



THE WHISPERING EYES

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. A QUESTION OF MURDER

LAMONT CRANSTON sauntered into the Cobalt Club and paused for a moment to listen to the chatter of the reporters who had gathered there. From doorways, balconies and alcoves, dignified club members were glaring at the newspapermen, and Cranston could hear the rumble of outraged voices. It was unthinkable, this invasion of the most exclusive club in all Manhattan. It behooved somebody to do something about it, and at once.

Somebody was trying to do something.

That somebody was Police Commissioner Ralph Weston. Himself a member of the Cobalt Club, the commissioner could sense that his standing in that exclusive retreat was somewhat at stake. Often, Weston had been eyed askance when he invited representatives of the press into these select preserves. To date, however, Weston had only admitted reporters singly or in pairs; never in droves. He had intimated to his fellow members that he was their shield against a mass intrusion such as this. A shield no longer, the commissioner decided to become a sword and drive the upstarts out of the foyer.

"Outside please, gentlemen!" Pompous, but with booming voice, Weston was raising both hands to gesture the crowd back. "This is no place for an interview. I have no appointment with any of you!"

A chorus came from the reporters:

"You've got an appointment, commissioner, though maybe you don't know it."

"That's right. Your appointment is with Inspector Cardona and our appointment is with him."

"It's for seven o'clock, commissioner, right on the dot."

"Down in the grill room, where you always are at seven -"

"And it's almost seven o'clock now!"

There was no holding back the throng. A dozen strong, they were pressing Weston back toward the stairs up which he had come at first news of the invasion. Bristling to the tips of his military mustache, Weston realized suddenly that the reporters couldn't have halted if they'd tried. Shoving in behind them was a larger crew of photographers and their assistants, anxious to crowd downstairs and set up their cameras. At that, Weston would have offered a last resistance, if Cranston had not sidled in beside him, to apply a persuasive grip upon his arm.

"Let's get them down to the grill room," suggested Cranston in an even tone. "The sooner the better, unless you want to be trampled. We can ease them out through the kitchen afterward."

With a helpless gesture to the club members who bordered the foyer, Weston turned and waved for the intruders to follow him downstairs. Cranston went along to help hold back the stampede and soon Weston, purple-faced but tight-lipped, found himself seated at a table in the center of the grill room. It was the sight of Cranston, seated alongside him, that enabled the commissioner to regain his self-control. Calm-faced, casual of manner, Cranston was taking the situation as a matter of course.

"Perhaps you can explain this, Cranston," sputtered Weston. "You act as though you had expected it."

"I have learned to expect anything," returned Cranston, nonchalantly, "but I can assure you I had no part in this affair. Perhaps one of these gentlemen"- Cranston's eyes were idly roving the group—"might act as spokesman for the rest and tell us what brought them here."

Cranston's eyes chose one face in the circle and flashed a signal by the merest pause. Catching the flash that was unnoticed by the rest, the chosen man stepped forward. He was a wiry chap, who had the look of an experienced newsman, including the slightly reassuring smile that impressed people who didn't want to be interviewed. Commissioner Weston recognized him as Clyde Burke of the New York Classic.

"It happened last night, commissioner," said Clyde, "when Inspector Cardona invited us down to headquarters."

"You mean Inspector Cardona is responsible for this?"

"Not exactly," rejoined Clyde. "I would credit it more to Professor Bogardus."

Nods from the surrounding reporters gave Clyde's statement unanimous approval, which only served to revive Weston's recent outrage.

"And who," demanded the commissioner, "is Professor Bogardus?"

"Eric Bogardus," specified Clyde. "He calls himself a P.H.D., all in single letters, which he says stands for Professor of Hypnotic Demonstrations."

Weston turned a side glance toward Cranston.

"Have you ever heard of this Bogardus?"

"Frequently," replied Cranston. "He does hypnotic shows three nights a week in an upstairs hall just off Broadway. I understand he gives lessons in between."

"You have seen him work?"

"No." Cranston gave a shrug. "There are a lot of such chaps around town, commissioner. Their demonstrations are boring and very similar."

Weston turned to concentrate on Burke.

"What was Bogardus doing down at headquarters?"

"It was some question about a license," Clyde explained. "Dr. Fontaine, the psychologist, claimed that Bogardus was engaged in a form of medical quackery. He argued that unless Bogardus could demonstrate actual hypnotism, his performances should be stopped."

One of the cameramen was pressing forward with some photographs. He handed Weston one that showed a handsome man with a high forehead and a trim Van Dyke beard. The commissioner scanned the photo, gave a nod.

"Big forehead, small chin," said Weston. "That's the reason he wears a beard. It's practically a disguise for the character he lacks. I could tell this man for a fraud at first sight. Now if you notice his eyes -"

Weston didn't get further with his analysis, because Clyde snatched the picture away and handed it back to the cameraman.

"Come again," the reporter told the photographer. "You gave the commissioner the wrong picture. This is Dr. Fontaine and he's a real Ph.D. We want the P-h for phoney and that's Professor Bogardus."

Sheepishly, the photographer went through his prints while the surrounding newsmen chortled at his mistake. That was a bad break for Commissioner Weston, whose self-importance had been jarred by his own quick jump to conclusions. Only Cranston noticed the several shades of red that diminished on Weston's face. Then Clyde had found some Bogardus pictures and was spreading them before the commissioner.

"Here's a good shot," said Clyde, extending one photo. "It was taken down at headquarters last night."

The picture showed Bogardus as a man with a rugged, commanding face, glittering eyes and bulging jaw. Weston made no comment on that score; he couldn't, without damaging his earlier opinion. Clyde had helped the situation however by giving Weston a picture that showed another man beside Bogardus. The other man was Inspector Joe Cardona, whose face was swarthy and square-set. In the picture, Cardona was staring intently at the eyes of Professor Bogardus.

"What is Bogardus saying?" queried Weston. "I never saw Inspector Cardona look so interested in anything before."

"The inspector is hypnotized," explained Clyde. "He wanted Bogardus to demonstrate his powers, so Bogardus did."

At that, Weston grunted disdainfully.

"Bogardus gave Cardona a post-hypnotic impression," continued Clyde. "That's why we held off the

story. At seven o'clock tonight, Cardona will again be under the professor's influence, though he doesn't know it."

An old-fashioned clock was beginning to strike seven from its place on the grill room wall. Weston gave the clock a startled glance; then laughed, a bit indulgently.

"That's why we came here," Clyde finished. "Cardona asked Bogardus if a hypnotist could make a man perform a crime, like murder. Bogardus said 'no,' but stated he could cause a subject to simulate a crime without his knowledge."

"Simulate a crime?" demanded Weston. "How do you mean?"

"Bogardus gave Cardona an imitation knife made of paper," stated Clyde. "While Cardona was hypnotized, Bogardus told him that at seven o'clock tonight, he was to seek out a certain victim and try to stab him with that knife."

"And who was that victim to be?"

"You, commissioner."

The clock had finished its chiming, which made the sudden silence all the more impressive. Suppressed wrath was purpling Weston's face anew, as he stared about the group, convinced that this whole party had been arranged as an absurd hoax. Then, before any one could interrupt Weston's mental train of indignation, the commissioner himself supplied the grand surprise.

Staring past the group, Weston fixed his eyes on the stairway, with a gaze of total unbelief. Instantly, the reporters spread apart, edging in among the tables, to clear the setting for the next scene in the drama.

The chief actor in that scene had arrived.

Moving forward from the steps that he had just descended was a swarthy man of stocky build. His face had the square-set features of the photograph, with the same rigid stare. The man was none other than Joe Cardona, ace inspector of the New York force, behaving in the fashion of a human automaton, a manner which Weston had never seen him employ before.

Step by step, as though he had become a self-appointed purveyor of doom, Inspector Cardona moved mechanically toward the target of his gaze, Commissioner Weston. The scene took on unexpected drama when Weston rose from his chair, stepped forward and gave a brushing gesture, the sort that he'd used to shoo away the reporters when they were upstairs.

"Enough of this farce, inspector!" exclaimed Weston. Then, as flash bulbs flicked: "We'll be the laughingstock of the whole city, if you continue with this farce."

Stolidly, Cardona moved forward, straight toward his goal. A photographer caught a snap of Weston's face, showing a mingling of rage and amazement. The commissioner was realizing that this wasn't a game. Inspector Cardona wouldn't jeopardize his status by knowingly defying a superior's order.

And now, Cardona's hand, thrusting beneath his coat, was drawing out a feeble weapon, an imitation dagger made of paper that had been folded in the fashion of a child's soldier hat. Between flashes from bulbs, Cranston, calm-faced as ever, stepped forward to thrust Weston back before the commissioner could grab at the silly object in Cardona's hand.

"Let him continue, commissioner," advised Cranston. "It is always best, when a subject is under a post-hypnotic influence. He must carry his purpose to its realization."

As Cranston withdrew, Cardona arrived. With a half crouch, the inspector delivered a stab with the paper knife, directly against Weston's chest. The frail weapon crumpled, but Cardona did not notice it. His eyes were on the man whom he had made an imaginary victim. Recoiling, more through bewilderment than the force of Cardona's blow, the commissioner sat down in his chair and gave a flabbergasted look around the group while bulbs flashed anew.

In the center of the scene, Cardona slowly opened his hand and let the folded paper flutter to the floor. His face showed no expression that could betray his thoughts, if he had any. Staring at the hypnotized inspector, Weston said, in hollow tone, "If that had been a real knife -"

Weston didn't finish the sentence. Turning to look for Cranston, he saw his calm-faced friend moving toward the wall, where the clock now registered three minutes past seven. That clock was a trophy which had been given to the Cobalt Club and other odd gifts adorned the wall along with it. Among them was quite a different sort of souvenir, a thin-bladed stiletto that some medieval duelist had used as a fencing dagger.

Plucking the stiletto from the wall, Cranston strode toward Cardona. The reporters were frozen, the photographers too stunned to remember their cameras. Planting the handle of the stiletto in Cardona's hand, Cranston gestured for Weston to rise, which the commissioner did, though slowly. Snapping his fingers toward the photographers, Cranston brought them to life.

Here was drama, indeed. A question of murder was at stake. Would Cardona use the steel blade as he had the paper? If he did, could Cranston, standing by, be quick enough to stop the thrust which Weston, stepping forward, was about to invite?

Up came Cardona's hand. As bulbs flashed, the silence was the sort in which anyone could have heard the dropping of a proverbial pin. It was more than a pin, however, that struck the tiled floor with a sudden clatter. It was a stiletto.

Cardona's eyes had tilted downward, drawn perhaps by the weight he noticed in his hand. He had dropped the stiletto in horror and now his hand was spread in the same wide fashion as his eyes. Springing forward, Cardona gripped Weston by the shoulders.

"What have I done, commissioner? Why am I here? Where is Professor Bogardus? He said I would kill somebody. He even gave me the knife!"

Steadying, Cardona turned, saw Cranston weighing two knives, one of steel, the other of paper, in either hand. Staring toward the stiletto, the inspector noticed that its blade was not bloody and gave a relieved sigh. Looking toward Weston, Cardona saw the commissioner going toward the side of the room, where an attendant was beckoning him to a telephone. Cardona followed, Cranston accompanying him. Clyde Burke also came along, with the reporters crowding after.

"Don't worry, inspector," Cranston was saying. "You only used the dummy knife, the paper one, which Bogardus gave you. When I handed you the stiletto, you shunned the very suggestion. That's usual with subjects under a post-hypnotic influence."

Clyde Burke was busily dashing off penciled words on a sheet of paper. As Weston turned from the telephone, lowering the receiver from his ear, Clyde read what he had written.

"You can't commit murder with a paper knife," stated Clyde. "How's that for a caption, commissioner? We'll use it with the picture that goes with the story. It won't reflect on anyone and it's a true statement. You can't commit murder with a paper knife."

Weston's eyes gave Clyde a stare that was much like Cardona's recent trance gaze. In a tone like an echo, Weston queried, "You can't?"

"Of course not."

"Tell me, Burke," said Weston, "did you ever hear of a man named James Kelthorn?"

"Why, yes," recalled Clyde. "He's an importer who was mixed up recently in a government investigation."

"Would you like a good murder story, Burke?"

"Of course."

"Very well. I'll take you along to cover one and you can bring your photographer. James Kelthorn has just been murdered."

Commissioner Weston was quite himself again and from the grimly humorous expression on his mustached face, Lamont Cranston could guess what was coming next, though Clyde Burke didn't.

"Perhaps, Burke," added Weston, "you would like to know the sort of weapon with which Kelthorn was slain?"

"Definitely," replied Clyde. "I suppose they told you over the telephone?"

"They did," declared Weston, tersely. "Make a note of it and at the same time cross out that clever caption you just wrote." Grimly, yet triumphantly, the commissioner swept his gaze around the group as he added:

"James Kelthorn was murdered with a paper knife!"

CHAPTER II. KILLER UNKNOWN

COMMISSIONER WESTON had misinterpreted the statement on the telephone that caused him to infer that James Kelthorn had been murdered with an imitation knife made of paper. He had been told that the death instrument was a paper knife, which was something quite different from the toy weapon that Inspector Cardona carried and decidedly more lethal.

Now, in Kelthorn's office, Weston was studying the paper knife along with the body of the victim.

Kelthorn's office was on the fourth floor of a building on West Twenty-fifth Street. The building was old, but well managed. It had one elevator and a watchman named Jenkins who also operated the elevator during the night shift. Only Jenkins could have gone up and down, because the stairway from the ground floor was closed off at night by a locked gate, which had not been tampered with.

When on duty, Jenkins remained in the lobby and kept a signed book of all persons who entered and left the building, listing the times of such arrivals and departures. Jenkins had come on duty at six thirty, he testified, and at six forty-five, Kelthorn had arrived, according to the register. Seven was the time at which Jenkins began his rounds and he had started on time. Arriving in Kelthorn's office, he had found the murder.

James Kelthorn, a baldish man whose limited streaks of hair were gray, was sprawled in front of an old safe at the back wall of his small and rather shabby office. The door of the safe was wide open and its contents, mostly papers, had been scattered all about the dead man. Behind the body was a desk with a

revolving chair, now turned toward the safe.

Apparently, while opening the safe in the presence of some visitor he trusted, Kelthorn had been stabbed treacherously in the back. Either that, or the murderer had entered stealthily, staged a silent sneak to the spot where Kelthorn stooped, and had driven home the killing blow. Weston inclined to the theory that the killer was already present. Unless Kelthorn had been with a man he considered a friend, he would have been more cautious and would probably have locked the office door before opening the safe.

The paper knife had been twisted from Kelthorn's body after the fatal blow and was now lying on the floor beside the body. Weston had not touched it, because he wanted the knife to be tested for fingerprints, but he was examining it closely, as he stooped on the floor. The paper knife had a flat metal handle, stamped with letters. Its long metal blade had nothing of a cutting edge, but it came to a fine, sharp point, like an ice-pick.

"More deadly than it would appear at first sight," was Weston's statement in regard to the knife. "If Kelthorn's friend noticed it lying on the desk, it could have tempted him to murder, providing, of course, that he had considered such an act." Looking up at Cardona, Weston added, "Bring the light closer, inspector. I want to read what's stamped on the handle."

While Cardona complied, Lamont Cranston studied Jenkins. The watchman had a sharp, pointed face, the kind that indicated an individual who should be nervous and quick of manner. Instead, Jenkins had assumed a stolid pose; his eyes were fixed dully on the scene before him, as though he were witnessing the enactment of a dream. There was nothing of horror and scarcely anything of interest in the watchman's gaze. All this might merely be routine, quite customary in his rounds, judging by the fellow's expression.

"Compliments of the Arcturus Agency," read Weston, from the knife handle. "General Insurance. Brumder Building, New York, NY. Phone, Chelsea eight—four —three—six—six. Call them, inspector."

Cardona picked up Kelthorn's desk phone by its tips, to avoid smudging any likely fingerprints. He dialed, then lifted the phone to his ear, with the same trick hold. Receiving an answer from the insurance agency, Cardona announced himself officially and asked if they did business with Kelthorn. Learning that they did, Cardona also found that Kelthorn was a steady enough customer to have been given a complimentary knife.

"Tell them to send a man over," ordered Weston, as he caught the gist of Cardona's conversation. "We want them to identify the paper knife."

"And you might have them bring another sample," suggested Cranston. "It would be good for a comparison."

Cranston's remark was addressed to Weston, but Cardona waited for the commissioner to repeat it, which he did. Cranston gave a slight smile of approval. It was smart of Cardona to let the order come direct from Weston, rather than ruffle the commissioner by acting without his authority.

That was always the way when Commissioner Weston was personally investigating a case. Patience was more than a virtue; it was a necessity. During the next quarter hour, Cranston, Cardona and others watched Weston sift stacks of papers, bills, receipts, invoices and other documents from Kelthorn's safe, all of which seemed to become more and more irrelevant to the case. Over near the door, Cranston heard Clyde Burke confide to another reporter.

"If they ever find the murderer," Clyde said, "he will have saved himself half a life's sentence by the time

the commissioner catches up with him."

An interruption came soon afterward. The man from the Arcturus Agency arrived, bringing one of their paper knives. Prompt comparison of this sample with the murder weapon proved the wisdom of Cranston's suggestion. The knife with which Kelthorn was slain obviously had been sharpened for the kill. Either the murderer had surreptitiously taken Kelthorn's paper knife during a previous visit, or he had prepared one and substituted it on this trip, taking Kelthorn's away for keeps. In discussing this, Inspector Cardona made notes to the effect that the murderer must have been familiar with Kelthorn's office, a valuable thing to know in pursuing the investigation.

That brought the matter back to Jenkins.

Concentrating upon the dull-eyed watchman, Cardona began a direct quiz.

"You say you came on duty at six thirty, Jenkins?"

Jenkins nodded.

"Who was here when you came on?"

"Rankin was. He's the super. He'd locked the gate and made the rounds. He always does."

While Cardona was jotting down Rankin's name, Cranston put a casual question:

"Where were you, Jenkins, before you came on duty?"

Snapping suddenly from his dull manner, Jenkins gave a quick grunt, "Huh?" Then, laughing a bit nervously as Cardona looked toward him, Jenkins addressed Joe.

"Funny, what this gentleman just asked me," the watchman said. "I was just thinking about it myself. I came in from the back alley, like I always do. I've got a key to the back door of the lobby, you see. Only I was a little late. I guess Rankin was sore."

"So you were a little late," repeated Cardona. "Why?"

"I don't know." Jenkins let his eyes set in a dull, reflective gaze. "I should have been on time. I guess I was late on account of what happened in the alley."

"And what happened in the alley?"

"That's where I saw the eyes." As he spoke, Jenkins assumed a mechanical tone. "They were staring right out of the dark, like a cat's eyes. Seems like I can't remember anything else, except the voice."

"Eyes, staring at me," repeated Cardona, in a voice that seemed an imitation of Jenkins'. "I can't remember anything else, except the voice."

Apparently, Cardona was repeating Jenkins' testimony, but the inspector's hand was not writing down the notes. Curiously, Joe's gaze had assumed a fixed look, too. Cranston noticed it, as did Clyde, who was watching from the door. Then Weston snapped into the situation.

"So you heard a voice." Weston spoke impatiently to Jenkins. "What did the voice say?"

Jenkins shook his head and Cranston noticed that Cardona did the same.

"Then what did you do?" demanded Weston. "Come, man, snap out of it."

There was a nervous blink of Jenkins' eyes, which Cardona matched in less apparent style. Then:

"I came in and went on duty," said Jenkins. "Rankin was there, right enough, because I remember him saying something about my being late. I know I must have locked the alley door because it was locked afterward. Then"- Jenkins rubbed his head—"I kind of remember going up and down in the elevator. Or maybe that was later."

"You mean," asked Weston, "when Kelthorn arrived and you brought him up to this floor?"

"That I remember perfectly," replied Jenkins. "I know Mr. Kelthorn" - he gave a side look toward the floor—"I mean I knew him. So I had him sign the book and I brought him up to his floor."

"And then you went down again."

Jenkins nodded; gave his chin a rub.

"I must have," he decided. "I guess it was afterward that I took the car up and down. It's this way, commissioner. You take so many trips for one reason or another, that you kind of forget what they were about, or who was with you. But I couldn't have taken anybody up and nobody could have rung to come down. I guess I was thinking about some other night. This whole thing kind of worried me."

"You mean finding Kelthorn's body?"

"Not exactly. I mean I was worried about Kelthorn when he came in. It was sort of like I expected him and I was uneasy knowing he was in the building. I sort of thought there ought to be somebody else coming in and out instead of him. Finding the body sort of shocked me out of the way I felt. I guess I feel sort of responsible for something I don't know anything about."

"At least, you've proven yourself a man of sorts," asserted Weston, testily. "All right, Jenkins. At seven o'clock you made your rounds. Did you start from the top of the building down, or from the bottom up?"

"I came right to this office first," testified Jenkins. "I always check the book to see who's in the building before I start. Tonight it was only Mr. Kelthorn and looking at the book made me begin wondering about him."

"Did you say wondering," queried Weston, "or worrying?"

"Both. I must have been worrying first or I wouldn't have been wondering next. So I came up here and found—that."

Jenkins accompanied the "that" with a nod toward Kelthorn's body. At that, Cardona suddenly came back into the quiz.

"You've told us something we didn't think to ask you, Jenkins," said Cardona. "You said you'd started your rounds, so we supposed you'd made them this far. I should have known you came directly here. Otherwise, you couldn't have reported the murder so soon after seven o'clock."

Weston gave Cardona a glance of disapproval.

"You should have thought of that sooner, inspector."

"I was thinking of other things around seven o'clock," reminded Cardona. "Maybe I wasn't thinking of anything, or at least not for myself, on account of the hangover from that hypnotic jolt Professor Bogardus gave me last night. But let's get back to this case, commissioner. If Jenkins didn't make his

rounds, he hasn't checked on how the killer might have got in or out."

"Then why not check with him now?" queried Weston. "I'll stay here and finish going through Kelthorn's papers."

Cardona gestured to Jenkins and they started on their task, followed by a small coterie of reporters and photographers that Weston had allowed to accompany him here. Cranston strolled along to see what might be found, but from the calm, almost bored expression that he wore, he apparently didn't expect much.

If so, Cranston was due for a surprise, provided he ever allowed any experience to surprise him.

Around a turn in the hall, the group came to a door that led to a fire escape. Like all such doors in the building, this one had a heavy latch, which prevented it from being opened from the outside. Beside the door was a window which also gave access to the fire escape; as a precaution against marauders, it had been fitted with a frame containing heavy bars.

No longer was that window barred.

Someone had wrenched the frame, bars and all, from the surrounding framework of the window. The barred device was propped against the hallway wall. Whoever had done this must have employed huge strength to wrest the frame from its moorings, for there were no marks on the bars to show the use of any instrument, nor were the bars bent. The edge of the fire escape was only a foot away from the side of the window. Cardona flickered his flashlight, saw nothing amiss with the fire escape, then turned the beam straight down.

All the inspector saw below was narrow paving alongside a brick wall, with a few ash cans stacked with old barrels. Turning to Jenkins, Cardona asked, "Is that the back alley where you came in?"

"Yes," nodded Jenkins. "The extension ladder from the fire tower is right alongside the back door."

"And that's where you saw eyes like a cat's?"

"That's right. I guess it was a cat that looked at me. They like to sit on the barrels and boxes there."

"But what about the voice you heard?"

"I guess maybe I imagined it. I can't remember anything it said. That shouldn't happen with a voice or should it, inspector?"

"I ought to say it shouldn't," replied Cardona, "but since last night, I'm beginning to think anything can happen. I'm not sure about voices myself. We'll go down in the elevator and check the back door. But first we'll report this to the commissioner."

They headed back to Kelthorn's office, where Cardona was the first to enter. Weston was rising from among the dead man's papers as if eager to receive Cardona's report. But before the inspector could speak a word, the commissioner delivered a triumphant announcement of his own.

"I've found what the murderer was after!" exclaimed Weston. "Either he missed it entirely, or he found a lot more like it, enough more so he didn't bother to count them, to see if they were all there!"

With that, Weston shoved his right hand, fisted, into the light. Spreading his fingers wide, he disclosed an object lying in his palm. It was a gem, a magnificent ruby, which both in size and sparkle proclaimed itself a thing of worth. Even a skeptic like Cranston would have accepted that stone as a prize without

demanding the surety of a jeweler's test.

"A genuine pigeon's-blood," defined Weston. "I found it under an envelope that was wedged beneath Kelthorn's elbow. That's why the killer overlooked it. And now"- Weston closed his hand loosely about the ruby—"since you are back so soon, inspector, tell me what you have found."

"We've found the way the killer got in and out," stated Cardona. "He's a man with plenty of brawn to punch his way through a barred window, frame and all. That may prove he depended on his strength, more than his skill, when he stabbed Kelthorn with that sharpened paper knife."

Commissioner Weston gave an approving nod.

"You have the method and the motive," Weston declared. "Now find the man we want for murder."

A routine job, as Commissioner Weston defined it. But there was still one skeptic in the group. That skeptic was Lamont Cranston, whose calm eyes, like his immobile face, could very well have indicated a completely opposite opinion.

Often, Cranston could see through the simple to uncover the complex. The murder of James Kelthorn was the type that promised a quota of problems before the trail to an unknown killer would lie open.

CHAPTER III. TRAILS OF THE MIND

BEING an experienced police officer, Inspector Cardona resumed his investigation by accepting the obvious, then rejecting it, and finally accepting it again.

This took place when the group returned to the window by the fire exit. Since Commissioner Weston came along, Cardona gave out his theories in the fashion of a lecturer.

"Very obviously," declared Cardona, "the murderer entered by this window. That accounts for the fact that Jenkins saw no one come through the lobby. It would seem obvious that the murderer went out by the window that he entered, but I am not willing to accept that point. It is equally obvious that he could have gone somewhere else in the building to seek another exit, so our first step is to search elsewhere to make sure that this is not a blind trail."

By this time enough policemen had arrived to give Cardona a sizable searching squad, so they set off. Photographers and reporters followed, with one exception. Clyde Burke remained as he felt a hand grip his arm. The gripping hand belonged to Lamont Cranston.

"This window, Burke," queried Cranston, quietly. "What would be your opinion regarding it?"

"Why, the murderer forced his way through it," replied Clyde. "As Cardona would say, that's obvious."

"I wouldn't say so, Burke. Suppose you step out to that fire escape and show me how you would have forced that barred frame loose from the window."

Easing out to the fire escape, Clyde gained it with a long step, turned and reached for the edge of the window. Then he realized what Cranston had in mind. It would have been impossible for anyone to force the bars from outside. The reach to the window was too long from the fire escape. Drawing himself back to the ledge, Clyde realized that from such a slender perch it would be equally impossible to exert strong pressure on the bars. Coming in from the window, Clyde took a look at the interior, saw where screws had been wrenched from the woodwork. He turned to Cranston and nodded.

"It's plain enough now," agreed Clyde. "I can see that the frame must have been yanked free from this

side. Shall we tell Cardona?"

"Hardly," replied Cranston. "It might embarrass him to realize he overlooked such a detail. Besides, Cardona is engaged in useful work and I don't want to confuse him. He may find the killer's trail somewhere else in this building. My opinion, however, is that since the murderer took the easiest way in, he would also take that way out."

"The easiest way couldn't have been through the window," argued Clyde. "Not until he'd got inside first, to yank those bars loose."

"I'm not sure that the murderer wrenched the bars from the window."

"Then who could have?"

"Whoever came up in the elevator with Jenkins and later came down with him again, before and after Kelthorn's death."

Clyde's eyes became meditative; then he looked through his notes of statements made by Jenkins.

"There's something to that," nodded Clyde. "Jenkins did say that he remembered going up and down in the elevator, but he was very vague about it."

"Naturally," affirmed Cranston. "Jenkins was hypnotized. Remember when he began to talk about a voice and Cardona repeated what Jenkins said?"

"I remember. They were looking right at each other."

"Staring would be the proper term, Burke. Cardona had recollections of a voice, too, from yesterday, when Bogardus gave him a hypnotic treatment. They were both over it, but they still showed the dazed effect that comes after a hypnotic experience or the fulfillment of a post-hypnotic action."

Not being in a similar state, Clyde tried to piece a few facts together, particularly in relation to Jenkins and those mystery trips in the elevator.

"Suppose somebody walked in and threw the hyp on Jenkins," said Clyde. "Whoever did it could have made Jenkins bring him up and down in the elevator -"

"It doesn't work that easily," interposed Cranston. "Jenkins would have challenged any stranger who walked into the lobby. We must look for an earlier origin of the hypnotic experience. I would set it at the time Jenkins came through the back alley."

"When he saw the eyes!"

"Precisely."

"Then the man who hypnotized Jenkins must have doubled around to the front of the building. He came in and Jenkins brought him up unknowingly. While up here, the man murdered Kelthorn and wrenched the bars loose as a blind -"

"Too fast again, Burke," interrupted Cranston. "I still think the killer came and went by the window route. Someone else could have made those elevator trips with Jenkins and pulled the window from its moorings."

"But why?"

"Because the man with the eyes and the voice could not be sure that he had hypnotized Jenkins sufficiently. Those vague recollections that Jenkins retained could have been stronger. Besides, to have another man come in and out, would be all the better throw-off. I think we'll find a trail, Burke, but when we do, it will be the wrong man's."

With that, Cranston eased himself through the window in lithe style, to gain the fire escape. From its edge, he called back to Clyde.

"I'll try this route and see what it brings," said Cranston. "You can find the others and tell the commissioner I went back to the club. I'll see you later, Burke."

By the time Cranston had glided down the fire escape and merged with the darkness and silence of the alley below, a singular transformation was under way. It was a case of blackness blending into blackness. Somewhere in the alley, Cranston must have previously placed the accessories needed for his change, otherwise it would have exceeded the range of possibility.

For the tiny flashlight that began to probe the alley for traces of clues was held by a thin-gloved hand belonging to a figure cloaked in black. Lamont Cranston, so invisible in the darkness that he seemed a very part of it, had become The Shadow.

Long and thorough was The Shadow's probe. It was interrupted suddenly when the alley door swung wide, throwing a betraying shaft of light along the cement paving. Yet no eyes could have glimpsed the living Shadow. His form receded as swiftly as the darkness itself, leaving only a momentary trace in the shape of a dark silhouette that glided after him along the ground and was absorbed by the darkness at the side of the alley.

