

CRIME COUNTY
by Maxwell Grant
As originally published in
The Shadow Magazine
September 1, 1940

Darport was quiet, but crime was brewing under the surface--and The Shadow knew it!

CHAPTER I.
CRIME'S DEAD END.

JUNIUS THARBEL sat at his battered desk writing a letter in slow, plodding fashion. Beside him lay a very small stack of correspondence, which he had been working on since noon. Across the square from his window, the hands of the town clock were approaching three, proof that Tharbel was a very slow worker.

Patient, painstaking, old-fashioned even in his style of penmanship, Junius Tharbel had the appearance of a small-town businessman who had spent his life in Darport. He was solemn, hatchet-faced, and his features were creased with lines, like the surface of his ancient desk.

Tharbel was in his seventies, but he made no effort to conceal his age. That would have been difficult, considering that he had been on the same job for more than fifty years. Difficult even for Junius Tharbel, though he was an expert at keeping facts to himself.

For this hatchet-faced man had a wide reputation in a specialized profession. As a crime detector, Junius Tharbel was practically in a class by himself. For half a century he had upheld the law as county detective in the area surrounding Darport, and his record was a tribute to his amazing skill at tracking down criminals who ventured into his preserves.

Outside Tharbel's windows, the town of Darport lay peacefully beneath the afternoon sun; a sprawling but prosperous community without even a traffic policeman in sight. Off in all directions stretched the rolling farms and sloping woodlands of the county, one of the largest in the State.

Neighboring counties, smaller and less populous, were heavily policed, for this region was close to the metropolitan area of New York City, and an easy target for crime.

But crooks stayed away from Darport and the county which it represented. They didn't like to get too close to Junius Tharbel. His specialty was stocking the State penitentiary with the proper sort of occupants.

Tharbel's offices were only on the second floor, and he seldom looked from his windows. But where crime was concerned, his headquarters was as satisfactory as a thousand-foot watch tower, and his eyes as keen as if fitted with permanent telescopes.

Tharbel never had to travel far to get his men. He bagged them before they could clear his county; and there had actually been times when this ace among sleuths had been on hand to take crooks into custody when they arrived.

Rumor had it that Tharbel could smell crime before it happened, and he lived up to the reputation. Even his own deputies, a mere handful in number, were mystified by the famed detective's foresight. As for the world at large, it had heard of Darport only because Tharbel lived there.

Today Tharbel was not alone in his office. He had a companion, who occupied a chair beside the window. Tharbel's friend was a dog of more than medium size, and white with brown spots.

The dog was a Dalmatian, the species formerly used as carriage dogs. Since Tharbel no longer drove a horse and carriage, he had converted the Dalmatian into a hunter.

Eyes fixed, ears pricked, the Dalmatian was looking from the window, watching the front of an antiquated brick building that bore the name of the

Darport Trust Co.

Customers were few at the Darport Trust, and Tharbel had trained the dog to watch persons who entered or left the bank. The dog's vigil was being rewarded, for a sudden growl told that someone was at hand.

Affixing his signature to a letter, Tharbel arose and approached the window. He stroked the dog with one hand, while he drew a stick of chewing gum from his pocket. He spoke to the dog in a soothing tone:

"Quiet, Mox."

Then, methodically chewing the gum, Tharbel watched the scene across the way. A small armored truck had arrived at the bank; it bore the name of the Darport Quarry Co. While two uniformed guards stood on watch, a third carried a squarish metal box into the bank.

When the man returned without the box, he entered the armored truck and drove away with the others. Immediately afterward, the bank's door was closed and locked, in accord with its accustomed schedule, for the town-hall clock was donging three.

Tharbel went back to his desk. He was writing another letter when footsteps sounded outside his door. Mox looked up; then, recognizing the man who entered, the dog resumed its attentive gaze from the window. Without turning, Tharbel gave greeting:

"Hello, Breeland!"

THE entering man chuckled. His deep tone denoted his size. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and his face was handsome, though large-featured. Breeland was middle-aged, but looked much younger than his years. A natural briskness gave him the youthful touch.

"Hello, sleuth," returned Breeland. "Keen as ever, aren't you? Your calendar says Friday, the town-hall clock hits three, so you figure the payroll must have reached the bank. From that, you figure that your next visitor will be Blair Breeland, president of the quarry company, with the lists. Well, here I am, and here are the lists."

Stepping to the desk, Breeland handed Tharbel an envelope. Opening it, the detective glanced along columns of figures that listed the numbers of bank notes, treasury certificates, and other currency.

From his manner, Tharbel looked as if he were trying to memorize the serial numbers in a glance. His eye stopped at the total, in dollars, at the bottom of the list.

"Fifty thousand dollars," approximated Tharbel. "Bigger than usual this week."

"Bonus money," explained Breeland. "End of the quarter. Well, Tharbel, there's the lists, in accordance with our usual precautions. I have the duplicates, in case you want to check."

Tharbel shook his head. Breeland stopped by the window to pat the dog.

"An unusual dog," he observed, "with an unusual name: Mox. Where did you find that name, Tharbel?"

"From the man who formerly owned the dog," replied Tharbel tersely. "He called himself Mox."

"A friend of yours?"

"Hardly. The toughest murderer I ever came up against! We couldn't take him alive, so I never had a chance to ask him the dog's real name before he died."

"But why give the dog a bad name?"

"The dog doesn't know the difference. It's a good name for him. Easy for me to remember, easy for him to answer to when I call. Anyway, Mox is smart, like his old master."

Mox showed no sign of demonstrating his smartness while Breeland stroked him, so the president of the quarry company left to get back to his office. As he heard Breeland's foot steps descending the stairs, Tharbel smiled.

Breeland was burly, his footfalls probably heavier than he realized. Tharbel hadn't needed to know that it was Friday to guess that Breeland had

arrived at the office. As for the matter of the truck's arrival with the payroll, Tharbel had actually witnessed the transfer of the money box into the bank.

The cash would remain there until tomorrow at nine. It meant something of a vigil for Tharbel, as was always the case when opportunity for crime came to Darport. Tharbel had long since learned that cash was the honey that could attract crooks like flies. It was a simple but effective policy to be on the lookout for crime at times when it might happen.

HALF an hour after Breeland's departure, Mox gave another growl from the window. Tharbel looked up in mild surprise and tossed away his tasteless chewing gum. He stepped to the window, drawing out another stick. The only people who could be leaving the bank were employees, and Mox didn't usually growl at them.

Tharbel saw why Mox had growled. The reason was proof of the Dalmatian's smartness. The dog, well trained by Tharbel, always showed suspicion of persons who carried large or conspicuous objects when they entered or left the bank.

Tharbel saw such a person coming from the bank. The man was Wallace Layton, the assistant cashier. The object that Layton carried was a large suitcase, which looked fairly heavy. His manner was very sneaky; he acted as though he had slipped from the bank unnoticed and wanted to get far away.

Even from across the street, Tharbel could observe Layton's wispy-mustached face, which was of the pointed, prying type. The fellow had always reminded Tharbel of a rat, but the fact did not prejudice Tharbel against Layton. It was one of the detective's rules never to judge persons by appearances nor by actions.

Combined, however, such factors could be important. Today Layton looked more ratlike than usual, and his sneaky manner was far above par. Even more important was the furtive glance that he threw over his shoulder; its direction told exactly what was in the cashier's mind.

Layton wasn't looking back at the bank. He apparently felt that he had made an excellent exit from the building. His squeamish glance was directed straight toward the window, where Tharbel stood. Tharbel was far enough in the background to remain unnoticed from the street.

Mox saw Layton's shifty stare. The dog came up from its haunches, starting a growl that threatened to end in a protesting bark. Catching the Dalmatian's collar, Tharbel drew the hound back to the chair.

His grayish eyes fixed sharply on Layton, Tharbel watched the cashier duck into a parking lot, where he kept his car. Layton was huddling the suitcase as he went from sight.

Stepping to the desk, Tharbel lifted the telephone and made a brief call. By the time Layton's car pulled from the lot, a blocky man had appeared from a poolroom across the street to enter a car of his own. The blocky chap was one of Tharbel's deputies; the detective had ordered him to trail Layton.

It was five minutes before Tharbel glanced at his watch again. The detective was already nodding when the telephone bell rang. It was the call that Tharbel expected; from Griffith the deputy.

From the chair, Mox pricked up his ears as Tharbel talked. The dog seemed to sense things from the detective's tone.

"Layton went home, eh?" queried Tharbel. "Put his car in the garage. Took the suitcase into the house. All right, Griffith, stay across the street... No, don't worry if he sees you. He won't be going out again until after dark... Yes, I'll have Wilbur join you before then."

Clamping the receiver on the hook, Tharbel went back to the window. His hand was velvet as he stroked the dog, but his eyes were steely. They seemed to take in more than the town of Darport and the countryside beyond it. The glint of Tharbel's eyes betokened a gaze into the future.

"We've been lucky, Mox," spoke Tharbel musingly. "Outsiders haven't been bothering us much lately. It's about time that something happened, and it's

due to begin right here in our own territory. We'd better attend to it in advance."

Reaching for the telephone, Tharbel called headquarters of the State police and requested that officers be stationed at dusk on the principal roads leading from Darport. He gave a description of Layton's sedan and suggested that the car be stopped and searched should it be seen leaving Darport.

By then Tharbel's gaze was reflective. With the future, he was recalling the past. He remembered one time when crime had begun in Darport, produced by a master criminal named Mox. On that occasion Tharbel had escaped disaster only through the efforts of a fighter who championed justice--The Shadow.

Since then Darport had been crime's dead end, a place that crooks avoided. But Tharbel had long ago convinced himself that the quiet which pervaded the little town could, in itself, breed crime of a most virulent sort.

As he stroked the dog whose name was a reminder of strange crime in the past, Junius Tharbel had a premonition that he might soon again need The Shadow's aid.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHADOW'S SEARCH.

DARKNESS lay solid in the Stygian room where daylight never penetrated. Only the faintest of sounds pervaded that gloom--a swish that betokened a figure in motion. Next a sharp click produced illumination, the rays of a bluish light that cleaved downward to cast an eerie glow upon a polished table.

Hands crept into the light. Creatures in themselves, those hands. On one long, tapering finger--the third of the left hand--was a gleaming fire opal that caught the bluish rays and flung them upward in a scintillating, many-hued glow. The gem was a girasol, a rare unmatched stone. It was a talisman that symbolized its owner: The Shadow.

Weird master of darkness, The Shadow always chose secluded gloom to formulate his plans against men of crime. This hidden room was his sanctum, where he kept his extensive files and archives, so useful in his battles against evil. As The Shadow's hands moved into the light, they brought report sheets and case histories of various criminals.

Two photographs peered up into the light. One showed a square-jawed face, with eyes that were narrow beneath top-heavy brows. The other was a longer visage, sallow even in the photograph; the eyes were large but diverted, as though their shifty owner had been unable to face the camera.

The faces differed, but the men did not. They were twins of crime, that pair. The square-jawed man was Speed Kroner, noted for his rapid work in every crooked scheme he undertook. The long-faced rogue was Matt Felson, Speed's running mate in every enterprise.

They used a system, those two. Speed was the one who traveled well afield, while Matt stayed in New York gathering men they needed. Usually Matt sent picked members of the crew along to Speed; then joined his partner, bringing the rest.

It had been quite awhile since the pair had worked their game, but apparently they were planning a new stroke. Speed had suddenly left New York with a few pals, and had disappeared somewhere in the New Jersey hinterlands. Matt was still in Manhattan, but he had dived into some hide-out.

Those combined symptoms meant that daring crime would soon strike, probably in some small and unsuspecting community, unless The Shadow intervened. Knowing that Speed and Matt always worked in tandem, The Shadow could reach both by finding one.

Hands spread two maps upon the table. One was a large-scale chart of Manhattan. In one section was a circle covering an area of about a dozen square blocks. It represented the district where Matt's hide-out was likely to

be located. Capable agents of The Shadow intended to scour that East Side area tonight.

The other map showed fifty square miles of country around New York City. Towns were marked with colored dots, where The Shadow's agents had checked and found no traces of Speed. They were still searching those farther regions, and hoped for results. It happened, however, that one sector was permanently marked in red: the county where Darport was the center.

Studying the maps, The Shadow uttered a grim, whispered laugh that seemed to stir the somber sable curtains lining the sanctum's walls.

The Shadow was considering the possibility that Matt Felson might not be in the portion of Manhattan where agents believed: also, the chance that Speed Kroner might be in Darport, the one place where no one would look for him.

The first supposition had merit, for Matt was slippery and ever ready to shift hide-outs. But the second prospect seemed preposterous, even to The Shadow, who was always ready to consider the unexpected.

Familiar with the fame of Junius Tharbel and the way in which the county detective controlled his bailiwick, The Shadow took it for granted that no crook--not even so fast a mover as Speed--would tarry in the neighborhood of Darport.

LAYING Speed's photograph to one side, The Shadow concentrated upon the picture of Matt. His scrutiny of the sallow, shifty-eyed face brought back many recollections. The Shadow was translating some of Matt's criminal exploits, in other terms, connecting them with activities of certain criminals not listed as Matt's actual friends.

From an envelope filled with recent reports, The Shadow drew out a photograph that showed a pompous, white-haired man whose dignity was somewhat injured by a paper cap that tilted above one ear and whose grin showed that he had been having a very good time when the picture was taken.

The white-haired man was Prexy Elthorn, a crook of a very fancy breed; the picture had come from the Club Cadiz, a de luxe night club with a two-dollar cover charge and proportionate prices for food and drink.

Prexy had been seen at the Club Cadiz every night during the past week, which indicated that he was definitely in the money.

The situation was an odd one. For years Prexy had served as a "front" man in stock swindles. He was the pretended stock purchaser whose example encouraged the suckers to spend their coin. Sometimes he was introduced as "Commodore," or "Judge," but he was always at his best when he posed as a college president, which accounted for his nickname of Prexy.

Stock swindlers were not operating heavily at present. Such criminals couldn't be the ones who were supplying Prexy with his spending money. Slim though the lead might be, it struck The Shadow that this was the proper time to look into the affairs of Prexy Elthorn and see what they might produce.

It wasn't The Shadow who strolled into the Club Cadiz an hour later; that is, no one could possibly have connected the tall arrival in evening clothes with a mysterious figure cloaked in black.

The guest who entered was recognized by the head waiter as Lamont Cranston, millionaire sportsman and world traveler, a person entitled to the utmost in service.

Soon Cranston was seated at a choice table, looking across the dance floor at Prexy Elthorn, who was buying drinks for other patrons of the club and beaming smiles at girls who decorated surrounding tables.

Evidently Prexy was doing his best to live down his questionable past, and his manner showed that he was having success. The Shadow saw him rise and go over to another table, where he made himself acquainted with a broad-built, heavy-jowled man who had the large forehead of a thinker and the strong jaw of a fighter.

Speaking to the head waiter, The Shadow inquired the name of Mr. Elthorn's friend.

"That's Titus Rann," the head waiter explained. "He comes from somewhere

in New Jersey. Owns big factories over there, I understand. Perhaps you have heard of him, Mr. Cranston."

The Shadow had heard of Titus Rann. What the head waiter said was correct, but The Shadow could have added other facts; namely, that Rann's factories and other businesses were located chiefly in the town of Darport.

It was a curious set-up, Prexy chatting with Rann. On the surface they looked like birds of a feather, but one was a crook, the other a financier. The actual contrast, however, did not reveal itself. Prexy was with a party of friends; so was Rann. Both were spending money, and in the atmosphere of the Club Cadiz they were hail fellows well met.

It might be that Prexy was working to some build-up, with Rann as the prospective victim. If so, The Shadow could gain nothing by watching this get-together, for the game could not yet have passed its early stages. Nevertheless, The Shadow decided to play his role of Cranston a while longer. In so doing, he was rewarded.

PREXY abruptly cut short his chat with Rann. Glancing at his watch, the white-haired man gave a benign smile and added an apologetic bow as he arose. Evidently Prexy had remembered some important appointment that was in keeping with his pose.

He stopped at his own table only long enough to pay the check, then he stepped toward the revolving door that led from the Club Cadiz.

By then Cranston's check was also paid. With a leisurely stroll that marked him as anything but a stalker, The Shadow was taking up Prexy's trail.

Outside the night club, Prexy told the doorman that he wanted a cab. At the same time The Shadow tossed away a half-finished cigar with a slow but sweeping gesture suited to the style of Cranston. Instantly a cab whipped from across the street in answer to The Shadow's signal.

The cab was The Shadow's. Its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, a secret agent of The Shadow, was one of the speediest hackies in Manhattan, accustomed to swooping in and gathering up passengers before other cabbies could get started.

Moe had seen Cranston's toss of the cigar; he had noted, too, that it was done with the left hand. The signal meant for Moe to pick up the first passenger, Prexy Elthorn, take him to his destination and report back later.

But Moe wasn't quick enough. Another cab, on the near side of the street, was in motion as The Shadow gave the signal. It thrust itself between Moe's cab and the curb; its driver was leaning out, opening the door, as he stopped. He heard the shriek of Moe's brakes and grinned. A few moment later Prexy was in the winning cab and riding away.

By then The Shadow was at the curb. Almost before the doorman knew it, Moe's cab had shoved in front of the Club Cadiz and Mr. Cranston was stepping aboard. Before the other cab had rounded the corner with Prexy, Moe was in pursuit, with The Shadow as a passenger.

A whispered voice came from the rear seat, and Moe understood. This was to be a careful chase, but at no cost was the trail to be lost. The Shadow was no longer Lamont Cranston; he was himself.

From a drawer beneath the cab's rear seat he was producing a black cloak, a slouch hat, a brace of automatics.

Evidently, The Shadow expected action at the trail's end and was preparing for it. From that, Moe supposed that his chief must have spotted something suspicious inside the Club Cadiz.

At the same time Moe couldn't quite understand why The Shadow had first ordered him to simply pick up Prexy, for in that case The Shadow would not have been able to take an immediate trail in person.

There was an explanation. It lay outside the Club Cadiz, not within. At the moment when the other cab had sliced in to pick up Prexy, The Shadow had spotted the driver's face. He had seen the fellow's long features, the odd leer that went with shifty eyes. The Shadow had found the very trail he wanted.

The driver of Prexy's cab was Matt Felson, the hiding mobster who soon would join Speed Kroner to complete a partnership that had a single object: crime!

CHAPTER III. STRANGE COMPANY.

THE evening was still young, but blackness had a midnight thickness near the Hudson River. There, away from feeble street lamps, the lights of a taxicab cut a sharp swath as they stopped in front of a big sliding door that looked like the entrance to a garage.

In a sense, the building was a garage, for it was filled with automobiles. But few of those cars were in actual use. The place served as a storehouse for used cars that were kept on various floors.

Instead of waiting for an attendant to answer a summons, Matt Felson, the cab driver, alighted and went through a small door that was fitted in the big one.

Sliding back the large door, Matt threw a wary glance along the street. He was looking for lights of other cabs. Seeing none, he reentered his own and drove it into the garage.

By the time Matt had closed the big door there was a stir across the street. A figure emerged from a cab that had parked without lights. Gliding like a specter of the night, the cloaked shape reached the little door and edged it open.

The Shadow saw Matt driving the cab into an elevator. Prexy had alighted; he walked into the elevator and pulled a lever at Matt's order. The elevator started upward, bearing cab and passengers. The Shadow watched two big elevator doors go shut; after that he listened.

From the steady rumble of the elevator, The Shadow calculated that its stop came at the third floor. By then he was through the little door and had closed it behind him. He looked for another way to reach the third floor and saw one.

It was a door that obviously led to a stairway, for it was one step in height above the garage floor level.

Crossing the deserted floor, The Shadow reached the stairway door and found that it had a push-button beside it. The bell was obviously used to summon an attendant from the floor above. Having no intention of announcing his presence at this moment, The Shadow tried the door and found it unlocked.

Examination of the opened door proved that it was fitted with an automatic latch so that someone upstairs could push a button and admit a person below. That arrangement applied only when the door was locked, and since The Shadow had been fortunate enough to find it unlocked, his path to the floors above seemed quite clear.

Gliding up the darkened stairway, The Shadow was almost to a door on the second floor when something disturbed his calculations.

Beyond the door above, The Shadow heard a sharp, repeated buzz, which meant that someone must have pushed the button below. New arrivals had come to the garage and were signaling from the ground floor.

But that wasn't the odd part of the situation. The thing that made The Shadow instantly alert was the opening of the door below, while the buzzes still came from the second floor!

Against the square of light at the bottom of the stairs The Shadow saw two husky men push into sight. One had pressed the buzzer, the other had opened the door.

Why?

If The Shadow had not paused to consider the question, he would have thrust himself into very serious trouble. The natural thing was to get through the door above in order to avoid the hoodlums from below. Instead, The Shadow waited.

The buzz had been a signal; not a request to open the lower door, but a flash that friends were on the way up. It was obvious, therefore, that persons above would somehow know when people were on the stairs. There could be but one answer.

The automatic latch on the lower door operated in reverse! When the knob was turned, a signal was flashed above. The Shadow had given away the fact that he was coming up!

Already lurkers would be awaiting him beyond the upper door. To go through that portal would be the equivalent of suicide. The stairs were The Shadow's one place of safety. New foemen were at the bottom, but that fact, to The Shadow's keen brain, was something that could work to his own advantage.

The men at the top knew that an invader was on the stairs. They also realized that the men at the bottom had not learned the fact. The arrival of new crooks below meant that those above would have to show their hand!

RECOGNIZING precisely what was due, The Shadow stooped low in the darkness and began a quick but silent lunge toward the top of the stairs. He was still short of the door when it whipped open.

Flashlights blazed down the stairway; in their glimmer The Shadow saw the glitter of revolvers. There were two crooks at the top. The foremost spied The Shadow. He saw cloaked shoulders fling toward him, about to smother his gun. Savagely the fellow fired, point-blank, aiming for The Shadow's heart. By then the cloak had reached him; the hat was toppling sideward.

A triumphant snarl came from the thug's lips. It was stifled by the amazing thing that followed.

Driving hands hooked the crook's knees, powerful arms hoisted him upward. Half smothered by the cloak, the astonished marksman was hurled backward across The Shadow's shoulders in a long, headfirst dive down the steep stairway!

The Shadow's ruse had worked to perfection. His hands doubled upward, he had shoved his cloak high above his shoulders, carrying the slouch hat with it. The garments, not The Shadow, had been flinging toward the gunman when the fellow fired. The only casualty had been The Shadow's cloak.

Even then The Shadow's strategy had not ended. In lunging upward along the very slant of the steps he had done more than catch his foe-man off balance. In giving the crook the headlong hoist, The Shadow had wrapped the cloak around him and sent him downward in it.

Two men below saw a plunging figure bouncing at them and thrust in to stop what they thought was an attack from a superfoe, The Shadow. They were on their supposed adversary, slugging him with guns before they could guess their mistake.

The other man at the top of the stairs saw what had happened, but wasn't able to yell to those below. The Shadow had made a long dive through the doorway and was grappling with the mobbie who knew.

Rising from the cloaked form between them, the men on the stairs were about to shout their triumph over The Shadow when a pair of reeling figures came spinning downward, locked in a struggle. Suddenly realizing their mistake, the huskies aimed their guns. By then the human gyroscope was upon them.

