling together. Their number will give them a false impression of security."

"But how -"

"How will the job be managed?" The Shadow smiled. "That is something I intend to learn, after I have joined them tomorrow morning. That is when they will start into the danger zone."

LORETTA nodded, solemnly. She remembered the map that The Shadow had shown

her. Then she began to listen to instructions that The Shadow undertoned.

He was leaving this town, for a destination where he would arrive at dawn.

His briefcase, with its contents, would remain in Loretta's custody until another man arrived here - a man who was a trusted agent of The Shadow. She was

to deliver the briefcase to that agent.

By that time - The Shadow expressed the hope in Arnaud's steady tone - crime might be broken. That accomplished, Loretta would hear from him again.

His promise given, The Shadow arose, smiled a friendly good night, and departed.

The Shadow, it seemed, had overlooked nothing. Yet, with his departure, Loretta could not repress a qualm that gripped her to the heart. Somehow, the new adventure that he was undertaking struck her as a duty surrounded by great and unknown hazards.

For the first time, Loretta Wyndon felt real, harrowing fear; not for herself, but for The Shadow!

CHAPTER X

MEN OF MILLIONS

DAWN glinted from the silver wings of a monoplane that was traveling southward. Below, rugged mountain tops lay like the frozen waves of a mighty sea. Those peaks were surrounded by a vast wilderness of trees that gave the green-tinged likeness to the billows of an ocean.

Though the plane's altimeter showed seven thousand feet, one great peak jutted almost to a level with the wings, as though challenging the plane's ownership of the higher air. That peak was Mount Mitchell, highest summit in the East, the towering giant that dominated the region known as the "Land of the Sky."

Veering as it passed Mount Mitchell, the plane zoomed above another line of crests. Then, as if produced by magic, came a complete change of the scene below. A valley opened among widespread mountains, and the vista was a wilderness no longer.

A city spread amid that valley, which could also have been termed a rolling plateau, since its altitude was two thousand feet above the sea. It

was

a modern city, with the tone of a metropolis, for its buildings were large and new.

The city was Asheville, North Carolina, metropolis of a resort region that

claimed visitors throughout all seasons of the year. Its hotels and residential

districts were not the only signs of the city's wealth. From spots near the banks of rivers, the chimneys of sprawling factories poured columns of smoke into the thin mountain air.

The plane banked as it sought the airport; then came to a perfect landing upon the field.

From the plane came a passenger - a tall, distinguished individual with a hawklike countenance. The Shadow had again resumed the personality of Lamont Cranston for this visit to Asheville, playground of millionaires.

Hiring a car at the airport, The Shadow rode along one of the roads that wound up toward a mountainside. His destination was the exclusive Skyland Club,

where the membership fee cost a small fortune. It happened that Lamont Cranston

was not a member of that club; but he had several friends who were.

AN hour later, The Shadow, playing his part of Cranston, was having breakfast with a group of men who had accorded him an enthusiastic reception at

the Skyland Club. The spokesman of the group was a middle-aged man named Richard

Baybrock, whose chief interest in life was collecting profits from the rayon industry, and having a good time with the money thus obtained.

"It's good to see you, Lamont!" enthused Baybrock. "Here we are, two dozen

of us, getting pretty tired of each other's company, when who pops up but you! We'll count on you to be the life of the party, provided that you can get any fun by joining in our childish sports. I imagine playing golf here in Asheville

would be rather tame sport to a big-game hunter and traveler, such as you."

The Shadow made a deprecatory gesture, said, "But tell me, Dick - why all this talk about Asheville? I thought you were leaving here today."

"So we are," declared Baybrock. "You must have read about it in last Thursday's Classic. If you did, you've heard about the big bus, haven't you?"

The Shadow nodded.

"It's the swellest bus ever built!" assured Baybrock. "A deluxe cruiser that rides as smooth as a yacht in a calm sea! We're taking a trip up to White Sulphur Springs, in West Virginia. But after we've been there a few days, we'll

come back here."

"How did you happen to decide on the bus?" asked The Shadow. "I thought that you always traveled by rail, in a private car, when you went with a crowd of friends."

Baybrock gave a snort.

"Do you know how the railways want to haul us?" he asked. "All over the map! Down one valley, around by another, from one line to another, with waits and layovers for the right connections. They've abandoned a lot of branch lines

that would help out; and, worst of all, they want to charge us according to their own mileage!

"It's less than three hundred miles from here to White Sulphur Springs, but it would be double if we went by rail. And we'd pay for the inconvenience. Bah! I've got money to spend, but not to throw away! Here - look at this map."

Baybrock spread the map upon the breakfast table and traced the route that the deluxe bus was to follow. The Shadow observed that it was not the main route from Asheville to White Sulphur Springs. The regular road went through such cities as Bristol and Bluefield, and Baybrock had decided to avoid them.

He preferred roads where traffic was lighter and the scenery better. Moreover, there were detours on the main road; bad ones. Baybrock's route required a few detours, but they would not prove annoying.

From the way he spoke, he had evidently chosen the route long in advance, which made The Shadow silently decide that by this time, Thumb Gaudrey could know all about it. While Baybrock was marking the roads with a blue pencil, another important angle struck The Shadow.

The route that the bus was to follow cut deep into the smaller circle that The Shadow knew to be a danger zone. The message that The Shadow had shown Loretta on a counterfeit dollar bill was more than accurate; it was ominous.

IN this party of Baybrock's were men of many millions. The wealthiest included Carter Sanders, owner of a merchant fleet; Titus Jenney, whose oil wells included some of the biggest gushers in Oklahoma; George Demble, whose annual output of chewing gum, if laid stick to stick, would probably gird the globe.

Besides, there was Hastings Bleer.

The Shadow saw him strolling past the spacious breakfast room - Hastings Bleer, a crab-faced man of seventy-five, who seemed to have solved the secret of perpetual youth, despite his dyspeptic look. Bleer, so far as energy was concerned, was a walking example of the product from which he had made millions: Oxotone, the famous nerve tonic advertised everywhere.

Hastings Bleer, the maker of Oxotone, who claimed that he intended to begin life at eighty! Along with Baybrock, Sanders, Jenney and Demble, Bleer would be a fine plum for the kidnap pudding that Thumb Gaudrey intended to cook.

There couldn't be a tinge of doubt regarding what Thumb intended. That tycoon of the snatch racket, past master and sole survivor from the band of crooks who had formed The Hand, was conniving to abduct this entire group of millionaires before they reached their destination in West Virginia!

At The Shadow's request, put in the calm tone of Cranston, Baybrock took the new member of the party out to see the bus. It was a splendid vehicle, quite worthy of Baybrock's boasts. The bus was painted a strong maroon, with tasteful decorations that followed its streamlined contours.

The windows alongside the commodious seats were spacious. The top was divided into sections that slid into one another, allowing full vision from below. That feature, Baybrock explained, would allow the passengers to view the scenery from every angle.

Moreover, the bus was equipped with every safety device. It was to be piloted by Baybrock's own chauffeur, a man of absolute trust and experience. Another chauffeur, who worked for old Bleer, was to act as relief driver.

"We'll give them both a dose of Oxotone," jested Baybrock. "Then watch this old buggy roll! This trip will make history, Lamont! Only, we won't get to White Sulphur before dark, as a lot of the crowd hope."

The Shadow asked why they preferred an early arrival. Baybrock explained that members of the party hoped to do some gunning in West Virginia. They were bringing along their shotguns and rifles.

"They must think they'll have a chance to wing something on the road," laughed Baybrock. "This bunch of sportsmen carry their guns loaded, even when they're on my private car. It's a good thing guns are made with safety catches

nowadays."

Baybrock, though he did not realize it, had solved a problem for The Shadow. Until he heard that statement, The Shadow had been vexed by the need of acquiring guns himself, to replace the brace of automatics that he had left in his briefcase, with his cloak.

He had also considered the necessity of having other armed men on the bus, to meet a mass attack if Thumb Gaudrey sprang one. Such worries were ended. This crowd, with Cranston as their leader, would be able to beat off an attacking band.

Yes, there would be shooting on this expedition, The Shadow decided, with bigger game than squirrels to intrigue the gentlemen sports.

One question alone remained; The Shadow asked it so casually, that Baybrock caught no clue to its importance.

"What about the roads, Dick? Are they safe for this heavy bus?"

"Absolutely!" assured Baybrock. "We've checked on everything - bridges, detours, all that sort of stuff. But I'm taking no chances. I'm sending servants ahead in cars.

"If they see anything that looks like a washout or a shaky bridge, they'll stop and wait for us. Yes, sir! When this journey is over, bus travel will have such a swell reputation that we'd better all buy stocks in bus companies, before they hit a new high!"

This opportunity - the bus trip - The Shadow believed, was the best for which he could have hoped. Whatever stroke Thumb Gaudrey made should prove a boomerang to the master crook. Of that, The Shadow was confident.

Sometimes confidence could become overconfidence - even with The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI

THE DANGER ZONE

LATE afternoon found the big bus purring smoothly through the West Virginia hills, over terrain resembling that which Loretta Wyndon had traveled on her trip south from Charleston, West Virginia.

Civilization was absent, though, except for traces of coal mines, many of them abandoned, that studded some of the rounded hills. The cleared spaces on the slopes showed squares of black: places where shafts drove down into the hill.

Sometimes the bus followed the valley of a creek, where ancient suspension bridges hung above roaring streams. Some of those crude affairs were no more than footbridges; others looked strong enough to bear the weight of a light car.

Those bridges, however, merely led to abandoned shacks across the streams, some of them close to the mouths of larger coal shafts. None of the paved roads crossed such bridges - as Dick Baybrock carefully explained, when questioned by members of the party.

Having disposed of such occasional inquiries, Baybrock seated near the front of the bus. was talking to his friend Cranston, who was across the aisle.

Baybrock was full of enthusiasm regarding one of his rifles.

"A sweet gun, Lamont!" he told The Shadow. "You could wing a mosquito at

a

hundred yards, with that telescopic sight. Take her; try her out when we do some long-range shooting tomorrow."

The Shadow accepted the rifle, and the cartridges that came with it. He opened the breech, slid in the clip of cartridges. then fixed the safety catch.

"Might as well load it," agreed Baybrock. "All this crazy gang carry their guns that way."

The bus had swung a long curve rising toward a hilltop. Upon a farther slope stood a rickety sign advertising a shoe store in a West Virginia town. A chorus came from the cluster of merry millionaires who saw the sign.

"What!" They chimed. "No Oxotone?"

Old Hastings Bleer swung around in his seat. His look was testy.

"Why should I advertise my product in this region?" he snapped. "People down here get healthy from the mountain air!"

"We saw one of your signs about fifty miles back," reminded one of Bleer's tormentors. "How do you explain that?"

"Near a city, probably," muttered Bleer, "or near a main road. You always see my signs advertised on main roads."

"Good old Oxotone," gibed another millionaire. "It saves its punches for those who need it - and have the cash to buy it!"

Bleer tried to get into the spirit of the fun.

"Maybe the folks around here can't read," he suggested. "If they can't, why waste signs? My advertising is smart."

"So are the hillbillies," someone answered. "Smart enough not to believe your advertisements."

Old Bleer looked angry. He turned away, faced the front of the bus. He clenched his fist around a double-barreled shotgun that stood between his knee and the window.

The group at the back of the bus must have recognized that they had ribbed

Bleer too much, for they dropped further comments concerning Oxotone. Nevertheless, Bleer himself kept a close watch for any signs that advertised his product, and grumbled when he saw none.

"We've got them here," he muttered, including the advertising department along with himself. "We've got them, all right. We cover every State. Yes, sir, Oxotone is advertised throughout the entire country; and that includes West Virginia!"

At the summit of a hill, the bus riders could see their road curving below. Along it, tiny in the distance, were the cars that carried the servants.

The midget procession bore left at a fork, and Baybrock gave an approving nod.

"That begins the last detour," he told The Shadow. "Only a dozen miles and a good road, but slow because of curves. Then we come into a wide highway."

THE hillsides had darkened by the time the bus reached the fork. Curving toward a valley, the bus had dropped below the level of the setting sun. Its headlights blinked on, as the big machine rolled into deeper gloom.

This portion of the journey was definitely in the danger zone, which was why The Shadow became more alert than ever. Added to the fact that they were off the through highway, he sensed a menace in the premature twilight that enshrouded the bus.

Hands tightened on the rifle, The Shadow saw a curve ahead. The bus took it at less than twenty-five miles an hour. Through a slight gap in the hills

peeked the sun, to give a sharp view of a bridge, a quarter mile ahead.

It was an unusual bridge for West Virginia, for it was one of the covered type, more common in New England States than in regions farther south. Those bridges were meant to shed snow in the winter.

What The Shadow wanted to determine was the strength of the bridge that the bus had to cross. He noticed that the two chauffeurs were both looking closely as the bus approached the bridge.

At last, they exchanged nods - with which The Shadow agreed. The bridge was certainly safe. Its timbers were mounted on heavy stone foundations; the beams showed signs of recent reinforcement.

Other cars had gone over that bridge, only a short while ago, and had kept on their way. The only problem that remained was the width of the bridge; and that was solved the moment that the bus swung the final bend.

Gleaming headlights showed that the bridge was ample both in width and height.