From the doorway stepped Commissioner Weston, beckoning to Jenkins, the watchman. When Jenkins stepped out into the alley, Inspector Cardona came with him. A moment later, Clyde Burke followed.

"Show us the place, Jenkins," ordered Weston. "The exact spot where you claim you saw those eyes."

"I'll try to remember, sir," said Jenkins. "But don't hold me responsible if I'm a trifle out of the way."

"We've only your word for it, one way or the other," declared Weston. "So jog your memory as well as you can."

Shuffling around through the dark, Jenkins picked a high stack of barrels and crates at least twenty feet from where The Shadow had performed his gliding vanish. Then:

"It was here, commissioner."

"You mean," asked Weston, "that you could see those eyes in this darkness?"

"It wasn't quite so dark then," explained Jenkins. "But it was pretty dark at that."

"And you heard the voice here, too?"

"Right here."

Weston gave a snort.

"Perhaps, Jenkins, as well as seeing things, you are hearing things."

At the commissioner's remark, Jenkins jerked suddenly about, throwing up his hands as though frightened. His voice came in a frantic gasp.

"I... I thought I heard something just then, commissioner. Like... like a laugh, coming in a whisper."

"So you heard something," retorted Weston. He turned abruptly to Cardona, who was standing in the light. "Make a note of that, inspector. Jenkins heard something. Did you?"

To Weston's surprise, Cardona began to nod. Then, catching himself, the inspector said:

"Why, yes, I heard you say something, commissioner. Are you asking if I heard anything else?"

"That's right."

"I could have," conceded Cardona. "It might be my imagination, though. Jenkins is nervous, so I'd make allowance for him."

From Cardona's expression, Clyde was sure that Joe had heard the same whispered sound as Jenkins, yet not a trace of it had reached Clyde's ears. Apparently, Weston was willing to accept Cardona's compromise, for the commissioner stalked indoors and Cardona followed, bringing Jenkins. Clyde remained, for a simple reason. Again, a hand had gripped his arm.

This time it was The Shadow's voice that spoke:

"Come."

As they moved out through the darkness of the alley, Clyde spoke to his unseen companion.

"They actually heard you, chief. I mean Cardona and Jenkins. If they did, why didn't the commissioner and I?"

"It was a case of hyperesthesia," came The Shadow's reply. "The term means an acute sensitivity, in this case an ability to hear lesser sounds than normally. It is a sure check on a hypnotic condition. It proves that Jenkins, like Cardona, has recently been under hypnotic influence."

They turned a corner into the next street and The Shadow edged Clyde into the darkness while a couple of police cars rolled away. As the sounds of departing sirens died, Clyde heard The Shadow's whispered instructions.

"Stay in this neighborhood," ordered The Shadow, "and play your proper part, openly. Be the inquiring reporter and learn if anyone went into Kelthorn's building or came out between six thirty and seven."

Nodding, Clyde stepped out of the darkness and The Shadow seemed to fade, restraining hand and all. It was often that way, Clyde remembered, when he accompanied his chief on special missions in the darkness. An uncanny feeling, to which the reporter had never become accustomed, even after years in The Shadow's service. It at least made Clyde understand and appreciate the startling power that The Shadow held over men of crime when he encountered them. When Clyde reported cases of berserk crooks emptying their guns into empty darkness, he always knew his chief had been around.

Clyde was glad The Shadow was around tonight.

This whole case was uncanny in itself, and that applied to the preliminaries leading up to the discovery of Kelthorn's death. The strange behavior of Inspector Cardona carried more of the sinister than the humorous, now that The Shadow had identified Jenkins as another hypnotic subject. Now Clyde was on the trail of a man who rated as a human question mark. That was the unknown, perhaps imaginary, person who had taken two elevator rides with Jenkins.

The man existed, how did he figure?

Not as the murderer, in The Shadow's estimate. That unsavory distinction belonged to someone who could so far be described only in terms of eyes and a voice. Therefore, Clyde was seeking leads to a man who had been an accomplice, willing or unwilling, in a murder. Checking on the ownership of the eyes and the voice would come in The Shadow's own province.

Reaching the front street, Clyde entered a drugstore, showed his reporter's card to a clerk, who nodded and then shook his head. What he meant was that the police had already inquired about strangers in the neighborhood and that he had not seen anyone. Along the block and up the next avenue, Clyde received similar responses. Turning another corner, Clyde saw a dimly lighted shoe repair shop, stopped there, just on a chance.

The man who owned the shop pondered when Clyde questioned him. Then:

"Yep, I saw somebody," he said. "I left here around seven but I came back, on account of forgetting to mark the prices on some repair jobs. When I was going out, I saw him."

"Saw who?" asked Clyde.

"The funny guy. He wasn't laughing or nothing. He was just acting funny. Walking like this"- the shoemaker did a few long strides behind his bench— "and looking straight ahead, except he was crossing the street like what you'd call an angle."

"Why was he doing that?"

"Well, he'd come out of an alley and was going to another on this side. You'll find it a few doors down. Only you won't find him, he'd be gone by now. He was a tall guy, with a dark coat and a gray hat. That's all I noticed."

Leaving the shoe shop, Clyde found the alley, entered it. In twenty feet, he came to an open gate, a grilled arch above it. Clyde had close to a foot of clearance beneath the gate, so he didn't have to stoop, but that might not apply to others, as he promptly discovered. His foot kicking something in the dark, Clyde picked up the object. It was easily identified in the dim light; it was a soft gray hat.

This, indeed, was a find, and Clyde, as the inquiring reporter, stepped back to the gate to check the theory he had in mind. It fitted. The hat had probably been brushed from the head of the stalking man described by the shoemaker. So intent was Clyde that he failed to hear a slight sound from the far side of the gate. Nor did a slight touch on his shoulder startle him. Thinking that he'd brushed the side of the gate, Clyde merely turned around.

From the gloom, eyes met Clyde's.

Strangely mild, yet strongly fixed, those eyes. Cat's eyes, as Jenkins might have called them, but with a human gaze that seemed to harden. Eyes only, lacking any human form that Clyde could notice, but that was not surprising, considering how intently Clyde's own gaze was riveted. This couldn't be a cat, for there were no barrels or boxes here as in the alley behind Kelthorn's building. But Clyde was no longer in the inquiring mood to bother with such details.

Clyde Burke was listening to a voice. Slow, precise, but commanding, it evoked spontaneous replies.

"Tell me your name."

"Clyde Burke."

"State what you do."

"I am a reporter."

"Name your paper."

"The Classic."

A pause; then the voice declared:

"I shall take the hat."

Clyde handed over the hat. The voice was speaking again, its sentences ending in slight queries, to each of which Clyde gave an automatic nod.

"You will forget you found this hat, understand?... You will forget how you happened to come here, understand?... You will remember only my eyes, do you understand?"

Waiting for the end of Clyde's third nod, the man with the strange eyes added these words in the same emphatic tone.

"When you see my eyes again, you will obey whatever my voice commands. Now go your way."

Clyde stood rigid on the brink of what seemed endless hesitation; then, steered in the right direction by a hand he did not feel, the reporter walked blindly, mechanically, to the mouth of the alley. There a slight breeze stirred him from his daze and Clyde started to cross the street, only to halt fixedly.

The eyes again. Vaguely, Clyde recalled them. Blinding eyes, growing larger, glaring furiously. They were no longer eyes when brakes shrieked and a police car veered to avoid running down the transfixed reporter. Then came a familiar tone that jarred Clyde from his reverie.

"What are you doing, Burke, staring into the headlights? Climb in here and I'll drop you at the Classic."

It was Joe Cardona, ending a futile inquiry of his own, as he explained while they rode along.

"Nobody saw any suspicious characters around Kelthorn's building," the inspector stated. "Seems like you were roving farther afield. See anybody or find anything?"

"I saw nobody," Clyde replied. "I found nothing."

Any companion other than Cardona, or perhaps Jenkins, would have wondered at Clyde's steady stare and mechanical reply. Cardona, because of his own hypnotic treatment, was not in a mood which enabled him to judge such conditions. Lapsing into a stolid manner of his own, Cardona sat silent until the driver stopped in front of the Classic building, where habit induced Clyde to alight.

Once he reached the city room, Clyde felt practically himself again. His mind snapped back to earlier matters, prior to his chat with the shoemaker. There was a report Clyde had to make before he batted out his story of Kelthorn's murder. To make that report, Clyde entered a pay booth instead of using one of the newspaper office phones.

A voice responded to Clyde's dial:

"Burbank speaking."

"Report from Burke," stated Clyde. "No clues to any strangers in vicinity of murder building."

"Report received."

That call to Burbank, The Shadow's contact man, concluded Clyde's duty to his chief. The hat clue which The Shadow might have considered vital had been blanked from the record as completely as the true testimony which only Jenkins could have given!

CHAPTER IV. THE EYES HAVE IT

THE next evening found Commissioner Weston again in his favorite habitat, the grill room of the Cobalt Club. Instead of a surrounding throng of reporters and photographers, Weston was speaking to an audience of one, a man with high forehead whose features had a sharp look, despite the camouflage of a Van Dyke beard.

"I'm telling you," Weston was saying, "it's fabulous. Perhaps I should say priceless. And this"—between thumb and fingers, Weston turned a gleaming object in the light—"is the clue that proves it!"

At that, a new voice interrupted, a touch of whimsy in its calm tone:

"What's priceless, commissioner? Don't tell me you've found a pearl in that plate of oysters you haven't even touched."

Smothering his indignation, Weston turned to greet his friend Lamont Cranston. With a wave, the commissioner introduced the bearded man beside him, who gave Cranston a keen stare with narrowed, beady eyes.

"This is Dr. Gerald Fontaine," declared Weston. "You have probably recognized him, Cranston, from the photograph that a newspaper man showed us here last night. Sit down and join us." Then, as Cranston complied, the commissioner showed the object that he held between his thumb and fingers. "And this," Weston added, "is something that you also saw last night, Cranston. It is not a pearl, but something far more valuable, the ruby I picked up in Kelthorn's office last night."

Eyeing the ruby more closely than he had before, Cranston asked:

"Did you say it was priceless, commissioner?"

"Not this ruby alone," replied Weston, "but the collection of which it is a part. There is no doubt as to its origin. Jewel experts have identified it as one of the Royal Burmese rubies that disappeared mysteriously in Singapore just prior to the Japanese occupation of that city."

"And how did Kelthorn come to have it?"

"That question can be only partly answered, Cranston. I have made a thorough check on Kelthorn. His importing business was pretty much of a blind for undercover dealings, though before today, no one cared to say so. He picked up war loot and sold it. How many shady transactions took place in that little office of his"—Weston shook his head—"we shall never know. But he is a far bigger fish than anyone thought. Imagine, Kelthorn peddling the Royal Burmese rubies!"

Cranston gave the statement brief consideration, then asked quietly:

"What makes you suppose he had all of them, commissioner?"

"Because that safe was thoroughly searched, Cranston. It gave every evidence of being tooth-combed. I should know, because I went through every item carefully. If this ruby"—Weston was thumbing the gem as though recalling boyhood marble games—"had been a single item, I am sure the murderer would have

found and kept it. But if it had been only one of forty-eight more, the total of the Royal Burmese collection, he could have dropped it in his eagerness to gain the rest."

"An excellent point," approved Cranston, "particularly if Kelthorn had been bringing the entire collection from the safe at the time the killer stabbed him."

Weston nodded, as though that idea had been his own. Immediately, Cranston deflated the theory.

"If Kelthorn owned such a collection," Cranston observed, "it is rather odd that he should have kept it in an old-fashioned safe in an unprotected office."

"He didn't keep the rubies there," explained Weston. "He never brought anything valuable to that office, except when he had a special customer. He sounded people out, found if they wanted to buy something in the black market, always at a bargain price. Naturally, the people who gave me this information were honest. They all felt that Kelthorn was simply feeling them out; that he would have larger loot to offer if they agreed to buy any. But they had no idea who his steady customers were, the ones who would consider such offers, and, therefore, they did not guess the magnitude of Kelthorn's operations."

Setting the ruby some distance from his plate, where he wouldn't confuse it with any pearls he might find, Weston ate his oysters in a series of swallows. Then:

"Kelthorn must have trusted his visitor implicitly," said Weston. "Otherwise, he would not have invited him to the office in the evening. As a matter-of-fact, his undercover customers wouldn't want to enter the building at night, because they would have to register their names. That explains why the murderer chose his own way into the place."

Cranston could have argued that point, but he ignored it. As with Cardona, Cranston preferred to have Weston follow his own leads. Therefore, he had to appear to accept the theories upon which they were founded.

"I've talked to Rankin," stated Weston. "He's the man who was on duty before Jenkins relieved him. Rankin doesn't remember any suspicious characters around the building, but he does say that Jenkins acted rather queerly or dumbly."

At that word, Dr. Fontaine leaned forward on the table. His voice was sharp as he asked:

"Just how would you define dumbly?"

"From Rankin's description," stated Weston, "I would say he meant blankly, just about the way Inspector Cardona has been acting. Blankly and dumbly. Why, every time Cardona talks to Jenkins, he nods at everything the fellow says, as though they had some understanding between them."

A glitter came promptly to Fontaine's eyes.

"That's what I wanted to hear you say, commissioner," the sharp-faced man asserted. "The two appear to have gained a common bond. You told me that Cardona was under hypnotic influence last night. I would say that the same applied to Jenkins."

"In that case," exclaimed Weston, "Jenkins might be the man who murdered Kelthorn!"

Dr. Fontaine gave a slow head-shake.

"Very unlikely," he said. "For a posthypnotic command to be strongly effective, it should be concentrated. If you had found Jenkins standing rigid in Kelthorn's office, he might be held responsible

for the murder. But as it was, Jenkins went about his business and later discovered the body himself."

"Then perhaps he wasn't hypnotized at all."

Smiling at Weston's comment, Fontaine gestured to some report sheets lying on the table. They contained Jenkins' testimony of the night before.

"Jenkins spoke of eyes," reminded Fontaine, "and also admitted a time lapse in his recollections. Those facts are indicative of a hypnotic condition. Just why Jenkins was hypnotized, I can't quite say"—stroking his Van Dyke, the psychologist narrowed his sharp eyes - "but I am sure it did not concern an act of violence. That would either have led to a rude awakening or a cataleptic condition after the deed, such as Jenkins becoming rigid or immobile."

In his speech, Fontaine's voice carried a strong tone of authority that impressed Weston and brought a studied gaze from Cranston. Though Weston admitted himself at sea where hypnotism was concerned, he had at least been witness to one post-hypnotic deed; an important witness, at that. Weston's sudden nod showed that he was recalling events in this very room, when Inspector Cardona had gone through with an imitation murder, but had recoiled from the realistic version when given a stiletto.

"You are probably right, doctor," said Weston. "But again, if those eyes really hypnotized Jenkins, what was the purpose?"

"To produce a hallucination," replied Fontaine, promptly. "Jenkins apparently talked like a man who had undergone such an experience."

"You mean he was seeing things?" demanded Weston. "That couldn't be. He didn't see anything imaginary. On the contrary, he found Kelthorn's body."

Settling back in his chair, Fontaine glanced at Cranston and in that gaze seemed to recognize that here was a man who would understand subtle points that might take considerable explaining to Weston. Momentarily, the psychologist hesitated; then, as though Cranston's interest had committed him, Fontaine proceeded.

"There are two types of hallucinations," Fontaine specified. "Positive and negative. In the positive type, the subject imagines that he sees something which does not exist. In the negative type, he imagines that he does not see something that is really there."

Cranston gave a slight nod to show that he understood; not noticing it, Weston gave a half laugh at Fontaine's statement.

"You must be joking, doctor," Weston said. "I've heard of people seeing things, but people not seeing things is something difficult to credit."

"On the contrary," stated Fontaine, "a negative hallucination is much more plausible than a positive one, though, as a rule, it is more difficult to induce. A real object can often escape a person's notice; but to see something that does not exist"—Fontaine shrugged—"well, judge for yourself, commissioner, as to which is the more remarkable."

"I get your point," conceded Weston, "and yet I don't. Why should people have either type of hallucination? What kind of power does a hypnotist gain over his subject?"

"None, to be exact," replied Fontaine. "Actually, it is a matter of self-hypnosis. Any man can delude himself into believing ridiculous things, or committing outrageous acts. As for hallucinations, they are common with demented patients. All that a hypnotist does is encourage a person into one of those mental

states. From then on, the subject obeys the hypnotist's suggestions."

"That still doesn't explain hallucinations, doctor."

"I'll give you another example, commissioner. You've observed patients who were suffering from brain concussions, haven't you?"

Weston nodded.

"Very well," continued Fontaine. "Such patients report all sorts of curious sights, such as people climbing ladders without any ladder being there. Sometimes they observe heads and shoulders, apparently floating in air. We can carry this theme still further, by discussing the optical illusions witnessed by alcoholics or dope addicts. With them, hallucinations become more the rule than the exception."

"Then you mean," queried Weston, "that a hypnotist puts his subject in such a state of mind?"

"He induces what could be termed an equivalent," returned Fontaine. "That about sums it up."

Unable to credit all this, Weston turned to Cranston for corroboration.

"You've been to Tibet, Cranston," reminded Weston, "and it's supposed to be a place where amazing things happen. What is your opinion regarding these matters?"

"Dr. Fontaine has merely scratched the surface," stated Cranston, calmly. "I agree with all that he has said, and more. In Tibet the masters spend years practicing self-hypnosis, so that they can recognize the full effect that can be produced upon others."

"As what, for instance?"

"You probably won't believe me, commissioner," declared Cranston, "but it is possible for a man to will himself into a state of imaginary invisibility which can be transcribed upon the minds of others so they will not see him."

"You mean literally to cloud men's minds?"

"A good way of putting it. Compared to such experiments, the efforts of American hypnotists, as just described by Dr. Fontaine, are rudimentary."

A skeptical smile curled beneath Weston's mustache, then dwindled. In this setting, of all places, Weston could scarcely be a doubter. He was remembering Cardona's actions of the night before here in the grill room of the Cobalt Club. That, however, brought up the subject of Professor Eric Bogardus.

"About this chap Bogardus"—Weston turned to Fontaine. "I understand, doctor, that you have classed him as a fake?"

"Not precisely," returned Fontaine. "I denounced him as a fraud."

"A fake or a fraud, what's the difference?"

"There is no doubt that Bogardus can and does demonstrate some actual feats of hypnotism," explained Fontaine. "His test with Inspector Cardona proves that his work is sometimes genuine. But he uses trickery throughout his performances and makes false claims regarding hypnotism in general. I would suggest that after dinner, we go to his show, since he is giving one tonight. I can then explain the difference between the genuine and the fraudulent."

"A good idea," agreed Weston. "Inspector Cardona is going to be there and he is bringing Jenkins, the watchman." Turning to Cranston, Weston added, "How about it, Cranston, will you meet us there?"

Cranston nodded that he would. Then, as Weston turned to chat with Fontaine, Cranston rose and strolled from the grill room. Purely by coincidence, the distance of Cranston's walk was timed to Weston's query and the answer it produced.

"One thing more, Fontaine," Weston was asking. "How long does a hypnotic state last?"

"It depends on the hypnotist," was Fontaine's reply, "or how strongly he implants an impression. Also, when or how he awakens his subject."

"Hear that, Cranston?" Weston wheeled in his chair. "Perhaps Cardona had awakened before you gave him the stiletto -"

Stopping short, Weston blinked when he saw that Cranston was no longer there. Then, with a baffled expression, the commissioner swung again to Dr. Fontaine.

"You don't think," asked Weston, in an awed tone, "that Cranston could have learned the invisibility act in Tibet? Or it couldn't be"- the commissioner's eyes narrowed—"that you've been trying some hypnotism yourself and using me as a subject?"

Smiling, Dr. Fontaine shook his head.

"You weren't watching when Cranston left," explained Fontaine. "Therefore, you created a false notion in your own mind. If you'd been hypnotized, commissioner, you might have still believed that you saw Cranston; then he would have vanished when you blinked."

Commissioner Weston sat back, hardly willing to test out a plate of soup that a waiter brought and set before him. Weston was beginning to think that anything might be a hypnotic illusion. Also, a new thought was growing in his mind. It concerned a certain personage whose existence Weston had sometimes doubted, but now seemed very real, along with the power that he was reputed to have.

The commissioner was thinking in terms of The Shadow, the master crime hunter, whose ability to arrive from nowhere and disappear into darkness had often seemed too uncanny to warrant belief.

Perhaps after all there was something to those stories about The Shadow!

CHAPTER V. ENTER THE PROFESSOR

AN early crowd was gathered in the lobby of the upstairs hall where Professor Eric Bogardus held his hypnotic demonstrations. It wasn't much of a crowd, but, for that matter, it wasn't much of a hall. However, considering that only a few dozen people were standing around, it seemed quite unlikely that the place would be strained to its capacity.

Clyde Burke was among the early arrivals. The Classic had ordered him to stay on the Kelthorn case, and since it had a hypnotism angle, Clyde had decided to look into the subject by attending one of Bogardus' performances. Besides, Clyde had a definite hunch that Inspector Cardona would be at the hypnotic demonstration to see if Bogardus could give others a treatment resembling the one that Cardona himself had received.

Nor was Clyde disappointed. Not only was Joe Cardona in the lobby; he had brought Jenkins along with him. As Clyde moved over to join them, he saw Cardona motion toward a huge lobby frame that contained a portrait of Professor Bogardus. Blown up to giant size, the picture threw heavy accent on the

eyes. Noticing Clyde, Cardona spoke to the reporter in an undertone.

"Jenkins was talking so much about seeing eyes," said Joe, "that I figured he ought to study the professor's. I remember them all right, from the jolt Bogardus gave me. They wound up looking as big as they do in that picture."

They waited until Jenkins finished his survey of the blown-up photograph. The watchman turned toward them with a slow shake of his head.

"I can't say 'yes,' " testified Jenkins, "still I wouldn't want to say 'no.' All I remember in the alley was eyes, without a face to go with them."

"Forget the face," suggested Cardona. "Just took at the eyes. Its easy with a big picture like that."

"Sort of different, though," said Jenkins. "When they were looking out of the dark, the eyes sort of glowed. They didn't get big, neither; they just stayed sharp."

"Better wait until you see Bogardus work," decided Cardona. "Then you may be able to decide. So stick around, Jenkins."

Clyde, by then, was standing in front of the picture, getting a close look at the mighty Bogardus eyes.

"Sharp eyes," spoke Clyde, half-aloud. "Eyes that glowed. But they grew bigger... bigger... bigger -"

"What's that?" Cardona's voice came suddenly from Clyde's elbow. "Talking about eyes? You'd think that you, too, had been hypnotized, Burke."

Turning Clyde gave a sheepish laugh.

"Guess I was imagining I was Jenkins," he said. "But it's funny, inspector. After watching you at the Cobalt Club and listening to Jenkins talk in Kelthorn's office, my mind has become sort of dazed. What I meant by bigger and bigger, though, were the lights of your car when you picked me up last night. They seemed to grow right out of a haze."

Cardona gave Clyde a blunt stare; then put a query in a confiding tone:

"Do I look goofy to you, Burke?"

"Why, no, inspector."

"That's good. I don't feel goofy, so I'm sure the effect of Bogardus' treatment must have worn off last night. But other people have begun to look funny, particularly around here."

"You mean Jenkins?" asked Clyde. "Or do you mean me?"

"Jenkins more than you, Burke," returned Cardona, frankly. "But I'm thinking of the other customers, too. Glance around and tell me, do they have that zombie look to you?"

Studying some of the early arrivals, Clyde began to appreciate what Cardona meant. They were, indeed, a queer lot, these patrons of the Bogardus show who had arrived early at the hall. One in particular caught Clyde's attention. He was a tall chap, a full head taller than Clyde, which put him a few inches over six feet. He was slightly on the handsome side, but his face had a haggard, worried look and he was pushing his fingers back through his disheveled hair as he paced about aimlessly.

Cardona saw Clyde watch the man in question.

"There's a sample for you," said Joe. "That guy looks like a candidate for one of the walking dead."

"He still shows some signs of life," returned Clyde. "I'll try and find out who he is."

Moving over, Clyde blocked the pacing man and was met with a hollow-eyed stare. Clyde gave a prompt nod.

"Haven't we met before?" asked Clyde. "My name is Burke, but I don't remember yours."

"I don't remember." Speaking mechanically, the young man drew a card from his pocket. "I mean I don't remember where we met." He glanced at the card and Clyde noticed that it was one of the invitations that Bogardus sent out as admission tickets to his demonstrations. "My name is Chester Hudson."

Noting the card more closely, Clyde saw it bore the name that the young man gave. Then:

"I'm looking for somebody"—Hudson pushed his fingers through his hair again—"or something. You'll excuse me."

The doors were opening and an usher was directing people to a cloak room. His eyes brightening as though he'd gained a sudden inspiration, Hudson headed that way. Turning to find Cardona, Clyde saw the inspector greeting Commissioner Weston and a bearded man who could only be Dr. Gerald Fontaine. Moving over, Clyde joined them and was introduced to the noted psychologist.

A curious thought struck Clyde. Commissioner Weston was looking about in the same puzzled manner as Chester Hudson. Before Clyde could speculate as to the cause, Weston's worried expression relaxed. Lamont Cranston had just entered the lobby with an attractive brunette named Margo Lane. Though Clyde didn't know it, Weston's relief was the result of Cranston's arrival. The commissioner was now assured that his friend was something more substantial than a hallucination.

As the group started into the hall, Cardona turned to look for Jenkins and beckoned Clyde along. Thus they happened to miss some slight confusion at the cloak room, where Hudson was arguing over the matter of a hat. He didn't want to check a hat; he wanted to claim one. Not having a check to prove his claim, Hudson wasn't getting anywhere until the check-girl found a gray hat without a check that had fallen down behind the counter. She gave it to Hudson, who went out to the lobby, brushing off the hat, passing Fontaine, Weston and Cranston, who were waiting their turns at the hat-check booth.

It was then that a singular occurrence took place in the lobby. Finding Jenkins, Cardona turned about and saw Hudson pacing up and down. With a gesture, Cardona said to Clyde Burke:

"There's the fellow we were talking about. Did you find out who he is?"

Thinking the question was addressed to him, Jenkins stared across the lobby and asked blankly:

"What fellow? I don't see anybody."

"The tall fellow," snapped Cardona. "Walking back and forth right there in front of you. Don't you see him there, brushing off his hat?"

"You're kidding me, inspector?"

At Jenkins's query, Cardona swung to Clyde. Angrily, Joe demanded:

"You see him, don't you, Burke? Right there, brushing off his hat?"

"I see the man I talked with," said Clyde, "but he hasn't any hat. His name is Chester Hudson, only you

must be looking at someone else."

"Not unless I'm cross-eyed," snapped Cardona, "which I'm not. Maybe you could use an eye-test, Burke. You're looking right at the man I mean."

Clyde was doing just that, but his eyes had gained a peculiar stare which Cardona didn't notice, being more interested in the puzzled expression that dominated Clyde's face. In a way, Clyde's gaze had become too intent; he was studying Hudson's features, measuring the man's height with upward and downward glances. In the process, Clyde's eyes skipped past the hat that Hudson was holding, ignoring it completely. Always, Clyde paused when his gaze reached the man's dark, wavy hair, and then it was that Clyde looked the most puzzled.

"He isn't wearing the hat," Cardona told Clyde. "He's holding it. Say"- Joe eyed Clyde suspiciously—"what is this, some gag you cooked up with the fellow? Maybe he's working with Professor Bogardus and you're playing along, just to kid me. I've had enough of that stuff, Burke. I'll see what this fellow Hudson has to say about it."

With that, Cardona strode forward to accost the tall young man, while Clyde, with a helpless shrug, turned to Jenkins.

"Do you see any hat?"

Jenkins shook his head.

"I don't see anybody," Jenkins replied, "except Inspector Cardona. I'm beginning to wonder what's wrong with him, the way he's standing there, sort of talking to himself."

Anyone except Clyde Burke would have forgotten other matters at that moment in order to analyze Jenkins. Staring directly at Cardona and Hudson, Jenkins appeared to be looking right through them. It was odd, considering that distant stare, that he should mention that he saw one but not the other. But Clyde was in no mood to study Jenkins. He was almost willing to take what Jenkins said in preference to Cardona's argument about the hat. Hudson hadn't been holding any hat that Clyde could see, and by a peculiar application of false logic, it was easier for Clyde to believe that Hudson wasn't there at all, rather than accept the matter of the hat.

Yet it couldn't be that Hudson, even though hatless, was a figment of Clyde's imagination. Through the reporter's mind surged a turmoil that carried him back into a vague darkness, out of which he could recall only a pair of sharply glowing eyes. His own eyes half closed, Clyde was trying to remember what that scene concerned, but the result was a mental void, the daydream equivalent of a nightmare. Clapping his hand to the back of his neck, Clyde pulled his senses to the present, looked steadily at Jenkins and demanded:

"You don't see anybody talking to Cardona?"

"Certainly not." Jenkins, too, had become relaxed and his laugh sounded human. "Here's the inspector now, so you can ask him. One thing, though"- raising his hand, Jenkins whispered to Clyde behind it - "whatever he tells us, just pretend to believe him. I think he's trying to trick both of us. Maybe he thinks we haven't told him all we know about last night."

Of course, Jenkins was referring to his own testimony regarding Kelthorn's death. Realizing he might still be under suspicion, Jenkins was including Clyde in the matter because he wanted an ally. Nevertheless, Clyde nodded, for he, too, was experiencing a vague form of mental misery that needed company. Last night, for reasons that Clyde could not explain, was a time that Clyde preferred not to be questioned

about.

Turning at Jenkins's gesture, Clyde saw that the watchman was right in one particular. Cardona was approaching them and he was coming alone. The man who called himself Hudson wasn't anywhere in sight, and Clyde was beginning to hope the fellow didn't exist, when Cardona presented testimony to the contrary.

"Here's your friend's calling card," Cardona told Clyde bluntly. "He gave me one when I asked for it. You got his name just about right. It's W. Chester Hudson."

On a cheaply printed card which Cardona held, Clyde saw the name, with the first initial W.

"That wasn't the card I saw," declared Clyde. "He was holding an invitation to Bogardus' show."

"I know," nodded Cardona. "He showed me that, too, when I asked why he was hanging around here."

"And then?"

"I told him he belonged inside the hall, so I steered him in there. Look through the door and you'll see him." Cardona pointed and emphasized his words. "He's checking that hat of his."

