



No Safety In Numbers

Maxwell Grant

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

? I.
? II.
? III.
? IV.
? V.
? VI.
? VII.
? VIII.
? IX.
? X.
? XI.
? XII.
? XIII.
? XIV.
? XV.
? XVI.

I.

THE washroom, so full of laughing, jostling men a few moments ago, was quiet now. The one man who was left was grateful for the silence. He had a lot to think about. He looked at his watch. Whew—almost time to meet her and he hadn't figured out yet how he was going to do it.

He lathered his hands, realizing as he did it that he was really stalling for time. He ran through in his mind all the scenes in the movies that he'd laughed at—How did you do it without making a fool of yourself, that was the big problem. He punched the handle that allowed the soapy water to run down out of the bowl. The white walls of the washroom lit his face as he looked at it in the mirror. He could have shaved a little closer, he realized.

Now, he turned hands dripping wet to the towel container set on the wall. They were paper towels and as he irritably balled one up and threw it away he wondered how anyone was supposed to dry their hands on one towel. He ripped another down. It was really getting late now. She was to meet him across the street. If he hurried he'd be just about a minute late.

His hands were still a trifle wet. He turned back to the towel dispenser. Were they all gone? No, he reached his fingers up under the lip and pulled the last towel out of the receptacle. The next guy was going to be out of luck.

He barely noticed out of the corner of his eye, that a small slip of paper had dropped out after the last paper towel. While he wiped his hands dry, he thought, all this brooding and I still don't know how I'm going to say it.

He was almost at the door before he realized that the slip of paper still lay on the floor. What of it? He started to leave again, but then with a grin quirked the corners of his mouth, he went back, for he remembered one time he had been superior and not stopped to look at what a pitchman had been selling. He had walked on purposefully and as a result had always had a nagging wonder at the back of his mind about what the pitchman was selling. Now, knowing his own curiosity, he walked back to where the little slip had fluttered down.

It would only make him another couple of seconds late and as he still hadn't figured out what he was going to say, it was time well spent.

He picked up the paper and looked at it. He had expected it to be some kind of ad for the specific kind of paper towels in the receptacle. Instead, he saw a column of figures. They were hand-written and definitely purposeful. But, despite the fact that they were set up like a problem in addition, the answer, or what was under the line that totaled the list, had no relevance to the sum.

His eyebrows drawn together in thought, he brushed by a man who entered as he left. The man looked at him cautiously. The young man was gone. The man who just entered looked from the closing door to the towel dispenser.

In the elevator the young man spent some more time looking at the figures on the slip of paper. But when the operator said, "All out, ground floor," the young man stuffed the paper into his pocket and, looking at a clock on the wall, suddenly swore and ran out of the building.

Across the street, down the block at a diagonal angle, she was waiting. Even if he hadn't been in a hurry, he wouldn't have seen a man's head sticking out of the washroom window. But the man in a parked car did.

The girl who was standing still, tapping her foot on the pavement, suddenly saw him running down the block across the street. The dear, sweet fool... leave it to him to let it go to the last possible second, and then run. He was starting to cross the street now. He was grinning, and his mouth was forming words she could not hear.

He was all she could see. He meant romance, satisfaction, life itself to her. She smiled forgivingly as she would always forgive him no matter what.

He saw the smile, knew that he was forgiven for dawdling, and ran a little faster. That was when the car that had come out from the curb drew even with him. He was almost on the same side of the street now that she was. She waited.

The sound was almost lost in the hubbub of traffic. It was like more of a spat than a real pistol shot. The bullet caught the young man between the shoulder blades. He crumpled in midstep, front foot reaching for the curb that would have brought him close to her. His head was over on the side now.

She was numb with shock. A man leaped from the car and leaning over, ran his hands through the young man's pockets. He found what he was looking for.

In a split second he was erect again. Another fraction of time and he was in the car. It drove off and still the girl had not escaped from the paralytic grasp of shock. People on the street, passersby alert to trouble of any kind, had that pitying smile on their faces that urbanites save for the sight of a drunk who is too far gone to navigate.

It was an offshoot of that attitude that broke the spell of horror for the girl. A thin-nosed ascetic-looking middle-aged woman going by sniffed, "There now, if that isn't enough reason for bringing back

prohibition... it's disgusting, a young man like that rolling in the gutter!"

For he was rolling in the gutter. He had turned over so that his poor strained face was looking straight up at her as she ran to his side.

She bent over as he gasped, "Darling, I love you. Will you marry me?" He had finally found words to say it.

As she nodded, her eyes full of tears, he died.

In another section of town, a man walked up to another man who was standing on a corner holding up a building with his back. He was well dressed in a peg-trousered, too-padded-in-the-shoulders way. He had a key-chain in his hand, which he was whirling around and around. The chain never stopped moving as the man who walked up said, "I dreamed up a beauty last night, 329. Dreamt about cigars and tables and the dream book says that's gotta be 329. Put me down all the way down the line."

"Gasmeter?"

The other nodded as he flipped a quarter through the air. The chain continued to circle as the man grabbed it with his free hand.

On the heels of the man who had dreams, a dowdy old woman walked up to the chain twirler. She said, "My same old number, Joe. It's gotta come in soon"

He took the two cents she gave him and said nothing.

In still another section of town, and this was as different as eclipse from sun, a parlor maid looked out the back window of the mansion that she worked in and said, "Marie, Ronnie, come in, here comes the ice man!"

They dropped what they were doing and came to the back door. The ice truck that drove up to the back door was an anomaly. It had no place in that section of electric refrigerators.

The ice man grinned down from his truck as they walked up. "Gotta tip?"

The parlor maid shook her head, "No, but that snooty cook next door hit yesterday for a nickel. If she can do it so can I. Here, a nickel on 999."

"Mine's on 743. I figured it out. It's due. Hasn't come up in three months." That was Ronnie the valet.

"I'm hunchin' mine. Here, a dime on 432." Marie handed over the ten cents.

The ice man scratched his head and, taking a soiled notebook out of his pocket, said, "Let's see if I got the orders right. A dime's worth of ice for you, a nickel on 999 and 743. See you tomorrow." The ice wagon drove off and the servants returned to work.

A sharply dressed character, twin to the chain twirler, walked up to a funeral parlor. He looked through the window at the two depressed palms that drooped in their pots. He looked in the glass till his eyes had adjusted and the glass acted like a mirror. Nobody around.

He opened the front door. A man in a cutaway stood up and said, "In what way can I help you in your bereavement—Oh, it's you, Charlie. Couldn't see with the sun outside." He jerked his thumb past him. "G'wan in; you're late. It's almost three."

Hunching his padded shoulders, the man who had just come in elbowed his way past the man in the

cutaway. He pushed the door open. Behind the quiet sombre hangings of the funeral parlor, there was a lot of activity.

At the far end of the room, adding machines, run by expert fingers, made a pleasant clacking. Just before him, in the center of the room, there was a broad table with a series of cash registers on it.

He smiled with the corners of his mouth, although his eyes strayed warily as he emptied his pockets on the table. A man who was standing at the far end of the room looked up at the sound of small change hitting the table. "Late again?"

"Yeah, waited for a pickup. Good customer. Don't like to lose one."

"You're gonna be late one time too often. I don't like it."

"Awright, don't read the hymn to me now, I'm busy."

"Too busy to take orders?"

"What goes on here anyhow? This is worse than the army!"

"In the army you could gold brick. Me, I don't like it!" The man was still quiet, conversational. "Now, why were you really late?"

"I told'j'a. What gives? You makin' like a boss all of a sudden? So I'm a couple minutes late, so what?"

The man looked at him for a little while. Then his hand went into his pocket. He took it right out. He was holding something in his hand. He held it up and looked at it for a moment. He didn't say anything. Then, he put the object back into his pocket again.

It was a curious thing to cause the reaction that it did in the man who had been in the army such a short while ago. He looked at it with horror in his eyes. He tried to say something and then evidently thought better of it. He licked his suddenly dry lips. The room was quiet. The men had stopped their work at the adding machines. All of them had seen the little thing. It was about two inches long, round and pointed like a pencil, and it was the color of a blue crayon.

The man gulped, then said, "I can take a hint. I won't be late again." He moved his shoulders nervously under the padding. His eyes darted from side to side. He had been publicly disciplined. At any other time he would have resented that more than the discipline. But that little... He turned on his heel and left.

"All right, the rest of you, show's over. Get to work." The quiet man fingered the little blue object in his pocket, and a grim smile played over his lips. This was more like it. This was only the beginning of what this town was going to see.

The rackets were in, and they were going to stay in—unless a telephone call that was being made at that moment could stay the course of dread events.

II.

IN the midst of the web of wires that fed into the telephone answering service where Burbank, one of The Shadow's most trusted aides, sat like a spider, a phone call was in progress. Harry Vincent was on the other end of the line. He said, "Burbank, you kill me. I don't know how you know there is something due to pop up here in Skillton, but it's popping all right. You better let The Shadow know. I haven't seen anything like this since prohibition!"

"How's that?" asked Burbank. He had known there was some devilry afoot because of little shreds of

gossip he had heard, but as to the size of the mess, or what was causing it, he was in the dark.

"The racket boys have walked in and are taking the whole place over lock, stock and barrel. It looks to me like a fix is in to the gendarmes. I don't see how else they're operating the way they are."

"I see. Anything concrete?"

"Plenty. A young lad on his way to propose to his one-and-only just got knocked off like a torpedo in Cicero in the old days. The shot came from a car. No one got the license. The boy's clean as far as I can find out. His girl, his family, the cops, nobody has any idea why he was killed. And in such a way. Strictly a gang killing!"

"How far is the town organized?"

"All the way. I tell you it's a job for The Shadow! Is he back?"

"Yes, he's home now, resting. I'll give him a ring. You sit tight up there. I have to send some of the other boys up there to you to help."

"If you do, deal Hawkeye in. I have a hunch we'll be able to use a spotter like him. I'll keep in touch with you, 'bye."

Burbank yanked the plug out of the board and plugged in on a secret phone number. There was no answer. Burbank thought a moment before he dialed the number of Lamont Cranston's home. It was busy.

It was busy for good reason. A call from Skillton had come in ten minutes before. Cranston was speaking, "But Gerald, what do you want me to do?"

"Good heavens, Lamont, if I knew, do you think I'd be calling you? Here I am with the most influential newspaper in town, not unpossessed of some personal influence myself, and yet I am powerless! Powerless, I tell you! I've seen the D.A, the commissioner, we've had about ten blue ribbon grand juries, and the net result is another gang killing this afternoon. A young man, shot down in the streets like an animal!"

Cranston thought a second. Gerald Winthrop was certainly a personage in his home town. If he said things had come to this sorry pass, then the situation must be desperate. For Winthrop had his eye on the mayoralty as a stepping stone to the gubernatorial mansion of his state. He would not like having his town used as a shooting gallery.

"Gerald, I'll come up, if you think I can be of any assistance, but I can't promise you anything, of course."

"Of course, I understand that. Perhaps I am behaving in a silly fashion, Lamont, but believe me, I am frightened at the turn events are taking. There's the same air about all this that there was in that lawless period during prohibition. I don't like it one bit!"

"I can see why you wouldn't. I'll see you tomorrow."

Cranston no sooner set the phone down than the bell rang again. It was Burbank. "Heard anything about the deal up in Skillton?"

"What, you too?" There was grim amusement in Cranston's voice.

"Me, too? What have you heard?"

"Winthrop, who owns the Skillton Journal, has just been telling me about conditions. From what I can gather, you may have to send some of our friends up there."

Burbank knew what that meant. Cranston's views then were coincidental with his own. "Think you'll need me?"

"You're more valuable right where you are. Stay put and keep your finger on things. This may be just the snow-capped top of a glacier of crime. I don't think this can be just an isolated instance. It may be the precursor of a nation-wide attempt to put things back on the old gang war basis. That must be prevented, no matter what the cost!"

Unseen, Burbank's face was wreathed in smiles. Nobody could put anything over on his boss. He had smelled the same something wrong. This was bad medicine and the cure had to be applied quickly! Suppose Skillton were the testing ground, the guinea pig for crime leaders all over the country. If the law could be shown to break down in this one place, it might well be the signal for all the criminals to make their bid for control!

"Harry Vincent's up there now and I'm sending Hawkeye. Need anyone else?"

"Not right away. I'll let you know." There was a quiet click. There was not time for anything else. Cranston walked away from the phone. On a library table the brief case that hid the raiment of the night lay waiting.

Cranston tucked it under his arm. In the brief case, under a zipper, was the cloak; that deep black cloak that masked the movements of the creature of night, of sudden vengeance, The Shadow!

It was Lamont Cranston who flew up to Skillton; it was even Cranston who took a taxi to the middle of town. Again, it was Cranston who looked up and down a long street with a practiced eye. He saw the mouth of an alley. It was a dark alley, and despite the fact that it was Cranston who went into the alley, it was The Shadow who, a moment later, stood bathed in darkness looking up and down the street. He had an idea that this was no time for half measures, no time for appearing in his normal guise. This was a case for the sure eye and steady hand of the master of men!

A low, mirthless laugh rolled down the cobbled street that led to the end of the alley. A cat, nervous as nature had made her, leaped half out of the garbage can she was munching in. The laugh had rubbed her sensitive fur the wrong way. It would have been luckier for certain denizens of Skillton's underworld if they had been possessed of the cat's sensitivity. The Shadow was on the prowl!

Raw, unshaded light spilled down on the green baize table. The reflection on a narrow pool cue looked like a lance of brightness. At the far end of the table, a ball, the thirteen, teetered at the edge of the pocket. It teetered and then stopped, half in and half out of the pocket. The man who was shooting swore. He banged his cue down on the floor, but even that did not cause the ball to overbalance in.

His opponent said, "You're as scatty as a viper tonight, what's the matter?"

"Nothin'." His voice was flat. It was the man who had been disciplined with the strange little blue pellet. He was scatty, there was no use denying it. What had he let himself in for? Things hadn't been this way before he went to war. What was going on? Deep in thought, he had to be called before he realized that his opponent had scratched.

"There's your chance for a run. Can you clean up the table?" The man's voice was mocking. He had

seen early in the game that something was up. There was something in the wind. He was using it to win the game of pool. After all, he'd been beaten a lot of times by this guy.

"Yeah, sure, you want to make another side bet?" No sense in letting everyone in the pool room know he was upset.

"Like candy from a baby, Charlie. Like candy."

Charlie threw some more money down on the table. He had to get a grip on himself. If he could end this game he'd go home and try to think this thing out.

He chalked the tip of his cue and bending gracefully over the table, took careful aim. This was his meat. He couldn't miss it with his eyes closed. But he did.

"Cripes, can'ch'a even make hangers? Out'a the way and let a guy shoot pool as can."

With neat precision as another man might hold a scalpel, the man clicked off a run of fourteen balls. It took quite a while. He looked up and said, "How did you like that? Hey, Charlie—"

But he was talking to the walls. Charlie was gone.

On the street, alone and still nervous, Charlie looked around him. His walking out like that had been a giveaway as to how he was feeling. It was not too good to let the boys know he was upset. Now, what was it that was getting him down? He thought about it for a while. It was a difference in attitudes. Before he'd gone into the army, this racket had been simply a way to make a soft dollar, but now it was rigged. There was a peculiar sense of strain that Charlie could not understand. After all, the fix must still be in, the cops were being paid off—then what was in the wind?

That rumor? That business about Larry Bonds trying to move uptown?

The North Side had always been big enough for Larry; why should he decide to try and muscle in on the South Side? Was Joey Raoll getting soft? No, he wasn't getting soft... that was part of it. Joey was tougher than ever, but why? What was there to get tough over?

The dark areaways to his side were secret mouths that, in this slum part of town, might hold anything. Charlie eyed each of them as he passed.

But when it came it came right out in the open. A man walked up the street towards Charlie. The man was next to him now. He asked, "Gotta match, bud?"

Charlie snarled more from nerves than nastiness, "Nah, beat it! Scram."

He tried to walk past the moocher, but a hand appeared from the man's clothes and the hand was heavy with a gun. The gun was in Charlie's stomach. He looked at it and took an involuntary step back. This brought an iron railing into the small of his back. The railing was meant to keep you from falling into the areaway.

It did not serve its function. For, as the bullet wiped all fear from Charlie's mind, as well as every other thought, forever, his slumping body fell backwards onto the railing.

He remained there, dead, for a moment teetering like some horrid kind of see-saw. The man who had shot him grinned and reaching forward, flipped the feet upwards. The seesaw overbalanced and the body fell backwards into the darkness of the areaway.

The muffled sound of the body did not reach far. No one seemed to have heard either the bullet shot, which was low, or the sound of the body landing in terrible disarray, all dignity gone, like a sack of garbage.

Gun back in pocket, the killer looked up and down the lonely street. No one. That shadow down near the corner? No... just his eyes. He blinked. He wasn't used to seeing things. There had been a strange lengthening of that shadow... but, it was probably an alley cat looking for dinner. He shrugged and walked back towards the lights that illumined the avenue that led into this back street.

He walked with no tremor of fear towards the lights. Fear? What had he to fear? Certainly no pangs of conscience, for this was his job. Other men sold milk, drove cabs, conducted businesses. This was his business. There are his like in every big city and in more than one small one. Completely amoral, with no compunctions, no regard for the value of life, they sell their services with gun, knife or poison to the highest bidder.

Fear of the police? He would have laughed at that. He had been booked twenty times. Nothing ever came of it. If there were witnesses they showed a curious ability to forget. At least they did after some friends of his went around and saw them—

Then, he was usually careful that his killings took place in a section of town where there might be a venal cop or two who could be bought. That was part of his insurance. He was willing to split his price if it meant staying out of jail. No, he was not afraid of anything. Not until there came, low, chilling, like a blast from the grave, the whisper of laughter. He had never heard it before in his life, but he knew what it meant!

That laugh could only emanate from the lips of one man! The Shadow! Somewhere behind him, hidden in the darkness of the night, there was a minion of the law who could not be bought or intimidated!

III.

IN an over-decorated suite, in the finest hotel in town, a figure stood before a mirror. It was the figure of a man. He was dressed well; nothing overdone, but his clothes were too well pressed, his shoes too shined, his necktie too pristine. Each of his garments looked as if they had never been worn before.

It was a far cry, thought Larry Bonds, from the way he had dressed ten years ago. He was well-satisfied with his appearance. To his eyes, he was the perfectly dressed gentleman as seen in the pages of a man's fashion magazine.

He compared the sombre richness of the fabric of his clothes with the loud patterns which he had once thought were a sign of richness. A voice broke in on his narcissistic revery. It was harsh, brittle.

"You gonna stand there all night, or do we do the joints?"

He turned and looked at her. She seemed even less satisfactory tonight than usual. She had not been able to peel off the layers of cheapness and vulgarity the way he had.

He looked at her for a long time while she piled even more lipstick onto her already neon red lips. His gaze and silence finally caught her attention. She looked up from her compact mirror. She said, "Now, what's goin' on in that dizzy head of yours?"

"Nothing—not a thing." His eyes were steady. She had to go, that was all there was to it. She was an anchor tying him to the past. Reminding him of the slums from which he had fought his way. It was a

reminder for which he did not care. He waited at the door, topcoat thrown over his arm, while she threw a stone marten cape around her shoulders, took a last look in a full-length mirror and walking stiff-leggedly, the way a model does when she is displaying clothes, joined him.

"At least pretend you enjoy goin' out with me. C'mon, put on a smile so the elevator boy doesn't give me a look like he always does."

It was hard, but he pretended to be an ardent husband while they made their way down and out of the building. Once they were in his long black car and he had told the chauffeur the address, he let his face go all grim again.

"Look, Larry, what's cookin'. You're not conning me. Something's up and I got a right to know what!"

He hid what was in his mind and said, "Business troubles."

