

QUETZAL

by Maxwell Grant

As originally published in

The Shadow Magazine

February 15, 1937

CHAPTER I

FORCED LANDING

THERE were five passengers aboard the silver-hued plane that was droning westward across the California desert. All were persons who had boarded the ship at Phoenix, Arizona, for direct flight to San Diego.

More than an hour out of Phoenix, the sky liner had passed over Yuma, where a muddy ribbon represented the lower stretch of the Colorado River. Twenty-odd minutes had passed since Yuma. At its present clip the plane should be close to El Centro, north of the Mexican border.

From dead ahead, the glow of the setting sun glistened upon a huge sheet of water, that looked like a gigantic oasis situated amid barren desert soil. One passenger gazed downward through the window at his elbow. His eyes keened suddenly, as he observed the broad lake below.

To many who had flown across the south of California, sight of that lake, miles in width, would have signified that the plane had swung to a more northern route. In size, in location, the lake resembled the famous Salton Sea, that stretches through California's Imperial Valley. Sight of it would have brought confidence that the trip was going well.

The present observer gained a different thought. Though no change showed upon the masklike features of his hawkish face, his eyes told, by their glint, that he had made a discovery. That sheet of water was not the Salton Sea, well north of the Border. It was Lake Maquita, an inland sea in Lower California, miles below the United States-Mexico border line.

Veering slightly from its course, the plane had swung south instead of north.

The hawk-faced passenger proved this to his satisfaction, when he drew a watch from his pocket. Clicking open the back of the watch case, he displayed a compass. The needle showed the plane's direction as southwest by west.

Long fingers closed the watch case; the timepiece went back into a vest pocket. His gaze still toward the window, the passenger reached beside him and opened a flat, flexible briefcase. From folds of black cloth, he drew a massive automatic.

The plane had passed Lake Maquita. His view of that water had told this passenger that an emergency might be at hand. The plane's course was cutting deeper below the Border, farther from the normal air route toward San Diego. Its entry into uncharted Mexican territory could signify that the hawk-faced passenger's identity was known.

That might mean trouble. The hawk-faced passenger, alone near the rear of the cabin, was The Shadow. Master fighter who hunted crime single-handed, The Shadow had long since learned that when the unusual occurred, it could mean that his own life would be concerned.

WHEN he reached for his gun, The Shadow did not glance toward the other passengers. Instead, he kept up a pose of absent gazing from the window. Hence, he was unable to see the action of a man who was seated across the aisle and farther front.

The other passenger was a long-faced, dreary-looking individual, who had been idly sketching on a piece of paper ever since the plane had passed Yuma. The man's penciled drawing had come to a completion. He raised the paper slightly, tilted it forward and toward the aisle.

The paper bore a strange, outlandish symbol: the well-drawn figure of a feathered serpent. The lifted head of the reptile bore a plume. Hideous in every detail, the drawn sketch represented a mythical token of the past. It

stood for Quetzal-grotesque reptilian god of the ancient Aztecs.

A peering eye saw that monstrous figure sketched upon the artist's pad. The co-pilot of the plane was looking through from the front compartment. He had opened the connecting door a mere inch, to watch for the signal from the long-faced man. Sight of the completed Quetzal was all that the watcher needed. He closed the door; turned toward the pilot who was seated at the controls.

The pilot of that plane was Jerry Loyden, who knew every mile of desert and mountain that lay between Phoenix and San Diego. Frequently, Jerry flew a different route for test purposes; but he had been puzzled by the orders that the co-pilot had brought to him at Phoenix, today.

Instructions were to veer southwest at Yuma; to keep that direction past Lake Maquita. Then straight west to the coastal range of mountains, and northward up to San Diego. Jerry's only guess regarding this odd route was that the line intended to make future stops at Tia Juana, for benefit of passengers who wanted to visit the resort at Agua Caliente. Even at that, the route went too far southward.

Something else had puzzled Jerry. The co-pilot was a stranger; apparently a substitute who had been chosen just before flight. Jerry had not even learned the fellow's name. There were lots of odd angles, working for this lesser air line; but shoving aboard an unknown co-pilot at the last minute was something that Jerry could not understand.

Jerry Loyden was due to have two questions answered simultaneously. The co-pilot had shifted close. From his hip pocket, he drew a gun. His face was ugly as he pressed the muzzle against Jerry's neck. The pilot gave a startled, upward glance. The thuggish co-pilot gestured for him to land the ship.

Grimly, Jerry understood. Faked orders, brought by a crook who had passed himself as a co-pilot. The fellow wanted a landing on Mexican soil, so he could stage an air holdup. That, at least, was Jerry's conjecture.

For a moment, Jerry showed reluctance; then began to handle the controls, to start the ship downward. In those brief seconds, he gained determination.

The plane's dip fooled the crook who had the pilot covered. The pressure of the gun muzzle eased. With a quick twist, Jerry sprang from the controls, made a grab for the crook's revolver. An instant later, the pair locked in a desperate struggle.

ODDS were even in the pilot room; but the scene was different in the cabin. There, the man with the longish face had been waiting for the first motion that would indicate a landing. As the plane began its downward nose, the long-faced man shifted toward the aisle. He thrust the sketch of Quetzal outward, so that the three passengers near him could see it.

Instantly, four persons became a murderous band. A big-jowled man came to life from a faked doze, to whip out a .38 revolver. A darkish fellow who looked like a Mexican flashed a knife from his belt with one swift gesture. A dark-clad, middle-aged woman pulled a .32 from a hand bag; her face was tigerish as she swung about.

All turned toward the rear of the cabin; and with them, came the long-faced man who had drawn the figure of Quetzal. He flung the sketch pad aside as he yanked a revolver; his countenance was as vicious as that of the imaginary snake-god. The order that he mouthed was like a reptile's hiss:

"The Shadow! Finish him!"

On their feet, the four were shoving toward the lone passenger at the back of the cabin. They thought they had trapped their victim unawares. They were wrong. In answer to the murderer's order came a challenge that sounded above the drone of motors. It was a sinister, mocking laugh from lips that scarcely moved.

The laugh of The Shadow! With it, the lone fighter shifted from his seat. His move was a sidewise fade; as he made it, his hand came into view. As revolvers barked, an automatic tongued its response. The Shadow's shots were

thrusts of doom.

The big-jowled man sprawled first, in the middle of the aisle. A quick shot from The Shadow clipped the forearm of the tigerish woman, as she aimed with her .32; with a sharp cry, she slumped back into her seat. The way was clear between The Shadow and the long-faced leader who had depicted the token of Quetzal.

The leader jabbed a hurried, badly aimed shot that bashed the steel exit door beside The Shadow's shoulder. That attempt was his last opportunity. The Shadow's big gun answered. The attack leader sagged.

One enemy remained in combat; he was the darkish fighter with the knife. The Shadow had ignored him to deal with the others. The blade-wielder was leaping along the aisle, hoping to gain a thrust from an angle, before The Shadow could turn. The Shadow's free hand clamped upward, caught the crook's forearm as the thrust came. To counter, the dark-faced man grabbed for The Shadow's gun.

Both weapons temporarily useless, the two fighters grappled. They swayed across the aisle; then took a jolt when the plane suddenly shivered as though it had struck a mammoth air-pocket. The direction of the stagger was forward-past the slumped woman, across the two sprawled bodies. The Shadow and his adversary crashed against the door that led to the pilot room.

The plane was out of control. It was going into a nose dive. Matters had gone amiss in the pilot room. Death faced The Shadow, even if he proved victor in his present grapple. Speed, perhaps, might save him.

TWISTING, The Shadow slugged his gun on the skull of the darkish man. The crook subsided, his knife clattering beside him. Yanking open the door in front of him, The Shadow sprawled into the pilot room.

Conditions had reversed there. Jerry Loyden lay helpless in a corner, stunned by a blow from the fake co-pilot's gun. In eliminating Jerry, the crook had made trouble for himself. Seizing the controls, he was unable to right the ship from its dive.

Even The Shadow's own experience with planes could not help. The ship was sure to crash; the best course was to let the crook continue his frantic efforts to prevent the smash.

Grabbing the unconscious form of Jerry Loyden, The Shadow tried to clamber back through the cabin, toward the rear door. The plane was hurtling groundward; spinning, its fall partly aided The Shadow. He made progress through the cabin, dragging the senseless pilot across the sprawled bodies that were wedged between the seats on the sides of the aisle.

The crash arrived just as The Shadow reached the last seat. The plane hit the ground at a slant; a big wing crumpled; the nose bashed the earth and flattened. The whole frame of the ship twisted and crackled. The Shadow lurched sidewise, half trapped between two broken seats.

He felt the side of the plane heave, start downward, then pause. A huge roar filled his ears. Dazed, The Shadow could feel his briefcase beneath him; he sensed the weight of Loyden's body above him. Dimly, he realized that the cabin had tilted backward, tail down. His brain drummed upon one thought: the rear door of the cabin.

Gripping his briefcase, shouldering Loyden's inert form, The Shadow wedged free of the trapping seats. The roar had become a crackle. Heat seemed to sweep the demolished cabin. The wrecked plane was afire. The door, alone, could bring safety.

The tilt of the cabin floor fairly slid The Shadow toward it. He found the door jammed when he reached it. With a hard shoulder heave, The Shadow drove the barrier outward.

A sudden sweep of flame seared the cabin. Like the blast from an inferno, it whipped upward from the ruined front of the plane. Gripping Loyden, with the briefcase clamped between, The Shadow lunged outward. He and the stunned pilot took a five-foot pitch to the softish ground, while the rising flames howled above them.

With renewed effort, The Shadow hauled Loyden away from the fire's range. He left the pilot forty feet from the plane, with the briefcase lying beside him; then turned back toward the wreckage. One glance told The Shadow that it would be impossible to rescue any crooks who might still be alive.

The plane had become a pyre, its flame more brilliant than the setting sun. Crashing, it had mowed down clusters of giant cactuses. All about, stood other specimens of that spiny tree, like vengeful sentinels viewing the plane's fate. Within a short while, the wrecked ship would be no more than a steel skeleton.

ABOVE the roar of the flames, The Shadow heard a vibrant hum. He looked upward, to see a plane zooming low over the crest of a distant foothill that marked the desert's edge. Something in that prompt arrival betokened further menace, The Shadow stepped back to where Loyden lay.

The pilot was near a clump of sagebrush, beside the base of a giant cactus. From the briefcase, The Shadow drew a cloak of black; he stretched it across Loyden's body. Crouching partly beneath the brushy shelter, The Shadow drew both the pilot and the covering cloak closer to him.

Remaining motionless, The Shadow trusted to this hasty camouflage. He knew that observers from the approaching plane would look for motion on the ground, or for conspicuous objects. If they saw neither, they would not suspect that a patch of blackness, stilled by a fringe of sagebrush, represented human life.

The plane neared the wreckage. Hundreds of feet above, it circled the flaming spot; then rose higher, circling as it gained altitude. Like a vulture, the mysterious plane performed another long circuit against the sky; then straightened course and departed westward, beyond the hills.

The sun had set. The flames from the wrecked air liner were dying. For short minutes, the fire seemed to fight the brief twilight; then the last flames subsided. Thick darkness settled on the desert. It blanketed The Shadow and the rescued man who lay beside him.

From The Shadow's lips came a strange, mirthless laugh, that sounded like a ghostly tone amid that desolation. The Shadow had triumphed over enemies who sought his life. He had deceived spying eyes that had peered from the vulturous plane above.

The Shadow had expected danger upon his present mission. He had outlived the first thrust made against him. Though stranded upon the desert, miles below the Border, The Shadow was ready to resume his campaign against new enemies who dwelt on Mexican soil.

CHAPTER II

BELOW THE BORDER

THE SHADOW welcomed the arrival of night. It meant that he could leave the spot where the crashed sky liner had carried five attackers to their doom. The hazard of the desert was small compared with the danger that might come, should other crooks learn that The Shadow still lived.

The Shadow's chief problem was Jerry Loyden. His first task was to revive the pilot; to bring him to a state where he could join The Shadow in the long trek that would lead back to civilization.

A flashlight glimmered beside the sagebrush. It showed the pilot's face, pitifully drawn; nevertheless, The Shadow noted that Loyden was due to revive from his unconscious state. To speed that result, The Shadow reached into a pocket in the black cloak. He brought out a small phial that contained a purplish liquid.

Waiting until Loyden's eyelids flickered, The Shadow pressed the phial to the pilot's lips. Drops of the elixir trickled down his throat. The effect was immediate. The pilot opened his eyes, blinked into the flashlight's glare. He began incoherent mutters.

The Shadow quieted the reviving man; with calm tone, he ordered him to rest. Loyden sank back upon the cloak. His whirling thoughts began to steady.

The Shadow caught words that Loyden uttered. They referred to the treachery of the unknown co-pilot, who had boarded the plane at Phoenix.

This fitted with The Shadow's understanding of the case. A brief recollection of the past twenty-four hours told him all that had occurred.

Just one day ago, The Shadow had been in Washington. There, he had been entrusted with a mission of vital importance to the United States government. The task demanded that The Shadow go to Lower California, the Mexican territory just below the California border.

The Shadow had chosen an air route to reach San Diego, intending to start southward after he reached that city. Somehow, his plans had been learned by the enemies who plotted against the United States. Knowing that The Shadow intended to change planes at Phoenix, they had prepared a trap. They had loaded Loyden's plane with their own agents: those crooks who had posed as passengers and co-pilot.

Though The Shadow had eliminated a quintet of foemen, he had scarcely dented the ranks of the enemy. He was up against an organization that might have agents anywhere. Those vultures in the spying plane were samples. They had come to view the scene of disaster; they had gone away to report.

They would flash the good news, that The Shadow was dead. The fact that five of their own kind had also perished, would mean nothing. Probably, the head of that enemy band had expected his tools to die along with The Shadow.

Who was the head of that organization that had its headquarters in Mexico?

That was a question that had baffled the state department. It was one that The Shadow could not yet answer. Today, however, he had uncovered one important fact. He had learned the symbol that stood as countersign between the members of the nefarious band.

THE SHADOW had seen the sketched picture of Quetzal, that had been flashed as a signal for attack. It fitted with news that The Shadow had gained in Washington. There, he had been told that he would have to deal with an unknown supercriminal, whose followers knew him only as Quetzal. Why that master-plotter had chosen the name of an Aztec deity, was a mystery.

The Shadow had gained its answer. The superfoe was called Quetzal because he had adopted the reptilian god as his chief device in a campaign of intrigue and murder.

Logically, the plotter who called himself Quetzal would be in Mexico; here in the territory of Baja California, as the Mexicans termed Lower California. The crash of the sky liner had brought the Shadow directly to Mexican soil. He no longer had need to travel by way of San Diego. His best plan was to find some place of safety where he could leave Jerry Loyden; then travel on his own.

Thin paper crinkled. The sound made Loyden open his eyes. In the rays of the flashlight, the pilot saw the hawkish features of The Shadow. Keen eyes were studying an outspread map, that showed this territory below the Border.

The Shadow's forefinger rested upon the map, indicating this spot in the desert. Calculating from the plane's speed when it passed Lake Maquita, The Shadow was able to gauge his present location.

Loyden watched the finger move one direction; then another. At last, it glided in zigzag fashion, south and west. The Shadow had picked an inhabited spot that lay nearly twenty miles to the southwest. Though deeper in Mexican territory, the little settlement was as near as any town above the International Border.

Turning toward Loyden, The Shadow saw the pilot rising to his feet. Loyden was thinking of the plane. The last that he remembered was the final dive. That was enough to tell him that the plane had crashed. Rising also, The Shadow gripped the pilot's arm; spoke steadily:

"The others are dead. They were murderers, all of them! My testimony will clear you of all blame."

Loyden nodded, gratefully. The Shadow's words gave him confidence. Then

came another statement.

"Proof will be needed," declared The Shadow, in an even tone. "Until I gain it, my testimony will be unsupported. Therefore, you must follow my directions."

Loyden nodded his willingness. The Shadow gathered up the black cloak, packed it in the briefcase. The sky above was moonless, but the studding stars were brilliant. The Shadow did not need his compass to find the course he wanted. Sighting by the North Star, he glimmered his flashlight along the dry ground ahead and started the southwest journey.

IT was a slow plod through the night. With blinking light, The Shadow picked pathways between sagebrush and cactus; but the sandy soil made the march tedious. Fortunately, the night had brought coolness. The Shadow counted upon reaching his goal by dawn.

For two steady hours, Loyden kept pace with The Shadow's steady march. Then the pilot's stamina began to fade. The Shadow called for a rest. After fifteen minutes, they began new progress. Remembering every detail of the map, The Shadow chose hilly paths where the surface soil was thinner. Nevertheless, halts became more frequent. The going was becoming tougher for Loyden, every hour.

It was nearly dawn when the marchers reached a high level. As Loyden sank for another rest, The Shadow spoke and pointed. Far below was a glimmering light that shone like a grounded star. There were still miles to go, but Loyden was hardly equal to the task. The Shadow recognized the fact.

From his briefcase, The Shadow produced a brace of automatics and parked them in deep pockets beneath his coat. He closed the zipper top of the briefcase; locked it with a little padlock that was imbedded in the leather end. He placed the briefcase in Loyden's care.

"Wait here," The Shadow told the pilot. "By dawn, I shall return-or send others."

Starting on his lone trek, The Shadow made more speedy progress. He unleashed all the effort that he had reserved during the slow march with Loyden. Guiding for the distant light, he kept to a straight course; but for a full hour, the glow seemed to move ahead of him. It was like a mirage in the desert night; a taunting goal that could never be reached.

The Shadow continued, undiscouraged. He knew the trickiness of the dry desert air, that made distances seem short. He was confident that he had nearly reached his destination; and the proof came when dawn began its flicker from the east.

The light still shone upon the darkened ground, but beyond it, The Shadow saw the outline of mountain tops, forming a background far above. Nearer than the bases of the mountains, the evasive light could no longer be far.

Dawn increased. The lone light dwindled. In its place, The Shadow saw buildings less than a mile away. Their size enabled him to gauge the distance correctly. Some were no more than adobe huts; their appearance indicated that the little settlement had been deserted. But the building that had furnished the light was larger, and stood secluded from the abandoned village. The place was a hacienda, two stories high, surmounted by a watch-tower at one corner of its surrounding wall.

Once, the hacienda must have been the home of some rich rancho, whose peons dwelt in the near-by village. The days of feudal lordship had ended in Mexico. The peons had gone to more fertile lands. The hacienda was still occupied; but probably it had changed ownership. Soon, The Shadow would learn the facts of its present ownership.

DAWN showed The Shadow as a long, striding figure, almost within the shaded stretches outside the hacienda walls. His gaze was upward. The Shadow was watching the tower. He saw a motion there.

The Shadow halted; his hand shifted unnoticeably toward his coat. As if

in answer to his gaze, came the sharp query:

"Quien va?"

In answer to the question, "who goes," The Shadow responded in Spanish:

"Un amigo."

The reply seemed sufficient. The Shadow, arriving alone from the desert, would naturally announce himself as a friend. There was a pause; then the query:

"Va tiene un Americano, no es verad?"

The Shadow gave the affirmative "Si," in reply to the question whether or not he was an American. He sensed that the statement would bring him a prompt welcome. That surmise was correct. The shout went below: "Un Americano!"

Immediately, a gate opened in the wall and a rough-clad Mexican with a big sombrero beckoned the stranger to enter.

The Shadow was ushered through an inner door, along a hallway of the building itself, then into a patio surrounded by a balcony. He heard the clatter of a door above; looked up to see a man who was hurriedly donning a dressing gown. As the man descended the stairs to the patio, The Shadow saw that he was an American.

Greetings were prompt. The owner of the hacienda was middle-aged, portly and broad-faced. His smile added to the friendliness of his face. His eyes were keen, as they surveyed the wayfarer from the desert. Evidently, the broad-faced man was impressed by the calmness of The Shadow's hawklike visage, for he bowed a greeting as he thrust forward a firm hand.

"My name," he rumbled, in basso tone, "is Latimer Creeth. May I ask yours, sir?"

"I am Lamont Cranston," replied The Shadow. "Lately from New York. More recently stranded in the desert, due to a forced landing west of Lake Maquita."

Creeth's eyes opened. He put an amazed question:

"You're not from the air liner reported lost last night?"

"I am," replied The Shadow, calmly. "Moreover, Mr. Creeth, you have another survivor to care for. I brought the pilot with me. He is resting on the hillcrest, directly northeast of here."

Creeth clapped his hands; Mexican servants appeared. The portly man gave prompt orders. Two were to take horses and go immediately to Loyden's rescue. Creeth snapped the reminder:

"Pronto!" The servants scurried away. Creeth turned to The Shadow.

"Breakfast?" he queried, amiably. "Or would you prefer some sleep first?"

"A rest would be preferable."

Creeth bowed and indicated the stairway. He conducted The Shadow to a room on the second floor. As soon as Creeth had gone, The Shadow took account of his surroundings

From the window, he could see the broad expanse of desert that stretched to the northeast. Two horsemen were already riding toward the slope where The Shadow had left Loyden. They were taking a riderless mount with them. Soon, the pilot would arrive at the hacienda; Loyden, too, would be resting before the sun's blaze made the desert intolerable.