Clyde looked and caught a glimpse of Hudson's tall figure leaving the cloak room. With a laugh, Clyde said:

"I don't see any hat."

"I don't either," put in Jenkins, "because I don't see anybody."

Cardona took it all as a good joke.

"All right," said the inspector. "Have your fun. Now let's get serious. You're after a story, Burke, or you wouldn't be here. All right, stick with Dr. Fontaine. Get his opinions on hypnotism in general and on Professor Bogardus in particular. As for you, Jenkins, I believe the testimony you gave me last night. I brought you here because I want you to meet Bogardus face to face and find out about those eyes of his. After that, you can go. So come along, we're going inside."

They didn't need any invitations to get in. Cardona crashed in with his official badge, beckoning Clyde and Jenkins to follow him. They entered a small hall, where a sprinkling of people occupied about a quarter of the three hundred chairs that faced the platform on which Professor Eric Bogardus was to perform his hypnotic miracles.

Finding Dr. Gerald Fontaine in the center of a group that included Commissioner Weston, Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane, Clyde sat down to hear what developed. Already, Fontaine was belittling Bogardus though the renowned professor had not yet made his appearance.

"You can tell by the audience that Bogardus is a faker," asserted Fontaine. "Look at the types of people he attracts. Curiosity seekers, Broadway idlers, sidewalk peddlers, all a cheap lot who either believe the claims of a charlatan or who would like to copy his work. The only exception to the rule is that little group over there" - he pointed to a small cluster at the right of the front row—"and I feel really sorry for them."

The group in question consisted of about a dozen men and women who were listening intently to the words of an earnest, middle-aged man whose round face was fronted by a pair of thick-lensed tortoise shell glasses, which made him look like a cross between a full moon and a wise owl.

"Hanneford Lang," identified Fontaine. "He's a student of the occult. He's tried to solve everything from the riddle of the pyramids, ancient, not modern, to the prophecies of Nostradamus. He publishes a magazine called 'The Worlds Between' and he's written books supporting every theory that defies common sense. Naturally, he swallows all Bogardus' fakery, because Lang can always quote it as proving something. Those people with Lang are his students. I wouldn't call them dupes, because Lang is a dupe himself. He never misses one of Bogardus' demonstrations, if he can help it."

As Fontaine finished talking, a door opened at the side of the platform and a flurry of hand-claps came from the audience as Professor Bogardus strode on stage. Fake or real, the hypnotic show was ready to begin, with skeptics and believers free to form their own conclusions.

CHAPTER VI. THE ARTFUL FAKER

FROM his lobby photographs, Eric Bogardus should have been a tall, imposing man of a commanding appearance. Instead, he was squatty, portly, and very rumpled looking in a baggy dress suit. What the professor lacked in dignity, he supplied by his overbearing manner. Assuming a Napoleonic pose, he addressed the audience as though it had been a full house with members up among the rafters.

"You have assembled tonight to witness a scientific demonstration of hypnosis," boomed the professor. "You are about to witness the power that one mind holds over another; even more, the force by which one mind can sway many. If there are doubters here"—Bogardus spread his thick lips in a contemptuous smile—"I do not expect them to change their opinions. That would be impossible, since they are already under a hypnosis of their own creation, which makes them unwilling to believe what their eyes see or their ears hear."

Bogardus accompanied this with a roving, challenging gaze that finished by singling out Dr. Fontaine. Then:

"I shall prove the statement that I just made," Bogardus declared. "I shall prove it by making people see things, hear things, that do not exist. What more could I add to prove that certain prejudiced parties are already the victims of their own closed minds?"

"The perfect charlatan," observed Fontaine, to those seated about him. "Sometimes I rather admire Bogardus for his bombast. He starts by claiming scientific knowledge, then repudiates it by unscientific statements."

"Who are these doubters?" Bogardus was demanding. "What do they know about the secrets of the ages, the mysteries of the Orient, or the riddle of life itself? Nothing, or they could not doubt. They believe that if they deny, they disprove. Whatever they can not understand, they disclaim. But there are others here"—Bogardus let his hand sweep toward Lang and his little group—"who recognize that the real facts of life are its mysteries. They know that whatever can be demonstrated, must be real."

"Always the same spiel," said Fontaine, with a smile. "Now comes his appeal to ignorance. Listen while he plays through weakness into strength."

"If you want the truth regarding hypnotism," boomed Bogardus, "I do not ask you to take my word. Consult your own physician; ask him if he believes in hypnotism. The chances are ten to one that he will say 'yes.' Should he express doubt, ask him if he is familiar with such mental states as trance, catalepsy, amnesia and somnambulism. When he admits that such exist, ask him how they can be induced. He can give but one answer, through hypnotism."

Having driven home those arguments, Professor Bogardus became mild of manner, almost honeyed in his appeal.

"To see is to believe," the professor went on, "but to experience is to know. That is why I am inviting you to this platform, all who wish to come. I do not want you to go away saying, 'I saw the professor do experiments with others that he would not try with me.' I shall make my tests with anyone who is in a receptive mood. If I should fail with you or you"- Bogardus stabbed a thick forefinger toward his audience—"or you, it will only be because you refuse to adopt a willing attitude. In that case, I shall at least rely upon your honesty. You yourself will realize that you were the cause of the unsuccessful test and your own conscience would not let you place the blame upon me."

Clyde Burke took a look around him. Professor Bogardus was really selling the stuff. Commissioner Weston was leaning forward, quite agog. Joe Cardona was maintaining a stolid air, but Clyde could tell that the inspector was much impressed. Joe would have to be, since he was one of the professor's principal exhibits. Margo Lane, too, was tense with interest. Of the group, only Dr. Fontaine remained the complete scoffer.

For when Clyde Burke looked at Lamont Cranston, deciding that he could be defined as the acid test, Clyde was unable to guess at Cranston's reaction. Steady of gaze, Cranston was taking all that Bogardus said with an expression of imperturbable calm that seemed an absolute balance between a "yes" and "no."

There was no doubt, however, that Bogardus was impressing his audience. As the professor spread his arms and drew his pudgy hands toward him in beckoning gestures, as many as a dozen people arose and came up to the platform. There, Bogardus bowed them to chairs and became particularly grateful when Hanneford Lang arrived on the platform. Giving Lang a chair at one end of the row, Bogardus addressed his audience:

"We are particularly fortunate in having with us a student of occult science, Mr. Hanneford Lang. He believes in hypnosis from the mystical standpoint. Perhaps we should have a critic who takes the attitude of a strict materialist." Turning abruptly, Bogardus asked, "Will you join us, Dr. Fontaine?"

Fontaine's only answer was a head shake which he delivered with an indulgent smile.

"Then for our other technical witness," declared Bogardus, indicating a chair at the far end of the row, "I shall ask Inspector Cardona to come to the platform. I feel sure that Inspector Cardona will willingly agree that there is something in the science of hypnotism."

As he looked toward Cardona, Bogardus gave a bland smile which seemed to say, "Come along and I won't tell," which left Cardona with practically no other choice. So Joe went up onto the platform, took a chair at one end and stared bluntly at the audience, while Lang, at the other end, removed his glasses and also eyed the throng, giving a solemn nod to his own little group of people.

Noting that there were three empty chairs in the row, Bogardus turned to the audience and declared:

"I can use three more."

Clyde Burke decided to go up for one. As he did, a slight, pale man with a dopey expression arose and followed. Right behind them came the tall man who called himself W. Chester Hudson. Cardona wasn't watching any of those three; looking into the audience, Joe singled out Jenkins and nodded. The watchman started up.

Receiving the first three and bowing them to chairs, Bogardus turned, saw Jenkins and waved him back with a sweeping hand.

"I said three," declared Bogardus. "Not four."

"That's right, three," returned Jenkins. He nudged at Clyde and the dopey man. "I'm the third. I'll take the empty chair."

There wasn't any empty chair, because Hudson was sitting in it. That chair, however, was the one that Jenkins meant, because he was walking straight toward it. Annoyed, Bogardus blocked Jenkins.

"This is no time for comedy," snapped Bogardus. "The audience will see plenty of funny things after I hypnotize my subjects. I'll thank you to go right back where you came from."

They were glaring at each other, Bogardus and Jenkins. From his place in the audience, Dr. Fontaine delivered a pleased chuckle.

"The professor is having trouble already," said Fontaine. "A bad start like this would ruin a real hypnotic act. Fortunately for Bogardus, he is enough of a faker to pull through."

Hearing what Fontaine said, Weston turned helplessly to Cranston, seeking an interpretation of Fontaine's statement. It was promptly forthcoming.

"Dr. Fontaine means that Bogardus is losing the confidence of his audience," explained Cranston. "He will get back by resorting to trick methods. A real hypnotist wouldn't."

By then, Bogardus had won his argument with Jenkins, but in a curious way. Meeting the professor's angry glare, Jenkins gave a slight laugh and turned away.

"All right, professor," said Jenkins. "I'll go. If you don't want me, why should I stay around?"

Glancing at Cardona, Jenkins gave a head-shake and received a nod in reply. To Clyde, who had taken the chair beside him, Cardona undertoned:

"Get what Jenkins meant? He was looking right into the professor's eyes and he doesn't remember them from last night. That's what I wanted him here for. His job is done."

Apparently, Jenkins knew it, for he was not only leaving the platform, he was leaving the hall. Meanwhile, Cardona was speaking to Clyde again:

"Notice the fellow who came up with you, Burke?"

"You must mean Hudson," replied Clyde. "Yes, I noticed him. He doesn't have a hat."

"That's because he just checked it," Cardona retorted, "but I don't mean Hudson. I mean the little guy with the dopey face."

Clyde looked along the line and nodded.

"They call him Larry the Horse," whispered Cardona. "A hustler if ever there was one. He has a trick knee he can throw out of joint, he can fake a nervous fit, and a lot of other things. I'll bet he's working for Professor Bogardus. Keep tabs on him. Maybe Bogardus did give me the hyp, but I still think he's mostly fake."

By that time, Professor Bogardus was beginning to establish his status, through actual demonstration. Promenading in front of the seated group, Bogardus announced in commanding tone:

"Close your eyes, all of you! Good. Eyes closed, now look upward, keeping your eyes still closed. Upward, upward, as high as you can look! Now try to open your eyes. You can't—you can't—you can't! Try harder—harder—You can't!"

Following the professor's order, Clyde found himself half-frantic. Bogardus' voice was goading and Clyde wanted to defy the professor's argument, but couldn't. The harder he tried to open his eyes, the more his eyelids seemed to glue themselves together. From the audience, the thing looked as funny as it was uncanny. All along the line, from Cardona to Lang, men were grimacing, wrenching their faces, trying to get their eyes open without success.

"And now," shouted Bogardus, "relax! Stop trying to defy my command. Rest back—ease your eyes—lower them. Look down and open your eyelids, slowly."

The line of men obeyed. Slowly, their eyes came open and they looked at each other, wonderingly. In the audience, Margo Lane touched Cranston's arm.

"Why, Lamont, it was amazing. But how -"

"Listen to Dr. Fontaine," whispered Cranston. "He's explaining it to Commissioner Weston."

"Sheer trickery," Fontaine was saying. "You can't open your eyelids, commissioner, while your eyes themselves are straining upward. Bogardus talked them right into it and out again. Watch now, he'll be faking another test."

Professor Bogardus was bringing four men to the center of the platform, Clyde Burke among them. There the professor placed a table; told two men to flank it from each side. Next the professor ordered each man to press an arm against the table, maintaining a hard, steady, upward pressure. Clyde was facing the audience, pressing the table with his left arm. He could hear Professor Bogardus droning from behind the table:

"Keep pressing, gentlemen, hard—hard—hard! Now when I give the word, step two paces sideward from the table. Two paces, mind you, and relax your arms. You will then obey my unspoken command. Ready now, press—press—press. To the right, two paces, step! Relax—and—obey!"

Front man on his side of the table, Clyde stepped two paces to the side. So did the man behind him; likewise the two on the other side of the table. As Clyde relaxed, he realized that something was happening to his left arm. Glancing toward it, he saw that the arm was literally floating upward. Then, over his shoulder, Clyde observed the professor behind the table, both arms lifted.

The audience was buzzing with excitement. Bogardus had lifted his arms as the four men stepped sideward from the table. In copy of the professor's action, each man had subconsciously raised an arm, though not one could see Bogardus at the time!

Again, Dr. Fontaine was undertoning an explanation.

"Constant muscular pressure produced that reaction," Fontaine stated. "Once away from the table, the arms responded automatically. If you want to try it for yourself, just stand in a doorway and press your arms hard against it while you count thirty. When you step forward, your arms will rise like wings. Bogardus has turned a parlor stunt into a pretended hypnotic experiment."

Bogardus was doing all right with his parlor tricks. He had placed two men in chairs and was telling them to fold their arms, extend their legs and put their heads well back. They were reclining there, as if in barber chairs, when Bogardus stood between them, extended his hands, and pressed a forefinger straight downward on each man's forehead.

"Now!" boomed Bogardus. "At my command, you are powerless. Try to rise, try to rise. You can't—you can't—you can't! You are helpless under my mere touch. Your strength is

gone—gone—gone!"

The men were struggling, writhing, completely unable to lift themselves from the chairs. Their gyrations brought the audience to a high pitch of excitement. It couldn't be faked, this test, for people could tell that the two men were fighting to break the professor's control, yet without avail. Then, suddenly, the professor removed the spell that held his victims.

"Now! Your strength is back. You can rise, because I now am willing to release you!"

Up came Bogardus' hands in a dramatic gesture and the two men popped from their chairs with the alacrity of a jack-in-the-box. On their feet, they stared in sheepish bewilderment at each other, then at the professor; who returned a bland smile.

In the audience, Commissioner Weston was more than ever agog.

"How can you explain that, Dr. Fontaine?"

"The men were lying so far back," stated Fontaine, "that they were completely off balance. They had to raise their heads and shoulders before they could get up. Fingertip pressure was all that Bogardus needed to keep those foreheads back. Until he released it, the men were helpless, but merely through a physical law, not hypnotism."

Margo Lane was looking to Lamont Cranston for corroboration of these statements. She received a nod, as an indication that Fontaine was right. But when Margo looked to the platform, saw the expressions of the people there, she realized that all were puzzled, including Clyde Burke. From his end of the line, Inspector Cardona was staring stolidly, but that was his way of covering the fact that he was mystified. In contrast, Hanneford Lang was openly enthusiastic, willing and anxious to give Professor Bogardus due acclaim for a successful exhibition of genuine hypnotic prowess. Accepting Lang's congratulating hand-shake, Bogardus bowed the moon-faced gentleman back to his chair. Then, to the audience, Bogardus said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have witnessed what I term preliminary tests. You have observed how I have influenced persons who were total strangers to myself, rendering them either powerless or subject to my mental control. Now, for the benefit of those upon the platform, I shall hypnotize you, the members of the audience, all at once. I shall prove that mass hypnotism, disclaimed by some who call themselves men of science"—Bogardus was looking straight at Fontaine—"is not only possible, but a demonstrable fact!"

There was conviction in Bogardus' tone, an enthusiastic gleam in his bulging eyes. Clapping his hands together flatly he ordered:

"Place your hands together. Now interlock your fingers, clasping them tightly. That's the way"—he nodded approvingly at the audience - "fold your hands and press your fingers tight. Tight—tighter—tighter! Keep pressing with those fingers—tighter—tighter—just as I am doing. Palms flat together, press hard with those fingers, and now your hands are locked to stay!"

"Try to spread those palms apart! You can't! I say you can't—you can't— and my power holds you under full control. Your hands are locked—locked— locked—you cannot open them no matter how hard you try!"

The place had become a bedlam and with good cause. Everybody's hands were locked and people were fairly shrieking with amazement. Madly, Margo Lane was trying to spread her hands apart; she couldn't. Almost horrified, she saw that Lamont Cranston, right beside her, was in the same predicament. So was Commissioner Weston and even the skeptical Dr. Fontaine was struggling to break his own hand clasp

without avail. The mania had spread to the platform, where the men in the chain were tugging with their folded hands, unable to make them budge apart.

And in the center of the scene, Professor Bogardus, his own hands clenched high as an example, stood, master of the show. He was baiting the crowd, dominating it, turning the mass demonstration into a frenzy as he shouted:

"You are helpless, all of you, under my complete control! Your hands are locked and will stay so until I release them. Only when I say that time is up, will you be free. And time is up—now! Watch me and relax—now! Spread your hands apart—now!"

Slowly, emphatically, Professor Bogardus spread his pudgy fingers, letting them unclasp. In the same deliberate motion, he drew his hands apart. The people in the audience saw those upon the platform do the same. Those on the platform watched raised hands draw apart below. The gasp that Margo Lane gave as she sat back in her chair seemed but a tiny echo of the huge sigh that the audience emitted.

"And now," announced Professor Bogardus, triumphantly, "we shall proceed with our more important tests. Having confounded scientists along with skeptics, I am ready to delve into the deeper mysteries of hypnotic art, known only to the privileged few, such as myself!"

CHAPTER VII. DIVIDED TRAILS

FROM then on, Professor Bogardus moved rapidly with his hypnotic show. He didn't give his critics time to catch up with their explanations. Dr. Fontaine was trying to analyze the hand-clasp business for Commissioner Weston, but the latter only waved him aside.

"Let's watch Bogardus," urged Weston. "Look at the way he's going through that line of subjects! Why, he has one man barking like a dog, another crying like a baby. And that one evidently thinks he's an automobile. He's dashing around in circles giving honks!"

Margo Lane was watching the silly business on the platform and in her excitement she had clasped her hands. Now she looked at those hands in sudden horror, wondering if she might be under some post-hypnotic influence. From amid the hubbub, Margo heard Cranston's reassuring undertone:

"You weren't hypnotized, Margo; none of us were. That handclasp business is just a trick. I pretended to fall for it like the rest rather than attract the professor's attention. I'll show you how it works. Keep your palms flat, press your fingers hard against the backs of your hands—" Cranston paused while Margo did as he told her. Then he went on:

"See what you're doing. Margo? You're clamping your hands with your own fingers. You can't spread your palms while you're giving yourself that clutch. First, you must relax your fingers, but you don't need Bogardus to tell you that."

Margo relaxed her hands, drew them apart. She could realize at last what a faker Bogardus was. The antics of the people on the stage became laughable. In particular, Margo smiled when she noticed Hanneford Lang at his end of the line. Lang, moon-faced and owlsh of gaze, was sitting with his hands still tightly clenched, pondering as though engrossed with some momentous problem.

"Look at Lang," laughed Margo. "He's been left behind in the rush. It's all so ridiculous, isn't it, Lamont?"

"Not quite," replied Cranston. "Here's something that may prove more on the serious side."

Professor Bogardus was singling out the dopey-faced man whom Cardona had styled Larry the Horse.

The undersized fellow was facing Bogardus and wearing a sickly grin as though defying the professor to put him through a course of antics. Larry's smirk faded as Bogardus made a few passes in front of his face and finished with a sudden finger snap. Stiffening, Larry swayed and would have toppled forward if Bogardus had not caught him.

Then Bogardus was putting the stiffened man through a series of slightly gruesome tests. He first struck a match and ran it back and forth in front of Larry's eyes. The pupils did not budge; their gaze remained glassy. Then, lifting Larry's arm, Bogardus began drawing pins from his coat lapel and thrusting them into the puny man's flesh. For a finale, the professor brought a thin meat skewer from his pocket and deliberately pushed it through his subject's cheek.

"To prove that this is bloodless surgery," announced Bogardus, "and that through hypnotism I have anesthetized this subject until all pain is absent, I shall halt all flow of blood when I remove the skewer. But for this, I need reliable witnesses."

Bogardus beckoned to Cardona and Lang; they arose and came over to him. Lang's hands were still clasped; Bogardus first undid them for him. Then Bogardus slowly withdrew the skewer from Larry's cheek and both witnesses testified that there was no flow of blood. Drawing back Larry's shirt sleeve, Bogardus told Lang to hold the man's wrist and check his pulse. As moments passed, Lang's eyes became wide with surprise.

"Why, its dwindling away!" exclaimed Lang. "The man has no pulse beat at all! This is impossible!"

"All is possible in a state of true hypnosis," assured Bogardus, importantly. "Watch now, how at my command, the blood will flow into the subject's arm."

Despite his short, chunky build, Bogardus looked imposing as he drew to full height and flung both hands toward Larry's extended arm. As if by magic, the dull, whitened flesh took on life. The arm grew ruddy and Larry himself roused from his coma, though his eyes still retained their fixed stare. Bogardus turned to the audience and took a bow, while Lang kept steadying Larry and speaking quietly to the fellow to see if he would respond. Larry's lips moved, but only feebly.

"You see what I mean," Fontaine was saying to Weston. "Bogardus has his genuine moment, when he finds a suitable subject. But we can not pass final judgment until we see what he accomplishes with others."

"But that man is still hypnotized," argued Weston, pointing to Larry. "He'd collapse if Lang weren't there to hold him up. This may be serious, Fontaine. Perhaps you had better intervene."

Fontaine's response was a short, dry, laugh.

"Bogardus won't forget him," said Fontaine. "He's playing for effect. I've seen him do the act before. Watch."

Despite Lang's solicitous efforts to hold up Larry, the fellow started curling up. Lang was gripping him, talking to him; Larry reared up again, shrieked and pitched forward. People sprang to their feet, Weston among them, but all would have been too late. Bogardus, however, was about in an instant. He literally scooped Larry's falling form with one hand, supplied some finger snaps with the other. Larry came upright, blinked and steadied himself.

"Help him down from the platform," Bogardus told Lang. "He is awake now. Then return. I still need you."

As Lang helped Larry down into the audience toward a back seat, Fontaine gave a knowing nod.

"A confederate, that little fellow," expressed Fontaine. "I recognize him now. He's worked for Bogardus before. He's going out into the lobby. I'm going to find out why."

As Lang returned to the platform, Fontaine slid from his chair and followed Larry from the hall. By then, Bogardus was picking himself another subject. He tested a few briefly, among them Clyde Burke, by meeting them eye to eye. But he finally concentrated on the tall, young man with wavy hair who called himself Chester Hudson. Perhaps that was because Hudson, when seated, was almost as tall as Bogardus and hence responded immediately to the professor's gaze. With a couple of quick finger snaps, Bogardus put Hudson under control and brought him to his feet.

From his pocket, Bogardus brought a calling card; showed it to Hudson.

"Observe this calling card, young man," declared Bogardus. "You will notice that it has a telephone number written on it."

Hudson nodded that it had.

"Take it to that telephone," ordered Bogardus, pointing across the platform. "Call the number on the card and tell me what you get."

There was a phone on a table at the far side of the platform. Mechanically, Hudson went to it, dialed, then listened.

"Come, come," called Bogardus. "What do you get?"

"A busy signal," replied Hudson, staring straight ahead. "That's all, a busy signal."

"Hang up and call again," ordered Bogardus. "Meanwhile"- he looked along the line, chose Clyde as a subject—"I shall try another test. Here is a small metal box. Look it over from every angle and tell me what is odd about it."

Clyde took the little box that Bogardus handed him; turned it over and found that it was locked. Clyde said:

"It's locked. That's all."

"Does it feel warm?" asked Bogardus.

"No," replied Clyde. "It's cold."

"It's beginning to feel warmer, though."

"Of course. From the heat of my hand."

"Good. It will grow warmer. It will grow hot. Yes, hot—hotter— hotter -"

Bogardus broke off a glare that he was giving Clyde and strode over toward Hudson. The young man had dialed the number again; now, in a monotonous style, Hudson was repeating words as he listened to the receiver.

"Yes, I understand... Yes, I understand... Yes, I understand -"

Snatching the receiver from Hudson's hand, Bogardus slapped it angrily in the cradle.

"What's that about?" demanded Bogardus. "All you were hearing was a busy signal. You can't understand a busy signal, except to know that it means nothing. Try that number again!"

Hudson's lips were moving; his eyes had a far-away stare. Bogardus shoved the telephone in his hand, waved the card beneath his eyes, making Hudson focus his attention. By then, everyone had forgotten Clyde. The reporter was beginning to find the box uncomfortable to hold and was shifting it from hand to hand. Wheeling, Bogardus saw Clyde's plight and gave a triumphant smile.

"Hotter—hotter—hotter -"

The box was really becoming hot. Clyde couldn't hold it more than a second in one hand.

"Hotter—hotter—so hot you cannot stand it!"

At the professor's words, Clyde felt that the metal box had grown red-hot. Bogardus swung him to a table, told him to drop the box there. Clyde did, willingly, and turned away, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket to ease the sting of his burning hands. While the audience rocked with merriment, Bogardus walked over to Hudson, who had dialed the number again. Holding up his hand for silence, Bogardus had everyone listen. They could hear a busy signal from the receiver.

Taking the card that Hudson held, Bogardus showed it to the young man once again and said:

"You see this number you were calling? I'll tell you why it's always busy. Because you weren't calling it at all. Awake now and look at this card again. You will see"—Bogardus raised his tone to a triumphant boom—"that it has no number on it!"

Hudson blinked; saw that the card was blank as Bogardus flipped it to show one side, then the other. Approaching the others, Cardona included, Bogardus showed them the same thing, a card that was blank on both sides. With Clyde, Bogardus went through the formality of a finger snap to awaken him from the hypnotic trance in which he'd fancied he'd been holding a red-hot metal box. Then Bogardus showed Clyde, too, that the card was blank when flipped to display both sides.

Tearing the card in quarters, Bogardus tossed the pieces onto the table with the metal box. He set the table off behind a screen, returned to the group and began goading subjects into more horse-play. He turned one man into a college cheer leader and had the others shouting "Hip-hip-hooray!" until their voices were husky. That concluded what Professor Bogardus termed an hour of hypnotic entertainment.

Dr. Fontaine was back beside Commissioner Weston, but couldn't speak until the cheering ended. Then:

"I came back in time to witness the finish of that telephone test," undertoned Fontaine. "If you can get Inspector Cardona to keep Bogardus busy, I'll show you what a fake the professor is."

Cardona was coming down from the platform, chatting with Lang, who had heard rumors of Joe's experience in post-hypnosis the night before and wanted to know more about it. Cardona didn't want to talk and was glad when Weston flagged him.

"Here's your opportunity to get even with Bogardus," said Weston. "Use your official capacity, inspector, and ask him where he was last night. You might mention that you expected him to come to the Cobalt Club and witness the conclusion of the experiment he tried on you."

That suited Cardona perfectly. He headed for the platform, drew Bogardus aside and soon had him in a corner away from everyone. It wasn't to Bogardus liking to have to answer questions; his business was to dominate the scene at all times. But the law couldn't be denied, so Bogardus was accepting the situation as best he could; namely by keeping the quiz a private matter.

In the course of this, Bogardus was not aware of Fontaine's subterfuge. Beckoning Weston through a doorway, Fontaine led him around in back of the platform to the table where Bogardus had placed the metal box and the torn card. Cranston and Margo came along; as they reached the table, Margo started to pick up the metal box.

"Funny, wasn't it?" said Margo. "The way Burke thought this box was growing hot -"

A quick slap from Cranston knocked the box from Margo's hand as she stifled a loud "Ouch!" The mere contact had nearly burned her; if she'd really gripped the box, it would have been a painful ordeal.

Margo gasped, "Why, it really is red-hot!"

"Of course it is." Wrapping the box in a handkerchief, Cranston shook it and the sound of liquid came from within. "This box contains quicklime and water in separate compartments. When Burke kept turning the box, they mixed together. It's an old trick, but it's still hot stuff."

"Nice work, Cranston," approved Fontaine. "I'll confess that I missed that one entirely. But one good trick deserves another, so take a look at this."

Fontaine had begun to piece together the portions of the torn calling card. Now they were together and Fontaine overlapped them slightly to turn them over. On the bottom side was written a telephone number: CO-9-2826.

"I was sure I spotted it," declared Fontaine. "Bogardus gave that card a double flip to make it look blank on both sides. That was after he first handed it to the young man. The fellow really read this number and dialed it."

"Then he wasn't hypnotized at all," snorted Weston. "Just another of Bogardus' fakes."

"Not entirely." Fontaine shook his head. "The young chap looked hypnotized to me. After all, he took the professor's word for everything, so there was something of genuine hypnosis in it. Bogardus isn't all fake; that's the worst of it. Give a faker some genuine ability and he'll abuse it, dangerously."

Cranston was studying the pieced-together card.

"C-O for Columbus," said Cranston. "Columbus 9. That's the exchange number in this particular neighborhood."

Smiling, Fontaine nodded wisely.

"You'd like to know more about the number the young man called? Come along."

Leading them around the back way, Fontaine reached an obscure corner of the lobby. There, he pointed into a pay booth. The telephone bore the number Columbus 9-2826. The receiver was off the hook. Weston swung quickly to Fontaine.

"The little dopey fellow?" queried Weston. "The human pin-cushion that you followed out here?"

"That's right," replied Fontaine. "I saw him come into this phone booth, so I doubled back and watched the finish of Bogardus' telephone test. I was right when I picked the fellow as a confederate. Bogardus sent him out to see that this phone stayed busy."

Looking into the hall, Cranston saw that Cardona had finished his discussion with Bogardus and was coming along the aisle. In a leisurely, casual fashion, Cranston strolled to meet the inspector. Cardona

arrived with an emphatic nod.

"I've got Bogardus worried," said Cardona. "He hasn't any alibi for last night, if that means anything. He'd been expecting to give a lecture in New Jersey, but it was called off at the last minute."

"Too bad," observed Cranston. "If he'd been giving a show, he'd have had his pet stooge with him for an alibi."

"His pet stooge?"

"The little undersized chap who enjoys being stuck with pins and skewers."

"Funny, I didn't think he was part of the act. He's easy enough to find though, if there's any reason to ask him. He hangs around Forty-ninth Street. They call him Larry the Horse."

Cardona didn't notice the momentary gleam that came to Cranston's eyes at the mention of the nickname "the Horse." It was sufficient, though, that title, to formulate Cranston's immediate plans. Rejoining the others, Cranston spoke to Margo.

"I'll be leaving you a while," said Cranston, "but I may need you later. Tell Shrevvy to cruise along Forty-ninth Street so he will be handy. I'm making a check-up that may lead to something."

For reasons of his own, Cranston had concluded that Larry the Horse might prove a weak link in the criss-crossed mesh that disguised a chain of crime amid its maze. Leaving Fontaine with Weston, Cranston bowed a "good night" to Hanneford Lang who was discussing the working of the mind with a group of his students. A janitor was coming to close the lobby and soon everyone would have to leave.