"How come? I thought you had the town taped up."

"So did I, but the boys on the South Side are getting too big for their breeches. Two runners came in today and gave me the tip that some of Joey's controllers are looking for a spot for a control room."

"How long ya gonna let them get away with it?" She was curious, for he didn't even sound mad.

"Not long." He looked at his watch. "About ten minutes to be exact."

"That's why we're making with the judge tonight, huh? An alibi? Is that it?"

He pointed to the chauffeur and said, "Can't you ever button your lip?"

There was no further conversation till they were in the judge's house. They handed their clothes to the man at the door and walked into the large living room with the old oak paneling that was as phony as the judge's pretension to fairness and justice.

He looked up as they entered and smiled a greeting. Larry shook hands with him and took that chance to look at his watch. 9:32. This was it. He'd see how tough the South Side wanted to make it after tonight.

Down in the neighborhood that Joey Raoll made his stamping grounds, Raoll, tall, well dressed, handsome in a strange way, for his face was too harsh for normal standards of good looks, was coming out of his controller's office. The receipts had been up to standard and he was pretty satisfied with the way things were going.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a car racing up the street. The only thing that signaled suspicion to his quick brain was the fact that the car was too close to the curb.

With the jungle-quick reflexes that had helped him to fight to the particular top of the crime heap that he called his own, he spun on one toe and leaped behind a low wall that sectioned off a space next to the store he had just quitted.

He landed on all fours in a mass of garbage that had spilled from some brown paper bags. Without a second's loss of time he flattened down in the muck of highly smelling garbage and waited. The car zoomed by. He waited. Curious, he didn't quite know what he was expecting, but silence was not part of it. Seconds passed. He risked his life and looked at the front of the store that hid his illegal bookkeeping department.

The window was whole; they hadn't thrown a pineapple. It was then that he saw it, and he flattened

down on the ground a second before the blast. For, sticking to the icy smoothness of the glass front he had seen a round lump with a fuse hanging from it. A sticky bomb like the ones the anti-tank boys had used in the war.

It rocked the neighborhood. The glass was gone as though it had never existed. The inside of the shop was full of torn and scattered remnants that in no way resembled what they had been such an infinitesimal time before.

The sound was gone. The smaller sounds of plaster and brick falling had long since ceased before Raoll, sick at his stomach and with blood running from his ears, staggered out from behind the breastworks that had saved his life.

He looked at his store, or what little was left of it. He was rocky. Even as he stood there, he swayed from side to side like a fighter who had been hit on the jaw and hasn't quite realized he's knocked out.

So the rumors had been correct. Bonds was trying to muscle into his section. He wanted the whole town. Raoll took one last look at his store and turning, walked away, staggering, before the police cars rocked into view.

In the wonderful old house that Gerald Winthrop's family had owned for a hundred years, Winthrop, a badly worried man, waited. He had heard from his city desk, and the editor was as excited as Winthrop had ever known that phlegmatic man to be.

Reports had come in that showed the town was in for a criminal war. The city editor had mentioned the murder of an unidentified man in a lonely alley that was capped by an explosion that had torn up a whole building down on the South Side of town.

Winthrop, waiting, wondered what, if anything, Cranston could do. The bell rang. Winthrop, in a moment of bad manners that was rare, elbowed the butler out of the way as he ran for the door. In the open doorway stood Lamont Cranston, cool, impeccably dressed, carrying the inevitable brief case.

Winthrop grabbed him by the arm and piloted him into the library. He mixed two drinks and offering one to Lamont Cranston, downed the other at one gulp. He told Cranston about the blast.

As it happened, this was a twice told tale, for Cranston in that guise of night, that costume that brought fear to even the hardest criminals, had followed the keening sounds of the police cars. At the outskirts, unseen, he had looked at what remained after the bomb had finished its work. Not that it had been necessary, but the profligacy of the method had given another spur to his desire to end this menace to the peaceful life of the city of Skillton.

However, he listened and pretended to be amazed as Winthrop, with a wealth of adjectives, described the scene, the loss of property, the two old people in a nearby house who had died of shock, and wound up with a heart-felt plea to Cranston.

In the background, almost unnoticed because of Winthrop's commanding air, was Peebles, a secretary who looked precisely like what one would imagine a male secretary to look.

He gulped before he said, "It's terrible, that's all I can say, terrible!" He shivered to show how terrible he thought it was. His thin frame, narrow shoulders and a certain pigeon-breasted look that he had, all combined to make him look like a mouse in an animated movie.

Winthrop turned, looking down from his greater height, glowered at his employee. "That's certainly a big help, Peebles. Do you have anything else as concrete to offer to this meeting?"

"Gulp, well—I just meant that it's so terrible that something will have to be done. After all," Peebles offered this brightly, "you know they always say that its darkest just before dawn. Maybe now that Mr. Cranston is here—"

"Fine, if you have finished, let me say, Cranston," Winthrop completely ignored the little man, "that we have at the moment what is to all intents and purposes, a civil war going on in the city of Skillton. Heaven only knows where it will all end. I certainly don't— gang war, pineapples, random shooting of innocent bystanders—"

Winthrop lit a cigar and puffed on it angrily. "It can't go on. We must do something and do it fast! Otherwise the streets of Skillton will be awash with blood!"

"Whoa, hold on, Gerald. This sounds like something out of the roaring twenties. Are you sure your analysis of what's going on is correct? What's the motivation? What's the big racket here in town?"

Winthrop grimaced and reached into his pocket. He took out a slip of paper. He showed it to Cranston.

"You see that list of numbers?"

Cranston nodded.

"That's the answer. Policy, playing the numbers, whatever you want to call it. You know about it, don't you?"

"A bit. You bet that you can call three numbers in the correct order, don't you?"

"That's right. This is a list of numbers that was used in court as evidence against what's called a runner."

"The runner is the one who picks up the bets? A sort of bookie for the numbers."

Winthrop nodded. "This list of numbers was found by the police on a man with no visible means of support. The man, a number runner if you ever saw one, said this list of numbers were the house addresses of places where he had gone apartment hunting!"

The expression on Winthrop's face was one of those I-dare-you-to-top-that things.

"Don't tell me he got away with it!"

"Oh yes, and for one very good reason! The people in this city, as well as in most of them in this country, take the same attitude to numbers that they used to take to liquor during prohibition. Most people like to gamble. They don't find it very sinful, therefore, they have a tendency not to pay much attention to anyone who breaks the gambling laws."

"I see. That feeling is very widespread, I must say. I've seen countless newspaper editorials pleading for a state or national lottery here in this country, like the Irish or the Calcutta sweepstakes. The editorialists have quite a bit on their side too. They can show that here in America we used lotteries early in history to raise funds for the government. Then too, they keep saying that since gambling is built into humanity, it's pretty hard to extirpate it."

Cranston paused to clear his throat and before he could say anything else, Winthrop interrupted.

"Well, you'll never find any such editorials in my paper. After all, there are plenty of other ways to raise money for the government. Those means work well without putting Uncle Sam in the position of being some kind of super-bookie!"

"Hold it, I'm making no brief for that sort of opinion. I'm just saying that I can see why the citizens of your town might well feel as they do about the number runners that the police pick up."

"The really unfair part of the betting is something that doesn't seem to upset the people who bet their nickels and dimes with the gambling ring. You see, the real odds against them picking the right three numbers in the correct order are 999 to 1. But they get paid off at about 550 to 1. So with all other things being equal, the bettor is always fighting against the 449 percentage."

"That makes quite a lead-pipe cinch for the operators of the numbers ring." Cranston looked thoughtful. He'd never before given much thought to this kind of racket.

"There are a lot of other angles that militate against the bettor and in favor of the operators. But all that to one side, it's a multi-million dollar racket... and you know what that means."

The newspaper owner who had been brandishing the slip of paper with the numbers on it in the air, folded it up and put it in his pocket. He picked a newspaper up off the desk and spread it out flat in front of Cranston.

He read the headlines, " 'Mass Murder! Gang Fight On!' That was the last edition today, but wait till tomorrow, with that blasting that took place tonight! I'll wake the people of Skillton to the viper they are harboring in their midst!"

"When you said that, I realized what the fact that it is a multi-million dollar racket means. You mean that any gang given that amount of money for protection is going to set itself above the law."

"Of course. And the events of today and tonight are proof of it. It's the beginning of a reign of terror if these hoodlums have their way."

"I can see that. You go ahead, Gerald, and keep hammering away at the public conscience. Try to make them realize what all this can mean—"

Cranston looked thoughtfully off into space and then said slowly, "Perhaps you can use this in some way in your editorials. I don't remember now where I read this, but it is so apposite that I have never forgotten the words: 'In the thirties there was a pitched battle between the gangsters and the citizens of the world. In most of the places of the globe, the men of good will prevailed and jailed the gangsters. But in Italy and Germany, the gangsters prevailed and jailed the men of good will.' "

"That is well put. I'll frame my next editorial around it. Thank you for the thought and for any help you may be able to give to our beleaguered city."

They parted that way. Lamont Cranston made his way back to the hotel where he had reserved a room. He was thinking of the pattern of conquest that the fascists had used. It was so easy, given money and the proper attitude amongst the people. It thrived in an amoral atmosphere. That had been the biggest weapon of the bootleggers during the old days. The people had wanted to break the law just as much as had the lawbreakers proper.

He shook his head. The law would have to come to Skillton, for "where law ends, tyranny begins."

IV.

AS though trying to provide a proper atmospheric backdrop for the crime wave that was threatening to engulf Skillton, the sun rose in a murky red haze that boded no good.

The sourly red beams made their way with effort through the air that was heavy with humidity. People scurrying along the moist streets were cranky and irritable. The weather was a strain. You were conscious of the air pressing down on you.

Before going into the elevator that would carry him up to the cubicle in which he spent forty hours a week, a man stopped and spoke to the elevator starter. "Hi, Jocko, here's a dime. Play it straight on 476. And with this other dime, give me a run down."

The starter caught the twenty cents and smiled at the player. As a runner, he made about four times what he made for directing the going and coming of the elevator cars.

A woman, looking around suspiciously, pressed a dime into the starter's hand. He was a little surprised, until he saw who it was. He grinned.

After the woman had given what she thought would be the winning number for the day, the starter looked around. It really was a sweet set-up. The building paid him for being in the best position to meet a slew of people. Very kind of them. He grinned again as another customer came hurrying up.

The scene was being repeated all over the city. The runners were everywhere, doing everything. The smart ones had jobs as cover-ups so that in the unlikely event that they would be picked up by the cops in some purity wave, they could prove that they were hard-working citizens who resented the intrusion into their lives.

The not-so-smart ones, who thought they were the smart ones, were the men who stood on street corners, too well-dressed for the neighborhood, looking like big shots. They seemed to have a uniform. No matter what kind of clothes they wore, one and all had the same kind of hat. Expensive and all very light, almost white. It was a not very subtle way of bragging about how well off they were. The lightness of the color showed that they could afford to have their hats cleaned every other day if they felt like it.

A cop, pacing his beat, waiting for the time to grab a cup of coffee, saw one of the light-hatted, sharply dressed contingents lolling against a building. Swearing to himself, the cop wished that there didn't have to be a certain percentage of dishonesty among even the best police forces. Policemen, after all, are human beings. If you took a cross section of them you'd find the honest ones outweighed the dishonest about ten or twenty to one. But what could a beat cop do when he knew his captain was getting paid off for allowing the number runners to ply their trade?

Walking slowly, swinging his night stick, the cop passed in front of the smart money boy. Their glances crossed. The man leaning against the wall, tipped his hat up with his thumb and grinned. He knew the cop. Knew him for an honest man, or in his own parlance, a sucker, and knew that he had nothing to fear from the minion of the law.

Hand clenching his nightstick, dying to at least sweep the light pearl-gray hat off the grinning face and throw it in the gutter, the cop walked slowly on.

"What's 'amatter, copper, don't 'ha wanta play a number? The hunch players are all down on 311 today."

That did it. The cop swerved in his path and clipped the hat off the man's head. The hat rolled along the street and wound up in the gutter. A passing truck swept muddy water over it. The cop waited for the man to pick up a fist, to swear, to do any thing.

Instead, still grinning, the number runner said between his teeth, "Boys will be boys, eh? Ante up. That hat cost me a fast four pounds. Get it up..."

Indecisively, the cop stood trying to make up his mind whether to rough the man up or walk on.

"Ya deaf? I want the green for that little number!"

The cop walked away, hands clenched to keep from doing anything more he'd regret. The last words he heard were, "I'll expect the dough by tonight or you get transferred the hell out to the sticks!"

The tough part to take was that the number runner was probably right. He did have the power to cause the policeman to be transferred. All he had to do was go to his controller and tell him that the cop had tried to put the heist on him. The controller would get hold of the police captain and lay down the law. About a block later the cop decided to swallow the green bile in his throat and pay for the hat he had ruined.

The phone rang and Lamont Cranston pulled himself up through bottomless layers of sleep. He pulled the phone over to the bed. Clearing his throat he said, "Yes?"

The phone chirped cheerily, "You left a call for nine, sir."

"Nine? Oh yes... thank you."

Sitting up in bed, Cranston pulled his wits together and remembered the task that lay before him. It was a Herculean one, but one that had to be done.

A brisk shower helped to rid him of the oppressive feeling engendered by sleeping in that humidity. He made his way downstairs to the dining room.

Not even his super-keen eyes took it in, but to his left, a patron, leaving, put a tip down on the table, and next to it, some money wrapped in a slip of paper. The slip said 678. The waiter who picked it up didn't even look at it. He stuffed it away in his pocket with the other bets that some of the customers had left for him.

Cranston had the waiter bring him the morning paper along with his breakfast. He opened it to the front page. The sharp clarity of flash bulbs made the scene of the bombing look even worse than it had looked in reality the night before. The story about the pictures was full of mysterious hints about gangdom's vengeance but little else. The paper did not even mention Joey Raoll's name although every reporter in town knew that the spot was one of his control rooms.

Paper folded under one arm, the brief-case under the other, Cranston rose from the table. A genteel looking little woman passing by said, "Oh, pardon me, sir, but might I look at your paper for a second. I haven't had a chance to see one yet."

Puzzled he handed her the paper. She didn't even look at the news columns; she turned to the last pages and looked down at the bottom of the page devoted to the sport of kings. But she didn't look to see what the winners of the races were. There was a box, in it a row of numbers was printed. Ostensibly they showed the dollars and cents results from the mutual tote boards. But it was obvious she wasn't looking at that.

Looking over her shoulder rudely, Cranston saw her gnarled shaking finger go down the line of numbers. It stopped at the last digit in the first row of numbers. It was a five. Next she stopped at the last digit in the third row and finally the last digit in the last line.

She sighed. "I was close. I had 519, but 516 came in. I should have played a run down—that's what! I'll know better today."

She smiled at him in thanks and returned his paper. A moment's thought explained her peculiar actions. They were using the mutual total figures for the determination of the winning number in the "policy game". By a rundown she had meant that besides betting on the figure she had in mind, namely 519, she should have coppered off and bet some smaller amount on each of the number in that series of ten. If she bet a dime on the whole number she could then bet a penny on 511, 512, and so on up to 519. That cut down on her winnings. Cranston thought a moment. If she won on the rundown, she stood to make five dollars and fifty cents. Whereas, if she "hit" for a whole dime, she would receive fifty some odd dollars. No wonder they bet—

He shrugged off a feeling of oppression. The racket seemed to be everywhere, entangling everyone with its tentacular arms. Of course it wasn't true; probably no more than twenty or thirty percent of the population bet on the policy game. But twenty percent of almost a million population was not to be sneered at.

It was a big town and basically a good town. It was well worth saving. Cranston, walking along aimlessly, getting the feel of the place as he always liked to do before getting into real action, saw the changing faces, the mixtures of blood streams that had poured into the making of the face of America, and was reassured. These people were his people. If they once saw the danger that they were playing with in dealing with the malicious men who made their fortunes from the racket, the public would take over.

In the too ornate suite that was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Bonds, Larry Bonds got out of bed with a feeling of achievement. Too bad the bomb hadn't gotten Joey. But next time—

His wife entering the room was snappish. She said, "Larry, will you stop giving me that look?"

He lowered his eyes. Somehow the early morning sunlight made her brassy good looks seem ever more meretricious than they had the preceding evening.

She said, "Every time you look at me lately, I get a feeling that you're measuring me for a cement kimono. Cut it out!"

A pulse throbbed in his temple. That was the way. Why hadn't he thought of it before. Trying to hide the look in his eyes, he glanced at her again. Yes, she would be much better off at the bottom of the river, tastefully draped in cement.

Divorce was out of the question. She knew too much. This would clean up the whole slate. And the next time he married, it would be someone whom he could bring anywhere without flushing with embarrassment, the way he had at the judge's last night. That made him even more angry. After all, the judge was in this as deep as he was. Why should he feel guilty just because his wife's laugh was too loud after she took a couple of drinks? He knew he couldn't rid himself of the feeling, of the shame. It would be much better to get rid of her once and for all.

He grinned, and it was an unpleasant sight to see. Maybe he could rig it so as to dump both Joey and Clarissa at once. Her newly assumed name made his grin sink even deeper into the flesh of his swart face. Clarissa! She thought that had class!

And in the middle of the tangled web of dealing and double-dealing, of bribery and murder, of illicit profits and hidden safety deposit boxes, at the center of the web there was one who rose well-content. To this one, the red, red sun was a pleasant omen of the bloody fulfillment of all plans.

What of Joey Raoll? Was he to sit quietly by and be blasted out of existence? That was a question that was on the lips of every member of the underworld.

They wanted to know because if Joey took last night's attack lying down, then there was but one proper course to follow and that was to switch allegiance and switch it fast—to Larry Bonds. These were rats that didn't wait for the ship to sink before deserting. They wanted to be a long distance away before the ship even got into deep water.

Spruce, not a hair out of place, Joey Raoll walked through the streets of the South Side like a reigning monarch. He had to show himself, whether he wanted to or not, so they could see he was all in one piece and that he was not skulking somewhere, afraid of the death that might strike out of the blue from some ambusher's window, in any house he walked past.

While he walked, while he flashed his white teeth in a smile to anyone of sufficient importance to warrant the trouble, his mind was working as it never had before. His sleep, troubled as it had been, had shown no other way out of his spot but death for Larry. Death—and it had to be fast—had to be framed so that everyone who counted knew who had done the killing.

He thought he had it all taped out. He'd know before nightfall. It had to be settled by then, for he, of all people, knew only too well how tenuous was the hold which he had over his men and of his nether world.

The only thing that made it a little tough was the fact that, of course, Larry knew that he, Joey, would now have to kill or be killed. It was a case of twice warned.

He wondered if Larry was at all put out because the bomb had missed the night before. He imagined that it must have caused some quick planning on his enemy's part. All Joey had to do now was keep alive till after the death of his opponent.

The plots and counter plots went on back and forth. And none of the powerful men who were making the plans knew that brooding over the scene like a malevolent genius was the uncanny figure of the creature of the night—The Shadow!

V.

HIDDEN from the light of day, like two master chess players invisible to the eyes of the world, were the master criminals of whose existence there was not the slightest whisper. Equally unknown to the people who were the pawns in the master game, was the black-cloaked man who moved in strange ways to bring justice where there was none.

Day however was no time for that sinister enemy of the underworld to put in an appearance. In that lighter guise that was known as Lamont Cranston, he walked along keeping his eyes open, analyzing, deducing, trying to make a pattern out of what as yet was but a tangled snarl.

Why, he wondered, were matters coming to a head at this point? Why, after a period of years in which Raoll and Bonds had worked the town between them, had they suddenly decided to cause a civil war? What was the motivation? Once that was known, then the matter would be fairly simple.

