



THE JADE DRAGON

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CHAPTER I

THE lights of Chinatown sparkled like jewels against the velvet background of the darker area surrounding it. Neon lights - red, green, and blue - were the rubies, emeralds, and sapphires of that galaxy; while blinking bulbs of white represented the sparkle of diamonds.

Such was the effect of Chinatown when viewed from Chatham Square. Of course, it was all illusion, but that created by the lights was small compared to the deceptive effect of the blackened background against which the dazzle played.

There was nothing of velvet in those off streets of Manhattan. Gloomy, dismal, the borders of Chinatown were places where anything might happen. Indeed, Chinatown proper, far from being sinister, was a welcome oasis of light in a desert of dangerous darkness.

Yet, the figure that glided through the bordering gloom gave little heed to persons about him. A tall, shrouded form that had a human shape, he was passing shamblers who had thuggish eyes; panhandlers whose whines carried the taint of threatening snarls; loafers who could well be wanted criminals posing as Bowery bums.

Of those, at least three out of four would have relished a glimpse of the figure in black. Had they seen it,

they would have started a hue and cry to rally others of their ilk. Guns, knives, and other assorted weapons would have come to hands quite capable of using them, had these wolves among the riffraff sighted the foe who had forced them into the dregs where they belonged.

For the gliding shape in black was the scourge of crimeland, that creature of mystery known only as The Shadow

Tonight, The Shadow had no time for the skulkers who shunned the glow of Chinatown. The most they saw of him was an occasional patch of passing darkness that flitted along the grimy sidewalk. By the time sharp eyes looked for the figure that had cast the passing shade, it was gone.

Other work lay ahead for The Shadow, and his passing up of opportunity to deal with human scum was proof that his mission must be of prime importance. Moreover, the direction that he took told where his mission lay.

In Chinatown!

Where lights increased, The Shadow became a master of camouflage, a creature of invisibility. Not that he actually elbowed his way through throngs, unseen; he was made of too material stuff for such a practice. Rather, he blended with backgrounds, using what stretches of darkness he could find.

Chinatown was not all lights, not even a large percentage of it, and darkness, where it did occur, was all the better as a pausing place, when lights were thereabout, to produce a contrast.

From door to door, under the shelter of steps, past windows that were lighted but empty of watching faces, The Shadow pursued his strange course. On Mott Street, he halted in the mouth of a tiny passage, while a throng of Americans came down a stairway and filed along the street.

They were sightseers from a Chinatown bus, and they went the other direction, chatting, laughing about their visit to the joss house. To them, Chinatown was fast losing its spell of mystery, and not one of them realized that they had passed within a dozen feet of real mystery in human form: The Shadow.

As soon as the last had filed away, The Shadow emerged from darkness, turned into the doorway and went up the stairs to the joss house. The stairway was dimly illuminated, and The Shadow's ascent, if noticed, would have been regarded as nothing more than a flicker of a faulty light bulb.

Looking into the joss house, The Shadow saw the serene proprietor and the usual attendants, waiting for another bus load of Chinatown tourists.

That was all The Shadow wanted to learn.

DOWN the stairs again, The Shadow moved along the street and stopped beside the window of an antique shop. From an angle where he could not be seen against the lighted window, he observed the two Chinese partners who ran the place - bland men, who like the joss-house keeper, wore jackets common in China.

Then, crossing the street, The Shadow blacked himself out against a basement doorway. Looking back, he saw two Chinese stopping at the very window where he had paused. They, too, were checking on the bland proprietors, and when they continued their course, they stopped at the doorway to the joss house.

Nor were these the only persons bound on an inspection tour. In their turn, the two Chinese were being watched by an American whose manner of gait identified him as a headquarters detective. He peered through the window of the antique shop; then watched the Chinese ahead. One had gone up to the joss house, while the other waited below.

Just then, The Shadow had a visitor, whose pounding footsteps announced him. He was a patrolman, and one of his duties was to try the door against which The Shadow stood.

Looking down into the basement entry, the bluecoat saw nothing unusual. Absolutely immobile, The Shadow might have been part of the darkened door itself. That was why the patrolman remembered another, and more pressing, duty. Postponing his trial of the door, he crossed the street and contacted the plain-clothes man opposite.

While the two were in conversation, The Shadow glided away. The darkness that he left was stirred by the echoes of a whispered laugh. Well did The Shadow know why certain Chinese were keeping tally on others, and why the police were checking on both.

Recent crimes - robbery and murder - had shown a distinct Chinese angle, throwing suspicion upon Chinatown. It didn't please law-abiding Chinese to know that they were under official surveillance. They were as anxious as the police to learn whom of their compatriots, if any, might be the culprits.

Thus, while honest Chinese were actually luring the police along the proper inspection tour, The Shadow continued his own.

From Mott Street, he glided into Pell, and looked into numerous places: tea shops, where placid Chinese let time float by; book stores, where more enterprising Celestials were busy arranging Chinese magazines on display racks; even into obscure basement restaurants, unlike the showy eating places that attracted the American trade.

Always, The Shadow was interested in those Chinese who, whether sleepy or wide awake, preferred the jackets of their native costumes to American style of dress. Somehow, that preference had the effect of a badge, that marked the jacket wearers as a group unto themselves.

If such were true, the plan was subtle. Oriental tradesmen would naturally wear Chinese garb to attract the tourist trade. It was simply a case of keeping tabs on all such individuals, to make sure that they stayed in the stores where they belonged. In doing so, The Shadow noted that more strolling Chinese, all American-clad, were doing the same.

In the curve of Doyers Street, The Shadow again crossed the path of the sightseeing party. They were coming from an exit of an old mission, and The Shadow turned back into another basement doorway. He'd finished his tour of the Chinese shopping district, and his present pause was merely to let the sightseers go by.

Then the pace of heavy footsteps diverted The Shadow's attention from the tourist party.

Another patrolman was covering the Doyers Street beat. He had more doors to handle, for most of these shops closed early, and some, like the one in front of which The Shadow was hiding, were empty.

Forgetful of tourists, patrolman, even the murmur of Chinatown itself, The Shadow turned toward the basement door. From the solid blackness representing the cloaked shape in black came muffled, clicking sounds.

Reaching the door in question, the patrolman came down the steps and thrust his hand into darkness that looked solid, but no longer was. He tried the door and found it locked.

This time, darkness had swallowed The Shadow, thanks to his deftness with a pick. Using his set of special tools, he had unlocked the door, gone through, and locked it from the other side, while the patrolman was making his slow approach.

WHEN The Shadow reappeared, he came from a cellar window opening into a narrow alley. He heard a rumble and saw the big Chinatown bus go by on a wide street, carrying its passengers back to Times Square.

Turning into the alley itself, The Shadow was moving back toward the heart of Chinatown, when he came upon a little side alley nestled between two antiquated brick buildings. The alley was a cul-de-sac; short, with no outlet. The Shadow observed that fact, and more.

The "more" was this: By the chance light cast from a second-story window, The Shadow saw that the blind alley terminated in a heavy door which had a metal sheathing. In the door was a small, barred wicket, slightly more than shoulder high. As The Shadow watched from a darkened corner of the alley, he saw a crouching Chinaman steal out from beside the wall

The fellow was wearing a Chinese blouse, much like the jackets that so many shopkeepers preferred. He gave a crafty, slant-eyed look along the alley; failing to see The Shadow, the Chinaman turned his yellow face toward the wicket and tapped a signal with a quick, darting hand.

Immediately, the wicket opened. Framed in its square, The Shadow saw a face that could be described as ivory, both in smoothness and beauty. A girl's face, of the matchless sort that belonged in a garden in Old Peking. The sparkle of dark eyes carrying the tinkle of a fountain; a background of raven hair that bespoke the perfume of flowers - these were but the complements of her exquisite features.

There was a glitter from jeweled rings as a lovely, graceful hand moved through the bars of the wicket and thrust a folded paper to the crouching Chinaman. Then, before the man in the blouse could even bow his thanks, the wicket snapped shut.

Turning, the crouched man started for the opening of the alley; then, on afterthought, he paused to open the message, reading it by the light that came down from above.

He didn't hear the faint swish that moved toward him. Instead, the Chinaman scowled only because he couldn't get enough light. He thought his shoulder was blacking it out, and he turned to look up.

Suddenly alarmed, he faced the other way, to see the figure that had really blocked the light. Burning eyes from beneath the brim of a slouch hat met those of the scowling Chinaman.

The scowl faded into an expression of alarm, as the Chinaman voiced the name that stood for The Shadow:

"Ying Ko!"

That was all. Black-gloved hands gripped the Chinaman's throat, suppressing further outcry. Deft pressure on the proper nerve and the Celestial sank, temporarily paralyzed, at The Shadow's feet. The note fluttered from his hand; The Shadow caught it before it reached the paving.

It was a slip of rice paper, and on it, written in a girl's thin hand, were the English words:

Herbert Dayland. Nine o'clock tonight.

Folding the paper, The Shadow pocketed it; stooping, he lifted the numbed Chinaman across his shoulder and moved to the mouth of the alley; thence along the through alley, to the street that bordered Chinatown.

Just within the shelter of darkness, The Shadow paused; producing a tiny flashlight, he blinked it. The glow was green.

Soon, a taxicab wheeled up. From it stepped two men: Cliff Marsland and Clyde Burke, secret agents of The Shadow. To them, The Shadow turned over his burden. He used his flashlight, white on this occasion, to point out the cellar window leading to the empty shop. As the two left, carrying their prisoner with them, The Shadow blinked another green flash across the street.

A small, furtive man appeared; he might have been a panhandler or a bum, but he was neither. He was Hawkeye, a most efficient prowler, who spotted doings in obscure neighborhoods and reported them to his chief, The Shadow. Briefly, The Shadow gave Hawkeye instructions involving a tip-off to the police.

Then, with a swish of the black cloak, The Shadow was in the cab itself and away, so promptly, that even the sharp eyed spotter blinked in wonderment. Back to the Chinatown alley came The Shadow's parting token: a whisper laden with grim mirth.

It told that The Shadow, master of justice, was bound on another mission - that of battle with crime!

CHAPTER II. NINE O CLOCK

HERBERT DAYLAND lived well uptown, in a house that had been a show place of the Nineties. He liked old things, did Dayland, and the house was one of them. He had modernized the place, yet kept some of its glamour.

The ground floor was a great reception hall, with a huge dining room at the rear; on the second floor was a living room, a few bedrooms, and a special room that Dayland called his strong room.

On the third floor, more bedrooms, while the servants' quarters occupied the fourth. Of course, there was a basement, too, furnished with a bar and game room, with a kitchen to the rear. Such was the house where Herbert Dayland entertained in lavish style, as he was doing on this evening.

There were at least forty guests, so far, and more were arriving in the reception hall. Dayland's half a dozen servants were not enough, so he had hired more, planning to keep them through the season, since events like the present party were to be a common thing.

The guests were all in evening clothes, and among the women, daring gowns predominated. Most of Dayland's friends were from the cafe set, and they liked his parties because he turned his house into a night club, or its equivalent.

Not that Herbert Dayland was a playboy. He was an elderly man, with thin hair and serious, heavy-jowled face that occasionally wrinkled itself into a smile.

Dayland had been serious all his life; so serious, that he had acquired several million dollars. In search of better things, he had spent a fortune on art works and antique jewelry, only to find that possession of the same did not make life any merrier.

So Dayland had chosen to surround himself with convivial acquaintances, along with friends of old standing. He hadn't disposed of his art collection; instead, it was all over the house, making the place into a mammoth picture gallery. His jewels, however, were in the strong room, along with some much-prized curios. Dayland's jewels were very valuable, particularly his Chinese collection.

Among the early guests was a girl named Margo Lane. Though she belonged to the cafe set, she was quite different from the rest of the feminine contingent present on this evening. To begin with, Margo was a brunette, whereas most of the other girls were blondes. Moreover, she was a quiet brunette, friendly, but with a smile that could be genuine.

Margo listened more than she talked, which made her very popular with people who counted. As for attire, her evening gown was modish, but neither too revealing nor too garish.

In looks, Margo could more than hold her own, and she gained attention by her manner, not by her get-up. This was proven by the way the men of the cafe set singled her out when they arrived.

Two such young men were Errol Garvin and Don Feldon, who came in together, and hurried over as soon as they had checked their top hats with a servant. They met Margo at the bottom of the grand staircase, under a huge painting of the Roman Coliseum.

Garvin was stocky, and an athletic type. He looked as if he had come from a polo match, which he hadn't, because this wasn't the season for them. His squarish face and thin, light hair suited the character of an outdoor man.

Feldon, lighter of build, dark-haired, and with roundish, sallow features, looked like an indoor product; but such was not the case. His complexion was mostly tan, gained from sailing in Long Island Sound. As a yachtsman, Feldon had more than average reputation.

The two were going to the game room, and they wanted Margo to join them after they'd had time for a few drinks, which they agreed, would handicap them sufficiently for a billiard game with Margo, who was quite adept with the cue.

Margo said she would remember the invitation, so Garvin and Feldon went their way, followed by some other new arrivals.

Margo was glad of the interruption, for it gave her an excuse for pausing on the stairway until Harry Vincent arrived; which he did, quite shortly.

HARRY was a clean-cut chap who frequented cafe society but didn't let it throw him. Considering that both he and Margo were levelheaded, it was odd that they didn't get together more often than they did. The oddity was explained by a fact that both kept strictly to themselves.

Harry and Margo were working for The Shadow, and parties like Dayland's were a duty with them - the sort of duty that meant keeping to their separate ways.

Noting Margo glancing at the Coliseum painting, Harry looked the same direction and nodded his approval.

"A fine painting," he said. "One of the best in Dayland's collection." Then, in an undertone, he added: "That phone call from Burbank. Chinese trouble, heading here. I'm going to have a look outside. Stay close to Dayland, particularly after nine o'clock."

Continuing up the stairway, Margo noted a huge clock at the top. It showed twelve minutes of nine. Knowing that The Shadow had probably gone to Chinatown, Margo could understand why he had relayed a call through his contact man, Burbank. There wouldn't be time for The Shadow to get to Dayland's uptown residence before the zero hour of nine.

On the second floor, Margo looked along the hallway. She saw Dayland's strong room, and its door was open. That wasn't unusual, since all the smaller curios were in the vault, but Dayland always locked the room, itself, when he threw these big parties.

At the rear of the hall was a stairway which the servants used, and Margo was starting in that direction, hoping for a look into the strong room as she passed it, when the sound of voices made her turn.

Herbert Dayland was coming from the front living room. With him were two friends of the jowl-and-paunch variety. One was Louis Walstead, a retired tycoon like Dayland. The other was still in harness; he was Burton Royce, the celebrated artist, who might have rated half a millionaire, had he chosen to save his money.

Wheeling quickly on one high heel, Margo began to study the picture gallery in this section of the hallway, and, as luck had it, she found herself right among the Royces. Dayland had bought at least a dozen paintings from his artist friend, and they were all on exhibit.

Sprinkled among paintings of modern New York skylines and street scenes were three human studies, each posed by a different blonde. Royce paused, lifted his heavy eyebrows with interest, as he noted the contrast between the blondes in the paintings and the pronounced brunette who was surveying his work. Royce had met Margo, and saw an opportunity to extend the acquaintance.

"How do you like my work, Miss Lane?" he inquired in a purring tone. "The studies from life, I mean."

"I don't know," replied Margo, wrinkling her forehead. "I'm comparing them with the originals that I just saw downstairs. They don't exactly match the paintings. Of course, they're wearing a few clothes this evening, but hardly enough to make them look so different."

Royce smiled. Margo was right; his blond models were at Dayland's party. They were among the early guests who raided the bar immediately upon arrival. Royce had started a model fad among the cafe crowd that frequented Dayland's and was becoming bored by too many applicants.

"They were sober when I did the paintings," remarked Royce. "That makes a difference, I suppose, though I must confess" - he eyed his own paintings critically - "that they are too much of a type. I need contrast in my work." He turned, to scan Margo from head to foot. "You know, Miss Lane, I believe you could supply it."

Margo gave another glance at the paintings. She was turning to shake her head, when Royce added pointedly:

"In costume, of course. I said my work needed contrast. I must trend toward another extreme. What I have in mind might be termed 'A Portrait of a Princess.' Most particularly, I need a model who can properly display my choice collection of antique jewelry."

Sudden interest showed in Margo's eyes, whereat Royce withdrew his smile and became very serious.

"My collection rates on a par with Dayland's," he declared. "Like Dayland, I have traveled extensively in China -"

ROYCE was rousing Margo's enthusiasm more rapidly than he had expected; nevertheless, he was forced to interrupt himself. Both he and Margo turned to see a stocky man, of swarthy complexion, who had joined the group outside the strong room. Royce was sure that the arrival wasn't a guest, and Margo could have told him why.

She knew the stocky man; he was Inspector Joe Cardona. Ablest official on the New York police force, Joe hadn't any spare time to spend learning the fancy ways of society.

Cardona was introducing himself to Dayland, but he wanted the rest to take in what he had to say. He looked hard at Margo, to make sure she was with Royce. Then, wresting his attention from the paintings, Cardona swung back to Dayland.

"It's about your Chinese jewelry," said Cardona bluntly. "Those recent robberies had a Chinese angle."

We just had a tip-off that the same might apply here. Where do you keep your jewels, Mr. Dayland?"

"Here in the strong room," returned Dayland, with a gesture. "They're in the vault, of course."

Cardona looked into the strong room, noted that its many curios were heavy. More important, in Joe's estimate, was the size of the formidable vault door and the strength of the steel-shuttered window. He turned to Dayland again.

"You're locking the strong room, Mr. Dayland?"

"Not just yet," replied Dayland. "I was going to show the antique jewelry to these friends of mine."

"What about the rest of the party?"

Dayland shook his head.

"I'd include Alexander Marne, of course," he said, "but he phoned to say that he was stopping at a board meeting and can't be over for a while. I'll leave word downstairs to have Marne shown up, should he arrive."

"I'll leave the word," announced Cardona. "And while you're in the strong room, keep it locked, Mr. Dayland. Don't open it until you hear me knock and give the word."

"You mean -"

"I mean just this: the other men who were robbed were murdered, too, Mr. Dayland. Your jewels are safe enough in the strong room. The best place for you to be is with them."

Dayland saw the logic. He gestured the rest into the strong room. When Margo hesitated, Royce took her arm and escorted her through the door. She turned, saw Royce throw a heavy latch bolt that securely locked the door. Then, before Royce could pick up his previous theme, Margo questioned:

"Who is Alexander Marne?"

"Another collector," returned Royce. "Like Dayland, Walstead, and myself. Now, about that portrait, Miss Lane -"

Margo was looking at Dayland and Walstead. Much alike, facially and in manner, the two friends both appeared troubled, even if Royce didn't. Perhaps it was because they were both so wealthy, whereas Royce had spent most of his fortune.

"If you're all in danger," interrupted Margo, speaking to Royce, "perhaps you ought to notify Mr. Marne."

"He's safe enough at the board meeting," assured Royce. "Let's look at Dayland's jewels, Miss Lane. I know he would be glad to let you try them on, so we can see the effect. Of course, when you pose for the portrait, you will wear those from my collection."

"Has Marne been to China, too?" put in Margo. "Like the three of you?"

"Yes," replied Royce, ruffled by the interruption. "That's where we all became acquainted. But I've been all through the Orient, Miss Lane. I'm not picturing you as a Chinese princess. Rather, I would choose as our locale -"

This time, Margo's interruption was a breathless gasp. Dayland had opened the vault and taken out a

large teakwood container. Opened on a taboret between two golden Chinese screens, the coffer disgorged the most glorious glitter that Margo had ever seen. The Chinese gems were large, magnificent - and Royce, pleased by Margo's enthusiasm, moved her forward to the taboret.

"Suppose we hear Miss Lane's comments," Royce suggested to Dayland and Walstead. "We have seen these baubles before; this is her first view of them. Her reactions will prove more interesting than ours.

ROYCE was wrong. The real reactions were to come from himself and the other men, as much as Margo. But the gems were not to be the only cause. First token that the strong room had other visitors came when the two golden screens crashed to the floor.

Devil screens, they were, the sort that Chinese used to block doorways and keep out wayward demons. These screens, however, were behaving in reverse. Until they crashed, they were hiding places for fiends in human form.

Turning about, the group at the jewel coffer saw two leering faces that glistened yellow in the light.

Each invader had narrow-slitted eyes beneath jet-black hair. Both were wearing the native jackets so common in Chinatown. Their backs to the light, they were keeping their faces obscure, as though hoping to hide the fact that they were Chinese. But they weren't concealing the revolvers jutting from their fists.

The cold steel of the gun muzzles had a glitter all its own, that out-vied the sparkling jewels. For it told, that glint, that the owners of the guns intended to own Dayland's gems, too.

Nine o'clock had come, and with the hour crime had struck, in keeping with The Shadow's warning.

Crime had begun, however, in the last place where it was expected: within the very walls of Dayland's strong room!

CHAPTER III. MEN OF MURDER

GESTURED back by the motions of pointed guns. Margo Lane found herself in a corner where a screen had been. Burton Royce was close beside her, and his face was very grim. In the other corner were Herbert Dayland and Louis Walstead, their faces, hitherto similar, forming a distinct contrast.

Dayland's heavy features were set with determination, whereas Walstead's were thoroughly imbued with fright. The reason for the difference was simple enough: these were Dayland's jewels in the coffer; not Walstead's. Both men had lived to acquire wealth, and considered the two things inseparable.

Hence, Dayland could think of risking life when he saw a portion of his wealth departing; whereas Walstead, his own possessions quite safe elsewhere, was worried for fear he might not live to enjoy further the thing he owned.

Watching the armed robbers, Margo was impressed by the ways of the Chinese. She was sure that she could never pick those two leering faces out of a thousand other yellow countenances, should she be asked to do so.

To Margo, all Chinese looked alike; and she had heard that, to them, all Americans appeared identical. Which explained, of course, why they were keeping crouched and throwing their glances upward. They were thinking, in their way, that their ugly faces might be remembered.

Perhaps they would be, by Dayland or Royce. Noting Dayland's determination, and Royce's grimness, Margo realized that these two men, through long sojourns in the Orient, might be capable of distinguishing between strange Chinese. Margo couldn't count Walstead in with the others; though qualified, he was too

scared to remember anything.

Guns still wagging, the Chinese were half bowed over the coffer, scooping out its loose contents. Jewels in shimmering showers slid from yellow fingers into pockets somewhere beneath the baggy blouses the Chinese wore. Then, with the coffer emptied of wealth representing many thousands of dollars, the leering robbers backed away to the center of the room.

Instead of showing their faces when they reached the light, they turned and scrambled for the door, each racing to be the first to open it. The man who grasped the knob, tugged at it. The door wouldn't open because of the latch bolt. The second Chinaman, about to turn and wag his gun at the people in their corners, became excited and snatched at the bolt.

Both were babbling Chinese words that Dayland and Royce understood. Exchanging quick glances, the two Americans nodded. From the conversation, they knew that the Chinese were too busy with the door to bother about anything else. With mutual accord, Dayland and Royce drove forward.

The opportunity ended as suddenly as it had begun. The Chinese couldn't have timed the thing better, had they tried deliberately. They solved the business of the bolt just as the charge began, and as they whipped the door open to squirm through, they turned, remembering that they might be open to a rear attack.

Walstead gave a frantic bleat, and Margo, from her corner, could not withhold a genuine scream. Of the two who heard the warning, Dayland was too maddened to heed it. He bore down on the door like a wild bull, even to his bellows.

Royce, however, was more calculating. Realizing he needed a weapon, he stopped in his tracks, made a quick turn and grabbed the taboret, tumbling the empty coffer from it.

Two guns clicked just as Royce grabbed the taboret. Hard on those hits of hammers against empty chambers came new tugs of triggers. This time, the guns blasted in unison, and their target was Dayland, who had just reached the doorway through which the Chinese had gone.

The Chinese couldn't have aimed at anyone else, for Dayland blocked their path of aim entirely. Not for long, however. Receiving the shots, Dayland stumbled and landed face down, just beyond the doorway.

Royce was springing forward, wielding the taboret by one leg. Margo grabbed up the coffer, thinking it would do as a missile to back up Royce's bludgeon. Walstead was lifting a screen, not to serve as an item of attack but as a shelter behind which he could hide.

None could see the Chinese out in the well-lighted hall, because the two killers had jumped apart to avoid the plunge of Dayland's body.

Then, in from the hallway, darted a yellow hand, followed by a jacketed arm and shoulder. It was a left hand, and it didn't have a gun.

Royce made a great swing with the taboret, hoping to sledge the Chinaman before he could pull from his huddle and bring his gun into play. If the Chinaman had tried just that, Royce would have felled him.

Instead, the crouching Celestial staged a different trick. He yanked the door shut, to block off pursuit. He guessed, of course, that it would latch, thus giving Royce trouble with the bolt. Royce smashed the taboret against the door, and Margo scored a flying hit with the coffer.

Both cudgel and missile were too late to reach the dodging Chinaman, and, by rights, they should have served him by helping slam the door. Instead, the door bounced back.

It had encountered Dayland's body in the doorway, and the way was open wide, except that Royce and Margo both lacked improvised weapons.

REMEMBERING Dayland's fate, Royce stopped short in the doorway, flinging an arm across to bar Margo as she arrived. Seeing the two Chinese dodge toward the rear hall. Royce yelled for people to head them off.

At once, the pair turned full about. Margo saw the glitter of their guns and pulled Royce back into the strong room. Immediately, guns talked, chopping woodwork from the doorway.

Then the two Chinese were speeding by, only their backs showing, as they headed for the grand stairway. There they halted in the half gloom at the top, ready to aim below.

Margo darted a quick look to the rear of the hall, and made a beckoning motion as figures appeared there. Then, with all her might, she was pushing at Dayland's feet, getting them out into the hallway.