In fact, most members of the audience had left the building already, among them Clyde Burke. In leaving, Clyde had observed something that worried him badly. It had to do with the young man who answered to the name of W. Chester Hudson. At the cloak room, Hudson had paused, handed in a check, and gone through the motions of accepting a hat. Whether this was a pretext on Hudson's part or whether he was under some posthypnotic influence, Clyde couldn't guess.

It had bothered Clyde so much, however, that when they reached the street, he followed Hudson to Broadway. Now, amid the bright lights, Clyde could see Hudson's tall figure stalking ahead, along the crowded sidewalk. Somehow, the lights confused Clyde; as he blinked, to counteract their dazzle, he gained a peculiar image that reminded him of glowing eyes. Clyde could fancy, too, that he heard a voice, repeating the words, "Now go your way."

There was only one way to go and that was where Hudson went, for whatever the riddle, Clyde felt that the strange young man was, somehow, connected with the answer. Thus was Clyde Burke drawn along a trail that in its peculiar way promised more results than the search that Lamont Cranston was about to make for a man called Larry the Horse.

CHAPTER VIII. LARRY THE HORSE

THE CASTLE GRILL looked like any of a hundred other places in the Forties. Its narrow front was a window, topped by a neon sign; inside, patrons could find tables if they walked past a thirty-foot bar to a spot where the cafe widened sufficiently to accommodate four-seat booths on one side and a sandwich counter on the other.

It was at the counter that Cranston found Larry the Horse, feeding on a pastrami sandwich and a dish of pickles. While he ate, Larry kept an eye on a distant television screen near the front of the establishment,

which showed a wrestling match in process, the participants reduced to about postage-stamp size.

Seating himself near the Horse, Cranston ordered a cup of coffee and listened to the small talk that Larry exchanged with other Castle Grill patrons. The words were rather indistinguishable considering that Larry was munching a sandwich with them, but it became apparent that Larry didn't go to wrestling matches because he was too busy. He liked wrestling though, well enough to bet who would be the next winner, if anyone wanted to cover the cash he offered. As proof, Larry showed a fat roll of bills.

"Put your dough away," growled a man who was seated on the stool next to Larry's. "You ought to know the rules here. No gambling allowed in this joint."

"You mean nobody is supposed to phone in bets to bookies," returned Larry. "Anyway, nobody can, because the phone was yanked. Too many guys were using this place as a horse parlor."

"You for one, maybe," asserted the other man. "They call you the Horse, don't they?"

There was a moment's hesitation, then Larry nodded.

"I guess that's because you play them, ain't it? Or did you use to ride the ponies? You look like you were a jockey once."

Larry shook his head. "I never play them, and I never rode them. How I make my dough is my own business."

With that, Larry turned away from his questioner and began beckoning for the waiter to bring him another sandwich. At that moment, he heard an even-toned voice speak from close by:

"So you don't ride horses or bicycles."

Swinging about, Larry the Horse saw the calm, impassive face of Lamont Cranston. Having never seen Cranston at the Castle Grill before, Larry was suspicious of him. If he'd noticed Cranston at the hypnotic show, Larry's suspicions would have been stimulated much further, enough for Larry to close up like a clam, of which he was quite capable. But he was just aggressive enough, Larry was, to challenge the remark of this unknown customer.

"Bicycles?" demanded Larry. "Do I look like a six-day bike racer that belongs in Madison Square Garden?"

"Hardly," returned Cranston. "I think twelve hours would be your limit and in a store window at that."

This made no sense to the other men who were at the counter, but the comment caused Larry's face to stiffen. Then, with a sullen laugh, Larry twisted his pasty lips into a smile and asked, "What are you getting at, mister?"

"Your nickname," replied Cranston. "I don't have to guess why they call you the Horse."

"And why's that?"

"You've been in the business long enough to know. Your nickname dates from the old days, when hypnotists called their stooges horses."

"All right," conceded Larry. "So I used to do a window act, riding a bike like I was hypnotized. Twelve hours at a stretch was easy and I got good pay for it, because the thing was a big publicity stunt in jerk towns. But that stuff is out of date and it wouldn't go in New York, anyway. So what?"

"You can answer that for yourself," said Cranston. "Unless you want me to ask Professor Bogardus."

Larry winced, then gave a short laugh.

"Sounds like you've caught the professor's act, mister."

"I have."

"All the better then," argued Larry. "Riding a bike in a window is one thing; getting pins and skewers shoved into you is another. That's what I let Bogardus do to me."

"All of which proves," declared Cranston, "that Professor Bogardus is a genuine hypnotist. Good logic, my friend, except that there are plenty of your sort who don't mind tests of that type."

Larry's eyes went beady. This man, whoever he was, knew too much about the hypnotism racket, as judged from its seamy side. But there was a peculiar twitch to Larry's lips that Cranston did not fail to detect. Larry the Horse wanted to say something, but was afraid he wouldn't be believed.

"Pins shouldn't bother you," stated Cranston, "not if they are pushed through loose flesh. The skewer stunt is an old one, even with the no bleeding feature. I have seen Hindus with a hundred punctures in their cheeks and the trick of holding back the blood is very simple. If the skewer is drawn out slowly, the wound has time to close. In that case, no bleeding follows."

Cranston's crack-down of the hypnotic act impressed Larry greatly. Still, the pasty-faced man wasn't willing to admit too much to a stranger. Besides, he still showed the urge to say something in defense of the part that he had played. Observing this, Cranston prompted Larry's urge.

"Bogardus should pay you well," Cranston told Larry, "because you are the high spot in his act. His only other good stunt is the one that follows, when he has a subject keep calling a busy number. Of course, that depends on you, too."

Larry licked his lips.

"How do you know, mister?"

"I happened to learn the number that the man called," replied Cranston. "A neat trick, for Bogardus to use the lobby telephone, after giving you time to get there and take the receiver from the hook. But you slipped tonight. You went away and left the receiver off."

"I did?"

"You did. Perhaps you would be wise to tell me why."

There was a slow, steady emphasis to Cranston's words as though they furnished a preliminary answer to a question that was tormenting Larry's mind. Darting a quick look about, Larry saw that everyone had moved forward to watch the television screen. With nobody close enough to hear him, he could talk to this stranger. Gripping the lapel of Cranston's coat, Larry blurted out his problem.

"It's this, mister, if you'll only believe me!" There was something plaintive in Larry's tone. "The prof has really been putting the hyp on me. "No"—thinking he saw Cranston smile, Larry became earnest— "I'm not trying to kid you. I never did go for those needle tests, but I let Bogardus talk me into trying the stuff. It was easy the first time and still easier the next. Now I don't notice it at all. That would be hypnotism, wouldn't it?"

"To a degree, yes."

"That falling stuff," continued Larry. "I'll admit I'm used to faking it. Only there's times now, like tonight, when Bogardus really has to grab me. And if he didn't snap his fingers, I don't think I'd snap out of it. Maybe tonight I didn't, quite."

Cranston nodded as though he understood. His calm sympathy encouraged Larry to go into particulars.

"You ought to understand," said Larry, "on account of what you said about the telephone. I don't remember leaving it off the hook, because I don't remember taking it off, honest. I ought to have remembered both though, because it's my regular job. But there was something had me woozy."

Cranston's eyebrows lifted in query. Meeting Cranston's gaze, Larry went the whole way.

"It was the eyes," stated Larry, "and the whispers. Like eyes that whispered, whispering eyes. Don't think I'm goofy when I talk about it, though maybe I am when it happens. But it seems like something that's been creeping up on me and tonight I really took the jolt."

"When you speak of eyes," observed Cranston, "I suppose you mean the professor's."

"Not when I look into them," returned Larry, quickly. "I mean not when he's giving me the usual routine. He's like a fish when he gives you the straight stare. It makes you feel clammy, I'll admit, but I thought I was used to that part. But it's what happens afterward that bothers me. I feel like I'm floating off somewhere. I'm not looking at Bogardus, I'm not hearing his voice, when all of a sudden, those eyes are shining out of nowhere and the whisper comes like part of them."

"Tell me what the whisper says."

"I don't know what it says. I can't remember it. Somehow, it's always different."

"If it differs, you should remember why."

"Only I don't remember, honest."

There was something helpless in the way that Larry stared at Cranston. Meeting his questioner eye to eye, Larry was gaining a new experience. Unlike Bogardus's eyes, with their glassy bulge, Cranston's had depth and in their gaze was a probing power. Riveted by Cranston's gaze, Larry did not try to turn away, perhaps because he couldn't. Gradually, Larry's own eyelids flickered, his eyes went shut.

Larry the Horse had spoken truly when he said that he had adapted himself so that Professor Bogardus could put him into a hypnotic state. For Cranston, a real master at the art of hypnotism, was finding Larry an excellent subject, the sort that even a student of hypnotic methods could put to sleep.

Those flickering eyelids showed that Larry was entering a state of somnolence. By the time that Larry's eyes were shut, he was fully in a trance. Yet it all took place in a matter of mere seconds. During the process, Larry was muttering to himself and now his words became coherent.

"Shining eyes—I see them." Larry panted each phrase. "Whispering eyes—I hear them. They are telling me something, telling me something -"

Cranston's low voice came with controlling force, as if adjusting a cracked phonograph record that couldn't get out of its groove:

"State what those eyes are telling you."

"They tell me what to say," declared Larry, in his breathless tone. "Over the telephone—while I am answering it—here in the phone booth -"

Larry was giving a play by play description of his earlier experience. He was living over the events of a few hours before. Cranston was projecting Larry back into that scene, a neat yet not uncommon demonstration of skilled hypnotic work. Again, Cranston spoke persuasively:

"You are talking to someone."

"Talking," repeated Larry. "Yes, talking -"

"Talk to him now."

A spasm quivered Larry's puny shoulders. He came upright, his hands making motions as though to pick up a telephone. Larry's eyes were open now, but glassy, sightless in their stare.

"Zero. Be at zero." Larry's tone came in an exaggerated whisper, hoarse and urgent. "No. Zero. You remember, zero—zero—zero. Go there at midnight. No. zero. Midnight. Zero—zero—zero -"

Larry would have kept on with this, like a cracked phonograph record, if Cranston hadn't called a halt to it. Cranston's process was to press a thumb and finger against each base of Larry's jaw, tilt the fellow's head at a perfect balance. Then, while Larry was again voicing the words, "Be at zero— No. Zero. Midnight. Zero—zero— zero," Cranston supplied a sharp finger snap.

There was a blink of Larry's eyes. He came out of his trance so suddenly that he swayed off balance, began to corkscrew downward from the stool, his hands spreading as though dropping the imaginary telephone into which he had just spoken. Cranston caught him, steadied him. Larry squinted at the calm face of the man in front of him as if he had never seen it before.

"You talking to me?" demanded Larry. "What's it about, mister?"

"I was asking you a question," said Cranston. "Did you ever hear of No. zero?"

Larry stared, then shook his head.

"Tell me," continued Cranston. "What does the word zero mean to you?"

From Larry's puzzled look, his limited vocabulary did not include the term. Larry was giving a right answer without realizing it when he replied, "Nothing."

"You wouldn't be expecting something to happen at midnight," suggested Cranston, "at a place which we might call No. zero, or zero-zero-zero, which means nothing in three figures."

"You're giving me more than double talk," returned Larry. "That sounds like triple talk."

There was no use trying Larry further. He'd gone through his phone booth conversation purely by rote, under hypnotic persuasion and Cranston had recaptured all of it that he could. Larry would be useful in the future, perhaps, as a human pipe line that could be tapped again, but only within its own strict limitations.

The present, not the future, was Cranston's immediate concern. The telecast had ended at the front of the Castle Grill; above the screen, the two hands of an old clock were meeting to mark the hour of midnight. Whatever might be done regarding the mystery of No. zero would have to be accomplished right now.

"No. zero." Softly, Cranston undertoned the words. "Zero—zero— zero -"

In a flash, the answer came. It had to be something in the simplest of terms, for the man who had received Larry's message had been hypnotized, too. Thinking in terms of a destination to go with the time of midnight, Cranston could visualize the exact spot meant by No. zero, particularly with its triple twist. It might be of small importance, that midnight tryst at No. zero, but there was also the chance that it foreboded crime. Therefore, there was no time to lose.

Since the Castle Grill had no telephone, Cranston moved swiftly to the street and cut across to an old hotel on the other side. As he went, he recognized a cruising cab, signaled for it to stop. In the hotel, Cranston found a phone booth, put in a quick call to police headquarters and was lucky enough to get Inspector Joe Cardona on the line. But it wasn't Cranston's tone that Cardona heard.

The voice that reached Cardona across the wire was the sibilant whisper of The Shadow, carrying the slightly sinister touch that stirred listeners to action. While The Shadow's cab was waiting to race him to a scene where doom might threaten, the master of justice was urging the law to the same quest.

For midnight had already struck and every minute might prove precious in meeting the menace of the Whispering Eyes!

CHAPTER IX. MURDER AT MIDNIGHT

IT was midnight, the exact time of The Shadow's emergency call to Inspector Cardona. At that very moment, Clyde Burke was sitting on a park bench in Washington Square, near the north side, which marked the lower end of Fifth Avenue.

There, Fifth Avenue stopped at a cross street which answered to the title of Washington Square North. Traffic continued, however, down through the Square, hence a fairly frequent flow of taxicabs and other automobiles kept whisking by while Clyde watched. Clyde's bench was slightly to the east, hence across Washington Square North, Clyde could see a solid row of four-story houses that covered the short block between Fifth Avenue and University Place.

At night, the houses gave the appearance of a single building, but their fronts had individuality. Old houses, dating probably from the Nineties, or earlier, but still well kept. They made a fitting backdrop to Washington Square; in fact, they seemed a traditional part of its setting. One of those houses, Clyde had heard, had once been the home of a celebrated detective named Nick Carter, the horse-and-buggy crime doctor of his day.

But Clyde wasn't interested in that row of houses, except as a passing thought. He was wondering how Nick Carter or any other sleuth would have handled a man whose trail had become utterly aimless; namely, W. Chester Hudson.

For an hour or more, ever since leaving the hall where Bogardus had given his show, Clyde had tagged along on a wandering excursion. Hudson had zigzagged back and forth across Fifth Avenue and had finally gravitated to Washington Square. He'd been looking at houses, studying their street numbers, never finding the one he wanted. Now, at the corner where Fifth Avenue met Washington Square North, Hudson was looking across from one blank wall to another, apparently trying to find some door that didn't exist. That was why Clyde had decided to take a park bench and sit it out.

As Hudson walked across the avenue again, to take another stare at a building wall, it dawned on Clyde that the fellow hadn't a chance of finding a numbered door. This was where Fifth Avenue began and its numbers started from this point. Hence, if Hudson did find a door, it would be No. zero, Fifth Avenue. Since Fifth Avenue was the dividing line between the East Side and the West, the side streets also began their numbers from that point, marking them off in opposite directions. Therefore, Hudson would draw

another zero, either way he tried to turn.

In brief, Chester Hudson had picked the one perfect blind spot in Manhattan. He'd whittled his trip right down to nothing. Apparently, he had stopped here because there wasn't anywhere else to go. This was the nearest place to nowhere.

Clyde was no longer worrying about Hudson's hat. As it happened, Hudson wasn't wearing it, but was holding it in his left hand, which was bent against his hip and in the darkness, the hat was well obscured. Hudson was continually running his right hand across his forehead and through his hair, as though trying to rouse himself from a perpetual daze. Clyde had just about decided to give up the whole thing as foolish, when Hudson's manner underwent a sudden change.

Standing on the west side of the avenue, Hudson swung about, instantly alert. Then, as if in answer to a spoken command, he started across the avenue at an angle, with long mechanical strides, staring straight ahead. Cars were passing at the moment and, amazingly, Hudson seemed to walk right through the midst of traffic. He couldn't have timed it himself, for he wasn't looking at the cars. Someone else, from the darkness up the avenue, must have gauged Hudson's action for him.

Oddly, Clyde Burke felt himself caught by the same impulse. It was as if a silent voice had spoken the one word: "Come!" Up from the bench, Clyde was crossing the street, hoping to overtake Hudson and learn the cause for his sudden action.

Then, as Hudson crossed the path that Clyde was taking, the fellow seemed to walk right through a blank wall. Ten seconds later, Clyde reached the spot in question and discovered the reason. There was an opening here, to a broad space behind the buildings that fronted on the Square. Further back was a row of lower houses, but Clyde did not notice them. Clyde was looking for Hudson; he saw the man, a dozen or more paces up ahead. Hudson had halted stiffly in the gloom; now was Clyde's chance to overtake him.

Something whispered in the darkness as Clyde approached. An electric tingle quivered along Clyde's spine, but its warning came too late. Clyde heard a voice speak one word: "Go!" and with that, Hudson turned, strode straight past Clyde, brushing his shoulder without noticing him. If Clyde had thrown out an arm he could have blocked the fellow, but Clyde didn't budge.

There was good reason.

Clyde was meeting with Hudson's own experience. The Classic reporter was staring squarely into a pair of cold, glowing eyes which had been obscured until Hudson turned and stepped away. Above those eyes, Clyde could see the rounded outline of a hood and he realized that the man's entire head was covered, except for an opening through which the eyes glared. Then, Clyde's brief discovery was absorbed in a strange limbo, ruled only by those eyes.

They were eyes that whispered, unless the sounds that Clyde heard were caused by a faint, passing breeze. They were growing larger, those glowing eyes, because Clyde was moving closer, though he was unconscious of his slow, mechanical steps. Something lifted Clyde's chin, as effectively as if a hand had reached out to tilt it upward, but Clyde felt no touch; indeed, there was none. It was all due to the power of those focused eyes, commanding Clyde to meet their full and forceful gaze.

A voice spoke, aloud, repeating the word that Clyde thought he had heard before. It said:

"Come."

Clyde seemed to float, but slowly, through vast spaces. Actually, he was walking into the darkness

behind the row of low houses, guided by the controlling power of the hooded figure that stalked beside him. In a matter of mere minutes, Clyde had been transported from the realm of reality into the same void that had enmeshed him the night before.

Now Clyde stumbled over a slanted obstacle that stood waist-high in the darkness near a wall. Clyde's clumsy action brought a muffled growl from below. The obstacle was a large dog kennel and from it emerged a huge Great Dane. The big dog bounded toward Clyde, flinging its forepaws toward his shoulders as he gained his balance. Just then, a driving arm shoved Clyde aside and the hooded man took the brunt of the Great Dane's spring, clamping his hands around its muzzle, twisting its snout upward.

The dog's eyes met the human optics that glowed through the opening in the hood. With a whimper, the Great Dane settled to its haunches, stayed there, rigid.

This was nothing, however, compared to the post-hypnotic control that the man with the whispering eyes exerted over Chester Hudson. The tall young man had rounded the front of the low-built buildings and was following a narrow street that was blocked off with a chain, except for its sidewalks. This was a one-block thoroughfare called Washington Mews. The houses that lined it had once been stables, but had long ago been converted into fashionable studio apartments, with only their low, blocky structure a key to their origin.

Some of these building fronts varied and Hudson, walking with a long, mechanical stride, automatically paced the distance to a house front that had a truly formidable look. In its wall was set a great square window, stretching two thirds of the distance from ground to roof. The frosted glass panes were protected by a great set of upright bars, strengthened by steel cross-braces at four foot intervals.

Despite his powerful shoulders, Hudson couldn't have bent those bars, though that seemed his purpose as he gripped them. Then, like an automatic figure, Hudson hoisted himself upward; used the cross-irons as the steps of an exaggerated ladder. With a clang-clang-clang, Hudson mounted the improvised rungs, stretched a long arm upward and grasped the roof edge. His feet impelling him with an upward kick, Hudson reached the roof.

This singular climb remained unwitnessed, but not entirely unnoticed. A patrolman, going past the opposite end of the Mews, heard the clanging sound and paused to listen outside a gate that blocked off entrance from University Place. The sound of Hudson's take-off was loudest of all and the patrolman came through the gateway to investigate it. By then, Hudson was out of sight. Puzzled, the patrolman studied the bars, but couldn't connect them with the noise.

Meanwhile, Hudson was moving crouched along the roof, still mechanically counting paces, though they were shorter, because of his crablike gait. He came to a skylight covered with a metal grating and here Hudson's strength came into play. Working his arms between the bars of the grating, he lifted his shoulders with a powerful spiral twist. Rusted rivets yielded; the skylight came free. Then, planting his hands upon the sides of the opening, Hudson let his long body downward; dropped, with surprising lightness to a floor at the top of a narrow flight of stairs. He descended the stairs, step by step, reached a small barred door and unbolted it.

There stood the hooded man, arms folded like those of an executioner. His eyes leveled straight to Hudson's. He spoke two words; the first was "Turn" and as Hudson obeyed, the man with the glowing eyes added: "Go." Then, as Hudson stalked out through the back areaway, the hooded man turned to Clyde who stood motionless nearby and commanded: "Come."

It was at that instant that the eyes wavered in their glare and instead of a whisper, a snarl came from lips

that were muffled by the hood. From two directions came the approaching wails of sirens, that seemed to close like a distant pincer grip upon this very neighborhood. They annoyed the hooded man, but largely because they might have disturbed the hypnotic slumber of the two subjects that still were close at hand: Clyde Burke and the Great Dane. But Clyde was entering the doorway blankly and the seated dog did not stir. The snarl became a short, ugly laugh.

Now, though, the hooded man showed speed. He moved Clyde rapidly up the steps, halted him at a door just past the turn of the hall. Here Clyde's companion rapped sharply; then stepped back out of sight. There was a grating sound of a drawing bolt, the door swung inward and Clyde's staring eyes were facing the muzzle of a big, old-fashioned revolver.

Though Clyde hadn't been conscious of the great dog outdoors, sight of the gun muzzle stirred him. He didn't recoil; instead, he went into a nervous tremble. It was like a thing in a dream, that gun. Clyde didn't even notice the person who was behind it.

That person was a sharp-faced woman whose indeterminate age could at least have been placed beyond fifty. She was heavy of build, dominating in manner. She was wearing a fluffy blue negligee that she probably thought went well with the blond dye of her hair, but if she considered that the combination made her cute, she was wrong. Her manner was hard, her voice a metallic clang, like the jangle of the gold bracelets that adorned her wrists. Around her neck, the woman wore a three-strand necklace of magnificent pearls, and her fingers glistened with diamond rings.

"Who are you?" the woman demanded. "How did you get in here?"

Clyde did not answer. He scarcely heard the voice. The gun muzzle still held him frozen.

"Somebody must have let you in here," the woman continued. "Timothy, no doubt, the fool. I told him I was expecting a visitor, but it was his business to ring me instead of unlocking the door."

Sirens now were passing the place; their sounds told that they were halting on Fifth Avenue, but the woman paid no attention to them. Sirens were too common a thing in Manhattan.

"You are not the man I expected, but I'm not surprised he didn't come here." The woman gave a hard, knowing laugh. "He wouldn't want Timothy to know that he had been around. And yet—" She paused, tilting her head to give Clyde a suspicious look. "Why shouldn't he? Timothy wouldn't have known what he came for, or would he?"

Getting no reply from Clyde, the woman demanded:

"Do you know Timothy?"

Slowly, Clyde shook his head.

"It wouldn't matter if you did," the woman decided. "He couldn't have found out anything. But you do know my friend, the man I expected here tonight, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And he sent you in his place?"

"Yes."

"You have the money with you?"

"Yes."

What prompted Clyde to give those affirmative replies, he never could have told. It was as if a whisper, so low that only he could hear it, had spoken the words for him, through Clyde's own lips. The answers satisfied the woman, for she laughed, and in less raspy fashion. Then:

"You know who I am, of course."

"You are Maresca Lepavnu." Clyde picked up the name from a whisper that stirred within his mind. "You have brought twelve golden statuettes from Bucharest, which you are willing to sell for five thousand dollars each."

How Clyde knew these facts, he could not say. He could hear his own voice giving them, as though the words were stated by someone else. Nevertheless, the woman accepted them.

"And cheaply enough," she declared. "Since you are here to buy them, you will want to see them. Look over there."

She gestured to a wall of the room and copied the motion with the gun. Clyde turned, went to the wall and stopped short in front of a large framed portrait of Maresca herself, which portrayed her at least twenty years younger, Maresca followed close behind Clyde, and her cold tone carried all the chill that Clyde had sensed in the revolver muzzle, which he felt was still trained on him. The woman spoke again:

"Press the upper corners of the frame."

Clyde obeyed. The portrait slid downward, revealing a cabinet built in the wall. It had three shelves: on each stood four golden statuettes, amazing examples of a goldsmith's skill. They were of medieval craftsmanship, portraying knights in armor, bowmen and other warriors, all worked to the finest detail.

"The money first," came Maresca's sharp tone. "Then you can take -"

The sentence broke off in a peculiar hiss, that Clyde could not understand. This was not surprising, because all that he had heard or done, had been in groping fashion, as if through a mental fog. Yet, dulled though Clyde's faculties were, holding him in a state of obedience to hypnotic command, he had not lost all control of his senses. To a degree, he had regained them, due to the fact that the mind which commanded him had relaxed its power so that Clyde could do what Maresca Lepavnu told him. Now, gripped by a strange mental turmoil, Clyde turned about.

Sheer horror broke the spell. The word "Murder!" fairly shrieked itself through Clyde's brain. He saw Maresca struggling madly, clutching at her throat with one hand, swinging the revolver backward with the other. Behind Maresca was a hooded figure of a man whose hands had gripped the woman's necklace and twisted it like a tourniquet around her throat, to strangle her. Maresca couldn't reach the hooded man with her gun. The very frenzy of her contortions proved that this was her last frantic effort in a losing fight for her life.

Clyde lunged forward to the rescue, unmindful of the sharp words "Stay back!" that came from the hooded strangler, as his eyes came up to meet Clyde with a glare. Clyde was his whole self again, taking orders from no one; but his surge was misunderstood by Maresca, who could only associate him with the strangler. She waved the revolver Clyde's way now, and pulled wildly at the trigger.

As the bullet whined past his ear, Clyde made a sidestep, then dodged as the gun turned his way and fired again. A third shot blasted as Clyde lunged up from the floor and it was Maresca's last. By then the gun was pointing straight upward and the hooded murderer twisted it from the woman's hand, muzzle

first.

With the same motion, the killer drove the gun down toward Clyde's rising head. Clyde tried to bob aside, but it was too late. The gun butt caught him above the ear and the blow sprawled him to the floor. A moment later another figure thudded beside him, the body of Maresca Lepavnu.

CHAPTER X. EYES IN THE DARK

THE reports of Maresca's gun shots brought bedlam to Washington Mews. Not since the days of boisterous coachmen and yelping carriage dogs had this private thoroughfare known such commotion. Here at the doors of the very stable from which Nick Carter had once raced forth behind a team of tandem horses to outspeed notorious criminals, police were flooding in from prowl cars to seek a scene of murder.

Inspector Cardona, wheeling up in a squad car, saw the activity and sprang out to take charge. He'd put the law into motion on the strength of The Shadow's tip-off and though the trouble wasn't at the exact corner that The Shadow had specified, it was near enough to satisfy Cardona.

As yet, however, nobody was quite certain as to the house in which the shots had been fired. The shots were muffled and probably wouldn't have been heard at all, but for the patrolman on the beat. He'd met the first prowl cars when they arrived at Washington Square and had reported suspicious sounds in the Mews. Hence several officers had been investigating along the little street when the shooting began and ended.

Police whistles shrilled. Fists began hammering on doors. Enough racket, all in all, to scare away any criminals within half a dozen blocks. It wasn't exactly the way Cardona would have gone at it, if he'd been here early enough; still, Joe couldn't disapprove. The best way to end a shooting match was to worry the shooters and it might be that the shooting had just started. Right now, the proper scheme was to round up anyone who tried to flee the scene, wherever it was. To do that, the best system was to guard the back of each building as well as the front.

At least, the police who invaded the Mews knew which side of the street the shooting had come from. So Cardona headed back to Fifth Avenue, flagged some patrolmen and plain-clothes men who were arriving there, ordered them to cover the area in back of the row of houses.

"Regard anybody who comes out that way as a suspicious character," Cardona added. "Hold them until they can show a clean bill of health."

One of the patrolmen turned to start up the avenue. Cardona waved him back.

"Where are you going?"

"To make an arrest, inspector. You said to hold anybody who came out of here."

"Either you're seeing things," snapped Cardona, "or I'm not. Nobody's come out since we got here."

"But there was a guy came out before. A big tall fellow, who looked like he was walking in his sleep. I saw him turn west on Eighth Street and go into one of those Village joints -"

"You mean back before the shooting started?"

"That's right."

"Then forget him. You'd better go around to the front. We have enough men back here. They may need

more there."

Muttering over the patrolman's stupidity, Cardona went in back of the houses, where flashlights were already sweeping the walls. One light outlined a big dog kennel; stopped there and focused on a Great Dane that was sitting placidly with its snoot high in the air. Cardona hurried over, stopped short as he gained a close look at the dog.

"A big tall fellow," muttered Cardona. "Walking like he was asleep. Say, that's the way this dog is sitting, like he was asleep. This thing has got a hypnotism slant." Joe turned to an officer standing by. "You'd better call back that patrolman I sent around to the front. I want him to look up a fellow he told me about."

The officer took the simplest system for the call back. He drew a police whistle, blasted it. He thought that would bring half a dozen men on the run, the patrolman among them. It did more. The shrill blare snapped the Great Dane from its trance. The dog went into action. Then men were shouting, dodging, clubbing with guns and flashlights in a mad, wild whirl. They finally suppressed the Great Dane because of its own exhaustion through trying to tackle ten men at once. A detective came crawling out of the kennel, so they could put the dog back where it belonged. Another poked his head out of a door in the back of a house. Cardona saw him.

"How did you get in there?" demanded the inspector. "Was that door unlocked?"

The detective nodded.

"Then maybe it's the house we want," asserted Cardona. "Come on!"

The police had found the right house, but hardly soon enough. While they were outside, a hooded murderer had been busy upstairs. On a table lay the golden statuettes, neatly rolled in hand towels. Around the floor were papers, dumped from drawers of tables and a secretary desk. Beside Maresca's body lay a few loose pearls from the strands of the necklace that had strangled her. The rest were in the hooded killer's pocket.