He was passing a radio store. An amplifier at the doorway was going full blast. As Cranston walked by, the jivey music halted and an announcer's oily voice said, "We interrupt our regular scheduled program for an important talk by one of Skillton's foremost citizens." He paused with false dramatics and then said, "We take pleasure in presenting, Mr. Gerald Winthrop, who is perhaps best known to you as the publisher of that daring, dynamic paper—"

Cranston turned his ears off to the phony build-up. Gerald was certainly doing everything in his power—The voice that took the place of the oleaginous announcer was that of Cranston's friend. His

measured tones were a relief. He said, "Citizens, this is a call to arms. Something dreadful has happened to our city. It is up to us, you, me, everyone, to see if we can't put a stop to the depredations of warring gangs of hoodlums."

The speech went on. It was well thought out, a trifle too cold, for Gerald could not turn on the emotionalism that is needed for a plea of this kind. But it was a good speech.

Other people beside Cranston stopped on the street and listened to the precise diction, the well-rounded phrases that came from the amplifier. When the speech came to a halt with a well-reasoned plea for one and all to be in the lookout, for everyone to try to stop the rackets by no longer patronizing the numbers game, a man in the impromptu audience spoke and he seemed to speak for them all.

"What's wrong with that guy? These do-gooders, all the time stirrin' up trouble. What's wrong with a bet on the numbers? Does it hurt anybody to bet a nickel or a dime?"

From the temper of the crowd, Cranston figured that Gerald would have to do more than editorialize either on paper or on the air before he got anything like the response he wanted. Cranston walked off as the people began to disperse. The raucous rhythms of the radio blared out again in some plea about not putting fruit in the refrigerator.

Cranston glanced at his watch. He wanted to take a look at Larry—or Lawrence—Bonds. He had found Bonds listed in the phone book, and the swanky hotel that housed the racketeer was not far away.

Walking there, taking his time, Cranston continued to mull the whole thing over in his mind. Once he had taken a look at the man, he intended to get in touch with his agents, who assuredly would be in town by now.

He barely spared a glance at the over-done lobby, and without being announced got into an elevator. He had used his eyes at the desk and seen some mail in a slot with a nameplate on it. Bonds' suite was on the eleventh floor.

He said to the operator, "Twelve, please."

Getting off, he stepped purposefully away from the car so that any eye watching would think he had a room in mind. When the door closed, he stood still. Over there—the stairs. But first he wandered through the hallway seeing what the position of 1234 was. Bonds was in 1134.

He had the blueprint laid out in his photographic mind now. Stepping along the soft deep carpet that covered the floor, he made his way to the stairwell. There was not a sign of life. He closed the door behind him. Seconds later, his gray homburg was in his brief case; the rakish looking black hat that belonged to The Shadow shaded his face. Over his business suit he threw the jet cape. That done, the brief case vanished under the concealing folds of the cape.

A last look around and he stepped down. Below was the floor where Bonds lived. He walked carefully down the stairs.

Joey Raoll had finished the promenade which it had been so essential he take. He was now in a car. In his lap lay a small package. Every time he looked at it he grinned, a sorry grin with no trace of humor in it.

The car drove through the busy streets. Night was falling. It had been a long day for him, but the night would be short and gaudy, he thought, and his lips curved up in a sinister grin.

The car pulled up to a halt in front of the hotel that had been his destination. In a second he was out. The

car, chauffeured by a plug-ugly with smashed nose and thick ears, drove away. It would stop around the corner near the bottom of a fire escape.

Raoll stepped into the lobby, almost following in Cranston's footsteps. Of course, he could not know that, and if he had, it would have made no impression on him, for the person known as Lamont Cranston was unknown to the swarthy-faced man who stepped into the elevator and called out, "Eleven."

At his floor he walked directly to room 1134. He knocked on the door. There was instant silence. The bustle that had penetrated out through the wood stopped.

He knocked again. As he waited, he shifted the package which was about a foot square and about four inches thick from under one arm to the other.

The door opened, just a slit. He grinned into the slit and said, "Tell that rat he's got a caller."

Out on the fire escape, a shrouded figure could see why there had been so much hesitation about opening the door. The immaculate figure of Larry Bonds looked a little ruffled about the interruption, as well he might. It was he at the door. It was he whom Joey had told to tell the "rat" that Joey was there.

In one corner of the room stood a heavy-looking plaster of Paris statue that was almost life size. Next to it, still bearing labels addressed to L. Bonds, stood a sturdy looking packing case.

What lent the scene the last touch of the bizarre was that there was a woman sitting upright in the case. Her brassy blond hair glistened as she shook and twisted her head. Around her mouth, broad strips of adhesive plaster kept her from uttering the faintest sound.

She kept moving her shoulders, but there was a reason why she could not move, even though all of her husband's attention was focused on the partly open door.

The Shadow realized that she was as helpless as a stuck fly. The reason was next to her. Three paper bags with the letters CEMENT on them told the sorry story.

A big basin with water and slop in it stood near the packing case.

At the door, Larry Bonds had come to some kind of decision. He opened the door just far enough for Joey's agile body to enter. No sooner had Joey's eyes flashed from the packing case, than he saw the ugly bulge which of course he had expected, spoiling the drape of his enemy's clothes. Larry's hand was fisted around the butt of the gun.

"As long as you're here, you may as well join the party," he said. "Here, all along I thought I'd have to send some of the boys for you. Very convenient having you drop in like this."

He gestured through the cloth of his pocket with the gun at an easy chair not far from the packing case. "Sit down and keep your hands where I can see them."

"Fine. Just wanted to have a little chat with you." Joey sat down, seemingly completely at his ease. The little package lay on his crossed legs as he smoothed out the fabric at his knees. "Have to be careful about that. Every time you sit down, it spoils the crease in your pants."

Larry's face said that he was going to spoil more than the crease in Joey's trousers. He looked from Joey to the figure of his wife and an expression that would have made a strong stomach queasy came over his face.

"Two for the price of one," he said and his eyes glinted.

"Bargain rate for today only?" asked Joey, and hunched down in the chair a trifle.

"Yep." Taking the gun out of his pocket, Larry said, "You may as well do some of the muscle work for me. There's enough cement mixed to pour some more in. Go ahead."

Joey Raoll rose from his chair and laid his package down on a table near Larry. He said, "Sure, glad to oblige" He picked up the bucket and upended it into the case. The cement poured down onto the already hardening cement that covered Mrs. Bonds' lower body. Her eyes were anguished as she looked at the man who had interrupted the plans for her murder.

But in them she found no responsive light. Joey didn't seem to care one way or the other about what he was doing.

Outside, it had gotten so dark, that Joey Raoll's chauffeur, peering up at the side of the building, could not see that shape, darker than darkness itself that hovered outside the window of Bonds' suite.

The Shadow was watching the events inside the room with a cold calculating stare. Fortunate indeed had been the chance that brought him here. He was seeing what well might be one of the pivotal points of the case of the people of Skillton vs. the forces of evil.

He stared at the package which Joey had left on the table. Larry's face was set in grim lines as he sat down next to the table. His gun hand was steady as a gyroscope. He seemed to get some kind of inner amusement out of causing his enemy to help him get rid of his wife. He set his arm down on the table to rest it. This was going to take a little time and there was no point in tiring his gun arm.

He looked over the form of his enemy. He was a little surprised. His practiced eye could spot a gun, no matter how clever the tailoring. But as far as he could tell, Joey was unarmed.

That puzzling fact made him take his eyes from where Joey was mixing some more cement with water and focus them on the package that Joey had been carrying. Was there some menace to his plans in that package?

He studied the matter carefully and, after seeing that Joey was fully occupied with pouring cement on top of his wife's body, he slowly extended the muzzle of his gun at the side of the package.

Outside, in the gathering darkness, The Shadow spotted a sudden tenseness that ran through the stooping body of Raoll. It was like some kind of electric current. The man was ready, waiting for something. And then it came.

Eyebrows drawn together in concentration, Bonds pushed the muzzle of the gun closer, ever closer, to the package. He was taking no chances. Out of the corner of his eye he could see that Raoll was still stooping over the cement.

Suddenly, without the slightest bit of warning, the package seemed to become imbued with life. It sprang through the space that separated it from the front of the gun.

Bonds gasped. The package had slid about five inches and jammed itself against the front of his gun. What kind of menace was this?

Subconsciously he heard a stir of movement behind him. The peculiar antics of the package held his attention just long enough to allow a deluge of wet muck to pour all over him.

Through the cement that covered his eyes, his ear, his face, he heard Joey say, "Why don't you shoot, sucker?"

VI.

IN a way, it looked like some kind of maniac slap-stick comedy. A Keystone comedy made by the producers of the "Cabinet of Dr. Caligari." The burning, wet slime of the concrete had made of Bonds' face a half-wit thing that yammered as he clawed with one hand at the covering on his eyes.

His other hand, his gun hand, for he had not relaxed his grip on the .45 for an instant, swung through the air in purposeless swings. What made that absurd was the fact that the package still clung to the muzzle like some insane kind of prop.

Raoll stood, hands on his hips, watching the futile antics of his enemy. He made no overt move. Instead he seemed to be waiting for something. Behind him, in the half-filled packing case, Bonds' wife watched through eyes that held little sanity. The adhesive tape cutting her face in half made her look somehow inhuman. The side of the box cutting off all view of her below the shoulders made her look like a Medusa gone mad.

And still Raoll waited.

Outside, The Shadow, watching the scene through impersonal eyes, suddenly saw a connection between the affectionate package that would not let go of the gun and an object that had clung to the smooth slick surface of a plate glass window.

With The Shadow to think was to act. He knew what Raoll was waiting for and had determined not to allow it to happen. Before the two spectators in the room who could see quite knew what had happened, an avenging fury tore in through the window. Mrs. Bonds blinked her eyes at the fast-moving swirl of black.

The Shadow was behind Raoll, and for a second Raoll did not know there was a fourth person in the room. All his attention was on the probing fingers of the cement-covered figure. The fingers were scraping enough of the cement away for Bonds to see. Raoll was positive that at the first spark of sight, Bonds would pull the trigger. It was this he waited for with quiet amusement.

Instead of the climax he had expected, a black-clothed arm swooped down and plucked gun and clinging package right out of Bonds' grasp.

Before Raoll could move to interfere, the black arm swung in a looping, shot-putting gesture, and the package and the gun went soaring out through the window, which just a split second before had allowed The Shadow entry.

There was a moment of complete immobility.

Then, outside in the court which the window fronted on, there was a sound. It wasn't particularly loud, about that of five five-inch fire-crackers going off.

Before the sound had died down, and certainly before Bonds or Raoll had gathered their scattered wits together, The Shadow was gone.

But they had not attained their preeminence in their sorry world by slow wittedness. They ran almost as one man, with Bonds still scooping cement off his face, to the window.

It seemed impossible that a man, a big man, could have vanished almost instantaneously, but look as they might, they could see not the slightest sight of him. They waited till their eyes became accustomed to the

lack of light and squinted again. Still, nowhere was there a sign of the man who had catapulted in and out of the scene so rapidly.

"That's a fire escape. It's made like a lattice. If he was down there we'd see at least a shadow where his body cuts off the light from the street .

But there was no such blob to give away the man's position.

The two mortal enemies withdrew their heads and looked at each other in a feeling of mutual fear. For a moment there was a truce. Where could he have gone?

Outside, the shapeless form of The Shadow clung to an iron bar above the window. They had not thought to look up. Just as well for them that they had not. For, as The Shadow heard their retreating feet, with his one free hand he slid his .45 back under his protecting cloak.

For a long time The Shadow clung there like a limpet while he waited for the two men to recover from their fear and get back to the realization that now, more than ever, they had to kill each other. Bonds' motive was increased a hundredfold now that Joey knew of the cement casket that was being prepared for the blond Mrs. Bonds.

It was a fairly clever setup, The Shadow thought. The big case delivered with the plaster of Paris statue. Remove the statue, put the cement encased body of Mrs. Bonds in the case and have it carried out. The hotel people would not give it a second thought if Bonds said something about being dissatisfied with the statue.

Then there would only remain the statue to get rid of and of course there was a reason why Bonds had used a plaster of Paris statue. The stuff would crumble at a blow. It became a fine powder when it was shattered. Big as the statue was, The Shadow had no doubt but that in time it could be washed down the plumbing or carried out in small packages that would never arouse any suspicion.

Below him, he heard the sound of voices. Cautiously letting himself down a trifle, he craned his neck till he looked like some huge bat, for, just as they, he hung now head down, feet almost in air.

Inside the room, the truce was showing signs of fraying at the edges. Like something that was not of this world, Mrs. Bonds, immobile in the first half of her casing, was stock-still watching the angry men.

Bonds said, "A sticky bomb with an anti-personnel blast in it!"

"Sure, the one you used on my store last night was the old-fashioned kind with the tar on it to hold it in place. You want to keep up with things, kid, you're in fast company. They stopped using those tar bombs early in the last war. The magnetic kind are much better."

It had been the magnet in the antipersonnel mine that had made it leap like a live thing to the steel of the gun.

"You figured on letting me hold a gun on you and taking a chance you could use the gimmick!" Bonds was accusing.

"Of course, I could always think rings around you, bub. I knew somehow I could get near enough to you to let the bomb latch onto your gun. But you fooled me, I must say!" Raoll's voice was sorrowful.

"Fooled you? How?" Bonds was certain he had cut a sorry figure in the whole thing.

"I thought when the bomb fastened onto your gun the first thing that would happen would be that you'd

pull the trigger and blast the thing wide open in your own stupid puss."

There was silence. Then Raoll said again. "Yep, you fooled me. But at that, I'm glad that vanishing man came in!"

"Glad?"

"Sure. Besides the impact release, the gadget had a time fuse and you were stalling so long, I couldn't tell when it was gonna let go."

The silence again filled the room. It was an impossible situation. Raoll knew that Bonds was stalling for time, hoping against hope that one of his men would come to the suite. He couldn't let Raoll go, not with his wife in her incomplete coffin.

Raoll, on the other hand, wanted to get out. He had no qualms, he thought, about calling copper. He'd like to see Bonds try to get rid of all the evidence of the cement rig before the cops got there.

He was tantalizing as he made his way towards the door. He said, "Got a tip on the numbers for me? I could use a hit."

"Don't go, Raoll. Wait, maybe we can talk this thing out. All I wanted to do was amalgamate. After all, if there was only one policy game here in town we'd double our receipts. Half of your customers won't ever play with me because they don't trust me and the same goes with mine for you. If we were together they'd have to trade with us. There'd be no other policy game for them to play.

"As it is, it's bad business. After all, we have double overhead. We could cut that right out, use the same controllers, the same office space, the same adding machines—" He knew he was wasting his time.

Raoll had his hand on the doorknob. He sneered, "Why didn't you dope all that out before you blew the bowl off my joint last night? This is your fight. You started it. Let's see you stop it!"

"Look, wait!" Bonds was pleading for his life, in effect. "Don't go. Tell you what, stay here, and we'll work out a deal. Any kind of a deal. Pay me off and take over my end of town. I'll take a powder."

"Pay you off? For what? Something I'm going to have for nothing or next to nothing? After all, how much does a bullet cost? That is if you beat this rap—" He jerked his finger at Bonds' wife.

"You know," his voice was low, for he had the door open, "You know, Bonds, I'll bet that even if you don't kill her, you're gonna wish you did. I can picture her on the witness stand testifying against you—and there's a gal that looks so mad I don't think you could blackjack her out of it. She'll testify even if she knows you're gonna have her shot in court."

It was too much. Insane or not, Bonds leaped through the air. He had to stop Raoll. Stop him with his bare hands if need be.

Raoll sneered as he saw the raging form leap at him. He sidestepped and Bonds' head crashed into the molding around the door.

"That was a stupid play."

He looked down at Bonds' body and, drawing back his leg, launched a kick into Bonds' stomach that vibrated up his leg. The shock felt good, he thought.

He walked off, leaving the door open for anyone to look in and see the bizarre scene.

In the hall Raoll pictured what he was going to do. He'd hurry downstairs and, like a good citizen, rush up to the desk clerk all excited and report that there was something messy going on up on the eleventh floor.

The clerk would send the hotel dick up. The private eye would yell for copper and all the smart boys would figure that it had been him, Joey Raoll, that had framed the whole thing. They'd never figure it right. They'd think that somehow Raoll had dreamed the whole thing up.

It was even neater having the cops do the dirty work, he thought, than to have to attend to his own garbage disposal. Just as well that little bomb had been as small as it was. Hadn't even attracted any attention. Might have sounded like a backfire at that. Those little buggers weren't rigged to do much damage, just take off a hunk of the guy that held it.

Well pleased with himself, he pushed his forefinger down onto the bell for the elevator.

All the while he'd been congratulating himself on his astuteness, at the back of his head had been that form, that hurtling figure in black that had whizzed in and out. What was the deal there?

He was trying not to think about it. After all, it was foreign to the realistic kind of crime he was used to. He knew the law upholders were not averse to having their palms crossed with silver. The very concept that was behind the actions of the man in black was unknown to his amoral brain.

If you'd tried to explain, he would have shrugged and said, "I don't dig you."

Try as he might though, he could not forget his shock at what had happened. What was the guy's racket? Why had he buzzed in and out like a bat?

How had he vanished? If he was a copper of some kind, why hadn't he come in with a gun? What was the deal? The elevator was coming up now. He could hear the whine of the cables. And then, just above that whine he heard, and finally understood, who and what that figure had been.

For, with heart-stopping intensity, a low malevolent laugh sounded. It made his back arch with animal fright. His short hairs raised on the nape of his neck.

The Shadow laughed... and when he laughed, evil men knew what real fear was—

VII.

AND now The Shadow did not hesitate. In seconds, he was back at his point of vantage, waiting to see how Bonds would react to the well nigh impossible position he had been jockeyed into.

He was on the phone and his fear and uncertainty were plain to hear. As The Shadow listened, Bonds finished with "—and if you don't get here inside of three minutes forget it. It'll be too late."

Bonds' brain was racing as it never had in all the years he had devoted to crime. There had to be a way out. If the boys could get here fast, if they could stall off the cops just long enough—

He left the phone and stood looking down at his wife. She was still immobile. He grinned at her. "You can't speak, kid, but you can still get an earful. Don't go gettin' all hopped up. Maybe I'm on the way out, but whatever happens, you go first."

The shallow veneer of gentility that he had built up so carefully was cracking faster and faster as things got hotter.

He turned from the fear that had switched on in the blonde's eyes like a flash bulb, and paced back and forth glancing continually at his watch. Two more minutes to go. Could the boys get here before the cops?

He ran one or two steps towards the door at a sharp ring that resounded through the silent room. Then he cursed his nervous reaction when he realized that the sound had come from the phone. He reached for it—and then his hand stopped midway. His thoughts were traced out on his face. Who was it? Something else to jam him up even more? Joey Raoll calling up to gloat over having called the cops? What? Why? Who? Should he answer?

The sound got infuriating. The ringing seemed determined to go on forever. Finally, after a hopeful look at the door he picked it up.

"Hmmm?" That wouldn't give away his voice.

Even from outside the window, The Shadow could see the blood drain out of his face. A taut muscle in his cheek jittered madly. He said, "But you don't understand what's happened. I'm over a barrel. I can't move outa here... the police are on their way—No, look, this isn't a jam we can schmeer."

Then he just stood there dumbly. His eyes, like a rat gone mad in a test labyrinth, skittered back and forth from his wife to the door. When it opened, would it reveal blue uniforms or his men?

The door began to slide open slowly. He said quickly, "Can't talk any more. Look, I know we fouled up the kill on Raoll, but I'll get him, don't worry. Can't talk any more—"

He replaced the phone gently. His eyes were glued to the door. It was further open. A head came cautiously around the edge of the door.

"Everything all reet, boss?" The voice was strangely high, shrill. The man who entered had his gun out and his hand was steady, but his knuckles were taut with tension.

