



THE VINDICATOR

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CHAPTER I. PRICE OF SILENCE

THE man in the limousine was nervous, fearful, as the big car swung into the narrow tree-fringed lane. His hands tightened on the metal box that rested in his lap; his eyes had a twitch as they peered through the car window.

In the front seat, the chauffeur calmly turned the car into a driveway between high box hedges. The passenger gave a last look along the lane, then settled back with a comfortable sigh. He was home at last; after a drive fraught with imaginary terror.

Ahead glowed the lights of the big mansion; the car was rolling to a stop on a side drive, quite close to a large veranda. There were lights on the porch, and people too. The strains of dance music wafted from the open windows of the house. All that brought new confidence.

Alighting from the car, the passenger was no longer shaky. He told the chauffeur to take the limousine to the garage. Then, with the metal box tucked beneath his arm, the man produced a key and unlocked his own side door.

He was smiling at his own fears. Odd that he, Thomas Grennel, man of finance, whose wealth exceeded a million dollars, should be worried by a short ride in the dark, from the station to his home.

True, this section of Westchester County was isolated; the roads the sort where enemies might lie in ambush. True, too, that the box which Grennel carried contained much that would attract men of crime.

But no one, except Grennel and one other man, was acquainted with the contents of that box; and that other man, even though Grennel mistrusted him, was not the sort who would resort to highway robbery; at least, not upon this occasion.

Inside the mansion, none was aware that Thomas Grennel was at that moment unlocking his own side door, hoping to steal into the house unnoticed. Most of the guests, some fifty or more, were dancing, except for the small group that Grennel had seen on the veranda.

There were two, however, who stood near the rear door of the large ballroom chatting as they watched the dancers. One was Grennel's daughter, Dorothy; the other, a guest, Ross Bland.

THOUGH vivacious, Dorothy Grennel was not attractive. She was overly tall and awkward. Her evening gown, though as tasteful as it was expensive, was too fluffy for her type. It made her arms and neck look skinny, rather than slender; and it would have suited a demure girl, rather than Dorothy, whose long, haughty face looked its best when she wore a mannish riding habit.

Never a good dancer, Dorothy preferred to watch the others perform the Lambeth Walk. She knew that her feminine guests were envying her. For Dorothy, by her charm alone, she thought, was keeping Ross Bland from the dance floor.

Bland was tall, handsome, his curly hair and well-pointed mustache matching in a light-brown hue. His well-tailored evening clothes added to his natural poise. Dorothy could count nearly two dozen girls who would have preferred Bland to their present dance partners.

There was one exception, and that was why Dorothy mentioned her.

"Cute, isn't she?" questioned Dorothy. "The little blonde in green, the one at whom you are staring, Ross."

Bland smiled, offered Dorothy a cigarette. He had been thinking that the little blonde was more than graceful. Her sparkling blue eyes and saucy smiling lips were the sort that he would like to meet at closer range. But he did not mention that to his present companion.

"I was looking at her partner," he parried. "An odd-looking chap, with his wide, dark eyes and long, serious face. Reminds me of a polo pony I used to own. I've been expecting him to whinny, any moment."

"You'd better not let Margaret Brye hear that," laughed Dorothy. "She's in love with the fellow. His name is Larry Chandler, and personally, I think he is rather handsome."

"So was my polo pony," chuckled Bland. Then, as he flicked his cigarette lighter: "Is the girl any relation to Dana Brye, the old chap who designs all those elaborate time locks and other contraptions?"

"He is her father," replied Dorothy, "and Larry Chandler is secretary to Roger Marquin, who controls all those rubber plantations in South America. You've heard of him, of course?"

Bland's eyebrows lifted. Everyone had heard of Roger Marquin, since his return from South America a few years ago. Marquin's connections were of an international sort; no one knew just how heavily he profited from rises in the price of rubber, but his wealth was estimated at a million dollars.

Then, his gaze turned toward the hall. Bland forgot the persons mentioned, at sight of someone else. It

was Thomas Grennel, coming in from the side door. He had locked that door behind him and was making quick steps toward his study, on the other side of the hall.

PUFFING his cigarette, Bland was heedless of Dorothy's further conversation. He had observed the box that Grennel carried and it roused his curiosity. He was anxious to talk with Grennel.

Bland's first problem was to get away from Dorothy; and that was suddenly settled for him. A servant approached, to say that she was wanted on the telephone. Bland waited until she had passed a corner of the hall, then began to stroll toward Grennel's study.

As he went, a pause in the dance music enabled him to catch Dorothy's words:

"Mr. Cranston?... You're coming out here? Marvelous!... Father? Why, he was to be at the office tonight... No; wait! One of the servants is telling me that he just arrived... Yes, his chauffeur just brought him from the station..."

The music had begun again, but Bland's knock on the study door was audible within, for a voice called to enter. As he stepped in, closing the door behind him, Bland was startled to see Grennel half risen from his chair, hands clamped to the metal box that lay upon the desk.

Then, seeing it was Bland, the financier sank back, ran his fingers weakly through his thin gray hair.

Grennel had the high cheeks, the large, aristocratic nose that his daughter had inherited. Usually, his expression was one of importance; tonight, worry made him look shriveled. He pointed Bland to a chair, then spoke in a hoarse whisper:

"I'm glad to see you, Ross, but I don't know whether you should have come here. I thought" - Grennel hesitated - "I thought it was someone else who knocked."

Bland gave an apologetic shrug.

"We've been going to discuss that mining deal," he said. "The option won't hold much longer, Mr. Grennel. I still think I can swing you a controlling interest in the silver mine for twenty thousand dollars. But it may not wait."

"It will have to wait!"

Grennel opened the box, began to take out stacks of currency, one hundred thousand dollars in all. Bland's eyes opened wide; he was wondering why a twenty-thousand-dollar proposition had to be postponed, when Grennel was exhibiting five times that amount in actual cash.

"I am taking you into my confidence!" Grennel's tone again was hoarse. "You must promise, Ross, that you will breathe no word of what I am about to tell you!"

Ross nodded his promise. Grennel brought a letter from his desk, passed it across to Bland, groaning:

"Read it."

The letter was typewritten, in italics, evidently done on a special machine.

Mr. Thomas Grennel:

Seven years ago, you were involved in the failure of the

People's Trust Co. You never sent the notes to cover the loans

granted to you privately by your friend Clayton Witherby, although you intended to do so.

Perhaps you would be willing to pay \$100,000 for the sealed envelope which contains those undelivered notes, the sum to be disbursed among depositors who lost through the bank failure. If not, they will be made public.

The Vindicator

Other letters were phrased more strongly. They teemed with actual demands for Grennel's payment to the writer who called himself the Vindicator. The final one specified that the hundred thousand dollars was to be paid in cash, setting this night - Bland checked it by the date on Grennel's desk calendar - as the time limit.

"Witherby was president of the People's Trust," spoke Grennel, hopelessly. "I actually sent him the notes, for a paltry fifteen thousand dollars, in the sealed envelope mentioned. I dated them ahead, so I would have a chance to pay; for I, myself, was in a predicament at the time.

"Poor Witherby! His plight was worse than I thought. He burned all his personal papers and committed suicide. I thought that my envelope had gone with the rest; but evidently I was wrong. Foolishly, I let the matter go until now -"

"WHAT about the Vindicator?" questioned Bland. "Do you think that he intends to reimburse persons who lost money in the bank crash?"

"He does not!" Grennel forgot his hoarse whisper, in his indignation. "This is blackmail, Ross! Sheer blackmail! The man himself has been bold enough to call me over the telephone and admit it, at the same time reminding me that I must pay. I can tell you much about this crook who calls himself the Vindicator, and his sham hypocrisy, because I know who he is -"

Grennel interrupted himself. The sharp gleam of his eyes showed that he was not yet willing to take anyone into his entire confidence. He admitted the fact a few moments later.

"This money," declared Grennel, tapping the bills that he had replaced in the metal box, "is marked. I have sent the list, with the numbers of the bills and their markings, to the New York police. Once I have reclaimed my envelope, I shall do more than seek the Vindicator. I shall expose him and the game that he has worked on others before me!"

Gathering the letters, Grennel replaced them in the desk drawer. There was a safe near one corner; picking up the money box, Grennel stepped spryly in that direction. He turned the dials, swung the safe door half open.

"I want you to be here," he told Bland, in a whisper, "in case the man himself arrives. Your description of him may be valuable when I denounce him. But you must remain concealed, no matter who arrives. Remember: the final letter stated that if any witnesses were present, I would suffer -"

Words dying on his lips, Grennel fairly shoved Bland into a niche between the safe and the wall, then swung the metal door fully open to cover the hiding place. There was reason for Grennel's hurry.

A knock had sounded at the study door; a sharp, imperative rap that carried an expected summons.

The time had come for Thomas Grennel to pay his tribute to the Vindicator!

CHAPTER II. CRIME'S PENALTY

THROUGH a narrow, but ample, space at the edge of the safe door, Ross Bland saw the visitor who entered Grennel's study. It took the crouched witness only a few seconds to decide that the arrival could not be the Vindicator in person.

The fellow was rangy, but slightly stooped of build. His face, somewhat sharp of feature, could have been presentable had he so chosen; but inclination, plus habit, had produced an opposite result. The man wore a leer that seemed fixed to his ugly-cornered lips; the glint of his eyes was wolfish.

He was dressed in an ill-fitting waiter's uniform, and it was plain that the man had never had training as a servant. Added up, the fellow was a thug.

"Hello, Grennel!" gruffed the rangy visitor. "Let's get acquainted. My name's Kobin - Trigger Kobin, they call me, and it's a moniker that's got sense. If you ain't convinced, start something!"

Trigger patted his hip pocket. Bland could see the outline of a heavy gun.

Either Grennel had steeled himself for this test, or felt that he could depend upon Bland. At any rate, the financier's accustomed dignity had returned. He acted as though unimpressed by Trigger Kobin. The thug, in turn, widened his smirk.

"We're in the same boat, Grennel," he informed. "I don't know nothing more than you do. The big-shot wants the dough and sent me to get it. I never met him: I've only heard him talk over the telephone, funnylike, the same as you have.

"He's got plenty on me, like he has on you. I gotta deliver, that's all. I planted myself out here along with the extra waiters that you hired for tonight, and I brought some other guys along. We don't want trouble, no more than you do. So let's get it over with."

Bland could see Trigger's crafty eyes rove the room. The blinds were drawn at the windows; against them, Trigger could see the dark lines of steel bars that protected the room against burglary. Trigger's glance seemed to consider the bars unnecessary, for he had given the safe a careful scrutiny and had admired it.

Good reason for that. The safe, like many of the latest and best design, had been installed by the expert, Dana Brye, whose daughter was a guest at Dorothy Grennel's party.

"I have the money here," declared Grennel, suddenly. "As you state, trouble would be bad for both of us. But I must see the envelope and be sure that it is intact."

Obligingly, Trigger produced the envelope and laid it on the desk, letting his hand go to his hip as soon as Grennel raised the envelope to the light. To Bland, the envelope looked intact; moreover, it was stamped with a wax seal that Grennel apparently recognized. With a nod, the financier turned toward the safe.

"Leave the envelope here," gruffed Trigger.

Grennel obeyed. He went to the safe brought the metal box to the desk, and let Trigger count the money.

"I must open the envelope," warned Grennel, "before you go. That was the understanding -"

"Sure thing!" interrupted Trigger "Why the squawk?"

"Because the arrangements were changed tonight. This transfer was supposed to have taken place in my office until the Vindicator" - Grennel pronounced the name contemptuously - "called up and made new arrangements."

TRIGGER came to his feet, snarled:

"The big-shot said to mention that. Listen, Grennel; if you know what's good for you, you'll keep your trap buttoned tight! Lay off the wise stuff - and I'll tell you why. The big-shot got leery that something was phony down at your office. That's why he chased you out here.

"He knows you've been squawking to the coppers. Sometimes stool pigeons work two ways. Get it? There's a police inspector that thinks he's hot stuff - a guy name Joe Cardona - and you've been talking to him. Whatever you've spilled so far, don't matter. It ain't been too much. But all the big-shot says is: one more squawk -"

Trigger finished the sentence graphically. He brought his hand from his hip, made a motion as if slicing his throat, then gestured his thumb at Grennel.

Rigid, the financier made no reply. Bland thought for a moment that the threat had put Grennel on the verge of a collapse. It was Trigger who revived him, with the sharp reminder:

"Well, there's your envelope. Open it, and find out if the goods ain't the real stuff!"

With hands that could scarcely pluck the paper, Grennel finally managed to tear open the envelope. He was feverish as he brought out slips of paper, studying them in the light. Then, with an eager bound, he crossed the room to a huge fireplace, where a small fire was burning, even though the night was warm.

With a pleased gulp, Grennel flung the reclaimed notes into the embers, watched the papers flare up and turn to ashes, carrying his incriminating signatures with them.

Trigger, leaning against the desk, watched the scene with relish. Then, remembering that he had closed the bargain, he grabbed the metal box, made for the door and sidled out into the hallway.

The closing of the door awoke Grennel to sudden activity. Forgetful of Bland behind the safe, the gray-haired man bounded to the door, made certain that Trigger had gone toward the kitchen on the other side of the house.

Satisfied that the emissary was on his way, Grennel pounced back to the desk. He snatched the hand telephone from its cradle and called for a connection with New York City police headquarters.

Grennel's eagerness caused Bland to remain where he was. Thoroughly intrigued by the recent scene, the young man had no desire to interrupt it. It would be best, he thought, to let Grennel finish his call undisturbed. After that, they could talk over the whole affair.

In a moment, Grennel's voice rose excitedly over the distant dance music. He was talking to the very man he wanted: Inspector Joe Cardona.

"I'm at home," announced Grennel. "I had to come here... A call from the Vindicator... Yes, the Vindicator; that's what the blackmailer calls himself. I have his letters here to prove it..."

"Yes, I delivered the marked money... No, not to the crook himself. He sent a man for it. A rogue called Trigger Kobin... You've heard of him? Good!... Yes, I received what I expected... No, I don't care to mention that part of it. You understand, of course..."

THERE was a pause. Evidently Cardona was asking questions. Bland could see perplexity show on Grennel's face. He repeated a name that Cardona must have put.

"The Shadow?" asked Grennel. "No, there was no call from such a person... A friend, you say? I expected a friend to drop in at the office. A man named Lamont Cranston... No, he isn't here. I left before he arrived. But I have a witness present... His name? Ross Bland..."

Grennel had said something previously about knowing who the Vindicator was. Bland wondered why he didn't get to the point. Grennel did come to it, after Cardona had finished a few more questions. His lips moving eagerly, the financier finally found his chance to speak.

"I can tell you more, inspector!" he exclaimed. "I know who the Vindicator is... Yes; positively! He gave himself away by something he said when he phoned my office. I was afraid to call you then..."

There was a click, that Bland took for an interrupted connection on the telephone. He hoped that Cardona had not been cut off. But Grennel was talking again, and the police inspector was evidently listening, although the click was repeated in the midst of Grennel's speech.

"He gave himself away," repeated Grennel, with a chuckle. "There's only one man that he could possibly be. He calls himself the Vindicator, but I recognized his voice. The Vindicator is -"

Grennel stopped himself. He was staring toward a window. He had forgotten that a listener was on the wire, waiting for the all-important name that Grennel was about to utter. He was riveted only by what he saw.

It was something that explained the clicks heard by Bland. Those sounds had been the raising of a window that the hidden witness could not see. Though barred, the window had an ordinary sash inside the metal cross-braces. The sash had raised two inches and was about even with the down-pulled shade.

Sharp, emphatic, flashing a tongue of reflected flame, a revolver shot spurted through the scant-raised window. Coolly delivered, the bullet knifed straight to the victim's heart.

Ross Bland, sole witness to the tragedy, saw the telephone leave Grennel's hand, strike the desk and slide to the floor, carrying the stand with it. But the fall of the instrument was drowned by a louder thud; that of Grennel's body.

Collapsing like a dummy figure, the gray-haired man struck the floor like a thing of waxwork. The name that Grennel had been about to utter was locked within his closed lips by the very man whose identity was at stake.

For the thrust through the window, delivered from the direction opposite the route that Trigger Kobin had taken, could only have been given by a lurker previously in wait.

Death had become the final price. Death delivered by the master criminal who called himself the Vindicator!

CHAPTER III. THE VANISHED MURDERER

THE shot that killed Thomas Grennel was timely, from the standpoint of the man that fired it. But the

murderer had overlooked two factors that definitely concerned him.

First, the night was warm; hence there were persons on the side veranda. Second, with a loud blare of sound, the orchestra finished the piece it was playing. An emphatic silence had resulted; and that sudden stillness was ruined by the gun's report, so startling that it cleaved the night air with its echoes.

Instantly, there were shouts from the veranda. Like the gunshot, they were heard by the lone passenger in a big car that was rolling in along the front driveway. Through the blackness, that arriving guest had also seen the spurt of flame outside Grennel's study window.

As men in evening clothes piled from the veranda, to spread across the lawn, the passenger in the arriving car spoke calmly to his chauffeur:

"Drive past the front door, Stanley. Stop beyond the house."

In the dozen seconds that Stanley required to complete the order, the passenger in the back seat underwent a remarkable transformation. As Lamont Cranston, a newly arriving guest, he had been a figure in evening clothes, when he saw the gun spurt from across the angle of the long lawn. But while men were springing from the veranda, Cranston had begun to lose that identity.

His hands were drawing a black cloak over his shoulders; as his arms flung themselves into the sleeves, he twisted to scoop a black slouch hat from the seat beside him. As one hand clamped the hat on his head, his other hand went for the handle of the door.

The moment that the car stopped, a figure slid out into the darkness of the driveway - a shape that went so swiftly, so silently, that Stanley still thought Cranston was in the car and sat back patiently to await further orders.

Lamont Cranston had become The Shadow.

A variety of matters were explained by his quick change. Cardona's question over the telephone regarding The Shadow, was prompted by the police inspector's hunch that such a crime hunter would certainly be seeking the trail of so cunning a criminal as the Vindicator.

Grennel's answer, that he had expected his friend Cranston, showed that Cardona's hunch was right, even though the inspector did not know it. Finding Grennel gone from the office, The Shadow had called his home. Learning of Grennel's return, he had headed directly there.

SPREADING out from the veranda, the excited guests were naturally forming a fanwise cordon across the lawn as they closed in toward the darkened wall outside of Grennel's study. In so doing, they were gaining the advantage of light that streamed from the windows on the veranda.

No crook, however willing he was to fight, would be foolish enough to fling himself into the light. His only chance to avoid exposure was to circle the rear of the mansion and take to the smaller lawn on the far side, unless he found a chance to duck through the hedges at the rear. In either case, the quickest, surest way to overtake him was by cutting in from the far lawn.

That was the route The Shadow took. As he neared the rear of the house, he could hear the shouts of the pursuers coming from beyond the corner. Driving swiftly, silently through the darkness, The Shadow had heard no scurry from the murderer. He was in time to trap the fellow, whether he rounded the house or darted for the hedges.

It was up to The Shadow, an automatic already in his fist, to waylay the killer before the others did. Otherwise, those unarmed pursuers would be on the spot.

It happened that the bad spot was The Shadow's.

As he clipped five yards by cutting close to low-roofed steps outside the kitchen door, a sudden clatter interrupted him. The door was flung outward; with it came a flood of light. A man lunged from the kitchen, a drawn revolver in one fist, a metal box tucked beneath his other arm.

His hurtle carried him across The Shadow's path; as he struck the ground, the fellow turned to shout back at other men, who were using guns to slug their way free from the kitchen. The fellow was Trigger Kobin, and as he wheeled about, the lighted doorway formed a background for a sight that startled him.

Against that glow was a black-cloaked human figure; a head that wore a black slouch hat. Trigger glimpsed a hawkish profile that disappeared as its owner twisted away to regain the darkness. In that instant, Trigger changed the shout that was coming to his lips. His cry was raucous-toned:

"The Shadow!"

With that, Trigger fired - at blankness. The Shadow had whirled back again into darkness, and Trigger took to the same sort of blanket. It was lucky that he didn't shoot again, as he dived into the dark, for The Shadow would have surely picked him off if given a revolver flash as target.

It chanced, therefore, that The Shadow's shot went wide. As he shifted, totally deceiving Trigger, the fellow made the mistake of returning a shot from a spot farther away. By all logic, the duel should have ended with The Shadow's next gun stab; but the tide had turned in Trigger's favor.

The thugs at the doorway had heard his shout; they had seen The Shadow's shots. They were flinging themselves from the sides of the steps, shooting wildly as they came. The Shadow, whipping away, had to use his next bullet for the nearest of those foemen.

Sprawling, the first comer hit the ground, but the others, three in all, were bounding across his prostrate form, shooting toward the deeper darkness. There was only one direction that The Shadow could have taken: toward the house wall, and they expected to riddle him against that background.

They were spraying their shots high and low, driving in to fall upon their prey. Whether he flattened on the ground, or tried to scale the wall, The Shadow would be prostrate by the time they reached him.

THEN, like a stab from nowhere, came an answer that dropped another of the thugs. It was repeated; this time, a crook located it - a volcanic gun spurt that seemed to issue from the ground beside the wall. The discovery did the man no good, for he received the bullet also.

The final hoodlum, lunging onward, stumbled. He grabbed at the wall, to save himself from a plunge into an open place in the ground beside the wall.

He had reached The Shadow's protective covering. The cellar windows had stone-walled wells outside them, for they were below the ground level. Those stone pits were scarcely ever noticed, because they were covered with hinged gratings. The Shadow, finding one against the wall, had yanked the grating up and dropped below it.

The grating had not fallen back into place. That was why the last thug stumbled in the pitfall. Before he could recover his balance, hands had caught him and were dragging him down. Wildly, the mobster tried to slug his invisible opponent. His blow was warded off by The Shadow's arm; and with a reverse stroke, the cloaked fighter let his own gun reach the thug's skull.

The shallow pit retained an occupant, but its inmate was no longer The Shadow. He was out from that temporary shelter, leaving the stunned crook below the grating that The Shadow dropped back into

place.

Quick, probing shots were The Shadow's next move; he dispatched them in an effort to locate Trigger Kobin. There was an answer from a line of trees along the drive, beyond where Stanley had parked the limousine. Trigger's one shot was so hasty that it whined harmlessly off into the darkness.

Trigger's bad aim did not deter The Shadow. He knew how poor such marksmen could be at long range. His own aim was the sort that could drop Trigger before the fellow fled out through the front drive, which was his obvious direction to escape. But The Shadow's fire was thwarted.

More men were upon him, a shouting frantic crowd whose faces were blurs above the sharp white of their shirt fronts. The guests had lost the murderer's trail when they heard the commotion by the kitchen. They thought that whoever was shooting would be the man to get.

All that they clutched was empty darkness; but amid it was a swishing form that bowled them in several directions. The Shadow, finally forgetting Trigger Kobin, had become a human whirlwind. The blows that he delivered were straight-armed shoves, rather than punches; but they carried a power that strewed the lawn with a bewildered array of well-dressed young men.

He was past the kitchen steps, The Shadow, still hoping to regain the murderer's trail, when he was met by the last of the guests, a man who sprang in suddenly. In the gloom, The Shadow saw a gleam which told that the fellow had a gun and was swinging it to aim.

There was a clang, as The Shadow's automatic stroked the revolver. That hard slash numbed the attacker's hand. He lost the gun and grappled, only to be flung into the light by the kitchen steps.

As his opponent sprawled, The Shadow heard a girl's shriek. A blonde, clad in an evening dress of green, dashed into view. She stooped to aid the sprawled man to rise groggily upon the steps.

THE girl was Margaret Bbye, the blonde that Ross Bland had noticed on the dance floor. Her whole expression showed concern, for the man she aided was her fiancée, Larry Chandler. He had been first in the chase around the house, and his long face was solemn now, as he ruefully rubbed his head.

Margaret's lips tightened as she stared into the darkness, hoping to sight Larry's opponent. But The Shadow was gone and, as a token that no one could trace him, a strange laugh quivered from the darkness. Sinister, mocking, that tone certified that he had done his part in battle against men of crime.

