



THE CHINESE PRIMROSE

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CHAPTER I. FRISCO MYSTERY

THE man behind the desk was very bland, his face so smugly serene that it registered a definite expression. It told that its owner was an adept at keeping certain matters to himself; a fact of which his visitor was quite aware, and showed it.

For the visitor formed quite a contrast to the man behind the desk. Pale, peak-faced, and twitchy of lips, the visitor was nervous.

Elredge Brend, the man behind the desk, was always serene, whereas the caller, Mark Trobin, was generally worried. It took a lot of nerve in their particular racket, and Brend apparently had full control of himself, while Trobin did not.

The door of Brend's office bore the title: "Pacific Prune Producers." All about the office were pictures of prune groves: colored tints of trees laden with purplish, plumlike fruit. Aptly enough, the office was located in San Francisco, as a view from its windows disclosed.

Gazing from the window which he faced, Brend could see the Ferry Tower and the great bridge to

Oakland, beyond. But Trobin, who was looking toward Brend's desk, viewed the scene that a different window afforded, and did not like it.

Trobin's view showed him the squatty, low-lying buildings of Frisco's Chinatown, already spotted with varicolored lights beneath the gathering dusk. The sight was sinister to Trobin.

"Well, Trobin," spoke Brend in a dry tone. "How did you make out on your last trip, selling—prune groves?"

Trobin didn't like Brend's pause before the term "prune groves," nor the artful accent that he gave the words. His lips tightening, Trobin pulled a wallet from his pocket. From it, he extracted a sheaf of bank notes, all of high denominations, and counted them on Brend's desk.

The money totaled thirty-five thousand dollars. Taking the cash in his turn, Brend counted off thirty-five hundred and handed that amount back to Trobin.

"Ten percent," said Brend, his tone still dry. "A good-enough commission, Trobin, for an easy sale."

"The sale was easy enough," blurted Trobin. "If I hadn't got rid of it quick, to that customer in Chicago, I could have gotten a lot more for the bracelet -"

"For the item," corrected Brend, his interruption stern. "Remember, Trobin, that we sell items—which can mean prune groves, instead of -"

He paused, his lips half smiling, but Trobin did not take the hint. He wanted to talk, to have his full say, now that he was alone with Brend.

"Instead of Chinese jewelry!" snapped Trobin. "That's our racket, Brend— getting rid of antique jewelry smuggled in from China. Why try to deny it, between ourselves?"

Brend merely shrugged. He retained his half smile, as though interested in Trobin's sudden mood and therefore quite willing that the nerve-racked salesman should continue with his theme.

"I want to know what's behind it!" exclaimed Trobin suddenly. "I know you're peddling the stuff, Brend, using fellows like myself to take the jewels all over the country. But who brought it into the country, to begin with?"

"Would you like to guess, Trobin?"

"I think I can guess!" emphasized Trobin bluntly. "There's a lot of junk jewelry, cheap stuff, being imported and sold by a man named Felix Mandore -"

A SUDDEN blaze of Brend's usually cold eyes forced Trobin to interrupt himself. As Brend arose from the desk, Trobin shrank back nervously in his chair. Then Brend was cool again, speaking crisply.

"Forget Mandore," he said. "All you need to know is that items of real value are being sold along with the imitation junk. When chaps like you go to the right places and do the right thing, you get the real stuff, and can sell it. That ought to be satisfactory, Trobin."

"It would be," admitted Trobin, "if the right places were outside of Chinatown; maybe out of Frisco altogether."

"Which they can't be," returned Brend decisively, "because only Chinese shops carry a large line of junk jewelry; and as long as the racket stays in Frisco, I can make sure that there is no leak in the game."

Brend's reference to himself merely emphasized in Trobin's mind the fact that someone else—quite logically, Felix Mandore—was the man higher up. Brend was glancing at his watch, noting that the afternoon was late. From his actions, he was going to close the office. But as he passed Trobin, the bland man suddenly stopped and clapped his hand on the nervous salesman's shoulder.

"You did well with the last item, Trobin," complimented Brend. "I'm going to let you pick up another tonight, one that your Boston customer will pay sixty grand for, after one look. Stop at the Acme Florists, as usual, then go to the Hong Kong Shop."

"In Chinatown," gulped Trobin. "Always in Chinatown. It's giving me the jitters, Brend!"

"Because of the Chinese?"

Trobin nodded a reply to Brend's question. The bland man chuckled dryly.

"There are Chinese who might make trouble," he admitted, "but not when I'm handling matters. Everything will be under control, Trobin, particularly in Chinatown."

The way in which Brend emphasized his statement carried weight with Trobin. His eyes showed eagerness, at thought of a quick sale that would net him six thousand dollars in commission. Rising, Trobin reached out to shake hands with Brend.

"I'm all set, Brend," Trobin decided. "I'll pick up the item, and take an early plane East tomorrow. I'll see you again early next week."

LEAVING Brend's office, Trobin hailed a taxicab and rode to the Acme Florists, a little flower shop not far from the outskirts of Frisco's Chinatown. The flower store was important for three reasons: it was near Chinatown; it stayed open evenings; and it carried a particular type of flower favored by Trobin and certain other persons.

That flower was a red primrose, and could easily be recognized by anyone who had ever seen a specimen before. The Acme Florists were the only ones who carried those primroses, which were shipped from a hothouse in Sausalito, across the Bay.

When Trobin entered the little flower shop, the lone clerk gave a smile, stepped to an obscure corner and brought the customer a red primrose.

There was a girl in the flower shop, buying daffodils. She was an attractive girl, with brown hair and friendly, inquiring eyes. She looked at the red primrose, and Trobin glanced at the girl, somewhat suspiciously, until he observed that she was attracted solely by the flower's beauty.

But when Trobin had paid for the primrose and placed it in his lapel, he gave another suspicious glance as he sidled out to the street.

The girl, by then, had stepped to the deep corner of the flower shop.

"What lovely roses!" she exclaimed. "I don't believe I ever saw any others like them."

"They're a special variety," explained the clerk. "We happened to get them, and it seems that some customers always want them, so we keep a supply. About the daffodils"—he gestured to the flowers that the girl had bought—"where shall I send them?"

"To my apartment," said the girl, her eyes still on the tiny roses. "My name is Paula Rayle, and the address is Apartment 3C, the Corinthian Arms."

Outside the flower shop, Mark Trobin was watching from across the street. He saw Paula Rayle come out and walk away, taking the opposite direction from Chinatown. Trobin's lips gave a wince of relief, as he fingered the red flower in his buttonhole. He turned, to start toward Chinatown.

At that moment, the flicker of a large electric sign caught Trobin's eye. It came from another angle, a few blocks away, and its gleaming letters read:

HOTEL ESPLANADE

After a few moments of hesitation, he turned about, deciding to go to the hotel before he visited Chinatown. His decision was logical enough; he intended to leave on an early plane, and wanted to be packed.

The Esplanade was Trobin's hotel; he always stayed there when he came to San Francisco. That last point, in itself, was good reason for his return to the hotel before visiting Chinatown and picking up the "item" that Brend had mentioned.

For Mark Trobin was none too sure of matters at the Hotel Esplanade. His jittery mood was partly inspired by the fact that he had seen too many slant-eyed Chinese in that vicinity, since his return to Frisco. It would be better to be packed when he came back from Chinatown; in that case, he could move out, bags and all, without delay.

One block from the Esplanade, Trobin stopped in a drugstore. He remembered that he needed razor blades, and when he entered the store, he saw a bargain combination on the counter. It included a new razor, blades, and a tube of shaving cream for sixty nine cents, so Trobin bought the combination. The clerk wrapped the package and Trobin stuffed it in the side pocket of his coat, where it formed a very noticeable bulge.

Trobin was trying to be nonchalant, as he reached the hotel. As he entered the glittering doorway of the building, he had a real shock.

His last glance gave him a chance glimpse of a face above the steering wheel of a parked car. The face was yellow. It was gone, as Trobin blinked, but he couldn't attribute the sight to his imagination. Instead, he was sure that he saw huddly forms in the rear of that same car.

Chinese!

SHAKILY, Trobin entered the hotel. All the way across the lobby, his knees were ready to buckle under him. Chinese, set here to watch him! Such was Trobin's thought, and his brain teemed with the recollections that Brend had scoffed at.

Why, now, should Trobin trust Brend?

Brend was safe, a hidden factor in the peddling of the smuggled gems; not quite as safe as Mandore, the man higher up, but safe enough. Vengeful Chinese, who might object to the secret drain of their national wealth, would start hammering at the bottom, beginning with men like Trobin, who actually sold the jewels.

Mechanically, Trobin entered the elevator. His lips were too twitchy to utter the word "Sixth," which happened to be his floor. The operator glanced in Trobin's direction, recognized him and gave a nod. He'd noticed Trobin's curious moods before. Reaching the fifth floor, the operator stopped the elevator, plucked Trobin's sleeve and spoke:

"Your floor, Mr. Trobin. The fifth."

The last word echoed in Trobin's ears after he had stepped from the car. He was repeating "fifth" aloud, as he heard the door clang behind him. Then, Trobin's lips tightened into an actual smile; his eyes took on a shrewd glisten. The operator had made a mistake, letting him off at the fifth instead of the sixth floor. It was a mistake that pleased Mark Trobin.

He was picturing his corner room, on the floor above; how he could reach it secretly and do his packing, unnoticed by any lurkers who might be watching. After that, he could leave the room in the same manner, and simply send up for his luggage.

No one would ever know that he, Mark Trobin, had gone in and out. Pleased with his smartness, Trobin was sure that he could outfox any vigilant Chinese who might be on his trail.

Just what results Trobin's smart idea was to bring him, the next ten minutes were destined to tell!

CHAPTER II. CROSSED TRAILS

EYES were watching the hallway outside of Trobin's sixth-floor room, at the Hotel Esplanade.

They were eyes that burned from darkness; the eyes of a shrouded, unseen observer, black-cloaked and hatted, whose own post was within the room next to Trobin's, on the left. Those eyes were peering through the crack of the door, so slightly opened that the space was almost imperceptible.

The watcher was The Shadow.

Talk of a mysterious stir in San Francisco's Chinatown, confined to certain Chinese of whom but little was known, had been enough to bring The Shadow to this city of the Golden Gate. Coupled to that, he had learned that thuggish Americans were abroad in Frisco. Bad elements, both: unknown Chinese, and known Americans.

The Shadow had learned that with different races, certain symptoms were in opposition. He was interested, therefore, in learning what each of these small, but dangerous, groups could be after.

Across the hall, in the room to the right of Trobin's but looking out on another side of the hotel, was a second watcher. He was Harry Vincent, a competent young man who happened to be one of The Shadow's agents.

Harry knew that The Shadow had picked up a trail from Chinatown, and followed it to the Hotel Esplanade. Whatever the trail meant, it had much to do with Mark Trobin, the man who had taken the corner room on the sixth floor, but who, very fortunately, was at present absent.

Very fortunately, because someone else was in the room. Watching from his window, Harry had seen a wiry figure, a Chinese, climb up from a balcony below and enter Trobin's room, only a half hour ago. Harry had reported that fact to The Shadow, by a signal from his own door.

At present, Harry was watching to see if anyone else would arrive. It was possible that the entrant was but the forerunner of others. As for Trobin, who might be due back at any time, he wasn't Harry's concern. Trobin would naturally enter by his own door, which The Shadow was watching. The Shadow, of course, intended to flag Trobin before the fellow could come to any harm.

Darkness had settled half an hour ago, at the time when the snaky Chinaman had entered Trobin's room. Both balconies, the one outside Trobin's window and that of the fifth floor just beneath, were visible, but Harry found it difficult to watch them.

His eyes were constantly attracted by the distant gleam of lights, lurid sparkles tinged with many colors,

from the low-lying region some blocks beyond the Hotel Esplanade.

Chinatown! Realm of mystery and intrigue, where this trail had begun!

There were many who claimed that Frisco's modern Chinatown was nothing like the famous quarter that had existed long before the great fire; but Harry Vincent happened to know differently.

The truth was, that the hidden powers of Chinatown had simply burrowed deeper, and were therefore all the more difficult to find. Foundations of old, forgotten buildings provided them with natural caverns, fitted for use as meeting places. The lights of Chinatown made Harry recall such burrows, and he was sure that only a dank and secret pit could have disgorged the snakish Chinaman who was, at present, in Trobin's room.

Time to contact The Shadow.

Harry took a quick glance at the balconies, then stepped to his door. From across the hallway, at an angle, The Shadow flashed a green blink with a tiny flashlight; the signal meant for Harry to watch the hall. Then, within the darkness of his own room, The Shadow stepped to the window and gazed below.

There was a narrow ledge outside his window, wide enough for a clever and cautious cat to creep along it. That ledge offered a route to Trobin's room that The Shadow could use, for he, personally, knew tricks of climbing and clinging that any cat might envy. But The Shadow had studied that ledge before; at present, his glance took in the street.

A car had pulled up to the rear of the hotel; it was the same car that Trobin had seen when he entered the Esplanade. Men were stepping from the car, but keeping huddled by it. But The Shadow saw enough of their motions, their gesticulations, to identify them as Chinese.

With a swish of his cloaked form, invisible in the darkness of the room, The Shadow moved back to the door and flashed a red blink. It told Harry to resume his watch of the balconies.

BACK at his own window, Harry had a powerful feeling that something was about to happen, and he was quite sure that it would occur on this side of the hotel. With the thought itself, something did happen. His eyes focused toward the balconies, Harry suddenly observed a climbing figure.

As if imbued with a spirit of boldness, the man pulled himself up to Trobin's window.

During those moments, Harry was quite convinced that the new intruder must be another Chinaman, coming to join the snakish scout. Probably, it was all part of the program that another should follow the first, at the end of a half hour.

It wasn't until the man was half through the window, that Harry realized the truth. The fellow chanced to glance warily along the wall, and Harry glimpsed his face. The man was an American. Instantly, a name shot to Harry's mind.

Mark Trobin!

Harry had never seen Trobin before but he hadn't a doubt as to the newcomer's identity.

Yes, this was Trobin, entering his own hotel room by stealth, fearful of watchers who might be in the hall, whereas the real danger lay within the room itself!

It was too late to shout to Trobin; he was through the window. A call might alarm him, and in addition warn the Chinese lurker who was expecting Trobin's normal return.

There was only one course for Harry. That was to notify The Shadow. With a bound, Harry left the window and reached the hallway. Hearing his approach, The Shadow was in the hall by the time Harry arrived.

"Trobin!" Harry's whisper was hoarse. "Up and in, by the balcony -"

Even while Harry spoke, The Shadow was moving swiftly. His black-cloaked form seemed a symphony of speed. With a mere flip of his gloved hand, he produced a passkey from beneath his cloak and inserted it, with a soundless stab, in the lock of Trobin's door. Harry saw those gloved fingers give a deft twist, while The Shadow's other hand turned the doorknob. But the door did not open.

The serpentine Chinaman had evidently thrown the bolt on the inside of the door, and must therefore be listening from the other side, to make sure that whoever came was Trobin, before allowing admittance.

Harry watched The Shadow. He could see the gleam of his chief's eyes from beneath the brim of The Shadow's customary slouch hat. The Shadow's eyes alone were visible, but from his lips, Harry heard a softly whispered laugh. That low tone reached Harry's ears alone.

"Keep working at the lock," instructed The Shadow, in an undertone. "Attract the Chinaman's attention, and hold it, until he withdraws the bolt."

The Shadow had gripped Harry's left hand and was pressing it against the pass-key. Why he wanted Harry to work left-handed, was explained when The Shadow poked Harry's right into the agent's own pocket. There, Harry's fingers felt the smooth coldness of a loaded automatic. The Shadow was reminding him to have the weapon handy.

Then, The Shadow was gone, back to the room from which he had kept watch, and Harry recognized his chief's purpose. The Shadow was going to make a deft trip along the ledge that afforded him a route to Trobin's room, a process which might require as much as two minutes, but certainly no longer.

It was Harry's task to hold a killer in abeyance, and he set to work upon it. The moment that he began a clatter with the passkey, he was conscious of an answering scrape inside the door, telling that the lurking Chinaman was busy with the bolt. The lurker was mistaking Harry for Trobin, as The Shadow had anticipated.

All seemed well to Harry; it would have been, but for another factor.

That factor was Mark Trobin, himself.

THE hunted man had swung across the ledge, into his room, where all was gloom. Keyed to a nervous pitch, Trobin's hearing was more than normal, and the darkness evidently helped it. For Trobin caught the sounds from the door; not the slight clatter of Harry's key, but the grate of the bolt that was being drawn on the inside. There was a sharp gasp from Trobin's lips; with it, he saw something against the door, where he had heard the sound.

A yellowish face swung about. A clawish hand reversed its process with the bolt, slashing it shut, instead of drawing it. With that move, the Chinaman blocked off rescue from the hallway, and made a long, twisty lunge for Trobin.

Against the side window, Trobin's chalkish face was visible, and the killer recognized it as belonging to the prey he sought!

Viewing the lash of that serpentine form, Trobin started a wild scramble across the room. Such flight would have saved him, had he continued it. He stumbled against a table and had a perfect chance to fling

the object into the Chinaman's path, but it happened that Trobin's hand contacted something else, a telephone. Grabbing the instrument, he swung toward his opponent.

This was another instinct on Trobin's part; that of fight. Had he used the telephone as a bludgeon, he could have warded off the Chinaman's clutch for his throat. But the fact that he held a telephone proved disastrous to Trobin. He thought suddenly of the telephone in terms of its actual purpose.

Diving for a corner, he yanked the receiver from its hook and yelled into the mouthpiece:

"Help! help!"

Trobin's cries ended in a gargle, as clawish hands took his throat. Lashed about by the Chinaman's choking grip, Trobin made a wide sweep with the telephone, trying to strike his adversary's head, which simply bobbed away. Then, as Trobin tried a back stroke, one torturing hand left his throat.

Plucking the telephone from Trobin's weakening hand, the assassin raised his own fist and brought the improvised bludgeon straight down upon the victim's skull.

The crunch of that furious blow marked the death of Mark Trobin. The victim's body thudded the floor as the Chinaman released it, and the telephone hit beside it.

Clicking sounds were coming from the telephone, signifying that Trobin's shrieks had been heard. The clatter of Harry's key was audible at the door. The yellowish killer who crouched above Trobin's body did not care to tarry on the scene. His claws were probing Trobin's pockets, and had found the wrapped package containing the bargain shaving kit.

Snatching the wrapped package as a prize, the assassin sprang for the door. He swept back the bolt with the same hand that held the package, while his other fist whipped out a long-bladed knife.

The Chinaman made a quick side step, as the door swung inward. Harry Vincent lunged half across the threshold, caught himself and took a quick back step, bringing up his automatic. It was a swift action, defensive enough for ordinary purposes, but useless against the man who had slain Trobin.

Before Harry could even sight the killer, the fellow was upon him, coming with a sidling spring through the doorway, thrusting his knife ahead of him in a sweeping, upward stab for another victim's heart!

Harry saw two things in a single instant: one, the flash of the assassin's blade; the other, a stab of flame from a window straight across the room. With the shot, the Chinaman's arm jolted; the dirk left his fingers and sped past Harry's ribs like an unleashed arrow, the shrieking killer reeling after it.

Taking an involuntary back step before he could turn, Harry saw the window again. Its lower corner was a blot of blackness, which could only signify The Shadow. Though delayed too long to rescue Trobin, The Shadow had arrived in time to save Harry's life with the timely shot that stayed the course of an assassin's knife.

To Harry's mind had come the answer to this deed of The Shadow's; a thing so amazing that all other thoughts were crowded out of mind. The flash of the knife darting out from darkness could not have been enough target, even for The Shadow's aim. In that moment, The Shadow had picked a better target.

He had aimed for Harry's heart!

Confidence that the bullet would never reach its actual mark, but would find another object that was driving in between, was The Shadow's even as he had pressed the gun trigger. The moving thing had sped in between, in the shape of the wrist behind the Chinese killer's knife.

Bullet and blade, both aimed for Harry's heart. One had nullified the other, thanks to The Shadow's consummate skill!

CHAPTER III. THE SHADOW'S THEORY

THE SHADOW was through the window and half across Trobin's room, before Harry's returning wits told him that there was still work to do. Turning, Harry looked along the hall, in time to see the staggered assassin gather up the knife and dart away. Stung by The Shadow's bullet, the killer wasn't capable of further fight.

He had done his assigned task. He had murdered Trobin, and was making away with what he regarded as an important prize: the package from the dead man's pocket. He wasn't able to carry the package and use his knife at the same time, having but one hand available for both actions; hence his mind was set upon escape.

Equally determined to head off such flight, Harry started after the fellow, shouting for him to halt. Already past a row of elevators, the Chinaman zigzagged for an inside fire tower at the end of the hallway. Deliberately, Harry paused and aimed for the fugitive's flying legs, intending to trip him with a bullet before he could reach his goal.

The Shadow's gun spoke first.

He was shooting from the edge of Trobin's doorway, not at the fleeing assassin but at others, beyond. As if in response came shots from the fire tower, but they were wild. For the first time, Harry saw a medley of faces, representing cover-up men who had arrived to aid the killer's getaway.

The Shadow had expected them, from the car below. They were Chinese, armed with revolvers, but too slow in their fire. They had the habit of keeping an empty chamber next to the gun hammer, requiring two trigger tugs before their guns could blaze. Profiting thereby, The Shadow had given them a taste of fire during their preliminary efforts.

As The Shadow fired, Harry heard his quick warning and ducked across the hall to the doorway of the room where he had kept watch. As he went, the Chinese came in a surge, thinking that Harry was their only adversary.

Seeing Harry reaching safety, The Shadow held his own fire, hoping the Chinese would come into the trap. But a sudden intervention saved them.

An elevator door slapped open and from the cage lunged a group of men. Two were house detectives, others bellboys, and the elevator man brought up the rear. They had come in response to the help call from Trobin's room, and they were in just the position to flank the advancing Chinese.

The house dicks had revolvers and began to use them, while their helpers grabbed for dodging foemen and tried to wrest their guns away.

The fight ended suddenly, before The Shadow needed to insert another shot. It stopped because of a curious incident involving the assassin who had slain Trobin. The snaky Chinaman was diving for the fire tower, when a bellboy tripped him.

Losing his hold upon the package, the killer let it fly ahead of him as he turned, snarling, to use his knife. The package hit the floor and cracked open, sending the razor in one direction, the tube of shaving cream in another.

Both The Shadow and Harry aimed at the killer, to stop his knife thrust, but the house detectives were

closer, and more hasty. They simply turned from the Chinese that they were handling and riddled the knife specialist with close-range fire.

In their hurry, the dicks laid themselves open to shots from the other Chinese, but the cover-up men didn't wait. For some reason, actually puzzling to Harry, the whole crew dashed for the fire tower, and intervening figures made it impossible to fire after them.

Seeing the Chinese on the run, the house dicks dashed after them, and the other hotel employees trailed along. Gunfire from the fire tower told that a running battle was in progress, with possible ill consequences below. The Shadow beckoned to Harry as the chase disappeared, and, together, they reached the elevator. Slamming the door, The Shadow started the car downward.

Here was a real chance to head off the Chinese before they reached the ground, and Harry again admired The Shadow's foresight, which was doubly demonstrated when his chief removed hat and cloak and thrust them into Harry's hand.

Divested of such attire, The Shadow was a figure clad in Tuxedo; above the stiff collar, his face was masklike and of hawkish aspect.

The Shadow was in the guise of Lamont Cranston, wealthy globetrotter, a personality which he frequently used. He had registered as Cranston at the Hotel Esplanade, and was now free to use his accepted identity.

STOPPING the elevator at the mezzanine, The Shadow pointed to a stairway. He wanted Harry to go up to his room, which happened to be on the third floor, and take the black garments along.

From the stairway, Harry saw people dashing up from the lobby; men who accepted Cranston as a chance leader, because he happened to be a few steps ahead. Reaching the third-floor room, Harry flung open with the window and drew his gun, hoping that he could provide some handy marksmanship. By then, however, the shooting was a thing of the past.

The Chinese had ducked before The Shadow reached them. They had sprung from the fire tower to the low roof of a neighboring building, and were already dropping over the far edge, before Harry spied them.

Harry saw The Shadow's followers join with the house detectives who had trailed the Chinese down the fire tower. The combined pursuers dashed across the roof and fired a few shots at the street beyond. But the roar of a car motor was evidence that the hunted Chinese had made good their escape, and were tearing back to Chinatown. With only a half-dozen blocks to go, they would have no trouble getting to their burrows.

With one exception: the dead assassin who had slain Mark Trobin.

Harry viewed the killer again, when, with Cranston, he went to the sixth floor and met the police who had arrived there. The headquarters men were reconstructing the case upon the evidence to hand. They found enough to form what they considered a very satisfactory solution of the Trobin murder.

In Trobin's pocket, they discovered five thousand dollars. In his suitcase were folders of various real-estate agents, advertising prune groves. Identification cards proved that Mark Trobin was a New Yorker, hence the conclusion seemed obvious.