The color flowed back up into Bonds' face. "You almost scared me to death, Jivey. C'mon, who's with you?"

Jivey opened the door further, and three men walked in. They were so perfectly what The Shadow had expected, so genuinely the thugs with guns for hire, that it was almost an anti-climax. Their eyes, like well-trained chorines, swung to the crate that held Mrs. Bonds prisoner.

"What's cookin' with her?" asked Jivey.

"She's your job. Now listen. The cops may be here any second. You gotta get her out and in the river before they get here."

The four thugs looked from the crate to Bonds. They were incredulous. Jivey asked, "How?"

The Shadow was wondering about the same thing. Bonds' answer came when he went into the bedroom of the suite and came back out with four handkerchiefs.

"This is going to have to look like a heist. You go out with her in the box. While you're doing that I'll take care of the plaster of Paris statue. I'll claim to the cops that you guys swiped a work of art and are holding it for ransom!"

"That's cute," Jivey agreed as he tied the handkerchief across his face mask-wise.

The four men tugged at their guns. One hand holding an edge of the crate, the other with a gun, they'd be able to manage it, Bonds thought.

Before they began to take the crate away, Bonds quickly hammered some nails into the top of the crate, closing it.

Where were the police? The question hammered away in his mind while he fastened the crate top. Was he going to be able to get away with this? If he did, Joey Raoll was going to be madder than ever. Bonds risked a quick smile at the thought. Raoll must think that he, Bonds, was really over a barrel at this point.

The men picked up the crate and started out of the room. Bonds said, "Take over the elevator, slug the operator so there's no trouble, and..."

Through the window came the sound of whining sirens. The cops were near.

"Rush it... hurry—"

The men left with their coffin-like bundle. Certainly, The Shadow thought, Bonds had responded to the danger in jig time. That call, that telephone call. Who was it that had been able to upset a man who could remain calm in the spot that Bonds had been in? For Bonds had assuredly been upset.

Alone, with the door closed, Bonds was hammering at the plaster of Paris statue, turning it to powder. There would be no time to try and flush it away with water. The Shadow realized that it would have to go out the window. Regretfully, for he had wanted to see how Bonds would act in front of the police, The Shadow made his quiet way down the fire escape.

There was a job waiting for him; one that in a way would combine business with pleasure. The business was the rescue of Mrs. Bonds, the pleasure would be the consternation that would come over the men if they got away from the police, and if they tried to throw the crate into the river.

As The Shadow passed Bonds' window, he paused and took a last look in. Bonds was working like a fury. The statue was but tiny pieces now. He swept some of the powdered plaster into a scoop and started for the window. Something stopped him in mid-stride.

That something was the baleful laugh of The Shadow. That laugh seemed to put at naught all the frantic schemes of the criminal in the room. The laugh crepitated up and down his spine. It was an awesome thing. Even with the sound of hammering fists on the door, Bonds paused, foot in air, where he had frozen as the laugh grated on his wrought-up nerves. He could not bring himself to walk to the window. But if the police found him with the...

He forced his reluctant foot down and took another step towards the window. The laugh had long since gone into the echoes and vanished. He peered cautiously out. Behind him the hammering on the door had reached a crescendo that shook the door on its hinges. He looked down into the darkness and saw nothing. Risking he knew not what, he threw the plaster of Paris out the window. It hung, the powdered part of it, in the air for a moment. His overworked imagination made it look like some ghastly spectre returned to haunt him.

He threw off the feeling and ran to the door. Had the cops caught his men?

The door open, he said with a voice full of anger, "What goes on here? How dare you carry on this way? I'll have your uniforms for this!"

A detective, lips curled in a satirical smile said, "Will you? This time I don't think even your influence can save you, Larry! Where is she?"

Where is she? How could they have missed seeing the men going out with the crate? Suddenly Bonds realized what must have happened and he sighed with relief. There could be but one explanation, and it was the proper one. As his men had descended in one elevator car, these the cops had come up in the other one. He wondered if the cops had left a stake out down in the lobby.

Before he could more than wonder, the phone rang. The homicide man grabbed the phone out of Bonds' hand.

"Hello?" He said it cautiously, but in a second all caution was gone. For the clerk downstairs said, "There's been trouble here—One of your men is wounded!"

His "What!" was a yell of surprise.

"The men who were stealing the crate shot it out, and held off two of your men and shot one!"

"What crate?"

"I don't know. The one they were carrying!"

The homicide man looked incredulously from the phone to Bonds who was filing his fingernails casually.

"I'll be right down." He turned from the phone to Bonds. "What do you know about this, you rat?"

"I realize that it is your emotion speaking, so I will forgive you for the epithet. The crate? I thought that was why you were here. I was just robbed. Some men came in and stole a priceless statue I had just purchased. I hope you'll be able to pick them up. I fear that the only thing they can do is hold it for ransom, for they would not be able to fence it."

The homicide man took a couple of deep breaths. He had not missed the significance of the bags of concrete, the slop all over the room, the muck on Bonds' clothes.

He said; "How's your wife, Bonds? Don't see her around. Does she approve of the mess you've made of the joint?"

"My wife? Oh, this is a bachelor place for a week. She's home visiting relatives." And let them prove otherwise, no matter what they thought!

The cords in the throat of the detective were working, but he got control of himself before he lashed out at the grinning face of the crime leader. After all, Bonds had plenty of pull down at City Hall. But this was too good a chance. He's going downtown and get booked even if I get broken for it, thought the detective.

"C'mon, Bonds, get going. I have to get downstairs, but you're going down to the fish tank."

"Don't be a fool. I'll be out ten minutes after you get me there"

"That's all right. Think of how much fun I can have in ten minutes."

"You wouldn't dare lay a hand on me," Bonds sneered.

"A hand? I wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole. But there's a steep set of stairs—So many people trip on that top step."

He was just baiting Bonds to see if he could make him blow his top.

"Fine. Take me downtown. I'll sue for false arrest, and if you so much as bruise me—" Bonds left the threat hanging in air as they left the room.

In a car, Jivey said, "Boy that was close."

"Didn't think we were gonna make it when that bull pulled his gun," one of the others agreed.

"We better dump her in the drink and get outa here and cool off for a while. These rags didn't hide too much. Some of them bulls mighta spotted us."

Ahead of them sparkling in the night, the river curled slowly around a bend. The bridge was narrow but long. There was no pedestrian traffic at this hour. Speeding cars were the only interlopers.

The murder car drove out towards the center of the bridge. "I'll go around and kick the tires, like I was looking for a flat. You guys roust the crate out and give it the old heave-ho," said Jivey.

"Okay, but keep your eyes open. It's gonna look funny three guys throwing a crate off the bridge..."

"Relax. There's nobody around for miles." Jivey grinned. "Get going, give her a bath. I never did like that broad anyway."

Inside the closed crate, Mrs. Bonds was beyond all fear. It had been so real, so present, that now she was in a semi-stupor. She knew that this was the last act, but she didn't care. She just wanted it all over.

The car braked to a halt. Jivey got out and, following his plan, kicked the front wheel. His toe bounced back. In the car the three men grunted as they stood on the side away from the traffic and yanked at the crate. It was heavy with the woman's weight and the added poundage of the concrete. There was enough concrete to hold her at the bottom of the river forever, one of the men thought.

That was his last thought for a long time.

For he was at the rear of the car, and as his whole attention was devoted to dragging the front of the crate out of the car, a hand loaded with a .45 came down with crashing emphasis on the nape of his neck.

One of the other men whirled around at the sound. He was just in time to see his confrere stagger forward on his face. He ran to him and said, "What happened?"

Some instinct made him look up. Because of this, the gun caught him under the chin. His head snapped back and he fell backwards sprawling.

The third man fumbled for his gun as he saw a swirl of black movement above his eyes. The two men on the concrete of the bridge soon had another companion. He fell in a heap on top of their prostrate bodies.

Jivey finished kicking the two tires on his side of the car, waited, ears cocked for the welcome sound of a splash in the water to denote that the crate had left them. The sound was a long time in coming so he came around the end of the car.

He saw the crate hanging half out of the car with three bundles of clothes draped around the far end of it. It took a second for his mind to translate the heaped bundles into his friends, and by that time it was too late. He fell victim to that snake-like arm that descended heavy-fisted with the weight of a gun on the side of his temple.

Glancing quickly around, The Shadow laughed. This time there was an element of humor in his laugh. There were going to be four badly puzzled thugs when they came to.

The Shadow descended from the top of the car where he had ridden as an unsuspected passenger, right from the hotel to the bridge. Leaning over, he pushed the crate into the car. That done, he got into the car and drove off. He didn't even send a glance back at the four men who lay at the side of the roadway. The Shadow once again had forestalled the murderous plans of a criminal gang.

VIII.

BONDS, released from the station house on his lawyer's recognizance, walked along the street next to the man. He wanted to get rid of the legal light, for he had an idea.

At a street corner he said, "Sorry to drag you out of bed at this ungodly hour, old man... but—"

"Of course, I know what the conditions are. But what was the matter with the cops? What did they think they could hold you for? Making a mess of your hotel suite?"

"I don't know. I just think they wanted time to see if they could tag anything onto me. So long—"

He walked away from his lawyer. Ahead was one of his control rooms. The lights were out and the gloomy funeral parlor looked even gloomier than usual. Opening the door with his key, he went into the back room. In a drawer there he found what he was looking for. Next, he needed an envelope. Addressing it to Joey Raoll, he smiled as he took the object he had removed from the drawer and, looking at it, dropped it into the envelope.

It was a small blue object that might have been the tip of a blue crayon, but wasn't, for it was made of wood. It made a bulge in the envelope.

Locking up behind him, Bond left the funeral parlor that was a front for his operations, and walked to a letter box. He deposited the cryptic envelope with its even more cryptic contents into the box and hailed a cab.

He felt better. Now that was done, he had given Raoll something to worry about. And with his wife safely at the bottom of the river, he could think with a clear mind about the orders he had received on the phone. Things had been moving so fast, he thought, that he hadn't had time to get his plans in order. What a break he had gotten tonight. If the cops had ever stopped the boys when they were leaving with the crate, no amount of influence could have removed him from the fish tank.

He'd still have been there, sweating it out under the glaring white lights. As it was, even knowing that he'd be sprung in a matter of minutes, he hadn't liked the interrogation he had received. Let him get the town properly set, with Raoll out of the way, and he'd make those dummies down at the station sweat... It was just one more bit of incentive to do as the voice on the phone had commanded him. The town had to be his. Without that, with the town split through the middle by warring camps, there could only be trouble and more trouble.

The boys would know enough to come back after dumping the concrete loaded box in the river. With them there, standing guard, he'd be able to get a good night's sleep and tackle the whole affair in the morning, as fresh as a daisy.

He jumped from the cab and walked into his hotel. The desk clerk gestured to him to come to the desk. He walked over, putting on a big smile.

"You don't have to apologize," he said warmly, "for the holdup. I realize it wasn't your fault"

The clerk was taken aback—that wasn't what he'd been going to talk about. He cleared his throat. "Mr. Bonds, I don't know what to do. Four men just went up to your floor a while ago. I'm not sure, but I think they're the same ones that—"

"Oh, that can't be. No, I was expecting some business friends to join me. Don't worry about it all."

Bonds walked away with an airy wave of his hand. He'd have to leave the hotel. Too much was happening here. Lucky the boys had come back as fast as they had. Now for a good night's sleep.

He put his key in the door on his floor. He yawned. What a day! As he entered he said, "Nice fast work, boys. Too bad you had to plug the cop, but there are plenty of them."

It took a moment for the fact that something was wrong to register. But when it did it was like getting hit on the head. The men all had long faces. One had blood, a dry stream of blood, down the side of his face. All of them looked as if they'd been given a workout and lost.

"What happened? Don't dummy up on me!"

He grabbed Jivey, who was nearest, by the lapels, and shook him the way an angry parent might a child. "Speak up, blast you! What happened? Cops?"

"Worse than that—we don't know. Somebody heisted your wife and the car... All we got is headaches!"

It threw him off balance. Here he had thought all was well, when as a matter of fact, he was worse off than ever—that laugh... was that who had done this to him? His wife! She could ruin him if she stayed alive. She certainly had no love for him now—

Driving back from a lonely plot of woods, where The Shadow had used a tire iron to break most of the concrete off Mrs. Bonds, he thought how lucky it was that the concrete hadn't hardened too much.

He grinned as he drove. In the back seat, the woman sat still in what amounted to shock. She was unthinking. She had been so close to death that she found it hard to realize what had happened.

This, thought The Shadow, was the only way to deal with a situation of this kind. The whole case was too big and sprawling, to handle in a normal way. He must keep on throwing the gangs off their footing, upset their plans, keep them from having time to figure things out properly.

Mrs. Bonds would make a fine ace in the hole. Bonds would not be able to function right with the ever-present menace of his vengeful wife always in the back of his mind like a sword of Damocles.

The next step would be to throw a monkey wrench in Joey Raoll's plans. That shouldn't be hard to do, for he must have been thrown off center by The Shadow's interruption at the time that Raoll had tried out his bomb. That must be worrying the rival gangster quite a bit. That and the laugh which The Shadow had sent after him to haunt him.

Harry Vincent would be the one to care for Mrs. Bonds. Trust him to get a nurse and a doctor who could be trusted and would be helpful. A call to Vincent and then a visit to Raoll. That was the agenda.

And then? A night's sleep and a conference with his friend Winthrop. The Shadow was curious to know what the response, the public response, had been to Winthrop's speech on the radio.

On through the night the car drove. At the journey's end, Mrs. Bonds would be helped back to normalcy

and be able to assume her part in overthrowing one of the crime dictators.

In a night club, a girl on each side, Joey Raoll was showing everyone that he had been triumphant in his battle with the enemy. Word had not yet reached him that Bonds had beaten the rap that Raoll thought would finish him.

Men, women, dancing by, saw him and had the thoughts which Raoll had wanted them to have. The bomb had come from the North Side. They knew that, and knew that it was a thrown gauntlet, an invitation to battle. The fact that Joey was here was proof that he'd picked up the gauntlet and heaved it back.

Raoll stretched and yawned, for a yawn can come from excitement as well as from boredom. He really lived for this. The adulation of those whom he considered his peers.

A waiter came up behind him and whispered in his ear, "They sprung the rat."

All contentment went out of Raoll, like wind from a balloon. The battle was on again. He was not even curious about how it had happened. Enough to know that he had to get Bonds again. This time would really have to be it. There could be no dilly-dallying.

He paid the tab and, leaving the two girls with their mouths open in astonishment, walked out on them. A word to the doorman brought his car. In it were two of his men—trustworthy as any he had ever employed. They'd have to keep a sharp eye out if he were to keep a whole skin. In the car he explained the setup, told them they'd have to be ready for anything.

After he had told them that the chase was on again, there was silence, until they drove up in front of the slatternly-fronted tenement house where he made his home. The house was a curious contradiction in terms.

No front of any house in that long narrow slum street was any more depressing looking. But the inside—a large amount of money and some of the best decorators in the business had been turned loose with carte blanche.

The contrast between the face of the house and interior somehow made the inside look even better than it really was. When a friend had pressed Raoll for an explanation of the setup one time, Joey's answer had been that when he was a kid, he'd always wanted a broken-down jalopy of a car, that under its rattling cover would have a souped-up racing motor, so that all the car owners who sneered at the exterior would be put in their places, when the rattlebang heap passed them like greased lightning. Unable to have such a car in his youth, he had made his daydreams come true in his house.

The house, in its peculiarity, was as much of a revelation of Joey's character as was Larry Bonds' insistence on dressing well and his emotional malaise about his brash wife. They were both compensations for hurts that the men had received in their youth, and never quite recovered from. It was part of the drive that in criminal circles had put them on top of their comrades.

Upstairs, in a study that looked as if it came from some magazine on gracious living, the men with Raoll looked as out of place as a paste gem in a diamond necklace. They stood around uncomfortably. Joey slouched into an easy chair and sat there deep in thought.

"What we gonna do, Joey?" said the one who was trying to look comfortable, as he lounged against the white fireplace.

"He's going to be as carefully guarded from here on in as I am. Whatever we do has to get around that guard. This time he's going to be dead... good and dead... Let me think a while longer."

Minutes passed. The men in the room waited. Outside the window, clinging to some brownstone decorations, was The Shadow. It was uncomfortable, but The Shadow was prepared to stay there till dawn if need be. Mrs. Bonds was in Vincent's capable hands. Hawkeye, the best trailer that The Shadow had ever known, was delegated to keep an eye on the coming and going of Larry Bonds.

There, Joey had thought out his problem. Straining his ears, The Shadow eavesdropped on the plan that was meant to wipe Bonds off the face of the earth, as if he had never existed. Satisfied, The Shadow made his precarious way up to the roof of the tenement, retracing the route that had led him to the point of vantage.

From the roof it was simple to drop ten feet down to the roof of the next tenement. That was one thing about poor people—they had little to steal, so they were not apt to worry about locking things like the door to the roof.

En route from the South Side, The Shadow became Lamont Cranston, and it was Cranston who went to his hotel bedroom. He undressed and threw himself on the bed. He was dog tired, but satisfied with the progress of the case. He could, at any moment that he wanted, precipitate the showdown between the rival gang leaders. But it was not yet time for that.

As The Shadow, he was positive that he had felt the presence of a super leader, who was behind the whole ring of policy playing. The case could not be marked closed till that leader had been

flushed out into the open.

Thinking of Winthrop's mealy-mouthed little secretary, Cranston smiled, and still smiling, went to sleep.

Harry Vincent had his hands full that night. When the shock had passed away, Mrs. Bonds turned into a screaming virago. She had cursed her husband in and out of the bottom-most pit of Hades. She swore that she'd get him no matter what the cost to her.

What made it worse, more uncomfortable for The Shadow's agent, was the fact that the doctor he had called in had insisted that she wear herself out emotionally before he'd give her a hypodermic that would insure resuscitating sleep.

He walked back and forth in the room, the nurse within call, while Mrs. Bonds' blond hair twisted and mussed, till she looked like a witch, ready to mount her broom, screamed and yelled imprecations onto the head of her husband.

But, thought Vincent, the doctor was right, the hysteria was dying down... there, she had yawned. He went into the next room and told the nurse to call the doctor. He looked into the wastepaper basket on his way back and, seeing the shreds of cement that the doctor had managed to hack off her, he couldn't blame Mrs. Bonds too much.

The Shadow had just removed enough of the cement to be able to transport her. The rest had come off painfully and slowly. What a fate, what a way to die... of all the incredibly callous ways of killing.

Thinking this, and knowing that the doctor was going to narcotize her in a minute, he found it in his heart to forgive her for the hysterics in which she had just been indulging.

He watched as the shining needle went deep into the soft white flesh of her arm. The doctor spoke, "She won't wake till long after noon tomorrow. Will you need her before that?"

"No, I'm sure we won't." Need her by then? As far as he could see, The Shadow might need anywhere up to a month to clean up this mess. He couldn't see how The Shadow was going to begin... It was a task like the cleaning of the Augean stables. But if there was a soul in the wide world who could do it, Harry Vincent knew, without a doubt, that the man was his boss... The Shadow—for The Shadow Knows.

I X .

"WELL, it's always darkest before dawn, I always say."

"Yes, you do, Peebles, but must you say it so often?" Winthrop's voice rasped at his secretary.

Peebles, looking wounded, faded into the background. Cranston smothered a grin. After all, it was unfair to pick on the fellow, it was like shooting birds on the ground, unsportsmanlike.

"Aside from this matter of the darkening dawn which Peebles insists on," said Winthrop, "have you been able to think of anything to do, Lamont?"

"Ummm—there's been a tiny bit of progress. But your side of it is what I'm interested in. What was the response to your broadcast yesterday?"