CALMLY, The Shadow locked the door. He lowered the window shade, laid aside his coat and automatics. Kicking off his shoes, he stretched upon a comfortable bed and closed his eyes. He was taking advantage of the coming hours, to gain a needed rest. Sleep was important to The Shadow—not because of past fatigue, but because of work that lay ahead.

Before this day ended, The Shadow intended to be on his way. The apparent security of the hacienda did not deceive him. Not only did The Shadow have a mission to perform; there was still a chance that enemies would learn of his escape from death. If they did, their efforts would become relentless.

In fact, The Shadow had a definite hunch that his chance arrival at this

obscure hacienda was something that the supercreek called Quetzal would surely learn. Seemingly, the agents of Quetzal were everywhere.

The Shadow's conclusion was like a glimpse into the future. This day was to mark new efforts by those who served the mysterious Quetzal. Again, death would stalk The Shadow.

CHAPTER III

CREETH'S VISITORS

EARLY in the afternoon, The Shadow came from his room and descended to the patio. There, he encountered one of the Mexican servants, who informed him that Creeth was in the living room.

The Shadow found the portly hacienda owner there. Creeth was pleased that his guest had awakened. He ordered lunch for two.

The living room was at the front of the hacienda; its windows showed an open stretch of ground that ended with the surrounding wall. The Shadow could see the high tower at the corner; noted that a watcher was on duty. Then he turned to hear a statement from Creeth.

"We brought in Loyden," informed Creeth. "He was fagged out. He is sleeping in another room, upstairs. I would say that his nerves were pretty well shocked because of that crash."

"Quite naturally," responded The Shadow. "The co-pilot went berserk. He snatched the controls from Loyden. That was why the ship cracked up."

"There were other passengers beside yourself?"

"Yes. Four. They were trapped with the co-pilot. Tell me about the reports you heard, Mr. Creeth."

Creeth gave the facts. He had heard them over the radio, the night before. Loyden's plane had failed to arrive at San Diego; a search had been instituted all along the route. It was conceded that the plane had crashed; but no trace of the wreckage had been discovered.

"Loyden was far south of his course," explained The Shadow. "The co-pilot must have gone completely insane. From what Loyden told me, the fellow handed him false flying orders."

Creeth raised his eyebrows, as he queried: "Does that sound credible, Mr. Cranston?"

"I believe it," replied The Shadow-"because Loyden had no reason to fly south of his course. Unfortunately, the orders were burned in the wreck."

"That will make it bad for Loyden," nodded Creeth, "when he returns across the Border."

"Not if he remains a while in Mexico. He can do that quite easily, since he is supposed to have died in the crash."

Creeth pondered over The Shadow's remark. Quietly, The Shadow added:

"I have friends in Mexico City. Loyden can go there."

"Quite easily," agreed Creeth. "I can arrange to have a plane stop here, en route from San Diego to Mexico City, to pick up both of you."

"I am not going to Mexico City."

Creeth looked quizzical. The Shadow stepped to the wall; pointed to a large map that hung there. He placed his finger just below the International Boundary, and remarked:

"This hacienda is located here--"

"A half inch farther south," interposed Creeth. "There-you have the exact spot."

"That makes my journey a little longer," declared The Shadow. "If you can spare a horse, Mr. Creeth, I can ride northwest to Tia Juana and cross the Border from there. I wish to reach San Diego."

CREETH joined The Shadow at the map. The portly man placed his finger on Tia Juana, where the Border met the Pacific Coast. Running his hand down the coast line, Creeth stopped at the Mexican town of Ensenada, some fifty miles south of Tia Juana. He marked a southwest line between the hacienda's location and that of Ensenada.

"Ride to Ensenada," he suggested, "instead of to Tia Juana. The distance is about the same, your course will be southwest instead of northwest. You can take a steamer from Ensenada up to San Diego."

The suggestion pleased The Shadow. Ensenada was his actual destination; but he had preferred not to reveal that fact. It was still good policy to object to Creeth's plan.

"Ensenada is out of the way," declared The Shadow. "I have no reason to go there."

"Except one," replied Creeth, gravely. "Your trip will be safer. You will escape the bandits that are between here and Tia Juana."

"Bandits?" The Shadow showed surprise in his question. "I thought they were gone from this part of Mexico."

Creeth shook his head. Sitting down at the table, he began a detailed explanation.

"Like other Americans," he stated, "I have interests in racing stables at Tia Juana. Because of the Mexican laws, it proved advisable for me to live in Mexico. I heard of this hacienda. I purchased it cheaply; and like it so well that I wondered why no one else had chosen it as a residence. I learned why, when I received a visit from Sancho Maringuez."

The name Maringuez was a new one to The Shadow. He inferred that Sancho Maringuez must be one of the bandits of whom Creeth had spoken. Creeth's next words proved that correct.

"Maringuez is a smooth customer," declared the hacienda owner. "Here in Mexico, he has started a racket that compares with those in New York and other American cities. He covers the road between here and Tia Juana, offering what he calls 'protection' for travelers. I found it cheaper to pay for such protection, than to ignore it."

"Anything may happen to a traveler who ventures along those roads without paying the price. Of course, Maringuez has nothing to do with it." Creeth shook his head, as he spoke in a sarcastic drawl. "No, indeed. Maringuez protects his friends. But those who do not pay are not the friends of Maringuez."

"Since you have not paid, I advise you to avoid that road. Maringuez does not patrol between here and Ensenada, for travelers are few. Therefore, the route to Ensenada is the one to take."

"Unless," remarked The Shadow, "I arranged to pay the toll fee."

"Unless I paid it," objected Creeth. "The mere fact that you have come here, makes me responsible. I already owe Maringuez two thousand pesos, by his method of calculation. Half for you; half for Loyden. That is why I do not inform Maringuez when I have guests. It is cheaper to keep a man as lookout in the watch tower."

ALMOST like an answer to Creeth's statement, came a call in Spanish from the tower. Another man relayed it. The Shadow heard the name "Maringuez" uttered in excited shouts. Creeth came to his feet with an exclamation. He clapped for a servant, ordered the man to summon Loyden and bring the pilot's bag.

Loyden arrived sleepily a few minutes later. His bag proved to be the briefcase, which he handed to The Shadow. Creeth stepped to the wall at the rear of the living room, found a catch and slid back a panel to reveal a small, secret room.

"This is where the rancho used to hide his gold," he declared, grimly. "Bandits were tougher than Maringuez; but he is as smooth as any could be. Stay out of sight here, while I deal with him."

Through a tiny crack in the panel, The Shadow watched proceedings in the room that he and Loyden had left. The Shadow had his briefcase with him; and Creeth was hastily ordering the removal of the extra lunch plates that indicated a guest. That had scarcely been done before there were shouts from the outside wall. The gate swung open; a dozen horsemen clattered through and dismounted.

Creeth received Maringuez in the living room. The bandit was a short, squarish man, who wore a Mexican costume that had once been gaudy. Velvet trousers and gold-braided velvet jacket showed signs of long wear. So did the fancy sombrero that Maringuez tossed upon the lunch table.

The bandit's face was sallow. Fully rounded, it gave him a moonish expression; but there was nothing of softness in the downturn of his lips. Maringuez's smile was an odd one; so was the glint that came from his narrowed eyes, set wide on either side of his broad nose. Maringuez darted glances everywhere, before centering his gaze upon the lunch table.

"Ah, senor," he purred to Creeth, "I have come too late to have lunch with you. I am sorry, so sorry! But still"-he shrugged his shoulders-"why should I ask what you do not give to other guests?"

"To other guests?" demanded Creeth. "What other guests, Maringuez?"

"The Americanos who arrived this morning from the desert. Perhaps they are asleep, eh? That is why they have not eaten lunch with you? Ah, si. That must be it."

"I have no guests here, Maringuez."

"Ah, no? I am so sorry, Senor Creeth." Head tilted, Maringuez began to roll himself a cigarette, watching his hands as he spoke. "That is too bad, senor. I have heard that you have dos amigos, two friends, who would be glad to pay me one thousand pesos each before they travel to Tia Juana.

"But perhaps those friends do not wish to meet me? They may have heard bad things said of Sancho Maringuez. Ah, senor, I must look for them and tell them that I am their friend. They will be glad to give me the two thousand pesos."

MARINGUEZ'S followers had entered with him. They were a nondescript bunch of ill-clad ruffians. Maringuez turned to them, spat words in Spanish. The bandits grimaced like pleased monkeys. Maringuez was ordering a search of the hacienda.

The Shadow heard the names by which Maringuez addressed some of his subordinates. One scar-faced fellow was called Tompino; Maringuez sent him upstairs with a pair of men. Another, who boasted a leering, pockmarked countenance, was Poroq. Maringuez sent him outside, with others. He reminded Poroq to send a man up to inspect the watch tower.

Creeth raised objection, fearing that the bandit's men might clash with his own. Maringuez remarked suavely that it was not his affair, if they did. Leaving two servants in the living room, Creeth hurried outside to prevent any disturbance.

That seemed to please Maringuez. With a chuckle, the bandit settled in a chair and placed his feet upon the cushions of another. His spurs dug into the upholstery, but the bandit cared nothing for Creeth's furniture. Blandly puffing his cigarette, he ordered his remaining men to search the ground floor and report to him.

Perhaps Creeth's departure had bluffed Maringuez. The bandit, apparently, did not regard the living room as a likely hiding place. He chanced to glance toward the paneled wall; but his eyes showed no suspicion of the partition that hid The Shadow and Loyden from his view.

Maringuez rolled another cigarette, after he had finished the first one. He was through with his second smoke when his men began to return.

Tompino and Poroq both reported a blank search. So did the men who had scoured the ground floor. Maringuez came up angrily from his chair, began a series of harsh oaths that ended when he saw Creeth enter from the outside. The bandit's suave manner returned.

"Ah, senor," asserted Maringuez. "It seems that you are right. You have no amigos here. It is too bad that I have troubled you. Soon you will go to Tia Juana, for the races. Buenos! Your trip will be a safe one. You shall have the protection of Sancho Maringuez.

"But should others ride to Tia Juana and meet me on the way, I shall ask them if they are friends of Senor Creeth. Should they say 'Si,' I shall say:

"Ah, no; Senor Creeth does not have his amigos visit him. He does not like to pay one thousand pesos for other Americanos. Adios."

SPURS clanking, Maringuez strode from the hacienda, with Poroq and Tompino at his elbows. The rest of the band followed. The Shadow heard the dull clatter of their departure. Through the crack, he saw Creeth mopping his forehead beside the lunch table, waiting for a new call from the watch tower.

The signal came after ten minutes: It told that Maringuez and his men had ridden away. Creeth slid back the panel, motioned The Shadow and Loyden out from the secret room.

"Perhaps I should have let Maringuez meet you," said Creeth apologetically. "After all, it would be worth two thousand pesos not to incur his enmity. Under the circumstances, however"-Creeth gave a worried glance toward Loyden-"it seemed best to deny that there were Americans present."

"Quite right," agreed The Shadow, promptly. "What about the plane for Mexico City, Mr. Creeth?"

"It passes here late in the afternoon," replied Creeth. "It will land at my signal. I doubt that Maringuez will see it land. He is too foxy to leave outposts near enough to be seen from my watch tower. If he suspects that the plane has stopped here, he will come. That produces another problem."

"My departure?"

Creeth nodded, as he heard The Shadow's query.

"You should be gone by the time the plane arrives," declared Creeth. "That is, unless you take my advice and go to Mexico City with Loyden, instead of starting for Ensenada."

"I prefer Ensenada."

"Then you must start an hour before sunset. Maringuez will not be close; he will expect you to travel after nightfall. You can reach the mountains to the southwest before sunset. If Maringuez closes in afterward, you will be gone.

"Once you reach the mountains, you will be on the road to Ensenada. It is very unlikely that Maringuez will expect you there. If he does spread his men, to cover more roads than the one to Tia Juana, he will probably close the routes that lead north to the Border."

Jerry Loyden was puzzled by the conversation between The Shadow and Creeth. The Shadow quietly explained matters, telling the pilot of the discussion that had been held earlier. At first, Loyden objected to a trip to Mexico City.

"It's like running away," expressed the pilot. "I'm willing to face an investigation, and tell my story of the crash. I'll have your testimony, Mr. Cranston."

"You will, Loyden," returned The Shadow, dryly, "if you follow my instructions. I can testify that I sent you to Mexico City because the crash took place on Mexican territory. You can report it to the proper officials there."

THE SHADOW wrote the name of the man whom Loyden was to see when he reached the Mexican capital. The pilot remembered how The Shadow had aided him, and agreed to follow instructions. That business finished, The Shadow glanced at his watch.

"It is later than I supposed," he told Creeth. "According to your plan, I should be leaving in an hour. Suppose we choose the horse that I intend to buy."

"To buy?" echoed Creeth. "You are welcome to the horse, Mr. Cranston. I intended to have you leave it in Ensenada, where I could send for it, later. Of course, one can never count on finding a horse again, after it is left in a Mexican town-"

"Therefore, I shall sell it," interposed The Shadow. "Later, I shall meet you in Tia Juana and pay you one thousand pesos."

"One thousand pesos for a horse-"

"A better bargain than Sancho Maringuez would have given me, had he met me. He wanted a thousand pesos without the horse."

Latimer Creeth chuckled at The Shadow's jest. He was still laughing, as he led the way to the stables outside the hacienda. The Shadow, too, wore a smile, that was barely discernible on his masklike lips.

"A thousand pesos for a horse," chortled Creeth, as they reached the stables. "You can have any broncho in the place for that price, Mr. Cranston! And some day"-Creeth seemed gleeful at the thought-"I shall tell Sancho Maringuez how I sold a horse for a thousand pesos."

"Reserve that story," suggested The Shadow, "until after I have paid you the money."

Creeth's smile faded. The Shadow's comment spoke of danger that lay ahead; some menace that might exist despite Creeth's assurance that the road to Ensenada was clear. There was a definite chance that The Shadow would never meet Creeth in Tia Juana, to pay him the thousand pesos.

The Shadow was thinking of more than Sancho Maringuez, the racketeer bandit whose marauders patrolled this terrain. He was considering the methods of a superfoe, whose followers called Quetzal.

The power of Quetzal could stretch far-even to this lonely hacienda, or into the mountain passes where Maringuez was supposed to have sole control.

The Shadow had already seen inklings of that fact. He was to encounter full proof of Quetzal's far-reaching methods, before he finished his ride to Ensenada.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH BY THE ARROYO

DUSK had settled in the lower foothills of the mountains southwest of Creeth's hacienda. In the gloom at the entrance to a high pass, The Shadow was seated motionless upon the horse that Creeth had loaned him. Turned about, The Shadow was gazing miles backward, to the hacienda, where white walls were still brilliant in light of the late afternoon sun.

From the northwest, high in the air, came the glint from a toylike plane. The Shadow saw the ship dip downward and circle the hacienda, preparatory to a landing. From the briefcase strapped to his saddle, The Shadow drew a small, but powerful, pair of binoculars. Focusing the field glasses on distant white walls, he watched the plane come to earth.

Human figures were plain through the glasses; The Shadow saw two that he recognized. One was Creeth; the other Loyden. The owner of the hacienda shook hands with the pilot, as the latter went aboard the plane. A few minutes later, the air liner was rising for its night flight south to Mexico City.

All during his ride to the mountains, The Shadow had been on the lookout for Maringuez's men. He had seen no sign of them. As Creeth had believed, they were beyond the mountains. With dusk, however, they could easily have approached the side of the mountains toward the hacienda. The Shadow recognized the wisdom of his early departure.

In The Shadow's present situation, all seemed well. If bandits had seen the through plane's stop, they might suppose that both of Creeth's guests had gone aboard the ship. Maringuez might go to the hacienda, to argue matters with Creeth; but the portly American could deny everything, with some logical excuse regarding the plane's landing.

One fact was certain. Sancho Maringuez existed as a bandit only because he employed modern methods. He could not risk an armed attack upon a hacienda; nor could he afford to injure those who had paid him for his so-called protection. Such measures would bring him trouble from the Mexican government. If lone travelers met Sancho, however, the story could be a different one.

Despite Creeth's belief that the road to Ensenada would be clear, The Shadow rode with caution through the mountain pass. He sensed that the next hour would be the most dangerous of his trip, for the setting sun played tricks among these high Sierras. The road, though ragged, was easy to find, even in the gloom. The horse seemed to know it; and darkness offered no huge

handicap.

The trouble lay when stretches of the road rounded into places where the pass faced west. There, the sun came into view. Its rays revealed the lone rider on his course. If watchers were hereabouts, they would see The Shadow.

A halt would be risky. If Maringuez suspected that only one of Creeth's visitors had boarded the plane, the bandit might think of the Ensenada road. Should pursuers be on The Shadow's trail, they might already have spotted him from a mile or more behind. This pass, Creeth had stated, was the most rugged part of the ride.

That furnished The Shadow with another urge for progress. He could go faster while occasional flickers of daylight still persisted.

THE road furnished sudden evidence to prove The Shadow's choice a wise one. Rounding a bend, The Shadow came to a straight stretch where the road divided. To his left was a slope that led down into an arroyo. That shallow canyon, in rainy seasons, could become a watercourse.

One road slanted into the arroyo. Whether it ascended on the other side was a question, for the arroyo curved after a few hundred yards and traces of the road were invisible in the darkness below. The other fork kept straight ahead, then turned to a hanging bridge that crossed the narrow arroyo.

The Shadow's side of the arroyo was almost dark, because of a towering summit to the right. The other side of the curving ravine showed traces of fading sunlight, particularly at a level spot just beyond the bridge. There, the road was fringed by a cluster of sagebrush that hung above the arroyo's edge.

Ordinarily, the clump of vegetation might not have looked conspicuous. At this hour, it was definitely plain, for it was one of the few stretches of ground reached by the sunlight. Halting at the fork, The Shadow studied the darkened bridge and the lighter patch beyond. In that cluster of sagebrush, he saw a perfect ambush.

A lurker crouched there could control not only the bridge, but the arroyo below. If this road chanced to be guarded by a man who knew it, the fellow could choose no better spot than that clump of sagebrush.

Halting at the fork, The Shadow dismounted. He tethered his horse in the protecting shelter of a big rock by the bend. From the briefcase, he drew his black cloak and slouch hat. Donning that garb, he crept along the road to the bridge. Close to the steep bank on the right, The Shadow was totally obscured.

The bridge itself offered a dark route to the other side. Stooping low, The Shadow approached it. His creeping pace was cautious. He did not want the bridge to give any sway that would denote his passage. The bridge remained firm. Strong enough to bear the weight of a horse and rider, it did not waver under the weight of a lone man.

Reaching the far side of the bridge, The Shadow was on the very fringe of darkness. Behind the clump of sagebrush, he saw one blackish patch that the sunlight did not reach. There was a flickery stretch between. The Shadow shifted, avoiding the light, to gain a better view.

There was motion behind the sagebrush. Instantly, The Shadow realized what had caused it. His own shift must have been noticed by eyes that were keen, even in this gloom. A lurker was there; and if the fellow had heard The Shadow's approach on horseback, he now suspected that the rider had come ahead alone.

WITH that instantaneous thought, The Shadow sprang forward, whipping forth an automatic. With his lunge came an attack from the opposite direction. The man behind the sagebrush had gained the same idea.

A bulky figure loomed in the sunlight. A huge hand swung downward a glittering knife-blade. As The Shadow drove his automatic upward, he recognized the pock-marked face that was speeding toward his own. The attacker was Poroq, the bandit lieutenant who had searched the grounds around the hacienda.

Gun muzzle clashed knife-blade in mid-air. The Shadow's jab had offset Poroq's thrust. Arms skidding above shoulders, the fighters grappled. Neither had lost ground in the drive; they were locked in the lighted space between the bridge and the sagebrush.

Poroq's plan was crude, but definite. He tried to twist The Shadow toward the brink of the arroyo, hoping to hurl him over in case a knife-thrust failed. Poroq's strength was formidable. The Shadow knew that a single slip on his own part would give the bandit the advantage that he wanted.

Quick strategy was the best method with Poroq; and The Shadow produced it. After resisting Poroq's twist, The Shadow suddenly gave way. With an ugly gloat, Poroq shouldered toward the brink. Halfway, he realized how he had been tricked. The Shadow had twisted farther; he was carrying Poroq along the edge instead of toward it.

Poroq tried to reverse his position. His move gave The Shadow new advantage. Yanking toward the sagebrush, The Shadow suddenly braced. Poroq's back went toward the arroyo.

Thought of the danger below gave Poroq the fury of a demon. He drove inward, hurled The Shadow through the fringe of the brush and flattened him to the darkened ground behind the cluster. With his left arm, Poroq pinned The Shadow's gun hand hard against his chest; with the fist of that same arm, he clutched The Shadow's throat.

Even while he choked his adversary, Poroq thought of the knife. The Shadow's left fist was losing the grip that restrained Poroq's bladed right hand. The bandit yanked his right wrist clear; he shifted leftward, as he poised his right hand for a downward stab to The Shadow's heart.

POROQ'S thrust never came. In his anxiety to clear the path for the blade, the bandit made his one mistake. He moved the arm that had The Shadow's gun hand pinned. Poroq did not expect disaster, for The Shadow's fist was still unable to come free; but it did perform a move that Poroq had not anticipated.

Poroq's cross-armed pressure was off the gun barrel. The Shadow's pinned hand levered the muzzle upward; his finger pressed the trigger.