During those last few twists, the hovering sun had about disappeared again. Only a few rays could be seen through the opened slats in the top of the bus. The bus came almost to a stop, then poked its long nose into the tunnel of the covered bridge.

The front wheels jarred a loose board, made it rattle heavily. The two men who piloted the bus heard that clatter, but thought it unimportant. Only The Shadow noticed the click that responded, like an echo, not from the floor of the bridge but from the roof above.

Quickly, The Shadow sped a quick look to the rafters, just as a roundish object came tumbling from the beams. Snatching up the rifle, he made a swing to strike the thing aside before it came through the open top. A slight forward lurch of the bus prevented The Shadow's effort to stay disaster.

The big ball struck five feet behind The Shadow, hitting the edge of a closed section of the roof. It took a crazy bounce into the mist of the jolly group toward the back of the bus; there, it broke with a fierce puff.

Hearing the sound, the driver of the bus applied the brakes and halted in the very center of the bridge. He stared about, to gape in horror at a sight that The Shadow had already seen. A yellowish smoke was spreading through the bus, with a sizzle that drowned the wild shouts of the men it had enveloped.

Actuated by a wire from the loose board in the bridge, a big gas bomb had dropped among the millionaires. The lever beneath the board had been tightened so that the weight of an ordinary car would not spring it; but the bus, far heavier, had set off the device.

GRABBING the men beside him, The Shadow started toward the front door, motioning for the two drivers to jump. Behind the chauffeurs came The Shadow, dragging Baybrock and Bleer along with him.

All were choking from the gas that overtook them. Its odor wasn't deadly; it had an effect more like tear gas.

The pursuing fumes curled out through the bus windows, to cling within the walls of the bridge. Escape from the first snare had merely brought The Shadow and his companions into another almost as bad. There was still a chance, however, that they could scramble across the bridge before they were overpowered.

Then into the headlights, which seemed filmed by a yellowish haze, appeared foemen with threatening revolvers. Men who wore gas masks; fighters, hidden beneath the heavily buttressed bridge, who had risen to complete the work that the gas had begun.

Hastings Bleer saw them first, for The Shadow had started him ahead. The Oxotone magnate had his precious shotgun, and wasted no time using it. But in valuing time, he simply wasted shots. The gas-masked men ducked at sight of Bleer's weapon. He blasted both barrels into the space ahead, then stumbled in front of the headlights, choking from the gas.

The Shadow was driving forward, his left sleeve across his nostrils, his right arm raising the rifle to his shoulder. He didn't notice that Baybrock and

the men who had piloted the bus were sagging as they tried to follow.

Swinging the rifle back and forth, The Shadow delivered one-handed shots that ripped the old boards in the bridge wall. Men were banging back at him with their revolvers, but his flaying fire had them on the dodge, which marred the accuracy of their aim. Despite the recoil of the rifle, The Shadow clipped two of the men who harried him. Five strides more, he would have been beyond the bridge.

One attacker prevented that by chucking a smaller gas bomb, the size of a hand grenade. The object hit at The Shadow's feet, puffed its deadly contents up beneath his arm. Stifling, he staggered; then gripping the rifle barrel with

both hands, he swung the heavy butt toward heads that clustered about him.

Mechanically, The Shadow felt the jar that one thump brought. He had flattened one crook; he tried blindly to fell others, despite the choking effect of the gas. His swinging arm, seemingly, melted in air. He was floating into space; the bridge had vanished, along with the roar of the water beneath it.

The Shadow had flattened, although he did not know it. The floating effect

came from the hands that dragged him back into the bus, along with Baybrock, Bleer and the senseless drivers.

Vaguely, a roar came to The Shadow's ears during one of those moments that

he fought valiantly for consciousness. It was the sound of the starting bus motor. Crooks had taken the wheel.

Then a voice - a growl that seemed oddly muffled, though the tone was uttered not far from The Shadow's ears. Only a snatched portion of a statement,

but one that dented sharply on The Shadow's muddled mind:

"We're driving for old Oxotone -"

A mobster had uttered those words. They had some curious reference, perhaps to Hastings Bleer. The words thrummed through The Shadow's fading thoughts: Old Oxotone

Life returned to The Shadow's numbed hands. His eyes tightly shut from the

effects of the tormenting gas, he shoved his fists up from the bus floor where he lay, seeking the throat of the crook who had spoken those growled words.

As the bus heaved forward, The Shadow found that throat and gripped. There

was a gurgle from the confines of a gas mask, which the crook had half lifted when he spoke. Then came another foe that The Shadow could not see. A gun butt thumped The Shadow's head behind the ear.

The blow brought blackness. No longer did The Shadow try to solve the riddle of the words that he had so vaguely caught. The Shadow had become another senseless victim among those who lined the floor of the luxurious bus.

Thumb Gaudrey, master of the kidnap ring, was to acquire one more millionaire than he expected - in the person of Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow!

THE SHADOW AWAKES

WHEN The Shadow awoke, he heard the buzz of voices. They seemed a continuation of the last that he had heard, but he could not make out the words they uttered. From the blur, however, he remembered the last clear statement that had reached his ears.

He recalled the final moments of the fight beneath the roof of the covered bridge; how he had been dragged into the bus. Then the talk of "driving for old Oxotone" - something that made as little sense as when he had heard it.

The Shadow opened his eyes.

About him, he saw a garish scene. He was in a square room, where overlapping rugs covered the rough floor. Deeper draperies hung from the walls; but otherwise, the place looked like an office.

No longer tortured by the gas, The Shadow's eyes discerned the man who sat behind a large desk. That man had a bloated face. His eyes glared uglily from beneath brows gray-streaked like his hair. His hands, resting on the desktop, were mammoth ill-shaped talons.

The Shadow recognized Thumb Gaudrey.

There were others in the room; vaguely, The Shadow knew their voices. He looked about wearily, saw their faces. Out of the blur, they became plain.

Two of the men were Clip Rallin and Rigger Bayne. The Shadow gradually identified a third as Uke Flenn, from his memory of the fellow's photograph.

Slumped in a chair, The Shadow was the object of the conversation between Clip and Rigger.

"He's the same guy, I tell you!" insisted Clip. "The dude we saw in the hotel at Charleston."

"Yeah," agreed Rigger, his smile hard. "The bozo who was squinting through the molecule."

"Monocle!" corrected Clip. "And this" - he laid something in front of Thumb - "is the card he was looking at!"

Rigger reached to The Shadow's vest, grabbed a cord that hung there. He gave a tug, bringing the monocle from the prisoner's pocket.

"Here's the eye dingus," declared Rigger. Fragments of glass were falling as he spoke. "Only, it's broke. The guy must have busted it when he put up that fight."

The Shadow withheld a sigh of relief. The monocle was broken; that was a help. With the glass gone, there was no way for the crooks to learn of its magnifying properties. Nevertheless, he knew that he would be in for a sharp cross-examination from Thumb Gaudrey.

The big-shot had already noted the opening flicker of The Shadow's eyelids. Leaning across the desk, Thumb boomed a question:

"Your name is Lamont Cranston?"

Slowly, The Shadow nodded. Thumb added:

"What were you doing in Charleston?"

"Charleston?" The Shadow spoke coolly, in Cranston's tone. Then, as if he didn't understand: "Do you mean Charleston, South Carolina?"

"I mean Charleston, West Virginia," boomed Thumb. "You were seen there, a few nights ago."

The Shadow stroked the bruise on the back of his head. His attitude indicated an honest attempt to remember where he had been a few nights ago. At last, his manner brightened.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "I was in Charleston the night of the governor's reception. An interesting place! I liked it so well that I stayed

awhile, before I went on to Asheville.

"But where" - he looked about blankly - "just where am I at present? The last I remember was the bus - the covered bridge -"

Thumb Gaudrey was out from behind the desk, his big fists threatening to punch Cranston into submission.

"You know where you are, all right!" challenged Thumb. "What's more, you know who I am! Because" - Thumb added the accusation with a venomous snarl - "you are The Shadow!"

THE eyes that met Thumb's were calm, almost puzzled. If ever The Shadow had played the part of Cranston to absolute perfection, it was at that critical

instant. He didn't seem to recognize that Thumb was speaking of a person. Even the name of The Shadow was a novelty to Lamont Cranston.

Thumb Gaudrey finished his glare. Again, The Shadow felt an unexpressed triumph. He had bluffed the master crook; left him guessing. Thumb went back to the desk; he picked up the card that lay there.

"This belongs to you" - Thumb shoved the card in front of The Shadow's eyes - "so maybe you can tell us something about it. Let's hear you talk - and talk fast!"

Those final words were crafty. Thumb figured that if Cranston happened to be The Shadow, he would recognize the parlance of the underworld and swing into

a smooth, glib speech. Instead, The Shadow clung to his part of a half bewildered millionaire. When he saw the card, he actually laughed.

"Hold it farther from you," he told Thumb. "That's right - in the light. Look at those dots. Notice how they change into hexagons?"

Thumb looked at the card, raising his heavy eyebrows. He heard Rigger ask:

"What's a hexagon?"

"A thing with six sides," growled Thumb. Then to Clip and Rigger, who were peering over his big shoulders: "The guy's right! Those dots look like they were six-sided when you hold the card a little off."

Thumb went back to the desk. He held the card edgewise, snapped at it, to see if it had double thickness. While he flipped the edge of the card, he spoke to Uke Flenn:

"Send for the professor."

There was an interval, while Thumb played with the card. At last, he set his heavy chin in one big hand and looked directly at The Shadow.

"Maybe you're right," declared Thumb. "You millionaires have a hard time amusing yourselves. Maybe you would carry a screwy thing like this card around with you, just to show it to a lot of boobs like yourself."

"Again, maybe you wouldn't. Maybe this card means something." Thumb was reaching into a desk drawer; he brought a large magnifying glass into sight. "And if it does, I'm going to find out! The closer I look, maybe the more I'll see."

BEFORE Thumb could sight the card through the magnifying glass, there was a rap at the door. He laid the glass aside, bawled a command to enter.

Felix Dort stepped into the room.

"Hello, professor!" greeted Thumb, in a cordial tone. "Meet another of our guests - Mr. Cranston. Treat him nice, because he's got a wad of dough - if he's

the guy he claims to be. He might lend you some cash toward your ransom."

Dort shook hands with The Shadow, then turned toward the desk where Thumb was beckoning him.

"Look at this card," said Thumb. "What do you make out of it?"

Dort studied the honeycomb of circles, held the card at different angles, until he noted the six-sided appearance of the dots.

"It's a novelty," decided Dort. "Those circles form an optical illusion. They look like hexagons."

Thumb nodded.

"Maybe that's just a blind," he said. "Listen, professor, I want you to take this card down to your laboratory. Give it the works. Put the X ray on it.

Heat it. Test it every way you can think of, to find out if it's phony."

Dort smiled, as though pleased by the assignment.

"Then bring it back," added Thumb, "and tell us what you've found out. Maybe by the time you show up, we'll have found out something for ourselves. We're going to give this guy the heat!"

They "gave the heat" while Dort was gone. Between them, Thumb Gaudrey and his lieutenants made a police third degree seem kindergarten play, when they worked on The Shadow. They told him that he wasn't Lamont Cranston, and they backed that argument with wallops from a rubber hose.

They cited names and places involving that same Shadow, in hope that their

captive would betray some recognition. When they had finished with the beating,

The Shadow fell to the floor as limp as a figure stuffed with sawdust.

But he was still Lamont Cranston. Gaudrey had learned nothing.

"He's passed out," grumbled Thumb. "No use bothering him any longer. Send a guy down to tell the professor to get a move on."

It wasn't long before Felix Dort arrived carrying a much-crumpled card with many dots. Wearily, the investor laid the card on Thumb's big desk. Immediately, Dort became the center of attention.

"I've done everything," declared the inventor. "I used the X ray. I heated

the card looking for secret ink. I tried an ultraviolet ray. I gave the card an acid bath."

"It looks it," returned Thumb. "But what did you find out?"

"Nothing!" replied Dort. "The card means absolutely nothing unless -"

His eyes showed a glitter as they fixed upon the magnifying glass that lay on Thumb's desk.

"There!" exclaimed Dort eagerly. "That's all I lacked! A magnifying glass!

It may show something."

DORT reached for the glass. Thumb shoved him aside. The big-shot took the glass himself and held it over the card. He wasn't thinking of the groggy prisoner who claimed to be Lamont Cranston nor were his lieutenants.

On the floor The Shadow had stiffened. He was on one elbow ready to begin an upward spring. Groggy though he was, his eyes almost closed, his arms numbed

by twists that thugs had given them, he preferred battle as a last resort. It would be forced, The Shadow thought, the moment that Thumb Gaudrey saw those circles enlarged beneath the magnifying glass.

Then came momentary amazement.

Thumb clanked the glass on the desk tore the card to fragments and scattered the shreds angrily.

"Nothing!" he bellowed. "Nothing but a lot of black dots that look ten

times bigger when you see them through a microscope! That guy" - as Thumb pointed, The Shadow was relaxing on the floor - "isn't The Shadow! He's just another one of those screwy millionaires!

"Haul him away; shove him in a cell, like the rest of them. Stick him in the end cell - the one we kept empty. If he wakes up, tell him he's at the governor's reception!"

