



MURDER BY MAGIC

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- ? [CHAPTER I.](#)
- ? [CHAPTER II.](#)
- ? [Chapter III](#)
- ? [CHAPTER IV](#)
- ? [CHAPTER V](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VI](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER VIII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER IX](#)
- ? [CHAPTER X](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XI](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XIII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XIV](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XV](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XVI](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XVII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XVIII](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XIX](#)
- ? [CHAPTER XX](#)

CHAPTER I. CIGAM SPELLS MAGIC

From the street the sign read:

CIGAM SPELLS MAGIC

Cigam was a neat name for a magic shop, even though it wasn't the name of the man who ran the place. Spelling Magic backward to form the word Cigam, was an old gag, perhaps, but it was new to the general public.

And Cigam was making a play for the general trade, even to demonstrating tricks in his second floor front window, which drew attention - and customers - from the street. He was rather clever, this drab proprietor who called himself Cigam.

Only today, Cigam wasn't working in the window.

It was six o'clock and the shop was packed because this was a Saturday afternoon. Usually though, the crowd began to thin before six, which was the closing hour, but today Cigam couldn't get rid of the

customers.

Maybe it was because this Saturday fell on the full of the moon, or possibly it was on account of the show that the Universal Wizards Association had scheduled for tomorrow night. Some of Cigam's customers were at least buying tickets for the show, even though they weren't purchasing any of the magical apparatus with which his shelves and counters were full.

Yes, Saturday was just a big headache for a magic dealer.

Youngsters in short pants were gawking into the glass-topped counters trying to guess the purposes of the gimmicks they saw displayed there. Others, a few years older, were dropping billiard balls and thimbles as they tried to show each other their pet sleights.

Over in a corner, Val Varno was performing deft one-hand cuts with a pack of cards, winning enthusiastic acclaim from an adolescent gallery whose quick-change voices tempted Cigam to sell them ventriloquist dummies instead of magical apparatus.

What bothered Cigam even more was the private conference between Glanville Frost and Zed Zito. Suave and persuasive, Frost was a manufacturer of magical apparatus who looked as though he could sell anything. Blunt, challenging Zito was a performer who didn't want to be sold. Nevertheless, Cigam didn't like to have other people doing business in a shop where he paid the rent.

Then Cigam forgot his lesser troubles because of Wade Winstrom.

Big, imposing, firm of eye and jaw, Winstrom looked like the business magnate that he was. Brushing through the juvenile customers as he would a flock of office boys, Winstrom arrived at the counter, laid down a bundle of currency, and gave Cigam a steady stare.

"Sorry, Mr. Winstrom," Cigam apologized. "I haven't had a chance to pack the stuff you want. If you can only give me until Monday -"

Winstrom looked around the shop and its confusion caused a sympathetic smile to appear on his broad lips. Waving for Cigam to keep the money, Winstrom gave an obliging nod, and turned toward the door. He was blocked off by a squad of whipper-snappers who were pouncing for the counter telephone, only to have Cigam intervene.

"No phone calls, boys!" declared Cigam. "The shop is closing right away."

That brought an argument.

"We're only calling Demo Sharpe -"

"So we can try the new phone trick you sold us -"

"The instruction sheet says to call him any time after six o'clock -"

"And he'll name any card we think of -"

Cigam ended all that by banging the counter.

"If it's six o'clock, this shop is closed," he asserted, "and that's official. Use the phone in the lunch room across the street. I charge a nickel for all calls you make here anyway."

Across the street a calm-faced gentleman was sitting in the window of the lunch room finishing a cup of coffee while he idly studied Cigam's second floor shop, or as much of it as could be seen through the

upstairs show window.

The gentleman's name was Lamont Cranston and he could easily have learned all that was happening in Cigam's by going up there, but in that case he would have missed something else that was happening in the lunch room.

Two rather obnoxious characters were also keeping their eyes on Cigam's without realizing that Cranston had them under observation.

Familiarly, these two characters were known as Louie the Grift and Side-face Sam and they represented what might have been termed in better circles a renaissance of the gangster epoch in American history.

Louie the Grift saw Mr. Winstrom come out the street door beneath Cigam's shop and get into a chauffeured limousine that promptly drove away.

"There goes the big dough customer." It was the Grift who said it. "I'll bet he left a sheaf of moola with Cigam for some of the junk the guy peddles."

"Peel an eye upstairs," suggested Side-face, speaking from the side of his mouth that he wasn't feeding with a ham sandwich, "and you'll win your own money."

The upstairs window showed Cigam opening an old-fashioned safe which had a door that unfortunately opened in the other direction. Cigam was equally unfortunate in counting his cash slowly and twice before putting it away. The long-distance witnesses could see that it was plenty.

Having seen all they wanted in Cigam's window, neither Side-face nor the Grift bothered to watch the lights go out. It was the astute Mr. Cranston who studied that procedure and later saw Cigam come out the street door with three of his professional patrons.

Those three were recognizable at a distance, even in the dusk. From left to right they were:

Val Varno, master manipulator, whose offer of five thousand dollars to anyone who could duplicate his skill at sleight of hand had never been challenged, chiefly because it was known that Varno didn't have the money.

Glanville Frost, creator and manufacturer of more magical tricks and illusions than any other inventive genius, including all persons whose ideas he had appropriated.

Zed Zito, hypnotist, mentalist and manager of the famed Miss Libra whose uncanny faculty had baffled every scientist who had witnessed her amazing performances which by a peculiar coincidence had never excited scientific investigation.

Cranston didn't blame Cigam for locking the street door. Only Cigam should have had more judgment than to use a type of padlock that anybody could open with one of the gadgets that Cigam himself sold for fifty cents.

These masters of mystery, Cigam included, didn't bother to come across the street and learn how Demo's telephone trick was working. They simply parted and stalked away in their various directions.

Maybe they took it for granted that Demo was naming the cards that people called for. In fact Demo was, much to the annoyance of two lunch room customers.

"If them punks would lam," side-mouthed Side-face, "we could start working on that joint across the way."

"Give 'em time," returned Louie. "It ought to be a little darker anyhow."

"It's dark enough now. For me, anyway, providing you stick here to flash copper if one comes along."

"Okay, only let's wait until the dead-pan guy fills up on Java. I'd rather see new faces before we move."

The "dead-pan guy" was Cranston and he became obliging a few minutes later. Maybe he'd just been waiting until Cigam's younger customers had finished letting Demo baffle them with his telephone mystery. Whatever the case as soon as the cluster had gone from around the telephone, Cranston strolled out too and moved leisurely away along the almost-deserted street.

Only Cranston didn't walk far.

Half way down the block, he stepped into a darkened doorway and opened the bottom of a special briefcase that he carried. From between the inverted V of the two partitions, Cranston brought out a tight-packed black cloak and a flattened slouch hat.

As Cranston put on those garments, he adjusted a brace of automatics that he already packed beneath his business suit in their well-designed holsters. Then, a gliding shape of blackness, this transformed personage edged forth into the thickened dusk.

It was rather magical, the way Lamont Cranston became The Shadow.

CHAPTER II. Louie the Grift didn't have one of Cigam's fifty-cent gadgets.

What he had was a revolver and one whack of the butt did a complete job with the street door padlock. Turning around, Louie blocked all sight of that damage and looked over at the lunch room.

Side-face Sam kept working on another sandwich. He saw nothing to worry him and neither did Louie. The grunt Louie gave meant that if the street had become dark enough for Side-face, it was dark enough for Louie too.

Only it happened to be too dark for both of them.

Close enough to touch Louie with a ten foot pole and have three yards to spare was a figure so black that it passed as part of the wall against which it stood. With a simple reach of his gloved fist The Shadow could have stopped Louie's first move toward burglary.

Only it wasn't The Shadow's policy to frustrate people like the Grift until they neared their ultimate objective. Crime was coming back and The Shadow recognized it; therefore he needed a few examples to prove properly that crime did not pay. Tonight was an excellent opportunity for such an object lesson.

To trap Louie actually at Cigam's safe and phone the police to round up Side-face as a preliminary would be a feather in The Shadow's cap. But he would prefer to divide the feather between a police inspector named Joe Cardona and a reporter, Clyde Burke, who would give the incident due publicity and thereby discourage similar endeavors by lawless characters.

So when Louie opened the street door, The Shadow let the Grift enter unmolested. In fact he gave Louie considerable leeway. The Shadow was timing his own entry until he saw Side-face begin to look upward at Cigam's window. However small Sam's chance of glimpsing The Shadow, it wasn't worth the taking while a moral issue was at stake.

That was why Louie the Grift had little trouble reaching Cigam's upstairs door and not much more in cracking that second barrier. For the door that said CIGAM - MAGIC had a glass panel and by

cracking a chunk from the corner, Louie was able to reach through and turn the knob on the inside.

Closing the door behind him, Louie looked around a trifle warily. Street lamps that didn't show the lower doorway did manage to give the shop a glow and Louie had never seen any more of this shop than the area visible through the show window.

And a magic shop was a rather uncanny place to anyone unused to it.

The counters weren't so bad. They contained small items like silk handkerchiefs, packs of cards, small canisters, miniature billiard balls, glasses, odd-looking coins that weren't money, and small nickel-plated tubes and boxes.

What impressed the Grift were the shelves behind the counter. There he saw boxes big enough for rabbits, portable tables with fancy drapes, big dice that would half fill a hat, fancy trays, bowls, and clusters of peculiar looking flowers.

One rack in particular commanded full attention. It formed a sort of wall beside a door leading to a back room and on its shelves were exhibits of magic as it used to be.

At the left of one tall shelf hung a curious clock dial made entirely of glass and furnished with a long flat pointer like a single hand. Over at the right, past a pyramid of small square bird cages was an upright metal rod set in a pedestal. On this rod was a large ball, pierced through the center to allow the passage of the rod. The surface of the globe was studded with fancy stars.

It was the large clock dial that captured Louie's eye and with good reason, for the pointer suddenly began to spin as though actuated by some invisible hand. Creeping toward the counter, Louie planted his hands there, forgetful of such minor things as fingerprints, and simply gawked.

That whirring pointer was making Louie's own wits whirl. He hadn't expected Cigam's shop to go magic on him!

Outside the shop door, blackness was looming up the stairs from below, its approach a symbol of coming trouble for Louie the Grift. But Louie was too busy wondering about Cigam's mysteries to be thinking in terms of The Shadow.

It wasn't just the clock dial that was behaving oddly now. The big ball was starting to move up and down on the rod finishing each drop with a sharp click as though counting off the seconds that the one-hand clock wasn't registering.

In the hallway The Shadow halted, his cloaked form barely outlined against the thicker blackness of the wall. The Shadow could hear those clacks from the spirit ball and for the moment was at a loss to define them.

The Shadow wasn't expecting Louie to be watching magic. Right now, the Grift should have been working at Cigam's safe. Not only were the sounds coming from the wrong direction; they weren't the sort that a safe-cracker would make. The Shadow paused to reconcile those noises with the circumstances.

And now The Shadow was missing the feature of the show.

Between the spirit clock and the mystic ball, a larger piece of antique magic towered above the pint-sized bird cages. It was a big grinning mask with horns that made Louie mistake it for a devil though actually it represented a satyr. The thing was mounted on a single pedestal and it was of more than human size, grotesquely lifelike with its bulging eyes and grinning mouth.

The satyr was coming to life!

First the head rolled its eyes as though looking Louie over and the huddled crook shied away. Then, classing the eyes as mechanical, Louie reared half across the counter and snarled at the satyr's head. At that moment the satyr wiggled its horns and Louie, suddenly infuriated, decided to throw something at the mechanical head.

All that was lying handy on the counter was a pack of cards, but Louie decided it might be enough to stop the works of this self-acting gadget.

As Louie's arm went back for the throw, the gloved hand of The Shadow was coming through the broken corner of the door to turn the inside knob, but Louie wasn't looking around behind him. Instead, Louie was throwing the pack of cards directly at the satyr's face.

The flying pack splashed all over the big head and the eyes stopped their contortions. The horns were frozen too, but Louie hadn't put an end to the magic. Instead, he'd actually played stooge to the climax.

From among the flutter of descending cards, four stood out. They were the aces from the pack, standing balanced in a slightly curving row on top of the weird head, directly between the horns!

The outer door had opened silently, but Louie hadn't turned to see it. The crook's face was as rigid as the satyr's until, a moment later, Louie's jaw sagged of its own accord as a token of sheer amazement.

At that moment, Louie was half across the counter, balanced on both hands in the exact position that had marked the finish of his fling. The bulge of the satyr's eyes seemed a copy of Louie's own. To make it perfect, the leering face had only to drop its own jaw, which it did.

Though inside the shop, The Shadow hadn't a chance to stop the thing that happened even if he'd expected it.

From the satyr's opening mouth came a tongue of flame accompanied by the sharp report of a gun. The stab was downward, straight toward the chest of Louie the Gift.

With a shriek the crook reared upward, staggered back and lost his balance, flattening supine on the floor!

Even before Louie landed, The Shadow was clearing the counter at the left, dropping there with a crouch that turned into a forward drive. He was out of sight behind the sliding doors that lined the rear of the counter and therefore as good as out of range.

His drive however was a quest for a close-range meeting for whomever stood behind the satyr, for The Shadow's route was straight past the display rack where the clock hand was slowly ending its spin, the metal ball having earlier ceased its rise and fall.

Through the doorway, The Shadow reached Cigam's back room, a dimly lighted place stacked with filing cabinets, assorted boxes, desk and shipping bench. There was nothing large enough to hide a human being, so all indications were that the murderer had gone through the window at the rear, which furnished the back room with what light it had.

Reaching the window, The Shadow established that theory when he found that the sash was unclamped. It came flying up with the whip of his hands and in the same gesture The Shadow was through the window and out across a ledge from which he made a twirling drop to the ground behind the building.

This was one way to take up a murderer's trail, except that it proved too precipitous for The Shadow to

conceal his presence.

Even as The Shadow landed, a chunky figure came flinging upon him, swinging something that had the glint of a revolver. Only The Shadow, even during his rapid drop, had been thinking in just such terms.

The gloved hands that swept upward from the folds of The Shadow's cloak carried the dark bulk of a gun-metal automatic that stopped the descending revolver in mid-air. Sparks flashed from the clashing weapons, preliminary to the more spectacular fireworks that were to follow.

For as The Shadow wheeled one way, his antagonist the other, the man with the revolver let loose with the wild sort of shots that The Shadow expected. In return came The Shadow's taunting laugh, as though commending such wasted fire. With his mirth, The Shadow whirled still further in the dark to gain the vantage of an alley that he knew led to the front street. Another foolhardy stab from his opponent's gun and The Shadow would wing him with a single.

Only the man with the revolver didn't choose to use it.

He knew this backyard better than The Shadow and he made the most of it. All that The Shadow heard was the wild clatter of footsteps making off through another passage to a side street. By the time The Shadow cut across the yard, found the narrow cleft and probed it with two shots to discourage any return fire, the passage was empty. The fugitive, whoever he was, had reached the street and was away.

Windows were clattering all around. Shouts were accompanying the cautious sweep of flashlights. From somewhere a police whistle shrilled and a siren responded not too far away.

It wasn't The Shadow's policy to stay around and take the blame for somebody else's crime. Speeding back to the alley that he preferred, he continued through it and seemed to evaporate somewhere in its gloom.

When Lamont Cranston, a calm stroller who carried a briefcase, stopped in front of a little lunch room to join the curious throng that watched the police going up to Cigam's it was only natural that he should glance into the lunch room too.

There was no sign of Side-face Sam.

In death, Louie the Grift had lost the services of the side-kick who had been willing to help him out in life. Like an unknown murderer, Side-face had decided to become scarce, leaving the riddle to the police - and the Shadow.

Chapter III

"Yes, my name is Demo Sharpe."

Pete Noland said it over the telephone in the half-sepulchral tone that so fitted Demo's style that it had taken Pete a long while to rehearse it.

Somebody put a query over the wire and Pete answered without changing voice:

"I know you are thinking of a card. You have that card in your hand, of course."

The person didn't have the card so Pete told him to get it and concentrate, then write the name of the card upon a sheet of paper. All this was done without the person stating the card aloud; that part was up to Demo, or rather Pete.

"You have concentrated enough," announced Pete in that same impressive tone. "Your card was the five of clubs."

There was an amazed gasp from the telephone receiver but Pete was used to all that. Besides, somebody was knocking at the window pane, so there wasn't time to waste listening to a customer's reaction to the phone trick.

Pete simply hung up the phone and opened the window. It was Demo of course, since he was the only person who entered his own apartment by that route. For the first time, Demo seemed unnerved by his crawl along the twelfth story ledge.

Demo went to pour himself a drink, which was unusual.

"Why don't you quit this fool stuff?" queried Pete in the frank style that went with his looks. "This steeplejack act will throw you, if you don't throw yourself. Taking a drink is bad, if you're intending to go out again -"

"Only I'm not going out again." Demo shoved his face up from the chunky shoulders that supported it. His face had the same squarish look. "Not tonight, I mean."

"Then why go out at all?"

The phone bell interrupted and Demo gave a jerky gesture.

"Answer it, Pete."

It was somebody else wanting to know a card so Pete went through the usual routine and named it. Eyes eager, Demo listened to Pete's copy of his style and nodded approval.

"I'm fed up, Demo," argued Pete, in his own tone, as he clamped down the receiver. "If we're going to be partners in this telephone gag, let me be myself at least."

Demo shook his head.

"It won't work that way, Pete. I've been selling those instruction sheets under the title of Demo's Own Mystery. Nobody's going to buy them if I make it common."

"Then handle the works yourself." Pete went to the closet to get his hat and coat. "I'm leaving and not by the window. Good luck, Demo."

Frantically Demo threw his hunched form across the door to block Pete's departure. Demo looked really wild with his gasping lips, his blinking eyes, and the tangled hair that strewn down across his forehead.

"You can't walk out on me, Pete."

"I'm doing it." Pete's handsome face had clouded, though not in a too unfriendly way. "Sorry, Demo."

The telephone rang.

"Answer it, Pete. Just once more. I'm still shaky."

"All right, Demo, for the last time."

Pete almost botched Demo's tone, because his mind wasn't on the telephone mystery. Vague thoughts and troubled ones were cluttering Pete's mind regarding the in-and-out act that Demo had been staging

every evening, leaving Pete to double for him in the apartment. So when he finished this last call, Pete wheeled and demanded:

"Out with it, Demo."

Demo nodded and took the telephone off its hook. To Pete, Demo said:

"That will cut off those calls for a while. Shed your hat and coat so you can listen. Remember, I said we'd go fifty-fifty. That goes for more than just the take on the telephone trick."

Demo wasn't forgetting the phone trick, though, because he made his story rapid and brief, so as not to keep too many customers waiting. Besides, Demo was thinking of an alibi.

"Here's the whole story, Pete," declared Demo earnestly. "I asked you to stay up here evenings and fake like you were me answering calls on the phone trick I've been peddling at two bucks a throw. My sneaking in and out by the ledge to the roof next door may have struck you as kind of eccentric, but you knew I was that sort of a guy."

"Until now I thought that was it, Demo."

"Well, I'm still eccentric," admitted Demo, "but in a way that may pay off for both of us. Look at this stuff." Pawing through a desk drawer, Demo brought out some yellowed newspaper clippings, and a few old frayed playbills. "These will give you the general idea."

As Pete began to study the exhibits, Demo glanced at the stifled telephone and became impatient.

"I'll explain them, Pete," said Demo rapidly. "The clippings are about the treasures belonging to the Sultan of Malkara that disappeared from his palace during a revolt of the populace, a good many years ago."