Hearing footsteps pounding downstairs, the killer tilted his head to listen. The footsteps were answered by crashes that sounded like a battering ram against the front door. The police out front had found the right house, too. They'd discovered it by a simple process of elimination; namely, because every front door along the street had opened voluntarily except this one. Hearing shouts downstairs, the killer knew that the police from the back were pausing to let the others in from the front. That gave him a minute or so more, so he made the most of it.

Pulling a dark slip from a pillow on a couch, the hooded man stuffed the towel-wrapped statuettes inside it. Stooping, he hauled Clyde Burke to his feet, planted Maresca's gun in the reporter's hand, and steered him out to the stairway. The bag over his shoulder, the hooded man steadied Clyde by gripping his chin and raising it; then he met Clyde eye to eye.

"Remember!" The murderer's voice breathed harshly. "You killed her. When the police arrive, you will repeat three words: 'I killed her—I killed her.' Remember and obey!"

Clyde was sensing the whisper, but not the eyes. He was not fit to think, after the jolt he had taken from the gun butt. The ache in his head was his chief idea of a present impression. Besides, his eyes were closing as he met the other man's stare. Now Clyde was standing there alone at the head of the stairs, as footsteps pounded upward. He didn't hear the scuffling sounds behind him, as the hooded man sprang to a window ledge, flung his precious bag up through an open skylight, caught the edge of the opening with a long fling of his arms and pulled himself up through.

Suddenly roused, Clyde opened his eyes, jabbed the gun forward to challenge the throng that reached him from the stairs. Weakly, Clyde said, "I killed her!" not realizing that guns were bristling in response to his and that his forward totter could well be mistaken for a murderous lunge. But Clyde's feeble words were drowned by the shout of the man who led the others:

"Burke!"

It was Joe Cardona. With an impetuous spring, the inspector gained a double step ahead of his men, blocking the aim of their guns. Catching Clyde as he staggered, Cardona guessed enough of the truth to come to sound conclusions. He figured that if Clyde had fired those shots, they must have been dealt in self-defense. Clyde looked as though he'd been in a fight, which in turn indicated that someone else would be found around these premises.

"Who is he?" demanded Cardona. "Where did he go?"

Clyde tried to gesture back to the room where Maresca's body lay. Already slumping, he let his hand point off in the wrong direction. Cardona's eyes followed up toward the ceiling, just in time to see the skylight clamping softly shut. Joe sprang for the window ledge, called for his men to give him a boost.

So far, so good, except that the police had wasted much of the head start that The Shadow had given them. The Shadow himself was verifying that fact as his cab pulled up at the gate end of Washington Mews. He could tell by the way reserves were pouring into one open door, that there must have been a lot of hue and cry before the police had found the place where crime had struck tonight.

The Shadow wasn't thinking in terms of a back way out. That low-built row of houses were the sort to invite invasion from the roof. What was needed was a higher perspective and The Shadow saw a way to gain it. Cloaked in black, he sprang from the cab, filtered through the gate, followed the darkened wall line to a fire escape attached to a taller building near the corner. Speeding up the fire escape, The Shadow had almost reached the level of the nearest roof when a sharp clang sounded just above him.

Somebody had swung for the fire escape and reached it, whether by an arm swing or with the aid of a rope. Drawing an automatic from beneath his cloak, The Shadow made an upward lunge to meet the man above, knowing that he must be the fugitive wanted by the police. Given a few moments more, The Shadow would have settled the menace of the hooded terror then and there. Unfortunately, those moments were not granted. Inspector Cardona had done too well in making up for lost time.

Powerful flashlights blazed from the low roof, converged in a single spot upon the fire escape. As if in answer, a searchlight blazed from a police car below, picking the same objective. Instead of trapping a killer, the brilliance saved him. The hooded fugitive, already starting down the fire escape, saw The Shadow driving up to meet him.

Even the hooded man's eyes were hidden from The Shadow, for the killer's left arm was across his face, helping hold the bag that was obscured behind his right shoulder. Without giving The Shadow an instant's leeway, the hooded man gave the bag a long, terrific sideward swing. Even a deluge of bullets couldn't have stopped that stroke, for with the force of his sweep, the hooded man was carrying himself with it. The Shadow simply took the line of the least resistance and the best.

Clearing the rail of the fire escape with a backward vault, The Shadow caught one of the steps above, did an acrobat's spin and was back at the rail again, as his foeman went reeling by. The hooded man hit the turn of the steps below, bounded back and went tumbling further down, bag and all. If he'd halted anywhere along that zigzag path, he would have been easy prey, not only for The Shadow, but the police. Maybe the killer realized it; possibly he was just lucky. In either case, managing to catch his footing, he continued to reel downward at full tilt.

With that, the hooded killer carried himself right out of the limelight, leaving The Shadow master of the show, and not liking it. Too many iron steps intervened for The Shadow to take a down shot at the fugitive, who had left the scene so rapidly that the police failed utterly to spot him. In his place was The Shadow, a black-massed target in the spotlight's glare and, therefore, the very thing for the police to shoot at.

The first shots were hurried and, therefore, wild. The Shadow didn't take any chances on the rest, nor did he count on recognition by Joe Cardona, whose shots would have been drowned in the gunfire, anyway. The Shadow simply flipped back over the rail, made a downward feint, then went into what was literally an upward dive along the very slant of the rising steps. It was neat business, doubly neat, giving the impression that he'd headed for the ground. Not only did it mean that the police would carry their fire downward; it added the chance that they might spot the fugitive they actually wanted.

The hooded man, however, had gained too good a start by staking everything on his wild tumble. He reached the darkened sidewalk, scooted across the street and took the far gate before the searchlight finished its descending probe of the fire escape. By then, the man who handled the searchlight figured that he'd guessed wrong. He swept the glow upward, hoping to find the black shape that had so suddenly evaporated. Clear to the top of the tall building went the searchlight's beam, showing never a trace of The Shadow.

Rather than wait to be openly spotted again, The Shadow had taken a long swing from the fire escape to the lower roof. Now, in the darkness that practically absorbed him, he was picking a path right through Cardona's squad, all of whom had their flashlights focused for the longer range. Reaching the open skylight, The Shadow dropped down through.

When Cardona returned to view the scene for the first time, he found Lamont Cranston talking to Clyde Burke, in the room where Maresca Lepavnu lay dead. Cardona wasn't particularly surprised to find Cranston there. Joe had notified Commissioner Weston that he was coming to this neighborhood and supposed that Weston had contacted his friend Cranston. Cardona hoped that Cranston could help get a coherent story from Clyde Burke, but it didn't work.

"Those eyes," Clyde was saying, as he pressed his hand to his head. "Whispering eyes—they are all I can remember. They told me to come here, but how I did or what happened, I don't know. Except for the gun." He gestured toward the floor. "She had it. She was shooting with it when I tried to save her."

"Save her?" queried Cardona. "From what?"

"From the eyes," replied Clyde. "They were trying to kill her, to choke her. That was what jarred me out of it."

Cardona nodded that he understood. He was recalling his own experience with the stiletto at the Cobalt Club, how the suggestion of committing an actual murder had horrified him. Cardona knew, too, that by "eyes," Clyde meant the man they represented. In looking at Maresca's throat, Cardona could see the deep indentations from the necklace. The few odd pearls beside the body bore mute testimony to the fatal deed. And Cardona, picturing Maresca's dying struggle, could very well understand that Clyde had only seen the glaring eyes above her.

After staring at the body, Cardona turned to Clyde.

"Do you know her name, Burke?"

Clyde frowned, as though seeking some recollection, then shook his head.

"Some of this stuff ought to tell us," said Cardona, gesturing to the papers that littered the floor. "Let's look through it without disturbing it too much."

It didn't take long to turn up a few papers bearing the name of Maresca Lepavnu. Some of these were press sheets, which proved the woman to be a former actress. Apparently, she had been in America since before the War, living in New York, but there was no trace as to her exact nationality.

"We'll check with the FBI on this," decided Cardona. "But it's a safe bet this fellow with the eyes was after some of her papers, the same as Kelthorn's. What's bothering me now, though, is something a patrolman told me about a big fellow who walked out the back alley like a zombie, just before the shooting started. Who could that be, Burke?"

Clyde groped mentally, but to no avail.

"I've just gone blank," Clyde declared. "It must have been from the sock I got, here on the head."

"Nobody socked you before you were arguing with me up at Bogardus'," retorted Cardona. "Saying you couldn't see Hudson's hat, when he was holding it in his hand."

Cranston's eyes went keen as he heard Joe's comment. Then, before Clyde could speak, Cardona continued:

"Let's drop that for the present, Burke. Get back to the murderer. You're sure you saw him go up through the skylight when you pointed there?"

"I didn't point to the skylight," rejoined Clyde. "I was trying to steer you in here, Joe, so you could find the body."

"And maybe the murderer." Sharp in tone, Cardona reached for his stubby-nosed police revolver. "I'd begun to think we started on a blind hunt. There wasn't anybody on that fire escape after all. The guy couldn't have gone out the front way or the back, not without hypnotizing half a dozen of my men at once. There's a chance"—Cardona was swinging about, alert—"that he is still here in this room!"

It wasn't a very large room, but it did have hiding places. One in particular was an alcove with a very flimsy drape hanging in front. Cardona eyed the curtain suspiciously, realizing that the stuff was so thin that from the alcove, anyone could easily see all that happened in the lighted room. With a forced laugh, Cardona shifted his attention elsewhere; nudged Clyde to one side, did the same with Cranston. Then, with a sudden dart, Cardona reached the edge of the alcove, snatched the curtain away and shoved his gun around the corner.

In the alcove were some clothes, hanging almost to the floor, but evidently with a space behind them. As Cardona edged a closer look, he saw something that bulked irregularly in that deep space, possibly a human figure crouched there. Figuring where the head would be, Cardona side-stepped for a slanted view between the clothes hangers.

There Cardona's gaze met the eyes.

They were eyes that glowed, unblinking, and Cardona recognized that they intended to outstare him. They weren't Bogardus' eyes, which was a point in the professor's favor, but Cardona didn't waste time checking that factor. These must be the eyes that Clyde had mentioned, for Cardona could hear their accompaniment, the whisper that Clyde had mentioned.

The Whispering Eyes!

As the phrase rang through Cardona's mind, he saw the shape beneath the eyes stir. Blurting the order, "Come out of there!" Cardona aimed his revolver not for the figure that might even now be drawing a gun, but for the eyes themselves. The eyes moved sideways, but not forward, and a sudden, grim desperation urged Cardona's trigger finger to its pull. He was deliberate, though, and took time to announce: "All right, I'm letting you have it!"

Those words took just long enough. Cranston had stepped up beside Cardona; with a quick stroke of his hand, he drove the inspector's arm downward, a split second before Cardona fired. The gun shot echoed in the alcove like the report of a cannon. There was a crash of tumbling boxes and Cranston, thrusting his arms between the hanging dresses, caught something that came hurtling outward, eyes first, as Cardona dropped back in sheer surprise.

Cranston swung about. In his arms, he was holding a magnificent white half-Persian cat, which stared rebukingly at Inspector Cardona with that same glowing gaze and delivered a plaintive "Meow" in protest over the blast that had all but wrecked its favorite resting place. Then, nestling deeper in Cranston's arms, the cat began to purr in recognition of its newfound friend.

CHAPTER XI. THE TALE OF A CAT

COMMISSIONER WESTON arrived a short while later along with the medical examiner. Weston was not surprised to see Lamont Cranston. It happened that Cardona had put in calls to several places for the commissioner, including the Cobalt Club, so Weston supposed that Cranston had been called there. Besides, Weston wasn't interested in minor matters. He was too intrigued by the scene of murder, including the white Persian cat that now rated as a witness.

Weston emphasized that point after hearing the testimony that Clyde Burke offered.

"If that cat could talk, Burke," commented the commissioner, "it would probably tell us more than you have. At that, it's done a better job, because you've told us less than nothing."

Even Cranston was looking rebukingly at Clyde, though that was only an act on Cranston's part. But Clyde could count one friend, his fellow-witness, the cat. The Persian, strolling about the room, kept rubbing against Clyde's legs, giving well-modulated purrs of approval. Then, as it stalked over toward the door, the cat suddenly arched its back, looked upward, and gave the peculiar hiss that Cardona had earlier mistaken for a whisper.

Weston was looking down at the cat, and he gave a disapproving grunt.

"You're a trifle mixed, kitty," said the commissioner, "You've no reason to be annoyed at me. Go over there and glare at Inspector Cardona. He's the man who disturbed you."

Apparently, the cat was paying no attention to Weston, which wasn't particularly unusual. From its manner, though, it was interested in something, so Cranston gestured the commissioner aside in order to watch the cat. Instead of following Weston with its eyes, the cat arched its back further, turned its gaze toward the door and began a slow, defensive retreat.

Cranston caught the idea at once.

"Intelligent creatures, cats," remarked Cranston, "Less responsive in some ways than certain other animals, but far ahead in matters that concern their own world or disturb their habits. They seldom display the imitative traits that cause people to consider animals clever. You might call it indifference, but that in itself is something akin to wisdom."

"Cats combine instinct with experience," continued Cranston. "During kittenhood, they stalk each other, taking turns at pretending they are prey. They scramble up trees as far as they can climb, as if measuring each attempt against the previous. But when the test comes, they reach the first branch, even if it is higher than the cross-bars of a telephone pole."

Cranston's remarks were punctuated by plaintive meows from the white cat. Either it understood his comments or expected him to understand cat language.

"When cats are treed," declared Cranston, "they know it. Check with the fire department, commissioner, and ask them how often they are called to Brooklyn, or wherever else trees grow, to rescue cats with fire ladders. That's not a sign that cats are stupid; quite the contrary. You won't find other animals smart enough to depend on humans to help them out of a dilemma.

"This cat"- Cranston gestured to the Persian—"is right now thinking out a problem, calculating how to deal with a certain situation, should it be repeated. It witnessed a menace that grew into a tragedy, before it could give warning. Now the cat is getting into practice for the next time."

Clawing the carpet with each step that it retreated, the cat gradually lowered its arched back; then, with a valiant effort, gave a long, forward spring. Its head was lifted, as though its eyes sought a man-sized target. Again, the cat went through the retreating motions, made another spring; then turned to look up at Cranston with a long, inquiring meow.

"The cat wants advice," said Cranston, "or possibly encouragement regarding a situation with which it cannot cope. Go right ahead, kitty. Tell us more."

The cat began to stalk about. From the way it paused, turned to Cranston with expressive meows, its story was plain enough. Step by step, the cat was retracing the course of Maresca's murderer, at the same time explaining its inability to deal with the human menace that had trod these premises. Pausing beside Maresca's body, the cat looked up, tensed for a spring, then relaxed. This time its meow was more plaintive than before.

"Dogs become mournful when they lose a master," observed Cranston. "Cats show their unhappiness in more practical ways, often through some small ritual of their own creation. Here we see something resembling remorse. The cat wishes it had been at this exact spot, to attack the killer. Instinct told it, at the time, that it could not help. Now it is proving the fact to its own satisfaction."

By then the cat had turned, crossed the room, and sprung to a chair near the wall. From the chair back it stretched a paw and began to claw at the lower corner of a framed picture which showed a youthful portrait of Maresca. As Cranston approached, the cat sat back, tilted its gaze toward the top of the frame and lifted one front paw, then the other. Now its meow was impatient, until Cranston, running his hands up the sides of the frame, found what he expected. The frame released itself as Cranston pressed the top corners. Downward came the frame, revealing the empty cabinet behind it.

Clyde Burke was staring fixedly at this scene and Cranston studied the reporter's expression while Weston and Cardona were examining the empty cache. Then, the cat was rubbing Cranston's legs, as if to nudge him elsewhere. As Cranston crossed the room, the cat leaped ahead, up to a table, then down and up to the secretary desk. It was trailing the murderer's course during the time when he had ransacked the room. Always, the cat poised, as though gauging these spots as vantage points for an attack, should the murderer return to the scene of his crime.

Finally, perched on a small end table, the cat stiffened its back as Cranston approached. Then it began boxing at him with its paws, hissing snarls, but never baring its claws. It was going through the motions of protecting something, but recognizing Cranston as a friend, the cat was giving him no more than a

paddy-paw treatment. This serious play ended, the cat clawed at the edge of the narrow table top. Lifting the cat away, Cranston examined the table. A moment later, the top yielded to his tugs and hinged upward, showing a shallow compartment beneath.

Here were papers, a few jewels, money in both American and foreign currencies. Cranston looked down and stroked the cat as it came purring past his knee. Then, to Weston, he said:

"Here's something the murderer missed, commissioner. Better bring it along as evidence. I don't suppose you'll need the cat, though."

"The cat isn't evidence," decided Weston. "It is a material witness. I don't know how we can summon it to court, unless it comes in someone's custody. Suppose I appoint you as its custodian, Cranston."

Cranston agreed with a nod.

"The Great Dane was hypnotized out back," declared Cardona, suddenly. "I guess the cat must have stayed out of sight when the murderer was here. What do you think, Mr. Cranston?"

"You are probably right, inspector," replied Cranston, "but I doubt that the cat would make a good subject. In fact"—Cranston smiled slightly—"it might make a better hypnotist. You were a bit influenced, inspector, though it may be that you are just over-susceptible to hypnotism."

"By that," returned Cardona, "do you mean on account of the treatment Professor Bogardus gave me?"

"In a way, yes," said Cranston. "Considering that Bogardus has been branded as a fake, he did pretty well in your case, inspector. By the way"—Cranston turned to Weston—"did you take up that point with Dr. Fontaine, commissioner?"

"Certainly," replied Weston. "Fontaine has gone on record as defining Bogardus as a fraud, rather than a fake. You heard him state that yourself, Cranston."

"Yes, but that was before we witnessed the professor's demonstration."

"Fontaine has seen Bogardus work frequently. After the show, he told me that tonight's demonstration was typical."

"How long afterward, commissioner?"

"Right after the show." Weston became suddenly quizzical. "You aren't implying, Cranston, that Fontaine might be responsible for what happened here?"

"I'm simply thinking in terms of hypnotists," stated Cranston, "and I mean the genuine kind. As an authority on the subject, Fontaine should certainly be familiar with its practice."

"Granted," said Weston, "but the same applies to Bogardus, within his range. He knows the methods, better perhaps than Fontaine. Anyway, answering your question about Dr. Fontaine, I dropped him at his office. He had been forced to postpone some work in order to attend Bogardus' show. He wanted to catch up with it."

"And Bogardus?" queried Cranston, in an impartial tone. "Where did he go?"

"To his studio," replied Weston. "He is preparing a new course of ninety-eight easy lessons for his students, and he said he wanted to record the results of to-night's demonstration, while it was still fresh in his mind."

"Then neither has an alibi," mused Cranston. "Understand, commissioner, I'm not suggesting that either Bogardus or Fontaine could have entered here unnoticed. Not suggesting it at all"—Cranston's lips formed a faint smile—"not any more than that I might have done so myself. But the stranger who stalked up Fifth Avenue, the dog that froze beside its kennel, Burke's inability to explain a scene that he must have witnessed—all these indicate that a capable hypnotist engineered this murder."

"Here's more evidence on that score," put in Cardona, showing a report that a detective had just brought him. "They've just found a fellow named Timothy who works for Madame Lepavnu. He should have been around tonight, but he wasn't."

"Why not?" asked Weston.

"Because he's been wandering all around the Village trying to buy fresh white raspberries, which they don't carry and which are out of season, anyway. He remembers meeting somebody who told him Madame Lepavnu wanted them, but he can't remember who it was."

"Another case of hypnotism!" exclaimed Weston. "You have brought up a good point, Cranston. I'm going to check on both Bogardus and Fontaine, if only for their own good. Not only concerning tonight, but last night, too. The more I learn about them, the better, and there's one man may help me."

"Who is that?" queried Cranston. "Hanneford Lang?"

"Yes," replied Weston. "He knows both Bogardus and Fontaine well and trusts both of them, despite the fact that they are in opposite camps."

"Where did Lang go after the show?"

"To his penthouse, with a group of his friends. They are holding what Lang terms a crystal seance, which was scheduled at half past eleven, because some other guests were coming from the theater. It will probably last for several hours, so I won't disturb Lang tonight. I'll phone him in the morning."

With that, Commissioner Weston decided to go, leaving Inspector Cardona to carry on the investigation. Cardona had another report which had just arrived; it concerned the tall, stalking man who had come out from behind the Mews and gone up Fifth Avenue. A check-up had been made at the cafe where the patrolman had last seen the man, but he had evidently left there and the place was too crowded for anyone to have noticed him well enough to remember.

Weston was picking up his coat and hat while Cardona was covering this report; hence both of them failed to see the black garments, a slouch hat and a bundled cloak, that were lying on the table under Weston's coat. Nor would they have had much of a chance even to glimpse that black apparel, Weston and Cardona, for Cranston, stepping by, had gathered them up with one arm, almost as Weston lifted his coat. With his other arm, Cranston was carrying the white cat and in the same maneuver, he planted his new pet upon the cloak and hat. The cat liked the improvised cushion and began to purr again.

When Cranston left, he took Clyde Burke along with him in Shrevvy's cab, which was waiting a half block away. As they rode, Cranston kept watching Clyde, observing the reporter's stolid but reflective stare. A soft laugh came from Cranston's lips, reminiscent of The Shadow's tone. Cranston had struck upon a way to clear Clyde's mind and at the same time check on the questions of Bogardus and Fontaine. It meant leaving the cat somewhere, so he told Shrevvy to drive to the apartment house where Margo Lane lived.

Margo had just come home when Cranston arrived. Her eyes sparkled with excitement the moment she saw the white cat.

"Why, what a beauty!" Margo exclaimed. "You're leaving him here with me?"

"Only if he likes you," replied Cranston. "Let's see."

Cranston had left his hat and cloak in the cab, so the cat made no objection when transferred to Margo's arms. It purred inquiringly and settled down.

"I'm going along with Clyde Burke," explained Cranston. "He has to cover a crystal seance that Hanneford Lang is running as a sort of aftermath to Bogardus' show. If it's interesting, I'll get you an invitation to the next one."

"Not if it's anything like the professor's act, you won't," retorted Margo. "By the time I get through gathering my nerves, I'll be a bundle of them, after going through that ordeal. I'm glad you brought the cat to stay here. I was thinking I'd start screaming or sticking myself with pins if I had to stay alone."

Smiling a "good night," Cranston was turning toward the elevator, when Margo called after him:

"Wait! Since the cat is staying here, I certainly ought to know his name or doesn't he have one?"

"If he has," decided Cranston, "we'd better change it. What would you suggest?"

"Every cat should have two names," replied Margo seriously. "Its surname should be one of importance, or distinction, like the name of some famous person. Its family name; well, since it's a cat, the name should be characteristic of the cat family." Looking down into the cat's blue eyes, Margo added, "Don't you think so, kitty?"

The cat evidently thought so, for it began to meow, turning its gaze appealingly to Cranston.

"And the name should have an appropriate significance," added Margo. "But I guess that's asking too much on the spur of the moment, isn't it, Lamont?"

"Not at all," replied Cranston with a smile. "I have the very name for this cat. Just call him Washington Mews."

The name couldn't have been better. As Lamont Cranston stepped into the elevator and waved back to Margo Lane, he heard Washington Mews purring him a "good night."

CHAPTER XII. THE CRYSTAL SEANCE

THE penthouse owned by Hanneford Lang was more of a dream of lofty grandeur than an actuality. Not that the penthouse didn't exist; it was real enough, so far as walls and ceilings were concerned. But instead of an air castle topping a cloud-capped skyscraper, it was simply a squatty, square-shaped addition to the roof of a flat-topped twelve-story apartment building, dating back to the period when builders were too superstitious to go as high as a thirteenth floor.

Hanneford Lang certainly wasn't superstitious. His whole life was devoted to defeating hoodoos. This was apparent from the moment that the wheezy old elevator completed its climb and forced Lamont Cranston and Clyde Burke to stretch a full step to gain the hallway that fronted Lang's door. On the door was the number 1313, emblazoned in big letters. After all, being the only occupant of the thirteenth floor, Lang had a right to choose his own number.

The knocker on the door was an L on casting shaped to resemble a leering gnome that seemed to wince when Cranston pounded its nose. When the door was opened by a drab-faced servant, the visitors found that they had to walk under a ladder to enter the living room. These were just little jests, mild satires on

superstition, which seemed out of character with Lang, whose manner had been very serious when he attended Bogardus' hypnotic show.

Such travesties usually explained themselves. The rule was true in this case. After the servant had pressed a button to call Lang, the man himself appeared, wearing a bland smile that was probably his custom when he received new visitors. Through his glasses, Lang studied Cranston and Burke in owlish style, not recognizing them until Cranston made the introductions.

"We met only briefly this evening," declared Cranston. "My name is Lamont Cranston and I attended the Bogardus show this evening with Commissioner Weston and Dr. Fontaine. This gentleman is Clyde Burke, of the Classic."

"Ah, yes," said Lang with a nod. "I remember now that you were with Dr. Fontaine. I hope you are not too superstitious, to be annoyed by these surroundings."

"Not at all."

"I must apologize, too," continued Lang, "for not being more social when I met you earlier. Unfortunately"—Lang's smile took the exact curve of his circular face—"you were there with Dr. Fontaine."

"I understand," said Cranston. "Naturally, Professor Bogardus wouldn't have liked to see you fraternizing with the other camp."

"Precisely. Bogardus and Fontaine are both frequent visitors here, but never at the same time. Their opinions do not concur."

"So I gathered."

"Therefore," declared Lang, "I invite them only on alternate evenings."

It was Cranston's turn to smile as he asked casually, "Which of the two was here tonight?"

"Neither," replied Lang. "There was a trifling mix-up in the dates not long ago, and both have stayed away rather than risk meeting each other."

"How long has that been going on?"

"Perhaps a week." Lang's shoulders hunched in a shrug. "After all, I am not to blame. But none of this"—Lang's eyes gave a worried glance toward Clyde—"is for publication." He stared at Cranston again. "Perhaps I should have inquired the purpose of your visit before I talked to you."

"It's quite all right," assured Cranston. "Burke is not here for a story. I brought him along to be the subject in one of your crystal gazing experiments. That is, provided our ideas concur regarding the use of the crystal."

With a bow, Lang gestured his visitors to chairs. Then, lifting his shoulders, he adopted the manner of an orator warming to a favorite theme.

"If you are puzzled because I have confidence both in Professor Bogardus and Dr. Fontaine," declared Lang, "I can give you an answer in a single phrase. It is because both are half right. I emphasize that fact, half right. Therefore, you might suppose that from Bogardus and Fontaine together, it would be impossible to learn the full truth. Unfortunately, that is not the case."

"Bogardus and Fontaine agree on too many points. They agree on so many, that they constantly disagree. To give a brief example, Bogardus will tell you that hypnotism is a state which an operator projects upon a subject. In contradiction, Fontaine will say that hypnotism is something that a subject himself attains under an operator's urge. What, may I ask, is the difference? Which is more essential, the operator or the subject?" Pausing, Lang delivered his full-moon smile. "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?"

Probably, Lang expected his visitors to laugh. Instead, Cranston accepted the statement with a calm nod, while Clyde retained a stolid stare. Lang's large, dull eyes brightened momentarily with a fanatical gleam. Much pleased, he continued:

"Hypnotism is a function of the mind. Therefore, it requires one mind only. The great mistake made both by Bogardus and Fontaine is that they consider hypnosis as an abnormal state, a thing which can be induced. On the contrary, it is normal, basic, the very essence of life itself. In a word, all living is hypnotic.

"Why do flowers open with the dawn? Why do moths seek the flame? Why do birds fly south in winter? Instinct, you may say? Then what is the impulse that governs instinct? If it is the desire for self-preservation, whence comes that desire? It comes from life, of which it is an integral part. Action, creation, the will to do, are merely concomitants of the life principle."

In his harangue, Lang had seemingly multiplied his audience of two by a thousand. Now, as if wresting himself back from vast spaces, he lowered his tone, stooped his shoulders, and wagged a decisive finger.

"There are times," concluded Lang, "when these motivating forces slacken, indeed, almost cease to function. Then life rests upon a dead center. Watch this chair, as I try to balance it on two legs"—tilting a chair backward, Lang held it so that its back and forth sway was slight, stopping it each time it wavered in one direction or the other—"and you have the perfect illustration. Theoretically, it should be possible to make this chair stay on its point of balance, but I have never seen it accomplished.

"The same is true of the mind. It can be kept at the waver point through its own sheer power of concentration. In no case is the hypnotist the man who places it there, nor does he even supply the urge. He is merely the provider of a setting in which he becomes the opportunist who takes advantage of someone else's undecided mind. Divide and conquer is the hypnotist's real motto. He wins during the conflict between the conscious and the subconscious mind."

Again drawn to his full height, Lang stood tall and thin, his head almost touching the top of the doorway in which he was framed. This was a striking contrast to his huddled pose, when he purposely reduced his height to draw closer to the persons upon whom he wished to emphasize his opinions. Now, with a dramatic gesture, Lang swept his hand through the doorway and said:

"Come."

They followed Lang through to the central room of the penthouse. There, beneath a ceiling fitted with an artificial dome, sat half a dozen people, gazing from a circle into a huge crystal ball. Among them were a few who had been at the Bogardus demonstration with Lang. Their eyes were rapt, but their expressions varied. Some showed smiles, others were tinged with horror. But in every instance, the faces were undergoing slow changes, as though stirred by variable emotions.

Gently, Lang tapped the crystal gazers on their shoulders. One by one, they lifted their heads, stared about; then, recognizing each other, they began to pour excited accounts of sights they had seen in the crystal. Lang allowed one woman to remain gazing at the ball; she was undisturbed by the chatter. Indicating the woman, Lang said to Cranston:

"She arrived quite late. It takes time to rouse these crystal visions. It would not be fair to disturb her."

"How long," asked Cranston, "does a seance last?"

"Let me see." Lang calculated slowly, then turned to a white-haired man who was leaning back in his chair. "When did we start consulting the crystal? At eleven o'clock?"

"That's when we got here," the white-haired man replied. "We didn't begin until about half past." Looking up as he spoke, the man saw Cranston, rose to his feet and extended his hand, "Well, well, Cranston!" he exclaimed. "You remember me, I hope?"

"Donald Gregg," identified Cranston. Then, turning to introduce the man to Clyde, he added, "We used to be directors of the same bank." Cranston gave Gregg a smile. "The Governor's National, wasn't it?"

Gregg nodded.