It wasn't The Shadow who took the brunt. He was using his foeman as a bludgeon. Thwacked by the living battering-ram, two thugs were bowled to the bottom of the stairs, where they landed hard and heavy against the door which they had closed.

Quiet followed the double slump. It was ended by a whispered laugh--a strange, sinister tone that seemed to request if listeners wanted more. One crook heard it and gave a whimper. Plucking the fellow from the sprawl, The Shadow dragged him to his knees and flashed a light in his face.

He recognized the hoodlum as a small-fry gunzel named Sparrow Andrim. Under The Shadow's urge, Sparrow began to chirp. He'd come from outside, bringing a new recruit named Clink Brophy. Sparrow had recommended Clink to

Matt, and Clink had been accepted, although Matt had never seen him.

The news offered The Shadow an immediate course. Poking a gun against Sparrow's ribs, he told the whining thug to get busy and help bind and gag the rest. Belts and handkerchiefs served the purpose, with Sparrow working ardently. The task was easy, considering the stunned condition of the three victims.

It needed speed, however, in the final stages, for The Shadow could hear the rumble of the descending elevator. He had whipped Clink's sweater from the fellow; while Sparrow was tightening the belt on Clink's arms, The Shadow put on the garment.

His cloak was handy, so was the slouch hat, for it had been kicked down the stairs. Stuffing those garments beneath the sweater, The Shadow spread them around his body, adding a squatty touch to his appearance.

He was remolding the features of Cranston when Sparrow looked up. It was a process that The Shadow could perform by touch alone, even in comparative darkness.

Cranston's face was not The Shadow's own; in itself it was a disguise. A spreading motion somewhat flattened the aristocratic profile; downward pressure added a bulldog effect to the jaw.

Thinking The Shadow fully occupied, Sparrow let his hand creep toward a gun that lay beside the door. His fingers had just encountered the metal when the muzzle of an automatic pressed his ribs. Sparrow heard The Shadow's tone, harsh, jeering, as suited his present appearance.

"You'll need that heater, Sparrow," The Shadow told him. "So lug it along, but don't try to use it. Call me Clink, but don't forget who I am. Remember, if I start shooting"--the muzzle of the .45 jabbed deep--"you'll get the first dose!"

SPARROW lifted the revolver with a gingerly clutch. Arm in arm with his new pal, he went out through the lower door. The Shadow closed it behind them as the elevator clanked to a stop on the ground floor.

The car that came out wasn't Matt's taxicab. It was a very expensive limousine, shiny and polished. Matt was at the wheel, wearing a chauffeur's uniform. In back was Prexy, looking the part of a millionaire-owner who belonged in such a luxurious car.

Matt waved a greeting to Sparrow and told him to open the sliding door. Shoving his revolver into his pocket, Sparrow obeyed, with the help of The Shadow. The big car rolled out. Pushing the door shut, Sparrow and his new pal joined Prexy in the rear seat of the limousine. Matt started southward.

"A swell heap," announced Matt, referring to the limousine. "It cost some guy five grand when it was new. It's four years old, and he'll be lucky to get a few hundred bucks for it. Nobody wants a gas burner like this--not secondhand."

"We want it," observed Prexy testily. "But if you want to put on a real show, Matt, why are you bringing these chaps along with us?"

"You'll see," retorted Matt. "I'm giving orders, Prexy. When it's time for you to act the stooge, I'll tell you."

Inclining his head backward, Matt addressed Sparrow, who was huddled in a corner of the rear seat.

"Thought you were coming earlier, Sparrow," said Matt. "It don't matter, though, since you got to the garage in time. I suppose this is Clink, the fellow you were telling me about."

"Yeah," returned Sparrow. "Like I told you, Matt, Clink is a great guy."

Considering that Clink was holding a gun muzzle tight against Sparrow, but did not press the trigger, the tribute was honest to a degree. Even in the mirror, Matt couldn't see The Shadow's automatic, for his other arm was crossed above the hand that gripped it.

"What Sparrow says goes with me, Clink," declared Matt in a satisfied tone. "He's A-1 when it comes to finding trigger men who know their stuff. He says that when you start shooting, you're a tough guy to stop."

Sparrow winced at Matt's words.

"Yeah, Clink," informed Sparrow in a worried tone. "That's what I said. Only, don't start shooting too soon."

The Shadow responded with a gruff laugh that pleased Matt Felson. Forgetting the passengers in the back, Matt sped the limousine in the direction of the Holland Tunnel. He was satisfied that Clink could uphold his own in any battle.

There wasn't a doubt that Matt was right, considering that this new member of his crew was actually The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV.

CRIME MOVES AHEAD.

IN the little parlor of his Darport home, Wallace Layton was pacing the floor in restless fashion. His eyes were sharp, yet worried; they had the ratlike look that Junius Tharbel had noted long ago and tabbed for future reference.

Layton was dividing his time between the front window and the telephone. At the window he peered out into the darkness; when he reached the telephone he hesitated. His wife, knitting in a corner, finally peered sharply through her glasses.

"What's come over you, Wallace?" she demanded in a chiding tone. "Land sakes! Can't I plan a trip to Ohio with the children without you getting all upset? Or is it something else?"

Angrily, Layton turned from the telephone.

"Something else?" he queried hoarsely. "What do you mean by that?"

"Those phone calls you've been making," his wife retorted. "Funny business, you calling Mr. Rann."

"What's funny about it?"

"He's the head of the County National, isn't he? You're working for the Darport Trust. It don't seem ethical to me, such doings."

Layton gave a sound that was a cross between a snarl and a grunt.

"It wouldn't occur to you," he sneered, "that men in the same business would have a right to talk to each other. I know what you're afraid of. You think the Darport Trust wouldn't like it if I was friendly with Titus Rann. That's old-fashioned stuff, Martha!"

Picking up the telephone, Layton called Rann's number. After a short conversation, he slammed the receiver.

"Only the secretary again," snapped Layton. "That fellow, Jorgan, with a voice like the purr of a cat! He says that Mr. Rann is still in New York, waiting for the men from Chicago, who haven't come in yet. I can't understand it."

"I can," observed Martha. "His business with men from Chicago must be bigger than his business with you."

Layton clenched his fists.

"Who said I had any business with Mr. Rann!" he stormed. "If you keep on with this, Martha--"

"I won't." Gathering her knitting, the woman left the parlor and went to the hallway stairs, where she paused to add crisply: "Good night, Wallace."

Striding back and forth across the parlor, Layton kept glaring toward the window, muttering two names: Griffith and Wilbur. He knew that Tharbel's deputies, the total police force of Darport, were keeping watch on his house, and Layton did not like it. His nerves were getting worse when a sudden jangle of the doorbell stopped him like a jolt.

Shakily, Layton answered. He stepped back in worriment as Junius Tharbel entered. The elderly detective bowed a formal greeting and walked into the parlor, uninvited. Layton followed him, lips twitching, as though trying to suppress something that he didn't want to say.

"I'm glad you're alone, Layton," observed Tharbel quietly. "I wouldn't

want to alarm your wife."

"What about?" blurted Layton.

"About strangers being in town," replied Tharbel. "Some people mentioned them. Kind of suspicious characters."

LAYTON pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and tendered them toward Tharbel. The detective shook his head and produced a stick of chewing gum instead.

It was an old trick of Tharbel's, to busy himself with a fresh stick of gum. The delay often started another man talking to break the tension. It worked in Layton's case.

"What have strangers got to do with me?" demanded Layton. "I've got nothing to do with them."

He put the words as though parrying an accusation, which satisfied Tharbel. The detective waited for Layton to say more; when nothing came, Tharbel took up the conversation.

"Strangers might be crooks," he said. "They could be after the money that Blair Breeland deposited this afternoon. You were in the bank when it arrived."

"But the money is in the vault--"

"Which would mean they would want the combination," interposed Tharbel. "They might try to get it from you, Layton."

Layton shook his head.

"I don't know the combination," he insisted. "I lock the cash up"--he suddenly chewed his lips--"that is, I often lock it up, but I never open the vault in the morning."

Tharbel's gaze was steady, stolid.

"If you don't believe me," blurted Layton, "ask anyone who knows. The bank president--the cashier--"

"I believe you," interjected Tharbel, "but I doubt that crooks would. So I put Griffith and Wilbur across the street to watch this house. If you suspect any trouble, Layton, just call on them. Good night."

Layton was fuming when Tharbel left. He'd been outguessed by the calm-mannered detective. It was always Tharbel's way, to turn low cards into high ones when he laid them on the table. Until Tharbel's visit, Layton had felt that he had a right to protest because deputies were watching the house; but he had not done so for reasons of his own.

Now it was too late. Instead of being mere snoopers, Griffith and Wilbur had become sturdy watchdogs of the law. To demand that they be removed would put the burden on Layton. It would look as though he expected visitors of the very sort that Tharbel had mentioned.

Nervously Layton went to a hallway closet, brought out the suitcase that he had carried from the bank and hurried upstairs with it. The suitcase had suddenly become more important to Layton than his telephone call to Rann.

Across the street, the deputies saw Tharbel step from Layton's front porch and beckon to them. They approached, and the detective gave a nudge toward the house.

"Layton just ran upstairs with the suitcase," said Tharbel, "and it's just as heavy as it was before. If he goes out with it, follow him. By the way, did he make any more telephone calls before I arrived?"

One of the deputies nodded. He'd seen Layton at the telephone from across the street. Tharbel gave a satisfied smile and entered an old coupé that he had parked in front of Layton's. As Tharbel drove away, the deputies saw the head of the dog, Mox, poked from the window of the car.

Tharbel's next stop was at Breeland's. The owner of the Darport Quarry Co. lived in a pretentious house farther away from town.

Seated in Breeland's living room, Tharbel decided that an expensive cigar would not spoil his taste for chewing gum. He and Breeland had lighted their perfectos when Tharbel remarked:

"I just stopped at Layton's. He has been trying to get someone on the

telephone all evening."

"Probably someone connected with the Darport Trust Co.," observed Breeland. "Perhaps the president, or the cashier."

"I don't think so," returned Tharbel. "They are both at home. I wonder"--he puffed his cigar speculatively--"if Layton could be trying to talk to Titus Rann."

An amazed look came to Breeland's strong features. Then, his lips widening into a broad smile, he gave a hearty, rich-toned laugh.

"Are you joking, Tharbel?" he demanded. "Why, Rann practically owns the County National. Why should he be calling anyone connected with the Darport Trust?"

"That is what I would like to know," returned Tharbel coolly. "Suppose you call Rann, Breeland, and find out what you can. Tactfully, of course."

BREELAND'S face became serious. His nod told that he understood one point, at least. Tharbel did not care to call Rann because the detective and the financier had long been at odds.

In Rann's estimate, Darport was a one-horse town and he did not like it. Of all human fixtures linking Darport to its old-fashioned past, Tharbel was the most prominent. Rann had long insisted that Tharbel's success against crime was sheer luck that wouldn't hold. He wanted Darport to modernize itself by getting rid of Tharbel as a start.

As Rann put it, Tharbel was fighting off development of Darport because he knew that when the town woke up he would not be able to cope with new problems that might confront the law. Tharbel's only answer was that he liked Darport as it was and had lived there longer than Rann.

The argument was blunt rather than logical, but it was the sort that carried weight with the Darport natives. The farmers throughout the county agreed with Tharbel, too, and were ready to vote in his behalf.

Those points occurred to Breeland as he made the telephone call. After a chat with Jorgan, Breeland learned from the secretary that Layton had been calling all evening, but that Rann had been delayed in New York because of a business conference.

When Breeland relayed the facts to Tharbel, the detective became unusually brisk.

"I am going to my office, Breeland," said Tharbel, "and I would suggest that you accompany me."

"Why?" queried Breeland, surprised.

"Because you have much at stake," insisted the detective. "To be exact, fifty thousand dollars."

"You mean that Layton--"

"I am accusing Layton of nothing just yet. But I said something tonight that worried him. I told him that suspicious strangers have been seen around town."

"When were they seen?"

Tharbel gave an odd smile at Breeland's question.

"They haven't been seen at all," said the detective crisply. "But Layton believed me very promptly. Too promptly, in fact. It made me presume that he knew something which I hadn't learned, but should have."

Tharbel and Breeland went out to the coupé. With Mox seated between, they rode to the detective's office. Tharbel turned on a corner light in an outer room, then eased carefully through the door to his office, beckoning for Breeland to follow. Mox squeezed through the doorway and joined them by the window.

In the shelter of darkness, Tharbel stared across the dimly lighted street toward the brick hulk of the Darport Trust Co. Sharp though his eyes were, they saw nothing, nor did Breeland's. But Mox must have been more observant, for the spotted dog gave a low growl that Tharbel understood.

"Someone is prowling over there," declared Tharbel. "I shall have to count on you, Breeland. Considering that your money is in the bank vault, I

could choose no one better. Take my car and drive over to Layton's. Pick up either Griffith or Wilbur, my detectives. Tell the other to keep watching for Layton."

"And then?" queried Breeland tensely.

"Gather a few more men," ordered Tharbel. "But be back within fifteen minutes. I'll have others waiting for you. Form a cordon around the bank, and use Mox as a password. If anything suspicious is observed, send word around to me."

Tharbel was fishing for the telephone when Breeland stole out from the office. At the window, Mox was still alert, giving his master informative growls. Yet, except for the dog's low-rumbled tones, all was quiet in the town of Darport.

It was exactly as Junius Tharbel had expected it would be on the night when crime would strike anew in Darport. Somehow this was the very sort of scene that the veteran detective had anticipated.

Crime by stealth, with a master hand pulling the strings; evil, nurtured within the town itself, as a challenge to the skill for which Tharbel was famed.

Junius Tharbel was a man without qualms: but in the tense silence he could sense a growing burden-- one that might prove too large for him to handle.

As he waited, Tharbel was hoping that the outer blackness held more than men of crime. He was thinking of a being who belonged with night itself.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER V.

CRIME'S OUTPOSTS.

As Junius Tharbel began his quarter-hour vigil, a limousine was stopping on a lonely road a little more than a mile away from Darport. Blinks from its lights were answered by those of a sedan parked on a side road. Two men came creeping through the darkness to reach the limousine.

The pair addressed Matt Felson as their leader. Their story was brief, but quite to the point. State police had stationed themselves at the crossroads just past the bend, evidently at instructions from Junius Tharbel.

"Tharbel can smell trouble," one crook growled. "You were right, Matt, figuring the State coppers would be on the job. We've got to send that bus of ours farther away."

"Send it away," snapped Matt. "But come back, both of you. Open the valve on one of my rear tires and let me know when you've done it."

Very promptly the sedan coasted from the side road, taking advantage of a slight slope. The two crooks rejoined Matt, saying that they had done the job on the limousine's rear tire. Silent in the back seat, his gun pressed tighter against Sparrow, The Shadow could feel the slight sinking of the car.

"Get out, you two, Sparrow and Clink," ordered Matt, turning to the rear seat. "I'm going ahead with Prexy. That will leave four of you here on the ground, and I want you to spread out. Get it?"

"There's going to be a lot of shooting, and that's when you fellows open up. You won't have any trouble picking your targets. State coppers are the guys you're to get. Then scam for the next road, a quarter mile back. The heap that just left here will be waiting for you."

Sparrow climbed from his side of the car. He was prodded into speedy action by The Shadow's gun. When his pal, the pretended Clink, dropped out beside him, Matt slammed the door and started the limousine ahead.

Complete darkness followed the quick departure of the taillight. Free of the gun muzzle, Sparrow started a quick shift toward the side of the road. As he went, he spat a warning to the two men who had come from the sedan.

"Say, you guys--"

A thud ended Sparrow's outburst. It landed on the side of his head in

the shape of a deftly swung automatic. There was a slight clatter as the crook hit the road. The Shadow heard a whisper from the darkness.

"Why did Sparrow squawk?"

"Better ask him," gruffed The Shadow in Clink's tone. "He's right here. Take a look."

The questioner looked, aided by the flashlight that The Shadow supplied. Wheeling, the crook demanded:

"What was the idea in slugging Sparrow?"

In answer, two hands shot for the fellow's throat. He was completely deceived, for the flashlight never budged. It was underneath The Shadow's elbow, tilted downward so that it couldn't show his hands. Then, as the mobbie writhed, The Shadow let the flashlight drop.

A pair of figures took a hard fall, The Shadow landing uppermost, as he intended. The crooks head hit heavily; he was lying quite still when The Shadow arose. Picking up the flashlight, The Shadow brought the last man on the run. But there wasn't any glow when the thug arrived.

Instead, The Shadow stepped in from the darkness beside the road and planted a gun muzzle against his neck. Again the flashlight blinked, and the startled crook saw his captor. No longer posing as a thug, The Shadow had become the black-cloaked avenger.

His tone, too, had changed. No longer a gruff voice that went with the guise of Clink, it became a sinister whisper of the night. Here, in a vast open space, The Shadow was even more formidable than he had seemed to Sparrow on the stairway in the old garage. He had no trouble gaining an eager helper when it came to trussing up the two victims on the road.

This time The Shadow was collecting all available revolvers. With Sparrow and the other senseless man bound and shoved to the brush beside the road, The Shadow marched his helper up an embankment and shoved him into a forward sprawl. The thug didn't even protest when The Shadow bound him.

There was no need gagging the fellow. He wouldn't yell, nor would Sparrow and the other crook when they came to their senses. Shouts would simply bring the people they did not want: the State police.

Taking a quick short cut, The Shadow neared the crossroads to look upon a very interesting scene.

The limousine was halted in the glare of headlights from a patrol car belonging to the State police. Matt was playing the part of chauffeur to perfection. He was changing the flat tire, which had gone down badly during the last jog, and a State policeman was helping him.

Old Prexy had stepped from the limousine and was behaving in his most distinguished style.

"Come, come, Matthew!" suggested Prexy in an irritable tone. "Do not dillydally. It was bad enough missing our proper road. We should have been at Lake Maquoit half an hour ago."

"Lake Maquoit!" exclaimed a trooper. "Say, you missed your turn five miles back. Your best bet is to cut through Darport and take the cross-state highway."

"Darport?" The name seemed unfamiliar to Prexy. "Which direction is Darport?"

The State policeman pointed to a sign that said:

DARPORT, 1 MILE

Prexy thanked him and turned again to Matt.

"Let me choose the roads after this, Matthew," he said in his important style. "In the future I hope that you will inspect the tires before we begin a trip!"

A black figure edged to the crossroads; momentarily it glided into the fringe of light and was in plain sight. No one noticed the brief appearance of The Shadow.

The State policemen were divided between helping Matt and talking to

Prexy. Then the darkness of the Darport road had swallowed the strange figure of the night. The Shadow had chosen the center of the town as his immediate goal.

He could calculate the coming game. Crime was due in Darport, probably within the next ten minutes. Crime, engineered by Speed Kroner, who was already on the ground.

How and why Speed had happened to choose this terrain was something that betokened a bigger game behind the crime itself. Mobsters like Steed and Matt wouldn't come to Darport unless expressly invited.

Even as it stood, the two would have to outwit Junius Tharbel. Speed would stage the crime and Matt would be on hand to aid. In a way, Speed's part was the harder, but Matt would have the tougher task of covering up. That was why he was establishing an alibi for himself, to begin with, and Matt was making a good job of it with Prexy's aid.

The State police might suspect ordinary strangers, but certainly not a man who rode in a limousine with a uniformed chauffeur. Best of all, Matt was letting Prexy play the major part, so far as the police were concerned.

Most vital, however, in any aid that Matt could give, were the four outposts that he had stationed along the return route. He was counting on Sparrow, Clink, and two others; and Speed would also depend upon the presence of those competent sharpshooters to snipe off the police.

Such assistance had been banished by The Shadow. Only three of the four gunmen remained, and they were bound and weaponless. As for the fourth, he had become crime's arch foe, The Shadow. One important matter, the getaway, had been settled. It was no longer in favor of the crooks.

The thing that remained was crime itself. Within the next few minutes, Darport was due to burst wide open in a fashion that could cost many lives unless proper intervention came. As clearly as Junius Tharbel, The Shadow could foresee those consequences and was taking measures to forestall them.

Companions in justice were to team again against partners in crime. The Shadow was eager to furnish the co-operation that Junius Tharbel needed. Crime, it seemed, was doomed at the outset.

Yet even The Shadow could not foresee the startling consequences this night's adventure would bring!

CHAPTER VI. CRIME'S MOMENT.

SPEED KRONER was standing in front of the old vault in the Darport Trust Co., a flashlight in one hand, a revolver in the other. His face could hardly have been recognized by the photograph that The Shadow had studied in the sanctum. Speed's hard-jawed visage was livid, uglier than any of his men had ever seen it.

The object of Speed's rage was a squeamish crook whose fingers were fumbling badly with the dial of the vault. Others who stood around couldn't understand it. The man who was working on the vault was Touch Quidden; his nickname was a token of his deftness in opening the most difficult safes.

All were agreed that this antiquated vault should be a set-up for Touch, but it wasn't proving so.

Touch turned a thin, hollow-cheeked face into the light, met Speed's hard gaze with watery eyes that blinked.

"Better use the chowder, Speed," pleaded Touch in a hoarse whisper. "This box ain't going to crack."

"If I soup that vault, Touch," returned Speed harshly, "there's going to be a lot of noise. So loud that nobody will hear the blast I put on you!"

Quivering, Touch tried to draw away from the vault. Speed clamped a fist on the man's thin shoulder and shoved him back again.

"You've got five minutes, Touch!"

Wiggling his fingers, Touch started to work again. His mouth close to

the safe-cracker's ear, Speed growled accusations.

"You've been balking all along, Touch," he said. "Don't like the racket, do you? What's the matter? Are you scared of old Tharbel?"

"What if I am?" whined Touch. "That guy can put the arm on anybody!"

"The way you talk of Tharbel," sneered Speed, "you'd think he was The Shadow!"

Mention of The Shadow didn't help Touch's nerves. The thing that jolted him back to the job was Speed's cold reminder that there were only four minutes left. Feeling the approach of the gun muzzle at his neck, Touch managed to rally his fingers. He sensed the fall of tumblers so keenly that he seemed to pluck the vault's combination out of thin air.

Men crowded up as the door swung wide. Speed pushed them back, picked the ones that were to bundle the stacks of cash and pack the money in square boxes. Keeping his eye on the procedure, Speed spoke further instructions.

"When we make the getaway," he said, "we split. I take the main crew; the rest join up with Matt, wherever we meet him."

Speed paused. Thugs were flitting back and forth like ghouls, passing the word that the vault was open, relaying instructions to men outside the bank. Speed heard quick footsteps from the side door which his men had jimmied to make their original entry.

"Speed!" A hoarse voice brought the news. "There's guys out back--a flock of 'em! Looks like Tharbel's outfit."

"You mean those two dopes he calls his deputies?"

"There's more than two. A dozen, anyway! They've been getting careless with their glims."

"I'll take a look." Speed's decision silenced murmurs from the mob about him. "Come on, all of you, with the swag."

From the doorway, where he dragged Touch, Speed peered out into the darkness. He caught the glimmer of a flashlight in the offing and stepped back into the bank.

"Looks like they're wise," he declared. "They're keeping to the back, thinking we won't spot them. So we'll go out through the front. Plant the soup there and blast the door."

OUT behind the bank, Blair Breeland was making a quick trip along a closing semicircle. He was mentioning flashlights testily, telling the assembled men to be careful with them. All claimed that they were using due discretion.