Pete nodded. He'd gotten that far with the clippings.

"The chief harem beauty disappeared at the same time," he added. "Kwana, her name was."

"And later all the stuff showed up," declared Demo, gesturing to the clippings. "Here, there and everywhere, with one important exception. None of the sultan's crown jewels ever showed - not anywhere."

That brought a shrug from Pete.

"Perhaps the rabble got them."

"I don't think so," argued Demo. "Look, Pete. How would you guess Kwana got out of Malkara?"

Pete couldn't answer.

"These tell how." Demo brandished the long, old-fashioned playbills. "You've heard of Savanti, the Magician of Many Lands. Look where he was playing, right at the time Kwana disappeared along with the sultan's treasures!"

Staring at the playbill, Pete exclaimed:

"In Grandog, the capital of Malkara!"

"Right," confirmed Demo, "and here's something more. Look at this billing a year later." He was spreading the other playbill. "Where did Savanti get Mysteria, the Maid of the Himalaya Mists, exotic

creature of the higher atmosphere, who floats in mid-air?"

The playbill made Pete smile.

"You mean where did Savanti get the levitation act," he laughed. "Swiped it, I suppose, like he did with most everything in his show. Savanti was notorious for that -"

Stopping short, Pete stared at the playbill, then at Demo.

"You mean Savanti was behind that palace robbery?"

"If you want to call it a robbery," returned Demo blandly. "I wouldn't say that Savanti would go in for that, though. Maybe Kwana had a right to her share of the sultan's wealth. Her deal with Savanti could have been just to get her out of Malkara."

"And Savanti's cut was the crown jewels!"

"That's what I think, Pete."

Chin buried in hand, Pete watched Demo hang the receiver on its hook to resume the answering of card calls. It fitted except for one thing, on which Pete commented.

"Only Savanti died broke, Demo."

"He died on his last world tour," corrected Demo, "before he could get back home where he had stored most of his old apparatus." Demo's eyes narrowed Pete's way. "A lot of Savanti's props have been junked off lately."

"Then you mean the sultan's jewels may be hidden in one of Savanti's old tricks?"

"I couldn't think of anywhere better," returned Demo. "Nobody would steal magic apparatus, and if they did, they wouldn't know what it was all about."

The phone was ringing. Demo answered it personally and by his peculiar system of queries told some lady that she had picked the jack of spades, which proved correct. Then, hanging up:

"There are some smart characters who may have guessed what I have," Demo told Pete. "That's why I don't want them to know that I'm checking on all old apparatus that may once have belonged to Savanti. The best way to keep them from knowing is to make them think I'm here in the apartment every evening."

Now the whole business of the telephone tie-up was clearing itself in Pete's mind, along with Demo's procedure of using the window route instead of the apartment house elevator. No wonder Pete had been called upon to rehearse the part of Demo!

"There's only one man who makes a specialty of buying old apparatus," expressed Pete. "That's Wade Winstrom. He must have a ton of it along with his thousand books."

"And his million bucks," added Demo. "Winstrom loves to waste dough on junk that nobody else wants - or let's call it stuff nobody else wanted until now."

Another phone call gave Pete time to think over that analysis. Then, after Demo had floored somebody who took the two of diamonds, Pete suggested:

"Why not let Winstrom keep buying up old apparatus? Then go around to his place and ask to look it

over just for curiosity? He's an obliging sort, Winstrom."

"I thought of that," said Demo. "But I finally decided that I wouldn't be soon enough, going through stuff after it reached Winstrom. Tonight I found out I was right."

Remembering Demo's jittery mood at the time of his return through the window, Pete waited for his eccentric friend to say more.

"Cigam dug out a lot of old apparatus," declared Demo, "and sold it all to Winstrom as a lot. I figured it wouldn't be shipped until Monday so I decided to break into Cigam's and give the stuff a proper preview. Only somebody got there ahead of me."

"Who?"

"I don't know, except that there was some shooting, and I met somebody coming out. I don't know who it was and I haven't an idea what happened in Cigam's shop. I only hope you'll believe me, Pete."

The telephone rang just as Demo's tone became an ardent plea. Deepening his voice to the sepulchral, Demo went into his customary act as he informed some stranger that the queen of spades was the selected card.

By then, Pete Noland had decided to believe Demo Sharpe where tonight's adventure was concerned. A lot of odd things were possible in the world of magic.

After all, Pete hadn't believed that the telephone mystery would work until Demo had demonstrated it and explained the system. Since then Pete had played a personal part in the seemingly incredible.

Pete Noland was only on mystery's threshold. As yet he had never met The Shadow!

CHAPTER IV

Unacquainted with the secret history of the Great Savanti, Lamont Cranston actually spent a brief portion of Sunday morning weighing the police theory regarding the death of Louie the Grift.

The man who voiced the theory was Inspector Joe Cardona; and it was avidly received by Clyde Burke, the reporter whom The Shadow had hoped to provide with a scoop while supplying Cardona with a living safe-cracker instead of a murder victim.

Here in the magic shop, opened specially for the occasion, Cardona was putting the quiz on Cigam and doing it emphatically. Cardona's theory was that Cigam had been in the shop, plugged the prospective burglar and gone out by his own back window. Joe kept telling Cigam that the law would be tolerant with a man who had resisted invasion of his own premises, but Cigam seemed to doubt it.

Cranston flashed a look at Burke.

"Say, Joe," put in the reporter suddenly. "Wasn't Louie the Grift a great pal of Side-face Sam?"

A furrowed forehead became Cardona's answer.

"Maybe you've got something, Burke -"

"You might have something if you picked up Side-face," suggested Clyde. "Particularly if you got him to talk out the right side of his mouth."

Of course Cranston had relayed that suggestion through Burke simply to get the law working along the

right track, only now the law was beginning to do it anyway. For certain of Cigam's friends and customers, reached by telephone, were beginning to arrive. They'd found it rather difficult getting up this early on Sunday morning, about eleven o'clock.

First was Zed Zito, the blunt-faced, rather ruddy man who looked like anything but a magician. There was the showman's air about Zed, though, his dead pan and cold but precise tone giving an effect of authority to everything he said. Zed's hands, though blocky, were the sort that could be deft; moreover they were big enough to hide things. Cranston could tell that when he looked at them, and he particularly noted the purposely slow way in which Zed Zito moved those hands.

Next came Val Varno.

Here was a wizard who looked as clever as he was, maybe more so. Or perhaps Val wasn't too clever, putting up that sort of front. While he listened to proceedings, this sallow, undersized deceptionist kept doing things with his hands, which were as long as Zito's but not as wide.

Varno's left was working the coin roll, making a half dollar run somersaulting across his knuckles in a smooth, uncanny fashion. His right was simply taking his cigarette from his lips between the short, rapid puffs which was Val's way of enjoying a smoke.

Only Val Varno couldn't even take a cigarette from his mouth as the normal human would. He invariably raised his hand palm frontward so that the backs of his fingers pressed his lips when he removed the cigarette. Then by some peculiar flip he made the cigarette do a complete turn-over, so that when he put it back in his mouth his hand was as it should be, the backs of the fingers away from his face.

Just about the time an onlooker was hoping to catch on to this intricacy, Varno's cigarette would get too short for further manipulation, so he would stop the coin roll, pocket the half dollar, and bring out a handkerchief which he laid over his left hand. Poking down some cloth with his right thumb, Varno would drop the cigarette butt into the pocket thus formed, then suddenly spread the handkerchief, showing the cloth unburned, the cigarette butt gone.

Replacing the handkerchief, Varno would reach in the air, pluck a fresh cigarette already lighted and start another smoke, while his other hand came out with the half dollar to resume the coin roll. Only this time, Val varied the process by ending the roll with a spreading movement of his hand which multiplied the coin to two, edgewise between his finger tips. Then each hand took a coin and both were starting that tantalizing roll when Cardona inserted a growled interruption.

"Cut that trick stuff!" ordered the inspector. "All right, Varno, what have you got to say?"

"The same as Zito," returned Val, briefly.

"But you weren't here when Zito testified," argued Cardona. "So how do you know what he said?"

"Because I was here yesterday afternoon when Zito was. That's what you're asking him about, isn't it?"

Cardona growled that it was.

"All right." Varno resumed the double coin roll. "That was all."

"What was all?"

"We all went out together. Cigam, Zito, myself" - Varno clinked the coins into his left hand, vanished them by a simple rub and showed his right hand empty as he gestured it to the door - "and our good friend here, Glanville Frost."

Maybe those polished coins served Varno as mirrors; otherwise Cardona couldn't guess how Val had seen the suave Mr. Frost enter. What Cardona hadn't observed was that two fancy caskets on Cigam's shelf of antique apparatus were polished even more brightly than Varno's coins.

From where Varno stood, one nicked casket reflected the other and the second mirrored the door. Cranston alone detected Varno's upward glance that gave him that double reflection. But the view wasn't good enough for Varno to see beyond Frost, to the arrival who followed him.

The other man was Wade Winstrom, the extravagant collector who had purchased Cigam's entire lot of antique stuff to add to his already oversized aggregation of obsolete magicana.

Frost had evidently caught Varno's statement for the suave man announced in silky tone:

"Whatever Varno and Zito agree upon, inspector, I can confirm. I was present, as Val says. I presume that Mr. Winstrom will corroborate their statements too."

It was rather subtle of Frost to put it that way, since he would prove either Zito or Varno a liar if the two didn't agree. Particularly subtle since Frost's reputation in the magical fraternity was that of a promiser, which was a polite way of saying he wasn't exactly trustworthy.

As for Frost's added touch, that of involving a man of substance like Winstrom, this was just another evidence of the smooth gentlemen's subtlety. Frost was the sort who could have sold magicians palming oil if he'd wanted.

This didn't go with Cigam.

"Don't count Mr. Winstrom in this," Cigam protested in defense of his best customer. "He left before the rest of us did, by ten minutes at least."

Frost only smiled.

"Calm yourself, Cigam," he suggested. "I'm not hurting your business. Mr. Winstrom merely stopped off at my factory to look at an old cabinet illusion which I regarded as a collector's item. That shouldn't annoy you, Cigam. You don't deal in large illusions."

"Neither do I," commented Winstrom, drily. "They take up too much storage room and you can't show them to your friends. Nevertheless I like to see them demonstrated."

"You'll see the Golden Pagoda tonight," promised Frost, in the emphatic tone that meant this was one promise he intended to keep. "I'm doing it at the U.W.A. show." He smiled at Cardona. "Maybe you ought to buy a ticket, inspector. Cigam sells them."

"I'm not thinking of magic shows," grumbled Cardona. "I'm thinking of magic shops and this one especially. When a magic shop gets turned into a shooting gallery, I want to know why."

Winstrom gave Cigam an anxious glance.

"My apparatus," he queried, "is it all right?"

"Except that somebody was fooling with it," returned Cigam. "They had the clock working and the ball. The same with the big head."

Looking toward the shelf, Winstrom saw the satyr's head with the aces roosting between its horns and the mouth wide in a horrified gape.

"If anything was damaged," began Winstrom, "I won't buy it. If you had shipped that apparatus earlier -"

"I'm shipping it right now," interrupted Cigam, "if the inspector here will let me."

Cardona nodded that he would and turned the same nod into a sign of dismissal for all present. So they filed out with the exception of Cigam, who stayed because he owned the shop, and Cranston who, as a friend of the police commissioner, could claim some special privilege.

In fact Cardona was glad that Cranston stayed.

As they stood in the back room watching Cigam take the antique apparatus through openings behind the shelves, Cardona tried out his theory on Cranston.

"If the clock dial and the rising ball were working," declared Cardona, "somebody must have been back here, wouldn't you say?"

Studying the appliances mentioned, Cranston nodded, so Cardona added:

"And the same with the big head. And for one special reason. Look here." He stopped Cigam from turning the satyr's head edgewise to bring it through the space behind the shelf. "The only way the killer could have plugged Louie the Grift, was by shoving a revolver through the satyr's mouth from the back. What's more, he'd have to wait until the mouth opened, which is the last thing it does." Joe turned to Cigam.

"Am I right?"

Cigam nodded soberly, but only Cardona saw him do so. Cranston was looking elsewhere, among spaces between the back room packing boxes and a cranny where the sides of two filing cabinets didn't quite meet.

That gap was right behind the satyr's head. Something glittered from the floor and Cranston shoved a file cabinet aside to pick up the object. It proved to be a black wand with nickel-plated tips.

"Somebody must have put that wand on a file cabinet," said Cigam, "and it rolled down between. Magicians have a lot of trouble with wands rolling off their tables. Sometimes they use square wands so they won't roll."

"This wand didn't roll," commented Cranston. "It couldn't. Look at it."

Looking, Cigam saw a little knob on the side of the wand, set in a slit which actuated a plunger. Amazed, he exclaimed:

"A firing wand!"

"A firing wand?" queried Cardona. "What's that?"

"An improvement over a magician's pistol," explained Cranston. He pressed the knob and there was the sharp click of a hammer. "A wave of this wand, you hear a shot and see a spurt of fire. Now suppose -"

Pausing, Cranston inserted the wand through the back of the satyr's head so that the wand's open tip extended out from the mouth of the big false face. Reaching around, Cranston lifted the satyr's jaw so that the wand stayed in the closed mouth.

"This head is practically an automaton," explained Cranston. "Start its mechanism and it goes through a whole routine of contortions, opening its mouth for a finale."

As Cranston let the jaw drop to illustrate his point, there was another sharp click from the wand.

"A hair-trigger," commented Cranston. "Rather odd for a firing wand. This one can shoot bullets; it's practically a pistol composed entirely of barrel. But it doesn't have the weight of a gun, so the recoil would send it some distance." His hand supporting the wand behind the satyr's head, Cranston gave it a straight, deft backward toss. "Like this."

The wand arched into the space between the file cabinets. Cardona pounced after it, exclaiming:

"So that's what killed Louie the Grift!"

Cigam's wits were coming back. Hoarsely he protested that the firing wand wasn't his, that he'd never seen it until the present moment. In fact there hadn't been a firing wand around Cigam's shop during the dozen years that he had owned it, not even among the lot of old apparatus that he had excavated. Firing wands were very rare.

So ardent was Cigam's plea that Cardona was inclined to believe him. Joe looked at Cranston hoping the commissioner's friend would have some more ideas.

Cranston had one. He smiled as he gave it.

"Good-bye inspector," said Cranston. "I'll be seeing you at the magic show."

CHAPTER V

The late editions of the Sunday morning newspapers carried a small item about the death of Louie the Grift, but the details were meager. Nevertheless, Demo Sharpe took great pains to show the story to Pete Noland as they sat in Demo's apartment along about the middle of the afternoon.

Such frank procedure gave Demo the opportunity to interpret the case his own way.

"You see what I mean," insisted Demo. "Somebody must have guessed that I was going to crack into Cigam's, only they expected me to use the front way."

It sounded logical to Pete, who nodded. Then:

"Only how would they be expecting you?" Pete inquired. "Everybody knows you're supposed to be up here, answering phone calls on the telephone trick."

"The killer wasn't necessarily thinking in terms of me," expressed Demo. Then, with an odd stare that he used in working out mysteries like his telephone stunt, he continued: "It's known, though, that somebody is going around to all sorts of junk shops, hunting up old magic apparatus. That's what I've been doing evenings."

Things were adding up in Pete's mind. He could picture Demo sliding in and out of obscure stores, keeping himself well muffled as he looked over anything resembling old apparatus that might have belonged to Savanti.

"I've been calling up old timers too," added Demo. "Magicians that most everybody has forgotten. I haven't told them who I was. I've made my voice different just like you've been faking mine. But anyone who is on the trail of Savanti's stuff may have learned about those calls."

Aloud, Pete began to check the names of persons who might prove to be Demo's rival bidder. Naturally he picked individuals whom he had at some time seen at Cigam's shop.

"There's Val Varno," began Pete, "but he goes in for sleights, so apparatus wouldn't be in his line. Take Glanville Frost, he manufactures apparatus, but mostly he makes illusions for night clubs or stage acts. Zed Zito has a lot of smaller equipment, but his stuff isn't strictly magic. Let's see now - who else -"

"Why?"

Demo put the query so abruptly that it stopped Pete short.

"You mean that's enough of a list?" demanded Pete. "If that's the case, it's my turn to ask why."

"Because those fellows fit my case," explained Demo, simply. "I don't bother with apparatus either. I'm a mentalist, doing mysteries of the mind." He gestured to a stack of typewritten papers on a desk.

"Daytimes I'm working on my new book called 'Mental Marvels' and evenings I'm servicing customers who bought my telephone miracle. If I'm smart enough to cover my real interest, so is the fellow who is trying to beat me to it."

Demo's ingenious argument won Pete completely. Pete gave a worried shrug, then reverted to his frank policy.

"I didn't ask for a split on this Savanti proposition," put in Pete. "Why don't you take my share as yours and sound these chaps out, offering a fifty-fifty basis?"

"And put three of them in the market?" retorted Demo. "Not a chance. Where they're concerned, my motto is 'All for one and nothing for anybody else' - because that's the way they work."

Again, Demo had nailed his point home.

"Let's keep on playing it my way," Demo insisted. "You stick around and handle the phone trick for me, so I can slide out again tonight."

"You're sure it's safe, Demo?"

"I'm only going to buzz old Professor Del Weird over at the Universal Wizards show."

"But you can't let anybody see you there!"

"I'll get in the back way and talk to the Prof in his dressing room. He just came into town and he doesn't know about my phone mystery. He won't care, either. He doesn't think a trick is any good until it's been tested fifty years."

"Del Weird doesn't use much apparatus."

"He may have stowed some away in years gone by and some of it could have been Savanti's."

Pete's smooth forehead furrowed. He was worrying over Demo's dilemma more than his friend was.

"Wade Winstrom is throwing a buffet supper," reminded Pete. "Del Weird will be there of course. Why don't you go there to him before the show?"

"And try to outbid Winstrom on buying apparatus?" snorted Demo. "No, I'll have to see Del Weird privately and get him to hold out on any tricks that may have been Savanti's. I can top Winstrom on a few items, particularly if Del Weird hasn't given him the list."

"Besides" - Demo shook his head reminiscently - "it's hard to break away from Winstrom when he gets in a chatty mood. The last time I was there, six o'clock was slipping by before I realized it. Lucky I had you

planted over here. What's more, the supper is only for U.W.A. members. You know what that means: 'Usually We're Amateurs'."

Pete smiled at the quip involving the U.W.A. initials. Of the professional magicians appearing in tonight's show, only Del Weird belonged to the Universal Wizards Association; the rest, like Varno, Frost and Zito, had been hired to bolster the bill. So Pete acquiesced to Demo's plan regarding a clandestine interview with Del Weird, Pete's part being to miss the show, which was no hardship, and continue to play Demo's role of the master mind across the telephone.

There were others, however, who considered Winstrom's supper to be a rather important occasion. One such person was Lamont Cranston, who at present was riding by cab to Winstrom's hotel, accompanied by a girl named Margo Lane. Quite intrigued by the thought of meeting a group of magicians, Margo suddenly exclaimed:

"But Lamont! If only magicians are invited to this supper, how can you get in there?"

Cranston smiled. As The Shadow he had ways of getting into places that would have mystified even a magician, but that wasn't the chief reason for his smile.

"It isn't exactly a magicians' party," Cranston explained. "It's being given for the members of the Universal Wizards Association, which happens to be a magical society."

"But they must all be magicians -"

"Not all of them." Still smiling, Cranston brought out a card and showed it to Margo. Bearing Cranston's name, it was a membership card in the Universal Wizards Association. "I joined the U.W.A. this afternoon and paid my five dollars for a year's dues."