That shot was dulled beneath the muffling hulk of Poroq's chest. The bullet had less than two inches to travel to its target. Poroq's poised hand wavered crazily, as his body towered upward as if jolted from below. Then the knife hand came downward at a slant, Poroq's body with it.

The blade drove past The Shadow's shoulder, drove deep into the turf. Carried by the weight of his descending arm, Poroq rolled over beside The Shadow.

Crawling to hands and knees, The Shadow puffed for breath; then arose unsteadily. His slouch hat fell from his head. His cloak, ripped in the struggle, hung from one shoulder. Poroq lay on the very edge of the shaded ground beneath the sagebrush. The Shadow was standing in the light between his dead foe and the arroyo.

It was his own position that made The Shadow suddenly realize the possibility of new danger. Instinctively, he looked along the edge of the arroyo; then across, to a rocky ledge where sunlight supplied its last tints. There, by freakish chance, The Shadow caught a glimpse of another menacing figure. He saw a man stretched upon the ledge, aiming at long range with a rifle.

The distance was great, far beyond the reach of a pistol shot. Yet the range was not too long for a rifle expert. The Shadow's best chance against the sharpshooter lay in the trickiness of the light, which had become splotchy by the clump of sagebrush. Quick motion, amid the increasing gloom, might offset the first shot.

The Shadow shifted away from the sagebrush; then moved again, in the direction where Poroq's body lay. The rifle crackled as The Shadow made the quick reverse twist. A bullet buried itself in the sandy slope just behind The Shadow's shoulder, with a plop! as sharp in sound as an explosion.

The Shadow did not halt his dive. He sprawled beneath the sagebrush, beside Poroq's body.

THE trick shift had fooled the marksman; but The Shadow knew that the man was still on watch. Chances were that the fellow had arrived after The Shadow's struggle with Poroq; otherwise, the shot would have come sooner. Further strategy was needed, without delay.

On the ground, The Shadow drew his torn cloak from his shoulders, to spread it across Poroq's form. Rolling the bulky body beneath the shelter of the sagebrush, The Shadow shrouded the limp form in the cloak. With one arm, he hoisted the shoulders upward, then put his whole strength beneath Poroq's dead weight.

Like a wounded figure rising from the ground, Poroq's black-clad corpse moved upward from the sagebrush.

For a long moment, the cloaked body swayed on a balance point, as The Shadow shifted downward behind it. In the dimming light, Poroq's shape looked like The Shadow's. It offered a perfect target for the watching rifleman. With final effort, The Shadow gave Poroq's figure a forward thrust and dropped flat, as the bulky corpse tilted toward the arroyo.

At that instant, the rifle spoke again. This time, its bullet found a mark. Poroq's body quivered as if imbued with new life. The corpse wavered haltingly; the bullet's impact had slowed its forward fall.

Before The Shadow could stretch forward to deliver an added shove, the body caved and rolled headlong. Clearing the sagebrush, Poroq's bulk went tumbling down into the arroyo, carrying the black cloak wrapped around it.

THE SHADOW waited. He saw the marksman on the opposite ledge turn and look westward along the arroyo. The man gave a shout, that must have been answered, for he pointed downward. He came from his crag, slid down the slope and went out of sight into the arroyo.

The Shadow came from the sagebrush and approached the bridge. He could hear hoofbeats coming eastward in the arroyo, telling the arrival of men on horses. That proved that the lower road rejoined the upper. By his ruse, The Shadow had diverted a whole troop of men who had been coming toward him from the other side of the pass. Since they had gone into the arroyo, The Shadow's way was clear.

Moving across the bridge, The Shadow reached the big rock. He mounted his horse and rode boldly toward the bridge, to prepare for the final dash. The Shadow knew that the men in the arroyo would soon find Poroq's body.

Below, the first horseman reached the marksman from the cliff. Dismounting, he struck a match. The glow showed faces that The Shadow would have recognized. The marksman was Tompino. The dismounted man was Sancho Maringuez. Tompino pointed to a black-shrouded body. Maringuez cried angrily, in Spanish:

"Fool! Why did you kill him? I told you we sought a prisoner, not a dead man!"

Tompino grumbled that the victim had fallen into the arroyo. Maringuez stooped, whipped back a fold of the cloak. A dead face stared up into the matchlight. Tompino saw it, also, and uttered:

"It is Poroq! How did he come here?"

"He tried his own luck," purred Maringuez. "It was a bad mistake for Poroq. He has met El Ombre!"

Tompino recognized the Spanish name for The Shadow. He had heard of that dreaded foe, whose power stretched out to find all men of crime.

The match flickered out. A clatter sounded from above. Amid the pound of a horse's hoofs, there came the burst of an outlandish laugh, that quivered its echoes down into the arroyo. The walls of the pass caught the mockery, flung it again and again upon the ears of those who stared upward.

SHOUTS rose from Maringuez's men. They had heard the horseman's dash

across the bridge. They whipped their rifles from their saddles, expecting an order from Maringuez. None came. Shots would have been useless, had Maringuez chosen to give them. Once across the bridge, The Shadow was riding westward above the sheltering brink of the arroyo.

"El Ombre!" Maringuez chuckled the name fiercely. "He is riding like the wind. Go back to the others, Tompino. Tell them that it is useless to pursue The Shadow."

Tompino went toward the horsemen. Sancho Maringuez listened in the darkness. He heard the fading of hoofbeats, far along the upper road. He shrugged his shoulders, as if to prove to himself that he was correct regarding The Shadow's speed.

Maringuez struck another match. Pulling away the folds of the black cloak, he began a search of Poroq's pockets. Deep in one, he found a rounded object, larger than a coin. Maringuez brought it to the light.

The disk looked like an ancient medal. Stamped upon it was the device of an Aztec pyramid. Maringuez turned the medal over in his hand. Upon the copper surface he viewed the glaring image of a reptilian face, topped by a plumed headdress. The medal was the token of Quetzal.

Maringuez thrust the copper piece into a pocket of his velvet jacket. Striding back through the darkness, he rejoined his men. Tompino had mounted an extra horse and was seated beside Maringuez's steed. The bandit mounted; gave a raspy order for departure.

As they rode from the arroyo, Tompino spoke to his chief.

"It was as you expected," declared the lieutenant. "Whoever came from the hacienda would take the road to Ensenada. It was to please you that Poroq came here alone, before us."

"Enough, Tompino," returned Maringuez, in the smooth tone that was as emphatic as any command. "Let us talk no more of Poroq, nor of The Shadow. It is your duty to obey my orders; not to question the acts of others."

The rebuke struck home to Tompino. It made the lieutenant realize that Maringuez might have ordered Poroq to maintain his own one-man ambush along the lonely road. That thought gave Tompino speculation for the future.

Usually, Maringuez's plans were a mystery to the slow-thinking Tompino; but this time the lieutenant was sure that he could predict them. Sooner or later, Maringuez would meet El Ombre. Tompino hoped he would be on hand as witness, when the bandit dealt with The Shadow in repayment for Poroq's death.

CHAPTER V IN ENSENADA

IT was more than a night's ride across the Sierras to the Pacific. The Shadow, from the beginning of his journey, had known that he could not reach the coastal town of Ensenada much before noon. Creeth had emphasized that fact; but had seen no danger in it.

By dawn, Creeth had said, The Shadow would be past the danger zone controlled by Sancho Maringuez. He would be in a region near the coast, where there were occasional villages along the last stretch to Ensenada.

To The Shadow, the final stage of the journey offered the greatest hazard, even though he had not expressed that opinion to Creeth. The Shadow had depended upon darkness to carry him past the bandit region. He was convinced that agents of Quetzal would be found beyond the mountain passes, particularly in the district close to Ensenada. There, The Shadow would have to elude them by day.

If word reached the master crook that The Shadow had survived the plane wreck, enemies would be prepared for his arrival at Ensenada. Doubtless, they would have a description of Lamont Cranston. They could even identify The Shadow's horse as a mount that had come from Creeth's hacienda.

That was why The Shadow delayed his approach to Ensenada. The day passed, until noon had gone by; yet no Americano appeared near the outskirts of Ensenada.

It was siesta time when a plodding rider arrived outside the town. He

bore no resemblance to The Shadow. This rider appeared to be a Mexican of the poorer class. He was attired in old, ill-fitting clothes; his darkened face looked long and droopy beneath the broad brim of a battered straw sombrero.

The horse that the Mexican rode was a weary nag that could hardly stand a half-day's journey. It seemed to sag under the weight of its rider and the frayed saddle pack that hung beside him. Even though the pack was a light one, the horse apparently disliked the added burden.

Close to Ensenada, the Mexican paused to rest his horse. Before him lay the narrow streets that marked the center of the town; beyond was the blue bay of Todos Los Santos, where a clumsy steamship was moored among smaller craft.

To the average traveler, Ensenada would appear to be a pitiful town; and its harbor a poor one. To local inhabitants, however, the place was important. Ensenada, with its population of more than three thousand, was by far the largest town south of Tia Juana. Moreover, it was the only seaport along two hundred and fifty miles of coast. That accounted for the presence of some handsome yachts among the smaller craft in the harbor. And the boats also indicated another fact.

Ensenada had gained popularity since the opening of a highway south from the International Boundary. It was a spot that attracted tourists from California, who wanted a real glimpse of Old Mexico. Most Americans drove down by car; but some—as the yachts indicated—preferred the water route.

THE mounted Mexican grinned, as though the view of Ensenada pleased him. Clucking to his horse, he rode toward the town and soon reached a narrow street where balconies projected from the second floors of white-walled buildings. He weaved his way through an alleyway; then to another street. The Mexican had reached the center of Ensenada.

Few persons were abroad during the siesta hour. Occasional white-clad Mexicans, lounging beneath balconies, looked asleep on their feet. Most of the shops were closed, with blinds drawn; yet there were eyes that scanned the stranger who rode so slowly. Loungers, and watchers from shop windows, were studying all persons who came to Ensenada. The ill-clad Mexican passed their inspection. He could not be the man for whom they watched.

On a side street, the Mexican stopped his horse beside a small building that served as a hotel. He eyed it sleepily, as though the place offered a chance for a siesta. Dismounting, he hitched his horse in the shade and entered. A sleeping clerk woke up and eyed the new guest sourly, until the latter plunked some silver pesos on the counter.

Money commanded respect. The clerk decided that he had a room, even for so ill-attired a guest. He showed the arrival to a room and arranged to stable the sorry horse. As the clerk left the room, the new guest sprawled upon the bed to take his siesta.

Two hours later, the ill-clad Mexican reappeared downstairs. He slouched out to the street; saw a clothing shop a few doors away. Siesta time had passed. The shop had opened for business. The droopy-faced Mexican was grinning as he jingled a pocketful of silver pesos. When he came back to the hotel, he carried a large bundle to his room. There, he changed attire.

In place of a peon, he became an example of the latest in Mexican fashions. The clothes that he had bought were expensive ones. He looked like a visitor from Mexico City, rather than an arrival from the hills. His face had lost its droopiness.

Looking into a large, cracked mirror beside the bed, the transformed Mexican indulged in a slight smile. From his lips came the whisper of a laugh. It was an echo of the taunt that had sounded above the arroyo in the Sierras.

The Mexican was The Shadow. Outside of Ensenada, he had found a village, where a silver-hoarding peon had gladly exchanged horses and given old clothes and pesos in addition.

Opening the frayed saddle bag, The Shadow produced his briefcase. From it, he brought a flat make-up kit and retouched the dye that adorned his face. He also produced a silver-mounted revolver that he had gained in exchange for

an automatic. It was the sort of weapon that went with his new attire.

Strolling to the stairs, The Shadow watched the clerk counting money. When the fellow turned to put the cash in a strong box, The Shadow strolled out through the door. The clerk looked up just in time to see The Shadow's departure. He thought that the well-dressed Mexican was someone who had stepped in from the street, and then decided to go out again.

THE streets of Ensenada had livened. Dusk was approaching; automobiles were arriving from the North. Storekeepers were preparing their shops for the benefit of Americanos, who were apt to spend many pesos. All around were eager-eyed Mexicans, ready to steer visitors to restaurants and casinos where the night life flourished.

They paid no attention to The Shadow. They took him for a Mexican, and they were looking for Americans. But among those watchers, The Shadow knew, were some who were looking for one specific Americano. They were hoping to see a hawk-faced stranger who answered the description of Lamont Cranston.

Agents of Quetzal were due for disappointment. The Shadow had reversed the tables. He was spotting them, one by one. Entering a tobacco shop, he bought a packet of cigars. Pocketing a handful of copper change, he placed a thin cigar between his lips and politely nudged a staring Mexican away from the cigar lighter at the window.

The fellow moved aside; kept up his ceaseless stare toward the street. He was looking for The Shadow, that lounge, not knowing that the personage he sought was at that moment lighting a cigar at his elbow.

Leaving the tobacco shop, The Shadow came to a small restaurant that bore the sign: "Cafe Federal." Inside were Mexicans sipping mescal and tequila. A fat-faced proprietor was at the door, as though advertising the fact that dinners were already being served.

As The Shadow paused for a few last puffs at his cigar, a solemn-faced Indian staggered up to the cafe, weighted by a huge burden of blankets. He dropped the load beside the doorway and began to spread the blankets, gazing askance at the cafe proprietor. The fat-faced Mexican laughed.

"Very well, Moyo," he said, in Spanish. "You may sell the blankets here. But you must tell the Americanos that they should try the Cafe Federal."

Moyo nodded solemnly, and kept on preparing his display of blankets. Two Americans arrived; they shook their heads as Moyo held up a blanket. The Indian gestured toward the cafe; the Americans paused, then decided to go in there. The fat proprietor beamed toward Moyo and followed the customers, to show them to a table in the cafe.

Moyo saw The Shadow; held up a blanket in hope that he might sell it to the well-dressed Mexican. The Shadow took the blanket; then returned it. Stooping toward the Indian, he spoke in low-toned Spanish:

"I am Senor Rembole."

Moyo's dull eyes sparkled. The Indian mumbled the question:

"You wish a blanket, senor?"

"Si," returned The Shadow. "One with a red border."

"I have one." Moyo reached among the blankets. "The price is twenty-five pesos."

The Shadow shook his head as Moyo produced the blanket. He took the corner of the blanket from the Indian's hand, and remarked:

"It is worth no more than twenty."

Moyo's eyes gleamed again. The Indian pressed his hand against The Shadow's. Beneath the corner of the blanket, The Shadow's fingers received a tiny wad of paper. With a last glance, The Shadow tossed the blanket to Moyo; turning away, he entered the Cafe Federal.

AT a table near the window, The Shadow opened the message with one hand, holding a printed menu, he glanced at the paper in his palm. He read these words, in English:

Casino Del Toro. Room E. Nine o'clock.

R.

As The Shadow's glance was lowered, a coupé rolled along the street outside. Seated by the Mexican driver was a Spanish woman of marked beauty. Her blackish eyes and hair formed a marked contrast to her olive tinted skin. Hers was a face so striking that it could not well be forgotten.

Oddly, the woman could remember faces that she had seen before, as well as others could recollect her. Like men who strolled the streets of Ensenada, she was looking for a masklike countenance that went with Lamont Cranston. She saw The Shadow seated in the window of the cafe; but, on this occasion, her memory went amiss. Despite the keenness of her gaze, the Spanish woman failed to pierce The Shadow's present disguise.

It was unfortunate that Moyo had never seen the woman before. Otherwise, he might have had a message of his own for The Shadow. As it happened, the Indian was busy with his blankets. He did not even notice the coupé as it rolled past.

Nor did The Shadow. As he pocketed the crumpled message, he looked out to the street, just too late to see the car that carried the observant passenger. A waiter approached; The Shadow ordered dinner. He intended to bide his time at the Cafe Federal until the hour of nine.

Had The Shadow spied the woman in the car, his plans would have undergone immediate change. Of all persons who might be in Ensenada, that woman could prove to be most dangerous. Her present destination had much to do with The Shadow's cause. If he had seen Dolores Borenza, he would have left the Cafe Federal and taken up her trail.

More than that, The Shadow would have sent a warning through Moyo, to reach the messenger-sender who had signed himself "R." The Shadow would never have let hours drift, had he known that Dolores Borenza was in Ensenada.

So far, The Shadow had defeated the thrusts of the superplotter called Quetzal. At this hour, The Shadow's mission seemed on the verge of success. That was no longer a certainty.

Greater menace was to confront The Shadow, thanks to Dolores Borenza.

CHAPTER VI

SYMBOLS OF THE SERPENT

SOON after the coupé had passed the Cafe Federal, it swung from the narrow streets of Ensenada and followed a road that led to a high-walled quadrangle just outside the town. That wall marked the presidio of Ensenada; khaki-uniformed soldiers were on guard outside the military reservation.

The driver of the coupé announced that he had business with the commandant. The car was allowed to pass through the gate. It rolled past a squatly building that served as the military prison, where ugly faces leered through barred windows. Farther on, the car arrived at the commandant's headquarters.

The driver alighted long enough to speak to a sentry. When the soldier took the message indoors, the man stepped back into the coupé. Dolores Borenza opened the door on her side of the car, preparing to step out as soon as the sentry returned.

In the commandant's office, a tall, lean officer was seated at a desk. He wore the uniform of a Mexican colonel; and he was busy opening a long envelope that was addressed to Colonel Pedro Laplata, commandant at Ensenada.

Anticipation showed on the tawny, withered countenance of Colonel Laplata. His leatherish lips framed a smile, as his avaricious fingers drew a bundle of American currency from the envelope.

There were one thousand dollars in the bundle. The commandant spread the bills to count them; but stopped abruptly when he heard the sentry's rap at the door. Thrusting the money into a desk drawer, the colonel barked a command to enter.

The sentry stepped in with the news that a senorita named Dolores Borenza had requested an interview with Colonel Laplata. The commandant

ordered the sentry to usher in the visitor.

Colonel Laplata was pacing the space in front of his desk when Dolores arrived. His dryish forehead furrowed when he met the visitor. Dolores Borenza was clad in black, a hue that added to her charm. Her attire, though, gave her an insidious appearance that troubled the commandant.

"You wished to see me," remarked the colonel, cautiously. "May I inquire why, senorita?"

Dolores smiled, as she seated herself near the colonel's desk. Without a word, she opened a silver cigarette case and extracted a silk-tipped cigarette. She turned the interior of the case so that the inner lid was toward the commandant. There, the colonel saw an engraved device: the plumed serpent that represented Quetzal.

The commandant stood rigid, as Dolores snapped the cigarette case shut. The click roused him. He faced the inquiring glint of the woman's eyes. Turning about, the commandant stepped past his desk, to a small shelf that formed a niche in the wall. On that shelf was a crude vase, a relic of Aztec pottery. The colonel turned the vase so that the back half came in view.

Emblazoned upon the Aztec vase was the plumed head of Quetzal. The commandant turned toward Dolores. His visitor displayed a wise smile.

"What do you wish?" inquired the commandant, his tone a strained one. "I have done all that Quetzal has asked, in repayment for the funds that I receive. My soldiers have arrested none of those who serve Quetzal."

"They must do more," declared Dolores. "Quetzal has a new demand, senior commandant."

THE colonel sat down at his desk. He viewed Dolores steadily. He saw her as one who was in the close confidence of the mysterious Quetzal.

"The ways of Quetzal baffle me," admitted the colonel. "For months, he has been interested in the irrigation project at the mouth of the Colorado River. But that is leagues from here-across the Sierras, on the Gulf of California.

"True, there are Americanos there-engineers employed by some huge company. Perhaps Quetzal does not like the gringos; but why should he send spies to the Colorado delta? Why should those spies come here? What does it mean to some foreign government, the one with whom Quetzal has negotiated?"

Dolores wore a sphinx-like smile, that offered no promise of an answer. When she spoke, however, she produced the explanation that the commandant wanted. Her words brought amazement to Colonel Laplata's tawny face.

"The project at the mouth of the Colorado," declared Dolores, "is not one of irrigation. It concerns the establishment of a huge military base, for ships and for planes. The corporation that has supplied the funds is the government of the United States!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the commandant. "The mouth of the Colorado is in Mexican territory!"

"Quite true," agreed Dolores. "The operations are the result of a secret treaty between Mexico and the United States. That is why they have adopted the irrigation camouflage. The actual men in charge are military engineers from Washington."

Colonel Laplata tilted back in his chair. He spread his lips in a smile. He chortled, as he brought the money from the desk drawer. He thwacked the bills between his hands.

"I have worried because of this!" he exclaimed. "I have thought perhaps I made a mistake to take gringo money from Quetzal. Bah! My worries were foolish!"

"I detest the gringos"-the commandant was glaring as he spoke. "I must protect the Americanos who come to Ensenada, because it is my duty; and they have a consul here. You understand that, senorita-"

"Of course. That is why Quetzal chose you. He knew you would be pleased when you learned that your efforts would make trouble for the American government."

THE commandant seemed more pleased than ever. He nestled his chin in his hand and gazed from the window, toward the mountains, as if visualizing the mouth of the Colorado River, miles beyond.

"It is very plain," declared the commandant. "The gringos fear for their Pacific coast. They must extend their line of defense. Perhaps they would like this whole territory of Baja California to be theirs; but they would never dare to ask for it.