Elusive, the laugh left others guessing as to its precise location. Even Stanley was puzzled; staring from the front seat of the limousine, the chauffeur scratched his head. That laugh might have come from anywhere.

Not so with the voice that Stanley suddenly heard. It was Cranston's quiet tone, ordering him to start the car, drive out from the grounds, turn around, and come back to the front door of the mansion.

Chance of pursuing either the murderer or Trigger was ended. The Shadow, having accomplished the utmost under the circumstances, had again become Lamont Cranston. Playing that part, he intended to learn what had happened in the mansion prior to his arrival.

Such details would be vital to his quest. For The Shadow was sure of one important fact. He knew, although he had not viewed the result, that Thomas Grennel had been murdered; that an unknown killer was the man responsible.

He had heard, too, of a master criminal who styled himself the Vindicator. Other facts testified that the crook in question must be the murderer. The killer's escape, therefore, marked the beginning of a new

campaign.

The Shadow, true champion of justice, would seek the Vindicator, that pretender whose claims of righting wrong were but a sham to mask his criminal desires.

CHAPTER IV. GATHERED EVIDENCE

INSPECTOR JOE CARDONA played an important part in the investigation of the Grennel murder case, even though the crime had occurred outside his bailiwick. Arriving at the mansion, he found the Westchester County authorities in charge. And they had been eagerly awaiting his appearance.

They regarded Cardona as a material witness, due to his telephone conversation with Grennel. They felt grateful because the New York City inspector had called them and reported the murder before word had reached them from Grennel's. Joe's testimony, moreover, was needed to establish that given by another witness, Ross Bland.

Stocky-built, swarthy of countenance, Cardona had a direct manner that made his statements convincing. He declared, emphatically, that Grennel had told him of Bland's presence. Every detail given by Cardona - such as Grennel's mention of the Vindicator, and the payment to Trigger Kobin as go-between - meshed perfectly with Bland's testimony.

When Cardona had finished, he found himself shaking hands with Bland, whose face had regained its usual smile. While waiting for Cardona, the mustached young man had been very much a suspect; one county detective holding to the belief that Bland might actually have been the murderer.

With Bland cleared, he was asked to repeat his testimony. He gave it, from the moment of the murder.

"That shot was fired through the window," stated Bland. "I heard it; I even saw the flash. But I was where I couldn't do anything about it. By the time I was out from behind the safe door, the killer was gone.

"The window was barred. I couldn't go after him through there. I yanked open the study door and ran right into some excited servants. They saw Grennel's body and grabbed me. But I couldn't have gone out through the side door anyway. It was locked. One of the servants had to take Grennel's keys to open it."

The servants substantiated Bland's story; so did Dorothy Grennel, who had arrived with them. That swung the burden to the outside witnesses, who told their stories in half a dozen styles but with the same chief fact. All had heard the shot and swore that it had been fired outside. A few claimed that they had seen the gun flash close to the study window.

Their story of the chase was uniform. They had pursued the murderer to the back of the house. There, they had been diverted from their chase by the roar of battling guns. They had mixed it with a fighter in the dark, someone who had flung them right and left, to disappear with a parting laugh.

The name of that fighter was known.

He was The Shadow.

Someone had heard the name shouted just before the fray, and the title fitted. Like a living shadow, he had come and gone, but he had left tangible evidence of his battle in behalf of justice. Four crippled crooks had been taken into custody. One of them, the thug that The Shadow had slugged, was able to act as spokesman in behalf of his pals, all of whom had gone to the hospital.

The fellow was a small-time hoodlum named Muck Salders. He had been too groggy to think up an alias, and was glad he hadn't, because Cardona recognized him.

"We didn't come here to pull no rub-out," testified Muck. "We come along with Trigger Kobin, because he wanted to chin with old Grennel and didn't want nobody butting in. We was to use our dukes, if any guys got tough with us. But Trigger says to lay off with the gats.

"But when we run into The Shadow, Trigger yells to start shooting, so we did. Anyway, we didn't croak The Shadow - so what? It wasn't us that put old Grennel on the spot; nor Trigger, neither. Nobody can hand us a rap for something we didn't know about."

POSSESSION and use of firearms seemed a sufficient charge against Muck and the other thugs; but that was a matter for the courts to settle. Joe Cardona held to the personal opinion that Trigger Kobin, if captured, would be due for plenty more.

It was certain, though, that Trigger had not foreseen the murder of Thomas Grennel, although he had issued veiled threats to the millionaire.

There was one feature that Cardona definitely did not like. Even if found, Trigger would furnish no trail to the Vindicator. That was obvious from Trigger's statements to Grennel, as reported by Bland.

But how to account for the disappearance of Grennel's murderer? What had become of the vanished Vindicator?

A lone witness suddenly offered testimony. He was one of those who had been in the pursuit: Larry Chandler. His previous statements had been similar to those of other guests who had left the veranda. But Larry had something else to add.

"I was closest to the man," he stated. "So close that I saw his gun when he chucked it away. I might have nailed him" - Larry's tone was regretful - "if I hadn't grabbed the gun instead."

"This gun?" demanded a county detective, exhibiting the weapon. "The one picked up near the kitchen door?"

Larry nodded.

"I saw The Shadow," he declared. "I didn't know that he'd been fighting crooks, so I went after him. That's when I lost the gun. You'll probably find my fingerprints on it, to prove my statement."

Cardona's eyes went sharp, his lips tight. He sped a glance toward Lamont Cranston, who was present as a listener but wasn't rated as a witness, because he had arrived after all the excitement was over. Cardona knew Cranston; recognized him as a man of keenness.

He was wondering, Cardona was, whether Cranston, too, had noted the smartness of Larry's statement. The young man was intimating that the fingerprints would prove his story; whereas, they might more logically incriminate him as the murderer.

Whether Cranston caught it or not, Cardona could not guess. Cranston's face was immobile, masklike. Not even the slightest trace of a smile appeared upon his hawkish visage.

The county detective snapped a question at Larry.

"Since you didn't tackle the murderer," he said, "maybe you can at least tell us which way he went."

"There was only one way he could have gone," returned Larry. His face was more solemn than ever. "I was coming from one side, The Shadow from the other. The killer must have cut through the rear driveway, between the hedges."

"And where, after that?"

"I don't know. But if he had a car parked in the lane out back, he would have used it quick enough."

That led to questioning of Grennel's chauffeur, who had been in the house with the other servants. He hadn't seen any car in the back lane, but maybe one had followed from the station. There had been several cars parked at the station; ones that the chauffeur had noted while waiting for Grennel.

No one, though, could testify to having heard a car pull away from the back lane. Again, that proved nothing, for the lane was fairly distant and the sound of a starting car could easily have escaped notice.

Apparently, Larry's story was to be taken at face value. Cardona, fuming at the thought, suddenly introduced a question of his own. Swinging to Larry, Joe demanded bluntly:

"Where were you at the time the shot was fired?"

"The shot that killed Grennel?" parried Larry, coolly. "I was on the veranda talking to Miss Brye. We were both startled by the shot; I was faced toward the study and happened to see it. I told Margaret - that's Miss Brye - that I was going to see what was the matter. Being near the rear of the veranda, I was the first to begin the chase. So many others followed me, that the killer ran for it."

NOT for a moment did Cardona's eyes leave Larry's. The young man met the inspector's gaze directly. County detectives, as well as other witnesses, had their eyes glued on the pair.

Two persons, however, glanced elsewhere at Larry's mention of Miss Brye. Those two were Lamont Cranston and Ross Bland. They let their eyes turn toward Margaret, read the facial expression of the girl in green.

Margaret's face went pale, then took on a flush that crept down her neck and shoulders. But she recovered from her stress by the time Cardona turned to her with the question:

"Is that true, Miss Brye."

Margaret's eyes were looking past Cardona, to meet Larry's. His gaze was as steady as ever, and it gave the girl a final lift of courage.

"That is true," said Margaret. "Larry and I were on the veranda together. We heard the shot, and he dashed away. Others followed, and I went with them. That was why I was close enough" - her voice took on a new firmness - "to see Larry pick something from the ground. When he dropped it by the kitchen, I saw that he had picked up a gun."

Cranston's eyes had moved again. They were watching Ross Bland. The Shadow saw that Bland, like himself, had recognized that Margaret's testimony was colored to support Chandler's story. How much of it was actual truth was something that the girl alone could tell.

It was Joe Cardona, this time, who had missed his opportunity to find a flaw. Margaret's testimony gave the sterling mark to Larry's statement, so far as the police inspector was concerned. Joe turned to the county detectives and apologized for breaking into the quiz. They politely thanked him for his efforts.

The net result of Cardona's interjected question was to clear Larry of all suspicion, thanks to Margaret's support. When the county officials decided to dismiss the witnesses, they included Larry Chandler and Margaret Brye among those who were no longer needed.

One man alone remained. That was Ross Bland. But the detectives made it clear to everyone that they

merely wanted to go over the details of Bland's conversation with Grennel; that Bland, like all the other guests, was cleared completely of any complicity in the case.

Joe Cardona rode back to New York City with Lamont Cranston. On the way, the ace inspector gloated over his future opportunity. The murder had been done in Westchester; but Manhattan, Joe's own stomping ground, would surely be the place where Trigger Kobin would choose to hide out.

"Trigger is the guy to find," assured Cardona. "Maybe he can't tell us who this Vindicator is, but it's a cinch he sent Grennel's dough along to the bigshot. That's the lead I'm going to go after, when I get hold of Trigger Kobin. The best lead that there was tonight."

The gloom in the big car hid the slight smile that The Shadow allowed upon his lips. There were persons, perhaps, who would prove more important in this case than Trigger Kobin. One was Larry Chandler, the other, Margaret Brye.

Besides those two there was a third, whose excellent memory of details and whose sharp ability to notice persons' faces made him the sort who might obtain important clues on his own. That was a reason why The Shadow was mentally listing him as another person to hold for future reference.

If The Shadow's thoughts of the future were correct, and they had an uncanny way of being right, Ross Bland would figure heavily in the coming search for the unknown Vindicator.

CHAPTER V. CROSSED PATHS

THE next two days produced sensational newspaper accounts relating to the Grennel murder. There wasn't a doubt that the Vindicator, despite the smugness shown in his letters, was a crook of superior skill. Facts leaked out to prove that Thomas Grennel was not the first victim of the Vindicator's blackmail schemes.

Over a period of a few years, the Vindicator had shaken down at least a dozen men of considerable prominence, accumulating close to a quarter million dollars by such methods. Some had told a partial story to the police, without mentioning the Vindicator by name; that was how Inspector Cardona had recognized what was due, when he first heard from Grennel.

Similarly, The Shadow had obtained vague facts regarding the Vindicator. But until he suspected that he had been recognized by Grennel, the Vindicator had never resorted to violence, let alone murder.

Curiously, Grennel's death made previous victims talk. Like Grennel, all had received documents relating to their own misdemeanors of the past. They had paid cash for such papers, then had destroyed them; so they were safe in that respect. But when it came to guessing the identity of the Vindicator, there was nothing they could offer.

One of the victims had used Grennel's trick of delivering marked money, then had instructed private detective agencies to watch for it. After a year the cash had bobbed up from various places, always defying efforts to trace it back.

It was plain that the Vindicator was well fortified financially; that he could afford to let "hot" money cool. He probably would keep Grennel's marked bills in his own possession, then release them some months hence, through various well-protected channels. The people who would eventually put the cash in circulation would not know a thing about it.

The sooner, therefore, that the Vindicator was found, the more chance that he would be caught with the unsavory goods. On that account, Joe Cardona was combing the underworld for Trigger Kobin. The

Shadow, however, was more interested in the affairs of persons who belonged to a much higher layer of society.

LATE in the afternoon of the second day, Margaret Brye entered the cocktail lounge of the fashionable Hotel Clairmont. She chose her favorite table in a deep, comfortable corner where the lights were mild.

There was a man at a nearby table, but he looked half asleep. Studying his face, Margaret decided that she had never seen him before. She was wrong, but could hardly be blamed for the error. The Shadow, when he changed the contour of his features, always appeared quite different from Lamont Cranston.

Margaret was sipping a daiquiri when she saw another man stroll over from the bar. He was coming to her corner, and she heard a polite voice that she recognized; a moment later the man was seated at her table.

"Ross Bland!" exclaimed Margaret. "I didn't recognize you at first. I never knew you came in here."

"I don't, usually," returned Bland. "I just happened to come in with a friend. He had to catch a train, so I stayed to finish my drink."

Bland had actually arrived alone, as The Shadow could have testified. The man's real purpose was to have a private chat with Margaret; and he had learned, probably through mutual acquaintances, that she sometimes came to the Clairmont.

"I'm waiting for Larry," said the girl. "He's driving me out to Mr. Marquin's home. I'm living there, you know."

"So I understand," nodded Bland. "They tell me that your father likes to isolate himself when he gets in an inventive mood."

"Not exactly that," explained Margaret. "Some of his experiments are dangerous. That is why he goes to Vrekill Castle. I shall be glad when he returns to New York, so we can take our old apartment."

"Do you hear from your father often?"

Bland's question was casual, but it brought a tightening of Margaret's lips. In any discussion of her father's work, she preferred to settle questions rapidly. Opening her handbag, she took out some letters, laid them on the table.

"This letter is from dad," said the girl, picking up an envelope. "It came yesterday. He isn't certain how soon he will be back. What is more" - Margaret was gathering the envelopes, putting them back in her bag - "I never go out there to see him. The road from Vrekill to the castle is a poor one, and it is the only way to get there. Besides, dad never admits visitors. I don't think he would open the door, even for me!"

There was an emphasis to Margaret's tone that discouraged further questions. She wanted the subject changed, and Bland obliged. There was another matter that he was particularly anxious to discuss.

"I'm obliged to Larry Chandler," remarked Bland, "because his testimony helped so much the other night. He made it quite clear that the shot was fired from outside the window and not inside the study. Without Larry's statement, those county detectives might have doubted my story."

Margaret nodded. She was looking past Bland, toward the man at the other table, and was confident that he was out of earshot. She didn't realize that the low curved ceiling of the nook acted as a sounding board. The Shadow was hearing every word.

"Of course" - Bland was offering a cigarette - "Larry owes a lot to you. His testimony needed your support. It was lucky that you said that you were with him when the shot was fired."

There was a touch of alarm in Margaret's eyes; her fingers were nervous as they plucked a cigarette from the case. She puffed at the light that Bland offered, then found her voice.

"Let's talk about something else." Margaret was covering the worry in her tone. "I feel so badly about poor Mr. Grennel and Dorothy. She's such a good friend of mine."

Bland nodded. He seemed to recall something.

"You two used to race your speedboats, didn't you?" he inquired. "Out at the Northview Yacht Club. Isn't your boat called the Whiskaway?"

It was Margaret's turn to nod, a bit reluctantly.

"You'll have to match her with the Rambler," chuckled Bland. "That's my boat - about the same build as your craft. What say to a race, some day this week?"

Margaret bit her lips, met Bland's eyes.

"The Whiskaway is up for repairs," she said. "I... I struck a rock when I missed the channel."

"A rock outside the Northview basin? I didn't know of any there. I'll have to watch out for them in the future."

Margaret, trying to recover from her confusion, was grateful at that moment to see Larry Chandler enter. She beckoned; Larry came to the corner, shook hands with Bland.

After a few moments' chat, Bland found he had to leave. He was scarcely out of sight before Margaret spoke in a sharp whisper, that carried to The Shadow:

"Larry! He suspects that I wasn't with you when that shot was fired!"

Larry stared a moment then shrugged. His hand came across the table, steadied on the girl's.

"It doesn't matter," he assured. "I really thought you were there, Margaret, or I wouldn't have said so. It actually happened exactly as I told you after we were alone. I saw someone lift his head, there by the window. I said to you: 'Look, Meg,' and I swung over the rail -"

"I didn't hear you say that. I wasn't there, Larry!"

"You'd been there just a moment before. It must have happened when you started away to look for Dot Grennel. Anyway, I was halfway to that window sneaking up on the fellow, whoever he was, when the shot ripped out."

"I heard that," acknowledged Margaret. "That's when I forgot Dot and looked for you. I didn't see you where I had just left you. I thought" - her eyes were large, with a dewy sparkle - "that someone had fired at you. That's why I hurried to the lawn with the men."

"Poor kid!" Larry's hand parted the girl's fingers. "Of course it scared you! But I'm glad, darling, that you testified the way you did. It saved us both a lot of trouble."

Margaret's eyes narrowed. Her mood was becoming firmer.

"There's one question, Larry," she said. "No matter what your answer, I promise never to reveal it. But I must have the truth."

THE SHADOW could see a twitch of Larry's features. In a moment, the man's long face had stiffened for the test. The coming question might prove a grim one. It was possible that the girl might actually ask if Larry, himself, had been the man by the window. But she didn't. The question that she put brought quick relief to Larry's face.

"That man by the window," asked Margaret, "did you, by any chance, recognize him - then or later?"

Larry shook his head.

"Positively not!" he declared. "I couldn't see his face at the window, for it was dim and his back was turned. Out by the hedges, I barely noticed the gun when he dropped it."

"I lied about that, too," reminded Margaret. "I thought it would help you, Larry."

"It did, and I appreciate it. I was a fool to snatch up that gun and put my own prints on it. The killer must have wiped it on a handkerchief while he ran. Only my prints showed. Fortunately, they don't count against me. My story was a true one. It was believed - thanks, of course, to you."

The girl's gaze was far away. She didn't doubt a word of Larry's story, so far as his own part was concerned. But, musingly, she came back to that other question:

"You swear then, Larry, that you have no idea -"

"Who the murderer might be?" Larry snapped the interruption hotly. "Certainly not! If I had recognized him, I'd have shouted it out! But what makes you think that I might know the Vindicator?"

"Nothing," replied Margaret, with a forced smile. "Nothing, except a crazy notion that I suppose I shall forget."

Larry arose from the table.

"Let's go, then," he suggested. "I just called Mr. Marquin. He's having a guest for dinner and wants us there early. You'll remember the chap; he was out at Grennel's, but he didn't get there until after the fireworks."

"You mean Lamont Cranston?"

Larry nodded. He and Margaret left the lounge. From his own table, The Shadow watched their departure. His changed lips wore a slight smile. Larry's remark was a reminder that it was time for The Shadow, too, to leave.

Soon, The Shadow would be back in his guise of Cranston, with another opportunity to overhear any comments by Larry and Margaret on the subject of the Vindicator.

CHAPTER VI. THE RUBBER KING

ROGER MARQUIN'S Long Island residence was larger, more pretentious, than Grennel's Westchester home. Marquin had chosen it because he entertained a lot, mostly foreigners, who were interested in the rubber trade.

Since most of his holdings were managed through South American agents, Marquin had no office in

Manhattan. A suite of rooms on the second floor of his mansion had been converted into offices, where he worked with Larry Chandler, his secretary.

At present, the only guest at the mansion was Margaret Brye.

The dinner proved a subdued affair. Roger Marquin sat at the head of a table large enough to have accommodated two dozen diners, in addition to the four persons who were present. Yet the table, large though it was, looked small in proportion to the immense dining room.

The service, like the food, was excellent. Marquin always kept a large retinue of servants, in expectancy of many guests; and his serving men were so well trained that each course of the dinner seemed to arrive in magical style.

From one end of the table, Marquin chatted at long-distance range with Lamont Cranston at the other. The rubber king was a man of middle age, forceful both in manner and expression. His face, tanned from long periods that he had spent in the tropics, had the large forehead of a thinker, the square jaw that marked him as a man of action.

It was that combination of brain and brawn that symbolized Marquin's success.

In booming tone, he talked of expeditions up the Amazon; how he had won the control of valuable rubber plantations despite the opposition of powerful foreign syndicates. He spoke almost cheerfully of defeats that he had suffered, his air indicating that losses merely drove him on to other gains.

Larry and Margaret, at opposite sides of the table, faced each other in silence throughout the entire meal. Marquin was too busy talking to notice the fact; but to The Shadow, it evidenced that they had resumed their discussion during the trip from Manhattan.

Perhaps Margaret had put some other questions, more pointed ones, and Larry had not liked them. Possibly their coldness was exaggerated. This gloomy dining room was anything but a chummy place.

Near the dinner's end, Marquin glanced at Margaret. His heavy tone dwindled as he remarked:

"Don't worry about your father, Margaret. Those experiments of his will soon be over. Furthermore, I doubt that he regards them as dangerous."

"Time bombs are not playthings," reminded Margaret. "I hope that dad will turn to something different in the future."

DINNER ended, Marquin conducted Cranston up to his suite of offices. There, The Shadow saw stacks of foreign correspondence on a desk which evidently belonged to Larry. There were filing cabinets along one wall, proof that Larry's task was a heavy one. Marquin commented on that very fact as they went into the inner office.

"Young Chandler is a prize," he declared. "He is far more than a mere confidential secretary. I hope some day - although Larry does not know it - to appoint him sole manager of my business."

"How did you first acquire him?" was Cranston's response. "Was he a secretary originally?"

"No, indeed. He was an architect. With a firm that had many wealthy clients. But the building boom ended and there was no more opportunity for Chandler. He came to me to ask advice regarding conditions in South America. He wanted to go there."

"Did he ask you to finance the trip?"

Marquin shook his head at Cranston's question.

"Chandler has money," he declared. "How large a fortune, he never stated. Enough, I would say, for him to live on the income, provided his stocks were paying dividends. I liked him, and offered him his present job. He took it because the salary was a good one and enables him to spend money.

"Chandler is a social climber. I say that in his favor" - Marquin smiled frankly - "because I like men with ambition. At present, he is engaged to Margaret Brye; but I am not sure" - Marquin's tone lowered to a confidential pitch - "how that will work out. There's still a question regarding the wealth of her father, Dana Brye."

By that, Marquin intimated that Larry, if not a fortune hunter, at least took into calculation the financial position of his future father-in-law. Mention of Dana Brye put Marquin into a reflective mood. He pointed to the safe in the office wall; it was similar to the one that The Shadow had seen in Grennel's study.

"Brye designed that safe," declared Marquin. "He sold a lot of them, because the combinations are so intricate that no one has ever been known to crack one, except with dynamite. But I am not sure that Brye is a good business man.

"He may have money, but I doubt it. Unless love of his work is all that moves him, he should have retired a few years ago. Instead, he is working on a dangerous invention. So dangerous, that he has arranged for me to become Margaret's guardian, in case -"

A knock interrupted, from the door of the outer office. Marquin called to enter; Margaret appeared. She hesitated a moment, at sight of Cranston; then said abruptly:

"I would like a few hundred dollars, Mr. Marquin."

"Certainly!" agreed Marquin. He opened a desk drawer. "I believe that there is enough in the fund that your father left with me. No; wait!" He was opening a notebook. "It appears that you have overdrawn the amount. Did you get some money from Larry? The last entry looks like one of his."

Margaret nodded. Her eyes were troubled.

"If it is important," declared Marquin, "I can advance the sum."

Again, Margaret's air was one of hesitation. At last, she unfolded a letter that she carried and handed it to Marquin, who read it.

"Who is this man Jolden?" asked the rubber king. "Why has he written you, begging for money?"

"He worked for dad years ago," replied the girl. "Two letters came from him; they were addressed to my father, so I forwarded them. But dad was evidently too busy to reply."

QUICK links were forming in The Shadow's chain of thought. Margaret was holding the envelope from which she had taken the letter. The return address was in one corner of the envelope, printed in a sprawly hand. That envelope was one of those that Margaret had taken from her handbag at the Clairmont.

Definitely, Bland must have seen it and noted its clumsy hand-printed address. From it, he could have learned where Jolden lived; the fact might have interested him. If Bland happened to be investigating the Grennel case on his own, there was a chance that he would check on any unusual name that came his way.

The name "Jolden" was unusual. Moreover, to The Shadow, it was important. Classified in the back of his brain were the names of many lesser crooks, and among them was that of Louis Jolden. Since the envelope stated "L. B. Jolden," it could signify the man in question.