"You mean all you need is five dollars to belong to a magical society?"

"They're the ones who need the five dollars," replied Cranston. "The U.W.A. is having a membership drive. Wade Winstrom saw me down at Cigam's, thought I must be interested in magic, so he phoned me at the Cobalt Club."

The cab was stopping at the palatial Hotel Chianti where Winstrom lived and where the Wizards were holding their show in the grand ball room, a coincidence indicating that Winstrom probably had a large say regarding the policy of the U.W.A.

Cranston and Margo rode up to Winstrom's penthouse and found a flock of Wizards there. None of them wore goatees; they were largely a lot of tired-looking business men mostly in their portly forties. Their wives were present in abundance and Margo was promptly swallowed by the ladies auxiliary whose chief topic of conversation was the amount of time their husbands were wasting on that most detestable of hobbies, magic.

In glimpses that she obtained between the shoulders of the broadaxes, Margo was almost inclined to agree. The wizards were fumlbers when it came to doing impromptu tricks, turning their backs to arrange special packs of cards when they tried to fool each other. Maybe they found it fun, but it didn't look like magic.

Wade Winstrom, though, was different. For all his austere looks, Winstrom was quite genial and enjoyed it when his fawning guests admired the array of magical apparatus that stocked his spacious living room. Margo joined the group that followed Winstrom into his library where there were shelves upon shelves of magic books that appeared to be in the immaculate condition of jobs fresh from the bindery.

Finding Lamont nearby, Margo remarked upon the fine condition of Winstrom's volumes.

"They should be in good shape," was Cranston's comment. "I've heard that Winstrom never unlocks the book cases, let alone read the books themselves. But you still have a lot to see. Come this way, Margo."

This way led into a windowless room where Winstrom kept his exhibit of play bills. There were a few hundred of them, all in tall narrow frames and many of the specimens were more than a century old, extolling the merits of such historical magicians as the Chevalier Pinetti, Professor Anderson, and Signor Blitz.

However, Winstrom dismissed the play bills with a careless wave of his imperious hand and ended the gesture by introducing a wizened gentleman who looked like the living relic of the conjurors described in the posters.

"Professor Del Weird," boomed Winstrom. "I know you'll be glad to meet him, those of you who haven't already."

Old Del Weird bobbed a toothless smile from beside a table where he was unpacking a lot of fancy glassware from an old battered suitcase.

"The professor does the wine and water act," announced Winstrom. "The trick baffles me every time I see it. I know it will make a big hit tonight."

Absent-mindedly, Del Weird was reaching in the various pockets of his over-sized frock coat. In plaintive tone he spoke to Winstrom:

"I must have left that package in my overcoat. Where would my overcoat be, Mr. Winstrom?"

"I'll ask one of the servants," replied Winstrom. "He'd know. But don't worry yourself, professor. It's two hours yet before show time."

Quite relieved, Del Weird regained his senile smile. Then, noting a lady present, the professor bowed profoundly. Plucking an embroidered cloth from his table, Del Weird showed it back and front and from its folds suddenly produced a glass of red wine which he tendered in Margo's direction.

As the girl gasped at this quick surprise, Del Weird withdrew the glass and holding it in one hand swept the cloth across it. In the brief time that the glass was covered, its contents changed from wine to water.

Margo was still speechless when Del Weird bowed, raised the glass and drank it as a toast, all without a word. Staring at the others, Margo met Winstrom's beaming gaze.

"Why - why -" Margo paused to halt her stammers. "Why, it's the most amazing thing I ever saw!"

"You'll see a lot greater surprises tonight," promised Winstrom. "I think you'll like magic, Miss Lane."

Cranston too was smiling at Margo's reaction, but the rest of the Wizards looked bored. They had seen Del Weird's tricks too often to be impressed.

Nevertheless, Winstrom's prediction stood. People were going to have a real surprise before tonight's show ended.

CHAPTER VI

The Chianti ball room was on the ground floor of the hotel and it had a stage that turned it into an

excellent auditorium. Only no one was in the auditorium at curtain time; instead, people generally were flooding the large foyer. The same people usually bought tickets to a magic show and they knew that none of the performances began on time.

Besides, the U.W.A. show was being stolen before it even started. To pass the time, somebody had tried Demo's telephone mystery and now everybody was at it.

There was a string of half a dozen phone booths in the foyer and people were using all of them, all trying to get the same number. This bothered Margo so she asked Lamont about it. Looking up from the fancy program he was studying, Cranston said:

"Think of a card, Margo. Got one?"

"Why, yes. The ace of diamonds."

"Grab one of those phone booths," instructed Cranston. "Call the same number as the rest of the people, Anaconda 4-8601. Better write it down before you forget it, because you may be a while putting a call through."

"And then?"

"Ask for Demo Sharpe, tell him who you are and that a friend said for you to call him. He'll tell you what card you took."

"If this is a gag -"

Margo halted, deciding that even as a gag, it would be a good one. She went to a booth, was lucky to get a quick call through. A voice mysteriously responded and heard what Margo had to say. Then the voice announced:

"You took the ace of diamonds."

Margo just stood there, flabbergasted. She didn't even realize that she'd hung up the receiver until the phone bell began to jangle it. Margo answered, wondering if the amazing Demo was calling back to read some more of her mind. It was only the switchboard operator saying there was a call for Professor Del Weird.

At that moment the professor came waddling by, carrying his suitcase flat in front of him so as not to damage the glassware set inside. Margo beckoned him to the phone booth, and finding the call was for him, Del Weird handed her the suitcase, saying to hold it carefully.

So there was Margo standing outside the booth with the professor inside. Still very puzzled, Margo looked up suddenly as she heard Del Weird say, through the half-open door:

"Oh, hello, Demo."

Could it be that Demo was really calling back?

Margo was sure she'd heard right, but Del Weird didn't repeat Demo's name again. Instead, he affirmed that he'd sold all his old apparatus and that he couldn't be bothered until after the show. Finally he conceded that he could be reached in his dressing room after he finished his act.

With that, Del Weird came from the booth and without even a thank you, took his suitcase from Margo and blundered off through a door marked "Stage."

Going over to where Cranston was, Margo said:

"Lamont, this is all very puzzling, but -"

"But don't talk about it now," supplied Cranston. "The telephone trick always works and I know it's wonderful. But right now I'm looking for somebody who ought to be here but isn't."

"And I'm telling you about somebody who ought to be somewhere else, but isn't," persisted Margo. "I mean Demo Sharpe."

Cranston's eyes went quizzical.

"Demo called back," explained Margo, "and he talked to Del Weird. But all the while people were in those phone booths talking to Demo. Of course maybe they were just getting the busy signal."

Perhaps that was the answer, but Cranston wasn't letting it pass that simply. Instead, he said something that was very unusual for him.

"I wonder!"

Then, showing Margo the program, Cranston explained what he had found.

"Here's a list of the reception committee," said Cranston. "You'd think they'd all be here; they aren't. A chap named Pete Noland is missing."

"Maybe he couldn't get here."

"There's another reason Noland ought to be around," continued Cranston. "He reviews these shows for a magical paper called The Wivern under the name of Paracelsus Junior. He certainly shouldn't be missing this present function."

"But what has that to do with Demo Sharpe?"

"A lot. I'm not restricting the list of murder suspects just to persons who were at Cigam's yesterday and who happen to be working in tonight's show."

"You mean it was murder at Cigam's?"

"Somebody certainly planted that firing wand too neatly. Whoever did wasn't expecting Louie the Grift. Crooks don't advertise robberies in advance."

"Then the murderer mistook Louie for somebody else?"

"Very probably. Louie's back was to the light. His face couldn't have been seen through that space behind the satyr's head."

Cranston spoke impassively as though he had learned all this today. He wasn't even suggesting to Margo that he'd been in Cigam's at the very moment when murder struck. In analyzing this case of murder by magic, Cranston was not neglecting any magical clues and Demo's telephone trick was looming as one of them.

Checking some time notes that he had made on the margin of his program, Cranston decided on his course.

"I'm going over to Demo's now," he confided to Margo. "I'll have just time enough to get back before Del

Weird finishes his act. I'll see you later, Margo."

Cranston went through the door marked "Stage" carrying his briefcase with him. Remembering something else she'd wanted to ask, Margo started after. Past the door she saw a group of dressing rooms, off at another angle a wing of the stage where several performers were arguing because each intended to do the other's tricks.

None of them noticed the further door, past the dressing rooms, that Margo saw closing. It was very dark beyond that door, but as the blackness suddenly cleared, Margo saw the glimmer of alley lights.

Then did Margo Lane realize that she'd witnessed one of The Shadow's strange evaporations. Too late with her question, she went back and around into the auditorium which by now was filled with people.

As for Lamont Cranston, now become The Shadow, he took a rapid ride in his own cab, the same cab that had brought him here with Margo, its driver the speediest hackie in New York. The driver's name was Shrevvy and he clipped about five minutes off The Shadow's estimated time in getting to the Albuquerque Arms, the apartment house where Demo Sharpe lived.

This gave The Shadow extra minutes to gauge the location of Demo's apartment. The Arms was a swank apartment with doorman, clerk and elevator operators, a gamut that The Shadow didn't care to run as Cranston. What intrigued The Shadow was the much less pretentious apartment building next door, which nestled up against the Arms as though the two were a pair of love birds.

There was a ledge that looked too narrow to be even a cat-walk, but The Shadow knew his ledges and could gauge their proper size from the street. So he glided into the adjoining building, took the automatic elevator to the top floor and found an exit to the roof.

Then, navigating the ledge of the Albuquerque Arms, The Shadow moved like an unseen wraith around the corner and followed his ample path to the lighted window that represented Demo's apartment.

The telephone mystery was still doing steady business, which proved that plenty of magicians didn't attend the U.W.A. shows. But it wasn't Demo Sharpe on the receiving end. The man handling the apartment's private line was Pete Noland.

One pleasant feature of investigating a magical murder was the ease with which anyone could recognize whichever magicians might be involved. One wall of Cigam's shop, opposite the longer display shelves, was completely covered with autographed pictures of the local magic. The Shadow hadn't missed a face in that prospective rogue's gallery while he had been at Cigam's today. The accompanying names had likewise impressed themselves upon his mind.

If The Shadow had wanted to go into the magic business he could have prepared a memory training system that would have outsold the popular brand that Cigam peddled at five dollars.

Though Demo's system of telephone telepathy was just a trick, constant concentration upon it seemed to have stimulated Pete's extra-sensory perceptions. As he finished naming the nine of clubs for someone, Pete turned suddenly and stared straight at The Shadow's window.

Or perhaps it was a peculiar darkening of the window, which though ever so slight, had caught Pete's tense attention. Now, Pete saw the blackness unblur and he frowned at the familiar glimmer of the city lights beyond. Like Margo he had witnessed The Shadow's process of what could be styled evaporation.

Coming over to the window, Pete pulled it open, stared along the blackened ledge. He couldn't see The

Shadow now, the cloaked shape was so close to the wall. In a hoarse, anxious whisper, Pete voiced - "Demo!" and then stared downward.

The tingling telephone broke into Pete's fear that his friend had plunged below. Mechanically, Pete went back to answer what might be his last call. His voice came gladly: "Demo!"

Through the open window, The Shadow heard Pete's end of the conversation.

"Guess I was getting jittery, Demo." Pete gave a half-laugh, "Thought you were outside the window just now... What's that? Maybe there is something in telepathy? You might be right... Yes, it was funny I'd think you were here just when you phoned..."

"You're seeing Del Weird? Kind of risky, Demo... Well, maybe you can make him stay mum... Only, I'm worrying what if anybody else sees you... A good stunt for the book? I get it - how to be two places at the same time... But that's one secret you'd better not give away... Good luck, Demo... Better hang up now. Customers are waiting..."

When, after a couple of more card calls, Pete went over and closed the window, the outside ledge was actually unoccupied. The Shadow had learned all he needed at Demo's, at least for the present.

His theory established, The Shadow was on his way back to the Hotel Chianti and further along the trail of magical murder as well.

Only sometimes trails moved faster than the person who followed them. That was something The Shadow knew but he hadn't applied the rule in this case.

At least not yet.

CHAPTER VII

Margo Lane was getting her first impression of a magic show.

The bill was opened by a dapper amateur who tore some strips of tissue paper and turned them into a fancy party hat. Next he fanned whole packs of playing cards in clever style. Finally he did the well-known trick of clanging a lot of big rings and making them link and unlink.

Next on the bill was Val Varno. He did his short act: just the card fans. Val added a few flourishes that the amateur either hadn't learned or couldn't do.

Another amateur followed with a rapid act in which only three out of a dozen tricks went wrong, Two that went all right were the paper hat and the linking rings.

By then people were beginning to look around the audience instead of at the show. They received smiles, austere ones, from Wade Winstrom, who would have shaken hands, too, if his reach had been long enough. All the way down from the penthouse and during the half hour that people were around the foyer, Winstrom had been smiling and shaking hands. That seemed to be his idea of a magic show.

The bill spruced up when Zed Zito appeared. He introduced a very attractive blonde whom he called Miss Libra. She could change her weight under Zito's hypnotic power, so Zito said. While Zed was getting a committee on the stage, he had Miss Libra do a trick, since this was a magic show.

Miss Libra did the paper hat.

Margo saw some people sneak out from the audience. They were going to have a smoke in the foyer and

try the telephone to see if Demo could still name cards in his uncanny way. Demo's trick could stand repetition that others could not.

Deciding to sit through Zito's act, Margo was well-rewarded. The act was really good. When Zito said "Heavy!" strong men found themselves unable to lift Miss Libra. When he said "Light" she became as a feather. To prove it really happened, Zito had Miss Libra stand on a scales. Her weight went down to twenty-five pounds at his command of "Light" and rose to two hundred and fifty when he thundered "Heavy!"

For the finish, Zito hitched Miss Libra to a rope which ran up over a big pulley above the stage. Three men took the other end of the rope and with no effort hauled the girl a dozen feet above the stage. Zito commanded "Heavy!" and Miss Libra came straight down while the surprised committee men went up on their end of the rope, all three of them at once.

It was really very good and the audience remained patient even when Glanville Frost, suave and sleek, appeared and started his act with card fans. Quite smooth, Frost won real applause which faded suddenly when an assistant brought him a stock of linking rings.

Frost talked the audience down. He said that his version of the rings was the correct Chinese edition, taught to him by Ching Ling Foo. Even Winstrom seemed to swallow that, though his own play bills upstairs would have proven that Ching went back to China when Frost was only three years old. But Frost, the clever showman, held his audience by adding that the rings were a necessary introduction to his finale, the famous Golden Pagoda, now to be shown for the first time.

Under his breath Frost might have added "in fifty years;" but if he did, nobody heard him.

Frost was bowing from an armor of tangled rings when the curtain rose disclosing the famous pagoda. It was a miniature pagoda measuring about four feet every direction and it stood on a little platform so that people could see beneath it. Shaking himself free of the rings, Frost opened the whole front of the pagoda and showed it empty; then he and the assistant wheeled it around.

Closing the pagoda, Frost recited something in Chinese; there was a puff of smoke and flame, the pagoda sprang open, top and all, and a girl in Chinese costume rose to take a bow. It was a really startling illusion and everybody applauded heavily, particularly when they saw that the girl was Miss Libra and that Frost had been forced to do the other tricks to give her time to change costume.

Then Professor Del Weird came on and Margo Lane gave up. If after fifty years of wand wielding, Del Weird hadn't learned a better opening than the paper hat trick, Margo didn't want to watch him. Besides, those were the inevitable linking rings hanging over a T-stand behind the table where a pitcher and a row of glasses were set for the wine and water specialty.

Margo wanted more than a smoke, she wanted a drink if the cocktail lounge was still open, and she was so sick of magic she didn't even care about testing Demo's telephone mystery. So she started out to the foyer only to find herself stopped by a man who wore a badge that said "Committee."

"You can't interrupt Professor Del Weird -"

"That so?" queried Margo. "Well, if he turns torn papers into a hat, I'll scream and that will really interrupt him."

Another committee man decided in Margo's favor. Already she had drawn considerable attention at the back of the house and among the persons who stared her way was Inspector Joe Cardona. He had an expression that resembled the Great Stone Face and was obviously annoyed because he had come here

at Cranston's suggestion only to find Cranston himself absent.

Seeing Cardona brought Margo's mind back to stark reality. When she reached the foyer, she threw a look at the door marked "Stage" and saw a muffled man entering it. He had rapid striding legs under a coat that was hunched over his shoulders and his hand was across his mouth holding a cigarette from which he blew a heavy cloud to hide his face.

That was hardly necessary, considering that his hat was tipped down over his eyes, but he could still see well enough to notice Margo looking his way. Increasing his already rapid pace, the man went through the door, slamming it behind him.

Margo gathered a very good hunch that this was Demo. She went through the stage door, too, and saw the muffled man bob out of sight into a dressing room. A girl's voice gave an excited protest and the man came out again.

"I'm sorry," Margo heard him mutter. "I was just looking for Professor Del Weird."

A girl's arm pointed from the doorway.

"That's his dressing room over there!"

The girl was Miss Libra draped in a hastily arranged towel. Two doors closed as Margo neared them, one admitting Demo Sharpe to Del Weird's dressing room, the other declaring that Miss Libra wanted no more unannounced visitors.

Now Margo knew that the man was really Demo. His voice, losing all disguise, had been identical with the tone across the telephone!

On stage, Del Weird was doing the wine and water. Margo stopped for a view from the wings. It was much more elaborate than the simple trick the professor had done earlier. He was pouring glasses from the pitcher, some wine, some water; then pouring them back into the pitcher, which suddenly became all water.

Yet that same pitcher was pouring wine and water again, alternately. Mixed, the various liquids turned to wine. Yet from a pitcher full of wine, Del Weird poured only water, half a dozen glasses of it!

This was so amazing that Margo stood enthralled, forgetting all about Demo. And now a great, hollow buzz came from the audience. Professor Del Weird was about to prove that his demonstration had been truly magical. As Del Weird picked up the linking rings, he pretended to remember the thing he hadn't forgotten. With a bland smile, he turned, picked up the last glass in the line and raised it to his lips.

Del Weird was going to drink the result of all his transformations to prove that it was truly harmless water. Margo could hear the words "He drinks it!" repeated by various persons amid the stir of voices.

The professor drank it.

That audience was spared another demonstration of the ring trick.

Knees caving instantly, Professor Del Weird hit the stage so flat and hard that everybody knew he must be dead.

CHAPTER VIII

To say merely that pandemonium reigned would not have been doing justice to what pandemonium really

could make of itself.

The audience went wild with screams that were drowned by the clatter of the folding chairs used to turn the ball room into an auditorium. Nobody had to ask if there was a doctor in the house because there were plenty, all amateur magicians. They flooded the stage as fast as the performers from the wings.

It was Glanville Frost however who reached the spot first and seeing the rush of arrivals, Frost had the presence of mind to pick up the table beside which Del Weird lay and start to carry it off stage before anyone could upset it and ruin the precious glassware.

Frost was coming directly toward the wing where Margo stood when Zed Zito, arriving from an angle, blocked him in rather bulky style.

"Where are you taking that table?" Zito demanded. "Better put it over there by your pagoda and leave it alone!"

To prove his point, Zito practically scooped the table from Frost's hands, since the latter wasn't in any position to interfere. Momentarily it looked as though Frost intended to use his hands to punch Zito, but the blunt-faced hypnotist balked him by swinging around, thus blocking him off with the table itself.