Clip and Rigger hauled The Shadow to his feet. From his limpness they thought that he was unconscious for he started a forward sprawl in their arms. They didn't notice the moment when The Shadow's eyes opened; when his lips took on a smile.

That was when The Shadow took a final look at the scrawny frame of Felix Dort as the old inventor shuffled out through the door. The smile was one that even The Shadow could not repress.

Here in the realm that Thumb Gaudrey ruled, The Shadow knew he had found a friend who could answer many questions; a man upon whom he could depend for future assistance.

That much-needed person was Felix Dort.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NEW ALLIANCE

HOURS passed before The Shadow moved stiffly upon the cell floor where his captors had thrown him. Recuperated from the rough treatment given by Thumb Gaudrey and his lieutenants, he was ready to begin a countermove.

At first consideration, such seemed impossible.

His cell was small, blocklike; barred by a solid steel door through which faint light trickled from slits high up on the barrier. Outside that door was a corridor leading past many cells as stout as this one. A guard was posted at the farther end of the passage.

The door was mechanically controlled; made to slide into the wall. Breaking through it, if that could be accomplished, would bring The Shadow into nothing but a more serious snare.

These cells, on a level slightly below that of Thumb's personal headquarters, were deep within the mastercrook's hidden domain. If trouble started hereabouts, even if The Shadow freed other prisoners to help him, the makers of that commotion would be boxed.

A few of Thumb's gas bombs, chucked by his ugly henchmen, would put any jail-breakers back where they started.

Reasoning thus, The Shadow began a study of the cell's interior. He noted that the walls were rough, but plainly discernible in the light that trickled through the door, for they were thickly whitewashed. The only rift was a small opening deep in the cell: a crevice that looked like a jagged window.

That gap was large enough for a person to squeeze through, but such a process was doubly blocked. First, by short bars across the opening - bars that rattled when The Shadow tested them. Those bars didn't amount to much; that was

why Thumb Gaudrey had replaced them by a stronger barrier, in the shape of a steel grating set beyond the bars.

The grating could not be attacked, for it had been put in place from the other side and was driven deep into the rock. Beyond the grating was blackness;

and from the absence of any breeze, The Shadow decided that the space outside was nothing more than a crevice that followed the line of cells, much like the corridor that ran in front of the doors.

From his knowledge of this hill country, The Shadow had a hunch. Working at the window, he wrenched away one of the old bars. It became a valuable tool.

Then The Shadow soon was hacking, scraping at the lower portion of the side wall that marked the final buttress in the long line of cells.

Whiteness disappeared, leaving a blackness that smudged The Shadow's fingers when he contacted it. His laugh whispered softly between smiling lips. The wall was what he had expected it to be: honeycombed rock, veined with coal.

This hidden domain, with its many passages and deep-hewn cells, was located in an abandoned coal mine; one of the many forgotten shafts that form subterranean caverns in the hills of West Virginia!

Thumb Gaudrey had enlarged the mine's corridors and rooms into an underground citadel, where he and his chosen followers could live like gnomes.

WORKING with his improvised pick, The Shadow was trying to chisel a passage through the deepest cell wall. The vein of coal led downward. That didn't promise much, but it was the only route to follow, for the coal yielded steadily and became a mound upon the floor of The Shadow's cell. At moments, the grim worker halted; not through weariness, but to listen for any sounds from the corridor. The greatest risk that The Shadow faced was the chance that some guard might overhear his hacking at the cell wall.

The Shadow had started another gouge, when he caught an echoed sound that seemed to quiver from the rock below the hole that he had chiseled. He waited; listening, he heard the tap repeated. Thumping the rock with the metal bar, he was rewarded by a prompt response.

Soon, messages were tapping back and forth through the sound-conducting rock. The man below understood Morse, and communication in dots and dashes became rapid. When The Shadow and the other man took turns at work, the idle one listened, then tapped his findings.

Eventually, they were hewing along the same slanted vein - The Shadow from

above, his friend from below. From the blows that he heard, The Shadow recognized that his helper must have a real pick that he was using lustily.

Shoulder deep in the hole that he had carved, The Shadow felt coal crumble at his feet. He tapped on the rock beside him; gnawing efforts ceased below. Punching with the steel bar, The Shadow opened a final crevice; squeezed through into a passage that received him like a chute. Thumping his way to the bottom, he found a man waiting with a flashlight.

The man was Felix Dort.

Beckoning, the inventor led The Shadow through a maze of passages, until they reached the laboratory. There, he pointed his visitor to a chair. From a hiding place beneath the efficiency motor, Dort brought out a dot-studded card.

"I kept it!" he chuckled triumphantly. "I saw what it was, when I used my microscope. A rogues' gallery, so I kept it. But I had to prepare another card"

- his voice became apologetic - "with pen and black ink. It took me a long while; otherwise, I would have relieved you sooner."

The Shadow nodded his understanding.

"You spoke of a microscope," he said. "Let me see it, along with the counterfeit bills on which you write your messages."

Dort grinned. He opened the cache and brought out the bills and the plates that went with them. He showed The Shadow his printing press concealed in the

lathe; then began an explanation.

"I'm not a counterfeiter," he declared, "but I must admit that such work always lured me. Not the desire for profit. you understand; but the joy of doing work to such perfection that it would stand the acid test of close inspection.

"Engraving was my hobby, but I limited it to honest work - stock certificates and such, for which I had a salable market. Then came the time when I was abducted, brought here - as the first of many persons to be held for ransom. I had no money, other than my royalties. Thumb Gaudrey sent me back, under guard, to pack up my laboratory and bring it here. I managed to secrete the printing press in the lathe. The counterfeit plates I engraved here."

Pointing with a scrawny finger, Dort indicated the big contrivance that he termed the efficiency motor.

"I told Thumb that this motor will bring a fortune, when perfected," the old man continued. "That is why he wants it. I know his game: once the motor has proven itself, he will kill me and appropriate it. But I foresaw that and brought my engraving tools with me.

"Thumb Gaudrey knows's nothing of the counterfeit bills that I produced, as the only way by which I could get word to the outside world. I gave him twenties, when I paid my ransom installments, and he passed them along to his lieutenants. When he wanted one-dollar bills instead" - Dort licked his lips in pleasure - "I had them for him!"

THE SHADOW kept short silence, then: "Have you any idea where this mine is located?"

Dort shook his head. He brought a map from a table drawer, spread it on a chair. A sweep of his thin hand indicated half of West Virginia.

"Somewhere in this area," he declared. "That is all that I know."

The Shadow's eyes became reflective.

"The bus was captured at six fifteen," he recalled. "Have you any idea at what time it arrived here?"

Dort's face showed eagerness.

"Yes!" he exclaimed. "It came in at half past seven! It was just after I had adjusted the disturber."

"Disturber?"

"Yes. This instrument with the revolving blades. Hear it hum? I designed it to create interference with radio reception. That is why Thumb Gaudrey has never found a radio set that will give him satisfactory reception."

The Shadow smiled at this new evidence of Dort's efforts to secretly harass the kidnap-king. Then, consulting Dort's map, The Shadow marked the spot where the covered bridge was located.

From that center point, he drew a circle with a radius of approximately thirty miles. Several roads went through the rim of that circle. The Shadow pointed them out to Dort.

"We are near one of these spots," he assured. "The mobsters would have brought the bus here without delay. Thirty miles, however, is the best that they could have done in an hour and a quarter."

Dort nodded agreement; then he asked: "But which road is the right one?"

"That will have to be determined later," replied The Shadow. "For the present. we must revert to your procedure of sending messages on counterfeit bills."

Dort looked pleased. He brought the microscope, the pen and the green ink.

He pointed to the stacks of false money, inviting The Shadow to choose the

denominations that he wanted.

Instead, The Shadow held the microscope above one of the engraved plates. Before Dort could stop him, he had picked up an engraving tool and was deliberately routing out some of the finer bits of workmanship.

"Don't ruin them!" wailed Dort. "Those plates required weeks to make!"

"And you made them too good." Coolly, The Shadow pressed Dort aside.

"This

portrait, for instance, will look better when the eyes are slanted. This border

requires a few flaws. Let's help this figure, by breaking it."

Dort gulped.

"You mean" - his eyes showed amazement - "that my work was too good?"

"I do," replied The Shadow. "It was almost sheer luck, my detection of these counterfeits. If we want our messages to reach the proper authorities, we

must first print new bills that bank tellers will recognize as counterfeits and

send in to Washington."

"But if the crooks suspect them -"

"They won't be poor enough for that." Dort, listening, saw that The Shadow

was making alterations very neatly. "Your new bills will pass with Thumb Gaudrey, just like the others did."

FINISHED with one plate, The Shadow started on another. He paused a few moments, to study Dort's efficiency motor, and a large packing case which stood in the corner.

"Pay Gaudrey all the money you have," said The Shadow. "That is, after we have prepared the new bills." He bent above the plate, worked carefully as he peered through the microscope. "I am engraving the message on the plates, so it

will be printed with the bills."

"But I need some excuse," injected Dort, "when I give Thumb all my money."

"Of course. You will tell him that you are eager to complete the ransom payments."

"Why should I have that sudden urge?"

"Because" - The Shadow leaned back, smiling - "you will also tell Thumb that you have perfected your efficiency motor; that you are ready to have it tested by the right experts."

Anxiety flickered in Dort's eyes. The delay on the efficiency motor had long been the thread that kept him alive. He foresaw a huge risk, if he followed The Shadow's instructions. Nevertheless, Dort was game. He simply asked:

"And after that?"

"You can tell me what Thumb has to say," replied The Shadow, "and we can plan accordingly. For the present" - he was rising, as he spoke - "I must leave

you. We must remember that you have work to do, and that I have a cell to occupy."

Getting back to that cell was not the only problem. The place would have to be fixed well enough to stand inspection when guards peered through the slits of The Shadow's door. Fortunately, the needed properties were in Dort's laboratory.

Slabs of veneer were stacked in a corner of the laboratory, and The Shadow

also saw a can of white paint. He told Dort to paint one sheet of wood; meanwhile, The Shadow took a tape measure and went up through the hole that

led
to his cell.

Returning, he marked the whitened veneer to the proper size and cut it to fit the hole. Taking a broom, The Shadow again went out to the passage, while Dort followed with the slab.

Back in his cell, The Shadow swept the powdery mound of coal down into the chute that he and Dort had dug. He sent the broom bouncing down through the cavity, as a signal to Dort that the sweeping had been finished.

Crawling up through the narrow, twisty hole, Dort managed to push the thin-ply veneer into the cell. Thanks to its irregular dimensions, there was a way to squeeze it past. While Dort was descending, The Shadow fitted the slab exactly to the hole.

With white paint that he had brought in an empty glue bottle, The Shadow touched up the edges where the slab met the wall, using a small brush that Dort had given him. When the job was done, the crack was gone from sight; it would remain invisible, even should captors open the cell door to admit more of the corridor's dull light.

The Shadow's cell was a prison no longer; but he preferred to bide his time, rather than attempt a mad escape. His life was not the only one at stake.

By biding his time, depending upon the cooperation of Felix Dort, The Shadow could set the stage for rescue of his fellow prisoners.

In preparing for a duel with Thumb Gaudrey, The Shadow had not forgotten that the master criminal was backed by a mobster horde. His plan was to snare that band along with Thumb Gaudrey, commander of the crooked crew.

CHAPTER XIV

WORD FROM THE SHADOW

WHEN Thumb Gaudrey's gigantic stroke of snatchery dawned on the outer world, it produced the greatest news sensation in a dozen years; a front-page story that built up day by day.

First, the deluxe bus with its cargo of millionaires had not arrived at White Sulphur Springs.

That was enough to start the wires ticking, feeding news to the big newspapers in New York. It was supposed that the bus had met with an accident somewhere along the route. As a result, the police of different States began a search.

They found no traces of the bus. They couldn't even learn where it had vanished. Natives reported having seen it in North Carolina, close to the borders of both Virginia and Tennessee. Had it continued on its course, it would have reached West Virginia; but there was a chance that it could have veered westward and reached Kentucky.

From all that anyone knew, that bus and its precious passengers might be in any one of five different States!

All those border districts, it happened, were within the circle that The Shadow had long ago formed; but the law knew nothing of The Shadow's earlier investigations of Thumb Gaudrey and the kidnap racket.

ON the fourth day of the search, a dazed man wandered along the roadway that led from Asheville, stumbling toward the Skyland Club, that residence of millionaires. Mistaken for a hitchhiker off the beaten path, he was warned to go elsewhere, until someone realized that he was in need of medical attention.

Carried into the Skyland Club, he was recognized as Carter Sanders, one of

the missing millionaires!

It was another day before Sanders could talk. He awoke from a doped condition; encouraged, he told what little he knew. Where the bus had been captured, Sanders couldn't say; but he was pretty sure that they were out of North Carolina when it had happened.

He remembered being quizzed by a man with an ugly bloated face, whose hands looked big enough to choke an ox. He told how he had been blindfolded, led to a cell; finally, how he had been doped. He muttered something about a letter somewhere on his person.

The letter was found in the lining of the coat that Sanders wore. It was from Thumb Gaudrey, although the kidnapper had signed no name. The message stated that the lot of millionaires would be released upon payment of two million dollars in ransom.