"Any signs of men inside the bank?" queried Breeland. "Have you gotten close enough to find out?"

The deputies responded in the negative. They were men who worked for Tharbel whenever he needed them, and he had trained them in caution. In his turn, Breeland had been careful not to let them approach too close.

"We've got to find out something," decided Breeland, as he squatted between two watchers. "Suppose you flank the bank. Get around toward the front, see if you can find something from that angle."

The two were moving away when a man came from the parking lot, stumbling in the darkness. Breeland told him to use a flashlight, rather than make so much noise, but the fellow didn't listen. He was breathless with excitement. He had found three cars parked in the lot.

Breeland asked if he had done anything to put them out of commission; the deputy shook his head.

"You missed an opportunity," Breeland chided. "Anyway, you learned what we wanted to know. Get around to the other side of the courthouse and go up to Tharbel's office. Tell him we need him."

Before the deputy had moved half a dozen steps, the air was split by a muffled explosion. The question of marauders in the bank was settled. First, by the blast itself, which sent gushes of flame that were reflected to the rear of the building. Next, by the pell-mell clatter of running men who came out by the front and suddenly appeared, dashing for the parking lot, along the

same route that Layton had followed that afternoon.

From behind the bank, Breeland bellowed a timely order for the deputies: "Go after them!"

Quick work was needed if the robbers were to be halted, and Breeland was keen enough to recognize that situation. To hold the deputies in hiding after crime had come would have been stupid. In fact, the deputies were actually on the move when Breeland shouted.

But strategy was needed, even in rapid attack, and Breeland lacked experience in battling against crime. He should have ordered the deputies to spread out, so that they could surround the bunched-up crooks. Junius Tharbel would have given such an order, had he been at hand; but word had not been dispatched to the detective in time.

In fact, Tharbel's first knowledge of trouble below came when he saw the door of the bank blast wide. From his window, Tharbel watched the dash the bank robbers made. He heard Breeland's command, spied the massed surge of the deputies.

Instantly, Tharbel foresaw what would happen, and the sound of hasty shots fitted with his apprehensions.

When crooks turned to fight off the deputies, all odds would be with men of crime. They were better armed, quicker with their triggers, used to open combat. Had the deputies spread, or even tried to flank the crooks in batches, they would have gotten the advantage, for they knew this ground.

But they were putting themselves into trouble, which would begin the moment when the bank robbers reached the parking lot. Entrenched there, Speed and his gang could deliver slaughter when the blundering deputies attempted open attack. There was only one way to forestall such disaster: to scatter the crooks before they reached their goal.

FROM his window, Tharbel began a deliberate, calculating fire with an old service revolver, he was expert with the weapon, as cool as though engaged in target practice.

He had a dozen men to shoot at, and he picked them with precision. Tharbel staggered a pair with his first two shots, and expected to drop at least three with his next four shots.

Some of the crooks wheeled at the sound of the fire, which was just what Tharbel wanted, since it kept them within his range. They were shooting blindly, wasting bullets, like the deputies. A few more shots from Tharbel's window and the robbers would scatter. But Tharbel was halted before he could try a third shot.

Some gunman below was either lucky or uncanny in his judgment. A gun blasted; with it, a bullet shattered the open window above Tharbel's head.

Dropping away from the clattering glass, Tharbel reached the floor just in time. Other shots came whistling through to ping the wall of his office.

There was no use staying in that spot, once the sharpshooters had marked it. Crouching, Tharbel reached his outer office and started through, with Mox at his heels. When he reached the hall he ran into the panting deputy sent by Breeland a short while before. Tharbel grabbed the fellow, told him to follow downstairs.

Things were back to their former status: mobsters making for the parking lot; deputies in foolhardy pursuit. Unless Tharbel could provide some sort of flank attack, this occasion would become known as the "Darport Massacre," with local men as victims.

Had Tharbel known the man who commanded the crooked tribe, he would have accepted all as lost.

Speed Kroner was at his best--or worst. He and his men had reached their cars. The gunzels were ready to jump aboard and flee, but Speed stopped them with a blunt command.

"Chuck in the swag," he told them, "then stick with me. We're going to chop this bunch of yaps into a whole lot of pieces!"

Pointing a man to a car at the far edge of the parking lot, Speed

ordered him to handle a spotlight attached beside the wheel, as soon as he heard the word. Taking the rest of the crew, Speed doubled back toward the street.

Individual deputies had slackened, to await the others. Assembled, they were coming forward in a body. In the dimness, Speed could see rifles thrust forward, along with revolvers.

They looked like a bunch of vigilantes coming in quest of a cowering bad man. But they were after ten bad men; not one. Nor were the crooks cowering. They were crouched, waiting for Speed's command to attack. Coolly, Speed blinked a flashlight toward the far car.

A spotlight's beam sliced the blackness. Widening, the powerful rays showed the clustered deputies. Caught flat-footed, Tharbel's men had no idea where the crooks lurked. Coming up from the rear, Breeland gave a warning shout, telling the deputies to scatter. They did, in sudden panic.

That was then that Speed growled the command:

"Give it!"

Before a single gun could respond, Speed's murderous words were countermanded. From darkness came a challenge that no mobster could ignore. It was a laugh, fierce, strident, its mockery promising doom to men of evil.

Hands froze upon their guns. That peal of mirth, eerie in the night air, could mean but one foeman:

The Shadow!

Speed gave an angry roar. He wanted the deputies slaughtered before his crew bothered about anyone else, even The Shadow. But Speed's command came too late. By then, crooks not only heard The Shadow: they saw him!

A black-cloaked shape had wheeled into the fringe of light from the other side of the street. Huge automatics were swinging in gloved hands, as though the gun muzzles themselves could pick out targets.

Again, the taunting laugh quivered the night air--The Shadow's invitation to battle, which he, alone in the open, was delivering to ten foemen safe in ambush!

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE HIGHROAD.

REVOLVERS spoke of their own accord.

It could not have been otherwise, considering The Shadow's folly in thrusting himself into the light. Fingers had come to life and were tugging hair triggers, back in the darkness where Speed and his crew crouched.

Those shots were all that The Shadow wanted. They were wide, futile, delivered before a single sharpshooter had time to really aim. Instantly, The Shadow wheeled away; as he whipped back into darkness, his own guns blasted.

Knife thrusts in the night--such were the tongues from The Shadow's gun muzzles. The recoil of those big automatics seemed to shove their owner off into blackness. But there was nothing futile in The Shadow's shots.

He knew where crooks were huddled. They had given their position away. The Shadow had wounded two with his opening stabs, and the return fire from the rest was useless. Off in the darkness, The Shadow had all the room he needed, considering that Darport was a town of open spaces, even near its center.

Speed's men were wasting a wide-flung hail of lead, completely at loss for a target. The laugh that mocked them seemed to come from nowhere. Some of the marksmen actually turned in opposite directions, to fire at the spot where they thought the mirth had originated.

New jabs announced The Shadow's whereabouts; shot from clear beyond the spotlight's range. The Shadow's choice of position was excellent. He had a massed target, nearly a dozen men, marked out by their own blazing guns. A considerable percentage of The Shadow's shots were sure to carry to those ranks, even at long range.

Conversely, Speed's tribe hadn't a chance in a thousand to drill the solitary marksman who was shifting invisible in the darkness. They couldn't guess which direction he had taken; and if their shots came close, The Shadow could at any time wheel completely out of range and come in from a new angle.

Such a prospect worried Speed; there were other things, too, that bothered him. The scattered deputies were beginning to pepper away from secure places.

Two guns suddenly opened from a flank near the courthouse, a fire provided by Tharbel and the deputy with him. Grabbing at the members of his depleted band, Speed told them to get back to the cars.

They made it in a rush. Laden with the loot from the bank vault, manned by cripples as well as unscathed crooks, the cars came roaring from the parking lot, to take the highroad out of Darport.

A while ago, Speed had wanted to delay, to insure a proper meeting with Matt. At present, the case was the opposite. The Shadow's intervention had taken up slack minutes; there was no more time to lose.

Wisely, Speed let a certain car go first. It was one that contained wounded men chiefly, and none of the boodle from the bank. Speed wanted it to take the principal attack, in order that the other two cars might clear.

Naturally, Speed was in one of the rear cars, but the men ahead did not know how he was misusing them. However, Speed himself was due for trouble.

As the first car swung wide into the main street, a black figure detached itself from beside the courthouse wall and reached the veering car with a long lope. Timed to the driver's swing into the straightaway, The Shadow leaped to the running board and dived straight through the window, to reach the man at the wheel.

Not one of the four crooks in the car expected him, and the only one physically qualified to beat off a close range attack was the driver. Being busy with the wheel, the driver was unable to beat off the hard-slugging gun that swung against his head.

Before the others realized their dilemma, the car was skewing slant-wise across the street as The Shadow jerked the wheel.

Before crippled fighters could get at him, the car had jolted to a stop. The Shadow was gone from the running board; he was spinning toward the curb, to open fire on the next cars.

They were already out of the parking lot, but they were bottled by the car that The Shadow had set across their path.

It was a question of taking to the sidewalks to get around the barrier, and deputies were coming up to those flanks. One driver saw The Shadow and veered for the opposite curb.

Speed, driver of the last car, chose a more daring course. He launched his car straight for The Shadow, giving the old motor all the power it had.

GUNS were blasting everywhere along the street, and from cars as well. The Shadow was visible, directly in the path of headlights that seemed to rocket toward him.

From across the street, Tharbel saw his friend in black and opened a valiant fire, hoping to reach the driver of the car.

Then, with a twist, The Shadow was back to the center of the street, driving in upon three men who had staggered from the car that he had turned into a blockade.

Speed hadn't expected The Shadow to dive in that direction. There wasn't a chance to veer in and strike him. As for the crooks from the wrecked car, The Shadow was slugging them right and left, tossing them aside like puppets.

Speed's car had passed The Shadow. A few shots from a well-aimed .45 were all that The Shadow needed to ruin the get-away. But he had no chance to fire; instead, he was forced to hit the paving and roll beneath the stalled car. Aid had come to Speed and the fugitive crooks from a quarter least expected.

Tharbel's deputies had seen The Shadow for the first time; they were

standing open-mouthed, as they witnessed the gyrations of the cloaked fighter. They didn't know whether to take The Shadow for friend or foe, so rapid were his shifts.

One marksman in the offing suddenly let loose in The Shadow's direction; his fire was an example to the more bewildered deputies.

Harried by shots from the very men that he had rescued, The Shadow was forced to shelter, and his sudden withdrawal from the strife nullified his chances to deal with Speed Kroner!

Tharbel's hoarse voice sounded above the chatter of guns. The veteran detective recognized their folly, and was shouting for his men to desist. Some heard him; others didn't. By then, The Shadow was away to safety: but so was Speed and the crooks who accompanied him.

Seeing his coupé where Breeland had parked it, Tharbel made for the car. He reached it from one direction, just as Breeland arrived from the other. Like Tharbel, Breeland understood the error of the deputies. They both had the same idea, when it came to rallying the local men.

Tharbel took the wheel, Breeland the seat beside him. Mox, the dog, jumped in between them; trained to hunting, the Dalmatian liked the rattle of guns. Tharbel's car shot away in pursuit of Speed's car and the other. Seeing it go, the deputies stopped their crazed fire, which, so far, had not found The Shadow.

Running for their own cars, the men of Darport joined the chase that Tharbel and Breeland had begun. As the last taillight dwindled from sight; a solemn laugh broke the new silence that had gripped the main street.

The Shadow was coming from the side door of the bank, where he had taken refuge, after a circuitous route to avoid the mistaken gunfire of the frenzied deputies. He saw flattened forms in the street: those of the crooks from the halted car.

The Shadow had felled some of them; the rest had been in line with the barrage that the deputies laid down. None were in condition to offer any objection when The Shadow yanked a senseless thug from the driver's seat and took the wheel himself.

Meanwhile, Tharbel had covered close to a mile in his pursuit of Speed. Ahead were the fugitive cars; as they swung a bend, they met a limousine coming into town. Right then, an odd thing happened out of Tharbel's sight.

The limousine's chauffeur shoved the big car half into the ditch, as though to avoid a collision. Speed and his pals could have kept ahead, full speed, but they didn't.

Instead, the cars jerked to a halt. It was Speed who hoarsed the word: "O. K., Matt. Here they come!"

One man sprang from Speed's car, another from the car ahead. Each was loaded with bundles representing the money taken from the bank. Speed decided that Matt could use three men, instead of two, so he shoved another along from his own car.

The man that Speed chose was Touch. He knew that the squeamish safe-cracker would be useless in the fight that lay ahead, but that Matt might be able to use him, later.

Touch and the other two had barely scrambled to hiding beyond the ditched limousine, when Speed and his cars were off again.

At that moment, Tharbel's car reached the bend. He saw the fugitives he wanted; their cars moving rapidly, but Tharbel had made a considerable gain. He knew he couldn't overtake them with his comparatively slow coupé, but they would be blocked very shortly by the State police.

IT happened past the next bend. The crossroads were in sight; police were springing out to flag the cars that roared in their direction. Instantly, Speed's car and its companion vehicle veered from the road into a field. Crooks jumped out and took to flight on foot.

Jamming his car to a halt, Tharbel heard a roar behind him. Deputies were arriving in their cars. Tharbel pointed them into the field, and

scrambled out, with Breeland, to join in the hunt. Grimly, Tharbel was thanking The Shadow for having produced this situation, by delaying the departure of the mobsters.

There was more for which Tharbel could have thanked The Shadow. Though the ace detective did not recognize it, Speed and his gunners were performing according to a prearranged plan. Their mad flight was intended to draw pursuers.

Beyond the crossroads lay an ambush, carefully laid. Four guns strong, sharpshooters had been posted to pocket the deputies, or State troopers, whichever were unwise enough to pursue Speed Kroner and his pals.

This time, Speed was confident that there would be slaughter without The Shadow's interference. It hadn't occurred to Speed to trace The Shadow's activities back to earlier events. Had Speed done so, he might have pictured certain things that would have destroyed his confidence.

The ambush on which the fugitive crooks depended was no longer in existence! The Shadow had settled it in advance.

Though absent from this scene, the hand of The Shadow was again in evidence, as the factor that would turn the tide of battle to the advantage of Junius Tharbel, upholder of the law!

CHAPTER VIII. BROKEN TRAILS.

CALM as ever, Junius Tharbel waited beside his halted car. He could hear spasmodic firing from the field, but he did not follow, for he knew that the same sounds would guide him later. Tharbel was waiting for the State police to arrive from the crossroads, which they did very promptly in their car.

"We'll handle those fellows," Tharbel told them, with a gesture toward the field. "We chased them out of Darport, and we can round them up. There's a bigger job ahead for you."

The State cops looked interested. Tharbel pointed back along the road.

"Start into town," continued Tharbel, tersely. "Get the other car before it can pull away. Don't give them a chance to go after you first. They're dangerous!"

Motioning to Breeland, Tharbel jogged off into the field, leaving the State troopers to handle the matter that he had mentioned. On the higher ground, Tharbel could see flashlights bobbing, proving that the deputies were hot in chase.

In fact, the deputies were doing all the firing, up to a certain point. Then, crooks turned about and began to spurt shots in return. Their efforts looked very feeble; out-jogging Breeland, who was stumbling on the rough ground, Tharbel hurried ahead, with Mox loping beside him.

Beyond the crossroads, Speed had rallied his crew and was giving them quick orders.

"When the depts get close, we'll rush them," said Speed. "Sparrow and the rest will box them. Get ready!"

Bullets were chopping the ground close to Speed. With a wild yell, crooks drove for the deputies, shooting at random. They expected to see their foeman topple from flanking, close-range shots, but the result did not occur.

Undisturbed, the deputies poured lead squarely into the ranks of Speed's crowd, thugs tumbled like tenpins and Speed would have shared their lot, if others hadn't been in the way. Diving for the rough ground, Speed found a hole and lay there, cursing, while bullets whistled overhead and ricocheted from knolls.

Tharbel arrived while the deputies were gathering up the remains of Speed's mob. The wounded gunzels were snarling a name, as though they hated it. They were blaming Speed Kroner for their plight, branding him a double-crosser. Tharbel promptly decided to look for a crook who answered to the name of Speed Kroner.

Flashlights swept the rough ground. The glare revealed a huddled figure scrambling off into the darkness. Whether Speed's arms were loaded with booty; whether he was crouched simply to make himself inconspicuous, did not matter. He was spotted, that was the important thing, and a dozen deputies were on hand to capture him.

Speed heard shots, along with shouts, and knew that he was being outflanked. He had only one immediate refuge: the roadway. Speed took a dive over the embankment and landed, snarling, in a ditch.

Coming to hands and knees, he began to crawl. All the while, he could hear calls that came closer, and from various directions. Speed knew that he was trapped.

Rising to his feet, he took a few steps, then stumbled over something. He heard a grunt; using a flashlight, he found a bound man lying in the ditch. The fellow was Sparrow. Producing a knife, Speed cut his bonds, while Sparrow was telling him about The Shadow.

Speed was quick in thought, as well as action. He called Sparrow's attention to the approaching shouts.

"Hear those?" queried Speed. "Those guys are a bunch of yaps, and we're laying for them. When they get too close, I start shooting, and the rest of the crew piles in on them."

Sparrow grinned. The idea sounded good.

"Take this heater," Speed pressed his only revolver into Sparrow's eager hand. "I've got another. I'll ease farther along, and we can both start the fireworks. You begin it, Sparrow, so as to tip me off."

CREEPING off into the darkness, Speed kept low. Beneath the embankment, he heard men prowling above and dug into a clump of bushes a hundred feet from Sparrow's present post. Deputies blundered past, and Speed crawled farther along. He had to stop again, however, when he heard sounds ahead.

Then, sharp in the night, came a report from Sparrow's gun. Instantly, lights flashed all about, as a dozen deputies converged for the spot.

They were after one man, only: Speed Kroner. They supposed that he was the only crook at large, and naturally mistook Sparrow for him.

Waiting, Speed heard men dash up from farther down the road. Sneaking from the bushes, he hurried off into the clear, knowing that he could easily reach the waiting car that was posted a half mile away. Fading from behind him, Speed heard a loud roar of revolvers and guessed that they marked the finish of Sparrow.

Speed was right. Expecting aid, Sparrow had risen from concealment to take quick shots at the deputies. He did no damage, for there were only two cartridges left in the gun that Speed had given him. But with the second shot, Sparrow brought a deluge in his own direction.

Thinking that they had found the most dangerous of their foemen, the deputies flailed Sparrow unmercifully with their bullets. Reaching his riddled body, they lifted it and carried their trophy back to Junius Tharbel, announcing that they had put an end to Speed Kroner.

Very calmly, Tharbel told them to lay the body on the ground. Jogging a dying thug, Tharbel turned the man's glazed eyes toward Sparrow and supplied a flashlight. He asked if the victim happened to be Speed Kroner.

"That ain't Speed!" the dying crook coughed. "That's Sparrow Andrim! The guy that was supposed to help--"

The informant sagged. In the stillness of the night, Tharbel could hear the faint rumble of a motor, some distance away. Then came calls, closer by. Deputies had found two bound men, and were bringing them in.

Tharbel knew quite well, that Speed Kroner was in the clear; he could picture the exact ruse that the smart crook had used in making Sparrow the scapegoat.

More than that, Tharbel traced back into the past and recognized the part that The Shadow had played, preliminary to his arrival in Darport. Unfortunately, Tharbel's thoughts were too much in the past; otherwise, he

might have done something about the immediate future.

ALONG the road into Darport, the State police had stopped beside the ditched limousine. It was the car that Tharbel had told them to take into custody; but they weren't aware of it.

Tharbel hadn't guessed that the State troopers had become quite chummy with the occupants of that limousine, a gentleman named Mr. Elthorn and his chauffeur, Matthew.

State cops were looking for another car. Failing to find one, they were asking Prexy if he had seen it. Leaning from his open window, Prexy was neatly covering bundles that lay on the floor, while he shook his head.

Meanwhile, Matt Felson was keeping a wary eye toward the side of the road, hoping that Touch Quidden and two other crooks would have sense enough to lay low right where they were.

"Two suspicious cars passed us," insisted Prexy. "They were both traveling at a high rate of speed. Fortunately, Matthew veered from their path in the nick of time. A competent driver, Matthew, although he often chooses the wrong road.

"Then, of course, there were the other cars"--Prexy's tone was reflective--"and I don't remember just how many. But they were mostly together. I fancy that they all contained the deputies that you have mentioned."

At that moment, Matt became suddenly alert. Looking ahead, he had caught the flash of headlights swinging past a bend, coming out of Darport. Eagerly, he turned to the nearest officer.

"There's the car!" he exclaimed. "Coming hell-bent this way--"

"Such language, Matthew!" interposed Prexy. "I cannot tolerate--"

"It's the car we want," snapped a State cop. "Come on! We'll meet it!"

The police were off at full speed. Matt beckoned to Touch and the others. They piled into the limousine; Matt jerked the big car from the ditch and started forward. He reached the bend in time to see what happened ahead.

As they sped toward the arriving car, the State policemen opened a hearty fire, calculated to drive the other machine from the road. They succeeded sooner than they expected. With a sharp twist, the car picked a flat space between two hummocks and demolished a rail fence.

The officers did not follow with their car. They saw trees beyond the fence and expected the fugitive car to crash. Instead, it twisted among the trunks; its lights suddenly vanished. Leaping from their car, the cops dashed for the woods.

They found the car deserted. It resembled the other vehicles in which Speed and his tribe had fled. They began to scour the woods, expecting to find more crooks, but without avail. The car had carried only a driver, and he was too elusive to be discovered.

Filtering in between the searching officers, The Shadow was returning toward the road. From the trees, he saw a car spin past the space between the hummocks; it was gone instantly, allowing no time for a shot. The Shadow knew the car, despite its speed. It was the limousine that carried Matt and Prexy.

The big car was far out of sight when The Shadow reached the road. Stepping into the patrol car, The Shadow started into Darport. He paused, on a line with the shattered fence rail, to fire a single shot. The officers heard it, came dashing from the trees. They were just in time to see their own car whip away.

Instead of seeking the fugitive limousine, which had gotten a considerable start, The Shadow stopped as soon as he reached the Darport courthouse. Alighting, he hurried up to Tharbel's office and found the telephone in the dark.

Using a brisk tone that suited Tharbel, The Shadow called State police headquarters and gave the number of Matt's license. He also suggested that all large cars be stopped along the roads leading in and out of Darport. He added that a stolen patrol car had been reclaimed and was at the courthouse.

SOON afterward, Junius Tharbel drove into town in his coupé, followed by a clattery car in a damaged condition that three State policemen had redeemed from the woods. Blair Breeland came upstairs with Tharbel, and the officers followed.

They were arguing that the limousine could not have been the car that Tharbel meant. They had talked with Mr. Elthorn and his chauffeur, Matthew and considered them above suspicion. They argued, besides, that they had met another car along the road and that it had given them trouble.

One officer became a vociferous spokesman for the other two.

"You're trying to pin the blame on us, Tharbel," he accused. "This fellow Speed Kroner got away from you, so naturally you'd say he handed the swag to someone else. But it didn't go in the limousine. Mr. Elthorn was bound for Lake Maquoit."