Trobin was an Easterner who had come to San Francisco with five thousand dollars, to go into prune raising. Visiting Chinatown, he had probably flashed his bank roll and some crooked Chinese had seen it.

They had sent the assassin to Trobin's room.

Just why the assassin had snatched the razor package instead of the cash was quite explainable. Marks on Trobin's neck proved that the killer had tried to strangle the victim, before bashing his skull with the telephone. A blunt-faced detective therewith decided that the assassin had been assigned to the murder job alone.

"Take these guys," said the detective, thumbing toward the dead assassin. "They're like a cult, stranglers are, same as with hatchet men. Somebody pays 'em to make a kill, and that's all there is to it. They don't trust 'em no further, maybe because they're too dumb. They climb in windows, put the choke on a guy, and find their way out again.

"Take this killer. He had sense enough to know that Trobin had yelled into the telephone, after putting up a fight. He knew that his pals were coming after something, so he grabbed the only thing he saw: a package sticking out of Trobin's pocket. What did he get? A drugstore bargain!"

So far as the police were concerned, Mark Trobin was merely a victim; a man unfortunate enough to have been singled out by a band of robbery-minded Chinese.

Such a theory did not suit The Shadow.

STROLLING to his room, as Cranston, The Shadow talked in a calm-voiced tone to his agent, Harry Vincent. His first remarks concerned the fact that the trail had begun in Chinatown, and that, later, Mark Trobin had crossed it.

One thing was certain: the dead Chinese assassin was not dumb, as the police believed. His actions, as The Shadow and Harry had observed them, had proved quite otherwise.

"Trobin was not slain for his money," spoke The Shadow. "The killer could have taken the cash as readily as the package. It was the package that he wanted, but it did not happen to hold the contents that he, and the others, supposed."

The logic impressed Harry, particularly when he remembered the sudden flight of the cover-up crew. He realized why they had lost interest in the whole matter. Their departure dated from the moment when the package had broken open and revealed the razor. Had they been after Trobin's money, they still could have fought to reach his room and acquire it.

"Yes, the assassin was very bright," continued The Shadow, as if picking up Harry's forming thoughts. "Probably the smartest of the whole crew, which is why they took it for granted that his mistake proved that Trobin did not have the thing they wanted."

"Something in another package," voiced Harry. "Something worth more than five thousand dollars."

"Something, worth more than any money," corrected The Shadow, "that is, to the person who wanted it. That is why we must look into the affairs of Mark Trobin. That will be your assignment, Vincent."

"Beginning with prune groves?"

"Yes. Go the rounds tomorrow. Find out what you can about Trobin, and do it tactfully. To begin with, Trobin might have been selling groves, not buying them."

Harry nodded, as The Shadow stated that point.

"And again," came the calm tone of Cranston, "the whole business may have been a blind; a

reason—should Trobin be pressed for one— that would explain his presence in San Francisco."

The Shadow paused beside the window. Looking toward him, Harry could see beyond. The lights of Chinatown, abetted by blinking signs, were throwing a lurid, ever-changing glow that seemed to carry more of a challenge than a welcome. Again, The Shadow used the even tones of Cranston to express his theory.

"Something more valuable than money," he said, in reference to the unknown package that Trobin had not brought. "Something which, if it involves wealth, would do so through power. Something that could have come from Chinatown, and was wanted back there.

"When a person like Trobin visits Chinatown," The Shadow remarked, "and is intrusted with something of great value, which powerful persons seek, he must, in some way, identify himself. He must have a token, and Trobin did have one.

"It was dangling from his lapel, and fell when his body was lifted. The detective who saw it simply threw it in the wastebasket, from which I reclaimed it. The token was this."

The Shadow held it to the light, the red primrose that Trobin had bought from the Acme Florists. The light was sufficient to show the flower in detail, and Harry, leaning forward, observed that it was very unusual. He said so.

"A Chinese species," declared The Shadow. Then, as Harry showed new interest: "But that is not important in itself, since many Chinese varieties are grown commonly in America. It would be interesting, however"—turning, he pressed the switch of a desk lamp and held the red flower beneath its glare—"if this were the true Chinese primrose, the *primula sinensis*.

"But it is not. I class it as a *primula obconica*, which is a much more ordinary flower, though so red a variety can be regarded as rare. Do you know, Vincent"—The Shadow's tone took on a speculative note that he often used as Cranston—"it may prove profitable for me to visit hothouses, while you are looking into prune groves. Chinatown can wait a while."

Harry Vincent recalled the last remark, long after he had left The Shadow. It brought Harry to the verge of an absolute conviction: namely, that red primroses, whether *sinensis* or *obconica*, were to have a great bearing on a riddle far deeper than the death of Mark Trobin.

Though Chinatown could wait, as The Shadow had decided, the longer it waited, the more pressing the problem would become. For this case smacked of a hidden antagonist of Oriental cunning, whose ways and power were a challenge to The Shadow's might!

CHAPTER IV. ANOTHER VISITOR

IF Harry Vincent had stopped to look at the flowers, he would have noticed the girl. The flowers were very beautiful; so was she. Whatever lack of eye Harry had for flowers, would not have applied in the girl's case.

She had just stepped into the Acme Florists and given an order to the clerk. He was saying: "Yes, Miss Rayle, we shall deliver them tomorrow," when the girl turned away. Coming from the shop, Paula Rayle nearly bumped into Harry Vincent as he hurried past, and he had only time enough to say "Sorry," as he side-stepped.

Then, realizing that he might have missed something, Harry swung a look back over his shoulder; but Paula had turned to walk along the street. All that Harry really noticed was her wealth of brown hair and

the easy stride that befitted her trim build.

Harry was in a hurry. He had spent two days wandering in and out of real-estate offices trying to gain some trace of Mark Trobin, and it was just his luck that the chance clue that came his way should arrive at five o'clock, when it might be too late to use.

The clue concerned the Pacific Prune Producers. A real-estate man had mentioned the company, almost laughingly. He had said that Brend's organization might know something about Trobin, because it certainly knew nothing else. So far as Harry could understand, Pacific had never raised a prune tree, let alone a grove, and was considered a joke by all who really knew their prunes.

During those two days, Harry had formed the definite conclusion that Trobin's connection with prune groves must have been very, very phony. Hearing of the Pacific Prune Producers, he checked their address in the telephone book, and decided that he could reach the office quicker on foot than by cab, which accounted for his hurry when he passed Paula.

It explained, too, why Harry did not bother to look at the florist shop, for he had noticed such stores frequently, even though they did not belong to his assignment.

SOME luck, at least, was awaiting Harry Vincent. The Pacific office was still open, even though it usually closed before five. The reason was that Elredge Brend, smooth manager of the fake outfit, had another visitor.

The visitor's name was James Alban; he was a tall man, with a thin face that had a very wary pair of eyes. He looked smarter than Mark Trobin, but he was not too smart for Brend, who felt that Alban was a very easy man to handle.

"Yes, Trobin was murdered," declaimed Brend, as though the matter was of little consequence. "But it was his own fault. I told him that he shouldn't be so careless, the way he flashed his commission money."

"The chinks weren't after the dough," returned Alban. "If they had been, they would have taken it. They were after Trobin."

Brend gave his head a decided shake.

"They couldn't have been after Trobin," he argued, "because Trobin didn't have the package. He hadn't been to Chinatown to pick up that item."

"So they were after the item," agreed Alban. "The same one you want me to pick up this evening. That doesn't sound so good, Brend."

Promptly, Brend tried a new tack.

"Trobin was a fool," he scoffed. "He always did everything wrong. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been noticed by Li Husang."

"By whom?" demanded Alban.

"By Li Husang," repeated Brend. "He's the fellow who sent those Chinese after Trobin. We've known about Li Husang for some time"—Brend delivered the news quite casually—"and have been watching out for him. But it was impossible to protect Trobin; he made all sorts of mistakes, such as stopping at the same hotel twice."

Alban sank his long body deeper in the chair and eyed Brend very steadily.

"Let's get this straight," suggested Alban. "Felix Mandore has smuggled -"

"I didn't say anything about Mandore," interrupted Brend sharply. "Remember that, Alban."

"Then somebody has smuggled in the jewels," Alban compromised, "and that same somebody knows about a gent named Li Husang, who is evidently a Chinaman. What else does somebody know about Li Husang?"

"The fellow was formerly a pirate," explained Brend, referring to Li Husang. "He used to knock off coastwise vessels over in the China Sea, until all traffic became limited to ships of the Japanese navy. So Li Husang took to shore."

"And found it too cramped?"

"Yes. He couldn't take time for robbery and keep ahead of the Japanese army, too. So he settled down in occupied territory and began to behave."

Brend's nonchalant way of dropping the Li Husang question did not satisfy Alban, for Brend had not explained why the ex-pirate was in San Francisco. Noting his visitor's sharp curiosity, Brend added tersely:

"Li Husang squared himself with the Japanese, and then began picking up whatever he could get. Evidently, he was after the jewels that were smuggled out of China. When he learned that they had gone to America, Li Husang came here, too."

Alban was nodding as he arose.

"I've heard enough," he declared. "You can count me out of this racket, Brend."

Brend's gloss ended with a snarl, as he sprang from his desk and blocked Alban's path to the door.

"Don't be a fool!" he ejaculated. "Trobin went to one extreme; you see what happened to him. You may find it just as bad to take the opposite course. You've got to pick up that item, Alban!"

"Why not let Darvel handle it?"

"Darvel won't be in for a week. He's sending a new man instead, a fellow named Howard Kemper."

"Then give the job to Kemper."

"But I've never met Kemper. I can't trust him with the biggest item for a starter. Listen, Alban, there's six grand for you in this deal. After you've handled it you can quit the racket, if you like."

An avaricious gleam dwindled the doubt in Alban's eyes. He was still sidling toward the door, but Brend recognized the change. Picking up his hat, he followed, purring new arguments in Alban's ear.

"You won't even have to come back to town," said Brend. "You can send me the fifty-four thousand in drafts, from different banks. We've hired people to watch those Chinese killers who work for Li Husang. Look at what they did the other night."

Shrewdly, Brend veered from accuracy, to put across a new point. "They knocked off the chink who murdered Trobin. If Trobin had only been careful -"

THEY were in the hallway as Brend cut himself short. Neither noticed a young man who was looking at another door, apparently comparing the name on the office with a letter that he held in his hand.

The man was Harry Vincent; he had heard the pair coming from Brend's office and was faking a reason for being on this floor.

Brend gave Harry a glance, as did Alban; then, observing that Harry was an American, not a Chinese, they continued to the elevator.

There, Brend undertoned:

"How about it, Alban?"

Sidling a glance, Harry saw Alban give a slight nod; then the elevator arrived, and the two men were on board. As the door closed, Harry made for the stairway and began a rapid downward trip. He reached the ground floor in time to see the two men stepping out to the street, where they parted.

Already convinced that the smug man was Brend, Harry decided to follow Alban. Tomorrow, or any other day, Brend could probably be located in his office, but this might be the last chance to trail Alban. Correctly, Harry had gauged Alban as a man of Trobin's ilk, whose actions might be a perfect index to those of the recent murder victim.

As he trailed Alban, Harry noticed that the tall man was becoming more and more wary, which suited Harry's own conclusions.

Holding back as they reached a less-frequented street, Harry saw Alban enter the Acme Florists, which was near the middle of the block. Vaguely, Harry remembered having seen that shop before. But any flower shop would have done, in Alban's case. This was a link with something else that concerned Trobin: the red primrose that the victim had been wearing at the time of his death.

Sliding into a corner drugstore, Harry called The Shadow. It was Cranston's tone that answered from the hotel room. Briefly, rapidly, Harry gave the details. The Shadow's reply was terse.

"Watch Alban," came Cranston's tone. "I shall have a cab there within ten minutes. If it picks up the man, you can return here. If not, keep on his trail, and report whenever possible."

Stepping from the drugstore, Harry watched the entrance of the flower shop. One customer came out; then another, indicating that Alban had been forced to wait before making his purchase.

Five minutes were gone when Alban stepped from the flower store. To Harry's intense interest, the man's hand was pressed to his coat lapel, apparently hiding something, which could be a telltale primrose, of reddish hue. Instinctively, Harry stepped forward; then paused, as a cab wheeled in from the corner and swept past him.

In that moment, Harry thought that the trail was to be his no longer; but he was wrong. Despite the arrival of a cab, in half the time that The Shadow stated, Harry still could find a task ahead.

Though he did not know it at the moment, Harry Vincent was to follow a further trail, that would bring the most surprising sequel that Harry had ever experienced in the service of his chief, The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. THE HIDDEN MASTER

WHEN James Alban beckoned for the cab as it approached, Harry Vincent almost turned away. Then, realizing that danger might already be stalking Alban, The Shadow's agent took a steady look, to make sure that all was well.

Harry was searching for lurking figures near the flower shop, and saw none. Just for a final touch, he

stared at Alban's cab as the passenger stepped into it.

At that moment, the driver reached out to close the door. His head was bowed so that Alban, inside the cab, could not see his face. But the driver, not thinking in terms of Harry, turned his countenance directly toward The Shadow's agent. A moment later, the driver had swung back to his wheel, but Harry was standing electrified.

The cabby was a Chinaman!

The Shadow had made it quite clear to Harry that Trobin's death was the outgrowth of some Chinese intrigue, which could only be the work of an Oriental master mind. Here was evidence that such a crime wizard had stepped up his game, rapidly enough to move in ahead of The Shadow.

To Harry, it wasn't a case of another hotel-room threat. Alban was being snatched away, to a doom that could strike before he ever managed to return to his hotel.

The cab was swinging the next corner, to head for Chinatown. Probably Alban had told the driver to take him there, without realizing that he was bound for such a destination, anyway. Frantically, Harry looked about for a means of following Alban, and at that moment another cab swung in from the corner.

This could be the cab that The Shadow had ordered. The driver was an American, a stranger to Harry. But Harry knew The Shadow's system of obtaining new recruits and breaking them into service gradually. The only hitch was, that this cabby might have been ordered to pick up as a passenger a man who came from the Acme Florists, wearing a red primrose.

Harry was close enough to the flower shop to fill the first requirement. Remembering how Alban had hidden the flower that he wore, Harry faked the same process. He placed his hand over his buttonhole and turned the lapel downward, making the action quite conspicuous, while he signaled the cab with his other hand.

The cabby gave Harry a single glance, then opened the door for him. Still keeping his hand over an imaginary flower, Harry leaned toward the front seat. He was quite sure that this driver would take him wherever he ordered, so Harry gave a forward gesture.

He couldn't say "Follow that cab," because there was no longer another cab in sight. But Harry had an excellent substitute. He simply ordered the driver to turn right at the next corner.

When the cab made the swing, Harry observed the taillights of Alban's cab, a few blocks ahead. It was bound for the heart of Chinatown, and that gave Harry an idea.

"Take me into Chinatown," he told the driver. "I'm looking for a place that I'll recognize when I see it. Just turn the corners as I call them, and, by the way"—Harry was pulling out his watch, by way of emphasis—"I'm already late for another appointment. So hurry."

Obligingly, the driver hurried, closing the space to Alban's cab. Harry noted that the man at the wheel was giving little glances back to the rear seat. It was natural enough, considering that Harry had not acted like the average fare. But Harry, himself, saw a different reason for the cabby's back glances.

He felt that the man was making mental check of him; that, later—the thought made Harry smile—this cabby would make a report by telephone to some mysterious personage who had hired him to pick up a passenger outside the Acme Florists.

Alban's cab was making various turns through Chinatown's cramped streets, and Harry called the same turns, in a half-doubtful fashion. He didn't want the driver to know that they were following another cab,

for fear the fellow might decide that he had picked up the wrong passenger.

So Harry kept glancing at the shops they passed, and at intervals requested the driver to slow down. The process kept the driver's mind on the Chinese stores, instead of the cab ahead.

Then, as they turned into a steep street, Harry's survey of the thoroughfare ahead ended in a mental jolt.

Alban's cab had disappeared!

It couldn't have sped to the next corner, for it had been going slowly and the grade was upward. The disappearance was so sudden that Harry almost believed that the street had swallowed the cab, until he noticed the tiniest of alleyways, fronted by a grilled gate.

The alley ran between two buildings, and, at first glance, it would seem that nothing wider than a motorcycle could have entered it.

The illusion was caused by the alley's lack of sidewalks, and Harry's real clue came when he glimpsed a yellow face turning away from the far side of the bars. He knew then that Alban's cab must have swerved into the alley; that the gate, open at first, had been promptly closed by the Chinaman now sidling into cover.

This situation, as Harry analyzed it, was one wherein lost minutes could prove costly.

Harry voiced the word "Stop!" so sharply, that the driver jabbed the brake pedal automatically. Thanks to the steep grade, the cab stopped instantly.

Pointing through the window, Harry indicated the first place that he noticed, which happened to be a dingy tea shop across the street from the barred alley.

"That's the place I'm looking for," he told the driver. "Here"—he thrust two one-dollar bills into the driver's hand—"keep the change for your trouble."

The fare was only a dollar twenty, and the cabby, as if loath to lose so good a customer inquired:

"Want me to wait?"

"No, no," returned Harry. "I'll walk where I'm going, after I leave here; it's only a short way."

Harry was counting upon the cabby's immediate report to The Shadow, who would then come to the tea shop. Though The Shadow would be hunting Alban, not Harry, it would not matter.

Those final words of Harry's—"only a short way"—would be, if accurately repeated, the right cue for The Shadow. The barred gate, Harry's next objective, was, indeed, only a short way from the tea shop where the cabby had left him.

Confident that The Shadow would immediately investigate the alleyway beyond it, Harry sprang across the street, in further quest of Alban.

The barred gate was latched, but not locked. Through the bars, Harry found the handle on the other side and let himself through, with only a slight groan of the gate hinges. Easing the gate shut, Harry avoided a telltale clang and crept into the pitch-black alley.

It led beneath a low arch, and beyond, Harry saw a dim courtyard, lighted only by the parking lamps of Alban's cab. He saw two figures emerging from the cab: one was Alban's; the other, the driver's. Then Alban's voice reached Harry. The tone was half irritated, half worried.

"You've made a mistake, driver. This wasn't where I told you to bring me. If you think that I -"

Alban's speech ended in something of a shriek, as he saw the cabby's face thrust into the light. One glance at the yellowish countenance told Alban that he was in the clutch of the Chinese. He made a frantic pass at the driver, who closed in upon him, hooking Alban's arms and thrusting a hand over his mouth.

By then, Harry had drawn a gun, but the struggling men were nothing but a pretzel shape beside the cab. Before Harry could single out either one, shady forms were lunging from the fringes of the small courtyard and Alban was buried somewhere beneath a surge of Chinese.

This called for a prompt counterstroke. Harry sprang forward, intending to slug his way through a mass of foemen and wrest Alban from a dozen hands.

TWO waiting sentinels heard Harry's clatter and pounced upon him like a pair of mighty watchdogs. They were brawny Chinese, stationed just past the archway.

Not only did they smother Harry's drive, one jolted his neck with a blow so paralyzing that the numbness carried to his gun hand, from which the other plucked the automatic with the utmost ease.

Sagging limply, Harry could not even find his voice. His numbed wrists were bound, a gag was drawn between his teeth. Recuperating from his daze, he saw Alban, similarly bound and gagged, being marched into a dark doorway beyond the court.

Harry's captors turned him over to the less formidable Chinese who had tackled Alban, and The Shadow's agent was also thrust through the black doorway.

Like Alban, Harry was being pushed up a stairway. Up ahead, Alban was babbling briefly while captors were further tightening his gag, and Harry heard the name the prisoner uttered: "Li Husang!"

Alban voiced it with so sincere a fear, that Harry felt the shock of it. Who Li Husang might be, and what his purpose, Harry might learn much sooner than he wanted. For even now, at the top of the stairway, were sinister signs of a living threat.

Chinese were pushing Alban to the doorway of a room where the glare of red lights came in flickering, firelike glow. Alban struggled on the threshold, and as the fellow managed to turn about, Harry saw the primrose that he wore, colorless against the ruddy light.

Then Alban was going through the door, and Harry could see terror in the prisoner's eyes, could even hear the muffled cry that the man forced through his gag. Harry was sure that the man had viewed some monstrous sight; perhaps a devil-robed Chinese amid a setting of artificial flame.

But Harry, himself, was steeled for such theatricals. As he reached the door, he stared stiffly ahead, ready to meet any challenge that came his way. But even he was not prepared for what he saw.

On the floor was Alban, slumped in a pleading attitude before a grim, forbidding figure that sat in a great chair draped like a throne. From each side, revolving lights splashed their ruddy hue upon the cringing prisoner.

But the hidden master, now revealed upon his throne, was neither robed nor masked in devil fashion. Instead, he was cloaked entirely in black, his only visible features a pair of burning eyes that Alban could not face, though Harry could.

Yet Harry, himself, was staring in amazement at sight of the rescuer who had arrived ahead of him. The

cloaked being who ruled this Chinatown lair was none other than The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI. ALLIES OF JUSTICE

THE hopeful heights to which Harry's surprise carried him were suddenly jeopardized by the brink of real despair. It seemed impossible that his chief could have reached Chinatown so soon.

Perhaps the being in the chair was a masquerader, the dread Li Husang, whose name Alban had gasped.

It wasn't until The Shadow spoke that Harry felt secure again; then the throb of the weird tone convinced him that this was The Shadow. The sibilant whisper, addressed to Alban, was too realistic to be imitated. Moreover, the accusations that The Shadow directed to the prisoner were the sort to be expected.

He was denouncing Alban as a tool of thievery, an accomplice in a scheme of international crime, who bore the very token that condemned him: the symbolic flower in his buttonhole.

When The Shadow reached forward and plucked Alban by the lapel of his coat, the accused man quivered as if shaken. He heard one of his Chinese captors address The Shadow as "Ying Ko," the name by which the cloaked avenger was known in Chinatown, and Alban, thankful that he was in other hands than those of Li Husang, showed so pitiful a look in his eyes, that The Shadow recognized his readiness to speak.

A gesture of The Shadow's hand, and Alban's bonds were cut. Ungagged, Alban began to pour his story, not as a man furnishing information, but as an accused culprit confessing a known guilt.

"We've been selling off the smuggled gems," he babbled. "Trobin, myself, and another fellow named Darvel, all working for Elredge Brend, who's managing the racket. But there's someone higher up than Brend, and I think it's Felix Mandore, the importer.

"I'm not sure it's Mandore"—Alban was hasty to emphasize that he had merely made a guess—"but I think he's in back of it. Mandore couldn't risk showing his hand in it, to any one but Brend. He wouldn't trust me, or Trobin, or Darvel, or -"

The Shadow interrupted. His whispered word sliced into Alban's statement, like a prompting note.

"Or -"

"There are no others," panted Alban. "No others that I've heard about. No; wait! There is another, but I haven't met him, and neither has Brend. He's a new man, named Howard Kemper, that Jay Darvel is sending. Brend said today that Darvel won't be in for a week; that Kemper is coming instead."

Pausing for breath, Alban observed a silent Chinaman who had taken his stand beside The Shadow. The Chinaman had paper and pencil and was jotting down shorthand notes of everything that Alban said.

Once started, Alban wasn't to be stopped. He blubbered the list of items that he had sold and the prices he received for them along with the names of the purchasers.

The list included a dozen items of antique jewelry, sold for sums from five thousand dollars upward, yet bargains at the prices named, and therefore quickly bought by jewel collectors who were not too inquisitive to ask how Alban had acquired them. This proved, as Alban was quick to state, that Mandore, or whoever headed the racket, must have received the gems as stolen goods.

"A Chinaman named Li Husang was after them," explained Alban, "but he must have been too late. According to Brend, Li Husang is now in San Francisco, and he sent the killer to get Trobin."

STANDING in the background, Harry detected an audible gasp that echoed through the room. It was the name "Li Husang," repeated in a fearful tone by the very Chinese who served The Shadow. Alban did not hear that echo, for The Shadow, leaning forward, had again plucked his lapel and was speaking close to Alban's ear.

"With this token"—The Shadow was lifting the red primrose toward Alban's eyes—"you were to receive another item, the one that Trobin did not call for -"

"Yes, yes," Alban interrupted eagerly. "A necklace worth sixty thousand dollars, on sale at the Hong Kong Shop. I was on my way there, but I didn't want to go. I asked Brend to let me out of it."

"And when Brend hears from you," supplied The Shadow, "saying that you changed your mind and left town -"

"He'll send someone else!" broke in Alban. "He'll send the new man, Kemper, because Darvel won't be here in time. Brend can't afford to let that stuff lie around too long—not with Li Husang after it. If I could only leave town -"

The Shadow made a silencing gesture. He beckoned, and the Chinese brought Harry forward. Looking at Alban, Harry saw the tall man wince, which was to Alban's credit. Recognizing that Harry had tried to rescue him in the courtyard, Alban suddenly put in a plea for his fellow prisoner.