Before Royce could realize what it was about, Margo warded him away and swung the door shut. This time it slammed, and Margo grabbed the bolt, to throw it.

"More Chinese!" she exclaimed to Royce. "Coming in from the rear of the hall! That's the way the others must have come, when they stole in here without anyone noticing them."

Royce nodded. He had glimpsed two bloused figures dashing past the door just as Margo slammed it. He decided that there was nothing to be done except remain in the present stronghold until aid came. Looking about, Royce saw Walstead poking his head from behind a corner of the raised screen. Margo noted that Royce smiled, though his eyes remained grim.

"You'd better dive deeper, Louis," suggested Royce. "They finished Herb, and they're coming after us. The whole house is alive with Chinese. You'd think that they were invited to the party."

Royce's smile was followed by a short chuckle, when Walstead took his advice and dropped behind the screen. Quite calmly, Royce turned to Margo and remarked:

"While we are waiting, Miss Lane, we may as well resume our earlier conversation. As I was saying, you need not pose as a Chinese princess. Indeed" - he chuckled dryly - "we shall both be allergic to anything Chinese, after this evening's experience."

Margo flashed an angry look at Royce. She couldn't well admire his sangfroid, considering that his friend Dayland had met death during the episodes that Royce was willing to treat as a jest. In addition, Margo could hear sounds from beyond the door.

Guns were talking, several of them, indicating that Royce hadn't exaggerated in saying that the house was full of Chinese. Margo knew that Joe Cardona would be in the thick of it, and she hoped that he was faring well.

At that moment, Joe was faring well enough. He was on the grand stairway, shooting up at Chinese that he couldn't see, and they were nicking the stairs with shots of their own.

Their bullets, however, were ricocheting over Cardona's head, and he was motioning for two detective below to toss him their fresh guns, rather than risk running into the flying pellets.

Guests had scattered off into other rooms, and servants had extinguished lights to help them hide. Cardona finished his second gun, threw it below, and caught another loaded one that came flying up to him. He knew that he had the Chinese boxed in atop the stairs, unless they fled along the hallway, in

which case, he could pursue them, with the detectives following after him.

Downstairs, those two detectives were reloading the empty revolvers, to be ready at Joe's call.

Everything looked great to the ace inspector in this fray of wasted gunnery, where delay would prove costly to the trapped Chinese. So rosy, that Cardona would ordinarily have foreseen a catch to it, but for the fact that he was too busy playing his lone hand to think of anything else.

Then came the sharp clicks from below. Warnings like the rattles of a snake, but deadlier. Deadlier, even, than the actual gunfire that was blasting from above. Cardona looked down across his shoulder, and saw doom.

Four more Chinese had arrived in the lower hall. Crouched killers, distinguishable by their baggy jackets. They'd edged in toward the fringe of the light that still remained. Cardona couldn't see their faces, for their guns were poked up to eye level. He saw the shine of the revolver muzzles, though, and hearing the clicks, he knew what they meant. The same sounds had preceded the murder of Herbert Dayland.

Like the assassins who had invaded the strong room, these reserves were following, the rule of Chinese gunnery: that of keeping an empty chamber next to the cartridge under the gun hammer, as a safety catch. Thus, when a Chinese gunman first pulled trigger, the hammer fell on the empty chamber that moved into place. After that, each trigger tug meant business. Cardona had heard people say that it was a dumb idea; but it wasn't in this case, which happened to be Joe's own.

THE Chinese below had swung Cardona around by baiting him with the hammer clicks, and they were ready to give him the full benefit of a wholesale blast.

In his swing, Joe wasn't placing himself so he could fire back. There wouldn't be time for that. He was simply rearing himself as a better target, and now, if he tried to turn from his awkward state and try a wild dash upstairs, they'd mow him down while he was still off balance.

This meant curtains. The two detectives couldn't help; they were standing with guns all broken for reloading. It would take more than two guns, anyway, to save Joe Cardona. There was only one thing he could think of that might save him.

It came.

It came as if Joe's own imagination had prompted it, that challenge that he had heard so often in the past. But no recollection, no matter how vivid, could produce the mighty mirth that beckoned all attention.

Sinister, strident, it was a mockery that threatened sudden doom to all who heard it. A challenge that must be met at once by those for whom it was intended, if they chose to live.

In from the front door, flung wide by an unseen hand, came that chilling taunt that seemed a creation of night itself, since the fighter who issued it was shrouded in the outside darkness.

The laugh of The Shadow.

CHAPTER IV. VANISHED BATTLERS

AT the first peal of The Shadow's mighty mirth, four killers behaved with the speed of scared rabbits. Where Cardona had viewed a quartet of bloused Chinese, he saw only vacancy. With one accord, they were darting into the darkness from which they had come - darkness that represented the depths of the house, the only burrow that might save them.

As they went, they fired wildly. Under other conditions, The Shadow would have picked them off by using their spurting guns as targets. As it was, The Shadow's own guns, booming new challenge amid the echoes of his laugh, were too high in aim to clip the opposing marksmen.

The Shadow knew that the house was full of guests, among whom the tribe from Chinatown might flee. He had to keep his own shots high to avoid innocent people. But the zing of those bullets, their sharp smacks just above the heads of the darting killers, were enough to route the Chinatown clan.

Wheeling across the lighted hallway, The Shadow reached the grand staircase and shoved a big .45 automatic straight Cardona's way. Joe dropped from sheer instinct, and he was just in time. Guns chattered from above, where Cardona's former foemen had crept forward when his fire ceased. They missed Cardona on two counts.

His drop was one; their haste, the other. For the upstairs sharpshooters saw The Shadow and didn't wait. His big guns tongued, but they were darting away. Bullets were whisking blousy jackets, but the men who wore them managed to preserve the hides within their native garb.

On his feet again, Cardona was yelling for his men to help him chase the Chinese. The detectives started for the stairway as they finished loading their guns. By then, The Shadow was gone.

He had taken the other route through the ground floor of the house. In from the front door came Harry Vincent, to take the same trail. Pandemonium was everywhere, for huddled guests were rallying to the chase, and the excitement was most evident at the rear stairway, which continued to the basement.

There, at the head of the basement flight, a whole batch of guests and a few servants had been trapped, staring upward at an armed Chinaman who kept to the darkness of the stair top, but showed himself and his gun sufficiently to worry them. When the rest of the Chinese clan came running through and took the back stairway upward, the guardian of the basement flight did the same.

Reaching the back stairway, The Shadow ran into an excited human flood from below. They saw him only as a shape in black, but his guns were very evident. They grabbed for him and hauled him back, only to have his cloaked form evaporate in their grasp.

Harry, arriving, was recognized as one of their own, and he waved his gun, yelling for them to keep going up. They did, but they saw no sign of The Shadow.

He had reversed his course, rather than be delayed by the capable, but excited guests. He knew that they would follow Harry's lead, and thereby cut off the Chinese from the rear. His quickest route upstairs was by the front staircase, so he took it.

Guests who poured into the front hall were scattered by a human whirlwind that sped up the staircase like a funnel-shaped tornado bound upon a devastating spree.

Near the top, The Shadow heard shouts from a front stairway leading to the third floor and knew that Cardona and the detectives were pursuing fugitives in that direction. So The Shadow took to the same darkened stairs, anxious to insert his hand at the finish of the chase.

Margo saw The Shadow pass. She had unbolted the door of the strong room and was peering out, with Royce, but he was more interested in getting downstairs than up, and insisted that Margo accompany him. She did, because she knew she could not help in the pursuit of the Chinese. Calmly, Royce escorted her down the grand staircase, pausing to gesture below.

There, frightened guests were blundering into each other. Screaming women were dashing out through

the front door, hanging onto straps of evening gowns that were dangling from their shoulders. Among them, Royce recognized a couple of his models, and shook his head quite sadly.

"There go the blondes," he told Margo. "A flighty lot, I've found them. None of them would do for the serious work that I have planned. Let them wear anything like jewels and they would want to keep them! Come, Miss Lane, and let me escort you to a dignified exit. Should we find a cab outside, we can go to some more quiet place."

THE only way to make Royce serious was to humor him; at least, Margo had learned that much. Since Royce's testimony would prove most valuable in tracking down the murderers of Dayland, Margo decided that her proper part was to go along with him. She also realized something that hadn't appeared to dent Royce.

Both he and she had battled the Chinese assassins, after witnessing Dayland's death. It wasn't wise for either of them to stay around where Chinese might bob up. Even in flight, the Celestials might take time out for vengeance, if they thought they were far enough ahead of The Shadow.

A big, official car was stopping in front of Dayland's just as Margo and Royce found a cab. The car belonged to the police commissioner, Ralph Weston, and he was stepping from it in person.

With him was a tall, gray-haired man whose face was firm-jawed and rugged. He looked about Royce's age, but he seemed more active, though Margo could not deny that Royce had shone effectively while swinging the taboret.

"There's Alexander Marne," declared Royce. "It will be a shock for him to learn that his friend Herb Dayland was murdered. Well, we can let Lou Walstead break the sad news. We can phone after the excitement has ended. At present, the premises are too crowded."

Somehow, Margo felt that Royce's show of nerve had been forced; even his jests took on the semblance of false bravery. Perhaps she had misjudged him, even though she did not like his oily manner, with its mock politeness. She was glad, at least, that they were riding in The Shadow's cab.

Its driver, Moe Shrevnitz, had spotted Margo and had turned down other customers to let her have his cab. With Shrevvie at the wheel, Margo wasn't worried about any Chinese finding them, nor, for that matter, was she troubled about riding with Burton Royce.

MEANWHILE, the chase at Dayland's had come to a dead end. On the fourth floor, Cardona and his detectives, Harry and the bolder guests, were smashing away at a closed door where excited servants had seen the Chinese go. The whole hallway was crowded, and the servants were peering from the doors of side rooms, apparently ready to duck to safety if the Chinese made a sortie

The Shadow saw it all from a stairway, and decided against remaining. There were only four guns against eight belonging to the Chinese, but there were at least a dozen guests armed with such usable weapons as bottles, fire tongs, and billiard cues. The Shadow's decision was also influenced by his belief that the fugitives would not have chosen an actual dead end for the finish of their flight.

Taking the back stairway down, The Shadow came out behind the Dayland house. From below, he saw something that he had not had time to notice when he made his quick arrival. Dayland's house was a story higher than the one next door, and the adjacent house was empty. A wall divided the two rear courts, and across it The Shadow could see the opening of a passage between buildings, leading to a side street.

If the next-door house had a trapdoor in its roof, the Chinese could have come down through it to reach

the side passage. Cutting through the rear street, The Shadow started around the corner, hoping to head them off. A look back told him that his idea was correct.

Cardona and the rest must have smashed through the door on Dayland's top floor and found the Chinese gone, for figures were piling out onto the roof, and men were shouting back to others, as a crowd of pursuers would do. Some of those figures dipped from sight, proving the existence of the trapdoor that The Shadow suspected.

Reaching the side street, The Shadow crossed it and stationed himself directly opposite the passage. Only if they knew the route could the Chinese have fled by their side outlet prior to The Shadow's arrival, and at that, they would have needed uncommon speed.

So The Shadow waited, expecting to hear the clatter of footsteps that did not come. When seconds turned into minutes, he moved over to the outlet, in case the Chinese had decided to lurk there and ambush their pursuers.

Sirens were wailing in the neighborhood, announcing the arrival of police cars. A big spotlight swept toward the passage, and The Shadow, to avoid it, sidled past the corner.

As the light struck him, he heard a clatter, but it wasn't the one he had expected. He recognized the shouts as those of guests from Dayland's. They'd come down through the house ahead of the pack, and the chance light had given them a fleeting glimpse of the same figure in black they had met on the back stairs.

Cardona and Harry must have still been scouring the empty house, or they would have put those fellows straight. Such a thought did not help The Shadow's present dilemma. The pack was after him, and halted police cars were bearing their searchlights on the space between the houses. It wasn't a healthy place, even for The Shadow, which was why he didn't stay.

The passing light showed him as a fleeting figure, cutting back across the street. Thinking that they had spotted a real fugitive, the crew of the patrol cars tried to keep The Shadow in the light. They might as well have endeavored to hold a clump of evaporating smoke. The Shadow, reversing from the spotlight, was gone in much the same fashion.

Traffic was tangling up in the street, and men were deploying everywhere to make sure that the mysterious fugitive had not climbed into a car. Once inspected, vehicles were told to be on their way.

In the midst of his spreading pursuers, The Shadow saw two men stop an arriving cab, open its door, look inside, and wave it on its way. That car wasn't exactly an arrival; it was Moe's cab, returning after dropping Margo and Royce.

Hardly had it started again before Moe heard a whispering order, almost at his ear. The cabby eased the accelerator long enough to hear the thump that told him that a rear door had opened and closed again.

Even in the mirror, Moe couldn't spot the action of the door, and he knew that its closing would have been totally silent, had The Shadow chosen. The slight clatter had a purpose; it told Moe to be on his way.

Twisting the cab half across the sidewalk, Moe pulled it from the traffic jam and rounded the next corner. He could hear the fading of shouts from the men who were continuing their futile search. The whispered laugh that followed was The Shadow's, and it came from within the cab. It took the place of an order that Moe didn't need.

There was only one trail that The Shadow would want. His goal was Chinatown again. If, by a swift trip there, he could overtake the fugitives who had gone ahead, men of murder would soon be answering for their crime!

CHAPTER V. DR. TAM EXPLAINS

MOE made the trip to Chinatown a fast one, but the news of crime had traveled there ahead of The Shadow. Inspector Cardona was no longer thinking in terms of robbery with a Chinese angle; he had acted on the knowledge that such existed. A call to headquarters had put the whole Chinatown squad in operation, and when The Shadow dropped from Moe's cab, he saw police everywhere.

They were practically quarantining Chinatown, to trap the returning horde, but there were still loopholes in the cordon. Finding one, The Shadow did not doubt that the fugitive Chinese were doing the same, provided that Moe's speedy trip had cut down the five minutes' head start that the Chinese could have over him.

Once inside this section, The Shadow discovered that the returning Chinese were either lucky, or he was late. Into every place where he peered, Chinese in native jackets were exactly where they belonged. Not only was The Shadow finding it so, but the same applied with other searchers.

The American-clad Chinese were looking into shops and shaking their heads. Police, including plainclothes men, were doing the same.

Like The Shadow, the raiders who had murdered Dayland were in the class of vanished fighters. Apparently, they had preserved their identities by letting numbers absorb them, for there were dozens of their ilk in Chinatown.

The Shadow saw no reason for prolonging his search. Others were doing it for him, and he couldn't afford to be stopped and questioned by police, as was beginning to happen with the honest Chinese.

Not that The Shadow would have been stopped and questioned. They would have had to see him first. But his search would certainly have been hampered, until it become nothing but a series of fade-outs, with no results obtained. Chinatown was beginning to take on an aspect of a police field day.

Besides, The Shadow still had a card to play. Picking the alley that he wanted, he slid through a cellar window just ahead of incoming lights, flourished by police. Finding the empty shop that occupied a Doyers Street basement, The Shadow joined Cliff and Clyde, who were still holding their Chinese prisoner.

The man in native costume was quite recovered from the treatment The Shadow had given him. Bound and gagged, he stared at his cloaked captor and gave out sounds that were muffled grunts. Instead of removing the gag and questioning the fellow, The Shadow told his agents to bring the Chinaman along. Out in the alley, The Shadow made sure that the police had gone, then guided the party to the next street.

How The Shadow picked the crossing was something that his agents couldn't explain. He had an uncanny sense of timing, that enabled him to pick the brief seconds when half a dozen police were too engaged, otherwise, to spot the trio that cut across the street; two men with a huddled prisoner dragging between them.

True, The Shadow helped, by wheeling in from just the proper angle to cover the finish of the trip. A detective, turning in that direction, saw only a mass of blackness, which he didn't particularly wonder about until it moved. When he threw his flashlight toward the splotch, it was gone. The Shadow had

made a quick twist into the doorway where his agents took their prisoner. The door was unlocked when they entered it, but The Shadow bolted it before the detective came over to try it.

Waiting, The Shadow made sure that the man outside did not hear the footsteps that were going up a flight of stairs. That done, The Shadow followed. At the top of the stairs, his agents took their prisoner into a little office, where a very studious Chinese seated at a desk was observing them curiously through his glasses.

Placing the bound man in a chair, the agents left. Outside the office door, The Shadow told them to wait; then reentering, he closed the door behind him.

THE man at the desk smiled. He and The Shadow were old friends, and he had been expecting this visit. He was Dr. Roy Tam, a man of modern methods, who had done much to reconcile the old with the new in Chinatown. The Chinese who had been making inspection tours this evening were all Tam's workers.

"Welcome, Ying Ko," greeted Tam, his face becoming solemn as he spoke. "I have just heard the unfortunate news. I cannot understand it. I have done my utmost to prevent it, yet crime has occurred again."

"This man may tell us something," replied The Shadow. "I shall let you question him, Tam."

As he spoke, The Shadow removed the gag from the prisoner, doing more than permit the man to speak. Once the gag was gone, the man's face was revealed, and The Shadow saw Tam stare. He didn't have to ask if Tam recognized the captive. He saw that Tam did, and something more.

"This is Lee Sook," declared Tam soberly. "He is one of my own men. Do not misjudge him by his garb. He has not deserted to the other camp. He wore that jacket tonight at my special order. Where did you find him, Ying Ko?"

It wasn't often that The Shadow made such mistakes, so he let Lee Sook tell about it - which the fellow did, quite volubly. He'd gone to the door with the wicket, Lee Sook had, hoping to get another message from Chenma, the niece of Shang Chou. She'd mistrusted him, until he'd told her that his get-up was merely to deceive other members of the Dragon Cult, should any be around.

So Chenma had given him her message, and he had turned it over to Ying Ko, under pressure. Lee Sook had been surprised to meet Ying Ko in the alley with the wicket door, and realizing that his costume was against him, Lee Sook had been too bewildered to explain himself.

However, upon awakening to find himself guarded by Ying Ko's men, Lee Sook had solaced himself with the knowledge that the message was intended for Ying Ko anyway, and would have reached him through Tam.

While Lee Sook was giving his statement, The Shadow unbound him. Tam took him to the office door and introduced him to The Shadow's agents in the hall. Closing the door, Tam turned with a slight smile, to hear The Shadow's whispered laugh.

"I would have done well, Tam," conceded The Shadow, "had I contacted you before making my own tour. I wished to gain a first-hand view of the situation which you had mentioned. Quite by accident, I ran into Lee Sook."

"I intended to tell you about him this evening," explained Tam, "along with other features of the case. The chance meeting was very fortunate, for it saved time in getting the message to you. And yet" - Tam spread his hands helplessly - "crime has struck again. I cannot understand it!"

Seating himself at the desk, Tam brought out papers and passed them to The Shadow. Among them was a list of names, including all members of the so-called Dragon Cult reputedly controlled by a hidden master called Shang Chou. Tam added, however, that the cult was quite as evasive as its secret leader.

"Shang Chou has taken his name from two ancient Chinese dynasties," declared Tam. "The name Shang stood for cruelty, in its day; Chou for wisdom. We must grant that Shang Chou has called himself by an appropriate title, for his ways are both ruthless and intelligent. But there is more behind it.

"Without doubt, Shang Chou, for purposes of his own, has duped his followers into believing that he will some day return to China and become a power there, taking them with him to share his importance. They call themselves the Dragon Cult, but the emblem of the dragon means old China, so it affords us no clue.

"We can only suppose that the Dragon Cult is responsible for recent crime, for every night that its members meet, crime follows. They have no badge except their preference for native jackets, and therein Shang Chou is crafty, for he forces us to watch all men who wear such attire."

FROM the drawer, Tam was bringing out little slips of rice paper, each inscribed with a girl's handwriting. One by one, he laid them on the desk.

"These are the only clues, Ying Ko," declared Tam. "We have received them from Shang Chou's niece, Chenma, who evidently disapproves of her uncle's evil ways. They have always arrived too late to stop the crimes involved, but they have proven that Shang Chou is responsible. What puzzles me, is which members of the cult do the crimes that Shang Chou orders."

The Shadow could understand why Tam was puzzled. This evening, The Shadow had checked on various of the suspected Chinese, before he left Chinatown and after his return. To have made the trip to Dayland's and back, the chosen eight must have moved with precision and speed. That, however, was from The Shadow's viewpoint, alone.

Tam's watchers had been keeping tabs, at intervals, all along, and had nothing to report on any absent Chinese. Tam was frank to admit that certain members of the cult had not been closely watched, but that fitted with Tam's policy. He didn't want the suspected parties to think that they were under observation. Somehow, they must have known it, for everyone had given himself an alibi in the eyes of Tam's own men.

There was just one point that might explain it.

"Those who remain in Chinatown," declared Tam, "aid the friends who leave. They do it by stepping out of sight into the back rooms of their shops, or by leaving to visit other merchants. Thus they keep my men watching the wrong places. It is then that the others go and return."

Negligence, even treachery, on the part of Tam's own men might account for the mysterious movements of the Dragon Cult, but The Shadow knew the caliber of Tam's workers too well to suppose that such was the solution. Unquestionably, the ways of Shang Chou were as subtle as they were insidious, but the very methods of the hidden master limited his scope.

Shang Chou could only gain new members for his compact group by approaching those who favored a revival of the ancient Chinese dynasties. To work upon any who were no more than lukewarm would be fatal to his tactics. He couldn't even trust a traitor, if one existed in Tam's camp. Consideration of that fact proved helpful to The Shadow.

"Shang Chou has reached no one close to you," declared The Shadow. "Of that, I am positive, Tam. I am equally certain that this is one rule that will work the other way."

It took Tam only a few seconds to absorb the full point of The Shadow's statement. Then, his eyes owlish through his glasses, Tam stated:

"You mean Chenma."

"Exactly!" said The Shadow. "She is our link to Shang Chou. So far, she has limited herself to sending last-minute messages. We must learn more from her. Tell me, Tam: what lies behind the door with the wicket?"

Tam shook his head.

"I do not know," he admitted. "I am only sure that it must in some way connect with Shang Chou's headquarters, though no one has been seen to go in or out of that door, and it is always locked."

"Someone must go beyond it, Tam."

The Shadow had risen. Tam rose, too, in real alarm, to clutch his visitor's cloak sleeve.

"It would be dangerous to pass through that door!" exclaimed Tam. "It might mean death, even for you, Ying Ko! Knowing the ways of Shang Chou, I am sure that the door must be a trap. Whoever passes through -"

Tam's words were halted by a whisper. It was then that he recalled the term that The Shadow had used. Tam's visitor had not said that he would go through the fatal door. He had stated that someone must go beyond it.

Profound were the ways of Ying Ko, The Shadow. Wiser, Tam believed, than those of the dread Shang Chou. Tam's bow was more than an acknowledgment of The Shadow's craft. It was his farewell nod, given in expectation of The Shadow's prompt return from a visit to the hidden domain of the unknown Shang Chou!

CHAPTER VI. BEYOND THE DOOR

THE SHADOW'S flashlight blinked within an empty room. To all appearances, it was an ordinary room that might have belonged in any vacant house. It was not remote from the haunts of man, for the noise of city traffic reached The Shadow's ears subdued. Yet the room could be called a strange one.

It had windows, but not where they belonged. Its front walls should have held a pair of them; instead, it was quite solid. The windows were at the sides, and they opened into narrow air shafts no larger than chimneys, judging from the very feeble light that trickled through them. Most upstairs rooms in this area caught much of Chinatown's glow. This room was quite the exception.

The Shadow had found it by probing from the closed store on Doyers Street. It had meant a trip through houses, some of them occupied, and over short stretches of rooftops, down into other buildings.

At last, at the end of a tiny hall, The Shadow had found the very door he wanted. His senses of direction and distance, trained to the utmost possible, were guides that could not fail.

The next thing was to find a way to the entry that lay just beneath. It couldn't be reached through the house, for The Shadow had searched the floor below, only to run into a wall.

In pacing the room where he was at present, The Shadow found that it extended a dozen feet farther than the ground-floor route that he had tried. This was his claim, and he meant to dig it.

Crouched on the floor, The Shadow kept his flashlight well concealed within the folds of his black cloak. All the while, he was conscious of those side windows and the narrow air shafts beyond them.

They were windows that could easily be reached by prowlers, and The Shadow did not doubt that members of the Dragon Cult would serve in that capacity, should they suspect that he, Ying Ko, was seeking a private entry to the domain of Shang Chou.

This floor showed more than ordinary cracks. Instead of long boards, it had short ones, that formed a jigsaw pattern. Inserting a stubby prying tool on the muzzle of an automatic, The Shadow used the combination as a jimmy. Wedged into the largest crack, the device brought results.

Not one board, but a whole clump came upward. They formed a simple trapdoor leading down to the space beneath. A hinged door that stopped with a sorrowful grating noise before The Shadow had lifted it very far. The groan of the hinges warned that listeners, if close, might hear too much for The Shadow's good.

The reason why the hinges halted was because the lower side of the trapdoor was sheathed with metal that underlapped the floor. Motionless, The Shadow watched one window, then the other, and noted the faintest of flickers from the dimness.

It couldn't be that the lights of Chinatown were playing tricks. There would have been some regularity in their behavior. Nor were persons using lights from the air shafts. The logical explanation was that lurkers were blocking off what light there was.

Evidently, Shang Chou recognized this weak spot leading into his preserves, and had placed watchers in neighboring windows across the very gloomy air shafts. Watchers who were no more visible to The Shadow than he was to them, which made it all quite even, provided that the others had not heard too much noise.

Listening, The Shadow detected no sounds from outside. The wavering of the dim light ceased. Having traveled this far into Shang Chou's premises, The Shadow decided to continue, leaving the empty room to those who watched it.

He eased through the trap without lifting it farther; let it come down slowly upon his hands, as he hung his body from the beam he gripped. Only The Shadow's fingers remained in place, with the trapdoor resting on his knuckles.