Jolden had done time in Sing Sing, as a secondary member of a bank-robbing mob. That dated back twenty years - the exact length of Jolden's sentence. But the fellow had been released in much less time, because of good behavior.

"Why don't you let your father handle this?" questioned Marquin, addressing Margaret. "Old employees can become a very great nuisance. Perhaps your father has tired of helping out the poor chap and, therefore, has ignored his letters."

The statement decided Margaret.

"Very well," she said. "You are probably right. It was very long ago that Jolden was in dad's employ. But he told me once, dad did, that if Jolden needed money and he was not around, I should give the fellow some.

"But since he actually wrote to dad, I suppose it is not my affair. What should I do? Write to Jolden and tell him that I forwarded those other letters?"

"Wait," suggested Marquin. "Do nothing, unless the man writes again and becomes insistent. Perhaps your father has already attended to the matter."

The two men walked with Margaret to the door of the outer office. When she had gone, Marquin shook his head and said:

"There's Dana Brye for you! That is why I fear he may have squandered all the money he made. He is a soft mark for everyone who was ever a friend of his."

A moment later, Cranston was shaking hands. Marquin wondered why his guest was leaving, until he recalled that Cranston had mentioned an appointment that would take him away soon after dinner.

The Shadow usually made such statements when he went places as Cranston. Appointments always accounted for a sudden departure; if he wanted to stay anywhere, he could decide that they were not important enough to keep.

Within ten minutes The Shadow, still Cranston, was leaving Marquin's front driveway, a passenger in the limousine that Stanley drove. His hands, however, were pulling out a secret drawer beneath the seat.

From that drawer, The Shadow was bringing the black garments that so effectively obliterated his guise of Cranston, whenever occasion called.

The Shadow intended to pay a prompt call upon Louis Jolden, a man whose crooked past might have a powerful bearing upon the crime-laden future.

CHAPTER VII. CRIME DELAYED

JOLDEN'S address was well north of Times Square, on a side street lined by crumbly old houses that had once been private residences. Most of them, including the one where Jolden lived, had been converted into cheap apartment houses.

The Shadow was no longer in the limousine when he rolled past the row of buildings. He had transferred from the big car to a taxicab, an independent cab, which The Shadow privately owned. The driver, Moe

Shrevnitz, was the speediest hackie in New York - and one of The Shadow's secret agents.

There were cars parked along the street, and The Shadow noted lurking figures that were shifting back toward an old sedan. Apparently, that car had arrived only a few minutes ago. Consequently, The Shadow ordered Moe to drive round the block.

Observing a space between two buildings, The Shadow whispered another order. The cab slackened speed, The Shadow dropped off into darkness. By the time the cab had swung the corner, he was taking the passage that led into the rear courtyard behind Jolden's house.

Scarcely had The Shadow picked the building door that he wanted, when a stir occurred near him. Two other persons had crept in by another route; they were holding a subdued conference, close enough for The Shadow to hear.

"Yeah, here's where you cover, Greasy," said one. "I'll slide back and tell Trigger you're posted."

Shuffly sounds marked the speaker's departure. The crook called Greasy remained; The Shadow could hear him moving about on the cement just below the steps to the rear door. Meanwhile The Shadow, though engaged in an important task, was making less noise than the posted crook.

Crouched low, to avoid a dull light that came through a pane of thick frosted glass, The Shadow was working to open a well-latched door.

Tiny picklike instruments did their duty. But when the latch gave, it clicked sharply and Greasy heard it. Immediately, his stealth became remarkable. He started creeping toward the steps so neatly, that The Shadow could barely detect the sound. Before he managed to locate Greasy's position, the thug paused.

The situation indicated that Greasy had a drawn gun, would be using it at close range if he saw the door move. This was a jam that could become more troublesome, the longer The Shadow postponed action. The detail of Greasy's exact position had to be settled. In the dark, The Shadow shifted.

Against the frosted pane, Greasy suddenly saw the shaded edge of a slouch hat that rose, then stopped. The crook took two sidesteps to a perfect position and leveled his revolver. He had a suspicion that he had spied The Shadow, and Greasy was taking no chances. With a sharp intake of breath, he tightened his trigger finger.

Right then, an avalanche struck him. The hurtling mass bowled Greasy to the ground. His gun clattered, unfired, as long fingers took his throat. Greasy went senseless when the back of his head rammed the cement. The crook's shift had given away his position.

RISING from Greasy's prone form, The Shadow turned to the steps and reclaimed his slouch hat, which he had balanced sideward on its brim, so that it projected against the frosted pane. The next question was what to do with Greasy. After peering into the apartment house hallway, The Shadow decided to lug the stunned crook inside.

There was a space just beneath the inside stairway that served as a resting place for Greasy. Trussing the crook with belt and handkerchief, The Shadow closed the fellow's lips with a strip of adhesive tape that Greasy carried for the purpose of gagging someone else.

Moving stealthily past the foot of the stairs, The Shadow was a gliding thing of blackness, difficult to discern against the darkened stairway. Noiselessly, he moved upward to inspect the floors above.

It was at the third floor back that he found Jolden's apartment. Most of the doors bore name cards; but this one didn't, which seemed good policy for an ex-convict. The door wasn't latched; easing it open, The

Shadow heard the buzz of voices. He was looking in upon a scene that he had half expected.

He saw Jolden, a thin-lipped, tight-faced man with baldish head. With darting eyes that peered through clouds of cigarette smoke that he puffed, Jolden was talking to a visitor: Ross Bland. Apparently, the two were finishing a conference, for Bland was about to rise from his chair.

"It's the straight dope I've given you," assured Jolden, in a wheezy voice. "And why not?" - he shrugged his shirtsleeved arms - "considering that I don't owe anything to Dana Brye. We've got along all right, him and me. I ain't no shakedown artist; all I've asked for is to be taken care of."

"I understand," returned Bland, in an icy tone. Then, more indulgently: "I hope, Jolden, that your conscience, rather than the money I just gave you, impelled you to reveal the truth."

Jolden grinned.

"Conscience, hell!" he mouthed. "I've done my stretch, and that's that! Say, if I'd figured you for a dick when you walked in here, you couldn't have made me talk if you'd used a hunk of rubber hose! That sob stuff you handed me about that poor Grennel dame and her dead father - bah!

"You want justice done. Sure! A lot of dopes feel that way, but they're guys that have never been in stir. If I'd ever been that soft, the trip to the big house would have cured me. You're using your bean, though, by trying to dig up the facts without calling in a lot of bulls. Dumb coppers, like that Joe Cardona, can gum up anything."

Jolden paused, to take a last puff at an inch of cigarette before he chucked it. Then, following Bland toward the door, the ex-convict added:

"I needed dough and old Brye won't give it. All I've ever done is tell him I was hard up; nothing else. You wanted to hear what I knew about Brye, so I told you, for five hundred bucks. This country's still free enough for me to do that, ain't it?"

"I suppose it is," returned Bland, his hand on the doorknob. Then, curtly:

"Good night, Jolden."

WITHDRAWN to the second floor, The Shadow watched Bland come down the stairs. Stiffly, eyes straight ahead, Bland was clutching an inside pocket, proof that he carried more money than the five hundred dollars he had paid Jolden.

It was obvious that he had found no pleasure in dealing with a man like Jolden; but he was trying to act unconcerned, probably fearing a knife thrust in the back.

It wouldn't do to let Bland walk out through the front door into the hands of new mobbies governed by Trigger Kobin, who had mysteriously bobbed back into the game. To warn Bland, The Shadow stepped out to meet him, gave a friendly whisper that the fellow should have heeded. At that moment, Bland heard a sound from above. Alarmed, he went berserk.

Taking The Shadow to be a foe, he flung himself madly upon the black-cloaked accoster. Grappling, The Shadow tried to whirl Bland to safety along the second-floor hall, for a sharp clatter had begun on the third story.

They reeled against a crazy railing, that gave with their weight. Catching a solid post, The Shadow remained where he was; but Bland went through, to the steps that led down from second floor to first.

That drop inspired him to another. Bouncing to his feet, Bland vaulted the banister and landed in the rear hall of the first floor. The quick dash of his footsteps told The Shadow that Bland had taken the proper route to safety: out through the back door that Greasy no longer guarded.

Whipping about, The Shadow looked up to the third floor. He flattened instantly, for he saw guns above. There were shots, but the bullets whined over The Shadow's head. Immediately, his sweeping hand sped from his cloak, to jab answers with an automatic.

Two thuggish figures bobbed above - one diving back to safety, the other beginning a long, sprawling dive down the stairs.

Rolling aside, The Shadow avoided the hurtling thug that he had clipped. Coming to his feet with a powerful knee spring, he gave a mocking challenge as he drove for the top of the stairway. Flattening again near the top step, he saw the route by which the thugs had entered: an open trapdoor that led out to the roof.

The second thug was crouched below that gap, aiming a gun. Behind him stood his leader, Trigger Kobin, also with a drawn gun. Both fired at sight of The Shadow's head, but they were too slow. The Shadow was sliding one step downward, as he took that peek. It was his gun, poked over the top step, that got results.

In the midst of blazing shots, Trigger's mobster pal collapsed. Trigger, himself, was wheeling away toward the wall as The Shadow fired. But he made the mistake of stopping too soon, as he had that other night.

In two more seconds, Trigger Kobin should have known the folly of trying to beat The Shadow in a close-range duel. But the quick changes in this scene were not yet ended.

The Shadow barely managed to halt his trigger tug, as a figure lunged through an opening door. It was Jolden; he had heard the shots and seen the results. He thought that Bland must have started the battle, even though he had caught the tones of a weird laugh.

Jolden, in the penitentiary nearly twenty years, belonged to an era that dated back before The Shadow's amazing campaigns had begun.

He had heard of The Shadow, but the cloaked fighter's battle challenge was something that newcomers did not talk about when they had reached their prison cells. Therefore, Jolden thought that the marksman from the stairway, presumably Bland, had reached his limit in bagging two crooks out of three.

Considering himself the prey that invaders sought, and seeing only Trigger left, Jolden decided to risk a dash. Hurdling the sprawled figure of the second thug, he made for the stairway. His leap took him farther than he expected. Jolden had blocked The Shadow's fire, but not Trigger's. For Jolden's guess was right; he was the man that Trigger wanted.

JABBING the shots that he had hoped to give The Shadow, Trigger turned Jolden's hurdle into a plunge. With a mad shriek, Jolden went over the top of the stairway. His body, writhing in air, came down so rapidly that The Shadow could not avoid it. Together, they bounded down the stairs.

At the halfway point, The Shadow clutched the rail and stayed there; but Jolden continued, to end in a dead crazy-shaped mass beside the thug who moaned on the second-story floor.

Though The Shadow's eyes looked above, his ears heard pounding feet from the stair well below. Crooks were invading from the front, attracted by the gunfire. They figured that Trigger needed them and

they were on their way.

The Shadow spurted final shots toward the third floor. Amid the echoes, his laugh rang out anew, to let Trigger know that he could expect more. Poking a fresh gun through the banister, The Shadow blasted away and temporarily halted the new arrivals. Then he started up after Trigger.

Trigger had escaped through the trapdoor to the roof. Once in flight, he had decided to keep going. When The Shadow rolled out to the roof, there was no sign of Jolden's murderer. Trigger had taken a quick route across other housetops.

Sirens were wailing from the streets below. Police were arriving too late to trap Trigger Kobin. They would furnish no obstacle, therefore, to The Shadow, when he also used the roofs to reach some empty house and there descend. For The Shadow was carefully clamping the trapdoor, to leave no trace of his departure.

That task done, his laugh came weirdly, but subdued, as The Shadow began his journey beneath the shroud of night. The game had shifted tonight, producing new elements in the quest for the Vindicator. Ross Bland had become an important figure; for that young man had personally gotten important facts that referred to Dana Brie.

Louis Jolden, Bland's informant, could talk to no one else; not even to admit that he had spoken to a visitor. The fact that Bland had heard Jolden's story was known only to The Shadow. As for Trigger Kobin, he had become more than a mere go-between in the Vindicator's schemes.

Like his hidden chief, Trigger had committed murder. Under such circumstances, the law would hunt him harder; but it was likely, too, that the Vindicator would use Trigger right along, since the fellow's lot was cast.

Out of tonight's confusion The Shadow would foresee trails with many crossings; new paths that would end their tangle in a straight route to that hidden master of crime, the Vindicator.

CHAPTER VIII. VREEKILL CASTLE

THE death of an obscure ex-convict was not important enough to become lunch-table conversation at the swanky Northview Yacht Club. Nor were the members interested in the fact that the police had pinned murder on Trigger Kobin, after rounding some crippled mobbies in a raid the night before.

Among the luncheon group was Ross Bland. He, perhaps, was thinking of Louis Jolden; but there was something else upon his mind. All during lunch, he scarcely noticed another silent member who sat opposite him. Ordinarily, Bland would have been glad to chat with so prominent a person as Lamont Cranston; but today, his own plans gripped him.

They met, Bland and Cranston, outside the yacht-club library, where Bland headed immediately after lunch. It was then that Cranston remarked in quiet tone:

"Someone was telling me about a buy in Arivada Silver. They say that you have options on a controlling interest. Perhaps we might get together on it."

Bland showed a flash of interest. As always, when he began intensive conversation, he proffered his cigarette case.

"It's a reclaimed mine," he stated. "Huge prospects, Mr. Cranston. At present prices of silver, the big mining interests are so busy with their own projects that they have let many opportunities slide. This is the

right time to buy up a mine like the Arivada.

"At what price?"

Bland started to answer; then hesitated. His glance went toward the library and its huge file of charts. He had something more important than the Arivada matter.

"I'll find out," he told Cranston. "Suppose I call you in a few days, when I have all the details."

Cranston was agreeable. He strolled away, while Bland went into the library. But Cranston did not go far. Passing the doorway again, he saw Bland spreading a large map on the table.

From that distance, printed names could not be read; but The Shadow easily recognized the outlines on the map. The sheet was a navigation chart of the Hudson River.

AN hour later, Bland started out in his speedboat, Rambler, bound, so someone said, on a trip across Long Island Sound. That report did not deceive The Shadow.

A package had just been delivered for Lamont Cranston. In the library, The Shadow opened the envelope and began to study a collection of aerial photographs.

The picture showed Vreekill Castle, on the Hudson. They had been taken this morning from a passing airplane. Such craft were commonly seen above the Hudson's cliffs as far north as Vreekill. Comparing the photos with the chart that Bland had so recently consulted, The Shadow found that the pictures revealed all - and more.

Whether or not Bland had learned what he wanted, was a question. The Shadow, however, had certainly obtained required facts.

As Margaret Brye had said, Vreekill Castle could be reached by a road. The pictures showed a twisty ribbon that extended to the promontory where the castle stood.

Perched on the cliff, the castle held a precarious position, due to the cleft rocks below it. Though the photograph had been taken directly from above, the building, a sprawl of ancient stone, appeared to have an outward lean.

Although much of the ground near the castle was barren, there were clumps of trees that formed an irregular path toward a cliff just north of the building, which was on the west side of the river. A narrow chasm lay between; on its brink were a few fair-sized saplings that had gained root in crevices among the rocks.

An important fact, that only the air photos could have shown, was the presence of houses among the scrubby patches of woods. The buildings were scarcely more than shacks; probably they had belonged to workmen who had once repaired the ancient castle.

One of those wooden structures, the largest of the tiny group, was certainly inhabited; for the camera, working from above, had picked out the pygmy figure of a man, who could have considered himself concealed along the trees.

Photographs returned to their envelope, The Shadow soon was riding to Manhattan. Stanley headed the limousine to the Holland Tunnel, glad that Cranston was returning home to New Jersey, for furious storm clouds were gathering from the south, betokening a late afternoon storm. But while they were riding along the Skyway, Cranston instructed Stanley to take him to a certain airport.

There, Cranston dismissed the limousine and entered an autogiro. Defying the approaching storm, he took off in the strange machine. Big flaying arms shaped like a horizontal windmill, lifted the wingless giro into a sharp ascent.

As he piloted the craft, The Shadow donned his garb of black. He was flying north, keeping ahead of the storm clouds; but his route was by no means an easy one.

Early dusk had brought lights to Manhattan and the city was one mighty cluster of tiny firefly sparkles. The glow of the George Washington Bridge was another landmark; but soon The Shadow's only guide was the blackened Hudson, sometimes impossible to sight.

Lights of water craft, occasional glimmers along the shore, were beacons that brought The Shadow back to his difficult course, until, when he was many miles north, the blackness of the settled night was broken by a glow upon which he had depended.

It was the full moon, rising blood-red because of the horizon's haze. The Shadow had outraced the storm; the clouds had not yet occupied the east. The moonlight, according to The Shadow's calculations, would be dependable for at least another hour. That space of time was much more than The Shadow needed.

He had gauged his own schedule to the moon's. Within the next ten minutes, the ruddy glow showed the sight that The Shadow expected. From an altitude of seven thousand feet, he spied the toylike structure of Vreckill Castle, capped upon its crag.

A few miles above the castle, The Shadow dropped the autogiro into a tree-surrounded clearing and concealed it where no one would discover it. Alighting, he spent the next fifteen minutes picking a compass-guided path on foot.

He came, at length, to the turning point where he could move eastward, to the cliff just north of Brye's stone-walled retreat.

Despite the moonlight, The Shadow determined to visit the largest of the wooden shacks before approaching the castle. Keeping to the trees, he found a blackness that the moonlight could not penetrate. Spotting a lamplight from an open window, The Shadow advanced with absolute stealth.

This side of the shack was away from the moon's glow.

One glance within the shack explained how Trigger Kobin replenished his depleted mobs. This was where he kept his reserves; and Trigger, himself, was with his crew. Only three thugs were present, but from Trigger's growled statements, The Shadow learned that there were at least half a dozen more around the grounds.

"WHY the squawk?" Trigger was demanding. "This is a cinch here, ain't it? Nobody's supposed to go into the castle. All right, we're seeing that they don't. The way the bunch is posted near here, they'd spot any guy that tried to get by. All you lugs have to do is take turns keeping watch."

One of the thugs grumbled that this duty didn't worry him. The place he wanted to stay away from was New York. His pals muttered their agreement. Trigger shrugged.

"Stick here then," he decided. "When this job's over, you can lam. A couple of good torpedoes is all I'll need, and they're in town already. The way saps like you guys let The Shadow knock you off, I'll do better without you!"

Moving away from the shack, The Shadow worked his way north of the castle. At moments, he paused,

particularly at places where the trees thinned. There, by blotches of moonlight, he could see the patrolling members of Trigger's band.

They were keeping themselves well under cover. None was close to the castle, for their game was to block anyone before such a person reached the bare ground.

Lingering at one spot, The Shadow gained a proper view of the castle itself. Its stone walls looked crumbly, but they bore signs of strengthening patches. Its windows, all high, were narrow, vertical slits. Its door, the only mode of direct entry, was massive and crisscrossed with bands of steel.

Skirting among the trees, The Shadow reached the cliff on the north. There, he crept on hands and knees, taking a snakelike course along the rocks.

No watchers were posted near, for they were unnecessary. Persons might reach the stone walls of the castle from west or south; but on the north side the chasm intervened.

Without considerable equipment, it would be seemingly impossible for anyone to bridge the chasm. But the watchers had not reckoned with the ingenuity of The Shadow.

Black against rock shadows, The Shadow arose beside the brink. The space that yawned was too wide for an ordinary leap; and it afforded no landing place beyond. Nothing but sheer wall, built to the very edge of the castle's crag, with an abyss straight below. Close to the cleft, The Shadow could hear the murmur of the Hudson's waves, stirred by the storm that was beating up from the south. Then came swashes, as if larger billows had rolled into the water-filled ravine. There were scraping sounds, then nothing but the murmur.

The Shadow was concentrated upon the castle, not the chasm's depths. In the rugged wall he saw a slitted window, slightly below his level. He gauged its width and was satisfied. His next task was to reach it.

As he stood on the brink, The Shadow was holding to two of the saplings that the photograph had shown. He chose the taller of those rock-rooted trees.

Testing the ground as he edged away, The Shadow turned and made a short, swift dash that ended in a leap.

HIS take-off looked as if he had started a crazy jump across the chasm - a suicidal stunt that could only have ended in a bounce from the opposite wall. But that spring also had an upward impetus. Its outward effect ended as The Shadow grabbed the sapling.

He was literally hurling himself up the slender trunk, making a climb through the speed of his surge. His carry in the direction of the chasm was intended to bend the sapling, and it did. Instead of sliding back to the ground, The Shadow wriggled forward, his hands hauling him farther along as the tree yielded downward.

He was past the center of the bend. Hanging by his hands, he hauled the slender tree into the shape of a drawn bow. Dangling above the abyss, The Shadow depended solely upon the strength of his grip, to prevent a fall that would have dashed him straight to death. The tree, as it bent, seemed woefully frail; yet The Shadow risked it further.

Hand over hand, swinging above black nothingness, he was working himself to twiglike branches at the tree's very top. The bend of the branches at that point became straight downward. Twiggish branches snapped warningly. The trunk, if it could still be called such, was like a rope in texture. From this point,

there could be no return.

His strength taxed to the full, The Shadow would have a long, slow task to work straight upward, hand over hand; and by that time the sapling, already weakening, would give beneath the strain.

Return, however, was not in The Shadow's plan. His shoulder was scraping stone. Twisting, he saw a slit of black carved in a stretch of grimy gray. Tightening one hand with nails that dug into the sapling's bark, The Shadow flung his other arm through the gray slit. His hand found a grip upon an inner ledge.

The sapling slid from a loosening fist. It whipped back to its position on the chasm brink, lashing to and fro like a living thing resenting the treatment that it had received. While the tree still quivered in the darkness, The Shadow's other hand was through the slitted window in the wall, taking hold at the side.

Strong shoulders heaved. Arms spread wide within the window, gave a pull. Twisting to get through the narrow space, The Shadow gave another haul and yanked his body inward. His black shape had merged with blackness.

Hands reached the floor, to make the drop a light one, as knees supplied a final shove from the window ledge. The Shadow had arrived within the forbidding walls of Vreekill Castle.

CHAPTER IX. THE QUEST THAT FAILED

A SPOT of light glimmered upon an ancient flagstone floor; turning, it threw its brilliant eye against walls of moldy stone where cobwebs formed a woven tapestry. Probing, the glow found a doorway leading from one cramped room into another.

The beam was The Shadow's flashlight. In the upper story of Vreekill Castle, he was picking a route through silent apartments as forlorn and uninviting as dungeons.

The Shadow knew the history of Vreekill Castle. Begun in Dutch Colonial days as a sure citadel against raiding Indians, it had later been converted into a blockhouse. These were the rooms that had quartered the garrison during that period.

Abandoned time and again by successive owners, the gloomy, isolated structure had finally been acquired by Dana Brye; but it was obvious that the present owner had no use for the upper rooms. They had been left to their decay, peopled only by ghosts of the past.

As he glided through the ravenlike rooms, The Shadow's flashlight met a shaft of black only a few feet ahead. There was a whisper: the subdued tone of The Shadow's laugh. He had escaped the deep outside chasm, only to miss an inside danger by the fraction of a yard. Turning the flashlight to the right, he stepped toward a corner wall, where he saw a solid floor.

Something detached itself from a broken flagstone and whipped away. The Shadow took a side step to avoid the sliding object; but he pivoted with the flashlight as the center, keeping the glow fixed on the spot. There was a lashing motion, a whisk, like the yank of a loose rope.

The thing was a black snake, that had found its way into the castle seeking field mice as prey for its constrictor's coils. Alarmed by the light, the snake had taken to a wide crack in the wall.

Other fissures showed along that same wall. Playing the flashlight in a semicircle, The Shadow saw a series of narrow, jagged crevices. This was the wall on the river side; its outward lean was very apparent. Dipping the light to the bottom of the wall, The Shadow continued its course down into the black hole that he had so barely avoided.

The pit was a stairway, and The Shadow's sideward shift had brought him to the steps. They were made of stone, those steps, and each was a huge single slab. Despite the size of the slabs, The Shadow tested each one as he descended.