"This man wasn't in it," he told The Shadow. "Not in the racket, I mean; unless -" Pausing, Alban shook his head. "No, he couldn't be one of the thugs that Brend hired to fight off Li Husang. He's just a stranger who tried to help me."

"He shall continue to help you," returned The Shadow, in a cold tone. "I shall keep him as a hostage, after you have gone. You are a petty thief, Alban, not the sort who would be a party to murder."

"To a murder?" gulped Alban.

"Yes. To this man's death." The Shadow waved his hand toward Harry. "Should you fail to keep silence, this man will surely die, in your stead. His death will be a warning to you, Alban—a reminder that the hand of Ying Ko reaches far in seeking justice."

Alban needed no reminder. Again, The Shadow's hand had gripped him and given him new tremors. Mouthing his promises to leave San Francisco, and keep his whereabouts unknown, Alban was led from the room by a pair of brawny Chinese.

As the door closed, others released Harry at The Shadow's order; then the Chinese themselves were treated to a surprise, for instead of quizzing the second prisoner, The Shadow gestured him to a chair.

Someone pressed the light switch, and the room was suddenly transformed. Instead of a weird lair, it became a simple office. The uncanny lights were merely red shades on ordinary brackets; shades that revolved from the heat, like the cylinder of a barber's sign.

The Shadow had risen, to remove a rug from a swivel chair that belonged behind the office desk. Placing his hat and cloak aside, he showed the guise of Cranston. Gesturing to the Chinaman beside him, The Shadow said to Harry:

"You remember Dr. Roy Tam."

Harry did remember Tam, but had failed to recognize him under the lurid light. Dr. Tam was the acknowledged leader of a group of Americanized Chinese, who was well known and highly honored

both in New York and San Francisco. Tam stood for law and order, and was unrelenting in his efforts to put down superstition and unrest among the members of his race.

Harry was therefore not surprised to find Tam in San Francisco, where trouble had been brewing. He realized, instead, that he should have guessed that Tam was already on hand, and co-operating with The Shadow.

"Another case of overzeal, Vincent," remarked The Shadow, in Cranston's quiet tone. "Dr. Tam had promised to have a cab on hand, should I need one, so I called him after I heard from you. Chinatown was very close, so I knew that the cab would arrive quite promptly."

"But I made an oversight," said Tam to Harry. "I failed to tell Ying Ko that one of my own men would be driving the cab."

THE thing unraveled itself to Harry. The Chinese driver of the first cab was actually the man sent to pick up Alban. The cab that Harry took was merely another that chanced along. No wonder its driver had given Harry so many curious looks!

"Tam had transformed this office at my request," explained The Shadow. "Knowing that others in Trobin's racket were fearful of a Chinese menace, I decided to bring in the first one who came our way, and treat him to the thing he dreaded. I started for Chinatown immediately after you called me, Vincent."

How well the system had worked with James Alban, Harry could testify from his own experience. It had been a harrowing outlook, until he had fully assured himself that The Shadow, and not Li Husang, had captured him.

Harry mentioned the fact, and when he spoke the name of Li Husang, he noticed a troubled look on Tam's serious face. Tam turned to The Shadow.

"I have reports of Li Husang," said Tam, "but I did not suppose that he was in America. You know of Li Husang, and his purposes, Ying Ko."

"Only that Li Husang hoped to have himself set up as the head of a puppet state in China," returned The Shadow. "But it seemed unlikely that a former pirate would be appointed to a post of such distinction."

"So it would be," stated Tam, "except that Li Husang intends to marry the Princess Mei Luan, a descendant of the Empress Dowager. As the consort of Mei Luan, Li Husang could become the ruler of East China."

"And to marry Mei Luan?"

"Li Husang would have to fulfill some great promise. There could only be one such promise: to restore the long-lost necklace of the Empress Dowager, the imperial symbol of the Manchu dynasty. There is our answer, Ying Ko.

"It is that necklace which is now waiting at the Hong Kong Shop. Even Mandore, and his tool Brend, do not know the priceless importance of that one item which came with other smuggled goods!"

Finishing his speech, Dr. Tam strode to the door, his purpose to summon his followers and order them to invade the Hong Kong Shop. Harry could well understand Tam's ardor, for Tam could foresee that once Li Husang acquired the dowager's necklace, millions of Chinese would come under the sway of a tyrannical power.

But Tam halted before he reached the door; he was stopped by the quiet tone of Cranston.

"We stand for justice, Tam," reminded The Shadow. "It is not our way to force strife when it is unnecessary. We may still acquire the dowager's necklace and restore it to the Princess Mei Luan, without needless bloodshed."

"But Li Husang seeks the necklace -"

"He seeks it blindly. His only lead was Trobin, who was slain too soon. The necklace can stay at the Hong Kong Shop until tomorrow."

"But then, Brend will send for it! He expects a new man, named Kemper -"

"Exactly!" There was a faint trace of mirth in Cranston's tone. "A man named Kemper, at present a stranger to Brend."

The Shadow was turning as he spoke. His eyes left Tam, to fix steadily upon Harry. The significance of the changing glance impressed itself upon Dr. Tam.

"You mean that Vincent will visit Brend!" exclaimed Tam, in a delighted tone. "He will introduce himself as Howard Kemper, while you, Ying Ko, will see to it that the real Kemper does not appear. Tomorrow night, then, Vincent will obtain the necklace!"

The Shadow's nod was slight, but it was sufficient for Dr. Tam. Keenly, The Shadow had analyzed the difference in the cases of Li Husang and Felix Mandore.

Until Li Husang knew where the necklace was, he could make no move. Doubtless, his vicious servants were scouring Chinatown, but their search was fruitless for the present. Conversely, Mandore, who considered the necklace simply as another smuggled item, lacked all knowledge of the thing at stake, as did his front man, Brend.

Through his alliance with Dr. Tam, The Shadow had learned the entire issue, and was prepared to wrest away the priceless prize from the opposing masters of hidden crime!

CHAPTER VII. HARRY TAKES OVER

SEATED in his little office, Elredge Brend was in a glum mood, and showed it. His face, usually expressionless, wore an unaccustomed scowl. There were moments, indeed, when Brend seemed quite as nervous as his recent visitors, Trobin and Alban.

Even the sudden jangle of the telephone bell jarred him, and Brend gave a swallow, cleared his throat, before picking up the telephone to answer the call.

"Hello," he began. Then, lowering his voice. "I forgot that you were going to call again at four -" As he spoke, Brend stared questioningly from the window, to observe the time on the Ferry Tower clock. "No, I haven't heard from Alban... Yes, it must be a case of cold feet -"

Still staring at the clock, Brend felt jittery. Time had been slipping rapidly that afternoon, so speedily that he could not believe that it was really four o'clock. His eyes drifting to the door, Brend had another jolt as he fancied he saw blackness creeping across the frosted glass pane.

"No, the new man hasn't shown up yet," continued Brend, still staring at the door, "Wait a minute, just one minute... Yes, it's something important, here. Maybe Kemper has come -"

Bounding to his feet, Brend reached the door. Blackness was fading as he started, but he didn't realize it. Yanking the door open, Brend stared at other offices, some of them empty, then decided that no one

could reach one of those hiding places in the space of a few seconds. Closing the door, Brend returned to the phone.

"It's all right, Mandore," he said cautiously. Then, with a bite of his lips: "I'm sorry; I won't forget again... No; I've never mentioned your name to anyone... About Kemper? Certainly, I can send him, if he shows up and looks all right... Yes, I'll call you first."

The call finished, Brend drummed the desk impatiently, watching the door all the while. It looked black again, as though a strange figure had moved close, to cloud it; but by this time, Brend was convinced that his imagination was getting the better of him.

But Brend's view of blackness was not the product of imagination.

Out in the hallway, that darkness stirred and drew away from the door. With a quick glide, a cloaked shape reached an empty office—and was gone so swiftly, that a man arriving from the elevator did not notice it. The man paused as he neared Brend's office, and waited inquiringly. The arrival was Harry Vincent.

Instantly, the door of the other office opened and The Shadow glided into sight. He beckoned to Harry, and gave him undertoned instructions.

"Brend is ready," said The Shadow. "He was just talking to Mandore. He will accept you as Kemper, and use you. But say as little as you can, until later."

"What about Kemper?" inquired Harry.

"He has not arrived yet," returned The Shadow, "and it is obvious that Brend has not heard from him. But the sooner he comes"—there was strange mirth in The Shadow's whisper—"the better it will be."

The Shadow had edged away, when Harry boldly entered Brend's office. Eyeing the smug man coolly, Harry closed the door and stepped to the desk. Quietly, Harry stated:

"I'm Howard Kemper."

BREND did not immediately reply. In fact, his eyes showed such a flare of challenge that Harry felt he must be expecting more than a mere introduction. Remembering The Shadow's admonition to say as little as he could, Harry simply retained his silence; and it proved the perfect policy.

"Hello, Kemper," said Brend, suddenly, rising and extending his hand. "You've seen our friend recently?"

"Not very recently," replied Harry, shaking hands. "In fact, I don't expect to see Darvel for another week or more."

"Why not?"

"Because he won't be in Frisco until next week, and I hope, by then, to be away myself."

The handshake was finished. Brend settled back into his chair, with a chuckle. Evidently he considered Darvel as thoroughly reliable, and was quite ready to accept Harry as the new man, Kemper.

Brend asked if Harry wanted to go to work at once, and Harry replied that he expected to do so. A short conversation followed, during which Brend further sized up the new salesman. At last, in a decided tone, Brend said:

"I think you can pick up an item tonight, Kemper. I was going to keep it for Darvel, but since he's a

friend of yours -"

Brend broke off, his face screwed funnily. He was staring toward the door, and when Harry turned in the same direction, he saw the thing that troubled Brend.

It was a man's profile, blunt and long-jawed, against the door pane. It jolted back as Harry watched it, and blackness spread over the pane in its stead.

"See that, Kemper?" Brend's tone was hollow. "What do you make of it?"

"Nothing," replied Harry, "except that somebody was coming past the office, and decided to go back to the elevator."

"I mean the blackness," exclaimed Brend. "Look! No, it's gone!"

Harry watched Brend stride across the office, to reach the door Brend opened it and stared into the hall; he gave a nervous start as Harry joined him. Then, laughing off his shakiness, Brend turned around.

"I guess it's the phone call that's worrying me," he said. "A call I ought to make. Do me a favor, Kemper: stay out here a few minutes, and see that I'm not disturbed?"

Harry agreed, and Brend went back into the office. Thinking it likely that Brend might be calling Mandore, Harry stayed near the door, but was careful not to block off the glass pane. All that he heard from Brend's office was a guarded mumble, its words impossible to distinguish.

A more coherent tone came from the empty office at an angle across the hall. It was The Shadow's whisper:

"Vincent."

Harry stepped to the door where The Shadow beckoned. In the office, a groggy man was slumped in a chair, and Harry did not have to ask what had happened to him. The fellow's big jaw had been a perfect target for The Shadow's fist.

"Kemper," confirmed The Shadow. "Take these, Vincent." He passed Harry some opened letters and a few identification cards. "Kemper won't care about them after I've talked to him. He will listen to reason more readily than Alban. But you can use these things to convince Brend."

STROLLING back to Brend's office, Harry was glancing through the letters. One was a brief note from Kemper's friend Darvel, and Harry had finished it when he heard Brend's footsteps coming to the door. Inviting Harry in, Brend showed him to a chair, then began to pace the office. Evidently, Brend's chat with Mandore had caused him to become more wary.

"Just when did you last hear from Darvel?" inquired Brend. "When he was in Omaha?"

"I didn't know he was in Omaha," returned Harry. "He wrote me from Kansas City and I received the letter in Denver. By the way, Brend, I'm not so sure I like this business."

Brend, by this time suddenly convinced that Harry must be Kemper, could only query in amazement:

"Why not?"

"Because Darvel knows I don't like questions," snapped Harry, "and told me, in his letter, that you weren't the sort to ask them. Here, Brend"—Harry thrust the letter into Brend's hands—"read it for yourself. Furthermore, if you don't think I can do business for you, look at this letter—from a customer

who says he'll pay up to a hundred thousand dollars for the right sort of items."

The second letter reached Brend's hands, and at the same time, Harry dropped a few of Kemper's cards on the floor, as if by mistake. In a few minutes, Brend was passing everything back to him, assuring him that it was quite all right. Still, Harry wasn't convinced.

"Maybe this business isn't as sweet as Darvel said," Harry argued. "You don't seem any too pleased with it yourself, Brend. Seeing things at the door, worrying about phone calls, are things that don't appeal to me."

"Would six grand appeal to you?"

"All in one piece?" rejoined Harry. Then, with a laugh: "Say, that's a bigger chunk than Darvel thought you could give me! He said maybe the thing would build up -"

"It's already built up," inserted Brend. "Look, Kemper"—Brend pointed to the Ferry Tower—"it's nearly five o'clock. You come along with me and I'll set you right."

They set out from the office, and it wasn't long before Harry knew that they were on their way to the Acme Florists. Along the route, Brend chatted pleasantly in an effort to convince "Kemper" that he was no longer nervous. When they neared the flower shop, Brend drew Harry to a stop.

"Step in there," said Brend, "and ask for a red primrose. Put it in your buttonhole, but not until after you are out of the store and in a taxicab. Tell the driver you want to go to Chinatown, to the Hong Kong Shop."

Harry nodded, as though he expected peculiar instructions of the sort that Brend gave him.

"Stop at the junk jewelry counter," added Brend, "and ask to see some necklaces. Take the one that the salesman wants to give you. He'll price it at two dollars and a half, but it will be worth sixty thousand to that customer of yours in Cincinnati."

Harry nodded. Then: "Want me to stop back at your office, Brend?"

"Not if you get the necklace," undertoned Brend; then, with a note of confidence: "Which you will. Take the night plane, and see me when you get back here, which ought to be soon. There will be another big one for you, Kemper."

HARRY sauntered into the flower store. This time, he really saw Paula Rayle, for she was in the shop receiving a wrapped package of flowers from the clerk. Not only did Harry see Paula, but he immediately learned her name.

"We were going to send these, Miss Rayle," said the clerk. "We still can, if you prefer -"

"No, no," the girl interrupted, with a smile. "I intend to wear them. I'm in a hurry, too, because I want to do some shopping. I'm afraid"—Harry was noting that Paula's frown was almost as attractive as her smile—"that most of the shops will be closed. But I suppose I'll be able to find many of the things I want."

Paula went from the shop and Harry watched her, which did not delay him, because the clerk's eyes were following Paula, too. In fact, Harry was the first to recuperate from the spell. He jogged the clerk and pointed to the corner.

"A red flower," said Harry, fingering his coat lapel. "It ought to go well with this suit. One of those will

do"—he was pointing to the corner—"unless you've something better."

"These are primroses," said the clerk, a bit stiffly. "They are a special flower that we carry. Perhaps you would prefer -"

"A primrose," interrupted Harry. "Wrap it in a little package, so that I can save it until dinner."

With the little package tucked in his pocket, Harry went out, and promptly encountered Brend, who had been taking wary looks along the street. If he had seen Paula, he at least did not mention her, which proved that Brend had something serious on his mind. But, for that matter, Brend did not mention Chinese. Instead, he tried to act quite casually.

"Let's stroll a while, Kemper," suggested Brend. "It's better to wait until dark, before you go to Chinatown. You can pick up a cab, in a half hour or so, and I'll take another."

"Another?"

"Yes," replied Brend, "so that I can arrive later and make sure that you received the item. Sometimes they change clerks at the Hong Kong Shop."

Actually, Harry knew that Brend depended upon darkness to move in his cover-up crew. He foresaw, too, that Brend intended to be in the offing, just to watch for certain persons who might be working for Li Husang. Such protection, Harry decided, would not be amiss, while he was playing his present part. But he welcomed Brend's delay for a better reason.

By this time, Harry assured himself, The Shadow had probably talked sense into the real Kemper, and would therefore be free to visit Chinatown himself and take charge of the competent Chinese who were undoubtedly on guard by order of Dr. Roy Tam.

Delay was seldom on The Shadow's calendar, but Harry decided that this was one time when it would prove important, and simplify the situation.

How important that delay was to prove; how it would complicate matters, instead of smoothing them, Harry was soon to discover. Already, The Shadow's well-laid plan of acquiring the dowager's necklace was on its way to an unexpected climax, which would force The Shadow into double combat with factions representing rivalry in crime!

CHAPTER VIII. AT THE HONG KONG SHOP

THE Hong Kong Shop represented Chinatown's greatest contrast between the new and old. It was a modern emporium, as modern as stores found elsewhere in San Francisco, but it stood in the oldest and gloomiest sector of the Chinese quarter.

Forming an oasis of brilliant light in a sea of surrounding darkness, the Hong Kong Shop was not difficult to find, nor hard to reach. The powerful flood lamps above its show windows threw a path of welcoming light to the nearest corner, and few visitors realized that they were forced to pass gloomy, forbidding buildings in order to reach the modern store.

Harry Vincent observed it, however, as he rode in by cab. He noticed that the lights of the Hong Kong Shop showed the street quite clearly, but not the doorways that flanked the thoroughfare.

Not only were those doors good lurking spots; they were being used as such. Men who looked like bums and panhandlers were slouching about them. But when Harry stepped from his cab and threw a rearward glance, he noted that none of the bums were approaching passers-by. Since no police were in

sight, the answer was quite obvious.

The lurkers were not professional panhandlers; they were thugs posing as beggars. They were the men hired by Elredge Brend, the front man of a very profitable racket, to make sure that his specialty salesmen were not bothered by slinky Chinese assassins in the employ of a certain Li Husang.

To confirm Harry's opinion, another cab pulled into the street, but stopped short of the Hong Kong Shop. The man who stepped from it was an American, who moved in huddly fashion and took advantage of the darkness beyond the cab, to escape the glare from the Hong Kong Shop.

From the fellow's manner, the way he sidled to an obscure door, Harry knew that he was Elredge Brend, on hand to support "Kemper" in case of trouble.

Carrying his pose of Kemper, Harry gave another wary glance along the street, then deliberately entered the Chinese store.

All the clerks were Chinese, but most of them had an American manner. Similarly, the Chinese shoppers were clad in American clothes, but they made up no more than half the customers. The rest were Americans, who, from the way they shopped about, looked like persons who had come to this store because it stayed open later than others. In fact, the merchandise they picked was the sort that Harry would expect to see along Market Street, rather than in Chinatown.

By way of precaution, Harry looked over the exits from the Hong Kong Shop and made a prompt discovery. Except for the main door, the others opened into dark streets and alleys. Evidently, only the Chinese customers used those, for the Americans were all choosing the lighted route.

One door, a very narrow one, was so black that Harry doubted that he saw the street beyond it. Pausing by that door, he heard a sibilant whisper.

Harry had guessed correctly. The Shadow was watching from that doorway. Cloaked in black, Harry's chief was keeping vigil of his own.

Brend and his thugs out front, The Shadow at the side exit, and— if Harry's guess was right—servers of Li Husang somewhere in the offing. For it was a sure conclusion that Li Husang was scouring Chinatown in search of the dowager's necklace, and would not neglect such an important center as the Hong Kong Shop.

Over in a far corner, Harry saw the junk jewelry counter, so conspicuous that his eye could not possibly miss it. A dapper Chinese clerk was in attendance, and the display included every type of imitation jewelry, bringing a dazzling effect of false, but resplendent, gems.

When he paused at the counter, to examine bracelets, rings, and other knickknacks, Harry was forced to admire their workmanship. It would take an expert eye to tell whether these were false or genuine, but the best indications were the price tags. All the ornaments were marked from fifty cents to three dollars and a half, none higher. Yet somewhere in this array was one article which was wrongly priced; the imperial necklace that once belonged to the Empress Dowager of China, now wanted by the unscrupulous Li Husang as a wedding gift for the Princess Mei Luan!

THOUGH the junk jewelry bore no marks to show it, Harry knew that all of it had been imported by Felix Mandore. It was clever of Mandore to have Elredge Brend slip out the real items under cover of this imitation junk. So clever, that even Li Husang had not caught on to the scheme and was looking everywhere for the leak except at the most obvious place, this junk jewelry counter.

A bare-faced system on Mandore's part, and therefore all the better for his racket, considering that he was dealing with Li Husang, a man whose mind preferred the complex to the simple.

Of course, the Chinese clerk was in it. He had to be, and when Harry studied the dapper fellow, he noted a shrewd look in the clerk's almond eyes. The man wasn't bothering about Harry, who stood near the counter; instead, he was taking in the entire shop with a very watchful eye.

He was on the lookout for the wrong persons, as well as the right one. The latter thought made Harry remember the red primrose, which was still in his pocket.

Turning slightly, Harry dipped his shoulder toward the counter and slid the primrose stealthily from his pocket, up to his coat lapel, where he maneuvered the flower into its proper place. He was helped by a display of jewelry on the counter, which hid the action from all viewers.

Nor did Harry hurry, for when he glanced across the display rack, he noticed that the clerk was busy with a customer, who happened to be a girl.

Rather than attract attention, Harry glanced away. It was the girl's voice that made him turn suddenly.

"Why, how lovely!" he heard the girl exclaim. "I can't believe that it could be so cheap!"

Harry had heard that same soft voice before. This was the girl who had been in the flower shop. Harry remembered that the clerk there had addressed her as Miss Rayle; he also recalled that she had mentioned some shopping that she had intended to do. Naturally, since most of the Frisco stores were closed, Miss Rayle had come to the Hong Kong Shop.

The object that Paula described as both lovely and cheap, was a necklace. The dapper Chinese clerk was dangling it in front of her delighted eyes, and she had decided to buy it, for Harry could tell by the motion of her shoulders that she was passing money across the counter.

He couldn't see below the level of Paula's shoulders, because the display rack was in the way. Nor did Harry particularly notice the necklace, which seemed simply a combination of green and white beads, because he was too interested in Paula's glowing face.

In fact, Harry was glad that she was buying a necklace, because that was the type of item he wanted, too, and the clerk was at the proper section of the counter. The clerk dropped Paula's purchase in a little paper bag, and as she turned away, carrying the parcel, Harry moved along the counter.

The dapper Chinaman was darting looks about the store and rubbing his chin with little circling motions, when Harry remarked, almost in his ear:

"I'd like to see some necklaces."

The clerk gave Harry a suspicious glance, one that should have ended in a nod, when his eye noticed the red primrose in Harry's lapel. Instead, sight of the crimson flower produced an alarmed look from the clerk.

Until that moment, Harry had supposed that when Chinese became excited, they showed it by action, not by facial expression. But if ever anyone had registered real consternation, it was this Chinaman behind the jewel counter.

He was so excited, that he couldn't keep his eyes on Harry. He gave a wild look toward the distant front door of the big shop, and Harry, turning, saw Paula as she departed. With that view, Harry spied what he hadn't noticed before.

The girl was wearing a bouquet of blood-red primroses, every flower in the bunch an exact duplicate of the token which showed on Harry's coat lapel!

The necklace!

Thought of it made Harry's own brain whirl. This girl, Miss Rayle, had taken the priceless heirloom which The Shadow had hoped to twist from the rival clutches of Felix Mandore and Li Husang! Whether by accident or design, the girl had obtained the priceless item by virtue of the flowers that she had bought that afternoon.

ONE course struck Harry as the right one. He must appease the excited clerk, explain things to Brend, and insist upon regaining the necklace personally. Then, by flashing word to The Shadow, he could put his chief on the girl's trail. Of those three steps, the first seemed the least difficult.

With nonchalant air, Harry turned toward the counter to speak to the clerk.

At that instant, the clerk came across the counter with two lunging hands that grabbed for Harry's throat. He shrieked one word: "Thief!" Then, as his clutch reached Harry, he broke into a wild babble of Chinese.

Wrenching free, Harry saw other clerks springing toward him. Starting for the door, he suddenly realized that he had broken his accuser's clutch with surprising ease. The fellow was following, still shouting and pointing, as Harry dodged between the counters; but it wasn't the clerk's idea to have Harry stopped until he arrived outdoors.

Only that one Chinaman was a party to the peddling of smuggled jewels. He thought that the girl was the person who really should have received the necklace. In the employ of Felix Mandore, the crooked clerk believed that Harry had come from Li Husang. Therefore, his shouts were meant for Brend and the thugs outside. He was telling them to stop Harry!

As proof, Brend and the others suddenly appeared, guns in hand, within the lighted entrance.

Yanking his own gun, Harry yelled as he drove for the front doorway. Despite the odds against him, he couldn't shoot men without warning.

Then, from across a counter, came a lunging shape in black. Before Harry could remember that his gun had a trigger, The Shadow plucked the automatic from his hand and gave it a wide fling. Then, as Harry instinctively raised a warding arm, The Shadow's other hand hooked the agent's chin.

Laden with the weight of a .45 automatic, the blow from The Shadow's fist, though pulled, completely staggered Harry.

That was not all. Gripping his tottering agent, The Shadow spun him full about and flung him directly into the path of Brend's intruding thugs.