With a twist, he freed his fingers and dropped. As he landed on the floor behind the wicket door, The Shadow heard a sharp click from above.

The trap had a hidden latch. Loose when The Shadow tried it, the latch had sprung in place, loudly enough to tell of an intruder. In the little entry where he stood, The Shadow gave a whispered laugh.

He didn't have to worry about the closed route above. He had found the wicket door, and, in an emergency, could use it as an exit. By way of precaution, he produced his flashlight and played it toward the door.

That was, he played it toward the place where there should have been a door. Instead, the flashlight flickered on a wall of solid brick.

It wasn't the only brick wall in the square-shaped entry. As The Shadow swung his flashlight, he found exactly three others. Four walls, in all, surrounding a space no more than eight feet square.

It was a trap, as Tam had feared, but the door was not the trap. There simply wasn't any door to this

brick cell wherein The Shadow had so willingly hemmed himself!

SILENTLY, The Shadow waited. His vigil was not prolonged. From above, he heard the slight scrape of feet. Chinese had heard the trap door's telltale click. They were in the room above, probably preparing something that would not prove pleasant.

Using his flashlight again, The Shadow took another look for the door that wasn't there. He saw the brick wall, and noted it carefully.

The bricks were new, the mortar damp. In the course of the last few hours, Shang Chou had put willing men to rapid work, probably in very short shifts, so that none would lose his alibi as regards the crime at Dayland's. They had built a solid wall, with a special mortar that dried rapidly. Even if it hadn't fully hardened, the fact would be of little help.

To get at the door, The Shadow would have to punch the bricks outward, and the door, itself, would block that endeavor. In the time required to tear the wall apart in inward fashion, could it be done at all, The Shadow would find himself burdened with other problems. In fact, a problem had begun to loom.

From above, The Shadow heard a hissing sound. Pointing his flashlight upward, he saw tiny holes that studded the locked sheathing beneath the trapdoor. The hisses came from gas that lurkers were piping down to The Shadow. Deadly gas, of course, and the time that it would take to fill this brick-walled chamber represented The Shadow's remaining life span.

Even with death a potent threat, The Shadow remained cool. He was swinging the flashlight down from the ceiling to the brick walls about him. After centering it on the wall that had once been a door, The Shadow turned the flashlight lower, to the floor.

It was solid, but it was wooden, like the floor that he had just come through, though it might have metal underneath. It showed no outlines of a trapdoor, but that wouldn't prevent The Shadow from carving one. Moreover, he believed he could.

This entry certainly must lead somewhere; otherwise, Chenma would not have used the wicket for sending messages to Dr. Tam. Nor was it likely that the normal route from the entry led up through the floor above, for that would bring a person to the world outside.

Dropping to the floor, The Shadow thumped it with a gun butt, ready to use the jimmy on the muzzle, should the probe produce a weak spot. All the while, he was ignoring the steady hiss from above.

It was curious how the gun taps echoed. The Shadow paused between strokes to listen, and for a moment he thought the gas was getting him, for the echoes moved along without the raps that had produced them! Moving over, he tapped again, picked up an echo, and let it continue on, as before.

Those weren't echoes; they were answering taps, from beneath. They went to the rear wall, stopped there and beat an excited tattoo, until The Shadow thumped quick raps in return. Then the raps from below moved along the rear wall and stopped, with another succession, all in one spot.

Again, The Shadow laughed.

He wanted to find weak spots, and those taps were telling him where he could. Marking the first spot, The Shadow jimmied at the edges of the floor beneath the brick walls. Taps told him to hurry, so he wasted no more time.

He fired three shots from his gun, all in a line, right through the circular opening the jimmy had made. The floor quivered from the blasts, and didn't quite recover. It had canted slightly when The Shadow finished.

Over to the other side, The Shadow gave three more shots at the other spot. As he fired the third, the whole floor quaked; then, before he could catch himself, The Shadow was slipping. The floor was splintering under his weight, and it was dropping like a hinged flap.

He grabbed for the wall, hoping to gain a grip among the bricks, but the floor gave too fast. It stopped very suddenly, at an angle of forty-five degrees, transforming itself into a mammoth sliding board. With the bottom of the brick wall out of reach, The Shadow scooted into a room below.

THE place was lighted, and as he thumped over the edges of some steps, The Shadow saw Chenma, the Chinese girl, springing from his path. She was beside him as he finished his slide against the stone floor of a cellar. He could tell from her eyes that she feared that he was hurt.

Rising, The Shadow removed the jimmy from the gun end and pocketed the smaller tool, keeping the larger ready. He might need the automatic very soon, for the hissing sound from the ceiling of the entry had ended when listeners heard the crash of the floor. They knew that The Shadow had escaped them, and that their gas was not sufficient to fill an entire cellar.

Chenma was talking in English, in a very rapid undertone. She was chiding The Shadow in one breath, thanking him in another. She wished that he hadn't come here, yet was glad that he had. Her present hope was to get him to some exit from this cellar, so that he could safely go his way before Dragon Cult men arrived to capture him. As for Chenma, she would be safe, if she hurried back to Shang Chou's headquarters.

While Chenma talked, The Shadow was looking upward, studying the route by which he had reached the cellar. The wicket door had been an entrance, not to a level vestibule but to a flight of steps that led directly down to the cellar. In blocking off that route of entry, Dragon Cult men had carried bricks up the steps and built their wall in the doorway at the top.

They must then have slid away the steps in order to swing a large-hinged floor up to the level of the doorway. The floor, long in readiness, had previously been fastened beneath the cellar ceiling. A simple release of its clamps, it had dropped into position where the bricklayers could shove it up to make it fit the entry as a perfect floor.

The rear edge of the trick floor was hinged beneath the back wall of the entry; the front edge stayed in place because Shang Chou's men pushed the steps under it to prop it. In signaling The Shadow, Chenma had decided that the hinges were the vulnerable spots. By demolishing them, The Shadow had proven that the girl's guess was right.

Though studying the details of the floor, The Shadow did not miss a word that Chenma said. His whispered laugh was his reply, and its strange sibilance told all. Looking up into The Shadow's eyes, Chenma realized that he had come here, not for a mere encounter with the Dragon Cult men but with the definite intent of penetration to the secret abode of Shang Chou.

Chenma, herself, had said that she could return there. If she could travel unnoticed, so could The Shadow. Firmly, the girl declared:

"There is time, Ying Ko. Come!"

She turned off the light and guided The Shadow through the darkness. They went through a partition into another cellar; then turned right to a short passage, that Chenma found with no difficulty. Reaching another pitch-black room, Chenma pressed The Shadow along the wall.

"There are posts here," she whispered. "If we find them, we can pick our way to the doorway on the

other side -"

A stir in the darkness produced The Shadow's interruption. He heard it up ahead, and knew that he and Chenma were not alone. The Shadow was smothering Chenma's whisper until he learned what living things the darkness held. His investigation proved unnecessary

Before The Shadow could begin his probe, the cellar room blazed suddenly with light. The glare was brilliant, produced by four large incandescent bulbs, each affixed to the posts that Chenma had mentioned. Across the room, staring from an open doorway, stood a Chinaman who wore a silver robe. He gripped a revolver, as did four other Chinese with him - men who wore the customary jackets of the Dragon Cult.

With two gunners flanking him on each side, the man in silver was formidable. His eyes, peering from a yellow wrinkled face, were merciless. Beneath a silver skullcap, that face wore a mustache whose trailing ends gave his features an insidious touch.

It wasn't necessary for Chenma to cry out the name of this formidable personage. His very appearance, his show of authority proclaimed it.

The Shadow had found Shang Chou!

CHAPTER VII. DOUBLE STRATEGY

CONSIDERING that Shang Chou had ordered the sudden blaze of light, it would seem that he had found The Shadow, rather than the other way about. There was a circumstance, however, that altered the entire case. Shang Chou had not found The Shadow.

When he had sensed the stir in the darkness, The Shadow shifted, drawing Chenma with him. As the glare came, The Shadow's shift became a whirl. Darkness was his habitat; he had an uncanny sense of finding it in some of the oddest places. Darkness could draw The Shadow like a magnet. It did in this case.

Each of the four wooden posts in this cellar room stood near a corner. The lights were set centrally; hence it was their crosswise glow that reached the corners. Actually, the corners were as fully illuminated as the center of the room, except for one feature.

Directly behind each post was a blind spot that offered patchy darkness. It was into the nearest of those that The Shadow swung, bearing Chenma with him. The girl was wearing a long silk dress, black, with silver adornments. But even the silver did not catch the reflected light. With a wide sweep of his cloak, The Shadow had enveloped Chenma entirely within its folds.

Chenma was very small, and proportionately slender. Her head did not come above The Shadow's shoulder. She nestled perfectly within the cloak, as if it had been made to include her. Chenma was quick, too, to recognize what The Shadow was about. Relaxing, she let him carry her along so easily, that she might have been a Chinese doll.

Then, taking it quite for granted that The Shadow had staged one of his famous trips into the invisible, and that she, too, belonged to the unseen, Chenma looked up quite calmly from the cloak folds. Her eyes met The Shadow's, and she smiled quite cutely, as if to inquire:

"What next?"

There was a gesture of The Shadow's other hand. From its gloved fist, Chenma saw a projecting

automatic. The gun muzzle, of dull metal, could be regarded as a portion of The Shadow's black attire. Quite different from the glitter of revolvers that so often gave The Shadow his chance to spot opponents.

The admiration in Chenma's eyes was quite reciprocated by The Shadow's. He had found a valuable ally in the Chinese girl. He was quite sure that if a pinch came, this human wisp would prove herself nine-tenths dynamite. But this was no time to meet Shang Chou in battle, could it be avoided. The notorious Dragon Cult master was too well fortified with henchmen.

In addition to the four with him, others were lurking in the background. More were coming through the cellars, along the route that The Shadow and Chenma had used. They were the men who had tried to gas The Shadow in the entry.

There was a question as to what might happen when the groups met. The Shadow looked to Chenma for the answer. She phrased it, in a whisper that was muffled by the cloak folds.

"They will think that you found a way out of the cellar," said Chenma. "We shall be quite unnoticed here, Ying Ko, even after the search is finished."

The search was under way. Striding across the four-posted room, Shang Chou disappeared in the far reaches of the cellar. The others followed him, but faces still peered occasionally from the deep doorway leading to the heart of Shang Chou's domain.

Quite sure that those watchers could not hear her whisper, Chenma told The Shadow that she had nothing to fear.

"No one saw me leave my apartment," declared Chenma. "Not even Tseng, the doorman, and he is my friend. Like myself, Tseng is a true Manchu. It is Tseng who gives me the information for my messages. He learns what happens at the Dragon Cult meetings."

THE word "Manchu" explained much to The Shadow. The Manchu Dynasty had carried through to modern times, and there were many who looked forward to its restoration. Chenma was not necessarily so inclined; she was modern enough to have reconciled herself to the republican era.

But it was certain that if schemes of empire took hold, Chenma and others like her would be totally opposed to the institution of an ancient order instead of the existing Manchu group. Hence, she could not sympathize with Shang Chou; but there were more reasons why she sought to thwart him.

"If Shang Chou is my uncle, as he claims," spoke Chenma, in her tiny whisper, "it is my duty to obey him. But if he is my uncle, he is also a Manchu, and therefore a traitor to our cause. So I must stop his schemes."

Quite logical, the way Chenma expressed it, and she had an argument that worked both ways.

"I am not sure that Shang Chou is my uncle," she added seriously. "I never met him until after my parents died. If he is not my uncle, I do not need to obey him. Even if he is not a Manchu, he is still an enemy, and therefore as dangerous as a traitor."

The Shadow responded in a whisper that denoted approval of Chenma's statements. He hoped that she would say more, which she did.

"All else aside," spoke Chenma, very firmly, "I am opposed to Shang Chou's crimes. He has duped his Dragon Cult followers into ways of evil. You wish to meet Shang Chou, alone. Very well, Ying Ko, I shall arrange it."

Lifting a tiny hand, the girl drew down a fold of the concealing cloak and gave a winsome glance past the sheltering post. She saw that Shang Chou's reserves were becoming restless. Two were at the doorway. One was about to carry a message to Shang Chou; the other looked ready to return into headquarters.

"Tell me more about Shang Chou," suggested The Shadow. "Any further facts may prove important."

"I know nothing more," Chenma confessed. "Tseng does not attend the meetings. He merely hears what members say while on the way out. They have secret routes, which even Tseng does not know. His only path was through the wicket door, but of late he has not used it; and now, it is sealed."

The two Chinese had separated, one going to find Shang Chou, the other returning through the deep door. Looking up, Chenma spoke pleadingly to The Shadow.

"Let me leave now, Ying Ko! I can go back to my apartment and be there when Shang Chou returns. He cannot have guessed that I am here, for he was absent at the time I left. I had not seen him since the meeting. If you will wait until all have gone, and then continue through the cellars, you will find the passage with the silver door.

"It is beneath an old stairway with a broken rail. Tap three times, and I shall release the catch that will enable you to draw the door open. It must be operated from both sides, whenever it has been locked."

The Shadow let Chenma steal from the cloak folds. He watched her frail figure disappear through the doorway leading to the next cellar. Her mention of the silver door with the double lock was proof of the risks that she had taken in sending messages to Tam.

Unquestionably, Chenma must have left the door unlocked when she made those expeditions to the wicket. If anyone other than her friend Tseng had found it, she would have returned to discover that her path was barred.

Even greater was the risk upon this final trip. Knowing that Shang Chou's men had turned the wicket entry into a trap, Chenma had nevertheless ventured there, to aid anyone who might fall into the toils. She had helped The Shadow effect his own rescue, in a way that might have terminated her own future.

Fortunately, news of The Shadow's escape had reached Shang Chou and he had come with followers, leaving the path open behind him. Thus had Chenma been able to return, and The Shadow agreed that it was best for her to go alone.

By waiting here, he could hear what Shang Chou's followers had to say. If they even suspected that Chenma had aided The Shadow, he would be able to handle them beforehand.

Several of them returned quite promptly, with Shang Chou in their midst. The Shadow could see annoyed wrinkles on the face beneath the silver skullcap. The messenger was with them, and he was talking in singsong Chinese, which The Shadow understood.

He was telling Shang Chou that a few newcomers had arrived and were waiting at their portal, but that Tseng was not on hand to admit them. Shang Chou told the messenger that he should have informed Chenma; that she might have told him where to find Tseng.

At those words, The Shadow lowered his automatic into the folds of his cloak. He had been following Shang Chou with the gun muzzle, hoping to clip the Dragon Cult master first, if battle proved advisable. Keeping a bead on the silver-clad figures was not at all easy, with other figures intervening in bobbing style.

The fact that Shang Chou supposed Chenma to be in her own apartment, was enough. The Shadow

decided to wait for the meeting which Chenma had said she could arrange. A private interview with Shang Chou was much to be desired.

By bearding Shang Chou - or, to be more literal, by clipping the Dragon Cult leader's mustaches, The Shadow would be in a perfect position to probe the Dragon Cult from within. Already, he had identified some of the members for future reference, but he hoped to include all before he finished.

Searchers continued to prowl the cellars after Shang Chou had gone back to his headquarters. They occasionally poked into the room where The Shadow lurked, but the glare of the lights deceived them. It didn't seem possible that anyone could be hiding in the midst of such brilliance. The darkness between posts and corners looked very thin, when viewed from angles.

It must have been half an hour before men gave up the hunt, and when they filed back through the posted room, others came with them, carrying hammers. Evidently that crowd had fixed the broken floor above the steps, thus again transforming a stairway entrance into a forgotten brick-walled room.

When the last had gone through, they turned off the lights, and The Shadow gave them another ten minutes to rejoin Shang Chou and then go their respective ways. His own time limit up, The Shadow used his flashlight to light a path to the silver door that Chenma had mentioned.

In an obscure cellar, the tiny glow picked out a dusty stairway that had a broken rail. A satisfied laugh whispered through the darkness as The Shadow stepped behind the stairs. His flashlight focused itself beneath the steps, and therewith The Shadow's mirth ceased.

There wasn't any silver door.

Instead, The Shadow saw another wall of brick, quite as solid as the one that had blocked the entrance from the blind alley. Like the other wall, this one was freshly constructed, its quick-drying mortar not yet hardened. However, this wall was outside a door, instead of inside. It was blocking entrance, instead of exit.

Workers had probably begun its construction while Chenma was trying to aid The Shadow. Returning to her apartment, the Chinese girl must have witnessed the operation. Her only course had been to slip through at some moment when the workers were absent. When the last of Shang Chou's retainers returned, the last bricks had been promptly put in place and the silver door locked from the other side.

Between them, The Shadow and Shang Chou had indulged in double strategy. Failing to trap The Shadow with one brick wall, Shang Chou had blocked him off with another. In his turn, The Shadow had slipped a snare, vanished before Shang Chou could find him, and covered the fact that Chenma had given him aid.

In the duel, The Shadow still held the aggressive. He had forced Shang Chou to draw in his outposts and to tighten his domain. Having thus tested his adversary, The Shadow could plan other strategy while he waited for Shang Chou to move again.

A whispered laugh stirred the darkness. If walls had ears, that brick barrier would have a stern warning to repeat to its builder, Shang Chou.

A reminder, from The Shadow, that crime's final fruit would be Shang Chou's own payment for his misdeeds.

CHAPTER VIII. OUT OF CHINATOWN

FINDING an exit from these outer cellars was very easy for The Shadow, but it brought him into unexpected trouble. Mild trouble, however, compared with the difficulties that Shang Chou had offered him; nevertheless, The Shadow was forced to a quick display of his ability at being here, there, yet nowhere.

The police had really taken over Chinatown. They were marching into restaurants, banging at shop doors and calling for the proprietors. They were out to question everyone who might have seen suspicious Chinese return to this quarter.

In fact, they almost had opportunity to question a person who could really have told them something. Coming around a corner, three detectives ran squarely into The Shadow.

They didn't know who he was; not even what he was, considering the speed with which he whipped into a doorway, then out of it, as the detectives charged his way.

Crossing the street on the rebound, The Shadow was totally missed by his seekers, only to be spotted by others who were coming up. They knew they were after something that had life to it, even though it was distinguishable only as a batch of darkness.

There were too many clumps of darkness along this street, now that many of the shops had turned off their lights. Police and detectives stumbled into basement entries that they thought were solid; others lunged at darkened objects, only to embrace ash cans. It was very funny, or would have been, if they had kept it up longer.

At that moment, The Shadow had reached a corner and could have glided farther, but he saw what looked like a better choice. A cab was pulling up, and The Shadow recognized it as Moe Shrevnitz's. He wheeled over and seized the door handle, but the door came open before he could pull it, to unload a pair of detectives!

They had commandeered the cab on the outskirts of Chinatown, and hearing the commotion near the corner, were stopping to learn what it was about. Seeing The Shadow, they grabbed for him, but missed. They couldn't have done otherwise, considering that they were in awkward position while coming from the cab.

The Shadow escaped the first man's lunge, wheeled about, and helped the other detective from the cab so fast that he hurdled right against the first man, who was turning to make another grab at living blackness.

With a spin, The Shadow went right into the empty cab, slammed the door, and was away amid the shrill excitement of police whistles.

The cab couldn't travel far in crooked streets where police were as thick as fence posts. After twisting around two corners, Moe's only chance was to head back, and he voiced it to The Shadow. It looked as if abandoning the cab could be The Shadow's only policy - until he saw a big official car, parked a short way ahead. Calmly, he told Moe to stop.

With one swoop, The Shadow divested himself of hat and cloak, stowing them in a secret drawer beneath the cab's rear seat. He opened the cab door and stepped out, a figure clad in immaculate evening clothes.

With calm eyes peering from an aristocratic face, The Shadow coolly introduced himself to a reception committee of police. He was Lamont Cranston, a friend of Commissioner Weston, and he had just arrived in Chinatown at the commissioner's request.

Other police came pounding up on foot, to find the calm-mannered Mr. Cranston explaining how his cab had almost tangled with another that was speeding out of Chinatown. Fortunately, the two dicks who had used Moe's cab failed to recognize either the vehicle or the driver, for they had made only a short ride, and a hurried one.

They were suspicious enough, however, to follow after Cranston when he went over to the commissioner's car. Weston wasn't in it, but the car had a passenger in the person of Louis Walstead.

He knew Cranston, and certified him as a friend of the commissioner. The detectives went their way shaking their heads, and Cranston sat down to have a chat with Walstead.

THE chat produced a first-hand description of the robbery at Dayland's, though Walstead, because of his fright and his hiding tactics, was a bit sketchy on certain details. He credited both Burton Royce and Margo Lane with a brave attempt to overtake the Chinese assassins who had murdered Herbert Dayland. He then explained how he happened to be in Chinatown.

Commissioner Weston, notified of possible trouble at Dayland's, had stopped to pick up Alexander Marne, who was at a board meeting. They had arrived after robbery and murder were over, to learn that a tribe of Chinese killers had vanished with their loot.

Since the trail led to Chinatown, Weston had suggested going there, taking along all who might aid in identifying any of the guilty Chinese. Both Marne and Walstead had accompanied him, and they had picked up two others on the way.

The other two were Royce and Margo. They had phoned back to Dayland's house, to say that they had safely eluded the Chinese. Finding Chinatown so thoroughly under control, Weston had suggested that all look about as they might choose. So, like Weston, all had gone their own way, with the exception of Walstead.

His choice was to look for Chinese from the window of Weston's official car. He'd been doing it for nearly an hour, and so far, none of the rest had returned.

Instead, Walstead had observed other guests from Dayland's, who had heard about the search and had come to offer aid. Young blades like Errol Garvin and Don Feldon and another, whose name Walstead finally recalled as Harry Vincent.

Inspector Cardona was still back at the Dayland house, talking with other guests and servants. He was due to arrive in Chinatown shortly, to report any new descriptions of the vanished Chinese. Meanwhile, police were rousing all the Chinese they could, to question them regarding suspicious characters.

Walstead had just finished his harangue when Marne appeared. Serious of face and manner, Marne gave a nod to Cranston and said that the commissioner was expecting him. This tallied with what Cranston had told the detectives, and it was better than a guess.

Invariably, when crime occurred in select circles, Commissioner Weston phoned the Cobalt Club, where he and Cranston were members, to leave word for his friend to join him. Weston had learned, through long experience, that Cranston could often offer suggestions helpful in solving certain types of crime.

Margo Lane was next to arrive. She was very glad when she saw Cranston, for the two were close friends. She managed to draw him aside while Walstead was talking with Marne.

"It's about Burton Royce," said Margo. "I'm depending on you to see me home, no matter how polite I am to Royce. He's so sold on one idea that he can't think of anything else. I had to slip away from him,

so that I could help in the hunt for the missing Chinese."

Hardly had Margo finished before Royce arrived. Margo introduced him to Cranston, and smiled sweetly when Royce shook his head to chide her for having left him. But he was unable to resume the conversation that Margo had so frequently interrupted.

Cranston was asking about the crime at Dayland's, and Margo was looking at Royce, expecting him to supply the details, which he proceeded to do in serious and precise fashion.

COMMISSIONER WESTON soon appeared, accompanied by Inspector Cardona. The two had met near the old joss house. They took charge of the sidewalk conference, and Weston asked Cardona for a final report on matters at Dayland's.

"Nobody knows when the Chinese sneaked in," declared Cardona emphatically. "It must have been before nine o'clock, of course, but guests were arriving, and so were extra servants, because the party hadn't really gotten under way.

"We looked through Dayland's house and the one next door, but no Chinese were hiding in either place. So I told the guests they could go, and I let the servants pack and leave, except for a couple who are going to close the house and look after it."

Weston gave a grunt, then turned to Marne and Walstead. He asked them if they could estimate the value of the stolen gems.

"I wouldn't know," declared Marne. "I have never gone in for collecting antique gems, except for a few odd pieces that happened to intrigue me, though some of them are only trinkets. Walstead can tell you better than I can, commissioner. He collects gems on a large scale."

Walstead nodded, nervously.

"I'd say that Dayland's gems were worth a hundred thousand," he declared. "At first sight, the contents of the coffer might appear more valuable, but so many of the items were merely jade and carnelian. The Chinese do some lovely carvings in both jade and carnelian, but they are valuable chiefly for their workmanship. I am evaluating Dayland's collection on the basis of the really precious stones that it contained."

"I would say that you valued it properly," put in Royce. "My own collection is about on a par with Dayland's. In fact, he and I frequently exchanged items."

Walstead gave Royce a sharp look.

"I never heard Dayland mention such transactions," said Walstead. "I thought your only business was selling him paintings."

"We didn't want to make you jealous, Lou," returned Royce, with an indulgent smile. "You considered yourself so much superior to us, with your collection valued at a quarter million, that we felt we'd better keep our own small business to ourselves. By the way, Lou, you've gone in for jade and carnelian, too, haven't you?"

"I have," retorted Walstead testily, "and I own some large chalcedony vases that I prize quite highly!"

"Then we'd better tack a few more thousand on our estimate of Dayland's collection. Poor Herb!" Royce shook his head. "I wonder why they went after his collection, instead of other game."

At that, Walstead's nerves gave way. He turned to Weston and Cardona, pleading with them to protect him, which they assured him they would do. Chuckling in his indulgent style, Royce declared that he, Royce, needed no protection; that he kept his jewels in a safe-deposit vault.

One thing, however, made itself quite evident. If Chinese raiders kept up their campaign, with gems as the objects they sought most, Walstead and Royce would be candidates for trouble, like Dayland.

Of the two, however, only Walstead appeared worried. Royce was ready to leave, now that the futile hunt was over. He turned to Margo announcing that he was ready to escort her to her apartment, only to learn that Cranston had claimed first honor. So Royce nodded a polite good night and stepped into Weston's car. About to follow, the commissioner paused.