Carter Sanders, it appeared, had been put back in circulation as proof that the others would be freed, once the money was paid over. The big-shot, who had a score of millionaires as prisoners, could easily afford to let one go as a demonstration of his "good faith," as he termed it.

The reason why Thumb had released Sanders was because Thumb's quiz had produced a most important fact. Carter Sanders had gone to sleep in the bus while it was still in North Carolina. Therefore, he was the one man who could not give any worthwhile testimony as to where, how, and at what time the snatch had been staged.

Sanders had been gassed. So had the others. He knew that much.

Later, he had been doped, although the others probably hadn't. Since he had been dead to the world, agents of the head kidnaper had easily brought him back to Asheville and dumped him on the road to the Skyland Club.

Within a few hours, government men were listening to the millionaire's story. Since he had reappeared in Asheville, and crooks had brought him there, that city was the best starting point for an investigation. During the next few days, however, not another clue was uncovered.

AMONG the F.B.I. men who came to the Asheville base was Vic Marquette, long experienced in government service. Though technically in charge of operations, Vic chafed at what he considered to be inactivity. He would have liked to be among the more active searchers, who were scouring the mountains of five States for clues. But his job, for the present, was to stay in Asheville.

Six days had gone, and on this seventh day, Marquette was pacing the office that he and his men had taken temporarily, opposite a lofty hotel.

Vic's swarthy face was glum; his heavy mustache had a droop that came only when he had reached an absolute wall.

Another day half gone and nothing to show for it, until Marquette was suddenly surprised by the entrance of a man whom he hadn't seen for several years: Ted Revell, of the Secret Service.

Marquette had scarcely greeted his old friend, before Revell was spreading a batch of ten-dollar bills on the desk, asking Vic to look them over. Marquette did so with an expert eye.

"Hamilton looks sour," he declared, pointing to the portrait on the bill. "His lips aren't right. Neither are his eyes. Not enough shading over the left one."

Revell turned the bill over. Marquette found objections to the appearance

of the treasury building depicted on the back. He also pointed out smudges in the border beneath the words "Ten Dollars."

He laughed when Revell handed him a microscope.

"You think I've gone blind?" demanded Marquette. "Say - I could spot that note for queer money if I looked through the wrong end of a telescope!" Then, angrily, he added: "Say, Revell, if you've got business here in Asheville, you'd better attend to it! I'm busy working on a kidnap case."

"I know it," returned Revell. "That's why I want you to use the microscope."

A few seconds later, Vic Marquette's peering eye was goggly as it looked through the glass. Those marks on the lower border of the counterfeit ten-spot were not smudges. They were finely printed letters, which, when enlarged, bore a brief message.

That message was to Vic Marquette!

It read:

Marquette. See V. Put men in circle.

More later. S.

"What do you make out of it?" inquired Revell. "who's 'V' and 'S'?"

"'V' is a chap named Vincent," declared Marquette, his thoughts stirred by a chain of recollections. "And 'S' stands for The Shadow. This means that when I find Vincent - his full name is Harry Vincent - I'll find out what the circle is."

Marquette put in a long-distance call to New York. While he awaited its completion, he told Revell a few brief facts about The Shadow. It seemed that on several occasions, Vic Marquette had cracked some tough cases through The Shadow's aid; that in addition to such favors, The Shadow had stepped in to save Vic's life during emergencies that had arisen.

In the course of those events, Marquette had formed a friendship with a young man named Harry Vincent. Although Harry had never claimed to be an agent of The Shadow, Vic was sure that he served in that capacity. However, Vic Marquette was quite as convinced that Harry Vincent did not know the actual identity of the mysterious personage whom he served.

The message on the counterfeit bill, combining the letters "V" and "S," was a sufficient link for Marquette to connect the persons concerned. He was convinced that any message from The Shadow could only relate to the wholesale kidnapping plot.

When The Shadow battled crime, he invariably took on the most difficult cases available. It was no surprise - at least not to Vic Marquette - to find The Shadow again leading the nationwide drive against some hidden supercrook.

THE call came through from New York. Vic Marquette learned that Harry Vincent was not at the Hotel Metrolite, where he usually stayed. He had left there a few days ago; and recent word from him stated that he had arrived - of all places - in Asheville, North Carolina!

In fact, Harry was reported to be stopping in the very hotel that Vic Marquette could see from his office window!

It took the Fed just two and one half minutes to contact the hotel and learn that Harry was actually registered there. Unfortunately, he had gone out a few hours before, and had said that he would not return until late in the day

Vic Marquette fingered the counterfeit ten-spot that lay on the desk. He heard Revell remark that several such bills had been picked up; that he had found one at a bank in Asheville that very morning.

"That gives us a lead!" exclaimed Marquette. "Some of the kidnap mob were here! They must have been, because they dumped Sanders in Asheville! They're

the bunch that are shoving this queer, without knowing it!"

He held the bill closer to the light, intrigued with the new theory.

"There's to be more word later," mused Marquette. "Maybe it's already on the way." He snapped his fingers. "Make the rounds of the banks, Ted! Right here in town. Look over currency of other denominations. Maybe you'll find some other brands of queer dough."

One hour later, Marquette received an excited call from Revell. Over the phone, he learned that the Secret Service man had uncovered a few fives and one twenty - all bills that showed the flaws of counterfeits.

They bore other messages to Vic Marquette. Word for him to post men secretly in certain cities near the borders of West Virginia; to await a call from the mysterious "S," who represented none other than The Shadow.

Vic Marquette decided to follow those instructions to the letter; to be ready, at The Shadow's bidding, when the crucial period came. Spreading a map on his desk, Marquette stuck pins into the towns named in The Shadow's messages. He noted that they were in a circular arrangement.

"There's our circle," announced Marquette, when Revell arrived. "Not as perfect as it ought to be, but it will do until we hear from Vincent. Somewhere

in that circle" - Vic was confident in tone - "is the kidnapper we're after. But

we can't afford to let him know we want him."

Revell eyed the circle. It looked good, but it covered a large area. He saw Marquette writing orders for F.B.I. operatives to station themselves at places indicated by the pins. Revell gave a doubtful headshake, as he asked:

"What next?"

Vic Marquette returned a grim stare.

"What next?" he echoed. Then, in a tone that put an end to doubt: "The Shadow knows!"

CHAPTER XV

THE COVERED TRAIL

WHILE Vic Marquette was making plans in Asheville, a speedy coupe was racing northward from that city, carrying two persons who were very much alert.

One, the driver of the car, was a young man of clean-cut appearance, whose eyes were intent upon every scene along the highway. He was Harry Vincent, the man that Marquette had tried to reach too late.

Harry's companion was a girl, who ordinarily would have interested him much more than the passing scenery; for she was a very lovely and agreeable person. She was not disappointed, however, by Harry's lack of attention toward her. Loretta Wyndon was herself quite as interested in this quest.

A fork in the road caused Harry to pull over to the side and consult a road map, which Loretta, too, studied from across Harry's shoulder.

"I'd say the bus took the left fork," decided Harry. "A swing that way would have taken it well up toward White Sulphur Springs."

Loretta voiced her agreement.

They took the road to the left, each watching from a different side of the

car. They were in West Virginia and the roads here were winding, rolling, yet monotonous with hills all studded with the tiny shafts of coal mines, far up the slopes.

Through both their thoughts kept running the circumstances that had brought about this quest.

Harry Vincent had joined Loretta Wyndon in the small city where The Shadow had left her. Loretta had given Harry the briefcase containing all The Shadow's papers - the folder stamped with the symbol of The Hand; the map marked with the circle, as The Shadow had finally narrowed it; written papers giving the facts that linked Thumb Gaudrey, sole survivor of The Hand, with that very circle.

The briefcase also contained The Shadow's cloak, gloves and hat. It had held a brace of automatics; but only one of those guns was at present in the briefcase, which was now behind the seat of the coupe. The other .45 was fully loaded, resting in Harry's pocket.

There was good reason why Harry had the gun so close to hand.

He and Loretta had gone to Asheville, after hearing that one of the millionaires had returned there. Today, Harry had decided upon a new field of investigation: the circle marked on The Shadow's map. From all that had passed within that circle, entering it would be an unwise venture for any unarmed person.

Particularly persons so closely associated with The Shadow as were Harry Vincent and Loretta Wyndon. For both had been overwhelmed by the fact - true, though it seemed incredible - that The Shadow must have fallen prey to the vulturous band of criminals who served Thumb Gaudrey!

They could only hope that The Shadow had remained alive by continuing to pose as one of the captured millionaires, those unfortunates held by Thumb Gaudrey in some invisible stronghold that both Harry and Loretta would have given worlds to find.

Perhaps they could find it somewhere in this danger zone!

That was their hope. It might have been a complete conviction, had they known of the clues that had reached Vic Marquette. But Harry Vincent had avoided the F.B.I. man while in Asheville. It would be better, he thought, to make this trip, and contact Marquette later.

Thus, The Shadow's first message had failed to score a bull's-eye. Fortunately, he had sent out later details that had also reached Marquette. Somehow, The Shadow had foreseen that chance might prevent a meeting between Vic Marquette and Harry Vincent.

Chance was moving in to play an immediate part, while Harry's car rolled through those lonely hills.

SWINGING a bend, Harry heard Loretta give a slight exclamation. The girl was pointing toward a creek that rolled through the valley; she had seen a covered bridge that crossed it. The unusual sight intrigued her.

It intrigued Harry, too. The afternoon was late; from their angle, the bridge blended with the scenery, then caught the sun's glow as they approached.

Nearing the bridge, Harry halted the car just in front of it; he looked at Loretta.

The girl smiled. There was something romantic about a covered bridge. She thought, for the moment, that Harry's interest had at last drifted from his quest. Then she saw that his expression was very serious.

"That Sanders chap," remarked Harry. "Remember what the papers had to say about him? His description of what happened to the crowd?"

"He said he was gassed," recalled Loretta, "and that he thought the others

were, too. The Feds believe that a gas bomb was set off in the bus."

Harry nodded.

"That bus had an open top," he said. "We saw the pictures of it. The theory is that the gas worked so rapidly that its escape didn't matter. But that bothered me, until -"

He drew a pipe from between his lips, pointed the stem toward the covered

bridge. Loretta gasped a sudden understanding:

"If the bus had been going through the bridge. the gas couldn't have escaped so quickly!"

"Exactly!" said Harry. "What's more" - he pointed the pipestem upward - "the bomb could have dropped from those rafters. I'm going to take a look at that bridge."

Take a look he did, and came back with the news that the boards at the side of the bridge were splintered as if by gunshots. There were stains, too, he said, that might have come from settling gas.

Harry drove slowly through the bridge. The road on the other side followed

the creek, keeping well along the brink. At one spot where the grass thinned, Harry saw a pile of old boards. He was to remember them a short while later after the highway had revealed no other clues.

Turning at a dirt road, Harry drove back to the bridge, on the hunch that he had missed something there. Coming up the creek, he and Loretta caught a straight view of a small dam that they had not previously noticed.

"Look how the water is coming through!" exclaimed Harry. "That dam has broken recently."

"It's very old," declared Loretta, "and weak. Perhaps a heavy rain -"

"There haven't been any heavy rains. My hunch is that the dam was pulled just after the bus vanished. Let's go back down the creek."

THIS time, Harry got out and looked at the board pile. On the bank just beyond the pile, he noticed marks against the creek's edge, as if boards had been placed there and pressed into the soil.

Loretta, looking from the coupe, was puzzled when Harry took off his shoes

and socks, then rolled up his trousers and began to wade in the creek.

The water was shallow, although if Harry had waded farther out, he would have found it hip deep. Shallow enough, however, in most spots, to serve his next purpose.

Stepping back into the car, Harry swung it over the brink and down into the creek. Before Loretta could catch her breath, they were plowing through water that would have stopped the motor, except for Harry's careful management.

Keeping at low speed, he continued that course for a full mile, until Loretta was used to the sensation of navigating a stream an automobile. Then, as the sunlight glinted on the water ahead, Harry swung into shallows on the left.

A stony road opened up beneath the wheels; the coupe jerked up the bank.

Harry was out again, pointing enthusiastically to muddy marks along the abandoned road.

"That creek was almost dry below the dam," he explained. "It gave them the

idea to bring the bus along the creek bed. They made tracks, but they destroyed

them by having men pull the dam afterward.

"This road doesn't show on the map. It's forgotten; covered over with weeds and trees. But we can travel it, like the bus did. Do you know where it's going to take us?"

Loretta shook her head. Harry showed her the road map. He didn't have to word an explanation. It showed itself on the map.

A dozen miles away from the road where the bus had vanished was another paved highway, that kept a parallel course among the hills, then took a long swerve. The map showed no connection between those two roads.

To reach one from the other would have meant a roundabout course of more than fifty miles, by highway. But there was a shorter link between the two;

one
that only Harry had managed to detect. That link was formed by the creek and
the
stretch of old roadway that faded away in the woods.

It was difficult, in the gloom of the trees, to pick the course that
Harry
wanted. But he managed it, and all along were occasional indications that the
bus had traveled this direction. At last, the remnants of the road were gone;
but a swing back to the creek made up for it.

Harry forded the coupe through the stream, found a dirt road on the other
side. It led to the highway.