For some reason this registered oddly with Margo and she looked around as though asking the advice of other witnesses. There was only one and that was Val Varno, who had sauntered from a dressing room and was watching proceedings with a casual eye while practicing his coin roll with his left hand.

It was then that the door of Del Weird's dressing room opened, just a chink it was true, but enough to catch that keen eye of Varno's. With a nudge of his free hand, Varno called to Frost:

"Better find out who's calling on Del Weird. There's somebody in his dressing room!"

Zito heard Varno's words too. In fact he couldn't have heard better if Val had timed it, for Zito was just turning from the wing where he had placed the professor's table beside the golden pagoda. As if neither wanted to be the last, Frost and Zito came lunging from the stage while Varno stepped aside to let them pass.

Neither got far, for by now a stocky man was arriving from the foyer door. This was Inspector Cardona, taking the shortest way back stage and Joe didn't intend to let anyone get off these premises. Impartially judged, Frost and Zito gave the impression that one was trying to get away while the other stopped him; which was which could be decided later.

Behind Cardona came others, among them Wade Winstrom who motioned people back, then rushed ahead to help Cardona. Smiling blandly at the commotion he created, Val Varno stepped back to a niche in the wall and began slowly placing hand over hand so that his animated coin could continue a perpetual waltz from one set of fingers to the other.

A horror was gripping Margo that the man in Del Weird's dressing room might not be Demo Sharpe!

If one person could fake Demo's voice, so could another. Lamont was due back by this time and perhaps he was trying to beat Demo at his own game, whatever that was. It could be that the mysterious caller was actually Cranston, for Margo had known him to try odder stunts than this.

And Margo wasn't taking any chances, not with murder again infringing upon magic!

While Varno was watching Cardona tangle with Frost and Zito, Margo took advantage of the moment to rush for Del Weird's dressing room. If Winstrom saw her, she wouldn't care; it might be all the better,

since he'd know she hadn't started there until after the cry of suspicion had been raised.

If Margo had given a thought to the alley door, she could have forgotten her needless trip right then. That exit was opening, with blackness its impelling force. The very blackness that meant The Shadow, if Margo had only looked!

The girl who looked was Miss Libra, coming from her own dressing room in the tangles of a kimono. She saw blackness mold itself into a cloaked shape that was vaguely human and this time her screech carried more of horror than surprise. An instant later, the cloaked figure was gone, the exit slamming automatically.

And people, a flock of them, were coming in Margo's direction, thinking that Miss Libra's frantic gesture was indicating Del Weird's door.

Already in the old Professor's room, Margo was finding that she'd taken a big chance after all.

The man who had ducked back was half way through the window. He wasn't Lamont, his form was too hunchy. Besides, it wasn't Cranston's voice that came hoarsely, savagely though withal forced in tone.

"Stand back! Stand back or I'll shoot!"

Whether it was Demo, Margo couldn't tell for the dressing room was dark except where the light from the corridor hit it. Not dark enough though to hide the big gun that the intruder brandished in his hand, an old-fashioned, one-shot pistol that belonged to Professor Del Weird and had the look of a blunderbuss.

Caught half off balance Margo couldn't turn about, so there she was, wondering if the antique gun could be loaded and hoping that it wasn't. That kind of cannon could blow the dressing room apart at this close range if the savage man let go with it. Shouts were almost at the door and even if Margo tried to stand back, she'd be swept off her feet.

Then the menace ended.

It ended when the man at the window went backward, outward with a snarl waving the gun as he went. It was blackness that took him, living blackness that could only be The Shadow.

Now Margo was sure that the man must be Demo since The Shadow, popping into the picture, had eliminated her silly theory about Lamont. Demo was slashing at something using the ancient pistol as a bludgeon. A chunk of gloved blackness stopped Demo's arm in mid-air and the pistol left his hand, scaling in through the window and landing almost at Margo's feet. Margo jumped away, but fortunately the gun didn't strike on its trigger and therefore it didn't go off.

But was it fortunate?

That question was to become a moot one, very promptly.

Cardona and three or four other men came piling into the dressing room as the pistol landed and saw the open window to the courtyard where The Shadow had intercepted Demo. Shouting something about the law and all it stood for, Cardona rushed to the window and squeezed through. One man followed him; the others, being bulkier, started around the other way.

That struck Margo as a good idea. On the way, however, she intended to look for Zito and Frost, who had somehow been left behind in the rush. But before Margo could even glance along the passage, every light back stage was suddenly extinguished!

There was another deluge of excitement and somewhere from its distance, Margo had the faint impression of the tinkle of breaking glass. Then out of the hubbub she heard Winstrom's strong voice urging everybody to be calm, to stay where they were or walk - not run - to the nearest exit,

Probably most of the people couldn't guess where the nearest exit was, but Margo wasn't bothered by that complication. Her nearest exit was right at hand, the alley door, and she reached it at something faster than a walk. Closing the door behind her, Margo cut off most of the confusion; then listened to sounds from the courtyard which formed a sizeable cul-de-sac around a corner of the building.

Sounds came first; then the sweep of flashlights. Evidently Cardona and his coterie weren't faring well in their hunt for an unknown intruder who happened to be Demo. Odd too that they didn't find him, for by now The Shadow certainly should have overpowered the man who was leading a peculiar double life.

Then the thought struck home to Margo that perhaps The Shadow didn't want to capture Demo. This was supported by the sounds that Margo heard of someone stealing out through the alley to the street. The Shadow wouldn't make that much noise, so it could only be Demo.

But where was The Shadow?

Peering boldly around the corner Margo watched the play of flashlights in the courtyard. One gleam suddenly moved upward, climbed the wall and swept along a third floor cornice that topped a low extension wall. Below the cornice was an upright oblong, the black outline of a window against the white wall.

As the flashlight focused there, the outline spread like an increasing blot which curiously continued upward like grappling hooks seeking a hold. That blot was The Shadow, reaching to grasp the overhanging cornice which gained a wavering effect as the flashlight moved in an unsteady hand.

Margo would have cried out if she could. Only to call a warning might attract the attention of eyes that had not yet seen the weave of that shape below the cornice. So far no one in the courtyard seemed to have noticed it; therefore silence was the better course.

Except that there were other eyes that no one took into accounting, not even The Shadow.

From that window of Del Weird's blacked out dressing room, a big gun throated a powerful message. The shot could only have come from Del Weird's oversized pistol for it sounded like a cannon and its flame glared from the wall like a lightning flash in miniature.

That message was meant for The Shadow, and its potency was proved by the result. Blackness was suddenly banished by a topple of something white; then, cleaving the blurred gloom below it, a chunk of cornice came crashing down and smashed the paving of the courtyard with a pulverizing force.

The window was a stern oblong once again. All traces of the spreading blot were gone!

CHAPTER IX

Inspector Cardona was after the answers to certain questions and wasn't getting them. Maybe it was because the people he was quizzing knew too little; perhaps it was because they knew too much.

At least it was a new experience for Cardona, dealing with a batch of magicians. Every man in the group seemed to be a past master at the art of equivoque, turning questions to suit their own purposes.

Two murders by magic in as many days convinced Cardona that the cases were connected; therefore he had narrowed down his quest to persons concerned in both. Cardona was conducting his quiz in

Winstrom's penthouse and the principal guests were three in number: Varno, Frost and Zito.

There were a few others, including Margo Lane, who had been invited too. One of these was Miss Libra, who in private life answered to the name of Claire Meriden. However Cardona was bearing down upon the men who might have had some individual reasons for murdering Professor Del Weird, only the problem was to find such reasons.

Like Winstrom himself, the three performers from tonight's show all expressed the greatest admiration for Del Weird, as they had known him in life and had the greatest regret for his unfortunate death.

"Del Weird was poisoned," announced Cardona, bluntly, as though everybody didn't know it. "What I'm after is who did it. Who fixed that wine and water trick with the kind of chemicals that would kill him?"

Eyes running along a row, Cardona took in Zed Zito and Glanville Frost, seated stiffly a short way apart. He looked at Wade Winstrom standing by the fireplace and studied Claire Meriden seated near, but Cardona gave them not much more than a passing glance.

The inspector's gaze settled stolidly on Val Varno who was almost in a corner by himself. Val had put away his coins and was practicing a triple one-hand cut with a pack of cards. Cardona didn't like the half-smirk that Varno gave him above the flipping pasteboards.

"Maybe you can tell me, Varno."

"Tell you what?" returned Val. "Who killed Del Weird?"

"That's right."

"You really want to know? All right, I'll tell you." Varno drew himself up in his chair, squared the pack with an emphatic clamp of his hand, and with all the manner of a man prepared to make a full confession, delivered his answer: "Del Weird!"

"That's enough, smart guy," retorted Cardona. "If you're trying to tell me it was suicide -"

"Only I'm not," interrupted Varno. "The old prof just got absent-minded, that's all. Probably brought along a lot of old-style chemicals forgetting he was going to do the new improved drinkable wine and water."

"Except that somebody could have switched in the poison stuff," reminded Cardona. "Or could they?"

He was leaving the question to Varno as an authority rather than a suspect, but Val was too smart to be taken in by that.

"I wouldn't know," was Varno's reply. "Wine and water isn't in my line. I stick to sleights" - he began manipulating the cards as if to prove it - "except for a few spook effects like the spirit slates. Better ask somebody who knows magic in general."

Cardona turned to Winstrom as the final authority but the big man shook his head.

"I am a collector," affirmed Winstrom. "Among my apparatus I have some involving liquids. For instance" - he turned to a large old-fashioned conjuring table that fairly teemed with antique apparatus - "here are two cylinders, two glasses and a decanter that belong to the 'Wonderful Separation of Liquids' in its improved form of sixty years ago.

"You mix wine and water in the decanter" - Winstrom gestured as though performing the trick and put the

cylinders over the glasses. "You run ribbons - ah, here they are - to each cylinder, white for water, red for wine. At command the liquid leaves the decanter; the wine arrives in one glass, the water in the other."

"Now we're getting somewhere," decided Cardona. "This is like Del Weird's wine and water trick."

"Nothing like it." Winstrom shook his head. "It works on an entirely different principle."

Speculatively Cardona's gaze roved the rest of Winstrom's large array of antique magic. Joe finally settled on a nickel-plated globe mounted upon a fluted pedestal. The globe had a dividing band around the center and it was topped with an ornamental knob.

"What kind of a trick is that?" Cardona asked, "Anything to do with wine and water?"

That brought a smile from Winstrom.

"It's a cannon ball globe," he said. "I'll show you."

Stepping over, Winstrom lifted the top half of the globe and revealed a fair-sized cannon ball which he lifted, tossed in air, and replaced in the globe. Putting the top half on again, Winstrom twisted it, lifted it again and showed them the cannon ball was gone, the globe now being filled with candy.

Even Cardona laughed at that.

"I had one of those in a trick box when I was a kid," said Joe, "only mine was a pocket model made of wood. They still sell them for two bits in the Broadway trick stores. Watch me bring back the cannon ball."

Cardona tried and did pretty well. When he put the top half of the globe in place, twisted it and lifted it, the cannon ball came back, but it was somewhat awry. It was made in two hollow hemispheres that fitted the respective halves of the globe, but Cardona was too hasty and failed to drop the top section of the cannon ball on straight.

"Anyway, that's the idea," apologized Joe. Then, getting back to the slight subject of murder, "But how about the wine and water?"

"My books explain numerous methods," stated Winstrom, waving in the direction of his library, "but I have never bothered with the trick because it is too messy. In fact I seldom do tricks at all. Not even these."

Winstrom's weary gesture to his general array of apparatus was self-expressive. Owning so much of it, Winstrom would hardly know where to begin and besides, the tricks themselves were mostly out of date. Cardona decided to concentrate upon something more modern. He turned to Frost.

"You make magic apparatus they tell me," asserted Cardona. "That wouldn't include a wine and water outfit, would it?"

"It would," returned Frost, coolly, "and it does. As many as five hundred customers have bought my instructions which include facts about chemicals, the poison kind that killed Del Weird. That gives you a lot of suspects, inspector."

His smile as sleek as his smooth, glossy hair, Frost seemed to be mocking Cardona openly. Rather than show he sensed it, Cardona turned abruptly to Zito and asked:

"You wouldn't be one of Frost's customers, would you?"

Zito's sneer was prompt.

"Do I look like a sucker?" he demanded. Then, bluntly: "But it isn't a question of who knows all about the wine and water. It's who fixed Del Weird's set-up down there in the dressing room."

Cardona decided to question a new and possibly impartial witness on that point. He turned to Claire Meriden.

"Who went into Del Weird's dressing room, Miss Meriden?"

"If you mean before his act," the blonde replied, "I wouldn't know. We were all back stage" - she was looking from Zito to Frost; then remembering she'd been in both their acts, she switched her gaze to Varno who was too busy with his cards to notice - "so any of us might have dropped in to talk with the professor. But after his act was on, I saw a muffled man go into the dressing room."

"The man who was there later?" queried Joe.

"I suppose so," nodded Claire. "I really didn't see his face. He blundered into my dressing room first but I was so busy hunting for something to wear that I hardly looked his way."

"I'd like to know who that chap was," grumbled Cardona, "except that he got to Del Weird's dressing room too late to be responsible for murder."

"I wouldn't say that exactly," put in Winstrom, drily. "From later reports, the fellow was pretty handy with that old gun he found in Del Weird's suitcase."

"It was somebody else who used the gun," corrected Cardona, throwing a significant look about the room. "The man we were after went out through the window. Later somebody threw the light switch and blacked out everything. If you want my opinion it was the man who threw the switch who did the shooting later."

Cold silence followed and Margo particularly felt its chill. Cardona was right; a trip from the back stage light switch to the dressing room would have been simple and the gun was lying where anyone would have stumbled over it. But Margo was thinking not in terms of the marksman but the target.

Half a ton of cornice cracked all over a smashed stone courtyard was a rather harrowing recollection, except that no human fragments had been found amid the ruin. That at least gave Margo hope that The Shadow had maneuvered one of his remarkable escapes from an almost certain death. Thinking in just such terms, Margo looked up to see a newcomer who was entering Winstrom's living room. She gave a glad cry:

"Lamont!"

Casual as ever, Cranston curbed Margo's over-enthusiasm with a slight but significant gesture. Then, in calm style, he said to Cardona:

"I hear there's been another murder, inspector."

Cardona acknowledged the fact.

"When murder strikes twice," Joe asserted, "it's bad enough. But when the same three people are there both times, it gets worse. However I'm holding nobody. I'll know where to reach them when it's

necessary."

Including Zito, Frost and Varno with his roundup gaze, Cardona gave a gesture of dismissal. As the three were filing out, Frost paused to inquire about another matter.

"That pagoda of mine," he reminded. "All right if I truck it out of here?"

Cardona nodded.

"Does the same go for my scales?" asked Zito. "I have the pulley rig too."

"Take them," growled Cardona. "There's nothing on the stage that counts, considering that somebody busted Del Weird's pitcher and glasses as soon as the light went out. Only it didn't help because there was enough trace of the liquids to prove that somebody switched in poison chemicals."

Either Cardona's glare was impartial or it was meant for all three of the departing men. Varno, the last to leave, gave a sharp, snappy rifle to the corner of his pack of cards.

"I carry my baggage with me," boasted Varno, fanning the pack as he went through the door. "Fifty-two pieces in all. No, wait! Fifty-three, but I don't need the extra piece. You can have the truck pick it up too."

As he turned the corner, Val Varno deftly plucked the joker from the remaining fifty-two cards. Just when Val was out of sight the card came skimming around the corner and whizzed past Cardona's chin to lodge under the front collar of his vest.

Cardona started toward the door only to stop as Claire Meriden blocked his path by bowing out. Turning to Winstrom, Cardona indignantly exhibited the joker. Winstrom took the card and nodded.

"Wonderful how that chap Varno does it," was Winstrom's comment. He gave the joker a clumsy toss and instead of skimming, the card merely fluttered to the floor. "I wish I could be clever like that!"

What Cardona replied failed to reach Margo's ears for she was drawing Cranston into the room where Winstrom kept the play-bills. Cranston motioned that he didn't want a report on what had happened in his absence; he'd hear it all from Cardona later. But Margo had something in her mind that she simply had to get off.

"Out in the courtyard!" Margo exclaimed. "Someone was climbing past a window and reaching for a cornice when a shot was fired from Del Weird's window -"

"And the cornice came down," added Cranston. "Only there wasn't anybody with it."

Margo nodded.

"It might have been that he found the cornice was already loose," suggested Cranston. "In that case he'd have swung down into the window instead of continuing up to the roof. Cornices don't make good parachutes, you know."

So that was it! The cornice had already begun its drop before the shot was fired. Its bulk had proven a falling shield against the spraying slugs from the blunderbuss pistol!

Leaving Margo to speculate on whether luck or rapid judgment had served The Shadow more, Lamont Cranston strolled out to the living room to hear Inspector Cardona summarize this night of crime.

CHAPTER X

Nearly six o'clock again, the hour when Demo Sharpe went on duty with his telephone trick or at least pretended to do so.

Only tonight, the night following the murder of Professor Del Weird, Demo was really planning to take over. He was worried though, as he looked up from the undersized portable typewriter where he was working at his manuscript. Pete Noland caught Demo's worried look.

"Take it easy, Demo," urged Pete. "If I believe your story, so will other people. Only you won't have to tell it, because you have a perfect alibi."

Demo shook his head.

"It isn't even a story," he argued. "I didn't get a chance to even see Del Weird. I was away from the place before the shooting started."

"And no one really saw you?"

"The girl did. The one they called Miss Libra, who Frost borrowed for the pagoda production. She might recognize me if she saw me again."

"Then don't let her."

Pete's advice was helpful but it didn't quiet Demo much.

"I want to know what's going on," insisted Demo. "Cigam is in the clear and he probably has heard a lot. If I went over to his shop, he might tell me a lot."

"Only his shop closes at six," reminded Pete. "Remember?"

Either Demo didn't remember or he didn't care. Other things were really more important.

"Cigam sent those old tricks to Winstrom yesterday," Demo declared, "and it's a cinch that Del Weird's shipment came in today. When I phoned Del Weird before the show he said he'd crated the stuff and expressed it to the Hotel Chianti. If I'd had a chance to see him, he might have agreed to let me have first look at it."

"Instead the first look will be Winstrom's," declared Pete, "if he even bothers to go through the stuff. He must be a couple of months behind, going through that assorted junk of his."

"I wouldn't be too sure." Demo shook his head, "Winstrom has a lot of servants around and any time they're idle, he has them arrange his magic apparatus. Let's hope they don't fool much with the stuff, unless what we want is still on the loose."

"You mean more of Savanti's original apparatus?"

"Yes. There's no way of accounting for all of it. Something else might bob up somewhere and be the very piece that had those Malkara jewels in it, only the one man who might know is dead."

"Del Weird?"

Nodding, Demo amplified his reply by producing an old frayed playbill. It was of a later date than the Malkara sample, but it advertised the Great Savanti. It was an American playbill announcing Savanti's tour across the country.

Among the big-print items the playbill stated:

THE PAGODA ILLUSION

OR

THE INVISIBLE FLIGHT

Invented by the Great Savanti during his
tour of the Orient, this creation proves that
a living person can be in two places at once!

Pete was particularly interested in the reference to the pagoda because it was the illusion that Frost had performed the night before, but Demo brushed that factor aside.

"If Frost had found those gems," declared Demo, "he wouldn't be bothering with making magical apparatus. Of course there's just a chance -"

Pausing, Demo snapped his fingers.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Frost stays open late. Get over to his workshop, Pete, and ask about the pagoda."

"You mean buy it?"

