

LEGACY OF DEATH
by Maxwell Grant

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With a killer at large, it was up to The Shadow to find out why the Framingham fortune had become a Legacy of Death.

CHAPTER I

WEALTH TO COME

OLD Elmer Trope bowed profoundly and gestured his thin hand toward the dining-room table. As dryly as though the occasion called for nothing more than mere formality, Trope inquired:

"Another glass of sherry, Mr. Haverdale?"

"I rather think I need one, Mr. Trope!"

Alan Haverdale meant it. Who wouldn't have meant it, after learning that he was heir to half a million dollars! For such was the announcement that Elmer

Trope had made on this, his first meeting with young Alan Haverdale.

The sherry was in a decanter on the table. As Alan reached for it, Trope stopped him. Taking the glass stopper from an antique container, Trope lifted the decanter and filled Alan's glass; then did the same with his own. Watching the sherry pour across the thick decanter lip, Alan was impressed by the rich color of the wine. Trope seemed to understand.

"This was Mr. Framingham's best," spoke the old man. "Often, I poured it for him; but never did I taste it until after his death. Perhaps that is why Mr. Framingham willed the full supply to me, with the ample pension that he left me."

For a moment, Trope's eyes were lighted with recollection; then he dwindled into his withered self. Though he raised his glass along with Alan, the spark was gone. Even the rich, nut-flavored taste of the very special sherry could not bring Trope out from his shell, once he had retired into it.

"I am a simple man," declared Trope, in an almost plaintive tone. "A very simple man. I was a faithful servant to Landis Framingham, and I shall not forget him, for I have lived among the benefits that he bestowed upon me."

There was sincerity in Trope's tone; too much of it to suit Alan. But he didn't blame Trope for it. Rather, Alan felt a surge against the iron tyranny of Landis Framingham, whose dominating will had humbled all who came beneath his sway. If anyone wanted proof of that, they could see it in the attitude of Trope, who for forty years had been Framingham's secretary.

The yoke had borne so heavy upon Trope, that its burden still existed.

And Trope, of all things, felt himself honored by the fact that his master had saddled him with the postmortem task of serving as executor of the Framingham estate.

Those thoughts passed, however, as Alan felt the warming tingle of the sherry. An exuberance swept the young man as he recalled Trope's recent words with their promise of immediate wealth.

"It is a very simple matter," repeated Trope, "this distribution of the fortune that Mr. Framingham left. It is to be divided equally among all eligible heirs."

"Suppose there had been no heirs?" queried Alan idly. "What then, Mr. Trope?"

"The whole estate would go to charities founded by Mr. Framingham," Trope replied. "Such a possibility, however, is too remote to consider. For I expect

to have the fortune divided among the half a dozen heirs within the next fortnight."

Alan's forehead raised furrows beneath the sleek black hair that topped it. His broad, smooth features showed a trace of anxiety that Trope's keen eyes

detected. The old man waited until Alan's dark eyes were turned his way. Alan saw the steel-gray glint of Trope's responding gaze.

"I can answer your question," stated Trope, "You are wondering if, as Mr. Framingham's stepson, you are entitled to a share of the estate. The answer is positively yes, for it was so stated in the will. None of the other relatives are near enough of kin to contest it."

TROPE'S lifting hand was the sign for Alan to rise. Finished with their sherry, they laid the glasses on the table. Almost immediately, a soft-footed servant entered from the kitchen to clear the table. Before he could do so the doorbell rang. Trope made a gesture, said:

"Answer it, Tifton. Show any visitor into the front parlor."

Alan watched Tifton leave. The servant was a small edition of Trope himself, even to his plain black suit, his wing-tipped collar, and the shoestring necktie which adorned it. Long trained in the Framingham service, old Trope had learned his lessons well. The obedience which Trope had shown Framingham was being exacted from Tifton by Trope himself.

"You are finding New York interesting, no doubt," said Trope, in his dry, polite way. "So I assume that you will remain here until the estate is settled.

Meanwhile, should you require any funds -"

"None needed, thank you," interposed Alan, with a smile. "I'm well fixed for the present, Mr. Trope. I'm going on a tour of the bright spots this evening, particularly the famous Forty-one Club, where I hear they have the town's best floor show."

Trope's eyebrows raised, as if in mild reproof. Those brows were lowering, when the eyes went narrow, a thing which Alan couldn't quite fathom, until he realized that Trope was looking beyond him, toward the hallway door. Alan turned.

There in the doorway stood a girl whose expression, at first glance, struck Alan as demure. She was a blonde with clear blue eyes that momentarily sparked an apology for her intrusion. Old Trope bowed, spoke his dry introduction:

"Allow me, Miss Framingham, to present Mr. Haverdale. He is another of the heirs."

Instantly, the girl's manner changed. She drew the collar of her mink coat close about her throat and eyed Alan with a cold hauteur that made him wince. Quite rapidly, he formed his conclusions regarding the girl's manner.

She, at least, bore the Framingham name and could snub claimants of Alan's sort. No matter how distant her relationship to Landis Framingham, she was an aristocrat; Alan, a member of an upstart tribe. Drawing back as though she could not tolerate such a meeting, the girl ignored Alan and spoke to Trope, in a tone that rang with snobbery:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Trope. I did not know you had a guest." Even the girl's apology was stiffly spoken, as was the request that followed: "Might I use your telephone for an important call?"

"Certainly, Miss Framingham."

Trope finished with his most obsequious bow, and Alan watched the all-important Miss Framingham turn proudly away while the old man fawned. Such arrogance enraged Alan, but he managed to stifle his temper.

"If she's a genuine Framingham," said Alan bluntly, "I'm not anxious to meet the rest of them."

"Miss Catherine Framingham," mused Trope. "She has the family name, but she is really a very distant relative."

"She's very distant, all right," agreed Alan, "and the farther I keep away from such snobs, the better I like it!"

Trope gave him a very humble bow, as though his own opinion could matter little, compared with Alan's. Then, with a new note of apology, Trope stated:

"I felt it good policy not to have the heirs meet until I talked with them

separately. Of course, there are certain exceptions, in the cases of those who have already met, and are friendly. But in this instance -"

"I understand," put in Alan. "I and this fur-bearing Framingham female just wouldn't mix. No need to apologize, Mr. Trope."

There was another bow from Trope, as he gestured to the sideboard, where he had replaced the decanter.

"Have another glass of sherry, Mr. Haverdale," suggested Trope, "while I go to see what Miss Framingham wishes."

ALAN uncorked the decanter and poured himself another dash of the rare wine. Pacing the modest dining room, he scowled, grumbled to himself, particularly when he pictured old Trope kowtowing to the Framingham girl. Recalling that his own interview was ended, Alan wished that Trope would return, because he didn't want to walk out on the old gentleman without a good-by.

At last, an opportunity for departure came. Tifton entered, bowed to Alan and told him that Mr. Trope was still occupied and would be for some time. So Alan told the servant to pay his respects to Mr. Trope; and added that he could be reached at his hotel the next day.

Tifton brought Alan's hat and coat. The young man strode out through the front hall, glowering at the closed door of the parlor as he passed.

The fresh outside air wasn't soothing when Alan reached it. The warmth of the sherry kept his anger high. Looking at the drab house and the decayed neighborhood about it, Alan agreed that Elmer Trope was, indeed, a man of simple wants. What a contrast to the Framingham relations, who were splitting an estate into half a million dollars each!

Then, remembering that he was coming into just such a portion for himself,

Alan shrugged, as though that ended it. Looking for a cab, he saw one near the corner. He hoped that it had brought the Framingham girl, because in that case,

he'd bribe the driver not to wait, thus making her go to the trouble of calling another cab.

So Alan gestured impatiently, and after a short hesitation, the cab came over.

Alan was speaking to the driver as he stepped into the cab. All he said was:

"Take me to the Forty-one Club."

But there were others in the cab, who said more. Two of them, both sharp-mannered gentlemen with very pressing ways. One managed to squeeze into the near corner of the cab, so that Alan stepped past him. Next thing, Alan was

wedged between the pair staring from one muffled face to the other.

"Sit tight, fellow," grunted one. "Nothing's going to happen, if you listen first and talk when we say so."

"We're going for a little ride," informed the other. "If you want a

return

ticket, it's up to you!"

Alan's eyes went downward, to view the pressure that the two were giving him. That pressure came from guns, stubby revolvers that were flanking Alan's ribs. So far, what these chaps said, they meant, and there was nothing to do but hear what else they had to say.

Alan let his hands come up, while his head gave a slow nod. One of his captors gruffed at the driver:

"Get going! You know where."

The cab started, and with its forward roll Alan felt an obliteration of the past. Old Trope, his servant Tifton, the haughty Framingham girl, all seemed like people belonging to another world. There was one thing, however, that kept ringing through Alan's brain.

Half a million dollars!

That sum, in Alan's opinion, was the cause of his predicament. He'd come into money and these ruffians had guessed it. They were but the vanguard, these

ruffians, of a whole horde of leeches and vultures who would be seeking a share

of Alan's wealth. Being wealthy, Alan would have to adjust himself to this sort

of thing.

So Alan Haverdale settled back to face this odd adventure, little guessing

the real causes behind it, and lacking all conception of the startling consequences that his enforced journey would produce!

CHAPTER II

THE FRIEND FROM THE DARK

THOUGH they had promised to talk, the two men didn't; at least, not for quite a while. Unless Alan could count their rather frequent admonitions to "keep looking straight ahead" as something in the way of conversation. Apparently, they didn't want him to get a close look at their faces, which might have been possible from the passing street lamps.

At that, Alan's captors weren't taking much chance of recognition. The cab

was threading itself through a maze of side streets, and speeding rapidly whenever it was forced to cover a stretch along an avenue. And Alan, a stranger

in New York, was completely lost, even wondering if they were still on Manhattan Island.

One solace: the cab driver wasn't in league with Alan's captors. Occasional growls directed his way were proof that the fellow was acting under enforced instructions. Should there be a chance to break from the cab, Alan felt that he could depend, to some extent, upon the cabby's cooperation.

Then, issuing from a side street, the cab crossed an avenue and dipped into a driveway that Alan first supposed must be the feed line into the East River tunnel. It happened that the cab was going west, which Alan didn't know, but at least he was soon disillusioned on the tunnel question.

The cab wasn't dipping under the river; it was simply entering Central Park, and there, as it rolled along the winding drives, Alan's captors began to speak their piece.

"Come into a lot of dough, haven't you, bud?" began the man on Alan's left. "Some of the cash that old man Framingham left. Am I right?"

"I'm coming into money, yes," replied Alan casually. "But I haven't

gotten
it yet."

"You mean that guy Trope won't hand it over?" demanded the fellow on the right. "Holding out on you?"

It sounded as though the pair were suddenly taking Alan's side against an injustice. But Alan was quick to see a deeper point. Remembering that his captors had said they would talk first, he let them, and their speech proved voluble.

"Figure that!" said one. "Here's a guy has cash owed him and he can't get it!"

"Because he don't know how," put in the other. "Now, if he had fellows like us with him, working on commission -"

"We'd make Trope come through!"

"And in a hurry, too!"

They silenced, as though putting it up to Alan, who spoke, quite coolly.

"If you want money," he said, "you're welcome to what I have on me. Quite welcome, if it would terminate this ride, which is rather boring, considering that I prefer to see Central Park by day, rather than by night.

"But if you are trying to dupe me into betraying my good friend Mr. Trope,

you are wasting your efforts. I am quite sure that he will deliver my share of the Framingham money, at the proper time. Meanwhile, I doubt that he is foolish

enough to have any of those funds at his house. In turn, I am not so foolish to

introduce strangers there, in an effort to find out."

"Particularly" - in the darkness, Alan let his eyes rove from side to side

- "when those strangers are the sort who seem inclined to help themselves to anything on which they can lay their bands!"

THOUGH he spoke boldly, Alan was relying on sheer bluff. These men were armed, and held him helpless.

Therein, they held a most potent weapon in the matter of obtaining funds from Trope. The weapon was Alan himself.

Technically, the pair had already kidnaped Alan, and if they were through with it, they could certainly demand ransom money from the Framingham estate. So Alan was hoping to keep their minds from that idea.

Silence followed, and with it, tension increased. The cab was digging deeper into the park, and from the curves it took, Alan decided that the driver

was under orders to keep circling indefinitely. Then, as if by mutual understanding, Alan's captors pocketed their guns.

"Don't get us wrong, fellow," spoke one. "This isn't any snatch. We just brought you along for your own protection."

"Yeah," added the other. "There was somebody watching the house. We figured you'd need a couple of friends."

"Sort of bodyguards, see? This was just our way of selling you the idea."

"And we can give you references. From right guys, who will tell you that our rates are reasonable."

Alan could see but one reason for the change of tune. These toughs figured

that a holdup wouldn't prove worthwhile, since Alan hadn't brought a bundle of inherited money with him.

As for going through with a kidnap, they either lacked the nerve, or weren't equipped for such an enterprise. All they seemed to want was Alan's assurance that he wouldn't prosecute them for their actions up to the present.

"All right, gentlemen," decided Alan. "Suppose you drop me at the Forty-one Club. I'll pay the cab fare, and pay you each a deposit on your

services as bodyguards. You're right; I shall probably need your services after

I actually become wealthy."

Immediately the pair began to haggle. They'd risked too much, they argued,

to be put off so lightly. Dropping Alan so promptly, and at a place so conspicuous as the Forty-one Club, wasn't to their liking. They'd paid the cab fare already, and it was hired for another hour. So they preferred to keep riding through Central Park, discussing terms.

Alan believed them.

There wasn't any reason to do otherwise. If they were really going to abduct him, they'd be foolish to waste time. Perhaps their changed tune would become more convincing if they rode a while longer.

But why another hour?

Alan could see but one answer. It would keep him from the Forty-one Club just that long. Which, in turn, would make Alan miss the floor show that was the big attraction at the Forty-one. While Alan was piecing those conclusions, he heard further arguments coming from his captors.

"There was a cab tailed us from Trope's house," put in one. "We ought to make sure we've shook it."

"That's right," chimed the other. "Take a gander from the back window for yourself, boss. See if you can spot the guy that's tagging us."

Alan grinned as he turned around, particularly when the others did the same, as if to press home their silly argument. The thing they saw by chance, suddenly changed the whole situation.

The cab had just swung into a little-traveled drive. In back was a curving thoroughfare where traffic was heavier, and from it the sweep of passing headlights threw flashing paths along the little byway. One of those sweeps came at an ill-timed moment. It gave a kaleidoscopic glint of something just behind the cab in which Alan rode.

Another cab, hot on the trail!

A cab without lights, guiding by the taillight twinkles of the vehicle in which Alan was still a prisoner. A ghostly cab swallowed instantly in the returning darkness. More lights swathed past, but they no longer revealed the ghostly trailer, for Alan's cab and the ghostly thing behind it had rolled far enough ahead to escape further glares.

IMMEDIATELY, Alan's captors took over, and not as prospective bodyguards should. They were their old selves, vicious and threatening. One jabbed a gun against Alan; the other reached through the front seat and wagged his revolver at the cabby, ordering him to swing into a bridle path and park, when told.

Brakes screeched; the cab bumped hard as it struck the thick dirt of a bridle path, the headlights lighting up a sign that said for horseback riders, only. Thumping down a deep hill, the cabby cut the wheel hard to cross a small wooden bridge that arched a brook in the middle of a tiny ravine.

It wasn't necessary to tell the cabby to stop. He did anyway, with his front wheels nearly over the side of the bridge. But the men with the guns were

quite satisfied. One tapped the cabby with his gun, slumping the fellow behind the wheel. The other prodded Alan right out of the cab, hooking his arm before he could jump away. The fellow who had knocked out the cab driver came tumbling out, too.

Beside the little bridge, both faced back along the bridle path, Alan between them.

There wasn't a sign of the other cab. It wouldn't be coming down the bridle path blind, for it no longer had taillights to guide by. If people had alighted from it atop the little hill, they couldn't get here in a hurry

without the use of flashlights.

Maybe the ghostly cab was an imaginary figment, an illusion created by sweeping lights. But the thugs weren't taking any chances on that question.

They had time in which to act, and they intended to use it, where Alan was

concerned. Shoving him up beside their cab, one thug snarled to the other:

"A slug for this guy!"

They might have meant a bullet, but Alan took it that he was to receive a gun butt on the head, the way the cabby had. Wanting neither, Alan tried to avoid both, and therewith proved that his conjecture was correct.

Wrenching hard from his captors, Alan stumbled away, flinging an arm to ward off a gun swing that came his way. Twisting, he was going right into the arms of the other thug, whose gun was lifted to strike him down, when rescue came.

It arrived with a blaze of head lights from straight ahead. The ghost cab was on the scene again, but it hadn't come from the direction that crooks expected. Instead, it had overrun the bridle path, found the other end of the dirt road that zigzagged across the driveway, and it was arriving from the far side of the bridge.

No longer relying on darkness, the cab was using its bright lights, and they framed the whole scene on the bridge, where Alan was striving against the attack of two muffled thugs who had him trapped between uplifted guns.

As the lights revealed them, the two crooks snarled, darted quick looks across their shoulders into the brilliant lights. But they wouldn't have desisted in their effort to sledge Alan, if it hadn't been for something else.

From behind the halting glare came the peal of a challenging laugh - a tone of mirth so sinister, that Alan could feel its deadly chill. As for the men who were about to slug him, it froze them utterly, for the mockery was meant for them; whereas, for Alan, it signified a friend from the dark.

Who that friend was, Alan learned from the lips of the very ruffians who were about to beat him senseless. In unison, they snarled the dread name that Alan was to hear often again:

"The Shadow!"

CHAPTER III

PATHS BY NIGHT

HAD Alan Haverdale known of The Shadow's prowess, he would have aided his new friend, not hindered him. But Alan wasn't acquainted with the facts concerning a most amazing fighter, cloaked in black, who had long been the champion of justice and the Nemesis of crimedom.

To Alan, the startling laugh was merely a respite, for he didn't know that

it presaged titanic action. He thought that the two thugs would suddenly turn his way again and slug him, as they planned. Alan's ignorance was somewhat excusable, considering that the pair remained where they were.

It happened that they were rooted, so chilled by the echoes of The Shadow's weird mirth that they were unable to do the thing they wanted; namely,

to flee in the darkness. For they remembered that darkness was The Shadow's habitat; that this fighter who might be everywhere, was likely to trap them.

Even if they'd had reserves behind them, Alan's captors would have hesitated, hoping to locate The Shadow's position before hurling themselves willy-nilly.

So Alan, expecting more trouble from the pair, acted upon his own, and thereby broke The Shadow's spell.

Flinging himself upon one man, Alan tried to wrench the fellow's gun away.

The thug swung with a frenzy, his blows hopelessly wild. The other gunner sprang over to join the melee, not to have a crack at Alan but to protect himself from The Shadow. He reached shelter just in time.

Again, The Shadow's laugh from darkness. With it, the burst of guns, the whine of bullets that sizzled close to his two foemen. But for Alan's untimely intervention, The Shadow would have clipped that pair. However, by the time he fired, the group was too closely clustered for even The Shadow to risk a telling shot that might have winged Alan instead.

And now, reeling Alan with them, the thugs were getting away from the light-bathed bridge, toward darkness where The Shadow couldn't distinguish them from the prisoner who was becoming their human shield.

They were gripping Alan, but not slugging at him, for their guns were busy otherwise. They were aiming for the spots where they had viewed the flash of The Shadow's automatics, hoping to clip him by the very system that had made him famous in battle against others!

How badly that pair guessed!

Whatever poison The Shadow delivered in the form of gunfire, he always had the antidote - for himself. He didn't stay flat-footed when he fired. He was always on the move; his gun as it were the pivot by which he guided. Even the recoil of an automatic could shunt The Shadow off in an unexpected direction, so well poised was his balance.

Alan's kidnapers fired at blackness, nothing more, and received evasive laughs in return. Having finally reached darkness, they flung their prisoner aside and turned to take flight, not even willing to risk more shots that might betray them.

Again, Alan insisted on getting into the thing.

He grabbed one assailant with a fury that the fellow could not well ignore. A gun swung savagely at Alan's head and landed a glancing stroke that staggered him. With that blow, Alan saw blackness, hard upon a starburst, but he lunged blindly and blundered upon his second antagonist as the first man fled.

With a fury that only his scattered wits would allow, Alan wheeled this foe into the light, though he scarcely noticed it, the way his head was swimming. A foolhardy thing, doubly to Alan's disadvantage. He was forcing his foe to violence, and making himself a perfect target for the fellow's sledging revolver.

Down came the glittering gun with an unsparing force. Whatever crooks had hoped to do with Alan through treating him lightly, all thought of it was gone.

The smash that came Alan's way was the sort that would have cracked the thickest of skulls, had it landed home. The fact it didn't wasn't due to Alan's efforts.

Clutching his opponent below the arms, he wasn't doing a thing to ward off the murderous crash.

What saved the staggered young man was a hand that swept in from the dark, a gloved hand, bearing a gun of its own. It gave a cross slash of tremendous proportions, thanks to an arm that seemingly extended itself to twice its cloaked-sleeved length.

Like a bolt from nowhere, a heavy automatic clashed the down-coming revolver, inches above Alan's head, and sent the other weapon scaling from the fist of the man who drove it.

With that, blackness really engulfed Alan Haverdale. Living blackness, that laughed as another arm whirled him full away, so that even if the other stroke had landed, it couldn't have rocked Alan into oblivion.

Alan's rescuer, The Shadow, was never content with half measures. He was seeing this through to the full.

IN a way, The Shadow made it too complete.

Having snatched the victim from the verge of death, The Shadow carried him clear away, and thereby received thanks in reverse. Still dazed by the first glancing stroke, Alan lacked the wits to use properly the strength that he possessed. He was fighting blackness in order to get at enemies amid it, and he confused The Shadow with his former foemen.

Furiously, Alan clutched The Shadow and drove headfirst against him. The ground here sloped down toward the brook, and The Shadow couldn't get the needed footing to divert Alan's blinding thrust. So the cloaked fighter simply let himself go along.

It was well that The Shadow did. He tumbled, carrying Alan with him, and as they rolled, a revolver jabbed rapid shots from the darkness above. The first of Alan's ex-captors had paused to fire, and the second man, snatching his gun from the darkness where The Shadow's slash had sent it, added a few more shots. Their aim, of course, was high, thanks to The Shadow's rolling tactics. All that the bullets found was the woodwork of the little bridge.

Then, in response, came the stabs from the lower darkness, sizzling shots that nearly nicked the heels of the panic-stricken thugs as they dashed off madly. Despite Alan's persistent clawing at his gun, The Shadow managed to dispatch those timely messages. Unfortunately, Alan disturbed the marksmanship just enough to allow the escape of the unidentified pair.

Shrill sounds rose above the babble of the brook; sounds that even drowned the crackle of the underbrush through which two fugitives were madly seeking safety from the vengeance of The Shadow. Those blasts marked the arrival of the Central Park police patrol, attracted by the bark of guns.

Dashing down the bridle path, the police were coming right to the focal spot, the bridge beneath whose shelter The Shadow had carried Alan Haverdale.

The Shadow's amazing treatment of that situation was totally lost on Alan's muddled mind. No longer concerned with the fugitives, The Shadow gave full attention to Alan, making him a veritable prisoner in a style far more efficient than Alan's previous captors had done.

With a sweep of his cloak, The Shadow half smothered Alan in its folds; twisting the muffling garment about Alan's arms, this remarkable rescuer shoved his charge to his feet, thrust him through the shallow brook and up the opposite bank.

At the same time, bright headlights cut off. The Shadow's cab was back in blackness, leaving only the dimmer glow from the light of the stalled cab that was mired beside the bridge. Arriving police saw those lights alone and hurried to investigate them, which gave The Shadow just the time he needed.

Into his own cab, The Shadow shoved Alan, and hissed a quick command to the driver. The cab shot into reverse, back up the path that it had descended. A clever maneuver, performed by Moe Shrevnitz, who handled the wheel of The Shadow's cab.

At clever feats of hack driving, Shrevvy was unequalled, and he proved it by this stunt. He hadn't any lights to guide by. Instead, he used the very tracks that his cab wheels had dug in the dirt when it came down the bridle

path. Those ruts, plus Moe's memory, proved enough.

By the time the police threw flashlights upon the receding cab, it was actually atop the slope. Then, as police revolvers barked, the cab was speeding off along the solid driveway. Its lights flicked on among the trees, as taunting as the laugh that The Shadow flung back. Both were invitations for gunfire, if the police were foolish enough to waste it.

These cops didn't.

As members of the park patrol, they knew about The Shadow, for he'd roved this area before, trailing men of crime. Rookie cops in certain precincts often fired at The Shadow by mistake; but here it didn't happen. The Shadow's laugh, given in the trailing fashion that betokened his departure, was an unmistakable identification, particularly after the police had found evidence of what seemed to be an unfinished holdup by the bridge.

SOON after The Shadow's laugh faded, Shrevvy's cab was sliding into the traffic of a larger drive, losing itself along with other cabs. All that was lost upon Alan, whose brain was still in a whirl. Clear of the enveloping cloak folds, Alan was slumped beside The Shadow, blinking at the lights that passed and muttering feeble sentences.