"Never, for they have robbed Mexico much in the past. So, instead, they seek a treaty; and they gain it. They are allowed to spend their millions of dollars, establishing a base. They promise to defend Mexico in return; but it is their own skins that they wish to protect. Irrigation? Of course, they will give that, too. They must cover their military operations.

"One man has learned all that." Colonel Laplata's eyes showed admiration. "Quetzal, he calls himself. He has sent spies to the Colorado delta. They have come here, to Ensenada, where all is safe. The information will be gathered by Quetzal, delivered to the government that expects it. Ah, it is good, senorita. All very good!"

The commandant's enthusiasm was exceeding the hopes of Dolores Borenza. The time had come for her to deliver new orders from Quetzal. Dolores showed wisdom in her method.

"All was well," she told the commandant, "until the Americanos learned of Quetzal. They sent their own spies to Ensenada."

"Ah!" exclaimed the colonel. "That is why the men of Quetzal were so busy here."

"Yes. It became death for any gringo to visit Ensenada in the service of his government. Only one has stayed here; one whom we could not find. He belongs to the American secret service. His name is James Rikeland."

Dolores paused. She saw that the commandant was fuming inwardly, as though he would have liked the news before.

"We have found James Rikeland," added Dolores. "Tonight, he will die, before he can speak the facts that he has learned."

A smile gleamed from the commandant's face. Colonel Laplata approved of the prospective murder. Suddenly, his expression changed. Angrily, he snapped:

"You say Rikeland will die before he speaks? If he is here alone, who can hear him speak?"

"The Shadow," returned Dolores. "El Ombre is here in Ensenada!"

COLONEL LAPLATA stiffened in his chair. He had heard of The Shadow. His tawny face showed dismay, as he watched Dolores draw a folded paper from a pocket of her dress. Calmly, the senorita spoke:

"The Shadow was summoned to Washington. He was sent to contact Rikeland. I learned of it. I started for Ensenada before The Shadow left Washington. Word reached Quetzal. The Shadow's plane was destroyed."

Pleasure showed on Laplata's leathery lips. It faded when Dolores added:

"The Shadow escaped alive, with the pilot. They reached a hacienda owned by an Americano named Latimer Creeth. The Shadow rode by horse for Ensenada. The pilot has gone to Mexico City; no harm will be done him, for he knows nothing.

"Death was planned for The Shadow in the mountains. He escaped it. By this time, he is in Ensenada. Every Americano has been watched. We are sure that not one can be The Shadow."

Colonel Laplata sat puzzled. Suddenly, an idea struck him. He recalled what he had heard of The Shadow's ability at disguise. He exclaimed:

"El Ombre! Un Mexicano!"

Dolores Borenza nodded.

"If The Shadow has adopted such disguise," she declared, "there will be no complications, senior commandant. Once captured, he will become a prisoner, here at your presidio."

The possibility pleased the commandant immensely. He displayed

enthusiasm; then curbed it.

"Buenos," he declared. "But I shall be careful, senorita. All will be done in good military fashion."

"That is the way Quetzal would prefer it."

Dolores arose. The colonel came up from the desk, turned about to twist the vase so that its serpent emblem faced the wall. He accompanied Dolores out to the car. Dusk had settled over the presidio; the lights of Ensenada were twinkling off beyond the high wall.

"One question, senorita," remarked the commandant in a low tone, as they neared the coupé. "You have seen Quetzal?"

Dolores paused to shake her head.

"Who has seen Quetzal?" she returned. "No one. Not, at least, to know him. I might be Quetzal; so might you, senor commandant; but neither of us are."

"Today, word reached me from Quetzal. I do not know from where he sent it. I learned the facts that I have told to you. I learned this also"-the woman's tone had lowered to a whisper. "Quetzal will be in Ensenada tonight."

"To deal with Rikeland?"

"Yes. And perhaps to meet The Shadow, afterward. Your assistance, senor commandant, may not be necessary."

Dolores entered the car. Colonel Laplata watched the coupé drive from the presidio. When it had gone, the commandant returned to his office. He counted his new money; added it to a larger hoard of currency in a metal box at the bottom of the lowest desk drawer. He gloated, as he viewed the funds that he had received from Quetzal. That sort of money pleased the commandant.

Coolly, the colonel began to prepare the orders for the night. Soldiers would be plentiful in Ensenada this evening; soldiers who wore Mexican uniforms and were loyal to their government, but who took instructions from Colonel Laplata.

As such, the full military force at the presidio would become the unwitting tools of Quetzal. The master-spy who used the serpent emblem had chosen well, when he had added Colonel Pedro Laplata to his pay roll.

The Shadow, should he escape the toils of Quetzal, would find himself opposed by overwhelming odds, represented by an entire Mexican regiment.

The capture of The Shadow seemed a certainty to Colonel Laplata; and such capture would produce a definite sequel:

Death to The Shadow!

CHAPTER VII

AT THE CASINO DEL TORO

IT was nearly nine o'clock when The Shadow left the Cafe Federal. Beneath the outer balcony, he saw Moyo, still peddling his blankets. The stout-faced Indian did not even glance at the supposed Mexican to whom he had given Rikeland's message.

Sauntering amid the street throngs, The Shadow summed the facts that he had been told concerning Rikeland. The man had lived in Mexico for years; he had served as special contact between the Mexican government and Washington, chiefly to aid in the maintenance of the arms embargo that prevented revolutions.

Spies had been reported at the Colorado delta. They had been linked with Ensenada. Rikeland had gone to Ensenada immediately, from Mexico City. That was why he had passed unsuspected by the agents of Quetzal. Unfortunately, Rikeland could not leave Ensenada; and those who had tried to reach him had failed.

The task had become The Shadow's. Here in Ensenada, he had found the one aid whom Rikeland trusted: Moyo, the Indian blanket-seller. The message passed by Moyo was emphatic proof that Rikeland still believed himself safe.

Was Rikeland safe?

The Shadow had asked himself that question often during the past few hours. The answer was uncertain; but the fact that Rikeland had survived so

long in Ensenada put the odds in the government agent's favor. Nevertheless, The Shadow kept a keen lookout for any factors that might prove otherwise. Oddly, the evidences that The Shadow saw pointed definitely to Rikeland's advantage.

Quetzal's agents were as numerous as before, apparently looking for an American who answered the description of Lamont Cranston. Since they were on the streets in numbers, it was obvious that they would be few at the Casino Del Toro. The other factor that The Shadow noted was the prevalence of soldiers in uniform.

The Shadow had received no information regarding any tie-up between Quetzal's men and the military. News of such a league would certainly have reached Mexico City, to be forwarded to Washington. Furthermore, the Mexican government would have applied quick clamps of its own.

In fact, the presence of the soldiers looked like a handicap for Quetzal's agents. The Shadow noticed loungers shift whenever uniformed men neared them. The mistrust was not faked; that was why it actually deceived The Shadow. Quetzal was managing a clever game tonight. Neither his own men nor the soldiers knew that they had a common cause.

Quetzal's men were looking for an American. The soldiers had orders to bring in any Mexican who started trouble. Those separate aims promised trouble for The Shadow. In the meantime, the soldiers were suspiciously watching the very men who were to become their allies later.

THE SHADOW reached the Casino Del Toro. It was a pretentious place, compared with others in Ensenada. The front formed a sidewalk cafe; beyond the tables was a dance floor, with a small orchestra in the background. Tables lined the side walls; The Shadow saw booths that were scarcely noticeable beneath the modulated light.

Passing among the nearer tables, The Shadow reached the innermost portion of the sidewalk cafe. He ordered a bottle of wine; while the waiter was bringing it, he watched a dance begin. The couples who came from the tables included a fair proportion of Mexicans; but Americans were in the majority.

The main room was a high one; for its three inner walls were flanked by a balcony, with stairways at each rear corner. The Shadow saw doors open along the balcony. Diners who had engaged private rooms were coming down to the dance floor.

Counting along the left wall, The Shadow saw one door that did not open. It was the fifth in the row, the door that would logically designate Room E.

The waiter brought the bottle of wine. The Shadow filled a glass, lifted it, and paused to look across the dance floor. His dyed face displayed a sudden smile; apparently, he had recognized a friend in a party at a far table. Putting down the glass, The Shadow left his table and went around the dance floor. All the while, his smile increased.

Any one who happened to notice him supposed that he was some Mexican who had recognized old friends. The Shadow seemed quite anxious to reach his comrades; but he ran into obstacles. Tables blocked his path; so did waiters. Before he reached the corner table, its occupants had risen and were stepping toward the dance floor.

The Shadow paused; with a shrug of his shoulders, he decided to wait at the corner table until the dance was finished. He sat down and lighted one of his long cigars. Through half-closed eyelids, he made sure that he had attracted no attention.

The dance ended, patrons began to crowd back toward the tables. Hidden from conspicuous view, The Shadow arose and strolled toward the near-by staircase. He followed several persons who were going up to one of the private dining rooms.

They passed the door on which The Shadow saw the letter "E," plain at this close range. As the others went into different rooms, The Shadow kept on past them until he reached Room A, which, like Room E, was unoccupied. The

Shadow remained there until the music began anew.

The music of the next dance was the sort that proved irresistible to the upstairs diners. The orchestra was playing "La Cucaracha"; the notes of the ever-popular tune brought a round of applause from the crowd. Doors opened along the balcony. Every one was starting down to the dance floor.

The Shadow followed the throng until he reached the door of Room E. There, he paused; he eased the door inward and stepped into darkness. A moment later, the door eased shut behind him.

IN the darkness, The Shadow spoke two names, using a low-toned Spanish accent. They were the only countersign he needed. One, the name of the man whom he had come to meet; the other, the name which he himself was using:

"Rikeland-Rembole-"

With his right hand on the handle of his silver-mounted revolver, The Shadow pressed the light switch with his left. He had located the switch instantly, thanks to his inspection of a similar room along the balcony. Lights glimmered from a ceiling chandelier. The Shadow studied the interior of a seemingly deserted room.

His right fingers tightened; the revolver came into view. Nine o'clock had passed; Rikeland's absence signified that something had gone wrong. The Shadow had counted upon Rikeland being present earlier than the exact hour named in the message.

At first glance, the room appeared undisturbed. Like Room A, it was simply furnished, with a round dining table and chairs in the center. The wall at the right had a long mirror; that at the left, a curtained doorway that connected with the next dining room. In this respect, Room E was the reverse of Room A, which had the connecting door at the right.

The Shadow shifted toward the left. The move gave him a view beyond the table. There, The Shadow saw the projecting elbow of a huddled body. He stepped past the table, looked down upon an upturned face. He saw the drawn features of a blunt-faced man, whose head was partially bald.

The victim answered The Shadow's description of James Rikeland.

THE slain man was clad in tuxedo; his white shirt front was gory. A knife-thrust to the heart had finished Rikeland. A hanging corner of the tablecloth showed crimson streaks where a murderer had calmly wiped blood from the knife-blade.

Rikeland's fists were clenched, as though ready for battle that he had never been able to give. From one projected a torn slip of paper. Stooping, The Shadow drew it from the dead man's grasp. Spreading the paper in his left hand, he arose, moved nearer the table and raised the slip to read it in the light.

There were penciled words, in Rikeland's handwriting. They matched the message that The Shadow had received earlier. That message had conformed to specimens of Rikeland's handwriting that The Shadow had been shown in Washington.

The strip of paper was a slender one. It had been torn from the right edge of a single sheet. The murderer had taken the bulk of the message. Not even a complete word remained on the portion that The Shadow had found. The fragment showed these parts of words:

zal.
ana
eign
gnal
able
no.

The letters were carefully written, as had been the case with Rikeland's previous message. The inference was obvious. Rikeland had prepared a brief report for The Shadow, in case he found it impossible to make more than

passing contact.

Much though he trusted Moyo, he had been unwilling to send his information by the Indian, for Moyo might have made some mistake. Rikeland had intended at least to see The Shadow, before giving him this important word.

It was not probable that Rikeland's murderer had been in too great haste to take the remaining piece of the torn message. The cold-blooded kill was proof that the assassin was a man of iron nerve. That, and the importance of the murder, indicated that Quetzal himself had done the deed.

There were other reasons why a murderer like Quetzal would have left the torn paper in Rikeland's fist. Perhaps because the narrow fragment seemed a worthless clue; possibly as a grim jest for the benefit of the person who found the body.

Neither of these were sufficient for The Shadow. They did not go deep enough. There was a greater, more insidious, reason why The Shadow had discovered the remains of Rikeland's message. The purpose was already realized. Quetzal expected The Shadow to come here. He had left the clue to attract The Shadow's attention; to hold him on the scene of crime.

The Shadow had suspected that, the moment he took the paper from Rikeland's fist. That was why he raised the paper to the light. At the Cafe Federal, The Shadow had given full attention to a message, because danger had been absent there.

Here, the case was different. By holding the paper almost to the level of his eyes, The Shadow was able to look beyond it. His slight sidestep toward the light gave another advantage that he wanted.

Across the room, The Shadow could see the wall mirror. It gave him a reflected view of the curtained doorway that was no more than five feet behind his right shoulder. The Shadow was watching for a motion there. He saw the slight rustle that he expected.

There was an upward creep beneath the curtain. It went too high to be a leveling gun. The motion signified a hidden knife, raised in a murderer's hand. Behind that curtain, Quetzal was preparing for a forward drive, its finish the downward sweep of a knife-thrust, with The Shadow's neck the target.

RIKELAND'S body had been placed at a perfect spot for the murderer to strike. Quetzal had expected The Shadow to remain there while he studied the slip of paper. The Shadow had balked that plan; but he was still within the murderer's range. He had, however, gained two advantages that the killer did not suspect.

The Shadow knew that Quetzal intended to use a knife instead of a gun. He could also see the reflected motions of the curtain that concealed the murderer.

Music was loud from the dance floor below. The orchestra was repeating the chorus of "La Cucaracha"; voices were shouting the words of the song. There was time to deal with the murderer behind the curtain, before persons came up to the balcony. The Shadow decided to speed Quetzal's move.

With his left hand, he tucked the torn paper slip into his pocket. He placed his revolver beneath his coat. His right foot moved, as though starting its first step toward the door. Instantly, a knife-blade glimmered its reflection from the mirror. Curtains were parting at the top. The murderer was starting his drive with a long swing of the arm.

The move that The Shadow performed was a backward drop, that carried him below the level of the mirror. He lost all sight of the reflected curtain. Instead of that view, he received the drive of the killer's body.

The stabbing hand sped across The Shadow's shoulder. Speeding upward, The Shadow's fists clamped the assassin's throat. A gurgled snarl sounded from lips that The Shadow did not see. The blade dropped from Quetzal's hand, as the halted murderer tried to grapple in return.

Crouched, The Shadow heaved upward. He was ready to release that hold. When he did, his opponent would hurtle headlong under the impetus that The

Shadow's arms could give. A skull cracking crash against the wall would end a murderer's attempt at flight.

Toying with his writhing antagonist, The Shadow swung around to head Quetzal toward the wall beside the curtain.

The twist carried The Shadow's gaze toward the outer doorway. Timed to his swing, the door bashed inward. On the threshold stood a glaring Mexican. The fellow's fist was at his hip, leveling a revolver. Chance had brought one of Quetzal's men here to witness the conquest of his chief.

WHILE the door still swung inward, The Shadow lunged. Like a human catapult, he propelled his burden straight for the aiming Mexican. The figure of Quetzal formed a whirling mass, as it struck the man in the doorway. Both figures sprawled across the balcony and crashed hard against the wooden rail above the dance floor.

There were shouts from the stairs. Others of Quetzal's men had followed the first-comer from the floor below.

The Shadow did not wait to view Quetzal's slow rise from the balcony rail. The killer was on hands and knees, groggy, his face turned toward the floor; but the Mexican with the revolver was swinging to aim toward The Shadow.

Slamming the door, The Shadow cut off the attack. He snapped the light switch; sprang for the curtain where Quetzal had so lately hidden. Beyond the curtain, The Shadow found the connecting door. It yielded when he turned the knob. The Shadow had expected that door to open. He knew that Quetzal had intended to exit that way.

What The Shadow did not expect was the greeting that he received. He had seen diners leave this room--the one marked "D"--to join the dance on the floor below. Room D, therefore, should have been empty. Instead, it was occupied. Two men stood on either side of the closed outer door, each with a leveled revolver. One was a grinning Mexican; the other a hard-faced American.

Agents of Quetzal, both. Sentinels whom the master-plotter had placed here to guard his retreat. The Shadow, his gun but half drawn, was blocked by these watchers who had not moved from their posts.

A clatter from the next room told that new attackers were arriving there. The Shadow's chance for retreat was ended. Where a lone murderer had failed, a score of killers were ready to sound The Shadow's doom.

CHAPTER VIII DEATH POSTPONED

IN the crisis that so suddenly confronted him, The Shadow seized the only course that promised life. Battle, alone, could save him from the horde of Quetzal.

The situation called for a drive past the two guards who blocked the door of this tawdry dining room; yet blind attack would bring certain death to The Shadow. That knowledge flashed instantly to his brain; and with it, The Shadow instinctively found an answer to the dilemma.

He had swung the connecting door toward the two men who blocked the outlet. His left hand was on the knob; his right was drawing the revolver. Instead of driving toward the two men in the light, The Shadow swung back into the darkened room that he had just left, pulling the door shut with him.

As he performed the sudden retreat, The Shadow saw the two men spring toward him. Their revolvers blasted toward the closing door. The bullets were belated, by less than a half second; but that was sufficient for The Shadow.

Wheeling clear about, The Shadow still gripped the knob of the connecting door with his left hand. To his right was the outer door of the darkened room; through it were plunging Quetzal's main force of desperadoes. They were aiming for the curtain of the connecting door. Before the first-comers could fire, The Shadow's revolver spoke.

Shafts of flame stabbed from the curtain; three quick shots that were fired with precision. Oncoming attackers floundered; those behind them dived

for the darkness all about the room. Of a half dozen, The Shadow had floored a pair; but the others, scattering, ended The Shadow's advantage. When those spreading marksmen aimed, the curtain would be their target. With only three bullets left, The Shadow's revolver was useless against four foemen.

Nevertheless, The Shadow had reserved those cartridges for a definite purpose.

Already, he could feel tugs at the connecting door. The two men in the next room were trying to yank the barrier open, that they might join the fray. The Shadow had not forgotten them. This reminder was to his liking.

Twisting about, The Shadow drove his full weight against the door, bashed it inward to the next room. As he plunged, he heard a snarled shout from the darkened room that he was leaving. It told that Quetzal had leaped in from the balcony.

Shots rang; bullets burned the curtains behind The Shadow's back. Quetzal was using a gun instead of a knife; but again his thrusts were failures.

THE SHADOW was already through the connecting door; and his hard stroke against the barrier had served him well. Driving the door inward, The Shadow had bowled over the man who had been tugging at the knob.

Sprawling on the floor, his revolver gone from his hand, was the hard-faced American. His hands were going to his forehead, which had received the hard swing of the door.

The leering Mexican was still on his feet, dropping back to aim for The Shadow. He never fired. The Shadow jabbed a straight shot for his chest. The Mexican collapsed. By eliminating one enemy with the door as a bludgeon, The Shadow had managed to handle the other with a gunshot.

Wheeling across the room, The Shadow fired his last two shots back toward the curtain. One of Quetzal's men plunged through and sprawled beside the groaning American. Another face showed at the curtains; with it, the muzzle of a revolver. The Shadow flung his emptied weapon straight for the fellow's eyes. The foeman ducked away. His departure gave The Shadow leeway for new action.

Snatching up the gun that the half-stunned American had dropped, The Shadow sprang out through the doorway to the balcony. He came head-on against two attackers, who had heard the shots from the lighted room.

The Shadow sledged the first with a revolver-stroke to the skull. As his gun stopped at dead level, he fired before the second man could shoot. His shot clipped the man's gun arm. The aiming revolver sank, unfired.

At that moment, there seemed a strange lull amid the fray. The Shadow was at the balcony rail; the stairs were scarcely a dozen feet away. Yet it would be suicide to use those stairs. Quetzal and half a dozen followers would pour from the tiny dining rooms, to form a firing squad along the balcony.

The music had stopped below. Dancers were flocking for the shelter of the booths beneath the low balcony. The Mexican orchestra was scrambling for shelter. Across the dance floor lay the one path to safety: the open front along the sidewalk. Patrons of the sidewalk cafe had hurried for the street. No one had remained to block The Shadow's possible escape.

WITH one hand, The Shadow vaulted the balcony rail. His body seemed to poise, turn slowly as it straightened downward. The drop that he took did not land The Shadow on the floor. Instead, he ended squarely atop a table just below the balcony edge.

His left hand steadied against the table top, as his body doubled to absorb the force of the drop. Regaining his balance instantly, The Shadow took a long bound toward the dance floor.

The frightened customers were treated to a display of one-man strategy. The Shadow did not dash for the sidewalk. He sidestepped in that direction, moving rapidly in leftward fashion. His right hand was aiming back for the balcony, the revolver shifting from one door to the other. Every time a

glaring face poked into view, The Shadow covered.

Shots were unnecessary. Heads bobbed back at sight of the aiming gun. Quetzal must have snarled commands from the darkness, for two men suddenly sprang forth, one from each door.

The Shadow fired from the edge of the sidewalk cafe. The first of the two Mexicans bounded in the air, sprawled across the balcony rail and hung there, his gun arm dangling downward while his glassy eyes surveyed the dance floor.