Though they had settled at different angles, all the steps were tilted toward the outer wall. The masonry, should it finally yield, would take to the direction of the river.

Perhaps some flaw in the foundation was the cause; possibly the original builders had set the castle too close to the brink. The exact reason was less important than the fact that Vreekill Castle could not long continue as a safe abode.

AT the base of the stone stairs, The Shadow came to a heavy door. Brye had evidently placed that barrier not only to block off the rooms above, but to trouble any chance venturer who might enter there.

Nevertheless, he had foreseen that invasion from that direction was improbable; for the door was merely bolted and gave slightly under pressure.

Wedging a thin strip of metal through the crack, The Shadow worked upon the bolt. Had that measure failed, there were others that he would have used. But the bolt, allowing play in its socket, worked under pressure. Gradually, The Shadow forced it back.

Hinges groaned as he pressed the door open. Stifling that sound by slower tactics, The Shadow gradually gained a required space. Once through the door, he closed it, again avoiding any repetition of the grinding screeches that sounded like utterances from ghoulish throats.

His precautions were wise, for from the other side of a fair-sized room came a trickle of light that denoted a door that stood ajar. This room, stacked with odd boxes, was evidently used for storage. If The Shadow's conjecture proved right, the room with the light should be Brye's workshop.

So it was, and more. Peering through the partly opened door, The Shadow saw a curious conglomeration. He viewed a large room, entirely windowless, with workbenches in one corner, a cot in another. The room was lighted by oil lamps.

At the far side of the room was a tiny oil stove, the principal portion of Brye's kitchen. In final contrast, the end wall, hollowed into a niche, contained a huge safe that The Shadow recognized as one of Brye's make.

That one room served Dana Brye as workshop, eating place, living quarters, and office. There was no reason why Brye should ever leave it while he dwelt alone in Vreekill Castle; and for that very reason, Brye was there. He was near the workbench finishing some trifling task, and his profile was visible from The Shadow's angle of view.

THERE was nothing of the hair-brained inventor in Brye's appearance. His profile was well formed, with straight forehead, even shaped nose, and strong chin. His hair, gray-streaked, was somewhat shaggy. Brye's face and expression were youthful despite the wrinkles that came when he smiled.

There was cunning in Brye's countenance. First sight was insufficient for The Shadow to pass judgment; but it was a certainty that Brye had toiled ably. In his own way, he had contrived something which definitely pleased him. His chuckles proved it.

Turning from the workbench, Brye went to the wall opposite the big safe. There, The Shadow saw a door much stronger than the one that blocked the upstairs route; a door, moreover, that had no mere bolt. It was fitted with a combination of the sort that Brye manufactured.

His head tilted, his lips holding a half smile, Brye worked the combination and drew the big door slightly open. Crossing the room with a spry stride, he reached the safe and thumbed its dial in rapid fashion.

He was engrossed in that task, too much so to hear disturbing sounds. The Shadow, too, was intent; yet his ear caught something that Brye missed.

It was the stealthy tread of feet upon stone. Looking toward the big door, The Shadow saw it open. Into the room stepped a man whose face declared its determination.

The arrival was Ross Bland. As he swung the door wide, The Shadow could see curved stone steps that came up from below.

BRYE had finished with the safe's combination. He was ready to swing open the big metal front when he sensed Bland's presence, either from a slight footfall or the draft which swept sharp and chill from the dank stairway.

With surprising alacrity, Brye whipped about; but Bland, ready for that emergency, was quicker in drawing a gun. He had Brye covered, helpless, the moment that they came eye to eye.

Approaching Brye, who stood with upraised hands, Bland tapped the man's pockets, then pointed him to a chair. As Brye sat down, Bland put away his gun and remained standing while he spoke.

"My name is Ross Bland," he told Brye. "Thomas Grennel was a friend of mine; and so, for that matter, is your daughter. I mention those two facts, Mr. Brye, because they will have a bearing on what is to follow."

Brye looked interested, but not at all disturbed.

"Last night," continued Bland, "I talked to Jolden. You knew him, didn't you, Mr. Brye?"

Emphasis on the word "knew" brought a rise to Brye's grayish eyebrows. Seeing it, Bland smiled grimly.

"Yes, Jolden is dead," he declared. "But he didn't die before he talked - to me. He told me that he used to work for you some twenty years ago, and why."

"Probably he lied," observed Brye, speaking for the first time. His voice was sharp and piping. "He has lied to me, when he claimed that he was destitute. That is why I refused to help him any longer."

"I'll take your word for that," conceded Bland, "but you are not touching the main issue, Mr. Brye. I mean the reason you paid money to Jolden at all."

"Because he had been faithful -"

"Of course!" Bland snapped the interruption. "But faithful to what? I can tell you. Jolden was a member of the Krigley gang, big-time bank robbers of twenty years ago. But he worked for you and helped you figure out methods of opening all makes of safes but your own."

Brye gave a subdued chuckle, as though he thought that all other types of safes were obviously easy.

"I know you camouflaged it," declared Bland. "Such type of work was in your line of business. But everything that you discovered reached the Krigley gang. They used your information to pull those bank jobs."

"What if they did?" demanded Brye, suddenly. "I had no idea who Krigley was. That is why -"

"Why you wrote to him?" broke in Bland. "Yes. Jolden told me that you corresponded with Red Krigley. He's dead, Krigley is, and so is Jolden, the one remaining man who knew the facts. But you know as well as I do, Brye, that you were deep in the business. Jolden said so."

"A crook," sneered Brye, "will always brand an honest man as one of his own class."

"Quite true," nodded Bland, "and a crook can also recognize another crook."

"Which makes it even. But you say that Jolden is dead. So we can eliminate his testimony."

Bland shook his head emphatically.

"All that we can do," he decided coolly, "is come to terms. I know your present game, Brye. It is bigger than any you ever played before. You are the man who calls himself the Vindicator! You have used your contacts with important men to gain their confidences. From that, you have blackmailed them, to gain yourself a fortune."

Brye tilted his head back and gave a long laugh.

"That is something," he told Bland, "that you will find much more difficult to prove than my association with the Krigley gang. I call tell you this -"

"You can tell me nothing!" interrupted Bland. "You have merely learned enough to keep your methods covered; something in which you failed before. I have not come here to argue the question. I have come to make terms!"

BRYE'S laugh faded. His eyes narrowed coldly; Bland met them with an equal gaze.

"As the Vindicator," declared Bland, "you claimed that you intended to make restitution to the proper persons from the funds that you demanded and got. My purpose is to see that it is done. I owe that to my friend, Thomas Grennel.

"Though you may be a murderer, Brye, it is not my task to punish you. I have another friend: your daughter, and on her account I intend to let you go your way. One false move on your part, however, will justify my ending your ugly career."

Turning, Bland stepped toward the safe. He had seen Brye unlock the combination; therefore knew that he had simply to swing open the door. But Bland's move produced an electrical effect. It brought Brye from his chair in one long, maddened bound.

"Stay away!" screeched Brye. "I warn you!"

Bland couldn't get his gun from his pocket in time to meet Brye's surge. Forgetting the weapon, he struck out in a furious attack. His hard punches drove Brye back, until the older man reeled away, his face buried in his arms. Striking the big door by the lower stairs, Brye slumped to the uppermost steps.

Standing with fists still clenched, Bland saw that Brye's slump was no fake. Long-fingered hands were clawing weakly, but they could barely stroke away the grizzled hair that had streaked over Brye's eyes. With his opponent temporarily helpless, Bland saw no use in wasting opportunity.

He made for the safe, yanked the big door wide. Inside were boxes, stacks of papers, but most important, a square cabinet that was actually clamped to special crossbars in the safe. That box, constructed of thin metal, was the one that intrigued Bland. He tried to open it, but the top would not budge.

All that was plain to The Shadow's gaze. Shifting to get a distant view over Bland's shoulder, the hidden watcher saw a streak of copper beneath the silvery line of a steel bar. The sight told him instantly that it was time to intervene. Knowing Bland and his inability to listen when under stress, The Shadow paused long enough to draw an automatic.

That brief delay was fortunate. At that very moment, Bland's efforts to open the metal box came to an abrupt end. The cause was produced by the box itself. It exploded with a blast that not only ruined it, but spread the sides of the safe as well.

With that shock, the whole room quivered, responding to a glare of vivid light accompanied by a horrendous roar.

When his vision cleared, The Shadow found himself sprawled on the storeroom floor, staring through the doorway toward a ruined mass of metal against a blank space in the wall. In front of that wreckage lay a misshapen human mass that had been hurled toward the center of the room.

The mangled corpse was the remains of Ross Bland, the man who had come in quest of the Vindicator's ill-gotten wealth, to find death instead!

CHAPTER X. WALLS OF DOOM

AMID the reverberations that echoed in The Shadow's ears came sharper clatters, as chunks of stone detached from walls and ceiling, to strike the floor of the storeroom. A warning rumble told that inner masonry was about to give, through loss of its support.

Coming to his feet, The Shadow swung himself into the doorway that connected with Brye's workroom.

There, he halted. The ceiling had begun to peel, beginning at the niche, where the debris of the safe was visible. In peeling, the ceiling shed a thick layer of stones and mortar. Loosened chunks caused others to go; the epidemic spread toward the center of the room.

It was as if some invisible acid had begun to eat its way on a gigantic scale, gobbling the ceiling with increasing speed. Only one result could follow; it arrived with a titanic crash, exactly as The Shadow expected.

Due to the collapse of the ceiling below them, the flagstones of the floor above came rumbling through, bringing some of the heavy stone partitions that divided the tiny upstairs rooms.

The floor of the main room quaked. Bland's half-mangled figure quivered as though imbued with a return of life. The Shadow could feel tremors from the sides of the stone doorway where he stood. Chance stones fell about him; some bounced high enough to glance from his arms and shoulders. But the ancient door frame held.

Gazing across a pile of debris, The Shadow looked for Dana Brye. He saw the master of Vreekill Castle risen in that other doorway that led to the descending steps.

Brye, safe, relished this scene of ruin. He was studying it with an expert's eye. His time bomb, set in the safe, had done more than trap his unwanted visitor, Ross Bland. In fact, Brye wasted no more than a brief glance upon the dead form that was half covered by rubbish.

Every trace of Bland's overhandsome features had been obliterated as completely as if they had been mere waxwork, which, to some degree, they had resembled.

The blast had singed his clothes into ashes. No mark of identity remained to prove that the dead man was

Ross Bland.

Brye had seen that almost in a glimpse. His final survey of the room was accompanied by repetitions of his piping laugh. With sudden decision, he turned about, yanked the steel door that stood beside him. That barrier closed, he began his exit by the stairway that curved to places beneath.

Instantly, The Shadow followed. Brye's route could be the only feasible road to safety. Moreover, it gave The Shadow a chance to trace the crafty man.

Reaching the metal door, The Shadow pulled its latch and tugged it wide. Fortunately, Brye had not bothered to twist the dial to lock the combination.

Hardly had The Shadow sprung through the open doorway, before another explosion occurred. The blast came from beneath the ruined room where Bland's body lay. It heaved the floor like a volcanic eruption, threw a barrage of stone in all directions.

Spreading outward, chunks from that convulsion reached The Shadow. He was hurled, head foremost, down the winding stairs, to bounce from the wall and tumble farther downward in a helpless spiral.

CATCHING himself at last, The Shadow lay numbed, incapable of immediate motion. From the clatter above, he knew that the second blast, set off by Brye somewhere below, must have weakened the old castle even more than had the first explosion.

Here on the stairs was total blackness; but The Shadow's flashlight operated, when his numbed fingers found it. Rising through sheer will, he resumed his descent at a pace that was painfully slow. He came to a landing, where an open doorway showed a small chamber that had probably once been a dungeon. It was here that the second blast had been set off.

Sliding noise, broken by heavy thumps, proved that the wreckage from above was settling steadily into this lower pit. Eventually, Bland's body would slide down with it.

Soon, after The Shadow resumed his downward descent, he was staggered by the effects of another blast, at the landing that he had just left. Brye, safely below, had set off a blast to demolish the upper section of the stairway. Probably he would repeat that process with the stretch that lay ahead!

Flinging himself down the steps, The Shadow let the spiral walls guide him. It was a nightmarish descent, that became realistic only when The Shadow stumbled into light along a rocky path at the bottom of the spiral stairs.

The level ground felt soft when he sprawled upon it. Too numbed to feel pain, he crawled to a jutting rock and settled there. He was in a tiny grotto lighted by electricity, probably supplied by a small power unit.

Hearing the swish of water, The Shadow knew that he had descended at least a hundred feet, the height of the crag that Vreekill Castle topped. This grotto was a natural cave, connecting with the chasm that The Shadow had crossed to reach the castle.

It was here that Ross Bland had come in his speedboat, the Rambler, after guessing that Margaret Brye had loaned her craft, the Whiskaway, to her father.

Assuming that Brye was the Vindicator, Bland had recognized that Vreekill Castle might have a secret way of entry. So had The Shadow, but he had bridged the chasm, figuring that the upper route would be less protected.

A hollow roar ended those reflections. A rocky avalanche came pouring to the bottom of the spiral stairs. Brye had let off the next time bomb; as reverberations died to whispers, they seemed to speak a warning.

The grotto would be next!

Strength flowed to The Shadow's limbs. Staring over the jutting rock, he saw a deep brackish pool; in it two speedboats side by side. Brye was clambering from one craft, the Rambler, into the other, which bore the name Whiskaway.

Before The Shadow could raise a shout or draw a gun, the Whiskaway was in motion. Brye sped it beneath a narrow low-vaulted channel; rising in the cockpit, the grizzled man yanked a thin rope from a concealed spot in the rocks above his head.

The Whiskaway was gone, out to the watery chasm. The dangling cord controlled the final time bomb. The Shadow's lease on life was cut to the time space that Brye was allowing for his own race to safety!

FLINGING forward again, The Shadow tumbled aboard the Rambler. Still half dazed, he found himself trying to start the motor, wondering if Brye had put it out of commission.

But the motor coughed into life. Yanking the control lever, The Shadow shot the Rambler out through the channel. The light from the grotto showed the wall of the chasm straight ahead; with a hard twist, The Shadow swept the speedboat past the turn. He saw the end of the chasm, a mere crack against the moonlight.

There lay safety that might even yet be denied. To The Shadow's ears came a rumble vaster than any that had preceded it; a subterranean roar that staggered the whole cliff above. It wasn't just the grotto. Brye's last touch had set off as many as a half a dozen mines, located at various places beneath the castle.

The blast that banished the grotto and its lights sent a sweep of water through the collapsing outlet. Like a tidal wave, the billow lifted the Rambler and lofted it out through the rift in the chasm. There were rocks ahead; it took all The Shadow's regained skill to veer the boat away from them. He saw his proper channel - past the base of the hundred-foot cliff where the castle stood.

Instinctively, The Shadow stared upward, for his course was set. He saw Vreekill Castle, still ruddy in the glow of moonlight that was about to vanish under the creep of black thunder clouds that dominated the sky. The castle was a hollow shell, for its inner floor had settled into one deep pit; but, until this moment, the outer walls had retained their form, except for fissures that the moonlight showed.

Cracks that were widening, spreading into fantastic patterns. In sudden fashion, those breaks were rendered vivid by a flash of blinding lightning that split from a storm cloud just as it effaced the moon.

With the flash came a peal as loud, as sudden, as a thunder clap; but it did not burst from the glare-swept sky. That roar was the outer wall of Vreekill Castle, as it spread into a mass of ill-shaped fragments and took its long-awaited topple from the cliff.

A Niagara of stone was bounding from the summit, hurling its frightful, irresistible cascade toward the tiny hull of the Rambler, which was speeding directly beneath. Governed by the law of falling bodies, those devastating blocks of masonry were to reach the river in a scant three seconds.

That brief time was sufficient for The Shadow. As his eyes saw the great wall cave in, his hands had yanked the speedboat's wheel. He was chancing that he had reached the open channel, and he had. The Rambler, despite a lost second in its veer, was more than a hundred feet from the cliff when the stony

deluge spattered the river.

The Shadow was swinging the Rambler northward, when another sweep of lightning came. It showed vacancy atop the cliff, except for a few jagged edges of foundations that might have been the summit of the rock itself.

Vreekill Castle was gone forever. But Dana Brye, in his destructive departure, had left but one victim entombed within the ruins. The Shadow had escaped the fate of Ross Bland, thanks to the speedboat that the luckless visitor had left in the secret grotto.

LIGHTNING flashes guided The Shadow as he sped the Rambler northward; but he saw no trace of the Whiskaway upon the heaving surface of the wind-lashed Hudson. Brye had probably headed downriver, or toward the opposite shore. The Shadow was keeping close to the west bank, to pick a landing place from which he could return to his autogiro.

He had covered a mile and was throttling down the motor to scan the shore more carefully, when the next flare of lightning came. The pelt of rain was audible, and with it, The Shadow's keen ear detected another sound, just below the seat behind the wheel.

It was a muffled ticking, like a clock. Springing up beside the wheel, The Shadow turned about. When lightning flashed, he saw a square box wedged in place: a death machine much like the metal cube that Bland had found in Brye's safe.

The thing was a portable time bomb that Brye had placed in the Rambler to destroy all traces of Bland's visit. Methodical to the last degree, Brye had transferred it from the Whiskaway, because his calculations regarding the destruction of the grotto had not included the presence of an abandoned speedboat.

The Shadow had seen too much of Brye's devices to risk any trouble from another. Instead of trying to pry the time bomb loose, he sprang to the side of the Rambler and took a long dive overboard.

By the time The Shadow had swum a dozen strokes, the throbbing speedboat had lifted into fragments. His head below the water's surface, The Shadow missed another dangerous hail - this one composed of broken metal sprayed piecemeal over an area a hundred feet square.

Fifty yards farther, The Shadow's swim was completed. Pulling himself to a rock beside the shore, he stared into the rain-swept blackness of the Hudson. Above the fury of the elements, his lips phrased a strange, grim laugh.

The world would believe that Dana Brye had perished in the destruction of Vreekill Castle. The body of Ross Bland, when found, would support that belief. But Brye, alive, though posing as a dead man, could not evade discovery.

The Shadow knew the truth. Some time in the none-too-distant future, he would again find Dana Brye. But the weird mirth toned from his remote bank of the Hudson, betokened more than a mere search for a crafty fugitive.

It was a renewed challenge issued by The Shadow. A challenge to the Vindicator, man of supercrime!

CHAPTER XI. TRIGGER SEES THE SHADOW

DURING the next few days, dozens of workers searched the ruins of Vreekill Castle looking for the body of Dana Brye. Among that crew were six who always managed to be digging with their backs turned whenever a news photographer snapped a picture of the search. They were members of the

outside squad that Trigger Kobin had kept on duty, to make sure that no visitors bothered Dana Brye.

Those hoodlums hadn't wanted their present job. Circumstances had simply thrust the work upon them. The huge explosions that came from Vreekill Castle had brought a fire truck from the village, along with a sheriff and a carload of deputies. Trigger and three mobbies had decamped by that time in the only car available; but they hadn't time to send back for the rest, before the villagers arrived.

Trigger had previously coached his reserves on what to say if the authorities discovered them living in the shacks near the castle. They told their story and it went across.

A couple of them, so they said, had worked here the summer before, when Brye had repaired the outside walls of the castle. Finding work scarce this year, they had remembered the empty shacks and had decided to occupy them, rather than go on relief.

They had brought along some pals - other workmen who were out of luck. Honest fellows, all, who would rather live on what they had saved than become burdens to the taxpayers.

The kind-hearted sheriff decided to give them the employment that they claimed to need. They were just the right men, he declared, to help dig out the debris from the castle, and they could live in the shacks while they worked there.

To preserve their alibi, the six unfortunate hoodlums had to accept the sheriff's offer.

The situation pleased Trigger Kobin when he heard about it through other mobbies, who arrived with curious throngs that came to watch the morbid work. It meant that he would obtain first-hand information regarding the recovery of Brye's body, should it be found.

That news came through on the third afternoon, when searchers, Trigger's men among them, unearthed the mortal remains of Ross Bland.

Since it was commonly agreed that Brye had lived alone in Vreekill Castle, the body, it was decided, must be his. In fact, the sheriff established that point by questioning the "honest" workers who had squatted in the shacks among the woods. They testified - and this time they told the truth - that they had never seen a single visitor come to Vreekill Castle.

WHEN Joe Cardona, the swarthy New York police inspector, saw the front-page photograph that showed a crowd watching workers bring the supposed body of Dana Brye to light, he crumpled the whole newspaper and slammed it in the wastebasket.

"That's the stuff that makes crime!" roared Cardona. "Boobs that go around looking at a lot of corpses, are the kind of nuts who get what doctors call a murder complex. Some time I'm going to tell the commissioner that when he wants to stage a real roundup, he ought to send us to a place like this Vreekill Castle. I bet if we grabbed all those spectators, we'd get a lot of those psycholitical birds they talk about."

Cardona's outburst produced a nod of agreement from his only listener, Detective Sergeant Markham. To himself, Markham was muttering the word "psycholitical," pronouncing it carefully, in syllables, "sy-ko-lit-ik-el."

That was one word that Markham intended to look up in the big dictionary that he had acquired by cutting out daily coupons from an evening newspaper over a period of six months.

It paid to know what long words meant, thought Markham. Maybe that had helped Cardona rise to the rank of inspector. It didn't occur to Markham that the word Cardona had used might not be in any

dictionary at all.

"Those pictures are bad stuff," repeated Cardona, thumbing toward the wastebasket. "You've got a couple of nephews, Markham, that you're always talking about. Don't ever let them get interested in stuff like that."

Markham nodded, rather dutifully. His nephews never looked at the front page of a newspaper. The comic strips were their meat.

"It gripes me!" muttered Cardona. "Here I am chasing all over town, looking for mobbies that used to work for Trigger Kobin, and not a one of them anywhere around. I might just as well been out there with that bunch of nincompoops watching guys haul what was left of Dana Brye out of that mess they used to call a castle!"

Cardona's comment was more accurate than he knew. Had he gone to Vreekill, he would have seen the men he wanted. They were in the picture that had roused his anger, but, as usual, they had managed to keep their faces away from the camera.

It was unlikely, however, that Cardona would have learned anything from those hoodlums, had he found them. They were no longer in direct touch with Trigger Kobin. That fact explained why The Shadow had not dropped in to enliven one of their dreary evenings, when they were resting up from their compulsory job at excavation.

Trigger, The Shadow knew, was depending no longer upon the cooperation of a mob. He regarded his reserves as on the lam, which they would be, as soon as their present work terminated. The Shadow was willing to let them travel unmolested, since none of that particular group had aided Trigger in any murders.

Like Cardona, The Shadow was at present looking for Trigger Kobin, because the man had assumed a special importance. He was probably closer to the Vindicator than ever; and with leads lacking to Dana Brye, The Shadow could profitably take time to hunt up Trigger.

Unlike Cardona, The Shadow was visiting places other than those where Trigger would normally be found. He knew that Trigger was smart enough to stay away from the usual underworld establishments; besides, Trigger had announced a new policy, that night when he had talked to the mobbies assembled in the shack.

He had said that he had acquired a couple of good torpedoes; men who were already in town; hence The Shadow had checked on persons of that description. Through his own channels in the underworld, he had learned that Jeoper Quade and Slink Rembo, two highly touted sharpshooters from Chicago, had been recent visitors to Manhattan's badlands.

THROUGH Hawkeye, one of his agents who had an uncanny skill at tracing shifty crooks, The Shadow had located Jeoper. The Chicago expert had gone high hat. He was living in a studio apartment in Riverview City, a collection of apartment houses that overlooked the East River.

Rents in Riverview City were no longer high; nor were many questions asked of tenants who paid in advance. Many of the more conservative residents in those apartments had moved because of shootings in the vicinity. The Shadow could picture those dead-end streets as just the neighborhood where Trigger Kobin could sneak in and out, which meant that he might be using Jeoper's apartment as a hide-away.