Out of incoherent words, The Shadow picked what seemed to be Alan's slogan, so he passed it along to Moe:

"The Forty-one Club."

Alan heard the words, and nodded as he rubbed his head, almost thinking that he had uttered them to the cabby himself. Then, from beside Alan came a low-toned, whispered laugh that struck him as a vague echo of something that he had heard before.

Alan stared, bewildered, but saw only blackness. He rubbed his eyes and squinted, hoping that the glow from an approaching avenue would enable him to see his fellow passenger.

Just then, the cab stopped because of a red traffic light. It was short of the avenue and therefore still in gloom. Moreover, it was near a neighborhood that Alan might have recognized, but didn't: the district where Trope's old house was located.

A door opened on the far side of the cab, so softly that Alan neither saw nor heard it. Through the narrow space slid a dark form that was invisible against the outside gloom; a figure that paused and gave a few added instructions to the cab driver, in a whisper that didn't reach Alan's ears.

Then the cab was on its way again, crossing the avenue, with Alan staring stupefied as the glowing thoroughfare showed only an empty seat beside him. To the dazed young man, his imagination was more at work than ever. So much so, that he didn't believe the sound that did come from somewhere in the darkened street behind the crossing.

A whispery, trailing laugh, voiced by Alan's mysterious friend, The Shadow, wishing the rescued man good luck on his journey to his chosen destination!

CHAPTER IV

THE CLAN GATHERS

IN dropping off for a return trip to Trope's, The Shadow was seeking an explanation of his own for the unexpected ride on which Alan Haverdale had been

taken. The Shadow had been there, in the first place, because he had foreseen that Trope's house might be a target for crime.

The cab that took Alan away hadn't brought the girl in the mink coat. Her cab had departed after she paid its driver in imperious fashion. The cab with the thugs had shown up just before Alan came out, and the time had been too brief for The Shadow to spot its occupants.

Naturally, The Shadow hoped that nothing else had happened at Trope's during his absence. The scene looked quiet enough as he approached, but it changed immediately, though not in troublesome fashion. All that occurred was the arrival of an expensive-looking four-passenger coupe, that pulled up at the curb just as The Shadow reached the corner.

Two men alighted, and were promptly admitted to the house. In going up the steps and ringing the doorbell, they allowed The Shadow time to glide up close behind them. He was almost looking over their shoulders when they nodded to the servant, Tifton.

On the chance that Tifton merely intended to shut the door, without locking it, The Shadow receded from the steps and waited.

As the two men entered the house, The Shadow recognized them. Both were members of Manhattan cafe society, and likewise heirs to the Framingham estate:

Richard Menlo and Mark Robling.

In the antiquated dining room, old Elmer Trope received these guests with a rather relieved smile. They'd been here together before, and it was pleasing to see two Framingham heirs on such good terms. With his humble bow, Trope brought the cut-glass decanter from the sideboard and went through the ceremony of pouring sherry for his visitors.

They were rather a dissipated pair, Menlo and Robling, though they seemed in good spirits. Menlo, fat and inclined to baldness, relished his sherry highly. He not only tasted it, he sniffed it, and looked pleased.

"Got rid of that chronic cold of mine," drawled Menlo. "Inoculations did it. Should have tried them before, you know."

"I'd prefer a trip South," returned Robling, as he finished his glass of sherry. "But then, you know, I'm never bothered with ailments."

Ruddy-faced, Robling was of healthy appearance, despite his bleary eyes. His manner, too, was brisk, aggressive, in contrast to Menlo's drawly style. As

the two chatted, Trope finished his own wine, then suggested that they come to business.

"Two other heirs were here this evening," stated Trope. "Alan Haverdale and Miss Catherine Framingham."

Menlo and Robling took Alan's visit for granted, but they were intrigued by mention of Miss Framingham.

"I'm anxious to meet that girl," spoke Menlo. "She sounds so important, bearing the Framingham name and all that."

"No more important than we are," reminded Robling. "Mr. Trope will tell you that she is one cousin further removed than we are."

Trope nodded. Dismissing the subject of relationships, he brought out a stack of papers dealing with the estate itself. Seeing that Trope was going into business matters, Menlo reached for the decanter and poured himself another glass of sherry, whereupon Trope nodded politely.

"Ah, yes, gentlemen," he said. "We must not forget the sherry. You, too, Mr. Robling."

Reaching for the decanter, Trope personally filled Robling's glass; then

poured his own. He replaced the stopper in the bottle, however, as a reminder that he preferred to offer the sherry before people took it. At that, Robling gave a chaffing glance toward Menlo.

UNOBSERVED by anyone in the room, darkness was clouding in from the hallway door. Darkness that took on a cloaked form - the shape of The Shadow.

From his vantage point, the unseen witness heard Trope drone off figures relating to the estate, while Menlo and Robling, both quite bored, were discussing plans for the remainder of the evening.

It wasn't surprising that they should mention the Forty-one Club as their first stopping place. In fact, it would have been surprising if they hadn't, for the Forty-one was the rendezvous for persons of their type. What would be more surprising, would be if they went anywhere else after they once began to sample the wares at the Forty-one's very lavish bar.

Anticipation of the drinks to come caused Menlo to give a drab smile at the decanter on Trope's table. No need of sampling any more sherry, provided this conference didn't last much longer. Menlo, and Robling, too, preferred drinks of a stronger sort than sherry.

From their conversation, the two were going to the Forty-one Club in Robling's car, which was the fancy vehicle out front. By the time Trope finished with his facts and figures, Moe would be back with the cab, so The Shadow foresaw that by retiring ahead of Menlo and Robling, he could readily follow them to their destination and see that they encountered no harm on the way.

It would also give The Shadow a further chance to check on Alan, who by this time was safely at the same goal.

The Shadow prepared for emergencies, and he had done just that in Alan's case.

AT this precise time, Moe's cab was unloading its lone passenger at the fancy Forty-one Club, and things were taking a turn that called for proper action. For Alan Haverdale was by no means recovered from his daze, and the appearance of his muddled Tuxedo didn't quite befit a customer of the Forty-one Club.

Hardly was Alan out of the cab, before a brawny, big-faced doorman tried to shove him in again, whereupon Moe hopped out to take Alan's part. As Alan wrenched away, helped by Moe's aid, the doorman bawled loudly for assistance and two hard-faced fellows in Tuxedos stepped from within the club doorway.

To Alan, they were very much the counterparts of the pair who had taken him on the interrupted cab ride. So his fighting spirit returned and he let loose a few punches that might have brought him trouble, if a timely friend had not arrived.

Moe being busy with a doorman twice his size, a wiry young man stepped briskly from the doorway and joined Alan's fight against the bouncers.

The fray was short-lived. Not only did the wiry chap stop the bouncers with telling elbow jolts; he also pushed Alan back. By that time, Moe had kicked the big doorman's legs from under him, and sight of the floundering man in fancy uniform brought a laugh all around.

Alan suddenly found himself gripped by Moe and the wiry chap, with the latter doing all the talking, to the satisfaction of the Tuxedo-clad bouncers.

"All right, Mr. Burke," said one. "If you think he's fit to go inside, we'll take your word for it."

Behind Alan's neck, Moe was whispering words to the young man called Burke, who promptly turned and shook hands with Alan, adding that he was sure he'd seen him somewhere before. Alan doubted it, but didn't say so when he heard Burke's first name, which happened to be Clyde.

Alan had read a column in the New York Classic that bore the name of Clyde Burke, and was pleased to make friends with a member of the press.

It happened that Clyde Burke was more than a newspaper reporter and columnist. He was also a secret agent of The Shadow, and his chief had known that he would be at the Forty-one Club. So when Clyde dismissed Moe's cab and ushered Alan into the club, he was doing far more than he appeared to be. He was seeing to it that Alan wouldn't encounter any further trouble until The Shadow arrived.

Alan felt better after he'd washed up and had his suit brushed. He was pleased when he and Clyde were shown to a ringside table. Clyde was known at the Forty-one Club, and the courtesy was therefore extended to Alan, who became

profuse in his thanks. In return, Clyde gave a knowing smile and said:

"You can give me a story, Haverdale. I knew you weren't drunk, the moment I saw you. I like to hear what strangers run into when they hit New York - or when New York hits them!"

At first, Alan hesitated; then, feeling that he owed a debt to Clyde, he told his story briefly. All the while, he noted a dubious expression in Clyde's eyes, that was followed by a headshake.

"Afraid I can't use it, Haverdale," said Clyde. "No one would believe it. Those fellows who grabbed you didn't act as crooks should. Not even if somebody

put them up to the job. And besides - who would have put them up to it?"

Alan thought that one over.

"Miss Framingham probably heard me say that I was coming here," he stated.

"Right afterward, she made a phone call, from Trope's house -"

Clyde interrupted with a friendly but depreciating laugh.

"You're really imagining things," he told Alan. "I think we can take it for granted, though, that you don't like Miss Framingham."

"I don't," asserted Alan. "You wouldn't, either, Burke. Why, just take this place for example" - Alan gestured at the extravagant setting around them - "and you'll see what I mean. That Framingham girl would think she was slumming, if she came to a place like this!"

Clyde nodded.

"You're right," he said. "I know the type."

"If she did come here," continued Alan, "she'd give everyone the haughty stare. The one that says: 'I am a Framingham, and too good for you even to look

at!' Airs like that annoy me, Burke."

This time, Clyde laughed.

"Here's your chance to look a bit," he told Alan. "The floor show is just starting, and if you want an eyeful that will make you forget the very name of Framingham, just watch the leading lady, Kay Lorley. Here she is."

WITH a blare of music, Kay Lorley appeared, outlined in the glow of a spotlight. Alan had heard of Kay Lorley, the main attraction at the ultra Forty-one Club, and one glance showed that she deserved her reputation. Dancing

across the floor, she paused to take a bow, and Alan marveled at her rhythmic grace.

Catching the beat of the music, Kay Lorley carried it right up from the floor. Her shapely figure quivered from her ankles to her fingertips; the undulation brought brief, passing shimmers from the narrow, jeweled bands that formed her trifling costume. Tossing her blond head back, she poised, only to begin another rhythmic shiver as the music rolled anew.

With each repeat, the fascinating blonde circled to another table,

stopping with extended arms to give the patrons a smile they would remember. In that journey, she arrived at Alan's table.

Captivated by Kay's charm, Alan's eyes were rising, until they met the girl's gaze. When Kay saw Alan's face, she stiffened, smile and all.

For their stare was one of mutual recognition. Startled though Kay Lorley was, her expression couldn't equal the amazement displayed by Alan Haverdale. He couldn't forget that face, with its blue-eyed gaze.

That face was all that Alan had seen of the aristocratic Miss Framingham, who had stared at him so haughtily from the doorway of Trope's dining room!

CHAPTER V

DEATH TAKES ONE

IT was so incongruous, meeting Catherine Framingham in the person of a night-club dancer, that Alan Haverdale wasn't ready to believe it. He'd have decided that Kay Lorley was merely the Framingham girl's double, or, at most, her twin sister, but for the fact that she recognized him, too.

By that recognition, Kay Lorley gave her twofold role away. Missing the next measure of the music, she was unable to continue her routine until it ended; hence her embarrassment was complete. All the people at tables around the nightclub floor were stretching forward, wondering what had stopped Kay Lorley. Naturally, they followed her gaze, and saw Alan Haverdale.

He'd relaxed back in his chair, taking the situation very calmly, since he didn't have to go on with a dance. All that Alan had to do was look and let Kay worry, which she did.

She'd forgotten the night club, the orchestra, as it tried to shake her from her trance with louder rolls of the drums. At last, with the third beat, Kay found herself; too late.

Turning toward another table as she resumed her quivering dance, Kay hurried the routine, and tripped awkwardly over one of her jeweled dancing slippers. Landing almost in the laps of laughing patrons, the girl grabbed for the table and found the cloth instead, pulling it away with a great clatter of glassware.

She might have turned her routine into comedy, but she was too flustered. With one rebuking look at Alan, Kay flung a slender arm across her face, pivoted on one heel, and ran from the floor through a line of waiting chorus girls, who immediately took over in her place.

Looking across the table, Alan saw Clyde gazing his way, an inquiring lift upon the reporter's eyebrows.

"Believe it or not," informed Alan, "that was Miss Catherine Framingham. I'd expected to see her again, probably peering from a fur wrap through the window of a limousine. But I never dreamed she'd appear without her mink, as the mainspring of a pretentious floor show!"

"I believe you," returned Clyde. "I saw how she was overwhelmed. But brace yourself, because here comes trouble! Better let me handle it."

Alan looked toward the floor and saw the chorus. Some of the girls, who sympathized with Kay, were giving him very outraged glances. Others, jealous of the leading lady, rewarded Alan with very friendly smirks. But Clyde wasn't referring to the chorus when he spoke of coming trouble. The storm arrived at the table, close by Alan's elbow.

Turning, Alan saw a man in a Tuxedo, whose blunt face had a nose that looked as if someone had once pushed it flat and left it that way. Having seen

the face along with ads relating to the Forty-one Club, Alan recognized it as belonging to the proprietor of the place, a gentleman named Herble.

"This is Mr. Herble," introduced Clyde. "We call him Cue Herble, for two reasons. He used to be a billiard expert, and after that, he began tipping people to the best night spots, until he started one of his own."

"Cut it, Burke!" snapped Cue, as he regarded Alan coldly. "Is this the bum that started all the trouble on the sidewalk?"

Alan resented the term "bum," and showed it by rising from his chair. His clenched fists also indicated that he regarded the outside fracas as a mere preliminary to the one he was willing to start inside the Forty-one Club.

"Easy, Alan," warned Clyde. Then, to Cue, the reporter added: "If you're looking for a bum, go find your own doorman. You did right, putting him in a monkey suit. He's a gorilla, if ever there was one! He started the trouble outside!"

"It don't sound right to me," snapped Cue, still watching Alan through hardened eyes.

"It would look all right in print," observed Clyde, "in a column signed by

an eyewitness named Clyde Burke. We give the night clubs a lot of breaks, Cue, but there's such a thing as going too far."

"I'll fire the doorman," gruffed Cue, "so that winds up your gripe, Burke.

Now, about this fellow" - Cue thumbed at Alan - "that you say isn't a bum. I'll

form my own opinion, after you tell me what he said to Kay."

Clyde shook his head.

"Haverdale said absolutely nothing," he declared. "He simply looked at Kay

Lorley, and that, I understand, is the privilege your customers pay for."

"He must have taken a long look."

"Considering your outrageous cover charge of five dollars," argued Clyde, "a customer is entitled to a long look at Kay. However, we are missing the main point. The trouble came when Miss Lorley looked at Mr. Haverdale."

AN idea dawned on Cue Herble. The flat-faced night-club owner faced Alan with an expression that was very hard to analyze. It was partly puzzled, partly

defiant, and deep behind it Alan sensed a strong dash of jealousy. But Cue's tone was simply a crisp query:

"You've met Miss Lorley before?"

Alan nodded.

"How long ago?"

"A very long while ago, it seems," replied Alan slowly. "Maybe that was because the place was so different. She wasn't the same person then and perhaps

that explains it all. She recognized me as if I were someone from a forgotten world. Unfortunately, I didn't realize that I was rising like a specter from the past. Otherwise -"

"Never mind the rest," snapped Cue. Rising, he turned to Clyde: "I'm going

out to fire the doorman, Burke."

After Cue Herble had gone, Clyde laughed.

"You stopped Cue with those metaphors," he said to Alan. "Such talk isn't in his line. It dazes him! But don't think you've squared yourself. He doesn't like people who know Kay Lorley too well. He'll have you tagged, from now on."

Alan went into a reflective mood.

"When Cue tags people," he asked suddenly, "how does he do it?"

"With some of those tough gents who work here," returned Clyde. "You remember the pair who helped the doorman. They work as bouncers, in shifts, and Cue always knows where he can get more of them. If there's a call for an outside job -"

Clyde stopped suddenly. He was stating the facts already in Alan's mind: namely, that the two thugs who had taken Alan for the Central Park excursion could have been in the employ of Cue Herble. That, in turn, linked directly back to Kay's phone call, as Miss Framingham, from Trope's house.

Alan put the abrupt question:

"Do you think Cue knows that Kay is also Miss Framingham?"

"Not if she is really a Framingham," returned Clyde. "But there may be a game behind this. Cue might be putting the frame on Framingham, using Kay to collect a chunk of the estate."

Clyde glanced around as he spoke, to make sure that Cue hadn't returned. With a quick gesture to Alan, Clyde nudged across the floor toward the bar.

"Those two chaps might know." Clyde was indicating two new arrivals. "They're bona fide heirs to the Framingham millions, like you, Haverdale. One is Dick Menlo; the other, Mark Robling. But no" - Clyde shook his head - "they wouldn't know."

"Why not?"

"Because they come here every night, so they've seen Kay Lorley often. That makes it a sure bet that they haven't seen Miss Framingham over at Trope's."

Neither Menlo nor Robling showed interest in the acrobatic team that had taken over the floor show. Nor, for that matter, did Clyde or Alan. So Clyde suggested that Alan stroll over to the bar and find out what subject his fellow heir's were discussing.

Alan agreed, and that gave Clyde a chance to get to the telephone, where he called Burbank, The Shadow's contact man. From Burbank, Clyde learned that his chief had already convoyed Menlo and Robling to the Forty-one Club, and would soon arrive there in person.

The Shadow would appear not as his cloaked self, but as a gentleman of society named Lamont Cranston. In order to make a more formal entrance, Cranston would be accompanied by a young lady named Margo Lane, who was something of a darling among cafe society, and therefore very useful on occasions such as this, for Margo was clever at picking up gossip on subjects that interested The Shadow.

Since it wouldn't take long for Cranston to meet Margo and return to the Forty-one Club, Clyde reserved his report, particularly because an attendant was rapping at the door of the phone booth, to give him a note. One glance at the message, and Clyde was off to the bar to find Alan.

AT the bar, Alan had ordered a drink that he wasn't imbibing, so that he could listen to the conversation between Menlo and Robling. Menlo had finished a Scotch and soda, and was calling for another, while Robling was ordering a second Tom Collins.

"A fine drink, Scotch," commended Menlo in a drawly style. "Never gives a hangover, you know. Never!"

"You don't drink enough of the stuff," argued Robling. "I've watched you, Dickie. Suppose we try drink for drink, and see how we turn out."

"Bother the notion!" said Menlo. "I'd have you on my hands, with a headache from the awful stuff you drink."

"A headache?" Robling laughed. "It wouldn't trouble me! I end one every morning with a special pick-me-up that I've used for years! Alkavita, they call it. Wonderful, but quite harmless."

Alan was ready to give the opinion that Menlo's empty skull was the reason for his lack of headaches, but the statement wouldn't account for Robling's case, which most certainly should be included. So Alan listened, hoping to hear

something more important. "Here's to old Trope," said Menlo, finishing his Scotch. "Drink to it, Mark!"

"Good enough, Dickie," rejoined Robling. "And we'll have another, as a toast to Miss Framingham, the lady we have never met."

A hand plucked Alan's elbow. He turned quickly, thinking it might be Cue Herble. Instead, the arrival was Clyde. As he drew Alan away, the latter started to whisper what he'd heard Robling say about the Framingham girl.

"Never mind," rejoined Clyde, in a quick undertone. "I just received a note from Kay Lorley. She wants to see both of us. Hurry, and we'll make the exit to the dressing rooms ahead of those acrobats, which means that Cue won't see us."

The bartender, finishing his job of mixing drinks for Menlo and Robling, turned to look for Alan. All that he saw was the untouched drink that Alan had first ordered. Glancing elsewhere, the barkeep spotted a man's back, disappearing through the exit that Clyde had mentioned. It was Alan's back, for

Clyde, leading the way, was through the door.

Odd business, this, in the bartender's opinion - a man ordering a drink and then ducking out. The barkeep began a shrug; then stopped his shoulders at the height of their lift. For his eyes, staring straight ahead, were viewing something very startling.

Glass in hand, Richard Menlo was coming straight up from his stool, while Mark Robling wagged his own drink, clinking the ice in it by way of applause.

"Good boy, Dickie!" Robling was saying. "You're doing better than the acrobats! Jolly neat, I call it!"

The bartender didn't think it jolly neat. He saw the pained, distorted look on Menlo's fat face and the inhuman bulge that the man's eyes displayed. He reached for Menlo's arm, but wasn't even in time to save the glass, as it dropped from the pudgy hand, to strike the bar and spread its contents as it smashed; for Menlo was toppling backward, away from the bartender's reach.

As for Robling, he, too, was belated in his grab for Menlo. Perched on a stool, and already half drunk, Robling's own arm sweep nearly overbalanced him, and made him clutch the bar instead.

Over backward sprawled Menlo, striking shoulder first upon the floor. His head took a sharp rap, but not enough to hurt him, for it struck upon a thick rug. Light or heavy, the blow did not matter, for Menlo never felt it. The grotesque condition of his face told too well that death had overwhelmed him, even while he fell.

Death of a swift, invisible sort! Such was the doom that had plucked one Framingham heir from the ranks of the living. The disaster from which The Shadow had saved Alan Haverdale seemed trifling compared to this horrendous fate that had overtaken Richard Menlo.

To those who saw Menlo transformed from a living creature into a lifeless corpse, in no more time than a finger snap would require, the thing had every look of an insidious murder, dealt by design.

Whether such, one person alone could have defined it, and he had not arrived in time to view the sudden tragedy:

The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI

QUEST FOR A KILLER

CHAOS began immediately at the bar of the Forty-one Club. Patrons who turned to look down at Menlo's face, saw in it the realization of horrible visions that overindulgence in the wares of the bars could cause. That face was like the dream of a madman brought to actual mold.

It was no wonder that tumult followed, a tumult punctuated by shrieks. Such sounds, of course, brought some of the thickset troubleshooters who formed part of the club's personnel, and in their wake came Cue Herble, right from his office, where he had just paid off the wayward doorman.

In keeping with his nickname, Cue gave signals that confined the commotion to the corner where it had begun. He signaled the waiters to stay at their tables, the orchestra to burst into louder music. Menlo's sudden death had rocked the Forty-one Club, but Cue Herble was setting things straight again, at least outside the confines where the real trouble lay.

Nevertheless, the confined excitement did not escape the keen-eyed observation of a calm-faced gentleman who at that moment was entering the Forty-one Club. The man in question was The Shadow's other self, Lamont Cranston. Tall, leisurely of manner, he was the perfect man about town. With him was a beautiful brunette.

Cafe society regarded Cranston and Margo as a perfect pair. Certainly, they could show teamwork in situations such as this. Idly, Cranston glanced at the attractive brunette whom he escorted, and caught a slight tilt of Margo's finely curved eyebrows. Her brown eyes, too, flashed full understanding, and with that, they parted, unnoticed by anyone near.

In a most unconcerned fashion, Margo continued on beyond the floor show, until she reached the area where trouble was rife. There, very helpfully, Margo began to quiet the shrieking ladies who were pointing at Menlo's body. Meanwhile, Margo wasn't missing a thing that went on.

As for Cranston, he had stepped back to the cab that had brought himself and Margo here. It was Shrevvy's cab, and under the rear seat was a secret drawer that Cranston opened with a single swoop. From it, he plucked hat and cloak of black, flung the latter across his shoulders and settled the hat on his head, as he went through the opposite door.

The cab pulled away, leaving a patch of blackness that remained momentarily motionless, then stirred, unnoticed by any bystanders. Swift in his glide, The Shadow was making for the rear door of the Forty-one Club, knowing it to be the exit that trouble makers would use if the going became too hot.

That murder had been done, The Shadow was sure. He knew the symptoms that announced sudden and unexplainable death. Should a murderer at large be seeking a way out, he would find one - and The Shadow with it!

All this occurred to Margo as she played her part, over by the bar. She saw Cue Herble, his flat face very grim as he stared at Menlo's body, then at Robling, the dead man's companion. Thumbing across his shoulder, Cue gruffed an order to one of his strong-arm men:

"Phone the police!"

Right then, the barkeeper reached over and plucked at Cue's sleeve. The barkeeper's name was Tom, and he was as trustworthy as they came. But he was buzzing something that seemed very important, close to Cue's ear. Turning to a couple of his toughies, Cue said:

"There was a guy did a sneak backstage. Find him, wherever he is, and bring him here."

Margo heard the order, but didn't connect it with Alan, a portion of whose history she had heard from Cranston. It wasn't logical that Alan should have put himself into further trouble, considering that he had been placed in the competent custody of Clyde Burke.

If Tom, the barkeep, had mentioned two men seeking the backstage exit, Margo might have suspected. But when she looked for Clyde and didn't see him, she decided that they must have left by the usual front-door route.

If anyone else had gone backstage, Margo couldn't see how it would matter.

By the time the polite bouncers could circumnavigate the floor show and do a sneak of their own that wouldn't alarm the customers, the man in question would have reached the outer exit - there to meet The Shadow.

Of course, Margo's guess was wrong, though she could not be blamed for the error, since she knew nothing of the connection between the mink-wrapped Miss Framingham and the much-less-encumbered Kay Lorley.

AT that moment, Clyde Burke was knocking at a door that bore a golden star, and Alan Haverdale, the wanted man, was standing right beside him. The door opened to reveal a dressing room, and with it, Kay Lorley.