"I don't see your limousine anywhere, Cranston," he remarked. "Didn't you ride in it from the club?"

Two listening detectives were very eager to hear Cranston's answer. It came, in his most casual style.

"I did," he replied, "and found traffic all snarled by your police cars, commissioner. So I had to walk through the tangle and pick up a cab. I'm riding back to where I left the limousine."

The detectives went their way, satisfied that they had guessed wrong. Cranston helped Margo into Moe's cab, but they didn't hunt up the limousine, because it wasn't anywhere near Chinatown.

DURING the ride to her apartment, Margo supplied a few more details on the Dayland case, but they didn't offer much new. Then Margo blurted what was uppermost in her mind.

"It's about Burton Royce," she said. "He wants me to be a Chinese princess, Lamont."

Cranston looked at Margo and gave an absent smile, which she didn't understand. He hadn't told her that this evening he had met a genuine Chinese princess, of the Manchu blood. It was rather difficult to picture Margo playing the part of a human doll like Chenma.

"You'd hardly do as a Chinese princess." Cranston shook his head as he surveyed Margo. "Some other nationality would be better, in your case."

"Royce mentioned Javanese -" began Margo slowly. Then, abruptly, she added: "But can't you understand, Lamont? I don't want to pose for Royce. Wearing all those Chinese jewels wouldn't interest me."

At mention of the jewels, Cranston's eyes showed an interested expression.

"Royce is a gentleman of judgment," he declared. "I agree that you would make an excellent model, Margo. I suggest that you become the Javanese princess."

"Why... why -"

Margo was speechless for a moment; when she found her voice again, she was stormy.

"Why, you'd think I was just another dizzy little fool!" she exclaimed. "Like those who talk about how marvelous Royce is, and think it's wonderful to have him add them to his gallery! I suppose" - groping for something else to say, Margo finally found it - "I suppose, Lamont, that you're even wishing I was a blonde!"

"Not at all," returned Cranston, with a quiet smile. "Royce could only use a dark-haired model for a Javanese princess. If you were a blonde, he wouldn't expect you to wear those Chinese jewels."

It was Margo's turn to display enlightenment. Her eyes opened very wide. She was remembering something that Royce had said just before they left him, and she was picturing it in future terms, which Cranston had already done.

"Royce would have to bring his collection from the safe-deposit box!" expressed Margo. "Of course he would, Lamont! And if the Chinese heard about it, they would come to his studio, because it would be easier than going after Walstead!"

Cranston's nods kept time with Margo's eager comments. Then the girl showed worry.

"Would it be right," she asked, "to help Royce put himself in danger? I'd be doing it, if I posed for that princess portrait."

"Royce has no trouble finding models," reminded Cranston. "If you refuse, he will choose someone else. I could depend on you to help out, Margo, if you were the girl on hand when the Chinese arrived."

Margo's nod was her agreement. Dropping her at the apartment, Cranston rode back to the club to see his friend, the commissioner. From the front seat, Moe heard a strangely whispered laugh, that was not Cranston's.

It was the laugh of The Shadow. His turn had arrived to shape a trap for the followers of the notorious Shang Chou!

CHAPTER IX. THE DRAGONS MEET

MATTERS moved slowly during the few days that followed the raid at Dayland's. The police had gained no clue to the missing Chinese; nor had Dr. Tam. The Shadow had identified some of the Chinese that Tam had listed as members of the Dragon Cult, but it was not conclusive evidence against them.

As Tam pointed out, in his solemn style, mere membership in the cult could not be considered a crime. Furthermore, Shang Chou had every right to guard his own preserves, and others could legitimately serve him.

By the unwritten law of Chinatown, The Shadow, otherwise Ying Ko, had trespassed at his own risk. He, in turn, had such privilege, provided he was willing to take the consequences of capture.

Most important were the alibis, and most unfortunately all the suspected Chinese had them. Certain men had been absent from their shops and other places prior to the raid at Dayland's, which indicated that they could have attended a cult meeting. Some had likewise been missing when The Shadow invaded Shang Chou's premises, and a few tallied with men that The Shadow had recognized.

But none had been away from Chinatown while crime was happening at Dayland's, and that was the real problem. The only way to break the Dragon Cult, and bring Shang Chou to grief, was to trap at least a few of the members while they were actually participating in crime. Such, at least, was the way that Dr. Tam would like it.

Tam said as much to The Shadow when the two held an early evening meeting.

"You may not agree, Ying Ko," declared Tam, "but your problems are not the same as mine. I must preserve my prestige in Chinatown. I cannot show malice toward any faction. Unless I have a proven case, I would be severely criticized - and justly so, for stirring agitation against someone like Shang Chou."

"In this instance," replied The Shadow, "our problems are the same, Tam. I have not forgotten that your

information gave me my first lead to Shang Chou."

With a bow, Dr. Tam acknowledged the compliment.

"The way is prepared for the thing that you desire," The Shadow continued. "There will be opportunity for Shang Chou to attempt new crime. In fact, two opportunities."

This time, Tam smiled blandly.

"One is hardly an opportunity," he declared. "The police are protecting Louis Walstead as though he were more precious than his own jewels. But I have heard" - Tam tilted his head wisely - "that Burton Royce considers himself immune from danger."

"He is bringing his gems from storage this evening -"

"A fact that I have already heard," interposed Tam. "That is why I say that Royce believes he is immune. Otherwise, he would be requesting police protection; something which he has not done."

It wasn't surprising that Tam had heard the news. The one place where Royce had talked openly about his gems was in Chinatown. He had gone there more than once, trying to identify some of Dayland's assassins. He had boasted of his gems and how he intended to bring them to his studio. He had talked both in English and in Chinese, the latter a language which he spoke quite fluently.

"Royce will be protected," The Shadow told Tam. "Whether he wishes it or not. One thing more, Tam: you have heard nothing from Chenma?"

Tam shook his head, quite worried.

"No word at all," he declared. "I doubt that Shang Chou can have harmed her, but she may be closely watched. I am sure, however, that we shall hear from her after the Dragon Cult meets again."

THE SHADOW shared the opinion of Dr. Tam. Leaving, under cover of dusk, he stopped by a few windows and noticed that certain Chinese were all in place. On his way from Chinatown, he noted that police were fewer than before but that Tam's men were still on patrol. He noted other faces - those of Americans who had been at Dayland's.

Among them, The Shadow saw Garvin and Feldon, dining in a Chinese restaurant. Weston had encouraged such individuals to frequent Chinatown, on the long chance that they might spot some of the unwanted Chinese who had raided Dayland's home.

There was one thing more.

As he passed the blind alley where the wicket door had been, The Shadow saw only a blank brick wall. Some of Shang Chou's stealthy servers had removed the door from the outside. Perhaps Shang Chou had wanted The Shadow to see that fresh new wall, merely to remind him that he would have no further opportunity of locating Shang Chou's hidden lair.

The Shadow held his own opinions on that subject. He was banking heavily on Chenma. But in remembering Chenma, The Shadow had not forgotten Margo.

After leaving Chinatown, The Shadow stopped near Royce's studio, which was located near Greenwich Village. The studio was on the top floor of a four-story building, and its skylight was dark, indicating that Royce had not arrived there.

However, other persons had. The Shadow contacted them in the darkness behind the studio building. They were The Shadow's agents.

They were holding the place well covered. Not only were agents outside; they were within, too. Harry Vincent had rented a studio underneath Royce's. To a man, they would be right on call, when needed.

This evening would be the real beginning of their vigil, for Royce intended to start the Javanese painting tonight, with Margo as his model.

As Cranston, The Shadow stopped by at Margo's, and found her quite serene. She recognized the danger of her coming mission, but did not regard it as an ordeal. She gave a nod when Cranston reminded her to take a gun along.

"The first sitting will be very short," said Margo. "Royce will work for only an hour or so. He has invited some friends to drop in for a party."

"Which friends?" inquired Cranston casually.

"The cafe set," Margo replied. "Errol Garvin, Don Feldon, and several others. I'll call Harry Vincent and invite him up. Of course, there will be some girls there, too."

"Disappointed blondes, I suppose?"

"Very probably," returned Margo. "But you're the person who will be really disappointed. Royce didn't suggest that I invite you to the party."

"I might come, anyway, Margo."

With that cryptic remark, Cranston left - and Margo, nodding to herself, understood exactly what he meant. If uninvited. Cranston would probably arrive as The Shadow, to make sure that Royce's jewels would be safe.

Reaching the Cobalt Club, Cranston found his friend Weston there, with three others. Marne, Walstead and Royce were all present, discussing the Dayland case. Each seemed to regard it from a different viewpoint.

Marne was demanding that the police show some skill at finding Dayland's murderers. He termed his friend's death a mild outrage, when compared with the inefficiency that the police had shown. Marne practically suggested that Weston arrest the whole of Chinatown, to hold a general police line-up.

"We are watching the quarter," Weston told him. "More closely than anyone supposes. I have stationed men on the outskirts, to check on any suspicious-looking Chinese who leave. That is far better than having police parade the streets."

"Neither is good enough," declared Marne, as he arose to leave. "Before you have finished with this, commissioner, you will agree that I am right."

As soon as Marne had gone, Walstead prodded Weston with his angle. He didn't think that his apartment was properly protected. When Weston reminded him that Inspector Cardona and five detectives had been stationed there on steady duty, Walstead argued that there had been more than six Chinese at Dayland's.

Weston finally agreed to add two more detectives to the detail. Walstead left, accompanied by two headquarters men, who were to see him home as bodyguards and report to Cardona for further duty.

It was then that Royce relieved the tension by asserting his viewpoint of the case.

"I don't believe those Chinese came from Chinatown," declared Royce. "I'd say they were outsiders, mere rovers who dropped in at Dayland's."

"I wish you could prove that theory, Royce," asserted the commissioner. "It would spare me a lot of criticism."

"I might, if I can think of a way," said Royce, rather casually. Then, as he arose, he added: "By the way, Cranston, I'm giving a studio party this evening. I wish you would drop over sometime after ten o'clock."

Smiling acceptance, Cranston shook hands with Royce. His smile could have meant that he had a coming surprise for Margo. It might also have signified that Cranston was thinking in terms of an earlier surprise.

Royce had made no mention of his own jewels to Weston. Any police protection would therefore apply to Walstead only, a fact which might have much bearing on events to come.

EXPRESSING his regret that he couldn't dine with Weston, Cranston left soon after Royce had gone. His course led back to Chinatown, and on the way, he became The Shadow.

He was using Moe's cab again, and the trip was delayed somewhat by a Chinatown bus that lumbered ahead, carrying its usual quota of sightseers.

In Chinatown, The Shadow stopped at Tam's to learn of any new developments. Finding none, he started on one of his inspection tours. As on his first night's patrol, he crossed the path of a procession from the rubberneck bus.

Business was booming for the Chinatown tours, thanks to the publicity caused by recent crimes. To the gawking sightseers, every man who wore a Chinese jacket might be a secret member of a very dangerous cult.

So the guides told them, and for once, the spielers were correct. Passing many windows, The Shadow observed their placid occupants and picked out the very men in question.

He looked about for some of Weston's amateur helpers, like Garvin and Feldon, and saw that they had gone. The Shadow doubted that any of them could single out and remember any Chinese faces.

But The Shadow could remember such countenances. Just after the Chinatown bus rumbled away with its load of passengers, he noted that certain Chinese were missing from their windows. It wasn't that they had simply decided to display themselves no longer because the tourist crop had lulled. The Shadow could see a deeper reason. The Dragon Cult was meeting again, tonight.

If Shang Chou called for lightning crime, it would strike in one of two places: at Walstead's apartment or Royce's studio. Both places were well guarded - one openly, the other secretly. As yet, The Shadow was unneeded.

He might be, later, and when the time came, he would make his choice. Rather, the choice depended upon someone else, who, so far, had proven an unfailing ally. The Shadow was thinking of Chenma.

A whispered laugh stirred Tam's lower doorway as The Shadow started up to see his Chinese friend. Tam's would be the place where The Shadow would receive the expected message, guiding him to crime's goal.

Others, already on guard, would be strong enough to hold crime in abeyance until The Shadow arrived to

spell a finish to the schemes of Shang Chou!

CHAPTER X. WITHIN THE LAIR

IN a lavish suite of rooms furnished in Oriental style, Chenma, the Manchu princess, was seated at a little writing table. She was making entries in her diary, recording everything that might prove of value to Ying Ko when she met The Shadow again.

She would meet Ying Ko; of that, Chenma was positive, though of late, her range had been curtailed. Shang Chou, the man who claimed to be her uncle, had informed her that unkind enemies were troubling him, and that he had therefore been forced to restrict his present domain. Doors that had hitherto been open would, of necessity, be closed, even to Chenma.

The girl had accepted the edict with the obedience that characterized the true Manchu. All the while, she had been depending on another man to counteract it. Chenma was thinking in terms of her friend Tseng, the Manchu doorman who guarded the portals of the room where the Dragon Cult met.

She was sure that she would hear from Tseng soon. Listening from her own door, Chenma had heard sounds that indicated visitors, and had recorded the fact in her diary, naming the time to the dot. By this time, she was sure, she would hear from Tseng - and footsteps, coming closer, filled her with elation.

Hurriedly, Chenma tucked her diary in a hidden compartment of a Chinese music box, a memento that her parents had given her when she was a little child.

It was Tseng's knock that Chenma heard at the door. She opened the portal and saw the doorman.

Tseng was much older than Shang Chou. Very wrinkled of face, with draping beard and eyes that peered through spectacles, he looked like an ancient counselor. Like Shang Chou, Tseng wore a skullcap, but it was plain black, instead of silver.

Tseng talked only Chinese, and it was difficult to understand his singsong when he whispered. So Chenma beckoned him within the door, and asked:

"What of the meeting, Tseng?"

"It has not yet been held," replied Tseng. "The men that you heard depart were workers."

"Engaged upon what work?"

"I do not know," Tseng replied, "unless it is to build more barriers. Your esteemed uncle has been much worried of late."

"How soon will the meeting be?"

"Very soon, princess. But I come to advise you of something else. Shang Chou will invite you to this meeting."

The news thrilled Chenma. Shang Chou had often promised to introduce her to the Dragon Cult. Fearing that something might spoil the situation, she gestured Tseng from the room, but as he left, she queried:

"You have found another outlet like the wicket door?"

"I believe so," assured Tseng. "I shall inform you afterward. I must hasten; I hear new visitors arriving."

Before she closed the door, Chenma glimpsed Tseng as he stopped at the entrance to the meeting room,

just past the corner of a passage. She caught brief sight of a Chinese face, heard a man babble his credentials to the bearded doorman. Closing the door, Chenma took out her diary again and made another notation, after which, she hid the book again.

At least a half-hour passed before Shang Chou announced himself with an imperious knock. Answering the door, Chenma was informed that she was to attend a Dragon Cult meeting,

Instead of taking her around the corner to the portal that Tseng guarded, Shang Chou conducted Chenma in the other direction. She glanced back, hoping for a glimpse of Tseng, but the doorman was evidently too cautious to show himself.

Shang Chou led the way through his own apartment, which was about the size of Chenma's. They went through several rooms, finally reaching a pair of silken curtains which Shang Chou spread, to reveal a silver door. Pressing a hidden catch, he slid the door aside, and for the first time, Chenma found herself within the meeting room of the Dragon Cult.

She had expected something very garish; instead, the room was furnished quite plainly. Its walls were hung with silver, and, to Chenma's surprise, there was no symbol of a dragon as a decoration. She had always thought of the cult meeting in a room where dragons predominated, and the simplicity of the place puzzled her. As for the men of the Dragon Cult, they were nothing novel.

Chenma remembered most of them. She'd seen them, months ago, when she had been free to wander about Chinatown. Later, they had come here to serve as bricklayers on the night of The Shadow's partial invasion. None were wearing uncommon costumes; they had on the simple Chinese jackets. Shang Chou, in his silver robe, was the outstanding member of the lot.

In the meeting room, however, were two objects that attracted Chenma's notice. One was a squatly idol, perched upon a pedestal in one corner. It was a very heavy idol, and it was made entirely of silver.

Considering that it was life size, it must be very valuable. Chenma did not know the weight of silver, in such proportions, but she was sure the idol weighed at least half a ton.

It had an ugly, glaring face that Chenma had never seen upon a similar statue. Obliging, Shang Chou introduced the creature to his niece.

"This is Yatku," he declared. "The ancient deity of power, forgotten through the centuries that have passed since the Shang dynasty reigned. Yatku in the symbol of the stern rule that I shall give to China."

He turned to the other corner, pointing out the second object that interested Chenma. The object was a stone well top, set in the floor. It was fully a yard across, and when Chenma approached at her uncle's beck, she looked far into the depths, to see her own reflection in water that must have been fifty feet beneath.

"The Well of Wisdom," proclaimed Shang Chou. "Symbolic of the Chou dynasty. Wisdom, as an adjunct to power, makes its owner too formidable for any to oppose."

In place of power and wisdom, Shang Chou should have stated cruelty and shrewdness. He had named two virtues, instead of the pair of vices that were his stock in trade. Chenma found herself wondering more about the old well than the silver idol in the other corner.

Quite obviously, Shang Chou could have molded the silver statue of Yatku from precious metal supplied him by his dupes, the Dragon Cult men. But the well must have been in this room long before Shang Chou came. Chenma knew that this headquarters was under the level of the streets that ran through

Chinatown; still, that did not explain the well.

Chenma decided, finally, that it must be a relic of old New York, that Shang Chou had come across by accident and decided to use as a symbol. It was certainly very old, that well, because Chenma had observed the mossy condition of its stone sides when she looked down into the water, far below.

She wondered if there were any other symbols that Shang Chou regarded as important, and she learned, quite promptly, that there was a third.

It happened to be Chenma, herself.

Taking his niece by her silken sleeve, Shang Chou turned her toward the throng. Then, in Chinese, the language that he always spoke, he announced:

"This is Chenma, princess of the Manchu dynasty. She is my niece, and because of her, I have the right to rule. Into the Manchu throne I shall instill the power of the Shang, the wisdom of the Chou. I, Shang Chou, shall reign, and you will be my favorite subjects!"

THOSE ringing words were drowned by the acclaim of Shang Chou's followers, and Chenma quivered with a fever of hate toward this man who termed himself her uncle.

He did not deserve the right to rule, even over these fools who owned him as their master. He was using Chenma simply to influence any dupes who might have leanings toward the Manchus.

Steadying, Chenma felt herself begin to sway at the insidious statements which followed. With effort, she managed to regain her calm, that she might hear, in full, the lies with which Shang Chou had built his rule over the Dragon Cult.

"Our whole thought is for China," Shang Chou declared. "Some of you may believe that others have been too ardent in their appointed missions; that in seeking one thing, they should not have taken others - such as these."

He stooped and produced a casket from beneath an ebony stand. The casket was of ivory, and when Shang Chou opened it, Chenma saw the glitter of many gems. She knew what they represented: they were the spoils of the Dayland robbery and others that had preceded it.

But Chenma could not understand how Shang Chou could justify such wholesale theft - until he came to a new climax. As he laid the large casket aside, he declared:

"Those gems had to be taken. Otherwise, people would have suspected our real desire. These!"

From a slit in his silver robe, Shang Chou produced some objects that Chenma thought must be emeralds, considering how highly he prized them. But when he laid them on the ebony stand, she saw that they were jade.

Each piece was triangular, and just about large enough for Chenma to take within the curve of her thumb and forefinger. However, she resisted the temptation to touch the jade pieces, though she admired their carving and their apple-green hue.

Then Shang Chou was arranging the jade objects, and Chenma stared in new wonderment.

Though separate, each was a segment in a long line, that Shang Chou placed in order. They made up an articulated stretch that had the shape of a dragon. Of a dozen pieces, only three were missing. There was an absent section in the dragon's back; and the jade creature had neither head nor tail.

"When the Jade Dragon is completed," announced Shang Chou, "it will mean that my power is absolute. All who know the secret lore of China will rally to my cause. Centuries have passed since the Jade Dragon was divided among the faithful mandarins. Their descendants waited long years to assemble it, yet never did.

"When evil days befell our land, those who owned segments of the Jade Dragon let them pass from their possession. Each precious piece came to America. I came here to reclaim them, and with your aid, my followers, I have gained all but three. Tonight, we shall seek one more!"

Again, the members of the Dragon Cult voiced their enthusiasm, and Chenma could almost sympathize with them, until Shang Chou added:

"And remember! No one must know our purpose. Therefore, all other gems you find must be brought here with the segments of priceless Jade.

Such was Shang Chou's way of covering the wholesale robbery to which he committed his dupes. He wanted more than the Jade Dragon. He wanted the wealth of the hapless collectors, men like Dayland, who owned a portion of the dragon without knowing what it represented.

When Shang Chou specified that no one must know the purpose of the robberies, he was endorsing murder. There was always a chance that a victim might mention a curious piece of jade that had gone with his stolen jewels!

THEN, as Chenma looked on helplessly, Shang Chou demonstrated the system whereby he chose the men who were to serve both as robbers and killers. From his robe, he produced a batch of square papers, which he shuffled, face down, between his hands.

"Of these papers," he declared, "some are marked with the symbol of Shang Chou, while others are blank. Those that bear the symbol tell which of our members shall fare forth upon our stated mission. I have chosen the exact number required."

He dealt the slips to the men about him. Chenma saw the Chinese take furtive glances at their respective slips, then tear them to tiny shreds without revealing which were marked and which were blank.

As they scattered the minute fragments, they turned and left by the outer portal Chenma was looking after them, hoping to see Tseng, when Shang Chou plucked her sleeve and ordered:

"Come!"

He led Chenma back to her own apartment, and as soon as she had closed the door, the girl paced frantically. She remembered everything so vividly, that she knew she could record it later.

If only Tseng would keep his promise and enable her to get word to Dr. Tam! Word that Tseng would have to personally provide, for Chenma had reached the meeting too late to learn an all-important fact: namely, who the victim of tonight's crime would be.

At last, the knock that Chenma knew was Tseng's. She opened the door and saw the bearded doorkeeper beckon. She started to speak, but he raised one hand to his lips warningly; with the other, he pointed toward Shang Chou's apartment. With a nod, Chenma followed Tseng.

Up steps, along twisted passages, through doorways that were secret panels, Tseng brought Chenma to a small window that overlooked the corner of an alley. He gave her a folded bit of newspaper, and spoke quickly:

"Number One man."

Then Tseng had left, to watch for any approach of Shang Chou. Opening the paper, Chenma found it to be a newspaper clipping which showed three portraits in a horizontal row. They were pictures of men who were the closest friends of the latest murder victim, Herbert Dayland.

From left to right, Chenma read the names of the three men: Louis Walstead, Alexander Marne, Burton Royce.

Tseng had said, "Number One man." On a slip of paper, Chenma wrote the name of Louis Walstead, the first in the line. She peered from the window, saw a Chinese in American garb just within the corner of the alley. Knowing that he must be one of Tam's patrollers, Chenma tapped against the pane.

The man looked up. All he saw was the paper slip that Chenma slid beneath the window crack and sent fluttering down to its eager receiver.

Chenma, by then, had left the window. Her task was done.

Word of crime was on its way to the mighty fighter who awaited it: The Shadow!

CHAPTER XI. THE WRONG CHOICE

THE lights were on in Royce's Greenwich Village studio. Beneath the frosted skylight, Burton Royce was smiling wisely as he opened a small satchel and spread its contents on a table.

Margo Lane tamped her cigarette into an ash tray and leaned forward from her easy-chair, to view the splendor on display.

In size, at least, Royce's collection of gems was much larger than Dayland's, but it included many heavy items that were long on metal, short on jewels. Rings, bracelets, anklets, clattered heavily as Royce brought them from the satchel.

"The more of these, the better," declared Royce. "I mean it as a compliment, Miss Lane, when I say that you are to be a setting for these gems. After all, a Javanese princess would be apt to adorn herself with all the ornaments that she could acquire. Don't you agree?"

Margo glanced about the studio, searching among paintings, some half finished, some complete. Turning to Royce, she replied:

"I can tell better after I have seen my costume. So far, you haven't even described it, Mr. Royce."

"Of course!" exclaimed Royce. "The Javanese costume! Let me see; where did I put the key to the costume closet."

He poked about the studio, while Margo was fingering the gems and admiring their glitter. Royce finally found the key in a pocket of an old smock that he hadn't worn for months. The closet was in a corner of the studio. Unlocking it, Royce brought out costumes, one by one, dusting them as he hung them over chairs.

"Here it is," he finally said. "An authentic Javanese costume. I brought it back from the Orient with me."

Margo surveyed the garb that a Javanese princess should wear. It couldn't be termed elaborate, but considering the scarcity of costumes in Royce's recent paintings, Margo regarded it as ultraconservative. The Javanese outfit consisted of diaphanous pantaloons, an abbreviated tunic, and slippers that

resembled sandals.

A dressing room adjoined the studio. Entering it, Margo locked the door, then softly opened the window. She saw a light below and gave a tap on the sill. The light went off, and Margo heard a window slide upward. She extinguished her light, too, and whispered down to Harry Vincent.

"The gems are here," she told him. "They don't match Dayland's, but they look sensational enough."

"I saw Royce bring in the satchel," returned Harry. "I was going to phone you, but thought I'd wait."

"No further word?"

"None at all. I'll let you know if there is."

Margo left the window open and the light off. She preferred darkness, since it offered quicker communication with friends. This business of being bait for a tribe of Chinese bandits gave her the shivers. She began to wish she hadn't gone through with it, even to help Lamont.

Her shivers continued after she had discarded her own clothes and found her way into the costume that Royce had given her. Even a well-dressed Javanese princess wasn't equipped to meet the breezes that wandered into a fourth-floor New York window.

But when she stepped through the door, into the warmer studio, Margo managed to repress her shudders before Royce noticed them. He was busy mixing paints, and his back was turned.