"Oh, simply overwhelming—overwhelming is the only word for—" Peebles relapsed into silence at his employer's glare.

"Overwhelmingly indecisive, I'd say." Winthrop was still glowering at the interruption. "The only phone calls that came into the station were from cranks. It's too soon for mail, of course."

Winthrop got to his feet and strode back and forth across the lovely oriental that covered the floor. He was again using the slip of paper with the number on it to gesticulate with, Cranston noticed.

"It gives me a feeling of being in handcuffs to have evidence like this," he slapped the paper against his palm irritably, "and still be unable to do anything concrete! It's exasperating. Like fighting under water!"

The word concrete reminded Cranston that Mrs. Bonds had seemingly recovered in pretty good style from her harrowing experience. Vincent had said she was sleeping comfortably.

He snapped his mind back to attention. Winthrop was saying, "What shall I do? Help me, Cranston. Any idea, no matter how wild, will be deeply appreciated."

"Hey, Governor!" This was from Peebles, and his voice cracked with enthusiasm. "Gee, golly, boss. I have an idea!"

"Get it out fast before it dies of solitary confinement."

Grinning sheepishly but not at all deflated, Peebles said, "Why don't we offer a reward in the paper, say a thousand dollars, to everyone who turns in a number runner!" His voice put inverted brackets around the phrase number runner, like a minister self-consciously using a slang word.

"Give a reward to every one who—Good heavens, man, don't you realize how many runners there are? I'd have to be a billionaire. Please, if you have any more brainy ideas like that, file them in the circular file."

Cranston wondered how Winthrop could stand having the man around since he so obviously got on his superior's nerves. But, perhaps, this was just because of the strain that Winthrop was under—What strain? Cranston decided to bring it out in the open. He knew of Winthrop's mayoralty ambitions—but—

Cranston asked, "Just why are you so concerned over all this, Gerald? I knew you were public spirited and all that, your record shows ample proof—

"It's no secret that I want to be mayor, Lamont. You know that—"

But how badly did he want the office?

"It's more than that, of course, the governor wants—" Peebles paused significantly on the word "governor."

"Peebles, letting you know anything in confidence is a better way of getting it circulated than using the personal columns of my own paper."

Winthrop tried to sound angry, but it was obvious that it didn't annoy him too much.

He stood and looked off into the distance. There was a sort of 'I am the captain of my soul' look that Cranston had noticed before in men with political ambitions. After all, Skilton was in a

pivotal state, one that had sent a large proportion of its governors onwards to the White House... was it possible that Winthrop had been bitten by the presidential bug?

Looking from Peebles' beaming face to the onward and upward expression on his friend's face, he was positive that the blueprint of Winthrop's future was being laid with Washington at one end of the road.

Governor Winthrop? Cranston didn't show his amusement. It was a long, hard journey that Winthrop had mapped out for himself. It was quite clear that he would not appreciate any jesting on the subject.

The mood passed and Winthrop again looked troubled. "We're getting nowhere fast—That poor boy was shot down while running to meet his fiancée. The public is truly incensed about that. If a connection could be shown between the numbers racketeers and that killing, then we would have an aroused public conscience with which to deal."

"Good idea. Of course, the only real danger with any racket comes when the public becomes tolerant of it. No big band of robbers could ever exist as openly as a bootlegger in the old days or a numbers man today. It is the public's attitude that gives the racketeer the real strength. The few dishonest cops who take a chance on their jobs and their pensions do it knowing that even if they are found out there will be no public condemnation of their actions the way there would be if they lent their aid to, say, a band of safe-crackers."

"Do you have that down, Peebles?" Winthrop asked. "It seems to me that you should write my editorials, Lamont."

"Yes, indeed, I have every precious word down on paper, sir." Peebles wagged his stenographic pad at his boss.

"My paper has a big write-up this morning on some kind of shenanigans at Larry Bonds' hotel suite. For once the police seem to be really baffled. They're not just covering up because Bonds is Bonds."

"What happened?" Cranston wondered what the police had been able to figure out.

"I can't seem to get the story straight. There's some to-do about four armed men stealing a statue from Bonds. They left with it, met some police who had received a phone tip that there was something doing at Bonds'. The crooks shot it out with the cops... then they got away."

Peebles interrupted, "Governor, don't forget the curious circumstance of the unexplained concrete and white powder that the police found in the suite."

"That's down your alley, Lamont. What was Bonds doing with that?"

Cranston pretended to be thinking deeply. Finally he said, "Have the police found Mrs. Bonds?"

"Mrs. Bonds? I didn't even know she wasn't there. Why... what do you mean?"

"I deduce," Cranston burlesqued a great detective going through the throes of induction and said, "I deduce that Mrs. Bonds will be away somewhere that it will be difficult to check on."

Peebles transferred some of his hero worshiping glances to Cranston. How could he have known from some traces of concrete and an unidentified white powder that the woman was missing?

Winthrop was puzzled too. He had heard stories about Cranston's deductive powers, but this was the first evidence of them he had met. "Are you inferring that she's missing, by foul play?"

"Might well be. However, let's just say she is not around, not accessible at the moment."

"Is it a weapon that can be used against Bonds?"

"Yes, but that part of the matter is in competent hands. I'd just drop a word in the police's ear that it's a touchy subject with Mr. Bonds."

"What a pleasure to be able to do something about that insolent creature!" Peebles was squeaking with excitement now.

"It's a far cry from putting him behind bars where he belongs. But it's a help. I must say. Can you tell me anything else of that sort, Lamont?"

Cranston, thinking of some of Raoll's plans for the day, smiled, but said, "About all I can suggest is that it might be of some small help if the police kept an eye on the ubiquitous Mr. Joey Raoll."

"I'll tell the commissioner this minute!"

Peebles, Cranston thought, would be in a fine state if he knew what Raoll had in mind. There was the small matter of the quart bottle that Raoll had asked one of his men to be sure and have ready.

He left while Winthrop was still waiting for the operator to put his connection through.

"So long, Lamont. Please let me know the minute you dig up anything."

"I will indeed—" Cranston flipped a hand in airy farewell to the newspaper owner and to Peebles who looked delighted about being included.

There was nothing left for Cranston to do but wait till either Vincent or Hawkeye checked with him on the phone. The Shadow had directed Vincent to leave Mrs. Bonds with the nurse and go out and trail Raoll, just as Hawkeye was watching every move that Bonds made.

Back in his hotel room again, Cranston eyed the clock. It was ten-thirty and Raoll had said last night that his plan would be put into execution when Bonds went around to his control rooms some time between 11:30 and 1:00.

The phone rang.

"Boss? This is Harry, Raoll and his mob just came out of the house. They're heading uptown and the word has been passed around by Bonds that if any of Raoll's men pass the square—that's the dividing line between the two sections—that there's going to be trouble!"

"Raoll's on the move, eh? Where are you now?"

"It looks like a stakeout to me. They're down the block from a funeral parlor, and I saw Hawkeye down the street, so Bonds must be in the place! The address is 11-12 Harris Street."

"Hold everything. I'll be along in a couple of minutes."

Grabbing the ever-present brief case, Cranston made the best speed he could. He didn't pause till he was on the uptown side of the street. The sun shone down in the harsh right angle of midday. So light was the area, that the places that were in shadow were doubly black by comparison.

Cranston looked down the street. No use looking for Hawkeye or Harry—they'd be out of sight. But at the far end of the street he saw a parked car. It was facing towards a big car that was out in front of the funeral parlor.

Cranston stepped back into a patch of darkness near a building. There was an areaway there. It was about six feet down. Looking around, Cranston saw that he had attracted no attention. He vaulted over the railing and down into the darkness at the bottom of the areaway.

Down the street in the parked car, Raoll was seated with a tight smile on his swart face. He was flipping something into the air and catching it over and over again. It was a small blue object about the size of the end of a blue crayon—but it was made of wood. Every time Raoll looked at it, when he caught it, his smile would tighten.

He glanced up the street. No sign of Bonds yet.

In the back of the car, one of his men sat with a quart bottle held between his legs. He said, "Any sign yet?"

"Keep your shirt on, Tommy; it's any minute now." Raoll continued to flip the object in the air. He had received it in the mail that morning. Although there was no message, no signature, he knew who it was from and what it meant.

"Now, they're getting into the car. Light it!"

Tommy bent over with a cigarette lighter and flipped the wheel. It refused to light. Tommy looked nervously at his companion in the back seat who grinned and lit a match. He held it to the fuse that projected from the mouth of the bottle. The colorless fluid in the bottle swayed in an oily fashion as the car went into gear.

Bonds' car drove down the street towards them. The distance was cut in half, for they were driving up towards it. Raoll clipped, "Heave it!"

The bottle, looking absurd as it went through the air with a short fuse sticking out from it, sputtering, headed for the hood of the other car.

X .

IN the car, Bonds looked up from his watch. It was 12:40. He had been told to take the 12:45 train for New York, and that order had come from one who had to be obeyed. If he hurried, he'd just make it.

It was then, his mind full of plans, that he saw the bottle. He instantly identified it. A Molotov cocktail. The havoc they had wreaked against tanks in guerilla warfare! A bottle of gasoline with a fuse... thrown into the hot insides of a tank—

But this was heading for the motor of his car! It would explode once it hit, that was certain—and there was nothing he could do about it!

Seemingly, there was nothing anyone could do. But the dark figure of The Shadow, eyes even with the edge of the areaway that hid him, had known what was coming and he had been prepared. For as the bottle neared the hot radiator of the speeding car, The Shadow snapped a shot at it.

His gun barked, and almost simultaneously, the menace of the impromptu bomb was gone

Bonds watched incredulously as the bottle exploded into flaming fury. Some licking flames stretched fingers at the radiator, but not enough to cause the engine to explode. What Bonds could not figure out was why the bomb had exploded too soon. He could still see the fuse; it had been blown to one side, harmlessly, just as had the fragments of the bottle.

But all danger was not gone, he knew that. Even in the midst of the battle, he spared a second for a glance at his watch. He could still make it, if he could get by the car that had been responsible for the bottle. The car had circled around and was coming up from the rear.

And then suddenly, as though he had been possessed of a guardian angel, that menace too was gone. He could see the men in the other car, could see the guns that were raised ready to rake him like a pirate ship of old passing a victim... and then, the car skidded, the wheels slowed, for a rear tire had blown out.

Bonds' car drove on. He had to hurry if he was to catch that train. He'd be back in Skillton in time to take care of getting Raoll. That he was sure.

In the shade of the areaway, The Shadow grinned. His second shot had been the one that had made Raoll's car *hors de combat*. He put his gun back under cover of his cloak.

The street, shattered shards of glass the only reminder of what had so quickly come and gone, was quiet. Raoll's car had limped away with the rubber in the back tire flapping.

Up the street, Harry Vincent looked around. Surely his boss had put a finger in this pie. But where was he? A little way down the street he saw Hawkeye. He made an imperceptible gesture to which Harry nodded in agreement. By all means it was time to quit this street.

He and Hawkeye passed each other, and any watching eye would never have known the men had ever seen each other before. Vincent was thinking that there was no point in staying there; the cops would be along any second now.

The Shadow knew that too. He wasted no time. Even while his two aides were passing just a few feet away from his place of concealment, he was doffing his black crepe. It had served its purpose. It had just been used in case any accidental glance had pierced the gloom of the little areaway.

Seconds after his aides had gone, and a scant minute before a police car, siren screaming, made its way into the now silent street, the casual, well-dressed figure of Lamont Cranston walked away from the scene.

At a candy store in a nearby block, he walked into a phone booth. He got an instant response to the ringing of the bell. It was Peebles' voice which said, "Hello, this is the residence of Mr. Gerald Winthrop."

"Is the 'guvnor' there?" Cranston was sure that Peebles would not get the satire in the word.

"Yes, just a second; who shall I say is calling?"

"Whom, not who, and it's Lamont Cranston."

"Oh, oh... I'm sorry for the delay. Here he is, sir."

Cranston glanced at his watch. It was 12:45 on the nose. The hours were slipping away. This case was consuming too much time.

"Lamont?" Gerald's voice was full of worry, "Is there anything new?"

"I just thought you'd like to know that a bomb attempt on the life of Larry Bonds just missed."

"I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry that it missed."

"You'd better get some reporters over to the scene." Cranston told him where the battle had taken place.

"Cranston, what are we to do? These hoods can't continue to use our streets for a civil war! Something must be done."

"Your idea of getting the people to turn against the numbers men is the only solution I can think of—I'm working on a thought in that direction... There's only one way that I know of, to talk a gambler out of gambling —"

"Whatever you do, try to do it fast..." Cranston could hear Winthrop's tone change. He was speaking to Peebles. He said, "Get the office on the phone, send some good men down to cover this latest episode."

"Lamont, may I see you later today? About three-thirty?"

"I'll try to make it."

Cranston turned on his heel and left the cigar store. Behind him, a customer gave the cigar store man a dime more than his cigarettes had cost. He said. "Put the dime on 679."

The racket was everywhere, all around him, enmeshed in the life of the people of the town, Cranston thought. The people were adjusted to it. They bet on the numbers as casually as they talked of the weather... Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it, was the old cliché. Everybody—Cranston was thinking of Winthrop—talks about the numbers but what can you do about it?

His idea, that he had casually mentioned to Winthrop, was this: if the people of the town were ever to find out that the numbers racket was not only a racket as far as the odds were concerned, but was also a racket because of being fixed, then the end would be near.

In the back of Cranston's mind was a name, a man... he had been in jail the last time Cranston had heard anything about it. His name... it was a nickname, Ike Cue—

He had been employed by a numbers ring that had been broken up by an enterprising D.A. in Chicago... Burbank might know. Somewhere in the voluminous files that supplemented Burbank's encyclopedic memory there would be some word on Ike Cue. It was almost too much to hope that he was out, but if he were, then Cranston would have a lever with which to fight the embedded racketeers... as Archimedes had said, "Give me a lever long enough and I will upset the world"

The question was, would Ike Cue be a long enough lever to upset the criminal world?

It was long past lunch time. Cranston had walked quite a way while he was thinking. It was getting late. He went into a restaurant and ate a hurried meal. Once his hunger for food had been satisfied his desire for information returned and he placed a phone call to New York.

Burbank's eager voice answered the phone. "Skillton calling? Who is it?"

"Burbank, remember that fellow with the photographic memory, the man who knew everything?"

"Oh, yeah, Ike Cue... I just read something about him in the papers, he's out on parole!"

Cranston sighed. Perhaps this was going to be the lever. "Good. See if you can find out where he is. I have an idea he may be up here in Skillton. If he is, I want to know where."

"Roger, will do. But listen, where will I call you?"

Time was speeding by so fast. Cranston looked at the time. It was 3:15 and he had an appointment with Winthrop at 3:30.

"You can call me at Winthrop's in about an hour. After that call my hotel. If I'm not there, leave a message and I'll call you. So long."

"Wait! Don't hang up. I have some news for you! You know Larry Bonds, that guy that was mixed up in your case up there?"

"Sure, what about him?"

"Well, he isn't mixed up in it any more. He's dead. He was shot coming out of the Grand Central terminal here in New York!"

"That's curious—"

"It just came over the radio a couple of minutes ago. He was knocked off at about three o'clock."

"I see—glad you told me. This may change the complexion of things a bit. 'Bye for a while."

Cranston rolled this latest bit of data over in his mind. On the surface it might well have been one of Raoll's hoods that had done the job. Or, a call from Raoll to any one of a dozen places in New York would have hired a gun and a practiced hand to wield it.

Cranston took a cab for Winthrop's place. First things first. He wondered what was on Winthrop's mind this time. He probably wanted another idea for an editorial. Cranston was smiling when he entered the old house. Peebles greeted him.

"I'm glad you can smile, sir. Mr. Winthrop is very upset. He seems to feel that the whole thing is futile, that there is no solution. I hope you can get him over that, sir. After all, the blackest clouds have a silver lining."

"Oh, no, Peebles, no more banalities, not for today anyway. You've had your quota already."

Winthrop said this, and he did look depressed. He had deep rings under his eyes and he looked beaten.

"Come, come, you'll never get the women's vote if you allow all this to get you down." Cranston smiled.

They walked into the study. Cranston sat down in one of the old, comfortable, well-worn club chairs. Winthrop paced back and forth irritably. He flipped open the front of his coat and ripped a cigar out of his vest pocket. He must be distraught, for despite his neatness that was almost primness, a big blotch of ink had soaked into his vest. It was under a pocket that was loaded with a variety of pens and pencils.

He bit the end off his cigar viciously and said, "That was quite an episode. A Molotov cocktail used in the streets of our fair city! It must stop! This can't go on. The amazing thing to me is that so far, so few innocent spectators have been injured. Why, if that bomb hadn't gone off ahead of time, who knows what the resulting explosion might have done?"

"One of the things it would have done is saved Bonds from another death. He would have died right here in Skillton instead of racing to meet his fate in New York!" Cranston said.

"Larry Bonds dead?" Winthrop said, and Peebles echoed his words.

They stood for a second, the secretary a pale carbon imitation of his boss. He practically mimicked the gesture with which Winthrop snapped his fingers.

Winthrop grabbed the phone and put a call in for the city desk of the Skillton Journal, his paper. Before he could speak, his managing editor barked, "Say, G. W., something hot just came in on the wire! Bonds got his! In New York!"

"I see. You got the information. All right, play it up big." Winthrop slammed the receiver down onto the hook.

"This will really bring things to a head. In a way I'm glad."

"You can say," said Cranston, "that this is just the first step in the dissolution of a crime empire. That Bonds ring will dissolve and gather together again around the dynamic figure of Joey Raoll. Now, while the criminal lines are scattered, before they have a chance to reform, is the time for the aroused citizens to take a hand."

"You can say all that, but I have an idea it won't do any good."

Winthrop nodded dejectedly. The phone rang. Peebles answered it. He seemed a little surprised. He held his hand over the phone.

"It's that Darrison person, I thought you met him this afternoon."

"Darrison?" Winthrop puzzled for a moment. "Oh, him—I couldn't make it. I got jammed up. Tell him I'll meet him tomorrow at the same time. About two forty-five."

He turned back to face Cranston again. "Have you been able to find anything about that young lad that was shot? The one who was meeting his fiancée—what was his name?"

Peebles jogged his memory. "John Finneran, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that's right. Any luck in that direction, Lamont?"

Events had moved so rapidly that there had not been time for that, Cranston realized with a start. However, that would be the next item on the agenda. The facts had seemed all very clear. He had left work, gone to a wash room, washed up, and gone out on the street to meet his loved one; and instead, had wound up in the arms of death.

What had caused that was still a puzzle. One piece of a puzzle with many ramifications.

The phone rang again. Peebles looked surprised. "It's for you, sir."

Cranston picked up the phone. As he had expected, it was Burbank. Burbank said only a few words.

"That man you were interested in. He broke parole and is in Skillton. Rumor says he's back at his old job."

That was all. But it was enough to make Cranston smile with pleasure. So Ike Cue was here, working. He now had a lever in his hands. That lever might well be enough to crash the criminal rings to small pieces.

He put the phone back. It was too soon to say anything.

"You look pretty pleased with yourself." Winthrop sounded cranky, as well he might.

"I am pleased with events, not with myself." If Cranston had been alone, he might have laughed. But this was not the place for that eerie foreboding sound. Time and enough for that when night had fallen and The Shadow went out to do battle with the forces of evil!

X I .

IN the washroom of the big office building, Lamont Cranston looked about him. He had already been to Finneran's office. No one there had been able to help at all. They knew that the lad was in love and a couple of the girls had guessed that he was trying to get up enough nerve to propose. Aside from that, nothing. Any reason why he might have been shot down like a mad dog on the street? None at all.