The star was wearing a dressing gown adorned with butterflies, so closely wrapped that it reminded Alan of the mink coat, except that the gown did justice to Kay's lithe figure.

Without a word, Kay gestured the visitors to chairs. She left the door open, but glanced anxiously toward the corridor, to make sure that no one was within earshot. Then, standing with her back against the dressing table, she faced her visitors and said in a low, serious tone:

"I hope you both can keep a secret?"

Alan smiled, particularly when he noted Kay's eyes follow his glance toward a half-open closet where a lavish mink coat was hanging along with other clothes.

"I think I can," spoke Alan. "In fact, I'm sure I can - Miss Framingham!"

"That's just it," the girl declared. "I don't want to be known as Miss Framingham - not just yet. I treated you very snobbishly this evening, Mr. Haverdale, and I hope you will accept my full apology."

Alan agreed that he would. Actually, he felt that Kay had already made more than an apology when she lost her composure and ruined the floor show. He felt a real sympathy toward her, that abolished his brief recollections of Miss

Framingham, who was rapidly becoming a nonexistent person in Alan's mind.

"What else could I have done?" pleaded Kay reverting to the case in question. "Don't you see the spot I'm in? I'm under contract to appear here, with only a short while longer to go. After that, I'll no longer be Kay Lorley.

I'll be Catherine Framingham,"

"The change won't do you justice," observed Alan. "I'd like you better as Kay Lorley."

"Call me Kay Framingham, then," the girl said. "I won't be the snob I was tonight. It was only because Mr. Trope introduced you as one of the other heirs, that I acted the way I did. I took you for one of the crowd who thought they were too good for anybody else, so I thought I'd have to pretend the same."

Kay's plea was so ardent that Alan felt convinced that it was real. It was obvious that she wanted to lead a normal happy life, wherein people would

neither point to her as the chief feature of a night-club show, nor as a member of the upper crust.

She'd played one extreme against the other only in the hope that it would help her reach the middle route. And now, her eyes, dimming with tears that she could no longer restrain, were asking Alan to preserve the secret on which she so depended.

"Don't worry, Kay," said Alan. "I won't breathe a word about it. You're right about the rest of the crowd. I just saw two samples, named Menlo and Robling. I'd like it if you'd play the snob act when you meet them, provided we can laugh about it together afterward."

Kay's prompt smile indicated that the laugh would be forthcoming on the occasion mentioned. Thereupon, the girl turned to Clyde and asked:

"Will you keep the secret, too, Mr. Burke?"

"I'd like to, Kay," returned Clyde, staring hard at Alan, "but getting stories is my job, and this is a very good story. A very, very good story!"

The accent on the word "very" drove home to Alan. As Kay turned his way, about to plead with him to use his influence on Clyde, Alan shot the question:

"Why did you call Cue Herble from Trope's? Were you trying to clinch things, so I couldn't see you here at the Forty-one Club?"

"I did call Cue," admitted Kay, "but it was only to tell him not to be worried if I arrived a trifle late," She paused, and her eyes blazed suddenly: "How did you know that I called Cue? Were you listening?"

"I'm asking the questions," insisted Alan. "I want to know about the strong-arm twins that Cue sent to grab me. Was that your idea, or just his?"

"Why... why -" Kay stammered, then caught herself. "You couldn't have listened to my phone call, after all. If you had, you'd know that I didn't mention your name. I didn't even dream that you'd be coming to the Forty-one Club!"

"Not even though Menlo and Robling come here?"

"But I don't know either of them," claimed Kay. "Really, I don't! I never meet any of the patrons; that's one of Cue's rules. Why, I wouldn't think of getting you into any trouble, Mr. Haverdale!"

BEFORE, Alan could acknowledge the sincerely spoken statement, he heard the pound of footsteps in the corridor. Coming to his feet, he sprang to the door, glimpsed the approach of Cue's strong-arm crew. When they saw Clyde, they

shouted, but before they could take a good look at the young man, Clyde shouldered Alan aside and slammed the door, turning the key as he did. Alan turned, to find Kay reaching past him.

"It's all a mistake," the girl began. "Cue never sent those rowdies here before. Let me talk to them -"

"You've done enough talking," Alan interrupted. Throwing an arm around Kay, he swept her across the dressing room. "I'll put you where you can stay a while. Burke and I will handle this."

Completely off her feet, Kay couldn't struggle against Alan's sweeping tactics, until he paused to swing open the closet door. Then she clawed savagely, but Alan ended the brief attack by dumping her in the middle of the closet, where she landed hard and looked up angrily, drawing her breath to raise a scream. Alan stopped the scream by pulling the mink coat from the hook and using it to blanket the blonde.

It was very funny, the way the fur began to twist around, like a big bear who had finished hibernating for the winter, particularly as Kay's muffled gasps were much like a bear's grumble. But Alan hadn't time for comedy.

He slapped the closet door shut and turned the key, leaving it in the lock

so that Kay could be released later. Then, bounding back across the dressing room, Alan rejoined Clyde, who promptly clicked off the lights and announced:

"Here goes!"

Men were banging hard against the door, with blunt instruments that sounded much like gun butts. Clyde helped them to their destination by turning the key and bringing the door suddenly inward.

Two attackers pitched through headlong; grabbing Alan, Clyde started past them, into the dim corridor.

It would have been a good ruse, had there been only two attackers. But there were four more, crowding the corridor. They pitched on Clyde and Alan, swinging guns in the sincere fashion that the thugs had shown in the park.

Before Clyde and Alan could do more than ward off blows, the first pair of huskies were on their feet again and coming from the dressing room with swinging weapons.

The thugs were going through with Cue's orders to the limit, which meant that they intended to bring in two prisoners, not just one, and those more dead than alive.

Ducking, both Clyde and Alan could feel the hammering strokes of guns against their lifted arms, and knew that they could expect no mercy.

Better than mercy was the thing that came. It was a challenge that made the strong forget the weak and turn to deal with a more formidable foe.

The strident laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII

THE VANISHED SUSPECT

SWIFT was the swath The Shadow cut in that backstage corridor of the Forty-one Club. First sounds of the fracas had brought him in from the rear exit that he secretly guarded, and he came like a living thunderbolt of blackness.

The Shadow didn't even look for the victims who were so sorely beset. Instead, he used the simpler and more effective method of eliminating the attackers.

Flung right and left by the black-clad hurricane, Cue's men thumped the walls so hard that they saw stars on all the doors, not just Kay's. Last of all, The Shadow reached the pair who had taken Clyde and Alan from the rear. The guns of those huskies were already swinging when The Shadow came on them, so he acted with split-second swiftness.

Headlong, The Shadow pitched himself in a long, hard dive, straight across Clyde and Alan, who were crouched on the floor. His outstretched arms were the brakes that stopped him, by hooking the bodies of the gun-sledging foemen. Their hammering strokes couldn't land, because they were flying backward, guns and all, with The Shadow somersaulting his full weight upon them.

Hard were the punches that The Shadow drove to handy jaws, as he came to his feet. Clyde and Alan were up, wondering whether to aid The Shadow or start a drive out through the corridor. They did neither, for The Shadow decided against both plans. The drive with which he struck his friends was harder than the one his enemies received, but without further consequences.

Literally, The Shadow hurled Clyde and Alan so flat that they were prone when he turned his same drive into a long leap that totally cleared them and brought him right into the midst of the rallying bouncers who had been scattered when he commenced the rescue drive.

Four in all, these huskies still had their guns, and they weren't thinking

of using them as clubs. Crooks at heart, despite the respectable level to which

Cue had raised them, they recognized The Shadow as their natural foe. Theirs was the chance to achieve what crimedom had always failed to do. Under present auspices, defending the ground where they belonged, they could slaughter The Shadow and still beat a murder rap, under the head of self-defense.

If ever The Shadow had faced dangerous foemen, these four qualified. They were going to give bullets without stint, and risk their individual chances of survival for the ugly glory that the underworld would bestow upon them. Throwbacks, these four were, to the old tribe of gorillas who had roved Manhattan in the bad days that they hoped would exist again.

They just didn't know the ways of The Shadow. If they had, they'd have realized that numbers didn't faze him, but often worked in his behalf.

Four gunners could be a problem, if they had room in which to operate. Even two, the pair in Central Park, had been something of a menace to The Shadow. But the tighter that space became, the bigger the mob, the better - from the standpoint of The Shadow, as he now demonstrated.

USING his own gun as a club, The Shadow took a tremendous whirl into the very midst of his attackers. Not one of them had time to give a point-blank shot. Dodging the sweep of The Shadow's automatic, they dropped back to get a little more range. The walls stopped them, and before they could twist about and find elbow room, The Shadow did the rest.

One man, jolted by The Shadow's swift stroke, sagged, with an unfired gun sliding from his hand. Another, taking a jab from The Shadow's opposite elbow, went flying backward, his shots furrowing the ceiling. Landing on the back of his head, he stayed where he fell.

Meanwhile, The Shadow was disposing of the last two, both at once. He tripped a tough who lunged, and the fellow's shot went wide; not only that, in his sprawl he met the final man, and shoved the latter's gun hand as it followed The Shadow's whirl.

The last shooter snarled as his bullet missed The Shadow and ricocheted from the wall. Whipping about to try another shot, the fourth thug received a downswing of The Shadow's gun, because the cloaked fighter had twisted faster.

As he sank, the fourth man toppled on the third, spoiling the latter's aim. Still snarling, the third foeman rolled to a new angle and tilted his gun upward, only to make it a target for a straight, swift kick that The Shadow aimed at the glittering object. The flying revolver didn't stop that forceful foot-stroke. A jaw above it did. There was a groan as a propping elbow gave, and The Shadow's four adversaries were as quiet as the two that he had tackled by the dressing-room door.

All during that rapid fray, Clyde had been clutching Alan to the floor, to keep him from the path of any stray bullets. The Shadow's whispered laugh, eerie in the confines of the corridor, was a signal that Clyde understood. It meant that the danger was ended, so Clyde pushed Alan to his feet, giving him the words:

"All clear."

Alan was groggy. He'd taken a few more glancing blows upon an already tender head. He could hardly hear the whispered instructions that The Shadow spoke to Clyde. The next thing Alan knew, he was in the custody of the cloaked fighter who had triumphed over six attackers without firing a single shot. And The Shadow, as before, was hustling Alan away from a scene of battle, to a waiting cab. For Moe Shrevnitz, in due form, had rounded the block and was out in back of the Forty-one Club.

This time, Alan thought he could keep track of The Shadow; but he didn't. It was only a short trip to Alan's hotel, and when they arrived there the lights beneath the marquee showed the rear seat empty, except for Alan

himself.

Moe was helping the passenger out and steering him into the hands of a friendly doorman, while Alan blinked back at the empty cab, not realizing that the door on the other side was closing slowly.

As soon as Alan entered the hotel, that door opened again and The Shadow was in the cab when Moe closed the near door. At the wheel, Moe heard The Shadow's whispered order to return to the Forty-one Club.

MATTERS had straightened somewhat, at the Forty-one. Police had arrived to begin their investigation, and the man in charge was Inspector Joe Cardona, the best brain on the force.

Since there was no lethal weapon to account for the death of Richard Menlo, Cardona was working on the theory that the victim had been poisoned - a fair enough supposition, considering the gargoyle expression that had swept Menlo's face while he was experiencing sudden death.

Witnesses claimed that Menlo's fall was partly responsible for the fright that seized him, but that didn't change Cardona's theory. Learning that Menlo had dropped a glass of Scotch and soda when he fell, Cardona salvaged some of the liquid that still spread the polished surface of the bar, and decided that it would be sufficient for a chemical analysis.

A police surgeon was examining the body when Lamont Cranston arrived. Though Cardona had ordered that people be kept away, Cranston was allowed to approach, inasmuch as he was a friend of the police commissioner. Seeing Cranston when the latter joined Margo, Cardona, decided it was time for dramatic action.

"We're treating this as a poison case," declared Cardona. "On that account, I'm holding anyone who might be responsible. And that" - Cardona swung about - "means you, Mr. Robling!"

Staggered by Cardona's accusation, Mark Robling could only gawk. If blankness was a proof of innocence, the expression on his beefy face should have cleared him of guilt. But faces meant nothing to Inspector Cardona, not even the face of Cue Herble, when it thrust forward with a scowl.

"That's crazy!" stormed Cue. "Why, Robling was Menlo's best friend! One of my best customers, too. What's more, he couldn't have dropped anything in Menlo's glass! Tom mixed the drinks."

Cardona nodded his appreciation.

"I'll hold Tom, too," he declared, "on the same suspicion."

"Listen, flatfoot," Cue sneered, "Tom is my best barkeep, and an honest guy! He wouldn't do a thing without I told him."

Cardona's face retained its deadpan expression, one that seldom left his swarthy features.

"That puts you on the suspect list, Cue," announced Cardona. "Can you suggest any more?"

Under the stress which he had brought upon himself, Cue's thoughts shot back to Alan Haverdale.

"I'll say there's another," Cue exclaimed. "The real murderer, that's who!"

See that glass over there? He left it, and ducked out, just before Menlo flopped dead! Ask Tom."

"Which way did he duck out?" questioned Cardona.

"Over past the dressing rooms," returned Cue. "Come along, and I'll show you. I sent some fellows to bring back the guy. Maybe they're still chasing him."

Cue was leading the way across the floor as he talked. Through the

doorway, they reached the turn in the corridor, and there Cue stopped, amazed. Spread all about was the cream of his strong-arm crop, all six, still so dazed that not one had even thought to find his gun and put it away.

CARDONA told an accompanying detective to gather up the guns and take the owners into custody for having carried them. Looking beyond sprawling thugs, he saw another man, leaning against a doorway making efforts to light a cigarette.

The extra, man was Clyde Burke; recognizing Cardona, the reporter gave a weak grin.

"Hello, Joe!" said Clyde. "Thought you'd be along. This bunch gave me a lot of trouble. Left me kind of groggy."

Cue gave Clyde a cold stare, and expressed his doubts that the reporter could have handled six gunners all alone.

"Guess you're right, Cue," agreed Clyde. "As I remember it, they took to slugging each other while they were looking for somebody else."

"That fellow you brought in here, perhaps."

"You mean the bum?" queried Clyde. "No, he didn't handle them. He's gone. Left a good while ago."

"Yeah?" gruffed Cue. "Where's Kay, then?"

Clyde changed his grin to a look of apprehension, as he beckoned the others into the dressing room.

"Almost forgot about Kay," he said. "When I heard trouble coming, I shoved her into the closet so she'd be out of the way. Over here."

Clyde unlocked the closet door and Kay crawled out, very ruffled and quite angry. Before she had time to say a word, Cue stormed a question.

"I heard you sent somebody a note," put in Cue. "Was it to that smart-Aleck who threw you off your stride when you saw him for the first time in all these years?"

"Here's the note, Cue." Clyde brought it from his pocket, waved it, and put it away again. "It was sent to me. Kay didn't want me to kid her in my column. So I came back, and was telling her that I wouldn't even mention her, when your bunch stampeded the place."

Kay gave Clyde a very grateful look, one that wasn't missed by Cranston, who, by that time, had arrived and was looking in from the door. Though The Shadow hadn't as yet received Clyde's report, nor put any questions to Alan during the ride to the hotel, he analyzed the case so promptly that it gave him

the direct conclusion that Kay and the Framingham girl must be the same.

Watching the door, Clyde saw Cranston speak a few words to Margo, who nodded.

Inspector Cardona then took over.

"We're investigating a murder," Joe reminded, "and these people were out of that case. Come along, Cue, we're going down to headquarters, you and your barkeep, along with Robling."

Clyde, the last to leave the dressing room, gave a parting wave to Kay, who still looked for gratitude. When the door closed, Clyde found himself in the corridor alone with Cranston, whose one word came in a whispered tone:

"Report!"

LATER, after leaving Margo at her apartment, Lamont Cranston became his other self, The Shadow. Not that his appearance changed; outwardly, he remained quite the same, maintaining his pose of the idle-mannered man about town.

He became The Shadow only by the laugh he gave - strange, repressed mirth

that was heard only by himself and Moe, the faithful cabby.

The Shadow was thinking of Alan Haverdale.

With all his faults, Cue Herble was right on one point; that Alan, the vanished stranger, should be definitely regarded as a suspect in the death of Menlo. But The Shadow held the solid opinion that Alan had played no part in the case.

Until the cause of Menlo's death was fully decided, The Shadow intended to reserve opinion. After that, he would unravel the tangled threads that formed this net of crime.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FINAL VERDICT

IT was afternoon, and Lamont Cranston was in the office of his friend, Police Commissioner Ralph Weston, hearing the final verdict in the Menlo case. Inspector Cardona was also present, listening to experts, who rejected his poison theory.

There were three experts on the job, all renowned toxicologists. Their spokesman spread a chart on Weston's desk and tapped it importantly with a pencil.

"The autopsy proved this," declared the toxicologist. "If Menlo died from poison, it could only have been a species found in this group, A-3. I refer to the category of acid poisons, that leave no traces in the stomach but only in the blood stream - for there was no poison in the stomach."

"How do those poisons act?" queried Weston. "Slowly, or quickly?"

"They vary," explained the expert. "This class contains a considerable number, all quite deadly. But never" - he wagged an important forefinger - "never do they fail to leave their trace in the blood stream. In studying specimens of Menlo's blood, we found no acid content. His death was not by poison."

Weston swiveled in his chair and picked up the telephone. He'd promised to give Clyde Burke a prompt report on the verdict of the experts. While the experts were rolling up their charts, Cardona turned glumly to Cranston.

"That makes it what the doctor said it might be," decided Cardona: "an attack of acute indigestion. It gets a fellow's heart like that" - Cardona, doubled his fist to illustrate - "and people who eat and drink the way Menlo did, are apt to get hit by it."

Weston had finished calling Clyde, so Cardona took the telephone and told the reporter that there would be a line-up of Cue's gunmen in half an hour, and that he would need Clyde there.

While waiting to view the line-up, the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston reflected on the verdict of the toxicologists. Those poison experts knew their business, and Cranston, who, as The Shadow, had frequently made lab tests with poisons, recognized that their decision must be sound.

What stayed uppermost in The Shadow's mind, however, was the existence of a murder motive in the case. The death of Richard Menlo meant one less person to claim a share of the huge Framingham estate. Alan Haverdale, Kay Lorley, Mark Robling, along with others who had not yet entered the scene, were all gainers by Menlo's death.

Prior to the line-up, Commissioner Weston ordered the release of the suspects in the Menlo case. Mark Robling went home, and Tom, the barkeep, returned to the Forty-one Club, where patrons were thirsting for his presence.

Cue Herble, however, appeared at the line-up in person, in the interests of his employees, who were already represented by a battery of attorneys.

UNDER the glare of powerful lights, Cue's six henchmen paraded sheepishly while detectives looked them over. The police were trying to pin past offenses on them, for even minor charges would increase their crime of having carried guns.

In the black background away from the lights, Cranston contacted Clyde Burke, who was on hand to testify that these were Cue's sluggers, in case some lawyer argued otherwise.

Clyde hadn't come alone. He'd brought Alan Haverdale with him, for with the news that Menlo's death was natural, Alan, like the known suspects, was no longer wanted in connection with the case.

In the darkness, Clyde introduced Alan to his friend Cranston, stating that his advice would prove of value in other matters. Therewith, the three made their own use of the line-up.

"Look them over, Haverdale, suggested Clyde. "Tell us if you recognize any of them as the pair who took you on that taxi ride in Central Park."

Though Alan had seen his former captors but imperfectly, the glare of the big lights brought out such details, that recognition of last night's faces should have been quite possible - had they been in the lineup. But the longer Alan looked, the more he was sure that his former captors were not present.

All that while, The Shadow's keen eyes were busy, too, and though he had less to go on than did Alan, he concurred with the young man's opinion. It added up to a very definite possibility: that Cue Herble was smart enough not to mix his inside crew with those who might be working for him outside.

Further proof came when the detectives, among them visitors from other cities, admitted that there wasn't a known criminal among the entire group. So Clyde slid out with Alan, while Weston was dimming the lights.

"What are you going to do about it, commissioner?" demanded Cue. "If you hold these boys of mine, I'll be short-handed at the club. After all, they were only doing their duty, and they had permits for those guns."

"Permits belonging to other people," remarked Weston, "and most of them had run out. But I'll reserve decision, Herble. Since none of your men have past records, or, I should say, known records, I'll release them in your custody for the present."

Cue Herble congratulated his men, shaking hands with them and clapping them on the back, as he commented:

"Good boys! You kept your noses clean!"

Meanwhile, Commissioner Weston retained a pleased smile, which he explained in an undertone to Cranston.

"It means that guns will be taboo at the Forty-one Club," stated the commissioner. "Furthermore, it gives us something on Cue Herble. He'll be responsible, if any of that crowd misbehave. I've wanted to have a hold on Herble for quite a long while!"

After leaving headquarters, Clyde and Alan made a stop at a little restaurant, where they met Kay Lorley. She was very much herself, this afternoon, so demure and friendly that Alan really understood what she meant when she said that she didn't like extremes.

Neither a night-club star, nor an aristocratic miss, Kay was simply a very attractive girl, whose charm impressed Alan the longer he talked to her.

All doubts on the Framingham question were settled. Kay belonged to a distant branch of the family that lived in the Middle West. After her father's death, she'd studied dramatics, and finally had gotten a bit in a Broadway play that folded after a ten-day run.

"So I tried the night clubs," completed Kay, "and I landed." She shook her head ruefully. "And how I landed! Oh, well, when I wind up at the Forty-one,

that whirl will be over and I'll feel human again."

AFTER they left Kay, Clyde took Alan directly to the Forty-one Club, much to Alan's surprise.

A new doorman was on the job, a huge African twice the size of the fellow that Cue had fired, but his gleaming smile put Alan quite at ease, particularly when Clyde introduced the newcomer.

"This is Jericho Druke," said Clyde. "I had him waiting here for Cue to get back... So Cue hired you, did he, Jericho?"

"He sure did!" laughed Jericho. "And I'm going to do a right job here, Mr. Burke. A real right job!"

Those words meant much, had Clyde explained them. Like Clyde, Jericho was working for The Shadow. When the new doorman specified a "real right job," it meant specifically that the front route into the Forty-one Club would be covered as effectively as The Shadow had managed the back way, the night before.

Unacquainted with Broadway blandishments, Alan was further surprised when Clyde introduced him formally to Cue Herble, in the latter's ornate office, which occupied a rear corner of the Forty-one Club.

"Glad to know you, Haverdale," greeted Cue. "No hard feelings because of last night. We just didn't have the situation straight, that's all. Anyway, we both got blamed for something that was nobody's fault, and that's a reason why we ought to celebrate.

"So we'll have a drink on the house, but don't name your poison, because Tom doesn't serve any! The cops decided that it was all a lot of bunk."

They went out to the bar, and Cue told Tom to mix himself a drink, as one of the party. It was early, and there were few customers in the night club, so Cue extended the treat all around.

He gave another wave of greeting, when two more patrons entered, and Alan found himself being introduced again to Lamont Cranston. This time, the introduction included Margo Lane.

To make it all complete, Kay Lorley arrived, and Cue showed how big-hearted he was by inviting his star to join the clientele. That was when Alan received a warning nudge from Clyde, and recognized that Cue was springing

one of his crafty tricks, under cover of his friendly pose. Cue wanted to see the sort of greeting that Alan would exchange with Kay, to learn how far their former acquaintance went.

Knowing Cue's ways, Kay was quite casual when she spoke to Alan. In his turn, Alan, thanks to Clyde, behaved the same. A curious thought struck home to

him, however; one that rather amazed him. Cue supposed that Alan had a yen for Kay, and the odd part was that Cue was right. He hadn't been right the night before, but the situation had altered since then.

Knowing the real Kay, Alan more than liked her, and something in her manner told him he was winning her favor, too.

During a brief interval when Cue had gone to instruct the new doorman on his duties, Kay undertoned a query to Alan:

"You've heard from Mr. Trope?"

Alan shook his head.

"I think you'll find a message from him, if you call your hotel," added Kay, "because he phoned me a short while ago. He's giving a dinner to all the heirs this evening."

"You'll be there, too, Kay?"

"I can't," the girl replied. "Mark Robling might recognize me. You know my sentiments, Alan. I don't want any of that crowd to think they're better than

I

am. You happen to be different."

"You're right," agreed Alan. "It's better that the party should be one guest shy."

Another listener heard those words: the quiet Mr. Cranston, who seemed so unconcerned that no one ever noticed when he happened to be within earshot.

Had

he so chosen, Cranston could have amended Alan's final statement.

The dinner that Trope was giving the Framingham heirs would be attended by

its full quota. Though Kay Lorley certainly would not be present, a substitute would fill her place. A substitute who, uninvited, would remain unseen.

The unseen guest would be The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX

DINNER FOR EIGHT

WHEN Cue Herble finished his chat with Jericho, he went directly to his office. He closed the door but didn't throw its heavy bolt, as he usually did, for it was still too early to worry about intruders who might try to crash the gate of Cue's private preserves.

Seated at his big mahogany desk, Cue drummed nervously with his fingers, a

variety of scowls registering upon his flattish face. At last, he arose suddenly

and turned to the corner of the room, where a big filing cabinet stood. Timed to

Cue's movement, the door of the office opened gradually and keen eyes peered through. Eyes that belonged to blackness, for the observer was The Shadow.