That explained why The Shadow, his black garb blended with the darkness of a fire escape, was beginning a precarious trip along a tenth-story ledge. As he shifted against the wall of the apartment

house, he took on the appearance of a human beetle, too small to be observed from the street below, particularly as the wall, itself, was darkish.

The Shadow's objective was a dimly lighted window. Reaching it, he clung there, as if held in place by the stiff breeze from the river. Working the window open, he entered a room.

This, evidently, was the studio portion of the apartment. It was furnished with junky Oriental curios, some pieces of cheap statuary, and paintings that looked as if they had been bought in wholesale lots. It had an in-a-door bed; and odd clothing, strewn about the place, showed that it was used as living quarters.

The only light was near the wide doorway that led to an outer room. Moving along the wall, The Shadow peered through the doorway, to view a living room.

A darkish, wise-faced man was tuning in a radio. The Shadow recognized Jeoper Quade, saw the fellow press off the radio switch and come to his feet, reaching promptly for a gun as the door of the apartment opened. The arrival was Trigger Kobin; he gave a snort as he closed the door.

"Sit down, Jeoper!" voiced Trigger. "Cripes! You'd think you were the guy they're after for a murder rap! All you've got to do is stay relaxed. Any calls come in?"

"Yeah," returned Jeoper. "One from Slink. He got word from one of the guys out at Vreekill. He was waiting at your old number, like you told him."

"Anything new?"

"Nothing that we ain't heard. They found Brye's body, that's all. Slink says to call him when you want him."

Trigger glanced at his watch; he decided to ignore the telephone for a few minutes. The reason was explained when the bell began to ring. Trigger made a hasty grab for the telephone.

"Hello..." The expression on Trigger's face became crafty. "Yeah, we heard from Vreekill... Sure, they found Brye's body, all right. Straight dope, right from the guys that I left there... Yeah, it's Brye, all right. It couldn't be nobody else..."

THE call finished, Trigger darted a shrewd look at Jeoper. With a wise nod, he decided to take this capable lieutenant into his confidence. Jeoper was no ordinary mobbie. He was smart like Trigger; and smart guys worked better for persons who knew their stuff. Trigger could tell Jeoper something that would make his eyes pop, and it seemed good policy to do it.

"That was the big-shot," informed Trigger. "This Vindicator guy that I told you all about."

"Except who he is," reminded Jeoper. "You didn't put me wise to that."

"Because I'm not supposed to know. Only, I'm not as dumb as the big-shot figures."

Strolling across the room, Trigger faced about, to resume in steady tone:

"Listen. Up to the time that castle blew itself apart, I had a hunch that the big-shot was this Dana Brye. If he wasn't, what was the idea of me having the mob out there?"

"Maybe," put in Jeoper, "the big-shot didn't want nobody to get in and see Brye. Or he could have wanted to keep Brye there."

"And maybe it was Brye who wanted us to keep guys away. That makes sense, don't it?"

"It did make sense, maybe. But not any longer, now that Brye's cashed in his checks."

Trigger smiled. This was where the smart stuff came. He watched Jeoper's face to see how the theory struck him. "This is the fifth time the Vindicator called up," reminded Trigger, nudging toward the telephone. "He's always got two questions: Am I sure that Brye was in the joint when it blew? And have they found the body yet?"

"He asks the first one over again, right now, after I tell him that they found the body, the way the papers said. Still, he don't seem satisfied. He acts like he thinks I'm wise to something; at least, that's the way that funny voice of his sounded.

"Maybe I am wise. Listen, Jeoper. None of the mob even saw Brye, from the time we covered the place. He never went out to get his mail. It's still laying at the Vreckill post office. Suppose Brye wasn't in that castle at all!"

Jeoper showed the interest that Trigger expected. Before he could put a question, Trigger intervened.

"I know what you're going to ask," said Trigger. "What about the body? Well, what about it? Maybe it was a stiff that Brye lugged in there and left. He could have set those bombs of his way ahead. And that's how" - Trigger spread his wolfish lips in a wide smile - "Brye could have been around to croak old Grennel."

There was a nod from Jeoper. Seeing the fellow's increasing interest, Trigger spat a warning.

"Nobody's to know this, not even Slink. We're playing in with the bigshot, see? It means dough, so it would be bum stuff to let him know we've guessed who he is, because he don't want it that way. Brye's using this Vindicator gag to cover up. If nobody knows who you are, you're better off. Take, for instance, The Shadow -"

WITH the words, Trigger's lips clamped shut. Past the doorway, silhouetted against the wall, he saw a shape that was all too familiar - a hawkish profile, topped by a slouch hat. Stiffening, Trigger watched to see if the silhouette moved; then, coming to his senses, he shifted away.

"Let's have a drink," he gruffed to Jeoper. "The bottle's in the pantry."

He watched Jeoper as the fellow moved away, unsuspecting that anything was wrong. Easing back to his former position, Trigger finally sighted the profile again. He suspected that it had moved farther back, but wasn't sure.

Trigger didn't take time to study that silhouette closely. His left hand slid under the back of his coat, to reach his right hip. Trigger could shoot left-handed, as he proved in speedy style.

Leaping to the left to get the needed angle, he jabbed two shots deep into the corner of the adjoining studio. The silhouette performed a fading slide; there was a crash beyond the doorway.

Jeoper came dashing from the pantry, an uncorked bottle in one hand, a fistful of ice cubes in the other.

"I got The Shadow!" informed Trigger, gleefully. "Come on. Let's take a gander."

They stepped past the doorway. On the floor lay the shattered portions of a plaster bust that had recently been a life-sized replica of the Marquis de Lafayette. Beside it was a dark-gray felt hat.

"I paid ten bucks for that thing," commented Jeoper. "That's going high for a shooting-gallery target. Say - how did that hat get there?" He looked to a shelf above the table where the bust had stood. "I guess it

must have fell off and landed on that geezer's head. They called the thing a bust." He looked to the floor again. "Well, it's busted, all right!"

Trigger's "Shadow" was explained. He didn't realize that he had seen two separate silhouettes - one of The Shadow in person; the other of the Lafayette bust, after The Shadow, knowing that he had been observed, had decked the plaster statue with Jeoper's hat, which was handy on the shelf.

One token only could have told Trigger Kobin that The Shadow actually had been here, and that was a sound that the murderer did not hear - the soft closing of the window by which The Shadow had started his departure along his chosen route.

CHAPTER XII. PATHS IN THE DARK

TRIGGER KOBIN suffered little loss of pride because he had been overquick with his gun. He made a joke of his mistake; he told Jeoper and Slink that The Shadow had "turned out to be a bust." It took Trigger all night to think up that one; meanwhile, The Shadow, in his turn, had considered some constructive thoughts regarding Trigger Kobin.

It was plain that Trigger was no more important to the Vindicator than he had been previously. Instead of a mob, Trigger merely had two sharpshooting pals. Whether Trigger was called on individual duty, or the whole trio brought into play, it would be for cover-up work only.

Nevertheless, it was not yet time for The Shadow to inform the police regarding Trigger's whereabouts. By watching Trigger, some clue might be gained, in indirect fashion, to coming moves that the Vindicator intended. That work, however, belonged to The Shadow's agents.

There were plenty of empty apartments in Riverview City, so he ordered a picked few to move in there and keep watch on Trigger's activities. With that arranged, The Shadow concentrated on the more difficult task of tracing Dana Brye.

Since Brye had no criminal record, it was a devious matter to learn his past. The Shadow managed it through proper channels, but only to a limited extent.

Brye had retired from the business of manufacturing safes some years before. His experiments with time bombs, a natural outgrowth of his love for the intricate, had caused him to move from one workshop to another before he had finally purchased Vrekill Castle.

None of his former places were the sort that he could use for hide-outs, as all of them had been taken over by other businesses. But Brye, it seemed, had always liked obscure districts, and it was likely that he had an address book of unusual places that were vacant.

Putting other agents on the investigation of basements that had recently been rented, The Shadow hoped for results. They might come, if Brye proved overconfident in the fact that he had been declared as dead.

There was one place quite different from any of Brye's workshops, where the missing man might appear. The Shadow chose that for his own observation, on the chance that his path might cross Brye's.

Comparing the different theories of Ross Bland and Trigger Kobin, The Shadow saw how each had come to a similar conclusion, though not in possession of the full facts. Bland had used a starting point that was still a doubtful quantity. He had presumed that Larry Chandler had recognized Dana Brye as the murderer of Thomas Grennel. Since Larry was in love with Margaret Brye, he would have had a reason to suppress the fact.

From that, Bland had checked on other matters; his guess about the Whiskaway, his study of the Hudson River chart, had all resulted in the episode which caused him to denounce Brye as the Vindicator and come to a prompt doom.

Trigger, playing hunches only, was miles wide in his basic belief that Brye had not been in Vreekill Castle at all. Still, Trigger had come to the same conclusion as Bland: that Brye was the Vindicator. So he had arrived somewhere with his guesses, since his final result tallied with the opinion of a man who had used much sounder methods.

One fact that concerned The Shadow was that of the Vindicator's next move. With all the commotion following his murder of Grennel; some small excitement at Jolden's death; and the huge interest over the explosion of Vreekill Castle, the Vindicator could best afford to bide his time, since all those events were somewhat related.

Grennel had known Brye, and had bought a safe from him. Jolden had worked for Brye many years ago. Brye's daughter, Margaret, had been one of the guests at Grennel's home the night of the murder there, as had Larry Chandler, the man to whom Margaret was engaged.

None of those facts had been linked, except by Ross Bland and The Shadow. Nevertheless, the Vindicator might be waiting, to make sure that the links were not made public.

Perhaps the Vindicator was plotting crime of a different sort, as a variation before he resumed his blackmail enterprises. Possibly he had taken an actual holiday. The Shadow was confident, however, that the Grennel shakedown was not the last on the Vindicator's list.

Once he had shown himself proof against the law, the supercrook would pluck new victims. To block him when he tried that game, would be the duty of The Shadow.

THERE was one person, considered in The Shadow's review of linked events, whose interest in all such matters had ended. That person was Margaret Brye. News of the explosion at Vreekill Castle had kept her under a terrible suspense for three long days.

She believed her father dead. She had loaned him the Whiskaway under promise not to mention the matter; but she had also believed his statement that he merely wanted it for tests of submarine bombs - tests which might cause trouble, if persons knew that he was working such experiments in a navigated river like the Hudson.

It hadn't occurred to her that there was a subterranean route to Vreekill Castle. Her mind had been filled only with the knowledge that time-bomb manufacture was a highly dangerous business. She knew, too, that her father had arranged for Roger Marquin to become her guardian and manage her estate, should he, Dana Brye, come to an unexpected death.

The tragedy had fallen. Its final proof had been the finding of the body in the ruins.

During the day after that discovery, Margaret ignored the front pages of the newspapers. Listlessly, she read the society columns, where she noticed an item stating that Ross Bland had taken a trip to the West. Probably, the journey concerned Bland's silver mines, Margaret thought, of which she had heard mention.

It did not strike her that the name of Ross Bland should have appeared upon the front page in big headlines, while that of Dana Brye could be included among those of persons who had gone somewhere, without naming the exact destination. Insertion of the Bland notice, it happened, had been the work of Dana Brye.

With evening, Marquin's big mansion seemed like one huge morgue to Margaret. The servants moved about like living corpses. She hated the sight of Larry Chandler, seated across the table from her. Maybe Larry was in love with her, as he claimed; but the girl could not forget that they had quarreled only the day before the tragedy at Vreckill. He had felt sorry, very sorry, so he said, when he heard of the explosion.

In her present mood, Margaret considered that a very ordinary statement. If Larry cared so much for her, why hadn't he found some way to really, lessen her sorrow? Perhaps he didn't know how; but Roger Marquin certainly did. He had spoken so sympathetically, that Margaret had ended by sobbing, her head on his shoulder.

All through the dinner hour she felt Marquin's eyes upon her; and that knowledge calmed her. She remembered how he had first broken the news. He had told her that if Dana Brye were actually dead, he, Marquin, her father's friend, would always be a friend to her. The ordeal had lessened from the moment that Marquin had given her that assurance.

Tonight, Marquin's sympathy was even more apparent. At eleven o'clock, the usual hour that he retired, he understood that Margaret preferred to remain alone downstairs beside the fire; although Larry, who also turned in at eleven, could see no sense in it. By midnight, the huge mansion was so silent that the girl felt soothed.

When she went up to her room on the second floor, near the suite of offices, Margaret noticed the moonlight shining through the window. Half reclining on the bed, she undressed slowly, listlessly, letting her clothes drop to the chair beside her. At last disrobed, she was reaching wearily for her nightgown when her eyes, turned toward the window, saw something that fixed her gaze.

It was a figure on the lawn, gliding toward the house. It couldn't be a shape cast by the tree boughs, for they were entirely stilled. As she watched, the startled girl saw the peculiar shade disappear into darkness.

Breathless, she sat upon the edge of the bed, watching for its reappearance. It did not return; the thing had vanished like a ghost.

A MINUTE must have passed before Margaret sighed, drew the nightgown over her shoulders. Perhaps the moonlight, pouring in so gently, had roused her imagination. Why should she fear a ghost? Should any specter visit her, it would be her father's.

A strange thought, yet one that intrigued her. The notion keyed her senses. Staring through the window, she hoped again that the moving figure would reappear.

Instead, she heard a sound. It was slight, like the opening of a door. Not her door; for when she stared, it hadn't moved. Another sound came - a scruff, as though someone had encountered a chair in darkness. Margaret's mood changed immediately to alarm.

Hurriedly finding a dressing gown, she looked for the slippers that went with it. They weren't about; she decided to waste no more time. From a drawer in the dressing table she brought a .22 automatic that her father had given her on a trip to Mexico, a few years before. Softly, she opened the door of her room and went out into the hall.

She sensed a sound again. It came from Marquin's offices. She was glad that she had not found her slippers, for her bare feet made no sound as she trod along the hall. The door of the outer office was open, proof that someone was inside. Cautiously approaching the connecting door, Margaret opened it a few inches.

There was a light in the inner office. It showed a man crouched against the safe at the far wall. His back was turned toward her; he wore a dark hat on his head. The girl could see his fingers working the dials in slow, proficient fashion. The man could not be Marquin; he had gone to bed an hour ago. Nor Larry; he, also, had retired.

Tightening her hand upon the gun, Margaret covered the crouched man. From what she had heard of burglars, they had to be surprised and treated firmly. Reaching for the door, she opened it suddenly, hoping to bring the man about. He heard the noise and turned, exactly as Margaret expected.

With that, the girl's plan ended. Her fingers, numbed by the chill that swept her entire body, lost their hold upon the automatic. All her ideas of ghosts swarmed upon her with terrifying reality. For the man that Margaret saw was one who could be nothing other than a ghost.

The intruder was her father, Dana Brye!

CHAPTER XIII. DUEL OF DARKNESS

NOT until Dana Brye spoke did Margaret grasp the simple truth, that her father was still alive. His voice, firm but modulated, dispelled the girl's illusions of a ghost. Brye was using a familiar tone, kindly, paternal - one that Margaret had often heard. It was quite unlike the piping pitch that Brye employed when excited.

The gleam of Brye's eyes betrayed something that Margaret should have noticed but failed to detect. Her father was calm only because she, of all persons in the mansion, had been the one to discover him. A bulge of one pocket, with Brye's fingers just above it, signified that he carried a gun. His other hand, resting upon a dark-gray topcoat that he had placed across a chair, showed that he had been ready to begin a rapid flight.

The floor lamp, too, was close. Had he heard Margaret's approach a few seconds sooner, Brye could have yanked the cord and produced darkness throughout the room.

"There is nothing to fear," spoke Brye. "I am alive. You may be quite sure of that!"

Margaret nodded. She was sure. She watched Brye remove his hat, lay it carefully upon the coat while he stroked back his shaggy hair. His face, which had momentarily displayed distortion, became benign. Whether or not his expression was a mask, Margaret accepted it as a true index.

Never had the girl seen her father in any mood but a kindly one. He could be querulous, she knew, for there were times when she had heard his piping voice rise in argument when she was in another room. In her presence, however, he had never displayed anger, nor shown himself unreasonable.

Brye noticed that Margaret was staring past him, toward the safe. He didn't realize that she had been testing her own eyes, wondering whether, if this figure of her father proved to be a specter, she could see through the shape, like a cloud of mist. Brye thought that she was troubled because she had seen him working at the dials.

"I am not here to commit burglary," announced Brye, his mild tone carrying a touch of rebuke. "You may safely say that you did not see me opening this safe. Actually, I was closing it. Nor have I taken anything from it. Instead, I have placed something within."

Margaret's eyes showed belief. She didn't ask why Brye had still been thumbing the dials when she first saw him. Turning to the safe, Brye resumed his manipulation; his lips, away from Margaret's sight, took on a tight smile.

Boldly, Brye was completing his work with the combination. He reached for the handle of the safe door, drew the front partly open, then turned to Margaret.

"You see?" he spoke with a note of triumph. "I already knew the combination!"

"Because Mr. Marquin gave it to you?"

Brye was on the point of nodding, in response to Margaret's trustful question. Then deciding that the truth would be more impressive, he shook his head. Brye saw that he would need props of truth to support his previous falsehood and others to come.

"Marquin alone knows the combination," he replied, "but my knowledge of this safe enabled me to open it. First, let me tell you how I happen to be still alive. That will explain the rest."

THE story that Brye purred in confidential tone was one that intrigued his daughter to the core. His time bombs, he said, were far more important than they were dangerous. Because of their value in warfare, he had intended to turn them over to the government as soon as he had perfected the intricate mechanisms.

Four nights ago, Brye related, he had been awakened by peculiar clicking noises that could only have come from the detonators of his empty bombs. Peering into the storeroom, he had seen an intruder, a man who could only have been some spy in the employ of a foreign government.

Brye declared that he had stolen out to the huge front door, had found it open. Deciding to go to the village of Vreekill to get aid, he was scarcely past the door before the first explosion came. The spy had come across a loaded bomb, which Brye had planned to test under water during a cruise in the Whiskaway.

"That blast set off the others," completed Brye. "The castle went to ruin! Staggered by the shock, I found my way down a path, to where the Whiskaway was moored. By the time I had crossed the river, the boat was awash. She had been damaged by a flying rock. I managed to reach the shore, but the Whiskaway lies somewhere in the Hudson."

Brye's story explained the matter of the body found in the ruins. Margaret had almost accepted the entire tale, when she became dubious on one point.

"What about the squatters the newspapers mentioned?" asked the girl. "They declared that they saw no one enter or leave Vreekill Castle."

Brye had an answer for that question. He was convinced, so he said, that the pretended squatters were men in the employ of the unknown spy; for it would have taken several persons to pry open the great door. Naturally, they would not mention their chief's visit. As to whether they had seen Brye leave, that was a moot point.

"Amid the explosions and the storm," declared Brye, solemnly, "I may have reached the Whiskaway unnoticed. But it is possible that I am still known to be alive. My inventions" - he tapped his forehead - "are here! It is better, therefore, that I should pretend that I am dead."

Margaret agreed. Seeing that, Brye pressed another point. His face, though still kindly, displayed a crafty gleam.

"Marquin has many visitors," he declared. "Persons from South America but representing many nations. Perhaps -"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Margaret, horrified. "Mr. Marquin would never have betrayed you!"

"You misunderstand me," purred Brye. "Except for yourself, Marquin is the only person that I fully trust. That is why I told you both about my work. Either of you might have mentioned it too freely."

Margaret felt that the rebuke belonged to her, and said so. She remembered one person with whom she had discussed Brye's experiments: Ross Bland. She felt it unnecessary, however, to mention him by name.

Brye was looking toward the safe. His eyes were craftier than ever. He tilted his head as though he heard a sound; then, his face expressing well-pretended concern, he turned to Margaret and whispered:

"Tiptoe out to the hall and make sure that no one is awake. When you return, I shall explain more."

THE girl made the trip carefully. Lacking slippers, her tread was noiseless; but she was anxious not to stumble barefooted over anything. When she returned to report that all was quiet, she saw the safe door open. Brye was in front of it; he whipped about suddenly, clamping his hand to his inside pocket.

Seeing an open box inside the safe, Margaret felt a momentary suspicion, until she saw that it contained nothing but old envelopes and loose papers. Brye coolly closed the box, pushed it into a corner.

"I have placed a note for Marquin in that box," he declared. "It will explain this other box" - he lifted one of metal - "that I am leaving here."

Brye was wearing his hat and coat. Margaret remembered how the coat had lain on the chair and realized that Brye could have had the box concealed beneath it. When her father opened the lid of the metal box, the girl saw thousands of dollars, all in bills of high denomination.

"My entire fortune!" declared Brye. "Yes, Margaret, I am wealthy. The manufacture of safes was profitable. But" - he smiled wryly - "being dead, I cannot open a bank account. I am entrusting this cash to Marquin; and should I die, I can rely upon Roger to turn it over to you."

"He will not mention it to you, nor will he inform you that I am still alive, for I have instructed otherwise. Whatever he tells you, act as though you believed it; for he will be saying it in your own interest, at my request."

Margaret nodded.

"I must also have your promise," declared Brye, firmly, "that you will tell no one that I am still alive. No one, you understand - not even Marquin, because he would worry if he knew that someone, particularly yourself, shared the secret which he soon will learn. Do you promise that?"

"I do," affirmed Margaret, solemnly.

"And you will abide by that promise," persisted Brye, "until I release you from it?"

"Absolutely!"

Brye was satisfied. He put the metal box behind other objects at the rear of the safe. He closed the door, twirled the dials. Pulling off the light, he whispered for Margaret to follow him through the outer office. It was in that room that Brye suddenly became tense.

This time, he had heard an actual sound.

"Look from the window," he whispered to his daughter. "Tell me if you see a car there. And - wait!" - he had detected something else - "look at the front door, too. See if someone has opened it."

From the window, Margaret whispered back the worst.

"It's a police car! Officers are coming from it! One of the servants is at the front door beckoning to them. It looks like Gaylor. He must have heard us here and called the police!"

Brye was shuffling for the door of the outer office, Margaret hurrying after him and clutching her dressing gown with one hand, while she fumbled in the pocket where she had placed her little automatic.

"Down by the side stairs!" she told her father. "I'll listen at the top; if I hear them coming to cut you off, I'll fire a shot in the upper hall."

"Good!" agreed Brye. "Draw them away if need be. Tell them anything afterward - that you saw a burglar, or a ghost - anything, except that I was here."

"Don't worry, dad," assured Margaret. "I shall remember my promise."

THEY were in the hallway. To the left were the side stairs that Margaret had mentioned. Brye reached them first, making too much noise in his hurry. From the right, he had heard sounds that came up the large front stairway from the lower hall.

Alarmed by the noise that Brye made, Margaret turned as soon as she neared the side stairs. In dim moonlight reflected through the window, she saw a man bound in from a connecting hall.

It was Larry Chandler. Dressed in trousers and shirt, he was half black, half gray, in the moonlight. But Margaret could see his face plainly. Huddled, trying to obscure her father when he descended the stairway, Margaret knew that she must be visible to Larry. She was about to call out that all was well, when something glimmered in the moonlight.

Larry had a revolver. He was aiming it. His voice was harsher than the girl had ever heard it, when he rasped:

"Stop! Before I fire!"

Brye made a slight stumble on the stairway. Hearing it, Larry thrust the gun straight for the only figure that he saw, which was Margaret's. Before the girl could find her voice to scream, Larry pressed the trigger.

Death did not come to Margaret Brye. Instead, the gun spurt took a slant up toward the ceiling. In from some blackness had come another figure, a cloaked form as sable-hued as night. A driving fist gloved in black had thrust Larry's gun hand upward.

From the side stairway came the jab of shots from Brye's revolver. Seeing Larry, he had apparently begun a belated effort to save Margaret's life. He was shooting for the spot where Larry had been; but both figures were gone when Brye's gun spouted.

The Shadow, forceful in his drive, had bowled Larry clear from the hallway, over the brink of the front stairway. Larry was tumbling downward; but his cloaked opponent remained at the top. Lying flat, The Shadow poked a gun muzzle along the side hall; keeping his aim wide of Margaret, he jabbed an answer to Brye's futile shots.