The other man dived back for the safety of a dining room. The shots that he fired as he fled were hopelessly wide.

The Shadow stood waiting, in case the fellow reappeared. No move occurred. Quetzal's men had taken all the lead dosage that they could stomach.

Ready to turn toward the street, The Shadow tightened. He heard shouts behind him; the clatter of men approaching on the run. He was tense for only a moment, then a smile appeared upon his disguised lips. The shout of a brisk command told him who these arrivals were.

A squad of Mexican soldiers had heard the sounds of battle at the Casino Del Toro.

Keeping his gun aimed calmly toward the balcony, The Shadow waited. A pair of soldiers saw him; sprang upon him and bore him to the floor between two tables. They wrenched his revolver from his fist. The Shadow let them take it. He knew that Quetzal's men would not fire while he was in the clutch of Mexican troops.

TWENTY soldiers had arrived; the platoon was under the command of a frail, sharp-eyed lieutenant. Seeing that The Shadow was captured, the officer looked up toward the balcony and ordered his men to cover the spot with their rifles. Briskly, the lieutenant shouted for hidden men to surrender.

Slowly, Quetzal's followers filed from the tiny dining rooms, their hands raised above their sullen faces. The Shadow watched them, as he stood pinned between two soldiers. He studied every face. Most of the men were rough-looking Mexicans; there were a few Americans among them, but the latter were obviously renegades-riffraff who would serve any master who paid them.

Not one of the surrendering crew could be Quetzal.

Oddly, The Shadow had not gained a single glimpse of Quetzal's face. First, the murderer had been behind the curtains; then he had sprawled beside the balcony rail. Last of all, Quetzal had returned to the darkened room.

Nevertheless, The Shadow knew that Quetzal could be none of these. The master-foe had chosen departure. His task had been an easy one. While his men were filing forth, Quetzal had left by a window of the darkened upstairs dining room, dropping to the seclusion of an outside alleyway.

The trick was a smart one; for the steady surrender of Quetzal's men made the lieutenant suppose that none had chosen flight. He ordered soldiers to line up the prisoners; then sent other members of his platoon up to the balcony.

Scanning the rough-clad prisoners, the young lieutenant passed them with a contemptuous glance. He turned toward The Shadow; recognized him as a man of some importance. With a bow, the officer announced:

"I am Lieutenant Coroza. Your name, senor?"

"Jose Rembole," replied The Shadow, calmly. "From Mexico City."

"What happened here, senor?"

Free from the grasp of the soldiers, The Shadow gave a shrug of his shoulders. In perfect Spanish, he told a simple story.

"The place was crowded," he declared. "I went to the balcony, hoping to find an empty room to dine. I went into the one marked 'E.' There I found a dead man. Un Americano. He had been stabbed."

A sergeant was shouting news from the balcony, telling of Rikeland's body; and of others, who had fallen in the gun fray.

"The murderer was there," expressed The Shadow. "He tried to stab me also. He failed. The others came to his aid. They did not manage to kill me."

THE other prisoners began to snarl protests. They accused The Shadow; the lieutenant silenced them. They were rogues; their testimony could not be accepted. The Shadow was producing credentials, to prove that he was Jose Rembole. Lieutenant Coroza was ready to favor The Shadow's cause.

From the booths around the dance floor, respectable looking persons had crowded forward. Some were Mexicans; others Americans, who appeared to be chance tourists. Cupped hands displayed tokens that bore the feathered serpent emblem. Tools of Quetzal stepped from the throng. One spoke to Lieutenant Coroza.

"I saw Senor Rembole upon the balcony, alone," announced a Mexican witness. "No one else was there, lieutenant. Perhaps it was Senor Rembole who stabbed the Americano."

Nods of approval from other witnesses made Coroza consider the testimony. At last, the lieutenant shook his head.

"That does not disprove his story," he declared. "No one saw Senor Rembole kill any one."

"Ah, no, lieutenant? Look!" The speaker pointed to the balcony, indicating the thuggish Mexican who hung across the rail. "There is one that Senor Rembole killed. We saw him fire the shot!"

Other witnesses babbled their agreement.

"Senor Rembole fired from the tables at the sidewalk--"

"Point blank! Without cause!"

"The victim was defenseless--"

"It was murder, lieutenant mio!"

Looking up, Coroza saw the open hands over the rail. The dead crook's gun had dropped from his outflung arms; some agent of Quetzal's had slyly plucked it from among the tables by the dance floor, to hide it. Circumstantial evidence stood strong against The Shadow.

Other witnesses could have denied that the dead Mexican had been unarmed; but few were bold enough to give such testimony. Two who started to step forward were drawn back by agents of Quetzal, who snarled threats in their ears. The rest of the false witnesses crowded about Lieutenant Coroza, asserting their demands.

"Arrest Rembole!" The cry was in unison. "Take him to the presidio!"

The lieutenant had no other choice. His opinion had already wavered. He snapped a command to the soldiers. Clustering about The Shadow, the troops marched him to the street. Coroza ordered others to bring the witnesses. The command was unnecessary. Quetzal's tools were following the platoon of their own accord.

THRONGS parted on the outside street, to let the soldiers pass. Shouts of derision were hurled at The Shadow. Mob cries demanded the blood of Senor Jose Rembole. The Shadow remained oblivious to the shouts. As he marched along amid the flanking soldiers, he scanned the faces in the crowd.

The Shadow was looking for the man who might be Quetzal.

Along the narrow streets of Ensenada, to the road that led to the presidio; there, the rabble faded, leaving only the platoon of soldiers and the false witnesses supplied by Quetzal. Nowhere along that march did The Shadow see a face he recognized. His conclusion was that Quetzal had left Ensenada.

The Shadow had not seen all the faces along the line of march. Two had escaped him. One was that of Dolores Borenza, peering down from a balcony above the narrow street. The olive-hued woman had withdrawn from view as the procession approached.

The other face was that of a man who stood in a little doorway, almost out of view. His roundish countenance wore a downturned smile; his eyes glinted with narrowed gaze from beneath the brim of his fancy sombrero. When the procession had gone by, this observer stepped forward with folded arms.

He was Sancho Maringuez. The bandit's clothes were new and gaudy. He had

dressed well for this visit to Ensenada, and was pleased with his appearance; for he unfolded his arms to smooth away the few wrinkles in his velvet jacket.

A scar-faced man approached Maringuez. The newcomer was Tompino; like his chief, the lieutenant was dressed well. Maringuez spoke in purring tone, that bore a trace of sarcasm:

"Ah, Tompino! You have arrived too late. I have been watching the soldiers take their prisoner to the presidio."

"From the Casino Del Toro?"

"Si. You have heard then, what happened?"

Tompino grinned and nodded.

"One grand fight," declared Maringuez, as he rolled a cigarette. "Too bad that you were not there to see it, Tompino."

"I was late, because of riding into Ensenada--"

"Of course. I understand. But what does it matter? The soldiers have captured the man who made the trouble. He is Senor Rembole, from Mexico City. A brave young officer captured him. Lieutenant Coroza was the officer's name. It was very bad for Senor Rembole.

"Tomorrow, at dawn, Senor Rembole will meet the firing squad." Maringuez was smiling wisely, as he made the prediction. "He will find out what it is like, to stand unarmed, while others aim their guns for his heart. Ah, Tompino, it is too bad that Porog cannot know all this."

The reference meant nothing to Tompino. The scar-faced lieutenant recognized no connection between The Shadow and Senor Rembole. He was pleased when Maringuez suggested that they dine. Tompino was hungry from his ride.

Maringuez chose the Cafe Federal. He and Tompino paused at the doorway, to look at Moyo's blankets. Maringuez picked up a blanket, examined its texture and tossed it down again. The Indian's wares did not impress him with their quality.

When Maringuez and Tompino had gone into the cafe, Moyo remained as motionless as before. If Moyo had heard of Rikeland's death and The Shadow's capture, his face did not betray it. Whatever his thoughts, one fact was certain.

The Indian still dwelt unmolested in Ensenada. Moyo, at least, had escaped the clutch of Quetzal.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE PRESIDIO

A TRIBUNAL was in session at the presidio. Colonel Pedro Laplata sat as sole judge, eyeing the prisoner before him. Coldness showed on the commandant's tawny face. His stony gaze was proof that this trial was a farce, its verdict predetermined.

The Shadow still retained the pose of Jose Rembole. He shrugged his shoulders when he heard the testimony of some witnesses; laughed indulgently at the words of others. All those who had been brought from the Casino Del Toro placed the blame for battle and death upon Jose Rembole.

Colonel Laplata was making the whole farce legal. He had summoned the American consul, because of Rikeland's death. Laplata was emphasizing that the prisoner--this murderer, Rembole--had been responsible for Rikeland's death.

The consul, a frail, dreary-faced man, nodded his acceptance of the fact. He was on his last lap of diplomatic service; he preferred to have matters settled by the local authorities.

The Shadow already knew that he could count on no aid from the consul. The man was merely a temporary occupant of the post, who had happened to be on the job in Ensenada when matters went wrong. Washington had decided not to recall the acting consul, fearing that the appointment of a new man would throw suspicion upon Rikeland.

To gain the consul's aid, The Shadow would have to cast aside the role of Jose Rembole. That could prove suicidal; and the consul--who knew nothing of the real trouble in Ensenada--would not believe that the prisoner was an American.

Better help seemed likely from the mayor of Ensenada, who bore the title of el presidente. He, too, had been summoned by Colonel Laplata; and there was a chance that he would object to the military taking over the prisoner. In fact, the presidente did begin an argument along that line, until Laplata silenced him.

"Where would you keep the prisoner?" demanded the commandant. "In your own jail? Pouf! The people are excited. They would demolish that frail cheese-box."

"You could supply soldiers, senior commandant"

"To protect your prisoner?" Laplata leaned back and guffawed. "Suppose the riot came? What would my soldiers do? They would bring the prisoner back here to the presidio. So why should he be sent from here at all?"

The presidente had no answer to that question. With a spread of his hands, he signified that the prisoner belonged to the commandant. Colonel Laplata grinned his approval; then straightened his lips and glared toward The Shadow.

"You may regard yourself fortunate, Senior Rembole," declared the commandant, sneeringly. "It is better to be accorded military justice, than suffer the wrath of a mob. I pronounce you guilty of the murder of the Americano found stabbed at the Casino Del Toro. My sentence is death by the firing squad, at dawn!"

WITNESSES grinned at the verdict; both the consul and the presidente seemed satisfied. A squad of soldiers surrounded The Shadow, to march him to the presidio prison.

Just before he faced about, The Shadow saw the satisfied gleam return to the commandant's lips. Laplata had played his cards well. He had shifted the charge from the death of a Mexican thug to that of James Rikeland. That, he was sure, would square matters in Mexico City.

Drumhead justice was not in good standing; but in this case, the commandant was sure that he could explain it by stating that he had avoided international complications through his decree.

There was one man present who doubted the commandant's wisdom. That was Lieutenant Coroza. The alert young officer remained after the others had gone. Laplata eyed him squintily; then snapped:

"Well, lieutenant? Why have you remained here?"

"Because of the testimony," explained Coroza. "It was different, sir, than I expected."

"Bah! The witnesses saw Rembole commit the murder."

"They did not see him kill Rikeland."

"Ah, no. But they saw him shoot an unarmed man upon the balcony. What is the difference?"

The commandant stroked his chin, as he waited for the lieutenant's reply. He foresaw trouble from Coroza; he was looking for a way to offset it.

"The fight had begun," declared the lieutenant. "Men were seeking Rembole's life. He was fighting in his own defense, when he fired that shot to the balcony. At worst, it was a mistake. I expected a fair trial for Jose Rembole, sir--"

"And you consider that I gave him none?" The commandant was on his feet; pounding the table angrily. "You accuse me, your superior, of injustice?"

"Not for a moment, sir," insisted Coroza. "I accuse the witnesses of changing their testimony. I have never questioned your orders, colonel. I never shall."

The commandant's glare lessened. His lips curled cunningly. He wanted no trouble from Coroza. He saw a way to escape it. Clapping a broad hand on the lieutenant's slender shoulders he spoke in a smooth tone:

"Ah, lieutenant, you will come with me to Ensenada. You may enjoy yourself there. You have done well tonight. True, you have never questioned my orders in the past. I have confidence in you, and I shall prove it."

WHEN the commandant's big car arrived in Ensenada, Lieutenant Coroza stepped forth alone. He saluted as the car rolled away; but his military pose lessened as the automobile rounded a corner. A tortured quiver showed on his lips. His hands were trembling as he tried to light a cigarette.

Stumbling as he walked along the street, he saw the lighted front of the Cafe Federal. He almost blundered into Moyo, as he tried to find the door. Sagging at the first table, Coroza called for a glass of tequila. He gulped the liquor the moment it was served him, and ordered more.

From across the cafe, Sancho Maringuez saw the lieutenant. The bandit grinned, and nudged Tompino. Maringuez whispered the name of Coroza to his scar-faced follower.

"The lieutenant is no longer proud," observed Maringuez. "Maybe he does not like what has happened at the presidio, eh, Tompino? It would not be wise for him to talk too much."

Tompino gripped the handle of a knife, to denote that he had a method of enforcing silence. Maringuez shook his head in disapproval.

"No, Tompino," he purred. "There is no need to worry about Lieutenant Coroza. I would say that he has found a duty that he does not want. That is good. It means that we can leave soon for Tia Juana.

"But first, let us stroll about the streets and learn the news. As for that knife-keep it hidden, like mine. That is always wise, Tompino."

As he rose, Maringuez lifted the edge of his jacket to show where he concealed his knife. Tompino shifted his own sheath out of sight. Watching Coroza finish a second glass of tequila, Maringuez gave a little chuckle and strolled out to the street.

THE reason for Coroza's strange despondency would soon be known to Sancho Maringuez. Already, the news was spreading throughout Ensenada. At that very moment, Colonel Laplata was delivering it, with appropriate guffaws, to a most interested listener.

The commandant was seated with Dolores Borenza, in an upstairs room that fronted on an outer balcony. He had given the details of The Shadow's trial; he was coming to the sequel. His heavy laughter told that the colonel was pleased with his own smartness.

"That fool, Coroza!" derided the commandant. "He could cause me great trouble, when report of the execution reaches Mexico City. There could be an investigation. I would be asked why I had sentenced a civilian to death."

"You are the commandant. You can explain-"

"I could explain, until they would question Lieutenant Coroza. That was the difficulty, tonight. I found the way to settle it. I ordered Coroza to command the firing squad at dawn. When he has performed that duty, he will be the one responsible for the death of Senor Rembole!"

From his uniform coat, the commandant produced a partly printed sheet of paper, which had unfilled spaces, including a final line for the signature.

"An order to stay the execution," laughed Laplata. "I shall not sign it until I hear the gunfire that will tell the death of El Ombre. Then I shall apply my signature. Afterward, I can say that the order went to Lieutenant Coroza, but that he ignored it. There will be a court-martial for our young lieutenant."

As the colonel put away the blank order, Dolores asked: "You are sure that El Ombre cannot escape?"

"That would be impossible, senorita," returned the commandant. "The guard has been doubled. The presidio is alive with my soldiers."

THE commandant retained his assurance after he returned to the presidio, long after midnight. He inspected the prison; saw the corridor where two guards paced. He looked into The Shadow's cell. The prisoner was asleep on a wooden bench.

At his own headquarters, Colonel Laplata learned that Lieutenant Coroza had returned. Though somewhat under the influence of drink, Coroza had reached

his quarters with a reasonable amount of aid. He had left instructions to be summoned a half hour before dawn.

Unsuspecting the commandant's plot against him, Coroza was ready to go through with The Shadow's execution. As commander of the firing squad, he would have charge of the whole affair. The death of the prisoner would be placed upon his shoulders.

With that comforting thought, Colonel Laplata gave orders that he, too, be aroused before dawn. The commandant intended to be wide awake, watching when the bullets of the firing squad marked the finish of The Shadow.

CHAPTER X

THE SHADOW'S CHOICE

COLONEL LAPLATA would not have remained so exuberant, had he glimpsed the present happenings in the corridor outside The Shadow's prison cell.

The Shadow was confined in a deserted section of the prison, so that the special guards would have only his cell to watch. Pacing in opposite directions, the sentries kept a perpetual procession, passing each other at different places along the corridor. Each paused regularly to peer through the barred door of The Shadow's cell.

One guard saw The Shadow lying on the bench. That guard resumed his pace. The other came from the opposite direction. He placed his face to the bars; gave an inarticulate gurgle that his comrade did not hear. Hands had come between the bars. They gripped the sentry's throat.

The Shadow's thumbs gave expert pressure. The soldier was not merely choked; he was paralyzed. He sagged to the floor; his body settled outside the door, as The Shadow released him. The Shadow reached through to catch the sentry's falling rifle.

The second soldier turned at the end of the corridor. He saw his fallen comrade. As he swung his rifle down from its shoulder position, he heard a sibilant command in Spanish. Staring at the cell door, the astonished sentry saw the glint of a rifle muzzle. The Shadow was covering the second sentry with the first man's gun.

Helplessly, the guard dropped his rifle. At The Shadow's command, he approached with upraised hands. As the soldier came up to the door, The Shadow reached quickly through and clutched his throat one-handed, holding the rifle all the while with his other arm.

Choking fingers, sight of a rifle muzzle that still loomed, were too much for the astonished sentry. He felt the same effect that the other guard had experienced, and he took it without protest. Wavering on his feet, the fellow plopped slowly beside his fallen comrade.

THE SHADOW listened intently at the cell door. Sounds had not been heard outside. A glance at the sentries told that they would remain in their present condition for quite a while. Carrying the first man's rifle, The Shadow stepped to the rear of the cell and stood upon the bench. He was on a level with the bars of a small, square window.

Those bars were fastened into stone walls; but they had been put there years ago. Mexican prisons invariably had poor inspection; this one was no exception. The bars could be loosened, under proper persuasion. They were strong enough to resist a bare-handed attack; therefore, the commandant had considered them secure. He had not known that The Shadow would gain a suitable implement to spring them.

The soldier's rifle was the very sort of tool required for an attack upon these bars. Its long steel barrel offered formidable leverage. Choosing the proper bars, The Shadow thrust the barrel between them at an angle. He commenced a steady, relentless pressure.

One bar stirred slightly. A tiny fragment of stone slipped to the bench. The Shadow rested; he knew that another sustained effort would loosen the bar sufficiently to remove it. With a single bar gone, The Shadow could squeeze through the space.

The rifle barrel might suffer under this new, stronger pressure; but that would not matter. The Shadow would still have a second weapon available. He could reach through the cell door and fish for the gun that the second soldier had dropped. It was less than its own length distant.

After that, freedom. The window opened toward the presidio wall, where trees were dim beyond a darkened space. Even without his garb of black, The Shadow could reach that wall. If sentries spotted him, he could answer their rifle fire. Escape seemed a surety; the balmy outside air of the jail yard invited it.

Still resting, The Shadow looked toward the cell door, to make sure that the guards were still stiffened. All was well in that direction; but a slight sound foretold danger from another source. The Shadow heard a distinct scrape, just outside the window. Quickly, he removed the rifle from between the bars, rested it on the seat at his feet.

The sound indicated that the commandant had stationed a special guard outside the cell window, ready in case The Shadow started a jail-break. The noise scraped upward; The Shadow crouched just within the window, ready to deliver another paralyzing treatment to a guard when the time came.

A hand clapped softly on the ledge; peering up, The Shadow saw the muzzle of a revolver. He knew that a face would follow; that eyes would see the sprawled sentries at the cell door.

Timing his move to perfection, The Shadow made a thrust.

His lithe body snapped upward. His hands shot between the bars at the very instant a head appeared outside. As though drawn by a magnet, The Shadow's fingers caught the neck of the new arrival; his forearm pull brought the fellow's face squarely against the bars.

Ready for that paralyzing thumb pressure, The Shadow shifted his head to one side, so that the light from the corridor would reach the victim's face and show the results that came. The man's head had tipped forward; The Shadow nudged it back. Instantly, his thumbs relaxed, withholding their ready energy.

The man at the window was a friend. The Shadow was staring at the immobile face of Moyo, the Indian.

WHILE The Shadow had been eliminating the prison guards, Moyo was scaling the wall of the presidio. Arriving at the cell window, the Indian had encountered a welcome that he did not expect. Yet there was no anger in his expression, when The Shadow released him. The only emotion that Moyo displayed was a trace of admiration.

Resting his hands—one with its gun—upon the ledge, Moyo clung to his position. He was unshaken from The Shadow's grip. Those thumbs had stopped soon enough. The words that Moyo whispered were few; they were spoken in Spanish.

The Shadow nodded. Clutching a bar with one hand, resting his gun on the ledge, Moyo tugged a slip of paper from his old jacket. The Shadow held the message into the light. A strange kindle came to his eyes. No longer was his gaze the feigned one of Jose Rembole. His were the eyes of The Shadow.

Calmly, The Shadow spoke to Moyo; his instructions were the sort that Moyo expected, for the Indian had spied the prone guards at the cell door. The Shadow stepped down from the bench, took the rifle and pushed it out beside the guard to whom it belonged. Returning to the bench, The Shadow stretched there.

Minutes passed. The Shadow was watching the guards. So was Moyo, from the window. The Indian's eyes were just above the ledge; his revolver was in readiness. Moyo was on his toes, upon the higher ground outside the wall.