A sudden glisten came to Tharbel's eyes, as he turned from the desk. His manner immediately changed.

"I merely doubted that Speed could have carried all the loot," said Tharbel. "Still, it is possible that he did. As for your friend Elthorn and his chauffeur Matthew, I merely want them as witnesses."

The State cops seemed mollified. Tharbel turned to the telephone and put in a call to State police headquarters to have all roads closed. From the answer that he received, Tharbel learned instantly that the order had already been given, presumably by himself.

"I merely wanted to repeat the order," he said. "Yes, bring in all limousines... The car that we recovered? Yes, I'll tell your men that it is outside the courthouse."

The three State cops stared, bewildered, when Tharbel told them that they would find their car below. Breeland, too, was somewhat puzzled, but did not ask for any explanations. At his desk, Tharbel was calmly filling a report sheet, when footsteps clambered on the stairs.

Two State patrolmen entered, bringing a bulky man whose indignation equaled his size. Tharbel recognized the high forehead and heavy jowls of Titus Rann. The financier shook a heavy fist in Tharbel's direction.

"This is your work, Tharbel!" Rann stormed. "Telling the State police to bring in all limousines, just so you could humiliate me! My chauffeur and I were coming home peacefully from New York, when we suddenly found ourselves under arrest, as ordinary criminals!"

"Not at all," rejoined Tharbel. "I was simply seeking certain men as witnesses to a crime. I have made no accusation against them, as I can prove. Therefore, you have no ground for complaint, Rann."

Finding himself free, Rann departed, after indulging in a final glower. Breeland managed to give one of his broad smiles; rather a strain, considering his recent loss of fifty thousand dollars that had vanished with the other cash from the Darport Trust Co.

"You handled Rann well," Breeland approved. "But what about the other car, Tharbel? Do you suppose it slipped through the cordon?"

"Very probably," replied Tharbel, with a slow nod. "I doubt that I gave the order soon enough, to have all the roads properly closed. I don't suppose, though, that it matters." Tharbel shrugged as he spoke. "I presume that Mr. Elthorn will call us later, from Lake Maquoit, and tell us what little he knows."

WITH Breeland gone, Tharbel sat at his desk stroking his chin. He could recall the name of Speed Kroner, and he connected it with that of another crook, Matt Felson. But Tharbel was looking beyond those partners in crime.

He was wondering about Wallace Layton, whose house was still under surveillance. He was thinking of Blair Breeland and the heavy loss that the quarry owner had taken.

From his pocket, Tharbel produced the list of pay-roll money and gave an approving nod. Breeland's cash could be traced, and identified if found. That

much was fortunate, and proof of Tharbel's foresight.

The detective's thoughts turned to Titus Rann. A grim smile flickered on Tharbel's lips as he recalled the financier's recent indignation. Maybe Rann would have acted differently, had he known that Layton had been calling him all evening and that Tharbel had learned about it. It struck Tharbel as rather interesting that Rann should have picked this evening to stay in the city much later than usual.

Deep in reflection, Tharbel failed to notice Mox. The dog was seated in its usual chair, but was not looking toward the window. Its eyes were fixed on a closet door that stood a trifle ajar. The dog seemed to recognize a presence; that of a friend.

Reaching for a sheet of paper, Tharbel printed a name in bold capital letters: THE SHADOW.

Crossing out various letters, he inscribed them in a new rotation, to form another name: WADE HOSTH. To Tharbel, that name signified The Shadow. He knew he could reach a certain man who once called himself Wade Hosth.

Tharbel began to write a letter. The closet door was moving outward; blackness crept from its depths, to stretch along the floor and form a strange, hawklike silhouette. Blackness took form--that of a tall, cloaked figure whose keen eyes gazed over Tharbel's shoulder.

Mox, the dog, nestled his snout between his paws and watched, making neither growl nor whimper. Meanwhile, Tharbel finished the letter and put it in an envelope, which he addressed to Wade Hosth.

The Shadow had returned to the shelter of the closet when Tharbel left with the letter, accompanied by Mox. With Tharbel gone, pitch blackness filled the room. Soon the stillness was stirred by a low, whispery laugh.

Weird though the tone was, it would have pleased Junius Tharbel, had he remained to hear it. The muffled mirth told that The Shadow had already received Tharbel's message!

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDS TAKE A TRIP.

THE next day, Darport was flooded with reporters. They came in droves, bringing cameramen with them. They parked their cars all around the courthouse and practically took over the town. Finding that Tharbel did not mind their presence, they made his office their headquarters.

Tharbel was used to handling gentlemen of the press. He treated reporters as friends, but became smiling and taciturn when they asked too many questions. His favorite policy was to hand out information in dribs and drabs, in the form of statements.

Such statements always included new points, particularly when reporters were anxious for something that would catch the next editions of their newspapers.

By such a system, Tharbel could always hold back facts that he did not want made public. Sometimes reporters garnered information elsewhere, and shot it to their sheets without telling Tharbel.

Any who tried that game, always regretted it. Tharbel's antidote was to call other reporters to his office and give them a special statement, without the offender's knowledge.

Thus, newspaper men who scored scoops at Tharbel's expense, invariably were out-scooped at the finish. Therefore it had become a newspaper tradition to "play ball" with Tharbel.

Among the newspaper men who came to Darport was Clyde Burke, of the New York Classic. Clyde was not only a veteran reporter, who had met Tharbel before; he was also an agent of The Shadow. Being in town on a double mission, Clyde did his best to keep new reporters in line.

He advised them never to push Tharbel with questions, and warned them that when the famed detective assumed a clam like attitude, it would be a good

idea for everyone to stroll out of the office and spend a half hour viewing the scenery of Darport.

There were times when Tharbel preferred to be alone, although he never said so. Anyone who hadn't sense enough to catch his mood would never rate well with Tharbel.

In an early statement, Tharbel emphasized the robbery itself. He declared that Speed Kroner had accomplished it with the aid of a safecracker named Touch Quidden, a fact which Tharbel had learned from captured gunzels who considered Speed a double-crosser and branded Touch as yellow.

Tharbel added the opinion that the bandits must have come to the county at least one week before the robbery, and that they had hidden out somewhere near the town of Darport. To hunt up their hiding place would be useless, because Speed and the few other fugitives had fled for parts unknown.

Later in the day, Tharbel amplified his former statement, clearing an important question. The State police had argued that only Speed Kroner escaped, but Tharbel had obtained evidence proving that Touch Quidden was also with the mob.

Hence, it was obvious that there had been two get-aways, and to explain the case, Tharbel again brought up the matter of the limousine. He declared that Matthew, the chauffeur, could have been none other than Matt Felson, long a partner of Speed Kroner. That theory accepted, Touch and a few other bank robbers could have fled with Matt.

Following that statement, reporters impatiently awaited Tharbel's opinion on the matter of the loot. The vault at the Darport Trust had contained about eighty thousand dollars, of which fifty thousand had been Breeland's pay roll.

Who had the money--Speed or Matt--seemed quite as important a question as the matter of the cash itself. But Tharbel was waiting for the proper time to broach it.

Not until late afternoon, when visitors began to gather in the office, did the reporters realize that Tharbel was prepared to give the important statement.

THARBEL was not present when the others arrived. He had gone out somewhere, without stating why. The visitors included Titus Rann, Blair Breeland, and two State policemen. While they were chatting, another man arrived, but no one seemed to know him.

The stranger was tall, a trifle awkward in manner, which gave him a lanky look. His face was stolid, almost melancholy, somewhat like an Indian's countenance. He was wearing corduroy trousers, leather puttees, and a hunting jacket. He carried a double-barreled shotgun, which he deposited tenderly in a corner before taking a chair.

Titus Rann was in a stormy mood, much to the interest of the reporters, though the stolid stranger did not seem to notice it. Rann paced the floor in heavy stride, pausing at times to raise an emphatic fist. He was taking no notice of the reporters: his remarks were meant for Blair Breeland and the State police.

"Tharbel is passing the buck," Rann insisted. "He's keeping this case open just to cover his own incompetence. He knows quite well that Speed Kroner got away with all the money"--Rann swung to Breeland--"including your fifty thousand dollars."

Breeland looked doubtful, but the State troopers nodded. Finding them in sympathy with his opinions, Rann made the most of it.

"Speed escaped from Tharbel," explained Rann, contemptuously, "so the old maestro has to cook up something. He brought in Speed's one-time partner, Matt Felson, and claimed that Matt was the chauffeur of a missing limousine.

"Odd, how Tharbel changes opinions. Last night he wanted the people in the limousine as witnesses, not as criminals. That was to mollify me. Today, he says that there were crooks in the car, so that you fellows"--Rann faced the State policemen--"can be blamed for something."

"Just wait until Tharbel shows up." Rann gave a backward gesture toward the door, which was behind him. "He will claim that Speed passed the cash to Matt. He will say that if--"

Rann didn't go beyond the "if." He saw his listeners looking past him. Turning abruptly, Rann faced Tharbel, who had just stepped in from the outer office. Witnesses expected a scene between Tharbel and Rann. There was none, because Tharbel prevented it.

Ignoring the other persons in the room, Tharbel turned to the silent hunter in the corner and shook hands. Then, by way of introduction, he said bluntly to the rest:

"This is my friend, Wade Hosth. Came up here for the hunting season. Do you know, Wade"--Tharbel turned to his friend--"I think we picked the right time. I've been talking to some farmers for the last hour, and they say there's a lot of game about."

From the closet, Tharbel brought a shotgun of his own; cracking it open, he began to look through the barrels, to see if their polish suited him. Meanwhile, in casual fashion, he took up the very theme that Rann had discussed a short while before.

"Speed Kroner and Matt Felson," remarked Tharbel. "They always worked together; they probably always will. Which one carried away the money doesn't matter. Right now, they're probably together, trying to spend it."

"I hope they do." Tharbel laid the shotgun aside and picked up a sheaf of papers, from deep in his desk. "Because all of Breeland's pay-roll money was listed. Here are the numbers, and wherever any of that cash shows us, we'll have a trail to the men we want."

Tharbel distributed the lists among the reporters, who received them with enthusiasm. Up to this time, they had not known that the cash was listed. There was a scramble for Tharbel's telephone by rival news-hawks, who wanted to call their papers. Tharbel clamped his hand on the instrument.

"You'll find pay telephones over at the hotel," he told them, "and don't use slugs when you make your calls, the way you fellows generally do. I've got a deputy watching, to make sure you don't. It's my job to enforce the law hereabouts."

RANN'S heavy lips were wearing a smile when the last of the reporters hurried from the office. Apparently, Tharbel was willing to shoulder all the blame because crooks had escaped the night before; otherwise, the detective would have proceeded to make an issue of the matter.

There was another reason for Rann's smile; one that he expressed, hoping to nettle Tharbel.

"By publishing the numbers of the bills," remarked Rann, caustically, "you will warn the criminals not to spend the cash. So what have you accomplished, Tharbel?"

"Unless the numbers are made public," rejoined Tharbel, "No one will be able to identify the bills if any are spent. My plan is therefore preferable. In addition, it may keep much of Breeland's cash intact until the criminals are apprehended."

Tharbel's retort left Rann considerably nonplused. He reverted to his former claim that Tharbel was "passing the buck" to others; but it did not hold.

"The criminals are beyond my jurisdiction," declared Tharbel. "Having captured a considerable portion of the band, I feel that I should not be censured because the ringleaders managed to flee the county with the loot."

Tactfully, Tharbel had squared himself with the State police, by indirectly shouldering whatever criticism there might be. Watching the troopers shake hands with Tharbel, Rann decided that they were no longer his allies. Stormily, the financier left the office alone. The State policemen followed shortly.

Promptly, Tharbel became confidential.

"I want your co-operation," Tharbel said to Breeland, "in a matter which

still happens to be local. My deputies are watching Layton, at his home. I want to make sure that he does not contact Rann."

"How can I help?" inquired Breeland.

"By calling on Rann this evening," replied Tharbel. "Talk about anything. Try to borrow money, for instance, to make up your missing pay-roll. This may prove important to you, Breeland."

Breeland appeared quite puzzled, but finally nodded his agreement to Tharbel's plan.

When Breeland left, Tharbel dug in the desk drawer and fished out some shotgun shells. Turning to Hosth, he suggested that they start on their hunting trip.

Outside the office, Tharbel posted a notice on the door. Downstairs, he and his friend were greeted by Mox, who was waiting in Tharbel's coupé. They drove away in the car.

Returning reporters read the notice that Tharbel had posted. It stood as a final statement, a terse note that read:

The case is closed. I am going hunting.
J.T.

One news man smiled as he walked away. The man was Clyde Burke. He knew the ways of Junius Tharbel better than did the others. Sometimes hunting trips took an unusual turn, when Tharbel was concerned. It was interesting, also, that Tharbel should have taken a companion with him.

Knowing the methods of The Shadow and his ability at disguise, Clyde Burke recalled having met Wade Hosth once before, and could understand why he had again appeared in Darport.

Clever crooks would find it difficult to outwit a team so competent as Junius Tharbel and The Shadow.

CHAPTER X. CRIME'S STRONGHOLD.

THE isolated farmhouse stood near a fringe of woods, from which it could be easily reached. Close to the house was an old barn which, like the main building, was in rather dilapidated condition. To outward appearances, the farmhouse was unoccupied.

Eyes were watching, however, when a shifty man came sneaking from the trees. A side door opened to admit the arrival. He joined a group in the kitchen, where one man snatched a newspaper that the newcomer had brought and carried it to a window, to read it by the fading sunlight.

Those rays of late afternoon showed the long, sallow face of Matt Felson, as the fellow's shifty eyes darted from line to line. Finished with his reading, Matt snarled a pleased laugh. Approaching the man who had brought the newspaper, he clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good work, Bogo" said Matt. "It looks like we're set to lam out of here tonight."

Voices buzzed around the table. Eying five men, Matt picked out two whose tones showed too much eagerness.

"It suits you, does it, Prexy?" sneered Matt. "I thought it would. You don't belong in this league, anyway. But you do, Touch"--Matt reached out to collar the frail safetapper--"and I'm asking you, why all the squawks?"

Touch voiced a chattering reply.

"I got the jitters, Matt," he pleaded. "I don't like it, hiding so close to Darport where that guy Tharbel is head man."

"You hid out here with Speed for a couple of weeks," reminded Matt. "Why should you mind sticking with me for a few days?"

"That was before we pulled the job," argued Touch. "It was safer, then--"

"But you beefed just the same," growled Bogo, shoving himself into the conversation. "Listen, Matt; it ain't good judgment to trust this guy Touch. Speed had to put the heat on him to make him tickle the tumblers on the bank vault."

Matt gave Touch a hard shove that landed him in a chair.

"We foxed Tharbel," he said, "just like we figured we would. Nobody can rig a better game than Speed and me. Most guys would have tried a quick getaway, with a cover-up, but that wasn't good enough for us."

"They didn't know where Speed started from, and they don't know where I wound up. Why? Because I headed for the place that Speed came from, this hide-away. Tharbel was so busy chasing Speed that, when he started to look for me, he thought I'd gotten clear of his territory, too."

"No wonder! I had time, didn't I? That's why it was smart to stay right close to Darport, the one place where nobody will look for us. Take a look at this sheet"--Matt tapped the newspaper--"and you'll see that old Tharbel says the case is closed."

It was Prexy who ventured to dull Matt's optimism.

"Don't forget that they know our car," reminded Prexy. "It might be recognized along the road."

"We aren't using the limousine," returned Matt. "We'll pile into that old sedan that Speed left in the barn. It looks like some junker that a farmer would be driving."

Stepping across the kitchen, Matt unlocked a padlocked door and brought out a square, compact bundle.

"Thirty G's," he announced. "A nice chunk of dough for us to split, after we clear."

"It's hot paper," said Prexy, with a headshake. "I saw the list of serial numbers in the newspaper yesterday."

"Not this stuff," chuckled Matt. "Speed must have kept the red-hot. I checked these numbers last night and they don't fit. But that was Speed's lookout. He'll find a way to get rid of the pay-roll dough. Leave it to Speed."

The listeners were more than willing to leave it to Speed. When Matt promised to start, soon after dark, all were in agreement. Even Prexy lost his qualms; as for Touch, he seemed anxious to be anywhere except the present spot.

Having won full confidence, Matt showed a trend toward caution. He inquired what Bogo had seen during his recent foray from the farmhouse. Bogo gave a shrug as his preliminary reply.

"I didn't see nothing," he said, "except some of those boxes like where I swiped the newspaper, the way you told me. I heard some shooting, though. The hunters, that was all."

"Tharbel has gone hunting too," snorted Matt. "Say, that makes it all the easier for us. Nobody's going to bother a bunch of guys in an old car around this time. That's our story, so don't forget it. We've been hunting."

"We're friends of Mr. Tharbel," added Prexy, warming to the proposition. "City chaps, that he invited out here. I'll do the talking, if we meet anyone."

"Good enough," agreed Matt, "only don't call me Matthew. I won't be wearing that monkey suit I had on the other night."

WHILE the conference was continuing in the old farmhouse, two men were approaching a better-looking farm on the far slope of a neighboring hill.

Junius Tharbel and his friend Wade Hosth were carrying their shotguns under their arms, while they approached. Tharbel pointed to the name A. M. Tyson on a rural free-delivery box.

"I know Tyson," Tharbel said to his companion. "Let's drop in and have a chat."

They found a warm reception at Tyson's. The farmer was a big, friendly man. By way of renewing his acquaintance with Tharbel, he produced a jug of

mellowed cider. Over the glasses, Tyson queried:

"How's the hunting, Junius? That dog of yours looks purty frisky after chasing around through the woods."

"We haven't been beating the woods," explained Tharbel. "We prefer to stay along the roads."

About to fill Tharbel's glass, Tyson paused. He fancied that the cider was too well aged for the detective. The idea of hunters staying to the roads puzzled Tyson. Nevertheless, he was always ready to learn from anyone like Tharbel, provided the latter knew what he was talking about.

"Staying along the roads, eh?" queried Tyson. "Tell me, Junius, what kind of game have you been hunting?"

"Snipe," returned Tharbel. "The roads are the place to track them. They leave marks that show up just as plain as tire tracks."

"I didn't know there were any snipe around here."

"Odd snipe, these. Do you know what they feed on, Tyson? Newspapers, out of R.F.D. boxes!"

Gradually, understanding dawned on Tyson's face. The big man suddenly thwacked his thigh.

"So that's why my paper didn't come this afternoon!" he exclaimed. "Say--there was one gone yesterday, over at Humber's place. He dropped in here to borrow mine."

Tharbel was drawing a rough map on a sheet of paper. He marked in dirt roads that Tyson recognized. He added a square block for Tyson's farmhouse, another that represented Humber's.

"We found tire tracks," confided Tharbel. "Big ones, that matched those of the limousine we've been hunting. We figure the car is in this neighborhood. That means Matt Felson and his bunch are around."

Tyson nodded. He had gained the real slant on Tharbel's hunting excursion.

"Someone must have sneaked out to get newspapers," continued Tharbel. "and picked the first R.F.D. boxes he came across. Here's your farm; there's Humber's. There's only one other place that's anywhere in between."

"The old Apersham farm."

"Correct." Tharbel inserted another block. "You know my policy, Tyson. Whenever I find trouble, I always call in the fellows who live nearest and give them the first whack."

The farmer looked pleased. Evidently Tharbel's system suited the natives. Other eyes showed keen interest; those of Wade Hosth. The Shadow had been getting new side lights on Tharbel all during their expedition. This one showed why the aged detective was popular throughout the county.

"I'll get Humber," declared Tyson, rising. "That makes two of us. How many more do you want?"

"About a dozen," Tharbel decided.

"Give me an hour," said Tyson, looking through the window at the setting sun, "and I'll have them at the old mill below the Apersham place. Humber and I won't play favorites. We'll get the nearest neighbors, and if any aren't at home, they'll just be unlucky, that's all."

THE next hour brought dusk, which suited the coming plans. When Tharbel's car pulled up at the abandoned mill, it rolled in among some ancient vehicles already quartered there.

Tharbel alighted, to find Tyson, Humber, and a dozen farmers whom they had brought. All were armed to the whiskers, with a variety of shooting irons.

Briefly, Tharbel informed them that they constituted a posse, and swore them in as agents of the law. They knew the terrain perfectly, and listened carefully when Tharbel told them how he wanted them to deploy and what signals they were to exchange. Men were moving away when Tyson plucked Tharbel's arm.

"What about your friend?" queried the farmer, nudging toward Tharbel's car. "Ain't he going to have his share of the fun?"

"He'd like to," replied Tharbel, ruefully, "but I can't let him. Wade

doesn't know the ground, and beside, we ought to leave someone here at our base, to give any alarm we need."

While Tharbel talked, a blackened form was emerging from the far door of his coupé. Silently, the cloaked figure glided toward the concealing darkness of the abandoned mill and disappeared. Shortly, that same shape emerged again, but kept to the background of a wooded clump along the hillside.

In Tharbel's car lay an open satchel half-filled with hunting clothes, the property of Wade Hosth. The remaining space accounted for black garments, that had been removed along with a brace of automatics. Hosth's shotgun remained in the car with the luggage.

Though Tharbel's friend was gone, the base was not unguarded. In the detective's car, Mox was keeping watch. Its nose against the window, the patient Dalmatian was ready as ever to scent prowlers and issue a deep-throated warning.

With such a guardian available, The Shadow had taken his own path in the night, along ground that he could travel as well as any man who knew it.

Like Junius Tharbel, The Shadow had his own ways of dealing with men of crime!

CHAPTER XI.

STROKES IN THE DARK.

THE glow of a kerosene lantern made a feeble circle on the floor of the old kitchen. The light was safe enough, for Matt and his five pals had blanketed the windows with newspapers. As a means of illumination, however, the lantern was not very effective.

Flat on the floor, Matt was studying a road map, pointing out the route that he intended to take. His audience consisted only of Prexy and Touch. Bogo and the other two had gone outdoors to reconnoiter.

Touch made a sudden shift, away from the range of light. Matt hauled him back with a snarl.

"Jitters again, huh?"

"It's somebody at the door," protested Touch. "I heard it creak--"

"Like you said five minutes ago," sneered Matt, "when nobody was there. Lay off the chump act, Touch!"

Blackness was fringing the edges of the road map. Matt began to tinker with the kerosene lantern, but could find nothing wrong with it. He turned the wick higher; by then, the darkness had receded. Matt supposed that his own action had improved the light.

"Let's get ready." Rising, Matt picked up the lantern with one hand, the bundle of cash with the other. "I'll let Bogo do the driving, and I'll stick in back with you two. These thirty G's aren't going to slip out of my mitts."

Touch had turned away. His nervous ears seemed to catch a whispery tone from a corner of the room. The sound was ghostly; Touch fancied that it was calling him by name. Remembering a thing from the newspapers--how dying crooks had branded him as yellow--Touch gave a shudder. Maybe it was a ghost that gave the whisper!

Another corner issued the same sibilance, giving Touch a second scare. Two ghosts? They were as plausible as one, considering that several of Speed's gunners had died in the Darport fray. But Touch wasn't afraid of ghosts. Why should he be?

He'd gone with the mob and shifted to Matt's car, as ordered. His name, Touch Quidden, was echoing in his own brain; not from the invisible lips of spooks that could not exist.

There was a way to prove it; one that would convince Touch that he still had nerve. It was common sense, Touch argued, not fear, that had made him dislike the vicinity of Darport.