"Why not?" inquired Demo. "Have it shipped over here. Say you're getting up a big act, that's why you haven't been around much lately. Tell them I'm helping you rehearse."

As Pete started out the door, Demo remembered something.

"Better be back by seven though," said Demo. "I might want an hour for myself. The usual business. By the way, have them send up something to eat from downstairs."

Stopping in the little cafe off the lobby of the Albuquerque Arms, Pete relayed Demo's order. Nodding to clerk and doorman he went outside and was lucky enough to get a cab immediately. What Pete didn't see in the dusk was the cloaked figure close to the wall that signaled the cabbie to pick up this passenger and then moved toward the cab to hear the address that the driver repeated a trifle loudly.

The Shadow was picking up Pete's trail on the chance that it would serve as a temporary substitute for Demo's.

Reaching Frost's basement workshop in about twenty minutes, Pete found the place lighted. Inside was Zito, looking over a new guillotine illusion that Frost had just built. Nodding to Pete, Zito gestured to the guillotine which stood waist high. It contained a sort of stock where a girl could insert her head and hands, while above was a large cleaver set in slots.

"A nice chopper," commented Zito. "More gruesome than most. This one slices through the girl's arms as well as her neck, except of course it doesn't hurt her."

"I don't like it," returned Pete. "Any trick is likely to go wrong."

"Not this one," put in Frost, a trifle annoyed at Pete's criticism of his product. "It's fool proof."

"That's what Del Weird said about his wine and water," chimed a voice from a corner. "Maybe he was just a bigger fool than he thought."

The speaker was Val Varno. Why he was here, except to check on two suspects named Glanville Frost and Zed Zito, Pete couldn't guess, unless Val had begun to think in terms of an alibi, like Demo.

Or maybe it was because Val was practicing new manipulations with rhinestone-studded thimbles and wanted to get the opinion of such connoisseurs as Frost and Zito. He was a smoothie, Val Varno, in a way much more convincing than Frost's, if being smooth could be styled a convincing matter.

Pete concentrated on Zito.

"You're buying the guillotine?"

"That's right," replied Zito. "Seems out of my line, but it isn't. I'm going to present it as a feat of hypnotism, saying it can't hurt Claire while she's under the spell."

"You're dropping the light and heavy act?"

"No, no. This will just be an added feature. Useful too in case I'm held over and have to do the usual hyp routine. By the way, how did you like the weight act last night?"

"Didn't catch it," replied Pete. "In fact I've never seen it. By the way, who's Claire?"

"Claire Meriden. She works as Miss Libra. So you missed the Golden Pagoda, too. Claire doubled in that act."

"I've heard it was good," said Pete. He turned to Frost. "Want to sell the pagoda illusion, Glanville?"

Frost showed bland interest which was his equivalent of a nod.

"How much?" asked Pete.

"I couldn't say," returned Frost. "Not until you've seen it."

"And until I've tried it," added Pete. "How about shipping it over to Demo's? I'm staying there, working up my new show."

Frost picked up the telephone.

"The truck is due at the hotel shortly," said Frost. "It would be just as easy to drop the pagoda at the Albuquerque Arms as to bring it back here."

"Provided it isn't off the route to the Club Marimba," put in Zito. "My stuff is going there. And what about the chopper? The truck was to pick it up here."

"Take the guillotine in a cab," suggested Frost. "It's not too big and you won't have to wait around."

Accepting the suggestion, Zito hoisted the portable guillotine and started out with it. He expected Varno to open the door for him but Val was no longer around. Pete made a mental note of that, calculating that Val must have left within the last few minutes. The ways and means of Val Varno, seemed devious and doubtful to Pete Noland, which was all the more reason for checking on the card man.

Completing the call to the hotel, Frost made the arrangements for the shipment of the pagoda. Pete thanked him and left, taking a cab back to Demo's apartment. Though he'd met three Class-A suspects,

Pete couldn't say that he had learned a thing. However, one item of Savanti's old apparatus would reach Demo, namely the Golden Pagoda.

It was probably the worst bet of all Savanti's equipment from the standpoint of a jewel cache, but Pete was sure that Demo would be pleased.

Demo might have been pleased if he'd been there.

Instead of Demo, Pete found the telephone ringing and answered it to handle one of the telephone trick customers. There was a note under the telephone, reminding Pete that he should have been back by seven.

It was now eight minutes after, so Pete calculated that Demo had been gone about five minutes. Whatever his new mission, it must be important or Demo wouldn't have abandoned the telephone. Despite himself, Pete began to wonder about Demo. Maybe the sangfroid shown by the various suspects in magic's double murder had forced Pete to another choice. It took him a little while to shake off his doubts.

The Shadow, too, was wondering about Demo Sharpe. He'd figured that Demo wouldn't leave while Pete was absent, hence he hadn't watched the Albuquerque Arms. Now that Pete was back, The Shadow returned to the front street, was expecting to spot a figure at a certain window and see it start a sneaky trip along the high ledge.

Only Demo didn't appear; not for five minutes, ten, nor even fifteen. By then The Shadow, in his turn, was thinking he could do better elsewhere.

There was a whispered laugh in the lower darkness as a cloaked figure glided to a waiting cab, but the tone carried no note of prophetic confidence.

Seldom did The Shadow give such a laugh too soon.

CHAPTER XI

The Shadow hadn't missed much at Frost's. He'd been there in the darkness of the steps leading down into the basement workshop, during the period of Pete's visit. With the door ajar he'd heard enough of what was said.

Blended with darkness, The Shadow had stepped aside to let Varno pass when the slinky sleight man had made his surreptitious departure. He'd also seen Zito go the opposite direction, as he had that night at Cigam's.

With Frost closing the shop when Pete left, all three of the promising candidates for double murderer now were at large. That was a definite reason why The Shadow should pick up Demo's trail as soon as possible. Lacking a present trace of Demo, the only compromise was a trip to the Hotel Chianti.

Nearing the hotel, The Shadow saw a truck with the name UNICORN STORAGE marked conspicuously on its side with a picture of the fabled beast for which the name stood. Some men on the sidewalk were gesturing to the truck driver and it wasn't good policy for Shrevvy's cab to help block traffic. So The Shadow ordered Shrevvy around the block and there the cloaked investigator dropped off.

When The Shadow came back around the corner, the truck had moved. It was nearer the corner and the truckers were just loading on Frost's pagoda and Zito's scales, which they must have found ready for

them. Seeing an open doorway, The Shadow glided into it and promptly found another thing that suited him.

This was an empty service elevator. So The Shadow took it and rode straight to Winstrom's penthouse. There was just a chance that Demo might have gone there, for having evidenced a sudden interest in old-time magic apparatus, he would have a reason to look over some of Winstrom's.

Like wispy black smoke, The Shadow glided through a service door and along a hallway that led him into the big living room. Hearing voices, he could tell that Winstrom was in the dining room, having dinner with some guests. Hence living room, library and poster room were all empty. The Shadow made the rounds.

Among the playbills framed on the wall of the living room were some pertaining to Savanti. The Shadow noticed them because of their reference to the Pagoda Illusion and among them was one that closely resembled the bill Demo had shown to Pete. In scanning it, The Shadow noticed the names of the assistants in fine print at the bottom.

One name was significant. It was D. Elward. What the initial "D" stood for didn't matter; The Shadow was more interested in the entire name. It didn't take much imagination to transfer D. Elward into Del Weird. This fitted with two features that were fairly common in magic.

The first was that magicians' assistants quite often became performers themselves; the second that a stage name was often adapted from an actual one. The Shadow was quite sure that some research into Del Weird's early history would prove that he had gained his training under the Great Savanti.

That produced thoughts of Del Weird's apparatus. Going back to a store room off the rear hall, The Shadow found it bulging with crates including some stacked empties. These were stenciled with the name Del Weird and they looked as though they had originally held the pile of smaller boxes which were in another corner. The boxes were heavy, when The Shadow tested them, but none had been opened. How soon Winstrom would be getting around to them would depend upon how much time he could spare from his serious business enterprises.

Here would have been The Shadow's opportunity to go through Del Weird's shipment, though he could more easily have examined the apparatus from Cigam's which was packed loosely in half open boxes in this same store room. But what meant opportunity to Demo Sharpe was of little importance where The Shadow was concerned.

This was just a lot more of obsolete magical equipment which had reached its eventual level, Winstrom's collection of forgotten mysteries. Since Winstrom had bought it in bulk and simply stored it, there was no indication that the stuff might have some secret value.

Except that murder by magic was still to be considered; double murder that certainly must have some motive greater than mere jealousy over who invented the paper hat trick or took priority in performing the linked rings. Still seeking Demo's relationship to that odd triangle of Varno, Frost and Zito, The Shadow felt that there might be an answer here.

A logical assumption considering that Cigam's apparatus, part of the setting of a murder scene, had been transferred here; and that Del Weird's apparatus, also on hand, belonged to a murder victim!

So The Shadow stooped to sort through some of the loose gadgets and immediately things happened. A tiny spirit bell began to chime when The Shadow lifted it; the bottom fell from an ornamental box delivering half a dozen billiard balls that clattered and rolled across the floor.

Something metallic whammed as a deluge of silk handkerchiefs shot in fountain style and cascaded all over The Shadow's hat and shoulders. Apparently Cigam believed in keeping hair-trigger gimmicks well-oiled, but The Shadow didn't stay to investigate further. Instead, he swooped for the half-open door, pulled it wide, then went back with it into darkness as one of Winstrom's servants arrived to seek the cause of all the clatter.

The servant was of squatty build and he intended to find the cord of an overhanging light, so being short he was stretching as he pawed the air. Deftly The Shadow's foot eased something the servant's way; hearing a rolling sound on the floor, the fellow turned and took a few short steps. They were enough.

The Shadow's gift consisted of a few odd billiard balls and the stocky man skidded when he stepped on them. Then his feet were sliding on others and he hit the floor in floundering style as The Shadow whisked past him and out through the hallway to the service elevator.

Like the rising crescendo of an orchestra came the increasing crashes from the store room. The floored servant had rolled against a stack of badly balanced boxes and overturned them, bringing a further clatter of glassware, tinware, and general hardware that belonged to Cigam's loosely packed shipment.

Another servant arrived from the dining room and behind him came Winstrom, calling loudly to learn what the trouble was about. They received an answer from the store room and when they reached there and turned on the light, they found the first servant crawling from a mass of nickel-plated debris.

It annoyed Winstrom to find some special glassware broken, for Cigam's shipment included items that would be difficult to duplicate. But Winstrom was even more incensed to find that all this had happened over nothing; that the servant had only thought he heard a prowler in the store room. It would seem that some gadget of Cigam's had popped, starting the rest, except for one factor.

Black against the elevator door, The Shadow was easing its sections open and stepping into the darkness beyond, as he heard the servant's plea.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Winstrom," the stocky man said. "Only I was sort of certain somebody was in here. You see when Frederick found the service elevator up on this floor and nobody in it, he said I'd better look around while he went down -"

The Shadow caught the warning in those words just a trifle too late. Already through the elevator door and easing it shut behind him, he realized that there wasn't any car. His feet meeting the vacancy of the shaft, The Shadow performed a flip in midair grabbing for whatever ledge might be within the door.

There was no ledge. The Shadow's only salvation was his cloak, which had caught in the closing door. Ordinarily he could have pulled it free; now he was hoping desperately that it would stay jammed, which it did. But those folds weren't strong enough to hold The Shadow's weight.

With a slow, dooming rip, the black cloth yielded -

CHAPTER XII

If Wade Winstrom had turned a moment sooner, he might have seen the final closing of the elevator door. As it was, all Winstrom could now have seen was something he didn't notice, a small chunk of black cloth, jammed between the halves of the door.

Nevertheless, the mention of the elevator interested Winstrom. His broad forehead grooved with puzzled lines, he approached with heavy stride. It was only a dozen paces to the elevator and as Winstrom completed them, a sudden clang came from within the shaft.

Winstrom stepped back startled, then relaxed.

The elevator door slithered open and out stepped Frederick, a dry-faced servant of the same stocky build that characterized the rest of Winstrom's hired help.

With Frederick was one of the hotel workers, a man named Kirk, who frequently ran the service car. Kirk was lifting a long jaw as he stared upward with deep-set eyes.

"Guess this car needs fixing," Kirk opined. "Getting sort of jolty."

Winstrom responded drily.

"Jolty enough to come up here by itself?" he queried. "Or wouldn't you know?"

"I wouldn't know," admitted Kirk. "Last time we used the car was to bring those crates up here, Mr. Winstrom. That was this afternoon."

Winstrom looked at Frederick who spread his arms in a perplexed gesture.

"I took the car down and found Kirk," reported Frederick. "There wasn't anybody else around, Mr. Winstrom."

"Whoever brought the car up could have gone down the other way," decided Winstrom, slowly. "We'll ask the regular elevator operators if they've seen any strangers. You can go, Kirk."

Kirk went down in the service car; Frederick and the other servants returned to their respective tasks. That left only Winstrom, standing at the closed door of the elevator. When Winstrom looked at the floor, he saw something. It was a jagged triangle of black cloth.

Picking up this memento, Winstrom studied it and tugged it between his heavy hands. Then, rolling it between his fists, he drew it away, made an absent-minded wave and spread his hand. The black cloth had vanished, but it reappeared a moment later when Winstrom clutched the air and literally plucked it into sight.

In his off-moments, Winstrom was a magician of sorts though he preferred not to display his comparatively meager talents in the presence of professionals.

Pocketing the piece of cloth, Winstrom went to the living room and hunted up a flashlight. It needed a new battery so he spent some time in finding one. Again, Winstrom was dropping behind schedule.

Down on the ground floor, Kirk had left the service elevator. Now something was stirring atop the empty car, a shape of living blackness. It rose, reached for a door above and found it. Hands that fumbled at first finally found a catch. The shaft door of the second floor slithered open.

Laboriously The Shadow worked himself through and elbowed the doors shut behind him. He rested there, his cloak oily and bedraggled, his whispered laugh a bit groggy as it emerged from beneath the tilted brim of his slouch hat.

The Shadow was the jolt that Kirk had attributed to some fault of the elevator mechanism.

Frederick's return had been timely for The Shadow. Kirk had been bringing the servant up in the service car all the while The Shadow's cloak had been tearing itself away in a fashion that would have also torn apart a heart less stout than The Shadow's.

The cloak had given just before the elevator arrived. Even a short fall could have proven fatal to The

Shadow for the upward speed of the elevator would have added to the impact. But Kirk was braking the car as it scooped The Shadow a moment after his dangle was converted to an actual fall. Elevators frequently jolted when stopped suddenly, so Frederick had accepted Kirk's theory.

Only Winstrom wasn't quite convinced.

Through the cracks of the second floor door, The Shadow saw the broad beam of a strong flashlight glare downward. It stayed there fully half a minute, ample time for anyone above to study the whole top of the elevator as it rested at ground floor level.

And now the top of that car no longer had a huddled passenger.

The ex-passenger, The Shadow, rose to his feet and found a stairway leading down to the ground floor. Becoming steadier as he progressed, The Shadow reached the grand ball room. Going back stage, he paused. By the dim light from a fire exit, The Shadow saw some baggage that the truckers had left.

Among other things they'd forgotten Zito's ropes and pulleys. Also the apparatus of other performers was still there. In fact all they'd taken was Frost's pagoda and Zito's scales.

The Shadow moved toward the thick darkness of the alley exit as he heard the sound of footsteps with accompanying voices, coming from the foyer. Into sight came Zed Zito with a pair of men in the uniform of hotel porters. When they reached the stage, Zito gave a disgusted snarl.

"I knew Frost would bungle it!" exclaimed Zito. "Look, they've left my pulleys! They should have taken them along with the scales."

One of the porters shrugged.

"Better ask the truckers," he said. "It was their job, not ours. Maybe they're still out back."

The Shadow decided to go out back first. He was through the door and had closed it before Zito even started in that direction.

Outside, a truck was just pulling away from the alley. His time sense considerably jarred, The Shadow did not regard it as irregular. All he wanted was Shrevvy's cab and he found it with a probing flashlight as soon as he reached the street.

Or rather, the cab found The Shadow.

That flashlight had a colored lens that could deliver red or green flashes as occasion called. This occasion called for green, and Shrevvy spied the blinks from the corner where he was parked. Whipping up, the cab gathered The Shadow automatically, though Shrevvy was a bit surprised at the slight delay The Shadow required. Usually Shrevvy's chief was inside before the brakes really gripped.

This time the cab came almost to a stop. There was a lapse, too, before Shrevvy heard the command :

"Tag that truck."

Shrevvy could have argued the point, but didn't, because he presumed The Shadow knew what he was about. Nevertheless, as the trail veered off in a totally wrong direction, Shrevvy pressed closer to the truck hoping that his chief would see for himself.

And The Shadow did see.

A corner light etched the side of the truck as it swung the corner. It wasn't the Unicorn truck. Its size was

wrong and besides it bore this name:

VANGUARD VANS INCORPORATED

As Shrevvy expected, The Shadow promptly pulled him off the trail. Then Shrevvy was explaining through the connecting window:

"The Unicorn job pulled out a while ago, boss. This one must have come along to pick up another load for somebody else. Or maybe it was delivering a shipment at the hotel. I didn't see -"

The Shadow's sibilant laugh interrupted Shrevvy's report. Then came the order:

"Go to the Albuquerque Arms." Curious that The Shadow should be saying just that and saying it just then. For at practically that same moment, Inspector Joe Cardona was listening to an anonymous voice across his telephone at headquarters.

The voice was saying:

"Go to the Albuquerque Arms."

Long practice had taught Cardona how to handle calls of this type. Indifferently he queried.

"Yeah? What apartment?"

"Apartment 12-J," said the voice, in a forced monotone that gave no clue as to its owner. "The apartment occupied by Demo Sharpe."

The name seemed somewhat familiar to Cardona.

"All right, Mr. Bones," said Joe, treating the call as a gag, "and why should I go to Apartment 12-J at the Albuquerque Arms to find somebody named Demo Sharpe?"

There was a pause during which Cardona expected to hear a receiver click. Instead, the voice spoke again, in that same prosaic monotone, but its words were fraught with something akin to menace.

The voice said:

"Because there you will find a murderer."

CHAPTER XIII

For a place where a murderer was supposed to be, the Albuquerque Arms was exceedingly quiet, but perhaps that was just the calm that stood as prelude to tumult.

There was nothing sinister however about the truck that pulled up at the side entrance. It bore the name "Unicorn Storage" and it had the type of load that the people at the Arms recognized, for they had seen things like it before.

Usually though, Demo Sharpe and his friend Pete Noland brought home smaller apparatus than the gilded pagoda which required a truck to haul it. The pagoda also looked antique when compared with other magical equipment that had been seen around the Arms.

The truckers had to weigh the pagoda in order to fix the charges. They'd been told to do this, one said, by Mr. Frost, the man who had phoned them to leave the pagoda here.

Weighing the pagoda was simple because in the truck was a pair of sizable scales, a flat type on rollers. The truckers planted it on the sidewalk, laid a board up to it and pushed the pagoda up the runway. The scales registered exactly one hundred and eighty-three pounds.

The clerk used the house phone to call Apartment 12-J. The voice that answered was Pete's perfect imitation of Demo's because Demo invariably answered the house phone when at home.

The voice convinced the clerk. Hanging up, he stated:

"Mr. Sharpe says send it up. He'll have Mr. Noland pay the charges. The pagoda belongs to Mr. Noland."

The door man helped the truckers roll the pagoda into the service elevator and took them up, since the regular operator was busy. On the way, the truck man speculated on their gilded shipment.

"Kind of heavy," declared one, "to be lugged all in one piece."