A sentry stirred. The man came to hands and knees; saw his rifle and picked it up. Groggily, he raised himself by the bars of the door. He squinted toward The Shadow's bench, raised his rifle as though to aim.

Moyo, at that moment, had his finger on the revolver trigger; but the Indian found no need to fire. The guard thought matters over.

Instead of aiming for The Shadow, who seemed placidly asleep, the guard

stooped and shook the other soldier. The second sentry came to, found his feet as stupidly as the first. The two held a whispered confab outside the cell. Their decision was the one that The Shadow expected.

Each recalled his experience hazily. They knew that the prisoner had tricked them. Apparently, however, he had gained nothing by his move. He had no key to the cell door, for the sentries did not carry them. The window was barred; and had evidently blocked him.

Why should they discredit themselves by carrying this fanciful tale outside? They would be accused of having drunk too much mescal. They would be disciplined. Since the prisoner had accomplished nothing, why not resume their sentry duty; and see to it that he attempted nothing more?

Thus did they reason, and so they agreed. They resumed their pacing along the corridor.

HALF rising from the bench, The Shadow flipped the crumpled message through the bars of the window. Moyo plucked the wadded paper from the ground outside.

Soft footsteps; the creak of a tree beside the wall--those sounds told The Shadow that Moyo had left by the route that The Shadow himself had intended to take. Satisfied that the guards would attempt no harm to the prisoner; Moyo had departed in accordance with The Shadow's orders.

The Indian had served James Rikeland in the past. His master was dead; Moyo's present allegiance belonged to The Shadow. In coming to the presidio, Moyo had brought word of hope.

The Shadow had not needed the Indian's aid. His own escape had been but a matter of minutes, at the time when Moyo had arrived. However, Moyo's message had offered something better than mere escape. It had suggested a plan that might help greatly in balking the future schemes of Quetzal.

Eyes upward, The Shadow saw the spot on the wall from which the chunk of stone had fallen. It would have been easy to dislodge that bar; yet The Shadow did not regret the fact that he had foregone escape. His smile showed confidence that the future would go well.

The Shadow's eyelids closed. He had chosen sleep for the hours that remained until dawn. That would be the time when he would gain full benefit from Moyo's message.

CHAPTER XI

BULLETS AT SUNRISE

DAY was breaking above the high Sierras that towered east of Ensenada. There was stir at the presidio. Soldiers were jesting, as they watched events. Death at dawn was always a matter that carried irony, here at Ensenada. It was an old saying that prisoners at this presidio were fortunate. They had longer to live than in other parts of Mexico, because the high mountains delayed the rising of the sun.

Lieutenant Coroza was standing alone at the door of a small building. Stiffly, the young officer awaited the arrival of an approaching squad. The soldiers broke ranks when they arrived. Coroza ordered them through the doorway. There, the members of the firing squad picked up rifles from the rack where Coroza had arranged them.

Coroza marched the armed squad to the prison. Guards produced The Shadow, turned him over to the executioners. His lips twitching, Coroza gave an order for the march. Between two files, The Shadow was conducted to the execution field at the rear wall of the presidio.

Close behind the firing squad shambled a trio of squatly Indians, carrying spades and pick-axes. They were to have the job of burial. An antiquated truck came along, to act as hearse. Colonel Laplata always buried his dead outside the presidio. The commandant claimed that it was poor business to make a cemetery out of a military encampment. The colonel was always looking forward to some revolution, so that he could suppress it with wholesale executions.

The firing squad had reached the wall.

A mounted orderly galloped from the commandant's headquarters, pulled up beside Lieutenant Coroza and showed him a paper. The lieutenant nodded; the orderly rode slowly back toward headquarters. Hands close to his saddle, he grinned as he tore the paper and let its pieces flutter in the wind.

The order was a mere routine one, that the commandant had told the orderly to show to Coroza; then destroy. In a pocket of his uniform, the orderly had a more important document. It was the filled and signed blank, calling for Lieutenant Coroza to stay the execution

IN his office, Colonel Laplata had visitors. The Presidente of Ensenada had arrived with members of the town council. In an all-night session, they had decided to protest against the interference of the military. The commandant was pleased to see these visitors.

"You are right, senores," he told them. "Already, I have thought the matter over. This morning, I have changed it. Look, here is my orderly returning."

The orderly was saluting from the door. Coolly, the commandant inquired: "You showed the order to Lieutenant Coroza?"

"Yes, sir. He returned it to me."

The orderly brought out the signed blank and tendered it to the commandant. Laplata showed the countermand to his visitors, and added lightly:

"This has relieved Lieutenant Coroza from a painful duty. Soon, he will march Rembole back to the prison cell."

From his desk, the commandant could glimpse the distant firing squad—a sight which the others could not see. His quick glance caught the flash of rifle barrels, tiny at that distance; the guns were being raised to firing position. Smiling to himself, Laplata wondered how The Shadow was enjoying this moment.

AT the wall of the execution area, The Shadow was standing with hands behind his back. His chin was raised; his eyes wore a smile. Those glinting gun muzzles that caught the sun from the Sierras did not perturb Senor Jose Rembole. The Shadow's disguised lips had curled in a disdainful smile.

The man who showed nervousness was Lieutenant Coroza. The young officer was poising his sword, to swing it downward as the signal to fire. For an instant, Coroza hesitated, as though fearfully doubtful of the deed that was his.

Just past the aiming riflemen were the squatting Indians. One of that grave-digging trio was staring stoically toward The Shadow. The watchful Indian was Moyo; his eyes met The Shadow's. Moyo's expression did not change. Apparently, The Shadow was going to his doom despite Moyo's efforts. Whatever the case, Moyo had stolidly accepted the result that was to come.

"Fire!"

Coroza gave the order hoarsely, as his trembling hand flashed the sword downward. Rifles boomed together; puffed their blasts for The Shadow's heart. The squinting soldiers saw Jose Rembole stiffen upward, as from a galvanic shock. With the jolt, lips lost their smile. They took on an expression half of pain, half of surprise.

The Shadow swayed forward. He twisted as he struck the ground, shoulder first. His arms went wide; his feet gave a convulsive kick. His eyes were closed when his face turned upward to the dawning sky.

Mechanically, Coroza put away his sword. His lips twitched as he approached the prone form. Soldiers, lowering their rifles, saw Coroza draw a revolver. Turned away from his soldiers, the lieutenant fired a final shot.

It was the coup de grace; a bullet through the head, to make sure that the victim would not linger on the verge of death.

Veterans in the firing squad grinned contemptuously. Their aim had been straight. Coroza's shot was superfluous. They saw the lieutenant's concern; a few thought that he had deliberately fired wide of Rembole's frozen face.

Coroza ordered the squad to march back to headquarters. He beckoned the Indians; ordered them to put the body aboard the truck. Coroza stayed; for it was his task to certify the death and burial of Jose Rembole.

At headquarters, Colonel Laplata sprang up in feigned surprise, when he heard the gunshots of the firing squad. He stared across the parade grounds, saw the squad marching to headquarters. The commandant turned to his guests.

"It is impossible, senor presidente!" he exclaimed. "My orderly delivered the countermand to Lieutenant Coroza. Come, orderly! Tell us-what did the lieutenant say?"

"Nothing, sir. He looked at the order and returned it."

"He was awake? Alert?"

"Hardly, sir. Lieutenant Coroza was different from usual. He was sleeping heavily when I summoned him this morning. I would say that he had not fully aroused."

Colonel Laplata paced angrily to the door, followed by the presidente. He saw a sergeant marching at the head of the firing squad. He ordered the soldiers to halt; he called the sergeant.

"You saw Lieutenant Coroza receive an order?" inquired the commandant. "Just before the execution, sergeant?"

"I did, sir."

"It is too bad," spoke Laplata to the presidente. "Ah, well! Nothing may happen because of this; but should there be criticism from Mexico City, I shall call upon you to testify as to the truth. Keep this countermand, senor presidente, as evidence of the actual facts."

The presidente received the paper that Coroza had never seen. He held conference with his companions. All were agreed that the blame rested with Lieutenant Coroza. In order not to appear too interested, Colonel Laplata turned away.

The sergeant had let the firing squad fall out. The men were jesting among themselves. The commandant chanced to overhear them. Two veterans were joshing a younger soldier.

"Think no more of it," said one. "Bah! A drink of tequila is all one needs after his first turn with the firing squad. Remember, one rifle always carried a blank. Yours could have been the one."

The recruit nodded; managed a smile of bravado as he walked away. The veteran who had spoken turned to his companion and said, in undertone :

"Let him think that his rifle had the blank. He never thought to feel for the kick of the gun. But I-caramba!-this business is old to me. I could feel that my rifle had no life. I knew that the blank was here."

He tapped his gun significantly. The second veteran scowled and shook his head. He lifted his own rifle.

"The blank was here," he snarled. "Would you make a fool of me? Bah! I am the one who can always tell when a cartridge has a ball!"

Another member of the squad stepped into the argument. He began to deride the others, claiming that the blank cartridge had been his. The face of Colonel Laplata showed sudden hardness. Looking quickly toward the firing wall, the commandant saw the old truck lumbering across the parade ground.

"Halt it!" he bellowed, pointing to the truck. "Lieutenant Coroza is carrying away Rembole alive! All the cartridges were blank! He has tricked us!"

Two soldiers raised their rifles, forgetting that the guns were unloaded. As their triggers clicked, others began to snatch cartridges from their belts, hurriedly trying to fill the magazines of empty rifles.

Lieutenant Coroza did not spy the menace of the soldiers; he was at the wheel of the truck, keeping his eyes straight ahead. It was Moyo, seated stolidly in the open rear, who spotted the excitement. The Indian gave a grunt that Coroza heard. As the lieutenant stepped on the gas, Moyo and the other Indians jumped over the side of the truck, down to the ground.

Their action was that of men who wanted to be free of a disagreeable

situation. It seemingly showed that they were not leagued with Coroza, but merely obeying his commands under stress. That left it safe for Moyo to remain in Ensenada. At the same time, the move served purposes that those at the presidio did not guess.

Three men off the truck lightened it and made it speedier. Also, those three were ready for emergency. If Coroza ran into trouble before he reached the gate, Moyo and the Indians could make an unexpected attack. Such would mean their lives; but they were willing to take the risk.

Sacrifice of the Indians proved unnecessary.

Coroza was driving with speed, straight for a gauntlet of soldiers who came running at the commandant's renewed shouts. The lieutenant was past the blockade; the danger was from men who halted to aim after the fleeing truck. Coroza could not offset them, but there was one who could and did.

Up from the low rear wall of the truck bobbed the smiling face of Jose Rembole. Hands came to view; revolvers gleamed. Coroza had placed those weapons in the truck. The Shadow, knowing the ruse was ended, had found the time to use them.

The Shadow fired. An aiming soldier staggered, dropped his rifle and clung wonderingly to a wounded arm. A rifle crackled; its bullet whined past The Shadow's head. Before the soldier who fired the shot could gain new aim, he saw a revolver swing toward him. Flinging down his rifle, the soldier threw up his hands.

THAT broke the resistance. The Shadow began shots for other groups of riflemen. He did not bother with definite targets. These soldiers at the Ensenada outpost were not noted for their bravery. They had seen one man fall; another surrender. The latter course looked best.

Scattered men in uniform hurled away their guns and hoisted their arms, as The Shadow's bullets kicked the soil about them.

Only the guards at the gate tried to make new trouble. They sprang in front of the truck, barring the way with crossed rifles. Coroza drove through at full speed. The guards dived for shelter, to avoid being plowed under. When they came to their feet again, the truck was roaring along the outside road. The Shadow, leaning over the back, was taking aim with both guns.

The sentries scrambled into the guardhouse. They were there when a roar sounded within the walls of the presidio. The commandant's car was surging forth, carrying the colonel and a squad of sharpshooters. Other automobiles, snatched from the presidente and his friends, followed with their quota of pursuing troops.

The chase was a fierce one. Rifles were speaking steadily, when the truck reached the narrow streets of the town. The range was too long for The Shadow to reply with his revolvers. Fortunately, it was also too distant for Laplata's sharpshooters to get results. The distance, plus the jouncing of the chasing cars, caused bullets to course wide.

People scattered from the lazy streets of Ensenada, as Coroza tore through. The lieutenant knew those twisty thoroughfares, which were deserted of traffic at this hour. He threaded a course that kept the automobiles from gaining. He reached a final stretch; drove the truck straight for a rickety dock that extended out into the bay of Todos Los Santos.

Boards splintered, beams shook, as the truck jounced for the dock end. The speed made it seem that Coroza intended to drive off into the water; but the lieutenant jammed the old truck's brakes full force, in time to prevent the plunge.

He sprang to the dock. The Shadow joined him.

Laplata's car was just reaching the inner end of the dock. It was swinging to come out toward the abandoned truck. The Shadow and Coroza were running forward. The lieutenant pointed over the end of the dock, to a trim, rakish speed boat that was waiting there, its motor idling.

The two leaped aboard. The speed boat roared for the open waters of the bay. It was picking up speed when the pursuers stopped by the abandoned truck.

Laplata's riflemen sprang to the pier and began a futile fire.

Leaning on the stern rail of their swift craft, The Shadow and Coroza watched wasted bullets splash the water far behind.

THE pursuit from the presidia was ended. Colonel Laplata looked like a tiny mechanical doll as he shook his fists at the end of the dock. The speed boat sped far out through the bay, heading for the open waters of the Pacific.

"My note last night was brief, Senor Rembole," explained Lieutenant Coroza. "When I left the Cafe Federal, an Indian followed me. He said his name was Moyo. He gave me an order signed by the president of Mexico. It said that the bearer's word must be obeyed.

"Moyo said but little. He gave me a written paper that explained the plan. As officer in charge of the execution, I was able to load the rifles unseen. It was Moyo's task to visit you last night, that you might be able to deceive the firing squad."

The speed boat was outside the harbor. Far back, the tubby steamship was puffing black smoke from its funnel. Coroza pointed, with the comment.

"That vessel sails for Guatemala. Colonel Laplata will go aboard. He knows that his game is finished. There will be a new commandant at the presidio of Ensenada."

Coroza's prediction was well founded. The Shadow knew that the power of Quetzal was broken in Ensenada. With Rikeland dead, secrecy was no longer needed. Laplata, by his actions, had paved the way for the Mexican government to clean up the town. Aids of Quetzal were by this time scurrying away like rats.

What of Quetzal himself?

There lay the unfortunate angle. The Shadow considered it, as the speed boat turned northward for its coastal trip to San Diego. Last night, The Shadow had foregone escape, to aid Lieutenant Coroza's ruse. Though The Shadow was clear, as he had expected to be, the ruse had failed.

It would have been preferable for Quetzal to believe The Shadow dead. As matters stood, Quetzal would soon know that his superfoe was still alive. With Ensenada barred as a point of contact, Quetzal would have only one other place to meet the agent of a foreign government. That would be Tia Juana, the gambling town just south of the International Boundary.

The Shadow had reason to believe that Quetzal had already picked Tia Juana as a meeting place. Hence the master-spy would not find his plans disturbed. In Tia Juana, however, Quetzal would no longer be lulled by false thoughts of security.

Quetzal would be ready for the arrival of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XII

EYES IN THE DARK

LATE that same afternoon, a young American was seated in the lobby of a small Tia Juana hotel. He appeared to be one of many visitors who had come to the Mexican town, where the races were to open the next day. The American, however, was present for another purpose.

He was Harry Vincent, agent of The Shadow. Like his chief, Harry had left the East in connection with the government mission. Until today, Harry had remained above the Border, in San Diego.

There, Harry had received a special government report. It was his job to get it to The Shadow. Today, here in the Hotel Hidalgo at Tia Juana, Harry expected contact with his chief.

A message was due from a Mexican named Jose Rembole. To Harry, Rembole meant The Shadow. There were others, too, who knew of that connection. The name, itself, was explanatory to those in the know. The letters in "Rembole" formed those of El Ombre.

There was a reason why The Shadow had delayed contact with his agent. Because of the adventure in Ensenada, it was unwise to appear again as Jose Rembole, when making contact. The Shadow had long since reached Tia Juana; but

he had other plans for meeting Harry Vincent.

After a while, Harry went up to his room. He stood at the window and looked over the squatly buildings of Tia Juana. Everything was lazy below, for Tia Juana slept by day. Even the gambling places looked deserted. The only sound that disturbed the sunny silence was the note of a bugle, that came in repeated fashion. Some soldier was practicing bugle calls at the barracks, and was making a bad botch of it.

Half in a reverie, Harry forgot time as he stared. Other sounds began to drown the faulty bugle notes. The hot sky dulled with sunset. Automobiles were coming into town; the coolness of the evening was bringing life to Tia Juana. The room where Harry stood was gloomy. From its haze, a voice spoke.

Harry swung about, as he recognized the whispered tone. Close beside him was The Shadow, garbed in cloak of black. His garments had been packed in the speed boat at Ensenada, put there by the faithful Moyo. Coming into Tia Juana, The Shadow had registered at this hotel; but he had waited for dusk before he met Harry Vincent.

"Report"

At The Shadow's word, Harry produced the required papers. Holding them toward the window, The Shadow read the details. He handed some of the papers to Harry, with the comment:

"You are to use these. Supply your own name. They will identify you as an American who has an interest in race horses."

The government had supplied the credentials for The Shadow. The character of a race-horse owner was a logical one to use in Tia Juana. The Shadow, however, was delegating that part to Harry. He had other plans for himself.

There was one special merit in the credentials, that The Shadow did not overlook. As a horse owner, Harry could take a strategic position in the duel to come; one that would render him most useful. Briefly, The Shadow recounted his recent adventures; then added:

"Those events began at the hacienda, when Maringuez made his visit. Latimer Creeth should be in Tia Juana tonight. Maringuez may be here also. He will be watching Creeth. As a man with racing interests, you can introduce yourself to Creeth. Stay with him."

With that, The Shadow was gone. Harry turned on the lights, studied his new credentials and supplied his own name wherever needed.

IT did not take Harry long to find Latimer Creeth. The portly American was staying at a club near the race track. Gaining admittance with his credentials, Harry introduced himself to several persons, and was introduced to others by his new friends. In one circle that he joined, he met Creeth.

All talk concerned the morrow's races. Harry was well posted on the subject. His specialty, as agent of The Shadow, was that of adapting himself to circumstances like these. In San Diego, Harry had made a thorough study of the racing entries. He had known that all race-track information would be useful in Tia Juana.

Picking up conversation with Creeth, Harry soon made friends with the portly man. When the crowd went into the dining room, Harry found a seat next to Creeth and continued his talk of horses. By the time soup was served, Harry had definitely established himself as a man who knew plenty about race tracks.

Creeth suddenly paused in his conversation, to stare across the dining room. A tall personage in evening clothes had entered; was looking around, as if expecting to find friends. Creeth's face showed a surprise that broadened into a pleased smile. Harry, in his turn, received a jolt of astonishment.

The arrival was The Shadow, disguised as Lamont Cranston. As he looked across the dining room, The Shadow saw Creeth; gave a faint smile and a nod. He walked slowly to the table, to shake hands with the hacienda owner.

Creeth wanted to talk with The Shadow, but saw obstacles preventing him. He handled the situation by introducing The Shadow to those about him. Harry was one who shook hands with his chief and expressed his pleasure at meeting

Mr. Cranston. The others took it for granted that Lamont Cranston was a racing man; and The Shadow covered that point by remarking, dryly, that he had recently purchased a horse from Creeth.

A waiter made a place for The Shadow. He declined it, stating that he had a dinner engagement elsewhere. Creeth stepped away from the table to bid him good-by. Harry caught the low-toned words that were not intended for his ears.

"So you reached Ensenada," expressed Creeth, in a tone of relief. "I was afraid you encountered trouble, even though Maringuez and his men did not return to the hacienda."

"I encountered them in the mountains," returned The Shadow, quietly. "I tumbled one of them into an arroyo-that brute called 'Poroq.'"

"Then Maringuez was covering the road to Ensenada!"

A nod from The Shadow. Creeth became thoughtful.

"That explains it," he declared, in an undertone. "We saw no sign of Maringuez, when we rode here today. I had my men with me, just in case he forgot his so-called promises of protection; but we met neither him nor his bandits. Probably they have ridden in to Ensenada. They would never dare come to Tia Juana."

CREETH spoke the final sentence with assurance; but The Shadow did not agree with it. He saw good reasons why Sancho Maringuez would like to be in Tia Juana at the present time. He made no comment, however. He merely shook hands and left, promising to see Creeth later.

Something dawned on Harry Vincent at that moment. He realized why The Shadow could have come here.

The Shadow, himself, had said that Creeth might be watched. Therefore, any one meeting Creeth-as Harry had-would be under suspicion, unless something was done to offset it. The Shadow had supplied that factor by coming here as Cranston.

If agents of Quetzal were on the job, they would recognize The Shadow. They would believe that he was working entirely alone; that he had looked up Creeth to learn of any recent happenings at the hacienda. Elated by sight of The Shadow, those agents of Quetzal would think that they had learned all.

Harry would remain totally unsuspected. The Shadow had met him as a stranger. Even Creeth could not have guessed that Harry was close in the confidence of Lamont Cranston. What went for Creeth would go for Quetzal, when the superspy received reports from his observers

In doing this, The Shadow had placed himself open to huge risk. Word, of course, had reached Quetzal that The Shadow had escaped death in Ensenada. As far as Harry could see, word of everything eventually came to Quetzal. Therefore, crooks would be watching for The Shadow in Tia Juana.