Brye, like his daughter, was away from The Shadow's aim; but the gunshot produced results. The crafty inventor did not care to wage further battle with an elusive foe who seemed charmed against bullets; whose own gun, quick with its response, had seemingly poked up from nowhere. Muffled clatters from the side stairs, heard only by Margaret and The Shadow, were proof that Dana Brye had fled.

A triple duel had ended in the darkness, with none of the participants harmed. Nor had Margaret Brye, petrified throughout that action, suffered any effects of battle. Perhaps that was why The Shadow regarded the result a victory.

From the gloom at the head of the front stairs came a weird, mocking laugh - a strain of mirth that brought shivery echoes from the great musty rooms of Marquin's mammoth mansion.

Half taunt, half challenge, that tone told The Shadow's satisfaction over the swift change that he had produced in this scene where death had threatened.

CHAPTER XIV. CRIMELESS MYSTERY

FEW fighters but The Shadow would have relished the present situation. By thrusting himself into the open, he had defeated the prime purpose of his journey here; namely, to meet up with Dana Brye under circumstances wherein he could make the inventor talk. Instead of that, The Shadow had taken over Brye's burden: that of escaping from the house.

Brye was gone, but The Shadow was in the thick of it. Two shots - Larry's and The Shadow's - had accomplished the very thing that Margaret had intended to do with her .22; they had attracted everyone to the center of the house, instead of the side where Brye had fled. Though Brye had fired a shot in between, it had been practically unnoticed amid the closer gunfire.

Someone had turned on lights downstairs. Larry, reclaiming his revolver halfway down the steps, looked up to see The Shadow weaving away from the light that came from the lower floor. With a shout, Larry was on his feet.

Gaylor, the butler, was yelling to the officers, telling them that Larry was all right. Thus Larry, as he dashed upward, became the leader of a surge.

He had recognized The Shadow as the fighter that he had met at Grennel's. The verdict there had favored The Shadow, as a person who sided with the law. Margaret knew that.

Standing in the side passage, her tiny gun in hand, she wondered why Larry was taking up the chase. Only crooks contended with The Shadow, so she had heard.

That flash of thought cleared the last doubt that Margaret might have held concerning her father. He, at least, had fled without shooting at The Shadow. His shot at Larry had been delivered in an effort to save Margaret's life.

Grateful for that deed, the girl overlooked the possibility that Brye might first have seen The Shadow; then fired. His shot, if meant for Larry alone, had been rather long delayed.

However, that was past. All that counted at the present was The Shadow's plight. It was real, for he was ignoring the best path to safety: the side hall where Margaret stood. He didn't want Larry to start another fusillade in that direction, with the girl still there.

As she saw The Shadow turn toward another hallway, Margaret recognized the reason and chafed at her own folly in remaining where she was.

Again, she didn't see both sides of the matter. Her presence also prevented The Shadow from overtaking Dana Brye. That was something for which her father would have thanked her. Brye, anxious to meet no one who might recognize him, would not have enjoyed the prospect of outfacing The Shadow.

The hall that The Shadow took was blocked. It led to the rear of the house, where a flight of stairs went

to the servant's quarters. Alarmed by the gunfire, some of Marquin's hired help were on the way down. Husky chaps, they flung themselves at the cloaked figure that came their way.

Moonlight from a hallway window failed to show the gun The Shadow carried; otherwise, those servants might have dropped back. They were armed only with improvised weapons: one had a broken chair arm, another the chassis of a table lamp. A third carried a metal rod, the principal portion of a towel rack, that the fellow had wrenched from a bathroom wall. With those assorted cudgels, the trio piled upon The Shadow.

DOWNSTROKES of their arms were met by warding sweeps, as The Shadow whirled among them. His system was a series of side strokes delivered in revolving style. He put enough lift to the process to drive the cudgels away from his head; and he prolonged his own strokes, to land blows in return. His fists, each weighted with an automatic, planted solid thuds against the jaws of his assailants.

Opponents couldn't see The Shadow's strokes arrive, for his arms were like invisible pistons, shooting out from the vague darkness of his cloaked body. What the servants didn't see, they felt. Two were sprawling by the time Larry entered the rear hall.

The third husky took a lurch straight for Larry. They met; floundering to the floor, they wrestled there, for the servant thought he was grappling with The Shadow. The officers thought the same when they saw the floundering figures. They were dragging them apart, trying to figure which was Larry, when a driving thing of blackness shot straight past them.

Reversing his course, The Shadow was choosing the front hall again. He met Gaylor on the way, straight-armed the fellow with a force that sent him clear across the hall, through a door that ripped open when he struck it.

Margaret, away from the side hall, heard The Shadow's taunting laugh as he left pursuers behind him. With a glad cry, she pointed The Shadow toward the side hall.

Before he could take that route, The Shadow wheeled to meet another adversary. It was Marquin, attired in dressing gown, a revolver in his hand. The rubber king had come from a front room; the opened door flung a path of light that The Shadow would have to cross to reach the side stairs.

Marquin's eyes were sharp, his square jaw firmly set. He aimed with cold precision when he saw the invader loom upon him. From the shouts that he heard, Marquin was justified in the belief that he was meeting a deadly enemy; and he, more than any of the previous antagonists, was the one who could bring The Shadow's mad whirl to an end.

The Shadow was sweeping in to beat Marquin's gun - not with a shot of his own, but with the hope of slashing the revolver aside. Marquin, experienced in meeting danger through the long periods that he had spent in primitive lands, used sudden tactics to avoid the drive. In the fashion with which he had once avoided the thrust of a savage spear, Marquin sidestepped, jerking his gun closer to his body.

The Shadow's cross slash missed. Striking the wall, he recuperated with a valiant back-cut of his other hand. Whether that blow could have warded off Marquin's gun before it fired, was a question that was never answered. Before either thing happened, Marquin's gun hand was wrenched aside by the firm clutch of small, determined hands.

Margaret Brye had intervened, repaying The Shadow for saving her that time when Larry had fired. Marquin struggled to get his gun free, but couldn't manage it in time to aim again.

The Shadow was away; with Larry and the others coming from the rear, he took the front stairs as the

sure route to safety.

Shots rang from above, but all were wide. Pursuers were piling pell-mell down the stairs as The Shadow vanished through the open front door. By the time that they had reached there, he had gained the patrol car, which stood with motor still running.

A few seconds later two cops, shooting wildly from the porch, saw the taillights of their car twinkle beyond the driveway, while the fading whine of the high-speed second gear replaced the echoes of their gunfire.

RETURNING into the house, one angry officer put in a call to headquarters, while the other began to question Gaylor and Larry.

The servant stated that he had heard someone enter the house and creep up to the second floor. Coming down by the back stairs, Gaylor had phoned for the police. From there the story belonged to Larry.

He told how he had sighted someone in the side hall, only to be met by the sweeping attack of another assailant. At that point, Roger Marquin interrupted.

"Miss Brye can tell what happened," he told the officers. "She was the person in the side hall. She has told me so herself. You were very foolish, Larry" - Marquin turned to rebuke his secretary - "or else you were too excited. Whoever the man who attacked you, he saved Margaret's life."

Amazement showed on Larry's long face. He heard Margaret declare that she, too, had heard sounds in the house; that she had been looking along the side hall when Larry had seen her. It was plain that Larry, plunging toward the front stairs with The Shadow, had not heard Brye's shot; for he accepted Margaret's story without question.

"What happened subsequently," decided Marquin, "was your fault, Larry. You forced the unknown man to fight his way out of here. In all the commotion I would have shot him down, if Margaret had not shown prompt headwork, to prevent me."

Larry's face reddened; then his confusion ended with a display of sudden temper.

"He was a burglar, wasn't he?" demanded Larry. "Maybe he robbed the place before he stole that patrol car. If he wasn't here for crime, how could I have known it?"

"Because you should have recognized him," put in Margaret hotly. "He was The Shadow - the person who would have captured that murderer at Grennel's, if you hadn't interfered!"

"What if he was The Shadow?" snapped Larry. "Maybe he was pulling something crooked that night, only nobody found it out. Why was he here - can you answer that?"

"Perhaps I can," returned Margaret. "I think that he came here to talk to me - about my father."

Larry stared, a blank look on his face. Marquin displayed immediate interest.

"Are you sure of that?" He asked Margaret quietly. "Did you see The Shadow before Larry encountered him?"

"Yes, I did," replied the girl, realizing that she could build slim facts into a case that would favor The Shadow. "He was outside my window hoping, perhaps, that I would notice him in the moonlight. Perhaps he saw me, too, for I was looking out. Perhaps the noise he made when he entered was to attract my attention."

"I wonder," mused Marquin. "what The Shadow could know about your father."

"He might be able to explain the explosion," declared Margaret, warily. "Perhaps it wasn't accidental, as we supposed. Possibly some enemy was responsible."

Marquin shook his head.

"Dana Brye had no enemies," he said. "What is more" - his tone became emphatic - "we know that those experiments of his were dangerous! Much more dangerous, Margaret, than he ever admitted to you. Nevertheless, there is a matter that troubles me: the question of your father's fortune."

"How much money he possessed is doubtful, but there has been no trace of where he placed it. Perhaps" - Marquin spoke hopefully - "perhaps The Shadow knows."

Marquin's words, though speculative, went far to overrule Larry's claim that The Shadow could have come to the mansion intent on crime. Larry's notion was further ridiculed when Inspector Joe Cardona arrived from headquarters.

On the way here, Cardona had found the abandoned police car. When he heard the circumstances under which The Shadow had taken it, the ace inspector grunted.

"What else could he have done," demanded Cardona, "with a lot of crazy guys shooting at him? He couldn't stay around and pass out calling cards! Anybody that thinks The Shadow goes in for crooked work" - Joe turned an accusing eye on Larry - "is nuts!"

"I regard the episode as closed," decided Marquin. "To satisfy everyone, however" - his glance, too, meant Larry - "I suggest that you accompany me upstairs, inspector, while I open my safe and make sure that nothing is gone from it."

CARDONA went upstairs with Marquin. Larry, alone with Margaret in the living room, became suddenly apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Margaret," he said. "Very sorry!"

Margaret ignored the statement. Persistently, Larry repeated it at intervals for the next five minutes, until the mere monotony of his tone became maddening to Margaret.

"Sorry for what?" she snapped. "Sorry because you didn't manage to shoot me, there in the hall?"

"That was a mistake, Margaret! A horrible mistake. It was dark; I couldn't see that it was you."

"You have a cute way of not noticing faces when you don't want to, Larry. Funny, how you failed to recognize that murderer at Grennel's. You saw him, but nobody else did. Yet you couldn't describe what he looked like."

"It was too dark in back of Grennel's house."

"I don't mean that time." Margaret raised her tone. "I mean when you sneaked over to the window of Grennel's study. No wonder you lied, and said you didn't go there. Maybe persons would have wondered -"

"I swear I didn't see his face!" interrupted Larry. "You must believe me! Remember, too" - Larry's tone was hoarse - "that you said I was on the veranda. You're in it as deep as I am!"

Larry's final statement was not a tactful one. Possibly he didn't mean it to sound as pointed as it proved;

but Margaret was in no mood to make allowances.

"I lied for you," she declared, coldly, "because I thought I loved you. In way of gratitude, you accuse me for that lie. That means the end of everything between us, Larry!"

Larry began to stiffen, then relaxed. Marquin was entering the room, smiling as he came. Rubbing his hands cheerily, he scarcely noticed the dark expressions on the faces of Margaret and Larry.

"Everything is shipshape," informed Marquin. "The safe is untouched! I didn't have to go through it thoroughly to learn that it had not been opened. Cheer up, Larry!" He clapped the young man on the back. "And you, too, Margaret! Our friend, The Shadow, is cleared, and no one has been hurt. After Inspector Cardona finishes writing his report in my office, we can call it a night."

Margaret smiled, and Marquin seemed pleased. He did not know the thoughts that inspired her expression. The girl was glad that Marquin had not searched the safe more thoroughly. She preferred that he should find no evidence of her father's visit until tomorrow, when he could give it more sober thought.

Riding back to Manhattan, Joe Cardona muttered over the details of the report that he had written. One fact had been established. The Shadow's visit had been to good purpose. But it had the elements of a crimeless mystery, a fact that baffled Joe Cardona.

"It don't make sense," mumbled the ace inspector. "Or does it? Whatever it makes" - Joe shook his head - "only The Shadow knows!"

CHAPTER XV. AGAIN THE VINDICATOR

IT happened that Joe Cardona had for once attributed too much to The Shadow. The most important facts concerning the episode at Marquin's were known to one man only: Dana Brye. The little that Brye didn't know about, he learned the next day when he read the newspapers.

The grizzled inventor was living in an excellent hide-out - a basement dwelling that had a boarded door and a dim, weather-beaten Chinese laundry sign hanging out front. Brye hadn't rented the place; he owned it, under another name.

Some months ago, crates had been moved into the place, after the Chinese laundryman's lease had expired. Those boxes had remained unpacked until Brye's arrival the morning after his supposed death at Vreekill.

That day, Brye had unpacked; as a result, he was at present living in a room that resembled his Vreekill establishment on a small scale.

There was a workshop in one corner, its bench covered with bits of mechanism. Another corner formed Brye's kitchen. His cot was in the third corner, while a fourth actually held a small light safe that Brye had clamped to the floor with special locks. Like the explosive safe at Vreekill Castle, the tiny strong box was one of Brye's own manufacture.

As with his former quarters, there were two ways out. One was the boarded door, which Brye did not intend to use; the other, a trapdoor that led into a small subcellar. From there, Brye had a secret exit out through a window that opened on an alley.

All in all, he regarded this hide-out as one where no one, not even The Shadow, could find him.

The place had one advantage over Vreekill Castle. It had a telephone, allowing Brye outside contact without the necessity of a long trip. Brye was very particular about that telephone. He kept it in a little

closet at the back of the room, and whenever he made a call, he stepped inside and closed the closet door.

During the day that followed his trip to Marquin's house, Brye entered that closet often. It was not until evening, however, that his face showed a canny smile after he had finished a telephone call. Opening his little safe, Brye took out a small valise and laid it on the workbench.

A glance at his watch brought a nod of satisfaction. Another look toward the closet; Brye nodded again. There would still be time for another call before he left here. The thought brought a chuckle from Brye's smiling lips.

Soon, he would be leaving this hideout on an important mission; one that must be fulfilled tonight. No one would witness Brye's exit from the cellar window. No one; not even The Shadow!

CIRCUMSTANCES made The Shadow's surmise about Brye's hide-out unimportant. He was no longer looking for it. Dusk had taken The Shadow to a previous district that he had visited - the neighborhood where the apartment buildings of Riverview City raised themselves to lofty heights, as if to shake off the squalid streets beneath.

The Shadow had taken a new interest in the affairs of Trigger Kobin; an interest that demanded his personal attention.

The day before, Jericho Druke, The Shadow's giant African agent who hailed from Harlem, had been admitted to Trigger's apartment when Trigger was not there. Jeoper had let him in, and Jericho, posing as a janitor, had roused no suspicion from the Chicago thug.

Jericho looked like a janitor, in his overalls, and he had come on a logical mission. He was bringing fresh electric light bulbs to replace those that had burned out.

As in the fabled story of Aladdin, there was a catch to Jericho's offer of "new lamps for old." One of the bulbs that he inserted in the ceiling, with the aid of a ladder and his long reach, had a tiny microphone attached. When the ceiling lights were on - and Jeoper always kept them burning in the gloomy living room - the mike was in operation.

Anywhere in the building, a person could plug a special receiver into an electric-light socket and hear everything that was said in Trigger's apartment. Such a receiver - the loud-speaking end of a dictograph - was in the possession of Burbank, The Shadow's contact agent.

Day and night, from the time when Jericho had supplied the light bulb, Burbank had been listening in on everything that happened in the apartment occupied by the crooks. Burbank was located in the other apartment that The Shadow had rented for his agents.

Off and on during this new day, Trigger had been getting telephone calls from the Vindicator. Burbank had relayed all the details to The Shadow; and although the calls merely included Trigger's end of the conversation, they had been important enough to command The Shadow's personal attention.

Eight o'clock was the time when Trigger expected a final call. While he waited for it, he indulged in comments for the benefit of Jeoper Quade. Trigger felt that he could talk freely to Jeoper, as Slink Rembo, the other torpedo imported from the Middle West, was not yet back from dinner.

"I told you the big shot was Brye," bragged Trigger. "He had something on the bean, all right. Whatever it was, he settled it last night, when he was out at Marquin's."

"How do you know Brye was out there?" demanded Jeoper. "The newspapers didn't say so."

Trigger snorted his contempt. He demanded:

"Ain't Brye's daughter out there? That's good enough reason why he'd show up. He's using her as a stooge, or I'll miss my bet. So he can pull something on Marquin."

"The grapevine ain't wise," reminded Jeep, referring to the mouth-to-mouth "telegraph" system of the underworld. "It piped that The Shadow mixed into it at Marquin's. That's all."

"Sure! But the grapevine didn't tell us what The Shadow was there for. He wasn't out there calling on Brye's daughter, was he?"

"No. The Shadow doesn't fall for dolls - not even for blondies."

Trigger felt that Jeep's comment clinched his point.

"You're right, The Shadow don't," he affirmed. "He'd even walk out on a Turkish harem, that guy! Listen, Jeep: The Shadow was out there looking for Brye. Which means that Brye is the Vindicator! I can put two and two together and, what's more, take 'em apart!"

The telephone bell provided an emphasis to Trigger's final statement. Reaching for the telephone, he said to Jeep:

"Ten to one it's the Vindicator - Brye to you and me - because something's hot and here's where I get the dope."

Trigger's end of the telephone call consisted mostly of monosyllables, chiefly the word "yeah," which he uttered with various inflections. When he had hung up, Trigger turned to Jeep.

"It's what I thought," he said. "We're going to stage another of the Vindicator jobs, like the one out at Grennel's. Only, I ain't doing the collecting this trip. I'm going to talk to the guy that has to do it. He'll like it, after I get through with him."

WHEN Trigger sneaked from a dead-end street, a half-hour later, he was confident that no one was on his trail. He had two sharp-eyed lookouts posted in the darkened thoroughfare to make sure that his way was clear. Those watchers were Jeep and Slink, and both boasted that they had eyes like cameras.

Perhaps they were right. However, no photographer could have snapped a picture of the gliding shape that followed Trigger through the darkness. Garbed in his black attire, The Shadow did more than use darkness as his cover; he became a part of it.

Riding in a cab that he entered in such a manner that the driver saw his face but vaguely, Trigger felt complete satisfaction. The police, in his estimate, were palookas; and that applied to Joe Cardona in particular. As for The Shadow, Trigger argued that since the cloaked investigator hadn't dropped in and started battle, it meant that The Shadow knew nothing about the apartment in Riverview City.

It didn't occur to Trigger that The Shadow had decided to leave him alone, on the hope that Trigger would be assigned to just such a mission as the one the Vindicator had ordered for tonight.

That, at least, had occurred to the Vindicator. Trigger was using Jeep and Slink in a manner that the big shot had ordered. Also, on his present journey, Trigger adopted some precautions that were not of his own choice. Spying another cab at a gloomy corner near an elevated station, Trigger dismissed the one in which he rode and transferred to the other cab.

Several blocks north, he alighted; ascending to an elevated platform, he took a train and rode two

stations south. Hailing another cab, he gave an address; taken there, he looked about, then sneaked through an alleyway to the next street.

Crossing over, Trigger cut through another passageway that brought him to an avenue. He stopped in front of a small jewelry store, stared through the window, then entered the doorway.

Behind the counter was a meek-faced baldish man whose name, so Trigger guessed, was Tobias Bourne. That name was on the sign in front of the jewelry store, and the meekish man answered the description that the Vindicator had given.

Trigger edged along the counter, looking at cheap jewelry. Bourne followed along the other side, as though magnetized by the customer. Trigger was well dressed; his sharp features were not unhandsome when he avoided his wolfish smile. He seemed to take a solemn interest in the jewelry: hence Bourne suspected nothing until they reached the end of the counter.

There, Trigger's hand emerged to poke a gun past the counter end. Prodded in the lower ribs, Bourne started to raise his arms, but stopped when Trigger growled:

"Lay off! This ain't no stickup. Get in the back room. I want to talk to you!"

THE back room was on the other side of a partition. Opening the door, Bourne entered, with Trigger close behind. Looking around the place, Trigger saw another door, which he knew led to the cellar; for the Vindicator had mentioned that detail.

In another corner was a curtained entrance to a passage. It led to a side door that opened into a little courtyard connecting with the last alley that Trigger had cut through.

Trigger introduced himself. When he mentioned his name, Bourne jerked upward as if he had experienced an electric shock. The baldish jeweler had heard of Trigger Kobin. He gave another start when Trigger spoke of the Vindicator.

"We're getting places," chuckled Trigger. "Here's the whole dope, Bourne. The big shot knows all about you. He knows how you fenced those sparklers that Peewee Wendorf brought in from Buffalo. What's more, he can prove it!"

Bourne's mouth opened to an egg shape. In scared fashion, he ejaculated one word:

"How?"

"Because the Vindicator was smart enough to buy some of 'em," informed Trigger, "and to keep 'em. Remember the Jem Jewelry Co., that took eight hundred dollars' worth? That outfit's phony! It didn't even have an office; nothing but a letterhead.

"The Vindicator put that one over on you. All he's got to do is send the stuff he bought up to Buffalo, along with your letters to Jem Jewelry. When the bulls get tired looking for a company that nobody ever heard about, they'll come around to see you."

The frantic look on Bourne's face was exactly what Trigger expected. He pushed the jeweler into a chair, then leaned back to look him over. He waited until Bourne began to whine an incoherent plea, then remarked casually:

"There's a way out, Bourne. All you've got to do is play ball the way the big shot wants."

Again, Bourne's mouth formed the word "How?"

"You've heard of Noel Shalley, haven't you?" asked Trigger. Then, as Bourne nodded: "Well, the Vindicator has got him labeled, just like he had Grennel and all those other big-money boys that he shook down. He's given Shalley the deadline, just like he did the rest.

"Tonight, Shalley comes across, or else. Only, it ain't dough this time, it's jewels; because Shalley collects them and has plenty. Shalley's coming here, see? To leave the rocks - and you're the go-between."

Bourne began to understand. Realizing that he could protect himself by doing what the Vindicator wanted, he found his squeaky voice, to ask:

"What about the evidence that Shalley will be buying? That's the way the Vindicator works, isn't it?"

"You know a lot," approved Trigger, in a genial tone. "Been reading newspapers, haven't you? Yeah, the Vindicator is selling something, like he always does. It's nine o'clock now; in half an hour a messenger will leave an envelope. That's what you're to hand over to Shalley when he shows up at ten.

"Only not until Shalley gives you the jewels and shows you the letters that the Vindicator sent him, so you can check and make sure they're worth a hundred grand. After that, you'll get a call from the Vindicator telling you where to deliver 'em. But don't get jittery, Bourne. I'll be around to see it go through."

Looking past the jeweler, Trigger studied the curtained doorway, then the door that led to the cellar. His nod told that he preferred the cellar entrance.

"That's where I'll be," he decided. "Come on, Bourne. It's nine o'clock. Time for you to close up shop."

While Bourne was nervously closing the store, Trigger watched him from the connecting door in the partition. His eyes toward the front of the shop, Trigger didn't notice the slight stir of the curtains at the back corner of the rear room.

An outer door opened noiselessly, then closed. The silence of the tiny courtyard was stirred by a strange, subdued whisper that trailed mysteriously to the alleyway beyond.

The Shadow had heard the Vindicator's plans, as voiced by Trigger Kobin. From those, The Shadow was forming measures of his own.

CHAPTER XVI. THE LAST SHAKEDOWN

THE huge clock in Marquin's living room was chiming nine when Margaret Brye looked up from a book, her lips set in a determined expression that increased her resemblance to her father. She heard someone stepping in from the hallway, and if it would prove to be Larry again, she wasn't going to talk to him. This would be the fifth time since dinner, that he had come in to stare at her and wait for her to speak.