ROYCE heard Margo reach the table where the jewels were. He turned, came over to help choose adornments that would elaborate the simple costume. As they proceeded, it became apparent that Royce intended to load Margo with all the jewelry she could carry.

Indeed, both girl and costume made a fitting background for a galaxy of gems. The short tunic was sleeveless, and after Margo's hands were embellished with rings on every finger, her arms looked very bare. Royce corrected that by supplying three heavy bangles for each arm; large ones, that slid above Margo's elbows. Next came as many smaller bracelets, which fitted Margo's wrists.

While Margo was putting on a pair of large cameo earrings, Royce girded her with an elaborately jeweled belt, wide enough to cover the gap in her costume. Margo sat down and extended each foot, while Royce fitted her with anklets, much heavier and larger than the arm bangles.

Studying herself in a full-length mirror, Margo was quite pleased with the result. Instead of clashing, the garish ornaments produced a mass effect that a skilled painter like Royce could develop to perfection. Still, when Margo turned around, Royce shook his head. The jewels weren't too many; they were not enough.

"You represent barbaric splendor," declared Royce, "but there must be something more. Some trinket that will strike a delicate touch. I have the very thing we need."

From the glitter on the table, Royce chose a ruby necklace, but it wasn't the ornament in question. Going to a table, he brought out a small box, and from it dumped some pieces of jade. He showed the largest carving to Margo and she was intrigued by its appearance.

The jade was tooth-shaped, and had two tiny prongs extending from the corners above its points. By those prongs, Royce attached it to the ruby necklace, which he slipped over Margo's head. As the rubies settled around the girl's neck, the jade carving slid down from her throat, stopping just above the V-shaped border of her tunic.

Contrasted with the deep olive hue of the costume, the apple-green jade gave the final effect that Royce desired, though he did not discount the crimson of the ruby necklace. While Margo was mirroring herself and approving the result, Royce looked across her shoulder and nodded.

"Red and green," he declared. "A splendid contrast, in this particular arrangement. And now, Miss Lane" - he gave a deep chuckle - "you are wearing the real prize of my collection."

Fingering the ruby necklace as she turned, Margo gave an understanding nod as she said:

"These rubies are large enough to be worth a fortune in themselves -"

"I do not mean the rubies," interrupted Royce, still chuckling. "I refer to the jade pendant."

"Why -" Margo paused, somewhat puzzled. "Why, the other night, you said that jade had little value."

"Little value in itself," agreed Royce, "but far more than the rest of the junk jewelry you are wearing. Don't think that I am laughing at you, Miss Lane." Royce's tone was becoming convulsive. "We shall enjoy the final laugh together, when the crowd arrives for the studio party."

"You can stay in costume, and I shall keep on painting, while we watch their faces. When they ask how much these gems are worth, I shall say, conservatively, thirty thousand. I won't add, of course, that I mean cents, not dollars!"

MARGO began to laugh, too. Royce thought she was picturing the coming envy of his former models; but Margo wasn't thinking in terms of blondes. She remembered that Royce had told her he had invited Cranston to the party. It would be delightful to watch Lamont eye the imitation gems, believing them real trophies that would demand his full protection.

Then, considering Cranston in terms of The Shadow, with the serious matters that were at stake, Margo was ready to revoke her decision, when she heard Royce say:

"Queer people, the Chinese. What one hears, all learn. I talked too much in Chinatown, quite purposely. I wanted the Chinese to show their hand, but they were far too wise. They must have learned, through sources of their own, that my wonderful gem collection was all junk; that I never showed it to experts like Dayland or Walstead, except when I borrowed occasional items elsewhere."

"After all" - Royce gave a shrug - "I had to keep up a front among friends who regard a man who spends all his money as a fool."

"But you told Walstead that you often traded gems with Dayland!"

"Why not?" chuckled Royce. "Dayland was no longer alive to deny it."

"Then you sold Dayland paintings for actual cash?"

"Yes, and plenty of it. I bluffed him into thinking that I had all the money I needed, and thereby always received the full price I wanted."

"Well" - Royce snapped his fingers - "Herb is gone, and Lou is my best prospective customer, so I am bluffing him, in his turn."

Margo felt that Royce's attitude was heartless, but she did not say so. After all, he knew his friends - if they could be so termed - and Royce was generous, at least, while they were graspers.

It didn't fully apply to Dayland, who had begun to throw away money as he approached a state of senile

boredom; but Walstead had remained a complete tightwad. Margo was just about to ask Royce how he rated Alexander Marne, when the telephone bell rang,

The call was for Margo. Royce thought that Cranston was on the wire, but it proved to be Harry, phoning from the studio below. He told her that he had just received word from The Shadow; that crime was scheduled at Walstead's, instead of Royce's. The agents were leaving for a trip uptown to Walstead's, to block off any Chinese who might escape the police.

"I understand," returned Margo. "Everything is all right here. I was worried over nothing. I was mistaken about the things I mentioned."

Subtly, Margo was telling Harry that there weren't any jewels in the studio. She couldn't go into the fake angle; she simply let Harry conclude that Royce had brought something other than jewels in his satchel, which amounted to the same thing.

Harry had been about to say that he would leave Hawkeye on watch outside the building, but Margo's assurance told him that no emergency measure would be needed, though The Shadow had ordered such, if necessary.

Royce heard Margo's comments, and smiled. He misinterpreted her words, which was exactly what Margo wanted him to do. Knowing that Margo suspected that he might switch from the princess theme, with its burdening jewels and costumes, Royce supposed that she had expressed her doubts to Cranston, who had accordingly called to make sure that Royce had kept his original idea.

It didn't occur to Royce that Cranston had personally allayed Margo's doubts, beforehand. Correctly, Cranston had judged that Royce's new customer, Walstead, lacked Dayland's interest in art, and would be interested only in paintings that emphasized his one love, jewels.

POSING Margo upon a small platform, Royce told her to balance slightly to the right and let her arms relax downward, with the weight of the heavy bangles carrying them. At best, the pose was difficult, and Royce added that Margo could rest as often as she chose. Returning to his easel, he began a preliminary sketch.

"This will all be wasted on Walstead," said Royce moodily. "I could heap those jewels on the table, paint them like a basket of fruit, and still please Walstead. But I couldn't put my interest into it. When I've finished this portrait, those fake gems will look as real to Walstead as any he ever saw."

Margo was looking across the room, to a table where her handbag lay. She'd just remembered that it contained the revolver that Cranston had told her to bring. She should have thought of the gun earlier, though she doubted that she could have tucked it in the folds of her rather filmy costume without Royce noticing it. An easier plan would be simply to have the bag handy; but that no longer mattered.

Royce's studio was the wrong place for crime. Shang Chou knew it, Margo had learned it, and the fact had reached The Shadow. He was on his way from Chinatown to the right place: Walstead's apartment. Should Chinese desperadoes attack the police stationed there, The Shadow and his agents would mop up the raiders.

This trip to Royce's studio was no longer an adventure for Margo Lane; instead, it was beginning to prove a bore. From the way the bracelets were beginning to tire her arms, she wished she'd never heard of Java or its princesses. Of all the ways that Margo might have helped The Shadow in his campaign against crime, this was the wrong choice.

Gazing across the studio, Margo saw its door move open and hoped that it signified the arrival of a party

guest. That, at least, would relieve the monotony. A figure came into sight, beckoning to another. Then, with a quick move, the figure jerked about as another bobbed in beside it.

Both were men who wore loose jackets, the kind that Margo had seen before, with yellow faces above them. These intruders had such faces, and their hands were yellow, too. Yellow hands with glittering revolvers.

Shang Chou's raiders!

Yes, Margo Lane had made the wrong choice in coming to Royce's studio. So had these Chinese, for they had chosen a place where only worthless gems abounded. But those wrong choices nullified each other. Futile though both might prove, Margo was experiencing her adventure; the Chinese were satisfying their urge for crime.

Someone else had made the choice that was really wrong: The Shadow, when he had accepted Chenma's word that crime would strike tonight at another place than this!

CHAPTER XII. FORCED MURDER

BEFORE Margo could gasp a warning to Royce, he heard the clatter at the door and turned. By then, there were more than two Chinese. There were four, spreading in fan-wise, with their leveled guns.

Margo saw Royce's hand dip to his smock pocket, then twist away and come upward into sight.

He was armed, but he couldn't hope to beat four marksmen to the shot, even though they were the sort who made a fetish of wasting their first trigger tug on an empty cartridge chamber. At least, Royce accomplished something; by deftly diverting his hand, he managed to cover the fact that he had his own gun in his pocket.

Margo's hands were coming up, too. They didn't lift automatically, like Royce's. Her arms, already tired by the weight of the bangles, almost refused to budge. Margo finally brought her hands shoulder high and held them there. Hopelessly, she thought of her own gun, tucked away in the handbag so far from reach.

More than she even realized, Margo was the center of the show. Royce had focused lights upon the platform, to make the jewels glitter to the full. The rest of the studio was comparatively dim, and the Chinese, acting as they had at Dayland's, were keeping to the darkness. Their faces, as Margo saw them, were scarcely more than yellow blurs.

While one held Royce covered, another stole up behind him and prodded the artist with a gun. Royce stepped back as though the weapon drew him, and while Margo was viewing the odd effect, she was treated to it, too.

A Chinese slid right in back of her and nudged her with his revolver. But Margo's back steps were stopped by a forward shove. They wanted her off the platform and over by the table.

Other Chinese were peering in from the doorway, grinning at what they saw. Margo realized that they were guarding the stairway to make sure they wouldn't be disturbed. One thing, however, was evident: from the way the Chinese eyed the gems that Margo wore, they seemed to believe that the jewels were real. The quicker Margo let them take the imitations, the sooner this ordeal would be over, and the less chance that they would discover the falsity of the gems.

So Margo extended her hands, inviting the Chinese to come and get the rings she wore. Two men bounded forward and grabbed at them. Margo was tempted to double her fists and let them have the

rings, brass-knuckle fashion, for their heads were bowed and their chins conveniently at hand. But that would have settled only two of them, even if Margo's punches had scored.

Flinging the rings into the open satchel, the two Chinese clutched Margo's shoulders and swept their hands right down her arms, carrying bangles and bracelets in a metallic clutter. They were banging those into the satchel, too, when Margo realized that a gun was no longer pressing her. But it was only because the man behind her was unhooking the jeweled belt.

He flung that trophy to the others, and the gun came back more emphatic than ever, for it was pressing Margo instead of the belt, and its muzzle chilled like ice.

Remembering the cameo earrings, Margo clutched them, hoping to loosen them and hand them over, rather than have them wrenched away. The Chinese let her have her way. They gabbled at the man with the gun, and he stepped aside. Then, just as Margo was extending the earrings, the two Chinese shoved her into the easy-chair that was behind her.

As Margo sprawled, she looked up and saw the leering Chinaman who held the gun. His head blocked off the light, and his face, darkened and contorted, had the glare of a demon's.

He plucked the earrings from Margo's open hands, while his companions hauled the bangles from her ankles, flinging away the slippers that came with them. The two turned to toss the anklets in the satchel, and the gunner reached around to give them the earrings. He was watching Margo, but his eyes had lowered from her face.

His gaze was on the tooth-shaped pendant that hung from the imitation necklace. The jade was real; the rubies imitation; and though, so far, these Chinese had treated all the jewelry as real, this man, for some reason, preferred the pendant. He jabbed his hand for it; then, with a slit-eyed glance at Margo's face, he let his fingers creep up and take the necklace, instead.

He was drawing Margo up from the chair, as his hand moved around her neck to find the clasp of the necklace. But he had given away his preference for the jade pendant, and he knew that Margo had guessed it.

As she reached her feet, Margo understood those glinting eyes still more.

They meant murder!

Dayland's death, those others, had not been done in heat of crime. They were premeditated murders, to seal the lips of men who might have mentioned some certain item lost along with other gems. By the same token, Royce was already marked to die, and Margo, by recognizing something that she shouldn't have, would share the same fate, if nothing intervened.

Across the Chinaman's shoulder, Margo saw two others beside the table; not far away, a fourth was peering from behind Royce, more interested in Margo than in his own prisoner. A glance toward the door showed Margo that the guarding Chinese were all outside.

Margo saw her chance and took it. Swaying slightly beside the chair, she took a step to catch herself and purposely stubbed her toe against the chair leg. Her cry was very genuine, sufficient to make her sudden wrench appear the same. It was a quick wrench, away from the Chinaman's hand, and it did what Margo wanted.

As the Chinaman clutched the necklace, it broke, not at the snap but somewhere along the string. Red beads flew like hailstones, glittering as beautifully as real rubies would have. The jade pendant fell, too,

and the Chinaman with the gun went after it, while the others dropped to their knees to scoop up the fake rubies. Even the man who was guarding Royce took a few steps forward.

Shrieking for Royce to use his gun, Margo sprang for the other table and grabbed her handbag. She was dashing elsewhere, when she yanked the bag open and peeled it from the revolver. By then, guns were beginning to chatter, and Margo, skidding when a scatter rug went out from under her, heard a bullet ping the wall above her.

Royce was in one corner, flinging easels as he fired; Margo was in another, spilled so suddenly that she had lost her gun. Chinese were lunging for both of them, snarling threats of instant death, when the greater challenge came.

Double was that mighty challenge, with its shuddering mockery and the blast of two big automatics. Never had The Shadow's laugh, nor his gunfire, been a more welcome duet to the ears of Margo Lane. New bullets were bashing the walls, as close to the Chinese gunners as The Shadow could fire without clipping Royce or Margo.

Scattering wildly, the Chinese flung themselves about to focus all guns on The Shadow. Others were springing in from the hallway door. They had The Shadow spotted; he had come from the little dressing room, having reached it by way of Harry's studio. Margo, by leaving the window open, had aided his timely arrival.

But The Shadow had wheeled too far from that door to get back to its shelter. It wasn't misjudgment on his part; he couldn't retire without leaving Margo and Royce in jeopardy.

Again, the empty clicking of Chinese guns had given The Shadow a brief advantage; but that was all past. At best, he could only blast a shot from each gun before revolvers spurted his way. So The Shadow fired them, not at his foemen but at the two lamps which threw their glare upon the posing platform.

The lamps crashed and their lights were gone. The studio became a haze of gloom, for those were the only lights, except for a glow that trickled through the frosted skylight. The Shadow's laugh, answering the blaze of enemy guns, might have been anywhere in the semidarkness. Certainly, it wasn't where his foemen aimed.

Any moment, The Shadow might have tongued a sharp return; but he was purposely withholding fire. He knew that the Chinese would expect him to draw their own fire from Royce and Margo; likewise, the Chinese would seek to finish The Shadow first, and settle the lesser victims later.

The Shadow crossed that up by wheeling first to Margo's corner, where he pressed her to the shelter of the costume closet, at the same time whispering for her not to use her gun, which he had just found.

Then, with a long, low fling, The Shadow went almost beneath the muzzles of the Chinese guns, as they kept up their probing barrage to the far walls of the studio, near the extinguished lights.

Reaching Royce, he shoved the artist under a heavy table, which The Shadow then tilted as a shield. He didn't have to tell Royce not to use his gun; it was already emptied from wild and wasted shots.

As he turned from his second safety spot, The Shadow heard the Chinese barrage slacken. He gave another of his taunting laughs, the kind that couldn't be located in the dark.

It was necessary, that challenge. Gunners had begun to believe that they had felled The Shadow, and would therefore start to aim for other corners where Margo and Royce were partly protected, but where The Shadow, himself, could be found. He wanted them to know that his turn was about to come, and

with it, keep them shooting the wrong way, until his stabs began to wing them.

The Chinese took the laugh more literally. To a man, the Oriental gunners couldn't understand how The Shadow had escaped their fire, unless he happened to be bulletproof. They didn't wait to probe the darkness further.

Four in a pile, they flung themselves out through the wide door just as The Shadow's guns began to thunder. Clatters from the stairway told that they were going down pell-mell, the other Chinese with them.

THE SHADOW issued a quick command to Royce and Margo. Neither was to venture from safety until he returned. They heard a swish, saw a patch of fleeting blackness, as the cloaked fighter went through the doorway in pursuit of the Chinese.

Wild clatter faded from far downstairs, followed by the trail of The Shadow's laugh. He was keeping his enemies on the run, so they couldn't turn and tackle him from ambush.

Margo heard Royce come from his corner. He reached a table and turned on a light, whereupon Margo hurried from the costume closet with a warning cry. His normal coolness returned, Royce simply smiled at the girl's cry and gestured toward the mirror, which had been near enough to Royce's corner to escape the barrage meant for The Shadow.

Pausing, Margo saw why Royce had smiled. She was, indeed, a wreck, with her jewels gone, her slippers missing, and her hair strewn over her eyes. Her tunic was awry, and the gauzy leggings were tattered from Margo's slide along the floor.

Deciding that she could prove as cool as Royce, Margo began to preen herself at the mirror, and Royce, obliging as ever, relieved her of the gun she carried, so she would have both hands to fix her hair.

When Margo looked for Royce, a few moments later, she saw him in the mirror. He was over by a window, leaning out, with Margo's revolver ready in his hand. At the same time, Margo heard a mad clatter coming up from the sidewalk below. The racing Chinese had reached the street ahead of The Shadow, and were still in full flight.

Heedless of Margo's call, Royce brandished his gun from the window. He brayed derision at the fugitives. One, at least, must have stopped, for Royce stretched farther out and began to pepper him with the gun.

Seeing folly in his action, Margo scampered across the studio and made a grab for Royce's shoulder, to draw him back. She was just too late.

A gun barked from below. The ascending whine of its speeding bullet finished as Royce's body jolted right up into Margo's grasp. Then dead weight was slipping from her grip, even though Margo climbed half through the window, to hold back Royce's bulk.

His body turned and hung sideward, over the ledge; Royce's face, its heavy features set in a sickly grin, looked up at Margo with glassy eyes.

Blood was dripping from his shirt front - tiny blobs of it, that fell upon a nerveless hand whose opening fingers let Margo's gun go from them, to drop to the street below. It was the metallic echo of the landing weapon that really brought Margo's numbed senses back to understanding.

Tragedy had stalked in the wake of victory, because of Royce's foolhardy effort to resume a gun duel with the invaders who had quite easily escaped his short-range fire. At long range, Royce had not only

shown greater inefficiency, but had laid himself open for a demonstration of a foeman's skill.

Across the street, a gloating Chinese gunner was still pointing a smoking revolver upward.

The Shadow had saved the life of Burton Royce, only to have the rescued man force murder upon himself!

CHAPTER XIII. THE BOXED TRAIL

FROM a doorway below, The Shadow was wheeling out into the street in quest of the departing Chinese. He didn't stop on the lighted steps; instead, he cleared them at a bound and cut over to darkness across the street.

Darkness that offered a basement shelter that might be needed, if the fugitives were taking their only chance to spring an ambush.

Not a shot came The Shadow's way. He heard only the scurrying of feet from the darkness farther along his side of the street. Looking in that direction, The Shadow caught the glint of a revolver, pointing upward, a wisp of smoke curling from it. Like the hand that held it, and the yellow face just above it, the gun slid down behind a pair of steps, some fifty feet away.

The gunner hadn't seen The Shadow. He'd been looking upward. Following the angle that the gun had shown, The Shadow saw the studio window, with Royce hanging from it. He saw Margo, too.

Quite oblivious to all below, she was crouched on the window ledge, trying her utmost to haul Royce's motionless form back into the studio. Against the light that Royce had turned on, the brunette was clearly outlined.

Snapping his gun upward, The Shadow fired. His shot crashed a windowpane three feet above Margo's head. In a twinkling, her shapely figure vanished from the ledge. Margo had dived back into the studio, thinking that Royce's assassin was taking aim at her.

The guess was not far wrong, for another gun spoke amid the echoes of The Shadow's shot. It spurted from beyond the other steps, and its slug whined through the space where Margo had been. Unable to clip the killer who was aiming Margo's way, The Shadow had fired a quick-enough warning to send the girl from danger.

The frustrated assassin was off to new flight, keeping close to the house walls as he took to the direction his friends had gone. The Shadow was after him, driving bullets that should have scored, but didn't. One shot ricocheted from stone steps; another clanged an iron fence rail hidden in the darkness of a basement entry. The third bashed the frame of a doorway just as the bloused killer went through the door itself.

At least, the third shot revealed the rathole through which the Chinese had fled, with the satchel load of loot from Royce's. The Shadow wasn't many yards behind, but he paused as he reached the doorway, because he saw the lights of a police car wheel the corner.

For once, The Shadow wanted those lights to spot him. He fired a shot in the air, and as the car stopped, with its glare fixed upon him, The Shadow went through the door, slamming it behind him.

He hoped that the police would have sense enough to know that he was going through the block. In that case, the car would speed around the block and cut off the Chinese. Keeping to his own route, The Shadow dashed through an empty store, across a courtyard, where he spotted a door on the other side.

He spotted it by a gun muzzle poking through its crack, and he made a side sweep to avoid it. The gun

gave a belated spat; the door was promptly slammed and barred. But The Shadow wasn't wasting time on doors. He crashed right through a basement window, carrying away sash and all.

Another door was slamming, and this time The Shadow had to blast it. He knocked its lock off with a single shot, ripped another bullet through the center of the door to scare away men beyond it, then threw his full weight on the barrier in an attempt to lunge through before his enemies could rally.

It took three jolts to make the door give way, because things were piled against it from the other side. Heaving through, The Shadow scattered a great mass of bulging bags that were light but well packed.

He saw a counter, sprang past it and looked around. He was in the front room of a little Chinese laundry, which was apparently open, for the place was lighted.

No fugitives were in sight, however, so The Shadow sped out from the basement laundry and up into the street. The police car was coming by, but it didn't stop. Instead, it was after a car that had started from farther down the street.

In the wake of the police car came a cab, that shrieked to a stop when its driver saw the red blink of a tiny flashlight.

IMMEDIATELY, The Shadow was in Moe Shrevnitz's cab and active in the chase, one of the strangest that he had ever undertaken.

This was Greenwich Village, the part of it where the streets were winding. So winding that, as Moe described it later, you couldn't go fast without having a head-on collision with yourself, coming around the wrong corner.

These streets seemed made to order for an escaping car, but such was not the case. The very factor which should have helped the fugitives, tended toward their downfall. No matter how well they threaded, there was always a chance that pursuers, through luck or design, would suddenly come across their path again,

The Shadow left the job to Moe, who had acquainted himself with the entire area. Moe was wheeling out and in again, playing a game of ring-around-the-rosy that meant business well as fun. For it happened that this section, by virtue of its troublesome streets, demanded more patrol cars than most. Attracted by reports of gunfire, police were wheeling in from many angles.

Each time Moe identified a new police car, he assigned it to a portion of the area, and sped to another spot. All the while, distant sirens were approaching, telling that more patrols were coming up. At last, when Moe was zimming back toward Royce's, he heard a whispered laugh from within the cab and knew exactly what it meant.

Unless the Chinese had luckily slipped the fast-forming cordon, they were boxed in. The Shadow knew, because, by this time, he was in the same situation. So were others, for when Moe wheeled into the street in front of Royce's, they found a cluster of cars that must have entered the area during the chase.

Police were ordering their occupants to step out, to learn if any were Chinese. None was.

Most of them were guests invited to Royce's studio party, and the police showed them special favor. So The Shadow decided to become one of the same. He stepped from Moe's cab in the guise of Lamont Cranston, and nodded to acquaintances who greeted him.

Two men, had already learned a few things that had happened, and were telling the rest. The two were Errol Garvin and Don Feldon.

"They say that Burton Royce was murdered," stated Garvin. "Chinese again, the same as with Herb Dayland. No wonder we haven't been able to spot that bunch around Chinatown! They weren't there; they were here!"

"A lot of people saw them," added Feldon. "They ran along this street and into the next, where they were operating from a Chinese laundry. A couple of customers who had just left the laundry saw the Chinese jump into a car and get away."

Casually, Cranston inquired if anyone had actually witnessed Royce's death. Both Garvin and Feldon nodded.

"Margo Lane did," said Garvin. "She was up in the studio, posing in a costume with a lot of jewels."

"Royce's whole collection," explained Feldon. "Worth as much as Dayland's. The Chinese made her shed them, and took the whole lot."

It developed that Margo had phoned the police from the studio, and that Inspector Cardona had arrived to take charge of the case. As a friend of the police commissioner, Cranston took the privilege of going up to the studio. He found Margo giving a graphic account of the battle there, with an exact description of Royce's death.

After recording the details, Cardona suggested a trip to the laundry where the Chinese had fled. There was no delay in starting, because Margo was wearing her own clothes instead of the Javanese costume.

"Quick work, Margo," Cranston complimented, on the way downstairs. "You must have had to hurry, getting dressed before Cardona arrived."

"Not at all," replied Margo. "I changed back from the princess getup before I phoned the police."

THEY reached the Chinese laundry, and there Cardona questioned the proprietor, who was huddled in a chair, his head wrapped in an improvised bandage.

He said his name was Wang Wu, that he didn't live in Chinatown, and that he had never seen the Chinese who invaded his premises during their flight.

He used the word "never" in a very full sense, because, according to Wang Wu, the invaders had piled in from the rear room, slugged him before he could turn around, and had rolled him under the counter, where he awakened to find himself buried beneath a heap of laundry bags.

A patrolman corroborated the finish of Wang Wu's statement. He had found Wang Wu crawling out, very groggy. Nevertheless, Cardona decided to hold the laundryman, as the first suspect of Chinese nationality that the police had managed to arrest, even as a mere witness to any phase of the recent crime wave.

Residents of this section were crowded outside the laundry door, and some of them came in to report what they had seen. Most of those who spied the fleeing Chinese had spotted them on Royce's street. Everyone put in a good word for Wang Wu. When cross-examined, none of them could remember any mysterious Chinese who ever visited their local laundryman.