Sagging, Harry saw the glint of aiming guns but was unable to ward them off. He was conscious only of the devastating thought that this couldn't be The Shadow, who had thus delivered him to the foe.

Then came the blasts of mobster guns, and Harry Vincent, sprawling to the floor, felt blackness swallow him!

CHAPTER IX. BATTLE OF DARKNESS

IT was The Shadow, no imitation, who had thrust Harry to the foe. As proof of his identity, The Shadow

was showing the surprising tactics that had made him famous. Wheeling from the very path of aiming guns, he was back across the counter with another leap; then he was coming from the near end of it, to flank his enemies.

All this while guns were jabbing above Harry's prone form, which would have lain forgotten but for Brend's mad shouts. Brend was yelling for his thugs to forget The Shadow and to bring along the victim. For Harry could still be useful, being by no means dead, or even wounded.

Those gun bursts that marked Harry's lapse of consciousness had not been directed at The Shadow's sprawling agent. They were meant for The Shadow, instead of the man who had temporarily been his shield. But the diversion caused by Harry's spill was all The Shadow needed to gain the cover that he wanted, not for himself but for others in the place.

The Hong Kong Shop was filled with innocent bystanders, whose lives would have been jeopardized by an unrestricted gun fight. By first tossing Harry to the foe, then drawing the fire to one side of the store, The Shadow had ended the danger. But he wasn't willing to let thugs run wild, over the shop.

His sudden appearance at their flank, the taunt of his mighty laugh close to their ears, was sufficient to send them scurrying. A few, already heeding Brend's shouts, had scooped up Harry and were carrying him along. They would have flung their burden aside, but for another surprise action by The Shadow.

Wheeling about, the cloaked fighter faded. He was gone, back to the darkness of the side door, with only the trailing tone of a mocking laugh as a reminder that he might return. Hesitating, almost ready to go after The Shadow and resume the fray, Brend's thugs suddenly connected The Shadow's departure with a trap. Heeding Brend's calls, they started for the street, taking Harry with them.

By then, things had changed within the Hong Kong Shop. Customers had scooted for cover, along with the reliable clerks. There were some Chinese, however, who crouched in readiness, looking toward The Shadow's door with patient eyes. They were men supplied by Dr. Tam; to them, The Shadow, or Ying Ko, as they knew him, was their leader, and they were ready for his call.

It came. Issuing a command in Chinese, The Shadow sent his allies toward the lighted entrance, to hurry the flight of the thugs. From outside the doorway, Brend saw the rush and yelled for his men to get to cars, which they did, putting Harry into one.

Brend, himself, started for the cab that had brought him to Chinatown; but he was too late to rejoin it. The cab was already taking on a passenger—a girl who threw a startled look back along the street, as she stepped into the vehicle.

The girl was Paula Rayle, and Brend saw more than her face; he saw the bouquet of primroses that she wore. But before Brend could either reach the cab or call his men, the girl was gone.

With a dash, Brend reached the running board of a crook-manned car and rode off in the opposite direction.

Tam's men would have harried those crooks, if given the opportunity. But there were shouts from back in the Hong Kong Shop, that told them of new strife. They turned, in time to see a thrust of ugly faces from the rear doors of the place.

Standing between the groups was the befuddled clerk who had sold the necklace to Paula. A tool of Brend's, he recognized the newcomers and screamed:

"Li Husang!"

UGLY voices took up the name, uttering it like a war cry, as they surged in through the rear doors.

"Li Husang! Li Husang!"

Knives were flying through the air, guns were ripping loud reports, all directed toward the hapless clerk. He went down to instant death, and figures came pouncing toward him. They were the knife throwers, anxious to reclaim their blades.

From the front of the shop, and spots along the side, Tam's men hurled themselves upon the invaders, prepared to sacrifice themselves in a new cause of justice. But above all came the command of The Shadow, a high shout in the Chinese tongue. It was heard by one of Tam's men, the right one.

Instantly, the lights went out. Tam's man had pulled the main switch. The Shadow's guns were stabbing from the side door, toward the spot where the vulturous followers of Li Husang had congregated above their prey, the Chinese clerk.

Again, The Shadow was confining the field of battle. He was limiting it to the rear of the shop, where Li Husang's followers were seeking rapid exit. They tried to halt there and return the fire, but every blind gun stab brought a direct hit in reply. From counter to counter, The Shadow was picking off those enemies by his fire, and finding shelter before they could spot him by his own shots.

Silence from the rear doors told that the invaders had fled, but The Shadow did not stop his drive. Reaching a door, he blazed shots into the alley, and Tam's men, noting the direction of the fire, knew that Ying Ko was taking the offensive.

The Shadow left the chase to Tam's men, while he rounded the block to the front of the Hong Kong Shop. Deprived of the glow from the Chinese emporium, the street was very dark, as sinister as the deepest section of Chinatown. Suddenly, all was transformed, when someone thrust the switch that restored the lights. Caught momentarily in the brilliance, The Shadow faded to one of the doorways where Brend's thugs had formerly lurked.

From that vantage spot, The Shadow saw that the cab was gone, and that the street now lacked any cars which might have belonged to Brend's crowd. As for the defeated horde that represented Li Husang, the sounds of vague and very distant shooting told that they were still on the run, with Tam's men in pursuit.

Then, all other sounds were drowned out by the shriek of sirens that announced arriving police cars.

With the police taking over the scene, The Shadow had no need to remain. He tried the door behind him; when it failed to yield, he probed its lock with a thin tweezer-pick. The door grated open; The Shadow stepped into a deserted hallway and closed the door behind him. Using a tiny flashlight, he went through the hall, pried open a window and dropped through, to a rear alley.

FROM then on, the course of Ying Ko was as mysterious as Chinatown itself. Choosing dark alleys, crossing low roofs, The Shadow finally dropped into a tiny courtyard within an alleyway that was fronted by a barred gate.

Entering a doorway, he went up a flight of creaky stairs, stopped at a door, and signaled with a succession of raps.

A voice spoke from within. The Shadow stepped into an office, where Dr. Tam was seated quite complacently behind his desk.

Soon, others were knocking at that door. Entering, they did not find The Shadow with Dr. Tam. Instead, they saw a calm-faced American who called himself Lamont Cranston; a very worthy gentleman, who,

for some reason, had Tam's full confidence. Though hesitant to make reports while Cranston was about, the Chinese did so, at Tam's request. All their reports were alike.

Ying Ko had routed Brend's thugs; Ying Ko had fought off Li Husang's horde. Ying Ko, The Shadow, was wise and powerful; they were sorry, however, that they had failed to follow up his great victory.

He had sent them after the men of Li Husang, but the fugitives had disappeared like rats, dragging their wounded with them. They only hoped, did these loyal servers of Dr. Tam, that Ying Ko would be willing to lead them again, despite the unworthy way in which they had behaved.

Solemnly, Tam assured them that Ying Ko would understand. When the last had reported, he turned inquiringly to The Shadow, who, all the while, had listened to the reports in the quiet style of Cranston.

"They did well," commended The Shadow. "Once the rats found their holes, there was no way of preventing them from getting back to Li Husang."

Tam nodded. Then:

"About the dowager's necklace -"

As he spoke, Tam caught himself and gave his head a grieved shake. There was no need to ask The Shadow about the necklace. From all reports, it was safe enough at present. Whoever the girl who had taken it, a question which even The Shadow had not answered, Tam knew, at least, that the priceless relic was not in the hands of Felix Mandore, or of Li Husang. What grieved Tam was the fact that he thoughtlessly put the necklace ahead of a more important human matter.

"I should have said," spoke Tam, humbly, "what about Vincent?"

The lips of Lamont Cranston took on a cryptic smile. Rising, Tam's visitor opened a closet door, took out his black cloak and hat and put them on. He stepped to the door of Tam's office, opened it halfway, then paused. From The Shadow's lips came a strange, whispered query:

"About Vincent?" he asked. "Who is Vincent?"

The words ended in a laugh that made Tam stare blankly. Astonishment must have made Tam go blank, for when he narrowed his gaze, the door was closing and only the faint echo of the curious laugh gave proof that The Shadow had indeed departed.

Half aloud, Dr. Tam repeated slowly:

"Who... is... Vincent?"

The question answered itself as Tam voiced it. His tightened lips formed a gradual smile, that ended with a pleased chuckle as Tam understood. No longer could Tam feel that The Shadow had abandoned a faithful follower to the power of the enemy.

Instead, Dr. Roy Tam had gained new evidence regarding the subtle methods of The Shadow, whose deeds, even when they seemed to be in error, were inspired by a foresight which only he, The Shadow, possessed!

CHAPTER X. THE WAY OF THE SHADOW

THINGS like big sledge hammers seemed to be pounding hard on Harry Vincent's skull, and, with every other stroke, somebody with a kindly hand was swabbing his forehead.

He'd been in the Hong Kong Shop, that much he remembered hazily, and while there, somebody had slugged him. It must have been a terrific wallop, because Harry could remember only The Shadow. It didn't make sense, The Shadow slugging Harry; so, therewith, Harry put his thoughts in reverse. It must have been Brend who slugged him, and The Shadow who had performed the rescue.

So Harry opened his eyes with the confident idea that he would see Cranston as his present companion. Once open, Harry's eyes stayed that way. Never had anything so amazed him. This friend who was trying to help him out of it wasn't Cranston. Instead, Harry saw the face of Brend!

Reaching for the cold towel, Harry clamped it hard against his head, then managed to grin. He had a new idea. The Shadow was giving him a good lesson, in return for his folly.

This wasn't Brend; it couldn't be. The face above him was The Shadow's, but his chief had put on make-up, to make Harry think he was Brend!

"I was pretty dumb," spoke Harry weakly. "Very dumb, to be exact, the way I acted at the Hong Kong Shop."

"I don't think so," returned Brend. "You showed a lot of real nerve, Kemper, the way you went after The Shadow."

Harry sat straight upright.

This was Brend! There wasn't a doubt about it. With Brend were a pair of tough-faced men who were certainly two of the thugs who had been in the Chinatown battle.

Looking about, Harry saw that he was in a hotel room, and recognized it. This was a room in the Hotel Bayview, where Harry had registered under the name of Howard Kemper.

Still a bit wondering, Harry reached for his coat, which he saw on the chair beside the bed, and began to probe the pockets.

"I found your key, Kemper," said Brend. "That's how we knew where you were staying, and brought you here. Say, if it hadn't been for you, The Shadow would have drilled us like a bunch of sieves! We're all for you, Kemper!"

Even with the ache in the back of his head, all the facts fell in line, so clearly that Harry wondered why he hadn't seen them as they were when the trouble started at the Hong Kong Shop.

There, the Chinese clerk who was in Brend's pay had supposed that Paula, not Harry, was the rightful claimant of the sixty-thousand-dollar necklace. But that was because the clerk did not know who was coming for the necklace. It was easy to check the fact: if the clerk had known who was to receive the necklace, the person in question would not have needed the identifying token of a red primrose.

But Brend knew who was to get the necklace. He had assigned the task to his new man, Howard Kemper, and supposed Harry Vincent to be that man. Therefore, when the altercation took place between Harry and the clerk, Brend naturally supposed that the clerk, and not "Kemper," was the person in the wrong.

Right then, Harry should have stuck to his role of Kemper; instead, he had done the worst thing possible. His dash from the Hong Kong Shop was justifiable, and natural, but his effort to align himself with The Shadow had been the utmost folly. In fact, as Harry remembered it, he had actually started a thrust at Brend and the thugs without waiting for The Shadow.

In slinging Harry to the thugs, The Shadow had chosen the quickest way to save his agent's life. Brend's mobbies weren't going to shoot a man that they thought belonged to their own crowd, and The Shadow knew it.

That reason gave The Shadow the added advantage of using Harry as a temporary shield; and, therewith, The Shadow had bettered his own position for the fray that followed.

While Harry joined this chain of thoughts, he began to hear Brend and his pals talking among themselves. They were exchanging congratulations on the way they had escaped The Shadow, and the skill with which they had managed to bring "Kemper" along with them.

Escaped The Shadow!

This amused Harry, for he knew The Shadow had deliberately let them get away with the whole farce. Having saved Harry's life, it was good policy for The Shadow to establish further his agent in the enemy's camp.

PULLING the wet towel from his head, Harry turned to Brend. Still being Kemper, and now something of a hero, it was Harry's opportunity to pick up from where The Shadow had necessarily left off.

"What went sour?" Harry asked Brend. "I flashed the Rower at the clerk and the guy went goofy! Or did he? Say, maybe he was trying to pull some double cross -"

"Not Lee Keng," interrupted Brend with a headshake. "He's worked for us before. He was all right."

"But, maybe he'll talk!"

"Not now." Brend shook his head solemnly, but his lips showed a smug smile. "Lee Keng is dead!"

Harry sank back against his pillow and reached for the cold towel, as though the whole thing bewildered him.

"The girl was the trouble, Kemper," said Brend. "She picked up the necklace by mistake."

"What girl?" queried Harry.

"Didn't you see her at the counter?" quizzed Brend. "Buying a necklace ahead of you?"

"If I had," snapped Harry, "I'd have known what was wrong. But why did this Lee Keng hand her the necklace?"

"She was wearing primroses," explained Brend. "Maybe she got them at the Acme Florists, but it wouldn't be smart to ask them about it. What I want you fellows to do"—he swung to his pair of gunmen—"is find that taxi jockey who brought me in his cab. He's the fellow who took the girl away, later. Maybe he'll remember where she went."

From the way the thugs nodded, as they went out, Harry was quite sure they would stir the cabby's memory, if they found him. But since Brend had furnished no clue to the cab, or its license number, Harry could picture them having a long hunt.

For himself, Harry had obtained one point of information. The Acme Florists were not party to the jewel racket, hence Brend couldn't use them to find the girl. Evidently, the Acme shop simply carried red primroses, of the species *primula obconica* because there was a call for them.

Satisfied that Kemper was thoroughly loyal and reliable, Brend clapped Harry on the back and told him

to drop in at the office in the morning.

"We'll have something for you, Kemper," assured Brend. "We can always use a good hand. Meanwhile, don't worry. Things just went wrong tonight, but we'll make up for them."

As soon as Brend had gone, Harry pounced for the telephone book. Thumbing through the pages, he found the name Rayle. There were only a few in the directory, and just one of those was a girl's name. Harry read it, half aloud:

"Paula Rayle, The Corinthian Arms -"

He paused, his finger on the name. It was chance, Harry was sure, that had taken Paula to the Hong Kong Shop after she had bought red primroses at the Acme Florists. Not much of a coincidence, though, since Chinatown was the one place to shop after other stores were closed.

Paula's case simply tallied with something that Brend had indicated; namely, that the Acme Florists knew nothing of the subtler features involving red primroses. It was apparent that the bouquet sold to Paula might have gone to any other customer who happened to like the primroses.

A blackish splotch crept over the page of the telephone book, without Harry noticing it. The thing that attracted his attention was a whisper, low and sibilant.

"Excellent, Vincent," spoke The Shadow. "We must investigate the case of Miss Paula Rayle."

THE phone book fluttered from Harry's hand as he wheeled about, to find The Shadow standing beside him. Beyond was a door that stood ajar, a connection to the next room.

Harry realized that The Shadow, leaving nothing to chance after tonight's experiences, had arrived in time to witness his awakening. It was therefore plain that The Shadow had formed his own conclusions regarding Paula Rayle.

"A fortunate thing," defined The Shadow, "that we shall be able to observe what happens. It may be best to leave the necklace with Miss Rayle, for the present."

"While I keep contact with Brend?" asked Harry.

"Yes," The Shadow replied. "Kemper will be no obstacle. He listened to reason. As for Paula Rayle, we must remember that she now has a very powerful enemy, who, if he should find her -"

There was just enough pause in The Shadow's statement for Harry to insert an opinion of his own.

"If Brend does find her," said Harry, "it will take him a long while."

A whispered laugh came from The Shadow's lips. Never had Harry heard that tone more expressive. It told of dangers to come; of a game wherein The Shadow was willing to wait, in hope that the future might bring some clue which he did not possess.

"I am not speaking of Elredge Brend," spoke The Shadow, in that low, prophetic whisper, "nor of the man he represents, Felix Mandore. The foe whose threat we must guard against is Li Husang!"

CHAPTER XI. CREATURES BY NIGHT

PAULA RAYLE smiled as she looked at the necklace. It was lovely, but she simply couldn't wear it. Even junk jewelry should be within reason, but this necklace, despite its exquisite workmanship, was not. It was too fanciful.

Its pearls were too perfectly matched to be real. The green beads between them certainly could not be carved jade. As for the green pendant that hung from the necklace, no one had ever seen an emerald that size outside a museum.

Yet, somehow, the necklace was remarkable. Its pearls had a luster that Paul had never seen in imitations; the jade was the perfect apple-green that collectors most prized; and the pendant certainly was not glass, for its brilliance was remarkable.

On three successive evenings Paula had admired the necklace, trying, against her better judgment, to imagine that it was real. Its fascination had increased for her, and tonight, as she sat at her dressing table, she actually had the impulse to wear the garish ornament and find out what people thought about it.

Turning toward the mirror, she drew the necklace over her neck and closed the antique clasp. She breathed with admiration at the effect. The necklace was beautiful.

As she turned her head, the slight tilt of Paula's shapely shoulders gave a rhythmic effect to the necklace, causing jade and pearl to flow like ripples. But it was the emerald that fascinated Paula.

Catching the glow from the wall lamps beside the dressing table, the green stone sparkled with true gem quality. The glitter of its many facets was as brilliant as that of any diamond. It was real, this emerald, so real that it outshone the lights themselves. To Paula's raptured gaze, it had become a great green eye that glowed with a hypnotic power!

Jade and pearls were forgotten. In the mirror, Paula's own reflection seemed a blur. The background of the dim room behind her was so vague that she did not even see it. Nor did Paula hear sounds that she might otherwise have detected—soft creaks from the floor, that denoted something creeping inward from the door.

The guarded sound came closer; there was the faint tone of a hissed breathing, that Paula, had she noted it, would have mistaken for the deadly sibilance of a poisonous snake. The thing that came creeping up behind Paula's chair was snakelike, too.

It was a yellow hand, that writhed as it approached, and its long-nailed fingers formed claws as deadly as a serpent's fangs.

In its reptilian rise, the hand seemed to draw a writhing figure upward with it, but the owner of that hand did not bring himself in sight. Not even the hand was visible in the mirror, for it stayed between Paula's shoulders until it reached the level of the girl's neck.

A horrible contrast, that saffron claw, against the smooth whiteness of Paula's half-bared back; but at no time did the hand come close enough for the girl to feel its touch.

Paula did give a slight shudder, as she felt what she thought was a waft of night air from the open window straight in back of her. But the breeze that she actually felt was the stirred air that the clawish hand created, as it moved mere inches from her flesh.

Still admiring the emerald, Paula repressed her shudder at the very moment when the hand reached the clasp of the necklace.

Without touching Paula's neck, two long nails plucked the clasp. Those nails belonged to thumb and forefinger of the creeping hand. Instead of unclasping the necklace, the hand lifted it, and the beads of jade and pearl began an upward flow from Paula's breast.

Paula wasn't conscious of their ripple, or the necklace's new direction, but she did see something that

startled her.

The emerald was moving upward!

It seemed an illusion, until the green gem had passed the upper fringe of her pink garment; then the coldness of the stone was evident. Still rising, the emerald seemed imbued with life, and Paula could only watch it in amazement.

Then, suddenly, its beauty was lost; nearing her throat, the gem reminded Paula of a beetle, a horrible, green beetle. Thrusting her hands toward the cold object, she gave a scream.

Her cry was promptly drowned out by a sudden choke that the necklace gave her. Tugging as the necklace tightened, gasping for breath that she couldn't find, Paula saw the full reflection in the mirror and learned, in horror, what was happening.

A figure had bobbed up behind her chair, that of a scrawny creature with a hideous yellow face. With a leer that was demonish, the creature was using two clawish hands to twist the necklace into a tourniquet that encircled Paula's neck!

This strangler, a twin of the assassin who had murdered Trobin several nights before, was behaving in the style that Li Husang had ordered. He was choking Paula Rayle by the simplest of measures. He was using the dowager's necklace, the object that he had been sent to bring back with him, as an instrument of death. The rope of jade and pearl was a strangler's cord!

Writhing from the chair, clutching the necklace desperately but without avail, Paula could neither save herself, nor give a cry for help. She saw her own face in the mirror, its features contorted and the eyes bulging. Past her own face, she still observed the leering countenance of the merciless monster who was intent upon her doom.

Behind that, blackness—the background formed by the wide window; nothing more. Blackness that seemingly would swallow her within the next half minute. Blackness that suddenly came spreading inward an engulfing monster in itself.

Then, as a crackle racked through Paula's brain, the whole room whirled. As she saw it in the mirror, the spinning effect producing a fantastic flow of rapid action.

Engulfing blackness swooped. It became a creature as incredible as the yellow demon who was seeking Paula's life. Darkness turned itself into a black-cloaked being, with swift hands that shot for the monster's own throat.

They did more than choke, did those black-gloved hands; they applied an upward jolt that had a paralyzing effect upon Paula's tormentor. The girl saw the fiendish face freeze with a distorted grimace; at the same instant, she slumped forward in her chair and her breath came back with a long, inward gasp.

Turning as she thumped the floor, Paula found herself propped against the dressing table. Her hands were claspng her throat, which was no longer gripped by the twining necklace, though she could still feel the tingle of its imaginary pressure.

Her fingers sliding downward, Paula found the rope of jade and pearl; still lower, she encountered the dangling emerald. No longer a noose, the necklace was hanging loosely, as it had before.

But Paula's eyes were riveted upon the center of the room. There, she was witnessing the amazing finish of a remarkably swift struggle. Recuperating from his spell of paralyzed inaction, the creature with the ugly face was groping for living blackness, unable to recognize it as a human form. Two gloved hands

crossed, and clamped the scrawny yellow wrists; with that move, Paula's cloaked rescuer showed his full prowess.

With a twist that turned into an overarm fling, The Shadow sent Li Husang's scrawny serf on a flying trip out through the window. A whirling thing, with a revolving face that made a blur of yellow, the disappointed assassin screeched wildly as he sailed into the night. Paula saw a wide fling of clawish hands as the creature disappeared.

Completing his fling, The Shadow stopped against the window sill. He saw the scrawny strangler strike a projecting roof edge one floor below, then bounce to an alleyway ten feet farther down.

Paula's apartment was only on the third floor, and apparently the lightweight Chinaman had stood the gaff of the bouncing fall, for he hopped to his feet and lurched frantically into the lower darkness. But The Shadow, having settled that one foe so handily, was not yet through with battle.

He knew that Li Husang's killers traveled in squads; that the one he had so speedily handled might be but the forerunner of others. That was why he had disposed of the scrawny man so easily.

Even as he finished his look below, The Shadow was turning toward the room, drawing an automatic from the folds of his cloak.

PAULA, by then, was scrambling to her feet. Seized by the sudden horror of everything about her, fearing that even her cloaked rescuer might turn out to be another foe, Paula could think only in terms of flight. She didn't stop to grab her dress from the bed, but dashed to the door of the apartment, hoping to wrench it open and escape.

The Shadow was sweeping in from one side, hoping to halt Paula's frenzied flight by means of calming tactics. Hence, instead of trying to block her rush, he was actually a few paces behind the girl, and off to one side, when the door came smashing inward.

With a frightened cry, Paula stopped her dash and dropped a full pace backward, as a brawny Chinaman lunged inward.

He was not the only trapper. There were two others, at the head of the stairway, both with drawn knives. They were prepared to charge inward should their companion encounter trouble.

Sight of Paula brought contemptuous leers from all three. From her boudoir apparel, they supposed that she had merely managed to dodge the strangler and was trying to outrace him.

The foremost Chinaman thrust out his hand to grab the necklace and drag Paula toward him. The others saw the girl pull frantically away, back into the darkness, as the man's hand touched the jeweled prize.

Then, as the necklace stretched long and taut between her neck and the yellow fist that tugged the big green emerald, a long, solid shaft of blackness lunged between and veered upward, toward the brawny Chinaman.

First, an upslashing automatic stuck the hand that gripped the emerald, so hard that the fingers lost their hold. Pounded upward, the hand could not stop the blow, and The Shadow's gun fist ended its smash against the Chinaman's jaw. The stroke was a replica of the one that The Shadow had given Harry at the Hong Kong Shop, but this time, the uppercut was not pulled.

The Chinaman took a backward flounder that would have stretched him flat on the floor, if The Shadow had not grabbed him. A mere sprawl wasn't enough, in this case. Hoisting his shoulder under the stunned Chinaman's ribs, The Shadow lifted him clear of the floor with a terrific forward drive, at the same time

twisting the fellow's bulk toward the horizontal.