With the hour growing late, the mysterious investigator had resumed his black-cloaked attire and was looking in on Cue Herble before starting on the trip that Alan soon would make to Trope's.

Oblivious to observation, Cue was running his hand down the sliding drawers of the big filing cabinet, which was almost his own height. Having tapped the required gadgets, Cue pulled a handle and the whole front of the cabinet swung open, like a door, revealing a passage behind it.

About to step through, Cue suddenly changed his mind. Slamming the front of the cabinet, he came back to the desk, at the same time tossing a wary glance toward the office door.

By then, blackness had receded, and Cue failed to catch the glint of the burning eyes that had observed him. But The Shadow was still listening from the

door crack when Cue picked up the telephone.

Cue's call was brief, and to the point.

"Listen, Gaffey," he told someone at the other end, "I want you and Wingo over here in a hurry... Yes, it's the Haverdale guy. You're to tag him wherever

he goes... You know all about it, so the rest is up to you... Report here later,

in by the private door -"

Silently closing Cue's door, The Shadow moved along the rim wall of the night club. He didn't contact Clyde, to give him this new information. Clyde had present duties; his job was to see that Kay and Margo became better acquainted.

The fact that The Shadow had learned of an outside pair who might prove to

be the thugs who abducted Alan, was something that concerned The Shadow alone.

It was Jericho who heard The Shadow's whispered signal from just inside

the night-club entrance. When all was clear, Jericho made a gesture that brought Moe's cab from across the street and simultaneously notified The Shadow that there were no passers-by.

Gliding swiftly from the entrance, The Shadow boarded the cab as it stopped, and it pulled across the street again to await further orders.

Gaffey and Wingo made it just in time.

They showed up in an obsolete coupe, their faces well muffled, as Alan was coming from the Forty-one Club. Jericho called a cab, and it pulled away with Alan in it, the old coupe trailing it. Moe's cab followed, and everybody rode to Trope's.

There, trails diverged. Alan went into the house; Gaffey and Wingo swung around the corner; while The Shadow stayed in Moe's cab, parked across the street. More guests arrived at Trope's, including Mark Robling in his pretentious car, which he parked out front.

Finally satisfied that all were present, The Shadow crossed the street and entered the house by the unlocked front door.

THE group around the dining-room table included Elmer Trope, Alan Haverdale, Mark Robling and two other men, whose names were soon mentioned.

One was James Suttern, a portly, middle-aged man from Chicago, who made friends quickly with the other heirs. The other was Walter Creff, a thin, close-lipped person, who was quite well known in financial circles. Creff wrote

articles for financial journals predicting business trends, and from all accounts, was seldom seen in public.

Old Elmer Trope opened ceremonies in very sorrowful style.

"This dinner, gentlemen, was to have been for seven," he said. "We five, and two others."

Trope was wrong. It should have been dinner for eight, counting the unseen guest, The Shadow. But the cloaked guest, watching from the hallway, did not correct old Trope.

"Miss Framingham has sent her regrets," continued Trope. "As for our other guest, we must express our own regrets in his behalf. I refer to our unfortunate friend, Richard Menlo."

The quick, birdlike glances that Trope gave the group could have been taken as a challenge. He, alone, of all those present, could not possibly have profited by Menlo's untimely death. Apparently, Trope was watching for any smug

smiles on the faces around him. No smiles forthcoming, Trope summoned Tifton, who brought the decanter of sherry from the sideboard.

Personally, Trope poured a glass for everyone. First to raise his own, he voiced:

"To the memory of Richard Menlo."

The toast was drunk, and the dinner was served. Always thrifty, Trope supplied a very meager meal of only a few courses. Conversation made up a large part of it, and Robling was the leader for a while.

"A jolly good chap, Dick Menlo," observed Robling. "Sorry to have him go. Fancy it, their thinking that I could have had a hand in it, when it turned out to be nothing more than too much Scotch and soda!"

Robling's theory rather interested the others. Realizing it, he continued.

"A Tom Collins is a lighter drink," said Robling. "Better for you. Much better. All physicians agree, including my own."

Laughing at his own idea of a jest, Robling looked about the circle. A nod came from James Sutter.

"I'll take a Tom Collins any day," he said. "It goes well after a dish of curry. My weakness, curry. I like the smell of it, even the curry powder before they cook it."

"You've spoken to the right man," declared Walter Creff, with a slow smile. "While you're in town, Sutter, I'll take you to dinner at a little restaurant where I sometimes eat. There, you will have beef curry, of a very special brand. I can't say how many ingredients go into their curry powder, but they use far more than the average."

As Sutter acknowledged the invitation, Creff sank back as though he had spoken his entire quota for the evening. Robling promptly resumed the conversation.

"Dash it, I still prefer a Tom Collins," he declared. "Whoever said to eat, drink and be merry, said too much. You don't have to eat to be merry. Listen, Sutter" - Robling wagged a finger - "this evening, you'll come along with me, and I'll introduce you to the finest Tom Collins that was ever mixed!"

Such talk waned until dinner was nearly finished. Then Robling whose mind was very short on subjects, brought up the matter of drinks again. The thing that made him recall the former conversation was the coffee that Tifton served.

Robling, alone, declined a cup.

"Saw my doctor today," laughed Robling. "Guess I told you that already. Asked him about this old pump, here" - he tapped his chest in the general neighborhood of his heart - "and he said go easy with it. Maybe one less Tom Collins, though they never hurt me, but absolutely no coffee."

Laughing louder, Robling looked around the group, and finally saw that they didn't understand. Centering on Trope, he repeated:

"No coffee. Hear that, Elmer? As if I ever drank coffee! Fancy it, my doctor saying not to drink coffee, when I abhor the beastly stuff! No criticism

of your tastes, gentlemen; just a personal foible of my own. I don't drink coffee, and my physician told me to stop. Which proves that there are certain things one's own doctor doesn't know!"

The rest finished their coffee and accepted second cups. They were rising, finally, when Trope announced:

"No business this evening, gentlemen. I intended this purely as a family get-together. I may call you later, though, after I go over some accounts, so I should like to know where you will be."

ROBLING stated that he was taking Sutter to the Forty-one Club. Creff announced that he was going back to his apartment. So Alan simplified matters, by saying that he intended to go directly to his hotel. If he did go to the Forty-one, which he planned, he didn't want Robling and Sutter to know that he would be there.

The Shadow had completely disappeared when Alan left the house. From Moe's cab, across the way, he was keeping a sharp lookout in Alan's behalf.

Two cabs were near, and both were quite empty, for The Shadow had glided close and given them an inspection at short range. So far, however, Gaffey and

Wingo had not returned in their old car.

Alan took the first cab, and The Shadow noted that he, too, studied its interior. In fact, Alan waited until others came from the house, before he stepped into the cab. The next two were Robling and Suttern, and both were talking rather loudly.

Robling was reminding Suttern that they were going out together, but Suttern was beginning to shake his head.

"There's a cab here," he said. "I may as well take it to my hotel. Some other night, Robling."

Suttern didn't reach the cab he indicated. At that moment, two muffled men appeared from around the corner, hurried to the cab and crowded in ahead of the man who sought it. Alan's cab had just started, and the second cab took after his taxi with a burst of speed.

Immediately, Moe's cab whipped to action, becoming the third in the cavalcade. Knowing that the muffled men could be Gaffey and Wingo, taking a cab instead of their old car, The Shadow leaned forward to help Moe with the trail.

His automatic was already in his fist, poking from the window. If that second cab tried to overhaul Alan's, The Shadow intended to overhaul it first, with bullets.

At the end of three blocks, an odd thing happened. Alan's cab wheeled left, and The Shadow shifted, to get a new bead on the second cab when it swerved. But it didn't follow Alan's; instead, it swung to the right and sped off in the opposite direction. By then, Moe's cab, trailing without lights, was

too close to the corner to change its own veer, which had naturally been left.

Moe interpreted The Shadow's laugh correctly. It called for a quick halt, while he thought this one over. It wasn't sensible that crooks should have changed their plan so soon, dropping Alan's trail before they had real evidence

that The Shadow was on theirs.

Something else was in the wind; something different, and rather unexplainable, in the light of previous events. Whatever it was, The Shadow intended to learn, and quickly.

With Alan safely off, there was another trail that he could take; one which, by The Shadow's calculations, might bring a real result.

Calmly, The Shadow ordered Moe to turn the block and circle back to Trope's. The beginning of one quest might prove the start of another.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER X

THE CHANCE SURPRISE

BACK at Trope's, Suttern, the portly man, had nothing else to do but accept Robling's invitation to ride in his fancy coupe, since no cab was available.

They were getting into the gaudy ear, when Robling looked back and saw Creff coming down the steps. He waved an invitation to the drab-faced man, and Creff, at first about to decline, finally accepted for the same reason as Suttern: namely, the lack of cabs.

So all three were starting off in Robling's car, when Moe's cab nosed itself warily around the corner. The Shadow saw the departing taillights and gave the word. This being a simple trail, Moe turned on his own lights and followed.

At first, the course was toward the Forty-one Club; then, unexpectedly,

it

changed. The Shadow finally guessed the reason. Creff was in the car, and wanted to be dropped off at his apartment. This proved correct, but with a definite amendment.

When the fancy coupe stopped in front of Creff's apartment hotel, it remained there after he went inside. So The Shadow left Moe's cab and went to learn what was keeping Robling and Suttern.

The apartment hotel was an old-timer, only a dozen stories or so in height. Lights appeared in a corner room about halfway up, signifying that Creff had reached his apartment.

Those lights, like others in the building, looked quite bright in contrast to the street below them. For this was a quiet section of Manhattan, even more forgotten than Trope's neighborhood, though the buildings still retained something of their former grandeur.

It was definitely a street to The Shadow's liking. Pitch-black smoke amid a blackout couldn't have traveled less noticeably than did the cloaked personage who approached the parked coupe.

By the dashlight, Robling and Suttern were easily seen, because even that feeble glare was conspicuous against the surrounding gloom. They were chatting quite casually, those two, and it became evident that Suttern now favored the trip that Robling had suggested to the Forty-one Club.

Further conversation proved that the persuasion hadn't all been Robling's.

Evidently Creff had joined the discussion during the ride from Trope's, and had received an invitation, too. Won over by Robling, Creff's willingness to make it a party was all that Suttern needed. So Robling and Suttern, already wearing

Tuxedos, were merely waiting until Creff had changed to similar attire.

The lights on the higher floors didn't go out until Creff appeared. Maybe he'd forgotten them, or didn't bother to put them out. Whatever the case, The Shadow was still beside the coupe when Creff arrived hurriedly from the apartment-hotel door.

Lacking time to return to Moe's cab, The Shadow signaled it instead, by means of a tiny flashlight that blinked a diminutive green glow from the folds of his shielding cloak.

The taillights of the coupe seemed mammoth when they pulled away, compared to the tiny flash that The Shadow changed from green to red when Moe neared the

spot where his cloaked chief waited. Then, with only a minimum of delay, The Shadow was in the cab again, ready to follow the coupe to the Forty-one Club and insure the safety of its occupants.

Robling's car was already around the corner, but that was all the better. The Shadow preferred to allow some leeway when he was on the trail.

All that had a bearing on the thing that suddenly happened - a thing that The Shadow would have spotted had he been in the cab when Moe spurted it forward. Too intent upon watching The Shadow's light, Moe hadn't spotted the menace in an alleyway that he passed.

The thing drove - hard!

It was another cab, the very one that tagged Alan from Trope's, only to drop his trail. Because it hadn't been on his trail at all!

The cab had done the same as Moe's. It had circled back to Trope's. Maybe it originally intended to follow Robling's coupe, but it had found something better: the cab in which The Shadow rode. Or, perhaps, the men in that cab could have known that Robling was going to stop at Creff's, and therefore taken

a short-cut to the vicinity.

Whatever the case, they were taking a short-cut now, right out of an alley and hard across the street, with the fury of a juggernaut. A monstrous menace that Moe didn't see, for his back was turned and the other cab was using his own trick of driving without lights. If he heard the roar, Moe mistook it for something back on the avenue behind him.

Moe, usually alert, was basking right in the path of destruction without knowing it!

THERE wasn't even time for The Shadow to act against the hurtling menace that threatened to crush him with his cab. He was closing the door, and if he'd held a drawn gun, there still wouldn't have been a chance to divert the lurching juggernaut with bullets. His automatic was coming from his cloak, as it always did when he sensed a threat of doom; but the answer lay with Moe.

If Moe could only yank his cab from that oncrushing path! But this was once when orders could be futile. The mere words: "Get started" wouldn't fill Moe with the notion of a menace almost at its goal. Only The Shadow could have supplied a substitute for words in that crucial instant. He gave one automatically.

The point of an automatic laid against the back of Moe's neck - the most astonishing thing that the cabby had ever experienced. The cold touch of silent death that a gun could speak, coming at a time when Moe was convinced that his chief, The Shadow, was in this very cab.

The electric shock that riveted Moe sent its effect right through him and imbued the cab. No rabbit could have given so alarmed a bound as did that vehicle. The cab was in gear, and Moe stepped on the accelerator as though he intended to climb right through the windshield. Maybe he would have, if the cab had not overtaken him.

Impelled by Moe's foot on the gas pedal, the cab literally scooped him back into the seat. Slanted toward the curb, its front wheels climbed over, hopped the sidewalk and leaped the steps into the old hotel as though it were bound through the revolving door. The side of the steps slanted it, and the cab floundered like a wounded whale.

It happened so fast that it looked like a noiseless collision in which one smashing cab bumped the other, but there was actually no contact. That was proven by the way the intruding cab behaved. It took the curb, too, and found a building wall that stopped it.

If Moe's cab hadn't overturned, The Shadow would have turned the tables on his adversaries. As it was, he fared well enough. The door on the high side of Moe's cab flapped open, only to close again, disgorging blackness during the brief interim. Traveling in reverse rotation, The Shadow went right across the running board, to come about flanked by a pair of whirling wheels.

His gun fired first. The Shadow wanted crooks to locate him, rather than have them clip Moe within the inverted cab. He knew that their driver was probably a hapless chap forced into his predicament, so The Shadow aimed for the rear half of the cab. Crooks, however, had gone flinging through the far door and were firing from the other side.

Their bullets were deflected by a pair of excellent shields: the spinning spokes of the wheels that flanked The Shadow. His laugh came as an echo to his gunfire, a threat more potent than the juggernaut that had been launched his way.

Men of the dark fled off through the dark itself, and The Shadow, rolling from his perch, took after them.

These were unquestionably the pair who had battled The Shadow in Central Park. Their technique showed improvement acquired from experience. It was as if

the other fray were picking up where it left off, and The Shadow, always a jump

ahead of such fighters, was able to guess their shifty moves. Instead of bridle

paths and shrubs, foemen were dealing in alleys and ash cans without wasting time about it.

They were taking turns at harrying The Shadow, their alternating shots calculated to throw him off his stride. It was their way of duplicating The Shadow's dodging tactics, with the hope that they would spill him with their shots. A very dangerous game; so dangerous, that had this been the former setting, The Shadow would have settled them with rapid shots.

But the ash cans, hidden in the dark, stopped enough of The Shadow's shots

to give gunmen the depths of the alley beyond. Locating an ash can by his recollection of a plunk a bullet had given it, The Shadow used it for his own entrenchment, ready then to mow down his foemen as they fled for the next street.

However, this alley, right next to Creff's apartment hotel, ended in a low

wall with a very thick gate. Crooks found the gate unlocked and were through it,

slamming it, when The Shadow delivered a new hail.

The cloaked fighter lost very little time. The sound of smacking bullets informed him of the wall. He reached it, scaled it from an ash can that the fugitives had overlooked. On the other side, he found a courtyard that offered various outlets, including those through houses, or back through the hotel itself. Taking an open-air route to the adjacent avenue, The Shadow learned promptly that crooks must have gone another way.

He sped to the corner, where he could get a look at the front of the hotel; there he saw Moe crawling from his cab to help the driver of the other vehicle. People were coming from the hotel building, but they acted as if they knew one another; hence the fugitives were not among them.

Moe and the other cabby were getting help; they would be able to tell their stories unmolested. The thing to do was cut off the fugitive crooks. Dodging in and out of courtyards wasn't much of a policy.

The Shadow preferred something better, and found it in the shape of a cab that was stopping at the avenue corner, the driver looking wonderingly at the wreckage down the line.

ENTERING that pausing cab in his silent style, The Shadow threw a quick chill into the driver by means of a whispered laugh. The cabby didn't argue; he

went where The Shadow said. Nor did The Shadow worry about the tale that this newcomer might later tell. The police would figure well enough that The Shadow had again been about his helpful business of putting thugs on the run.

What The Shadow wanted to do was outrun them, so he gave his new cabby an address close to the Forty-one Club. In taking this cab, The Shadow did more than furnish himself with transportation; he deprived the fugitive crooks of a vehicle they might have commandeered.

As he rode along, The Shadow laughed again, this time restraining his whisper rather than worry a cabby who needed no further urge to make good speed.

The Shadow hadn't forgotten Cue Herble's last admonition to two gunners named Gaffey and Wingo, the pair who had tracked Alan to Trope's. They were to

report back to Cue, in by the private route, as soon as they finished their assignment. Having personally finished the assignment of the two crooks who tried to crash Moe's cab with theirs, The Shadow intended to keep a date with Cue; one that the night-club owner didn't know about.

There'd be a surprise in store for Gaffey and Wingo, if they showed up feeling tough. A surprise in the person of The Shadow, black-cloaked master of the night!

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW'S TRAP

CLYDE and Margo were watching the floor show at the Forty-one Club when Robling, Suttern and Creff arrived. More correctly, Margo was watching it, for she was fascinated by the rumba as rendered by Kay Lorley. That table-to-table routine had become automatic with Kay, for Margo could tell that the blond dancer was practically oblivious to her work.

Kay was looking for Alan, to see if he'd arrived from Trope's. Alan hadn't, and Kay appeared relieved. Margo understood, for she'd made real friends with Kay this evening. The other girl had confided how anxious she was to end her present career. Thinking of Alan in future terms, Kay was therefore anxious to disconnect him with her performances at the Forty-one Club, which she was trying to regard as something of the past.

As for Clyde, it wasn't that he had watched Kay dance so often that he could ignore her turn. Contrarily, he found it very difficult to wrest his gaze from that lithe figure on the floor.

He probably would have missed seeing Robling, if the fellow had entered the night club alone, because Robling always headed straight for the bar, dancers or no dancers. But portly James Suttern, and even casual Walter Creff, couldn't help stopping to look at Kay Lorley. They stayed right where they were until her dance was finished.

By then, Clyde had come to the conclusion that these two must be others of the Framingham heirs. He recognized Creff, but hadn't supposed that the financial writer was one of the privileged few who were to split the huge estate. The point not only intrigued Clyde; it gave him a chance to look into matters.

"I'm going over to the bar," Clyde told Margo. "If Alan shows up, keep him here. He's probably waiting at his hotel until after the floor show, because he doesn't want to throw Kay off her stride or have another run-in with Cue Herble."

Both points sounded logical to Margo, particularly the latter, for she saw Cue on the other side of the floor looking around at the tables and noting customers. It could be that Cue had Alan very much in mind.

Outside the Forty-one Club, Lamont Cranston was stopping to speak to the new doorman. Jericho shook his head when Cranston inquired if Miss Lane happened to be in the night club. He hadn't been here long enough to know the customers by sight.

Of course, that was just a cover-up for the benefit of persons who were lounging near. Cranston knew well enough that Margo was inside. He just wanted a pretext to inquire for Cue Herble. Again Jericho shook his head.

"Mr. Herble isn't in his office," stated Jericho. "I'm sure of that, sir, because he hasn't rung for me." The big African nudged toward an indicator box inside the door. "Mr. Herble sure likes to keep me hopping with that bell!

Guess it's on account of I'm new here. So he can't be in his office. Guess he's out looking at the floor show."

Cranston nodded.

"Cue always likes to watch Kay Lorley," he recalled. "But she ought to be off the floor by this time."

"Looking over a new act, too, Mr. Herble is," informed Jericho. "Number three spot on the bill. Maybe you'll find him over by the floor."

Jericho started to open the door, but Cranston decided not to enter. Instead, he undertoned:

"I'm taking a look in Cue's office."

At that moment, Jericho bowed to arriving customers and gestured them toward the door. His ham-sized hand spread its immense fingers twice, announcing that Cranston would have at least ten minutes for the excursion mentioned.

STROLLING along the street, Cranston paused at a convenient spot to light a cigarette. He was bothered by what seemed to be an overcoat across his arm.

Things happened to that coat, as Cranston adjusted it. The thing transformed into a cloak, and from its folds came a slouch hat. Black garments actually swallowed Cranston, and they in turn were engulfed, their wearer with them, by the passage that led to the rear of the Forty-one Club.

Going past the stage door, The Shadow caught a glimpse of Kay Lorley in her spangled two-piece costume as she turned the corner to her dressing room. Continuing farther, he reached a darkened basement entry that he knew must be the special route to Cue's office.

From then on, The Shadow did not hurry. Very deliberately, he probed a large locker in the basement, found the secret catch that opened its back, and stepped through to a little spiral stairway that led up to Cue's office.

The Shadow was quite sure that the opening of the hidden door must have buzzed a signal to Cue's office, but since Cue wasn't in there, it didn't matter.

Using his tiny flashlight, The Shadow threw a white beam on the steps and noiselessly ascended them. At the end of a short passage he came to the narrow barrier that could only be the rear of Cue's trick filing cabinet. Its catch was very easy to locate.

So far, The Shadow had spent comparatively few moments. He merely hoped that Gaffey and Wingo wouldn't be long in getting here. The Shadow wanted to be a committee of one to receive them, but he couldn't wait beyond the ten-minute limit. In that case, he'd have to let Cue become the one-man reception committee.

Much could happen, though, within ten minutes, particularly when The Shadow prepared a surprise. It would be the easiest thing in the world for The Shadow to turn Cue's office into a trap that would snag such gentry as Gaffey and Wingo.

Stepping into Cue's office, The Shadow found it lighted as Cue usually left it. All he needed was a hiding place. He saw one around the corner of a filing cabinet. There was another opposite it, behind a screen that hid a washstand. Both were very close at hand, on the near side of Cue's desk, which was why The Shadow didn't like them.

The Shadow preferred his natural shelter, darkness.

There was darkness, plenty of it, over by the office door. There, amid the

music that floated in from the night club, The Shadow could lurk and watch for Gaffey and Wingo while he listened for any sounds of Cue's return.

To reach the door, The Shadow had to pass Cue's desk. He took just three steps in that direction, steps that carried him openly into the light. Three paces were enough for things to happen behind his back. Things that came

swiftly.

A pair of huskies hurled themselves from hiding. Thugs who operated in Central Park or city alleys would naturally prefer cover, but in a place like Cue's office it was different. Particularly to types like Gaffey and Wingo, who

knew this setting well enough to consider it their own preserves.

They were here ahead of The Shadow, those two, and they'd taken the very hiding places that he passed by. Gaffey lunged from the space beyond the filing

cabinet; Wingo overturned the screen in the drive that he launched. But neither

lost a moment in attacking The Shadow, whose arrival had proclaimed itself by the very signal device that he suspected.

LIKE a meteor hurling in from outer space, The Shadow spun about. He was whipping out a gun, making one of those famous, long cross-sweeps that would have hammered an aiming revolver from any hand that pointed it.

But Gaffey and Wingo weren't aiming to shoot. Their gun hands were driving downward - hard.

Even The Shadow's dodge couldn't stay those blows. Two men weren't enough to snare him, but his opponents had a silent partner in the shape of Cue's desk. It stopped The Shadow's fade-away, and he didn't have time enough to vault it.

His attempt at such brought him into the paths of swinging guns.

The cloaked fighter reeled under the force of hard-dealt blows. He managed

to parry with one hand while he clutched the desk edge with the other, but his opponents pressed him fiercely. The Shadow glimpsed two hardened faces as merciless as they came, so far as he was concerned.

He made a quick turn that almost took him clear, but in his swirl he tangled with the desk chair. Blows rained anew, only partly warded off by The Shadow.

It was sudden, the finish.

Gripping the desk edge, The Shadow's hand slid along it, as he fought to even the unequal struggle. Almost on the verge of turning the tide, he squeezed

a tighter grip against the desk. Then, with blows smashing through his guard, The Shadow crumpled even before they landed.

His gun thumped the floor, dropping from the fist that held it. The hand that clutched the desk edge lost its hold. Doubled into an inert mass, The Shadow, world's most formidable fighter, was motionless at the feet of the lucky adversaries who had downed him.

So complete was his collapse, that Gaffey and Wingo found themselves slugging empty air. Stumbling over the blackness that blotted the floor between

them, they recognized that it must be The Shadow. Pouncing hard, they clutched their prey, only to stay their hands when The Shadow failed to move.

Those two toughened fighters who served Cue Herble as an outside crew, looked at each other and grinned.

This trap indeed had proved to be The Shadow's.

A trap, not for others, but for himself!