By way of proof, Touch groped to the darkened corner where he had last heard the whisper. He found the blackness solid near a doorway leading into a

front room. He pushed his hands ahead to contact the wall. His sensitive fingers failed to find the mark.

Instead, other fingers took control. As deft as Touch's, but swifter, stronger, they found the crook's throat. Invisible things that emerged from nowhere, they had Touch in such a strangle that his throat could not gargle a sound. Thumbs pressed deep into the captive's scrawny neck and gave a paralyzing jolt to nerves and muscles.

Touch collapsed, but never reached the floor. The strong arms of The Shadow swept him through the doorway and deposited their stiffened burden in the next room.

Matt was swinging the lantern, looking about for Touch. He wondered at the fellow's sudden disappearance, and told Prexy to help look for him.

While Matt was glaring suspiciously at the door that led outside, Prexy lighted a match and cupped it in his hands. Thus equipped, Prexy decided to look into the front room.

The match went out near the connecting door. Prexy lighted another; it was immediately extinguished. He couldn't understand where the draft came from. He decided he might have better luck when he had gone through the doorway. Stepping forward, Prexy fancied that he could feel the blackness ahead of him.

He did feel it, a few seconds later, just as Touch had. As Prexy stooped above another lighted match, his neck became a perfect target for The Shadow. The sweep of swishing hands put out the flame; the same black fists throttled Prexy and added the paralyzing jerk that sank him without a cry.

STEPPING over the two prone figures, The Shadow entered the kitchen. He was beginning a more formidable task; that of stalking Matt Felson. Here, new skill was required; quick changes of position that would escape Matt's ever-shifting eyes.

Equipped with the lantern, Matt could sight objects at close range. What The Shadow awaited was the right moment for a long, sudden lunge.

Once the chance came, the rest would be easy. For the lantern burdened Matt's right hand, and the bundle of stolen bank money required his left, which was clamping it beneath his arm.

A strange duel was in the making: one that Matt did not suspect, though passing seconds would soon acquaint him with the fact that something was amiss.

"Hey, Prexy!"

The low, raspy call should have been Matt's last, for he was moving straight toward the spot where The Shadow lurked and Matt was wide open for a sudden lunge. The thing that saved Matt was the sudden clatter of the outside door, followed by a hasty "Psst!" from Bogo.

Matt wheeled about, spoiling The Shadow's lunge. More than that, the wide sweep of the lantern forced The Shadow into a rapid reverse spin, off toward the room where Touch and Prexy lay. Having accomplished so much by stealth, The Shadow planned to continue the system. But circumstance had brought an end to the ghostly game.

As Matt reached the door, Bogo hurried him out. Following to the doorway, The Shadow saw the lantern bobbing into the barn; caught a glimpse of two other figures. All four were gone before The Shadow could take aim. The Shadow knew that the lookouts must have spotted members of the approaching posse.

The crooks had entered the barn through a small door. By the time The Shadow reached it, he heard a roar, as a car went rattling out through the main door on the other side.

Too late to catch a ride on the back of the vanishing sedan, The Shadow blinked a flashlight with one hand, raised a gun with the other, prepared to give a double signal that would bring in the fighting farmers.

His finger halted on its trigger, as the glint of the flashlight was reflected by the shiny sides of a large limousine. Springing to the car, The

Shadow found what he expected. The ignition keys were in the lock, where they would naturally be kept by men constantly considering the necessity of an emergency flight.

The mobster-manned sedan had gained an ample start. The grass-covered driveway from the old barn led to a road through the woods. Headlights glaring, Bogo was slashing the car along the pair of ruts, and the curving course, sheltered by trees, kept the crooks beyond The Shadow's immediate reach.

By the time the car was speeding down the hillside, opposition was in sight. In deploying his men, Tharbel had used the road as the main stem from which they branched.

The roar of the fugitive car, the glitter of its lights, told farmers that a flight had begun; and they rallied to halt it.

Somewhere in the darkness, Tharbel was shouting for men to get back to their own cars, and a few of them heard the command. It was another instance of Tharbel's foresight, considering what happened next.

Rounding a bend, the sedan loomed down upon half a dozen farmers who were scrambling into the road. Aiming shotguns and rifles, the farmers thought the threat would halt the speeding car. They were wrong. At a rasped order from Matt, Bogo forgot the brake pedal and jammed the accelerator to the floor.

The sedan seemed to gather itself, as it took off in a gigantic lurch from the middle of the bumpy road. With the metal menace catapulting at them, farmers took for the ditches beside the road. They discharged their guns as they dived, but the muzzles spouted upward as harmlessly as fireworks.

Revolvers barked as the sedan rocketed past, but the fusillade was futile. The car's speed, plus the jounces that Bogo could scarcely control, prevented Matt and the others from picking human targets as they passed them. Nonetheless, the crooks had scored. Their car had roared right through the cordon.

OTHER opposition was due. The sedan was under full control when it reached the road that skirted the bottom of the hill. But the roundabout course led past the abandoned mill, and Tharbel's reserves had reached their base by a short cut down the stream.

As the sedan blazed into sight, two rattletrap cars jerked out from beside the mill, to block off the fugitives.

Tharbel had reached his coupé. From the darkness, he yelled a warning too late. Tharbel knew what the zooming sedan would do when it reached the rattletraps. With its greater speed and weight, it would simply fling the lighter vehicles from the road, crippling, perhaps killing, the occupants.

To a degree, the sedan slackened; but that merely increased the menace. Tharbel knew quite well that the driver of the murder car was applying the brakes merely to get the proper control for a new lunge. By hitting his stride on the pickup, he would wreck the farm jalopies without damage to his own machine.

The farmers didn't hear Tharbel's shout, but they recognized the menace and tried to shove their cars to the far side of the road. They had tackled a flying Juggernaut without realizing it, and suddenly understood what the cost would be.

Matt saw their effort to get clear and nudged Bogo growling:

"Ruin them!"

The sedan veered, its brakes taking hold. Tharbel gazed hopelessly, expecting to see two helpless cars receive a sideswipe that would wreck them. The roar of the sedan's motor drowned other sounds, and Tharbel couldn't hear the smooth purr that was overtaking it.

Like a thing created by Tharbel's frantic hope, a glossy streak of metal whipped up beside the lunging sedan and flung its longer, heavier body between the murder car and the half-ditched vehicle that held the hapless farmers.

Instantly, Tharbel recognized the mystery limousine of the Darport road!

The power of that overtaking car reversed the situation. At the wheel was The Shadow, a more daring driver than Bogo, and one who held the edge. His speed, his angle of approach, the bulk of the heavy sedan, were all in the Shadow's favor. Rather than be swept from the road, Bogo yanked the sedan to the right, away from the threatened farmers.

It was Matt who saw the space to the right, and shouted. Bogo took the grass-covered stretch beside the mill creek. He spied Tharbel's car, and others, standing dark; the crumbling wall of the old mill beyond. Bogo was jamming the brakes when Matt yelled:

"Swing left!"

Matt mistook the old mill dam for a road across the creek, and Bogo accepted the error. The sedan took a hard swerve, while Matt and two gunmen were blazing wild shots from the windows, which The Shadow answered from his halted limousine. The fray ended with that preliminary volley.

Skidding on the slime that topped the mill dam, the sedan skewed over the edge. Clipped by one of The Shadow's bullets, Bogo couldn't hold the wheel; but it mattered little. He had lost control by that time. The sedan wavered as its rear wheel caught the wooden center of the dam; then the framework gave.

Traveling at nearly forty miles an hour, the sedan took a fifteen-foot nose dive to a mass of rocks, carrying the ancient flood gate with it. The sound of a terrific impact was suddenly muffled by the surging roar of the unleashed creek.

WHEN Tharbel and some farmers, coming from the other side of the maddened creek, reached the sedan, they found the wrecked car high upon the rocks. The hood had been driven back into the driver's seat, the rear shoved up against the turret top.

All four occupants were dead and mangled, their guns scattered about them. Amid the gore, Tharbel found the package which Matt had clutched all through the ride. He opened it, and therewith uncovered the thirty thousand dollars that Matt Felson had intended to share with the crooks under his command.

Other farmers had reached the limousine, to discover that it had no driver. Such a mystery became minor, however, when a car arrived from the direction of the Apersham farm.

The car was one of the farm relics that had gone to look for posse members. It brought back two prisoners, who had been found in the farmhouse.

The men looked paralyzed. They moved stiffly when jogged. Tharbel identified one as Prexy Elthorn, and shook the fellow from his daze. Questioned whether his companion happened to be Touch Quidden, Prexy finally gave a stupefied nod.

There was a sequel to the wipeout of Matt Felson and his murder crew. A man came stumbling from the path beside the mill, to blink in baffled fashion when farmers turned flashlights in his direction. The arrival was Wade Hosth.

He was carrying his shotgun, but hadn't used it. He had heard shooting up by the farm, he said, and had started there. Lost halfway, he had returned, attracted by new gunfire near the mill.

Amused farmers grinned. They didn't care to ridicule Tharbel's friend, because they had made blunders of their own. Still, it was laughable to think that Hosth had missed out on all the excitement.

The same fact brought a smile from Tharbel, but for a different reason. Tharbel knew quite well why his friend had temporarily disappeared.

Today, The Shadow had admired Tharbel's methods in hunting men of crime. In his turn, Junius Tharbel fully appreciated The Shadow's ways of handling such criminals after they were found.

JUNIUS THARBEL stood supreme in Darport. For years, he had been king dog throughout the county, but never before had he silenced his critics so thoroughly. In fact, opinion was actually unanimous--though in a few cases, begrudging--that Tharbel was the master crime-tracker of all time.

The thirty thousand dollars recovered from Matt's car accounted for the funds that the Darport Trust Co. had lost. The question of Breeland's fifty thousand dollars was another matter.

He had simply stored the payroll in the bank for safekeeping; the lost funds were his own. Tharbel, at least, could name the man who still held that portion of the swag. He did so in the presence of reporters.

Tharbel named Speed Kroner.

It was odd, how gullibly the reporters took that statement. Odd, at least, to Tharbel's friend Wade Hosth, who was lounging in a corner of the office. Odd, too, to Clyde Burke, the one reporter who could have put some pointed questions, had he chosen.

The proposition happened to be a paradox.

Only a few days ago, Junius Tharbel had emphatically declared that Matt Felson must have cleared the county, just as Speed Kroner had. Tharbel had said that the case was beyond his jurisdiction. Classing it as closed, he had gone hunting.

Tharbel had brought back Matt Felson, dead, and other crooks, alive. He had actually belied his own statement. He acted as though his search for Matt had been an afterthought; but that was just part of his pose.

All along, Tharbel had recognized that Matt could not have left the county on the night of the bank robbery. His whole talk of giving up the case had been a bluff that would lull Matt when the crook heard of it.

Last night, Tharbel had made his bluff good. Here he was, pacing by his window in the late afternoon, solemnly stating that the case was this time closed for keeps. Speed Kroner had taken Breeland's fifty thousand, because none of Matt's bills had tallied with the lists. Since Speed was unquestionably gone from the county, Tharbel was powerless to recover the payroll.

But did Tharbel really mean it?

Clyde Burke wondered. The amazing thing about Tharbel's bluffs was his ability to repeat them. Checking back on the detective's picturesque past, Clyde could recall that Tharbel had worked the same game over and over; so often, that everyone either forgot it, or supposed that Tharbel would not have the gall to stage the same stunt again.

Tharbel was a master of primitive psychology. He dealt in terms of A, B, C, and stayed there, letting others go on to X, Y, Z. Right now, Tharbel was stating facts that listeners took because they were simple; a term which applied to the listeners as well as to the facts.

Speed Kroner had taken Breeland's fifty thousand dollars. Since Matt Felson didn't have the payroll, it must still be with Speed. Inasmuch as Speed was known to have fled the county, Tharbel was powerless to recover the missing cash.

To Clyde, those facts might add up to anything. It might be that, if Speed did have Breeland's money, Tharbel actually knew where to find Speed. Or it could mean that Speed did not have the money at all, and that Tharbel intended to look elsewhere for it.

Glancing across the office, Clyde met the gaze of Wade Hosth. Steady eyes told him nothing, except to indicate silence. When the other reporters filed from the office, Clyde went along with them.

On the way out, they met Titus Rann coming in. Clyde paused long enough to hear Rann congratulate Tharbel, which seemed to please Breeland, who was present.

Clyde hazarded the guess that if Tharbel happened to be running for new office in Darport, he could win without a single dissenting vote. If Rann could approve Tharbel, everyone else would do the same.

RANN chatted for about ten minutes, then made his departure. Breeland was about to follow, when Tharbel called him back. With only The Shadow as a witness, Tharbel queried:

"Tell me, Breeland, did Rann hear from Layton while I was on my hunting trip?"

"I think so," returned Breeland, with a nod. "Rann answered a call that came to his house, and talked in a rather guarded fashion."

Pondering, Tharbel stroked his chin.

"I stopped in to see Layton, later," continued Breeland. "He seemed very nervous."

Tharbel showed a frown.

"Was he suspicious because you called, Breeland?"

"Not at all," assured Breeland. "I saw the president of the Darport Trust, first. He wanted me to give Layton a copy of my listed bills."

Tharbel's expression became a smile. Seating himself at the desk, he pondered: then spoke slowly.

"Layton took something important with him from the bank," declared Tharbel, "on the afternoon before the robbery. I thought then, and still think, that his bag contained cash. The question, Breeland, was this: did Layton carry bank funds, or yours?"

Breeland started to say something. Tharbel halted him.

"We have recovered the bank's money." Tharbel bit off the words. "Yours is still missing. Layton wants to get his cash to Rann. Your cash, Breeland."

"But it isn't possible!" exclaimed Breeland. "Surely, you can't suspect Rann of being party to a crime that--"

"Rann could be party to anything," interrupted Tharbel. "I mistrust anyone who opposes my work as county detective. Not because of pride, but because of logic. I have kept crime from Darport. Crooks do not like it."

"Then you consider Rann a crook?"

"Not necessarily. All mules are stubborn animals, but all stubborn animals are not necessarily mules. However, when I hear of a stubborn animal, I naturally think in terms of a mule."

Relaxing, Breeland smiled at Tharbel's words.

"Rann is certainly stubborn," said Breeland. "Until today, he would have done anything to injure your reputation, Tharbel. Perhaps that is why Layton thought he could depend on him."

Tharbel's slow nod showed that he saw merit in Breeland's theory.

"Layton is deep in some dirty game." Tharbel decided. "He is also weak, and I have worried him, badly. If Layton is trapped with your money in his possession, he will talk. It would be better to catch him alone, than with Rann, who may"--to stress the word, Tharbel repeated it--"who may be the man behind the game in question."

"To settle the problem of Layton"--Tharbel reached to the desk and brought out an official-looking paper--"I have obtained this search warrant. It enables me to search Layton's house, which I intend to do soon after dark."

Breeland glanced from the window and saw that the sun was setting. He gave an approving smile, which Tharbel translated in terms of the missing fifty thousand dollars. There was something else, however that Breeland had remembered.

"Rann spoke of going to New York this evening," said Breeland. "He hopes to meet the men from Chicago who did not arrive the other night. He may have gone in for dinner."

"Find out," suggested Tharbel, indicating the telephone. "Hosth and I are going down to the jail room to talk to the prisoners. You will find us there, Breeland."

POCKETING the search warrant, Tharbel left the office, accompanied by The Shadow. In the basement, they stopped at a cell, where Tharbel spoke to Prexy, who gave no answer.

Continuing, they reached another cell around the corner, where Touch was confined. Tharbel had purposely placed the two prisoners so far apart that they could not communicate.

"There's a question I want to ask you, Quidden," announced Tharbel, bluntly. "It will go easier with you, if you answer. You were hiding out with Speed before the bank robbery. Who gave him the idea to go after the pay roll?"

Touch responded with a blink.

"It was Speed's own idea, I guess," he said. "But I didn't like it." Nervously, Touch gripped the cell bars. "Honest, Mr. Tharbel, Speed made me open that vault. He'd have given me the blast if I hadn't played ball."

Tharbel ignored the plea. He was starting a fresh stick of chewing gum. When he had it comfortably settled, he queried:

"Ever hear of a man named Wallace Layton?"

Blinking again, Touch shook his head. There were footsteps from the corridor. Tharbel turned to meet Breeland, who was coming past the corner. Touch began to whine.

"Tell me who Layton is," he pleaded. "Maybe I'll remember something. But I'm telling you straight, Mr. Tharbel, I didn't want to handle that vault. I wasn't yellow, like the other guys said. I didn't want to do the job--"

The crook's plea became incoherent, as Tharbel stepped around the corner with Breeland.

"I talked to Rann," undertoned Breeland. "He was just leaving for New York City. He wanted me to meet him for dinner at his club."

"A good idea," nodded Tharbel. "Why don't you go?"

"I said I might." Breeland glanced at his watch. "I've plenty of time to make the next train."

"The one that Hosth is taking," said Tharbel. "Which reminds me"--he turned to The Shadow--"you'd better get over to the hotel and pack up."

Touch Quidden was shrieking from his cell, begging Tharbel to return. Breeland gave a nudge past the corner.

"Why don't you talk to him, Tharbel?"

"It's no use," returned Tharbel. "He doesn't know anything about Layton. I asked him."

"But he'll go mad if someone doesn't humor him. You can't let him go on shrieking--"

"You humor him, Breeland," interposed Tharbel. "You can act as though you believe his story, whereas I can't. Come upstairs later, and I'll drive you to the station."

Accompanied by Hosth, Tharbel went outdoors. He shook hands with his friend, but his only comment was a smile. Tharbel didn't offer Hosth a ride to the station, for a very good reason. He suspected that The Shadow might have plans of his own.

After watching The Shadow stroll in the direction of the hotel, Tharbel went up to his office. He had been there about five minutes, when Breeland arrived. The strong-faced man shook his head; evidently his chat with Touch had impressed Breeland.

"Quidden swears he's innocent," declared Breeland. "He wants to talk with you, Tharbel. He says he will tell all he knows, and do anything you want."

"What could I want with Quidden?" demanded Tharbel. "Layton is the man I'm after. I'm going to use this warrant"--he pulled the document from his pocket--"as soon as I drop you at the station."

As he spoke, Tharbel looked from the window, pleased by the fact that dusk had settled.

"Quidden insists that he knows something," continued Breeland. "He mentioned Layton's name."

"Because he heard it from me," chuckled Tharbel. "I know the ways of these crooks, Breeland. Anyway, I'm glad you humored him."

"It wasn't difficult. Quidden only wanted a listener. Still, I feel that

he may know something. He mentioned that Speed Kroner made some trips into Darport prior to the robbery."

Tharbel showed immediate interest. The news promised a link between Speed and Layton. The detective saw how the point could be turned to value.

"I'll talk to Quidden," he decided. "If he remembers the nights and the exact time of Speed's trips, I may have a surprise for Layton when I call on him. If--"

THE jangle of the telephone bell interrupted. Tharbel picked up the receiver. Breeland could hear an excited voice across the wire, but Tharbel did not appear to be disturbed. Very calmly, the detective finished his conversation and hung up the receiver. He stood in a reflective attitude.

"It was Griffith." Tharbel finally announced. "He says that Layton suddenly left the house, bag and all. He's gone in his car, and Wilbur is chasing him."

"Why don't you call the State police?" demanded Breeland. "They may be able to head him off before he gets out of town."

Tharbel's smile was cryptic. So was his reply.

"Layton won't be leaving town," declared Tharbel. "He is going to Rann's."

"But Rann has left--"

"Perhaps. In a way, it doesn't matter. The main thing is that Rann must have called Layton and warned him about the search warrant. I shouldn't have had you call Rann, Breeland."

"But I didn't mention the warrant--"

"I know you didn't," interposed Tharbel. "But Rann has eyes as well as ears. He must have seen the warrant when he was here. It was folded on my desk, but he could have recognized what it was."

Breeland gaped in stupefied fashion. Tharbel gripped his arm and dragged him toward the door, telling him there was no time to lose. When Breeland gulped that there was plenty of time to catch the train, Tharbel responded with an indulgent laugh.

"We aren't going to the station," said Tharbel, as they hurried down the stairs. "We're going to Rann's. When big men turn crooked, you can expect big things from them"

"Rann's cleverness may surprise you, Breeland, but I expected him to show his hand in such a way as this. He has played his ace, and I intend to trump it."

Blair Breeland needed no further urging to hurry with Junius Tharbel. From the detective's assured chuckle, Breeland could understand that Tharbel considered the missing pay roll to be as safe as if the law already held it.

CHAPTER XIII. HIDDEN MOVES.

WHILE Tharbel was straining his old coupé in the race to reach Rann's mansion first, a shadowy figure was approaching the Darport residence that Wallace Layton had so recently left. Again, The Shadow was on the move, cloaked in the guise that darkness favored.

Like Tharbel, The Shadow had awaited the capture of Matt Felson before considering Wallace Layton as an actual factor. The policy had been a safe one, for Layton himself had logically been awaiting the same outcome.

With Tharbel's deputies on watch, Layton would have been a fool to risk a false move, no matter how great his qualms.

All that had changed. Today Layton, like the rest of the world, had heard the news of Matt's death and the recovery of the bank funds, with the pay-roll money lacking. Layton would know that Tharbel's talk about Speed Kroner was largely bluff.

Haste, rather than delay, was the present policy for Wallace Layton.

Junius Tharbel recognized it; hence the search warrant. So did The Shadow; as a result, he was taking the opportunity of early darkness to visit Layton's home.

There was a chance that Layton might bury the money somewhere, rather than place it with Titus Rann; particularly because Rann, whatever his secret game, might prefer not to accept it under present circumstances. Knowing that the time element was important, The Shadow was moving in ahead of Tharbel, to make an immediate search.

A few lights shone from Layton's windows. Avoiding the glow, The Shadow tried windows on the ground floor, found them locked. Scaling to the second floor, he picked an unlocked window and entered. Silence soon told him that the house was deserted. Layton's family was out; so was the man himself.

From a darkened front window, The Shadow observed that no car was parked opposite the house. Evidently Layton had left shortly before The Shadow's arrival, and had been trailed by one of the deputies. The Shadow corroborated the fact by looking from a rear window, to note that Layton's garage was empty.

At least, the situation gave The Shadow an opportunity to search the house, which was a small one and could be thoroughly scoured in rapid order by a competent investigator. It could be that Layton's purpose was to decoy the law away, giving someone else an opportunity to come and pick up the cash. On that chance, The Shadow began his search.

Meanwhile, Tharbel was reaching his own destination too late. As he pulled up in front of Rann's large mansion, which stood in the far outskirts of Darport, he saw Layton's car parked in front of the house.

There were lights in Rann's big living room, which occupied one whole side of the house. Telling Breeland to come with him, Tharbel sprang from the car and hurried up to Rann's porch.

Looking through a window, they saw Layton standing in an alcove at the rear of the living room. With him was Jorgan, Rann's dapper secretary.

There was a large safe filling the corner of the alcove, a strong box of the most modern type. Its door was wide open; evidently Rann had left it that way, so that Jorgan could put away important papers.

Layton was shoving a suitcase into the safe; the very bag that Tharbel had seen the cashier take from the bank. At the same time, Layton was insisting that Jorgan close the door of the safe.