"Exhilarating, this crystal work," Gregg, said. "You should take it up, Cranston. It literally sheds time from your shoulders. Why, a galaxy of scenes passed before my eyes in what seemed only a few moments, yet by now it must be midnight!"

"It is after one o'clock," corrected Lang, glancing at his watch. "I called a rest period at midnight and about twelve thirty, we began again. That is the customary procedure"- Lang was turning to Cranston as he spoke—"half an hour at the crystal, half an hour's rest. Then we are ready for another turn.

"Of course, one set of visions completely dispels all recollection of the previous. On survey nights, we take notes between sessions, but this group prefers the crystal for their own enjoyment. Taking notes of crystal visions is like keeping a diary on a vacation."

Cranston was studying the crystal ball. It was artificial in construction, but as clear as the finest rock crystal. Nearly two feet in diameter, the globe rested on a low pedestal through which light was projected from below, giving the sphere a soft, diffused glow.

"A large crystal is needed for a group," explained Lang. "Sometimes they see similar images, an indication of thought transference. What we seek mostly are visions of the unknown, the sort that I intend to publish in my book 'The Worlds Between.' Of course, the hardest task is to keep past recollections from disturbing the clearer visions." He turned to Gregg. "How were your results at this session?"

"Excellent," replied Gregg. "I had visions of great golden palaces with jeweled domes, but they wavered and blurred, like a motion picture out of focus. They were disturbed, too, by the shadows of passing clouds."

"You must have had a vision of lost Atlantis," decided Lang, "the city under the sea. Those shadows were caused by passing fish that disturbed the water and distorted the scene."

"That could be it!" exclaimed Gregg. "But how did you gain so prompt a clue?"

"From what you told me between sessions," replied Lang, with a smile. "You saw islands rocked and swept by tidal waves. I told you to relax, that your preliminary vision would lead to a finer one. I was right; your later trance superseded the first."

Clyde Burke had stepped forward, fascinated by the great crystal. His eyes were fixed in a tense stare and his lips began a mutter. Noting this, Lang tried to draw Clyde away, but could scarcely budge him.

"His mind is troubled," Lang undertoned to Cranston. "It would be better for him not to try this."

"I would like to see what happens," returned Cranston. "Burke hasn't seemed right all evening. It might help if we learned the cause of his disturbance."

"You may be right," nodded Lang, "but it would be preferable to test him privately, rather than break the conversation of the group. In his case, a smaller crystal would prove more effective."

Cranston helped Lang turn Clyde away. Together they walked him to a small room at the back of the penthouse. The room was evidently Lang's study, for it had a desk piled high with papers, books, and sheaves of reference notes. It had one window, a barred affair, that overlooked the roof of an office building just below. Here, in the lower Thirties, there were plenty of old buildings far short of modern heights. Since Lang was putting Clyde in the only chair that wasn't occupied by books and papers, Cranston sat on the window sill; the window was open so he leaned back against the outside bars. From there, Cranston watched Lang bring a six-inch crystal, to set it in front of Clyde.

"I am only a student of the occult," stated Lang. "I make jest of superstition so that people who come here will have untrammelled minds. This man"—Lang's head gave a worried shake—"is groping in some mental darkness. His thoughts seem blank -"

Clyde's voice interrupted.

"I see them—the eyes!" Clyde's tone was strained, hoarse. "I hear them— whispering eyes! Telling me—telling me -"

"Try to remember," suggested Lang, as Clyde leaned closer to the crystal. "Remember the eyes."

"But I can't remember," gasped Clyde. "They're telling me to forget."

"Then forget the eyes," supplied Cranston, coming forward. "Remember only their whisper."

"I hear it," Clyde panted. "They are saying to forget the hat. I see the hat, but there is no one with it. Now, the lights -"

Clyde recoiled, throwing his arm across his eyes. Lang reached for the crystal, but Cranston halted him.

"They are gone, those lights," Cranston told Clyde. "Look in the crystal again. Concentrate on the hat. You see it -"

"Yes, I see it," spoke Clyde. "There is someone holding it."

"And his name -"

"It's on the card. I can read it, W. Chester Hudson. Now I see him again, looking for a number on a door. Only there isn't any door that could have that number."

"Because it would be No. zero."

"That's it." Clyde picked up Cranston's words again, "No. zero. Round, like a zero, it's the muzzle of a gun!"

As Clyde started to recoil, Cranston gripped him and Lang hurriedly removed the crystal ball, to relieve Clyde's horror. But Clyde needed no crystal now. He was staring straight ahead, as though viewing a face in mid-air.

"Maresca Lepavnu," spoke Clyde. "She's asking me for the money— She's showing me the Bucharest statuettes—she wants five—ten— fifty thousand dollars and now -"

With a shriek, Clyde was on his feet, struggling with Cranston, flaying with his arms, as Lang sprang in to help suppress him. In the melee, Lang lost his glasses and began groping about, squinting helplessly.

"He's choking her!" shouted Clyde. "Killing her. I have to stop him - stop him -"

Spinning about, Clyde blundered into Lang, who caught him in an arm-lock, reeled with him across the room, Cranston following after them. At the wall, Clyde suddenly went rigid.

"The eyes," gasped Clyde. "I see them—the eyes -"

Exhausted, Clyde was sagging when Cranston caught him. Lang, half-crawling around the room, found his glasses, put them on, and came over to study Clyde with a solemn, sympathetic gaze.

"A terrible experience," said Lang. "It sounded like an exaggerated interpretation of some actual recollection. I was fearful of this, Cranston. I never believe in letting anyone seek terror in the crystal."

"He didn't seek terror," returned Cranston. "Terror sought him. Don't worry about Burke; he's coming around now. But I probably should have followed your advice, Lang. In the future, I shall recommend less impressionable people to view your crystals."

Lang bowed a profound acknowledgment as he conducted the visitors from the study and out through the penthouse. Clyde Burke was more himself again, but still rather vague, as he said "good night" to Lang. As he rode down in the elevator with Cranston, Clyde felt tired and said so.

"Don't worry about tonight, Burke," said Cranston in parting. "Get a good rest and you'll have a clearer idea about everything when I talk to you tomorrow."

Lamont Cranston could have added that he had cleared up a few points on his own, thanks to Hanneford Lang and the extremely helpful crystal.

CHAPTER XIII. CRIME UNRAVELS

THE next day, Lamont Cranston staged a timely arrival in Weston's office while the commissioner was holding a teletyped correspondence with the FBI, in reference to Maresca Lepavnu. Looking over the paper that was streaming from the ticker, Cranston learned that Madame Lepavnu was a once-celebrated European actress who had maneuvered her way through the intrigues and tumult of a war-torn continent, escaping prison camps and catastrophes, but not without her share of danger and adventure.

Summed up, Maresca's record had been a good one, otherwise she wouldn't have been admitted to the United States. Where she'd been involved with Nazis and their satellites, it was always in places where they were established. Never had Maresca been party to operations of the quisling type. On the contrary, she'd helped to hamper such doings, even aiding members of threatened governments to escape their native lands before the invaders.

It couldn't be said, though, that Maresca had done this without price or reward. She'd been living in New York on the remains of what might be termed a heterogeneous fortune consisting of everything from foreign bonds to tulip bulbs. She'd lived on a pay-as-you-go basis, with other people paying, but she had claimed—and with some justification—that her gains had just about balanced her own losses.

The FBI had merely pretended to blink at that. They'd been waiting for Madame Lepavnu to attempt a final kill, where profits were concerned. Apparently, someone else had had the same idea. Maresca's career had ended with a final kill, but of a literal sort, in which she was on the receiving end.

There were no further facts. Maresca's story had all the elements of a sealed book. That wasn't Cranston's opinion, however. Casually, almost as a passing suggestion, he said to Weston:

"Ask the FBI what Madame Lepavnu did with the twelve Bucharest statuettes."

Indulgently, Weston sent the query over the teletype. The effect was electric in more ways than one. The wires really began to burn. Wordage came pouring from the ticker.

"What's this you've started, Cranston?" exclaimed Weston. "Tell me all you know, all you can even guess! Why, those golden statuettes were entrusted to the Rumanian Iron Guard and were last seen in Bucharest just before the Communists took over. Like the Royal Burmese rubies, they are priceless!"

"Hardly," returned Cranston, calmly, "since Madame Lepavnu was offering them at five thousand dollars each, or sixty thousand in all."

"Where did you learn that?"

"From Burke. He came out of his daze last night, at least partly."

"Have him keep it out of the Classic!" stormed Weston. "Or I'll hold him as an accessory to the fact."

Dictating the news across the teletype, Weston sat down and mopped his brow.

"That clinches it, Cranston. The same murderer, the same motive, with both Kelthorn and Maresca. The killer knew that each owned something of great value that could not be offered for open sale. In each instance, he negotiated privately and when the goods were produced, he murdered the owner instead of buying the treasures. He simply took the rubies and the statuettes along with him, but that wasn't all. He went through all Kelthorn's papers and Maresca's, too. I'm positive he weeded out any letters that would have incriminated him."

Cranston nodded agreement. Then:

"You didn't find any other papers at Kelthorn's home?"

"None that counted," answered Weston. "He evidently confined all his shady business to his office."

"But what about the papers in Maresca's trick table?" asked Cranston. "The ones that Washington Mews found for you?"

Weston stared at Cranston as though his friend were giving double talk.

"How could Washington Mews find anything for us?" demanded Weston. "We were hunting for things around Washington Mews."

"So you were," said Cranston, with a smile. He was recalling how the commissioner had tooth-combed Maresca's premises while the white cat sat and watched. "Odd that I should have said that. I must have been thinking of something else."

"You were asking about the hidden papers," picked up Weston. "They gave us more of a line on Madame Lepavnu, that was all. Nothing on the murderer. He must have walked away with any letters that he ever wrote to Kelthorn or Maresca."

At that, Cranston pondered. Then:

"I doubt that he ever wrote them anything," declared Cranston. "They wouldn't have corresponded on

such ticklish subjects as the rubies or the statuettes."

"You may be right," decided Weston, "but in that case, I can't figure what the murderer was after. There wasn't much correspondence in either case. Mostly form letters, charity appeals, oil-stock propositions, real estate opportunities and the like. Kelthorn and Madame Lepavnu must have posed as big-hearted folk with something of the sucker urge, to cover up their real operations."

"There's your next step," announced Cranston as he rose. "Check the mailing lists. Find everyone who sent such literature to Kelthorn and Maresca."

"But we already know."

"You don't know all," declared Cranston. "Mailing lists are often sold, leased, or even borrowed. Start from those you already know about and find out with whom they traded. That may produce your final clue."

Having given Commissioner Weston enough to keep him busy, Lamont Cranston left for another appointment. This took place in a snug little restaurant called the Press Box, near the Classic office. There, in a secluded corner Cranston met with Clyde Burke and Joe Cardona, each of whom was somewhat puzzled to find the other present.

"You've both had similar experiences," Cranston told the two. "You, inspector, let Professor Bogardus use you in a post hypnotic test and Burke saw the outcome of it. Now I'm convinced that Burke himself was hypnotized, at least twice, by someone he remembers only in terms of Whispering Eyes. I want him to account for everything before and after those experiences, while you, inspector, check his story as far as you can."

With persons other than an accomplished reporter and an experienced police officer, Cranston might have failed to get results. As it was, Cranston arrived at facts fast. Recalling the night of Kelthorn's death, Clyde remembered leaving the building; from then on, he drew a blank. Cardona filled in the rest, stating just when and where he had picked up Clyde in the police car.

To Cranston, that settled the question of the lights that Clyde connected with the eyes. It proved that Clyde's visions in Lang's crystal ball had been twofold, a brief experience near Kelthorn's; a more grueling one last night, at Maresca's. Both of those visions had involved a hat; now Cardona was supplying the details on that score.

"Don't forget that crazy business outside Bogardus' hall," said Cardona to Clyde. "You and Jenkins, I mean, giving me the business."

"What business, Joe?" asked Clyde, puzzled.

"Saying you couldn't see Hudson's hat," retorted Cardona, "while the guy was smoothing it out, right there in front of you. Then Jenkins topped it by saying he couldn't see Hudson at all. For once, Burke, be serious -"

"He is serious," put in Cranston. "Phone the Classic, Burke, and tell them to send over all the press copy they have on Professor Bogardus, particularly photographs."

Clyde made the call and returned. Then:

"Whoever the murderer," proceeded Cranston, "his system is simple. When he wants to do a crime, he diverts the opposition, then sends in a strong-arm man to clear the way and also to take the blame if anything should slip. He is also ready to frame anyone who happens to come along or blunder in on

things. The killer is using the most rudimentary forms of criminal operation.

"The unique part is his device. Instead of knock-out drops or blackjacks, he is using hypnotism. So artfully that he should have covered his trail completely, but like all attempts at perfect crimes, these have had their flaws. Let us consider the Kelthorn murder first."

Clyde and Cardona were thoroughly agog as they listened.

"The man with the eyes waylaid Jenkins in the alley," tallied Cranston. "He gave him a negative post-hypnotic impression applying to the man called W. Chester Hudson. The result: When Hudson entered the building, Jenkins took him up in the elevator and later brought him down, yet as far as Jenkins could know, Hudson might have been the original invisible man. It sounds incredible, but that is only because hypnotic phenomena are the exact reversals of normal experience. If you won't take my word, ask Dr. Fontaine."

Cardona perked up at mention of Fontaine. Professor Bogardus had been so openly blatant that Cardona had begun to consider Dr. Fontaine as a secret weapon masquerading in human form. Now, it appeared that Fontaine could be aboveboard, too. But that, in itself, could prove that one was playing the other's game.

"Hudson's mission was to wrench the bars from the hallway window," continued Cranston. "That enabled the murderer to enter, trick Kelthorn into staging his own death, and then depart as he had entered, by way of the back alley. Any chance witnesses out front would only remember Hudson as the man who entered and left the building. You, Burke, must have picked up a slight portion of Hudson's trail, and particularly his hat. The murderer found you with the hat; obliterated the incident from your mind."

Clyde nodded. Though he couldn't remember this story, he believed it. The whole thing fitted with the Whispering Eyes.

"Last night," declared Cranston, "the man with the eyes used Hudson again. He had him break into Maresca's house by way of the skylight and open the back door, by which route Hudson left. Hudson was almost spotted entering; he was noticed after he left. If all had worked as the killer wanted, Hudson would be the only suspect. But you happened to enter the picture, Burke."

Clyde nodded, realizing it, but his face was strained. He was hoping he wouldn't have any more meetings with the Whispering Eyes. Clyde felt he'd be like a swimmer going down for the third time, the last.

"The Whispering Eyes tried to frame you, Burke," added Cranston. "Maresca's shots were what spoiled the game. Now that we have pieced the chain, we must seek its weakest link. It may be here."

Cranston referred to a package that a waiter was handing him, the Bogardus file brought by messenger from the Classic. Soon, photographs were spread all over the table, most of them action shots of Bogardus and his subjects in the midst of the professor's hypnotic demonstrations.

"Excellent," declared Cranston. "The professor's flare for publicity is going to help us. See if you can spot our man Hudson."

They spotted him, Clyde and Cardona, at the same time. In one picture, Hudson was staring blankly from among a group. In another, he was towering above Bogardus who was looking up and making passes at Hudson's fixed eyes. The third photo was the best. It showed Hudson lying rigid between two chair backs, with Bogardus standing on him, giving Hudson the full weight of the professor's portly form. Turning the pictures over, Clyde shook his head.

"All different dates," he said, "but no names. The one with Hudson lying between the chairs just says: 'Professor Bogardus demonstrating a cataleptic test.' But we do know the fellow's name. It's W. Chester Hudson. I wonder what the W means."

"West," replied Cranston, looking at the photographs. "I'd suggest that you make a note of it."

"But how," queried Cardona, "do you figure it as West?"

"From Westchester," explained Cranston, "the name of a county, and Hudson, the name of a river. This chap probably comes from somewhere around Yonkers, or is acquainted there. It was a good tag to give him, along with those calling cards. Names like that stick with amnesia victims."

Studying the photographs, Cardona nodded.

"You're right," said Joe. "He looks the type. I've seen a lot of these lost memory cases. How they pick new names for themselves, they never know, so I guess somebody generally hangs the names on them. I'd say this guy wouldn't have any more ability choosing a name for himself than, let's say, a cat."

"Not as much," returned Cranston, smiling slightly as he remembered how Washington Mews had assisted in picking his own name. "However, inspector, there's your lead. Check other cities and see if any Bureau of Missing Persons has a case answering the description of this man whose name is anything but Hudson."

That was all. Lamont Cranston left the Press Box with the air of an Eagle Scout who had hit a daily double, where good deeds were concerned. He'd furnished Cardona, as well as Weston, with the sort of material that the law liked to sift. Sooner or later, both would bring results.

Meanwhile, Lamont Cranston was making some immediate plans that would be helpful to the crime-hunting career of his other self, The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIV. CRANSTON GETS AROUND

DR. GERALD FONTAINE had his office on an East Side avenue in the upper Sixties. It was a ground floor office and the entrance was just around the corner, but it bore the avenue address. The sign on the door read "Fontaine Institute, Inc." and inside was a small reception room.

When Lamont Cranston arrived, a girl promptly appeared from an inner room and asked his name. Cranston gave it and after a few minutes, he was ushered into an office, where Fontaine rose to greet him. The bearded psychologist was wearing a white coat, which gave him the look of a physician, though Fontaine made no claims of that sort.

Indeed, Fontaine must have been conscious that the thought was in Cranston's mind, for he went to immediate pains to nullify it.

"I am doing some laboratory tests, Cranston," declared Fontaine. "I like everything to be spick-and-span. Come with me, if you wish, and see how they are making out."

They went to a big rear room that befitted the title of laboratory. Here, three of Fontaine's assistants, all in white jackets but without beards, were testing various animals for their reactions. Cranston counted dogs, monkeys, rabbits, and even guinea pigs among those present, but no cats. He commented on the fact.

"Cats are excellent for regulation tests," stated Fontaine, "but not for the sort that I conduct. I am working in animal hypnosis. This instrument"—he indicated an upright disk, four feet in diameter, which contained

a clutter of inner wheels—"is my new automatic hypnograph. Watch its results."

Fontaine reached up to the hypnograph, started its wheels in motion. Fontaine, though an imposing man, was not tall, as was apparent when he stood beside the pedestal on which the hypnograph was mounted. In fact, Cranston doubted that Fontaine was even an inch taller than Bogardus; but unless the pair were actually together, Fontaine would give the impression of being much taller. It was a matter of build, of course. Fontaine, though not thin, was definitely slender, lacking the chunky mold that made Bogardus look ridiculously small.

Spinning wheels of the hypnograph were blurring their colors into a grayish pattern with flickers of white and black. As Cranston watched the wheel, he heard Fontaine's dry voice beside him:

"It won't hypnotize you, Cranston. More color is needed to impress the human eye. It will hold your interest, that's all. But you will be more interested in the effect on the animals."

Turning to study the animals, Cranston noticed a monkey staring hard, while two dogs were quivering as they watched the wheels. Some rabbits were motionless, but the guinea pigs were paying no attention at all.

"There you see the varying levels of intelligence," expressed Fontaine. "The effect is greater as it descends from monkey to dog to rabbit, but the guinea pig is of such a low order that it ignores the hypnograph."

Fontaine turned off the machine. The monkey relaxed, the dogs whimpered. Fontaine picked up a rabbit. The creature was rigid, stiff as a board. Fontaine defined it: "Complete catalepsy."

It was just the opening Cranston wanted.

"This test should prove then," stated Cranston, "that hypnotism can cause catalepsy where human beings are concerned."

"Very possibly," returned Fontaine, "but I would say that it depends on cases."

"On cases?"

"As determined by individuals. Certain people are subject to cataleptic fits or conditions resembling such. There are records of prolonged trances, but they invariably involve some physical cause, such as electric shock or an ailment like sleeping sickness. I doubt that hypnotism could produce such results alone."

"You should visit the Orient, doctor," declared Cranston, "I have seen instances there of suspended animation, produced by the spell cast by a yogi, wherein bodies can be stretched rigid and heavy weights placed upon them."

Fontaine gave a disdainful laugh.

"Professor Bogardus claims he learned that stuff in India," recalled Fontaine. "I saw him give such a demonstration only a week ago. He stood on the man's body while it was rigid, but that was not a great enough strain. I still term the demonstration at least a halfway fake."

"In India," said Cranston, reflectively, "I have seen them place huge paving stones on a rigid man's body and crack them apart with sledge hammers."

"You have?" Fontaine's eyes glittered, eagerly. "You can produce evidence of that?"

"Attested evidence," confirmed Cranston, "within the hour if you wish it. But such evidence would

support the claims of Professor Bogardus, rather than challenge them."

"Not as I see it," was Fontaine's prompt response. He glanced at his watch. "If you can get me that data in an hour, I'll still have time to challenge Bogardus before tonight's demonstration. I'll prove once and for all how much of his work is fakery!"

Leaving Fontaine's office, Cranston phoned his New Jersey home and ordered Stanley, his chauffeur, to pick up the file on Yogi Ordeals and speed it to Fontaine. Stopping off at the Cobalt Club, he found Weston there, learned that the check-up of the mailing lists was underway. Then Cranston remarked:

"What is this institute that Fontaine has incorporated? I just learned about it today."

"A very commendable project," declared Weston. "Fontaine intends to determine the exact status of hypnotism through laboratory experiments. He even intends to establish chairs of hypnotism at leading universities."

"How far has he succeeded?"

"His plans have been approved. But so far none of the universities have been willing or able to divert endowment funds to such a purpose. So Fontaine is raising subscriptions on his own, through the Fontaine Institute." From his pocket, Weston brought a slip of paper. "Here is one of the blanks."

While Cranston was looking at the subscription blank, Weston unfolded a big sheet of paper that looked like a playbill, printed in crimson on a background of circus yellow.

"Here is the way Bogardus solicits funds," declared Weston, in an outraged tone. "Look at this sheet, with applications attached, for membership in the Bogardus National College of Hypnotic Art, at ten dollars, complete with diploma. Every time Bogardus wants more money, he cooks up another phony organization. But he knows the letter of the law, or his attorney does, so he gets by with it. Fontaine's institute will help to counteract such despicable enterprises as this."

It was logical, after Weston's outburst, that Cranston should stop at the upstairs studio where Bogardus gave lessons and worked on his ninety-eight lesson course. A half block from the hall where Bogardus gave his demonstrations, the studio looked like the corner of an old abandoned gymnasium. It had a platform which had once been a boxing ring, and the partitioned office appeared to have been an old shower room.

Half a dozen callow youths were practicing hypnotism on each other when Cranston entered. None of them had been put to sleep, for all thumbed to the office door when Cranston asked for the professor. At Cranston's knock, the door opened and Bogardus looked up quizzically from the threshold. His bulgy eyes showed no sign of recognition.

Introducing himself as a friend of the commissioner, Cranston added that he had seen last night's demonstration. At that, Bogardus delivered what he probably considered a pleased smile.

"The commissioner was much impressed, I understand," declared Bogardus. "And that, despite an unsympathetic presence." His smile went very sour. "You understand the man I mean, of course. Dr. Gerald Fontaine."

Cranston nodded.

"I shall invite the commissioner again tonight," continued Bogardus, "so he can see how little this Fontaine knows. Bah! These psychologists. Their knowledge is all from books. They understand nothing about practical methods. Fontaine has just begun to find out the sort of things that are done in India and has

challenged me to duplicate them."

"You mean the rock test?" queried Cranston. "That's curious. I was mentioning it to Fontaine."

"And you could trust him to pick it up," assured Bogardus. "I'll make him show his evidence, though, before going through with it. I told him that, when he called me up just a short while ago."

"Why should the evidence be necessary?"

"So I can induce someone to go through with the test," explained Bogardus. "I am all ethics, Mr. Cranston. No monkeys, dogs and guinea pigs for me. I do my tests with humans, only, and never without their full consent. But don't worry about my finding some person for a subject. I think I know of one who will surely be there."

"You mean the little chap?" queried Cranston. "The one Inspector Cardona said was called Larry the Horse?"

Bogardus glared at him.

"I choose my subjects by their minds," he said, "not by their names. I shall need a sturdy man for the rock test." He gave Cranston an appraising look. "Don't worry, I am sure that a suitable subject will be there."

After his chat with Bogardus, Cranston paid a brief visit to Margo Lane. Washington Mews purred happily at seeing Cranston again and while he stroked the cat, Cranston detailed some of the day's activities.

"That's amazing about Hudson's hat," said Margo. "Naturally, the murderer would have to pick it up, to keep Hudson in the clear. But how did he get it back to Hudson; that is, the man whose name isn't Hudson?"

"Remember the tall chap who blocked traffic at the cloak room, last night, when Bogardus gave his show?" inquired Cranston.

Margo nodded.

"That was Hudson," said Cranston. "He was looking for his hat. The girl found it on the floor."

"Then someone must have planted it!" exclaimed Margo. "Somebody who knows too much about hypnotism."

"Don't look at me," remarked Cranston, with a smile. "I didn't go out to the lobby while Hudson was making that phone call later. Nor was I on the platform."

"Bogardus hypnotized Hudson," said Margo, slowly, "and Fontaine watched Larry the Horse. But wait, Larry was up on the platform first. Bogardus did some work with him -"

"And left him in a partially hypnotic state," added Cranston. "I checked that and know that Larry told Hudson what he was supposed to tell him, over the phone. But in this game of hypnotism, the participants use one human weapon against another, and may even borrow them. The question is: Where is Hudson now?"

"Have you any way of finding out, Lamont?"

"Yes," replied Cranston, in a confident tone, "unless Hudson has been tossed into the discard. I'll let you know later how I make out, Margo. I'll see you at the show."

It was dusk when Lamont Cranston reached the street, the hour at which he so often switched to the guise of The Shadow. But when Cranston entered Shrevvy's cab, he did not draw out the secret compartment beneath the back seat, where he kept the cloak and hat. Only by the softly whispered laugh that Cranston uttered, could he have been momentarily identified as The Shadow.

Whatever Cranston's present game, he preferred to play it as himself.

CHAPTER XV. MIND MEETS MIND

A TALL figure crossed the street, pausing openly to pick his course. Then, a trifle more warily, the man edged toward a doorway, worked his way from it to another, went past a narrow passage between two buildings; then hesitated in a patch of light and returned.

Lamont Cranston was playing a dodging game.

It was artful in its way, the game of a man who suspected nothing, yet at moments decided to be wary. Now, abruptly, Cranston entered the passage, came to the arch where Clyde had picked up the hat. There, Cranston made measurements, used a flashlight to study the paving, all in the same half-guarded style that made it look as though he were seeking to avoid the very attention that he was trying to attract.

Finding a trail to Hudson was apparently Cranston's motive. Actually, he was hoping to have himself found by someone who was hiding Hudson and, therefore, would be watching to see if anyone tried to pick up the trail.

When Cranston finished, it looked as though he had gained results. He made himself properly conspicuous when he returned to Shrevvy's cab. Looking back as he rode away, Cranston saw another cab pull out from a corner.

It just might be that a pair of whispering eyes had been on the lookout. If so, Cranston intended to bait them more.

Cranston let Shrevvy roll him around town. Purposely, he passed the building where Fontaine had his institute. From the rear street, Cranston saw that the laboratory lights were out. When the cab hit Broadway, Cranston looked for the window of Bogardus' upstairs studio. It likewise was black.

However, Cranston did not forget that trailing cab. He identified it effectively during his first glances back. At times, he noticed it on the trail, but it had a way of dropping the chase. Evidently its passenger had ordered the driver to take short cuts. The other cab wasn't even momentarily in sight when Cranston passed the places represented by the absent Fontaine and Bogardus.

That only told Cranston more.

Whoever might be in the trailing cab, and the rule could apply equally to Bogardus or Fontaine, had guessed exactly where Shrevvy's cab was going when it had neared those particular spots. Therefore, the trail was easily dropped and picked up again. But what applied to Bogardus or Fontaine could equally apply to other people, even Inspector Cardona, if he happened to be in a mood to spend city money on a merry-go-round chase.

There wasn't a sign of that other cab in the bright Broadway traffic. It had ducked and wisely. To give it time to resume the trail, Cranston told Shrevvy to nose along slowly in the Thirties. On one of those streets, Cranston assumed The Shadow's attire, eased himself from the cab as it hit a darkened stretch, and became the equivalent of gliding invisibility.

Cabs passed, but none were the one The Shadow had identified earlier. It might have dropped the trail or its passenger could have switched. So The Shadow let Shrevvy cruise a while, giving himself time to complete some more of his evening's plans. Finding a spot he wanted, The Shadow looked up through an opening between two buildings, caught a full view of Lang's penthouse, from the rear elevation.

The study windows were open. Beyond its bars, The Shadow could see Lang, piling books and papers on his desk. Sidling into the doorway of an office building, The Shadow found a phone booth in the deserted lobby. He called Lang's apartment, but when he spoke, The Shadow used Cranston's voice.

"You're holding a crystal seance this evening?" inquired Cranston. "If you are, I'd like to recommend a friend."

"Of course," acknowledged Lang. "But it won't be until after Bogardus's demonstration. He's giving another show to-night, you know."

"I hadn't heard. Should I go?"

"Most certainly. I understand he will deal in genuine Hindu hypnotism, something I have long wanted to see. I'll be looking for you, Cranston. Anything else?"

"Nothing else."

"Then you must excuse me." The Shadow could hear a chiming sound across the wire. "My servant has just rung the dinner gong. I can't afford to be late at Bogardus' this evening!"

The light in Lang's study was blinking off when The Shadow was going past again. Soon Shrevvy's cab came along with no one tailing it. The Shadow swung in and ordered Shrevvy to gravitate, by a zigzag course, to the foot of Fifth Avenue. Here was the last chance, that blank spot of Manhattan, the absolute zero that could be the only destination for a memory-lost mind like Hudson's, providing the hypnotic master who controlled him had been unable to contact him elsewhere.

Cloak and hat packed away, The Shadow was Lamont Cranston again, when he alighted near No. zero. In leisurely style, he strolled about, playing the part of an amateur sleuth who, if challenged by police, could boast that he was the commissioner's friend. Soon a cab pulled up, uncertainly, as Shrevvy's had. A tall young man alighted; began to study the buildings as if looking for a concealed doorway.

It was the man called Hudson.