It was then a question of going left or right, for the ground had been
smoothed to cover any tracks of the bus. The left was Harry's first choice; he
drove along at twenty miles an hour, straining his eyes for any other clue.

He hadn't turned the lights on, for there was still some daylight among
the bare slopes where the present route curved.

NEARING a side road, Harry saw another car swing in ahead of him. From
the
reckless sweep it made; he was sure that its driver hadn't noticed the coupe.

Although the car ahead lacked lights, Harry kept track of it for several
miles. He saw it gain; then take a bend in the road, a full mile ahead. When
he
reached that bend, Harry had another distant view, helped by a break in the
hills, where the yellow of the sunset glimmered.

There was a long stretch of road ahead; a stream to the left, with a
rickety suspension bridge that led across to a spot where a house had been,
but
stood no longer. Nothing else, except some sparsely placed advertising signs,
could be seen among these lonely hillsides.

A scene that was amazingly lonely. For somewhere along the road ahead
should have been a car - the one that had swung in from the byways. But the
car
wasn't in sight. It had vanished!

Gone - like the bus that had disappeared a week or so ago! That thought
pounded Harry's brain; and Loretta, also looking for the missing car, grasped
the same idea. Even their trail had vanished, which meant that they had
reached
the end of it: the very goal they wanted.

Grimly, Harry eased the coupe toward the hanging bridge. The sun seemed
to
set as they neared it, for the bridge was at a lower level. Then gloom was all
about them, for the sun had obligingly disappeared as Harry pointed the coupe
along beside the creek.

He was away from the bridge, parked in a spot that seemed safe, with
increasing dusk an ever greater help. In a silence that seemed great despite
the murmur of the stream, Harry told Loretta to remain in the car.

On foot, The Shadow's agent intended to follow the last short stretch of
the amazing trail.

CHAPTER XVI

CROSSED PLANS

OUTDOOR twilight brought no change to the atmosphere of Thumb Gaudrey's
invisible domain. There, it was always darkness, except where hanging
incandescents glimmered from the roofs of narrow rough-hewn corridors.

Along one of those passages a scrawny man was moving eagerly, unmindful

of
the irregular floor that often made him stumble. Thuggish guards chuckled as he
passed. They always had a laugh when Felix Dort went by in a hurry.

The old professor was making one of his frequent visits to the big-shot. Funny, the way Thumb humored the goofy old inventor. But Thumb was smart; therefore, he must have a reason. Such were the opinions of the crooks who were
on vigil; and it applied to the huge hoodlum who stood outside Thumb's office. He let Dort enter without announcement.

From behind his desk, Thumb raised his heavy brows and noted Dort's enthusiasm. The big-shot laid his huge hands on the desk, pushed back to hear what the inventor had to say.

"It's finished!" cackled Dort. "Working to perfection, as I promised it would be! It will stand any test, and prove itself! My efficiency motor is perfected!"

For once, Thumb let his own enthusiasm show. He came up from behind the desk and strode for the door, beckoning for Dort to follow. Panting, the old man stood there clinging to the desk that Thumb had left. In his eagerness, Thumb did not notice that Dort looked exhausted.

He was outside the door, giving orders to the guard, before he realized that Dort had not come with him. Angrily, Thumb turned about to go back into the office.

At that moment, Thumb was several feet along the passage. He could not see
into the office; therefore, he failed to catch the move that Dort had made. With
a new show of eagerness. the inventor had whipped his hand to the curtained wall
in back of the kidnaper's desk.

Lifting that drape at a spot where it was smooth, Dort gained the glimpse that he expected. There was an opening in the jagged wall that the curtains masked - the entrance to a long, dark corridor that formed a slight incline.

Dort's left hand let the curtain fall. His right, still clamped to the desk, gave a jerk that pulled him back to standing position. He sagged, breathing hard again; his eyes were half closed, as Thumb stepped into sight.

A half-phrased oath stifled itself on Thumb's big lips. He smoothed his voice to a humoring tone.

"Come on, professor," he suggested. "We'll go slow. You've been wearing yourself out; you've got to take it easier."

Dort nodded feebly. He let Thumb help him along the corridor. Their slow progress accounted for the interruption that came when two men shouldered in from another passage. The arrivals were Uke Flenn and Rigger Bayne.

"EVERYTHING'S riding jake, chief," informed Uke. "The Feds aren't getting nowhere. Of course, we haven't dropped in to say hello to them; but we've been listening a lot of places. They're still hanging around Asheville, wondering what to do next."

Rigger added a corroborating nod, along with the half smile that certified
his agreement.

There was coldness in the way Thumb Gaudrey took the news. The big-shot pulled a heavy watch from his vest pocket, studied it sourly.

"You got back too early," he told his lieutenants. "Unless it's cloudy outside."

"It isn't cloudy," admitted Uke. "The sun has set, though."

"But there still was some daylight, wasn't there? Listen, both of you, that order of mine is more important than ever! No pulling in here before dark.

When it's dark, you can spot the glims of other cars and douse your own. Remember it!"

Felix Dort was reaching up to tap Thumb's big shoulder. Reference to the sunset hour had aroused his interest.

"If it's dark outside," remarked Dort, "you can ship my motor, Mr. Gaudrey. With a whole night ahead, you can get it to New York by morning."

Thumb looked interested.

"Get hold of Clip," he told Uke and Rigger. "Tell him to have the truck crew ready. Clip will drive; you two cover."

When Thumb and Dort reached the laboratory, they were greeted by the sound

of a purring motor. It was Dort's efficiency motor, standing on its table, which, in turn, was deep in a large crate.

"I started to pack it," explained Dort. "Then I realized that you would want to see it in operation. Watch!"

He worked at levers; the motor speed increased, as indicated by a dial. There was another indicator that registered the fuel consumption, and Thumb was

pleased to see how slowly it advanced.

Dort was talking in terms of kilowatts, ratios, friction elimination, and what not; but Thumb was more interested in the dials alone. They couldn't lie, and the story they told was a pleasant one.

This motor would supplant many other types, rendering them obsolete. It showed economy at higher speeds, with less wear on the parts. Once on the market, it would have a steady sale through its own merits.

There were "millions in it," according to Dort, and while Thumb doubted that claim, he was convinced that profits from the motor's manufacture would be

the blind that he needed, to account for the wealth that he soon would spend.

While Dort bent above the motor, working at the levers, Thumb eyed him with a contemptuous glare. One clamp of Thumb's big hands around the inventor's

scrawny neck would mean the end of Felix Dort. In perfecting his motor the inventor had arranged his own doom.

However Thumb would need Dort for a while. If the motor failed to meet full specifications, it would require improvement. Thumb was anxious to get that over with; therefore, he fell in with Dort's next suggestion.

"You must ship it at once!" pleaded Dort. "I have rushed the work so that the motor could reach New York in time for demonstration at the convention of mechanical engineers. There are only a few days left."

He paused; his eyes took on an eager gleam, as he added plaintively:

"If I could only go -"

"Not a chance, professor!" interposed Thumb gruffly. "We're keeping you here. But I'll see that the motor gets its test. Where's the instruction sheets?"

Dort produced them. Thumb glanced over them, a smile on his big lips. This

would be soft for Clip Rallin to handle. Clip had a rep as a promoter. He'd sold

gold bricks, fake oil wells, and "green goods" in his time. Given something legitimate, Clip would go places. This motor was just the ticket.

Thumb could picture Clip demonstrating it to the engineers with no other object than to gain their opinions and testimonials. No stock to sell; no build-up. Nothing, except to learn if the machine had the goods.

If it had, one man would own that motor outright and he would be Thumb Gaudrey. The name of Felix Dort would never be connected with the Gaudrey Efficiency Motor, as it would be called.

THUMB noted Dort stooped above the motor, crooning to his brain-child. He

couldn't hear the old man's mutterings but he decided they must be some foolish babble. Thumb was wrong.

"There's another way out," Dort was telling the motor. "Through the curtain behind the desk. A long shaft that goes up into the hill -"

As Thumb approached, Dort sped the motor, drowning his words with its hum.

Then with lips moving wordlessly, Dort pulled the switch that cut off the motor.

Thumb called men in from an outer passage. They helped Dort finish the crating of the motor in its solid padded box. Dort told them the motor could be

carried on its side without injury So they tilted the box. It made a burden five

feet long and four feet square.

They lugged it to the underground garage where Dort, blinking from a doorway where he stood with Thumb, got his first view of a big bus that occupied the center of the vaulted chamber, its nose pointed outward.

The box carriers passed the bus and put their burden in a light truck. Clip Rallin was at the wheel; two other men joined him in the front seat. Rigger Bayne and Uke Flenn showed up to hop aboard with the crate.

Big doors slid open, closing after the truck passed. Outside, the truck felt its way through thick darkness. At last, its dim lights blinked into being.

Uke and Rigger dropped off; they watched the truck cross a level space, then take a short climb to a road. As it wheeled from sight around a bend, Uke said:

"O.K. - let's go back."

Rigger's hand clamped Uke's arm.

"Listen!"

Both heard it: the clatter of a small stone rolling against a rock. The sound was repeated farther away in the darkness. A flashlight gleamed cautiously.

Someone had been out here watching the truck's departure. Not knowing that

two men had dropped off to cover that same departure, the unknown man had lessened his caution. He was moving back to some base.

Following, stealthily in their tread along the ground that they knew so well, the two crooks were guided by the flashlight's blinks. They caught a glimpse of a car that the man was about to enter. As the car door swung open, the thugs made a spring.

THE attack was swift. They bowled their unsuspecting adversary to the ground. As he flattened there, helpless, they heard a girl's stifled scream from the car. Rigger dived through the open door, gained a grip upon the second victim.

The girl made a valiant fight, even after Uke added his weight to the struggle. Breaking away, she was momentarily lost from view; for her dress was dark. It was Uke who made a grab for her, to catch the back of her dress.

She tore away, letting the dress rip as she went. Uke was left with the discarded garment as his only trophy; but the girl's chance for escape was ended. Her slip was white; its silkiness showed wraithlike in the darkness as she stumbled away across the stony ground.

Rigger traced her; overtook her. Diving for her ankle, he tripped her upon

ground which fortunately was softer than the stony soil, for it was the turf along a creek bank. Nevertheless, the girl was jarred; too helpless to put up further battle.

Rigger dragged her into the light that Uke supplied. It was Uke who first recognized her.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "It's the Wyndon dame!"

Rigger leaned around to stare at Loretta's face. With a chuckle, he shoved her into Uke's grasp.

"You drag her in," said Rigger. "I'll haul the guy that's beside the car."

Rigger's flashlight shone on the face of Harry Vincent, showing the victim pale, half senseless from a blow he had received on the side of his head. Harry

mumbled thickly, as Rigger pulled him to his feet.

Then he was staggering, slumping in Rigger's grasp, when they reached the entrance to the underground garage where Uke's stubby fingers had a throttle hold on Loretta's smooth neck, ready to supply a choking grip if the girl attempted to escape.

Big doors slid back. Loretta felt a chill from the cavernous vault of the garage. Where she was going, she could not guess, except that she would ultimately meet Thumb Gaudrey, the big-shot who ruled the crooks who had captured her.

The same Thumb Gaudrey who had managed to overpower The Shadow!

That thought awoke horror in Loretta's mind, coupled with a dread of everything to come. Her fears were not for herself, but for Harry Vincent. An agent of The Shadow, Harry could expect no mercy from the kidnaper king.

Valiantly, Loretta tried to whisper encouragement to her fellow prisoner. With the grasp that Uke held against her throat, words couldn't leave her lips.

But words, perhaps, would have been useless.

Harry's own mumbles told that he was in no condition for coherent conversation. Out of his mutters, Loretta could distinguish only a single word,

that Harry repeated as though his fate depended on it.

"Oxotone," he muttered. "Oxotone -"

Crossed plans had brought disaster. In his eagerness to have his motor shipped to the outside world, Felix Dort had unwittingly caused the capture of Harry Vincent and Loretta Wyndon.

All had done their best to serve The Shadow. In their turn, they would need The Shadow's aid to remedy the new misfortunes!

CHAPTER XVII

THE CIRCLED TRAIL

THE truck that Clip Rallin was driving had covered just thirty miles in slightly less than one hour. That was good time, considering the winding roads and heavy slopes up which the truck was forced to labor.

A few more hours, they would be on a better highway, a through route where

the light truck could average close to fifty. They would then reach more congested areas, away from all suspicion.

But Clip wasn't worrying for the present. The search for the vanished bus had become very feeble. He wasn't apt to be stopped along these back roads. Besides, what connection could anyone find between Dort's crated motor and the kidnap racket run by Thumb Gaudrey?

All that concerned Clip was how well the big crate was riding. At intervals, he had ordered his companions to look into the rear of the truck and

make sure that the box hadn't shifted. Their reports were always the same: the

crate was riding well.

At times, there were slight creaks from the rear of the truck; the sort to be expected when traveling over an irregular road. One of those creaks differed

from the others, although none of the men in the wide front seat noticed it.

The creak came from the crate. It moved backward a few inches. Three minutes; then another creak, accompanied by a slight scrape. Again the crate had performed a peculiar backward shift, too short to draw attention.

The reason became visible. The end of the crate had opened. That end, pointed forward in the truck, was actually the bottom, when the big box stood upright. It was the portion that held the table to which the motor was clamped.