When the secretary hesitated, Layton brushed him aside and swung the big door shut. His nervous hand twisted the dial at the moment when Tharbel was drawing a revolver, outside the window.

Jorgan sputtered a protest.

"Mr. Rann won't like this!" he expressed to Layton. "I've been going over his insurance papers, and I was supposed to put them in the safe. You've made it impossible, Layton, because I can't open the safe again. I don't know that combination."

"So much the better," snapped Layton. "The suitcase was more important. Mr. Rann wants what's in it. Can't you understand?"

"But he told me nothing--"

"Because the matter is a confidential one between Mr. Rann and myself. Be sure and tell Mr. Rann that the suitcase is in there, before he opens the safe himself."

Jorgan muttered that he would. Glancing at his watch, he began to gather up the papers that he had mentioned. Outside the window, Breeland turned glumly to Tharbel and queried:

"What next?"

Tharbel motioned toward Layton's car. As they walked in that direction, Breeland began another observation.

"If Jorgan only knew the combination!"

"It wouldn't help," said Tharbel. "I don't have a search warrant for this house. I only obtained one for Layton's. Getting one for Rann's house would be bad policy. However, I can handle matters. Here is where I begin."

THARBEL made his final statement as Layton stepped from Rann's front door. As the squeamish assistant cashier approached, Tharbel accosted him:

"You're under arrest, Layton."

"On what charge?" demanded Layton. "You can't do this, Tharbel. You've no proof--"

"Proof of what?" queried Tharbel, coolly, as Layton cut himself short. "Go right ahead, Layton. Accuse yourself, and save me the trouble."

"You can't hold me--"

"I can, for questioning. I regard you as a material witness in certain matters. Besides"--Tharbel smiled crisply, as a car rolled up with Wilbur at the wheel--"here is an officer who has charges against you for exceeding the speed limit within the town limits."

Tharbel's statement was safe enough. He knew that Layton must have done some speedy driving to shake Wilbur and reach Rann's so soon. To complete Layton's dilemma, Tharbel showed him the search warrant, and suggested that they go to the man's house first. His arguments fading, Layton subsided.

Mox growled the moment that Layton neared Tharbel's car, and the cashier shied nervously. The fact increased Tharbel's satisfaction, for he regarded the dog as an excellent judge of human character, though Mox, like humans, sometimes made mistakes.

Putting Layton in Wilbur's car, Tharbel told the deputy to take him home and hold him outside the house.

There was still ample time to catch Breeland's train, for the local line ran on an hourly schedule. Stopping at the station, Tharbel shook hands with Breeland, and confided:

"I'm glad you're going to see Rann. You can soft-pedal the facts of Layton's arrest. Keep him lulled, by all means. Call me, as soon as you have talked to him."

"What if Jorgan calls him?"

"Jorgan will do more than that. See that cab?" Tharbel pointed to the station, where a local cab was pulling away. "It's going over to Rann's house, to bring Jorgan here. He will be on the same train with you, Breeland. But Jorgan isn't sure that we arrested Layton. He couldn't see much from the house."

Driving away, Tharbel looked back and chuckled at the amazed look on Breeland's strong-featured face. Ever since this case began, Tharbel had been treating Breeland to a series of surprises.

The Shadow was leaving Layton's when Tharbel arrived there. He paused long enough to overhear brief words between Tharbel and Layton, when the deputies delivered the cashier into the detective's custody. Enough was said for The Shadow to picture what had happened at Rann's.

Cutting off between houses, The Shadow reached the station just as the local train came clanging into sight. Whipping off cloak and hat, he stowed them in an unlocked bag that he had left in the deserted baggage room. With the bag in hand, he boarded the train as Wade Hosth just as it was pulling out.

The Shadow did not look up Breeland during the trip into New York. On the ferry, he strolled between parked trucks in the vehicle passageway and molded his face into Cranston's.

On the Manhattan side, he entered a cab and rode to Rann's club. Getting into the place was no task for Lamont Cranston. He was welcome in every club in New York.

At a table not far from Rann's, The Shadow watched developments. Breeland arrived to join Rann at dinner, and held a brief, but earnest, conversation with him before Jorgan showed up.

The talk became more heated when the secretary entered it, and no one seemed to notice the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston. The Shadow soon learned salient facts that enabled him to piece the rest.

Rann was quite self-possessed. He seemed more annoyed because of Layton's visit than the things that happened afterward, and acted as though the delivery of the suitcase was a great mystery.

In his turn, Breeland avoided all mention of the missing fifty thousand dollars. He talked as though the suitcase had nothing to do with the case.

Soon, Rann dismissed the matter. He began to talk about the men who were coming from Chicago to discuss a postponed business deal. That was Breeland's opportunity to go out and make the phone call that he had promised Tharbel. Rann had opportunity to talk with Jorgan while Breeland was gone, but he took no advantage of it.

Everything was pointing to a complete fade-out, when Breeland returned. As Cranston, The Shadow was finding the situation very dull, when an attendant arrived, stating that Mr. Rann was wanted on the telephone.

After a brief absence, Rann returned, to say that the Chicago men weren't coming, after all. Odd chaps, those Midwesterns. He knew them only by correspondence; twice they had promised to meet him; both times they had failed.

Dinner being over, the only thing was to return to Darport. Rann offered Breeland a ride back in his car. The Shadow wasn't at all surprised when Breeland accepted.

Alone, The Shadow became reflective. He was piecing the factors in the game, with Layton as the pivot. He could see the cashier's connection with the recent bank robbery, as a contact between such crooks as Speed and Matt and a local man of Rann's stature, who might readily be a master plotter.

The Shadow's thoughts turned to Junius Tharbel. Balked in his effort to learn the contents of Layton's suitcase, the detective would have to use real ingenuity when he dealt, later, with Rann. Picturing Tharbel's unique methods The Shadow tried to picture just what the veteran sleuth would do.

It came like a thunderbolt, the answer. A startling thing, that promised terrific consequences; bad, along with good.

For once, the complacent Mr. Cranston lost his calm, by springing up from a dinner table. Reaching a telephone, The Shadow put in a call to Darport, instructing the operator to find Tharbel, wherever he might be.

Minutes of delay weighed heavily. Tharbel was nowhere to be found. The news fitted The Shadow's apprehensions. He saw disaster, unless Tharbel could be reached. There was only one way to accomplish it, since the telephone had failed. The Shadow would have to get to Darport before Rann arrived home.

An ugly vista of evil consequences had opened in The Shadow's mind. The machinations of a master crook loomed with heinous reality. Things were falling into line at a devilish rate that promised dire results. The Shadow could see how a man of crime intended to invoke the law to defeat the law itself!

Given any break at all, The Shadow could defeat the threat that loomed. Valuable minutes had been lost, but they might be regained. Canceling the Darport call, The Shadow dialed his contact man, Burbank, and told him to summon a speedy car to a given place on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River.

Two minutes later, The Shadow was riding at a terrific clip through Manhattan in Moe Shrevnitz's cab, which had been waiting outside of Rann's club. Again, the master of the night was garbing himself in attire of black for the duty that lay ahead.

A trip through the Holland Tunnel: a shift to the high-powered car; a whirlwind drive to Darport--those were the coming stages in The Shadow's effort to snatch Junius Tharbel from a snare which threatened to end the celebrated detective's long and honorable career!

THERE were reasons why Junius Tharbel did not receive The Shadow's call. He was in a place where no one thought to look for him: in the cellar of the old courthouse.

True, the caller, Mr. Cranston, suggested that he might be found there, but the local operator had insisted on trying other places first.

No one knew that Tharbel had placed Layton under arrest. In fact, Tharbel hadn't taken the cashier to jail: he had simply left him at his home, with Griffin and Wilbur on guard, after a fruitless search of the premises. Still, Tharbel had gone to the cell rooms when he reached the courthouse. He wanted to talk with Touch Quidden.

There was a little downstairs door at the rear of the jail, to which Tharbel had the key. He had entered by that route and was standing outside Touch's cell, calmly chewing his gun, while he listened to the prisoner's pleas of innocence.

Touch was finding it difficult to convince Tharbel of anything, though he made the most extravagant promises, when the gray-haired detective coolly produced a large key and unlocked the cell door.

"You're... you're letting me out?" gasped Touch. "I'm free... to go anywhere?"

"You will be," confided Tharbel, "if you do something I want. As I understand it, Quidden, you'd gone straight when Speed Kroner made you take up with him."

"That's right, Mr. Tharbel."

"I don't believe it, Quidden! You'd have turned crooked almost anywhere, except in Darport. You were afraid of me."

Touch couldn't deny the charge. Nevertheless, he stuck to his story.

"I was trying to go straight, just the same--"

"I shall have to admit the fact," interrupted Tharbel, testily, "if you are willing to aid the law. You know nothing whatever about Layton. However, you can help me prove the case against him."

"How?"

"By giving me a demonstration of your talent. Come along, Quidden, out through the back door."

Tharbel's car was rolling away from the courthouse, when the jailer shouted for him, to come to the phone, through the corridors of the cellar. Getting no reply, the jailer went to the phone and said that Tharbel wasn't around. Learning that the call from New York had been cancelled, the jailer simply gave a shrug.

Fifteen minutes later, Tharbel and Touch were sneaking in through a side door for Rann's mansion in a fashion that made Touch wonder whether he was straight or crooked. Reaching the living room, they found a few lamps lighted.

After assuring himself that no one was in the house, Tharbel turned on another light in the alcove. He pointed to Rann's safe and ordered:

"Open it!"

Touch examined the combination; turned to Tharbel with a worried look.

"It's going to be a tough job."

"No job is tough for you, Touch," argued Tharbel. "I've looked up your record. I know the tradition that safe-crackers follow. They're very modest when it comes to a public exhibition. We can dispense with all that."

"Open the safe, and be quick about it. If you don't"--Tharbel produced a revolver--"I can show you that I'm quite as persuasive as Speed Kroner!"

Momentarily, Touch winced. Gradually, he grinned. He had scored a point that would go well in the future. Tharbel was admitting Touch's story that Speed had forced him to open the vault in the Darport Trust.

"I'll crack this blackie," agreed Touch. "Only you've got to give me time. It's a fancy baby, kind of new to me."

"How long do you want?"

"Half an hour, anyway," decided Touch. "Maybe it will take me longer. Not much longer, though."

Tharbel made a mental calculation. It took more than half an hour to

drive from Manhattan to Darport. He had heard from Breeland, while in his office, shortly before the visit to Touch's cell. At that time, Breeland had reported that Rann was quite in hand and evidently intended to stay in the city most of the evening.

"I'll give you three quarters of an hour," conceded Tharbel, generously. "But make it less, if you can. I won't annoy you by watching you work, if that will help."

STROLLING out into the living room, Tharbel made himself comfortable in an easy-chair. He began to read a book, close to the lamplight. His manner, however, was quite catlike. While he read, he kept a one-eyed watch on the alcove, to make sure that Touch stayed at work.

Time passed rapidly for Tharbel, whose patience never wilted under stress. He noted a big clock on the mantelpiece. It told him when a half hour had passed. Tharbel spoke a reminder to Touch, telling him that he was on the last stretch.

"Fifteen minutes more," said Tharbel. "If you don't mind"--he stepped toward the alcove--"I'll watch you work from now on."

Touch was turning the dial of the safe, his ear pressed against the front. To Tharbel, the attitude seemed a bluff. Touch was famed for his sensitive fingers, that could pluck combinations like a musician's hands on harp strings. Somewhere along the line, Touch went wrong. He tried over again, each time eagerly, but his face invariably gained a pained look before he finished.

Real sweat was beading on Touch's brow; he didn't seem to like the job. Maybe he supposed that he would find himself back in his cell when this job was through, and that Tharbel would entirely deny that he had used the safe-cracker's services.

"This will square you, Quidden," assured Tharbel, speaking close to the man's other ear. "I'm going to crack a case so big, that you will be forgotten. You're a specialist when it comes to locks. When the jailer finds your cell wide open, he will report that you broke loose. Such a report will be acceptable--"

Tharbel broke off. He could hear a sound from outside, a whine that came from the throat of Mox. Tharbel had left the Dalmatian in his car, which he had parked out of sight beyond a clump of shrubbery. The whine indicated that someone might be close to Rann's premises.

It was odd that Mox should have given himself away, for the dog was trained to absolute silence, under certain conditions. As Tharbel listened for other tokens, he had the answer for Mox's whimpers. The crunch of gravel told that a smooth-running car was entering Rann's driveway.

A glance at Touch showed that the crook was intent upon his work. Tharbel's last arguments had evidently convinced the safe-tapper. Touch wasn't missing a trick as he handled the safe dial. Left, right, left--this time, Tharbel was sure that success would come. Calmly, the detective waited.

Touch's fingers strained; then fluked. He twirled the dial, ready to begin again. Tharbel gripped him by the arm. He didn't tell Touch the danger, for he doubted that the safe expert had heard the sounds from outdoors.

"Time's up," said Tharbel in a low, blunt tone. "It's the cell for you, Quidden."

"But I've got it!" pleaded Touch. "I had it before, but went too far with it. This time, I only fluked the last number. Just one more chance!"

Tharbel could hear the front door opening. He knew that he could whisk Touch away, through the side hall, even if anyone entered the living room. There was just time for Touch to thumb through the combination once again. Though Tharbel doubted that would succeed, the chance was worth it.

Tersely, the detective ordered:

"Go ahead!"

Touch went ahead. His fingers squeezed the dial in a truly professional manner. They came to the last turn, just as Tharbel heard footsteps in the

hallway. His hand on Touch's arm, Tharbel was ready to yank the fellow away, when Touch gasped triumphantly:

"I got it!"

Still unconvinced, Tharbel kept his grip on Touch, but paused long enough to clamp his other hand on the handle of the safe door. The handle yielded; the safe was open, as Touch said.

At that instant, there were sharp cries from the front of the living room. Instead of dragging Touch away, Tharbel merely flung the fellow aside. Drawing a revolver, he leveled it toward three men who had entered, and ordered:

"Stand as you are!"

THE foremost man was Titus Rann, his heavy face clouded with anger at sight of Tharbel. Behind him was Blair Breeland, whose features were a remarkable study. All the wonderment that Breeland had previously shown at Tharbel's methods was combined into one great registration of astonishment.

Tharbel saw Jorgan at the doorway. The dapper secretary tried to perform a sneak. Tharbel brought him back with a gun gesture, and also spotted a fourth man, who blundered into sight. The last arrival was Rann's chauffeur.

By then, Rann had found his voice. His booming tone carried irony.

"The old maestro at work," spoke Rann. "Solving crime by performing crime. I've always doubted your genius, Tharbel. Any man can build up a reputation by hidden tactics. But I didn't suppose that you used other crooks to help you in your dirty work!"

Tharbel stood stolidly. He wanted Rann to continue.

"If you had come here honestly," resumed Rann, "I might have obliged you, by opening the safe for you. As it stands, you have no excuse for your actions. I shall stand by my rights and keep the contents of that safe to myself. What is more"--Rann's tone was highly pleased--"no one else will bother me, now that you have condemned yourself, Tharbel."

For answer, Tharbel gripped the door of the safe and pulled it wide. Beckoning with his gun, he brought Jorgan toward him and told the secretary to take out the suitcase that Layton had stowed inside.

Rann took a heavy forward step; Tharbel gave an upward nudge with his gun. The banker's hands lifted with the gesture.

"Tell me, Jorgan," said Tharbel, "is that Layton's suitcase?"

The secretary nodded.

"Exactly where he put it?" added Tharbel. "Locked, as he left it?"

Another nod from Jorgan. Tharbel told Breeland to fish in Rann's pockets and find any keys that the banker carried. By the time Breeland found a bunch, Jorgan had placed the suitcase on a table.

Breeland found that one of Rann's keys fitted the suitcase lock, a fact that produced a chuckle from Tharbel.

"Glad you arrived," said the detective to Rann. "You must have made a very quick trip from New York."

When Rann didn't answer, Breeland did.

"It was a quick trip," said Breeland. "Rann insisted on getting home in a hurry. We passed everything along the road. We clipped at least ten minutes from the usual time."

"No wonder Rann was in a hurry," returned Tharbel. "He wanted to find the cash that Layton delivered here. Not Layton's money, nor Rann's, but your money, Breeland! The fifty-thousand-dollar pay roll!"

Tharbel flung the suitcase wide open. Inside were bundles of cash, the exact amount difficult to determine without counting the bills. But Tharbel did not care if the funds were somewhat depleted. Any of those bundles would do for what he wanted. Passing a folded sheet of paper to Touch, Tharbel announced:

"There is the list of serial numbers. Read them off, Quidden, while Breeland checks them."

Touch began to read the numbers, which came in batches. He started with

one-dollar bills, which had made up much of the pay roll. Unable to find any ones in the suitcase, Breeland told Touch to go into higher values. But when Touch read the numbers of some fives, Breeland still couldn't find the type of bills required.

"Try tens," said Breeland. "Here is a bunch of them."

As Touch read the numbers, Breeland shook his head. He brought the bills to Tharbel and called for the list, which Touch handed over. None of the serial numbers tallied. Pocketing his revolver, Tharbel took the list and began to dig deep in the suitcase. He suddenly lifted his head.

"This isn't your money," said Tharbel slowly to Breeland. "None of this currency is listed. It comes to only fifteen thousand, and not one bill is from the pay roll."

"I could have told you that," sneered Rann. "Would you like to know what the money represents, Tharbel? I'll show you, and prove that I came by it honestly--as did Layton!"

Stepping to a desk, Rann probed as if looking for some papers. Instead, he suddenly flashed a revolver when he wheeled about. Tharbel recoiled, pulling out his own gun. Touch dived for a window curtain, yanking it aside.

"This way, boss!" yelled the crook. "You gave me a break! Here's one for you!"

On impulse, Tharbel darted for the window. He and Rann were aiming for each other. Had Rann fired, Tharbel would have responded. In either event, the loss would have been Tharbel's.

Rann had a right to shoot down a malefactor in his own home, and seemed to relish the privilege. Whereas, if Tharbel killed Rann, it would stand as murder in the presence of witnesses.

Tragedy was averted in amazing style.

As Tharbel shouldered into pitch-blackness beyond the window drapes, the gloom rose to meet him. Hands, unseen in the darkness, took the detective in an instant grip and flung him backward.

To the astonished witnesses, it seemed that Junius Tharbel had tripped in a most outlandish fashion. To prevent himself from pitching through the window, he had performed a back somersault that flattened him on the living-room floor!

Rann's revolver spat flame, but its bullet merely bored through space above Tharbel's sprawling form. Tharbel did not fire in return. His own gun had gone from his grasp and was bounding toward Jorgan, who grabbed it.

Rann didn't fire again. He couldn't, under the circumstances, for Tharbel was unarmed and helpless. Rann told his servants to take Tharbel into custody and hold him, along with Touch, until the State police could be summoned. Helped to a chair, Tharbel sank glumly to the cushions and stared at the open window.

Beyond, Tharbel could discern the dim outline of trees against a cloudy night sky. A breeze was coming through the window; the space was empty where Tharbel had encountered a solid form. The detective could hear the whimpers of Mox; along with it, he fancied that the breeze carried a strange, grim laugh, a departing whisper from the night.

The Shadow had arrived too late to warn Tharbel of a snare. Marked as a man of crime, the veteran detective would have to take his bitter medicine for his lawless entry into Rann's.

Tharbel had counted upon the contents of Layton's suitcase to justify his action, but he had guessed wrong about the money that was in the bag. It had nothing to do with the stolen pay roll.

Had The Shadow reached Tharbel in time, he would have prevented this disaster. Still, Tharbel owed a new debt to The Shadow. His cloaked friend had saved the detective's life, in that ill-guided moment when Tharbel had foolishly sought flight.

With life there could be hope, and Junius Tharbel held both. Though nonplused by the turn that events had taken, he felt that he could rely upon

someone else to solve the present riddle.

Junius Tharbel was counting on The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF A CAREER.

THE trial of Junius Tharbel was an event of national importance. It flooded the town of Darport with dozens of reporters, scores of cameramen, and thousands of morbid curiosity seekers.

Seats in the courtroom were at a premium, and the lobby of the local hotel became a betting parlor, where eager bookies offered ever-changing odds on Tharbel's acquittal or conviction.

In Tharbel's favor stood the fact of his long record in public service. Brilliant legal minds had rallied to his cause. At the outset, sympathy was highly in his favor, plus the fact that the jury had to include his personal friends, since he was acquainted with everyone in the county.

Against Tharbel, the State had damaging points. The fact that he was a first offender could not apply in his case, since he represented the law. The prosecution had a whole string of indictments against the detective, with chances of convicting him on one charge, at least, if others failed.

Furthermore, pressure was being put to bear upon the jury, on the basis that personal sympathy toward Tharbel would be a reflection upon the integrity of the jurymen.

The consensus had it that the longer the trial lasted, the worse the case would be for Tharbel. Probably the prosecution recognized the fact, for the trial certainly dragged. Days became weeks, while the evidence was sifted.

The facts, however, were simple.

Junius Tharbel had made forcible entry into the home of Titus Rann, and there, by means of threat and illegal promises, had caused Touch Quidden to open Rann's safe. Tharbel admitted that Touch had acted at his urging, which amounted to the same thing as if Tharbel had opened the safe on his own.

The detective's defense was likewise direct. He declared that he had been seeking certain funds in the possession of Wallace Layton; that, indirectly, he was acting under a search warrant, enabling him to look through Layton's house.

Warned by someone, Layton had fled with the funds. The man who gave the warning was logically Rann. Therefore, Tharbel considered Rann as a man who had obstructed justice. He had opened the financier's safe to prove the fact and place criminal blame where it belonged.

Such arguments might have carried weight if Tharbel had actually found the missing pay roll in Layton's suitcase. In that event, Rann certainly would not have been a valuable witness for the prosecution. But the funds weren't the ones that Tharbel sought.

When the defense demanded an explanation of the actual transaction whereby Layton had delivered other money to Rann, the prosecution supplied the answer.

Taking the witness stand, Titus Rann smilingly revealed the mystery, and shortly afterward, Wallace Layton corroborated the testimony.

It seemed that Rann had been dabbling heavily in local real estate. Knowing that farmers would ask exorbitant prices for property if they knew Rann to be the buyer, the financier had decided to purchase through a proxy. Even then, he feared that the facts would leak out because of frequent transactions.

He had thought of making the purchase through the County National Bank, which he controlled, but realized that it would be a giveaway. Naturally, his thoughts had turned to the rival bank, the Darport Trust Co. But Rann wasn't very chummy with the executives of the Darport Trust.

Wallace Layton was the final answer. Rann had approached Layton and signed him up as proxy. In saying very little when he made his offers, Layton

had caused sellers to believe that the Darport Trust was buying up their land. They never suspected that Rann was the real purchaser.

Rann liked to sell, as well as buy. Thus, at intervals, cash came into Layton's temporary possession, and he kept such funds at the Darport Trust. On the afternoon of the day of the robbery, Layton had taken fifteen thousand in such cash, to deliver to its rightful owner, Rann.

In so doing, Layton came under Tharbel's suspicion. Rann was in New York, where Layton could not reach him. The worried assistant cashier decided to hold the money until the next day. That night, the bank was robbed, which made it very bad for Layton.