CHAPTER XII

THE MISSING SHADOW

OUTSIDE Cue's office, music was wafting softly through the Forty-one

Club,
barely drowning the clink of glasses, chatter of conversation, and flurries of applause. The acrobats were finishing their number, to the tune of the usual music that acrobats prefer.

Over by the far wall, Cue was wishing that the act would get off the floor. He was anxious to view the next turn, a blues singer who was reputedly hot.

Always with an eye to the future, Cue wanted an attraction to rival Kay Lorley, on the mistaken assumption that she would renew her contract under such pressure. If he'd known how long the acrobats were going to linger for the applause, he'd have gone back to his office for the unsigned contract form and taken it to Kay's dressing room, so she could read it while she listened to the blues singer.

But Cue hadn't gone to his office, hence he was quite ignorant of what had just happened there; how his sluggers, Gaffey and Wingo, had overcome that most formidable of foes, The Shadow.

Cue was oblivious to other things, much closer at hand.

Over at the bar, Mark Robling and James Sutter were clinking glasses to mark the beginning of their Tom Collins session.

Walter Creff wasn't drinking with them. He was standing at Robling's elbow, scrawling a brief note on a slip of paper that he had taken from his pocket. Folding the note, Creff gave it to an attendant and told him where to take it.

Clyde Burke watched that process. He saw the attendant sidle past the floor and go toward the dressing rooms. When Clyde looked back at Creff, he noticed the gleam in the fellow's wise eye, his tight-lipped smile. Clyde had a very good idea that Creff had sent that note to Kay Lorley.

Robling placed his empty glass on the bar, used his elbow to nudge Creff while calling for another drink, which Tom the barkeeper promptly supplied. Sutter wanted another drink, too; like Robling, he was arguing that Creff ought to join them. But Creff didn't even look at Robling's face, nor at Sutter's.

"Perhaps later, gentlemen," said Creff. His hands were toying with his fountain pen as he closed it. "Have your drinks" - he pushed Robling's glass toward its owner - "so you will be a few up on me. You chaps are more used to it than I."

Clyde was working back to Margo's table, to tell her his definite suspicion that Creff was seeking an interview with Kay, thus adding another factor to the situation involving the Framingham heirs.

Clyde saw that Margo was watching Cue Herble; thus the circle was complete. Everyone in any way involved was quite too busy to be thinking of what might be going on in Cue's office.

THAT secluded room was now the scene of a dramatic climax. Crouched above the huddled form of The Shadow, two men were staring at each other in the fashion of prospectors who had happened on a gold strike but still found it hard to believe.

Gaffey and Wingo had struck crimedom's jackpot: They'd bagged The Shadow! What to do, was the next question.

"Maybe we ought to croak the guy," suggested Gaffey. "That would settle it for once and all."

"Settle what?" demanded Wingo. "The Shadow croaked would be just another stiff. We'd be in for a rap, with nothing to show for it."

"Plenty of big guys would pay dough to get rid of The Shadow -"

"Yeah, but we need to hear their offers first. I'd say to lug the guy out of here and keep him somewhere on ice."

Gaffey considered Wingo's suggestion.

"What about Cue?" Gaffey queried. "Don't we cut him in on it?"

"We'll do enough of a favor for Cue by getting The Shadow out of here," Wingo retorted. "So let's hop to it. But we're doing two things first. We're making sure he isn't waking up, and we're finding out who he really is."

The two things went together, though Wingo had stated them in reverse. It was better to find out who The Shadow was, first, because that meant removing his hat, which would lay his head bare for a neat tap from a gun that would insure a prolonged coma for The Shadow.

These captors were smart; they hadn't overlooked the fact that The Shadow might have recuperated somewhat from the jolts they had already given him.

But they didn't realize how far The Shadow's revival had progressed; nor that Wingo's trifling flaw in the way of handling the prisoner would provide the vital seconds that The Shadow still required.

Gun in left hand, Wingo was actually starting to slug The Shadow, when Gaffey stopped him. Halting Wingo's wrist with one hand, Gaffey reached toward The Shadow with the other. Chuckling, he announced:

"Hats off first!"

Up from the huddled blackness on the floor came two gloved hands that clamped with viselike power. Two hands that gripped three. With one fist, The Shadow gripped Gaffey's free hand; he planted the other on Wingo's wrist and acquired Gaffey's other hand in the bargain.

There lay the all-important situation - to keep Wingo's gun out of it, something which The Shadow did.

Three hands writhed altogether, and The Shadow's showed skill as well as power. Like a blacksnake twisting a rodent in its coils, the gloved fist massaged those hands and wrists in a style that twisted them together.

Gaffey, thinking he had clutched The Shadow in turn, put pressure on Wingo's hand instead. Endeavoring to get the gun muzzle around so he could blast The Shadow, Wingo received a twofold wrist wrench that made him lose the weapon entirely.

All the while, The Shadow was yanking at Gaffey's other arm, hauling him across in front of Wingo, who therefore couldn't get his free hand into action from behind Gaffey's shoulder. With the gun gone, crooks were cognizant of their increasing plight. Only one hand remained to them - Wingo's left - and while it couldn't act, The Shadow was showing a further return of strength. Indeed, from his hidden lips - those lips of a face that his foemen had failed even to see - came a whispered laugh, presaging a triumph wherein The Shadow was transforming two captors into prisoners!

IT was Gaffey who was struck by inspiration, while he and Wingo writhed in the deadly clutches of The Shadow. Gaffey could feel Wingo's left hand poking at his elbow, trying to work through, though it would still be useless if it did. Useless empty, but not if it held a gun. And a gun was very handy.

"In my right pocket, Wingo!" panted Gaffey. "Get the gun there... blast The Shadow -"

Wingo's hand, starting to that task, stopped as jerkily as Gaffey's voice.

The Shadow was a jump ahead of them; no matter what the risk, he had to keep Wingo from getting Gaffey's gun. Shoving with his shoulders, The Shadow forced himself upward instead of hauling his adversaries down.

A moment later, all three were rocking like a seesaw, The Shadow pitting his weight against the combined bulk of the pair.

To and fro they swayed, hands wrenching free at last, only to be clamped

again in a wild, slaphappy melee. The Shadow gave a final heave that should have thrown his opponents back, but the desk stopped them and they took a rebound. Their return drive flattened The Shadow, and in their elation, crooks forgot their guns to drive their fists for The Shadow's throat.

Their fists gripped.

So did The Shadow's. He laid one hand to Gaffey's neck, the other to Wingo's. Madly, each raised a hand to wrench away The Shadow's clutch, but couldn't. However, they were throttling him, too, and their grip went double. Added to that, their free hands were managing at least to relieve their own torture.

Gargles came from half-choked throats. But there were no sounds whatever from The Shadow's. His breath was cut off fully. Thugs had only to maintain this status and they'd soon wear down their foe.

Knowing it, The Shadow unleashed a final effort. He became a mongoose attacking two cobras at once. His fingers dug into those necks above him, swinging heads from side to side. He was trying to drive one head against the other, but they were on different levels.

Glaring faces were working downward toward The Shadow, to meet him eye to eye, at the same time shortening the leverage of his arms, rendering his task impossible.

One forearm, then the other. The Shadow was working them like pistons, but each push was weaker than the one before, Under clamping hands, The Shadow's own head went back suddenly and thumped the floor. His arms gave; then stiffened for a last weak shove that could only be likened to a dying gasp.

But what a gasp!

The Shadow's fists went so tight that they seemed to encircle the necks they held. His arms drove upward as though great springs had hurled them from the floor. He was coming, like a mass from a volcano, lifting two foemen completely off their feet as he reached his own. Then, in tune with that titanic thrust, The Shadow completed the task that he'd previously attempted.

His hands went apart, then slapped together. Two wagging heads cracked squarely as they flapped. Hands left The Shadow's throat and fell, their owners

with them. Right to The Shadow's feet went Gaffey and Wingo.

Most incredible of all, The Shadow began to follow them, and his hands slipped from their throats. The cloaked fighter was coiling as though there wasn't an ounce of strength left in him.

In fact, there wasn't.

There hadn't been, from the time when he began his upward spring. His feeble shove was indeed the last effort that The Shadow could have made.

Other hands had supplied the added effort, about ninety-nine percent of the total. Big hands like hams, that now caught The Shadow and kept him on his feet. The hands of Jericho, the giant doorman!

"Right glad I could help you, chief," spoke Jericho, with a grin. "You had right hold of 'em. All you needed was to tighten up and bang those heads together. So I just took hold, too, from right behind 'em, with that little extra squeeze."

Turning his head, Jericho rolled his eyes toward the desk and saw the corner that The Shadow had been clutching when he relaxed so crooks could no longer slug him. There, Jericho saw a button under the desk edge.

"Right smart, chief," the doorman added, "giving the buzz for old Jericho.

I was helping folks out from a cab or I'd have looked at the box sooner. When I

saw it, I knew it couldn't be Mr. Cue that was calling, so I came right away."

No longer supporting The Shadow, Jericho expected to hear his chief's

whispered laugh of approval, but no mirth came. Turning, Jericho blinked at blackness. He thought The Shadow had made a disappearance, leaving him the task of removing Gaffey and Wingo. So Jericho looked to the floor, to stare again at huddled blackness. Cloaked blackness.

Then, for the first time, did Jericho realize that his chief had been completely out. It was Jericho's own might that had brought The Shadow driving up from the floor, hauled by the clutches of Gaffey and Wingo. But Jericho's comments still stood. The Shadow certainly was smart.

Very smart, to have installed his giant agent, Jericho, as the new doorman at the Forty-one Club!

CHAPTER XIII

THE LAST STAGGER

THE mournful contralto of the blue's singer was penetrating to Cue's office, and its saddened note was not lost upon Jericho. Beneath the upward tilt of the visor of his cap, Jericho's forehead showed a glisten. His handling of Gaffey and Wingo hadn't caused him to perspire. Jericho's nerves - he had them! - were working heavily. The giant feared that he hadn't brought rescue soon enough to save The Shadow.

He was glad, Jericho was, to learn that he was wrong. As he stopped and lifted the crumpled black-cloaked form, Jericho heard the whisper that had failed to sound before. Very faint, it was, yet audible.

"Want me to get you out of here, boss?"

There was a nod in answer to Jericho's ardent query, so the big doorman put other questions.

"Over to Miss Lane's table?"

Another nod.

"These fellows?" Jericho meant Gaffey and Wingo. "Want me to take 'em away?"

The Shadow was slumping slightly. As Jericho took him in a firmer grip, The Shadow shook his head. Rather puzzled, Jericho asked:

"What'll I do with 'em? Leave 'em lay where they are, for Mr. Cue to find and worry about?"

Jericho saw The Shadow nod.

Those questions settled, the rest was easy for Jericho. He started The Shadow toward the door leading to the night-club proper. He noticed how his chief's steps dragged, so Jericho provided some helpful lifts, not realizing that The Shadow wasn't walking at all.

The cloaked warrior had recuperated only long enough to whisper his recognition of Jericho; then his senses had left him again.

Those answers to Jericho's questions!

Naturally, The Shadow nodded, for his head was dropping every time Jericho

tried to steady him. When he'd slumped, The Shadow tilted slightly; hence his head had wagged in answer to one query, only to nod again when Jericho pulled him upright.

Of course, Jericho took it that his chief was all right again, but probably not talking because his throat hurt him. So they continued their odd parade, Jericho and The Shadow, after they left Cue's office.

The blues singer was taking her bows to a great round of applause; hence she held the entire spotlight. Cue Herble, hoping that the blues would be transferred to Kay when she heard that ovation in her dressing room, was too occupied to see the blue of Jericho's uniform as it emerged from the office

and

followed the side wall toward the street door.

Even the waiters didn't notice Jericho; but if they had, it wouldn't have mattered, as he had various reasons for going to and from Cue's office. The only thing that might have mattered would have been someone seeing The Shadow, but he wasn't visible at all.

Jericho was keeping him toward the wall, and the cloaked figure was totally obscured in the darkness cast by Jericho's own bulk. Near the street door, however, Jericho paused, remembering something else he thought his chief had told him to do.

Steadying The Shadow with one hand, Jericho used the other to pluck away the hat and cloak. Rolling those garments into a bundle, he poked them beneath the ample front of his blue uniform.

During the lull in the applause, Jericho heard The Shadow's whisper. New hand-clapping drowned it, as the singer came back for an encore; hence Jericho didn't notice the weakness of The Shadow's mirth.

A few steps toward the door and Jericho made an about-face. He spoke to two waiters and tilted The Shadow into their supporting grasp, a thing that didn't surprise them, since The Shadow was no longer his cloaked self. He was Lamont Cranston, in the evening attire that made guests welcome at the Forty-one Club.

True, the waiters thought that Cranston was drunk, but the doorman was giving him a ticket through, and rules had been relaxed after the episode involving Alan. When Jericho pointed out Margo's table, the waiters took Cranston there. He was out of their grasp when he arrived, but he was stumbling badly.

His hands encountering a chair back, Cranston grasped it. Then, with a last stagger, he settled into the chair itself. That last stagger, the slump that followed it, were not noticed by Clyde and Margo. Facing the floor, they were looking at the singer, but at the same time they were engrossed in something else. They were discussing Walter Creff in terms of Kay Lorley.

BACKSTAGE, Kay wasn't green with envy at the blues. Instead, her color had reddened because of Creff's note.

Couched in witty terms, the brief note suggested that Kay meet Creff because they were two who had much in common. Between those lines, Kay read the fact that Creff had guessed her secret and knew she was a Framingham.

Since he was coming in for half a million, Creff wouldn't demand cash for silence. That point actually worried Kay, because she'd heard of Creff by reputation and knew he'd been a real wolf in his time. If he happened to be putting himself back in circulation, Kay wished he'd go somewhere else. Then the thought struck her that cash might be his sole motto.

Kay happened to remember Richard Menlo.

One death among six heirs had increased the proportion due to all. If others were in some way eliminated, remaining shares would continue to rise. Maybe Creff hoped to talk Kay out of her share by hook or crook.

Or crook -

The very term made Kay think of murder. Maybe crooks had meant to kill Alan the other night. Possibly Creff was behind it; perhaps, through some fantastic system, he intended to eliminate all other heirs one by one!

So incredible was the idea, that Kay suddenly laughed. Next, she had an idea that would settle Creff. Stepping to the door, Kay spoke through to the attendant who had brought the note:

"Bring Mr. Creff back here."

As soon as the message was on its way, Kay stepped from her dressing room to an open door across the corridor, where she greeted a pair of chorus girls

with a smile. Though the girls liked Kay, they were really amazed that she wasn't showing what they considered justifiable jealousy at the success of the new singer. So they smiled back.

"The Wolf of Wall Street is paying a call," informed Kay. "He knows so much about finance, that it would be a shame to have him forget it. So watch for him, and speed him along before he knocks at my door."

The girls raised inquiring eyes to ask what system they should use.

"Tell him Cue just stepped in to talk about my contract," suggested Kay. "Say you'll be very glad to let us know he's here. Make it sound as though you'd love to see what happens next. When he decides that he'd better not disturb him, show him the door out to the alley. He'll use it."

Returning to the dressing room, Kay locked the door. Discarding gown and costume, she began to dress hurriedly. She wasn't worrying any longer about Creff. What did bother her was the thought that Cue might come back to talk about the contract, and if he did, it would delay Kay's meeting with Alan somewhere else.

Actually, Kay had called the turn.

Cue Herble was on his way to his office to pick up the contract. Passing a table, he nodded toward Clyde and Margo, who noticed it and wondered, until they turned. For the first time, they saw Cranston, who was turning his head after Cue as the latter waved back. But Cue failed to notice what Clyde and Margo observed.

Cranston was slumping sideways in his chair, which was why his head turned around. Clyde caught him and pushed him back to Margo, who exclaimed: "Lamont!"

The name brought a flicker from Cranston's eyes and produced a slight smile on his lips. Margo picked up a glass of water and gave him a drink of it. Raising one hand, Cranston rubbed his head and showed signs of reviving slowly.

"Keep working on him, Margo," spoke Clyde. "This looks like Alan's case all over again - only worse! I'm going to find the answer to it - and maybe that answer isn't very far away!"

LOOKING toward the bar, Clyde noticed for the first time that Creff had left. With a quick glance over the room, he saw the man in question, spotting him as he went through the doorway that led backstage. Clyde side-toned to Margo that Creff had evidently received an answer to the note that he sent Kay; that, at least, Creff could be found when wanted.

Clyde was leaving that up to Margo, as soon as she found that Cranston was better. Deciding that his own job was to check on Robling and Sutter, Clyde started toward the bar.

The two Tom Collins fiends were lifting their glasses anew as Clyde neared them. Again there was a clink, and together the pair voiced:

"Cheerio!"

What happened next was like a figment from a dream. The trifling nudge of Sutter's glass produced a powerful effect on Robling. Astonishment registering on his beefy face, he recoiled as though a battering-ram had struck him. He grabbed at the bar, caught its edge as he twirled from his chair. His glass was wavering in his hand, and it finally dropped, smashing the way Menlo's had on another such occasion.

Horror replaced astonishment as Robling staggered. That stagger was his last. With a long lurch, Robling came Clyde's way, but landed before the

reporter could spring to catch him. As he struck the floor, Robling writhed, and the contortion carried him over on his back, where he lay with features quite as frozen as Menlo's had been.

Mark Robling was dead, struck down by the same unseen hand that had earlier plucked a victim from the million-dollar clan!

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHADOW WAITS

IT was death despite The Shadow! Whether or not the cloaked investigator could, or should, have prevented it, was still a riddle. Maybe Robling had died

a "natural" death, like Menlo. Maybe this was just coincidence, two men struck down by death the same way in the same place.

Of course, there was a certain thing known as the "power of suggestion," that might have had a hand in it. But The Shadow wasn't in a mood to think about such things. He wasn't in a mood to think about much of anything.

Lamont Cranston, erstwhile The Shadow, still wasn't over the effects of his recent battle. He was nodding intelligently enough when Margo Lane kept shaking him, but talk of people staggering and landing on the floor was considerably too personal to be connected with anyone else.

Cranston kept wondering why Margo was so constantly referring to his own recent experience, and he was actually puzzled because she knew about it. Not once did he look the direction that Margo pointed, over where Mark Robling lay sprawled.

This was one of those times when The Shadow's agents had to take over for their chief. Clyde was handling matters at the bar. Jericho was on the door, and that left Margo free for something else - a thing that riveted her when she realized how important it might be.

It was the matter of Walter Creff and Kay Lorley. If Robling's death was murder, Creff might be the killer! With a second heir eliminated, Creff might even now be disposing of a third: namely, Kay!

Tossing the rest of the water in Cranston's face, on the chance that it would really bring him back to himself, or, better still, The Shadow, Margo sprang from the table, raced across the floor to the doorway leading backstage.

Her dash went unnoticed because all attention was toward the bar. History was repeating itself, as on the night when Menlo died, except that the personnel of the Forty-one Club was handling itself more capably, now that they were used to having patrons drop dead at the finish of the floor show.

Backstage, Margo pounded at Kay's door. Maybe her punches had the feminine touch, for Kay promptly opened the door, and stared with surprise at the excitement with which Margo entered.

Kay had classed Margo as a very unexcitable person; still, the Forty-one Club was enough to drive anyone berserk. So Kay merely went on fastening the bell-sleeves of her dress, meanwhile turning around and asking Margo to help buckle her up the back.

For answer, Margo grabbed the mink coat from the closet, flung it over Kay's shoulders, and rushed the astonished night-club star out through the corridor.

They were passing another dressing room before Kay could even catch her breath. Coming from that room they heard the dreary contralto voice of the blues lady, telling a group of chorines how her songs had "knocked them dead" out front. Margo caught that gag line and commented on it as she sped Kay out through the alley.

"Maybe she did knock somebody dead," voiced Margo. "That's as good an explanation as any. It's the same thing all over again, Kay!"

"What same thing?"

"A death like Menlo's. But this time, it's Robling! He just dropped dead the way Menlo did."

"Not at the bar?"

"Right at the bar!" completed Margo. "This time with Suttern looking on. But I don't think that Suttern did it, nor that Tom mixed a Mickey Finn. I want to know what became of Walter Creff!"

Margo was looking for a cab, hoping that Moe's would be around; but it wasn't. Nor would it be for some time, considering the bashing that it had recently undergone. But a cab was coming into sight, so Margo flagged it while Kay was exclaiming how Creff had come backstage, only to be sent along his way by the helpful chorus girls.

Then Margo and Kay were in the cab, off to Alan Haverdale's hotel to tell him the news of Robling's death.

ANOTHER gentleman still lacked that news: Cue Herble. In his office, Cue was finding plenty to keep him occupied without looking for Kay's contract. Having found Gaffey and Wingo sprawled all over the floor, Cue was encountering

more trouble reviving them than Margo had with Cranston, even though Cue was using much stronger methods in doing so.

He was pouring some of his best brandy down their throats, forgetting the cost of the stuff in his anxiety to learn why his two strong-arm operatives had

wound up like a pair of Kilkenny cats.

Gaffey was the first to wake up, but he was so slow in finding his voice, that Wingo revived and overtook him. Weakly, Wingo nudged his thumb at something imaginary, and gulped:

"The Shadow!"

Cue looked to Gaffey for corroboration. Gaffey gulped, too, but not in words. He took the brandy bottle from Cue, swallowed a long drink, and gave a nod.

"It was him, all right," declared Gaffey. "The Shadow! In here! We konked him, Wingo and me, but it didn't do no good. He took us right by the throats, heaved us half way up to the ceiling and banged our domes together."

"Yeah," agreed Wingo. "Ever see a bowling ball go rolling back down the return track and bump another? Well, that's the way our noggins hit when The Shadow swung them."

Deciding suddenly that Gaffey and Wingo were trying to cover a quarrel between themselves, Cue turned scoffingly, only to stop short. On the floor, where it had lain hidden under one of the sprawled thugs, was the evidence that

backed their yarn - a .45 automatic, the sort of weapon that The Shadow carried.

Cue knew that Gaffey and Wingo preferred revolvers of .38 caliber. Picking

up The Shadow's gun, Cue juggled it while he studied his woozy henchmen. Before

Cue could express a new opinion there was a banging at the door, accompanied by

loud, excited voices of the toughs who worked within the night club.

"Something's gone haywire around here!" asserted Cue savagely. "I don't want you mugs to be in it. So scram out by the usual route. And say" - he added

the afterthought while the pair were wobbling toward the filing cabinet - "if you can get a new line on that Haverdale guy, do it."

Seeing Gaffey and Wingo through the secret exit, Cue started toward the door, carrying The Shadow's gun. Remembering that trouble might bring the police, and that they'd objected to guns on their previous visit, Cue turned back to the desk and placed the weapon in the drawer.

Opening the door, Cue asked what the trouble was about. When he heard, his jaw dropped. He glanced askance at the worried faces of the bouncers, as though

they might have had a hand in Robling's death. Then, anxiously, Cue queried:

"None of you guys are toting heaters, are you?"

Headshakes told that the whole tribe lacked guns.

"Keep your lips stiff," Cue told them. "I'll handle this. I know the right

gent to talk to first. He's still here, I hope."

The "right" gentleman was present at the very table where Cue had seen him

last. Lamont Cranston looked quite himself when Cue Herble approached, though he

was actually trying to shake off the cobwebs that still seemed to press his face, even after he had mopped away the water with which Margo had spattered him.

"Hello, Mr. Cranston," spoke Cue politely. "Listen: remember how you saw me going to my office a little while ago? Nothing had happened then, had it?"

Cranston nodded to the first query, shook his head in response to the second. He didn't remember seeing Cue, nor was he sure that nothing had happened at that time. But he could tell that Cue was very earnest, so he took the truth for granted.

"All right, then," Cue declared. "I'd like you to do me a favor, Mr. Cranston. Come with me and take a look at the dead guy over by the bar. When Inspector Cardona, gets here, you'll be able to square me with the law."

As Cranston found his feet, his mind cleared. He walked unsteadily, but Cue didn't notice it because they were working their way among the tables and Cranston found plenty of opportunities to keep himself from falling.

When they reached the spot where Robling lay, Cranston gripped Clyde and drew him aside, thus steadying himself further, and at the same time getting Clyde's full version of how another death had happened.

ABOUT that time, Alan Haverdale was meeting two very tense girls in the lobby of his hotel. He gestured them to chairs in a secluded corner, and suggested they tell him what had happened.

When Margo told of Robling's death, Alan's face assumed an expression that

Kay mistook for a scowl. She attributed it to the mink coat, and let the fur garment slide back from her shoulders. Probably Alan so hated anything that reminded him of a certain Miss Framingham, that he'd believe her responsible even for murder.

But that wasn't it. Alan's expression was merely one of concentration, and

his forehead was still furrowed when he smiled. A grim smile, though.

"At least, I'm not the mystery man tonight," asserted Alan. "I didn't go to the Forty-one Club." He paused, looked at Kay. "On your account, you know."

Kay smiled her thanks.

"You did right in getting out," continued Alan, speaking to Kay. "Since Margo was with you in the dressing room at the time Robling collapsed, they can't blame you, Kay."