But that did not seem to justify The Shadow's policy of openly thrusting himself into their view.

It seemed inconsistent to Harry, particularly because The Shadow had avoided the character of Rembole. Why should he have dropped the Mexican guise in which he was known; then deliberately assumed the American character of Cranston?

The answer dawned as Harry, with a last glance, saw The Shadow reach the lobby of the racing club. Before, as at present, The Shadow had been thinking of Harry's safety; not of his own. He had avoided meeting Harry as Rembole, in order to keep his agent covered. He had come here as Cranston to smooth the way for Harry's future actions in Tia Juana.

By leaving Harry with Creeth, The Shadow not only had placed his agent with a man who might in some way be drawn into the intrigues of Quetzal. The Shadow had also put Harry where he would be safe.

The Shadow's boldness gave Harry confidence. Harry smiled, as he resumed his meal. He felt that The Shadow had made the first score that his prompt visit to Creeth had been accomplished too soon for Quetzal's aids to take advantage of it.

IN that assumption, Harry was far from the truth. The Shadow had actually accomplished his primary aim: he had drawn all suspicion from Harry. In that move, though, The Shadow had seriously jeopardized his own safety. His risk had increased one hundred fold through his visit to the racing club, in the guise of Cranston.

The proof was where Harry could not see it--behind a pair of heavy draperies that separated the dining room from a small, dimly lighted lounge, that was deserted except for one person. That occupant was a woman in black, whose vengeful eyes peered through a narrow slit between the draperies.

The woman behind the curtain was Dolores Borenza. The scheming senorita had been watching the dining room from the moment of Creeth's entry. Up from Ensenada, following new orders direct from Quetzal, Dolores had come here to spy on Latimer Creeth. Quetzal had not passed up the chance that The Shadow might decide to look up the man who had put him on the route to Ensenada.

Dolores drew back from the curtains, stepped snakily to the closed door of the lounge room. Opening the door, she snapped her fingers. An attendant near the doorway heard the sound and looked about. He was a rough, smiling Mexican, that fellow; his lips tightened when he saw the slender hand of Dolores, extended with open cigarette case.

The engraved emblem of Quetzal made the man raise his knuckles. On his finger was a dull gold ring, that looked like a replica of crude Aztec jewelry. The signet of that ring bore the likeness of the feathered serpent god.

Dolores hissed her information. The attendant turned around, sighted the figure of Cranston leaving the door of the club. With long, ambling stride, he crossed the lobby and signaled from a front window.

The attendant's gesture was a trifling one, but it was spied by loungers outside a tawdry cafe across the way.

Dolores went to the darkened window of the lounge. She saw Mexicans leaving their tamales, to sidle from the cafe. Down the street she saw the strolling figure of The Shadow, moving in no great haste. The others were taking up his trail. They would pass the word as they went along.

Eyes in the dark were upon The Shadow. The danger that he had eluded in Ensenada had returned in Tia Juana.

CHAPTER XIII

MARINGUEZ REMEMBERS

DELIBERATE though his stroll appeared, The Shadow was alert as he continued his progress from the racing club. He had seen neither Dolores nor the watchful attendant; but he was confident that spies of Quetzal had been close by. He had not looked for them, because he knew that their moves would be preliminary. They would make no disturbance in the club.

This was the time to be watchful. Nothing escaped The Shadow. A chance turn of his head gave him a backward glance. He saw the sneaking desperadoes who were on his trail. He knew that their number was still too few. They were the same trouble-makers who had been in Ensenada. Mass attack was the only method that they would use.

The Shadow turned a corner, continued his way through Tia Juana. There were people on the streets; but any turn might mean a secluded stretch. Quetzal's workers knew it. Their number was increasing, as they stalked The Shadow. Here and there, they flashed symbols of the feathered serpent to loungers whom they passed. New recruits took up The Shadow's trail.

Where lights were many, where soldiers appeared, the trailers dropped their sneaky tactics and slouched along separately, keeping pace with The Shadow's slow gait. They joined when they came to less frequented spots. Each time, the evil band was larger.

The Shadow, meanwhile, was profiting by what he had seen of Tia Juana while on his way to the club. The town had not gained the gayety that it would have tomorrow night, after there were winners at the race track. Visitors were

holding their cash for bets. Nevertheless, there was life tonight; and enthusiasm in Tia Juana could mean trouble.

On that account, soldiers were more plentiful than usual. Reports from Ensenada had also caused an increase in the military. There would be no treacherous commandant here in Tia Juana. Quetzal had been lucky enough, finding one at Ensenada.

The Shadow neared a small, darkened building by a corner. He started to make the turn; paused to light a cigarette. Coins fell from a match pack that he drew from a vest pocket. The Shadow stooped toward the rough stone sidewalk.

Assassins saw their chance. They, too, had reached the darkness. Quick snarls passed as signals; a dozen attackers sprang forward with one objective. The weapons that they drew were knives; the blades flashed darkly in the gloom. Silent death was the fate they intended for The Shadow.

THE SHADOW came up with a long, loping swing. The first of the stabbing attackers jolted; his arms went high. A knife clattered as the man thwacked the sidewalk. A second charging killer took a jounce; then a third.

The Shadow was meeting the sortie with fists instead of guns. His long arms reached far; his hands gave their punches with speedy precision. His quick tactics bounced the skulkers in every direction.

Thugs who relied on dirks were always suckers for punches. The Shadow had seen that demonstrated; often stabs in the dark required snakish thrusts. One straight-fist jab could stop the best of them. With a dozen foemen, punches were better than gunshots. Every drive sprawled an attacker, where bullets might have wounded men without stopping them.

Some of The Shadow's punches scored knockouts; others did not. As The Shadow met the last of the assassins, some of the first ones were rising from the street, reclaiming their knives. Given a half minute longer, they could have struck The Shadow from different angles. The Shadow, however, did not allow that opportunity.

He changed tactics with a last trio of foemen. Jabbing the chin of one man, he caught the thug and hurled him against a companion. Nabbing the third man's wrist, The Shadow delivered a jujutsu hold, that did more than disarm the fellow. A twist of his body; The Shadow had the thug in air. With a long sweep, he sent him sprawling past the corner.

Spinning upon the pair that he had momentarily staggered, The Shadow lurched one, then the other, in the same direction. Pitching upon two groggy fellows who were rising, he gripped one with each arm; swung them against the wall. Heads cracked; the men were sagging in The Shadow's grip.

Snarling killers saw what they thought was a struggle, as The Shadow lurched past the corner with his burdens. Scattered men piled into action; as they came, The Shadow let one man drop and swung the other as a shield. Over a slumped shoulder, he shot another punch for an attacker's jaw.

The Shadow was past the corner, his back against the wall. How long his tactics could have continued, was a question; but The Shadow had no need for a sustained battle. He had carried the fight from darkness into light beyond the corner. He had chosen the new battleground with special purpose.

Down the lighted street, a squad of soldiers were on duty outside a cafe. The Shadow had seen them at that post; he had planned to bring battle to the spot where the soldiers could witness it.

There were shouts, as the troops heard the scuffle and saw massed men tangled, shifting at the corner.

The soldiers came on the run. The Shadow twisted back around the corner. His fists flayed furiously. Thugs staggered, bumped each other. They hurled their companions aside, trying to find a path to their departing victim. Knives were clanging the sidewalk.

The soldiers, too late to see The Shadow pass the corner, thought that they had come upon a street brawl.

Like hawks, the military pounced upon their prey. Not only did they grab

those who were close at hand; they sprang after the few who had started around the corner. Those thugs had stopped short, looking for The Shadow. He was gone; before they could find him in the darkness, the soldiers arrived. The last of Quetzal's crew was under arrest.

SOLDIERS marched their prisoners away. A corporal and two privates remained to look for stragglers. They saw the doorway where The Shadow had first paused; one soldier poked in there but found no one. When the soldiers had gone, The Shadow stepped forth. His laugh was whispered in this area of darkness.

By his ruse, The Shadow had drawn all of Quetzal's men upon him. Every trailer had taken the bait. Shifting back to the doorway, The Shadow had escaped the notice of the inspecting soldiers, even though he was not wearing his black cloak. The dark evening clothes of Cranston were sufficient for temporary concealment.

Reversing direction, The Shadow resumed his walk through Tia Juana; but his pace became swifter. He wanted to reach the Hotel Hidalgo before other enemies spotted him. Odds favored The Shadow in that plan. He had cut off the trail; and in ten minutes he could be at his destination.

Chance was to offset The Shadow's hope.

A limousine was rolling through the streets of Tia Juana. It happened to pass the grumbling, dejected thugs as the soldiers took those prisoners to police headquarters. A passenger in the rear seat saw the procession. Her dark eyes were evil in their glisten.

Dolores Borenza had come from the racing dub in time to learn that The Shadow had bested Quetzal's assassins. The woman hissed an order through the speaking tube. The chauffeur sped the car along the street. Passing a corner, Dolores looked along a side street in time to see The Shadow making a turn at the next corner.

The limousine stopped when Dolores gave another order. Leaning from the window, the senorita beckoned to a blind beggar. The man gave no indication that he saw her, until Dolores flashed her cigarette case. With that, eyes that stared through darkened glasses became alert.

The man lost his blindness; gave a wary glance along the street and approached the car. He raised his frayed jacket to show the symbol of Quetzal sewn to the lining.

A few moments later, the beggar had pocketed his dark glasses. A blind man no longer, he was slouching hastily along the street to take up The Shadow's trail. His hand was ready to twist the lapel of his jacket and show the Quetzal emblem whenever he passed others of the master-spy's men.

DOLORES had given the beggar definite instructions. The senorita was more than a mere agent of Quetzal. She was a recognized lieutenant of the superplotter. Knowing that mass attack had failed once, Dolores saw the futility of a second attempt. The beggar and other trailers were to use stealth as they proceeded.

Thus, when The Shadow neared the Hotel Hidalgo, lurkers were well behind him. They saw him enter the small lobby. When he had gone upstairs, they sneaked about the building. One-a smooth-looking Mexican-entered the lobby to see what he could learn.

Around the corner from the Hotel Hidalgo was a sidewalk cafe, where two men sat at a table beneath the shelter of palm trees. Both had their glasses of tequila; but one man was not drinking. He was Sancho Maringuez. His companion, who liked the juice of the century plant, was Tompino.

The Shadow had not passed along this street; therefore, Maringuez had not seen him. The bandit, however, had observed a lounge across the street; had watched another Mexican approach him. The two exchanged quick signs. The first man went his way, while the other took over his post.

Maringuez started to rise; paused, to look at Tompino. Stroking his rounded chin, the bandit leader dipped fingers into pocket and brought out a

rounded disk. It was the token of Quetzal, that he had taken from Poroq's body.

"Take this, Tompino," purred Maringuez, softly. "Show it to the man across the street. Tell him that you want word to give to Quetzal."

Tompino blinked, bewildered. He knew the symbol of the serpent god, for he was one who retained belief in Aztec superstitions. But he was doubtful that Sancho Maringuez could be on speaking terms with the deity whose name was legend in Old Mexico.

Tompino grinned, thinking that the request was a joke. Maringuez stiffened his gaze; growled the command:

"Go! Do as I have said!"

Tompino went across the street. Maringuez watched him hold palaver. Tompino returned, showing the eagerness of a child. He wanted to tell his master the surprising news that he had learned.

"They have found El Ombre," exclaimed Tompino, in an elated whisper. "He is at the Hotel Hidalgo, in a front room-so they think; but which one, they do not know."

"Buenos!" purred Maringuez. "Give me the Quetzal token, Tompino. Later, perhaps, you may carry it again. It is not wise for any one, too close to me, to hold this token. It was a mistake for Poroq to carry one."

"Poroq had the Quetzal coin?" Tompino's eyes gleamed avidly. "You trusted him with it?"

"I trusted Poroq too much." Maringuez had given his lips their downturn. "He failed me. He carried this token when he died. It would have been bad if The Shadow had found it. Fortunately, I claimed it instead."

WITH a gesture to Tompino, Maringuez arose. He paid for his unfinished drink, along with those that Tompino had consumed. Leading Tompino through alleyways, Maringuez reached a doorway. He pried it open and stepped into a deserted shop.

With a lighted match, Maringuez found a stairway and told Tompino to follow him to the second floor.

There, at a rear window, Tompino gained a surprise. They were looking across a street to the Hotel Hidalgo. They could see a balcony that ran along the third floor of the hotel. There, Maringuez spied a motion.

There was blackness against the white surface of the balcony. A shrouded figure was coming from a window, shifting to reach the next room. No one could have seen that shape from the street. Maringuez and Tompino had, luckily, gained a higher view from a lookout spot that The Shadow thought to be deserted.

"El Ombre!"

Tompino whispered the name fiercely. From his hip, he drew a gun, leveled it toward the balcony. Drinks of tequila never injured Tompino's marksmanship. One squeeze of the trigger, and Tompino could drop The Shadow like a puppet.

Maringuez clutched Tompino's hand with quick, hard fingers. The gun moved downward with Maringuez's pressure. Smoothly, the bandit leader whispered:

"There are soldiers on the street below, Tompino. Would you have us trapped like rats, when they hear the pistol shot? I, Sancho Maringuez, and you, Tompino, whom many have called bandits. What would our lives be worth, if they could prove that we had murdered? Bah! We would face the firing squad tomorrow; and we would not have the luck of Senor Rembole, who escaped today at Ensenada."

The Shadow had reached the next room while Maringuez was speaking. Tompino growled as he put away his gun, then pointed suddenly to a space beside the hotel. Lurkers were visible there. Three of them sneaked in through a side door of the hotel.

"They go to find El Ombre," purred Maringuez. "They do not know that he has changed his room. We alone know that, Tompino. I, too, shall go to find

The Shadow."

Drawing a revolver, Maringuez placed it in Tompino's care, with the strict order that the scar-faced lieutenant was not to fire a shot. Tompino gulped:

"What! You will go there unarmed?"

"I have my machete," reminded Maringuez, smoothly. "The knife makes no noise, Tompino. Sometimes, I have failed with it; but I have learned much from my mistakes."

DELAY was encountered by Maringuez, after he started for the hotel. His course was roundabout; he was forced to wait while a patrol of soldiers passed. When he reached the alleyway, he was ready with his token, but found no need to show it. Prowlers had returned from within the hotel; they were buzzing news to their companions.

"El Ombre was not there," Maringuez heard one whisper. "I went through the room next to his, and along the balcony, to peer into his window. He was gone!"

"Send the news to Quetzal," came a suggestion. "Tell him that we are ready to return. Once we have his order, we can wait in the room until El Ombre returns."

The group went through the alleyway. Lingering there was poor policy, while soldiers were about. Maringuez entered the side door; he found an obscure stairway and ascended to the third floor. He had his own theory regarding The Shadow's absence.

An assassin-so Maringuez believed-had gone through the adjoining room without inspecting it. That was how the man had found The Shadow missing. The Shadow had let him come and go. Maringuez, though, would find The Shadow. Either in that first room, or in his own.

The bandit reached the door he wanted. The hallway was darkened; it was easy for Maringuez to move through the unlocked door of the room that adjoined The Shadow's. Once inside, Maringuez saw the outline of the window; beyond it, the roof edge of the building from which Tompino watched.

Maringuez was sorry that he had not arranged for Tompino to have a signal, in case The Shadow had returned along the balcony. That was a point that Maringuez had missed in his hurry.

Listening as he edged through the room, Maringuez stopped to note a massed outline on the floor. He stooped struck a match below the window level. In one instant, Maringuez had remembered something. He had recalled the fate of Poroq, at the mountain arroyo.

The match glow showed the sallow face of an unconscious Mexican. This was the man who had come to assassinate The Shadow. Passing through the adjoining room, he had met The Shadow too soon. Not only had The Shadow slugged the thug into temporary oblivion; he had profited by the man's visit.

Leaving, The Shadow had spoken in Spanish to the men who lurked on the darkened stairs. They had mistaken him for the assassin, coming back to report. The Shadow had continued the ruse when he reached the alleyway. As one of the disbanding Mexicans, he had staged a complete disappearance.

Unquestionably, The Shadow had dropped the role of Cranston, to adopt the attire of a Mexican. The Shadow was at large in Tia Juana, prepared to balk the moves of Quetzal. He would not be Senor Jose Rembole. That part, too, was ended.

THE match went out. Maringuez lighted another. Ready for departure, he searched the pockets of the stunned assassin on the floor. They were empty. This man-like Poroq-had lost his token of Quetzal. The Shadow had taken the symbol of the snake god.

Sancho Maringuez had failed to meet The Shadow; but the bandit had profited by this trip. Not only had Maringuez remembered something of The Shadow's methods. He had learned The Shadow's future intentions.

Carrying a Quetzal token, The Shadow would remain in Tia Juana, seeking

to complete the mission that had brought him to Mexico. His success or failure would hinge upon future developments.

Sancho Maringuez, bandit of the Sierras, intended to take a hand in those coming episodes.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER THE RACES

NIGHT and day had passed in Tia Juana. New evening had produced a spirit of carnival in the Mexican town. Flocks of Americanos had staked their bank rolls on the horses. Those who had won were squandering their winnings. Money was everywhere in Tia Juana; and the population liked it.

A weary-looking Mexican was seated in his room at a squalid boarding house. Upon a table lay sheets of paper that bore words in English. They were new reports, useful to The Shadow. He was the unknown Mexican.

One batch of information had come through from Vic Marquette, a United States government man who was stationed in the American settlement just across the Border. Its information was meager. Nothing had been learned concerning Quetzal.

Word from Washington announced that foreign agents had been reported in Mexico; but who they were, what government they served, was a question. Not a clue to their identity was available. Once they met Quetzal, all his information would be theirs. Everything depended upon The Shadow; unless he could locate Quetzal and learn the superspy's plans, the cause would be lost.

There was a report from Harry Vincent. He had remained with Latimer Creeth; had spent the day at the races with the portly American. Not once had Harry detected any suspicious observers.

That did not surprise The Shadow. He knew that agents of Quetzal would no longer have instructions to cover Creeth at close range. They knew that The Shadow could not risk another meeting with Creeth. The guise of Lamont Cranston had served its usefulness in Tia Juana

The Shadow's own report was a checkered one. As an obscure Mexican, he had noticed Creeth and Harry at the race track. He had also seen Sancho Maringuez, accompanied by Tompino. He had spotted others—agents of Quetzal—engaged in new search. Among them, The Shadow had at last glimpsed Dolores Borenza.

Knowledge that the senorita was in Tia Juana gave The Shadow some answers that he had wanted. He knew at last why Quetzal's men had been so efficient in both Ensenada and Tia Juana. He could trace back to his misadventure aboard the airplane over the desert.

Seeing Dolores had almost made The Shadow change his plans completely. By trailing the senorita, he believed that he could reach Quetzal. Dolores was undoubtedly a contact between Quetzal and the nameless foreign agents. Unfortunately, The Shadow had spied Dolores only from distance. She had driven away in a limousine, leaving the traffic at the race track before The Shadow could follow her.

Since then, The Shadow had had no trace of Dolores. He knew that she must still be in Tia Juana; for she would be recognized by government men if she tried to cross the border. Dolores, however, had dropped from sight; and only a wholesale search could locate her. Such a measure might ruin The Shadow's chances for a success.

THE SHADOW had decided to adhere to his original plan. It involved the one clue that he had acquired in Ensenada; that slender strip of paper plucked from the dead fist of James Rikeland.

The paper lay here, on The Shadow's table, proclaiming its flimsy portion of a message:

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eign
gnal

able
no.

With whispered laugh, The Shadow extinguished the light. Motion occurred amid the darkness. When it was ended, the slight click of the door announced The Shadow's departure. There was an exit from the rear of this dingy house; The Shadow reached it through a darkened hallway.

When he appeared upon a lonely rear street, he was no longer an apologetic-looking Mexican. He was an American, with a fuller, but less distinguished, face than that of Cranston. His features bore but a slight trace of their hawklike characteristics.

The Shadow had become a mythical personage. He had assumed the role of Henry Arnaud, a man who did not exist. As Henry Arnaud, The Shadow had been many places and had encountered strange adventures, but always; he had been untraceable. This was an identity that he kept for emergency occasions.

The Shadow headed for the place that had become the center of gay life in Tia Juana. That was the big gambling casino—a barnlike structure, viewed from outside; but a pretentious place within. The hubbub of a gay throng reached The Shadow the moment he entered the grand casino.

Roulette wheels were spinning merrily, while money chinked the green baize layouts. Chuck-a-luck cages were turning, bouncing the dice inside them. Side rooms showed other species of gambling, where patrons played poker and other card games that brought a percentage to the house.

Enough persons had won at the races to fill the casino plentifully. The gala night had attracted others whom The Shadow expected; the racing men themselves. He saw Creeth and others from the club, Harry Vincent among them.

Near a roulette table, The Shadow came face to face with Sancho Maringuez. The bandit was in his best attire; he looked like a sporty visitor from Mexico City, rather than an outlaw from the mountains. The Shadow's face awoke no recognition from Maringuez. The bandit was completely deceived by the disguise. An incident occurred, however, after The Shadow had walked away from the roulette table.