His trail was so simple to follow. He had left the office where he worked and gone to the washroom. Cranston looked around the white-walled room. What could the walls have told him if they could have spoken? He wondered. He walked around, back and forth, grappling with the problem with all the tremendous background of knowledge of crime and its methods that was his.

From here, the boy had gone downstairs. Cranston closed the door behind him. Which elevator had he taken? Cranston pressed the bell. Luck was with him. It had been this elevator and this elevator operator who had seen him.

"You remember the day, then?"

"Sure, I couldn't forget it. That was the day I hit for a dime on the numbers. No sir, I wouldn't forget that."

They were riding up and down in the car while Cranston interrogated the operator. They stopped talking when there were passengers. The car was empty at the moment.

"Did you notice anything out of the way?"

"Just that he wasn't wasting any time talking to me the way he generally did. But, the car was pretty full so that might have been why. We generally argued about baseball. He was a Giants fan and I root for the Yanks. We been fighting about it for years."

"Search your memory. Was there anything, no matter how seemingly unimportant, that was different about his behavior outside of the fact that he didn't kid with you?"

"Ummm..." the operator thought hard. "Nothin' but... yeah, there was somethin', but it can't have anythin' to do with it—"

Cranston waited, the soul of patience. This was the way to get results, not by hammering at it.

The door opened and a flood of people jammed into the car. They were silent perforce. The car went down to the ground floor and emptied out.

Once again it made its way up. Now... the operator spoke. "I barely remember this. But Johnny seemed to be taking some work home from the office. That wasn't like him. He was no company man. He kept lookin' at a little slip of paper, with numbers on it."

"Could you see what else was on the paper?"

"Nah, he was across the car from me."

That led right back to the office, where the dead lad had worked. But once he got there, none of his co-workers could think of any work he might have taken home.

That in turn led back to the washroom. Once again Cranston looked around the crisp clean whiteness of the room. Could Finneran have found something here? Was it some piece of paper he found here that he was studying in the elevator... and most important of all, was it for that paper that he was shot and then had his pockets ransacked?

Down at headquarters, under the eyes of the police, Cranston had gone through what little had been in Finneran's pockets. There had been no clue there.

He went over the matter. Some co-workers had come as far as the washroom with Finneran and left him. He had been normal then. The elevator boy had noticed the paper after Finneran left this room.

Suddenly, while Cranston was washing his hands he remembered something about a ring of dope peddlers that he had been instrumental in breaking up. While he dried his hands on a paper towel, he looked at the towel container. In his mind was a big question mark.

He wondered as he pulled another towel out why you could never completely dry your hands on one towel. He took one more look at the towel container and left the room. Perhaps he had, for the first time, a lead about the bizarre death of John Finneran.

He had put Hawkeye to work on the problem of running down the peculiar gentleman known as Ike Cue. He put in a phone call. Harry Vincent answered.

"Hello, who's this?" As soon as he heard the voice he knew.

Cranston asked, "How's the patient coming along?"

"Fine, just fine." And she was. The doctor had looked over Mrs. Bonds earlier.

"Have you heard from Hawkeye?"

"Yes, just a couple of minutes ago. He said to look around a pool room over at Oak and Welsh. Number 717."

"I see. Thanks. I'll check with you later."

Settling the brief case under his arm, Lamont Cranston hailed a cab. He gave the address and settled down in the back of the cab. Too bad Shrevvy hadn't been able to make this trip. Shrevvy, one of The Shadow's most trusted agents, was a cab driver, and his feelings were hurt whenever a case came along that he couldn't help with.

The cab stopped. Cranston picked up his brief case, paid the cabbie and descended. Ahead of him was a pool room. It was in a run down neighborhood. The surrounding houses made the pretense of the sign seem absurd. It read, "Billiard Parlor." But that didn't fool anyone. They all called it what it was, a pool room.

The afternoon was disappearing. Night would descend soon. Cranston knew that he looked out of place in those surroundings. He would look even more out of place in a pool room of this type. He looked around. Down the block a way, an alley cut off from the street.

Perhaps he could do something about his appearance. He walked casually along the street. In the alley, he opened his brief case, but when the big black cape billowed up, he pushed it back into its compartment. Instead he took off his own gray hat and took out the big slouch hat of deepest black that was part of his costume as his other self.

He put his gray hat in the brief case and donned the black one. But instead of turning it down all around as was The Shadow's wont, he made a snap brim of it. He turned it up in back and down in front.

The last touch was a curious one. He took his necktie off, but left his collar buttoned. For some reason that he had never been able to analyze, the tough boys had a habit of appearing that way. The tightly buttoned collar minus a tie was a costume in certain of the sections that Cranston knew.

He looked around him in the narrow confines of the alley. To his right, peeling white paint made a house wall look scabrous. Above his head was a narrow ledge of brick that protruded. Making sure there was no one in sight, Cranston reached up above his head and left his brief case there. People never looked overhead unless they were looking at the sky. The narrow section of dirty sky that showed here would never lift a pair of eyes in worship or appreciation, of that he was sure.

As he walked out of the alley, he made his eyes narrow and shifty and reaching in his breast pocket, pulled his handkerchief out too far. That did it. The shifty-eyed, black-hatted, no-tied figure that walked out of the alley was a creature of the streets.

No one in this section would hazard a second look. It was protective coloration. He had become part of his environment.

This time he walked straight up to the pool room and yanked the door open. As he entered, there was a sudden cessation of all noise. This he had expected. Anyone who came in had to undergo this gauntlet of eyes. Men stood poised, statue-still at the pool tables, the harsh overheard lights carving deep hollows in their cheeks.

Reassured by his appearance, they relaxed and went back to their games. He walked to a desk where there was a stamping device. It had a clock in the front of it. A handle protruded from it. He knew what it was. When he got his cue ball, the fat man behind the desk picked up a slip of paper and slid it into the jaws of the device.

A fat paw descended on the lever on top of the time machine. The slip of paper was ejected with the time on it. When Cranston was through at the table, the process would be repeated. The

length of time between the two stampings was the time for which he would have to pay.

He grunted as he took the ivory cue ball from the fat man's hand. "If Ike Cue's around or comes in, tell him I'll shoot him a game of Chicago, see?"

The man grunted in return. "If I see him, I'll tell him. Take table 11."

Cranston, who preferred a light cue, spent some time looking through the cue rack for one that was to his liking. Then he walked over to the table that had been assigned to him and placed the cue ball.

He took the rack off the fifteen balls and walked to the far end of the table. Setting the cue ball in place, he bent over the pool table. All the while he was busy at the business of shooting some pool, his narrowed eyes went shiftily around the room. Down at the far end, out of the penumbra of light that flooded down from the hanging lamps, he saw a figure. It was a rear view, but sometimes the back of a person is as recognizable as the face. It was Ike Cue.

Shooting delicately, Cranston picked one ball off the tip of the triangle of balls. It rolled to the cushion, kissed and stayed there. The cue ball made three cushions and came around into position.

There were soft footsteps behind him, but he didn't look up. Instead, he eyed the pack of balls carefully, and aiming with high, hard, right-hand English, he hit the cue ball. The free ball dropped in the left end pocket. The English was strong enough to carry the ball off the cushion with enough impetus to slam into the pack. They broke prettily.

The man behind him sighed in appreciation. The man had a curious head. It was half again too big for his slender body. His thin neck carried its heavy burden carefully as though a hasty move might send the huge head rolling off the narrow shoulders. The big head tapered in the front to a narrow triangular face. The last touch of strangeness came from those small features. His face looked young, unformed and childish.

Cranston began his run. He ran six and missed a massed shot. The man behind him stepped forward and leaned over the table. His pool cue was steady. He picked off a hanger before he said. "I don't make you."

"Who you hunchin'? I was a couple down from you at the old school," Cranston said, and his voice was low. School was prison, and Ike had been in enough of them not to remember all his cell confreres.

"Take it on the Erie. I'm a little warm around here."

"Warm? Ya kiddin'? You're hot. The parole board's all out for you. How much do you owe them?"

"Ten and a half."

He'd been released from jail with ten and a half years to go of his sentence. Any infraction of the parole rules meant he had to serve out the rest of the time. His leaving the state meant he'd broken the rules.

"What's the deal?"

"This town's in the bag. Big stuff. Doncha read the papers?"

"I dig that, but they must be layin' it on the line for ya."

"Puhlenty." The big head was again bent over the table. Ike shot and missed.

"If you're working, how come you're here and not out at the track?"

"You're pretty nosey... I came in for some moola. Besides something's up. I was working for Bonds, and he got it today. I gotta see if Raoll wants a boy."

"He will," Cranston now knew all he had wanted to find out. The lever he had wanted was firmly in his grasp. Ike Cue's work meant only one thing. The numbers game was not on the square! Let the public know that... know that the racketeers were so greedy that not even their huge percentage was enough for them, that they loaded even those odds and maybe there'd be some fireworks.

"I hadda fly a kite to get here. Any connections I can make?" Cranston asked. Flying a kite meant forging a check. Asking for work should be an easy way out of the pool room.

"What else do you?"

"Odd jobs."

"See Raoll as soon as things cool off. Say I sent you."

Cranston didn't thank him. He said, "If I tie up, I'll see you're taken care of." He walked away without another word and replaced his cue in the rack.

Ike Cue watched him as he walked toward the owner's desk to pay for his time. Ike was trying to place that black-hatted figure. He had a photographic mind for most things, could he be starting to slip up? He could not remember ever having seen the man before. Better not let anyone know it. If they found out that he could forget, he'd be a dead duck. His value lay in his remembering everything.

Out of sight, out of mind, he gave up puzzling as Cranston left the place.

On the street, darkness had fallen. Cranston walked back into the alley after a quick searching look around. No one even looked at him. Once in the alley, the brim of his hat came down in front. Reaching up he grasped the brief case and pulled it down from its hiding place. Opening it, he dragged the black cape from the inner section of the case.

It flowed out and around him. A man, a tough looking man, had entered the alley. For all practical purposes that man vanished. No one could have seen the form that came out of the narrow street. The blackness that cloaked The Shadow was complete.

Now that The Shadow knew, the laugh that he murmured for a second was low and triumphant. Justice would triumph because of the odds against it, and not because they were favorable.

The laugh lingered in the stillness for a time after the form had mingled with the outer darkness and was gone.

IN the backs of barrooms, in apartments, in the lobbies of hotels, poker-faced men stood in groups. No one not in the know would have understood the agitation that possessed them. Bonds was gone and something had to be done about it.

One man, a sub lieutenant of Bonds, had tried to assume the reins of power, but had been laughed to scorn. His name was Sells, and the others would have none of him or his ideas. If Raoll had been strong enough to knock off Bonds, he was strong enough to take over his racket and combine it with theirs. The opportunists rather welcomed the idea, for with the rings combined, there would be even more gravy to split. Less payoff, because now there would be only one ring to buy protection, more profit automatically. It was good business, they argued. Big business did it all the time; why shouldn't the rackets?

The strife that ended in the death of their leader might well lead to more money all around. They were all in favor of it. The various groups that met in so many places were selecting emissaries to present their proposition to Raoll.

And while the warring racketeers were preparing to amalgamate and strengthen their forces, where was The Shadow?

The protecting cape and the slouch hat that shaded his face was that of The Shadow, but the voice that went over the phone in a booth at the edge of town, was the voice of Lamont Cranston.

"Winthrop? Lamont. Get a move on. I want one of your paper's photographers to hurry over to..." he gave the address of the pool room he had just quitted.

"It may save some trouble of—Have you any infra-red equipment? You know, the red flash bulbs?"

"Sure, we used them during the blackout during the war. I'm sure there's still some of the materials left. Why?"

"There are some pretty bad boys in the pool room. They may have some slight objection to having the pictures taken. I just want you to get a picture of one man. With any luck your photographer should be able to snap it through the window. With the infra-red equipment, there'll be no warning flash to reveal the cameraman."

"Fine, I'll get someone right over there. But who is the picture to be of?"

The Shadow described the bizarre form that was Ike Cue.

"I see, big head, frail body—there shouldn't be any trouble if he's still there. Hold on a second."

The Shadow waited while Winthrop dialed on another phone. He gave the order in a crisp voice that would brook no alibis.

"He's on his way, Lamont. What's all this about?"

"I hope it is the beginning of the end for your racketeers. Ike Cue was in the headlines not long ago for precisely what he has been doing here."

"What was that?" Winthrop sounded excited. "That nickname sounds vaguely familiar."

"It should, because of the photographic memory that Ike Cue is blessed—or cursed—with, he has been used to protect the numbers racketeers against their ever losing very heavily!"

"Good heavens, man, do you mean that besides the ungodly odds they have in their favor, they're also crooked?"

"Precisely. Luckily, I think, for us, they are. I don't think any amount of editorializing would have the effect on the public that this revelation of the kind of game they have been playing will have."

"But how is it possible? They use the tote board figures for their daily number, I understand. Surely the mutual-machines aren't crooked?"

"No, certainly not! Those machines used at race tracks everywhere are as perfect as man's ingenuity can make them. No, indeed. The faking is done by Ike Cue."

"But how can they do anything? They change tracks as the racing season progresses!"

"The method can be used anywhere. First, however, you must realize that there are certain loaded numbers that always get a big play from the number players. Those numbers are so called naturals like 711. On any given day there is always a lot of money down on that number. Or, take 111, or 333, or 777. In all history, 3 and 7 have been lucky numbers, and the poor suckers who bet their nickels and dimes have great faith in those lucky numbers. The fact that the numbers don't come out at all, or if at all, very rarely, never seems to register with them.

"Then, there's another factor: number players, like all gamblers, go in for hunches a lot. Somebody will get up in the morning with the idea that, say 567 is going to come in that day. The word gets spread around—soon there is a disproportionate amount of money bet on 567. The racket boys would not be very happy if they had to pay off about ten percent of their players in one day.

"Ike Cue takes care of all that. He's the racketeer's insurance. He works down at the track where they are using the tote figures for their result. Because of the freak mind that he has, he can watch the amounts of money wagered and do some lightning kind of intuitive arithmetic and determine in advance if the amount of money wagered for the day is going to end up with some amount that is dangerous to his bosses.

"If he sees that there is any danger of the number coming out 711 or any number that has been heavily bet on for that day, he goes to the betting window and bets enough money on certain horses and certain races so as to upset the dangerous number and translate it into another, safer number!"

"Whew... this should really do it! When we can tell the people of Skillton that not only have they been betting against impossible odds, but the odds have been loaded to boot... why I think we're going to get somewhere after all!"

"Right, I thought you'd see it that way too!"

"All my thanks, and all the thanks of the right-minded citizens of this town are yours, Lamont."

"Let's wait for that till the whole thing is over! Bye for now—"

The black-shrouded figure left the empty filling station as quietly and unobtrusively as it had entered.

One of the employees of the place, coming back into the station after filling a car's gas tank, scratched his head in bewilderment. He said to himself, that's funny, I could have sworn I heard some money drop in the phone box... Must be getting old.

Back in the heart of town, Lamont Cranston made another phone call. This was to his good right arm, the trusty Burbank.

"Anything new?" he asked when the connection was made.

"Glad you checked with me. I'll say there've been fireworks going on about Bonds' death. Get this: the one who shot Bonds wasn't taking any chances. The bullet that killed him is one so horrible that after the African campaign even the Nazis stopped using them... Wooden bullets, dyed with a poisonous dye—if the bullet doesn't kill, the shattered fragments of wood carry the poison all through your bloodstream. You don't have a chance—"

"I see... But what makes you think they didn't continue to use them after the African battles?"

"I dunno. I just thought so."

"When you get some time, speak to some of the boys in the Normandy invasion... Don't ever think anything is too horrible for the mind of a fascist."

"All that to one side, there is surely a clue to the mind of the killer who did this in the weapon he used, don't you think?"

"Sure, it's just corroboration of what I've felt all along. Keep your eyes open, although I'm sure I don't have to tell you that... "

The connection broken, Cranston wondered how long it would now take before the whole case was broken...

Alone, Joey Raoll wondered privately who had killed Bonds. He had taken the credit for it, but that was unimportant. He could only think of one person who could have been responsible, and what gave him the cold creeping horrors was the fact that he didn't know who that person was... Oh, he had heard the voice on the phone, had taken orders, had even run errands, had paid off as he was told to, had even been chosen to make safe deposit box deposits—

But he hadn't heard a thing in over a week now—what was he supposed to do? He had decided to just go along and take over Bonds' men, combine the rackets, and pretend to boss them just as he had pretended all along to be the head of his own racket. But if the higher-up could kill Bonds, there was no reason why another death shouldn't be added to the roster... Was the higher-up going to come out in the open and take over? That didn't seem likely; but what else was there to suppose?

He was getting the creeps worrying over it. If only he'd hear something... but with no phone calls coming in, he might just as well have been on the moon. There was no way he could get in touch the other way...

That last time he'd been sent to the safe deposit boxes, it had been to withdraw, not deposit. Did that mean something? Of course, there had been a reason to sell those one thousand dollar bills for seven hundred and fifty bucks; he could see that... but why the sudden desire for small bills?

The standard black market rate in thousand dollar bills had slumped to seven fifty because the government had decreed that all banks must make a record of whoever deposited such a bill.

Worried as he was, Raoll spared a grin thinking of all the hot money that was buried away in safe deposit boxes. The men who had taken the bills were stuck... where could they cash them?

It was then, when he was more relaxed than he'd been in weeks, that the phone rang.

Eyeing it for a moment, he finally answered it. He said, "Hello?"

Then there was a pause; he said, "Close up shop? The heat's on? But—"

He closed his mouth then and kept it clamped shut. The orders were terse and to the point. He was to pretend to take over Bonds' men and then, once they were amalgamated, he was to leave a list of all the racket men's names in an envelope for the cops, take his fall money, and hit the road.

He had plenty of money stashed away where he could put his hands on it, but that wasn't the point. Why break up a racket just when it seemed headed for a huge era of money making... but he didn't dare even ask the question. His was but to do as he was told—

When he put the receiver down, he was a badly puzzled man. He'd obey the orders of course; he was afraid to do anything else, but why, why, why?

Later on, that same night, the delegation of Bonds' men arrived. To an outsider it would have looked like any business conference anywhere, the same clouds of smoke from cigars, the worried, harassed faces as they haggled over small points, the poker faces when the big points were being argued over, all could be repeated at any conference of legitimate businessmen.

There was a squeaking of chairs, clearing of throats; Raoll held up his hand. Instantly there was silence. The eyes of all the men were on him. He said, and wished the words were true as he said them, "I know how you men feel; after all, your boss is dead. But let's look at this from a business standpoint."

Their expressions told him that they were all set to look at things in precisely that light. He went on, "All other things to one side, with Bonds out of the way, we're going to make even more money. We combine the control rooms, cut the overhead down, divvy up the town a little better so no runner is overlapping territory with any other, and what do we have?"

One of the men grunted; "We got a sweet set-up! We got more power than we ever had. I been wanting to move in on a couple of other rackets for a long time now. This way with the cops in our back pocket we'll be able to really do each other some good."

Raoll nodded. Why not? None of this was ever going to happen. Let them have dreams of unlimited power. He took a slip of paper and handed it to one of the men.

"Put your John Doe on there, and where I can latch onto you when I want to get in touch with you. When you've done that pass it along."

They did as they were told.

Raoll picked up the list, looked it over and said, "That's about all for the night. Take a powder. I'll check with you tomorrow. We'll get together and really get some work done."

The men nodded. This was the way to do it. No wasted time. They left each with a little glow of satisfaction. Things were really looking up! The town was theirs!

When Raoll was alone again, he relaxed a bit. He'd done what he had been ordered to do. He realized he'd have to start making his getaway plans.

He had the list of names that he had been ordered to get. There was no nonsense in his thinking of worrying about ratting on his friends. That was all nonsense dreamed up by screwy writers, that business about honor among thieves. He was just worried about how to get out with his own coat tails clean.