The man's two companions, springing forward, were met by a broadside battering-ram in the person of their own groggy pal. They didn't even see The Shadow, for they hadn't imagined that he was on the scene. They thought that Paula had somehow delivered the staggering stroke; but this business of turning a sagging foeman into a flying wedge was beyond all plausibility, so far as Paula was concerned.

It was the unexpected quality of The Shadow's heave, as much as the strength behind it, that took the two reserves off balance, as well as off guard. Diving back as the human missile struck them, they, too, were carried by The Shadow's thrust. All three together, the Chinese went over the top edge of the stairway and became a whirl of tumbling figures.

Landing at the bottom, the two reserves gathered up their stunned companion and staggered off in flight, their burden between them. The glances that they gave across their shoulders did not enable them to see The Shadow. He had stepped back into the darkness of Paula's apartment, and was putting his gun away beneath his cloak.

Darkness had hidden The Shadow's hand throughout this struggle. For reasons which might prove of future importance, he preferred that the fugitives should carry to Li Husang the story of some unaccountable event that had blocked their efforts to obtain the emerald necklace.

Perhaps Li Husang, himself, would puzzle over the riddle, without suspecting that Ying Ko, The Shadow, was its maker!

CHAPTER XII. WEIRD FLIGHT

No longer did Paula Rayle have a doubt that The Shadow was a friend. His swift handling of the three Chinese proved that his earlier exploit had not been a mere feud with the strangler who had first invaded the apartment.

Paula realized that this cloaked friend must have been on watch before the Chinese arrived; that his entry from the window had been in answer to the very brief cry that she had given when she saw the hideous face behind her chair.

She feared, at present, that The Shadow was about to leave, and that would mean a return of both horror and danger. Hoping that he would listen to her pleas, and stay, Paula reached The Shadow as he stepped back into the apartment.

Feeling the grip of trembling hands upon his arm, The Shadow turned to view a very ardent face, with eyes that showed their full sincerity. Paula's lips were finding words, which at first were somewhat disconnected, though she managed to express her gratitude. Then, inspired by the burn of steady eyes that met her own, Paula became quite calm.

"I'm sure they came here for the necklace," she said. "I had just begun to realize that it must be very valuable, and that I bought it by mistake. Am I right?"

The Shadow's nod told that she was.

"Then take it," urged Paula. Reaching for the clasp, she managed to undo it, and let the necklace trickle into The Shadow's extended hand. "It is rightfully yours, for having saved my life."

"It is not mine," replied The Shadow. "It belongs to a Chinese princess named Mei Luan."

For a moment, Paula's eyes flashed angrily.

"Did Mei Luan send those Chinese to take it?" the girl demanded. "If she did -"

"She did not," interposed The Shadow. "They came from Li Husang, an ambitious criminal who considers murder to be a very necessary part of his elaborate schemes."

Paula shuddered at mention of murder. Then, with a nervous laugh; she said:

"At least, I shall be safe if I no longer have the necklace. Only -"

The glow of her eyes, the sudden flush of her cheeks, were more expressive than any words that Paula could have added. She felt horribly abashed by her own statement, for it meant that she was putting the burden of danger on The Shadow.

True, he had proven his ability to deal with followers of Li Husang, but Paula felt that she had behaved quite shabbily. Mere apology would not be sufficient. To amend her fault, Paula reached for the necklace and took it from The Shadow's hand.

"Let me keep the necklace," she said bravely. "Whatever the consequences, I must face them. If I need protection, I can call the police."

The Shadow's laugh gave sibilant interruption. It struck Paula very forcibly that events must have reached a state where things were happening before the law could move to stop them. Certainly, it was The Shadow, not the police, who had intervened in Paula's behalf this evening. There was something else that came home with a shock.

Those men from Li Husang had not come merely to regain the necklace; they had also been intent upon murdering Paula. As The Shadow had said, Li Husang evidently considered murder as a necessary matter in the perpetration of other crimes. Possession of the necklace was suddenly becoming quite unimportant. Whether Paula kept it or not, she would still be marked for death by Li Husang!

"You must leave here at once," spoke The Shadow. "If you are willing to accept my protection, I can place you beyond the reach of Li Husang."

"Accept your protection!" Paula's reply was a grateful choke. "I'm willing to beg for it!"

"Then prepare to leave immediately," The Shadow advised, "because -"

He was glancing from the window of the darkened living room, and he reached for Paula's arm to turn her gently in the same direction.

From that window, Paula could see the front street, and she saw a little cluster of men gathered about a taxicab. Some were pointing upward toward the apartment house; another was beckoning to an arriving car.

"But they are Americans!" exclaimed Paula. "They could not be from Li Husang. Or—could they?"

"They represent another faction," returned The Shadow, "but they are quite as anxious to gain the necklace. They have been talking to the cab driver who brought you back from Chinatown the other night. If we hurry, we can be gone before they call."

REMEMBERING the Chinatown excitement, which, according to the newspapers, had resulted in the death of several Chinese at the Hong Kong Shop, Paula also recalled a batch of men with guns, who had dashed out of the Chinese store while she was getting into the cab.

Then, realizing that the matter of a speedy departure was up to her, Paula dashed into the bedroom and seized a green-and-silver dress lying on the bed. Though The Shadow was still looking from the window in the other room, he must have guessed that Paula had grabbed the first thing in sight, for she heard his quiet tone:

"Something darker would be better. We shall have to move out of here without being seen."

Tossing the colorful dress in the closet, Paula found a dark-blue one and put it on. She thought of packing a few things to take along, then realized that time was too short and the burden of a bag unwise. Hurriedly rejoining The Shadow, Paula said in bated tone:

"I'm ready."

The Shadow was still looking from the window, watching the last few men disappear from the street. Paula felt herself grow tense, for she recognized that the house was entirely surrounded and that the invaders were already moving upstairs. There must be at least a dozen of them, and all were on the move, except one who remained by the taxicab keeping the driver under surveillance.

"The back door!" whispered Paula. "It leads out to a fire tower which -"

"Which is their best way up here," interposed The Shadow. "We shall go down by the usual stairs; part way, at least."

They left the apartment. Oddly The Shadow did not insist upon the rapid flight that Paula expected; instead, they moved rather slowly down to the second floor. There, the girl could hear the approach of creeping men, and she was drawing back, afraid, when The Shadow suddenly thrust her forward.

For one instant, Paula was treated to the unwelcome sight of thuggish faces above lifting guns. She heard hoarse cries, as a pair of attackers sprang forward. But, during that instant, The Shadow's hand had not lost its grip on Paula's arm. Before a single gun could really aim, the strong clutch had whipped Paula away and released her in the opposite direction.

Utterly bewildered, Paula was sprawling in the hallway, past the upper stairs, and thinking all was lost, until she saw The Shadow's next action.

The thugs hadn't seen The Shadow in the background. They thought that Paula had darted away of her own volition. As they charged, The Shadow flung himself among them, giving a laugh far louder than the whispery mirth that Paula had heard earlier.

It wasn't just the mockery that halted the attacking gunners; The Shadow was using a weapon of his own. Paula saw his arm swing hard, down, up, then with a cross slash. His fist was carrying a huge automatic, that sledged warding arms aside and found the heads beyond them.

Guns were blasting, and the roar in the hallway was far more terrific than the shooting that Paula had heard in Chinatown. But the girl realized that the spurts of those revolvers were as harmless as blanks. Each man was sagging or stumbling as he fired. The shots were going into walls and ceiling, at angles wide away from The Shadow.

Then, with his opponents falling back to the lower stairs, where pounding footsteps told of arriving reserves, The Shadow swept toward Paula, caught her arm and carried her along the hallway toward the fire tower.

As they went, Paula could hear calls from above, followed by footsteps coming down the stairs from the third floor. Brend and the picked men who had used the fire tower were falling perfectly for The

Shadow's ruse.

First to reach the third floor, while The Shadow and Paula had been going down the stairs, they naturally took the quickest route to the second when they heard the shooting there. Thus the fire tower was an open route for The Shadow to whisk Paula away.

WHEN she and The Shadow reached the ground, Paula pointed to a little alley that led to the rear street; but instead of taking that direction, The Shadow fired a few shots into the darkness, then swung Paula around another corner of the apartment house.

Return shots from the alley were much belated, and this time, Paula understood The Shadow's system. He wanted to draw the main mob out the rear way, and from the shots they heard, that was the direction they would take.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was heading Paula to the front street, and she was gripped with the certain fear that this route, too, must certainly be blocked. It proved thus to be; moreover, The Shadow knew it. During his view from Paula's apartment, The Shadow had watched two men post themselves, and he knew right where to find them.

Springing ahead of Paula, he was upon them as they rose from cover. Paula couldn't help but shriek when she saw one man aim straight for The Shadow; then, the thug's shot went wide and high, as The Shadow knocked his arm aside. Down came The Shadow's own gun, with a thump that seemed to telescope his foe.

Valiantly, Paula sprang for the other man, who, for some reason, was very slow to aim. Wrenching from her grasp, he caught Paula's arm and twisted her about with a deft maneuver. She had a glimpse of his face and wondered why it wasn't as hardened as the others, until she found herself thrust back into The Shadow's receiving grasp. Then came The Shadow's brief, commending tone.

"Good work, Vincent," he said. "Coax in that fellow from the cab. But don't forget: you're Kemper."

No wonder The Shadow had chosen this route. One of his own men was with the invaders, and was fully prepared to help the escape should The Shadow come his way!

Paula saw Harry dash ahead, beckoning to the thug at the cab, shouting something about "The Shadow." Both came rushing toward the apartment house, where Harry's yell to look out came purposely too late. The Shadow hooked the other man with a side swing that sent him rolling over and over; then, rushing Paula with him, The Shadow reached the cab.

They were in the cab, and the driver was getting started under the persuasive pressure of The Shadow's automatic. Someone was shooting after them, and The Shadow took time out to return the fire as they rounded the corner.

But Paula, noting that The Shadow's aim was purposely high, looked back and saw that the other marksman was Harry Vincent, putting up a bluff for the benefit of Brend and the depleted mob. They were arriving too late to do any damage.

It was on her account, Paula realized, that The Shadow had avoided direct battle with the invaders. His succession of skirmishes could have been turned into a complete victory, had he been sure that she was away from harm.

Again, Paula was grateful, and the cab driver was beginning to appreciate The Shadow, too, for having pulled him from a jam. When The Shadow leaned forward and instructed the cabby, Paula saw the

fellow nod.

Then, after winding around many blocks, the streets were growing darker. The driver was getting wary, and The Shadow was forced to return to his persuasive tactics. When the cab finally stopped, and The Shadow alighted with Paula, the driver left them speedily. It was then that the girl first understood the darkness of the streets, and her alarm was roused.

She was in Chinatown!

CONFLICTING thoughts seized Paula. The Shadow had promised her security from Li Husang. Yet he had brought her to the very section where Li Husang held powerful control!

As they went through a narrow passage, Paula heard a gate clang shut behind her; then they were meeting Chinese who spoke to The Shadow, addressing him by the name "Ying Ko."

Through a doorway, up creaky stairs, Paula was almost ready to break away and flee from this self-proclaimed friend, The Shadow, when he drew her across the threshold of a lighted office, which, to her amazement, was American in setting, rather than Chinese.

A bowing, solemn-faced Chinaman was greeting them in English, adding his assurances to those of The Shadow.

Such was Paula's introduction to Dr. Roy Tam, in whose hand The Shadow placed the necklace. Through a far door, Tam led the way into a well-furnished apartment, where a friendly Chinese woman met them.

She was Tam's wife, and Paula smiled when she saw Chinese children of assorted sizes, the other members of Tam's family. There were servants, too, capable men who had the look of bodyguards. Tam indicated them with a sweep of his hand.

"You will be quite safe here," said Tam. "This is one place that even Li Husang would never dare attack. You shall be our guest as long as Ying Ko deems it advisable."

Ying Ko—The Shadow!

Paula turned, to look back through the door that connected with Tam's office, expecting again to see the black-cloaked friend who had twice rescued her. The door was closing, and The Shadow was gone. But Paula Rayle was quite sure that she heard the whisper of a departing laugh, that certified the promise made by Dr. Tam!

CHAPTER XIII. THE WAY OF LI HUSANG

WHILE Paula Rayle was suddenly deciding that Chinatown was not the sinister place that she supposed it, events in other parts of that district were proving the opposite.

Trouble-making Chinese had long ago found it good policy to avoid the area where Dr. Tam and his loyal followers held sway. Since that area was very limited, the members of other factions had plenty of space to roam.

At present, some were roaming in a skulking style, sneaking into the back doors of obscure shops, some of which were empty, others occupied by worried Chinese merchants who very wisely failed to notice the trespassers who were passing through their premises.

These routes led to underground passages, some so long that they certainly passed beneath the streets.

Along one such passage, which was dimly lighted by well-spaced electric lights, four men made a curious procession.

Three were brawny, and two of them were supporting a half-slumped companion, the third of the huskies. Behind them came a thin, spidery creature who followed at a limping gait. These were the Chinese who had gone in quest of the Dowager's necklace, returning to report their failure to Li Husang.

The group reached a metal door, which slid back after one tapped a signal. In the passage beyond they were met by an ugly-faced Mongol, whose face was tawnier than theirs. He rated high with Li Husang, this Mongol, for his thick lips showed a disdainful sneer, as his hand lifted, to silence the babbly voices of the arrivals. Then, turning about, the Mongol went through another sliding door and closed it behind him.

A network of short passages brought the Mongol to a brass door which had a dragon's head as its central ornament. The eyes of the staring dragon were rubies, and the Mongol pressed both of them.

His signal was heard, for the door slid upward, in contrast to the others, which had moved sideways into the walls. The door gave a muffled clang when it went up, and the voice that spoke as the Mongol crossed the threshold was as metallic in tone as the brass.

"Welcome, Holgo," said the voice. "What report have my searchers brought?"

The speaker was Li Husang. No one entering this subterranean abode could have doubted his identity, had they ever heard of Li Husang. The one-time pirate bore marks of his profession, most noteworthy being a scar from mouth to ear that gave the right side of his face a hideous, extended smile.

Without the scar, Li Husang's features were horrible enough. His forehead was pock-marked; his eyes, a watery green like the sea that he had so often sailed, were things without mercy, a true index of the brain behind them.

Powerful of build, Li Husang had thick arms that fitted his stocky body, and his hands, huge and long-nailed, looked capable of performing the work that he so often assigned to his scrawny stranglers.

Even Holgo, the powerful Mongol, was uneasy when he addressed Li Husang. Holgo's words were stumbly, as he apologetically explained that the quest for the necklace had failed. Li Husang's reply was a clangy laugh, which denoted anything but pleasure.

"Bring them to me, Holgo."

When Holgo returned with the shambling crew, Li Husang was seated in a great chair that looked like a throne. It was of dark teakwood, ornamented with gold, as were the taborets, the cabinets, and other furniture that filled the luxurious room. The tapestries that hung the walls were golden, all decorated with dragons, to symbolize the future power of Li Husang.

With all his ugliness, Li Husang had an air of dignity when he sat in the great throne. Holgo and the others looked relieved, for though Li Husang's cryptic face showed no change, they knew that he regarded the throne as a judgment seat, wherein he weighed all statements on an impartial basis.

The scrawny strangler spoke first, and Li Husang, as he listened, showed his first change of expression. It was the color of his face that changed; it became livid, clouded, darkening under the glow of hanging lamps. The spidery man stopped abruptly and Li Husang turned to the others, who began to chatter all at once, the saggy man included.

Then Li Husang's harsh tone drowned them. He rose from his throne, spat an order at Holgo, who retired, while Li Husang proceeded to pace the room, hurling fierce glances at his four trembling

servitors. His manner changed suddenly, when the metal door slid upward.

He turned his face to the right so that his scarred cheek could not be seen from the doorway. His lips formed a real smile, as he bowed to the girl who entered.

It was the Princess Mei Luan.

ROBED in purple, decorated with gold, Mei Luan was clad in a style that suited her. She looked the part of a princess; her features had the mold and hue of yellow ivory, exquisitely carved. Her eyes were a true black, as was her hair, and her head was crowned with a sparkling coronet of diamonds.

Her tapering fingers were noticeable when she seated herself on the throne, for she placed her hands upon the arms. Thus displayed, her fingers were as brilliant as her head, for they were massed with rings containing gems of many colors.

Her tone, in contrast to Li Husang's, was like the tinkle of a bell compared with a discordant gong. Having taken the throne which was rightfully hers, if anyone's, Mei Luan spoke in Chinese:

"What is the question, Li Husang?"

Li Husang had taken his stand on the throne's right, to keep what he considered the handsome side of his face on continuous display.

"I ask you to judge, princess," he declared. "These men have lied to me, and in order to show my fairness, I prefer that you declare their punishment."

"What is the lie they tell?"

"They claim that they went in quest of the imperial necklace," said Li Husang, "and that when they found it, each man who touched it was flung aside as if by a lightning stroke. This one, Loy Gow"—he indicated the scrawny strangler—"was hurled, so he says, through an open window.

"This other, Wing Choy"—he pointed to the brawny Chinaman who was still supported by companions—"insists that the same force tossed him down a flight of stairs."

Mei Luan nodded very solemnly, then turned reproving eyes upon Li Husang. In her musical tone, she said:

"Perhaps you have not heard of the legend, Li Husang: how the imperial necklace protects its wearer from all harm. Who was wearing the necklace, Li Husang?"

"An American, they say. A girl named Paula Rayle. Our spies heard of her, and learned where she lived. She had the stolen necklace, princess -"

"But she did not steal it," interposed Mei Luan firmly. "No thief could gain protection from the necklace. Therefore, I know that she could not have stolen it."

Despite the presence of Li Husang, the four men before the judgment throne began to babble their story anew. Glaring, Li Husang let them pour out the main details; then he gave a shout for silence, when sure that Mei Luan would agree that they had spoken enough of their story for her.

"You have heard their story, princess," scoffed Li Husang. "Now, let me state the facts. There is, in San Francisco, a certain person called Ying Ko, who has excited various Chinese and caused them to oppose us in our quest for the imperial necklace."

Princess Mei Luan turned her dark eyes upon Li Husang. Though puzzled, her gaze was steady. Her words had a tone of reproof.

"You told me, Li Husang, that an American named Felix Mandore had stolen the necklace, but that he was passing it through other hands. Now, you speak of a person called Ying Ko, whose name implies that he is not a person at all, but a shadow. Why should you ask me to doubt the stories of these men"—Mei Luan pointed to the huddled four—"while you expect me to believe a tale more fanciful than theirs?"

"Because it was Ying Ko who met them!" growled Li Husang. "The force that they attribute to the necklace must have been supplied by Ying Ko!"

With a doubting smile, the princess waved her hand toward the cowering men who had been accused by Li Husang. In musical tone, she spoke one word: "Go!"

Rising, they gladly herded toward the portal, which Holgo, the Mongol, opened for them at a signal from Li Husang. When Mei Luan arose to follow them, Li Husang bowed, as if in acceptance of her decision.

"I believe in the power of the necklace," reminded Mei Luan. "Therefore, those men shall have the benefit of my decision, Li Husang, until you have learned more concerning Ying Ko—if there is such a person. As for our agreement, it shall remain. I shall reward the person who restores the necklace, granting whatever wish may be given."

LI HUSANG'S ugly eyes were vivid with their greenish glow, as Princess Mei Luan stepped through the portal. His leering lips delivered a pleased hiss, as the brazen door slid downward to obscure the slim form of the girl whose beauty matched the rarity of old ivory.

Mei Luan knew why Li Husang had insisted that she come to San Francisco. He wanted her here when he regained the necklace, and he had made it plain that the wish which she could not disclaim would be her hand in marriage.

However much Mei Luan might hate the sight of Li Husang, she could not retract her promise. It was the word of a Manchu, and would be kept, even though Mei Luan knew that her marriage to Li Husang would ally him to a royal race which should rightfully disown him. Such a situation merely increased Li Husang's relish for the coming bargain.

"The time will come," he said, to Holgo, "when Mei Luan will no longer dare to doubt my word. I shall obtain that necklace despite Ying Ko."

"Yes, master," returned the Mongol, with a bow; then, in cautious tone, he added: "But if your followers fear the necklace itself, and will not touch its owner, how can you gain it?"

Li Husang's response was a metallic laugh. He stepped to a writing cabinet in the corner of the glittering throne room. Taking pen, he wrote a letter in English, sealed it, and handed it to Holgo.

"Remember when I spoke of Trobin?" queried Li Husang. "How I said there were two ways to deal with men like him? I chose one way, and it failed, because we were too early. But there are others, like Trobin, with whom we still can deal. This time, I shall try the other way."

"Mail this letter, Holgo, and you will learn the reason why all men fear Li Husang. You shall see the skill with which I conquer obstacles."

As Holgo left, he heard the clangor of Li Husang's evil laughter, louder even than the echoes of the dropping door. By that token, Holgo was sure that Li Husang rated Ying Ko, The Shadow, as merely

one of the obstacles that would soon be destroyed.

CHAPTER XIV. CRIME'S OTHER CAMP

WHILE Li Husang was planning great things for the future, other schemes were in the making elsewhere in San Francisco. In a mansion on Nob Hill, the exclusive residential section, Felix Mandore was in conference with a group of business associates.

Mandore's companions did not include such persons as Elredge Brend. In fact, Mandore, if questioned, would have denied that he had ever heard of Brend. His present callers were legitimate merchants, persons who had met Mandore in an honest business way, yet who marveled somewhat at his ability to sell certain goods at such low prices. Back of it they saw a scheme, but it was one that they approved, because it was quite legal.

It seemed that Mandore had gotten a corner on junk jewelry and was flooding the market with it, at prices which could promise very little profit. These men, who had come from all parts of the country at Mandore's request, were anxious to learn just what his policy would come to.

Mandore, a pompous, long-faced individual, who sat at the head of a long table, was beginning to tell them.

"We are starting a new trend toward junk jewelry," explained Mandore, "and I can promise you that the imports will continue. I have made the necessary arrangements with the Japanese authorities."

"But there are some consumers," ventured one of Mandore's guests, "who are prejudiced against Japanese goods."

"The goods that we sell," returned Mandore with a smile, "are all made in China. The fact that the merchandise comes from sections under Japanese control, is our own secret."

The buzz that passed among the listeners was an approving one, clearly indicating that they considered Mandore's policy quite in keeping with business ethics. The first question raised concerned another angle entirely. It came from a pudgy man seated opposite Mandore.

"But why sell goods at cut rates, Mandore?" questioned the objector. "We should wait until the market is saturated. We can then use reduced prices to clear out our excess stocks."

"My good friend Norwood," returned Mandore, pompously, "the thing you suggest has become too common a practice. I have learned many things from China, gentlemen"—he was addressing the entire group, with sweeping manner—"and one is their method of doing business, which is in reverse to ours.

"The Chinese create a market, then supply it. In quantity sales, they charge more for individual items, not less. They build up customers, instead of tearing them down. You don't think it can be done? Let me remind you that the Chinese have been doing it steadily for five thousand years."

Picking up a stack of mimeographed papers, Mandore dealt them around the table like a pack of cards. The sheets were price lists, giving the present retail values of his junk jewelry, and the future. All present observed that the future scale was higher.

"Our present prices are introductory," chuckled Mandore. "Soon, purchasers will realize that the trinkets they bought so cheaply have become more valuable. They will buy more, and so will other customers. The fad will become a tidal wave, and our profits will ride with it."

Expressions of doubt were fading as Mandore's visitors looked at one another. Then, from near the end

of the table, a calm voice spoke:

"I like your proposition, Mr. Mandore. When you are ready to sell stock in your new company, you can count upon me for a thousand shares of preferred stock."

On his feet, Mandore reached the speaker, a calm-faced man who was a stranger to the others present. Shaking hands with the calm man, Mandore introduced him to the rest.

"This is Mr. Cranston, gentlemen," said Mandore. "Lamont Cranston, from New York. He called me up, an hour ago, to congratulate me on the sensation that our merchandise has created. He sees the merit of our new plan and is willing to invest. What do the rest of you have to say?"

THE place took on the aspect of a stock exchange. Men rose from their chairs, shouting their offers for stock in Mandore's company.

Realizing that the issue would be oversubscribed on the spot, they began to dicker among themselves. Some were making bids for Cranston's shares, and they had him well button-holed, when Mandore took advantage of the excitement to step through a door at the end of the big room.

Calmly, Cranston shook off the others. In his quiet style, he told them that he would forego half his shares, to be divided among the rest, but that he would first have to consult Mandore on the matter. He suggested that they get together, and figure out just how much stock each wanted.

Acting upon the suggestion, the dozen men returned to the table and busied themselves with pencils and paper, while Cranston strolled through the door where Mandore had gone.

The route led through a hallway, and Cranston took a side passage to a cloakroom, where the visitors had left their coats and hats.

Finding his own, Cranston opened the coat wide; from within it fell a black cloak. Then, from an inside pocket of the coat, he produced a rolled-up hat. He spread it to form a slouch hat, which, with the cloak, he used for an immediate transformation. Donning the garments, Cranston became The Shadow.