Some of the local people were rummaging among the laundry bags. They were looking for their own, since with Wang Wu under arrest, his shop would be closed and they would have to send their laundry elsewhere.

The patrolman told Cardona that he had already let half a dozen bags go out when people claimed them,

so Cardona let the newcomers take theirs.

He asked Wang Wu if he wanted to make sure that the customers took the right bags, but Wang Wu decided to leave it up to them. There wasn't any fakery on Wang Wu's part; he really had a headache from the slugging he had taken, and was in no mood to worry about anybody's wash.

Cardona decided to take Wang Wu to a hospital, instead of headquarters. He didn't hold Margo as a witness, but let her leave in Cranston's custody.

They were riding in Moe's cab, when Margo told Cranston about the falsity of Royce's gem collection, and as evidence, she supplied him with a few of the ruby beads that she had found on the floor.

Cranston tested one with a knife, found that it could be easily scratched. Judged by the necklace, Royce had spoken the truth when he said his jewels were imitations.

The matter of the jade pendant interested Cranston still more. He nodded his agreement, when Margo insisted that the tooth-shaped carving must have been the chief object they were after. Royce had been murdered because of it, in Cranston's opinion, but he doubted that Margo would be in future danger.

"Assuming that each victim owned a prize piece of jade," Cranston analyzed, "we can readily understand why the robbers committed murder, too. If one man had an inkling of the jade's real value, whatever it may be, others would have been forewarned by his testimony. Your life was threatened, Margo, because one raider suspected that you knew too much.

"Simply do not mention the jade pendant, and, as a minor precaution, say nothing about Royce's other jewels being false. Shang Chou has ways of learning whatever the police uncover. If they show ignorance on these subjects, he will presume that you had nothing to tell them."

Margo still had qualms, on the basis that she had been a witness both to the robbery and Royce's death. Cranston eased those qualms by reminding her that she had served in precisely the same capacity at Dayland's. He added, rather pointedly, that if Shang Chou decided to eliminate all persons who had seen his raiders in action, he would need a regiment of helpers.

One thing was certain: the Dragon Cult men were dealing death only where it counted, and Margo, by being discreet, could count herself out.

After dropping Margo at her apartment, Cranston rode to the Cobalt Club and chatted with Weston. Later, as The Shadow, he visited Dr. Tam. He learned two things that he expected - two things that were the same.

Neither the Chinatown police squad, nor Tam's patrollers, had discovered any absentees among the Chinese who wore the blouses favored by the Dragon Cult. Nor had Chinese been noticed moving out or into Chinatown before or after the robbery at Royce's studio.

LATER, in his sanctum, a hidden room lost in the heart of Manhattan, The Shadow let his hand appear beneath a bluish light. From that hand trickled three ruddy beads, the imitation rubies that Margo had given Cranston.

As the beads clattered onto a polished table top, the Shadow's laugh whispered through the black-walled sanctum.

Tonight, Margo Lane had supplied clues more valuable than she realized. Parts of an important pattern, they needed other facts to fit them. There was another girl who might supply the extra portions: a Manchu princess by the name of Chenma.

She had made a serious error this evening; one that The Shadow had partly amended by stopping off at Royce's studio on his trip to Walstead's apartment. Knowing Chenma, The Shadow was confident that she could explain her mistake.

More than that, she would by this time have obtained new information, The Shadow's course was therefore plain. He would take up Chenma's standing invitation to visit the hidden abode of Shang Chou.

CHAPTER XIV. BEFORE THE MEETING

IT was the third night since Royce's death, and The Shadow had not yet fulfilled his self-given promise of entering Shang Chou's headquarters. He was abiding by a wish expressed by Dr. Tam, who felt that such an excursion would be unwise.

They had come to an agreement on the question, The Shadow and Dr. Tam. It was this: that if they heard no word from Chenma by the third night, The Shadow would seek her out.

And this was the third night.

Reluctantly, Tam watched The Shadow leave the little office. No word had come from Chenma; hence The Shadow was on his way. Tam's own men were to guard the alley beneath the little window from which Chenma had tossed her last message, while their friend Ying Ko let himself down from the roof and effected a silent entry.

Not only silent, but unseen.

The evening's crop of Chinatown tourists, passing an obscure alley, looked curiously at the few Chinese who lounged there. Seeing nothing strange in the American garb of those Chinese, the sightseers glanced into the alley itself and totally failed to see a sight that was worth ten times the price of the bus trip.

A batlike shape of human proportions was hovering beneath the eaves of a projecting roof, but it was blended too closely with the blackness of the wall to be observed. Then, as that same blackness swallowed the shape in question, the panes of a little window gave a faint reflection of the street lights. It was as if the window had appeared suddenly in the wall.

By then, the last of the sightseers had passed the alley and were returning to their bus.

Deep within the abode of Shang Chou, Chenma was standing just within the doorway of her apartment, whispering to Tseng, the doorman. She was asking him if the meeting of the Dragon Cult was over. Solemnly, Tseng replied that it had not yet begun. Then, for the third night in succession, Chenma spoke chidingly to Tseng.

"Remember, Tseng," she said, "that we are in America. Though a Manchu, I have adopted American ways, and you must do the same. The next time you count 'One, two, three' - do it like this."

Chenma demonstrated with the newspaper clipping that bore the pictures of Walstead, Marne and Royce, from left to right, the order in which Chenma counted them. Lifting her finger, she pointed to the clipping and demanded:

"Now, show me Number One man."

Tseng's fingers stroked his scraggly beard. He pointed his forefinger at Walstead's picture, then shifted it and made a jab at Royce's, declaring triumphantly:

"Number One man!"

Chenma gave a nod, and sent Tseng away to tend his door. She was folding the clipping, to keep it for a later lesson, when she heard a whisper close beside her. Gloved fingers plucked the clipping and spread it. There was a grim tone to The Shadow's whispered laugh.

He saw, without further inquiry, why Chenma's last tip-off had been wrong. Tseng had counted faces in the Manchu style, numbering them from right to left. Chenma was not to blame. Nor was she willing to lay the fault on Tseng.

"As always, Tseng was honest" Chenma told The Shadow, in an undertone. "But that is past. Much more is still to happen. I have kept a record of all that I have observed. There is time for you to see it before Shang Chou arrives."

"Time, in that case," insisted The Shadow, "to see the room where the Dragon Cult meets."

Chenma hesitated; then nodded. Leaving her own door, she conducted The Shadow through Shang Chou's apartment, into the secret meeting room. In subdued tone, she was telling him about the silver idol of power and the Well of Wisdom, pointing to them as she mentioned them. Then Chenma's gaze turned to a sheaf of paper slips upon a taboret.

"The ones that are marked with Shang Chou's symbol are important," explained Chenma. "Whoever receives one, must participate in crime. Those who receive blanks remain in Chinatown.

"Look at them, Ying Ko, and you will learn the number that Shang Chou will send to seek another piece of the Jade Dragon. I shall watch, in case Shang Chou returns."

HURRYING through Shang Chou's apartment, Chenma looked along the passage. She could hear the footsteps of arriving members of the Dragon-Cult men, so she hastened back to the meeting room.

The Shadow had finished examining the slips and had replaced them. Hearing Tseng open the main portal, to admit the first comers, The Shadow was coming through Shang Chou's own door when Chenma met him.

He closed the door and gestured Chenma to her apartment. On the way, he questioned what she had meant when she referred to the Jade Dragon. As rapidly as she could, Chenma told him. She wanted to show Ying Ko the record book, but he told her to keep it until later.

"If Shang Chou plots crime tonight," explained The Shadow, "there is no time to lose. I am almost certain who will be the coming victim. Nevertheless, Chenma, you must send the usual message to Dr. Tam. If I am wrong, he will notify me as soon as he hears from you."

Chenma understood. Hitherto, the Dragon Cult had moved too swiftly to be overtaken before the stroke of crime began. This was one time when The Shadow intended to be first.

Moving out to meet Tseng, Chenma was talking to the doorman when The Shadow's silent form glided past, unseen, as it took the passage leading back to the little window. She could not even tell Tseng that Ying Ko had visited these preserves. It was a secret that Chenma would entrust to no one but herself.

Learning that the last of the Dragon Cult men had entered the meeting room, Chenma hurried into her own apartment. She was there when Shang Chou arrived. The dragon master informed her that she was again to attend a meeting of his faithful followers. Willingly, Chenma accompanied Shang Chou to the meeting room.

There, Shang Chou's first act was to produce the Jade Dragon. Triumphant, he produced another segment and set it into place. This piece of jade differed from the rest. It was pointed, like a long tooth,

and it formed the tip of the dragon's tail. As the onlookers acclaimed, Shang Chou pointed to the single gap in the center of the dragon's body.

"Tonight, we shall fill that space," he declared emphatically. "After that, there will be but one more piece to gain, the head of the Jade Dragon. We shall reserve it until last. So listen, faithful followers, while I tell you of this evening's quest."

Listening, along with the cult members, Chenma hoped fervently that The Shadow had divined what was to come, for Shang Chou, even while he talked, was passing out the paper slips. Tonight, even Shang Chou had no time to lose.

If only The Shadow knew!

IN his Chinatown office, the worthy Dr. Tam was talking with faithful Lee Sook, who had proven so adept at picking up Chenma's last-minute messages. Tam was very worried, for Lee Sook had brought him serious news.

"No word from Ying Ko!" exclaimed Tam. "No one saw him enter or leave by Chenma's window. And now, while Ying Ko's absence is still unexplained, you bring word, Lee Sook, that the Dragon Cult men have left their places for a secret meeting with Shang Chou. Soon, they will be back, ready for new crime. If we only knew where to reach Ying Ko!"

Tam's statement ended emphatically upon the name that meant The Shadow. As though such mention stirred it, a whispered laugh crept through the office. Dr. Tam looked up, while Lee Sook turned, startled. There was no need to reach The Shadow. He had reached them.

"I left before the meeting," The Shadow told Tam, calmly, thereby announcing that he had been to Shang Chou's. "First, I shall send a warning to the place where crime most logically will strike" - he was reaching for the telephone - "and then I shall travel there. Send Lee Sook to pick up another message from Chenma, in case I should be wrong."

While Tam was dismissing Lee Sook, The Shadow called the apartment of Louis Walstead. Coming back from the door, Tam heard the black-cloaked caller inquire for Inspector Cardona, but the voice The Shadow used was that of Lamont Cranston. Instead of Cardona, Commissioner Weston came to the phone.

"Hello, Cranston," The Shadow heard Weston say. "I came over here to relieve Inspector Cardona. I'm expecting Alexander Marne. He phoned me at the club, said Walstead wanted to talk to us this evening. What it's about, Marne doesn't know. Why don't you come over, too?"

"I might," returned Cranston, "if I thought it would prove important. Why don't you ask Walstead, first?"

"I haven't seen him yet," Weston answered, "but you've given me a good idea. I'll use your call as an excuse. Walstead is in his study, and I didn't want to disturb him before Marne arrived. Hold the line, Cranston."

The next two minutes were painfully slow, trying even The Shadow's patience, but the result they brought was startling. Weston's voice suddenly came across the wire, charged with excitement. He was trying to shout a dozen things at once.

"Walstead isn't here!" he exclaimed. "Gone from the study, nobody knows where! He didn't tell Cardona, the servants, or anybody. Walked right out on us!"

"You had detectives posted, commissioner -"

"They were watching for people coming in, not going out." Weston couldn't waste time on interruptions. "There was a cab leaving when I came. Maybe Walstead took it. Wait -"

The pause was short. During it, The Shadow heard muttered sounds from Weston's end of the line. Then:

"He's gone to the Pan-Occidental Steamship pier!" Weston fairly shouted. "The liner Canopus leaves in an hour, and he's on it. One of the servants just found a note he left for Marne, on the table in the hall. The receipt for the steamship ticket was an Marne's desk. Stateroom BX. I'll meet you there, Cranston -"

Weston cut himself off by hanging up, but The Shadow's receiver landed almost as soon. Turning to Tam, The Shadow told him the latest development. He was stepping toward the door as he spoke, and he paused only long enough to add:

"This fits with my belief that Shang Chou is after Walstead. Somehow, Walstead has been drawn from safety into danger. If Chenma amends this opinion, Tam, you will know where to reach me."

From The Shadow's grim tone, Dr. Tam was sure that the opinion would not be amended. As The Shadow left, Tam hurried downstairs, too. He saw only a sweep of blackness, leaving by the lower door, and when Tam reached the street, even that hazy outline had vanished. Tam saw a cab spurt away from across the street, thought that he caught the trail of a parting laugh.

A laugh which could have been meant for certain men who did not hear it. Men whom Tam saw after The Shadow's cab had wheeled a corner of a street leading out of Chinatown. Those men were bland-faced Chinese, reappearing in shop windows or coming from doorways, where they had been paying visits.

They were the Dragon Cult men, just returning from the meeting with Shang Chou. They looked like the cult members who had been delegated to handle the alibi angle; but that very fact, by Tam's analysis, proved that the crime-bound members of Shang Chou's clan had not yet started.

This alibi business could not be cut too thin. Always, crafty Dragon Cult men had fixed it nicely for the others. If The Shadow had chosen the right goal, he would find success; of that, Tam was sure. But the question of The Shadow's choice bothered Tam while he went up to his office, and for five long minutes more.

At the end of that period, Lee Sook appeared and tendered Tam a slip of folded rice paper Tam's fingers were actually nervous as they opened Chenma's message. Then, as the worthy doctor fixed his eyes upon the name the note contained, his lips formed a very happy smile.

The name was Louis Walstead.

Turning to Lee Sook, Dr. Tam gave a solemn nod, which stated, as plainly as words, that this was to be The Shadow's night of victory.

Crime was on its way, but The Shadow had ridden ahead!

CHAPTER XV. DEATH GREETES THE SHADOW

DESPITE the numerous lights upon it, the steamship pier showed many stretches of darkness, enough to furnish a perfect path to the gangway. The Shadow knew, because he chose those splotchy areas as soon as he left Moe's cab.

His final strides took him under the black side of the steamship Canopus, from where he studied, to find the quickest way to get on board.

There were several prospects, but the quickest was the gangway. The best, too, thanks to a turn of circumstances. It happened that almost all the passengers had gone on board the Canopus, while it would be some time before the call came for "All Ashore!"

A ship's officer, at the bottom of the gangway, had stepped away to look toward the shore end of the pier, where a commotion had begun upon the arrival of some automobiles. There was a steward at the upper end of the gangplank, but some passengers were demanding his attention

It was a timely moment, so The Shadow took the rare opportunity. Around the end of the gangplank, he was a part of the night itself, swooping on board the liner.

A deckhand saw blackness end its glide, and gave his shoulders a puzzled shrug. Passengers heard a swish behind them and looked around, but they didn't see the shape that went through a companionway.

A professional stowaway would have envied The Shadow's arrival on the Canopus, the cloaked investigator wasn't playing a stowaway's role. Instead of heading toward the hold, he chose a stairway that led to the deluxe cabins, those that bore letters instead of numbers.

He was getting close to BX, when a steward came plodding in from the end of the corridor. The Shadow swished into a little side passage to let the steward pass.

Sometimes a trivial delay could produce irrevocable consequences. This was one of those times. So far, The Shadow had not seen a trace of doubtful visitors on board the Canopus. Indeed, in his careful style, he had given no one the benefit of any doubt. He'd taken sight of respectable faces, on the chance that he might spy unwanted ones among them.

There had been none. To all appearances, The Shadow had outraced the speediest men that Shang Chou could send. Even though BX was the first door past the side passage, it was good policy to pause and let the steward go by. The Shadow did not want any troublesome run-in with members of the ship's crew. He wanted to talk to Louis Walstead, alone.

Of course, there was a chance that the steward might be a fake. If so, it was all the better to wait. He'd give himself away, if he stopped at the door of Stateroom BX, which was another reason why The Shadow waited.

The steward didn't stop at Walstead's door; but, for that matter, he didn't go by The Shadow's passage. Instead, he halted at the very corner of the passage, as if something had jolted him.

His quick stop was justified, for the sounds he heard were of a jolting sort. They were muffled gun shots, three of them, fired almost in unison from beyond the door marked "BX"!

The stiffened steward had just begun to turn about, when a human avalanche struck him. The Shadow had no time for courtesies, as he swept from the side passage. Nor did he need the steward's aid; rather, he preferred to bowl the fellow headlong from his path. For The Shadow was gripping a drawn automatic in one gloved hand, as he grabbed the stateroom door with the other.

The door shot inward before The Shadow could shove it. Yanked from the other side, it plunged The Shadow into the stateroom. He did not try to halt his drive; instead, he lengthened it.

Clearing a form that was slumping to the floor, he wound up with a full-about swing that brought him face to face with an ugly trio, who hadn't time to get their revolvers around.

DESPITE the dimness of the cabin, The Shadow saw yellow faces above the glitter of revolvers. Faces that were blurred, with thick black hair topping them. Eyes glared from those countenances - slitted eyes, that were all alike in viciousness. Moving lips were just visible, as they muttered snarling words in Chinese.

On the floor, a fallen man was groaning. His face was turned toward the corridor. Between two of the assassins who wore the Chinese jacket costumes, the entering light showed the stricken man to be Louis Walstead. From his moans, The Shadow knew that his wounds were mortal.

The Shadow laughed, nevertheless. But there was no mirth in his tone. It was meant for the three who faced him - men whose smoking revolvers were frozen in their fists, under the moving probe of The Shadow's automatic.

The laugh told that The Shadow was prepared for a long-sought climax. He was going to solve the riddle of the Chinese assassins who did the vanishing acts.

He could solve it by bagging the assassins in person. From the motion of his automatic, it looked like the big .45 would settle it in one-two-three style. The Shadow's laugh was a challenge that invited attack, with death as the reward for the first man who tried it.

As the attack came, The Shadow reversed his decision. He had calculated in terms of three, not four.

The fourth man, the attacker, was not a Chinese. He was the steward from the corridor. He was on the rebound quicker than The Shadow anticipated, and he heard the laugh, too. He'd also seen a mass of wheeling blackness as he sprawled; so, blindly, he went after blackness again, and found it.

Blackness in solid form. Lunging in from the door, the steward tripped across Walstead, gained impetus from his plunge, and caught The Shadow in a frantic grip just as the cloaked warrior whipped away!

Guns chattered. The Shadow's was first; he used it across the steward's shoulder, as they reeled away in a fashion that would have brought a sprawl, had they not bounced from the stateroom wall.

The shots were wild, the only sort that The Shadow could deliver from the midst of a spinning grapple, but they weren't as wild as the guns that responded.

The three killers, shouting wildly in Chinese, were not only ducking, but were doing other things, while they tried to blast The Shadow. One was springing out into the hall; another was stooping to grab up a suitcase, and follow; while the third was diving behind the door, planning to close it.

Away from the aim of guns, The Shadow was cutting in toward the doorway, when he and the steward floundered across a chair. His three foemen didn't wait for him to prop up on an elbow and clip them. The one in the corridor was shouting for the others, and they came. The second man was carrying the suitcase; the third pulled the door shut behind him.

Rolling the steward from him, The Shadow sprang to his feet, snatched open the door, and followed.

Passengers and visitors on board the Canopus were treated to as mad a race as could have been seen. They saw three Chinese, streaking as if all the imaginary devils of Old Cathay were after them. Three Chinese who went hurdling down the gangway, followed by a weird, pursuing laugh.

Witnesses couldn't see the thing that laughed, until it began to talk, too, with guns. Then their eyes were attracted to a black-cloaked shape that whirled upon the deck.

The Shadow wasn't shooting after the three fugitives. A human gun turret, he was blasting along the deck,

where other guns were answering from the hands of more Chinese, who ducked as they fired. How many more these numbered, no one was quite sure, though conservative estimates made it half a dozen.

These reserves accomplished two things. They diverted The Shadow's attack from the fugitives, and they saved their own hides, by making quick darts for the interior of the ship. Then, with a sudden laugh, The Shadow turned from the gangway and went after the Chinese on board the Canopus.

A look along the pier had shown him what the arriving cars meant. Commissioner Weston was here, with some detectives. They were capable of rounding up the three fugitives, while The Shadow settled those who were still on ship.

But Weston didn't prove as good a strategist as Cardona would have.

SEEING the fugitives duck toward the other end of the pier, Weston gestured his small squad toward the gangway to see if more were coming. A few Chinese appeared along the deck rails, made gun gestures at the police, and fled.

Then, hearing The Shadow's laugh again, Weston realized that those on board were being handled. He looked for the three fugitives; they were gone.

So were the Chinese on board the Canopus when The Shadow swung around the deck to find them. He ran into passengers who were pointing down to the water; others, who were picking up Chinese jackets and trousers. The scared tribe had peeled their outer garments and were making the quickest getaway available.

Down the gangplank, The Shadow saw a pouring flood of Americans, mostly frightened visitors, who wanted to get off the ship. Beyond, he saw other excited men, yelling to the police from near the end of the pier.

Weston arrived with the detectives, to find the same evidence of the fleeing Chinese that The Shadow had seen: jackets and trousers, flung in heaps.

Unable to get through the crowd to reach the gangway, The Shadow made for the stern of the Canopus. There, he watched the detectives blaze shots at bobbing shapes out in the river. The Shadow could have supplied a few shots, himself, and his fire would have shown the accuracy which the detectives did not display. But The Shadow did not fire.

The bobbing things were logs, tin cans, and other flotsam. There was not a Chinese among them. Good swimmers could do wonders with the hull of the Canopus sheltering them, and there were plenty of places for human water rats to go.

Alone on the stern of the steamship, The Shadow deliberately removed his cloak and hat and folded them together, as though he intended to dive overboard and swim beneath the pier in search of missing Chinese.

Instead, he simply slid his automatic into a holster deep beneath his dress coat. He had become Lamont Cranston, a gentleman in evening clothes, visiting on board the steamship Canopus.

Strolling to the gangway, Cranston watched the other visitors scurry from the pier. Americans, all, some of whom Cranston recognized as acquaintances, but not a Chinese among them.

Below, Cranston saw Weston meet a man who had just come to the pier. The arrival was Alexander Marne. The two approached the gangway, and when it cleared, they came on board.

Noting that both Weston and Marne were apprehensive, Cranston let his features show the same expression as he went with them to look for Walstead's stateroom. Marne had called Walstead's apartment to learn if Weston was there, and had been told about the note that Walstead left for him. Hearing that Weston had gone to the pier, Marne had hurried there, too.

In State room BX, the three found Walstead's body. The steward was crouched beside the dead man; he looked up and shook his head. Walstead had tried to moan a few words, the steward said, but hadn't been able to make them coherent. The dying statement might have been something about a suitcase the Chinese had taken with them.

"Walstead's jewels!" exclaimed Marne. "He talked about them this afternoon, commissioner. He said they weren't safe in his apartment; that he was going to put them some place better."

"Which he did," added Weston grimly. "Right into the hands of those Chinese robbers!"

"If he'd only told me he was coming here," asserted Marne, "instead of writing a note and leaving it! He'd been talking about taking a cruise, but he hadn't said when he was going, or where. I thought I'd find him at the apartment, this evening."

"So did I," affirmed Weston. "Instead, we've found him here and look at the greeting he has given us!"

Weston was referring to the death stare on Walstead's face, an expression that seemed to register both horror and despair. Noting it, Marne gave a slow, sad nod.

There were other eyes, however, that met Walstead's glassy stare. They were the eyes of The Shadow. Peering from the calm features of Cranston, those eyes seemed to interpret Walstead's fixed gaze. Death was greeting The Shadow, in no uncertain terms.

It was death that demanded vengeance of the sort that only The Shadow could deliver. In return, instead of a whispered laugh, The Shadow delivered the thinnest of smiles in the style of Lamont Cranston.

That smile told that Walstead's death would be avenged. The Shadow, hereafter, could toy with the schemes of Shang Chou.

The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVI. THE DRAGON'S BROOD

WITHIN her door, Chenma was watching, listening, for signs of anyone who might approach. She wasn't merely fearful that Shang Chou would arrive; tonight, she didn't want even Tseng to come. Much though she trusted the Manchu doorman, Chenma did not want him to glimpse her present visitor.

That visitor was Ying Ko, The Shadow.

A day had passed since the death of Louis Walstead and the disappearance of the Chinese who had murdered him. All last night the police had scoured Chinatown, and had continued their search the next day.

By dusk, the vigil had begun to relax, though it would not have deterred The Shadow in his present visit. Coming to confer with Chenma, he simply reported the outside situation as a matter of course.

At present, The Shadow was reading Chenma's diary. Hearing a whispered comment, the girl turned from the door. The Shadow was asking her about the meeting nights.

"Always, Tseng reports when the meetings begin," declared Chenma. "As I have written it, Ying Ko."

"But sometimes you have heard early comers -"

"Yes when Shang Chou needs workers here. Tseng tells me that Shang Chou had been drawing the barriers tighter."

The Shadow studied the diary again, then asked Chenma if she thought that Shang Chou mistrusted Tseng. Chenma's headshake was not a negative; instead, it expressed doubt.

"Shang Chou sees Tseng privately," Chenma explained. "I have never been present to observe them. Sometimes, Shang Chou sends me to look for Tseng; often, Tseng tells me to wait here because Shang Chou intends to visit me. Never, however, does Shang Chou let us be together in his presence. Perhaps it is because he knows that we are both Manchus."

The Shadow put the diary back in its hiding place. Chenma had told him that Tseng expected the Dragon Cult to meet quite soon, and was already at his door. The Shadow suggested that Chenma tell him it would not be necessary to let her know when the meeting began, so the girl went out to do so.

When she returned, she saw The Shadow beckoning her toward Shang Chou's own apartment. They went through to the silver door that led into the meeting room.

There, on the taboret, lay the slips of paper which Shang Chou always distributed among the Dragon Cult men. On the previous night, The Shadow had gone through those slips to see how many bore the mark of Shang Chou, the symbol designating those who were to participate in coming crime.