The only interruption to his thinking was when one of his men came in to tell him about how Bonds had been killed. The New York papers were full of it.

He read them over carefully. Bonds had been killed with his own favorite weapon. As Raoll read the stories he drew from his pocket the small blue wooden pellet that looked so much like the tip of a crayon. This threat sent to him by the dead man—

There was some kind of ironical poetic justice in Bonds dying in agony with shattered splinters of poisoned wood all through his body.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him. Had anyone known of Bonds' preference for wooden bullets? He had found it out accidentally. And why had Bonds been killed? That still stuck in his craw—Was he, Joey Raoll, going to get the next dose? Had the higher-up called up Bonds and told him to get ready to clear out? Was the pattern about to be repeated?

There was no sleep for him that night.

X I I I .

LAMONT CRANSTON rose early on the morning that was to see the end of the racketeering menace that had endangered the life and happiness of the city of Skillton.

He looked out the window of his hotel room, down at the hurrying little figures of men and women on their way to work. He felt a warm feeling towards them. They were the backbone of the city and, of course, of the country. They were the people who worked and made America what it was.

At an upstairs window in another part of town, another male figure looked down at the scurrying figures of the few people to be seen on the street—tiny because of the perspective. This man felt for the little people only contempt. What were they, after all but insects, ants, to be crushed or rewarded as the occasion demanded... He felt a sense of power just from looking down at them from overhead. It was almost as if he could reach out a hand and crush them as one would some bothersome crawling things at a picnic.

He kept on looking down from his height. This feeling, this glow that filled him as righteousness might fill another breast, was the breath of life to him. What were the little ordinary set-backs of life to a man who could stand like this, spreading contempt down on the little beings who thought they were men? Men, his face contorted, perhaps they were men, but there were two classes of men—the ones who were born to command, and the ones whose life was but to do as they were commanded.

It was a heady draught that he was inhaling. A draught that had been responsible for more death and destruction than had any other single human emotion since the dawn of time. The sense that there were slaves and slave owners. That had been the motivation for the madmen who had tried to bring Europe down around their ears when their plans had failed.

His plans were made. He was right. He was sure of that. Right in every move he had made. All was going to work out according to the master plan. And once it did—

He grinned to himself as he turned from the window, and it was the kind of grimace that had at one time or another contorted the faces of many men who put themselves above the laws that concern mankind. Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Alexander, Hitler; all had been moved by the kind of megalomania that rode this man like a witch a broomstick.

And like that witch, there was in him the seeds of madness... For only one who felt as he did could have considered the ruthless extermination that was uppermost in his mind. He knew what they needed: a strong hand... And his was the hand to do what was necessary!

Dressing carefully as was his wont, Cranston ran over the salient factors of the case in his mind. He now thought he knew why Finneran, the young man, had been murdered on his way to meet his fiancée. He thought too, that he knew what it was that Finneran had found that had made it necessary he die—

Understanding of Ike Cue's function had helped in the plan that he had made, but even if Cue had not been involved, Cranston had another plan that would have worked; of that he was positive. Cue just made things a little easier.

Even up in his hotel room, Cranston could hear the shouts of newsboys vending their extras... the cries, muffled by the distance were still understandable as—"Wuxtry—readallaboutit... Wuxtry— Numbers Rigged! Policy Racket Loaded! Read all about it—"

He grinned as he straightened his tie before the mirror. That would cause some consternation among the camps of the enemy! He wondered how Raoll would react to this new menace to his crime empire.

He wondered too, if this helped or hindered the master plan of that other whose presence Cranston had become more and more aware of; how would this help to flush him out in the open? Today should tell the tale.

At breakfast, Cranston overheard a whispered colloquy between a waiter and a patron. The waiter had asked, "What's your bet today?" The patron had snarled, if you can snarl in a whisper, "Beat it! Think I'm dumb enough to bet after this!"

At this, the customer had pointed an irate finger at the revelations in the morning paper.

So it was working.

It was a scene that was being repeated all over the city. The bellboys, the elevator operators and starters, doormen, ice men, taxicab drivers, the smart money boys lounging on their favorite street corners, the whole motley crew which had covered the city in the meshwork of its operations, all were nonplused at the actions of their former patrons. There were some people who bet, just as there are people who will bet against a crooked roulette wheel or, play dice when they know the dice are loaded, but in the aggregate, the policy men suffered.

The police, the vast majority of them, the honest ones, walked their beats with smiles on their faces. Something was up that not even a pay-off would fix. The cops were sure of that. They walked along, and today the number runners were careful to keep out of sight.

In one section, a man who had been betting on the number 711 for over a year, walked up to his number runner and looked at him for a moment and then, without any warning, he swung a punch that knocked the number runner off his feet. His gray white hat flipped off his prostrate head and rolled under the wheels of a passing milk truck.

Lamont Cranston, visualizing the things that would follow the newspaper revelations, walked up the steps to Gerald Winthrop's house. He was smiling; Peebles, answering the door, smiled a weak smile in response. He said, "Good morning, Mr. Cranston, won't you step inside? Mr. Winthrop is waiting."

Cranston followed the narrow back of the secretary down the long hall. In the study, Winthrop was on the phone, barking orders like the editor in a quickie movie. He was saying, "Tear out and replat; I have a new lead, 'Scurrying for cover like the rats they are —' " He broke off as he saw Cranston.

"Good morning," Cranston said.

"And a very good morning to you," Winthrop smiled. "Your little stunt went off like a dream. Did you see the pictures my man got?"

Cranston nodded. If he hadn't, they were spread all over the room. Winthrop had laid out about ten papers on the floor. From all of them the strange face of Ike Cue stared. It was made even stranger by the infra-red which bleaches out the red parts of the face. His lips were a muddy white. All color was gone from his cheeks and the whiteness looked like prison pallor.

Under his picture were the numbers he had been given when he was sent to jail. Under that was lettered, "This is the man who has been helping the racketeers to clip you!"

Winthrop barked into the phone, "That's all for now. I'll check later." To Cranston he asked, "Now then, what's new for today? What do we do as a follow-up?"

"You're doing fine as it is."

"It's just as I always said, it's always darkest before dawn." Peebles put this in carefully, "And now the dawn has come and the rising sun is wiping out the whole thing like a bad dream."

Winthrop made a gruff sound in the depths of his throat. "Hmmm, very true. But Lamont, you haven't answered me. What do we do now?"

"Go after the men involved, throw Joey Raoll in jail, try to gather up the men who are left. You'll have public opinion on your side now. Perhaps this time they won't be able to frighten witnesses away or into changing their testimony."

"Good." Winthrop took the slip of paper with the numbers on it out of his pocket. "Perhaps now they won't be able to flaunt evidence like this in the face of law and order and get away with it."

"That," Cranston said, nodding towards the paper, "seems to have stuck in your craw."

"It did indeed. The bare-faced brass of them!" Winthrop put the paper back in his pocket.

"But all that's over now—" Peebles sighed. "Oh, isn't it wonderful? This publicity will help your campaigning so—"

"It won't hurt, that's a sure thing. The public will be going to the polls with the memory of our work on these racketeers fresh in their minds!"

Cranston, watching Winthrop's face, thought, it won't be the first time a mayor has been elected on a clean-up wave.

"And then, later," Peebles added, "this will always be on your record as you go—"

"Up, I hope," said Winthrop laughing, "not down—"

"Mr. Cranston," said Peebles, changing the subject, "will you be able to help the police find the murderer of that poor boy, Finneran?"

"Yes, what about that, Lamont?" Winthrop lit a cigar, "Why was he killed? It was under such pathetic circumstances that he died. The public will clamor for his killer. Do you now have any idea why he was shot?"

"Well," Cranston paused, after all, this was just an hypothesis. "You may not know about this, but about ten years ago, a city like yours, a clean, decent city, began going to the dogs. There was a dope ring operating and they had worked out such a fool-proof method of distribution that they were able to laugh at the efforts of the law enforcement officers.

"As I have pointed out before, the danger from crime is not crime per se, but the results of it, for when the public sees crime becoming triumphant over law and order, then the danger sets in."

"You're taking down all this, aren't you, Peebles?" Winthrop interrupted.

"Of course, sir."

"The way this ring operated was this: You are a dope addict. You walk up to a certain newsboy in a selected spot, that spot changed every day, and asked for a paper. If you asked in a certain series of words, and if you handed over a ten-dollar bill and waved away the change, you were given a paper.

"In that paper was a key. Written on one of the pages you would find, let's say, 7-2. Now how could anyone, a narcotics man, for instance, translate that into anything? You didn't have enough information.

"You see, what the hop head already knew, by grapevine, was the name of the building that was in use that specific day. If you didn't know that, and didn't know what the numbers referred to, you couldn't deduce anything.

"Let's follow our hypothetical dope addict. He knows what building to go to. The first number tells him to go to the wash room on the seventh floor.

"He goes there and waits till he is unobserved. Then, the second number tells him to go to the second towel container. He uses the key that he got in the paper to open the towel container; lying neatly on top of the towels is his bundle of stuff!

"Track that back and you'll see how impossible it would be to catch anyone at any point in the proceedings. If the dope addict were followed, if he saw any danger of an arrest coming, all he had to do was flush the dope down one of the wash stands. It was an almost fool-proof method."

"It's perfect, all right," said Winthrop, "but what's the relevancy here? How does this apply to the death of Finneran? Don't tell me that there's dope running going on here, too?"

Cranston shook his head. "No, I don't think so. The relevance of this method is this. Suppose the existence of a crime dictator here in Skillton."

Winthrop whistled. "You mean that we haven't reached the end of the case yet?"

"A crime dictator?" Peebles asked weakly. "Isn't that sort of melodramatic and improbable?"

"Melodramatic, perhaps, because so much of life is melodrama, but improbable, no. Take the big bootleggers during prohibition. Don't you remember the background of their working? The so-called big shots were generally just window dressing. The real brains of the outfits, nine times out of ten, were crooked politicians, men who knew where the 'fix' could go in. Knew the venal judges, the venal police inspectors.

"They are the real bosses behind any crime set-up. No criminals can exist on a big scale without backing. It would be impossible. There is, I am sure, just such a big shot behind the numbers ring here in Skillton."

"Let's presuppose the existence of such a person," said Winthrop. "I still don't see the connection between that and the death of the lad and your dope distribution setup."

"The big shot would have to, on occasion, be in touch with some of the men in the rackets. If he were wise, and wanted to avoid blackmail, he would take every precaution that recognition be made impossible. He would give his orders over the phone, of course, but how would he get in physical contact with the underlings? How receive money?"

"I get it now," Winthrop said. "He'd use the method that the dope peddlers had used. What a perfect method to avoid any contact at all!"

"Right. Now you have my theory."

"But... Oh, you think that Finneran accidentally saw this big shot taking something from the towel container?"

"No, I don't think it was that, because as you remember, the men that killed Finneran went through his clothes after his death looking for something. I think the poor lad found it accidentally. Perhaps the towels were used up faster than the criminals thought they would be, and the evidence, whatever it was, fell out of the towel container—"

"Then all he did was pick it up. He might never have known what the significance of the evidence was—"

"That's what I think," said Cranston. "I imagine that he found it, was puzzled by it, for there is a witness who saw him scowling over a slip of paper... The big shot probably came along, late maybe, and found the evidence gone. He tied up the appearance of Finneran in the washroom... he must have signaled outside rapidly and given orders for the killer to go into operation, for, as you realize, there was little time wasted."

"We'll probably never know if your theory is correct, but it certainly sounds lucid, Lamont."

There was a silence. Peebles was thinking over what Cranston had said. "Wouldn't the 'big shot' have had to give his identity away if he signaled out the building to whomever it was that did the real killing?"

"A good point, a very good point. I think events have shown who it was that saw and identified the big shot. After all, Larry Bonds is dead now, isn't he?"

Winthrop added to Cranston's words, "Dead men tell no tales! You think Bonds was killed just because he knew who the leader was?"

"I do. Perhaps Bonds had not arrived at the point where he was sure. After all, it was quite a distance. But as long as there was the tiniest chance that Bonds might realize who the leader was, why, the big shot had to remove Bonds.

"I think, too, that because of this setup, that probably the big shot, for the first time, actually committed a crime with his own hands. I don't think he would have delegated that killing to anyone else. He would want to be sure that Bonds was safely dead!

"And it is with that crime that I hope to convict the big shot. It would be, I fear, a gargantuan job to tie the leader in with the actual rackets... but the killing, that will be simple and will result in the death of the big shot!"

X I V .

"By that, do you mean that you know who this leader is?"

"Of course, I have for quite a while."

"I see." Winthrop looked thoughtful. "And have you enough evidence to prove your point?"

"More than enough."

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

"For some of the loose ends to tie in. The evidence I have is enough for me, but whether it would stand up in court, I don't know. I am sure that things will have come to a head before the day is over."

As Cranston said this, he looked at Peebles, who was busily writing down every word that was said in shorthand.

"Shall I hold space open in the paper for this?" asked Winthrop.

"By all means. I'll let you know later. 'Bye."

And Cranston was gone. After he left, Peebles translated the shorthand into typewritten sheets. Most of the conversation could go into the paper verbatim.

Out on the street Cranston walked along. He had but one regret, but that was unavoidable. It would end, the whole sordid case, in daylight. He would have to appear as Cranston as he watched the pieces coalesce. It would have been better if it could have been his dark alter ego who saw the end. But this was neither the place nor the time for The Shadow.

Cranston knew that he walked with death at his elbow. But, like a soldier who has become used to death, Cranston took it in his stride, redoubled his precautions, and walked as if this were but a constitutional. The big shot had seen and recognized the double danger of Larry Bonds: 1) the risk that Bonds might have recognized him, and 2) the fact that with the disappearance of Mrs. Bonds, Bonds was a leaky vehicle indeed.

For, if Bonds had lived, and if Mrs. Bonds had testified in court, there'd have been the danger that Bonds would have ratted in order to try and save his own skin.

That weapon had been torn from Cranston's hands by the death of Bonds. That step had resulted in a new one; one that made of Cranston's own body a snare. For if the big shot did not kill Cranston, then the evidence that Cranston had gathered would end in the big shot's demise.

Meanwhile, Joey Raoll had found out how it was to live with death as his every breath's companion. He drank, with death grinning at him. He walked, wondering where an assassin might lurk. He ate, and wondered if the food he swallowed might contain the seeds of death.

All his plans for evacuating were made. He held a reservation in a plane for that noon. If he were able to take the plane and leave Skillton behind, then and only then, would he breathe a sigh of relief.

Till then he walked in fear.

While Cranston walked towards the end of town that was Raoll's, a desperate plan was in the making. If Cranston had known of how Raoll intended to leave, he would have been able to take steps. But that was out of his ken.

He could not know what the exact murder schedule was. It happened that Raoll's death was slated to occur before his... A check with Hawkeye had told him that Raoll was moving fast, that something was in the wind.

Cranston wondered if Raoll were aware of the end of the racket, or if he thought it would continue. By sheer coincidence, his wandering feet brought him to Raoll's neighborhood in time to see Raoll leave his home.

He watched as Raoll, eyes shifting to cover as much territory as they could, came down the steps in front of the house. A car parked in front of the steps waited for him. There was no one in

it.

Cranston thought with a quirk of his lips, there's a man who wants to be alone—

Raoll hurried down the steps, a suitcase in his hand. It was like watching the disintegration of a personality. At the top step he was Joey Raoll, king pin in the rackets, but step by step as he descended, he became more and more fearful. He looked around him more and more, his eyes twisted back and forth.

He saw Lamont Cranston idling across the street, but dismissed him from his mind. To Raoll, Cranston was just a passerby. There was no danger there. But in all other directions, who could know from where a bullet might flash out?

By the time he reached the bottom step, his face was wet with perspiration. He dragged a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his streaming face.

He set down his precious suitcase, which was jammed full of the illicit proceeds of the rackets. He jammed the handkerchief back into his pocket and hazarded another glance up and down the streets, up into the windows across the street where the dirty panes were as uncommunicative as cataracted eyes. He could see nothing menacing.

He couldn't take heart at this, for after all, he hadn't expected to spot anything. Picking up his suitcase, he ran the last few paces across the sidewalk and leaped into the car.

Here, he thought, was comparative safety. What might greet him on the way to the airport he couldn't know. He slid his key into the dashboard and stepped down on the accelerator.

It happened so fast that his tortured mind barely realized that this was it. It was all over when the resounding boom ended.

Down the street, Cranston was thrown flat on his face. He swallowed a couple of times hastily, to try and equalize the pressure in his eardrums. He had been almost knocked out by the concussion.

Shaking his head groggily to try and clear it, he looked back at the spot where the car had been. By one of those freaks which explosions are prone to, the outside of the car looked relatively unharmed.

The inside of the car was like something out of a battlefield scene. The top of the car had been blasted out. What was left of what had been Joey Raoll was barely recognizable as having ever been part of humanity.

In that more-than-silence which follows a too-loud sound, Cranston watched incredulously while a green rain spattered down softly. The suitcase had given up its loot. Shattered, torn, some whole, some just tiny bits of green paper, the money was settling down from where the explosion had carried it.

Some of the few unshattered windows in the neighborhood were raised, as curious heads poked out. It would not take long, Cranston knew, for a crowd to gather. Particularly with the rain of money that was descending.

Crowds, brainless to a degree, will always hover at the edge of calamity.

Even as Cranston pulled himself together and tried to wipe off some of the muck his clothes had acquired from his precipitate fall, men, women and children began to appear as though by magic. At first, hesitant, as though afraid that the explosion might be repeated, then more bravely as there was no recurrence, the many-headed monster of a crowd pushed forward.

They gasped at the sight of the inside of the car; but the wreckage was soon forgotten in the scramble that ensued. It was a wild dream come true. Money all over the place, money still gently falling from the sky.

Leaving them to the scramble, Cranston walked away. There was a rough kind of justice in the money that had come from these people's purses being returned to them.

He thought the bomb was fastened to the gas pedal. When Raoll stepped on it—

Well indeed was it that the racketeers had come to the end of their tether. This insistence on using the weapons of war in their own petty kind of battles was insane. There was less regard for the innocent bystander than there is for the civilian in war. The killer had had no assurance that the car would not blast out of life anyone near it. Only luck had kept the explosion from killing a street full of humans, as it had Raoll.

The last act The Shadow had performed before doffing his cape the night before had been one of petty thievery. He had become a housebreaker—but all he had taken was a suit. A well-worn suit of clothes.

This one act was what made Cranston so sure that, even as plans had been made for the destruction of Raoll just so, plans would have been made for his demise.

As he went his way, waiting for death to strike, there was a contrast between his behavior and that of the man who had just gone, covered with cowardice, to his death.

Anyone seeing Cranston would have thought him a wealthy idler wasting time. There was naught of the craven in him. He was as prepared as one can be. He took every possible precaution, and was on his toes both mentally and physically. If he lost in this battle, it would be his own fault, he thought wryly.

He had given all the information he possessed to Harry Vincent. Harry would know what to do with it if the impending showdown turned out the wrong way. This was his life. This was the battle to which he had consecrated himself... and if it resulted in death, why he had taken that into consideration too... The most a man can do is go out fighting for that which he believes.

A car speeding around the corner caught his attention. He braced himself to leap if... A head poked out of the car.

"Cranston, what are you doing here? C'mon, jump in. We just heard that Raoll got his!"

It was Winthrop. Cranston walked to the car and got in. The car got into speed again. "It's just around the corner, Lamont. I wanted to see it. Some of my men are covering it, but this is one thing I think I ought to see, if I'm going to write about it."

From the rear of the car, Peebles said weakly, "But sir, do you think it's safe to approach so soon after the explosion?"

"You don't think they're going to kill him a second time, do you?"

The car was driving right back into the street Cranston had just quitted. In a way he felt more relaxed. Now he knew from where the danger was coming.