It wasn't Larry, however. The arrival was Roger Marquin. Margaret changed her grim look to a smile; but Marquin did not return it. His heavy face seemed anxious.

"Where is Larry?" he asked. "I thought I would find him in the office. He went up there after dinner, didn't he?"

Margaret remembered that Marquin had gone out soon after dinner, to attend a community meeting. He had said that he would be back in an hour, or so, unless the meeting proved to be important. Evidently, it had not been of much consequence.

"Yes, Larry was in the office," assured Margaret, "but he came down here regularly every fifteen minutes, hoping I'd talk to him - which I wouldn't!"

Marquin rang for Gaylor; when the butler arrived, he asked him if Larry had gone out. Gaylor replied that he had, but that the secretary had mentioned that he would return.

"That's curious," remarked Marquin slowly, after the servant had left the room. "I can't understand why Larry went so soon, even if he does intend to come back. There's no reason why he should return. I thought he would go directly aboard the steamer."

"The steamer?" echoed Margaret.

"Yes. The steamship Anaconda," returned Marquin. "It sails early in the morning for South America. Larry is going to Brazil. Didn't he tell you?"

Margaret's amazed eyes told Marquin that Larry had made no mention of the voyage. Stroking his wide chin, Marquin began a thoughtful nod.

"I begin to understand it," he said. "You're the person responsible, Margaret, though you didn't know it."

"I?" gasped Margaret. "How?"

"You will remember," explained Marquin, "that Larry has had a vacation coming to him for some months. Also, that I once suggested that if he went to Brazil and met with my representatives there, we could consider the trip half-business, half-holiday and would defray the expenses."

Margaret nodded. Larry had often talked about that trip. It was to be their honeymoon; that was why he had postponed it. Counting upon his marriage to Margaret, Larry had intended to take her along. Despite herself, the girl found her eyes tear-brimmed. Her voice choked, when she said:

"Larry didn't tell me anything about... about this vacation. Maybe... maybe that was why he kept coming in here - hoping I'd say something."

"It probably was," returned Marquin, sympathetically. "It troubled me, this morning, when Larry suddenly said he wanted to take that trip. He knew that the Anaconda was due to sail and said this was his opportunity. I told him to think it over; which he did. When he left his desk, just before dinner, he said that his mind was made up. He was leaving tonight."

Margaret's tears became real. In one surge of emotion, she realized that she did care for Larry, more than she would ordinarily have believed. Marquin sat beside the girl, spoke soothingly as he patted her quivering shoulder.

"Larry is returning because of you," Marquin told her. "He wouldn't leave without saying good-by. It's all for the best, Margaret. You two have seen each other too much lately, under circumstances that produced a strain. You can both begin all over when he returns, a month from now."

Gradually, the girl's sobs lessened. Marquin added further reassurance:

"Don't forget that this is Larry's last night in New York. He probably had some matters that needed attention. That is why he decided to go into town."

THERE was considerable truth in Marquin's surmise. At that moment, Larry Chandler was thinking of a very important matter. Riding in a taxi, he was holding a long envelope in his hands while he watched from the window, looking for a telegraph office that he knew would be open.

He saw the office. Telling the driver to stop, Larry alighted, entered the office. He handed the envelope to a clerk, gave explicit instructions:

"For immediate delivery!"

The clerk nodded; he beckoned to a gum-chewing messenger boy. While Larry was receiving his change, he watched the messenger go out the door studying the typewritten address on the envelope.

Much though he liked to dally, the messenger knew he could not linger long on this trip. He had only a dozen blocks to go, and the clerk would check to see that he was back in half an hour.

That envelope was addressed to Tobias Bourne; it bore the street number of the jeweler's little shop.

Glancing at the clock in the telegraph office, Larry observed that it was just quarter past nine. That allowed the right amount of time for the envelope to reach Bourne. It left Larry exactly one hour, at which time he intended to return to this same office.

"I expect an answer," he told the clerk. "It will be a package, that will arrive at quarter past ten."

"Soon enough," returned the clerk. "We don't close until eleven."

Larry strolled from the office and turned in the direction of Times Square. The arrangements gave him just enough time to watch an hour's show in one of the news-reel theaters.

SOME blocks from the lighted area of Times Square, a shrouded figure stood in the darkness beside an old-fashioned brownstone mansion, the most pretentious edifice on its street. This was one of those gloomy, forgotten sections that reminded old-timers of Manhattan as it had been in the gay '90s.

The Shadow was not concerned, however, with memories of the past. He was thinking of the present, and the immediate future. The brownstone house was the home of Noel Shalley, noted jewel collector, and its location was perfectly suited to The Shadow's vigil. Along a darkened street like this one, The Shadow could merge unseen into any of a dozen niches.

There were few lights in Shalley's house, but The Shadow knew that the collector was at home. He had seen Shalley draw a window blind only ten minutes ago, which was luck, for The Shadow had arrived only a short while before that.

There was no mistaking Noel Shalley. He was a tall, stoop-shouldered man, who kept to the tradition of the '90s by wearing a bushy beard. The beard was quite conspicuous, for it was a reddish brown; but it identified Shalley on sight, which rather pleased him, for he was a man of much self-importance.

Besides, Shalley's father and grandfather had worn beards like it, and that was enough for Shalley. He had traveled the world over, always with the beard accompanying him. People remembered him because of his adornment; and except during one trip to London at a time when street gamins delighted in shouting "Beaver!" at anyone who wore a beard, Shalley had never regretted his taste for whiskers.

While The Shadow's eyes were steady on the upper windows, his ears caught a sound below. Cautious footsteps were coming along a passage that led from a side door. That door had been locked when The Shadow tried it. Possibly, the man was Shalley; but The Shadow doubted it.

He let the man turn the other way and continue along the street. There was one place that the departer could not pass without being observed: a spot where a bright light was glowing from an open vestibule, while a street lamp gleamed from the curb directly in front of that particular house.

The man came into the light, darted quick looks right and left as he increased his pace. Before he had reached the farther darkness, which made a short stretch to the corner, The Shadow caught a full view of the fellow's face. It wasn't bearded. The man was clean-shaven, and his countenance was recognizable

instantly, even at a range of nearly forty yards.

The profile, with its straight forehead, even nose and strong chin, was that of Dana Brye's!

A secret visitor to Shalley's home, Brye was evidently pleased with what he had accomplished, for The Shadow could detect his usual cunning look. When Brye was gone, The Shadow edged toward the passage that led to Shalley's side door, intending to make an entry of his own.

Brye's visit threw a new angle on the case. There were always consequences when Brye slipped in and out of places, as he had at Vreekill Castle and at Marquin's mansion. No longer watching Marquin's, The Shadow knew that Brye could have other trips there; but he hadn't expected to see the missing inventor at Shalley's house.

This might mean that Noel Shalley would not leave for Bourne's jewelry shop. It was possible that Brye's visit had made such a trip unnecessary. Perhaps there were factors in the Vindicator's game that The Shadow had not discovered.

His own plans fully prepared, The Shadow was faced by a last-minute situation that threatened to turn them all away. He was half regretting that he passed up the present opportunity to overtake Dana Brye, when a new occurrence came; one that immediately put matters back in line.

FROM the entrance to the side passage, The Shadow heard a sound from Shalley's front door. He edged outward in time to see a man step from the doorway and reach back to close the door. Against the momentary light from the inner hall, The Shadow saw the bearded face of Noel Shalley.

There was no mistaking that profile, which Shalley regarded as aristocratic, like his beard.

By the time that Shalley had locked the door and started down the steps, The Shadow had crossed the street and merged entirely with darkness.

Shalley stopped at the bottom of the steps, looked in the very direction that The Shadow had taken, but saw only the dim lights of a parked cab. Stepping toward a street lamp, Shalley called "Taxi!" in a booming voice and signaled with his arm.

The cab came to life. Swinging across the street, the driver opened the door. Noel Shalley stepped into the cab, giving Bourne's address as he pulled the door shut. The bearded man was on his way to pay tribute to the Vindicator.

From that moment onward, many important events were to be shaped by the hand of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. DEATH LEAVES A TRAIL

TWO men faced each other across a back-room table. On one side, the bearded face of Noel Shalley showed a contemptuous glare; from the other, the meekish countenance of Tobias Bourne peered with a forced grin.

Bourne didn't like his present assignment; but his position was mild compared to Shalley's. By "playing ball" in accordance with Trigger's instructions, Bourne had found the task much easier than he thought.

At half past nine he had answered a banging at the front door of his shop, to receive an envelope from a messenger. At ten o'clock, there had been a knock at the rear door from the courtyard. There, Bourne had admitted Shalley.

Their business was coming to a rapid completion. On the table lay letters from the Vindicator, which had

been sent to Shalley. While Bourne was reading them in squinty fashion, he noted that Shalley was reaching in his pocket. Bourne was nervous for a moment, thinking in terms of a gun; but all that Shalley produced was a chamois bag that he let fall with a thump.

Opening the bag with hurried hands, Bourne began to appraise the jewels that it contained. There were emeralds, rubies, sapphires, all flawless stones as Bourne viewed them through his glass. The jeweler gave an approving nod.

"They are worth more than a hundred thousand dollars," he asserted, raising his tone loud enough to be heard by Trigger, behind the cellar door. "Far more, Mr. Shalley."

"Why not?" came Shalley's rumble. "I want no more trouble from the Vindicator, whoever he may be. Come, Bourne! Let me have those papers that he promised."

Bourne produced them. He saw Shalley's eyes gleam as brightly as the jewels that lay beneath the single lamp. Unlike other victims of the Vindicator, Shalley had not expected papers that he intended to destroy. These were documents that the bearded man needed for future protection.

One was a death certificate that bore the name of Lionel Durman; another, a scrawled note, evidently a dying confession, that bore the same man's signature. The third was a bill of sale made out to Shalley and receipted by Durman. It listed rubies valued at eighty-five thousand rupees.

"Durman was the rajah's secretary," muttered Shalley. "He stole those gems, though I didn't know it. To protect himself, he later stole this receipt, which he had given me when I bought the gems in good faith.

"So he confessed it!" Shalley was eyeing the scrawled paper. "Probably to crooks like himself, who were torturing him to get the gems he no longer had or the money that he had squandered. I knew that Durman was dead, but that didn't help me.

"Had the rubies been traced to me" - Shalley's fist thumped the table - "I could never prove that I had not been part to a criminal transaction! I have wanted this missing receipt for years. The confession, of course, supported it. The fact that Durman is dead" - he added the death certificate to the other papers - "relieves me of all worry that I shall ever meet the cad again."

Bourne saw the papers go into Shalley's pocket; watched the bearded man lean back in satisfied relief. The jeweler poured the gems into the chamois bag and placed the latter in a small square box. He began to wrap the box into a package, noting by darted glances that Shalley's expression was becoming rueful.

A buzz sounded near Bourne's chair. It was the telephone bell, which Trigger had fixed so it would not make too much noise. Bourne answered the call, held a brief conversation, then glanced at his watch.

"Quarter past ten," he said. "I am late; but I didn't know" - his tone was pathetic - "just where I was to go. You're to remain here, Mr. Shalley, for exactly half an hour, while I take this package to -"

BOURNE cut himself short. He saw a gun muzzle poking from the cellar door and realized that he was not supposed to confide in Shalley. The jeweler hastily licked his lips.

"Where I go is my own business," he declared. "Mine, and the Vindicator's. I am not coming back, so do not wait for me, Mr. Shalley. Remember: a half hour, and during that time you are to call no one on the telephone."

Bourne went out by the rear door, taking the package with him. Hardly had the jeweler gone, before Shalley looked warily about the little room. Trigger's gun had moved from sight.

After a few minutes, Shalley shifted over to Bourne's chair and picked up the telephone. Calling police headquarters, he asked for Inspector Cardona. Learning that Joe was not there, the bearded man announced:

"My name is Noel Shalley. I have just paid a large sum in jewels, to the Vindicator. I can describe those gems so that they can be traced. What is more, I can tell you who the Vindicator is. His name is -"

Shalley cut off short. He was on his feet, the telephone lowered in his hand. The cellar door had opened. Trigger Kobin was approaching with a leveled revolver.

"Lay off!" rasped Trigger. "I'm pinch-hitting for the big shot tonight. I'm here to give what he gives to guys that know too much!"

As Trigger finished the announcement, Shalley flung the telephone. Its cord was long, for Bourne used the telephone in both the shop and the rear room. Trigger dodged the unexpected missile, shooting wildly as he ducked.

Diving in the opposite direction, Shalley grabbed the lamp cord and tugged it. The instant darkness was marred only by the jabs of Trigger's gun. Then came spurts from another weapon. Shalley had a gun, too, as Bourne had suspected.

Amid the incessant roar, Shalley must have dropped, for his final gun spurt came from the floor, just as Trigger knifed another flaming stab in his direction. There was the clank of a gun striking the floor; then a fading groan. Gurgling sounds came from the front of the jewelry shop. Men were pounding at the outer door.

In that room of death, a flashlight glimmered. A man was working in the dark above a body. Finally, there was the crinkle of paper, as the gleam turned upon a bearded face that lay stiff in death. Footsteps reached the rear door just as the front broke through.

Arriving in the back room, two patrolmen found no trace of Trigger Kobin. Instead, they discovered the body of a dead bearded man who, by identification cards in his wallet, was promptly identified as Noel Shalley. But the officers found no money in the wallet. Shalley's cash was gone, along with the documents that had come from the Vindicator.

The fact that the dead man lay penniless, made the officers suppose that he had died resisting an ordinary robbery. Using Bourne's telephone, they tried to get in touch with Joe Cardona, but failed. Too bad, one said, that the ace inspector was not available to view this scene of crime.

ODDLY, Joe Cardona had been very close to Bourne's jewelry store, but had left a short while before the shooting began. The police inspector was following a tip-off that he believed was from The Shadow. Near the alley that allowed a rear exit from Bourne's place of business, Cardona had picked up the meek-faced jeweler's trail.

At this moment, he was watching Bourne enter a telegraph office near Times Square. Through the window, Cardona saw the jeweler leave a package, then depart. Considering the package more important than Bourne, Cardona waited.

A man came briskly along the street. When he entered the telegraph office, Cardona recognized the fellow. He remembered Larry Chandler very well. With all the fuss that Larry had kicked up out there at Marquin's mansion, he wasn't the sort of chap to be easily forgotten.

When Larry came out again, he was carrying the package that Bourne had left. There were plenty of

cabs at hand and the young man stepped into one. As soon as Larry's taxi had started, Cardona jumped into the one behind. Flashing his badge, he gruffed the instruction:

"Follow that cab!"

It wasn't long before Cardona guessed exactly where the trip would end. The cabs crossed the East River, followed the traffic of a boulevard, and swung into a paved roadway that Cardona recognized as the straight route to Marquin's home.

Figuring that Larry might notice that he was being trailed, Cardona told his own driver to ease the speed. By the time the trailing cab rolled into sight of the mansion, Larry's taxi was pulling from the driveway, having dropped its passenger at the door.

Gaylor answered when Cardona rang the doorbell. The inspector asked sharply if Larry had entered; Gaylor nodded.

"Mr. Chandler went to his room," said the butler. "Do you wish to see him, Inspector?"

"Yeah. Right away! Show me the room."

Gaylor led the way, with Cardona telling him to hurry. By the time the servant pointed out the closed door of Larry's room, the police inspector had made a lot of noise without realizing it.

Another door opened; Margaret Brye stepped in sight. She hadn't heard Larry enter; she gave a surprised gasp when she recognized Cardona.

Marquin appeared from his offices. The outer door was ajar, and he, too, had noticed the commotion. Like Margaret, Marquin stared as an astonished witness, when Joe yanked open the door of Larry's room and entered with a drawn gun. There was a sharp exclamation from the inner corner, where Larry was packing a suitcase.

Without waiting for Cardona's challenge, Larry dropped the package that had come from Bourne and snatched up a revolver that lay in the suitcase. Before he could get a grip on the weapon, Cardona lunged at him. Joe always preferred a live prisoner to a dead one, and he was glad, very shortly, that he hadn't been quick with his trigger.

For Larry's nerve faltered when he recognized the swarthy police inspector. Battered by Cardona's drive, the secretary collapsed in the corner, his gun gone from his hand.

By way of precaution, Cardona clamped handcuffs on Larry's wrists, then pocketed the secretary's gun. That done, Joe turned to the suitcase.

OPENING Bourne's package, Cardona found the chamois bag; he gave a low whistle when he poured out its sparkling contents. Cardona didn't know where those gems had originally come from, but he could guess that they weren't the property of a cheap jeweler like Bourne.

Handing the gems to Marquin, Cardona dragged Larry to his feet and demanded the facts.

Larry merely returned a sudden stare. From the way he acted, Cardona decided he was trying to appear bewildered; but that didn't go with Joe.

Before questioning Larry further, the ace decided to have a look in the packed suitcase. There, Cardona found a heavy oblong package. Ripping off the wrapping paper, he gripped a metal box.

It was locked, but the fastening gave when Cardona hammered it with his revolver butt. The lid of the box popped open and Cardona was looking at piles of green currency in bundles that totaled one hundred thousand dollars.

The amount, the high denominations, the numbers of the bills, matching a memorandum in Cardona's pocket, were proof that the ace inspector had struck a long-sought find. To Larry, Cardona rasped a denunciation that held the other listeners rigid.

"This was the cash that Thomas Grennel handed over," announced the detective ace. "It pins more than blackmail on you, Chandler. It tags you for a murder rap! You're the crook that calls himself the Vindicator!"

Larry's hoarse denials sounded puny. Cardona regarded them as meaningless chatter. This was one time when Joe could not be guessing wrong, not at the end of a trail like the one that he had just followed.

That trail, resulting in the recovery of stolen wealth, had been provided by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII. SHIFTED EVIDENCE

CARDONA'S next task was to grill the prisoner. As a setting for that process, he chose Marquin's inner office, where he placed Larry under a strong light. With Marquin and Margaret as witnesses to the quiz, Cardona opened fire.

"What about Grennel?" he demanded. "Who killed him? You're the guy that knows!"

Larry shook his head.

"It wasn't Trigger Kobin," snapped Cardona. "You can't shove the job on him. It was somebody out there on the lawn. Some fellow that you planted there! Say -"

Cardona's eyes were hard. They caught the signs of a nervous twitch on Larry's face. Shoving his chin close to the prisoner's, Cardona played his hunch:

"You could have fired that shot yourself!"

Out of the confusion, Larry found his voice. His eyes met Margaret's. Away from the light, her face was only a pale blur. Meeting Cardona's gaze again, Larry answered the challenge.

"I couldn't have killed Grennel," he argued. "I wasn't close enough to the window. I couldn't have done it, I tell you!"

A voice intervened. It was Marquin's, calm but emphatic in its very ease of tone.

"Let me ask a question," suggested Marquin. Then, as Cardona nodded willingness, the rubber king turned to Margaret: "I must question you, not Larry. The other night, after The Shadow had gone, I overheard you arguing with Larry. Didn't the discussion concern the testimony that you gave after the crime at Grennel's?"

Margaret set her lips firmly. She moved closer to the light, boldly facing her questioner.

"I know that you love Larry," added Marquin, soberly. "You proved that tonight. But I do not feel that I am asking too much, when I request you to state the simple truth. There are times, Margaret, when justice must be served."

The girl was still determined not to speak; but Marquin's words had taken effect upon another listener. The statement that Margaret had proven her love for him, brought a new expression to the face of Larry Chandler. He recognized that the girl must have talked to Marquin some time during the evening; and as Larry watched Margaret's reaction, he knew from her face that her love was a fact.

Before Margaret could be questioned further, Larry took the issue as his own.

"I can answer the question," he announced, firmly. "I lied about what happened at Grennel's. I had left the veranda before the shot was fired. I -"

"Larry!"

Margaret's interjection was one of anguish. The handcuffed man hesitated; then showed his own determination. Unflinchingly, he continued:

"By my own statements, I forced Margaret to testify that I was with her at the time. I was a coward, that was all. But only because my story was an honest one. I didn't want to weaken it."

Larry looked toward Margaret and received his reward. He had declared the facts at a time when such a step could ruin him. He had done so with the hope of clearing Margaret from any vestige of blame. To the girl, that meant that Larry had proven his love as he could have in no other way.

Though her face was sad, Margaret smiled. Her conflict of emotions revealed her true self; brought her closer to Larry than on the night, many months ago, when she had accepted his proposal of marriage.

During those months, Larry had been troubled by the increasing dread that Margaret's willingness for marriage had been inspired solely through loneliness. All such doubt was dispelled, in this present crisis.

It was Larry's task to prove himself innocent of crime, that he might collect the prize he saw before him. Boldly, he turned to Cardona and put his case in direct fashion.

"I SAW the murderer that night at Grennel's," Larry affirmed, "but did not recognize him. You will recall that I did not recognize Margaret - Miss Brye - in the hallway of this house on the night when The Shadow came here. Nor did I recognize you at first, inspector, when you entered my room.

"My eyes are not as sharp-sighted as they should be. I use these" - he drew a pair of glasses from his pocket with his handcuffed hands - "when I work at my desk. That accounts for certain of my shortcomings. But I am innocent of any crime, and feel that I can answer all questions to your satisfaction."

Cardona liked Larry's way of putting it; not because he believed the secretary innocent, but because he found it easy to meet direct statements with replies of the same sort. Cardona liked to "bat them back and forth," as he sometimes described it.

"All right," countered the inspector. "If you didn't murder Grennel, how did you happen to get his cash? Perhaps you'll tell me" - Cardona's tone was dry - "that somebody put it in your suitcase."

"Somebody did," returned Larry. "I'm that person. Tonight, after dinner, I found the locked box on my desk, with a note from Mr. Marquin instructing me to take it to Brazil."

Marquin supplied an ejaculation:

"A note? From me?"

"Yes - this note," replied Larry. "It also told me" - he was bringing a folded paper from his pocket - "to send an envelope to a jeweler named Bourne, by messenger. The envelope was with the box, and I was to receive a package from Bourne in return."

"The package with the jewels," put in Cardona. "What were you to do with it? Take it to Brazil, too?"

Larry nodded. He had handed the note to Marquin, who was reading it. Puzzlement came over Marquin's features.

"The note says all that," he declared. "But I didn't write it. I notice, too, that it instructs Larry to hold box and package intact, until receipt of instructions by cable."

Marquin passed the note to Cardona, who saw that it was typewritten, with the initials "R. M.," at the finish. With a grunt, Cardona commented:

"Anybody could have knocked out this note on one of the typewriters around here."

"Mr. Marquin always types his memos," argued Larry. "I naturally supposed that this was one from him."

"Except for the initials," reminded Marquin. "I never add them to the notes I leave you, Larry. I only include them on memos that go elsewhere."

Larry's lips went tight. To Margaret, that signified that he was merely annoyed because he hadn't noticed something unusual about the note when he found it. To Cardona, it meant that Larry had made a much more serious slip.

"The game's up, Chandler," asserted Cardona, bluntly. "You typed this note yourself, as an alibi. I'm taking you to headquarters - or, rather, I'm sending you there as soon as I can get the men to take you."

CARDONA reached for the telephone, made a call. Two minutes later, he was talking with some show of excitement. He slammed the telephone on its stand and announced:

"There's been another murder! The victim is a man named Noel Shalley. His body was found at Bourne's. These jewels are his. It's all clear, Chandler. You're the Vindicator; but you've staged your last shakedown!"

Larry was still staring at the incriminating note that he had so laboriously extracted from his pocket, because of the handcuffs that he wore. He turned to Marquin, said hopelessly:

"I'm sorry, sir. I wasn't trying to accuse you -"

"I can't believe that," interrupted Marquin, tartly. "No one other than yourself could have typed that note, Larry. You have found the man you were after, inspector. I suggest that you take him to the cell where he belongs."

"Wait!"

Margaret spoke the interruption. She had risen; her eyes were flashing. Looking from Marquin to Cardona, she pointed toward the box that contained Grennel's money.