Someone was in that crate bottom - a person who had been packed there when

Dort had started the crating operation alone!

Hands had opened the box end; they had worked the crate back, far enough for a body to squeeze out and come up behind the seat where Clip and the crooks

were riding. The face that showed dimly was one that Clip Rallin would have recognized, had his gaze been backward, instead of along the road.

It was the hawkish face of Lamont Cranston - the prisoner that Thumb Gaudrey had once suspected was The Shadow. Instead of occupying a cell, as did the other millionaires, Cranston was a secret passenger traveling his way to freedom.

AS he squeezed higher from the narrow space, Cranston became The Shadow, by deed though not in appearance. His long-fingered hands slid over the top of the truck seat, inched toward the neck of the crook who rode in the middle.

An instant later, those fingers clamped the neck in question. The Shadow's

thumbs pressed hard against the fellow's arteries. The crook didn't give a gasp;

he tightened, then slipped slowly downward. The Shadow had supplied a method of

so-called jujitsu that he had learned in Java; actually, a system of paralyzing

a victim by cutting off the blood stream to his brain.

Clip elbowed the slumped man beside him, then spoke to the crook on the far side of the seat.

"He's gone to sleep," gruffed Clip. "Wake him up. After a while, we'll stop for coffee. A dose of Java will make him stay awake."

The thug didn't waken when prodded. He had already had a dose of something

that came from Java, quite different from the coffee to which Clip referred.

"What's wrong with him?" demanded Clip, turning from the wheel. "He looks like he's passed out! Say -"

Clip's words ended with a snarl, as hands sped above the slumped crook's back. They were aimed for Clip's throat, and to avoid them, Clip tried to perform two operations at once. With his left hand, he was yanking the steering

wheel; while his right tried to pull a gun.

The hands took Clip's neck, shoved him downward, to force his feet against

the brake pedal. The truck was jouncing to a stop, as Clip lost his hold on the

wheel and let the half-drawn gun slip from his fingers.

By that time, The Shadow had swung to fight off a last adversary: the fellow from the right. They were locked in a hard struggle, during which the

crook tried to slug with a revolver that he had drawn but had found no time to shoot.

The Shadow twisted the thug's gun wrist just as the man's finger found the trigger. The revolver roared, but its muzzle wasn't toward The Shadow. It was pointed at the sideward-tilted head of Clip Rallin.

Half groggy, Clip was lying across the wheel, his foot tight on the brake pedal. He took that bullet through the brain; his body twisted toward the window. Immediately, the pressure left the brake, for Clip's inert foot slipped from the pedal.

The stalled truck began a slide down a slope; it canted toward a steep bank.

Jerking his last opponent clear across the seat, The Shadow grabbed the handle of the emergency brake. Ratchets clicked, but that was all. The hand brake hadn't been inspected for six months; it was so worn that it was worthless. The truck took a dive through a clump of bushes and began a series of long bounces down into a valley.

Fortunately, the slope was not a ravine. Finding a double grip, The Shadow held tight, one hand on the steering wheel, the other on the window ledge at the right. His body was flinging, twisting like an acrobat's, but he retained his hold.

When the truck finally crashed upon a pile of stones, bashing its left side as it struck, The Shadow managed to crawl out from the debris. Looking down through the window on the upper side, he flicked a flashlight on the other occupants.

All three were dead: Clip from the bullet, the others from the wrecking of the truck. The man The Shadow had paralyzed had been rattled about like a withered peanut in its shell. The last crook had clung to the window by the driver's seat; his head had gone through that window, for the truck to crush it.

GATHERING the guns that the mobsters had carried, The Shadow made his way up to the road. He followed it a half mile, came to a dirt byway that had a road sign, which he read by flashlight. Seating himself on a large stone, The Shadow spread a map and located the spot where he was.

On that map was a circle, its center the bridge where the bus had been captured.

Taking this spot where he was now as another center, The Shadow traced a circle of the same size.

Each of those circles had a radius of approximately thirty miles, according to The Shadow's calculations. It was obvious, therefore, that where the circles crossed, would be a spot very close to the hidden realm where Thumb Gaudrey ruled.

The circles showed two crossings. Either might be the one The Shadow wanted. After a careful study, he picked the wrong one.

Poor judgment was not the cause of The Shadow's mistake. On the contrary, his choice seemed logical. The spot that he picked was near a town where several roads converged. It could be reached fairly directly, from the bridge where the bus had been attacked; also from the valley where the truck had come to grief.

The other choice - the right one - was at least sixty miles from the bridge, by road, which did not fit The Shadow's estimate of thirty. The Shadow,

of course, had no clue to the route that Harry Vincent had discovered - where the creek bed, serving as a road, had cut the distance from bridge to hideout down to thirty miles.

Beneath the light of a rising moon, The Shadow hiked five miles into a town, where he found an old garage. His presentable appearance, his pose of Cranston, backed his argument that he was a person who had been expecting the arrival of friends, who had not appeared.

He wanted to buy a car, and he had a pocketful of genuine cash with which to buy it, supplied from the real funds that Felix Dort had accumulated while passing counterfeit currency through Thumb Gaudrey. For one hundred and fifty dollars, The Shadow purchased an old car that belonged to the garage owner. A car, the man said, that was serviceable and equipped with good rubber.

Driving his new property, The Shadow reached the vicinity that seemed the likely area for Thumb's headquarters. The drive took the better part of an hour, and The Shadow spent two more hours searching that terrain.

The moonlight did not show a single location that could house Thumb's headquarters. The hills were too gentle, and they were mostly farmland, away from the coal-mining area. Furthermore, a town encroached upon the few slopes that might have been suitable.

Either The Shadow's calculations were entirely wrong, or Thumb's underground domain lay near the other meeting spot of the circles. Seated in his car, The Shadow studied the map for clues that fitted the new circumstances. His lips phrased a laugh of grim understanding, as his forefinger traced along the creek.

Though valuable hours had been lost, The Shadow had at last reasoned out an answer to the riddle.

Again traveling the highway, The Shadow started the long trip that would take him to the new searching ground. He didn't press the old car to its limit, for the night was only half gone. There seemed no need for hurry in this careful quest.

Once more, The Shadow was mistaken; but not at fault. There was no evidence whatever by which he could have learned of the plight that had overtaken Harry Vincent and Loretta Wyndon.

COMING to a fork, The Shadow took a dirt road to the right, for he remembered that the truck had ridden roughly at first. The road swung him past a hill, where the moonlight gleamed to perfection. Much like the other steep hills that The Shadow had passed, this one showed an important difference.

Every other hill had displayed an old mine shaft somewhere up its slope. This hill lacked such a patch of blackness. It had bushes, however, and rocks. Those, perhaps, could mask a tiny opening. Not large enough for a bus or a truck, but suitable for the mouth of the secret exit that Dort had discovered when Thumb Gaudrey had left him in the office.

The Shadow hadn't forgotten the crooned information that Dort had given him while testing the motor. This bush-studded hillside struck The Shadow as important; but before investigating it on foot, he decided to see the other side of the hill.

Driving back to the fork, The Shadow took the paved road. It followed the course of a creek, with many turns. Passing one curve, The Shadow saw a hanging bridge that crossed the creek to rocky soil, where there was no house.

There was something else, however, just past the bridge: an object that looked innocent. It might even have passed The Shadow's scrutiny, if he had not remembered a certain word, that he now whispered in a soft tone of recollection.

The Shadow didn't stop. Instead, he kept the car along its course,

anxious

to clear this place where hidden watchers might be on guard. As he rode, he surveyed a hillside opposite the one that was reached by the bridge. Sight of trees and rocks against the moonlight were pleasing to The Shadow.

This time, his laugh had a tone of finality that betokened the plans of a master who dealt with strategy. The Shadow had found the main entrance to Thumb's headquarters, and he had mapped a campaign concerning it.

A few miles beyond the hill, The Shadow reached a cluster of houses, one a little store that handled gasoline. Soon, he was pounding at the door. A man came out, ruffled because a motorist was demanding gas two hours before dawn.

Humored by the friendly tone of Cranston, the storekeeper finally agreed to let the stranger use the telephone. Outside, filling the gas tank, the man didn't hear the words that Cranston uttered after his long-distance call was established.

Weird words, those; not in the quiet voice of Cranston, but in the whisper

of The Shadow. Words that electrified the listener at the other end. The Shadow

was talking to Vic Marquette, giving specific orders that the Fed repeated in a

tone that was no longer sleepy.

Five minutes later, The Shadow was away, driving for the dirt road that skirted the back hill. Two hours more of moonlight; then dawn.

Others would see that dawn; but not The Shadow. His work lay where dawn had never come!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRIPLE ORDEAL

HARRY VINCENT'S brain was pounding under the beating of invisible hammers;

his nerves seemed to crack with every imaginary stroke. Through that torture came the harshness of a rasping voice that sometimes rose to a thundering boom.

"You're The Shadow. The Shadow -"

Eyes closed, Harry shook his head. He'd heard that impeachment a hundred times, and had constantly denied it. In the moments when the torture lapsed, Harry wished he was The Shadow.

His chief, perhaps, could find a way to meet this ordeal that to Harry had become a maddening misery.

Massive hands clutched Harry's neck. It was lucky that they didn't tighten, for their grip was the sort that could bring rapid death. Harry heard a gasp, its tone pleading, and knew that it came from Loretta Wyndon.

Then the big hands hoisted Harry from his chair, jarred him back again with such force that he let his eyes come open.

Harry saw a face in front of him - a bloated face, with eyes as red as the draperies that covered the wall of this garish room. He clutched the arms of his chair, dug his feet into the overlapped rugs and tilted his head back away from the mammoth fist that Thumb Gaudrey shook in front of it.

During the past few hours - ever since he had regained something of his consciousness - Harry had been seeing more than enough of Thumb Gaudrey. Enough, too, of the big-shot's lieutenants Rigger Bayne and Uke Flenn, who flanked Thumb like a pair of lesser demons aiding a satanic majesty.

All that those fellows needed were pitchforks and a blazing fire, to make this room a scene from the infernal regions.

Stepping back to the desk. Thumb looked at the men beside him then motioned toward Harry.

"I've talked enough," boomed Thumb. "You tell him!"

They "told" him, Rigger and Uke did, with evidence to back their argument.

Rigger brought The Shadow's cloak and hat; Uke produced other objects from the briefcase - the file that bore the symbol of The Hand and the papers that went with it.

Clanking big automatics on the desk they announced that those were weapons that The Shadow used. One had been found on Harry's person; the other in his briefcase. That proved their story.

Each approached with a loaded .45 and they pressed the muzzles against the sides of Harry's head. They were going to blow out his brains, they told him. That would be a great finish for The Shadow: death from his own weapons.

The threat didn't break Harry's story. He wasn't The Shadow; and he said so.

There was a pause after that, while Harry met the sympathetic gaze of Loretta who was bound to a chair in the corner of the room. She looked sorry and bedraggled in her mud-stained white slip; but all the while, Loretta had been bravely pleading Harry's cause. She, too, declared that he was not The Shadow; but Thumb had finally roared for her to keep silent.

"So you say you aren't The Shadow," declared Thumb, finally. "And you've got the moll backing you. Smart stuff - but it don't get by! The trouble is you

know what would be coming to you if you admitted you were The Shadow.

"We'll fix that. You'll get what's coming to you anyway! Clamp him to the iron chair" - Thumb had turned to Rigger and Uke - "and we'll make him squeal even if he is The Shadow!"

RIGGER pulled a cord in a corner of the room. A side curtain lifted to show a wide hollow in the blackish rock. Instead of one chair coming into sight there were four all alike. They were made of iron and each had a high skeleton frame above it.

Rigger and Uke grabbed Harry. As he struggled they tore his shirt from his back. They handled him roughly, as they forced him to the nearest chair. They weren't taking chances with anyone who might be The Shadow.

Planking Harry in the chair, they clamped a large metal band around his waist, another about his neck. His back against the cold metal, Harry could feel a sharp chill that ran the length of his spine.

His wrists were next. They were fixed in metal rings attached to the uprights of the skeleton frame. Pinioned loosely, Harry felt nothing more than discomfort, until Rigger began to work a winch beside the chair.

Then the metal rings moved upward, until Harry's arms were spread-eagled above his head. His shoulder muscles humped beneath his flesh; the strain showed a corresponding stretch below his chest. Those tightening cables, it seemed, were meant to pull his arms from his sockets - until Rigger stopped, and undid the neck clamp.

Loretta gave a horrified gasp. Like Harry, she realized that if his shoulders stood the strain, his body would be racked. The cables that pulled above would lift him; the metal belt would restrain him. There wouldn't be much

left of Harry Vincent, if the crooks continued with that ordeal.

By this time, there was another spectator. The office door had opened, to

admit Felix Dort. The old inventor had been paddling back and forth during the past few hours, as if interested in how matters were progressing, yet also anxious to finish work in his laboratory.

To Loretta, Dort had seemed nothing more than another of Thumb's tools; and she found that impression strengthened upon Dort's present visit.

There was no touch of mercy in the old man's eyes. He acted quite delighted at the sight of Harry's body, strained and stretched from waist to neck, with arms that were about to be elongated. Loretta heard Dort chuckle.

So did Thumb Gaudrey.