"It's bulky," said the other. "That makes it seem heavier than it is. Funny how things fool you when they're tough to handle."

"This thing cracks apart, though," said the first man, pointing to a joint between the pagoda and its platform. "It would be easier in two pieces."

That didn't appeal to the second trucker.

"Not for us," he claimed. "They'd expect us to take it apart and put it together. That's more work than hefting it, and anyway it rolls easy."

At the twelfth floor the Unicorn men rolled the platform and pagoda to 12-J where the door man knocked. There was a delay because Demo's voice was coming through the transom. He was talking to somebody over the telephone, telling them they'd taken the three of diamonds, which caused the truckers to look askance as though they doubted Demo's sanity.

The door finally opened and Pete appeared in shirt sleeves. He nodded when he saw the pagoda.

"I'm Mr. Noland," he announced and the truckers didn't doubt it since his voice was entirely different from the one they'd heard. "I'll sign for the shipment. What's the charges?"

The truckers gave the charges and Pete paid them. The apartment door was just broad enough to accommodate the pagoda and its platform when they were tilted slightly. Inside the living room, Pete opened the front of the pagoda and let the truckers see that the interior was in good condition, something on which they insisted rather than have complaints on damage they hadn't checked.

Just as the truckers were leaving, Pete heard the police siren.

It sounded distant, but that was because the apartment windows were tight shut. They were locked too, for Pete thought that was good policy rather than have chance visitors suspect that they were used for more than ventilation. The telephone was ringing so Pete bowed the truck men out, the door man with them, and closed the door.

Just for effect, Pete called:

"Demo! It's probably for you!"

Door man and truckers heard Demo's voice take over the telephone, just as they were getting in the

service elevator. By then, the police siren had ceased.

The next interval was something for later speculation.

It couldn't have been very long, for the passenger elevator had gone up when the service car reached the ground floor. Seeing some police in the lobby, one door man went to find out why they were there while the truckers, not wanting to get mixed in something that didn't concern them, hurried out to their truck, loaded on the scales and started away.

Nobody stopped them because Inspector Cardona had given orders not to disturb anybody downstairs. Still thinking that the mysterious phone call might be a hoax, Cardona wanted to start with a visit to Apartment 12-J. By this time, Joe had recalled what Demo's name meant. It stood for telephone tricks and the fellow might just have the temerity to be staging some sort of publicity stunt to annoy the police, something that would help him peddle his instruction sheets.

Just as the passenger elevator arrived on the twelfth floor, the telephone jangled from Demo's apartment. Nobody answered it, which struck Cardona as odd. Motioning to the elevator man Cardona gestured for the fellow's pass key. The man supplied it and to the tune of the ringing telephone, Cardona unlocked the apartment door with one hand, while gripping a revolver with the other.

Whether or not Joe expected murder, he found it. Stretched on the floor in front of the Golden Pagoda was a body, twisted in death. One look at the chunky frozen face was all the elevator man needed. He gulped:

"Demo Sharpe!"

Wheeling around with leveled gun, Cardona saw that the living room was empty. Keeping his eye on a far door, Cardona picked up the phone receiver and said: "Yeah."

"I have a question, Mr. Sharpe," said a voice. "A friend of mine named Clinton says that you can answer it. I've written the answer here."

"Let's hear the question," Cardona answered gruffly. "Only who are you?"

"Clint says I don't have to tell you."

"He does? Well, why not?"

"Because you're supposed to tell me. What I want to know is the name of the card I took."

Savagely, Cardona clamped down the receiver and stalked to the far door. Flinging it open, he saw a lighted bed room, as empty as the living room. As Cardona came back, the telephone started a new jangle. Unhooking the receiver, Joe left it that way.

"Call the lobby," Joe told the elevator man. "Use the house phone. Say that I want one of my men to come up in the service elevator. The other is to use the stairs. They're to be on the lookout for a murderer."

"You - you mean Mr. Noland?" stammered the elevator man. "He lives with Mr. Sharpe. Only he isn't a murderer, I wouldn't think."

"I'll do the thinking. Make that call."

Cardona flung open the doors of the pagoda, saw that it was empty. Going to the windows, he checked

them, found every window clamped. Continuing through the little apartment, Joe searched it rapidly but thoroughly. There wasn't a place where anybody could hide.

One cop arrived in the service elevator and Cardona sent him down the stairs to meet the other. Meanwhile the door man was staring at Demo's body and protesting that Pete must still be around. He'd come up with the officer, the door man had.

"They were both here!" the door man testified. "Demo was on the phone when we went down. The murder would have taken Pete so long that he couldn't have gotten away before you arrived!"

Cardona wasn't inclined to accept the door man's calculation.

"He's gone now, Noland is," Cardona said. "You two can take those elevators down. I'll stay here and phone the lobby for whatever I need."

Door man and elevator man left. Out in the hallway Cardona watched them close the elevator doors. Along with those heavy clangs, Joe thought he heard something else, but wasn't quite sure what it was.

The sound might have come from Demo's apartment. Going back there, Cardona swung his gun around the place, but in that broad glance he failed to see anything that was disturbed. That fact brought a sharp grunt from the ace inspector.

Joe Cardona had encountered the thing he didn't believe could exist, the perfect sealed room mystery wherein a murderer had vanished, leaving nothing but a victim. Yet in this investigation it was quite logical that such should happen.

This case was one where murder by magic was the rule!

CHAPTER XIV

There were no police outside the Albuquerque Arms when The Shadow's cab arrived there, but the headquarters car, parked in front, advertised the fact that something had gone wrong. Telling Shrevvy to drive around the block, The Shadow looked for traces of the Unicorn truck but it had gone.

That left Demo's window as the next objective, so The Shadow, back in form, dropped from the cab at the right vantage spot. This was where he could reach the next apartment building and use its automatic elevator to the roof, but first The Shadow wanted to see if Demo's window was lighted. There was a convenient spot near the next building which permitted this.

From that spot The Shadow saw Demo's window and more.

Someone was easing along the twelfth floor ledge, someone who wasn't as familiar with that cat-walk as was Demo. This man was practically feeling his way on hands and knees as though he dreaded the transit. It wouldn't take much more than a slip of his own nerves to shake him from that ledge.

From somewhere in the lower darkness a rifle crackled. The Shadow could almost see the ping of the bullet above the crawling man. The fellow hesitated, wavered, and the sniper's long range weapon spoke again.

If smart, the hidden sniper would not try to actually hit his target. The man on the ledge, unquestionably Pete Noland, would soon yield to the threat of those whimpering bullets and their leaden bashes. If his knees gave way to his nerves, he would plunge from the ledge and his death, would be attributed to a fall.

They seemed distant, those rifle shots, but they couldn't be too far away. The marksman's gun was probably muffled in lieu of a silencer that would have either limited its accuracy or restricted the number of its rounds. In fact The Shadow was lucky to have heard its reports at all, as he realized when he started in their general direction.

Lost among the restricting walls of buildings, the rifle fire could only be heard from a few special spots. One such place had fortunately been The Shadow's location. In turn, that gave him a clue to where the rifle man might be.

Coming to a long narrow passage between two buildings a block from the Arms, The Shadow saw the rifle deliver an upward spurt and plainly heard its thudding report from straight ahead. Whether the shots had so far taken toll, The Shadow didn't look back to see. The first step was to end the menace; if that failed, next was to take quick vengeance.

The Shadow simply let blast with his .45 automatic in the direction of the rifle spurt.

There was a sudden clatter, the muffled sound of an overturning ashcan. Automatic still blazing, The Shadow drove ahead and brought up suddenly and hard against a solid brick wall. This alley had a dead-end right in the middle; the rifle had been shooting over the top of it. Therefore The Shadow's return fire had merely warned the sniper to get going from his ash-can pedestal on the other side.

The wall wasn't too high to scale, even though The Shadow lacked an ash-can as a springboard. Unfortunately, the top of the wall was lined with sharp-pointed pickets which had somehow been overlooked in the scrap-metal drives. It took time for The Shadow to maneuver past those and before he could emerge from the alley on the other side, the sound of a motor from the street announced the departure of the rifle expert.

Shrevvy's cab arrived about a minute later. It had a habit of appearing places almost as unexpectedly as The Shadow. But Shrevvy had come from the wrong direction; he hadn't seen the departing car and by now it had gained too good a start to be overtaken.

There were some police whistles sounding, for The Shadow's shots, louder than the muffled rifle, had disturbed the neighborhood. So The Shadow used the cab for a quick departure, watching from the window for traces of Pete Noland. There was no sign of anyone on that high ledge; so if Pete hadn't fallen, he, by this time, had used Demo's favorite route of the elevator in the next building.

The Shadow at least had done his part to make the latter sequel possible.

As Cranston, The Shadow arrived at the Albuquerque Arms and went right up to Demo's apartment. His appearance there was more than a surprise to Cardona; the inspector was almost inclined to regard it with suspicion, now that Cranston had joined a magicians' club and magic was so definitely linked to murder.

But Cranston had an explanation, as good as it was unusual. Nodding to Cardona, he thumbed first at the unhooked telephone receiver, next at Demo's body.

"I thought so," said Cranston.

"Thought what?" demanded Cardona.

"That something had happened to Demo," explained Cranston. "I was working the telephone trick and the person who called got the connection but nobody answered."

Cranston had pictured it just right, so the explanation went with Cardona. Then:

"If you're so smart at solving riddles," declared Joe, "riddle me this one. What's happened to the murderer?"

"You mean Demo was murdered here?"

"Where else?" retorted Cardona. "There's his body, isn't it? He was talking on the telephone when the pagoda was brought up."

"Did anybody see him?"

"No. The pagoda was for a fellow named Noland. He signed for it and here's the receipt."

"Then where is Noland now?"

"That's what I'm asking," Cardona said glumly. "He didn't have time to lam and we've searched the dump with a fine-tooth comb. When it comes to murder by magic, this stops any yet."

Mention of magic caused Cranston to repress a smile.

"It's one of those sealed room cases," argued Cardona. "Doors closed, windows clamped; the killer is here, only he isn't anywhere."

Cranston's eye roved expertly.

"Tell me one thing," he said. "Why did you step out of the room after you'd searched the apartment?"

Cardona became sharp.

"How did you know that?"

"Step out again and then come back. I won't leave the living room. But if you want me" - Cranston's tone sounded a bit whimsical - "just call."

It sounded silly to Cardona but he'd seen one gag realize itself tonight, so he was willing to take the bait again, hoping that the result would be more pleasant.

The result was.

Also it proved spectacular.

Going out to the hall, Cardona stamped around and returned. Cranston wasn't anywhere in sight. Remembering that Cranston had said he'd stay in the living room, Cardona gave up. He was staring toward the open pagoda when he called:

"All right, where are you?"

In the blink of an eye, Cardona was seeing things. Cranston didn't have to shut cabinet doors when he did magic. Out of nowhere it seemed, he appeared right inside the golden pagoda. Rising he stepped from it the way Claire had, the night Frost worked the illusion.

"Say -"

From the way Cardona toned the word, he was thinking of something else. Then, glancing at the receipt the truckers had left, he shook his head.

"I was thinking Demo might have come in that pagoda," declared Cardona. "I'd forgotten that they'd

heard him talking on the phone. Besides" - showed Cranston the receipt - "the pagoda only weighs a hundred and eighty-three pounds. Demo himself must weigh a hundred and fifty and thirty-three wouldn't be enough over."

Giving a hoist at the pagoda platform Cardona estimated that it did weigh about a hundred and eighty-three pounds. Then, staring at Cranston, he demanded:

"But what's this got to do with Noland's disappearance?"

"A lot," replied Cranston. "You can vanish from that pagoda as well as appear in it."

"You can?"

"Of course. Want me to show you?"

"I'll take your word for it. So that's why I couldn't find Noland! He worked the illusion backward when he heard me outside the door!"

Cranston nodded his confirmation. He knew what was coming next.

"But where is Noland now?" demanded Cardona. "Let's say he reappeared when I was out in the hall. What happened to him then? That pagoda can't disappear a lot of people, can it?"

There was a head-shake from Cranston.

"You checked the window too early," he told Cardona. "You should have looked at it after you came back."

Cardona looked and saw what Cranston meant. The window was unclamped at present. Hopping over, Cardona hauled it up and saw the ledge outside.

"So that's where the guy went!" exclaimed Joe. "Well, if he's hiding anywhere in the neighborhood we'll find him!"

Cranston doubted that Pete would be, but he didn't say so. Furthermore, Cranston was coming to the conclusion that it would be better to question persons like Varno, Frost and Zito regarding their evening's whereabouts, than to ask Pete Noland.

Still there were things that Pete could tell, if he could be found, so that task would become The Shadow's. This third murder, unfortunate though it was, had at least clinched Demo's innocence of earlier crime.

This was one of those cases where the gradual elimination of suspects would eventually narrow the trail to just one man.

But The Shadow intended to see to it that further eliminations were not the result of more murder by magic!

CHAPTER XV

Music was mellow at the Club Marimba and Claire Meriden wished that she didn't have to be Miss Libra. It wasn't fun being pawed by customers who tried to lift her when Zito commanded "Light" or "Heavy." Nevertheless it was show business, so Claire was putting up with it.

It was time to be getting ready for the act right now, so Claire went to her dressing room and got out her

costume which was necessarily scanty to prove that it didn't have a lot of hidden weights concealed in it. The closet door was open and Claire wondered why she'd left it that way. She didn't realize that she hadn't, until she closed it.

Then from the space that the door had hidden stepped a very grim young man whose picture had been in all the newspapers. Claire recognized Pete Noland, wanted for the murders of Louie the Grift, Professor Del Weird, Demo Sharpe, and perhaps a lot of others whose bodies hadn't yet shown up.

Pete had a gun, a logical accessory for a murderer's kit-bag. Only for some reason Claire wasn't scared. It struck her that Pete was driven by despair more than desperation.

For one thing, his pistol was a long-barreled affair that looked as unprofessional as Del Weird's old blunderbuss model. Obviously something that he had picked up at random, such a gun lessened the menace behind it.

Again, when Pete spoke, his voice carried a plea, rather than a threat.

"You've got to help me," he insisted. "You're the only person who knows that Demo Sharpe was out and around when he was supposed to be handling the telephone stunt. In giving him an alibi, I lost my own!"

This was news to Claire, but of a sort she didn't quite fathom.

"If Demo was murdering people," the blonde said coolly, "how does it happen he became a victim?"

"You don't understand." Finding that Claire at least would listen, Pete parked the pistol on the dressing table. "Demo was after something else, a fortune if he found it. He wasn't out to kill anybody."

"So somebody killed him."

"Yes, but I wasn't the murderer. Look - you worked in the Golden Pagoda illusion the other night, didn't you?"

Claire responded with a nod.

"And nobody knew where you came from, did they?"

Beginning a head-shake, Claire amended it.

"They might have," she said, "if they knew how the illusion worked."

"I know the secret," declared Pete, "because I bought the pagoda. The first thing I did was to see if it was in working order."

"Naturally."

"It worked all right." Pete spoke bitterly. "Only nobody popped out alive. Instead, Demo rolled out dead."

Claire's face showed genuine horror. What Pete said was not only graphic but plausible. Claire was thinking how startled she would have been in a similar situation.

"By then the police were coming," continued Pete. "I knew I was framed, so I used the pagoda for a vanish - of myself. That's why I'm still on the romp."

Although Pete didn't go into the further details of his sneak trip along the ledge, Claire was quite

convinced that his story was true. Before the girl could voice an objection, Pete added:

"What ruins my story is the fact that the pagoda was weighed before it was brought up to the apartment. It only hit a hundred and eighty-three.

"Of course," said Claire brightly. "That's just about what it would weigh."

"Not with Demo in it. The scales should have registered nearly double."

Staring steadily, Claire ended with a sudden exclamation:

"Zito's scales!"

"I figured that," declared Pete triumphantly. "I've heard about the weight changing act and knew that business with the scales would only work if they were faked."

"Of course they're faked," rejoined Claire. "How could my weight be different if they weren't? I'm just doing the old resistance act as they used to call it."

Pete nodded his understanding.

"And now I'm ahead of you," continued Claire. "You want to know if Zito's scales were on the truck with Frost's pagoda. They were and what's more they could have been set to show the usual weight while Demo's body was in the pagoda."

"That clinches it," affirmed Pete. "Your friend Zed Zito is the murderer."

Claire suddenly became loyal to Zito.

"I don't think so," she argued. "Zito's an all right person. He gave me a job when he first met me at Frost's and he says now I can quit the Libra grind if I don't like it and still be in line for the lead in his bigger show."

"Then maybe Frost was the murderer."

"Now you're talking," Claire told Pete. "Frost is so sleek he's slimy, if you want my unbiased opinion."

"How did you first meet Frost?"

"When he wrote about buying the pagoda illusion. It belonged to my great uncle."

"Great uncle!" exclaimed Pete. "You don't mean the Great Savanti!"

"Of course. He left me everything; that is, what was left of it. A nice gilded pagoda and a pair of scales to match. Frost bought the works and sold the scales to Zito."

Pete was pondering deeply.

"Did you ever hear talk about some jewels?" he queried, in that frank tone of his. "Gems from the Orient that belonged to your Great-uncle Savanti?"

Eyes wider, Claire shook her head.

"They're what Demo was after," asserted Pete, "but from what you say they're really yours. Maybe we'll find them at Frost's place. Let's go."

"But I have to do a show -"

Interrupting herself, Claire raised a hand for silence. She was sure she heard footsteps stopping just outside the dressing room. Eyes half closed, Pete was pondering and didn't notice Claire's gesture.

"We could get over to Frost's in fifteen minutes," Pete calculated. "Of course we might have a long time hunting there. Fifteen minutes more to get back -"

Claire gripped Pete's shoulder and jogged it, motioning for silence with her other hand. She was sure now that somebody was listening outside that door. Stepping to the door Claire wrenched it inward and a girl came launching through.

The eavesdropper was Margo Lane. She came up with a pocket-sized automatic from her handbag. All in one gesture, though a long one, Margo covered Claire and told her to stay where she was. Then Margo turned to look at Pete.

The wanted man was on his feet, coolly aiming the long-barreled pistol at Margo. He gestured for her to hand over her automatic to Claire. Pete told Claire to keep Margo covered, which she did with the brunette's own gun.

And then Pete clicked his own trigger.

Blonde and brunette both gave startled cries that ended as the pistol went off with a noiseless bang. Its barrel clicked apart and the "Bang!" appeared in big letters on a fancy silk handkerchief that unfolded from the trick barrel.

"It was the best thing I could find," apologized Pete. "Besides, I would not want to carry a real gun.

Claire needed no apologies, but Margo did. She was much annoyed at having been tricked so easily. Only it happened that Margo's troubles had just begun.

"Since you broke in here, Miss Smarty," decided Claire, "I think I'll break you into the Miss Libra act." To Pete, Claire added: "Wait for me outside, I'll be right along." Then, tossing the Libra costume to Margo, Claire backed her next order with the captured gun. "Climb out of your own clothes and into these," she told Margo. "Make it snappy, because if this trigger slips, a handkerchief won't drop. You will."

Closing the door, Pete tiptoed out the back way. He heard Claire saying that she'd explain the Miss Libra act while Margo was making the change; then, a few paces along the hall, he could hear no more. In what amounted to a stage alley outside the Club Marimba, Pete had finished a couple of cigarettes when Claire arrived.

"What about the girl?" he undertoned. "Did she agree?"

"So far, yes," returned Claire with a smile. "It will be up to Zito to convince her further and I think he can. So let's get on to Frost's place."