Back through the hallway, The Shadow crossed to the other side. He paused to watch a pacing servant, who strode back and forth before a flight of stairs that led downward in a sweeping curve. As the servant made a turn, The Shadow glided forward. He had reached his objective, the stairway, before the pacing man turned around again.

Even against the white marble of the ornate staircase, The Shadow was no more than a flitting figure, for dim lights enabled him to keep to the obscure side of the steps. He reached the bottom to find a small, well-lighted hall built on the side of the house that was toward the downward slope of Nob Hill.

Keeping to the shelter of the stairway, The Shadow looked for another human token to guide him on his route. He saw one. Another servant, as brawny as the one upstairs, was lounging near a doorway at the side of the hall.

The way in which The Shadow skirted the lighted center of the hallway was remarkable to behold, had anyone witnessed it. But the only person who might have been an observer was the lounging servant, and his eyes, when he lifted them, looked toward the staircase.

By then, the marble steps were deserted. The Shadow was edging in toward the servant from the opposite direction.

Almost at the servant's elbow, The Shadow worked the door open. Mandore, who was particular about

everything, had evidently seen to it that the latch was well oiled; for the door edged outward in soundless style. It was singular, how The Shadow glided through a comparatively narrow space; similarly, his closing of the door was a masterpiece of stealth.

In a passage beyond the door, The Shadow reached another barrier. Listening, he could detect low voices beyond it. The sounds were not loud enough, so he used his delicate pick to probe the lock in noiseless style.

When the door yielded, The Shadow inched it inward, to peer into a small, lighted room which had no windows. In fact, the place appeared to be Mandore's strongroom, and it was fitted with a sturdy safe in the opposite wall.

Two men were seated in front of the safe, which occupied a deep niche, specially made for it. One man was Felix Mandore; the other, Elredge Brend.

"YOU shouldn't have come here, Brend," Mandore was saying in a severe tone. "I have told you, often, that no one must ever learn of the connection between us."

"But you said, to come," reminded Brend, his voice worried, "in case of emergency."

"Not on a night like tonight!" snapped Mandore. "You knew that I had a dozen men here, all connected with my business -"

"With your legitimate business," broke in Brend. "But your racket is what counts. I'm tired of being the front man for it!"

Mandore tilted back his head and gave a deep, booming laugh. Brend didn't seem to understand it, until Mandore clapped him on the back.

"You the front man?" queried Mandore. "I'm my own front man, Brend. Why do you suppose I'm making such a big to-do about selling junk jewelry? Only to cover the real game"—he gestured toward the safe—"the sale of this smuggled stuff. Just now, I was organizing a huge company, inducing investors to ride with me on the band wagon."

"To where?"

"To the junk yard," snorted Mandore. "The junk jewelry yard, to be exact. They're so amazed at the way I'm selling merchandise without profit that they've fallen for my talk of higher profits later. A fellow named Cranston proved to be the perfect fall guy."

"When the fad for junk jewelry has spread, I'll boost the wholesale prices and load them with stuff to sell at big retail profits, that they never will get."

"They'll be holding the bag and I'll be holding the cash. But meanwhile, the whole success of the scheme depends upon the secret profits that I'm bringing in through you. We've got to unload the real jewelry under cover of the junk, in spite of this fellow Li Husang."

Brend shook his head.

"Li Husang isn't the whole trouble," he said. "We've got to think about The Shadow. He raised the real hob at the Hong Kong Shop, and he blocked us when we went after the necklace tonight."

"He did?" snapped Mandore. "Then let the necklace go. What does one item mean?"

"Enough for Li Husang to send Chinese after it," returned Brend. "Listen, Mandore, there's something special about that necklace. It's the one thing Li Husang wants."

"You're sure?"

"Positive! I got in touch with fellows down in Chinatown; men like Lee Keng, who had been doing counter work for us. They've had their ears wide open ever since Lee Keng was knocked off in the Hong Kong Shop. They've heard about the necklace, and they say that whoever gets it will rule a whole chunk of Eastern China. That's a bigger racket than any you thought of, Mandore!"

Mandore's long face grew even longer. His eyes showed an avaricious gleam. Then, raspily, he demanded:

"Who has the necklace now—The Shadow?"

Slowly, Brend shook his head.

"I think Li Husang may have it," he replied. "His men were on the way out when we reached the girl's apartment. Still, they looked like they had found the going rough. Maybe The Shadow got there ahead of them."

Mandore stroked his chin.

"We need that necklace," he decided. "So much, that we can go easy on the racket until we regain it. We must find out if Li Husang has it."

"How will we do that?" retorted Brend. "Dropping in to see Li Husang is just a way of taking a short cut to the morgue."

"We don't need to talk with Li Husang," returned Mandore. "Our system is to find out if The Shadow has the necklace."

"And just where and how," inquired Brend, "do you intend to find The Shadow?"

"The same way he found you," declared Mandore. "He must have worked through someone. What about this new man, Kemper? Could he be working with The Shadow?"

Brend's gaze narrowed.

"Funny about Kemper," he said with a nod. "He met up with The Shadow twice, and got by with it both times. Still, Kemper may be all right."

"There's one way to make sure," decided Mandore. "Wait until Darvel arrives. He's due, isn't he?"

"Very soon."

"Good enough," declared Mandore. "Darvel is the man who introduced him. Have Darvel check on Kemper."

THE door eased shut, for The Shadow could see that Mandore's interview with Brend was about to end. Out through the passage, The Shadow circled to the stairway, then reached the cloakroom across the upstairs hall, dodging both of Mandore's human watchdogs along the way.

As Lamont Cranston, The Shadow returned to the conference room, to await Mandore's return. As he entered that room, where dupes were fighting among themselves for the privilege of becoming Mandore's

financial victims. The Shadow phrased a soft laugh.

Unheard by the arguing business men, that low mirth promised new snags for Felix Mandore and his accomplice, Elredge Brend. Yet The Shadow's laugh did not carry a final note. So far as Mandore was concerned, the game could be finished at once, but The Shadow intended to carry it further.

Deep strategy was needed, with Mandore as an existing factor. The Shadow had not forgotten the other, and so far hidden, foe, whose strength had not yet been fully tested.

The Shadow was thinking of the ominous master of murder, Li Husang!

CHAPTER XV. FRIEND MEETS FRIEND

THREE days, long days for Harry Vincent, and during them the thought of one name only: Jay Darvel. Odd how that name, denoting a mere tool in the game, could crowd out impressions of so evil a monster as the formidable Li Husang!

But Harry had never seen Li Husang, nor did he ever expect to meet him. The Shadow, aided by men supplied by Dr. Roy Tam, had taken on the quest of Li Husang as his own. It promised to be a long undertaking for The Shadow, but Harry's own problem would soon come to a head.

As Howard Kemper, Harry Vincent must soon meet Jay Darvel, the man who had sponsored him as a member of the racket ring managed by Elredge Brend.

During those three days, Harry had visited Brend's office at intervals, and Brend always had suggested that business be postponed. There had been one excuse after another, and all of Brend's excuses were smooth and plausible. With them, Brend had occasionally remarked that Darvel would soon be in town, and each time Harry had given a pleased nod to Brend's expectant smile.

A smug pose on Brend's part, for Harry had learned the truth from The Shadow: that Darvel's arrival was slated to be a trap, should Harry turn out to be someone other than Kemper.

It was plain to Harry, since he knew the truth, that Brend was trying to test him to the breaking point. Brend wouldn't mind at all if Harry, troubled by the strain, should quit town and thereby prove himself a faker.

It would be a give-away that the so-called Kemper was working for The Shadow, and therewith, Brend could promptly close up shop and take to cover of his own. But Harry wasn't giving Brend that satisfaction. The Shadow had ordered otherwise.

Knowing how well The Shadow had handled the real Kemper, Harry was quite sure that his chief could take care of Darvel when the man appeared. Even stronger pressure on Darvel could force the fellow to switch sides, to save his own hide.

Harry hadn't forgotten the theatrical scene which The Shadow had arranged for James Alban, the man who had gone away and stayed. Given some of the same treatment, Darvel would probably play all kinds of ball.

The problem was to keep Brend lulled, which made the Darvel proposition rather ticklish. Thus, Harry always called Brend to make an office appointment, or waited to hear from Brend, before going there. On this, the third day, Harry was in his hotel room as usual, when a call came in from Brend.

"Hello, Kemper." Brend's tone was brisk. "I've heard from Darvel. He'll be in here later."

"Good!" returned Harry, keeping his tone steady. "What did Darvel do; wire you?"

"Yes," came Brend's reply. "Suppose you drop over, Kemper, and we'll have a chat before dinner. Darvel won't arrive until afterward, some time this evening."

The news was good, and gave Harry considerable leeway. None the less, he was chancing nothing without reporting first to The Shadow.

At present, The Shadow was at Tam's office, mapping out new plans for reaching the domain of Li Husang, wherever it might be located. So Harry put in a call to Tam's and heard the placid voice of the Chinese physician. Harry asked for Mr. Cranston, and The Shadow's even tone came over the wire.

Having heard Harry's report, The Shadow gave brief instructions. Harry was simply to wait until The Shadow had time to post himself outside of Brend's office. Whatever might happen there—and The Shadow advised Harry to be ready for anything—all needed aid would be on immediate call.

So Harry, calculating the time The Shadow needed to get underway from Chinatown, formed his own plans for the trip to Brend's office.

He could picture Brend, smug as ever, waiting there, gazing out at the San Francisco skyline. Perhaps the whole thing would amount to just another chat; but Harry wasn't sure. He never could get over the impression that, sometime, Brend was going to deal an ace right out of his sleeve and call for a prompt showdown.

HAD Harry actually viewed Brend's office at that moment, he would have known that the time was due. For Brend already had a visitor, a rangy man, whose sharp eyes were like little gimlets.

As an ace in the hole, this visitor was better than chaps like Trobin or Alban. He was Brend's star salesman in the smuggled jewelry racket: Jay Darvel.

"Kemper ought to be here soon," said Brend smugly. "That is, if he is Kemper. It's the one thing we've got to find out."

"Why 'we'?" inquired Darvel coolly. "I'll know Kemper when I see him."

"I was just speaking for myself," began Brend hastily. "Just for myself -"

"And Felix Mandore," inserted Darvel. "Why try to carry on a worn-out bluff, Brend?"

Brend's face reddened, which was a thing unusual. Then, realizing Darvel's importance in the present situation, and the fact that he might soon be the only salesman in the racket, Brend decided to parry.

"What if Mandore was in it?" queried Brend. "How would that strike you, Darvel?"

"Swell!" replied Darvel. "I'd know there was real backing. Listen, Brend: I can read. I know that the chinks have been raising hell around this town. I don't want to wind up like Trobin did. You say you can protect me from some tough Chinaman named Li Husang. But your promise isn't enough."

"Would Mandore's clinch it?"

"Sure it would. Why keep on playing button-button? Give me the whole dope, Brend, and you and Mandore can count on me one hundred percent plus -"

Brend started to speak, then caught himself. His smug manner returned, as he stated:

"Let's handle the Kemper matter first. He ought to be here pretty soon. How about it, Darvel?"

Darvel nodded. Brend arose and walked to a door on the other side of the office. He unlocked it and ushered Darvel into an empty office next door. A telephone was lying on the floor, near a closet. Brend gestured toward the instrument.

"Give Kemper the once-over," said Brend. "Then ring my number. Slide into the closet when you use the dial, so he won't hear it. But don't try to talk. I'll answer, and make Kemper think it's Mandore. He'll go out into the hall, like he did before."

"And then?"

"I'll have a chance to talk with you. If he isn't Kemper, we'll put the heat on him the moment he comes back into my office."

Brend spoke as though he was sure his visitor would not be Kemper, and Darvel gave a wise, expectant grin. Going back into his own office, Brend propped a piece of cardboard in the doorway, so the door would not close and latch by accident.

From his desk, Brend could see Darvel's eye peering through the crack, but he also noticed that the door would look tight shut to any one viewing it from the front side of the desk.

Glancing toward the door of his office, Brend was a trifle disturbed by something that occurred there. A blot of darkness filtered across the glass pane, as it had on previous occasions. It made Brend feel that someone was in the hall, and he slipped his hand to his pocket, to take a tight hold on the gun he carried. Such streaks of blackness forced Brend to think of The Shadow.

Still, he had seen that blot before and The Shadow had not appeared. It could be a passer-by in the hall, and they were fairly numerous. Brend laid the thing to taut nerves, and he gradually eased back in his chair, relieved by the thought that he had an ace in the hole in the person of Darvel, watching from the next office.

Streaky blackness filtered away, and Brend was laughing at his own peculiar impressions, when he saw the darkness return. This time, it was very apparent; too apparent to be imagined, and Brend gave a quick spring to his feet.

Just then, the door opened, and Brend settled back again. It was the visitor that he expected: Howard Kemper.

That is, the man who called himself Howard Kemper. Viewing Harry Vincent, Brend was very doubtful. There was something frank in Harry's manner, that did not go along with a man who would delve deep in a dirty racket. Still, one never could tell, and after all, Brend had the sure test right at hand. A glance toward the door of the other office gave him a view of Darvel's watching eye.

"HELLO, Kemper," greeted Brend. "About Darvel. I should have told you. He said he'd be in at eight o'clock."

"Pretty late for you to be staying open," returned Harry. "What will you do—see him tomorrow?"

"I'll stay at my apartment," replied Brend. "He will come over there. I'll give you a call, and you can join us. It will be a good place to talk things over. But you'd better stay at the hotel until you hear from me."

Harry nodded. Leaning across the desk, Brend spoke in a confiding tone.

"I'm expecting some important news," he said. "News about the item that you were going to sell. Maybe you'll have a job tonight, Kemper, and won't have to see Darvel at all. Of course, I know you want to see him -"

"Sure," interposed Harry, as Brend paused. "I always want to see Jay. But business comes first."

"It does," agreed Brend, "and this is important business. When the call comes, Kemper, I'd like you to step outside a moment, as you did the other day -"

The ringing of the telephone bell interrupted. Brend picked up the receiver, said hello, and listened for an imaginary reply. Then, facing Harry, he gestured his thumb toward the office door.

Taking the hint, Harry went out, closing the door behind him. He wanted to stay close and listen, but just then a hand gripped him from the gloomy hall. It was The Shadow's.

"Play it safe," came the whisper in Harry's ear. "This may be the test. Go in when Brend calls you, and remember: you will be backed by - this!"

The gloved hand that moved in front of Harry's eyes was carrying a .45 automatic. With such a weapon behind his own back, Harry need have no qualms, provided only that he stepped aside to give The Shadow clear aim at Brend or anyone else who might offer challenge.

So far, however, Harry was not sure that Brend's summons to the telephone was anything but bona fide. Nor was The Shadow sure. Like Harry, he was waiting to see what developed.

Something was developing, quite neatly. On tiptoe, Brend had left the telephone. He was across the office, opening the connecting door on the other side. He made no noise in the process, because the door was already ajar. Face to face with Darvel, Brend whispered:

"Well?"

"Stick to your story," whispered Darvel in return. "The stuff about giving him a call from your apartment when I arrive."

"But why?" queried Brend. "If this fellow isn't Kemper -"

Darvel interrupted. His tone was a whisper, but a sharp one. It carried a reproof, which, like the words he uttered, would certainly have astonished Harry Vincent, and perhaps would have given The Shadow some moments of unusual calculation.

"But he is Kemper," insisted Darvel. "Howard Kemper, the fellow I sent to see you because I knew we could count on him. We mustn't let him know that you suspected him, Brend, because Kemper is one man we can count on, no matter what may happen!"

CHAPTER XVI. THE DOUBLE DEAL

BREND closed the door to the connecting office. He walked past his desk, took a deep breath, then opened the doorway to the hall, where he saw Harry waiting. Hovering blackness, at an angle across the way, escaped Brend's notice entirely.

"Come in, Kemper," said Brend cheerily. Then, as he closed the door behind him, he confided: "Important news!"

"From Darvel?" asked Harry, shifting slightly, so that The Shadow could get a good aim at Brend. "Is he in town already?"

"It wasn't Darvel who called," replied Brend. "It was -"

He halted; then turned toward his desk. Harry, meanwhile, was conscious that the outer door had opened without a sound, and that The Shadow was hinging his next action on Brend's words.

"It was somebody you'll hear about tonight," declared Brend convincingly. "But I'd better wait until Darvel gets here. He'll be in on it, too. So stay at the hotel, Kemper, until I call you."

Harry went out, quite convinced that all was well. He paused outside the office, not to tell The Shadow what had happened but to take instructions from his chief, who had listened in on Harry's final chat with Brend. The Shadow's words were brief: Harry was to return to his hotel, the Bayview, and there await Brend's evening call.

It was already after five o'clock, and with darkness approaching, The Shadow was anxious to get back to Chinatown, as Harry knew. How close the trail was getting to Li Husang was a question, but Harry was glad that the Darvel matter had been postponed a few hours; as The Shadow would thereby have some leeway before returning to handle Harry's problem.

It did not occur to Harry that a new mystery had developed in the matter of Darvel; something that Harry had failed utterly to note while in Brend's office!

The thing had slipped The Shadow, too. Waiting outside Brend's office, The Shadow had merely been on hand to cover Harry. He had been depending upon his agent to report anything suspicious in Brend's actions; and Harry had not observed a trace.

Thus, as Harry left the office building by the main door, The Shadow glided from another exit. Neither was on hand to watch the new events that occurred in Brend's office.

There, Brend was listening to Darvel, who had come back from the other office. It was Brend, this time, who was being bluffed.

"Kemper is all right," Darvel was saying. "I picked him, and I ought to know. But I don't like this business of giving him the run-around."

"The run-around?"

"Yes." Darvel's tone was a testy response to Brend's question. "Kemper ought to be out of town by this time, making a sale. If the racket has gone sour, why not tell him, instead of keeping him waiting?"

"Maybe you ought to tell him, Darvel."

"All right. Suppose I drop in on him, right after dinner, and give him his choice. Meanwhile"—Darvel gestured toward the telephone—"you call Mandore and tell him that Kemper isn't phony. That part of it ought to be cleared up right away."

Knowing that Brend wouldn't call while he remained, Darvel left the office. As he closed the door behind him, he favored the frosted glass with a smile that Brend, within the office, could not see. Darvel was greatly pleased with himself for having pulled the unexpected; quite as pleased as if he had actually seen the real Kemper in Brend's office, instead of an imitation.

DINING at the Hotel Bayview, Harry Vincent noticed a rangy man who glanced into the dining room and then strolled away. He noticed too, that the stranger had very sharp eyes.

The man was in the lobby when Harry went through and took the elevator, but he didn't seem to be

watching Harry. Nevertheless, when a rap came at the door of Harry's room, several minutes later, Harry's first thoughts were of the rangy man.

Gripping his automatic, Harry stepped to one side of the door and opened it. Had it been necessary, he could have whipped the gun from his pocket at an instant's notice, and covered any intruder without placing himself in the open.

Seeing the rangy man in the hallway, Harry thought momentarily that such action would be needed; but it wasn't. Hands half lifted, as though suspecting that Harry had him covered, the fellow sidled into the room and gestured for Harry to close the door. When Harry elbowed the door shut, his visitor introduced himself with the words:

"I'm Darvel!"

There was something ardent in the tone, signifying that Darvel wanted a favorable reaction. But Harry wanted to feel the situation further, so he merely nodded. The gesture pleased Darvel.

"I saw you this afternoon," Darvel continued. "Brend planted me in another office. He wanted me to look you over and tell him if you were Kemper. That's why he faked the call from Mandore, so he'd have a chance to talk to me."

"And you told him?"

"I told him that you were Kemper," replied Darvel earnestly. "That's why he didn't make trouble for you when he called you back into the office."

Darvel's description of the scene was accurate, as far as Harry could check it. He thought, for the moment, that this might be trickery, inspired by Brend; then, it struck him that this would be a very roundabout way of making him betray himself, compared to the method which Brend—according to Darvel—had actually used. Rather than commit himself, however, Harry simply stared at Darvel.

"Don't you get it?" queried the man hopelessly. "First Trobin was murdered; then Alban disappeared. Those things were enough to make me sick of the racket. When I got into town and found Brend wondering whether or not he'd really met Kemper, I was right on edge. So far, I've only been a stooge in the game, selling stuff that they told me was legitimate. I didn't want to go any deeper."

Darvel reached to his pocket, but only for a cigarette. The way he glanced at Harry's coat made Harry think he was looking for a red primrose; then Harry realized that Darvel might be expecting sight of a badge. On the basis that Harry might be a government man, Darvel was evidently willing to turn State's evidence.

"When I saw you," declared Darvel, "I knew that something was up, and it offered me a good way out. Smart stuff, the way you took Kemper's place. I only wish that somebody had taken mine. I had time to do some quick thinking, before Brend called me back into his office. I figured I'd rather be on your side than Brend's. That's why I told him you were Kemper -"

"And what else?" queried Harry steadily.

"I said I'd like to see you first," replied Darvel, "so you wouldn't think Brend didn't trust you. I can handle things with Brend, and square you all along the line. Only"—he gave his head a weary shake—"I wish I could make some sense out of this business."

Harry decided to offer Darvel a chance, which, if Darvel accepted it, would greatly further The Shadow's campaign. Much depended upon the way in which Harry handled it, so he was tactful when he suggested:

"If you want to talk, Darvel, I can take you to somebody who will listen. What you can tell about Felix Mandore may help you a lot."

Darvel's sharp eyes went nervous; then, deciding that Harry's offer was genuine, the man gave a nod. Opening the door, Harry beckoned and said:

"Come along."

THEY took a cab, and Harry directed the driver to start toward Chinatown. He glanced at Darvel, while giving the order, to see if it worried the fellow. But Darvel was looking from the window of the cab, and apparently trusted Harry fully, now that their deal had been made. So they started off to Chinatown.

The cab passed the Acme Florists on the way, and Harry saw Darvel give the shop a sharp look, but that was the only incident, until they reached Chinatown.

There, the cab began to weave through narrow streets, and Darvel, for the first time, was restless. He turned to Harry and queried hoarsely:

"What are we doing down here?"

"It's all right," Harry assured him coolly. "This case has a Chinese angle, and we've gotten some information on a Chinaman named Li Husang. It may tally with your details, Darvel. Besides, you'll probably find out a lot you'd like to know."

Darvel nodded, as if pleased, but he began to stare anxiously from the window, thrusting his face too much in sight to suit Harry. As they neared the area where Dr. Tam held sway, Harry drew Darvel back into the seat and suggested that he take things calmly. Just then, the cab stopped.

A car was blocking the way. It was an old wreck, turned half across the street, and the men around it were Chinese. They kept beckoning, although the cab could not possibly go ahead, so Harry interpreted their gestures as an invitation to advance on foot. He saw the reason for it: these were probably Tam's men, and they wanted to make sure just who was coming in the cab.

Confident that he would be recognized, Harry stepped from the cab and motioned for Darvel to follow. Paying the driver, Harry waited until the cab had backed out of the street and started away, then, with Darvel, he turned to approach Tam's Chinese.

They weren't Tam's men, nor were they waiting for the two Americans to arrive. Instead, they were coming in a surge, which Harry couldn't have stopped even with a drawn gun, for there were too many of them. One look at those vicious faces told Harry what the Chinese were:

Servers of Li Husang!

Shoving Darvel away, Harry struck at faces with his bare fists, hoping at least to stem the flood. A few went down, but the rest overwhelmed Harry in their sweep. As he struck the cobbles, with a jounce that knocked him half senseless, Harry gave a frantic look for Darvel, only to see that the surging Chinese had already reached his companion. That was all that Harry saw, until later.

Then, he was lying on a curious couch, which had wooden ribs that made it very uncomfortable. Opening his eyes, Harry saw the blur of soft lights that produced something of a glitter. The gleam came from the furniture, which was decorated with gold.

A face intervened, but it wasn't a yellow one, as Harry expected. It was a white face, Darvel's, and it wore a vicious grin.

"You figured I'd walked out on Mandore," sneered Darvel, "and you were right. Putting that line over was easy, because I meant it. But I didn't tell you about this letter"—Darvel crinkled a paper in front of Harry's eyes—"that I received yesterday, giving me a better offer.

"Here's the fellow it came from." Darvel made a sideward gesture. "I began working for him as soon as I reached Frisco. He wanted me to bring in anybody connected with The Shadow. When I saw you weren't Kemper"—Darvel's eyes were studying Harry sharply—"I knew you were one of The Shadow's stooges. That's why I bluffed Brend, and pretended I was ready to team up with you.

"You were taking me to see The Shadow!" Darvel gave a laugh. "To learn about Li Husang! Instead, I've brought you to see Li Husang, so you can tell him all you know about The Shadow!"

Harry's eyes turned in the direction of Darvel's indicating hand. There, Harry saw the face that he had originally expected, and it was more horrible than he had fancied. It was a saffron face, which wore a permanent, one-sided leer, thanks to an ugly scar that crossed the cheek from lips to ear.