"You like it, professor?" queried the big-shot. "Stick around and see the rest. The show's just starting!"

Dort shook his head. He glanced in the direction of his laboratory. Turning about, he started through the door; once outside, he must have paused, for, of a sudden, his cackly laugh returned. It was no longer a chuckle, but an unrepressed burst of insane mirth.

"Listen to him!" began Thumb. Then, with a tilt of his overbalanced head: "Wait a minute!"

He was listening to another of Dort's mad laughs. Thumb looked at Rigger and Uke.

"Do you think what I'm thinking?" he asked. "I've got a hunch that the old geezer has something different in his bean."

The others nodded. They had caught a curious irony in Dort's laugh. It couldn't be meant for Harry Vincent, even if the prisoner happened to be The Shadow. Dort, though he might like the idea of torture given to anyone, had no grudge against The Shadow.

It was more like a laugh that was meant for persons whom Dort knew. It seemed to proclaim that someone was a fool and that Dort could explain why.

"Leave Vincent as he is" ordered Thumb. "You two trail the professor. See what he's up to."

THE next ten minutes were tedious for Harry Vincent, but he did not find them painful for his body was merely taut, not stretched. To Loretta, there were minutes of terrible anxiety, for she was convinced that the delay would merely postpone Harry's ordeal, not end it.

Then they heard a scuffle from the passage. Thumb Gaudrey arose behind his desk, as Rigger and Uke came dragging Dort between them. The crooks were trying to shout something, but Dort's mad cackle drowned them.

"Fools!" he chuckled. "That's not The Shadow! You had The Shadow, and he's left you! Left you -"

Hands clamped over Dort's mouth. Rigger and Uke explained. They had found the professor snooping in a passage near the laboratory. Surprising him, they had discovered a hole leading up through the rock.

"Into the cell corridor," explained Rigger. "So we stopped by there, when we came up."

"Yeah," added Uke. "The hole goes to Cranston's cell. Only, Cranston ain't in there any longer."

Dort relished that announcement as a joke. His cackle brought him prompt attention from Thumb Gaudrey.

"So Cranston was The Shadow?" quizzed Thumb. "All right, professor. You've

wised us to that much. Spill the rest. Where'd he go after you helped him out?"

Dort didn't answer. His merriment increased. Thumb's fingers gave a snap

like the clicking of a lobster's claws

"He went out in that box!" decided Thumb. "Well, it's up to Clip to handle him. Maybe Clip will, maybe he won't; but we're wise to the game and we're going to find out the rest of it - from this laughing hyena!"

The "laughing hyena" was Dort. Thumb ordered the lieutenants to shove him into an iron chair. They grabbed the inventor, ripped his shirt from him, as they had done with Harry. But Dort, despite his scrawniness, put up a neat tussle. He was slippery when they tried to hold him. It was several minutes before they had him in a torture chair.

"Stretch him along with Vincent," ordered Thumb. Then, noting Dort's thinness, "Take it slower, though, because those ribs of his will crack easy. We want to hear him talk before he snaps."

Dort canted his head against one of his upstretched arms. His eye was on a clock that adorned Thumb's desk. He gave a defiant chuckle.

The scene was too much for Loretta. Trying to twist from the ropes that held her, she pleaded with Thumb Gaudrey.

"I'll tell you everything!" she promised. "I know all about The Shadow - where he's gone, what he intends to do -"

Harry croaked for Loretta to keep silence. Before he could repeat the admonition, he heard a husky whisper from Dort. Harry tightened his lips.

There was nothing that Loretta could tell; therefore, it had seemed folly to let the girl try to bluff the crooks. She could supply only a few minutes' delay at most. Then, stirred by Dort's whisper, Harry realized that the old professor had himself produced what seemed a useless delay. Perhaps Dort wasn't

as crazy as he acted. If such were the case, Loretta's move would help.

THE ropes were off the girl. She looked slim and frail, a helpless thing in white, as Rigger and Uke dragged her to Thumb's desk for the big-shot to begin his quiz. But the questions that Thumb drove were sharp ones. Loretta, it

proved, did not know as much about The Shadow as she claimed.

Either that, or she was holding out. The latter possibility gave Thumb his next idea. His big lips showed a grin of anticipation. Thumb pointed to the third of the torture chairs.

"Put her there," he told Uke and Rigger. "Just like the others. When they see what she gets, they'll talk - even if she can't."

They dragged Loretta toward the chair, beating down her slender fighting hands. Standing beside his desk, leaning on one big hand, Thumb watched that scene. His eyes were interested only in Loretta, until Dort suddenly shrilled another of his wild laughs.

"Too late!" he screeched gleefully. "Too late! You waited too long, Gaudrey!"

Before Thumb could digest the meaning of those words, another laugh swept through that drape-walled room; a tone that made Dort's crazed mirth dwindle. It was a laugh that brought Thumb Gaudrey full about, facing toward his desk, from which the tone had seemingly come.

Rigger and Uke turned from the torture chair, their hands loosening from Loretta's bare shoulders. Like their chief, they had heard that weird taunt that left no doubt as to The Shadow's intended moves.

For that laugh was The Shadow's own!

Behind Thumb's desk, in front of the half-lifted curtain, stood Lamont Cranston, his eyes blazing from his masklike face. The burn of those eyes were a symbol of identity: the eyes of The Shadow!

The intrepid fighter had found the secret exit from Thumb's lair. Through

the shaft that pierced the hill, he had come to meet the big-shot in his throne

room. He was one against three; yet The Shadow held the odds.

From his fists pointed two of the revolvers that he had brought from the truck in which Clip Rallin had perished. Those guns were ready to deliver doom to other crooks.

Foremost of those who faced The Shadow's wrath was Thumb Gaudrey, the last member of The Hand!

CHAPTER XIX

STRIFE UNDERGROUND

IT took a bold crook to combat The Shadow, when the latter had the edge. A bold crook, and a tough one. Thumb Gaudrey had those qualifications. His effort toward combat looked suicidal, as he began it; but there was method in his boldness.

Faced toward The Shadow, Thumb started a charge that a bull elephant could have envied. He hoped by that mastodonic lunge to reach his cool opponent before The Shadow had a chance to use his guns. The desk lay in between; Thumb had to clear it to get at The Shadow. That element seemed highly in The Shadow's favor.

It proved otherwise; and therewith proved also that Thumb Gaudrey possessed craft along with brawn.

As he lunged, Thumb clamped his huge hands on the front edge of the desk. as if to vault it. Instead, he threw his shoulders into a terrific heave. hoisting the desk three feet in the air, straight toward The Shadow.

The flat top of the desk was flipping over like a door swung on a horizontal lunge; with the bulk of the desk coming with it. The thing formed a revolving barrier that blocked The Shadow's aim; and likewise, it was an approaching missile that threatened to bowl over the fighter in its path.

The Shadow had no chance to sidestep. He managed instead, to wheel back against the curtained wall, reaching there just as the desk hit the spot where he had been. The desk took a revolving bounce; its final thump came against The Shadow's knees. Catching his balance, he couldn't aim within the next half second.

That interval brought Thumb Gaudrey. Carrying his lunge across the overturned desk, the kidnaper pounced upon The Shadow in elephantine style. Scooping a gun wrist with each of his ham-sized hands, Thumb kept his big fists driving for The Shadow's throat.

There was The Shadow, pressed down toward the wall, in the clutch of fleshy pincers that bound his wrists and neck together, almost encircling them.

From his clenched fists poked the barrels of his guns, sprouting up from behind his ears, where he couldn't use them against Thumb Gaudrey.

All that The Shadow could perform was a body lash that carried him away from the wall. He flattened, face upward, beneath Thumb's bulk, his head pointed toward the torture chairs.

The head was tilted back upon a rug. Its eyes showed anguish. His fingers seemed to be making a vain grasp to hold the guns that were leveled along the floor. Fingers that had a motion, as if strumming piano keys in search of a

forgotten melody.

From their torture chairs, Harry and Dort stared helplessly. So did Loretta, although she was not yet bound. Rigger and Uke had dropped her when they heard The Shadow's laugh; she had shrunk to the floor in front of the empty iron chair, her hands huddled crosswise to her shoulders.

DURING moments that had been all too rapid, Loretta had felt the thrill of rescue. A rescue that was timely, too, for it had come at the very instant when she could fight no longer.

Given their way, Rigger and Uke would have had her pinioned in the third chair, in the same state as Harry and Dort. They hadn't managed to begin that operation; but their chance would come again, if Thumb Gaudrey conquered The Shadow.

Then, before Loretta realized their intent, Rigger and Uke were on their way to aid in the conquest. They were diving for those guns upon which The Shadow had almost lost his hold, to snatch them before his feeble forefingers could find their triggers.

Loretta gave a hopeless cry.

If she had only struggled with those crooks again, instead of cringing away! She could at least have given The Shadow an opportunity to fight Thumb Gaudrey alone. But that opportunity was ended, and so was The Shadow - at least, such was the flash that came to Loretta's brain.

Then, with kaleidoscopic suddenness, the odds had turned again. The Shadow's laugh taunted from his upturned lips, at the moment when Rigger and Uke were half upon him.

Like creatures detached, performing a volition of their own, his hands ended their pretended plucking at the guns. Instead, they tightened instantaneously, fingers clamped to triggers. Those guns behind The Shadow's ears coughed.

Two attackers howled as their lunges turned to sprawls. Rigger Bayne and Uke Flenn were rolling on the tufted rugs, each clipped by a bullet.

The Shadow, all but helpless in Thumb's clutch, had not been able to attempt a distant aim at the lieutenants. But he had duped them into becoming human targets, by that trickery with his revolvers. Almost above the gun muzzles, they were where they couldn't be missed, when The Shadow had fired.

That wasn't all. The roar of these guns, the spurts of flame before his eyes, made Thumb Gaudrey stare in the direction of the shots. He saw the writhing figures of his lieutenants and bellowed a startled oath. Savagely, he threw more weight upon The Shadow's throat.

His wrists a buffer, The Shadow didn't choke. Instead, he welcomed Thumb's forward shift. It gave The Shadow's knees a chance to work. Heels digging hard into the rug beneath them, he brought those knees straight upward with the force of pistons.

Even Thumb's bulk couldn't outweigh that thrust. The big-shot took a somersaulting dive across The Shadow, losing his grip as he went. Hitting the floor, Thumb bounced around with the speed of a landing cat, to go after another grab. He was quick enough to scoop The Shadow's wrists again; but this time, he couldn't carry the clutch to his foe's throat.

The fighters came to their feet, reeled across the forms of Rigger and Uke. Stumbling against the desk, they hit the floor. As they lashed there, The Shadow lost one gun and Thumb grabbed it; but The Shadow slashed his other weapon against the lost revolver so forcefully that he knocked it to the floor.

Loretta saw The Shadow's shoulders and head rise above the overturned desk. She saw Uke Flenn, lying very still upon a light-hued rug that was absorbing a crimson stain from the crook's heart blood. She saw Rigger Bayne;

but he was still alive. Propped upon one elbow, he was painfully bringing a revolver upward, hoping for a dying aim at The Shadow.

This time, Loretta's frantic thoughts brought action. On the floor, away from the iron chair, lay her white slip, lost in the struggle just before The Shadow's arrival. Seizing the silken garment, Loretta sprang forward and flung it across Rigger's head.

Blinded, the mobster tried to snatch away the thin cloth that blanketed his vision. He used his free hand for the task, and thereby lost the benefit of

his propping elbow. Slipping to the floor, he fired wildly; his tilted gun spent

its bullets against the ceiling.

The effort was too much. Tangled in the mass of white, Rigger Bayne succumbed. His revolver dropped from his useless fingers. Loretta grabbed it, looked for Thumb Gaudrey.

TWO fighters had rolled apart. The Shadow was coming up beside the wall. His face - the features of Cranston - showed strain despite their maskish look.

They were streaked with blood from a forehead gash - blood that his quick hand wiped from his eyes.

Thumb Gaudrey, too, came up, displaying titanic strength. He was lifting himself with hands that clamped the overturned desk. On his feet, he heaved his

yard-wide shoulders and hauled the desk to one knee. Rolling the desk higher, he

balanced it upon a shoulder, ready to hurl it in the manner a man of ordinary strength would fling a small log.

A strange laugh, weird despite its weariness, made Thumb hasten. He saw the figure of Cranston propped against the wall, bringing a gun to bear. Thumb threw the desk; quick spurts from the gun blasted bullets that splintered the woodwork.

The flying shield saved Thumb. But the missile did not harm The Shadow. This time, he had space to sidestep as he fired. The desk crashed the base of the wall beside him.

Thumb Gaudrey hadn't stopped. He was at the door, yanking it open. Again The Shadow fired; the door, flung in his direction, was another shield for Thumb. Loretta found her wits again and began to shoot from her angle; but the kick of the revolver surprised her. Her shots were wide.

She ran to the door, hoping to overtake the fleeing big-shot. On the threshold, she dived back again. Thumb was bellowing to the outside guards, pointing them into the office. They saw Loretta just before she sprang away.

Then the guards arrived. They expected to find a flimsily attired girl, hopelessly attempting to defend a pair of pinioned prisoners. Instead, they were greeted by a shivering laugh, that seemed a product of the square-walled room itself. Against the crimson drape, they saw a shape in black.