"But Margo wasn't with me," Kay began. "You see -"

"It's all right, Alan," put in Margo, not guessing why Kay paused. "There was a mystery man, who may be in a fix. Unless they were as puzzled as they were in your case. While Robling and Sutter were still having drinks, Creff

started backstage -"

Margo halted as suddenly as she had begun. In biting her words off, she did the worst thing possible. Alan linked the answer instantly and swung to Kay. Only for a moment did Kay hesitate. Then:

"Creff sent me a note," she declared steadily. "It is still on the dressing table, under my make-up kit. He wanted to see me, and I thought the best way to get rid of him was to ask him back."

There was a bit of defiance in Kay's tone, but Alan didn't sense it. He was very calm, displaying a patience that Margo admired, but she reserved decision until she should hear what he had to say. For the present, Alan merely

waited for Kay to say more, which Kay did.

"But I didn't see Creff," Kay added. "I asked the girls to tell him that I

was busy signing Cue's new contract, though I was really alone at the time. They

must have told him, because he didn't even knock at my door, so, I'm sure they showed him the way out. You believe me... don't you Alan?"

Kay's last sentence broke because Alan had turned to pick up his hat and coat. But it wasn't because he doubted Kay's story. His next action proved his trust in Kay, and fulfilled Margo's expectations of his merit. Before either girl could ask where he was going, Alan told them.

"I'm going out to find a rat named Creff!" asserted Alan. "After I've tracked him to the hole where he crawled, I'll be back. This is one thing I'll settle my own way!"

Those words brought a happy gasp from Kay, but they had a different ring to Margo's ears. Though they were much to Alan's credit, they promised complications of a very serious sort. This wasn't any time for further feuds between the Framingham heirs, but before Margo could shout that fact at Alan, he was gone. So it was to Kay that Margo voiced her alarm.

"We'll have to stop him, Kay!" expressed Margo. "Maybe you don't realize it, but he'll kill Creff if he finds him."

"But -" Kay halted, puzzled. "But - why?"

"On your account, stupid!" returned Margo. "He's crazy mad in love with you! If I can only find a telephone, I'll see to it that you won't be paying visits to Sing Sing the rest of your life, blowing kisses once a week through a

bullet-proof pane of glass, and saying, 'I love you' over a microphone!

There's

one person who can snap your boyfriend out of his berserk mood. Someone that I'll have to talk to in a hurry!"

By that one person, Margo Lane meant her own friend Lamont Cranston, better known as The Shadow!

CHAPTER XV

HAND AGAINST DEATH

IT was well that Lamont Cranston had waited at the Forty-one Club, because that was the place where Margo Lane expected to reach him. Offsetting that fact

was another: namely, that there was no one in Cue's office to answer the phone when it rang at persistent intervals.

Margo should have called Burbank, the contact man who was so ingenious in getting word through to The Shadow, but she kept on calling the Forty-one Club because she felt sure that someone would soon answer. Besides, Kay was crowding

into the phone booth with Margo, and it wasn't wise to let Kay overhear a chat

with Burbank.

At the Forty-one, Cranston, along with Cue, was receiving visiting delegates under the leadership of Inspector Cardona.

It was odd, how differently Joe was treating the case tonight. He wanted to cry "Poison!" the moment he looked at Robling's distorted face, but after his experience with the toxicologists, Cardona thought it would be better to wait until after the autopsy.

There had been no poison traces in the remnants of Scotch and soda from Menlo's glass; nevertheless, Cardona gathered what he could of Robling's last Tom Collins. As a matter of course, he had his detectives frisk Cue's inside crew, and Joe tapped their boss for a gun, too.

Cranston saw Cue's smile and had a hunch what it was all about. Quite back

to normal, Cranston was missing the .45 that he carried as The Shadow.

"These natural deaths are getting kind of frequent," announced Cardona, at

last. "Since I can't arrest any suspects" - Joe's tone carried a touch of sarcasm - "I'll deal in material witnesses instead." He looked at Suttern.

"You

first, because you were here with the vic -" Cardona caught himself - "with your

friend Robling."

Suttern nodded, rather weakly. Joe didn't ask if anyone else had come with

Robling or Suttern, so he didn't get a reply along that score. Not even from Tom, the barkeep, who was keeping a tightly-buttoned lip, knowing he would be the second "witness," a fact on which Cardona immediately informed him.

Remembering the scoffs that his mention of Alan had produced, Tom wasn't talking about tonight's mystery man, Walter Creff.

All this was taking time. So much time, that Alan Haverdale was getting to

the Forty-one Club faster than Margo could phone the place. Arriving first at the stage door, Alan was told to move along by cops stationed there, which prevented him from getting into Kay's dressing room to pick up Creff's note.

But Alan still was determined to enter the Forty-one Club. He had a hunch that in just such an upholstered sewer, he would find the rat that he was after.

Around at the front entrance, Alan ran into a detective, who didn't want to pass him through. Alan appealed to Jericho. He said the doorman knew him as a steady patron, which was flattery to Jericho, considering the short time he had held his present job.

Jericho merely grinned and nodded, but offered no further help. However, when Alan added that he wanted to see Clyde Burke, who was a very special friend of his, Jericho still nodded.

Somewhat impressed, the detective asked if Alan happened to be working for

the Classic, too. This time, Alan supplied the nod.

"Guess you can go in," the detective decided, after taking a close look at

Alan. "I'll remember you."

Getting backstage proved impossible after Alan entered the night club, for

suspicious-eyed waiters were stationed all over the floor. Keeping out of sight,

Alan suddenly found himself at the door of Cue's office. Remembering what Kay had said about a contract, Alan decided to have a few words with Cue Herble. Those words might help him get a trail to Walter Creff.

So Alan stepped into the office, only to find Cue absent. The telephone was ringing steadily, and for a moment Alan hesitated at the open door; then entered farther and closed it. Not finding Cue, he thought he might find the

contract itself. Stepping to the desk, he yanked the top drawer open.

Something better than a contract greeted him: The Shadow's big automatic. Without a moment's hesitation, Alan snatched the weapon, shoved it into his hip

pocket and left the office. He paused at the door only long enough to make sure

that no one had noticed him. Sauntering out, hands in trousers pockets, Alan kept his coat well bunched over his hip.

"Burke's busy," he told the detective outside. "I'll see him later. Tell him I was here." He turned to Jericho. "How about a cab?"

BACK in the night club, an intervening corner had prevented Cranston from viewing Alan's entrance and departure. That corner, however, couldn't cut off the ringing of the telephone bell, which The Shadow noted twice, with a brief interval between.

No one else caught the sound; not even Cue. So Cranston slapped the night-club owner on the back, told him he'd put in a good word for him with the commissioner, and moved away.

Cranston's first stop was at Cue's office. Inside, he picked up the telephone, spoke a calm hello, which brought a glad response to Margo's voicing of:

"Lamont!"

Then came a change. Margo's tone showed disappointment. There was someone else she had to call; someone that Cranston did not know. She meant The Shadow,

of course, and her bluff simply proved that somebody was with her.

In fact, Cranston could overhear Kay's impatient tone telling Margo to get through with that call and make the important one; that Margo was wasting a lot

of time expressing some of the troubles involving Alan to Cranston, who couldn't possibly help. So when she had told enough, Margo quit abruptly.

The competent Mr. Cranston did three things at once. He replaced the telephone with one hand, whipped open the desk drawer with the other, and used his knee to press the button at the corner of the desk.

Outside, Jericho saw the indicator box and told the detective that it was a summons from Cue Herble. Leaving the door to the detective, Jericho went to the office.

Cranston's calm query came as Jericho entered:

"Alan Haverdale was here?"

Rather amazed, Jericho nodded. Cranston knelt the desk drawer shut and gestured for hat and cloak. Jericho produced the accouterments and Cranston slipped them on.

As The Shadow, he made his exit through the filing cabinet without asking where Alan had gone - something that Jericho would have stated, had he known. The fact that Jericho didn't know, meant that Alan had cagily kept from stating his destination until the cab was under way.

At the corner of the rear street, The Shadow saw a cab and stepped into it. He gave the driver an electrifying whisper, that produced a prompt start plus increasing speed. Still lacking Moe's cab, The Shadow had to use a strange

one, and he wasn't doing it Cranston style.

Calm talk couldn't produce the rapid service that The Shadow's weird whisper did. The unstated threat behind that sinister tone made cabbies hurry to get rid of their ghostly passenger, in a fashion that wouldn't rouse his wrath. Such fashion lay in taking him where he wanted to go at record-breaking

speed.

STILL on the hunt for Walter Creff; Alan Haverdale was retracing his own route of the evening. He was back at Trope's, trying the front door. It was locked because the hour was late, and Alan hesitated at ringing the bell. Instead, he hurried around back, tried the kitchen door, and found it open. Coming through the dim kitchen, Alan heard the sound of voices. Pausing, he looked through into the dining room.

There sat old Elmer Trope, wrapped in an old flannel dressing gown and a nightcap on his head. He looked very out of sorts, because he had come from his bed to receive an unwanted visitor. Tifton was standing by, his face as wry as Trope's.

As for the visitor, he was just the man that Alan had hoped to find: Walter Creff.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Trope," Creff was saying, blandly. "I thought you would be working late on the figures that you mentioned. However, since I'm here -"

"Since you're here, I shall talk to you," interposed Trope. He shivered slightly because the room was chilly; then turned to the servant: "Bring the decanter, Tifton, and some glasses."

Tifton brought the decanter first, and laid down the wine goblets while Trope was removing the glass stopper. The old man's hands were shaking from the cold and the stopper dropped to the table. Trope was relieved when he saw that the thick glass failed to break.

"Mr. Framingham prized this decanter," stated Trope. "Almost as much as the sherry, I would say. Ah! I forgot, Mr. Creff. You say you went with Robling and Suttern. If you have been drinking their concoctions -"

"I haven't," interrupted Creff. "I've taken nothing that wouldn't mix with sherry."

Obligingly, Trope poured a glass of wine for Creff and another for himself. As they raised their glasses, Trope said solemnly:

"To the memory of our benefactor, Mr. Framingham."

Accepting the toast, Creff took a long drink of sherry. Laying down his glass, he asked deliberately:

"Speaking of Framinghams, why wasn't a certain Miss Framingham here this evening?"

Alan saw Trope's lips tighten. Evidently the old man knew of Kay's double identity and was one person who could faithfully preserve the secret. The commendation that Alan felt toward Trope only increased his bitterness toward Creff. Deep in his pocket, Alan felt the handle of The Shadow's gun, and gripped it.

In a dry manner, Trope said: "Miss Framingham could not come this evening."

"I take it then," returned Creff, "that she is here in town?"

"I am not at liberty to state," replied Trope. "Kindly do not question me further on that subject."

"You've seen her!" snapped Creff. "What does she look like?"

A headshake came from Trope.

"Anything like she was in an old photo I once saw?" persisted Creff. "Where old Framingham had some of his relatives with him?"

"I do not like the term 'old' applied to Mr. Framingham," returned Trope crisply. "Moreover, I never saw the photograph of which you speak."

"You lie," stormed Creff, coming to his feet. He raised a hand and sent Tifton back into a corner, as the servant pushed toward him. "You know exactly

who the Framingham girl is! So do I, and I'm here to say that she won't shelve me! I saw a lot of her this evening, and she was nice to look at. Too nice to think she's too good to meet her distant relations. I'm going to see more of her!"

IT didn't occur to Alan that Creff's case might be his own in reverse. Alan hadn't been quite fair to the stiff Miss Framingham, and maybe it was Creff's privilege to hold a grudge against the pliant Kay Lorley. All Alan wanted was to take a shot at Creff, and an ounce more provocation was all he needed.

Provocation arrived, though not on Kay's account. Trope was firmly on his feet, meeting Creff's ugly glare. No longer did Trope's hand tremble; his whole

pose had stiffened. His hand went to the decanter only to save it from damage, for his only act was that of thrusting the glass stopper into the neck of the wine bottle.

Creff misunderstood. He thought Trope was taking the decanter as a bludgeon, so he beat the old man to the grab.

Up came the decanter in Creff's fist. Trope made a quick side step from the table, while Tifton sprang to grab Creff from behind. At the kitchen doorway, Alan leveled the automatic toward Creff, giving the gun a forward thrust as preliminary to a trigger tug that never came.

A deluge of blackness overwhelmed Alan. He was spun like a human windmill in a long rear somersault, the gun flying high from his hand. The same hands that sent Alan on that spin continued their action, one grabbing the doorway to end its owner's lunge, while the other plucked the falling automatic from the air.

Over his cloaked shoulder, The Shadow viewed the dining-room scene. Creff was hardly visible, for both Trope and Tifton had already shoved in front of him. As The Shadow had gripped his reclaimed automatic, so was Trope catching the precious decanter, its crystal stopper still in place, while Tifton was persuading Creff to relax his fury.

Creff's face bobbed into sight, somewhat abashed, when he saw that old Trope was merely turning to replace the valued decanter on the sideboard.

Across the kitchen, The Shadow brought Alan to his feet and started him out through the back door. His own anger cooled, Alan recognized his cloaked friend and moved toward the waiting cab to which The Shadow pointed. Silently closing the back door of Trope's house, The Shadow turned against its darkness.

He saw two men sneaking forward in the gloom, almost at Alan's side. The Shadow gave a low, shuddery laugh of challenge to draw them in his own direction.

They turned, but not in The Shadow's direction. They were yards away, in mad flight, before they jabbed a couple of wild shots back at the house. The Shadow's return fire must have sizzled right between them, for the pair dived into their old car and swung the corner in frantic haste.

By then, The Shadow was shoving Alan into the cab and telling its scared driver to get started. He wasn't concerned with chasing Gaffey and Wingo. He'd find them again soon enough whenever he wished. Again, The Shadow was taking his own route, with Alan as a companion.

There was satisfaction in The Shadow's laugh. His hand had acted against death, and had won. Huddled in his corner, Alan felt ill at ease because of his foolhardy mission. If The Shadow hadn't stopped him, he'd probably have let fly, hit or miss, with all the bullets in the borrowed automatic.

Oddly, it was The Shadow who should have felt regret. In stopping Alan's hand, the cloaked fighter had halted death only to pave the way to murder more

insidious!

CHAPTER XVI

DOOM'S PRELUDE

THE New York Classic was a very scurvy sheet, that printed a lot of news it shouldn't. Clyde Burke regretted his connection with the journal, but felt that the whole thing balanced. By working for the Classic, he could serve The Shadow more efficiently. Hence Clyde was willing to write the news his editor wanted.

This time, the Classic scored a scoop in a very ingenious way. The idea came from the city editor, though Clyde wrote the story.

With Robling's death, Inspector Cardona hadn't raised the cry of poison, as he had in the Menlo case. Nevertheless, the toxicologists were on the job again, making laboratory tests in connection with the autopsy. So the Classic bombarded the town with scareheads shouting:

POISON PROBE IN SECOND NIGHT-CLUB DEATH!

The story itself was artful, as Clyde's usually were. It started by pitching the burden right on the police, who had classed Menlo's death a poison

case at the time of its occurrence. The medical examiner's verdict of acute indigestion wasn't necessarily final. Any mystery concerning a poison might apply to the poison used.

Though lightning seldom struck in the same place twice, poison could. So the mere holding of an autopsy in the Robling case was sufficient for the Classic to cut loose with its theory, that used the very words uttered by the experts themselves.

A virulent poison of a certain acid group was the logical answer to Robling's death, according to the Classic. Not that the Classic would even think of suggesting the names of poisons in that category. That wouldn't be right. The publication of the list of poisons might aid in other murders.

When Clyde stopped at the laboratory where the toxicologists were making their final tests, he expected to find himself unwanted. On the contrary, he was admitted by Inspector Cardona himself, and he even received a nod from Commissioner Weston. The only person who looked at all grieved was Lamont Cranston.

"Regarding Robling's death last night," Cardona told Clyde, "we want to show you just how wrong you are. Take a look at these slides showing specimens of Robling's blood."

Clyde looked, but the slides meant nothing to him.

"Maybe these will help." Cardona supplied two sheets. One was an analysis of Robling's drink; the other pertained to the blood test. "No poison of the acid group, A-3. The blood doesn't show any acid traces, and that's the one infallible test."

Studying the charts, Clyde was finally nudged by Cardona, who added:

"There's the telephone, news hound! Call your office and let's hear what they say about it!"

Clyde made the call. When he had finished, he shook his head and turned to Cardona.

"What are they going to do," demanded the inspector, happily. "Print a retraction?"

Clyde shook his head still more.

"It isn't my fault, Joe."

"What isn't your fault?"

"The story the Classic is going to run," Clyde explained. "They were

holding the presses for it. It says your experts are still baffled by the untraceable poison responsible for two deaths. Somebody has found the perfect crime, and the Classic can't pass it up."

Fortunately, Cranston was there to prevent another murder, or something close to it, for Cardona went after Clyde in homicidal fashion. The commissioner's presence didn't matter, for Cardona was quicker than Weston, who lunged at Clyde with the same idea. Overtaking both, Cranston managed to restrain them until Clyde escaped.

OTHER newspapers called it "coincidental death," and took the verdict of heart failure in Robling's case. To help the cause, Commissioner Weston ordered

Inspector Cardona to dig up all the past facts he could about Menlo and Robling.

Matters of recent illness, overindulgence in drink - all those would count.

So Cardona found himself in the rather unique position of trying to prove that there couldn't be a murderer behind two deaths so sudden, so coincidental,

and so involved with the question of wealth, that ordinarily the police would have been the strongest advocates of the murder theory.

Late that same afternoon, Cranston chatted with Weston in the latter's office. Even more than Cardona, Weston was trying to argue himself out of any thought of murder.

"Here are the facts on the Framingham estate," asserted Weston. "Elmer Trope, the executor, has absolutely no interest in the wealth itself. His task is to divide it into equal portions. Six heirs to begin with; now, only four. Should there be no heirs, Trope would still have nothing. The money would go to charity."

Cranston inquired if Weston had talked with the attorneys. The commissioner had, because it was they who had provided the full information. Trope, as executor, was literally hemmed in by a cordon of lawyers who once represented Landis Framingham.

"About the heirs -" continued Weston. "Menlo and Robling were friends. Anyway, they're both friends, so that let them out. Don't misunderstand me, Cranston" - Weston's tone was testy - "I'm in no way recognizing that absurd story that the Classic printed. I'm merely analyzing the facts, just as the toxicologists did with the blood of two men who died from natural causes."

Wanting to hear more, Cranston rewarded Weston with an understanding nod.

"Suttern, the man who accompanied Robling last night," declared Weston, "went to the Forty-one Club at Robling's persistent invitation. We have learned that Creff was with them for a while - you've heard of Walter Creff, the financial writer? - but he left early."

"I talked with Suttern and Creff, and it's so doubtful that either of them could have had a hand in Menlo's death, that they couldn't logically fit into the Robling case. Both are very trustful of each other. Having dinner together, in fact. Tomorrow, they're both going to see Trope."

"I'll call him and arrange to be there, too. The other heirs will be present."

Cranston feigned surprise.

"The other heirs?"

"A young chap named Alan Haverdale" explained Weston, "and a girl, Catherine Framingham. I know very little about either of them, as yet, except that they've scarcely been around."

Smiling over Weston's final sentence, Cranston left to meet the two heirs

in question. He found them with Clyde and Margo, and all four were awaiting Cranston's advice on an important question. They wanted to know what they should do about the coming evening.

"I RAN into something tough last night," declared Alan. "Some shooting out in back of Trope's. Somebody is after me with something stronger than any imaginary poison! And Kay isn't finding it easy. Her contract at the Forty-one is almost up, which means that Cue will bother her about it.

"As for Creff, we figure he's going to put some of his half million into a new night club and make Kay star there, or else spill the business that she's a Framingham heir."

With that, Alan turned to Kay.

"Why worry about people knowing who you are, Kay? My mother was an actress, before her first marriage. She never tried to hide the fact."

"She was an actress," returned Kay sweetly. "That's just it: I'm not! I seem to belong to the demimonde."

"That's what they used to call cafe society," Margo explained to Alan.

"In the days before straight laces gave way to zippers."

"And speaking of one's past," continued Kay, "you mentioned your father, Alan. After he died, your mother married Landis Framingham. Did she tell him she'd been an actress before her first marriage?"

Alan pondered a full minute.

"No, she never mentioned it," he admitted. "I guess she'd forgotten her stage name, which was Marie Trevylan. It belonged a long way in the past."

"Which is where mine belongs," assured Kay. "I'm going to forget it and take a new one Alan."

Margo knew the new name that Kay meant. It was going to be "Haverdale." Alan should have thought of that himself, but he wasn't looking beyond the present evening. Turning abruptly to Cranston, Alan asked:

"What would you suggest for the present problem?"

"Why don't you team along with Burke?" asked Cranston. "Trouble usually seems to be over, when he finds it."

"But what about Kay?"

"Margo will visit in her dressing room and look out for her. Cue won't talk contracts while Margo is around. As for Creff, it happens that I'll be seeing him myself. I'm going to sample the curry at the restaurant where he's taking Suttern."

With that verdict, as good as any that The Shadow could have supplied, Cranston left to keep his anonymous appointment with Suttern and Creff. He found them at the Orient Cafe, an obscure but cozy little restaurant that specialized in Indian curry served in old-fashioned chafing dishes.

Suttern and Creff were already eating when Cranston sat down at another table and gave the same order as theirs. The only difference was that Cranston received his curry in a smaller chafing dish.

A good curry, it was, with a sauce of a dozen piquant spices. A trifling taste of chafing dish was noticeable when one scraped the sides too closely, so

Cranston didn't play the glutton, though Suttern and Creff did. He was through dinner as soon as they were; as was usual at the Orient Cafe, Cranston remained

to relax a while in the comfortable setting.

Conversation was starting between Suttern and Creff; their opinions might prove helpful, particularly Creff's. At least one thing was very helpful: the Orient Cafe, unlike the Forty-one Club, had none of the hectic aspects that marked it as a setting for murder.

A strange thing, murder. Its roots were deep, its tendrils could stretch far. Even the keen brain of The Shadow was unaware that the present scene was a prelude to death!

CHAPTER XVII

CRIME MADE KNOWN

OVER his cigar, Walter Creff was chatting with James Suttern, who was having a Tom Collins rather than an after-dinner smoke. Blowing a cloud of smoke toward the oak wall beside him, Creff looked around and remarked:

"Old Landis Framingham used to come here, often."

Suttern showed mild interest.

"Once in a while, he brought Trope with him," laughed Creff. "A real treat for Trope, but I guess his simple soul didn't relish it. If he liked curries, he'd come here himself, now that he's on his own. But he prefers that boiled beef he served at the wonderful dinner he gave us!"

Reference to Trope's dinner brought a slight smile from Suttern. He ordered another Tom Collins.

"There used to be a picture here," continued Creff, gesturing his cigar toward the wall. "It showed some of the Framingham family, including the very distant relatives. One person in the photograph was the Miss Framingham that we've never met."

"A good-looking girl, as I remember. Reminded me a bit of that dancer we saw at the Forty-one Club. Yes, a remarkable resemblance, considering that the child in the picture had pigtails and wore gingham, whereas the dancer had bobbed hair and wore - well, what did she wear, Suttern?"

Suttern shook his head.

"I don't remember," he said feebly. "I didn't even see her. I was ordering a drink - with Robling."

Suttern's expression was becoming very flabby. Creff noticed it and asked what was the matter. He argued that it couldn't be the curry; he'd eaten as much as Suttern. As for the Tom Collins, the drink was Suttern's favorite. He'd taken a lot of them at the Forty-one Club.

"I'm worried!" expressed Suttern suddenly. "Worried about this poison talk! You didn't have a man drop dead right beside you, Creff. Suppose there is a mysterious untraceable poison of that acid group they talk about." Suttern's hand clamped tightly on his glass. "What if somebody was killing us for our money?"

"Easy, Suttern!" spoke Creff, trying to restrain the contempt that showed in his tone. "I'm as likely a victim as you are. But it's bosh, this poison talk! Who would want to kill us?"

Suttern's eyes went narrow.

"One of ourselves... perhaps -"

"Any man who would risk losing a half million would be a fool!" exclaimed Creff. "I don't feel any richer than I did before Menlo and Robling died. It would mean risking something sure, to work for a larger cut by killing people off. I am no fool!"

A waiter came over to tell Creff that he was wanted on the telephone. Oddly, another waiter brought the same news to Cranston. They went into adjoining phone booths to answer their respective calls.

Cranston's call was from Margo. She had a lot to say, so he took it in snatches while he listened to what Creff was saying in the next booth.

"Who do you suppose was waiting in the dressing room when we arrived?"

began Margo. "Old Tifton, Trope's servant. He said that Mr. Trope was asking all the heirs to come to the house this evening. Tifton was very sweet about Kay. He knew she might not want to meet the rest of them just yet.

"It worried Mr. Trope, of course, so Tifton suggested that Kay could come in through the kitchen and hear everything that was said. Afterward, she could decide if she wanted to join the group. Of course, Creff will be there."

Cranston doubted it. He could hear Creff talking on the other phone to Trope. Creff was saying that he had an article to finish. He was going to his apartment, but should his presence be absolutely needed, he would come on call.

However, he would send Suttern directly up to Trope's.

"The police commissioner?" finished Creff. "At your house already? All the

more reason why I'd like to stay away. I never did like Ralph Weston!"