In the car was the man who must try to kill him. He was sure of that, and he realized that the man was aware that he knew. It was a strange situation. One that was to Cranston's liking, but to the killer's—it had forced his hand.

His plan would have to undergo a change, for he either had to get rid of the potential witness or—kill him too. Cranston waited to see how it would turn out.

Peebles was horrified by the way the people were jammed around the car, fighting over the shreds of money. Then he was shocked when he saw what the car contained. Or rather, what it didn't contain.

"Is that—" Peebles pointed with a shaking finger, "is that what's left of him?"

Cranston nodded. "Not very pretty, is it?"

"So this is the end of a master gangster. I shall make an editorial of this. From the heights to the—to this—" Winthrop paused, words failing him.

"I think," he said, "I've seen enough of this. I saw too much of it in the war to want to be reminded of it too much."

Winthrop had been a Colonel in the war. It was hard to remember that, because all he had left was a certain stiffness of carriage. He never spoke of his experiences. As a matter of fact, this was the first time Cranston had ever heard him refer to them.

The car drove away. It had been a pretty strong dose for the killer, Cranston thought, for after all, it is one thing to fasten a deadly booby trap to the innards of a car, and still another to see the dreadful results of that act.

They were all three silent.

The car drove uptown. They were near the building that housed Winthrop's paper. Cranston could read, lettered on the top of the building, THE SKILLION JOURNAL.

"As long as we're here, Peebles, you may as well run up and give them your notes. I want to speak to Mr. Cranston alone. I'll pick you up later."

Peebles left the car. Left it with two men in it. One of them was determined to murder the other—had to kill him if his plans were not to come down around his ears, like the playing card castles that they were!

X V .

THE silence continued for a while. Cranston got a full view of Winthrop's face in the rear-view mirror. It was stern. He was evidently not looking forward to that which he was trying to steel himself.

"Got an alibi all arranged?"

That took the wind out of the newspaper owner. He had not expected it to come out in the open this way. He sparred for time. "Alibi? Good Lord, man, what do you mean? You talk as if I were a criminal, a hoodlum." He tried to laugh, but wasn't very successful.

Cranston sighed. He had not expected this. What was the point of carrying the pretense any further? He said, "That suit that disappeared out of your closet last night—"

"Wh... you mean you—"

"No, I didn't. A friend of mine took it. It is in safe hands. It will reach the police in the event of anything happening to me."

"But... what would happen to you?"

Cranston laughed and his laugh was rich and full of humor. "Come, come, Gerald, I expected better than that of you."

"I know that you know all about me. I don't expect understanding of you—but you are misinterpreting my motive in wanting to be alone with you. The jig is up.

"There comes a time in the fortunes of men when to try and continue is but the act of a fool. In my pocket, there is a full and complete confession of all my acts: the killing of Raoll and Bonds, my connection with the numbers racket, everything."

When Winthrop gestured at his coat pocket Cranston tensed, for after all, this might just be a gag to allow Winthrop to pull a gun.

But looking at his opponent's chest, Cranston saw that there was no gun concealed there. If Winthrop had a gun at all it would have to be either in the car or in his hip pocket.

"I can see you don't believe me. But as soon as we get to my house, I will sign the confession in front of you. That should show you what I'm trying to tell you."

So he was not to be killed in the car. Perhaps, Cranston thought, it would be wiser for Winthrop to make his try in the confines of his own house.

"There was nothing I could do about the suit. I saw that you realized the significance of the stain when you looked at it. But what could I do? I couldn't have it cleaned; that would have given me away, and at that time I didn't know that you were positive I was your hypothetical mastermind—your big shot."

"I was sure much sooner than that. That slip of paper you kept waving around. Was it for that you had Finneran killed?"

"Yes." Winthrop said in the tone and accent of a beaten man. "I learned a lesson from that. I saw that the more secretive I tried to be about the slip, the more suspect I would become. That way why—"

"That was why you tried the Edgar Allen Poe technique from then on. I knew that."

"Did you know?" asked Winthrop almost timidly. "What about the safe deposit boxes?"

"Of course. That went without saying."

"And my motives. Are you sure of them?"

"If you are going to try to say that the end justifies the means, forget it. I know that you needed money to consolidate your political position. You can't conduct a political campaign without money. You set yourself a figure, I imagine, and when you had made that much, tried to get out from under on your racketeering connections."

"Yes, I have that sum now. It should be enough to put me in the governor's chair... Or should have, I mean."

"Because of your political ambitions, the slightest breath of scandal would have been enough to end your career. It would have been political suicide to have allowed Bonds to remain alive."

There was a silence again. Then Winthrop said pleadingly, trying to justify his actions to his former friend. "You don't understand; you've probably been puzzled about my silence about the war. If you have, it's because the enemy made a convert of me. I came back assured that they were right even if they went down to defeat in the war!"

"Man is weak. When he's young, he needs a strong father; when he gets older he needs the guidance of we who are more intelligent! I am one of the intelligent! I could have run things better! In the long run, although they lose silly unsubstantial things like freedom and other catchwords, we, I, would give them far more, because of my superior intelligence. It was my duty to run for office, to win by any means I could, so that I could bring the right methods into use."

"I was sure you felt that way," Cranston said and he almost spat out the words. "You're the ones that feel that anything is right that ends in your power. Only such as feel the way you do could possibly use the weapons you have used. That wooden bullet, the bombs, are typical of your paranoid mentality."

"Paranoid—but I am not insane. If anything, I have a better brain than nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand people."

"I didn't say you were insane. Fascists don't have to be insane, but it helps. I'm talking about your tendencies. Your desire for power, your being so sure that anything you do is right, all are part of what in the end becomes megalomania. You and your kind are infinitely more dangerous than an out-and-out madman. History has proved that."

The car stopped.

Cranston followed the bowed shoulders of the man who had been his friend up the stairs into the old house. No butler came to the door. Winthrop let himself in with his key.

There were no servants in sight inside the house. Cranston looked around and his mouth quirked. This gave the lie to the mealy-mouthed protestations of giving up. If Winthrop were giving up, why had he sent all the servants away? But Cranston didn't say anything.

He followed Winthrop into the room—the study. His eyes were busy. He did not know from what direction Winthrop had planned for death to strike.

He watched carefully as Winthrop went to a wine cellar and flipping the doors open asked, "A drink?"

Cranston shook his head and sat down in an easy chair. Winthrop threw a man-sized hooker back into his throat and said, "We might as well get this over with. Do you want to look the confession over before I sign it?"

"Yes. What was the game?"

Winthrop opened his coat and drew a fat manila envelope out of his breast pocket. He threw it to Cranston and then turned and had another drink.

Cranston opened the envelope carefully, prepared for anything. But inside the envelope there were about five close-typed sheets of paper. He ran his eye down the pages. At the same time he managed to keep Winthrop under surveillance out of the corner of his eye.

But Winthrop stood there in front of him, jacket thrown back, the inevitable row of mechanical pencils and pens lined up in one vest pocket. Another pocket held cigars. He was taking one out. He lit and puffed on it while he waited for Cranston to finish reading the confession.

"Seems to be all here."

"It is. I know when I'm licked. It would be stupid to bat my head against a stone wall."

"I notice you say in here that all the money you have made is in small bills in your safe deposit box."

"That was a precaution I had to take because of income taxes. There was no earthly way I could justify the amounts of money I was making. But I had a scheme figured out for that. I was going to set up a dummy corporation, and through some clever bookkeeping, show that the money was coming into the corporation. I would have managed it so that only sensible amounts came in. I had it all figured out so nicely. Then, you see, I would have paid taxes on the money that came into the dummy. That way the money would all be clean."

"Curious use of the word clean—"

Winthrop shrugged. "It's a little late for recriminations."

"One final thing. What ever possessed you to call on me to help you to clean up the town?"

"Why that's obvious. Once I had received the amount of money I had set as my quota, I really wanted the rackets to get out. You were the best person I could think of to help me. I assure you it was not part of my calculations that you find out my position in the ring."

"Two birds with the proverbial stone. You get rid of the entanglements which have become distasteful, and at the same time get a reputation as a crime crusader. Very neat planning."

"Thank you," Winthrop bowed. "And now, shall we finish the formalities... before—"

"You are planning to kill yourself?" Cranston kept his smile hidden. The man was so transparent.

"Of course. When all your plans have failed what else is there to do? I can never try again."

"I see." Cranston got to his feet and walked to the table. He spread the confession out in front of him. He reached in his pocket for a fountain pen, but Winthrop forestalled him.

"Here, use this one. It's full of ink."

He held the pen out upside down. As Cranston reached for it, Winthrop said, "Oops, how stupid of me. Wrong end. Guess I'm more nervous than I thought—"

It was only then, so carefully had the shrewd mind of the killer planned, that Cranston saw the trap. The confession, the long talk, all had been scheduled carefully and for one purpose—to allay his suspicions, to get him to relax.

Winthrop said, "You sign down there as witness. I'll sign under your signature. That should be legal enough."

As the pen turned over, Cranston's hand shot out like a snake. His hand clasped the hand of the killer. He grappled with his wrist. Winthrop snarled, "Blast you... how did you know?"

They stood there at an impasse. The pen was still in Winthrop's hand. Cranston retained his clenched hold on the man's wrist, for he knew that death was in the air if he let go.

It could not continue. Winthrop's mind was too agile. He brought up his other hand, and it came down towards the nape of Cranston's unprotected neck. It was a blow that might have killed Cranston if it had landed where it was aimed.

Cranston did the one thing his enemy hadn't expected. He shifted his head so that he took the blow on the top of his cranium. It came down with all Winthrop's strength. But the top of an adult's head is one of the most solid parts of his anatomy.

Instead of making Cranston groggy, it hurt Winthrop. His hand shook with pain. While he was momentarily disconcerted, Cranston brought up his free hand and cut at his opponent's Adam's apple. It was a dirty blow, dirty as the rabbit punch. It connected.

A gurgling, horrid sound came grunting from Winthrop's throat. He fell backwards, doing the involuntary thing. Even with Cranston's hand still covering his, he brought both hands up to his throat.

Cranston took advantage of the respite to wrest the fountain pen from Winthrop's enfeebled grasp. His enemy's face was empurpled. He gagged and wrenched at his aching throat.

He forced air down his tortured tracheal tubes. All thought of resistance was gone for the moment. All he was concerned with was getting air down his throat and ineffectually trying to ease the pain of the assault.

Cranston spared a glance for the pen. It was what he had thought. A single-shot pistol made in the form of a pen. They had been dropped by air to the resistance troops abroad during the war. They were perfect used that way. A patriot alone, stopped by some enemy guards, could hold a pen in his hands as he raised them overhead. Then, when an inquisitive face came close, the pen went off. The recoil threw the pen backwards twenty or thirty feet.

Once again the criminal had tried to adapt a war weapon to a crime. Cranston glanced from the pen to his gasping opponent. It had been a clever attempt. If it had been successful, Cranston would have bent over the paper to reach for the pen. The pen's muzzle, but inches away would have sent the shot right into his brain.

"You poor fool," he said, "don't you realize that my death wouldn't have accomplished anything? I told you your suit was in a place where it would go to the police if anything happened to me. How could you expect this abortive murder attempt to help you?"

"Guh... you—" The venom came through the painful gasps. "You—if I could have killed you, I would have gone to defeat gracefully—Don't you see—"

Cranston saw more than Winthrop thought he did—saw the conceit that could not allow itself to be bested. For that was why he had tried to kill Cranston. He couldn't stand the blow to his ego, of having someone outwit him.

"You'd better sign this confession as long as you've gone to all the trouble of writing it out! And this time, you'll use one of my pens." Cranston held it out.

With all defenses seemingly gone, Winthrop took the pen and was scratching his name down on the paper when the sound he'd been waiting for came. The outside door opened.

"HELP!" he screamed at the top of his lungs.

Pounding feet came in answer to his summons.

Cranston wondered what new scheme the newspaper man had up his sleeve. He sat tight and waited while the door burst open.

X V I .

THE servants had returned. Evidently, in Winthrop's original plan, Cranston was to have been dead and disposed of by now. He looked up as the chauffeur—a burly-looking bruiser—and the butler ran in.

"Grab him! He attacked me! He's gone mad! Mad, I tell you!"

The chauffeur and the butler looked puzzled. If anyone looked mad, it was the boss, standing there grabbing at his throat. Cranston stood relaxed and at ease.

But after all, the boss was the one who paid their salaries. Cranston didn't bother to fight back. He stood quietly while the butler and the other man came up behind him and held his arms. After all, what good could this do Winthrop? He was just clutching at straws. These men, Cranston was sure, were respectable hardworking servants. Winthrop would never have allowed his underworld connections to come close to home. A few words would straighten out the whole thing.

Cranston cleared his throat. He said, "If you'll look at the paper on the table—" That was as far as he got.

Winthrop stepped to his side and grabbed the pen, the deadly pen, out of his hand.

Was he to die this way? Held on both sides while the man calmly shot him? Had Winthrop cracked to that degree?

The servants watched in puzzled awe while their employer held the pen in his hand. He looked from it to Cranston. No one could have interpreted the expressions that crossed his face.

He lifted the pen, and the muzzle was now pointing at Cranston's heart. But the pen continued to be lifted. He held it up and looked at it for a moment. Then with a shrug of resignation he said, "When your last ace is trumped, you lose—"

He put the muzzle between his teeth and pressed the clip on the side that acted as a trigger.

Just as he pressed it the last millimetre that separated life from death, another man ran into the room. It was Peebles. His eyebrows arched up at the sight of his employer putting the end of the fountain pen in his mouth. It was an idiotic-seeming thing to do. Before Peebles could speak, the sound of the report shattered the air in the room with the violence of its sound waves.

All eyes were on Winthrop. From the front, his face was normal. He might have still been alive. The pen fell from his hands. All dignity gone, he seemed to collapse in on himself.

It was only when he fell in a crumpled heap on the floor and his head fell forward, that they could see the wreckage that the bullet had made of his brain.

Almost simultaneously with his fall, the empire he had built, and then torn down, fell too. For the police, acting on the list of names sent to them by Raoll before his death, were swooping down en masse on the men who had made up the policy racket.

Consternation was the only word for what the racketeers felt. Men who had thought themselves above arrest—as had their fallen leader—stood with mouths agape, as the police came in and led them away.

As a knotted string defies opening until one end is found to unravel it neatly, the tangle of crime and criminals unraveled. With the brains gone, the rest of the group showed themselves for what they were—petty crooks, easy money boys, all anxious to get off as easily as possible. If anything, the police had too much testimony.

Some were inside suits of blue, employed to enforce the law, not to pervert it at the prompting of bribery. Some of the crooked cops took the easy way and died, as did Winthrop, by their own hands. Others, still not aware of the way things had come out into the open, tried to brazen it out.

A few of the rats wriggled out of the net, but that was to be expected in a ring as big as this one had been. It would have been a superhuman task to get each and every one involved. But they escaped with little but their skins.

In the study, Peebles said. "Uh—uh—what hhh happened? Why... Oh what did happen? Won't you tell me, Mr. Cranston?"

"There isn't much to tell. Your boss was the real head of the numbers racket. You'll be able to read all about it in his own paper tonight!"

Cranston stalked towards the phone. He dialed for the police, and in a few words described what had happened.

Peebles listened with incredulous ears to the story of infamy and double dealing. Like a lot of weak characters, he had fastened onto Winthrop like a leach. The insults he took, he took gladly, because Winthrop seemed to be all Peebles would have liked to have been.

His eyes were incredulous now as he saw Cranston bend over the fallen body of his idol. Cranston's probing fingers searched for and found a slip of paper.

He stood and looked at it. He was still looking at it when the police came.

"Here," he said, "here is one of the many proofs of Winthrop's complicity. This slip of paper, for which the young man, Finneran, was killed, is a list of Winthrop's safe deposit boxes."

"But, Mr. Cranston," interjected Peebles, "I always thought that was a list of bets on the numbers. Why, if it were what you say, would poor Mr. Winthrop have shown it to everyone?"

"He realized, when it was necessary to kill Finneran, that he had been wrong in keeping the slip out of sight. The best way to make the slip completely invisible as regards the secret it held was this:

He held the strip of paper out in front of one of the cops. "If you saw this what would you think it was?"

The policeman ran his eye down the column of figures. At the bottom, under the list a line was drawn as though for addition.

"I'd say first, that it was some kind of an addition problem. But then—after I added it, as I just did, and found that the sum doesn't tally with the figures, why, I guess I'd take it for granted that some number runner dropped his book."

"Exactly why Winthrop pretended it was a piece of evidence. He said it was part of a runner's book, so everyone took for granted that was what it was. Really, of course, he had so many different safe deposit boxes, with so many identifying numbers on them, that he could not trust his memory to remember them. He had to keep a list."

There was a pause. Peebles was shaken.

"Finneran found this and was killed for it. The list had evidently been given to a trusted aide in order to either withdraw or deposit some money in the boxes."

The police went about their business of photographing the body before it was moved.

"I hazard a guess," said Cranston, "that the reason, the main reason, why Joey Raoll was killed, was because he had seen this list, and might have copied it or remembered it. Winthrop dared not allow such a memory to remain."

It was too much for Peebles. He dropped his eyes as the men put the body in a long basket and, carrying it casually, like a bundle of dirty clothes, left the room.

"I suppose," he said hesitantly, "that this can't be kept out of the papers."

Cranston shook his head in the negative. "As much as Winthrop had sold out, I still think he was enough of a newspaper man to want his own paper to have the scoop. Why don't you call it in?"

Hands still shaking, Peebles picked up the phone that his boss had barked into so many times. As he was dialing, he said in sudden thought, "But wait. I don't have the whole story. How did you... how could you have known of his connection?"

Cranston rapidly sketched in the broad outlines of the whole story. Peebles gulped as he listened.

"The suit—you mentioned that, but didn't explain it. What does that have to do with it?"

"That was just one factor. It was the thing that showed me that the odds were in favor of Winthrop having shot Larry Bonds with a wooden bullet."

"How could a suit tell you that?"

"The suit didn't, an ink stain was what told the tale."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"The other day you said something to Winthrop about his not having kept an appointment that he was supposed to have. That was at the time that Bonds was being shot."

"But according to the papers, Bonds took the only train out of here. Oh, that's nonsense. Mr. Winthrop wasn't guilty of that—He couldn't have been in two places at the same time. The times are all wrong—why, he was back here seeing you long before the train would have brought him... And I saw him after the earlier train left. No. It can't be. That crime—he did NOT commit."

"Whoa—hold on... you're leaving planes out of consideration. The only way he could have gotten from Skilton to New York, and back in time, was to do precisely what he did. Take a plane. He flew—that allowed him the time he needed."

"Even if that's true, how could you know it? You're not a mind reader. Unless you checked out at the airport—"

"That wasn't even necessary; besides he might have flown in a plane of his own. No, he wore the proof that he had flown that afternoon. And that proof was the stain on his suit!

"His fountain pens had leaked all over his vest. Like most executives he carried a pocketful of them. The stain was too big to have come from one pen, and it is too improbable to think that a couple of them would spring a leak all at once.

"It was the air pressure that did it. I gather that you, Peebles, have never flown?"

"Oh, no. As it happens. I haven't."

"That's why this baffled you. You see when the plane goes up above a certain altitude, the air pressure becomes less and allows the rubber bag in a fountain pen to unload what it carries.

"In commercial planes, the hostesses always warn you in advance to empty your pens. It was that stain that helped me to solidify the suspicions I had which, up to that point, were still tenuous and hazy."

Cranston left the room as Peebles finally called the city desk to give what was at once an obituary and a lead story, a beginning and an ending. The end of the carnival of crime and the start of a new era for the city that was beleaguered no longer. The Shadow had added another chapter to his career against crime.

THE END