He had gone through all the harrowing unhappiness that an innocent man could suffer: at least such was Layton's testimony. Rann didn't ask him about the funds; on the witness stand, the financier declared that he supposed his own cash to be gone, with the other loot from the Darport Trust.

At last the thing had preyed horribly upon Layton's mind. He had decided, entirely upon his own, to take the cash to Rann and explain everything. Hounded by Tharbel, Layton had made a run for it; finding that Rann was not at home, he had argued Jorgan into stowing the bag of cash in the financier's safe.

SUCH testimony was very damaging to Tharbel. It marked him as a poor detective, as well as a malefactor. Defense lawyers rallied to his aid, by quoting Statute 907, Section K, Paragraph 14, which related to the duties and obligations of bank officials.

According to that law, Rann, as an official of the County National, had no right to deal in any private transaction involving sums in excess of one thousand dollars with an official of any other bank.

The prosecution promptly spiked the charge. It proved that Amendment 17 D distinctly showed that Statute 907 applied to State banks only, and that Rann, as an official of the County National, was therefore beyond jurisdiction.

To cover Layton, the prosecution cited the case of the State versus the Allied Title Co., an instance wherein officials of a bank had been indicted for general embezzlement. The decision, finally given by the Supreme Court of the State, had classed as officials all executives from president to cashier.

That precedent, applied to the present case, placed Wallace Layton beyond the limitations of Statute 907 and made him liable only under Act 254 of the State Banking Laws.

By making real-estate purchases without the knowledge of his employers, Layton was guilty only of a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of not more than one hundred dollars.

The final ironing out of such technicalities threw the whole burden upon Tharbel. His lawyers succeeded in quashing all but three of a dozen indictments. By pleading guilty to the rest, Tharbel received the leniency of the court, to the extent that he could serve concurrent terms in the State penitentiary.

It was another drab day when Junius Tharbel was marched from the courthouse, to pass stoically between a huge crowd that neither cheered nor jeered. The natives of Darport were as stunned as the dazed jurymen who filed from the courtroom, and visitors to the little town caught the spell.

With Junius Tharbel gone, the tradition of Darport had come to an abrupt end. The town could have stood an earthquake better than this sad end of a career that had stood for perseverance and integrity.

One man did not mind Tharbel's departure. Titus Rann was standing at the window of the detective's old office, his face displaying a satanic smile. Ever since he had come to Darport, Rann had chosen to be at odds with Tharbel. Letting his smile disappear, Rann turned to others in the office.

Blair Breeland was present, along with a few more important citizens. Seeing the sorrow on their faces, Rann let his own expression turn to gloom. He became the glummiest person in the room, with the exception of Wade Hosth,

who was present at Tharbel's request, in order to clear up the detective's personal papers and keep them intact for him..

"A sad thing, indeed," announced Rann. "I had no desire to see Tharbel imprisoned. I am truly glad that so many indictments were quashed. Why, if all the charges had been proven, Tharbel would have received extended terms of ninety-nine years!"

"Nonsense, Rann!" snapped Breeland. "The indictments were piled up merely to make sure of Tharbel's conviction. He's getting too long a term as it stands. Seven years!"

"It could be fifteen--"

"And you probably wish it were. What pleases you even more is the fact that Tharbel can't get a governor's pardon, under present restrictions. It will be impossible for Junius Tharbel ever to serve as county detective again."

Accepting Breeland's statement, Rann turned to the other men present.

"Law and order must be maintained in Darport," declared Rann. "It is our duty, as a special committee, to organize for that purpose. We are open to nominations for chairman."

RANN carried the vote himself, with only one dissenter. It was Breeland who objected, hotly. He didn't like the way the rest kowtowed to Rann.

"Can't you see what this means?" Breeland demanded of the others. "You won't find a single able-bodied man in Darport who will serve on our new police force, if Rann heads the committee for public safety. Those people out there"--he gestured to the window--"are still Tharbel's friends!"

"Judging by Tharbel's old deputies," retorted Rann, "there isn't a man in Darport fit for police duty. Tharbel is gone, and with him the old. I represent the new. Gentlemen"--he turned to the committee--"we shall import competent men to serve as a police force that will be the envy of the State."

"Who will choose them?" demanded Breeland. "Will that be up to you, Rann?"

"It will be the task of the committee," returned Rann. "I expect co-operation of all. We shall consider any and all applicants who apply."

Breeland turned toward the door. His manner showed that he was through with the whole task. Rann overtook him and laid a heavy, but friendly, hand upon his shoulder.

"We need you, Breeland." Rann's voice was earnest. "Come! Forget Tharbel! He failed you, Breeland. You can never recover that pay-roll money. Look at these newspapers."

Rann picked up a stack that lay on the table, the accumulation of recent weeks. Nearly every sheet reported some of the missing cash, that tallied with Breeland's lists. It had been coming in from all parts of the country.

"Tharbel was right," declared Rann, "but he did not know it. Speed Kroner got away with that cash and has been clever enough to pass it. By keeping on the move, he is out of every town before he is discovered.

"It was a hard loss, Breeland, but we can make it up to you. There will be many tasks in Darport, under our new regime, and this committee will pay well for competent services. I can think of no one better than yourself, for certain of the more important posts."

Committee men were shoving forward, to agree. Surrounded by a flurry of shaking hands, Breeland was quite impressed. He nodded his promise to serve with the committee, and he went with the others as they left the office.

Alone, The Shadow finished his task at Tharbel's desk. He stepped to the table, looked through the newspapers that Rann had handled. The Shadow was familiar with the daily lists.

All through Tharbel's trial, missing pay-roll money had been turning up in remote parts, as though Speed Kroner had chosen to show his contempt for Tharbel's plight.

The reappearance of the vanished money had not been to Tharbel's benefit. Rumors had gone around that Tharbel knew a lot more than he

pretended; that he might have made a deal with Speed Kroner, as he had with Touch Quidden.

It happened that Touch had gone to jail, too, because of the bank job. That fact was apart from the rumors.

Looking from the window, The Shadow saw that the main street was back to normal. Crowds had dispelled; soon Darport would be its own self--except for the presence of Junius Tharbel. How well Rann's committee would uphold the law, was a question to The Shadow.

Disguised lips whispered a strange laugh that seemed to link the past with the future. To The Shadow, Darport was a town left to an unruly fate, since Tharbel had been banished. A place where crime might threaten despite all precautions.

There was regret in the final whisper of The Shadow's mirth. He, too, was forced to leave Darport to its destiny, so that the former work of Junius Tharbel could regain its proper value in the minds of righteous men.

CHAPTER XVI. RULE OF CRIME.

CLIPPINGS lay on The Shadow's table, two stacks of them, mounting high toward the blue light which glowed in the corner of the sanctum. They were the accumulation of more weeks that had passed since Tharbel's trial and conviction.

One task told of crime in Darport.

If ever a town had gone wide open, it was the little Jersey hamlet. Things had happened just as The Shadow supposed they would. Tharbel's friends had refused to recognize the detective's past achievements, so his enemies had taken up the imprisoned man's cause.

Not on Tharbel's account, but on their own.

Darport had become a target for every form of crime, committed by daring crooks who had moved in on the place. They had shown their immediate contempt for the new police force by blasting into Rann's bank, the County National.

The new police force, a dozen strong, had driven off the marauders before the thugs could profit. On their next endeavor, the raiders had come back in double numbers. Ripping the old Darport Trust apart, they had rifled it of what little money it had, and had routed the police completely.

The result had been a complete reorganization of the force. Two dozen men were imported, fellows of a tougher breed. They had driven away one band of outlaws, into the hands of the State police; whereupon, crooks had tried new tactics.

Working in small, fast-moving bands, they had made quick sorties that left the local police baffled. Even the State troopers had been outwitted by the unknown criminals who sought to ruin law and order.

Every night, Darport citizens awoke to the crash of shattering windows, the muffled blasts of exploding walls. Jewelry shops were rifled, clothing stores ransacked, cash snatched from the box offices of the local theaters.

Pay rolls were brought in to Darport under heavy guard; people began to prefer checks instead of cash, when holdups were reported. Rann and his committee increased the police force to fifty men, but without avail.

The farmers, Tharbel's old friends, began to suffer. Crooks became brigands, who stormed every isolated house, and cleared out as soon as the police arrived. Despite the installation of two-way radio cars, the reign of terror persisted.

At one stage, the governor was on the point of declaring martial law. By then, the reign of crime had lulled. It recurred as soon as the governor changed his mind.

Meanwhile Rann, more obstinate than ever, pointed to the fact that Darport had more than ten times the police that could be found in any other town its size. When critics answered that Darport had more crime, too, Rann

retaliated by hiring ten more applicants for the police force.

At least, Rann could boast that his own mills and factories had not been attacked. There were two reasons: some of the factories were outside the county; the rest had private guards.

Rann argued that if other people put in their own guards, co-operation with the police would be possible. But the persons concerned claimed that it was Rann's own job to preserve law and order, as he had promised.

The last clipping in The Shadow's pile showed a cartoon of Junius Tharbel, looking from the window of an imaginary jail cell, sorrowfully surveying the burning, exploding town of Darport. The picture bore the caption: "They can't blame me for this."

Pushing the pile of clippings aside, The Shadow studied the other stack. It contained the accumulated lists of missing bills that had appeared in circulation from Breeland's stolen pay roll. In all, about forty thousand dollars of the full amount had come to light.

Beside the clipping, The Shadow laid a copy of the original list, which he had taken the day he cleared out Tharbel's desk. He checked the numbers of the currency that had so far been recovered. The numbers that interested him were those of bills that still were missing.

The Shadow's left hand moved away. It returned, with its gleaming girasol. In his fingers, The Shadow held two bills; both new and crisp, a one-dollar bill and a five.

He ran through the original list. His hidden lips phrased a laugh, as he compared the one-dollar bill with a serial number that he found there. Again, when The Shadow checked the crisp five-dollar note, his laugh was audible.

EXTINGUISHING the bluish light. The Shadow left the sanctum. Half an hour later, in broad daylight, Lamont Cranston strolled into the Cobalt Club.

Glancing in a box that bore the letter "C," he saw a long, official-looking envelope and asked for it.

The letter was addressed to Cranston; it was from Washington and bore a signature instead of a stamp.

Instead of waiting for the next plane, Cranston took a cab direct to Pennsylvania Station, reading the letter on the way. He was just in time to catch a four-hour limited to Washington.

He lunched on the train, and when he reached Washington, he went directly to an old, but pretentious, hotel in an exclusive section of the city.

Entering a large suite, Cranston was stopped by a secretary. He gave his name, and received a prompt and courteous reply:

"Senator Releston expects you. This way, Mr. Cranston."

In a sumptuous office, Cranston shook hands with Senator Ross Releston. A keen man, long-experienced in governmental matters, Releston had often called in Cranston's aid on national affairs. Rarely, though, did Cranston ask the senator for a favor. This was one of the few occasions.

"Your letter amazed me, Cranston!" exclaimed Releston. "Frankly, I couldn't believe it at first."

"Even with the evidence?"

"Those bills you sent me looked the part," returned Releston, with a smile. "Still, I wasn't sure about them. Were you? Or did you guess?"

Cranston's reply was the slightest of smiles. The senator seemed to understand.

"I presume you received them from your friend," said Releston. "I should say, our friend--The Shadow."

Reaching to the desk, the senator produced an envelope. He opened it and spread some crisp currency on his desk. The bills were like those that The Shadow had examined earlier. They bore serial numbers from Tharbel's list. Those that Releston had, ran in rotation, but The Shadow noted that a few were missing.

"I am not surprised at The Shadow's interest in Tharbel." declared

Releston. "Both are crime-hunters extraordinary, and quite individual in their methods. In fact, it is logical that The Shadow should sympathize with Tharbel's plight.

"There have been times, I believe"--he looked keenly at Cranston--"when The Shadow has found himself in situations that would be difficult to explain. His foresight, however, always showed him a way out. Tharbel, unfortunately, failed to find one."

Rising, the senator paced the floor. He took a long look from the window, toward the Washington Monument, then returned to the desk.

"The Shadow has done much to aid us," declared Releston, solemnly, "He therefore has the right to ask much in return. But his request concerning Tharbel would have been too much on your evidence alone, Cranston. I accepted your evidence because I know you, but that was not enough.

"So I followed your suggestion. I sought similar evidence, myself, taking great care to make it quite official. These bills"--he gestured toward the desk--"were the result. I obtained them from the same source that you claimed for yours, Cranston."

Spreading the bills, Releston pointed out that some were missing, a fact that The Shadow had already noted.

"I took specimens from the lot," declared Releston, "and sent them to the proper place, along with the official data."

Cranston's lips retained their faint smile.

"Where did you send the bills?" came his casual query. "To the treasury department?"

"No," returned Releston. "To the White House. I wanted you to be here, Cranston, when the answer came. It should be here any minute."

THE secretary was rapping on Releston's door. Admitted, he gave the senator an envelope. The flap was still unsealed: opening it, Releston read the document that he found inside. Replacing it, he sealed the envelope.

Then came the final touch to the dramatic scene. Though Releston's face remained emotionless, as it did through habit, his eyes told their story. Cranston's features also remained masklike, but his gaze caught the reflection of Releston's elation.

The thing was done. Evidence, totally unlooked for by the law, had thrown a new light on a case that the world considered closed. Steps extraordinary had been taken to clear a clouded situation.

Handing the envelope to Cranston, Releston summed the future issue with three simple words:

"For The Shadow!"

CHAPTER XVII. WITHIN THE WALLS.

THE warden of the State penitentiary was standing at his office window, looking into the yard. He could sense the spirit of unrest that crept in from everywhere. Every night it had increased, and this evening seemed charged with danger. The warden knew why.

In his custody was a certain man named Junius Tharbel, whose prestige could not be forgotten by men who had felt its power. There were other prisoners in the penitentiary who hated Tharbel tremendously, but feared him more.

Petty crime was common in State prisons, despite the efforts of authorities. Convicts had ways of stealing little things, from cigarettes to privileges. Such activities had gone out when Tharbel came in. Rumor was rife that the celebrated detective had not been convicted; that he was planted here to study penitentiary conditions for the State.

Turning to his desk, the warden glared at a newspaper. It, too, reminded him of Tharbel for it was filled with news from Darport. A public-safety

committee, headed by Titus Rann, had raised a fund of half a million dollars to wipe out crime entirely from the county which had become a crook's haven.

To the warden, there was an answer far cheaper than a half a million dollars. He wished that Darport would take back Junius Tharbel.

The warden's secretary entered, to find his chief standing by the window. There was activity in the prison yard. Under the glare of floodlights, convicts were unloading a freight car, which had been pushed in through a great gate by a panting switch engine. The metal gate had been closed and locked.

"Work that should have been done this afternoon," declared the warden. "It's just a sample of the way everything has been mired. Very well. Give orders that those men stay on the job and load the car with our manufactured goods, after they have taken off the supplies. They can miss the entertainment tonight. The auditorium will be overcrowded, anyway."

The secretary handed the warden an envelope, stating that it had been delivered by a visitor named Cranston, who was waiting in the outside office. Mechanically, the warden opened the envelope and read the papers in it. His countenance underwent a rapid change.

Hurrying to the outer office, he looked for Cranston. There was no one in the room. The secretary, arriving, decided that Cranston must have left. Replacing the papers in the envelope, the warden took it in to his desk.

"It doesn't matter," he decided. "I won't have to talk to Cranston. Send for Junius Tharbel." He paused; then, glancing at his watch: "No. Wait until after the entertainment, when the men are quiet. Then bring Tharbel, and Touch Quidden, too. There are some questions I want to ask Quidden."

The warden would have been surprised to know that Touch was already hearing questions. In the gloom of a lower cell block, Touch was huddled on a cot listening to a whispered tone that made him shiver.

He could see blackness beyond the bars of his door, and the voice came from that mass. A voice that was confined to the cell, which made a perfect sound box. The voice of the being whom all crooks feared: The Shadow!

Something crinkled at the bars. Despite himself, Touch moved closer. He pushed forward a quivering hand, clutched the object that The Shadow presented. It was a crisp one-dollar bill. As Touch fumbled the money, he saw the burn of The Shadow's eyes.

Hidden lips spoke the history of that bill. They told Touch exactly what it proved. To the crook, it meant the end of a game in which he had played a brief, though important, part. Another paper crinkled--a blank sheet.

"For your confession, Touch." The voice was close to the crook's ear. "Put it in your own words, and sign it. Give it to the warden when he sends for you."

Blackness shifted. Despite himself, Touch reached out to clutch The Shadow's sleeve. Controlled by the hypnotic power of burning eyes, the thug was ready to do all The Shadow asked, and more. He wanted to prove that he was on The Shadow's side.

"There's going to be a break tonight," began Touch, huskily. "They're going to get Tharbel, too, when they start shooting at the screws. Too many guys don't like Tharbel--"

A LOUD gong clanged. It was the signal for prisoners to be ready for the march from their cells to the auditorium. Touch heard The Shadow whisper: "The confession."

With a nod, the prisoner dived for his table and began to write. When he had finished, Touch looked toward the door.

The Shadow had gone, out from the gloomy cell block. A guard was at the door, rattling for Touch to get a move on, if he wanted to see the show. Thrusting the folded paper into his pocket, Touch shuffled from the cell when the guard unlocked it.

Soon, lines of prisoners were moving through the yard, under the surveillance of armed guards. They were well away from the lighted area where

the freight car was being loaded. Watching from a darkened corner of the yard, The Shadow could observe why convicts had chosen this night for a break.

Evidently, some had stalled on the loading job. Those were the men who were to begin the trouble. It might not come; therefore, The Shadow waited. In addition, he was looking for a certain man among the prisoners: Junius Tharbel.

The elderly detective came in sight. He was unchanged by the weeks that he had spent in confinement. Head erect, Tharbel looked proud even in his drab prison costume.

His eyes were straight ahead. He was trying to prove that he had no interest in what his fellow-convicts did, but, somehow, that very attitude worried them.

Signals passed, flashed very warily, even though they were given behind Tharbel's back. The Shadow shifted forward, just as things began to happen over by the box car. Men stopped their loading, to argue loudly. As guards moved toward them, the break began.

Hurling their boxes at the hated screws, the cons snatched for the guns that poked toward them. Guns talked, but not enough to stop the surge. Other guards swung from beside the prisoners who were filing toward the auditorium. With a yell, the convicts broke ranks.

The guards wheeled. They couldn't stop the attack. They had been looking toward the glaring lights: their eyes hadn't time to adjust to the comparative darkness. Men were piling all over them, grabbing away their revolvers, to aim for the high walls where other guards appeared with rifles.

The Shadow was driving for a spot where a little cluster of prisoners seemed tangled among themselves. The convicts closest to Tharbel were grabbing at the man they hated; he was trying to fight them off.

Fists aimed for Tharbel, sent him staggering back. Lunging forward, the attackers were suddenly blocked by a swirl of blackness that intervened. Out of that blackness came long arms swinging a pair of heavy automatics. Above the spasmodic shooting that echoed through the courtyard came a strident, outlandish laugh.

It told of an enemy greater than Tharbel: a foe that murderous malefactors never expected in their midst while sheltered by prison walls. They knew that challenge. Only one foe could deliver such strange mirth.

The Shadow!

GRAY ranks broke apart like spilling water. Shoving Tharbel to the safety of the wall, The Shadow wheeled to battle. His guns pumped bullets where they counted--in among the convicts who had grabbed the guns lost by the guards.

It was The Shadow against a dozen fighters. The guards on the walls were aiding him with their rifles, and under ordinary circumstances the fight would have been brief and in The Shadow's favor.

But here, there were more gunners than guns. As fast as convicts sprawled, others snatched up the weapons that they dropped, to battle with The Shadow.

There was an archway across the courtyard, that some of the convicts had reached, but the occupants were terrified prisoners who had no guns. It was a suitable vantage point for The Shadow. Once there, he could shoot from shelter and subdue the hydra-headed foe.

Tharbel, by this time, could look out for himself. In that calculation, The Shadow underestimated the old war horse. As The Shadow reached the arch, he heard wild shouts from another quarter, where convicts were diving for a lost gun.

One man emerged triumphant from that pile of gray. The man was Tharbel! Unrecognized by the other prisoners, Tharbel had obtained the gun and was shooting at those who sought to down The Shadow. He was clear of the men about him, for they feared the sweeping gestures that he made in their direction, between his shots at armed foemen.

A lone convict cupped hands to lips and gave a high-pitched shout to the guards on the walls:

"It's Tharbel! Get him! He's trying to escape! He started it, so get him, you screws!"

The shouter was Touch Quidden. With the actual jail break in progress, he had changed his tune. He was no longer confined in the cell where The Shadow had intimidated him. He wanted his confession to be forgotten and knew it would be if Tharbel and The Shadow perished.

By turning the guards against Tharbel, Touch could force The Shadow to come from cover. In the open, neither would have a chance.

The Shadow came from cover, aiming as he appeared. His first shot clipped Touch and knocked the frail traitor high from the ground, like a human jumping jack. Touch flattened, but his yells had done the damage.

Guards were aiming their rifles for Tharbel. Bullets were carving the cement about him, as the detective ran for the only possible shelter--the half loaded box car hooked to the switch engine.

Leaving Tharbel to the guards, convicts were trying to wing The Shadow. He was making in the same direction as Tharbel, weaving a zigzag course that tricked the aiming prisoners.

Then convicts were surging in a massive tide, hoping to overwhelm the hated fugitives. The Shadow snatched Tharbel from the open door of the box car and hauled him toward the switch engine.

Shoving his friend into the cab, The Shadow slugged off the attackers who tried to follow. Seeing that the black-cloaked fighter was on board, Tharbel did the rest.

Jerking the throttle, the detective put the switch engine in motion. Its wheels took a terrific spin as it lumbered toward the gate. It was gathering momentum, hauling the freight car with it, while bullets whistled through the windows of the cab. Laying low, The Shadow and Tharbel escaped those shots.

Like a thing unleashed, the locomotive hit the big gate with the strength of a massive battering-ram. The barrier gave with a great clatter: its metal was twisted into junk, as the engine bored through.

The switch was open to the track of the branch line. Slashing away at increasing speed, the locomotive reached the clear.

With Tharbel at the throttle, The Shadow climbed the tender to pick off a pair of gunners who had reached the top of the freight car. As the wounded convicts dived, others, back in the prison yard, heard a long peal of triumphant mirth above the hoarse chugs of the speeding switch engine.

The parting laugh of The Shadow!

BATTLE was over in the prison yard, as The Shadow knew it would be. Convicts were massed, helpless, under the rifles of the guards.

The dash toward the loading platform had given leeway to a new batch of guards, dispatched by the warden. Taking control, they blocked the outlet that led to the railroad tracks, and kept it completely closed.

Among the dying cons who were carried to the prison hospital was one who showed remorse because he had no other choice. Pawing in his pocket, Touch Quidden pulled out his bloodstained confession and passed it to a guard. The document reached the warden's office, along with other news.

"Tharbel got away!" The guard captain was giving the report. "He's on the switch engine, warden! We can get word down the line and flag him."

"Never mind," replied the warden, "Call off the hunt. We don't want Tharbel."

Laying Touch's confession on one side of his desk, the warden opened the envelope that Cranston had brought. Unfolding a paper, he spread it for the astonished eyes of those about him.

"Tharbel was really free before the break began," declared the warden, with a solemn smile. "This came for him, from Washington. A pardon from the president!"