The Shadow!

From the floor beside the overturned desk, the master fighter had plucked his cloak and hat. He had donned those garments and had armed himself with his own automatics, those fully loaded weapons that Rigger and Uke had so carelessly handled a while ago, and then replaced on Thumb's desk.

The big guns spoke. The guards, too startled to beat that fire, went reeling out through the door, hoping to flee by the route that Thumb Gaudrey had taken.

The Shadow pointed to the prisoners, ordered Loretta to release them. He took up the chase, and Loretta could hear his automatics booming from the outer

passage, while she loosed the clamps that held Harry Vincent and Felix Dort.

Freed, the prisoners snatched up guns. Holding the revolver that she had

obtained, Loretta dashed out into the passage with them. Following the twisted corridors, they found The Shadow by the sounds of his guns.

THOUGH he had failed in his plan to take over silently the office that formed the heart of Thumb's domain, The Shadow had rectified that matter. The spot where he stood was a connecting passage that divided the maze of mine shafts.

He had driven Thumb Gaudrey outward, along with a flock of the big-shot's followers. Within, protected by The Shadow, lay the deep corridor that ran along the row of cells. Telling his aids to go there and release the prisoners,

The Shadow added another instruction, addressed to Felix Dort

The inventor knew all about these underground corridors. He was to break into the room near the cell corridor where the luggage of the kidnapped millionaires had been stored. It would form the assembly hall for the captives, when they were released.

Alone, The Shadow took an outward path. All along, he was greeted by the hasty fire of retreating mobsters. His answering shots were rapid, and effective. As marksmen sprawled, the others ran to reach the domed garage that formed the outer chamber of this hidden realm.

As the last of them staggered into the garage, Thumb Gaudrey pointed them into the big bus that had brought the millionaires. Stooping low, Thumb hurled a gas bomb back into the passage. Through the vapor from the breaking bomb, he saw a black-cloaked figure shift from sight, an arm lifted across its face.

"The pineapple didn't get him," growled Thumb, "but it will hold him as long as we need. With those spark plugs gone from the other cars" - he gestured toward the side walls of the garage - "The Shadow won't be able to follow when he gets here. Let's go!"

A dozen crooks heard Thumb's order with satisfaction, and relief. Cut off from the underground depths, they wanted this hide-out no longer. They were ready for flight, along with their leader.

Out of disaster, Thumb Gaudrey had gained what he was willing to consider victory. He, the last member of The Hand, was escaping the wrath of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX

CRIME'S FINISH

DAWN had arrived amid those fierce scenes in the depths of Thumb Gaudrey's lair. It was the dawn that Felix Dort had played for - not by sight, but by the time registered by Thumb's desk clock. The hour of dawn had been the zero hour promised by The Shadow.

Spreading across the West Virginia hillside, that dawn had revealed a barren sight to men who had stolen into cover under the blanket of night. Fading moonlight hadn't shown them, when they had taken positions on a hillside just above a winding road.

With dawn, those men were peppering their leader with questions, as they huddled alongside him. The answers that he gave were whispered along the line.

This was the right spot. Of that, Vic Marquette was certain. He had been told to come here by The Shadow. No one else could have spoken in such a weird and sinister tone.

Yet Marquette, himself, had doubts that he did not express.

The scene below was too placid to suggest crime. It began with the road, not many rods away. Beyond that was a peaceful creek, crossed by a hanging bridge. Though wider than most of such bridges, which often were mere footpaths, this one looked very dilapidated.

Stout ropes held it in place; but those ropes had a frayed appearance - and no wonder. If there had been a house on the other side of the creek, it had certainly been gone for years; hence the bridge could be no more than a relic of the past.

The only other object visible beyond the creek, was a large advertising sign that stood some forty feet or so up the slope, buttressed by a shelf of rock that peered through the soil. It was an ideal place for such a sign, for it could be seen from either direction on the road. But Vic Marquette was tired of looking at that sign.

"Oxotone," he grumbled. "The stuff that gives you vigor! Makes you young when you're old! If that's so, why don't you take it when you're young, and never get old? Oxotone! You fellows can drink it. I prefer baloney when it's sliced!"

There were chuckles from the crouching Feds. They liked Vic's jest, and were passing it along. Vic decided to spring another; he began to figure what else he knew about Oxotone.

"Say!" Vic's whisper was sudden. "Oxotone - that's the stuff old Hastings Bleer peddles! He's one of the bunch that they snatched!"

The situation was a coincidence, but enough to make Marquette take a new interest in the sign. He reached for a pair of field glasses, used them to look

at the sign. He noted a thin streak that looked like a line dividing the sign into two sections.

Marquette laid down the glasses.

"That sign's split!" he said to the men beside him. "Just as if it were -"

Vic said no more. The Oxotone sign had begun to move. Vic was right; it was divided, and each section formed a door. The portions slid apart, smoothly, silently, on well-oiled rollers, showing a huge black hole in the hill.

The amazement that gripped the Feds might have been less, had they known certain facts. Days ago, The Shadow had heard a crook's cryptic remark: "We're driving for old Oxotone -" and later Harry Vincent, outside those very doors had muttered the word "Oxotone" for Loretta's benefit.

By moonlight, The Shadow had seen that sign, one of very few in West Virginia. He had known then what the crook had meant. "Old Oxotone" in the parlance of the crooks, was the nickname for the sign that camouflaged the entrance to their underground garage; not a sobriquet that they applied to Hastings Bleer.

WITHIN half a minute, Vic Marquette and his men learned much that The Shadow knew. Something nosed out through the arched blackness in the rocks, to become a mass of red in the sunlight. The thing materialized into a vehicle that the Feds recognized from its description:

The bus that had carried the kidnapped millionaires!

Timidly, the bus seemed to choose a path. Men inside were making sure that

they were not observed. They couldn't see the Feds hiding behind the rocks and bushes opposite. The bus eased down the slope, took a wide angle along level ground to reach the bridge.

Watchers saw the bridge sway as the heavy vehicle crossed it; but the structure did not collapse. They realized that the frayed supporting ropes

were camouflage. Inside those ropes were steel cables that gave the suspension bridge great strength.

Feds were awaiting orders from Marquette. They saw his lips go tight. His thought seemed to pass from man to man.

To all appearances that bus was being used to transport prisoners to a new hide-out. If so, an attack would jeopardize the lives of the helpless millionaire captives of Thumb Gaudrey.

Vic Marquette had learned the identity of the big-shot from The Shadow. He knew the ways of Thumb Gaudrey. If Thumb had chosen to change his headquarters, he was the sort who would send a load of hostages ahead of him to bear the brunt of any battle.

It was a sound that made Marquette raise the eyes that he had fixed upon the bus; a tone that roused recollections of a voice across the wire though this token was no whisper.

The sound was a strident laugh - a fierce peal of mockery that seemed to come from nowhere. Vic's gaze went instantly toward the gap upon the hill, for he associated its blackness with The Shadow.

There he saw The Shadow.

Out from the forgotten entrance came the cloaked figure, tiny against the rocks. Lowering one arm from his face, The Shadow brandished an automatic in his other fist. Pointing it at the bus, he fired rapid shots.

Pygmy spurts from a midget gun. The bus was across the bridge, heading up to the road and at that distance The Shadow's shots were useless.

The reason for the firing hit Vic Marquette as suddenly as if one of those lost bullets had stung him.

The Shadow would not have begun that fire, futile though it was, if prisoners were in the bus. His shots were not for the crooks; they were a signal to the Feds, a tip-off to the fact that the bus could be attacked.

Vic Marquette turned his head from left to right and shouted:

"Take it!"

OUT from cover poured the Feds, aiming their Tommy guns for the bus as it swung into the road, less than fifty yards below them. A wide line, they outflanked the crook-manned vehicle; and the drilling fire that they gave made the barks of answering revolvers sound like dud firecrackers.

When the Feds reached the bus they found a dead man in the driver's seat; others lying all along the floor. The few who remained alive were too badly wounded to offer any resistance.

On the far side of the bus, near the back, was an opened emergency door. Looking through it Marquette saw three men running across the suspension bridge. One was blocky and ungainly, but he outstripped the others despite his crablike gait.

Thumb Gaudrey was heading back for the mine, where The Shadow had vanished into the blackness. The big-shot had the desperate hope that he could bury himself some place where pursuers couldn't find him.

Cool fire flattened the two crooks who ran with Thumb, but the past master of The Hand was lucky. He staggered once or twice; but whether he had tripped on the rough ground, or been nicked by bullets, Marquette couldn't tell.

Vic led the squad that pursued across the bridge. They saw Thumb disappear

through the outlet on the hill. They reached the hidden garage, found the passage that led inward from it. A tinge of gas reached their nostrils, but it wasn't strong enough to bother them. The gas had been settling when The Shadow came through.

There were shots from below; Vic and his men supplied a fire of their own.

Reaching a turn in a passage they heard a welcoming shout. Out from behind a pillar of black-veined rock stepped a shirtless man who held a smoking revolver. Vic Marquette recognized Harry Vincent.

With The Shadow's agent was a scantily-clad girl who also held a gun. Harry introduced her as Loretta Wyndon, and Marquette's eyes went wide when he learned the identity of the cute brunette. Loretta's disappearance had been reported only the night before, by relatives who had returned from Europe.

Then, remembering the chase, Vic queried: "Which way did Gaudrey go?"

Harry pointed along a passage.

"We ambushed him," he said. "Drove him through to the room he calls his office."

Marquette turned, gestured to the men who followed him. Before they had gone three paces, Vic stopped short. He heard the reports of guns from another direction. From the heaviness of their fire, he took them for rifles.

"It's the prisoners," explained Harry. "They're loose, and they've reclaimed their hunting rifles. They're hunting down the rats that Thumb Gaudrey left here."

Marquette decided that the millionaires deserved their fun. He and his squad headed along the passage to the office. They reached the door and flung it open, in time to see the broad back of Thumb Gaudrey as he leaned across the battered desk.

There was someone beyond that desk - a person hidden by Thumb's bulk. That

person had replaced the desk where it belonged, and had been waiting here, in case the kidnap king returned. Thumb was aiming a revolver as he leaned, threatening the being opposite.

Together, Marquette and his men stabbed shots into the big-shot's back. Their fire formed a rousing echo to a gun that spoke ahead of theirs: a .45 that drove a bullet into the heart of Thumb Gaudrey. That was certain, from the way that Thumb jolted back just as he received the fire of the Feds.

Striking the desk, as bullets plunged him forward, Thumb rolled to the floor, his unfired revolver hitting the thick rug beside him. Marquette, foremost of the Feds, sighted the black shape that stood beyond; met the burn of eyes from the being who had finished Thumb Gaudrey.

Then a chilling laugh swept through that room - a tone that might have been a knell; perhaps a claim of triumph. It seemed to blend with the walls; their echoes became a repetition of the shuddery mirth.

Except for the laugh, the room was empty. The downward whisk of a crimson drapery had marked the departure of The Shadow through the long tunnel that led to the other side of the hill.

SEATED behind the desk, Vic Marquette received a visitor brought by Harry Vincent and Loretta Wyndon. The arrival first stared gleefully at the body of Thumb Gaudrey, then turned a plaintive gaze toward Vic Marquette. Harry introduced the man as Felix Dort.

The inventor was explaining the matter of the counterfeit notes. How he had made them here and put messages on them, hoping that when the counterfeits were discovered, the message might help in rescuing him. Marquette heard his story and assured Dort that the government would understand. Instead of arrest as a counterfeiter, Dort could expect full credit for his aid in cracking the

kidnap racket.

Millionaires were reporting, giving their names as they came in carrying rifles and shotguns. With them were other missing men, earlier victims of Thumb

Gaudrey's racket. The list was complete; politely, Vic Marquette showed the visitors out through the door.

Then Vic turned to open a folder that lay upon the table. It bore the printed symbol of a hand. Opening the file that The Shadow had recovered, Marquette found all the documents that pertained to the kidnap ring.

That case was closed; but what interested Marquette even more, was the list that lay inside the folder. It told a silent story of past achievements - by The Shadow. Blackmail, murder, rackets, theft, now kidnapping - The Shadow had outlawed all, and delivered doom to the instigators of those crimes.

Five names formed that list:

Thumb Gaudrey
Pointer Trame
Long Steve Bydle
Ring Brescott
Pinkey Findlen

Starting with the bottom, Marquette saw that each name was crossed with an inked line. The lowermost was a dark-blue, the next three of varying lighter shades, as if to indicate the order in which those "fingers" had been eliminated.

The top name was stroked with an ink of different hue; the marking line was red. The Shadow had crossed it with a pen from Thumb's own desk, using ink that he had also found there. Ink so red that it might have been the big-shot's own blood.

For when Vic Marquette looked at the bulky body on the floor beyond the desk, he saw a red-blotched shirt front beneath the chin of a heavy, bloated face. The lights of the room showed a ruddiness in those glassy eyes - another touch of red, like the blotch, the drapes, and the ink stroke that scored the name of Thumb Gaudrey.

One by one, The Shadow had found and banished the evil members of The Hand. Banished them, not to foreign parts, but to doom that they deserved.

The law, in the person of Vic Marquette, was master in this rock-walled lair where The Shadow had climaxed his fivefold campaign!

THE END