Hat in hand, Hudson rubbed his head as he stalked about. Nearing the space behind the Mews, he recoiled; then, as if following the command given him the night before, he walked away, with a slow mechanical stride. Cranston followed, making himself less conspicuous now. Soon Shrevvy's cab eased into the scene, guided by Hudson's course, which was easier to note than Cranston's.

Hudson was cutting across Washington Square. He attracted no attention from bums sprawled on benches; they, too, were lost in their own little worlds. Hudson reached MacDougall Street, below Washington Square West. Here was Greenwich Village at its strangest, with odd cafes, tiny night clubs and Calypso joints. The music of a jam session was screeching from the doorway of a deadfall, a few steps down from the sidewalk. The discordant wails punched through the veneer of Hudson's dulled senses. Pausing the fellow rocked, turned slowly, then tottered into the place.

Cranston was right behind him. Springing down the steps, Cranston caught Hudson as he pitched headlong against the far wall of a tiny entrance. The wall, crudely painted to resemble a tropical scene, gave way like a door, spinning them both into a cubicle that served as a box office on dance nights.

Automatically, Hudson came around with a snarl, grabbing for Cranston before he could turn about from his own spin. Before Cranston could lunge away in this limited space, Hudson had him gripped. Arms pinned behind him, Cranston was being bent backward by the dazed young giant.

This was under the glow of a single light, set in the ceiling. Now, as Cranston stiffened to resist Hudson's strength, the false door closed, at least a dozen seconds after it should have. The reason: Another man had stepped into the tiny room, a figure that stooped forward to direct a pair of eyes directly into Cranston's. Eyes were all that Cranston could see of the face, for the rest of it was hidden under a tight-fitting hood. But from lips beneath the opening through which the eyes peered, there came a hiss which a distraught mind could easily attribute to the eyes themselves.

The Whispering Eyes!

Low words spoke, as if the eyes had uttered them.

"You are helpless," came the whisper, as disguised as it was muffled. "You must yield your mind, or you shall die. Your mind must obey my commands. That is understood!"

Cranston's lips phrased the word: "Yes."

Glowing, the eyes of the hooded man came closer. Cranston had offset Hudson's clutch, by using a back brace against it. His right hand, against the side of his vest, could have gained an automatic from a hidden holster. Yet either a break from Hudson, or a thrust against the Whispering Eyes, would be precarious moves. As long as he retained the existing status, Cranston could use them as emergency measures. So he let the situation hold.

"Your mind is now at large," the whispered voice proclaimed. "You have no name. Repeat that, for yourself!"

Slowly, Cranston's lips lost their resistance and spoke:

"I have no name."

"I shall give you a name," the voice declared, while the eyes reveled in their accompanying leer. "Your name will be Lamont Cranston!"

A chuckle followed that pronouncement. It literally told how insidious the choice could be. Unlike the man who answered to the false name of Hudson, Cranston could stay in circulation, to all appearances his actual self, yet otherwise a virtual zombie. Just as Hudson was controlled, Cranston would be, according to the dictates of the Whispering Eyes.

"I planned this well," declared the hooded man. "My work has brought results. The plan has succeeded."

The glowing eyes awaited Cranston's response. His own eyes fixed, dilated, Cranston repeated the words:

"The plan has succeeded."

Moments were short, but they seemed prolonged, before two pairs of staring eyes unlocked. Then, sweeping backward, the hooded man opened the door with a mock bow. Cranston came forward, but still in Hudson's clutch; then, as the eyes from the hood renewed their gaze, Hudson relaxed.

Right then was the dangerous moment. The man with the hood had cleared the little room and could readily have boxed Cranston, if he offered fight. Hudson, his grip once eased, would have opportunity for

a more powerful clutch. Now Cranston was in the center of the entry. His hooded enemy was backing into the doorway from which wild music came. Hudson was starting up the steps to the street, but his footfalls could not be heard. This was still a danger zone for Cranston, under the threat of a two-way attack.

But that would have applied to Cranston as his normal self. His whole attitude now was different. His eyes were still fixed, his freed arms holding their position as though clutched in place. He seemed oblivious to all about him. Then, suddenly, Cranston was standing there alone.

Cranston gave a quick shake of his head, as if clearing away a stupor. He looked to the steps; Hudson was gone. He turned to the doorway of the jam parlor. Musicians were gone wild with trumpets and drums, a piano was practically banging itself apart. Dancers in fanciful costumes were jitterbugging everywhere. Grotesque costumes these; so grotesque that a stranger in the hooded costume of an executioner would be lost amid the masquerade, should anyone be looking for him.

Cranston's eyes took in the scene. Then, as if he were tearing himself from some strange dreams, Cranston turned, went up the steps and started toward Washington Square. He was crossing the street when a cab shrieked up beside him and its driver hailed: "Hey, boss."

The words were familiar to Cranston, even in his present state of mind. He entered Shrevvy's cab and it pulled away, taking the direction of the one-way traffic. "The tall guy," informed Shrevvy, referring to Hudson. "He went the wrong way. I lost him by the time I'd gotten around the block. I don't think I could find him now."

"It does not matter," said Cranston, calmly. "I have somewhere else to go."

"Sure you have, boss," reminded Shrevvy. "You're due up at that Broadway hall, where the prof is giving the hyp show again tonight. Want to go there now?"

For a long moment, Cranston seemed to ponder. Then, from his slow-moving lips came the one word: "Yes."

CHAPTER XVI. THE HINDU TEST

THERE was quite a crowd outside the hall. The news of Fontaine's challenge to Bogardus had caught the late edition of the Classic and it was helping the professor's box office. Commissioner Weston was commenting on that fact to Dr. Fontaine, as they waited in the lobby.

"Too bad that Bogardus should profit through your challenge," declared Weston. "If you could start a lecture tour and get turn-outs like this, it would help your institute."

"That's exactly what I intend to do," returned Fontaine, with a smug smile. "The publicity from tonight will be my springboard. When Bogardus fails in his Hindu test, I shall be credited with the exposure of a fraud."

"Are you sure he will fail?"

"If he doesn't, I shall concede that he is a genuine hypnotist. I am fair-minded, commissioner."

At that moment, Lamont Cranston arrived with Margo Lane. Weston promptly involved Margo in a conversation with Fontaine and took the opportunity to draw Cranston aside.

"We're working on the mailing lists, Cranston," said Weston. "It's amazing how they get around. Why, there are special services that handle what they call class lists -"

Weston paused. Cranston's eyes were staring off across the lobby. Weston asked sharply:

"Do you hear me, Cranston?"

"Yes," replied Cranston, mechanically. "I hear you."

"One company," said Weston, "the All-Way Mailing Corporation, sent us a list that they had used several times, but they did not say for whom. Its names were checked with different colors and we found James Kelthorn and Maresca Lepavnu on it, in the same color."

Cranston nodded as though the names meant nothing.

"But that isn't all we found," declared Weston, triumphantly. "We found the name of Artemus Drade."

"Artemus Drade."

Cranston repeated the name as if he intended immediately to forget it.

"Come, Cranston," insisted Weston, "you've heard of Drade. He was indicted for smuggling stolen paintings into America. He got off with a fine, but according to the FBI, he's still under some suspicion. So we played a hunch, phoned Drade, and told him his life was in danger."

Cranston didn't even appear interested.

"It broke Drade down, when we gave the details of how Kelthorn and Maresca were murdered," continued Weston. "He swore that he hasn't any smuggled goods, but says that people won't believe him. Particularly one person, a man who thinks that Drade has four famous portraits of the Hanover Electors that disappeared during the war."

The crowd was moving into the hall now. Keeping along with Cranston, Weston rapidly undertoned the rest.

"Drade doesn't know the name of the man who called him," said Weston. "Drade thought it was a trick but was afraid to call the FBI, particularly because he doesn't have the portraits; hasn't an idea where they could be. The man offered Drade a hundred thousand dollars and said he'd bring the money tonight at midnight. Drade had intended to play along to see what he could learn. Now Drade is scared stiff. He thinks the man must be the murderer we're after, and so do we. So Inspector Cardona has thrown a secret cordon around Drade's house and tonight we catch the killer!"

By then, they were overtaking Margo and Fontaine, so Weston didn't expect Cranston to reply. Finding seats halfway down the aisle, they sat down to watch Bogardus' show.

Because of the large house, the professor put on his customary show. Inspector Cardona being absent, Bogardus invited Commissioner Weston on the stage instead. Hanneford Lang, of course, was willing to serve on the committee, but Dr. Fontaine refused, shaking his head with a bland smile.

"Later, professor," called back Fontaine. He gave a dry laugh. "Perhaps much later." Then, to Margo and Cranston, Fontaine added: "I don't think that Bogardus intends to do the Hindu test at all."

In fact, as the show proceeded, Fontaine's opinion seemed justified. The professor was studying his committee, annoyed by someone's absence. The answer suddenly struck Margo.

"Bogardus is looking for Hudson," said Margo, "and, of course, Hudson wouldn't be here tonight. But wait"- Margo frowned—"maybe he's only pretending to look for Hudson. Would someone else do for

that rock test?"

Cranston's reply came mechanically:

"Someone else would do."

Margo darted an odd look at Fontaine, wondering why he had been so sure that the Hindu hypnotism would not be forthcoming. She knew the reply Fontaine would give if she asked him. He would lay it to the fact that Bogardus was a fraud. But Margo couldn't suppress the thought that Hudson's absence might be of Fontaine's own design. It could be that some of Bogardus' successful tests were due to subjects already hypnotized, like Hudson, and provided by Fontaine to pin suspicion on the professor.

The show dragged on and on, with rather indifferent results, until cat-calls came from the audience. Purpling, Bogardus kept scanning the crowd, looking for someone he couldn't find there, until at last he spread his arms in acceptance.

"Very well," decided Bogardus. "I shall attempt the masterpiece of Hindu hypnotism."

"This is where I go up," said Fontaine. "Are you coming along, Cranston? It's your idea, you know."

Slowly, Cranston arose and accompanied Fontaine up to the platform. Meeting Fontaine with a glare, Bogardus declared:

"My test is dependent upon a willing subject, you understand. By that, I mean a person who will assume all risk."

"And I suppose," returned Fontaine, "that very conveniently, you will find no such person present."

"I have done cataleptic tests before."

"But never on a scale such as this test demands."

They glared at each other, Bogardus and Fontaine, like a pair of bantams. Being almost as tall as Fontaine, Bogardus seemed to gain stature, despite his squatty build. Otherwise, Dr. Fontaine, his sly smile forming a mischievous contrast to the dignity of his beard, had the audience in his favor. The applause that followed Fontaine's statements proved this fact.

Bogardus had a couple of attendants move a screen at the back of the platform. It revealed a huge, rough rock. When the two men tried to lift it, they couldn't hoist it from the floor. Bogardus asked Weston and Lang to examine it. They did, even rapping off a few chips with a small hammer that Bogardus provided, raising dust that bothered their eyes. Weston was mopping his face with a handkerchief, while Lang removed his glasses and was wiping them, as they returned to the front of the platform, where Bogardus stood with Fontaine.

"And now," asked Bogardus, "who is to be my subject?"

Everybody looked around and particularly they looked toward Cranston, who might have something to say in the matter. Turning his head, Cranston smiled, more blankly than blandly, Weston noticed. Then, his eyes fixing in a steady stare, Cranston announced slowly:

"I shall be the subject."

Cranston's thoughts were on the Whispering Eyes. Those eyes had become very real; so had the strange voice that went with them, a voice which if it had spoken now, could only have been heard by ears as

keenly tuned as Cranston's.

"You mean this, Cranston?" demanded Weston. "Why, you haven't the weight even to attempt to support that rock!"

"I have been in India," spoke Cranston, as though imbued with the spirit of some mystic yogi. "I have seen these things accomplished. I shall be the subject of this test."

Professor Bogardus wasn't taking chances on Cranston changing his mind. He stepped up, waved his flabby hands in front of Cranston's eyes. Cranston stiffened so suddenly that he seemed hypnotized before Bogardus completed his mesmeric passes. Planting his stiffened hands against the sides of his thighs, Cranston toppled backward, rigid. Fortunately, there were men behind him. They caught him.

Instead of chairs, Bogardus had his men bring in stout trestles, like sawhorses, but with round metal rungs at the top. A towel was hung over each rung, the trestles were set apart. Cranston, his back arched high, was placed face up from trestle to trestle, his shoulders upon one, the other under his knees. Perspiring from what seemed sheer worry, Bogardus began making more passes at Cranston with one hand, while gesturing for the rock with the other.

The rock was a problem. It took four men to lift it. Staggering with their burden, they were blocked by Lang, who warned them to rest it very carefully on Cranston's body. Looking through his glasses, Lang seemed very wise, but his owlish gaze was directed toward Fontaine, as though asking final approval. Fontaine, making sure that there were no supports beneath Cranston, came up with a slow nod.

Setting the rock on Cranston's diaphragm, the four men withdrew their hands. Margo gave a happy gasp. There was scarcely a quiver of Cranston's frame. Now, Bogardus was waving for something else, the sledge hammer. They brought it and Margo would have turned her gaze away, but she was too petrified. The sledge hammer was delegated to Lang, as he was the tallest man present. Bravely, Lang reared to his full height; lifting the hammer, he drove it down with a powerful blow upon the rock, which by estimate must have approached a quarter ton in weight.

Crack—crack—crack—

The rock was yielding under Lang's blows, raising a real cloud of dust. Those first strokes only chipped it, but now the hammer was pounding deep, finding flaws in the great stone. The sounds sharpened until there came an emphatic crash and the stone showed a split. It widened, spread, under the next three blows and with the fourth, there was a final, crashing sound.

Breaking in three parts, Cranston's, stony burden went smashing to the floor, actually snapping the planks of the platform where the pieces struck. Dust rose and cleared and there lay Cranston, his shoulders and knees still comfortably cradled, his unsupported body not a whit disturbed.

Beckoning for men to lift Cranston from the rungs, Bogardus had them stand him upright. The professor worked swiftly, hoping to awaken Cranston without delay. He succeeded, for Cranston, opening his eyes, promptly caught his balance, looked about a bit surprised and finally saw the broken stone. Shaking his head, he made the remark that really climaxed the show.

"Three little stones won't do," stated Cranston. "You need one big one for this test, professor, a stone as large as those three put together."

Amid the applause, Weston clapped Cranston on the back, telling him the test had been a great success. Bogardus stood triumphant, while Fontaine looked glum, then shrugged his shoulders in polite acceptance of defeat.

Hanneford Lang held a short parley with Professor Bogardus, congratulating him on proving his worth as a genuine hypnotist. Then, Lang came over to give warm credit to Dr. Fontaine, whose challenge had at least been responsible for this genuine demonstration. But this didn't soothe the feud between Bogardus and Fontaine. As Lang was leaving with the others, the two rivals hurled some fast repartee.

"You'll have to take my word from now on," Bogardus told Fontaine, "so I'm going to class you as a fake, the way you did me."

"I called you a fraud," retorted Fontaine, "and the term still stands, regarding some of your claims."

"You'll bear watching," argued Bogardus. "I'm going to check on those animal tests of yours. There are societies, you know, that don't approve of cruelty."

"The same goes for taking money under false pretenses," snapped Fontaine, "which seems to be your chief business, Bogardus. Even calling yourself professor is a swindle."

"Go ahead with your bungling tests," taunted Bogardus. "But you'd better show results quickly. I'll be watching you."

"Disguised in a fake beard, I suppose," sneered Fontaine. "Maybe I'll surprise you by shaving mine off and popping up in the middle of your next class, to denounce you."

The rest of their argument was lost in the babble of the departing audience. Only their gestures showed that Bogardus and Fontaine were becoming more vindictive in their wrangle. By then, Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane had reached the street, where Shrevvy's cab was waiting for them.

Hanneford Lang had already started for his penthouse, so it was time for Margo to be going there. As she reminded Cranston of the fact, he seemed to snap out of his daze. Then, with a nod, Cranston spoke to Shrevvy in a far-away tone:

"Hanneford Lang's."

CHAPTER XVII. WITHIN THE CORDON

DURING the ride to Lang's, Cranston became somewhat himself again, but in a reflective way. Perhaps it was the darkness of the cab that changed his mood; possibly it was because he was picking up past themes.

"Keep your mind clear of worry, Margo," Cranston said, "before you begin your crystal gazing."

"That will be easy," returned Margo, "now that I know you aren't going to crack up along with a rock. Besides, I've been feeling quite serene, now that I have Washington Mews for company."

"Use the large crystal," stated Cranston, "along with the group. Then you can take notes between seances."

"Won't people mind?"

"You have a bag, Margo. In it, there is a pad with a short pencil. You can write things under cover."

"A good idea," nodded Margo. "I'm particularly anxious to remember what I see, if anything. But what about the other people? Why are they important?"

"Largely in case of crossed thoughts," replied Cranston, "or instances of true clairvoyance. I'm beginning

to believe that almost anything is possible through hypnotism. Therefore, crystal visions may be more valuable than I supposed."

The cab took a corner and Margo made a grab for a hand strap. Missing, she landed in Cranston's lap. Laughing as she righted herself, Margo said:

"I'd better hang onto the strap before we make the next turn." Then, puzzled, she added: "Why the strap is gone on this side." Looking across the cab, Margo saw the other strap was missing. "And the strap on your side is gone, too, Lamont."

Cranston took a look, gave a slow nod and spoke through the front window:

"What happened to the hand straps, Shrevvy?"

"Those gone?" asked the cabby. "Well, that beats all. I've had everything stolen from this cab one time or another, except a pair of hand straps. I ought to have known that some time it would happen. I'll get another pair tomorrow."

They reached Lang's apartment house, were bowed inside by the doorman and went up to the penthouse. Lang received them, introduced Margo to the other guests and announced that the first seance would soon begin as it was nearly eleven thirty. As usual, there would be two sessions, with a recess between.

At the door, Lang complimented Cranston on being an excellent hypnotic subject, then said in parting:

"I shall see you later, Cranston."

Once back in the cab, Cranston seemed to be going over an old routine. He had Shrevvy drive him past Bogardus studio and also past Fontaine's laboratory. Both places were dark. Then Cranston gave an address in the Eighties, a block from Central Park West. As they arrived there, Cranston reached through the front window with the comment:

"Here are the hand straps, Shrevvy. I just picked them up from the floor."

Those weren't all that Cranston picked up. From beneath the seat he was taking his black garb. Cloaked and hatted as he stepped from the cab, Cranston merged immediately with the darkness. He had become The Shadow.

Cranston's switch to his other self could well be attributed to a hypnotic mood. Even Bogardus and Fontaine would have agreed on that point. The mental lapses produced through hypnosis were the sort that would often cause a subject to revert to habit. Now, as The Shadow, Cranston was still in what might be termed a haphazard mood. He was skirting through darkness, pausing, changing direction, behaving generally as though avoiding something that did not exist.

The Shadow's focal point seemed to be a graystone mansion set on the corner, separated from the next house by only a narrow passage. Around the building was an iron railing so common in Manhattan, but it was set at different levels because the gray building was on a slope.

Under some trees across the avenue, The Shadow performed the unusual. He simply dropped his black garb, became Cranston again and walked across the street toward the large house. As he paused at a tiny side gate, Cranston suddenly became the target of bristling guns that all but surrounded him. Low voices told him to "Take it easy," and he was whisked through the gate, down some steps and into a small back entry.

There, while his captors were displaying badges, Cranston found himself facing an old friend, Inspector Joe Cardona.

"I guess the commissioner didn't tell you quite enough," stated Cardona, with a slight smile. "He said he'd let you know that we were here at Drade's, but I guess he didn't mention how thoroughly we were covering the place. We even have men in the cellar and on the roof. Artemus Drade is a pretty worried guy."

Cranston nodded as though he suspected it.

"Sorry if I've intruded, inspector," said Cranston, "but at least it gave your men a work-out. I wanted particularly to see you in reference to that Hudson matter."

"Which reminds me," declared Cardona. "Your idea was all right. We've found three places where a man answering to his description is supposed to be missing, a fellow called Lucky Lake. Full name, Montgomery Lake."

"From near Philadelphia, I take it."

"That's right." Cardona went poker-faced. "How did you know that?"

"In suburban Philadelphia," replied Cranston, "Montgomery County is somewhat the equivalent of Westchester in Greater New York. The name Lake would suggest a body of water; in this case Hudson being the nearest. It would help the fellow remember to have a name like that."

"But how? If he has no memory?"

"Somebody suggested it to him. The closer the association with a hypnotic subject, the better the result. One name would supersede the other. Just as one personality can wipe out a former, under hypnosis."

Cranston spoke as if from experience. Then:

"Tell me more about Lake, alias Hudson."

"He's a cave man," declared Cardona, straight-faced. "That's why they're worried about him in some little Pennsylvania towns."

"He looked strong enough to be a flashback," observed Cranston, "but not clear to prehistoric times."

"Lake isn't that kind of cave man," said Cardona. "He's a speelunker."

Cardona didn't expect Cranston to recognize the term, but he did.

"A cave crawler," mused Cranston. "Tall, thin, but heavy of arms and shoulders. He must be a special type. Does he do more than merely explore caves?"

"A lot more, this Lake," assured Cardona. "He hoists rocks, away down under. Not big rocks; they blast those. The reason he lifts rocks is to get at snakes underneath. He grabs rattlers and copperheads."

"That must be why they need him in Pennsylvania," said Cranston, with a nod. "Those snakes are common in that area and there are many commercial caves. Lake would be useful in clearing out new corridors before they are opened to the public."

"He lives in caves," affirmed Cardona, "and that's why they were worried. When he just didn't show where he was expected, they began thinking he'd been buried in a cave. They call him Lucky because

he's careless. Just the sort to go cave-crawling without saying where or when. But they'd been checking different cities for word about him. He liked to bust into town occasionally."

"So Lake likes to live in caves," remarked Cranston. "It wouldn't be that he's been saving hotel rent by hunting for caves in Central Park?"

"I'm one ahead there," returned Cardona. "There's been a fellow like Lake seen roving around the Park late at night or early in the morning and particularly near the snake house in the Park Zoo. He sounds like the man. The word is out now to find him."

Accepting the case as practically closed, Cranston decided to leave. He paused just long enough to ask casually:

"How is Artemus Drade taking this situation?"

"You mean where is he waiting for a killer?" returned Cardona. "Up in the attic at the third floor back. That's why we began worrying about the roof. Drade just wants to be as far out of it as he can get. If this happened to be the Empire State Building, he'd be roosting on the mooring mast."

With one of his slight smiles, Cranston left and went back across the street. The trees obscured him as he took his discarded regalia from one of the lower branches. Becoming The Shadow again, he skirted away to complete his tour.

Not a watcher anywhere around Drade's premises, New York detectives and FBI operatives alike, caught even a glimpse of the figure that roved so fleetingly through this guarded area. Gradually locating the positions of the guards, The Shadow worked his way between them; came up beside the smoke-grimed wall of the mansion itself.

This was near the rear of the passage between Drade's house and the next. Here, The Shadow noticed peculiarities in the foundation structure that few persons would have observed, particularly at night. Those foundations were set like steps, blocky and oversized. But though the slope from the front of the house to the back was equal, there were less of the step-down blocks on the passage side.

Translated in other terms, the foundation at the passage gate was at least four feet higher than at the rear corner on the street side. It continued, moreover, along the back of the next two houses, that higher foundation, until blocked by an old building that looked like a stable converted into a garage.

Looking through a tiny window in the garage door, The Shadow saw a repair pit over by the rear wall. Boards had been laid across it, so that a car could be parked above. Evidently the old pit was in disuse.

Instead of entering the garage The Shadow glided back to Drade's. He noticed two things, a lack of windows at the very back, and a peculiar arrangement of shutters in the attic. There all the shutters were closed, but those at the front were set within slabs of granite. The two side windows near the back had shutters but no surrounding granite.

Those closed shutters were dummies. The very rear of the attic, instead of being a continuation, probably consisted of two tiny rooms. There was no chimney at the back of the house; the chimneys were only at the sides.

A few minutes later, The Shadow was working his way up the side of the house, finding the rough stone with all its crannies to be a perfect grip for his probing fingers and digging toes, which worked through soft-tipped shoes. The human fly act was easy for The Shadow; his main problem was to keep camouflaged against the wall. This he did by constant changing of course, to gain benefit of darkened

stretches beneath the overhanging eaves.

At last, with a sidelong reach, The Shadow gained one of the actual windows toward the rear of the attic. Working the shutter open, he filled its space with his own cloaked form, prodded open a sash just within and pulled the shutter after him as he dropped through to what Cardona would have termed the back attic.

It was lighted, this room, and furnished with old chairs, bookcases and trunks. At the front it had a bolted door, above a clamped skylight. Otherwise, the room was unoccupied and most especially in terms of people or specifically one person.

As The Shadow had expected, Artemus Drade wasn't in the refuge where fear supposedly had hounded him.

CHAPTER XVIII. HOODED DEATH

THE rear of the attic was a threefold partition of unfinished wood that looked too simple in construction to be tricked. That, however, was the tricky part of it. Noticing cross-braces as well as uprights, The Shadow soon recognized that the end sections of the partition were like the doors of sliding bookcases; that either one could be shoved behind the center.

Except for the hidden rollers, it was as cheap a job as an ordinary partition, which was unusual in the case of secret rooms. Obviously, there were two such rooms, hence Drade could be found in only one. The next question was which, so The Shadow listened at each of the false walls that flanked the center. He heard a slight scuffling sound behind the partition on the right; knew that Drade must be there.

While testing the edge of the slider, The Shadow heard a faint rumble over toward the center. Guessing what it was, he lost no time with the sliding partition. Working with his fingers, he started it in motion; squeezed his way through the gap and arrived with an automatic half drawn from beneath his cloak.

In a lighted room measuring about six by eight, The Shadow discovered Artemus Drade, a gray-haired man with a tawny face which wore, as much as The Shadow could see of it, a smile of very unpleasant greeting. Drade was turned partly away from The Shadow, looking toward the inner wall that marked the space between the secret rooms. In his hand, Drade held a .38 revolver.

The wall that Drade faced began sliding down as the rumbling stopped. It disclosed a small elevator large enough for three people, but containing only one. The lone passenger was dressed in dark clothes like Drade, but he wore a hood over his head, its bottom folds tucked down beneath his collar. All that the hood showed of his face were two eyes glaring through a cut-out space.

Whispering Eyes, they seemed.

Yet the whisper working up from beneath the hood, was more a vicious snarl than a triumphant declaration of arrival. The reason was that the eyes had sighted Drade's gun, aimed squarely between them.

Beckoning the hooded man into the room, Drade stepped back and his shoulders, blocking the light, completely obscured The Shadow. Arms folded, the hooded man entered, waiting for Drade to speak.

"You came here to drive a bargain," Drade began. "I've heard of the sort you drive from the police commissioner himself. I do not care to pattern my future on those of James Kelthorn and Maresca Lepavnu."

A hooded whisper replied, "Perhaps you would like to avenge them."

"I?" ducked Drade. "They mean nothing to me. Why should I shoot you here and bring the Feds along with the police? The place is alive with them, by the way. They are even on the roof."

"I rather suspected so," spoke the hooded man. "But since you can't afford to bring them, what use is your gun?"

"I'll risk bringing them if I need them," retorted Drade. "Let me see the money that you brought."

"First, the portraits."

Drade gave a laugh.

"You're wondering if I have them here," he said. "Relieve your mind on that score. You'd be dead now if I didn't have them. I wouldn't mind being a hero in the eyes of the law."

Probing eyes from the hood scoured all corners of the room except The Shadow's; saw that the place was practically bare.

"Through to the other room," said Drade. "There's a sliding door on the far side of the elevator. You'll find it clamped at the top."

The hooded man went through the elevator, lowering the other door at Drade's gun point. The Shadow stole forward to the near side of the elevator; heard and saw all that followed in the other secret room. The four portraits were stacked against the far wall. They represented staid old burghers of a few centuries ago.

"Clever, this route from the garage," Drade was telling the hooded man as he examined the paintings. "They intended to complete this row with a central heating plant that was never installed. I bought the houses, converted them to my own use."

"Smuggling de luxe," sneered the hooded man. "All right, Drade, I'll take the portraits."

"For half the price again," argued Drade. "After all, you saved money on your last two deals."

"I'll tell you about those, Drade." The hooded man turned, arms folded. "Believe me, I would do anything I could for you. Anything in my power, you understand? You are my friend, anything in my power, I will do. You, my friend, in my power. You, my friend, are in my power. You—are—in—my—power -"

The hooded man was rising as he spoke, fixing his eyes upon Drade's, drawing them upward, like the gun point. But Drade, in straining to watch those eyes, was putting pressure on the back of his own neck. Unwittingly, he was thus aiding in a more rapid process of hypnosis, which in a few seconds more would have held him completely paralyzed. Drade's eyes were still raised, but his gun was moving downward. A harsh, commanding laugh came from the hooded lips.

It was echoed, that laugh.

In through the elevator sprang a cloaked figure that twirled Drade aside before the hooded hypnotist could grab the victim's gun. The eyes that peered through the hood were confronted by The Shadow's automatic. Keen, burning, The Shadow's eyes had all their probing power. Their gaze differed from the more receptive sort that Cranston had displayed in his last meeting with the hooded man.

Yet this hooded foe was swift. He'd recognized what might be coming, from the instant when Drade was

spun away.

Doubling like a jack-knife, hood face dropped below The Shadow's aiming gun and launched a pair of swift hands in an amazingly elongated reach for The Shadow's throat. Twisting under the grasp, The Shadow slugged his gun for the hooded head. It bobbed away, even beyond The Shadow's well-calculated aim. Now, the hooded man was reaching for the automatic, and there lay his mistake. The Shadow delivered a side-cuff with the gun, as if striking down a hooded cobra. Dropping away, the man came up to hands and knees. Those eyes of his went frantic, pleading.

"Don't shoot," he whispered hoarsely. "I'll pay—pay all I have with me," he whimpered as the gun muzzle nudged toward him, "twice what I offered for the paintings, if only to save my life. Two hundred thousand dollars—I'd gladly pay to anyone -"

To anyone!

That was The Shadow's cue. With a fling, he took a long sprawl of his own and none too soon. A gun roared, once, twice, thrice, its first bullet skimming The Shadow's shoulders, the next two whizzing inches above his fading, rolling form.

Treacherous shots from Drade's gun. The term "anyone" had assured Drade that he was included in the offer. Lawless to the core, Artemus Drade had willingly turned upon his original rescuer, The Shadow.