Just why Claire was so convinced about Margo's willingness to play Miss Libra remained a mystery, but only briefly. In about five minutes, blackness appeared suddenly from a door that led back stage at the Marimba, and The Shadow materialized from his self-made gloom.

Finding Claire's door, The Shadow knocked there; getting no response he turned the knob and peered into the dressing room. Pausing, The Shadow hung his hat and cloak in a dark corner of the corridor and entered the room as Cranston.

In a corner was Margo, attired in the chic costume of Miss Libra. She was seated at the end of the dressing table, her head and hands through the pillories of Zito's new guillotine which Claire had kindly placed at that convenient elevation. Margo was gagged with Claire's scarf and in front of her, where she could read and digest it, was a note.

Strolling over, Cranston picked up the note and looked at it while he was untying Margo's gag. Addressed to Zito, the note was signed by Claire. It said:

"Here is my new understudy. She says she will work as Libra but

I'm not sure. If she agrees to keep her promise let her out. Otherwise she can stay until I get back. Good luck."

Unclamping the hand and neck stocks, Cranston released Margo from the guillotine. Drawing her head from beneath the threatening chopper, Margo came to her feet volubly.

"They've gone to Frost's," she began. "Claire and Noland. Wait for me" - Margo gestured to the door - "and I'll be right along. I'll only be a few minutes getting dressed."

Cranston waved Margo back to her chair.

"Did you promise to play Miss Libra, Margo?"

"Yes, but who wouldn't with a gun backing the argument?"

"Claire told you how to work the act?"

"Certainly." Rising, Margo folded her bare arms and thrust them up toward Cranston's chin. "When Zito says 'Heavy!' I do this and it throws anybody off balance who tries to lift me. When he says 'Light!' I relax" - Margo let her arms ease down - "and then I can be lifted."

"You caught on quickly," commended Cranston. "You won't have to show Zito the note. Just tell him you're a friend who promised to take Claire's place."

"Why of all the nerve!" exclaimed Margo indignantly. "Unless you're just kidding me, you're worse than Claire. And anyway, you're wasting precious time!"

"Not at all," returned Cranston. "I'm saving it, because I'm not waiting for you to come along. But whatever you do" - his tone was very serious - "don't tell Zito where Claire went."

When Lamont spoke that way, Margo listened. She realized now that something important must be at stake, that The Shadow's battle to thwart murder by magic was nearing a climax. Arms akimbo, Margo watched Cranston leave; then, when the door closed, she turned and studied herself in the dressing table mirror.

After all, Margo made a trim Miss Libra, better perhaps than Claire. Maybe that was just a matter of opinion, but Margo was willing to let the public judge. Claire wouldn't be too happy if her new understudy stole the show.

Margo Lane was smiling at that thought as she went out to introduce herself to Zed Zito.

CHAPTER XVI

Frost's cellar was very dark except where Pete Noland pierced it with a flashlight. Finding this cellar

beneath the basement workshop had been a real discovery in Pete's opinion. Claire Meriden felt the same, except that none of its discarded junk looked old enough to be magic of the Savanti vintage.

"Anyway, this shows Frost up," claimed Claire. "He says that he only builds streamlined illusions. He bought the pagoda just because it had a modern slant. But look at all this old stuff!"

"Where else would Frost get new ideas?" queried Pete. "It's easier to revive things that have been forgotten than to invent something better. Take Zito and the Libra act for instance."

"Zito can have it," laughed Claire. Then, becoming serious: "Only I hope he did convince that girl."

Pete didn't inquire why. He was busy poking through some old escape tricks, padlocks, handcuffs, and other appliances.

"Mr. Winstrom will be at the club tonight," recalled Claire, "and Zito is trying to get him to back the big show. So if the act flops -"

Claire broke off. She was beginning to feel sorry for letting Zito down. Pete turned the flashlight into an old-fashioned trunk that was packed mostly with broken fish bowls.

"Nothing here," said Pete. "Let's look over in the other corner."

"But that's all new apparatus," objected Claire. "We looked there first."

"Frost may have buried something underneath it," declared Pete, "except that if he did, he knew its real value. No, our best bet with Frost is that he doesn't know anything about those gems."

Rather than waste the dimming battery, Pete turned off the flashlight as they moved to the deep corner. Claire gripped his arm very tightly.

"There's something fearful about this place," she breathed. "I felt it when we first came down those creaky old stairs. Only it's more repressive now. Somehow we don't seem to be alone here!"

The flashlight, twinkling again, cast great sweeping silhouettes across the wall and Claire swallowed hard. Maybe those were just shadows from stacks of old props but one in particular seemed very lifelike as it faded from the dull glare.

Then came the creaks.

Not from the stairs at first, but from the floor of the workshop, directly above. It was Pete now who gave the grip, but only to quiet Claire. The footsteps, which the creaks unquestionably represented, had now reached the top of the cellar steps.

"If only we'd closed that door!" groaned Pete. "Still, it wouldn't help. The door was bolted on the other side, so we couldn't have made it look right."

A horrified thought swept Claire.

"Suppose somebody bolts it now!"

The very suggestion roused Pete to action. Bringing Claire with him, he started for the stairs, making far too much clatter on the stone floor. Creaks paused in answer, a few steps from the stair top, which was around the rear corner of the cellar.

"Wait!"

The tone was whispered, between the strained ears of Pete and Claire. The girl was right, someone else was with them, here in this very cellar!

"Keep talking," ordered the mysterious whispered tone. "Whoever it is, keep him interested. Make him think you've found something."

Pete knew the speaker couldn't be Claire and Claire knew it couldn't be Pete. But they both realized that a friend had found them. They were lucky in that The Shadow had trailed them promptly from the Club Marimba.

"How about those fish bowls?" queried Pete in a loud tone. "Have you looked through them yet?"

Somebody rattled the trunk with the bowls and the glass responded. Pretending that she'd produced the clatter, Claire spoke as though calling back to Pete.

"I think I have," she said. "Better come over and help me look."

Fish bowls weren't interesting enough to the intruder on the stairs. His creaks moved upward, signifying that he probably intended the inevitable, the bolting of the upper door to lock the prisoners below. It was a strong door too, a fire door, sheathed with metal.

The Shadow's whisper was back again.

"Say you're going up." The whisper was for Pete. "Say that you have a phone call to make."

"I'm going upstairs," announced Pete loudly. "I'm going to use Frost's telephone."

By then, Claire was getting instructions from The Shadow. She replied to Pete in the words The Shadow gave her.

"But you can't do that!" the girl exclaimed. "What would anybody think, getting a call from Pete Noland?"

The Shadow was meanwhile prompting Pete, who carried the conversation according to the whisper.

"It won't matter," declared Pete. "Nobody could trace the call. Are you getting scared, Claire?"

Claire's turn now, instructed by The Shadow.

"But if anything happened" - Claire faltered neatly - "to me, for instance - well, they'd blame you."

"And what if anything happened to me?"

"Well, they'd blame me - or would they?"

All this was as The Shadow prompted it with whispers and there was more to come.

"I guess they would," said Pete with a half-sneer, "if they found us dead with an empty gun. They'd think we'd cancelled each other off."

"Don't talk that way, Pete!" Claire's voice showed horror that she didn't have to fake. "It sounds as though it could happen."

"Except that I haven't any gun," retorted Pete. "Anyway, I'm going up to the workshop. Coming along?"

"Yes, but since we haven't any flashlight," Claire lied glibly, "you'd better use that bulb with the long

extension cord."

"A good idea. It ought to reach upstairs. Let's find it."

Scuffling sounds denoted a hunt for the extension light that wasn't there. Why The Shadow had imagined that one was a puzzle to both Pete and Claire as he moved them deeper into the cellar. Anyway, whoever was at the top of the stairs had decided to listen further.

Perhaps he had decided more!

Of a sudden a glowing bulb appeared in the corner where Frost kept his extra supply of modern apparatus. It moved through the air so amazingly that Pete and Claire suddenly realized it was actually drifting there.

The floating light trick!

A favorite with magicians, this feat consisted in making an illuminated bulb literally float in midair, clear across the stage, even when the performer remained at the other side. Now The Shadow was performing the floating light effect in the direction of that stairway up to the workshop!

Riveted, Pete and Claire watched the bulb's peculiar action and realized, each in turn, that it could be mistaken for a light on an extension cord, carried in a human hand. In darkness, it didn't look like the floating lamp bulb at all.

This was why The Shadow had spoken in terms of an extension cord along with what the world would think if death occurred involving Pete Noland!

The drifting lamp was around the corner now, and moving toward the stair top. Though they couldn't see it, Pete and Claire knew its location from the way its glow diminished. They realized too that their unseen friend The Shadow was not directly behind it, but actually somewhere in the depth of the cellar proper, safely away from what was soon to come.

The murderer at the top of the stairs had good reason to believe that Claire and Pete were accompanying that ascending light bulb. Now was his time to act.

A gun blasted down the stairway. Its first shot blotted the bulb without a tinkle, for other shots stifled all lesser sounds. There were five of them, all that the killer's gun contained and for the finish, the revolver itself came clattering down the steps.

Those shots would have riddled both Pete and Claire had they been on the stairs!

Another gun was talking now - The Shadow's.

The murderer had no time to waste and knew it. The stabs were coming closer up the stairway, telling that The Shadow was surging in. The killer couldn't hope to bolt the door soon enough, even if he closed it.

Instead, he fled through the workshop. Close on the man's heels, The Shadow knew that Pete and Claire could now look out for themselves. Catching the killer was the task and no easy one.

Into a waiting car, and the murderer was away. Shrevvy's cab took The Shadow on board and the chase continued through a maze of streets, with Shrevvy hanging on like a bulldog.

This time The Shadow was really trailing a murderer to his lair!

CHAPTER XVII

Shrieking around a corner, the fugitive car disgorged its passenger as a roulette wheel would throw a spinning ball. Huddled over, the killer raced through a back alley to the side door of an old house. Spinning from Shrevvy's arriving cab, The Shadow copied the action but with more speed.

Through a little hallway, into a tiny back room; there, the murderer slammed the door. Out from a front parlor sprang a stocky figure that turned as The Shadow flung inward through the darkness. There was a wild, furious grapple that occupied The Shadow for one full and precious minute; then he and his new adversary hit the door so hard they crashed it, landing in a dimly lighted room.

Coming up with his gun, The Shadow looked for the killer. He was gone! Studying the groggy man who had blocked him and given that stout tussle, The Shadow wearily removed his hat and cloak, tossed them in a darkened corner of the hallway, and helped his late opponent to his feet.

The opposition consisted of Inspector Joe Cardona.

It was several minutes before Cardona regained anything resembling equilibrium. From a chair, he blinked and finally focused his gaze on Cranston.

"Nice work, inspector," approved Cranston, calmly. "I mean by both of us."

Cardona managed to find the obvious words.

"How did you come to get here?"

"Going past Frosts," related Cranston, "I saw somebody come running out. So I went after him and he crashed in here. How did you happen to be here?"

"Another tip-off," growled Joe. "Like the one telling me about Demo's place. Another phony."

Cranston raised his eyebrows.

"That's how I figure it," nodded Cardona. "I have a hunch I'd like to talk to young Noland. He wouldn't have murdered Demo."

"Why not?"

"Too silly. None of these magic guys are really cracked; they're just half way. Border line cases, the psycho-what-do-you-call-them. I've been reading that manuscript of Demo's."

Cranston couldn't help but smile, even after the real murderer's getaway.

"It's got a good stunt in it," continued Cardona. "A trick where two guys each learn to talk in the same voice. One turns off the lights while he's talking; the other picks up the spiel and the first guy does a sneak. When the lights come on, everybody wonders how the first fellow vanished."

"Very nice," commented Cranston.

"More than nice," approved Cardona. "Demo said in the manuscript that he'd tested the voice stuff with a friend. Who else could the friend be but Noland and what else could the test be but the telephone stunt?"

Cranston nodded. This was putting Pete well into the clear. So Cranston reverted to something else.

"The vanish idea was nice," he declared, "but it wasn't the way the real murderer worked it just now."

On his feet, Cardona stared all around, then began stamping the floor.

"No trap door there," said Cranston. "It's in the ceiling. Look."

It was in the ceiling all right and it had been clamped tight. Cardona looked at the square opening with its barrier of good stout boards. Then:

"What was the killer's idea of hoaxing me here?"

"To keep you watching a forgotten hideaway," analyzed Cranston. "Then, in a pinch, he found it was the only place that he could use. Of course it may not be a hideaway exactly. We're dealing with somebody very clever -"

Pausing, Cranston proved the point by yanking open a table drawer where he had seen a patch of projecting silk. He pulled out some colorful handkerchiefs of the sort magicians use, a few gimmicks of a common type, and finally what looked to be an ordinary slate.

"Maybe we can trace the killer from these," decided Cardona. "Unless every magician owns this sort of stuff."

"Every magician does," assured Cranston, "and so does every five dollar member of the Universal Wizards Association. Likewise every school-boy who has the price after he has learned of things called magic shops."

Showing the slate back and front, Cranston placed it in Cardona's hands and waved his fingers above it. Taking the slate again, Cranston turned it over.

On the other side the slate said.

"Nine of spades."

Sight of the chalk written message stupefied Cardona. Clapping the inspector on the back, Cranston turned to the door.

"See you later, inspector," said Cranston. "If I run into young Noland I'll have him look you up."

When Cranston arrived at the Club Marimba some time later, he was just in time to hear a loud burst of applause as Margo Lane bowed off quite gracefully in the panty-waist costume that she was wearing as Miss Libra. Intercepting Margo on her way back stage, Cranston queried:

"And how did the act go?"

"Better, this time," replied Margo. "This was the second show."

"When was the first?"

"Soon after you left. I was a good girl and told Zito that Claire was my dearest friend. I just simply had to come here and take her place after I heard she'd fallen down the subway steps and broken a leg."

"Why did you tell Zito that?"

"Because I wished Claire had. Poor Zito! He's been calling every hospital in town and I'm afraid to tell him the truth. I wish I could do something nice for him."

"You have," assured Cranston. "You've given him the alibi he needed. Since Zito has been here all

evening, that eliminates him as the murderer."

Over at a table, Winstrom was gesturing for Cranston to join him. Cranston did, hauling Margo along, despite her protests that her Libra costume wasn't quite in keeping with the fashionable gowns worn by the ladies in Winstrom's party.

"You're coming anyway," Cranston told her, "because Zito is over at the table and it's time you admitted the truth about Claire."

It wasn't her costume or lack of it that flustered Margo when she reached the table. It was the pathetic glance that Zito gave her and the kindly way in which he spoke.

"Miss Lane has been so nice," declared Zito, "When she heard that Claire was hurt -"

"Miss Lane!"

It was Winstrom who interrupted, his face quite amazed. Then, with a dawn of recognition, he bowed to Margo and said:

"Do you know, I never recognized you. Why, at the first show, I was wondering why you weren't a blonde. Of course I was called to the telephone and I had to go and meet these friends of mine, so I didn't see much of you."

Margo smiled.

"What about the second show?"

Indulgently, Winstrom gestured to his empty glass.

"I had a few before it began," he admitted. "But I can still do magic. Want to see some?"

Margo nodded and Winstrom brought out a pack of cards. He always needed a few drinks to start doing any tricks and even then Winstrom invariably depended upon mechanical appliances. Margo had heard all that, but there didn't seem to be anything mechanical about a pack of cards.

Holding the pack, Winstrom riffled the end and told Margo to take a card. She inserted her finger and stopped the riffle, then drew out the card she'd found there.

"Name it," said Winstrom. He was turning over the menu card as he spoke.

"The jack of diamonds," stated Margo. "Why!"

There was a reason for the exclamation. In bold letters, Winstrom's menu card bore the written words: "Jack of diamonds."

"It's uncanny," expressed Margo. "How did you do it?"

Winstrom smiled and put the pack away. Across the table, Cranston was finishing an earnest chat with Zito, who nodded very happily. Evidently Cranston had explained that Claire was all right, for rather than have Margo spoil his story, Cranston gave a waving gesture.

Glad of the opportunity, Margo went to the dressing room and discarded the Miss Libra trappings. Just when she had finished dressing, the door opened and Claire appeared, to stop short in surprise.

"It's all right," said Margo, very nicely, "and thanks. Only I have a friend who wants to tell you something

before you talk to Zito."

On the way down the corridor, Margo met Cranston. He nodded and went to tell Claire. Only Margo didn't know that the conversation concerned Pete Noland more than it did Zed Zito.

Riding back to her apartment in Shrevvy's cab, Margo was very silent until she arrived there. Then, in a meek tone she said:

"It was very wonderful, Lamont."

"You mean Winstrom's card trick?" inquired Cranston, as though he didn't know that Margo was referring to a great deal else. "Yes, it was good, but everybody does it."

Margo stared.

"It's in every magic catalog, you know," continued Cranston, "and you can buy it in any magic shop. The pack that makes you take the same card every time. All magicians have them, but they don't always write the name on a menu. Sometimes it appears mysteriously on a slate. Always the same card."

"Always the jack of diamonds?"

"With Winstrom's pack, yes," replied Cranston. "But I'm looking for the magician who makes you take the nine of spades."

And with that cryptic statement, Cranston waved good-night.

CHAPTER XVIII

Pete Noland was still in hiding but he didn't have to be. The police were looking for him only to make other people think they weren't being hunted.

Of the others, one was unofficially eliminated. He was Zed Zito.

Inspector Cardona made this official in a sense, but did it privately. He issued the statement in Winstrom's living room in the presence of Wade Winstrom and Lamont Cranston, where the conference was held at Cranston's suggestion.

"There was a lot of shooting at Frost's place last night," explained Cardona, "and that's the sort of stuff you can take or leave. For instance, Louie the Grift was killed in Cigam's shop but we aren't blaming Cigam."

Pausing to let that point sink, Cardona took up the other side of the story.

"Still, Frost could have decoyed somebody there," said Joe. "It would have been a smart move on his part. The very fact that Cigam wound up with a clean slate might have given Frost the idea he could do the same."

Something that Cardona himself had said caused him to become meditative, which wasn't a common thing with Joe, at least not publicly. His voice was almost mechanical when he added:

"What we've still got to establish is a motive. That's what I've got to look into now."

Going down in the elevator, Cardona was thinking of anything but a motive. What was running through Joe's mind was his own statement about Cigam having a clean slate.

That was just what Cardona wanted, a clean slate like the one he'd found in the murderer's hideout, the kind that produced a message when you called for it. Working backwards, Cardona hadn't reached the point of thinking in terms of a playing card rather than a slate.

Reaching Cigam's, Cardona told the drab man the kind of slate he wanted. Cigam asked:

"You mean you want to buy one?"

Cardona nodded.

"Don't be a sucker," confided Cigam. "That single slate job costs too much. They call it the perfect slate, so what? With a pair of ordinary spirit slates you can get the same effect. They cost you a buck fifty, the perfect one-slate version is twelve and a half."

Cardona still wanted the single slate version, no matter what the price. So Cigam fished under the counter and found the only one he had. Dusting it off, he wrapped it along with the instruction sheet.

"It works easy," assured Cigam, "only there's not much call for them. By the way, you'll want a Svengali to go along with it."

"A Svengali?"

"Yes. That's what they call this pack." Cigam brought one from the shelf. "Try to make it give you any other card. It won't."

Going out the door, Cardona bumped into Val Varno, who was now doing his coin roll in clusters. Varno gave a wise grin.

"Getting magic-minded, inspector? Better drop around and see me work tonight at the S.O.S."

"Huh?" asked Cardona. "What does that mean?"

"Society of Sorcery," replied Varno. "Cigam is selling tickets. Ask him."