The warden's tone was one of tribute, not only to Junius Tharbel, who

was free to resume his long career, but to the fighter whose campaign had never halted: the person, who, by his recent prowess, had saved Tharbel for a life of future freedom.

The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRIME'S GREAT NIGHT.

WALLACE LAYTON was standing before a mirror in his living room adjusting the black necktie of his Tuxedo. His family had taken a trip, and he was going out tonight, to a very important affair. Layton was one of the privileged guests invited to the home of Titus Rann.

Newspapers had carried big reports of the scheduled event. Every merchant in Darport, as well as the outlying farmers, had contributed to the half-million-dollar fund that was to end crime's rule. Rann's committee was to meet tonight and apportion suitable amounts for needed purposes.

Much was needed in Darport, from more police to a new jail large enough to house the criminals that the law expected to capture when the new regime got under way. A new bank building was required, inasmuch as the existing ones were no stronger than a pair of sieves.

According to those who knew, Rann intended to propose a merger of the County National and the Darport Trust, under his control, of course. Some of the public funds would be loaned for building purposes.

Meanwhile, the strongest thing in town was Rann's own safe, at his home, where servants were on constant guard. Contributions to the safety fund, all in cash and securities, had been delivered at Rann's.

Practically the entire police force, sixty strong, would be on duty tonight, to protect the half million dollars that the county had raised.

Layton was nervous as he tried to adjust his tie. Every time he noted his pointed face, he winced. Layton was doing his best to put on an important pose, but he couldn't satisfy himself. Something was bothering him, very badly.

A car pulled up in front of the house. It didn't worry Layton, for he expected friends to call for him. Finished with his necktie, he tried new facial expressions while waiting for the ring of the doorbell. Instead of the familiar tinkle, Layton heard a harsh laugh behind him.

Wheeling, he found himself faced by a man who held a leveled revolver. Real fear registered on Layton's features, as he recognized the hard-eyed, square-jawed intruder. He was confronted by a man who should have been very far away: Speed Kroner.

"Sit down, Layton," insisted Speed. "I want to talk to you about a lot of things."

"Why... why did you come here?" stammered Layton. "Don't you know that Darport isn't safe?"

"It's safe enough for guys like me," chuckled Speed. "You ought to know that, Layton. Wait a minute; before you sit down, turn off that radio."

Layton stepped over to obey. His hand halted on the switch. News was coming over the air concerning an attempted jail break at the penitentiary. Among the list of slain convicts, Speed and Layton heard the name of Quidden. That of Junius Tharbel was not mentioned.

"So Touch was croaked," said Speed. "Turn it off, Layton. We've heard enough. Good news, too! Touch was one guy who might have opened his trap too much."

Layton turned off the radio and sat down. He relaxed, somewhat relieved, when Speed stowed his gun away. When Speed began to talk, Layton's ease released.

"LISTEN, Layton," declared Speed, "I don't blame you for grabbing the fifty G's that came in Breeland's pay roll. You had to take a cut for the

big-shot, and you handled the hot dough. I told you that Matt and I would split whatever you left, and the thirty was a lot. It was Matt's own fault that he couldn't clear town.

"You did me a big favor, you and the big guy. The way you shoved that hot dough all over the country kept the bulls from finding me. Only, you didn't let me in on all this new stuff that you've been pulling. That's why I came back."

Layton nodded eagerly, as though he approved Speed's return.

"We didn't know where to reach you, Speed," he began. "If we'd known where--"

"Cut it," snapped Speed. "I'm back; that's enough. I've been hearing plenty about Darport. Enough to know that the big-shot will make a grab for a pile of cash tonight."

Layton's face took on a look of cunning. Tilting his head, he queried:

"When did I ever say there was a big-shot?"

"Just a minute ago," returned Speed, "when you said 'we'. But you're not telling me anything new. I guessed from the start that there was a brain behind the works, beginning with the bank job.

"You were the guy who steered me into Darport. You said it would be easy picking, and it should have been. You told me about the hideout; how Matt and I could team. That meant a brain bigger than yours.

"Afterward, you helped frame Tharbel. Don't tell me that a big guy wasn't in back of that one. With Tharbel up the river, this town has gone haywire! Somebody is working a racket that has them all stopped!"

Layton gave a nod. The best policy was to agree with Speed and act as though he knew nothing more. But the sham did not work with Speed. Drawing his revolver, the mobster approached and jabbed it against Layton's ribs.

"Why stall?" demanded Speed. "You're the one guy who knows. But I was in deep enough to know, too, after I learned what's been happening here, since. You were the contact guy before, so you can be still.

"Call up Rann. Tell him I'm back in town. He'll find a way to use me, like he did in the beginning. Just hand it to him straight. You don't have to say I'm putting the heat on you. We can work together."

To emphasize his claim, Speed put the gun away again. A sudden change had come over Layton's face, an expression of eagerness that Speed remembered from the past. Something had occurred to Layton that made him pleased because Speed had arrived.

Layton went to the telephone, in the far corner of the room, and gave a number in a low tone. When the response came, Layton talked louder, so that Speed could hear.

"Speed Kroner is back," informed Layton... "No he isn't sore. He's with us; wants to get in on whatever comes next... Yes, I heard what came over the radio."

Covering the mouthpiece, while he turned to Speed, Layton said quickly:

"He's glad that Touch is dead. He was afraid that Touch would squeal. But he's not worried about you, Speed."

Back at the telephone, Layton was making a reply to something that came over the wire.

"I've got plenty of nerve," he insisted... "No, no. Speed didn't force me to make this call... I'm willing to go through with it tonight only--"

Darting his head back and forth, Layton kept listening at the receiver and looking toward Speed, as though weighing the situation. At last, he gave an eager nod.

"That's just it," he spoke into the telephone. "I'd have to lam if I ran things tonight... Yes, Speed would be the man for it. That's why I called--to suggest that you use him... Certainly, I'll split my share with him. It's worth it, because then I can stay in town."

LAYTON'S smile increased as he listened. He raised the telephone and beckoned to Speed. Handing over the instrument, Layton whispered:

"He wants to talk to you."

Speed took the telephone and spoke in a smooth tone:

"This is Speed. Spill the works, Rann. I'll listen till you finish."

Watching Speed listen, Layton saw signs of many changes on the crook's poker face. Right from the start, Speed was learning things he hadn't dreamed about--an inside on crime that really amazed him. More and more, his lips flickered toward a smile, he wore a full-fledged leer when he had heard the entire tale.

"I'm in," said Speed to Layton. He held the telephone close, so that the words would pass across the wire. "I've got more nerve than you have, Layton, and besides, the boys all know me."

"But I have plenty of nerve--"

"Of course you have," interrupted Speed. "You'll never squeal, Layton. You want to be safe, so you're going to be. Nobody will ever pin anything more on you. Here, take the phone; the chief will tell you all about it."

Layton took the telephone. It occupied his full attention. He didn't notice that Speed was drawing his revolver and shifting close. Layton had his left ear tilted against the receiver, his right ear pointed upward.

Just as Layton was saying "yes," Speed's gun muzzle picked a spot an inch behind the man's right ear. Coolly, Speed pressed the trigger. Layton took the bullet in the brain, and sagged without a murmur. Deftly, Speed caught the telephone as it was dropping.

Holding the receiver with one hand, he lifted the phone with his other, along with the smoking gun. There was a pleased note to Speed's raspy voice, as he spoke:

"Hear that, chief? You won't have to bother about Layton any more. I'll take over like you told me. Layton's share will do. No extra charge for getting rid of him."

Placing the telephone on the stand, Speed Kroner stepped across the body of the man that he had murdered. Leaving Wallace Layton crumpled and inert, the newly appointed lieutenant strode from the house, to play his fresh part in crime.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MAN WHO RETURNED.

THERE were only a dozen guests in Rann's huge living room; still, the place was very crowded. Police took up the empty space, outnumbering the guests two to one.

Attired in natty khaki uniforms, the officers were a stern-looking lot.

With each new crime in Darport, weaklings had been weeded from the force. Bolder applicants had been appointed in their places, by Rann's order and the agreement of the entire committee.

Brawn, rather than brain, had been the final qualification. What Darport needed was a group of men who could deal with crooks on sight, without trying to outwit them. The rule apparently was working, for crime had done a fade-out during the past few days.

The one problem was money, to pay the costs of required protection. Tonight the problem was solved. Titus Rann held the funds; the committee was to decide how the cash would be applied.

Looking about the group, Rann decided that they were ready for business. One committee member objected that Wallace Layton was not present. Rann made reply in a heavy tone that showed contempt.

"We didn't need Layton," he declared. "His appointment to the committee was a mistake. Frankly, I've been suspicious of the fellow, lately. Layton has been behaving as though he did not wish to help us."

Committeemen nodded. They remembered Tharbel's trial, where Layton had admitted himself guilty of misdemeanor. Curiously, they did not connect the fact with Rann, though he had been responsible for Layton's proxy purchases of

real estate.

Rann had cleared himself on technicalities, which satisfied the committeemen. It was Rann, not Layton, who had really proven facts against Junius Tharbel. Besides, Rann was important, whereas Layton was not. Rann's wealth placed him above criticism, a rule which applied in Darport, as elsewhere.

One man failed to be impressed. The man was Blair Breeland. He rated high in Darport, and felt free to criticize. Rann's rap of Layton brought a mutter from Breeland, which some of the committee heard.

"Trust a thief," said Breeland. "He can always find another out."

Not hearing Breeland's comment, Rann turned to his safe and opened it. Aided by Jorgan, he brought stacks of money and piles of bonds to the conference table. He insisted that the committee count the funds.

"Make sure of the full amount," said Rann. "Four hundred thirty-two thousand dollars, with pledges for eighty thousand more, bringing the sum total above a half million. From now on, the fund is in your charge."

Committeemen stirred restlessly and glanced toward Rann's safe. They regarded it as the proper place to keep the money, and said so.

"Impossible," returned Rann. "Look about you, gentlemen. We have two dozen officers here and a score more outside. True, we are ready to spend money, but our force must patrol the entire county."

"I realize that our bank vaults are unsafe. Therefore, I have arranged for armored trucks to take the money into New York. The Federal Reserve Bank is sending the trucks, and they will be convoyed by State police. The fund will be absolutely safe!"

At present, the cash was spread all over the table, with committeemen counting it. The khaki-clad officers were standing with their hands on revolvers that poked from holsters.

A stir occurred at the front of the room. Rann heard a buzz pass among the officers.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Our captain," was the reply. "He's coming in to talk to you, Mr. Rann."

"So our force has a captain," said Rann. "Who appointed him?" He looked around the group, but the committee members were too busy with the money to hear him. "I thought we were going to take up the matter of a captain at this meeting. However, someone seems to have settled it."

Rann's eyes were approving as the captain approached. The man was square-jawed, his whole expression firm. He looked from right to left, and the officers snapped to attention as he passed them. Reaching the table, the captain saluted Rann, who turned to the committee.

"Our new captain, gentlemen," he said. "Come! Leave the money as it is. This is Captain--"

Rann hesitated, then looked about for someone to supply the name. The captain added it himself.

"Kroner," he said, harshly. "Better known as Speed Kroner. Just the man you need in Darport. I used to live around here!"

LISTENERS were electrified by the name. They came to their feet and lifted their hands as they did. Speed was as tough as ever, despite his fancy uniform. In speaking, he had whipped a gun from his holster, to cover the committee.

With that gun came a dozen others. Taking Speed's action for a command, officers were shoving forward, to back him. Their faces, too, had lost all gloss. In an instant of unmasking, the truth of crime stood explained.

The Darport police force was composed of mobsters! They were the men responsible for the mysterious crime wave that had increased along with added protection!

Rifled stores, raided farmhouses, terror on the highroads, had been the work of these well-disguised hoodlums that the committee had so foolishly imported. The very qualification held in greatest esteem, that of toughness,

was the wedge that had made the impossible possible!

No wonder crime had lagged in recent days! Men of crime had been waiting for the pay-off, when they could gather in one perfect swoop all the cash that the county has raised. They had needed a leader for the mob, and one had been supplied them: Speed Kroner.

Behind crime was a brain. Committeemen were sure of it. They stared at Rann, but he was registering horror too. Naturally enough, a master crook would have to hide his true part in the game. That thought was paramount in every mind.

Of course, Speed Kroner was the "front." He had taken over a task assigned to Wallace Layton. He would have to flee, along with the false police force; something which Layton had not wanted to do. Flight, however, would be a simple matter, hardly deserving of its title.

Most of the force were crooks. They could handle the few loyal men, along with the committee, and take their own time in departure. Nothing, it seemed, could prevent deliberate and wholesale crime.

Into that lull came a strange sound--a whispering tone from an opened window. It was a laugh, like the one that Touch Quidden had heard in his prison cell; this time, Rann's living room was the sound box that received it.

Vague, strangely muffled, the mirth was intended for certain ears: those of Speed Kroner and his new crew. It made them swing about, Speed among the rest, to look for the author of the laugh. They knew the tone: The Shadow's.

They were strong enough to settle their arch foe, if they could only find him. Eyes shifted from window to window, Speed began to give orders. He wanted his men to pass the word outdoors, so that others could box The Shadow and hound him with flashlights.

It occurred to none that The Shadow was drawing their attention from a door on the other side of the room. Through that doorway stalked a man who had discarded his suit of prison gray. He reached the table, thumped it with a revolver to command attention.

Speed and the crooks turned, to see the committeemen staring at Junius Tharbel!

"Remember the windows," said Tharbel, coolly. "The first man who fires in my direction will receive his answer from there! I might say"--he let his steely eyes rove--"the first men. The Shadow shoots straight--and often!"

One man was drawing away from the table. Tharbel reached out and gripped the fellow's arm. He drew Titus Rann toward him, and shoved him with the rest of the committee.

"Stay there, Rann," Tharbel ordered. "We are going to expose the truth of crime. I have come to reveal the real brain whose hidden hand is the one responsible."

Rann was trying to slide beneath the table. Other committeemen were grabbing for him. Into that crowd Tharbel thrust an arm, while astonished crooks looked on. Only Speed Kroner was amazed by the thing that followed.

Out from the committee, Tharbel snatched Blair Breeland and wheeled the man into the light, to use him as a shield. Junius Tharbel had returned, to find the master plotter whose evil genius had governed crime's whole chain!

CHAPTER XX.

THE FINAL THRUST.

From the instant that Blair Breeland was hauled into full view, He made no attempt to hide his identity. His subtle game ended, his only course was to admit his true status. He did so with a harsh snarl, calculated to tell crooks that he was one of them, and as tough as any.

"Get to the windows," ordered Breeland. "Block off The Shadow. Move in on Tharbel. Get him off me. Never mind Rann and those fellows under the table. We'll settle them when we pick up the cash."

The first orders, the important ones, were not as simple as they sounded. Thugs reached the windows, pointed there by Speed, who was quick to

back up Breeland. They saw plenty of blackness, but that was all about, with no cloaked shape in sight.

As for freeing Breeland from Tharbel, that was also a difficult task. Tharbel was dragging the snarling man toward the side door of the room, so briskly that it was impossible to flank him. He had his gun poked beneath Breeland's arm, so close to the crook's body that it could easily tickle his ribs. Breeland was due for a bullet if he started trouble.

He'd get one, too, from his own men, if they opened fire. His only course in the dilemma was to await some chance turn in his favor. The odds were good, considering that Tharbel had many men to watch.

Nearing the side door, Breeland could hear a stir in the front hall and knew that mobsters were sneaking in from that direction. There were other sounds from the back of the house. Help was close enough, if Breeland could find a quick way to get clear of Tharbel's grasp.

They were at the door. It opened inward, and Tharbel drew Breeland close beside it, shifting to watch Speed and the clustered crooks who passed as cops. Breeland's foot went sideward and found the door edge.

With a twist, crime's headman launched forward out of Tharbel's clutch. As he dived, Breeland kicked, sent the door slashing shut against the detective's quick-aiming gun.

Jolted upward, the muzzle blasted the door edge to splinters as Tharbel pulled the trigger; but Breeland struck the floor, unscathed.

Speed's rasp brought a surge of khaki-clad crooks. Tharbel had dropped to the shelter of the doorway; they could see him diving from sight, into the darkened hall. Shots were not needed until crooks overtook him, which should be simple, since he was trapped in both directions.

But the surge wilted halfway to the door. From the darkness that seemed Tharbel's only shelter came the rip of heavy guns, that hurled a point-blank volley into the driving thugs. With that double blast, stumbling men heard a laugh that rose in a fierce crescendo.

The Shadow!

THE cloaked fighter had doubled through the house, ahead of assembling crooks. He was in the very center, shielding himself and Tharbel with the best of buffers: a pumping fire that withered aiming foemen before they could deliver answers.

Only Speed Kroner held the floor. The rest were seeking shelter, firing toward The Shadow's doorway as they went. Speed was howling for them to hold their ground. The Shadow was seeing that they didn't. As for Speed, his argument was settled by another gun.

Jutting his revolver past The Shadow's shoulder, Junius Tharbel drilled Speed with a single well-placed shot. As Speed collapsed, Breeland began booming commands from the front of the living room.

The Shadow heard them. Yanking Tharbel through the doorway, he wheeled into the living room itself just as guns began to roar from both ends of the hall. They had escaped the flanking fire, but they were in the midst of foemen who were rising from every corner.

Never had two fighters seemed closer to doom. But neither Breeland nor his phony police saw the long gun barrels that had poked through the windows just before The Shadow and Tharbel came from cover.

Those barrels spoke before a crook could press a trigger. The heavy thunder of shotguns shook the room. Each weapon repeated, for all were double-barreled. While mobsters were staggering all about, the owners of the guns came through.

Tharbel had brought in his old playmates--the farmers who loved to join his posses. He and The Shadow had rallied them, in droves, before reaching Darport. They had stayed in the offing, at Tharbel's order, until shooting had drawn all the counterfeit police into the house.

There were more than the men at the windows. When crooks surged from the side door of the living room, The Shadow stopped the foremost invaders with a

two-gun fire. The rest fell back, into the path of a devastating hail.

Farmers were in the front hallway and the kitchen, blasting from both directions. "Good hunting" was their motto on this occasion. They were showing their loyalty to Tharbel as never before.

Alone at the front of the living room, Breeland forgot a little matter of half a million dollars lying on the conference table. With an abrupt about-face, he sprang for the front window, into the four muzzles of two double-barreled guns.

Sweeping his arms wide, Breeland dashed the weapons aside. Two farmers grabbed him as he yanked a revolver.

Other work finished, The Shadow turned. He aimed for the struggling three and waited. Breeland was wrenching free, and The Shadow was giving him time. Another hand, however, was less patient.

As Breeland twisted, making a momentary opening between the men who struggled with him, Junius Tharbel used the last cartridge in his old service revolver.

That gun was really part of Tharbel. He had told Wade Hosth to keep it for him until the prison term was over. The gun had been waiting in Tharbel's car tonight. The shot that he triggered at Breeland was delivered in accustomed style.

Tharbel's usual target at such range was a silver dollar. The front of Breeland's Tuxedo shirt was a great deal larger, but Tharbel picked the center. Two farmers found themselves holding up a dead man, when Tharbel rushed over to compliment them on their fight.

Guns were echoing in the distance. Farmers were dealing in minuteman fashion with fleeing crooks whose khaki uniforms made good targets, even in the darkness. More were coming in to join the fun. Chances that scattering crooks would reach the county limit were absolutely nil.

WHEN Rann and the other committeemen came crawling from the sheltering table, they found Tharbel awaiting them. They poured questions that Tharbel waived, in order to tell his story simply. It did not take him long.

"Breeland wanted to get rid of me," explained Tharbel, "so that he could rule high and wide with crime. He enlisted Layton, to contact the crooks. Knowing of your real-estate transactions with Layton"--Tharbel turned to Rann--"Breeland told Layton to take your money from the bank before the robbery.

"Naturally, I suspected that Layton had Breeland's funds. That is why I brought Touch here to open your safe. It was a frame-up, pure and simple, which is why I was granted a presidential pardon."

Tharbel paused, while Rann talked with the committeemen. Rann understood at last why the men from Chicago had never met him in New York. Breeland had faked the correspondence that took Rann to the city on nights when he wanted him away. Breeland, too, had arranged the call that caused Rann to go back to Darport in the to trap Tharbel.

"He was trying to pin the blame on me!" exclaimed Rann. "He talked me into getting more police and taking the toughest I could get. So well, that I thought it was my own idea."

The others nodded. They, too, were recalling Breeland's subtle methods of directing attention away from his own machinations. But they looked to Tharbel to explain the major points that had revealed Breeland's game.

"It happened at the jail," said Tharbel, slowly, "but I didn't guess it. Fortunately, I had a friend who pieced the facts after my arrest. A friend called The Shadow. He knew that Breeland had talked to Touch. He saw, too, that Breeland, not Rann, could have called Layton and told him about the warrant.

"Unfortunately those things would not have impressed people at the trial. The Shadow needed better evidence, and looked for it. Perhaps you would like to see a sample. Here is one he gave me."

From his pocket, Tharbel produced a crisp one-dollar bill and passed it

around. Even Rann was puzzled, until Tharbel gave him a the simple explanation.

"In suspecting Breeland," said Tharbel, "The Shadow formed the accurate conclusion that no pay-roll money had been delivered at the Darport Trust. Breeland did not care to sacrifice fifty thousand dollars to Speed Kroner and Matt Felson so early in the game.

"So he gave me a false list which contained the serial numbers of currency not in Breeland's possession--numbers he made up out of his head. When the money began turning up throughout the country, without a trace of Speed, The Shadow knew that his conjecture was correct.

"He saw the flaw in Breeland's game. He went to the treasury department, in Washington, and found"--Tharbel flourished the dollar bill--"some of these. Brand-new currency, that had never been put in circulation!"

Tharbel did not have to tell the rest. It went without saying. The Shadow had sent his samples to Senator Releston, who had sent to the treasury department for more, and had found them. The bills, fresh from the printing office, were proof absolute that Breeland never could have owned them.

Such evidence, proving a frame-up against Tharbel, had outweighed the charges against the veteran detective. The man really behind the opening of Rann's safe was Blair Breeland, master criminal, not Junius Tharbel, worker for the law.

STROLLING out to Rann's veranda, Tharbel shook hands with the owner of the mansion, who from now on would be his actual friend. Mox was whining from the coupé, which was hidden across the road. Tharbel gave a tired smile.

"More work to do." he said. "A trip to Breeland's house, to see what I can find there. Tomorrow, though"--he glanced at the clearing sky-- "should be a good day."

"For hunting?" inquired Rann, with a smile.

"No. I've had enough hunting," replied Tharbel. "I'm going fishing, instead. Dig out your tackle Rann, and come along. Set the alarm clock for five."

From the porch, Rann and the rest watched Tharbel's car roll away. The sound of its old motor faded into little putt-putts in the distance. Then came another sound, like an echo from the departed car.

It was a laugh, strange, solemn, quivering, that seemed a part of night itself. Trailing, it dwindled into the distance, as though absorbed by the surrounding hills. The men on the porch heard it; so did the farmers who were carrying away the figures of defeated crooks who could no longer listen.

There was tribute in that triumphant mirth. It was timed at a moment that men would remember, and thereby understand its full significance.

It was The Shadow's award of victory to Junius Tharbel, whose career was once again established throughout this region where he had won his fame!

THE END.