"I have seen that box before," the girl declared. "Here, in a place where Larry could not possibly have found it!"

"If you saw it," objected Marquin, "Larry could have seen it."

"No. I saw it in your safe. You are the only person who knows the combination!"

Marquin looked startled. His lips moved wordlessly, but when he found his voice his statement was deliberate.

"If you saw the box in there" - Marquin was pointing to the safe - "someone else must have learned the combination. I never opened the safe when you or anyone else was in this office."

"The man who opened the safe was my father."

"Your father?" Marquin was totally amazed. "When?"

"The night that The Shadow was here."

"But your father - he was dead, three days before!"

Torn between her love for Larry and the promise that she had made to her father, Margaret had come to an absolute decision. It was prompted by Marquin's earlier statement, that justice must be served. That factor threw the balance; for, despite her love for Larry, Margaret had considered her promise binding.

She had lied for Larry once. Tonight, she could have lied for her father. One or the other had to be sacrificed, and the girl was torn by the dilemma. Nevertheless, all honesty and fairness demanded that the guilty man be denounced, the innocent person relieved of all suspicion.

"My father is not dead," spoke Margaret. Her own voice seemed very far away. "He came here the night that I have mentioned. He opened the safe by some method of his own. He showed me the box and the money in it. He said that he was leaving it for me.

"What he could do once, he could have done again. He left the money here, deep in the safe, where Mr. Marquin would not find it. But he came here again today, to reclaim it. No" - the girl shook her head, as Cardona started an interruption - "I did not see him today, but I am sure that he was here.

"Because only he could have brought the box from the safe and left it with a false note for Larry. There was every opportunity for him to do so while we were at dinner. Had he come a trifle earlier, he would have overheard Larry telling Mr. Marquin that he had decided to take the trip to Brazil."

Her denunciation finished, Margaret sat down in a daze. Cardona was pummeling her with questions that she didn't seem to hear. She was looking at Larry; his head was bowed. He knew the greatness of Margaret's sacrifice. Marquin, too, was solemn. The only doubter in the room was Joe Cardona.

Getting no answers to his questions, the inspector hammered the desk and voiced a loud objection.

"You can't get away with that story, Miss Brye! Your father is dead, that's why you're shoving the blame on him! You're in love with Chandler - you've admitted it - and you're trying to save him! It's easy enough to claim that your father murdered Grennel and Shalley. But -"

Cardona's fist stopped tight on the desk. His eyes stared past the lamplight. Too amazed to speak or move, he sat there rigid, a frozen gaze on his face that made the others turn. Cardona had recognized the man who had stepped into the room; so did they, as the arrival reached the glare of the lamplight.

It was Dana Brye. His face had lost its craftiness. His features were drawn, weary, and the expression very pale. He looked the part of a man who had returned to life after a sojourn in the grave.

His voice, however, was firm. Like his daughter, Dana Brye had come to a decision. Facing the silent,

staring group, he announced:

"I am the Vindicator!"

CHAPTER XIX. BACK FROM DEATH

ALTHOUGH Dana Brye produced amazement by his unexpected entrance, no one was startled at the admission he made. From what Margaret had testified, it was evident that Dana Brye, if actually alive, would logically be the Vindicator.

Any man who could mysteriously vanish from Vrekill Castle, leaving another body in his place, was obviously a master of hidden ways. His ability, too, at moving in and out of Marquin's home without detection pointed to skill at the very measure which had made the Vindicator a criminal of evil fame.

Brye's operations with Marquin's safe were merely further evidence of crooked ability; and they came within the field of reason, not only because of Margaret's testimony but because every listener knew that the safe in question was one of Brye's own manufacture. If anyone could find a way to open the combination, it would be Dana Brye, the man who had devised the mechanism.

The question was: Why had Brye revealed himself?

Margaret's disclosure of her father's secret was not sufficient reason. Brye still could have kept out of sight. There was a deeper answer, and Margaret believed that she could give it, if she chose.

Brye, a lurking witness to this scene, had watched his daughter's loyalty swing from himself to Larry Chandler. Such disappointment might not have influenced him to declare himself a criminal; the real rub was that circumstances, some unforeseen by Brye, had thrown crime's burden on Larry and thereby predicted a permanent unhappiness for Margaret.

Behind the fixed expression on Brye's face, Margaret could sense emotion. No matter how crooked he might be, Brye was still her father and recognized his paternal obligation beyond all else. Margaret knew that he had sacrificed himself for her, and the thought swept her with remorse.

Flinging her arms around Brye's shoulders, the girl laid her blond curls against his chin and sobbed. Every weeping gasp that left her lips was throbbled there from her heart. Her anguish held the witnesses silent. No move was made toward Brye.

Rigid as a figure of stone, the grizzled inventor made no effort to comfort his daughter. His sacrifice was a stolid one, as cold, upon the surface, as the merciless deeds of the Vindicator. When Brye finally moved an arm, he did not let it rest on Margaret's shoulders. Instead, he pointed to Larry, with the words:

"Release him."

Cardona unlocked the handcuffs and dangled them loosely, in readiness for Brye. His hands finding Margaret's shoulders, Brye gently eased his daughter from him.

As she looked up, her brimming eyes and tear-streaked face gifted with a loveliness that only her heart could have produced, Brye's grip tightened. The muscles of his hands and forearms showed their strength, as he turned the girl toward Larry.

"Go to him." Brye's tone, though level, carried no reproach. "He is the man you love!"

Margaret hesitated; then saw that Larry's arms were waiting. As she reached them and heard her lover's soothing voice, she realized that this ordeal had forever ended her doubts. She belonged to Larry, as she

should have known long ago. Whatever her father's fate, both she and Larry would always remember that their happiness, in days to come, would be the legacy of Dana Brye.

That thought, to them, would clear the stigma of her father's name. Whatever his misdeeds, Dana Brye had made amends.

"YOU knew that it was father!" the girl sobbed to Larry. "You recognized him, didn't you, the night that he killed Grennel. But you wouldn't tell, because of me -"

"I did not recognize him," interposed Larry, his tone very solemn. "I told you the whole truth, Margaret. Had I seen his face, I would have told you but no one else. It would have been betrayal, to accuse your father without your sanction."

Cardona had clamped the handcuffs on Brye's extended wrists. Marquin, approaching, his face morose, said simply:

"I'm sorry, Dana."

Brye's only answer was a smile. He was looking toward Larry and Margaret. When he spoke, Brye looked toward neither Marquin nor Cardona. Eyes still upon the lovers, he declared:

"Anyone who would destroy such happiness should die. I suppose that applies to me. May it apply to all others whose deeds might bring such harm."

Cardona wasn't in a mood for parables. Though his gruff voice was a trifle husky, Joe began to demand facts. He wanted Brye's full confession and this was the time to get it, while the prisoner was in a soft mood. But Brye, still watching Larry and Margaret, remained heedless of Cardona's questions.

"You shoved Grennel's money into Marquin's safe," summed Cardona. "A smart place to put it, if you hid it deep; but you couldn't leave it there forever. You were waiting until the Shalley job was ripe. It was all set today.

"So you came here to pick up the dough. You were going to take it along, gather in the jewels that Bourne delivered; and keep right on traveling. But when you learned that Chandler was going to Brazil, you had an idea.

"Why not let Chandler lug the swag? That's the idea that hit you. So you stuck the tin cash box right there on Chandler's desk, along with the envelope that was to go to Bourne, for him to hand to Shalley. You typed a phony note with Marquin's initials, and everything was fixed."

Cardona might as well have been inside Marquin's big safe itself, shouting at the surrounding walls. None of his words had dented Brye's smiling calm.

"You made a bad slip," jabbed Cardona. "You thought it was all off between Chandler and your daughter. If something went sour and Chandler never got started for Brazil - where you were going to cable him, in Marquin's name, and have him send the swag - he'd at least be the guy to take the rap. But she loved him, after all."

It was brutal, that sort of talk, and Cardona knew it. But the Vindicator's murders had been a hundredfold more brutal than any words could be. Cardona didn't intend to stop until he forced Brye into giving details of those very crimes.

"They look very sweet," declared the inspector sarcastically, as he turned to stare at Larry and Margaret. "But I can spoil that picture, Brye. Suppose I don't take your say-so that you're the Vindicator, until

you've proven it. That means I'll have to take Chandler along too."

"You can't!" It was Margaret who gave the challenge. "You haven't a bit of evidence against him. My father has taken the blame for all those crimes. You've just built your own case against him. What more do you require?"

Still wearing his benign smile, Brye turned to Cardona, to speak at last:

"She is quite right, inspector. If you take me with you, I shall be glad to tell you more. By the way, there are some business affairs that I would like to settle. Would you, Roger" - he turned to Marquin - "mind coming in to the city alone, a little later?"

"I'll be there, Dana," promised Marquin. "You may depend upon me."

They were walking toward the door, Cardona and Brye, the inspector making suggestions that he considered subtle.

"You'll feel better, Brye," Joe was saying, "when you've got all this off your chest. I know that you're feeling sorry - sorry for your crimes -"

"Not for my crimes," interposed Brye dryly, pausing just short of the doorway. "For my mistakes!"

"Call them what you want," conceded Cardona. "Crimes or mistakes, they can't be changed once they're done."

"Some mistakes can be amended."

"Murder can't. When a guy's dead, he never comes back."

A dry smile flickered on Brye's lips. His tongue seemed to lick it away, so that he could make the solemn declaration:

"I was dead, yet I returned. If others only could -"

"You mean Grennel and Shalley?"

"Yes; both. But of the two, the one that I particularly mean is Noel Shalley."

TIRED of Brye's cryptic remarks, Cardona decided to cut all conversation until they were outside. He was due for another interruption, however, from a different source. The telephone bell had begun to ring; Marquin, answering the call, beckoned from behind his desk.

"For you, inspector."

Hooking one arm under Brye's, Cardona hauled the prisoner back to the desk with him. But as he stood there talking into the telephone, Cardona's grip relaxed. So did the hand that held the telephone. It was only by a sudden grab that Joe caught the instrument as it was toppling from his hand.

"It's from headquarters," announced Cardona, his voice peculiarly awed. "They've just been talking to the morgue. It wasn't Shalley who was killed at Bourne's. The beard fooled them, until it came loose. They've found out who the dead man is!" Joe paused, to take another breath. "Trigger Kobin!"

The hush that gripped the persons in that inner room was broken by a singular whisper that stirred from Marquin's darkened outer office. A vague, strange whisper, scarcely audible: almost an echo rising from that past night when The Shadow's presence had been known in this house.

Yet, with its fade, that sibilant token of repressed mirth proved its reality. It was no memory from the past. It was a prelude to the future: the cue for another man to appear upon the scene as strangely as had Dana Brye.

In through the doorway stepped the answer to Brye's recent wish: a man whose bearded face and high aristocratic nose went with the dignity of his steady-gazing eyes. Behind him, blackness seemed to stir. Other eyes, burning from the gloom, gave evidence of a sponsor who had remained behind the scenes.

None saw that strange figure in the background. Their gaze was only on the bearded man - another of death's reputed victims whose fate, like Brye's, had been annulled.

That man, produced from the past, was the last of the Vindicator's victims. Noel Shalley had been brought here by The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S TRUE TALE

IT seemed a greeting from one dead man to another, when Dana Brye sprang forward to meet Noel Shalley. His manacled hands extended, Brye received the bearded man's warm clasp.

Joe Cardona, suddenly aroused, thought that Brye had started to attack Shalley and drew a revolver to prevent trouble. But the inspector's gun hand lowered when he saw, to his complete bafflement, that the two were friends.

"I have brought the letters, Brye," announced Shalley. "The ones that you left at my house this afternoon."

With a gesture of his hands, Brye indicated Cardona. Shalley passed the letters to the police inspector, who stared at them, then spread them in front of Marquin, who had come to the desk beside him. Larry and Margaret, intrigued by this surprise, stared over the intervening shoulders, to read the letters also.

"From the Vindicator!" exclaimed Cardona. "Addressed to Dana Brye! Demanding a hundred thousand dollars for certain letters -"

"That I wrote to Red Krigley," added Brye, with a pleased chuckle. "The head of the Krigley mob. Louis Jolden - you've heard of him - was working with me at the time. I didn't know that Krigley was a crook; that my letters, stating the weaknesses in various makes of safes, were being used by his mob."

Brye's statement impressed Cardona. The inventor was appearing in a new light, as a victim of the type of blackmail in which the Vindicator had specialized. Questions were coming from others - Marquin, Margaret, Larry - but Cardona silenced them.

"Let's hear some more, Mr. Brye."

"My time limit was set," declared Brye. "The money that the Vindicator demanded was almost my entire fortune. So I put the money in a basement hideaway that I established here in New York, and went to Vrekill Castle. I was determined that I would find some way to beat the Vindicator's game."

"He knew it. He set men to watch me. But Vrekill Castle had a secret outlet - by way of the river. I saw how I could turn those watchers to my advantage. If the castle, which had become worthless, should be destroyed, word would go to the Vindicator that I had died."

For the first time, Brye decided to omit one detail from his new, and accurate, story. The matter of Ross Bland, he decided, was one that could wait for further explanation. Bland's visit, it happened, had precipitated his plans, but had not changed them.

"I set off time bombs that I had planted throughout Vreckill Castle," continued Brye. "The Vindicator was free to choose his own answer regarding my supposed death. Accident or suicide, it did not matter which he believed. I was beyond his reach, so long as I remained dead."

Shalley thought that Brye had finished. The bearded man supplied an interlude of his own.

"But I was menaced!" exclaimed Shalley. "Brye learned it, knew that my deadline was today. He kept calling me all afternoon. When I finally returned home and talked to him by telephone, I invited him to come to my house.

"When Brye arrived, he showed me the letters that he had received from the Vindicator. He left them with me and suggested that I go through with my own payment of tribute; that my jewels, like Grennel's money, would prove the Vindicator's guilt when found in his possession.

"I started out to Bourne's place" - Shalley turned to Brye, feeling that he, especially, would be interested in what followed - "but something happened to change my plans."

SHALLEY paused. Brye, eager to hear the story, did not interrupt with further details that concerned himself. Listeners watched Shalley stroke his reddish beard. He was coming to a portion of the story as incredible as anything that had yet been related, yet so definite in Shalley's memory, that he finally recited it as the simplest of facts.

"In the cab," declared Shalley, his tone half awed, "I saw myself! I mean that literally! I was looking at a man, already in the cab, who might have been my own reflection! True, the disguise was a simple matter" - again Shalley stroked his beard - "but the illusion was perfect.

"The man who might have been myself, was The Shadow. He talked to me quite as confidentially as Brye had. He won my trust; I told him all that I knew. I finally agreed to wait in the cab, while he took the jewels into Bourne's."

The rest flashed instantly to Joe Cardona. The ace could picture that back room as plainly as if he had been there. Bourne and Shalley, the latter actually The Shadow, completing the transactions that the Vindicator had demanded. Bourne's departure; the phone call to headquarters by the pretended Shalley.

Then Trigger Kobin.

There had been battle, Cardona knew. Swift shots in the darkness, wherein Trigger, the murderer, had found a foeman far superior to any that he suspected. The Shadow, by one of his clever feints, had jabbed home the one shot that counted: a bullet to Trigger's heart.

He had been forced to that eventuality. With men beating at the front door, there had been no time to remove Trigger's body. Yet it was imperative that the Vindicator, wherever he might be, should not learn of Trigger's death until The Shadow could complete other moves. But it would not matter if the Vindicator thought that Shalley had died.

There, in that back room at Bourne's, The Shadow had peeled away his own disguise; had placed the make-up, beard and all, upon the dead face of Trigger Kobin!

With the important papers in his own possession, The Shadow had placed a wallet bearing cards identifying Shalley in Trigger's pocket. The entering police had found only the body and had taken it for Shalley's. For The Shadow, by that time, had gone!

It was Dana Brye who offered the next comment.

"An admirable arrangement, Shalley," approved Brye. "Unfortunately, when I arrived here I heard that you had been murdered. Knowing that my story would never stand without your support, I was forced to sacrifice myself, to save another innocent man."

Brye had stepped to Marquin's safe. Despite his handcuffs, he turned the combination and swung the big door wide.

"That box on the desk," he said, "the one containing Grennel's money, was actually in this safe the night I came. So was this box" - with a quick dip into the safe, he brought out another box that Margaret remembered - "which contains the documents that the Vindicator kept for blackmail.

"In one envelope, I found my letters to Krigley and removed them. In another, I found papers relating to Shalley, the victim next on the list. That is why I went to Shalley - to enlist his aid, that the law would find new evidence with the old and have a living witness to testify against -"

A SHARP-RASPED command swung everyone about, to face a revolver held by Roger Marquin. No longer did Marquin need his oily mask; nor did he care that the truth was known regarding the source of his wealth.

"I am the Vindicator!" he announced, his tone a rumbling snarl. "I typed that note to Larry, adding the unneeded initials so I could disclaim it if I chose. Had he reached Brazil, I would have cabled him where to send the packages.

"If caught, he would have been branded as the Vindicator. Loss of the swag was worth that result. My plan failed; but I have another one. I intend to leave here safely. I shall add this wealth" - his free hand reached for the stacked money and the sparkling gems which lay close together on the desk - "to the profits that I have already sent abroad!"

It was Joe Cardona who gave a look toward those beside him. Including himself, he counted five persons, everyone of whom showed the same desire, to deal with Marquin at any cost.

"You can't get away with it!" warned Cardona. "We have you five to one, Marquin. The moment you go through that door -"

"I shall be safe," inserted the Vindicator, sharply. "I can depend upon Gaylor and the other servants. I have already summoned them" - in shifting his gun arm, Marquin revealed a button at the corner of the desk - "and if you listen, you will hear them."

There was a clatter from the outer hall. Marquin, chuckling his triumph, was backing toward the connecting office that would lead him there, when, from close behind him, came a peal of mocking challenge. Marquin, spinning about, saw The Shadow.

They were face to face, The Shadow and the Vindicator. The one a being cloaked in black, whose eyes burned their message of vengeance; the other a calloused murderer, whose latest fruits of crime were tucked beneath his arm, yet whose own eyes had suddenly lost their glitter.

The .45 that loomed from The Shadow's fist seemed ready to swallow the .32 revolver that Marquin was too late to aim.

The Vindicator stood rigid, helpless, so puny, he seemed, that The Shadow, knowing another clash was close at hand, gave the nod that turned Marquin over to those who wanted him.

As Cardona, Larry and Shalley surged for Marquin, with Brye and Margaret close behind him, The Shadow wheeled away.

There were shouts from the hallway door. Gaylor and the other servants had arrived. They saw only Marquin and the group that was suppressing him, for The Shadow had swished away from the intervening doorway, into the gloom of the outer office. Hearing Marquin's answering cry, the servants surged.

Then The Shadow was upon them, giving them a taste of sledging automatics, not merely his weighted fists. His guns tongued bullets, too, for tonight Marquin's men were armed with revolvers. They used those weapons as they battled, but not with the effect they hoped.

Shooting men were sprawling when they fired; the only blackness that their bullets found was that of the ceiling, the walls, the windows - not the ink-hued garb of The Shadow.

The door to the inner office had slammed. When The Shadow opened it, he saw chaos. Marquin's gun had been plucked from his hand; the weapon was lying in the corner. But the Vindicator, a fighting madman, had wrenched from the hands that seized him.

Across the floor was a strew of bank notes, Grennel's money; glimmering amid the green were Shalley's jewels. Marquin had lost the swag in his haste, but a corner panel, swung open, showed a spiral stairway by which he had made his escape.

Two persons had gone after him: Cardona and Brye. The others, Larry, Margaret and Shalley, were unhurt, but they had been sprawled in the final struggle and were too late to take up the chase. Larry, however, was going after Marquin's gun, exclaiming hoarsely:

"The window! We can cut him off before he gets to the garage!"

The Shadow reached the window. He saw the garage, heard the final rumble of its opening door. Marquin had shoved it wide; he was bounding into the garage as The Shadow aimed.

"He's taking the roadster!" added Larry. "He'll come out of there like a shot; so fast, it will be hard to stop him!"

THERE was a note of prediction in Larry's words; but before its fulfillment, another scene occurred. While The Shadow was calmly aiming to cover the open door of the garage, Cardona and Brye bounded from the back of the house.

Cardona was ahead; but Brye was gaining, shouting something that the inspector did not heed. Halfway to the garage, Brye overtook him. Flinging his long arms forward, he slung them over Cardona's head, using the handcuffs to hook Joe's neck.

Under Brye's rolling weight, Cardona hit the dirt. Both men were flattened there, tangled, when Marquin made the exit that Larry had promised. But his trip in that high-powered roadster was far more stupendous than any he had planned.

With one vast roaring blast, the roof of the garage split open. Its walls spread aside like the cardboard shams of a movie set. Spreading amid an inferno of flame came the chunks of Marquin's car, while from its very center a puny, clawing figure climbed fifty feet in air.

Last to strike the earth, that human shape landed in grotesque fashion, a misshapen mass. Inert, it lay amid the dust and smoke of the debris. When that cloud settled, the last spasms of flame from the shattered garage threw wavering light upon the mangled remains, revealing a face which bore sufficient vestiges to identify it as the countenance of Roger Marquin.

The Vindicator had perished before starting the next stage of a flight that The Shadow had been ready to

nip when it began. Dana Brye, foreseeing that Marquin might manage to escape in his high-powered roadster, had visited the garage before coming to the house tonight and attached a quick-action bomb to the ignition system of the murderer's car.

WHEN Brye returned to the house with Cardona, the grizzled inventor was no longer handcuffed. He was explaining how a body had happened to be found in the ruins of Vreekill Castle, and was also stating who the victim was.

"There was no trap set for Bland," declared Brye. "I did my best to stop him from opening my safe. He flung me across the room and went ahead while I lay dazed. By opening the safe, he set off the first of my time bombs.

"After the first explosion, I had to go through with my plan of abandoning the castle. The finding of a body in the ruins helped my plan, of course, but it was not intended. As for Bland, I believe that he was a crook working a game of his own."

Shalley, hearing Brye's statement, remembered an envelope that The Shadow had left with him. The cloaked visitor, himself, was gone; he had left immediately after the garage had exploded. Cardona received the envelope and read its contents.

"Don't worry about Ross Bland," said Joe to Brye. "There was a witness at Vreekill Castle - one you didn't know about. The Shadow!"

"You mean that he will testify in my behalf?"

Cardona grinned at Brye's question. What a scene it would be - The Shadow entering court, to take the witness stand! A dramatic sequel, however, that would not be needed.

"Your story will stand," Cardona told Brye. "Bland was crooked, like you thought. He'd been cleaning up on a small scale, selling a phony stock called Arivada Silver. This envelope contains all the facts to prove it. Bland figured you were the Vindicator, and tried to shake you down. Any jury will believe you on that, considering Bland's bad record."

Across the room, Larry was answering a phone call. He lowered the telephone with one hand and looked at Margaret, who was nestled against his other arm.

"Two passages to Rio!" exclaimed Larry. "Aboard the Anaconda. I only ordered one, but they tell me I have two!"

It was Margaret who understood. There was another telephone downstairs - one that The Shadow could have used.

"The ship has a captain, Larry," laughed the girl. "He can marry us, can't he? After we sail?"

The telephone left Larry's hand. Both his arms were needed, as he gathered Margaret into them. Their kiss was accompanied by a happy chuckle from Dana Brye; but that was not the only token of approval.

From somewhere, through the open window, it seemed, came a parting tone of laughter; mirth that faded as if it belonged, not to a living being but to the vast domain of night itself. That laugh carried no taunt of challenge, for crooks had been met and conquered.

It told of triumph, The Shadow's final victory, over the archcrook, Roger Marquin, who had styled himself the Vindicator, to pose falsely as a man who wanted justice. The Shadow, real champion of justice, had reason to be triumphant, for his prowess had ended the Vindicator's career of evil sham.

To Larry and Margaret, that mirth meant more. They knew that The Shadow was wishing them Godspeed upon a happy journey which he, beyond all others, had rendered possible!

THE END