Cardona bought a ticket and went back to his office. There he unwrapped the one-slate miracle and started to read its very explicit instructions. Oddly, Cardona didn't have to learn how the trick was done to do it.

The instructions said to lay the slate flat, turn it sideways to show the other side, then tilt it upward against some object, call for the message and turn the slate around.

Cardona did just that and during the process he saw for himself that the slate was entirely blank.

At least it was quite blank until the final turn around. Then, to Cardona's amazement, the slate revealed a chalk-written message.

It wasn't just the magical result that dumbfounded the ace inspector. After all, Cardona had seen Cranston produce a slate message with the same minimum of effort. The thing that would have knocked Joe out of his chair if the chair hadn't had arms, was what the message said.

In capital letters, it read:

LAY OFF COPPER!

That was enough to send a squad car to bring in Cigam and start quizzing him all over again. Only

Cardona managed to swallow the insult in favor of gathering more evidence. Remembering the Svengali pack that Cigam had sold him, Cardona decided to play with it.

Quite convinced that no pack in the world could always make you take the same card, Cardona saw a chance to arrest Cigam for taking money under false pretenses. But that failed too, after Joe began trying the wonderful pack. Soon he was working it on all the detectives around the place.

When Joe riffled the pack and a detective took a card it always turned out to be the deuce of diamonds.

Cardona was really getting magic-minded. He was thinking of going back to Cigam's and buying more of these wonderful packs. He'd let anybody say what card they wanted and he'd let them have it - from the correct pack. Out of that mental whirl, Cardona suddenly grabbed the telephone and called the Cobalt Club, where he asked for Lamont Cranston.

Getting the man he wanted, Cardona wasted no more time in ceremony.

"Remember that slate that said the nine of spades?" Joe inquired. "All right, I just bought a pack that makes you take the same card all the time. I got a slate to go with it, or maybe it was the other way around."

Cranston complimented Cardona and suggested that he join the Universal Wizards Association.

"Not much," retorted Joe. "I've heard of a better outfit, the Society of Sorcery. I'm going to their show tonight and I'm going to keep on going to magic shows. Do you know why? Because I'm going to find some magician who always does tricks with the nine of spades.

"The fellow who used that hide-away forgot his slate and probably thought it didn't matter. What he really forgot - and what does matter - was the writing on that slate. It said nine of spades and it's a safe bet that our man has a pack that hands out that card and nothing else."

When the curtain rose on the S.O.S. show, Cranston was there with Cardona. None of the first three acts performed either the paper hat trick or the linking rings. They didn't even do card fans, because of the horrible example set by the U.W.A., where everybody had done card fans.

The S.O.S. was different. Everybody on its bill was so anxious to avoid the hats and the rings that they all did either the milk pitcher or the Hindu sticks.

The milk trick consisted in pouring a pitcher load of milk into a paper cone from which it vanished. The sticks were a pair of wands that had a cord running through holes in one end; whenever the cord was cut it would restore itself when the performer - or more correctly performers - drew it through again.

The spectators had a good nickname for the Society of Sorcery. They simply termed it "Same Old Stuff!" and the soubriquet fitted. The show was even given in the same place as the Wizards' show, the Chianti ball room, and the audience contained its usual quota of regulars.

One act was somewhat different: Val Varno. He did his cigarette routine and for a finish, he performed a singular stunt known as the "Card and Ribbon." An empty envelope was affixed to a ribbon with sealing wax. The other end of the ribbon was hung from a stand so that the envelope dangled below.

Riffling a pack, Val had a spectator take a card and write his name across it. Replaced in the pack, the marked card vanished, Val riffling the pack to show that it wasn't among the rest. The envelope was opened and the card with the writing found inside it. Val took the card to the person who had chosen it and had him identify the signature.

It was all very wonderful and the whole audience appreciated it, particularly Joe Cardona.

For the chosen card that underwent those peregrinations was none other than the nine of spades!

Lamont Cranston could have written a prediction right there and then. As the show neared its conclusion, Cardona left the audience, as Cranston expected. To Margo, Cranston suggested that they walk out too, particularly as the last performer was doing the Hindu wands again.

In the foyer they found Wade Winstrom listening to Glanville Frost trying to sell him what Frost termed an "exclusive." That was one of Frost's rackets, to hook a customer for a fancy price on a single trick. Then after the purchaser popularized it, the trick would suddenly hit the market in quantity.

Knowing this, Winstrom was wary. He was glad when Cranston and Margo appeared for it gave him a chance to shake off Frost. Not a member of the S.O.S., which didn't get along too well with the U.W.A., Winstrom was a magical second fiddler tonight and was trying to live it down.

"Open house this evening," Winstrom reminded. "Some of the people have gone up to the penthouse already. I guess they couldn't stand this show" - he was shaking his head sadly - "and I must confess it's really terrible. Well, I'll be seeing you all later."

Later wasn't the correct term.

At that moment Cardona appeared from the door that led back stage, bringing Val Varno clipped in a pair of handcuffs. Before anybody could ask why, Varno raised his manacles and shook them at Glanville Frost.

"It's on account of the card and ribbon!" Varno practically shrieked. "Only you're the guy who sold it to me, as one of your exclusives. You can't deny it, Frost!"

For once Frost was too flustered to try. In a nice impartial style, Cardona clamped a pair of handcuffs on Frost's wrists too. With Solomonic wisdom Cardona announced:

"We're going down to headquarters. You fellows can saw each other in half down there."

Cranston stepped forward with a better suggestion.

"What about Winstrom's penthouse?" he inquired. "You held the last quiz up there. I guess Winstrom can call off his little party."

Under the circumstances, Winstrom could. He nodded and the group went to the elevator. On the way up to the penthouse, Margo gave a slight shudder, as she found herself standing between Varno and Frost.

It wasn't pleasant to be in the same elevator with a murderer, particularly the kind whose crimes were worked by magic!

As to which person was the actual killer, Margo was wondering if even The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XIX

Several guests were already in the penthouse looking around at Winstrom's apparatus. The library was locked along with the room that held the play bills because Winstrom always locked those rooms when he went out.

Cranston had been up here with other guests earlier. He had seen Winstrom lock up before they all went downstairs to the magic show.

Now Winstrom was politely dismissing the guests, telling them to come some other time. When the unwanted guests were gone, Cardona came right down to business. He spoke his piece to Frost and Varno mutually.

"All right, whichever of you knows," asserted Cardona. "The motive - and out with it."

Both suspects stared blankly.

"I can tell you the motive, inspector," put in Cranston, calmly. "The killer is after some gems once valued at a hundred thousand dollars and probably worth more than that today. They once belonged to the Sultan of Malkara and later became the property of the Great Savanti."

Cardona's mouth went wide; then clamped.

"Who cooked up that story?"

"Demo Sharpe unearthed it," corrected Cranston. "He told it to Pete Noland who passed it along to me."

Cardona was really astonished.

"You've seen Pete Noland?"

"I have," replied Cranston. "I reached him through Claire Meriden, who believed his story just as I do. You were right, inspector, in drawing your conclusions from Demo's manuscript. Pete was doubling for Demo with the telephone test."

Looking triumphant, Cardona suddenly went dumb.

"But how did Noland explain about Sharpe's body?"

"It was shipped up in the pagoda," explained Cranston. "The weight was faked with Zito's scales. We can check all that quite easily, inspector. Now let's get to murder's motive."

Everybody looked interested including Varno and Frost, though their expressions never could be accepted at face value.

Wade Winstrom made one of his big gestures that included all the antique apparatus in the living room.

"Some of this equipment belonged to the Great Savanti!" exclaimed Winstrom. "Could that have anything to do with murder?"

"It had everything to do with it," assured Cranston. "Assuming that Savanti hid the missing gems in some piece of apparatus, they could still be there."

"Let's look!" suggested Winstrom. Then, relaxing: "No, it would take too long right now. Go on with your story, Cranston."

"Since you were buying up all antique apparatus," Cranston told Winstrom, "Demo Sharpe was trying to examine all such items before they ever reached you." Then, turning to Frost and Varno as though one of them at least deserved more information, Cranston added: "And somebody was trying to get at that apparatus before Demo could go through it."

Cardona snapped up that point.

"That explains what happened at Cigam's!" expressed Joe. "Somebody planted the firing wand to get Demo. Only Louie the Grift walked into it instead."

The theory was approved by Cranston's nod.

"But what about Del Weird?" queried Cardona. "He'd already shipped his apparatus here. Why was Del Weird murdered?"

"Because he knew too much about Savanti," Cranston explained. "Demo Sharpe was trying to reach Professor Del Weird. Probably Del Weird knew nothing about the jewels, but he could have given important clues to them."

Cardona nodded. Then:

"And Demo was bumped because he got too hot on the trail." Joe looked from Varno to Frost. "Say, that business of Zito's scales ought to lead back to one of you fellows. Didn't you own those scales once, Frost?"

"They came with the pagoda," admitted Frost, "but Varno knew how they worked. Talk to him, inspector."

Before Cardona could quiz Varno, Cranston interrupted. He said the room was getting stuffy and asked Winstrom to unlock the other doors. As soon as Winstrom obliged, Cranston called:

"All right! We are ready!"

Out from the library stepped Pete Noland and Claire Meriden, their arms loaded with framed play bills and finely bound books, all from Winstrom's collection.

"Sorry, Winstrom," apologized Cranston. "I brought these people up here earlier and slipped them into the library while you were talking to the other guests. I wanted them to do a little research on the Great Savanti."

The research had been done. Pete and Claire spread the books and play bills on a couch and began to talk about them. It was Pete who stated:

"About the pagoda illusion -"

"Never mind about the pagoda illusion," interrupted Winstrom. "We're trying to uncover some mysterious gems. Have you found any traces of them?"

Pete shook his head, but Claire opened one of the books which proved to be a bound set of a long-forgotten magical magazine.

"Here's a report on Savanti's show," Claire said. "It mentions candy and that's something like jewels. In size and shape I mean. It mentions the wonderful vase in which candy appears and a cannon ball vanishes."

Winstrom gave a depreciating gesture toward the cannon ball globe which was standing proudly amid the lesser props.

"Just a hollow cannon ball," said Winstrom. "It's filled with candy which appears when the cannon ball splits apart. I've worked it often."

Cranston smiled as he stepped over to the big globe.

"Not often enough, perhaps," he remarked. "From everything I've heard about the Great Savanti, his work was always somewhat different. This magazine review indicates that."

Staring blankly, Winstrom asked:

"How?"

"Because it says that the candy appeared," recited Cranston, "and that the cannon ball vanished. In the usual version, it's the other way about."

"Maybe the reviewer just happened to write it up wrong."

"Possibly he wrote it right," declared Cranston. "We'll see."

Taking the cannon ball from the globe, Cranston replaced the top half of the latter. Never before had anyone attempted to work the trick in that condition; except of course Savanti. It didn't take Cranston long to find the gadget he wanted.

There was the sound of a plunger, noisy because it needed oil, shooting upward in the pedestal. From within the globe came the rattle of what seemed a miniature hail-storm. Cranston opened the globe and poured its contents into a glass jar that was standing near.

They formed a cascade of living brilliance, the crown jewels of Malkara, as Cranston drained the globe to the final gem. Wonderful candy, this, worth a thousand dollars a bite and guaranteed to retain its taste during all the years it had remained in Savanti's clever cache!

Extremely clever, too, because the trick wouldn't work while the cannon ball was in the globe and anyone who operated this apparatus - as Winstrom often had - would only have tried it while the cannon ball was inside.

Now Winstrom was coming forward, his hands eager as though he wanted to rinse them in that glittering bath of solidified color. Stepping aside, Cranston's swung the jewel-filled jar past Winstrom's grasp and tendered it to Claire Meriden.

"Your legacy," Cranston told Claire with a smile. "From your great-uncle, the Great Savanti!"

CHAPTER XX

If chagrin had ever overwhelmed any man, that man was Wade Winstrom. Others, their eyes on the splendor of the gems, failed to notice Winstrom's changed expression, but Cranston was watching for it.

This was a pay-off so unexpected that no man could have veiled his true emotions. Certainly Winstrom didn't, though he recovered rapidly. By then, however, his cause had suffered irrevocable damage. The congratulations that Winstrom offered Claire over her new-found wealth sounded as hollow as the cannon ball that lay beside the nickled globe.

Letting the farce continue, Cranston turned to Pete and reminded:

"You were saying something about the golden pagoda?"

"About the pagoda illusion," corrected Pete. "You ought to know, because you gave me the suggestion."

Cranston nodded slowly as though it was all just coming back to him.

"That's right," he said. "Savanti billed the pagoda illusion as the invisible flight. It wasn't just a production, the way Frost worked it. Evidently it was something in the nature of a transposition."

Winstrom tilted his head as he heard that.

"The scales belonged with the pagoda," continued Cranston, reflectively. "Now suppose somebody vanished from the pagoda. It would have been a great effect, wouldn't it, if the weight had suddenly dropped at the moment of that disappearance!"

Before Pete could say something, Cranston interrupted him.

"But there would have to be something equally sensational to complete the illusion. Suppose there was a second pagoda on the other side of the stage, resting on another set of scales. If the weight over there suddenly raised and the girl appeared from that empty pagoda, it would be very wonderful indeed."

Pausing, Cranston turned to the others and spoke straight to Winstrom.

"It would be so wonderful," added Cranston, "that the Great Savanti would logically have termed the pagoda illusion an invisible flight!"

"And that's what it was," asserted Pete. "There were two pagodas, just as you've said. None of Savanti's play bills dispute it. They just say 'the pagoda illusion' which could mean any number of pagodas. Only there happened to be just two."

Pete was flourishing an old book to prove it, one of Winstrom's very rare volumes that he seldom let people see. For what Winstrom hadn't known about the cannon ball globe, he did know about the pagoda illusion. Angrily, Winstrom made a grab for the book, only to have Cranston block him off.

"You own all sorts of odd apparatus," remarked Cranston. "Tell me, Winstrom, did you ever have a firing wand?"

Winstrom's only answer was a snarl.

"Of course you did," stated Cranston. "You planted it at Cigam's to kill Demo. You were the somebody who wanted to go through Savanti's apparatus first. Until it reached here, you had to block Demo's hunt."

Coldly logical all this, plus the fact that Winstrom played dumb, or at least indifferent.

Only now as Cardona saw it, Winstrom as the prospective owner would have been the first man to protect his coming interest, even with murder as the means.

Evidently Cranston had seen it that way quite a while ago.

"Fixing Del Weird's wine and water set-up was as simple up here as downstairs," analyzed Cranston. "I think Margo will remember that Del Weird was carrying his suitcase flat when he came down, which meant he had everything arranged inside it. So you can't alibi yourself where that murder is concerned, Winstrom."

Winstrom's glower proved he did not intend to try.

"Odd about Demo," continued Cranston, turning to Pete. "He must have been doing a lot of searching, those long evenings when you handled the telephone mystery for him. Where else could Demo have spent more time than here?"

It was Cranston now, who furnished the broad, sweeping gesture that not only included the masses of antique magic in this room, but carried toward the hall. Stepping in that direction, Cranston indicated the store room.

"You laid a nice trap there, Winstrom," Cranston stated. "Gadgets set so that they'd start working as soon as anybody handled them. That fact finally caught Demo. You'd been waiting for Del Weird's shipment to come in with the other pagoda and the scales belonging with it."

So that was the answer!

Duplicate pagoda and scales had been put on the Unicorn truck by Winstrom's servants, after they had murdered Demo Sharpe and stowed him in the pagoda. The Vanguard truck had been summoned separately to take away Frost's pagoda and Zito's scales to some warehouse.

"Of course if you hadn't quite caught Demo," Cranston told Winstrom from the outer door, "he would have fallen down the service elevator shaft. You ought to have that door fixed, Winstrom. Or I might say you already fixed it - in your own way."

It was Margo now who was remembering something. She told it right to Winstrom.

"No wonder you walked out on Zito's act at the Club Marimba!" accused Margo. "When you saw that I was Miss Libra instead of Claire, you figured something odd was brewing, and maybe at Frost's! Cute of you, to pretend you didn't recognize me later, while I was still in that Libra harness!"

"You were cute," corrected Cardona. "Winstrom here was just smart. Playing two bets as usual. When things fluked at Frost's, he headed for that phoney hideaway he'd fixed to look as though it belonged to Varno. He had to plant the goods on somebody."

"I was dumb enough to think that Varno planted that slate at Cigam's. But from the way Cigam dusted it off, I should have known it was there from away back; probably you put it there when you fixed the firing wand, just as a handy thing for the future."

"Nice stuff too, that nine of spades." Cardona turned to Varno and Frost. "Am I guessing right, Frost, in thinking you tried to sell that card and ribbon stunt to Winstrom, before letting Varno take it, pack and all?"

Frost nodded.

"That explains how you framed Varno then," Cardona told Winstrom. "So come along and we'll clean up any odd details down at headquarters. It's the right place for a quiz anyway."

Winstrom didn't think so. He gave a huge bellow that brought Frederick and the other servants, all of whom had been snooping close enough to know that their interests were at stake along with Winstrom's. Horrified, Margo saw that Cranston was gone from the hallway; then, a sudden stir of blackness proved that The Shadow had replaced him.

Only The Shadow wasn't needed, not just yet.

In springing for Cardona and Pete, Winstrom's servants ignored Frost and Varno because the two were handcuffed. The ex-prisoners took advantage of that oversight. In from the flanks they came and each brought a pair of handcuffed wrists hard against the head of a charging servant.

They were escape artists among other things, Frost and Varno. They knew the system for springing handcuffs, namely, by striking them sharply against some hard object at just the right angle, The hard

objects in this instance were the skulls of Winstrom's servants.

Handcuffs flew wide and Frost and Varno, with two knock-outs to their credit were free to help suppress the rest of Winstrom's tribe, which they did.

Only Winstrom himself managed to start a getaway which carried him as far as the store room. Passing The Shadow behind a screen of tumbling servants, Winstrom yanked open the store room door and wheeled out with a rifle. Backing toward the service elevator, he aimed the weapon down the hall.

"I nearly finished you with this!" Winstrom was storming at Pete, who was framed in the living room door. "I was the sniper who wanted to shake you off that ledge and close the Demo case for good! Now I'm really going to get you!"

Frantically Claire tried to haul Pete to cover and put herself in the rifle's path instead, just as Winstrom fired. Only Claire didn't fall; instead, she picked up the ends of a ribbon that apparently was running right through her. Surprised, Claire drew the ribbon back and forth.

The Shadow's laugh explained the mystery.

This wasn't Winstrom's regular rifle. The Shadow had switched it in the store room, leaving a different type in its place. Winstrom had fired a special rifle from his collection of magical apparatus, the one used in a harmless trick called "Shooting Through a Woman."

This time magic hadn't produced murder. Quite the opposite.

Along the hallway, Winstrom heard the whisper of doom. He saw blackness moving toward him, living blackness, a big gun looming from its advancing fist.

The Shadow was approaching, ready to deliver final vengeance should Wade Winstrom ask for it.

Madly, Winstrom flung the useless rifle at the black-cloaked figure and yanked open the door of the service elevator. Frantically he jumped inside, clanging the doors behind him.

Time seemed to hang during those next few seconds until there came a dull, mangling crash from far below, echoing muffled from the elevator shaft.

Winstrom should have remembered that in times of emergency, his servants saw to it that the service elevator was never there.

Another sound stirred from the hallway. It faded with the closing of the outer door that in turn obliterated a departing figure cloaked in black.

The sound was a strange-toned laugh, the weird evanescent mirth of The Shadow, marking the end of the menace called murder by magic!

THE END