As before, The Shadow picked up the slips and studied them. Watching from the silver door, Chenma was sure that she heard a whispered laugh come from his lips. At least, The Shadow was learning how many of Shang Chou's followers were to embark upon another crime.

Chenma decided, however, that it would not help him much, since he could not know which men would be chosen. That was always decided by lot, after Shang Chou shuffled the paper tokens.

Yet there was something in The Shadow's subdued tone that made Chenma believe he had made a real discovery. As he laid the slips aside and began to turn her way, Chenma stepped forward. Her tiny hand was in a fold of her quaint robe, clutching a small revolver.

As she approached The Shadow, she threw a glance toward the main door of the meeting room. Then, before The Shadow realized that the girl was close; even before he could reach for one of his own guns, Chenma's voice rang out harshly:

"Stand as you are, Ying Ko! I have trapped you, and if you move, I shall kill you!"

His figure riveted, The Shadow let his eyes travel the rest of the way about. They saw the glitter of Chenma's gun, aimed straight between them. In the girl's own eyes was a glare that matched the harshness of her voice. There was only one way to read that expression.

Chenma, the girl in whom The Shadow had placed absolute trust, had turned complete traitor at this crucial time when the arrival of Shang Chou and his followers was imminent!

From The Shadow's lips crept a throbbing laugh. It could have been interpreted as mock appreciation, as though The Shadow admired cunning, even when displayed by a traitor. So, at least, a foe would have interpreted it, though a friend could have felt that the appreciation was valid.

Therefore, the laugh was meant for Chenma, as she side-stepped to block The Shadow from any escape toward the main door. For, beyond the girl, The Shadow saw other faces at the portal, a dozen of them, yellow and glaring, that represented Shang Chou's followers, the men of the Dragon Cult!

They were thrusting Tseng aside so that they could enter, and in their fists flashed guns and knives. Nor were these all; a greater flood was coming. Their surge, violent and vicious, was evidence of their desire to heap penalty upon The Shadow for his illegal intrusion to their meeting room.

Quick work on Chenma's part!

She'd forgotten that Tseng would admit the members in his usual prompt style. She'd miscalculated, too, the time remaining before the meeting. By her own mistakes, Chenma had put The Shadow on the spot, and had taken the only way to rectify the error. A way which few, except The Shadow, would have realized as the method of a stanch, quick-thinking friend!

First to spy the Dragon Cult men, the Manchu girl had beaten them to their prey. Artfully had she brought The Shadow to bay; then made the quick move to corner him. In so doing, Chenma had blocked off The Shadow's real enemies; they couldn't touch him while she was in the way. Moreover, with true Manchu pride, she was gesturing them away from the object of her capture.

"We shall await Shang Chou," declared Chenma. "Meanwhile, if Ying Ko wishes" - her tone was biting - "he can try to explain what brought him here."

The Shadow saw Tseng in the corridor; watched the doorman hesitate, then close the portal. Chenma hadn't been able to call in the only man she regarded as an ally. In bluffing the Dragon Cult members she had been forced to do the same with Tseng. But Chenma, by her offer to let The Shadow speak, was doing the best thing possible. The sarcasm in her tone was false, as it had been in The Shadow's laugh.

For The Shadow did speak, in terms the glaring listeners began to understand.

He took the one theme that he knew would impress them: the fact that in choosing an honest quest, they had besmirched their very excellent reputations. The Shadow had no fault to find with their campaign to reclaim the Jade Dragon; indeed, to the wonderment of the Dragon Cult men, he endorsed it.

"You should have come to Ying Ko," spoke The Shadow in Chinese. "He would have restored the Jade Dragon, by persuading its wrongful owners to yield the trophies which were not truly theirs. Yes, I, Ying Ko, would have regained the symbol of ancient China, but not as Shang Chou did.

"He used it as a means to force you into crime, with wholesale robbery and death. Robbery from which he profited; murder which drove you deeper into evil!"

The Shadow paused; as he did, Chenma was elated by the approving buzz that came from the listeners. Then;

"You were duped," The Shadow added. "You are fearful because Shang Chou has thrown guilt upon you. But I, Ying Ko, can prove your innocence -"

It was Chenma who interrupted, at a moment as crucial as before; a moment when The Shadow, with a few more words, could have won the majority of the Dragon Cult men to his cause.

She interrupted by springing around beside The Shadow and jabbing the point of her gun beneath his arm.

"One word more, Ying Ko," raged Chenma, "and you shall die, as I promised before!"

Again, The Shadow saw the reason for Chenma's sudden shift. She had placed herself between him and the silver door. From that portal was stepping Shang Chou, his own hand bearing a revolver that made Chenma's gun look like a toy.

By her swift intervention, the Manchu girl had saved The Shadow from death, for Shang Chou was lowering his gun and relaxing the trigger finger that had been about to finish permanently The Shadow's long career.

Shang Chou's features wrinkled into a smile that was not so satisfied as it looked. Chenma had blocked his aim, and he could not harm the Manchu princess upon whom his claim to an imperial throne was established.

For her part, Chenma had cleverly strengthened her own position, and was better able to save The Shadow. She glanced triumphantly at Shang Chou, as though she sought his approval.

The Shadow saw a change in Shang Chou's smile. He understood it before Chenma did.

Chenma had made just one mistake; a tragic one, indeed. She had sworn to slay The Shadow if he resumed his speech. In her ardency to save him, she had ruined the very measure by which The Shadow could have won their mutual cause!

It was Shang Chou who did the speaking.

Shrewdly, he let Chenma keep The Shadow covered, while he put away his own gun in the pocket of his silver robe. From beneath his other arm, he drew a silver casket and opened it. The interior glistened with a mass of gems. They were Walstead's collection - as great a prize as Dayland's.

Dipping his fingers into the array, Shang Chou brushed gems aside as though the contact pained him. At last, he smiled anew, as he plucked forth another segment of jade: Walstead's portion of the famed Jade Dragon.

Stooping to the teakwood stand, Shang Chou brought forth the ivory casket and began to assemble the Jade Dragon. When he came to the gap in the body, he dropped the new segment into place. The dragon was complete, except for its head.

"As for these" - Shang Chou waved toward the Walstead jewels - "we shall use them to raise funds for our cause. Since Ying Ko has conceded that the Jade Dragon is rightfully ours, he can not criticize our wish to regain the throne that it represents. As for Ying Ko -"

All this while, The Shadow had been watching Shang Chou steadily, as had Chenma. Knowing what was in Shang Chou's mind, The Shadow had pressed harder against Chenma's gun. But the girl had failed to catch the situation. She was watching for a chance to relax the gun pressure and let The Shadow spring for the silver door.

Despite The Shadow's pressure, she suddenly let the weapon slide away. It was a pretended slip, and one for which Shang Chou was watching.

Quick as a whippet, the Dragon Cult master was full about, grabbing Chenma to fling her with one hand, while his other brought his big gun from his robe. He was slinging Chenma in front of him, so that The Shadow, no matter how quickly he drew an automatic, would be unable to fire Shang Chou's way. Again the girl had become a human shield, this time against The Shadow's aim!

Nor could The Shadow dispute the case with Shang Chou, for the Dragon Cult men were in action. A horde that totaled fifty or more, they were lunging en masse to overwhelm The Shadow. Coming in from

every angle, they left him only the corner behind him, which happened to be the one where the Well of Wisdom was located.

Unable to draw his guns because of the hands which grabbed him, The Shadow warded away spurting guns and beat off slashing knife hands. He twisted from the grapplers, made a leap to the corner, and sprang upon the stone ledge of the well.

There, with a long swing of his foot, The Shadow sent guns and knives flying from hands that were nearest him. The first comers ducked, so that a new wave might surge upon The Shadow before he delivered another telling kick.

From beside Shang Chou, Chenma saw sure death for The Shadow - death from incoming blades and aiming revolvers. But such death did not come. Instead of awaiting it, The Shadow took a side step over the well itself.

Shifting his weight, he flung his hands straight above his head, and let his other foot follow, as he took a deliberate step down into the well!

LIKE a diver with the springboard gone from under him, The Shadow plummeted from sight as knives whirled and bullets whined through the space where he had been. He had escaped one death; but Chenma, knowing the great depth of the well, was sure that he had merely found another.

Shang Chou, however, was taking nothing for granted. He shouted an order that his followers obeyed. A dozen of them seized the squatty idol that was in the other corner, the silver image of Yatku, that weighed half a ton. Rushing that symbol of power to the mouth of the well, they dumped it head downward into the yawning hole where The Shadow had gone.

As he heard the massive juggernaut go clattering full speed into the rounded pit, Shang Chou reached for the token papers that he intended to distribute among the cult members. The clang of Yatku's landing, echoing up from the well shaft, came as a final bar in the melody that Shang Chou had long wanted to hear.

Crime would proceed as Shang Chou had designed it. There would be no further interference from Ying Ko, The Shadow. Whether he had escaped all knives and bullets; whether he had survived a drop into a fifty-foot well - neither mattered.

In whatever state The Shadow had reached the well bottom - gashed, battered, or whole Yatku, the silver symbol of power, had certainly mashed him into pulp. With its squatly bulk of half a ton, the idol had bounced against the sides of the well all the way down, leaving no leeway for The Shadow to escape.

In the meeting room above, Shang Chou, as he dealt the papers, was bowing to Chenma, expressing his insidious gratitude for the aid that she had given in luring The Shadow to his own doom!

CHAPTER XVII. HOUR OF CRIME

FROM the moment that he took that bold step into the well, The Shadow knew that he had lost no part of a specialized skill that he had once acquired

His travels in India had acquainted him with the famous well jumpers, familiar figures in the courts of many rajahs. Theirs was a calling practiced through generations; a trick wherein the needed knack was nerve.

In a drop from any height to water underneath, the essential feature of safety was a straight, true drop. The surrounding walls of a well shaft could be a mental hazard only, for, in any drop, the slightest deviation from the vertical would bring disaster at the finish.

People marveled at the well jumpers, without realizing the advantage that those fellows had. To step into the mouth of a well was like aiming for a rounded bull's-eye in the center of a target. Much easier than trying the same stunt in the open, with nothing to serve as a guide.

So The Shadow had tried the trick in India while touring there as Cranston, and had liked it very much. So much, that he had done it often, and would chance it any time. For well shafts lacked wind, or dangerous air currents. They were like a welcoming vortex, once you knew them.

In his arrow trip down into Shang Chou's Well of Wisdom, The Shadow recaptured the old thrill that had come with his first well jump.

He could feel the air swooshing up past his linked hands, coming evenly from every angle. He was punching a hole right down the center, the way a good well jumper should. All that he needed for a perfect finish was water at the bottom of the well, and he found plenty.

Feet first, The Shadow chopped the waters' surface like a flat stone, knifing edgewise. He could hear the splash end with the old familiar cough as the water closed above him.

Body still straight, he bobbed up to the surface to catch the echoes from the shaft, the music that only well jumpers could appreciate. His hand pulled an automatic from his cloak; pointing the muzzle upward, The Shadow was ready to supply some music of his own, if foemen appeared above with knives and guns.

Instead, The Shadow saw the form of Yatku, tipping headfirst down the shaft. To The Shadow's ears, the melody provided by Shang Chou was terrific. The silver idol came with a roaring clang that outdid a dozen juggernauts.

Death in bulk was plunging squarely for The Shadow, and there was no way of avoiding it. The dozen feet of water that the well contained wouldn't stop the smashing impact any more than the contents of a coffeepot would halt a brick dropped endwise.

The crashing roar engulfed The Shadow, and the walls of the well rumbled like a trestle under a thundering locomotive. Clanging echoes died away in lessening waves, and there was Yatku, dead still, grinning right at The Shadow, so near that the silver image seemed to be thrusting out its face to have its jaw punched.

Halted close above The Shadow's head, Yatku had forgotten all about its human victim and wasn't coming any farther.

His fingers digging into the stone sides of the well, The Shadow was wedging himself with his spread arms, and his own action made him realize why Yatku had stopped. The idol was wedged, too. Yatku hadn't been too wide for the top of the well, but he was for the bottom.

By the light which filtered down past the jammed idol's inverted shoulders, The Shadow saw, for the first time, that the well narrowed near the bottom.

The slimy stones that The Shadow gripped gave the answer. They were loose, and water was seeping through them. Through many years of disuse, the walls of the well had pressed inward, reducing its bottom diameter by a foot or more. The Shadow had done wisely, stepping off to the very center of the

well.

If he hadn't, he would have scraped the side twenty feet before he reached the water. For the inward push of the lower stones had worked upon those above them, causing the well to taper a quarter of the way up.

Yatku had rammed himself headfirst into the contracting shaft, and even a thousand pounds of metal hadn't sufficed to crack it. Like a keystone driven into an arch, the idol was fixed to stay. Shang Chou would need more than a derrick to regain his silver trophy. He would have to blast to get Yatku out of his present jam.

As for The Shadow, Yatku was his friend. The idol hadn't smashed him; it had blocked off any attack from above, besides giving Shang Chou the illusion that there was no longer any Shadow. Even more: though the idol's crashing halt hadn't bulged the well's wall back to its original shape, the trend had been that way. Stones that took the brunt of the mighty smash were forced apart, showing gaps between them.

Water, trickling through those spaces, proved that the well was fed from a larger source. Under the sheltering shoulders of Yatku, The Shadow pried away at the stones, using the jimmy that fitted the end of his automatic.

Under such leverage, stones gave. Water gushed through, but when The Shadow prodded higher stones, he found they were above the flow, so he worked along the higher level.

The task simplified as The Shadow progressed. Within a half-hour, he had opened a space large enough for him to wedge through. The process hadn't disturbed Yatku. Nothing short of dynamite could have released the stones about the idol, though the pressure they had taken had caused the parting of the stones beneath them.

Through a low-roofed passage half filled with water, The Shadow came to an underground pool vaulted by an arch. His flashlight showed pipes of varying sizes leading off like the spokes of a wheel. The comparison was a good one, for these ancient pipes were made of wood. A hundred feet below the level of down town Manhattan, they were relics of a forgotten day.

It happened that The Shadow recognized their origin, though he had never heard that these deep pipes existed. He was in the remains of the old "Collect," a fresh-water pond that had been the pride of lower Manhattan in the days of the early settlers. A spring-fed pond of great depth, it had later become a nuisance when the city grew around it, and the Collect had finally been filled.

The springs had been a problem, since their flow threatened to undermine the filled-in ground above them. These pipes were the answer; forgotten for a century or more, they had enabled the ground above to settle firmly enough for the construction of buildings.

At present, the pipes were serving another purpose. They were offering The Shadow an outlet from Shang Chou's domain.

Skirting the pool, The Shadow chose a pipe from which water flowed. It was large enough to crawl through easily, and after a short distance, he heard sharp splashes ahead. His flashlight showed an open space where the water was coming down stone steps, like a small cascade. Above the steps, side walls supported cross timbers set at an upward angle.

Evidently workers had used these steps as they filled the ground, and had timbered the stone flight to serve as a channel for the water from the higher springs. The Shadow counted a hundred steps as he

crawled up them, with his back scraping the timbers. He knew that he was quite close to ground level, when he came to a horizontal passage. Low, arched with stone, it was of later construction than the wooden pipes.

As he worked along the new channel, The Shadow laughed despite his predicament. According to his calculations, this passage was taking him right under the Centre Street police headquarters.

He recalled that Centre Street had once been called Collect Street, because along it had run an open ditch, the last visible remains of the old Collect. But there were too many layers of earth above this passage to pause and start some subterranean tapping, in hope of rousing police in the Centre Street headquarters.

Instead, The Shadow kept along his trail, confident that he would make another find - which he did. In from the left, he saw a concrete pipe of more modern mold, that had tapped into the old Centre Street drainage line. A tight squeeze, but worth it, for when The Shadow had wormed a considerable distance along a bed of dry concrete, he struck an elbow that curved the route straight upward.

Dim light through a grating suddenly became a mighty blaze, accompanied by a roar and rumble that reminded The Shadow of Yatku's raging descent down the old well shaft.

Light vanished and the rumble faded. With elbows and knees, The Shadow squeezed himself up the vertical shaft for several feet; then took a long reach and grabbed the bars of the grating. Drawing himself as high as he could, he jammed himself tightly except for one hand and arm; then went to work with his combination jimmy.

More lights and roaring masses rushed by outside the grating, but The Shadow coolly ignored them and finished prying the grating loose.

Pulling himself out, he slid the grating back in place and rested. The space was ample here; very ample. The Shadow was in a concrete niche, extending from beside the tracks of a downtown subway. The roaring things with lights had been subway trains speeding by. The niche with the grating was just one of many drainage outlets necessary in case the subway flooded.

PASSENGERS, waiting at a local station, were puzzled a while later by a streaky shape that glided along the dim-lit platform. They didn't see the figure that cast that moving silhouette. The Shadow was too close to the platform wall. Nor did they see the same figure leave the platform. They heard the click of the turnstile, and looked around to see who had gone through.

They saw no one. Even The Shadow's departing blackness was invisible, for he had passed beyond the change booth and was going up the steps of a deserted exit, when the puzzled subway customers finally gazed toward the direction he had taken.

Returning toward Chinatown, The Shadow saw very few police around the outskirts. He was moving through an alley into Pell Street, when he saw an American-clad Chinese stop and look about before crossing the street.

The man didn't cross, for The Shadow reached out, gripped his arm and drew him into the alley, at the same time voicing a quick whisper.

The man was Lee Sook. He voiced the name: "Ying Ko!" Then, in hasty sentences, he told The Shadow what was happening in Chinatown.

Tonight was different from the rest. Men who wore the native garb of Shang Chou's Dragon Cult had

returned to their accustomed places, only to leave again. But they were not going back to see Shang Chou, wherever he might be. Instead, they were sneaking out of Chinatown, in such wholesale fashion that Tam's spies were afraid that the Dragon Cult men were staging a general getaway.

Others were contacting Dr. Tam, but Lee Sook had waited for a message from Chenma. It had come, at last, from the little window. Lee Sook handed The Shadow a folded paper that Chenma had dropped him.

It wasn't just a name on rice paper. It was a blank page from Chenma's diary, and it told, in terms as sad as they were brief, that Shang Chou had cast doom upon The Shadow. It finished with a plea for Tam to avenge Ying Ko by stopping tonight's crime at any cost.

This message, Chenma stated, would probably be her last, for with one more crime, the power of Shang Chou would be supreme. At the conclusion of her message, Chenma stated where the coming crime would strike.

Chenma's writing was tiny. It covered only half the sheet. Tearing the page in the middle, The Shadow kept what Chenma had written. On the rest, he inscribed a message for Dr. Tam, and told Lee Sook to deliver it.

As Lee Sook nodded and turned to cross the street, he heard the whisper of a parting laugh that trailed from far along the alley.

The Shadow was gone to play his part in avenging his own reported death!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE TRAP THAT FAILED

THREE men were seated in the kitchen of a mid-Manhattan penthouse. One, Commissioner Ralph Weston, was studying a batch of letters in old, frayed envelopes that bore Chinese stamps and postmarks. Another, Inspector Joe Cardona, was keeping anxious watch through a door to a darkened stairway.

The third man was Alexander Marne. This was his penthouse, but he didn't look at home, even in the informal setting of the kitchen. Marne's heavy jaw was set, his rugged features showed a nervous strain. His right fist was tightly clenched, holding something within it.

"You are right, Marne," Weston declared, with a slow nod. "These letters of Walstead's are important. They give us a strong clue to all the recent crimes."

"They mention a Jade Dragon," returned Marne. "A thing that Walstead wanted, but had never found. An item that Dayland, Royce, or any of the rest might have been keeping in their individual collections, which is why Walstead was so interested in seeing their gems."

"Even to the point where he was willing to buy a painting from Royce, if it would show the gems that Royce, for some reason, preferred to keep hidden."

"Exactly, commissioner! And if Walstead wanted the Jade Dragon, it is logical to suppose that this Chinese monster, Shang Chou, wanted it as well. And to think that I, of all people, should be the man who actually owned it!"

Marne opened his fist and showed the object that he held there. It was a dragon's head, cut from a piece of jade. At the end of the short neck, the head had two tiny holes that looked as if they were meant to receive a pair of prongs.

"I picked it up in Shanghai," stated Marne, handing the dragon's head to Weston. "Just another curio that I thought would make an interesting watch charm. But when I took it to a jeweler, he couldn't find an attractive way to mount it. So I kept it, and forgot all about it until today, when I was reading over the letters we found at Walstead's, commissioner."

Weston nodded. He had taken the dragon's head and was fingering it, wondering what significance the jade carving had. It struck him that the piece might be incomplete, but he didn't think in terms of a dozen more segments. To Weston, the thing looked more like the head of a chessman, that needed only a base to complete it.

Cardona was at a kitchen window, blinking a flashlight. Each time Joe paused, answering blinks came from spots along the street, twenty floors below.

"All odd-numbered stations reporting clear," announced Cardona in routine style. He crossed the kitchen to an opposite window. "I'll flash the even ones, commissioner."

Sounds of music came drifting to the kitchen, along with the buzz of voices. A party was under way at Marne's; it included the same guests who had been at Dayland's - the people who had also been invited to Royce's studio the evening when Margo had been a Javanese princess. Hearing the music, Weston tilted his head.

"I wonder what's keeping Cranston!" he exclaimed. "Surely he must have called the club by this time!"

"Perhaps he has arrived and joined the guests," suggested Marne, turning toward a door. "Suppose I go and see."

"No, no!" interposed Weston hastily. "You're supposed to be in your study. You mustn't appear to be going back and forth. If Cranston receives your invitation at the club, he will also be given my message. He will know to come here to the kitchen."

With that, Weston handed the dragon's head back to Marne, who placed it in his vest pocket. Still speaking of the object as though it were the Jade Dragon in entirety, Weston declared:

"Whatever that Jade Dragon represents, Shang Chou wants it and will send Chinese to seek it. True, he must have supposed that it was in the hands of some collector, but having exhausted such sources, he will try you next, Marne."

There was a nod from Marne. Weston was repeating a theory that Marne, himself, had suggested. To it, Marne added emphatic points.

"I have been to China," he reminded, "which makes me eligible to incur Shang Chou's suspicion. Furthermore, commissioner, we agree that in these previous robberies, Shang Chou wanted more than the Jade Dragon. He wanted the wealth represented by the gems that his men stole for him.

"My hobby is not collecting gems. I collect stocks and bonds. The safe in my study is loaded with negotiable securities that Shang Chou would certainly covet. However" - Marne's smile was confident - "if Shang Chou's men come here tonight, they will be trapped by their own trickery, in reverse."

OUT in Marne's big living room, certain of the party guests were thinking in those same terms. One was Margo Lane, and she found it difficult to keep her mind on coming events, because she was trying at the same time to talk with Errol Garvin and Don Feldon.

They were chatting about such things as polo and yachting. Though pleasant company at the average party, Margo wished she could get rid of them on this occasion. At last, she thought of an excellent way.

Glancing about, Margo singled out two of the blond models who had been the subjects of paintings that Royce had sold to Dayland. Catching their glances, Margo gave each a triumphant smile. She was reminding them that she had supplanted them with Royce, and that, at present, she had won the interest of two young men who were the life of Marne's party.

In effect, Margo was daring the other girls to try and wrest Errol and Don away from her. The blondes took the challenge.

They came to Margo's corner and sweetly broke in upon the conversation. What Margo didn't know or care about, horses or boats, her rivals used to full advantage. One blonde finally made off with Errol Garvin; the other appropriated Don Feldon.

Glancing back, the girls gave Margo looks that should have wilted any wallflower. Margo didn't wilt; instead, she looked around and picked another man for herself.

Her choice was Harry Vincent. Together, they strolled out to a little terrace that extended from the penthouse living room, and Harry promptly began to inform Margo on matters of interest to them both.

Immediately upon receiving a short-notice invitation to Marne's party, Harry had notified Burbank, The Shadow's contact man. Unable to reach The Shadow, Burbank had simply followed prearranged instructions. Contacting other agents, he had told them to cover Marne's penthouse and report back.

They had reported in full. Clyde Burke, the inquiring reporter, had seen Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona going up to Marne's, followed by a brace of detectives. Hawkeye, ferreting through the neighborhood, had spotted a dozen police stationed at strategic places. Other agents had reported police cars in the offing.

Looking down from their present vantage spot, more than twenty stories above the street, Harry and Margo could see those same patrol cars passing distant corners.

"But what about Lamont?" undertoned Margo. "I mean - has Burbank heard from The Shadow?"

"Not yet," returned Harry. "Shrevvie's cab is still cruising around Chinatown. He sent in a report, though, Moe did. It fits with what is happening here."

"How, Harry?"

"The commissioner has withdrawn most of the Chinatown squad. He wants certain Chinese to move out freely."

Margo smiled and shook her head.

"I thought the police had come to the conclusion that Chinatown was not the source of trouble, after all," said Margo. "That might account for the removal of the Chinatown squad."

"Not quite," rejoined Harry. "They've been picking up some odd rumors about Shang Chou, so they decided they ought to be watching Chinatown, anyway."

"So they ought to be watching there, but aren't. That puts them in a lovely fuddle, doesn't it, Harry?"

"Marne has pulled them out of it, Margo. Discovering, somehow, that he might be threatened next, he phoned his friends and arranged this party, setting just the scene he wanted. Then he called Commissioner Weston and asked him to take over."

Margo saw the merits of Marne's action. Weston would probably have advised against the party, even though the Chinese had harmed no guests during their raid at Dayland's, a point that Marne had doubtless remembered.

Marne's most natural purpose was, of course, to identify himself more fully with Dayland and Royce by proving, for the benefit of any inquisitive Chinese, that his friends were the same as those of two murdered men. Walstead, too, had belonged to the same set, which also helped.