"Alan just called," Margo was continuing in Cranston's other ear. "He's heard from Trope and is going up there soon. So I guess that's about all, except that Shrevvy has his new cab out front. I'll have Kay use it, if she goes to Trope's."

Creff had left his booth by the time Cranston's call had ended. Cranston promptly dialed his favorite habitat, the Cobalt Club, and asked if there were any messages for him. There was one from Commissioner Weston, an invitation for

Cranston to meet him at Trope's. So Cranston sauntered idly from the phone booth. He looked for Creff and Suttern. Both had left.

Still as Cranston, The Shadow started for Trope's in his limousine, which was waiting out front. Its rear seat hid a similar cloak and hat to those in Moe's cab, but Cranston didn't reach for them. This routine call at Trope's was

one that he preferred to make in his present guise, since he had been invited there by his friend the police Commissioner.

A lulling excursion, this one. Lulling even to The Shadow. It was to prove

a fateful trip, for tragedy was riding ahead. Death's prelude, undetected by The

Shadow, was to have a sudden climax at the end of this strange ride!

THE tragic stroke began while Elmer Trope and his first visitor, Commissioner Weston, were finishing a glass of the favorite sherry. Both heard the shriek of brakes out front and saw Tifton make a hurried dash to open the door.

Immediately afterward, an unseemly figure staggered through the hallway and into the dining room.

That figure was James Suttern.

His bluff face totally distraught, the portly man was clawing at his collar, only to double over and clutch at his stomach. His eyes were rolling, as he groaned, and it took the combined weight of Weston and Trope to support him.

The cabby who had brought Suttern here was telling Tifton how the man had been stricken in the cab. But the drab servant was busy calling to Trope.

"In here, sir!" Tipton indicated the front parlor. "We can put Mr. Suttern

on the couch."

Tipton was helping, so was the cabby. Another aid arrived, Inspector Cardona, who had just reached the house when the excitement began. When Joe gruffed "What's wrong?" Suttern answered him.

"I've been poisoned!" gasped the stricken man. "Poisoned... at dinner with

Creff... the same symptoms the newspaper mentioned. Help me, quick!" He pulled a

copy of the Classic from his pocket and waved the tabloid newspaper. "It tells you how... here!"

Shouting for Cardona to phone for a physician, Weston was grabbing among some books in the parlor, hoping to find anything, from an almanac to a medical

volume, that might tell how to give Suttern first aid. It was Trope who heeded Suttern's suggestion to refer to the Classic. In the tabloid, Trope found a particular statement and read it rapidly aloud.

"Antidote for acid poisons of the 3-A group," informed Trope. "'Beat whites of eggs and add to quantities of milk. This will bring relief except with the most virulent poisons in this class. Olive oil is also a remedy, but on no account give the victim an emetic. These are corrosive poisons and any sudden disturbance to the stomach may hasten the injurious consequences.'"

Pausing, Trope waved at Tifton.

"Hurry!" Trope ordered the servant. "Prepare the antidote milk and whites of eggs. Some olive oil, if we have any."

As Tifton hastened away, Trope read further in the article and learned that these particular poisons could produce burning sensations from throat to stomach.

Swallowing hard, Suttern panted that he did have something of a burning sensation.

"It was the drink," he added between gasps. "It tasted... different! Creff

must have dropped poison in it... at the table... the way he did with Robling's drink... at the Forty-one Club."

Weston pushed Trope aside to hear what else Suttern had to say. Rolling his eyes, the portly man gazed glassily from the couch where he lay.

"Creff was writing a note," added Suttern. "Just before... before Robling died!" Memory suddenly made Suttern wince. His next words were groaned. "A note... with a fountain pen that could have had acid in it -"

Suttern's voice gave out. He clutched his throat, whispering that it seemed to burn. Between snatches of Cardona's phone talk to the doctor, the rattle of Tifton's egg-beater could be heard from the kitchen. The sound ended and Tifton arrived on the run, carrying a glassful of diluted milk mixed with fluffy white of beaten egg.

They propped up Suttern and gave him the antidote. His face kept changing its expression as he swallowed. Each gulp was soothing, but the burning was recurrent. He looked better, though, when he had finished swallowing the antidote.

Trope sent Tifton back to the kitchen with the glass to prepare another round of milk and egg. Weston began to question Suttern further, and the man suddenly started to repudiate his previous statements.

"I guess I was wrong about Creff," conceded Suttern. "Why would a man risk

a half million in sure money by killing people off for more? It's just the curry

that made me burn inside. Very hot stuff, that curry."

"Did Creff eat curry, too?" queried Weston.

"Out of the same chafing dish," replied Suttern, with a nod. "As much of it as I ate - maybe more. But he's used to it. He goes to that restaurant often

-"

SUTTERN broke off with a moan. His hands went from his throat to the pit of his stomach. Dropping back on the couch, he writhed, his face contorting in horror.

Weston sprang to support him, gesturing for Cardona to do the same. Trope shouted for Tifton in a voice that took an excited pitch:

"Hurry, Tifton! More of the antidote!"

This time, Tifton halted on arrival dead short beside Trope, who was turning toward the couch. A horrifying climax was in progress.

Suttern was swaying in the grip of the two supporting men, and the pressure he gave his stomach seemed the force that made his eyes bulge. As Trope grasped Tifton's arms and hurried the servant toward the couch, Suttern's portly frame gave a huge convulsion.

The combined efforts of Weston and Cardona couldn't hold the stricken man.

His dead weight swept them back from the couch, as his spasm ended in a sideward

heave. Rolling over as he left the couch, Suttern struck the floor so heavily that he shook it. A turn carried him on his back; his face, staring upward, showed the same hideous glare that had characterized two other victims, Menlo and Robling.

Long, streaky blackness stretched in from the hallway door, casting its umbra across the death-stiffened features of the latest victim. When Trope and Tifton stooped to press the new supply of antidote to Suttern's lips, the streaky blackness was cut off. It shifted against the wall as its owner side-stepped into the room to view what happened there.

Odd, how that etched blackness resembled a cloaked form, with the silhouette of a hawkish profile above it!

For the man who cast that shadow was clad in evening clothes, and his features were calm, quite masklike. He was Lamont Cranston, the man who had left the Orient Cafe only a few minutes after James Suttern, expecting to reach

Trope's house almost as soon as the man who rode ahead.

Gripped by the horror of poison, Suttern had sped his trip to Trope's, outracing Cranston by several minutes. It seemed that those minutes couldn't have made a difference. Everything possible to save Suttern had been done by others. Even The Shadow could not have prepared the antidote more speedily than

Tifton had, at Trope's order.

Grim, strange was the laugh that came from Cranston's motionless lips, a tone so repressed that it reached no other ears. That mirth was The Shadow's. It told that crime's unexpected turn would produce new efforts from the master investigator in whose very presence death had struck!

CHAPTER XVIII

DOUBLE TROUBLE

PROBABLY the most disturbed person in Trope's parlor was Inspector Joe Cardona. His poker face didn't show it, but Joe was beset with a pronounced emotion. To him, that glassy stare of Suttern's was an accusation, denouncing him for a double fault.

If Joe hadn't broached the poison theory at the time of Menlo's death, but

had saved it for Robling's case - how different the present would have been!

The law, not a scandal sheet like the Classic, would have been working on the poison business. Doing it quietly, so that no one like Creff would have caught the idea, and tried it out on Suttern.

Such, at least, was Cardona's opinion, for he still sided with the toxicologists on their findings in the previous cases.

The first thing to do was find Creff. When Cardona broached that subject, Weston agreed. Trope, in his simple, innocent style, started for the telephone to call Creff's apartment. When Cardona waved him back, Trope looked puzzled.

"But Suttern exonerated Creff!" Trope exclaimed. "The last words he

uttered were a repudiation of his earlier claim."

"That was before death hit him," reminded Cardona grimly. "If he could talk now, Suttern would go back to his first story."

Trope shook his head.

"I can't picture Creff a murderer," he declared. "Why, last night when he came here, he hadn't even heard about Robling's death. True, Creff lost his temper over a trifling matter, but Tifton and I quieted him quite readily."

"I don't want to quiet him," gruffed Cardona. "I want to hear him talk - plenty!"

During Joe's speech the front door opened. Only Cranston noticed it; from the doorway, he observed the man who entered: Alan Haverdale. Alan's face was strained, though not in the fashion of Suttern's when the victim had made his hurried entry. Seeing Cranston, Alan approached and undertoned:

"Somebody followed us here. Burke kept on in the cab to draw them away, but they're sticking around. In an old car somewhere out front."

Cranston thumbed Alan right through the hall and the young man, hearing voices, didn't even glance toward the parlor as he hurried past.

Seeing that Alan had gone by unnoticed, Cranston strolled after him and overtook him in the dining room, where he gestured him on to the kitchen.

There

they saw the open refrigerator, two bottles of milk that had been taken from it,

and a bowl with an egg beater lying in it.

"What's this?" queried Alan. "Has old Trope run out of sherry? He must be serving egg-nogs to his guests."

Cranston explained that the exhibits represented the antidote for a poison

that had added Suttern to the list of victims. Alan's normally handsome face strained with horror at the news.

"Stay here," Cranston advised. "You're out of the case, anyway. They're blaming Creff and will probably be going over to see him."

"In that case," began Alan. "I'll go along."

"Not after what you admitted about last night," said Cranston. "You'd better be careful about seeing Creff. Leave him to the law, for the present. If

they're starting soon, I'll ship you out the back way, so you can shake those chaps you spoke about. They'll be busy watching the front."

With that, Cranston strolled to the front parlor to listen in on further conversation. His trip wasn't going to take him more than a few minutes, but even that time period was too much. For just as Cranston was leaving he heard a

tapping at the kitchen door, so light a rap that he recognized it.

Opening the door, Alan was face to face with Kay.

"I managed to get away early," the blonde whispered. Then, hesitating at Alan's glum stare: "I thought maybe I'd have to introduce myself as Catherine Framingham; that's why I'm wearing the mink. But I'm not going in" - Kay's tone

was determined - "if Creff is there!"

"Creff isn't here," said Alan. "Only Suttern, and he's dead. They think Creff killed him."

Kay's blue eyes went very wide. Beyond the girl's half-frightened face, Alan saw the dim lights of a parked cab. The sight decided him on a sudden policy.

"You're leaving at once, Kay," announced Alan, "and I'm going with you. Cranston suggested that I go out by the back door anyway, so he'll understand what's happened."

VERY fortunate it was that Cranston happened back just after the rear door

closed. The doctor had just arrived, and soon Weston and Cardona would be starting for Creff's, so Cranston had told them that he would drop by there later.

Not only did Cranston guess that Alan had used the back door but he included Kay too, for he already knew that she was coming by that route. Knowing that the two couldn't have reached Moe's waiting cab, Cranston started after them.

Alan was just putting Kay in the cab, when from the corner swung the very car that he had mentioned previously to Cranston. Cranston recognized it, too, along with its occupants, Gaffey and Wingo.

Gaffey was sticking to the wheel, with Wingo jumping out to get at Alan, who saw that the fellow had a revolver. Maybe Wingo only intended to threaten with the weapon, but he changed his mind when Alan came at him with his fists. Dodging Alan, Wingo aimed the gun pointblank.

As Kay screamed, human dynamite struck Wingo. It came in the form of Cranston, surging from the kitchen door. He hurled Wingo clear across the curb;

turned and spun Alan into the shelter of the cab, along with Kay. Then, full about Cranston was diving to the street under the spurting fire that broke from Gaffey's gun.

To Kay, it seemed a certainty that Gaffey's fire in behalf of Wingo had flattened Alan's rescuer, but Cranston's dive was ahead of Gaffey's shots and under the lowest angle at which Gaffey could aim while at the wheel of his jellopy.

Up came Cranston with Wingo's glittering revolver, and Gaffey, seeing the weapon, didn't stick around. He sped his old car forward, and Wingo, despite his daze, managed to catch hold and ride along.

Cranston fired two shots at the rear tires but failed to clip them, because Gaffey jerked in front of Moe's cab just as the borrowed gun loosed fire.

Springing to the cab, Cranston thrust Kay and Alan in ahead of him. He knew why Gaffey and Wingo were around. They were checking on Alan for Cue, and the reason they'd gone tough was because they recognized Kay. This was the thing that Cue had wanted to prevent - a clandestine meeting between Alan and Kay, so his strong-arm men had gone the limit to prevent it.

In his turn, The Shadow could go the limit to overtake them - as Cranston.

A nice feather for the commissioner's friend, to deprive one gunman of his revolver and use it to bring in the fellow along with his buddy.

Rather helpful to Alan and Kay, too, if Cranston so acted in their behalf.

It would put them in the light of victims rescued from crime, thus dispelling the slight clouds of mystery that still enveloped them.

But the trail was too much for Cranston. The fugitives were making for Central Park, and their old car was doing well. Moe's new cab wasn't out of its

breaking-in stage and he couldn't overtake the car ahead. When Gaffey finally swung into a steep byway, Cranston told Moe to park and turn off the lights.

Getting out at Cranston's request, Alan and Kay wondered why he didn't follow, if his intent was to look for crooks somewhere in hiding.

Cranston had followed - as The Shadow.

He'd put the others out in order to get at the space beneath the rear seat, there collecting his hat and cloak. And now Moe, having heard sibilant instructions when his chief went past, was suggesting that Alan and Kay get in again. Doing so, they were quite surprised to find that Cranston wasn't there.

The next surprise was to be The Shadow's.

Probing the dark byway for the missing car, The Shadow turned and looked back, to see lights creeping up behind Moe's cab. How Gaffey had found an outlet and come around to investigate, was something of a mystery, though the

reason for the lights was not. Most certainly, crooks were trying to stage a rear attack, so The Shadow stopped it.

Whipping out an automatic in preference to Wingo's revolver, he voiced a fierce, shivering laugh and blasted a shot across the front of the sneaking car. Guns answered instantly, their fire far wide of The Shadow.

Moe spurted away carrying Alan and Kay off to safety. Such were The Shadow's emergency instructions, and Moe was sure that his chief would handle matters.

ACTUALLY, The Shadow was very close to final disaster. The curious fact that saved him was this: Two guns, not merely one, had stabbed from the attacking vehicle. Doubting that Wingo had a reserve revolver, The Shadow dived rapidly for shelter. He was just in time.

That car from which gunners delivered a long-range fire didn't belong to Gaffey and Wingo. Its occupants couldn't have clipped The Shadow at such distance, but there was a chance that a closer enemy could. A perfect hunch on The Shadow's part, for as he dived, a stream of bullets ripped from a spot not twenty feet behind him.

They were aimed for the very place where The Shadow's gun had opened fire--shots triggered by Gaffey, who was parked with Wingo only a dozen paces behind the limit of The Shadow's search. Gaffey must certainly have supposed that his rapid spray of bullets had amended the defeat of a previous night, for he roared his old car away the moment he'd emptied his gun.

As for the other car, it proved to be a cab, when The Shadow, prone on the ground, saw it scoot off, taking a different road than the one where Moe had swerved. Whoever its occupants, they had probably judged Gaffey's shots to mean that The Shadow had a group of agents with him.

Alone in the darkness, The Shadow laughed; his tone was low but highly significant. This business of rival gunners was a factor that fitted with other things that he had pieced. Things that but for a freak of circumstance should have enabled him to prevent Suttern's death.

Freakish matters were not yet ended. Far out in Central Park, The Shadow would require considerable time to return to his investigation. Had he realized how costly his delay would prove, the black-cloaked master would have saved his laugh for later!

CHAPTER XIX

CRIME ADMITTED

STANDING in shirt sleeves, a green visor over his forehead, Walter Creff was receiving visitors with a smile half regretful, half contemptuous. His visitors were three: Weston, Cardona and Trope. Creff was sorry to hear them tell of Suttern's death, but he resented their implications.

"If you think I had a hand in it, you are very wrong!" snapped Creff. "By Mr. Trope's own statements, Suttern said he didn't think I poisoned him."

"I told you what Suttern stated first," put in Weston crisply. "He claimed that you poisoned Robling, at the Forty-one Club."

Creff's laugh was sharp. He turned, beckoning the trio from his small living room into an even smaller room, that served him as a study. On a desk

stood Creff's typewriter, beside it some finished pages, along with another stack of blank sheets. On a small memo pad that bore a few notations lay a fountain pen.

"Examine the pen," suggested Creff. "Tell me how in the world I could have

dropped a blob from it into Robling's glass. Here" - he handed the pen to Cardona and picked up a drinking glass from a corner table - "try it, inspector."

It looked so impossible, that Cardona didn't try. Another thing interrupted him, a tap from the door that connected with the living room. The group turned, and saw Tifton. He'd come to tell Trope that neither Mr. Haverdale nor Miss Framingham had arrived. He'd tried to reach them both by telephone, but had been unable to do so.

A somewhat demoniac smile spread upon Creff's lips, unnoticed by the other

persons present. Tifton's words had given Creff a neat inspiration, but he intended to reserve it until occasion required. Pouring himself a drink of water from a pitcher in the corner, Creff wagged his glass and suggested:

"Look around, inspector. The place is yours!"

There wasn't much to look at except the fountain pen, which Creff obligingly said Cardona could keep. He used it mainly for signing checks, and ordinary pen and ink would do for that purpose. Almost all of Creff's writing was done on the typewriter, except when he dictated. The few penciled notes on the memo pad were an exception.

Needing them no longer, Creff pulled the sheet from the pad, crumpled it and tossed it into a wastebasket.

Strolling out to the living room, Creff sat down and pushed back his eyeshade. Weston went with him, and Cardona soon followed bringing Trope, while

Tifton remained in the study, using the telephone in a new endeavor to reach Alan and Kay.

Studying Cardona coldly, Creff inquired:

"What next, inspector?"

"I'm going to hold you, Creff," returned Joe, "on suspicion of murdering Suttern."

Creff tilted his head so far back, that the eyeshade fell from it. Still laughing as he reached to pick up the visor, Creff said to Weston:

"Hear that, commissioner? Your ace is still a deuce, which counts for nothing! Unless he thinks that deuces are wild in this game!"

Weston surveyed Creff steadily, as though inclined to support Cardona's decision.

"Take me along, then," sneered Creff. "But remember: you'll be putting your necks out for false arrest! You held Robling after Menlo died. But you didn't hang on to Suttern in Robling's case. Such inconsistency can become a very serious matter, particularly where I'm concerned.

"That article I'm writing" - Creff nodded toward the study - "will be worth a lot of money if I finish it before my deadline, which happens to be midnight. I can finish it, unless you stop me by your absurd tactics!"

WESTON began to drum the arm of his chair in a way that Cardona didn't like. Seeing that the commissioner was weakening, Creff pressed home another angle.

"You still don't know that Suttern was poisoned," he argued. "His case was

like the others: too much to eat and drink. Besides, he was worried more. He even had me shaky when he talked about that poison story in the Classic."

That mention brought a glare from Weston. It wasn't meant for Creff but for the Classic and everyone connected with the tabloid. Seeing that he'd won a

point, Creff continued.

"Maybe you gave Suttern an antidote too late," he remarked, "or possibly not enough of it. But it could be that he didn't need an antidote at all, because his death was due to something else. You're going to hold an autopsy on Suttern's body, like you did with the others. I'd say you ought to wait to see what it proves, before you arrest me."

Weston was very nearly won over. Cardona, too, was getting a bit doubtful.

The thing that Creff suggested was exactly what the law had already agreed: to class deaths as poison cases only after they had been proven such.

"Of course," added Creff indifferently, "if the Classic has you both scared -"

He paused, letting that inference sink in. It might have been a clincher in itself, but Creff still had another. The door of the study opened and Tifton

came out shaking his head, muttering something about Miss Framingham. Creff leaned back for another chuckle.

"If you think these deaths are murder," he said, "you ought to look for more than a money motive, which, as I expressed to Suttern, is not a sensible answer. A certain Miss Framingham has a real motive. She doesn't want people to know who she really is, particularly the other heirs like myself."

"No, no!" protested Trope. "It really doesn't matter to Miss Framingham if people know -"

"That she is Kay Lorley," added Creff, cutting Trope off short. "Star at the Forty-one Club, where two deaths have already happened. She could easily have met Suttern after he left the cafe tonight. You see, I nearly met her myself the other night, when she invited me to stop backstage."

A mean statement and one that had telling force, since Creff acted as though he could prove it. Something that old Trope couldn't dispute, though his

dreary face looked pained. If Alan had popped in that moment, there would have been another death, with Creff the victim. For Creff had gone beyond the subtle

talk that he had delivered at Trope's the night before.

"We won't be holding you, Creff," declared Cardona abruptly. Joe didn't even wait for a wave from Weston. "However, I'll stay around here a while, if you don't mind. I'll find Kay Lorley and question her - after the autopsy."

Creff seemed quite satisfied with Cardona's compromise. He arose and went into the study, where he sat down at the typewriter and gestured to the telephone.

"Call the Forty-one Club now, if you like."

Cardona picked up the telephone, then laid it down beside the blank memo pad. He turned to Weston, who had come into the study with him.

"You could handle this better," said Joe. "If you stop by to see Cue Herble, commissioner, he won't suspect what's up. He might even introduce you to Kay Lorley. But I'd spill the game."

Weston rubbed his chin. Maybe he wasn't averse to meeting Kay; most everyone else seemed to favor it. So Weston nodded, turned about and went out through the living room, taking Trope and Tifton with him. As the outer door closed, Creff reached for the pitcher and poured a glass of water.

"Have one, inspector? It's my usual drink."

Cardona shook his head. Creff placed the glass beside the typewriter and thrust a blank sheet into the machine. Cardona took the hint and went out to the living room, closing the door behind him. He heard the typewriter begin to clatter. It went rapidly; then paused.

For several minutes, Cardona heard the machine intermittently, and was just getting used to it when he heard a thump at the door of the apartment.

Answering it, Cardona met Cranston, whose eyes roved the room idly, though there was speed behind their gaze. The clattering typewriter had already stopped, which was why Cranston queried:

"Where is Creff?"

As Cardona gestured toward the closed door of the study, there was the crash of a breaking glass beyond it. Cranston sprang to the door, but it wouldn't open, for it was latched automatically on the inside.

While Cranston still rattled at the knob, another sound came - that of a body falling from a chair.

WASTING no more time in useless ceremony, Cranston and Cardona broke the door down.

In the study, they found Creff lying quite as dead as three previous victims, his face registering a combination of surprise and horror that wasn't at all pleasant to view.

As with Menlo and Robling - though not Suttern - Creff had been drinking when he fell, though his beverage was merely water. The glass falling from his hand had struck the typewriter, spreading its liquid on the desk.

Soaked with water was the memo pad, but it was drying under the strong heat of Creff's desk lamp. Blank when Cardona had left the study, the pad now bore a note. The writing was plain, for the ink hadn't blurred too badly. That note solved the riddle of four deaths.

It was a confession signed by Creff's initials, "W. C.", and Cardona recognized the handwriting.

"'Menlo and Robling died from natural causes,'" Cardona read aloud. "'So rare a coincidence was too much to restrain my hand further. I had actually hoped to murder them both, so I couldn't resist with Suttern.

"'Two others were to come, dependent upon the verdict in the Suttern case.

But my purpose was guessed, even before Suttern died. I argued my innocence tonight, but I know that the autopsy tomorrow will prove my guilt.

"'Death was swift with Suttern. I prefer the same, rather than the slow torture of awaiting the electric chair and the terror of the thing itself - W. C.'"

That was all, and it was quite enough for Inspector Cardona. Only Creff could have written the note, for he'd been alone in the room, with Cardona stationed outside. Joe had been the last to leave, and he'd laid the blank pad aside just before Creff had offered him a drink of water.

All that Cardona wondered was if Creff had dosed the pitcher with the deadly acid before pouring the glass of water. If he had, he'd probably have been hoping to see its effects on Cardona first. Perhaps Joe owed his life to his refusal of the innocent-looking drink. In any event, a matter of murder was closed.

So thought Inspector Cardona, but the eyes of Lamont Cranston still held a distant, reflective stare. Strange was the burning gaze of those eyes that belonged to The Shadow!

CHAPTER XX

POST-MORTEM FACTS

THIS time, there were two autopsies instead of one. The toxicologists had a field day with their tests. All came out as was to be expected: blood samples from the bodies of Suttern and Creff showed the acid traces belonging to Classification 3-A. It was a poison as deadly as a cobra, slow to strike, but

insidious in its venom when it took effect.

This acid also fitted the description given by the experts, in that its rapid absorption left no traces in the stomach. Only in the blood stream and though a small dose could prove fatal, the effects were sure to be discovered. So said the experts, which left it a draw between the Classic and Commissioner Weston.

Even more than before, the deaths of Menlo and Robling were classed as natural, whereas those of Suttern and Creff were mentioned as poison cases in the suicide note, which every other newspaper published before the Classic even heard about it.

One interesting point: The unnamed poison had certain properties found in citric acid, a substance extractable from lemon juice. The main difference was that citric acid was harmless; this other acid very deadly. But the two mixed well; so well, that the lemon covered the taste of the poison without in any way offsetting it. Just the thing for putting in a Tom Collins, that poison.

Creff's suicide dose contained a dash of lemon juice and was found only in the glass. But that didn't prove that he hadn't wanted to kill Cardona. The mixture could have been in the bottom of the glass when he poured the drink, for he'd been drinking from that glass earlier.