Green eyes, merciless in gaze, were fixed upon Harry Vincent. They were the eyes of Li Husang, archenemy of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII. THE PRICE OF LIFE

It was very quiet at Dr. Tam's apartment; almost too quiet to please Paula Rayle. Somehow, the security was so complete that it seemed too good to last. Never had Paula imagined that so lulling a place could exist in the midst of San Francisco and all the city's tumult. It particularly surprised her that she should find that quiet in Chinatown.

Most of Tam's family retired early, and Paula did the same, though she had free run of the apartment. At present, she was in her own room, a very comfortable one, which opened on a tiny courtyard that had a little fountain, with a pool of fancy goldfish that Paula loved to watch by day.

Though Paula had gone to bed, she was wide awake, listening to the soft tinkle of the fountain, which, every night, had lulled her to a comfortable sleep.

Then came those disturbing thoughts that too much security produced. Reaching for her watch, which lay on the table, Paula looked at the luminous dial and saw that it was only half past eight. At first, the fact made her smile; then her expression turned to a frown.

Until recently, Paula had always regarded evening as the time to be awake. Seldom did she ever get to bed before midnight. She pictured scenes distant from Chinatown, where her friends were probably having a good time, and wondering where she was. They would certainly laugh, if they knew that Paula had adopted the policy of going to bed at eight every night.

But it didn't strike Paula as funny. Instead, it worried her, not because of what her friends would think, but because she had shifted certain burdens to others.

She was thinking of The Shadow and Dr. Tam. Nor had she forgotten Harry Vincent, the man who was working for The Shadow. All three—and probably many others—were using nightfall as their starting point, not as the time to quit. While she, Paula Rayle, was doing nothing to aid the all-important cause against Li Husang!

That thought was humiliating, considering that Li Husang had sought Paula's life and that she, more than

anyone else, should be doing her bit in the fight.

She would talk to Dr. Tam about it. Probably he would refuse her offer, but she certainly should make it. With that plan, Paula slid from bed, found her dressing gown and slippers and started out to Tam's living room.

A light was burning there and she had no trouble finding her way; nevertheless, she halted abruptly before she reached the other side. It was the sound of voices that stopped her.

Dr. Tam had gone into his office, but he had left the passage door ajar. The passage itself made a perfect sound tunnel, and Paula could hear Tam talking to a visitor as plainly as if she had been in the office itself. She didn't want to eavesdrop, but feeling that it was quite accidental and that the thing concerned her, she could not help but listen.

One thing that particularly interested her was the other voice. She was sure that Tam's visitor was The Shadow, but Paula had never heard him speak in so calm and steady a tone. It happened that The Shadow was using Cranston's voice.

Seated opposite Tam, The Shadow was in the guise of Cranston, but in a spot where Paula could not possibly see him if she peered through the passage. Confident that Tam had closed the far door, as Tam always claimed to do, The Shadow had no clue to the fact that Paula was overhearing everything.

"ABOUT these bills," said The Shadow quietly, as he fingered papers on Tam's desk. "Have you paid them?"

"The bills for the flowers?" queried Tam. "Yes, I have paid them."

"And you have the taxicab available -"

"Yes, yes, Ying Ko!" interrupted Tam, for once impatient. "But all those things are unimportant, compared to this demand that we have just received from Li Husang. Unless it is a hoax, we must do something about it at once!"

"It is not a hoax," declared The Shadow calmly. "Without a doubt, Li Husang has captured Vincent. I would say that a man named Darvel is behind it."

"But he may be torturing Vincent -"

"I doubt it, Dr. Tam. If Li Husang so intended, it would now be too late. I think his note is plain. He is willing to return Vincent, uninjured, if we give him the dowager's necklace. Certainly, Li Husang will keep Vincent undamaged, since he expects the necklace in the same condition."

There was a pause and during it, Paula, listening, sensed more, perhaps, than Dr. Tam. She realized that The Shadow's leisurely speech indicated deep thought behind it; that the things which Tam considered irrelevant to the case might have an important bearing upon it.

"Li Husang has given us a time limit," reminded Tam. "He says that if he does not have the necklace by ten o'clock, Vincent will surely die."

"That is the part I doubt," returned The Shadow. "My opinion is this, Tam. Li Husang wants an immediate answer because he is not sure that we have the necklace."

"You mean he thinks that Mandore has it?"

"Yes. Therefore, Dr. Tam, I suggest that you write a letter to Li Husang. Tell him that the necklace is not in the possession of Ying Ko - which is the truth, because it happens that the necklace is in your own possession."

Paula could hear a slight chuckle from Dr. Tam. During the following silence, she was quite sure that Tam was penning the required letter. Her surmise was correct, for soon she heard Tam say:

"Shall I send this at once, Ying Ko?"

"Yes," replied The Shadow. "Do exactly as Li Husang suggests. Have one of your men place the letter beneath the door of the basement entrance, three doors away from the Hong Kong Shop, and repeat the name 'Li Husang.' Meanwhile, I shall proceed with my own plans, as far as I can. Much depends, however upon how Li Husang accepts the letter."

"Very much," said Tam seriously. "Vincent's life, for one thing. I would say, Ying Ko, that it would be better to give up the necklace -"

Tam was rising as he spoke, and Paula heard his footsteps come toward the passage. She shrank back, alarmed, for fear he would misunderstand her presence. But flight back to her room would be even worse, should Tam hear her departure. Paula's quandary was real enough to hold her rooted. Then came The Shadow's voice:

"Do not bring the necklace, Dr. Tam."

"I thought you would like to see it, Ying Ko," Paula heard Tam say, "in case you wished to change your mind. The necklace is in the cabinet in my living room."

"Let it remain there," said The Shadow firmly, while Paula could tell that Tam had stopped to listen. "We shall not need the necklace, Dr. Tam."

TAM'S footsteps came along the passage, but only because he had seen that the door was ajar. He closed it without looking into the living room. Hence, he did not see Paula, nor did she hear the rest of the conversation after Tam returned to his office.

There, as Tam pressed a button to summon his messenger, The Shadow brought up a highly important angle.

"Once given the necklace, Li Husang will forget his promises," declared The Shadow firmly. "Therefore, we must not allow him the opportunity. I assure you, Tam, that only by tricking Li Husang can we save Vincent's life. If you sent a messenger with the necklace, Li Husang would seize him, keep the prize, and order Vincent's execution."

"If I should personally appear, bringing the necklace, Li Husang would like nothing better. We may be certain that his traps are set, in hope of my visit. Perhaps Li Husang's traps would fail him, as certain snares have failed others."

"I would risk my own life on it, but then there would be the problem of saving Vincent. I would prefer a plan of strategy, and I am sure that one will develop as soon as Li Husang receives your message."

Tam was nodding, when a rap told that the messenger had arrived. Tam handed him the letter for Li Husang, with the proper instructions. As soon as the messenger had gone, The Shadow arose, took his hat and cloak from the closet and departed.

Meanwhile, Paula Rayle had returned to her own room, far more disquieted than before. A life was at

stake, the life of Harry Vincent, and she was utterly to blame. There was something that she could do about it, and Paula was automatically taking that course.

She was getting dressed in the darkness of the little room, fighting off the spell of the tinkling fountain, which, by its pattering music, coaxed her to stay and to forget the dangerous task that she was setting for herself.

But Paula fought off the enticing sound, determined to go ahead with her plan. When a shudder seized her, she attributed it to the breeze from the courtyard, though she actually knew that her own qualms caused it.

At last, fully dressed, she was ready for her venture, and that moment became the most trying of all. Her hand on the knob of the door, Paula was seized with the impulse to forget the whole crazy notion. She was wavering badly, so frightened that she was ready to fling herself back into bed again. Once there, she would be safe, and could resist the urge to get dressed again.

But Paula stiffened in that moment. Instead of starting back to bed, she pushed the door open and moved into the living room, closing the door behind her. That cut off the music of the fountain; still, Paula had qualms, though of a different sort. She was fearful of her immediate task: the acquiring of the necklace.

As in a trance, she crossed the living room to the cabinet that Tam had mentioned. Opening it, she found the necklace, its green pendant glittering like a mammoth eye, even in the gloom.

As her fingers ran along the beads of pearl and jade, Paula felt a sudden shock; it struck her that she was behaving as a thief. Then she was swept with the conviction that the necklace was as much her property as Dr. Tam's; or, for that matter, as much hers as The Shadow's.

But did she have the right to offer it to Li Husang?

Perhaps not, but there was another name that flashed to Paula's mind: that of the Princess Mei Luan. She had heard Tam say that he thought Mei Luan was in San Francisco, living in the same hidden place as Li Husang.

Certainly, Paula could offer the necklace to its rightful owner, Mei Luan, and insist upon the price that Li Husang had offered—the life of Harry Vincent.

Paula was wearing the dark dress that had sheltered her so well in darkness the night when The Shadow had brought her to Tam's. The dress had a pocket among its pleats, and into that pocket Paula slipped the necklace. Then, reaching a corner of the living room, she crouched behind a divan that was set at an angle.

Soon, Dr. Tam would come through from his office. He wouldn't look for the necklace, nor would he see Paula. He would probably go right through to his own apartment, and then Paula would have her opportunity to steal through the passage and out by way of Tam's office.

Knowing that the courtyard guards were only on the lookout for invaders, Paula was sure that she could slip past them and reach the barred gate beyond the archway.

Predominant in her mind, during those minutes of long waiting, was the firm idea that she, in her own way, was helping The Shadow's cause. Paula was sure that she had taken over a duty which The Shadow would have assigned to her, but for the risk that it involved. Actually, the opposite was the case.

Paula had not heard The Shadow's final statements to Dr. Tam; his mention of the treachery that was part of Li Husang's innate evil nature. Had she heard those facts, Paula would have realized that her present

course was the very one that could prove disastrous to The Shadow's own plans of dealing with that monstrous genius, Li Husang!

CHAPTER XVIII. PARTNERS OF EVIL

SEATED upon the throne that rightfully belonged to Mei Luan, Li Husang was glaring at the note which Holgo had brought him. Watching Li Husang was Jay Darvel, and the double-crosser was very ill at ease when he saw the ugly glitter of Li Husang's eyes.

Nor did Harry Vincent feel comfortable; but it happened that Harry's discomfort was of a physical, as well as a mental, sort. Harry was lying bound and gagged upon the slatted couch, where he had awakened to find himself in the power of Li Husang.

Rising from the throne, Li Husang throated a gonglike order at Holgo. His words were in Chinese; he was requesting the immediate presence of Princess Mei Luan, with Holgo as the bearer of that request.

Holgo went out, and Harry turned his head to watch the brass door slide downward. When it rose again, Mei Luan stepped into the room and Li Husang bowed her to the throne. There, standing on the right, he extended the note which he had received from Dr. Tam.

"Important news, my princess," announced Li Husang in Chinese. "Dr. Tam informs me that Ying Ko does not have the necklace. This settles our problem, because if it is not in the possession of Ying Ko, it must be held by Felix Mandore, the original thief.

"That man"—he pointed to Harry—"belongs to Mandore. Our friend here"—his gesture indicated Darvel, who bowed toward the princess—"enabled us to capture the prisoner that we needed. I ask the life of the prisoner to be at my full disposal. If I choose that he should die, it will be because he has been a party to great crime!"

Li Husang thundered the final words. Though Harry could not understand them, he guessed what it was all about. References to Ying Ko and Felix Mandore, plus Li Husang's gesticulations, made the case quite plain. Gagged and bound, Harry could neither speak nor gesture in order to plead his own cause.

Harry managed at least to fix his eyes upon Mei Luan. Her beauty impressed him, and he saw in this rare creature a personality quite different from that of Li Husang. He recognized that the throne was hers by right, and with his eyes tried to tell Mei Luan how Li Husang had usurped it.

But the eye language did not suffice. Instead of interpreting Harry's gaze for what it meant, Mei Luan returned a cold, fixed stare; and to Harry, the loveliness vanished from her eyes.

Mei Luan, too, could be merciless when justified. From what Li Husang told her, she believed that such justification existed. With an imperious hand sweep toward Harry, she said to Li Husang:

"Do with the prisoner as you will."

Then Mei Luan was gone, and Harry was expecting the worst. But Li Husang, despite his ugly gaze, was not yet ready to treat his prisoner harshly. The Shadow, so Harry realized, had foreseen the respite that was due to come. Watching Li Husang, Harry saw the shrewd glitter that came into his eyes, as the plotting Chinaman again read the note from Dr. Tam.

"This may be false," said Li Husang to Darvel, in English. "We have no proof that Mandore still holds the necklace. What did Brend say about it?"

"Nothing," replied Darvel. "Brend is always cagey."

"He and his men followed mine," recalled Li Husang. "Though, from reports, The Shadow routed them and took the Rayle girl to safety. It is very possible that Brend acquired the necklace and took it back to Mandore.

"Particularly, because my spies, who have constantly been watching Mandore's house, told me of a visitor resembling Brend who called there that same night. It may be that Mandore has the necklace and is playing me against Ying Ko!"

SO strong was Li Husang's tone that Darvel had a new attack of jitters, feeling that he, as a former aid of Mandore's, might feel the wrath of Li Husang.

In fact, Harry, too, had a surge of hope that Li Husang might reverse his whole arrangement and make Darvel the prisoner. In that case, he would release Harry, a course upon which The Shadow might be counting.

But Li Husang had different plans. Over his face came a look of admiration, coupled with a distant gaze. His tone became one of commendation.

"A clever man, this Felix Mandore," stated Li Husang. "A man whose ideas are so much like my own, that I feel quite well disposed toward him. Sit down, Darvel, and make yourself at ease, while I write a note to Mandore."

At the writing cabinet, Li Husang penned the note. Pausing halfway through, he turned to Darvel and remarked:

"Mandore may wish to visit me. To bring him, I must show certain knowledge. Tell me, Darvel, what measure did he use to identify men like yourself when they went to places such as the Hong Kong Shop?"

Darvel stared, amazed by Li Husang's frank admission that he had so far failed to learn one portion of Mandore's system. Then, pleased because he could furnish the fact in question, Darvel explained about the red primroses.

A pleased glitter came to Li Husang's eyes; he chuckled as he returned to his letter. Then, the message finished, Li Husang sealed it and handed it to Darvel.

"Take this to Mandore," ordered Li Husang. "Remember: you are still his man. You must claim that I captured you; that Kemper"—he sneered the name, as he gestured toward Harry—"was the traitor."

Darvel nodded, showing that he knew how to handle Mandore. He stepped toward the brass door, but Li Husang delayed him.

"One moment, Darvel," said Li Husang. "We must first dispose of this man who calls himself Kemper. Come, Holgo!" Li Husang clapped his hands. "Summon my men and have them fling the prisoner into the dark pit. A few hours of misery in the pit will loosen his tongue, when we remove the gag."

Holgo brought the men. They carried Harry out, and Darvel followed. But the procession turned toward a damp stone stairway that led farther downward, while Holgo conducted Darvel along passages that offered an outlet from the domain of Li Husang.

IN the mansion on Nob Hill, Felix Mandore was playing bridge with a party of respectable friends, when a servant entered to tell him of a visitor. A slight signal given by the servant was all that Mandore needed to quietly excuse himself. In the hallway, he asked the servant:

"Who is it?"

"A stranger," the servant replied. "He says his name is Jay Darvel."

His long face glowering, Mandore took a few short, furious paces; then, calming, he told the servant:

"Show him in by the lower door."

Mandore was in the subterranean strong-room when Darvel arrived there. Greeting his visitor with a glower, Mandore demanded to know who he was and why he had come.

Darvel, knowing that Mandore would probably refuse to recognize him, promptly handed over the message from Li Husang. As Mandore read it, his glower faded.

"You did well, Darvel," he declared. "I understand now, how you learned about my connection with our special business. It was Li Husang who told you; not Brend."

Darvel nodded, wisely.

"I suspected Kemper," continued Mandore. "Naturally, Li Husang would not trust him, since the fellow was a traitor. Good judgment on the part of Li Husang. As he says in his note, he and I have much in common. Neither of us have any use for double-crossers."

Darvel held back a smile. Things were quite the opposite of Mandore's opinion. Actually, Li Husang did trust double-crossers, because Darvel himself was an absolute example. But then, Li Husang had ways of dealing with subordinates that kept them perfectly in line.

Having once made a deal with Li Husang, and having seen the way that evil master ruled his underground realm, Darvel had decided to stay entirely under Li Husang's control. A man might trick Mandore and get away with it, but such would not apply with Li Husang.

"So Li Husang thinks that I may have the necklace," declared Mandore. "I wish I did have it, Darvel. His offer is worth a hundred times its value!"

Darvel stared. He was calculating that a hundred times sixty thousand would be six million dollars.

"With that necklace," explained Mandore, who was referring to the letter, "Li Husang will control a huge province of East China. He promises to pillage all the wealthy residents, to obtain their valuables through torture. His problem will then be the disposal of their wealth.

"That will be my duty"—Mandore gave a chuckle—"and I am well equipped for it. We shall simply continue with our racket, but on a much greater scale. Smuggling in the treasures will be simple, as Li Husang can arrange it from China. If I had only known this a while ago, Li Husang could have had his precious necklace! I wonder why he didn't deal with me before."

Darvel could have answered that one. He knew that Li Husang had been somewhat in the dark concerning Mandore, particularly on such little, but important, matters as red primroses. Li Husang had simply been nibbling at the edges of Mandore's racket, going after such minor persons as Trobin. At that time, it had seemed easier to acquire the necklace without negotiating through Mandore.

But there was another reason, that Mandore himself expressed, slowly and emphatically.

"The Shadow is the problem," declared Mandore. "His interference makes it imperative that Li Husang and I become partners. I shall accept Li Husang's invitation to visit him."

A LOOK of alarm came over Darvel's face. It was not really feigned; he actually feared for Mandore. Though he preferred to serve Li Husang, Darvel could not forget that Mandore was of his own race. To Darvel, the ways of Li Husang were somewhat unfathomable.

"Since you do not have the necklace," began Darvel, "it may be dangerous to visit Li Husang. If he should fail to believe you -"

Mandore clapped an appreciative hand upon Darvel's shoulder. At least, Darvel's words had ended any trace of the fellow's actual connection with Li Husang.

"Li Husang knows that I will bring the necklace if I have it," assured Mandore. "I would be a fool to do otherwise, since it would be to my great advantage. When I come without the necklace, he will know that The Shadow has it.

"The purpose of our conference will therefore be toward one point: we shall discuss the proper measures for reaching The Shadow and taking the prize from him. Li Husang and I shall find the way."

Darvel could foresee what the way would be. Partners in evil would use Harry Vincent as their wedge. Li Husang would handle that part shrewdly. He would "discover" that "Kemper" was The Shadow's agent, and thereby protect Darvel's position with Mandore.

"We must get hold of Brend," decided Mandore, reaching for the telephone. "You can join his crew, Darvel, to help protect me against The Shadow while I am on my way to Li Husang's."

The note from Li Husang had evidently specified some method whereby Felix Mandore could meet with his new partner. What the method was, Darvel could not guess, but he was confident that the combined cleverness of Li Husang and Felix Mandore would balk all interference from The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. PATHS OF PERIL

ELREDGE BREND was pacing the lobby of the Bayview Hotel in a very worried manner. He hadn't heard from Jay Darvel, which was bad enough, but to find Howard Kemper absent from his hotel room was even worse.

The only thing to do was wait until one or the other came back to the hotel, but Brend was troubled by the possibility that neither might return.

In fact, Brend feared The Shadow's hand behind the thing, and on that account, he was continually on watch, with his strong-arm crew posted in cars outside the hotel. At times, Brend glanced with suspicion toward persons in the lobby, but he finally decided that none of them could be The Shadow.

Brend was quite wrong.

There was one man in the lobby who was watching Brend, though the fellow did not realize it. Brend, himself had noted the man in question, but only with a few brief glances.

Certainly, Brend could not fear a loungee who seemed so nearly asleep that he almost forgot to puff at the thin cigar which he was smoking. A man so clam-faced, so indolent of manner, that it was difficult to imagine him in any kind of action.

The Shadow was perfect with that pose, when he played the part of Cranston. He was Cranston at present, and it happened that Brend had never met The Shadow in that guise. At Mandore's house, the other night, Mandore had been very careful not to introduce Brend to any of the respectable visitors.

A bellboy came pacing through the lobby calling a name. Brend heard the call: "Elredge Brend!" and gave a nervous jump. Then, his smug manner returning, he stopped the bellboy and handed him a quarter. Smoothly, Brend inquired:

"You have a message for me?"

"You're wanted on the telephone, Mr. Brend," the bellhop replied. "First booth in the line."

Brend went into the first booth. About that time, the indolent Mr. Cranston roused himself and decided to make a phone call. He went into the next booth, then changed his mind. Instead of making a call of his own, he listened to Brend's through the thin partition.

Unfortunately, The Shadow could only hear Brend's end of the conversation; the other party was doing most of the talking.

"Yes..." Brend was speaking cautiously. "I understand... Yes, I have the crew all ready. We'll meet you there in ten minutes... What's that? You only want us to cover?... Good enough. We'll be on the job."

When Brend left his phone booth, he failed to look into the next one. He would have seen nothing, if he had, for the form of Cranston was blotted from sight.

With a speed that belied his indolent pose, Cranston had plucked black garments from a brief case that he carried. He was cloaked, a slouch hat on his head, and his face turned away, when Brend went by.

The door slightly opened, the automatic light was extinguished. There was nothing to indicate that Cranston had become The Shadow except darkness itself. However, as soon as Brend was gone, the darkness stirred. Fitting the flexible brief case beneath his cloak, The Shadow glided from the second booth.

It happened that the corner of the lobby was quite dim; though the light, what there was of it, had shown Brend quite plainly, it did not reveal The Shadow. Close to the dark woodwork of the booths, he was a gliding thing of blackness, that seemed to filter away like a cloud of dissipating smoke.

The reason was simple enough; instead of turning toward the lighted section of the lobby, as Brend had, The Shadow took the opposite direction and left the hotel by an unlighted side door.

WHEN Brend joined his crew and their two cars rolled away, a third car followed. None noticed it, because the trailing car was not in sight when they turned the corner. It came from a small parking lot that adjoined the hotel, and its driver was careful not to start until the cars ahead had made the turn.

Curiously, the trailing car seemed to have no driver at all. Deep behind the wheel, The Shadow merged with its dark interior. The fact was much to his advantage when the other cars stopped, for when he promptly pulled into a space behind them, his car had the appearance of being empty when sneaking men came along the street to make sure that all was clear.

From that car which had seemingly been parked a long while, The Shadow watched a lighted window across the way and repressed a whispered laugh that came to his lips. The lighted window represented the Acme Florist Shop, which dealt in various specialties and always stayed open late.

There was a customer in the shop, a pompous man who was very particular about flowers. The customer was Felix Mandore, and he had become interested in red primroses.

"A very fine species," explained the clerk. "This is the *primula sinensis*, or the genuine Chinese primrose."

"A remarkable flower," agreed Mandore. "I never have seen any of them before."

"We've always carried them," returned the clerk proudly. "That is, either these, or a red variety of the *primula obconica*, which is almost identical. Very delicate flowers, these; they have to be kept at hot-house temperature, to retain their bloom. But they won't wilt quickly. We merely advise that they should not be bought unless the purchaser intends to wear them that same evening."

"Let me have one," said Mandore. "I can put it on while I am here."

The clerk helped Mandore fix the primrose in his buttonhole. Paying for the flower, Mandore left the shop and stepped immediately into a cab, without even glancing at the cars across the way.

Those cars, however, were prompt to follow. Brend was in the first one, while the second thug-manned car had a new passenger, Darvel, who had been waiting across the street from the flower shop.

When the procession turned the corner, The Shadow started, too. He had seen Mandore and the red flower that the man was wearing, and the story was plain. Mandore was on his way to see Li Husang, as The Shadow had expected.

The Shadow had not anticipated that they would agree upon Mandore's own chosen token, a red primrose, as a means of identification, though he had foreseen that such a flower might serve the purpose.

The main point was that a primrose had been chosen; therefore, The Shadow could act accordingly. Instead of trying to cut in ahead of Mandore, The Shadow kept to the rear, using the cover-up cars as a guide. He was depending upon the primrose as a means of locating Mandore later.

Reaching Chinatown, the cover-up cars stopped near a wide-fronted building where an auction was in progress. The Shadow saw a taxicab pulling away and knew that Mandore had gone into the auction house.

Parking his own car, The Shadow stowed his cloak and hat in his brief case; then, as Cranston, he strolled along the street, ignoring the cars that contained Brend, Darvel, and the thugs.

They took Cranston for another of the many customers who were entering the auction shop. Once inside, The Shadow spotted Mandore, by the primrose, and promptly sidled to the other side of the place. Meanwhile, Mandore was noting that there were doorways on each side of the auction shop. Confident that eyes were peering from those doorways, Mandore fingered the primrose that he wore in his buttonhole keeping his gaze fixed on the nearer door.