In his turn, Commissioner Weston must have tacitly approved Marne's methods. The stage was set and Weston couldn't very well change it. Even if matters went wrong, the commissioner could not be blamed. His argument would be that Marne, at the last minute, had asked him to invoke the machinery of the law and he had therewith complied, in keeping with the situation.

"They're going to let the Chinese right through," Harry told Margo. "Then the squad will move in after them. Our job will be to -"

"Look, Harry!"

MARGO was pointing to twinkles that occurred below. The glimmers couldn't be seen from the street, for they were purposely tilted upward. Police, from their various stations, were reporting to Cardona an influx of Chinese. As the twinkles continued, Margo exclaimed to Harry:

"They can't be counting up the total! There are so many!"

For answer, Harry drew Margo back into the living room, across to a pair of folding doors that were closed. From beyond, they could hear the first creep of footsteps, that continue in steady procession.

The Chinese were arriving from the long stairway route up to the penthouse, and Shang Chou wasn't just depending upon a few this evening. He had unleashed a horde!

Into Marne's study they were flooding. The room was beyond those doors, hence Harry and Margo couldn't see what happened there. The witnesses who did were the two detectives. One was hidden behind a filing cabinet; the other in back of a clothes tree where overcoats were hanging. Between them was Marne's safe, a huge affair.

The study was large, but the arriving Chinese were filling it, for they numbered at least four dozen. All wore the bloused jackets the Dragon Cult favored, and these men in their native costumes were smiling blandly at each other. Some few were surprised to find that Shang Chou had ordered all hands on the job tonight, but they had expected to find a much larger turnout than usual.

Shang Chou had ordered them to remove Marne's safe bodily. They had demonstrated their ability at such a task by the way they had flung the half-ton idol, Yatku, down the Well of Wisdom to crush Shang Chou's supreme foe, The Shadow.

Crowding about the heavy safe, a dozen Chinese began to hoist it. When they had trouble, another dozen thronged forward to aid them. It was then that the two detectives bobbed into sight, shouting for the Chinese to raise their hands instead of the safe.

The order was echoed in louder terms from the door. Turning away from the puny revolvers of the corner detectives, the Chinese saw other headquarters men moving in, with Tommy-guns.

Reluctantly, the Dragon Cult men raised their hands. They saw Marne enter, flanked by Weston and Cardona. At a nod from the commissioner, Marne reached into his vest pocket, produced the Jade Dragon's head and held it to the light.

A frantic babble came from the members of the Dragon Cult. Some started forward; only to drop back when the submachine guns were thrust their way.

By their babble and their gestures, Shang Chou's followers had revealed that the Jade Dragon was the main object of their quest, though Marne's wealth was to have been taken with it. The thing, now, was to disarm the jacketed horde and ship them wholesale to headquarters. Commissioner Weston raised his hand for silence, so that he could give the order.

With the gesture, Weston stiffened. So did the others who were with him: Cardona, Marne, and the detectives who held the Tommy-guns. The two men in the corner gulped, knowing that their revolvers would be useless against the odds.

This trap, so cleverly laid and sprung, had failed at the final moment.

In from the hallway, new Chinese had crept up in back of Weston, Cardona, and the rest, and were prodding their backs with revolvers. Over the shoulders of the commissioner and his companions, the corner detectives could see saffron faces that peered with triumphant grins

All that was needed to complete the disaster was a surge by the horde of Dragon Cult men. Recovered from their own surprise, the jacketed Chinese were about to make it, when a weird challenge halted them. From the doorway it came, a thing that made the slant-eyed hearers blink, and listen in unbelief.

It was the laugh of Ying Ko, The Shadow!

CHAPTER XIX. THE WAY OF SHANG CHOW

NEVER before had The Shadow taken over so vast a situation with such consummate ease. Single-handed, he was placing a horde at bay. A horde of men who were eager to surge for safety; men fully armed, as The Shadow knew the Dragon Cult would be. But there was something in The Shadow's chilling mirth that mocked at weapons - something that the listeners understood.

To the members of the Dragon Cult, The Shadow stood as a power more than human; a being who could not possibly experience any disaster that they might try to supply. Earlier this evening The Shadow had faced them unafraid, and had flung them right and left, warding off every thrust they made with gun or blade.

Then, to show them how puny were the hazards that they produced, he had taken a greater one, by calmly leaving their midst with a straight step down the center of a well shaft, a thing which to any being but Ying Ko would have meant a quicker death than battle could give.

Some, among the Dragon Cult men, had believed that the plunge produced The Shadow's death. All doubters had been convinced of it after Shang Chou had ordered them to drop a massive idol after The Shadow, and they had complied.

To these viewers, The Shadow had not returned from a single death. He had come back from three. Killed first by knives and guns, Ying Ko had committed suicide by flinging himself down a great shaft, and Shang Chou had finally given him a crushing death with the idol, Yatku. No wonder The Shadow's laugh made the Dragon Cult men cringe!

Sight of him did even more. Entering from the doorway, blackness became alive as its cloaked arms pressed Weston and Marne aside. Into full light stepped The Shadow. Folding his arms, he approached the Dragon Cult men, who crouched beseechingly, all babbling at once.

They were pleading with Ying Ko, begging him not to consign them to the land of ghosts and demons whither he had gone, only to return. They would have listened fully to the words of Ying Ko, if Shang Chou had not interrupted him, that time they met before.

Amid this amazing scene, a baffling thing was happening. The power that cowed the Dragon Cult men was having no effect upon the Chinese who were covering Marne, Weston and the police. Possibly it had transfixed them, for they were making no effort to attack The Shadow. But their guns were still firm against the backs of the men they were keeping covered.

Then, as The Shadow turned, the two detectives in the corner noticed that the Chinese behind Weston and the other helpless men were garbed in American clothes. They weren't members of the Dragon Cult, at all. They were other Chinese, who had moved through the cordon, thanks to the general order that all Chinese were to be passed through.

Chinese working with The Shadow! Such was the dawning answer, and it was the right one. These Chinese belonged to Dr. Roy Tam. The Shadow had ordered them, because he needed them to augment the forces of his agents.

Then, contacting Burbank, The Shadow had learned full details of the situation at Marne's. Since the way was open to Chinese only, he had brought Tam's men through with him in the wake of the Dragon Cult followers.

Posted police had seen those yellow faces and let Tam's men through; but they hadn't seen The Shadow, gliding invisibly amid the Chinese throng. Nor had they guessed that these Chinese in American garb had stopped off while going up to Marne's, to let the incoming police pass them.

Not only here, but out in the hallway, members of Cardona's ample squad were helpless under the pressure of Tam's men, working at The Shadow's behest. It was baffling, indeed, to every one - with the exception of a certain man.

THAT man was Alexander Marne. He made an angry gesture when The Shadow faced him, only to stiffen as a gun nudged him from the hand of Lee Sook, the Chinese who stood behind him.

Then Marne was covered by another gun: The Shadow's. A gloved hand produced the big .45 with a simple upward flip. Under his crossed arm, The Shadow had gripped that gun beneath his cloak.

Gesturing the automatic toward Marne's safe, The Shadow ordered in sibilant tone:

"Step forward, Marne, and open the safe!"

Marne hesitated, and then complied. The Shadow's other hand reached toward him, and into it Marne listlessly dropped the head of the Jade Dragon. Subdued members of the Dragon Cult pressed aside to open a path as Marne proceeded forward, forced onward by The Shadow's gun, which was now against his back.

There was no more hesitation from Marne. He was nervous while amid the Dragon Cult men banked so tightly on each side of him, but he worked his fingers rapidly upon the safe combination. When the door came open, The Shadow pressed Marne aside and began tumbling bundles from it, many of them representing large sums in securities.

Behind the bundles was a coffer; upon it, an ivory box. The Shadow was close enough to see the ivory box, but the crouched Dragon Cult men were at too low a level to spy it atop the coffer. When The Shadow ordered Marne to bring down both items, the rugged man complied, but he hid the ivory box

behind the coffer as he did.

Turning Marne about, The Shadow marched him to a table by the door. At The Shadow's whispered command, Chinese guns relaxed from the backs of Weston, Cardona, and the detectives with the Tommy-guns. By this time, the commissioner was too interested in proceedings to stop them, no matter what Marne might argue.

Nor was there any chance of the two machine-gunners letting rip at the members of the Dragon Cult. Everything had calmed down, and the Dragon Cult men were too cowed to start a rush that would make their slaughter necessary.

Indeed, everything else had slid from mind except the matter of The Shadow's business with Alexander Marne. The Shadow gestured toward the coffer. Marne opened it, keeping the ivory casket behind it, away from the Dragon Cult men.

The contents of the coffer told enough.

To the brim, the chest was filled with gems - the accumulated collections of Walstead, Dayland, and other previous victims. Royce's imitation gems, of course, had been weeded from the loot. Here were spoils that should have belonged in the lair of Shang Chou, not in a safe owned by Alexander Marne!

Facts struck home to Commissioner Weston and Inspector Cardona, facts that The Shadow had suspected for a long time, and had finally established: namely, that Shang Chou, in private life, was Alexander Marne.

But the thing didn't dawn fully on Marne's Chinese dupes, the Dragon Cult men, until The Shadow slammed the coffer shut and picked up the ivory box.

A babble began at sight of the box; it increased when The Shadow dropped the segments of the Jade Dragon onto the coffer lid. Piece by piece, The Shadow fitted them to the pointed pendant that made the dragon's tail. Then, with a sweeping gesture, The Shadow turned about and set the dragon's head into place.

A roar broke from the men in Chinese jackets; a roar of approbation for The Shadow. He, Ying Ko, had told them that he could assemble the Jade Dragon without recourse to crime, and he had done so. The Shadow, not Shang Chou, was entitled to supreme honor, and these Dragon Cult men were voicing it.

Moreover, they were rising to surge forward, not to attack The Shadow but to overwhelm Alexander Marne, the pretender who had worn Chinese disguise and called himself Shang Chou!

The Shadow raised his hands to restrain the Dragon Cult men. Weston, Cardona, and their companions pressed forward, just in case of trouble. So did Tam's men, though it seemed that they should have been watching Marne. Instead, they gave the false Shang Chou an opportunity too good to miss.

Finding himself unwatched, Marne scooped up the Jade Dragon with a sweep of his hand, flung its contents into the ivory box, and bounded out, carrying his prize!

THE way wasn't open to the stairs. Tam's men and released detectives blocked it. So Marne used the folding doors that led into the living room. Managing to unbolt them, he plunged through, as, from close behind him, came a pursuing laugh telling him that The Shadow was right upon his heels.

Though not the first to go after Marne, The Shadow had flung others aside to clear a path. Tam's men were helping him; they kept the way open for Weston and Cardona to be the next in line. Then Tam's men were holding back the Jacketed Chinese who wanted vengeance most. They would get their

vengeance in due time.

Spurred by The Shadow's laugh, Marne crossed the living room; there, he turned and yelled something to his scattering guests. As The Shadow loomed into sight, a dozen men sprang into action. They formed a tuxedoed throng, led by such socialites as Errol Garvin and Don Feldon. From their pockets they were drawing revolvers, to aim at The Shadow!

The cloaked figure wasn't a target when they fired. The Shadow knew exactly what was coming, which was why he wheeled into a hallway toward the kitchen. Garvin, Feldon, and the others who formed Marne's real murder squad went bounding after him. Among the guests were servants, who also belonged to the murder crew.

Marne, still shouting that he was Shang Chou, dropped to a corner to draw his own revolver.

By carrying the surge to the rear of the living room, The Shadow had left Marne's crowd open to a flank attack, that promptly came. Weston and Cardona supplied it, with detectives aiding. It was a case of revolver shots only, for Tommy-guns wouldn't do, with so many innocent guests making for cover after the guilty ones had begun their charge.

Garvin and Feldon spun to meet the police attack. That was the moment for a jab from the other flank. Harry Vincent led it, coming from the hall, followed by The Shadow's agents. They had come up in an elevator, purporting to be guests bound for Marne's. Their shots, inserted timely, broke the thrust that was directed at the police.

Then, before tuxedoed crooks could rally, the real surge came. The Dragon Cult men were loose. They swarmed into the living room, saw the men with guns, and overpowered them. No words were needed from The Shadow to explain who these men were. From the moment that Garvin, Feldon, and their friends took sides with Marne, they gave themselves away.

Finding that he could pose as the Chinese mystery man, Shang Chou, Alexander Marne had decided that his real followers could do the same. He had chosen Americans for his compact tribe of killers, and they had operated in Chinese garb, to lay the real blame on Shang Chou's dupes, the Dragon Cult members.

Dupes no longer, the Dragon Cult men understood, and they were suppressing their betrayers in no uncertain style. But when they came to look for Alexander Marne, he was gone. Profiting by the chaos, the crime master had ducked from the living room, found an elevator, and fled.

As Chinese swarmed into the outer hall, they heard the clang of another elevator door, that was closing upon blackness. With that clang came the echoes of a laugh they knew

The Shadow was on his way to overtake Shang Chou, and his parting mirth was an invitation for others to follow after him!

CHAPTER XX. SECRET OF THE DRAGON

TO Chenma, alone in her tiny underground apartment, the past few hours had been an ordeal. She had seen nothing more of Shang Chou, nor had she talked to Tseng, the faithful doorman. She wanted to see no one except Ying Ko, The Shadow, and that, Chenma believed, would be impossible.

A sudden knock at Chenma's door startled her, for it was unlike any knock she had heard before. Opening the door, Chenma started to shrink back at sight of Shang Chou. Then, remembering that she was a Manchu princess and had preserved her status with the Dragon Cult, even while aiding The Shadow, Chenma faced Shang Chou calmly.

It wasn't rage that made Shang Chou's manner strange. He was excited, out of breath from some mad chase. Chenma was suddenly elated by the thought that something had gone wrong with Shang Chou's final crime; something that The Shadow might have successfully arranged, even though unable to be on hand for victory.

"Quickly, Chenma!" spoke Shang Chou, in short-breathed style. "Have you seen Tseng?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then find him!" Shang Chou ordered. "Look everywhere for him! Tell him I wish to see him in my apartment."

Shang Chou turned away, adjusting the silver robe that he was wearing. Chenma was sure that he must have been outside his preserves; that he had picked up the robe when he returned, and had put it on hastily while hurrying to his apartment. Chenma turned away, too, in order to hunt for Tseng.

There wasn't much ground to cover in the hunt for Tseng. Shang Chou had blocked his premises even more than before, so that all passages ended blind, in panels or walls that could be doors through which the respective members of the Dragon Cult came to their meetings.

There were some cross passages, like the connections of a web, and it was among these that Chenma expected to find Tseng, making his rounds. She had completed about half the circuit, when she heard a low call from the direction of her own apartment. Hurrying there, she found Tseng.

"I heard you in the passages, princess," Tseng told her. "It is unwise to move about so. Shang Chou might return and discover you."

"Shang Chou has returned," informed Chenma. "Five minutes ago. He wants to see you, Tseng, right away!"

Tseng turned toward the door of Shang Chou's apartment. He'd moved only a few steps, when a muffled blast sounded from beyond the door. Chenma hurried up; together, they opened the door and looked. The room, clearing of smoke, revealed a gaping hole in its far wall.

"Shang Chou has fled!" exclaimed Tseng. "I remember when that door was blocked. He wanted no one to know of its existence, because it is a private route, the one he was keeping should he need ever to escape!"

That Shang Chou needed to escape was evidenced by a whispered laugh that came from the passage behind Chenma and Tseng. Turning, they saw The Shadow, and both stared in disbelief. Their eyes, however, were to see more marvels, in many numbers.

If the police had flashed word ahead to halt a man answering the description of Alexander Marne, The Shadow's task would have been eased. But Marne had outraced such word, and when he finally slipped The Shadow, the cloaked pursuer was forced to go around by Chenma's message window.

The time lost by The Shadow was made up by others. They were the new marvels that Chenma and Tseng viewed. They came with a clatter as The Shadow's laugh ended - the members of the Dragon Cult, using their various routes to Shang Chou's, this time seeking their former lord to destroy him!

WITH eyes that were both amazed and grateful, Chenma saw The Shadow point the way. The Dragon Cult men shouted the name of "Ying Ko!" with a zest that proved he had become their leader. They ignored Chenma and Tseng, but to keep those two from the path of the trampling horde, The Shadow pressed them into Chenma's apartment.

The Dragon Cult men were piling through the hole that Shang Chou had blasted for an exit. Right after them came new invaders, police in dozen lots. They'd found quick ways into Shang Chou's domain by simply following the Dragon Cult men.

Among them was Inspector Cardona. Waving his men ahead to the chase, he looked in at Chenma's door and saw the Manchu girl

Politely, Chenma introduced herself and stated that she approved the search for Shang Chou. At that moment, Dr. Tam arrived with some of his men, and started to tell Cardona about Chenma's messages.

Cardona gave an understanding nod; when he looked toward Tseng, Chenma declared simply:

"This is Tseng. He helped me send the messages."

Another nod from Cardona, and then he was on his way with Tam, to join the hunt for Marne or Shang Chou, whichever the fugitive might prove to be when they overtook him.

A whispered laugh came from the corner of Chenma's room and The Shadow stepped into sight from behind the door, where he had watched Chenma's interview with Cardona. The Shadow's whispered tone added his own approval; then he, too, was gone, closing the door behind him. He was also concerned with the hunt for Marne, alias Shang Chou.

Tseng was pouring his thanks to Chenma for having identified him as her helper. With a smile, Chenma responded:

"You are the one who deserves thanks, Tseng. You, as much as I, did your utmost to defeat Shang Chou. We have both proven ourselves to the police and are now free to go and come, or do exactly as we choose -"

Chenma's hand was on the door, as though she intended to go as she chose. But Tseng planned otherwise. His laugh, close behind Chenma, was different from any tone that the girl had previously heard him give.

Turning, Chenma looked into Tseng's eyes and - the muzzle of a gun!

They were not the eyes of Tseng, as she knew them. They were the eyes of Shang Chou!

The Dragon Cult master and his doorman were one!

If Chenma had only realized that Shang Chou's own self was a disguise; that in ordinary life he was an American named Alexander Marne, she could have looked for such deception. Since Marne had to make himself up to look like one Chinese, there was no reason why he couldn't play the part of another.

The thing that had fooled Chenma was the pretended loyalty that Tseng had chosen. She realized, at this moment, what a sham it had really been. Knowing that Chenma would find ways to contact the outside world, Shang Chou had aided her as Tseng. Aided her in such a manner that the word she sent was always too late.

Once there had been an exception - in the case of Burton Royce. There, Tseng had played dumb by design, and had named Louis Walstead by using the term "Number One Man." Clever, these Chinese, when they were really Americans in disguise. Tseng had covered his falsity very neatly.

He wasn't trying to cover it any longer; not so far as Chenma was concerned.

"Yes, I am Shang Chou," he hissed. "I sent you to look for Tseng, and while you searched, I became Tseng. I shall go now, to hunt for Shang Chou, the man they will never find. They will think he doubled back among the many passages and will think it with good reason.

"For when they return, they will find you dead, the victim of Shang Chou's vengeance. I, Tseng, shall be the loudest in my grief, and they will believe me, because you told them they could trust me. So now, my adopted niece, prepare to die!"

Those words, "Prepare to die," were echoed, not in other words but by a laugh that quivered in from the door that Chenma's hand had partly opened. They were addressed to Alexander Marne, or to Shang Chou, or Tseng, however he might prefer. They carried a threat, too, in the form of a big gun.

The Shadow's .45 was poking through the door, his eyes a burning glow above it.

It happened very swiftly. As Marne wheeled, snarling, to aim at The Shadow, the cloaked fighter pushed the door and wheeled into the room.

The door edge came right at Marne and he jumped backward to avoid it. Finishing the spring, he jabbed his gun and fired.

He was too late. The Shadow hadn't stopped in the doorway. He was hurtling through, spinning about as he came, and in his sweep he gave an easy flip in his free hand that sent Chenma half across the room, away from the scene of the duel.

Marne's shot blasted empty space, and as he swung, hoping to make a better try, The Shadow's big gun answered.

Marne's body took the jolt. He reeled out into the hallway, turned back, trying to get his gun in action.

Commissioner Weston, arriving far behind the pack, had entered Shang Chou's preserves and was almost at hand when The Shadow's shot resounded. Coming from a corner, seeing a vicious-eyed Chinese taking aim at The Shadow, Weston let his gun go off with Tseng as the target. The range was less than a dozen feet, and Weston didn't stop with a single bullet.

He saw Tseng slump under the hail. If The Shadow hadn't mortally wounded his foeman, Weston certainly had. Frothy lips were giving their last gasp as Weston stooped to look at Tseng's thin-bearded face. Then a gloved hand, intervening, wiped away the visage at which Weston gazed.

Before the commissioner's astounded eyes, The Shadow changed the dead man's face to that of Alexander Marne!

It was simple enough. The Shadow simply peeled away a silk mask, wig and all, that was drawn over Marne's face. Then, while the commissioner arose, staring, The Shadow tossed him other exhibits.

One was another tight-fitting mask, with wig and long mustache that represented the face of Shang Chou. Another was the silver robe that the Dragon Cult master wore. The Shadow had found them both behind a secret panel in the wall of Shang Chou's apartment.

But the final exhibit came from the robe that Marne wore as Tseng. It was the ivory box holding the pieces of the Jade Dragon. Handing it to Chenma, The Shadow gestured toward Weston. Then, with a parting laugh, he was gone through the apartment of Shang Chou, not to join in the useless search but to find a route of his own to the outside.

His work finished, The Shadow had no need to stay, and his laugh, as it echoed back, carried a note of

final triumph over the notorious Shang Chou.

LATE though Weston had been in arriving at Shang Chou's, his friend Lamont Cranston was later. He finally showed up while Weston was inspecting the meeting room of the Dragon Cult, and the commissioner introduced him to Chenma.

As the girl's eyes met Cranston's, she knew that she had found another friend. His eyes reminded her of the eyes of The Shadow.

After Weston had related the details of crime's climax, Cranston gave an understanding nod.

"Too bad, commissioner," he said, "that we couldn't see the things that were so obvious to The Shadow."

"What do you mean?" inquired Cranston.

"These alibis among the Dragon Cult men," remarked Cranston. "They always had them - all of them. It must have finally occurred to The Shadow that none of them was in it. Too bad you didn't watch the Americans who came here on the sightseeing busses, or just dropped by to have a look at Chinatown."

"Yes, they were the real robbers," acknowledged Weston. "They must have held their meeting here, before the Dragon Cult assembled. They were gone, and off on crime, by the time the later meetings were finished."

Chenma interrupted, holding up some rice-paper slips.

"But Shang Chou gave these out!" she exclaimed. "Those that bore his mark told which men were to help the quest for the Jade Dragon!"

"He probably gave the Chinese nothing but blanks," explained Cranston, with a smile, "except tonight, when he wanted his dupes, the Dragon Cult men, to be captured and blamed for the murders done by chaps like Garvin and Feldon. Tonight, I would say, all the papers bore the symbol of Shang Chou."

Remembering that The Shadow had looked at the slips one night ago, and tonight as well, Chenma suddenly decided that Cranston's theory must be right.

"But we were looking for Chinese," reminded Weston. "Chinese who could have lived outside of Chinatown -"

"But who disappeared so amazingly," put in Cranston, "that they couldn't have been Chinese, at all."

He specified his points. At Dayland's, the trail had ended in the servants' quarters. There, Garvin, Feldon, and the rest had simply peeled off their Chinese blouses and facial disguises, packing them in suitcases of servants who were working with them, and who left, later, carrying the evidence.

After murdering Royce, the fake Chinese had fled to a Chinese laundry, slugged the honest laundryman and packed their disguises into laundry bags, which they had claimed soon after, while posing as American customers.

The thing had been even simpler on board the steamship Canopus. Tossing off their Chinese garb, the killers had pocketed their masks and passed as American visitors on board the liner. That time, they could afford to let their Chinese clothes be found, since the discovery gave the false impression that they had all dived overboard.

On every occasion, the real killers had stayed around to offer assistance in hunting down the vanished Chinese. Tonight, however, they had made their great mistake - of rallying to Marne's aid without benefit of their Chinese getups. Forcing them thus to show their hand was the master stroke of The Shadow's campaign.

Cranston was admiring the pieces of the Jade Dragon. Weighing the segments as he took them from the ivory box, he showed a puzzled expression. Putting the dragon together on the ebony stand, he began to press the coils together.

"Too heavy for jade, these segments," he remarked. "Odd, too, that Marne should have grabbed the dragon instead of the other jewels. He certainly didn't intend to rule China -"

As Cranston pressed, the segments of the dragon clicked. Cunningly wrought, those pieces were each in two portions, that opened like little boxes when the entire dragon was together and manipulated by an expert hand.

From each section rolled a green gem. The centers of the dragon segments were filled with perfect emeralds!

These were the secret of the Jade Dragon, the real worth that they contained and the wealth that Marne had sought above all other. The emeralds were Chenma's, for the segments of the dragon were specified only as jade in the lists of the stolen collections.

In addition, Cranston reminded Chenma that Yatku, buried in the well, was her property, too, and would bring several thousand dollars as old silver, less the few hundred dollars' cost of blasting him from his present mooring.

As for Chenma's status, she was at least the ward of Alexander Marne, even though he had posed as Shang Chou when he met her in China and announced himself to be her uncle. She merely needed another guardian, and Cranston was sure that his estimable friend, Dr. Roy Tam, could be induced to serve as such.

So they left for Tam's, Cranston and Chenma, with the girl carrying the priceless emeralds from the Jade Dragon. As they took an open route that led from Shang Chou's premises, Chenma paused for a last look back. Somehow, she fancied that she could still hear the laugh of The Shadow.

Chenma looked at Cranston and saw that he was smiling. A friendly smile, that blended with the thoughts in Chenma's mind. A smile that, like the echoes of a strange, weird mirth, remained as a symbol of The Shadow's triumph over crime!

THE END