In his own laboratory The Shadow made some interesting tests with the powerful poison in question. Tests that convinced him of more facts than even the toxicologists had emphasized.

But when Cranston chatted with Weston, a few days later, he didn't discuss the poison at all. Cranston was more interested in the reports that proved the natural deaths of Menlo and Robling.

Menlo's ill health, in the form of chronic colds, was considered a factor in his death, even though he'd been practically cured by inoculations. As for Robling, he'd been drinking much too much, as witness his need for a pick-me-up every morning.

After leaving Weston, Cranston again stopped at his laboratory, as The Shadow.

Reverting later to Cranston, he dined again at the Orient Cafe. Not only did he order curry, he sipped a Tom Collins with dessert, and talked of the Framingham family with the genial proprietor, who brought out the old photograph showing Kay's girlhood picture.

Cranston didn't put Margo through the ordeal of a curry dinner. He met her later, with Alan and Kay. They all went to Trope's, and Clyde Burke arrived there, too, hoping that his friendship with Alan would put him in line for a Classic story. That, at least, was Clyde's excuse for crashing the informal party.

It was while they were drinking some of the tasty sherry that Trope poured them, that Cranston brought a small package from his pocket and started to open it as they left the dining room. He stopped to make a phone call in the hallway, and when he joined the group in the parlor, he had changed his mind about the package.

Tying its cord again, he handed it to Margo, telling her that it was a present which she wasn't to open until he mentioned it again.

Margo smiled at the gift as she put it in her handbag. The package was about four inches long, large enough to contain a brooch, which would be a welcome gift indeed. Its weight rather surprised her, for the package was really heavy for its size. However, Margo felt that it would only add to the coming surprise.

THIS was Kay's last night at the Forty-one Club, and she prolonged her sojourn at Trope's to the limit. There were things that Kay wanted to talk about. One was the note that Creff had sent her that night at the Forty-one.

She'd turned it over to the police so they could compare it with Creff's suicide note, which it matched perfectly, one feature being the initials "W. C." which Creff had attached to Kay's note, too.

Trope nodded when Kay spoke about the note. He'd likewise supplied a few samples of Creff's handwriting from some documents that Creff had given him weeks ago. The police had also picked up the penciled memos that Creff had crumpled into his wastebasket.

Those combined items were about the only existing specimens of Creff's scrawling penmanship, for the typewriter had been his constant medium of written expression.

One thing pleased Kay: the police had not disclosed her dual identity, and Clyde was obligingly keeping it from the newspapers. Hearing how old Trope had tried his utmost to prevent Creff from stating the fact, Kay expressed her heartfelt thanks. In his simple style, Trope acknowledged the girl's gratitude with a bow. From the doorway, Tifton copied his master's gesture. They were all for Kay, those two, and they seemed much pleased by the romance that had budded between her and Alan.

It was Cranston who reminded Kay that it was time for her to leave for the Forty-one Club. He said he'd take her in his limousine, and Margo accompanied them, leaving Alan and Clyde with Trope.

During the ride, Cranston chatted about the theater and some of the famous names associated with its past, but his talk didn't make Kay yearn to remain a night-club star.

She switched the subject back to Trope and Tifton, remarking how faithfully the servant had been trained to perform the slightest duty that his master might order.

WITNESSING the floor show, Cranston saw Kay at her very best. Her dance brought huge rounds of applause and calls for encores, which Kay gave.

Across the table, Margo noted Cranston's slight smile and understood. Kay was putting everything into the act, as if to shake off the whole burden of the career she was about to end.

When Kay at last managed to make her exit, Cranston spoke terse words to Margo.

"Get backstage," he told her. "Stay with Kay until I join you. It's more important than ever before!"

Strolling from the table, Cranston stopped at the street door and spoke to

Jericho. Whatever Cranston wanted, the big doorman seemed unable to oblige him.

Jericho was going off duty for a short while, but he did at least summon Cranston's limousine.

It was while he opened the door that Jericho dropped something into Cranston's hand. Turning back into the night club, Jericho went to take off his

uniform; Cranston, meanwhile, was putting one on.

It was The Shadow who emerged from the far door as the limousine wheeled away. No one saw his gliding shape against the darkness of the street. At a moment when the sidewalk was temporarily deserted, the cloaked figure stalked

across it and merged with the gloom of the unattended entrance. The Shadow was completely gone when Jericho came out from the club and walked away.

In her dressing room, Kay Lorley was adding her own finale to the act she had just finished. As she slammed the door, she kicked her dancing slippers into a corner and flung her costume after them. She was Kay Lorley no longer; that was over forever.

Then, before Kay could do more than give a relaxing sigh, she saw the mink

coat in the closet. Snatching it out, Kay bundled the coat about her shoulders and surveyed herself in a mirror. She didn't like Catherine Framingham either, so she chucked the coat along with the costume.

Kay wanted to be a new self entirely. They could call her Kay until she added another name, which would happen very shortly. Alan had made it very definite that the name was to be Haverdale.

So Kay Haverdale-to-be sank into a chair, tossed back her blond head and drifted into a delightful reverie, which would have lasted indefinitely if Margo hadn't pounded at the door and asked what was keeping her.

"Just a few minutes, Margo," called Kay. "I'll get into my clothes in a jiffy, and join you."

"Don't forget that Alan is waiting," reminded Margo sweetly. "He's probably getting bored with Trope's dry conversation."

"I'll have to see Cue first," said Kay. "This is when I collect my final pay and sign off."

Margo had forgotten about Cue Herble. She began to realize why Cranston had said to stay with Kay. Though Kay wasn't long in getting dressed, Margo became more and more impatient every moment. She was really tense when Kay emerged smiling from the dressing room, wearing another coat other than the mink.

"Front office next," announced Kay. "Don't worry, Margo. I won't need any moral support. I've made it plain that I'm not renewing my contract."

The door to Cue's office proved Margo's obstacle. Opening it when Kay knocked, Cue gave a flat-faced smile and bowed Kay into the office. With a finishing sweep of his arm, he politely pushed Margo back and impolitely slammed the door in her face. Hard on the slam came the click of the automatic door lock.

Margo wasn't just taken aback. She actually quivered with alarm. She'd missed on the most important duty to which Lamont had assigned her. What to do next completely flabbergasted her, especially when she looked toward the street door and didn't see Jericho there.

Then, from the darkened corner past the doorway, almost at Margo's very elbow, came a reassuring whisper. The tone of a subdued laugh: The Shadow's!

A gloved hand drew Margo to the corner; unclenching that same fist revealed the glitter of a duplicate key, which happened to be the object that Jericho had acquired and delivered.

Fascinated, Margo watched The Shadow turn the lock of Cue's office and silently edge the door inward.

For a climax, Margo saw the snout of an automatic swing from The Shadow's cloak and poke through the narrow crack. True were all of Margo's apprehensions. Death still was scheduled to thin the ranks of the Framingham heirs, and Kay was the next in line.

But this time death was due for opposition from a rival who dealt in life, a power arriving in advance upon the scene where doom was planned. Kay's safety was assured by the vigilance of The Shadow!

CROSSED CRIME

ACROSS his desk, Cue Herble scowled as he wrote Kay's final salary check. Seated across from him, Kay merely smiled when she reached for the last payment. Bluntly, Cue stated:

"There's an old saying in this business, Kay. You've heard it: 'The show must go on.'"

"It can go on," returned Kay, "but I don't go with it. I'll thank you for my contract, Cue - the old one."

Cue produced the old contract and handed it over.

"There was an advance on this," he reminded. "It carries a forfeiture clause if you don't renew."

"Hock my mink!" laughed Kay. "Its yours, Cue. You'll find it in my dressing room. Shake it first, because my costume is with it, probably in one of the sleeves!"

Cue didn't appreciate Kay's humor. He brought out the new contract and shoved it across the desk, with a pen. Kay shook her head and arose; Cue promptly followed her. They were both moving toward the darkness of the door without noticing that it was open slightly, with blackness thick beyond it.

Nor

did they come close enough even to suspect The Shadow's presence. Even though he

thought the door was locked, Cue decided to cutoff Kay's path.

"Contract or no contract," stormed Cue, "you're giving up that Haverdale guy! Understand?"

"I think I do," replied Kay coolly, as she moved back toward the desk.

"You've made some pretty broad threats, Cue, with those gunmen of yours."

Cue's scowl spread. He didn't want to admit his employment of Gaffey and Wingo. His scowl turned to a leer when Kay darted about and pressed the button beneath the desk.

"I sent the doorman off" sneered Cue, "but since you're asking for a showdown, I'll give you one!"

He caught Kay in a powerful clutch; gripping her arms behind her, he stifled any screams. But Kay didn't try to scream. Determinedly, she wrenched to free herself, unheeding Cue's repeated threats regarding Alan.

Back and forth across the office, Kay fought hard, but to no avail. Cue was hurting her, but not too badly. Otherwise, there might have been an interruption from the door. For The Shadow's automatic, shifting ever so slightly, was keeping its aim on the path that Cue crossed every time Kay's struggles sent him in a new direction.

The Shadow was watching for a deadlier menace in the form of a gun. At last metal flashed, but not in either of Cues very busy hands. The weapon that threatened death thrust suddenly from a corner directly opposite The Shadow.

It

came from the crack of Cue's private exit, the front of the filing cabinet!

Only The Shadow's combined swiftness of brain and hand could have prevented coming murder. Another protector might have tried to gauge whether the glittering muzzle was meant for Cue or Kay, and therefore waited until the proper victim was swinging into the revolver's path. But The Shadow, archenemy of deep-laid crime, assumed that a murderer might have no choice at all.

Incredible though it sounded, either Cue or Kay could die as the accomplishment of a killer's design! Either one, or - for that matter - both!

THE hand that held the revolver was already beginning its trigger squeeze when The Shadow blasted at the tightening finger. The Shadow's shot was timed, but under stress, for he let blast just as Kay shoved Cue backward.

The bullet from the .45 sizzled right between them and found its target in

the hand that held the revolver!

The hand flipped from sight, dropping its gun. The revolver fell within the office, where the would-be killer had intended to toss it anyway, though it didn't carry as far as his unwounded hand would have sent it. The gun, however, remained as evidence of the intended crime.

Evidence that Cue half understood when he saw it. Whoever had been the victim, himself or Kay, the other would have been adjudged the killer. Thus it couldn't have been Alan; Cue realized that instantly. He was dumfounded the more by The Shadow's shot from the door.

Releasing Kay, Cue started to the corner; then wheeled about. By that time, The Shadow was swooping toward the desk. Cue dived wildly at sight of the cloaked avenger. Taking Kay, The Shadow spun her about and started her toward the door, where Margo caught her and continued the trip out through the night club.

By then, Cue was grabbing for the dropped revolver. He might have followed a natural inclination to let rip at The Shadow, rescuer or no rescuer. But The Shadow frustrated that one by wheeling full about. His laugh accompanied the aim of his gun muzzle, directed Cue's way.

Dodging around his desk, Cue fled through the door and turned toward the night-club floor, the best angle to escape The Shadow.

A sinister laugh pursued him; a tone that trailed, even as Cue shot a frantic glance back across his shoulder. What he saw only sped Cue's flight. He

saw - nothing! With the fade of his laugh, The Shadow had totally disappeared, which was something far too uncanny for Cue Herble.

Patrons of the Forty-one Club were treated to something they mistook for comedy, when Cue cut across the floor, waving a gun and upsetting a troupe of acrobats who were halfway through a balancing act, Cue kept on backstage and out to the rear street, where he spotted two men near the basement entry that marked the hidden route to his own office.

Thinking they were Gaffey and Wingo, Cue waved his arms and shouted, for he didn't believe that pair to be double-crossers. Instantly, the two men turned and blasted shots Cue's way.

With bullets nicking the sidewalk at his feet, Cue hadn't time to fire back. He dived away, stumbled on the curb, and brought up against a parked cab, where he made the very target that his attackers wanted.

Whether he deserved it or not, Cue's life was saved by what appeared to be

a vast upheaval from the entry. A giant bulk not only rose; it plucked the two gunners and hurled them hard. Somersaulting, they bounced the sidewalk with their heads and rolled on toward Cue, who was staring at the great fist that had flung them. Those mighty hands were attached to the arms of Cue's new doorman, Jericho.

Then Cue was suddenly trying to return the favor. A thin, rapid-moving figure was darting from the entry that Jericho had left. One hand hanging, it used the other to grab one of the revolvers that a flattened thug had dropped.

This was the thwarted killer, out from Cue's office! He wanted that gun to take a shot at Jericho, who was the nearest foe in sight!

Cue fired, but wildly. He saw Jericho lunge at the savage man who was turning with the gun. Again, it required a sure, swift hand to offset a killer's efforts, for Jericho made a massive target, good enough for a crippled gunner. The needed hand appeared, loosing a shot from the very entry that the foiled killer had just left.

Again, The Shadow! His timely shot spilled the scrawny unknown. A swirl

in

the darkness and he was gone, while Cue, moving forward, was looking at the faces of the senseless pair who had met misfortune at the hands of Jericho. They were thugs, all right, but they weren't Gaffey and Wingo. Nor did Cue recognize them as any of his strong-arm inside men.

While police sirens whined from the corner, Jericho plucked up the twice-wounded marksman who had on two occasions been halted cold by The Shadow's split-second gunfire. In the headlights of an approaching police car, Cue Herble viewed a drab but glowering face that he'd never seen before.

Puzzling, this: crime tossed Cue's way by an unknown enemy, who had a pair

of thuggish companions even tougher than Gaffey and Wingo. Cue couldn't understand it, and wondered if anybody did - until he heard the laugh.

Weird, parting mirth that carried a brief touch of triumph amid its foreboding note. The Shadow knew the answer; having solved the half of crime, he was leaving to reveal the whole. Death's rule was through.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XXII

CALL OF THE PAST

IT was The Shadow, not Cranston, who arrived at Trope's, but the cloaked fighter promptly became his other self. He retained his black garb to glide past the parlor, where Alan and Clyde were speculating how soon Kay and Margo would return. Stopping at a hatrack, The Shadow divested himself of cloak and hat, hanging them on the rack. His swift glide changing into Cranston's stroll, he entered the dining room.

Old Elmer Trope was there. The man of simple life looked up, rather surprised to see Cranston enter alone. Then, in his polite fashion, Trope brought the decanter from the sideboard and poured a glass of sherry for his visitor, another for himself.

"A singular thing, Trope," observed Cranston. "I've been looking into those cases of Menlo and Robling. I'm something of a chemist myself, you know."

Trope didn't know, but he was interested enough to listen further.

"That deadly acid the experts mentioned," Cranston resumed.

"Only a few drops were needed. Once they would get into the system, death would come like that!"

Trope nodded at Cranston's finger snap. Then the old man shook his head.

"The poison acid still would show in the blood," he argued. "Always, the toxicologists said."

"Because they were speaking of normal blood," declared Cranston. "But suppose the blood stream itself had already been supplied with a special alkali

content. My assumption is that the poison-acid traces would be neutralized; that

the blood would show a salt. And a salt is so common in the blood stream that the poison would be the equivalent of untraceable."

Trope's eyes showed puzzlement as he asked:

"You believe it was done with Menlo and Robling?"

"Absolutely!" replied Cranston. "Menlo had taken inoculations for his colds. The preparation recommended to him had a strong percentage of alkali, which naturally was absorbed by the blood stream. The poison acid that killed him acted on his stomach, but was rapidly gathered by the blood stream and promptly neutralized by the overabundant alkali."

"Robling's case was quite similar. He'd been taking regular doses of Alka-vita, a bromide heavy with alkali. Quite harmless stuff, but from it,

Robling's blood became saturated with alkali, after a period. As with Menlo, the poison acid that killed Robling was neutralized by the alkali, after it reached the blood stream, the only place where the acid could normally have been traced."

Nodding slowly as he heard Cranston's conclusive theory, Trope started to put the decanter on the sideboard; then pushed it across the table to his guest.

"More sherry, Mr. Cranston?"

It took Cranston a few moments to uncork the tight glass stopper that Trope had replaced in the decanter. Pouring himself a glass of wine, Cranston offered to do the same for Trope, but with a headshake the old man took the decanter and filled his own glass himself.

"A toast, Mr. Cranston," he proposed. "To the future happiness of Alan and Kay -"

They drank the toast. Still holding his wine glass, Cranston reverted to his former theme.

"An alkali will always neutralize all acid," declared Cranston. "But with Menlo and Robling, the acid acted first. It killed them before it reached the blood stream, where the alkali awaited -"

Cranston's discourse ended quite abruptly. His face strained, and while Trope stared as if puzzled by the grimaces, the masklike countenance twisted hideously. Head tilted back, Cranston swayed. His hand relaxed, dropping the wine glass to the table. As the glass smashed, Cranston's body tilted heavily to the floor and landed motionless!

SMILING craftily, Trope poked his head across the table and took a satisfied look at Cranston's face. Tilting his ear, Trope caught sounds from the kitchen. Rising, he stepped to the hallway door, made sure that Alan and Clyde were still occupied. Stalking to the kitchen door, Trope undertoned:

"All right, Tifton."

It wasn't Tifton who pushed into the dining room. It was Joe Cardona, a gun clenched in his fist. He pressed the weapon right to Trope's chest, and announced:

"We've got Tifton! He tried to murder Cue Herble or Kay Lorley, we haven't found out which. He had a couple of gunzels working with him, and it traces back to you, Trope -"

Cardona's voice cut short. Across Trope's shoulder, he was viewing the thing that the old man couldn't hide, the body of Cranston stretched on the floor in a manner Cardona had already seen too many victims stretched!

Before Joe could recover from his surprise, Trope was at his throat. The old man fought with fury, but Cardona was the stronger. They reeled from table to sideboard and back again, the only question being whether Trope could wrench himself away and escape.

It was settled when Clyde and Alan dashed in from the parlor, brought by the sounds of the scuffle. They helped Cardona suppress Trope. Thereupon, Joe waved his gun toward the floor beyond the table.

The others turned and stared, quite puzzled. But their astonishment could not equal Cardona's when he saw what they saw. The floor was vacant. Cranston's body had vanished of its own accord!

From the hallway came a low-toned laugh, its quiver presaging much to come. Into the dining room stepped The Shadow, fully garbed in black. His whispered tone repeated the things that Cranston had told Trope. At that, the old man sneered.

"You can prove nothing -"

"Cranston proved something, Trope," assured The Shadow. "He stated facts when he said that someone prepared the way for perfect crime by first arranging for the victims to saturate their blood systems with an alkali. You arranged that, Trope, and your next step was to give them the deadly acid poison, which the blood was to neutralize after death!"

Taking a salt shaker, The Shadow spilled a few grains upon the flat lip of the wine decanter, carefully confining them to the right side of the lip.

"These represent grains of colorless acid," explained The Shadow - "a lurking death that led men to their own disaster. You could always pour some harmless wine, Trope, because you did it this way."

To demonstrate, The Shadow lifted the decanter and poured a glass, tilting the decanter to the left. Naturally, the grains were undisturbed, for they were clinging to the right side of the lip. Setting down the decanter, The Shadow pushed it across the table.

"When you wanted a victim, Trope," continued The Shadow, "you let him pour his own, and with the wine find death!"

The Shadow gestured to Clyde. From the other side of the table, Clyde lifted the decanter and tilted it to his left. Being opposite The Shadow, Clyde was tipping the decanter the other way. As the wine poured into the glass, it carried the telltale grains with it!

So simple, yet so certain! Witnesses stared in silence that held a tinge of horror.

The pause was broken by The Shadow's sibilant accusation:

"Two victims died thus, Trope! Menlo first; then Robling. You sought a third tonight. Cranston was to die, because he had exposed your system. But I had him see to his own safety."

The Shadow picked up the stopper of the decanter and held it to the light. Old Trope gave a stare when he saw the stopper was hollow. At the top was a tiny air hole that still bore traces of wax.

"Cranston substituted this stopper for yours, Trope," declared The Shadow.

"It was filled with a colorless alkali. By merely pulling away the tiny wax slug, he let the alkali trickle into the wine. When he poured his glass - the way you wanted, Trope - the wine gathered the grains of deadly acid. But that same wine already contained the necessary alkali. The poison was neutralized before Cranston drank the wine!"

As simple as Trope's own system, but better! Cranston had begun proceedings with the chemical reaction. He hadn't waited for a postmortem reaction confined to the blood stream. He'd turned Trope's method of perfect crime into a perfect snare, wherein his fakery of death was just the final touch!

Another pause, while all watched Trope, whose glare was vicious, yet helpless. The Shadow spoke again; this time, his tone was regretful.

"I was watching matters here," he declared, "but you changed your technique, Trope. Suttern wasn't poisoned the night he arrived here very sick. He'd tasted metal from the chafing dish at the Orient Cafe. On top of that, the

lemon juice in his drink was all he needed to feel pains. It combined to produce a metallic citrate, giving him a slight ptomaine.

"He thought he was poisoned, so you gave him an antidote. And in that antidote Tifton put a dose of deadly acid so sufficient, that the milk and egg

couldn't begin to counteract it. The next thing was to blame it on Creff. Tifton aided in producing Creff's fake suicide by putting poison acid in his water glass at Creff's own apartment."

One thought was in every mind: Creff's suicide note. The Shadow explained its mystery.

"Possessing the properties of citric acid," he declared, "the poison develops invisible ink, for lemon juice is used for secret writing. Tifton wrote that note in some substance that picked up the poison spilled from Creff's glass. The heat of the lamp developed it.

"A special formula, no doubt, but based on a known one. As for Tifton's writing, it was a very easy forgery. He stole the note that Creff sent to Kay, then he went to see her and replaced it with a forgery of his own. Those memos in Creff's wastebasket were substitutes put there by Tifton. Your letters from Creff were other forgeries, Trope, that Tifton did for you."

Almost as The Shadow finished, Trope snarled. His words were proof that he no longer hoped to hide his crimes.

"You've guessed it, Shadow!" Trope admitted. "Tifton was a forger. I caught him at it once; that's why he did all I told him, even to hiring thugs" - he nudged to Alan - "to keep him away from the Forty-one Club."

Alan was puzzled at Trope's anxiety to keep him away from murder scenes. He realized, though, as The Shadow had before, that there had been two pairs of gunners. The mystery men of the first night, who had stalled so much, were quite different from Gaffey and Wingo, who were merely acting in behalf of Cue's jealousy over Kay.

From The Shadow's burning gaze, fixed so constantly on Trope, Alan knew that some startling yet simple revelation was about to be disclosed. Trope gave it.

"Your mother was my daughter," he told Alan abruptly. "She never told even you her maiden name, before she took her stage name of Marie Trevylan. As for old Landis Framingham" - for the first time, Trope spoke the name with a spiteful snarl - "she never let him know she'd been an actress at all! I hate all Framinghams! So much, Alan, that I wanted you - one heir who was not a Framingham - to have the entire fortune!"

So that was it!

Trope's sympathy toward Kay was explained; likewise, his later effort to dispose of her. He liked her as an actress, despised her as a Framingham! If Tifton had killed her tonight, well enough.

If Cue had been slain, Kay would have been blamed, and therefore been deprived of her share in the estate, because of a clause enabling Trope, as executor, to cut off any heirs who had turned criminal.

Staring at his grandfather, Alan saw Trope's teeth gnash suddenly. The old man followed that grimace with a choking swallow. Only The Shadow understood, but as he sprang forward, Trope gestured him back. The old man's lips mouthed two words:

"Too late!"

Trope's struggle with Cardona had not been without avail. During it, Trope had managed to get a capsule to his mouth. He'd bitten it and down his throat had gone a strong dose of his own poison. Elmer Trope was following his victims to their oblivion.

Even The Shadow couldn't have forced Trope to drink some of the alkali-saturated sherry in time to overtake the poison, for it acted quickly in

the quantity that Trope had taken. But the old man gestured for a drink himself,

a few moments later, knowing that he was beyond help of an antidote.

The Shadow poured a glass. Solemnly, Trope raised it. He was slowly sipping his much-prized sherry, when he stiffened and rolled dead, with the spattering glass cracking beside his body.

The Shadow's laugh carried the tone of a mirthless knell. When it ended, witnesses stared, not at Trope's body but at the spot where The Shadow no longer stood. Only the quivers of his parting laugh returned from the gloomy hallway where he had disappeared.

Later, when Margo and Kay arrived, they found Cranston in his limousine out front. Alan joined them, to declare the strange facts behind the crimes of Elmer Trope. As they rode away in the big car, Alan brought a small box from his pocket and displayed an antique jeweled ring.

"My mother's," he told Kay. "She would have liked you to have it. There is one thing, though" - Alan hesitated. "After all, I'm... well, really I'm a Trope."

"And I'm a Framingham," returned Kay, "which is just as bad, or worse. Let's say that you're a Haverdale, Alan, and that I'd like to be one, too!"

As the ring slid on Kay's finger, Margo remembered her own gift from Cranston. Without asking Lamont's permission, she brought the box from her handbag and opened it. Inside she found the original glass stopper, the solid one that Cranston had taken from Trope's deadly decanter to replace with one of his own.

Fortunately, Margo Lane had a sense of humor. She didn't mind when she saw Lamont Cranston smile.

THE END