MANDORE was right. Chinese were peering through those doors, which had tiny peepholes, unseen because of ornamentations. They were looking for the red primrose, and they saw it, the only red flower worn by anyone in the auction room.

Close to the door on the proper side, a Chinaman opened it very slightly, and gave the signal that Li Husang had ordered as a means of bringing Mandore to his presence.

Immediately, a Chinaman who was watching the auction stepped close to the man who wore the red primrose, whispered a few words of English in his ear, and sidled him toward the opening door. It was done smoothly, quickly, and the door was barred again before anyone else had a chance to move. One Chinaman leered happily, and said in perfect English:

"Greetings, Mr. Mandore! If Ying Ko is among those people in the auction room, you may be sure he will not follow us. This way, please. I shall take you to Li Husang."

Why the Chinese were so sure that The Shadow could not follow Mandore was plainly evidenced, when they conducted their visitor downward. They expected the shrewd looks that he gave along the route, because Li Husang had told them that Mandore was to be his partner, and anyone worthy of that distinction would necessarily be clever.

The reason why the route was closed lay in the number of strong doors that blocked it. Each of those sliding barriers opened only from the inside, and these men who shoved the way were forced to signal for access. Li Husang had provided that whereas Mandore, once inside the lair, might find it possible to leave, The Shadow, still outside, would find it impossible to enter.

Of course, there was more than one route to Li Husang's den, but the others were quite as effectively blocked. In fact, one route, the only one which The Shadow might know about, was in itself a perfect snare.

It began with a doorway on another street, a basement entrance three away from the Hong Kong shop. Had The Shadow intended to test that route, he should have gone there sooner; for, at the very time when the guards in the auction shop were signaling for Mandore's admittance, a very different visitor was craving entrance at the door near the Hong Kong Shop, several blocks away.

The person seeking such admittance was Paula Rayle. Her only token was the name she spoke through the slitted door: "Li Husang!"

The door swung inward, and Paula found herself propelled into a passage, because the step on which she stood promptly tilted forward. Before the girl could catch her balance, her arms were pinned behind her; thrust deeper into darkness, she heard the door slam tight. Then came another barrier, clanging sharply, and suddenly lights blazed.

Much terrified, Paula found herself in a squarish room, with three Chinese confronting her.

One was the strangler, Loy Gow, whose hideous face Paula could not fail to recognize. On each side were others, with drawn knives, Chinese as brawny as the ones The Shadow had routed on the stairs outside of Paula's apartment.

This time, Paula was in their own preserves, and did not have The Shadow to aid her. Yet the power of The Shadow still prevailed.

Not a hand rose to touch Paula. Instead, the three Chinese dropped back, for from the girl's neck dangled the dowager's necklace, with its alternating beads of jade and pearl that supported the mammoth emerald. The necklace which, to these Chinese, could deliver a lightning stroke to any profane hand that touched it!

Loy Gow, in particular, remembered the legend of the necklace. He still believed that the jolt from darkness which he once received had come from the famed emerald, instead of Ying Ko. Gabbling at his companions, Loy Gow gave them an unnecessary warning to stay away, for they were already in retreat.

Then, grimacing like an ape, the strangler mouthed a few words in poor, but understandable, English:

"You wish to see Li Husang?"

Paula's nerve was back again. The shrink of the Chinese were all she needed to go through with her mission. Shaking her head in response to Loy Gow's question, Paula said firmly:

"Take me to the Princess Mei Luan."

The Chinese bowed her to a panel, that opened when Loy Gow rapped a signal. A passage lay beyond, and Paula advanced with confidence. Yet, as the march continued, she was gripped by a growing fear that this adventure might eventually bring her face to face with Li Husang.

Should that occur, the necklace could no longer save her. Again, she would need the protection of The Shadow. Had Paula known that at this very moment Li Husang was waiting to receive her other enemy, Felix Mandore, and that all routes had been blocked against The Shadow's entry, her fear would have dominated her in full.

The sway of Li Husang had reached its zenith. Planning a new alliance, he intended to strike hard at The Shadow.

Li Husang would be pleased to learn that Paula Rayle had entered his domain to become another captive, bringing the very prize that he most cherished: the necklace that would render him supreme!

CHAPTER XX. THE CLOSED TRAP

SEATED on his borrowed throne, Li Husang was studying the visitor who stood before him. He was pleased by his survey of Felix Mandore; his new partner came up to expectations, and more. Li Husang had expected even Mandore to be nervous, when he found himself deep within the confines of this underground realm.

But Mandore, as Li Husang now recalled, was something of a king in his own right. His easy glance around the place, the interested smile that he gave, were proof that he had no awe of his surroundings. His glance, when it did center on Li Husang, was of a sharply questioning nature, as if he expected his Chinese partner to drop all mummery and get to business.

They made a contrast, Li Husang and his visitor. The man on the throne was wearing Chinese costume, a special robe that he had put on for the occasion. His guest, in turn, was suitably arrayed in a Tuxedo, and against its black lapel was the token that had brought him admittance: the red primrose.

It was a case of East meeting West and liking it, for the two men showed complete appreciation of each other, by the shrewd smiles which they gradually exchanged.

Though Li Husang's scarry leer was difficult to interpret, his action made up for the lack. Rising from the throne, he stepped down to shake hands with his well-tested partner. That done, they both took chairs beside the writing cabinet.

"Tell me, Mandore," suggested Li Husang in perfect English, "how would you propose that we reach Ying Ko and force him to give us the necklace—which you assure me that you do not have?"

"I would reach him through the girl," was the reply. "Her name is Paula Rayle, so Brend tells me."

"I know," nodded Li Husang. "But while she has the necklace, my superstitious followers are afraid -"

"Which my men are not, Li Husang. The necklace may cause fear among Chinese, but not among Americans.

"You are ready, then?" inquired Li Husang. "To deliver a thrust against Ying Ko?"

"Not yet. We must form a scheme of strategy. Let me have pen and paper, Li Husang -"

"One moment." Li Husang arose and clapped his hands. When Holgo appeared, Li Husang told him: "Request that the Princess Mei Luan come here. I have a friend that she must meet."

Then, to his visitor, Li Husang added:

"I must tell the princess that I was mistaken regarding you, Mandore. Your presence here will symbolize your honesty. I am sure"—Li Husang's eyes sparkled new approval—"that you can convince her that you never had the necklace. We can claim that Ying Ko brought it to this country, to gain control over certain Chinese."

Shrewd though Li Husang's plan might be, it would be a difficult task to convince Mei Luan, for a reason which neither of the new partners knew about. It so happened that at that moment Mei Luan was also receiving a visitor, whose statements interested her very much.

Mei Luan was in her own apartment, talking with Paula Rayle. The Chinese princess could speak perfect English, and was having no difficulty in understanding what Paula told her. For the proof of it all, the evidence that carried separate accusations against Li Husang and Felix Mandore, was the imperial necklace, which Paula had unclasped and placed in the hands of Mei Luan.

"It is yours," declared Paula. "I bring it from The Shadow, who recognizes it as your property, princess. I bring it without his knowledge, only because he intended to keep it longer, so as to expose both enemies, Mandore and Li Husang."

"I believe you," returned Mei Luan. "If Ying Ko had evil plans of his own, as Li Husang claims, he would not have left the necklace within your reach."

"There is something else, however," began Paula firmly. "I have a request -"

"Whatever your request," intervened Mei Luan, "it shall be granted. That was my promise for the return of the necklace."

Paula gave a relieved smile. She was certain, at last, that she could fulfill the most important purpose of her visit.

"My request is a simple one," said Paula. "I want you to release Harry Vincent."

The name was unfamiliar to Mei Luan. Her eyes gave a perplexed stare.

"The prisoner," specified Paula. "The one who was brought here tonight."

"But he is one of Mandore's men!" exclaimed Mei Luan. "So Li Husang told me -"

Mei Luan halted, realizing that she, herself, had spoken further evidence of Li Husang's double-dealing. Placing the necklace in a cabinet drawer, Mei Luan arose and spoke one word:

"Come!"

SHE led the way through passages that opened at her command, down a stairway to the most dismal underground surroundings that Paula had ever beheld. Stone walls were damply crowding the narrow passages, and when they reached the end of one, Paula saw a huge, fang-toothed Chinaman sitting like a fiendish guardian near the grating to a pit.

Mei Luan spoke words in Chinese; promptly, the big guard stirred. He opened the grating with a clang; then hooked it down into the pit, so that the bars of the grating formed a ladder. His snarling voice was a command that brought a stir from the black dungeon.

Up from the depths came a pair of hands that clutched the rungs of the improvised ladder. Then the face

of Harry Vincent appeared.

Harry was no longer bound or gagged. Bonds were not only unnecessary in his recent confinement; they would have been too great a handicap for him to survive. Harry was dripping with water, which indicated that the bottom of the pit was a stagnant pool, shoulder deep.

His face was strained, and very white against the black background of the pit, and sight of Mei Luan did not reassure him. But when he saw Paula, quite free and apparently on good terms with the princess, Harry's expression changed. He came up the final rungs with vigor.

Paula was telling Harry who she was, and he was nodding as though he already knew, when Mei Luan beckoned to them both.

"Come," she said quickly. "We have but little time. If Li Husang learns -"

There was no need to say more. They hurried up toward Mei Luan's apartment. When they reached the final passage, the princess pointed straight ahead.

"Go that way," she undertoned. "Whenever you are challenged, give my name: 'Mei Luan.' I am sending you out by the one way which is always open -"

Halting suddenly, Mei Luan spread her arms. With one jeweled hand, she held Harry back; her other hand restrained Paula. Pressing both companions back into the passage, Mei Luan undertoned:

"Wait here. Holgo is coming. I must speak with him."

They saw Mei Luan hurry toward the door of her apartment, where she met the big Mongol. Harry recognized the brute as the one who stood watch at the throne room. He remembered then that he had something to tell Mei Luan: how Li Husang usurped her throne whenever she was absent. But that matter was so trifling, that Harry was to forget it.

Paula gave the first link to coming trouble, when she saw Holgo stare past Mei Luan before the princess could fully block the doorway.

"He has seen the necklace!" whispered Paula, in horror. "Mei Luan forgot to close the drawer!"

Holgo, however, showed no change in manner. Having delivered the message from Li Husang, he turned and strode away. But when Mei Luan beckoned and pointed along the passage to the outlet, she was answered by a clang. A great brass door slashed down to block the way.

"Holgo's work!" exclaimed Mei Luan. "Wait here, one moment!"

She sprang into her apartment and dug deep into the desk drawer. She brought out two objects; one was the priceless necklace, the other a small inlaid revolver. She gave the necklace to Paula, and handed the gun to Harry.

"Put on the necklace!" Mei Luan told Paula. "If you wear it, they will not harm you. As for you"—she turned to Harry—"do not use the revolver until I give the word. Come, both of you. We may be able to pass the throne room before Holgo tells Li Husang. If we succeed, I can open the other way."

Events elsewhere already proved that Mei Luan's plan would be of no avail.

HOLGO had reached the throne room, and was babbling a jargon of Chinese to Li Husang. Rising, Li Husang strode to the brass door, beckoning as he went.

"Come, Mandore," he suggested. "I will show you how I deal with those who try to escape me. I will show you something else, as well—the necklace which we seek!"

The brass door slid upward. Across the threshold, Li Husang came face to face with Mei Luan and her companions, Harry Vincent and Paula Rayle!

At sight of Li Husang, Harry forgot the admonition of Mei Luan. He jerked the revolver upward, intent upon shooting the human monster. But in concentrating upon Li Husang, Harry forgot all others. He did not notice slinking Chinese, who had fallen in behind the procession.

They hadn't moved a finger while only Mei Luan was in sight, but with Li Husang master of the scene, they acted. They sprang for Harry, wrenching his arms behind him, so forcibly that he dropped the gun. But none dared touch Paula.

It was Li Husang who performed that deed. Sneering at the reputed power of the necklace which Paula wore, he snatched at the huge emerald, brought it upward, and gave a twist that broke the clasp. Sliding from Paula's neck, the string of priceless gems dangled from Li Husang's hand.

Holding the necklace so that Mandore could see it, Li Husang gave a sneering laugh, which brought pleased grimaces from his followers. His evil glare, as it passed from Paula to Harry, included even the Princess Mei Luan.

This was the final trap. Li Husang was gloating over the fact that he and his partner, Felix Mandore, now held two prisoners instead of one, and that the princess, Mei Luan, was now powerless to resist his evil sway.

Victory for evil seemed assured, since all this had occurred beyond the reach of Ying Ko, otherwise The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXI. CRIME REVOKED

WITH a bow to Mei Luan, Li Husang delivered a smile of mock courtesy as he extended the necklace toward the Chinese princess. The mockery in Li Husang's manner was emphasized by his failure to hide his scarred cheek. Though he fully understood all that had happened, Li Husang knew that his followers did not. He was taking advantage of their ignorance.

"Allow me, princess," he said in Chinese, "to return the imperial necklace, and with it, remind you of your promise to fulfill my request. Since I claim you as my betrothed, our followers shall now accept my commands alone."

It was an old Chinese custom, as set a belief as the superstition which concerned the dowager's necklace. By that single stroke—the public delivery of the necklace to Mei Luan—the already formidable Li Husang had won full control of all men who might have mutinied on behalf of Mei Luan.

"Allow me, princess," spoke Li Husang in English, "to introduce my friend and partner, Felix Mandore." Then, reverting to Chinese, he added: "After I have taken my rightful place upon the throne, Holgo will conduct you to my presence, along with the prisoners."

From his manner, Li Husang indicated that Mei Luan might regard herself as a prisoner also, and therefore subject to severe punishment. But the princess, clutching the necklace, faced him with eyes that were ablaze. Getting no result from Li Husang, she stared past him, hoping at least to impress Felix Mandore.

The man who wore the red primrose seemed quite as bland as Li Husang. Paula could also see his face,

and she noted its anticipating smile. He was stepping back into the throne room, to make way for Li Husang, when Harry Vincent, thrust forward by his captors, got his first look into the room.

Sight of Mandore had a curious effect upon Harry. He sagged in the arms of his captors, going so limp that they had to stoop to lift him.

Li Husang paused to see what had happened, and during that pause, Mandore was gone from sight. Then, as Li Husang started impatiently to turn about, something else occurred, very much stranger than Harry's falter.

A weird laugh sounded, a shivery peal of mirth, that seemed to grow from nowhere. It rose to an eerie taunt that caused every hearer, Li Husang included, to stand taut and breathless. Rising to fierce crescendo, the mockery flung its challenge in no doubtful terms.

It was the laugh of The Shadow!

The men who trembled now were Harry's captors, as they babbled, "Ying Ko! Ying Ko!" As they quavered, Harry showed the reason for his sag.

With a twist, he was getting clear of them, diving for the gun that he had dropped on the floor. For that weapon, supplied by Mei Luan, was to be immediately needed. The direction of The Shadow's laugh was at last discovered.

It came from the throne room!

Wheeling, Li Husang saw The Shadow. He was standing above an opened brief case, from which he had whipped hat and cloak of black. He had the garments half on as he drew his automatics, and the cloak, not yet in place, had been stopped by the lapel of a Tuxedo jacket. Not entirely by the lapel, but by something which appeared there—a red primrose!

Felix Mandore had become The Shadow!

Mandore, only as Li Husang knew him—by the token of a red primrose. Mandore, too, so far as Paula and Mei Luan were concerned, for they had never seen the face of Lamont Cranston. It was Harry Vincent, alone, who had recognized the true identity of Li Husang's visitor.

In looking for a man with a red primrose, Li Husang's men, by some quirk yet unexplained, had chosen Cranston instead of Mandore. They had brought The Shadow, in person, to visit Li Husang, while blocking Felix Mandore from that very goal!

"YING KO!"

It was Li Husang who snarled the name, as he whipped a long knife from his belt and made a cross slash, as though the weapon were a cutlass, his target The Shadow's neck. But The Shadow's crouch deceived him.

Before Li Husang could counter with a reverse slash, from right to left, The Shadow's hand came up alone, in a strong backhand swing that laid the weight of an automatic against the side of Li Husang's thick skull.

The blow staggered the snarling Chinaman. As others, led by Holgo, came surging across the form of their sagging leader, The Shadow met them with point-blank bullets that lurched them as they arrived.

Knife blades zimmered wide, thrown crazily by jogged hands. Driving forward as he fired, The Shadow

sprang between those plunging forms as if they had evaporated from his path. He was in the midst of more, slugging right and left, felling them with every blow, when Harry Vincent joined him.

Mei Luan, too, had been quick. Pushing Paula ahead of her, the fast-witted princess was starting toward the route to the auction house, thrusting the necklace back into Paula's hands. Mei Luan knew that none would dare touch her without command from Li Husang, and in giving Paula the necklace, she was placing the girl under a similar protection.

Even though Li Husang had snatched the necklace from Paula, its spell still remained. For the Chinese felt that the action of Li Husang was to a great degree responsible for the amazing appearance of The Shadow in their very midst.

Pointed along by The Shadow, Harry was hurrying up to join Paula and Mei Luan. Behind them came The Shadow, his guns aimed toward the scattering Chinese.

The very barriers set to prevent The Shadow's entry, were simply solved when heading outward. The men who manned those doors had come in from their posts, after admitting the man who passed as Mandore. All Harry had to do was find the switches that opened the inside latches. The way was clear, thanks to The Shadow's strategy.

But battle was not ended.

From the throne room came the clangy voice of Li Husang. He had recovered from The Shadow's gun stroke, and the influx of his followers had saved him from further harm, at cost of a few other lives.

Li Husang was rallying his followers for pursuit, and Holgo was beside him. Through each closing barrier, The Shadow fired shots to stay them, but always they came through, with Li Husang keeping men in front of him as shields.

It was Harry who caught the strange note in The Shadow's laugh: a tone telling that his chief would prefer to drive back into the pursuing swarm and snatch Li Husang from their midst, as final proof that Ying Ko was superior in power. But The Shadow had others to consider; hence his retreat. Yet, with it, he was urging his foemen to continue their pursuit!

The answer was found when The Shadow and his companions reached the space behind the auction room. There, The Shadow pointed the others to one door, and as they went through it, he darted for the other, this time apparently in actual flight.

There were yells from Li Husang's vanguard, as they came in sight and saw The Shadow hurrying his departure. They made for Ying Ko with a vengeance, and behind them came Li Husang and Holgo, opening fire with guns.

Those shots and The Shadow's were enough to stir the auction room. The customers broke for doors and windows as a cloaked figure came reeling from a doorway, amid wreaths of smoke that were curling from his guns.

From the other side, Harry saw The Shadow dart for the platform that the auctioneer had abandoned, and thought that his chief was either injured or badly pressed. Again, it was just The Shadow's strategy.

One man was still standing in the auction room, and with a glance, Harry decided that he must be Felix Mandore. He was pompous, and his face bore a look of annoyance, which certainly befitted a man who had been kept waiting for an important appointment.

In Mandore's lapel was a primrose; but Harry, as he stared from the sheltered doorway, saw something

about the flower that Mandore, its wearer, had not noticed.

Mandore's primrose was white!

FOR the first time, evidently, Mandore took a look at the flower. With Chinese rushing out with knives and guns, he wanted to make sure that he still had the flower. He had touched it often enough with his fingers, but under present circumstances, he wanted to see the primrose, too.

Sight of the white flower filled Mandore with alarm. He turned toward the outer door. There, men surged in to join him.

Brend and Darvel led the squad of thugs who were coming to Mandore's aid. Li Husang saw Darvel and shouted at his men, telling them to hold off their attack and go after Ying Ko, if they could find him. Seeing Li Husang's action, Darvel sprang ahead of the others, shouting:

"This is Mandore, Li Husang! I brought him!"

The Shadow's gun was trained on Darvel, the one man who could halt the confusion. A bullet from The Shadow's gun would have proven timely at that moment, but he withheld the shot. Something better was about to happen, and The Shadow's trigger finger proved itself as quick at restraint as in action.

Darvel had given himself away too well. He had shown himself a true accomplice of Li Husang. That point had struck home to Felix Mandore, the man who, unlike Li Husang, would never trust a double-crosser.

Brend and others had spied The Shadow and were shouting to Mandore, but he did not heed them. He saw only Darvel, and with roused fury, Mandore whipped a revolver from his pocket and shot the traitor between the shoulders. Diving forward with a long lurch, Darvel sprawled at the feet of Li Husang.

With that, Li Husang became the one who could not understand. He interpreted Mandore's action as a challenge, and launched his full force against the rival who had refused the offer of partnership.

It was logical on the part of Li Husang, who thought that Mandore had deliberately let The Shadow pay a visit in his stead. If Mandore preferred to eliminate Li Husang, the plan could work the other way, as well.

In the midst of massed confusion, some saw The Shadow and dropped other battle to aim at him. The thing was useless, considering his strong position. Crouched on the platform, he was weaving back and forth, picking out marksmen as they aimed and dropping them before they could fire.

Sometimes, The Shadow deliberately ignored an aiming foreman, because he saw that a member of the other faction was bearing down upon the man in question.

Harry was shooting from his corner, poking his gun out into sight, using his other hand to keep Paula and Mei Luan back in the shelter where they belonged.

To Harry, it seemed a mad race for both himself and The Shadow. Sooner or later, the remnants of the fighting forces—Li Husang's Chinese and Mandore's Americans—would turn en masse upon The Shadow. But the time that Harry dreaded never came.

Within brief minutes of furious battle, a new surge of fighters came through the doorway. They were Chinese, but of a different sort than Li Husang's men. These were fighters loyal to The Shadow, a whole squad of them, headed by Dr. Tam!

The Shadow was driving down from the platform, hewing a path through sagging enemies, while Tam's crew of capable fighters came from the other direction. In the midst of his dropping followers, Felix Mandore looked for Li Husang, and saw him. Mandore gave the last bullets that he had, and Li Husang took them, sprawling face downward on the floor.

Then Mandore, in his triumph, saw The Shadow bearing full upon him.

HIS gun empty, Mandore threw back his hand to fling the weapon. But another hand was quicker, more vicious than his own. It was the hand of Li Husang, whose dying form gathered what strength it had for a final effort.

His arm came up from the floor like a lashing snake; his fingers, dyed with blood, made a clawing motion to retain the handle of the long-bladed knife until his arm had finished its swing.

He was trying to hurl the knife toward The Shadow, who saw the coming move and took a long, quick side step, to carry himself away from the blade's range. But Mandore did not see the knife; swinging to fling his gun, he turned his back directly in its path.

Mandore's empty revolver skimmed harmlessly past The Shadow's shoulder, while Mandore, as if overbalanced by the throw, took a long plunge to the floor. The reason for the sprawl was not the power of the fling; another force had added the flattening impulse.

Jutting from between Mandore's shoulders was the handle of Li Husang's great knife. The blade itself was completely buried in Mandore's body.

Tam's men were taking full control, and Harry moved forward to aid them. Paula and Mei Luan came from their corner and kept on to the door, side-stepping the scene of carnage. Ahead of them, they saw a figure cloaked in black, that moved out into the night.

Battle won, The Shadow was departing, leaving Dr. Tam to explain things to the police, which Tam could well do, being known as an ardent worker for peace in Chinatown.

The Shadow was gone when Paula reached the doorway, but from the darkness with which his cloaked shape merged, came the trailing laugh that Paula had heard before. That parting mirth was symbol of a double triumph over two men of crime whose partnership of evil had never been consummated: Felix Mandore and Li Husang.

IT was afterward, when Paula sat in the quiet of Tam's living room, that she learned the answer to the riddle of the primrose. Princess Mei Luan was present, wearing the emerald necklace, and Harry Vincent was also in the group.

Tam smiled and Harry mentioned the primrose.

"It was wise of Ying Ko," he said gravely, "to make sure that none of Mandore's men would use the token again. That is why he had me arrange to send a different, kind of primrose to the Acme Florists."

"White primroses?" queried Harry.

"No—red ones," answered Tam. "Like these." He went to a corner, and brought one from a vase. "The *primula sinensis*, or true Chinese primrose, instead of the species called the *primula obconica*. I shall show you a peculiar thing about the Chinese primrose."

Tam opened the window and held the primrose in the cooler air. A few minutes passed; then the others noticed that the flower was turning white!

"It is so with the Chinese primrose," declared Tam. "It turns white when the temperature lowers. So Mandore, when he employed his own token, at request of Li Husang, was doing the very thing that Ying Ko wanted. For Ying Ko, always in readiness, was wearing under his lapel another kind of primrose. I wore one, too, at his wish, in case I might be needed."

Tam turned back his lapel to show the primrose. It was red, but when he plucked it loose, its petals did not yield. He passed it around the group, and they found that it was made of silk. Smiling, Tam bowed, and turned toward his office.

"You must excuse me," he said. "I have matters which I must discuss with a visitor who awaits me."

The door closed behind Dr. Tam, and this time, he latched it carefully. For Dr. Tam intended that, in the future, no one should overhear his chats with his friend Ying Ko, otherwise called The Shadow.

THE END