From the floor, The Shadow picked off the lone ceiling light with a single shot from his automatic. It was his only chance, for both Drade and the hooded man were pouncing for him now. Swinging guns found The Shadow's head, though he warded off their strokes in part. Dizzily, he stayed in the fray, keeping it at such close quarters that his enemies could not risk gunshots. But The Shadow could and the others knew it. They suddenly released him, took to hands and knees. Then the portraits were clattering toward him, flung from the wall. Above, however, stamping sounds came from roof, followed by a wrenching of the skylight into the attic proper. Drade shouted wildly as he sprang for The Shadow, the hooded man coming right behind him.

They locked in a heap, and The Shadow, swinging upward with his gun, encountered a hooded head. He twisted from the hands that gripped his throat, stabbed a shot for the spot where Drade should be. A quick volley of bullets came in answer, but The Shadow was rolling away, letting the hooded man come between. Choking hands failed in their next grip and the body that owned them slumped beside The Shadow, who fired again in hopes of hitting Drade.

Those bullets simply splintered the rising door of the elevator. The car was going down. Drade had counted on it for emergency escape; it was being used for that purpose now. Quickly, The Shadow yanked at the partition to the attic, squeezed through while the police and Feds were finding themselves blocked off in the other secret room, which they had discovered partly open. The Shadow gained his window, slithered through, and was hanging outside, as the invading men of the law came around the long way. Then they were dragging the body into sight, its head capped with the hood. They'd found a murderer at least, even though Drade had escaped, clattering the portraits into the elevator with him.

After all, once he had gained the elevator, why should Drade have cared who might receive his bullets, The Shadow or the hooded man? It was only through The Shadow's quick thinking that the hooded man had alone been deluged with that final volley. A real achievement for a treacherous crook like Drade, if he had managed it.

Drade hadn't.

When the men from the roof pulled away the hood, it disclosed the dead face of a man who had never

really owned it, Artemus Drade. The actual purveyor of hooded murderer had scored again. He'd outsped Drade in the business of the double-cross, bagging Drade with the hood the moment that Drade had gained his last clutch on The Shadow, in the gloom.

For half an hour, The Shadow clung like a giant bat beneath the eaves, contemplating crime's coming problems. A murderer was still at large, with new gain from his latest foray. Below, flashlights were flickering everywhere except upward. Only now, word was coming back that the killer had got away by a secret tunnel through to the garage.

The irony of it was that Drade was being mourned. With the paintings gone, his story of innocence could be credited, even though he hadn't divulged the secret route to and from his house. Maybe Drade had resolved to fight down crime alone; how little they knew below, from the comments that The Shadow heard float upward!

Gradually, the landscape cleared. The Shadow came down from the eaves, took his own route through the night and finally contacted faithful Shrevvy and the cab. Shrevvy had the radio going, and The Shadow didn't bother to turn it off. A newscast was coming through and at the sharp word "Flash!" The Shadow thought for a moment that the news of Drade's death had already been reported.

Not yet, it hadn't, but The Shadow heard something quite as interesting. The one-thirty broadcast was being livened by a report of a cave dweller captured in Central Park. Identified as Lucky Lake, the man had tried hunting for a cave and had chosen other quarters to his liking in the reptile house at the zoo. Disturbed there, he had fled. When finally trapped, at midnight, he was in a florist's shop on Central Park South, which stayed open late to catch the after-theater trade and supply the gardenia girls at night clubs.

He liked flowers, too, for he'd bought some and shipped them off by special messenger. Who his girl friend was, he wouldn't tell and the messenger had gone home, this being his last trip. In fact, Montgomery Lake—which was Lucky's full name—wouldn't admit that he was himself. He preferred to be known as W. Chester Hudson.

As the report concluded, a gong sounded and the time was announced as one forty-five. To Shrevvy, The Shadow said:

"Miss Lane is probably home by now. Stop at her place, Shrevvy. I want to talk to her."

It was Cranston's voice that The Shadow used. His tone was calm, but an instant later a new thought struck him. Then Shrevvy heard Cranston add an order in as nearly an excited voice as Shrevvy had ever heard his boss employ:

"Hurry it, Shrevvy! There's not an instant to lose! It's only a few blocks, but clip it!"

Cranston was right. Margo had arrived home and was petting Washington Mews as she looked at a long box that the doorman had mentioned. Flowers, of course, that Lamont had sent. He always remembered them, though often very late. The doorman had placed them on the low settee by the radiator, so Margo opened them right there.

For a moment, Margo mistook the hiss that issued from the box for noise from the radiator. Then she froze, unable even to scream, as she saw the horrible thing that reared from the box. Eyes, hypnotic eyes, glared beadily, along with a terrifying hood, and the whisper that it delivered was the lisp of death.

The creature was a cobra; livened by the warmth of the radiator it was weaving back and forth, following the trembles that now shook Margo, ready to deliver its fatal stroke. Instinctively, Margo recoiled, a sorry move indeed. The cobra head slanted forward. Its whip-lash speed would certainly have overtaken

Margo, but for an intervention as timely as any The Shadow had ever supplied.

But it was white, not black, this challenger.

Up from the floor came Washington Mews, straight for the hooded menace. This time, the cat had gauged a target that it knew was within its reach. To Margo's amazement, the cat seemed to climb the cobra's reared body like a Hindu boy scrambling up a rope, but that was slightly an illusion.

Actually, Washington Mews was rearing, too, getting his front paws into play, boxer style. The cat cuffed the cobra back, as cleanly as The Shadow had delivered his first telling gun slash on the hooded man with the Whispering Eyes. The cobra weaved, only to be punched again. It tried to flip away, only to have the cat spring over and bite it, forcing the snake back to its striking pose again.

Then Washington Mews was alternately punching it like a big balloon and biting it back at every effort to escape. Gasping with astonishment, Margo sprang for the door, intending to shriek for aid to end this one-sided struggle that could only result in the cobra's victory, no matter how long it tantalized the unsophisticated cat. As the door came open, Cranston sprang through, halted, caught Margo in his arms.

"Quick!" pleaded Margo. "It's a cobra! Kill it before it can bite Washington Mews."

Cranston settled Margo in a chair, told her to look. She saw the cobra's head go down and flop listlessly over the edge of the box, settled finally by a last clawing slash from the right front paw of Washington Mews. The cat watched briefly, then jumped down and gave Cranston a welcoming cry, that it followed with a purr. Lamont Cranston smiled.

In a matter of delivering deserved death to a hooded killer, Washington Mews had done a better job than The Shadow.

CHAPTER XIX. APPOINTMENT AT MIDNIGHT

THE next afternoon, crime's repercussion had traveled nation-wide. The fantastic story of Artemus Drade, dying disguised as the very killer who had tricked him with his own trap, was the sort that grew into front-page headlines of its own accord.

Equally exciting was the tale of an unthinking young man named Montgomery Lake and a cat called Washington Mews, who had been on the giving and receiving end of a cobra. Lake was nicknamed "Lucky" and the term held good. Had the cobra bitten Margo, Lake would have been arrested on a manslaughter charge. As it was, Lake was being held for observation only.

Commissioner Weston discussed that point with Lamont Cranston, during a conference at the Cobalt Club.

"We should have taken Lake into custody earlier," Weston decided. "The fellow showed peculiar symptoms every time we saw him. He always came to the platform when Professor Bogardus gave a show. He must have been in a dazed mood, to submit to all those tests."

"How about myself?" inquired Cranston. "I understand that the professor cracked a rock apart while I was under it. Should I be put under observation?"

"That was a special test," replied Weston. "Besides, Bogardus would have used Lake if he'd been around. He said so today."

Cranston showed immediate interest.

"Bogardus recognized Lake by his photographs," continued Weston, "but he swears he had no idea as to the fellow's identity, either as Lake or Hudson. Bogardus claims he never deals in personalities."

"Except," said Cranston with a smile, "where Dr. Fontaine is concerned."

At that, Weston nodded. He took some long sheets of paper from his pocket, spread them on the table. Cranston saw that the sheets were a mailing list, some of its names checked in blue.

"Those blue marks," declared Weston, "represent a double mailing. That is, the names were used twice, each time by a different party. Could you guess who the parties were?"

"Bogardus and Fontaine."

"Right," nodded Weston. "Bogardus sent out circulars advertising his hypnotic college. Fontaine did the same to boost his psychological institute. Both used the same list and it contained the names of James Kelthorn, Maresca Lepavnu and Artemus Drade."

"We found these at Drade's," declared Weston. "The killer who escaped without his hood did not have time to pick them up. He took care to do so, though, when he murdered Kelthorn and Maresca."

"Odd," said Cranston, "that he should have taken both."

"Not at all," returned Weston. "He knew that one list would lead to the other. Suppose, Cranston, that Bogardus is the hooded murderer. Would he have been smart to take only his own circulars and their envelopes?"

"Hardly," replied Cranston. "Their absence might have incriminated Bogardus."

"Of course," said Weston, "and the same would have applied to Fontaine, if only his circulars were gone. Unless"—Weston smiled shrewdly—"the killer calculated that whichever was removed would put the blame upon the other."

"You appear to be a jump ahead, commissioner."

"So was the murderer. That's why he removed all the evidence. He was afraid that if he tried to incriminate the other man, it would boomerang upon himself. We are dealing with a very shrewd customer, Cranston."

"Bogardus or Fontaine?"

"I don't know which." Rising, Weston smacked his fist against his open palm. "I simply can't decide. Neither man can provide an alibi for last night, but each has an excuse."

"For example?"

"Bogardus says he went over to Fontaine's. He wanted to walk in while Fontaine was doing a laboratory test. But Fontaine never showed up. I asked him why, and he said that he was watching outside Bogardus's place, intending to break in on the professor if he held a class in hypnotism. It's the same old story; each man nullifies the other's testimony."

Weston was pacing now, around the grill room. He suddenly swung about, defensively, as Inspector Cardona strode into the room. Weston's mind was flashing back to the night when Cardona had entered here in a murderous mood, though his only weapon had been an imitation knife made of paper.

Cardona wasn't even that well equipped today.

"We've been working on Lake," Joe said, glumly, "and all we can learn is that he came to New York for a good time, walked into one of Bogardus' shows because the professor was running a free night. After that, blotto. But Bogardus denies all responsibility. He claims that Fontaine was picking off some of his customers, giving them a treatment with a thing he calls the hypnograph. That was so he could shoot them back at Bogardus and make it look as though they were the professor's stooges."

"And what," asked Weston, "does Fontaine have to say about that?"

"He laughed when I told him," returned Cardona. "He told me that Bogardus actually hired stooges, such as Larry the Horse, which Bogardus had to admit. But Bogardus claims he used Larry just to keep the show moving along. He said he'd like to see Fontaine put on a hyp act cold."

Weston gave a hopeless shrug. Then:

"What did Lake say about sending that cobra?"

"He doesn't remember it," replied Cardona. "It's something that just doesn't fit." He turned to Cranston and asked, "Where did Miss Lane go after the show last night?"

"To Lang's," replied Cranston. "I dropped her off there so she could join one of those crystal seances."

"That was safe enough," decided Cardona. "Lang is one man upon whom we can depend. He's been home at midnight, all the past three nights, holding those seances. I checked with people who were there. They were all reliable people, too, like Donald Gregg, the banker. Here's the list of guests that Lang gave me"—taking out a sheet of paper, Cardona handed it to Weston—"and he suggested that you check it with those mailings that the company sent out for Bogardus and Fontaine."

While Weston was checking the list, Cranston asked, "How did Bogardus and Fontaine happen to use the same mailing list?"

"Somebody solicited them by telephone," replied Cardona. "The company was putting on a bargain rate and had a lot of operators buzzing the wires on a salary basis. I'd call it a coincidence, except that I figure someone was trying to pin something on somebody else."

A moment later, Weston gave a sharp exclamation. He had tallied some name on the list.

"Here you are!" expressed Weston. "Donald Gregg, the very man you just mentioned, inspector. Suppose we call him right away."

They phoned Gregg, and talked to him in turns. Gregg remembered the circulars that Bogardus and Fontaine had sent him. He also recalled something else, that he so far hadn't connected with either of the two. He had received several anonymous phone calls from a man who spoke in a whisper, offering him some very choice security in return for a loan of a quarter of a million dollars. The caller hadn't specified what the security was, but had assured Gregg that it was an opportunity he should not miss.

"That's it!" exclaimed Weston, as he hung up the telephone. "The murderer is trying to liquidate the stuff he stole. We know now that he must have picked up those Hanover portraits at Drade's, or he wouldn't be asking such a figure."

"Suppose Gregg took up the offer," said Cranston. "How would he get in touch with the man who called him?"

"That was mentioned in the phone calls," returned Cardona. "Gregg gave me the details while I was talking to him right now. He's to put an ad in the early edition of the Classic, saying he likes the

proposition and telling the stranger where to meet him."

Cranston glanced at his watch; turned to Weston with a smile.

"With your influence, commissioner," said Cranston, "I think you could make the Classic ad columns with that notice."

Weston nodded, much intrigued. "But the meeting?" he queried. "Where should it be held?"

"In Lang's penthouse," suggested Cranston, promptly. "Provided he is willing. You see"—Cranston spoke in a slow, calculating tone— "Bogardus and Fontaine are both friends of Lang. It wouldn't be unusual for either of them to call there, particularly at midnight, when he invited friends to gaze into the crystal."

"That would be perfect," agreed Cardona, "except we wouldn't want all those people around."

"Lang doesn't have to invite them," said Cranston. "Call him and see if he can fix things for tonight."

Weston and Cardona made another of their tandem calls, this time to Lang. They reported the result to Cranston.

"Lang will arrange it with Gregg," said Weston. "But he feels that he should have two other witnesses present."

"You, of course, commissioner," said, Cranston. Then, with a sweeping gesture, he added, "And Inspector Cardona."

"You're wrong twice," returned Cardona. "Lang said we'd ruin the set-up and he's right. He wants you to be there, Mr. Cranston, because you are one of Gregg's friends. He thinks you ought to bring Miss Lane along, because mixed company would make it look like an ordinary party."

Cranston nodded; then showed a slightly troubled gaze.

"It didn't work too well at Drade's," said Cranston, "your system of letting things take their course."

"We'll be around," assured Cardona.

"You were around last night," Cranston reminded, "but you only covered Drade's house, instead of watching its potential outlets. You wouldn't want to make that mistake again?"

"We won't," asserted Cardona. "We'll move in from long range, so we won't be noticed. We have two advantages. First off, we are making the killer come where we want him; in the second place, he won't be buying tonight, he'll be selling."

"And besides," added Weston, "Gregg has a clean slate and, therefore, nothing to fear. Also, Lang did well in choosing you to be present as a witness. You have the confidence of both Bogardus and Fontaine. Good luck, Cranston."

By nine o'clock, the early edition of the Classic appeared, carrying Gregg's advertisement in the business notices. Toward midnight, Lamont Cranston stopped by for Margo Lane and told her to bring Washington Mews along. As they rode in Shrevvy's cab, Margo said:

"I'm afraid Washington Mews won't do. He isn't a black cat. Lang ought to have a few of those around, as part of his anti-superstition set-up."

"Lang may not like cats," said Cranston. "I hadn't thought of that. We'll keep Washington Mews under wraps and let him go to sleep. By the way, Margo, how was the seance last night? Did you keep those notes I mentioned?"

"Yes" replied Margo, "but I must have dropped them from my purse. Lang picked them up and typed them for me. Those were the notes from the first session, between eleven thirty and twelve. We held another from twelve thirty to one. After that, Lang told me he'd found my first batch of notes, so he typed the second lot, too. He saw me writing them in my bag and offered to help."

"Anything unusual in your visions?"

"No. I'd like to try the crystal again, though. It's odd, how each time you gaze, you forget all that happened before."

They were nearing Lang's when Margo asked:

"Why do you think Lake sent me the cobra?"

"Probably because you had been working with me," replied Cranston. "Lake's hooded master may have decided we were beginning to learn too much."

"But you had learned more than I."

"Yes and no. I learned a lot but I could have forgotten it. Last night, Margo, I proved to be an unusually good hypnotic subject."

"I'll say you did, the way they cracked that rock on you. That was something nobody could have faked."

"It typed me," admitted Cranston. "It put me in a class with Larry the Horse and Lucky Lake. You'd better watch me tonight, Margo, and make sure that nobody hypnotizes me."

Margo laughed, then made a grab for a hand strap as they took the turn at Lang's corner. This time, a strap was handy.

"Good boy, Shrevvy," approved Margo. "He put in the new straps already."

"They're not new," corrected Cranston, "They're the old ones. I found them on the floor last night."

"But how did they get there?"

"That," replied Cranston, "is a deep, dark secret that has to do with the mystic ways of the East Indian masters, something that only a true yogi would understand. I'll tell you more about it later, Margo."

The cab had stopped at Lang's apartment house and the doorman was receiving the midnight guests. Bundling Washington Mews in a black cloak with a slouch hat bracing it beneath, Lamont Cranston alighted with Margo Lane, hoping that the time had come for another meeting with the man of the Whispering Eyes.

CHAPTER XX. CRIME'S PAY OFF

THE domed room of Lang's penthouse was hushed and solemn, though no one was gazing at the great crystal ball. Instead, the eyes of three visitors were roving about the room, keeping vigil in case of the unexpected.

Donald Gregg was trying to appear complacent, though the face beneath his white hair showed a nervous

strain. Across his knees, Gregg held a fat brief case which he was guarding with tightly pressed hands. His manner of looking around the room was something of a routine, since he was quite familiar with the place. At moments, Gregg turned longing glances at the great crystal, then wrenched his gaze away.

This was a night for business, though of a strange sort. Gregg had to resist his yearning for the ecstasy that came from gazing into the crystal.

Margo Lane was very alert. Her experience with the cobra had left her with taut nerves and she was particularly on guard for any danger close by. At one moment, Margo thought she saw something stir on a chair a few feet away; then she wiped away her worry with a smile. Margo's coat was lying on that chair and with it were garments that Cranston had placed there. They were black and, therefore, almost obscured, but Margo caught a trifling patch of white and knew that it was what had moved.

As for Cranston, he was giving the entire room a survey. It was in Moorish motif, with thin, ornamental pillars all about the walls, several doors between them. The central room of the penthouse, it led everywhere.

That fact apparently worried Hanneford Lang, for he kept pacing from one door to another, pausing to listen at each. At last there came a buzzing sound and Lang crossed the room.

"Our visitor," said Lang, as he paused. "But which?" He shrugged apologetically. "I phoned both Bogardus and Fontaine, mentioning that I had seen Gregg's notice. It was necessary, otherwise each might have overlooked it. So whichever man appears, we cannot condemn him on sight."

The buzzer sounded again. Lang snapped his fingers.

"I'd forgotten that my servant was off," he said. "It seemed best, considering the circumstances. After all, the apartment house has doormen and elevator operators, so we can summon them if needed. But first, I must let in our visitor."

Going out, Lang soon returned. With him was Professor Eric Bogardus. The portly hypnotist gave a flabby nod, then glanced about the room.

"Never been here before," said Bogardus. "Mr. Lang has invited me often, though, but I didn't want to interfere with his work. Each to his liking, you know. He prefers the crystal to induce hypnosis and I've nothing against it, you understand. I prefer to make passes, according to Mesmer's system, but I have three lessons on crystal gazing in my course."

"You'll like the course, Mr. Gregg. I brought it along with all my charts. It's in a package out in the living room. Now you know, Mr. Gregg, if you want to finance something good, this course of mine -"

The buzzer sounded again. Turning his head, Bogardus apparently didn't notice how Gregg worried the brief case.

"Who's that?" demanded Bogardus. "Fontaine isn't coming here, is he?"

"He might be," Lang replied, "Suppose you wait in the living room, professor?"

Lang must have kept right on through after leaving Bogardus in the living room, for when he reappeared it was by another door that he had reached by a skirting hall. With him now was Fontaine, who seemed quite familiar with the place and was laughing about the round trip he had taken.

"My word!" said Fontaine. "When we stopped in the study so I could leave my package, I thought we'd reached the end of the line. Now here we are in the big room. But you should have let me bring the

package. I'm sure that Mr. Gregg would like to see my hypnograph."

"Later," decided Lang. "If you'll go back in the study a few minutes, I'll summon you when Mr. Gregg is ready. You can take either of those two doors."

With Fontaine gone to the study, Lang formulated a rapid plan.

"Now we can relax," said Lang. "Let them worry, particularly the man who intends to show his hand. Bogardus knows Fontaine is here. Fontaine suspects that Bogardus is present, because we came the long way round. But the one who is bluffing, the one who wants to swing a big game, will be the first to become impatient."

"I'm going out to the kitchen to telephone the commissioner. After that, I'll keep looking in on Bogardus and Fontaine, each in turn. Meanwhile, I suggest that all three of you keep looking at the crystal. It will be a lulling sign while I am on watch."

The crystal did have a lulling effect. Margo was grateful when she looked into its glowing limpid depths. Briefly she noted that Cranston and Gregg seemed to appreciate it, too. Then Margo stared steadily at the huge ball until, just as the surface seemed to cloud, a sudden hiss alarmed her.

Momentarily, Margo thought she saw a cobra's shape in the glistening ball. She looked up, learned again that there were times when it was impossible to gasp.

Facing the three persons at the crystal was a man with the hood. It looked fresh and new, that hood, but it answered the specifications of the old one, where the eye space was concerned. The hiss seemed to come from the glowing eyes themselves and their glitter caught the reflection from the crystal ball.

Whispering Eyes!

Well had the hooded man timed his whispered announcement. He'd caught the eyes of all three persons almost at a glance, was adding his commanding power to the hypnotic effect that the crystal had already provided. Now he spoke brief words:

"Do not move. You cannot."

The command was hardly necessary with Margo, who already sat frozen. It took startling effect on Cranston, halting him as he shifted in his chair. He seemed to know both the eyes and whisper from the past, did Cranston. Gregg merely held the brief case more tightly and at that the hooded man laughed.

Spreading from a low crouch, he revealed a large package that he had brought with him. Opening it with a single sweep, he displayed the four portraits that had once belonged to Artemus Drade. Then, letting a long narrow cloth unroll itself, he neatly caught the Bucharest statuettes one by one, setting those trophies of Maresca Lepavnu in a row along the floor. Finally, he showed two fists filled with the Burmese rubies that he had taken from James Kelthorn. Interspersed with them were Maresca's missing pearls.

"This concludes our bargain, Gregg," declared the hooded man. "You are fortunate in that I have no way of disposing of these treasures, Otherwise, you would not receive them in return for your money. I shall take it now, Gregg."

Reaching across the crystal ball, the man of the Whispering Eyes took the brief case from Gregg's lap. His triumphant hiss seemed echoed from a chair near by; then, the hooded man wheeled suddenly and was gone through another door.

A moment only, then Gregg was on his feet, shouting:

"I've been robbed—robbed! I was a fool to bring that cash! Hurry, Lang, find him, wherever he went -"

Footsteps came pounding into the room; from one door Bogardus, from another Fontaine. They were much nearer than the kitchen where Lang had gone to phone and naturally had closed the door. It wasn't until Gregg had delivered another series of shouts that Lang arrived.

Then, seeing that the brief case was gone, Lang loomed above Bogardus and Fontaine, demanding hoarsely:

"Which one of you came in here? Which package is this"—he gestured to the open bundle and its treasures—"the one that was in the living room or the study?"

"It's not mine," retorted Bogardus. "Better ask Fontaine."

"Nor mine," put in Fontaine. "Let Bogardus explain this."

"You can both wait here while I look," decided Lang. "The absent package will certainly prove who brought this stuff instead. Or will it? No, either of you could have brought your own package inside of this. At least"—he looked from Bogardus to Fontaine—"I can trust one of you to watch the other. Stay here until I summon the police."

At that moment, Cranston seemed to come to life. Rising, he turned to a chair beside him, started to unfold black garments that were heaped there. Three men were watching him narrowly: Lang, Bogardus and Fontaine, as they thronged around the crystal ball.

"I can decide this matter now," said Cranston in a cool tone. "Since crime has been done, the services of an avenger are required. He is here!"

Nobody realized what the black garments were as Cranston gave them a forward fling. In fact, they remained unnoticed in the moments that followed. For from the blackness launched a furry avalanche in white that sprang right to the top of the great crystal ball, and did not hesitate there long enough to lose its footing.

Bounding from the glass as if it had been a springboard, Washington Mews picked a human target and leaped with spreading claws straight for his head and shoulders. The valiant cat had gained the height it needed to launch itself in vengeance upon the man whose glowing, leering eyes it could not forget, even though they were masked with magnifying glasses that deceived all human observers.

Washington Mews was attacking Hanneford Lang!

Flaying his long arms, Lang dived across the room, flinging the cat away from him. After him sprang Bogardus and Fontaine, allies at last. Grabbing a chair, Lang whirled and flung it at them, made another long dart back toward the crystal from which both Margo and Gregg had fled. As for Cranston, he, too, was gone, though through which door Lang didn't know. Springing toward the shortest route to his study, Lang spun around, with a drawn gun, planning to shoot down attackers, when he heard a laugh behind him.

Wheeling again, Lang met The Shadow. Weird, sinister, was the laugh that taunted Lang, mighty mirth compared to the insidious hiss that denoted Whispering Eyes. Lang had flung away his glasses; his eyes now showed the shining, hypnotic force that the lenses normally softened. He recognized the eyes that met his above a leveled gun muzzle.

The Shadow's eyes, yet strangely Cranston's, for this was one time The Shadow did not care to disguise them. As Cranston's eyes, they were telling Lang much, too much.

That duel of staring eyes at the time when Cranston had been half-trapped, was not a victory for Lang. Then, Cranston himself had met Lang with a commanding gaze that had more than nullified the duel. He had let the hooded man go, rather than battle in too small a space with Lang and the amnesia victim then known as Hudson. When Cranston had let the Whispering Eyes retire, he had actually sent their owner on his way. For now Hanneford Lang, the man of the Whispering Eyes, was going rigid under The Shadow's control!

A sibilant tone from The Shadow's lips was telling Lang the facts of crime as Cranston would later discuss them with others.

"Your seances, Lang, were your only alibi," declared The Shadow. "At each you held one session only, not two, leaving yourself free to leave here for an hour or more. Last night for the first time, that alibi was threatened. You saw Margo Lane taking notes after the second session; knew she would wonder what had happened to those from the first.

"Earlier you had laid a death trap for her, knowing she was Cranston's friend. You let that trap remain so that her notes, if found, would stand to favor your alibi. You used one of your early victims, Lake, to send the cobra, thinking you would not need him longer. You thought you had found a better subject to use in the future, Cranston."

A low laugh followed The Shadow's reference to himself as Cranston. From then on, he dropped his reference to such dual identity, as he spoke to Lang.

"The rock test looked genuine to you, Lang," said The Shadow. "Yet all I needed to perform my part were two hidden straps, girded above my knees. I took two hand straps from a taxicab, gripped them through my trousers and braced my back. With my arms as added braces, I was a human cantilever that could support the weight of that stone. Your smashing it meant nothing. The great mass of the stone absorbed the blows of the hammer and I never felt them."

Bogardus and Fontaine heard none of this from across the room. They thought The Shadow was holding Lang gun for gun; not by the growing application of hypnotic power. Slowly, cautiously, Bogardus and Fontaine were moving for the flanks, intending to rush in on Lang.

"Your height was your failing, Lang," concluded The Shadow. "To step from the fire tower at Kelthorn's, spring to the skylight at Maresca's, hold my gun swings beyond arm's length as you did at Drade's—Those were but examples of the things that betrayed you. Neither Bogardus nor Fontaine have the stature or the reach to accomplish what you did. You picked the wrong dupes in their case, as you did with me."

Lang was swaying now, his head weaving cobra fashion; as though he thought he still wore his hood. Actually, he was reaching the drowsy stage that comes with hypnosis. A few moments more and he would have flattened to the floor. But Bogardus and Fontaine, despite their claims to hypnotic knowledge, were deceived. Mistaking Lang's sway as a prelude to an attack upon The Shadow, they hurled themselves upon him.

Lang came to life and savagely, striking out hard with his gun. The Shadow hurled forward, met Lang's revolver with the clang of an automatic. Bogardus and Fontaine went spinning from the fray as The Shadow drove Lang full about. Then, with a desperate dive, Lang went through the door that led to the study, shooting back wildly as he fled. The Shadow came close behind him.

Along a passage, around a turn, into the study dashed Lang. There, he grabbed up Gregg's money-packed brief case, where he had left it after Fontaine had rushed into the crystal room. With the brief case, Lang snatched his new hood. Wheeling toward the window, he stabbed shots at the door.

From around its edge, The Shadow jabbed back bullets. One was intercepted by the fat metal base of a desk lamp, that Lang had once tapped to imitate the sound of a dinner gong over the telephone. Another struck Lang's private crystal ball, cracked it and sent it jouncing.

Then Lang was at the window, shoving its bars down like a big sash, that descended outside the wall. The Shadow's mocking laugh told that he expected that trick, too, and Lang remembered that Cranston once had leaned against those bars and must then have learned that they were loose. From that The Shadow had gained the secret that went with Lang's alibis, the back route from the penthouse that enabled him to go and come, without the apartment house attendants knowing it.

Nevertheless, Lang followed through this flight. Over the ledge, down the window bars as if they were a ladder, Lang reached the roof of the connecting office building. Turning, he stabbed a shot up at the window, then headed for a doorway that would take him down through the other building. Whether for bravado or to escape recognition when he reached the street, Lang flipped the hood over his head as he drove onward.

A surge of men came to meet him, Inspector Cardona as their leader. Joe hadn't forgotten Cranston's advice to look for unusual ways in and out of Lang's. Up came Cardona's gun to meet the hooded menace; Lang's revolver shoved forward to beat Joe to the shot. But Lang's aim turned to a lurch as an automatic tongued from the study window, its bullet winging Lang in the back.

With the echoes of that shot came the avenging laugh of The Shadow, as Lang's revolver spurted wide and high above Cardona's shoulder. Simultaneously, Cardona's own gun spoke as did those of the men behind him. Riddled with bullets, Lang sprawled on the roof, rolled over and lost the hood. Beside Lang's dead face flattened the brief case, spilling the money that Lang no longer could claim as profit through the sale of murder-gained treasures.

Such was crime's pay-off. Throbbing with parting echoes, The Shadow's final laugh seemed a knell for Hanneford Lang, he of the Whispering Eyes that now stared silent and sightless toward the dark sky of night.

THE END