Tompino entered the casino and found Maringuez. Into his chief's hand, Tompino pressed the token of Quetzal. Maringuez had sent him out with the token, to bring in a report. Tompino had news.

"Un Americano," muttered Tompino. "He was seen in a quarter where only Mexicans live. No one saw his face closely; but he came this way. Here, to the casino."

Maringuez grunted, as he looked about. There were hundreds of Americans in the casino. The news did not help much, even if the American happened to be The Shadow.

NOT long afterward, The Shadow garnered the same information that had come to Maringuez. Near a corner of the casino, he saw a Mexican that he recognized as one of Quetzal's men. The Shadow flashed the token that he had acquired the night before. The Mexican showed a finger ring with the feathered serpent emblem.

"Any word of El Ombre?"

The Shadow asked the question in Spanish, but purposely kept his accent poor. The Mexican was not surprised to find an Americano among Quetzal's aids. He had met others before. He gave The Shadow a report similar to Tompino's. It was possible, the Mexican said, that The Shadow might be here at the casino.

One side room was popular. Some of the racing men had entered it; the others were clustered at the door. The Shadow came up beside Creeth and Harry. Looking into the room, he saw a faro table in full blast. A bland-faced dealer was handling the game.

The Shadow watched for a few minutes then turned, to see Harry standing alone. Creeth was temporarily occupied with other friends.

Close to Harry, The Shadow spoke in a barely audible whisper. Harry recognized the whisper of his chief. He understood. The Shadow wanted him to

remain alone. New duty awaited Harry.

Creeth came back. The Shadow had gone into the faro room, unnoticed. Creeth had a question.

"Want to go back to the club, Vincent?" he asked. "Or would you rather stay here? I won't be gone long; it's just a case of finding out if any more of the boys have shown up. Some always arrive too late for the first day."

"I'll stay here a while," decided Harry. "If we don't see each other, I'll look you up at the club."

The faro room was doing a heavy turnover. It had attracted a cosmopolitan throng. Among the patrons, Harry saw men who looked like Cubans or South Americans. There were Europeans present, and a few Orientals. True, many nationalities were represented elsewhere; for Tia Juana drew foreigners who happened to be visiting Los Angeles or San Diego.

It occurred to Harry, however, that among these persons might be certain ones with whom Quetzal wanted contact.

A wad of paper reached Harry's hand, pressed there by The Shadow. Glancing at it, Harry saw that it was a ten-dollar bill. He spread the money; held it as though he intended to make a bet. He saw a message penciled on the bill:

Watch dealer's left hand.

Harry gave a sidelong glance. The first thing that he noted was a ring the dealer wore. It looked like a plain gold band; but it widened slightly between his fingers. That ring was a signet; the man had not quite turned it around enough on his finger to cover the fact. Instantly, Harry guessed what was inscribed upon its hidden surface.

The ring was a concealed token of Quetzal.

At first, Harry thought that was all The Shadow's message signified. Then, as he was pocketing the ten-spot and bringing out other money, Harry spotted something else. The dealer's hand was drumming lightly.

Deftly, the man stretched his fingers and doubled them again. His action appeared to be a nervous gesture until Harry observed that the motions were irregular. With that, the answer came to Harry.

The bland-faced dealer was delivering a message. His quick finger-moves were dots; the slow ones, dashes. Though scarcely noticeable, the motions would be plain to any one who was looking for them. That could apply to any person present. It applied to The Shadow.

Somehow, Harry's chief had guessed this phase of Quetzal's game. The Shadow had found the man whom Quetzal was using as an instrument to signal information to the foreign agents who were here in Tia Juana.

By watching the faro dealer, The Shadow was about to learn the most important feature of Quetzal's entire game. He was to discover the place and hour at which Quetzal would deliver the details of the secret naval base.

That learned, the fruits of Quetzal's toil would be ready for The Shadow's plucking. The Shadow would find a way to prevent Quetzal's information from reaching foreign hands.

CHAPTER XV

QUETZAL LEARNS

HARRY missed the message that the dealer tapped, for he caught the idea only at the finish. He gawked at the man's hand, and might have given himself away, had he not seen an action by The Shadow. Harry's chief was beginning to place money on the faro board. Harry did the same.

A deal followed; later, the gambler's fingers resumed their crawly tap. This time, Harry glimpsed the message easily. It came in detached words:

Quetzal... Carioca Club... Green Room... Ten-thirty... Quetzal.

Harry knew of the Carioca Club. It was a night spot recently established in Tia Juana. So far, the Carioca Club had not done well. Its owners had counted upon a regular membership and had failed to sell the idea. The lower floor of the club sold drinks and dinners; but the rooms upstairs were never

used.

One of those rooms must be the Green Room. Quetzal had chosen that unfrequented place for a meeting with the foreign purchasers of stolen information.

Who else was reading the gambler's message, besides Harry and The Shadow? Harry could not guess. There were too many likely prospects in the crowd about the faro table. Even the dealer did not know if the right men were present, for he began to tap the message again, word for word.

It seemed to Harry that he and The Shadow were becoming conspicuous; not because of any action, but owing to the fewness of Americans in the faro room. The bland dealer had a way of studying his customers that marked him as one of the shrewdest workers in Quetzal's service. The only thing to do, as Harry saw it, was to keep on placing bets.

Harry did that, moderately. The Shadow followed a similar policy, but played the board somewhat heavier.

Chips were being used in the play; a busy attendant gave them in return for cash. The Shadow's heap began to increase. He doubled a bet; the right card came his way. The dealer looked inquiringly toward The Shadow and asked, smoothly:

"Double?"

In Arnaud's fashion, The Shadow made another double of the bet. He won. The dealer looked annoyed. He began to concentrate on this lucky player, meanwhile strumming his repeated message when he found the time. More cards turned up to The Shadow's advantage.

Harry thought The Shadow lucky. Particularly lucky, because increased winnings would naturally keep him in the game for a while. There was still considerable time until half past ten. Of course, The Shadow would have to make a break before then; but there was no law against players cashing in their chips. There was an angle, though, to The Shadow's luck that Harry did not see.

The Shadow saw it. The gambler was smooth with his deals. He knew how to handle the faro deck; and he was doing it in an odd fashion. Deliberately, the dealer was running the cards to make The Shadow win.

His drummed signals had ceased. In The Shadow, the dealer saw a connection with the unknown American who had been reported en route to the casino.

JUST what the dealer expected to accomplish by throwing chips The Shadow's way was a question. The Shadow wanted the answer; the sooner he gained it, the better. Therefore, he played in with the dealer's policy. The Shadow's chips began to overspread the table.

The dealer feigned worry. He hesitated; grimaced sourly. At last, he delivered another deal. The Shadow received another win. The dealer beckoned to the attendant who had taken the cash. They conferred in mumbled fashion.

"Sorry, senor." The dealer held up the game, as he spoke to The Shadow. "We have a limit here. You have passed it. We must ask you to cash in your winnings."

The Shadow smiled indulgently. He began to stack his chips. The dealer added:

"The attendant will show you to the manager's office. You will be paid in full, senor. Perhaps, later, you may rejoin the game. But that must be decided by the manager."

Leaving Harry with the other players, The Shadow followed the attendant through a rear door of the faro room. They crossed a paved space and came to a lighted building away from the casino. The attendant explained that cramped space had caused the manager to move his office to this adjacent building.

The excuse was a thin one. Wearing a disarming smile, The Shadow prepared for coming trouble.

He knew that agents of Quetzal were working on sheer guesswork; that if he bluffed them properly, they would think that they had made a mistake. Paid

off, The Shadow could depart a few thousand dollars richer; as far as Quetzal was concerned, The Shadow would be absolutely secure.

Quetzal's men thought of The Shadow as ever-alert, itching for every chance of battle. They were counting on that at present, thinking that The Shadow would give himself away, if they provided the bait. Instead, The Shadow maintained a perfect bluff.

He was carelessly counting his chips as he entered the building beside the casino. A creaking door in a darkened hall did not even attract his attention; nor did whispers from beneath a stairway. The darkened hall at the top apparently meant nothing to The Shadow.

The attendant looked doubtful, very much so, when he ushered The Shadow into a little office where a heavy, bald-headed Mexican sat gloomily at a big desk.

The attendant explained matters; and with it, gave a slight shake of his head to signify that his own opinion was a negative one. The dealer--so the attendant tried to indicate--had made a mistake. This was not The Shadow.

THE bald-headed man introduced himself as Senor Dominio; he began an apologetic speech while the attendant stood by.

"So sorry, senor. It is a rule that we must enforce. We have set the limit, purely so that people will not flock from one room to another. You understand; when there is a heavy winner--pouf! Every one deserts where he is playing."

The Shadow expressed his agreement with the policy. His voice was even-toned, but less calm than Cranston's. As Arnaud, The Shadow appeared to be the type of American who would play the faro table at Tia Juana.

"We must keep record, senor," spoke Dominio. "That is all. When the faro table loses heavily, the owners always ask who was the winner--"

"My name is Arnaud," interposed The Shadow. "I believe that I have a card. Yes, here is one; A few travelers checks, this bank book--they should identify me."

Dominio was practically satisfied. He dismissed the attendant. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket; started it toward his forehead, then put it away to count The Shadow's chips. He opened small safe by the wall, produced bundles of currency, and paid The Shadow in full.

All the while, The Shadow sensed lurkers at the door behind him. They were waiting, dependent entirely upon Dominio's decision. That pleased The Shadow. He knew that he had bluffed Dominio to perfection. The manager wrote a brief note.

"This will straighten matters, Senor Arnaud," he said, politely. "If you care to resume your play at faro, the dealer will oblige you. Show him this message."

He handed the paper to The Shadow, and stepped from the desk. On the way to the door he proffered his hand; The Shadow paused to receive the shake. Tiny drops of sweat had started on Dominio's brow. The fake manager had been through an ordeal, meeting a visitor who might have been The Shadow. Almost mechanically, Dominio drew his handkerchief and started to mop his forehead.

INSTANTLY, The Shadow spun about. From the slow-moving Arnaud, he was transformed into a creature of galvanic fury. His hand whipped a gun from beneath his coat; he was springing toward the door as he drew the weapon.

The Shadow had been intent, listening for any outside move. He had heard one, a split-second before he whirled into action. A pair of Mexicans, with knives were plunging into the little office the moment that The Shadow turned.

A halting cry came from Dominio's throat. It changed to an inarticulate sound. Amazed, the manager saw what followed.

The Shadow met the two assassins as one. These were no mere thugs who relied on stabs in the dark. They were experts, taking advantage of the lighted room. They were sweeping their arms upward for straight throws when The Shadow met them.

Slugging rightward with his gun, The Shadow clashed the knife on that side; the blade bounded from the thrower's hand. Simultaneously, The Shadow's left hand sped for the other attacker's wrist. A quick clutch halted the throw; loosening fingers let the dirk bobble to the floor.

The pair tried to grapple. The Shadow delivered a cross-slug with his gun and felled the man at the left. Gripping the other, he pinned the man's writhing arms and swung the fellow as a shield, between himself and Dominio.

During a momentary stagger, The Shadow kicked the door shut. The barrier slammed, to form a temporary blockade against other invaders.

Dominio had not come to action, as The Shadow expected. The bald-headed man was rooted. His gaping face told what had happened. Dominio had given an unintentional signal. The mopping move with his handkerchief was the cue that assassins expected.

Once, Dominio had halted that move. The second time, he had forgotten. His cry had been a shout of alarm, for fear that Arnaud would be injured by the wrongly cued attackers. His gargle; his present pose, were signs that Dominio was totally astounded by Arnaud's transformation. Only one person could be a fighter of this caliber.

The Shadow!

STARK fear sent Dominio ducking beneath the desk. He pulled a puny revolver from his pocket; popped a pitiful shot that hit the wall five feet from The Shadow. With that action, Dominio gained good cause for worry. The Shadow had ignored him temporarily. Since Dominio wanted trouble, he could have it.

With a side twist, The Shadow sprawled the man with whom he struggled; made a long stride past the desk, toward an inner corner of the room. The leap was carrying him to a spot from which he could cover Dominio. The bald-headed man spied the move and made a ludicrous scramble. Turning back from the desk, he poked his head and shoulders on the far side of the little safe.

He looked like an ostrich, as he squeezed for cover. But Dominio's move was less funny than it seemed. His fat hand grabbed a lever on the wall and gave it a tug, just as The Shadow wheeled in from the corner beyond the desk.

Frayed carpet parted. Two sections of the floor flopped downward like a stage trap. The Shadow glimpsed an unfinished, cell-like room below, its walls lined with cross-beams. The bottom of the space was floorless. Far below was total darkness that meant the depths of a stone-bottomed pit.

The Shadow gained his brief glimpse at close range, for it was the weight of his foot that had caused the trap to drop. Dominio's yank of the lever had merely released the bolts that held the trap in place.

The Shadow performed a one-legged drop, keeping his other foot on the solid floor. Ordinarily, he could have saved himself; but luck was all against him. The Shadow was moving toward the opening as it fell.

His hands made a long swoop across the space, as his second foot followed the first. His gun sped to the solid floor, striking beside the desk. His fingers clutched the floor edge; their hold was too trivial. The Shadow's angled dive kept on, carrying him against the wall below the floor.

The trap, released of weight, returned upward. Shakily, Dominio pulled the lever to clamp the hidden bolts. He picked up The Shadow's gun and stowed it in the desk. He came around to the front, to aid the two assassins whom The Shadow had flattened.

Footsteps pounded up the stairs while the rogues were finding their feet. Viciously, the men grabbed for their knives. Dominio stopped them. He opened the door to admit a corporal, who had come with two soldiers.

"We heard the gunshot," announced the corporal. "What was the trouble here?"

"A misunderstanding," excused Dominio. "It was between these two. They were here on business; they drew their knives against one another. I was excited. I fired my revolver."

Dominio nudged one of the assassins. The fellow took the cue. He

grumbled that he had lost his head, but that the fault was equally the other man's. The soldiers decided to take both into custody; to hold them until the morning, in case Dominio wanted to make a charge against them.

When all were gone except Dominio, the bald-headed men heard shifting footsteps on the stairs. He stepped out to contact one of Quetzal's lurkers. Dominio gave a breathless order:

"Get word to Quetzal. The Shadow was here! Perhaps he has learned too much. Plans should be changed. There may be trouble."

Dominio paused; held back the messenger before the fellow could start. With a broad smile, he added:

"The trouble cannot come from The Shadow himself. Tell Quetzal that I have settled that. The Shadow is dead!"

There was a positiveness in Dominio's tone that made the message-bearer grin. When the man departed, Dominio went back into the office, sat down and mopped his forehead in earnest. Real relief was registered on the fake manager's face.

Perhaps Dominio would not have appeared so pleased, had he known the truth about The Shadow's plunge.

CHAPTER XVI FROM THE DEPTHS

IN surroundings of complete darkness, The Shadow was stretched in a most precarious position. His body was twisted full about. His left hand was clutching a beam of splintery wood with a hold that could scarcely support his body. His right foot was wedged in a narrow crevice that gave him no more than a toe-hold.

That position, nevertheless, had saved him from a death plunge. He was high above the stone-floored pit, clear of the doom that Dominio had regarded as certain.

The very factor that had produced The Shadow's fall was responsible for his temporary safety. The Shadow had pitched through the opened trap only because he was striding too swiftly to halt his toppling weight. Once past the brink, he had continued his sweeping plunge, instead of falling straight downward.

Thudding the beamed wall below the floor level, The Shadow had clutched instinctively to gain a hold. His hands had picked up splinters as they slipped from beam to beam. His left had caught at last, thanks partly to the chance stoppage that his right foot had provided.

Because of the darkness, the flimsy condition of the rough woodwork, The Shadow could do no more than cling for the time being. It was minutes before he found a chance to change position.

His right fingers, creeping warily, so that an arm-shift would not overbalance, found a crevice in the wall. There was a finger-hold between two cracked boards. The Shadow took it and pulled his body slightly upward. Another shift, his right hand sped up to join his left. It caught the beam before his fingers slipped. His foot lost its toe-hold. The Shadow dangled over a space that seemed limitless in the dark.

That did not worry him. His double grip enabled him to pull upward. Above, The Shadow found another hold. Foot by foot, he ascended until his knees were on the beam. A long stretch enabled him to find a beam above.

The Shadow rested, eased down to the lower beam and fished a flashlight from his pocket. He plucked some troublesome splinters from his palm; doused the light and resumed his climb.

It would be poor policy to use the flashlight unguardedly. The Shadow knew that Dominio might decide to inspect the trap. A glow from below would be disastrous to The Shadow's climb. The Shadow had carried only one gun to the casino; therefore, he was weaponless, at present. He would need every element of surprise to deal with Dominio.

Groping, The Shadow reached the upper beam. As he drew his chin above it and groped further, he found a mortised space with a flat surface a few inches

higher. He was at the level of the trapdoor. A clutch at the mortise; a pull that strained his fingers; The Shadow swung up to the beam and flattened there.

THE trap was something of a problem. It opened downward; hence The Shadow had to wedge himself along the beam and reach for the dividing crack in the middle of the trap. He found it, by stretching to a dangerous limit. Following the crack, The Shadow came to a wire; then a bolt. The release was of the simplest sort.

Dominio's lever had pulled the wire.

The trap had dropped. Coming upward on heavy springs, it had locked again, like a latching door, due to an angle at the end of the bolt. Fortunately, the bolt itself was accessible from beneath. Slowly, noiselessly; The Shadow drew the wire.

The trapdoor did not budge. It needed weight to bring it downward. The Shadow's fingers dug, to force themselves between the halves of the trapdoor. They succeeded. The far half of the trap wavered slightly downward. The Shadow had reached the crucial part of his game.

If Dominio saw those fingers that were creeping through the floor, there would be trouble for The Shadow. Dominio had survived one conflict with The Shadow. He would have more nerve for the next. That was an important point that The Shadow considered with his coming strategy.

Wedging his hand along the space, The Shadow neared the solid floor at the side. He was ready for his daring uprising from the pit. His right hand was the one that held the half of the trapdoor. He sped his left to join it. At that instant, The Shadow's body was almost totally in space. Both hands gripped. His full-weight was on the section of the trapdoor.

The hinged slab creaked downward, with The Shadow clinging to it. A one-foot drop, the angle would be too great. In half a second, he was due to drop squarely down into the pit that he had previously escaped. It seemed like an impossible attempt; but The Shadow had calculated the chances. He was not a drowning man, clutching for a wisp; he was like a skater, taking a hasty spin across ice that could hold until he passed.

As the trap started downward, The Shadow snapped his right hand to the solid floor beside it. His left held his body momentarily, before the trap he'd angled too far. His right had its clamp before his weight slipped downward. Hanging by one hand, The Shadow pivoted; clapped his second hand to join the first.

The result was twofold. Not only did The Shadow have a hold upon the solid floor; his shift of weight had stopped the trapdoor's fall. It was bucking upward, under the pressure of its springs.

Leaning his shoulder against the pressing slab, The Shadow used it as a partial brace. That added help assured him of a quick hoist up from the hole.

THE clatter of the trap foretold The Shadow's arrival. It brought a response from Dominio, at the desk. The moment that The Shadow's head emerged, his eyes saw the man who had dropped him through the floor. Dominio was half up from his chair. His eyes were bulgy.

Incredibly, Dominio gawked at the face from the floor. To him, the features of Henry Arnaud were those of a ghost. Had The Shadow been attired in his usual garb of black, which gave him a spectral touch, Dominio would have slumped back in fright. As it was the man remained capable of action. He made himself believe that this was no unearthly reappearance.

What The Shadow's present features lacked; his voice supplied. From his lips came a shuddering peal of whispered mirth that needed no additional effect. That ghostly thrust was a stab that shook Dominio. It raised the whole belief that he had tried to reject. The Shadow was a visitor from the tomb!

Dominio gulped for mercy from the supposed ghost of Arnaud. Quivering, he watched The Shadow reach the floor edge. The Shadow was almost from the trap when the spell broke. A trifling slip; The Shadow caught himself from

sliding back into the hole.

It was enough for Dominio. The accident was human, not ghostly.

Pouncing from his chair, spurred to belated action, Dominio pulled his gun. He jumped toward The Shadow, to take aim at close range. Though The Shadow was stretched out from the trap he had not risen far enough to stop Dominio's shot. He chanced a quick trick of suggestion in the emergency.

Rolling sidewise, The Shadow delivered a quick, triumphant laugh. His hand pointed to the door; gave a beckoning motion. Dominio wheeled instinctively; saw no one at the door. He swung back toward The Shadow, an instant too late.

Dominio's foot had stepped six inches toward the trap. With a sprawling stretch, The Shadow clamped the man's ankle with one stabbing clutch.

The Shadow gave a hard jerk as Dominio aimed. The crook went backward, losing his gun as his neck cracked the desk edge. Bumping the floor, Dominio grabbed for the toyish revolver. The Shadow's swift hand plucked it from his very fingers. The muzzle of the gun pressed cold against Dominio's sweated forehead.

THREE minutes later, Dominio was trussed with his own suspenders and a suitcase strap that The Shadow found in the desk. The victim was gagged with the large silk handkerchief that he had used in giving his accidental signal. The Shadow regained his gun from the desk drawer; went from Dominio's office.

No sign of Quetzal's men below. Matters, apparently, were settled at Dominio's, hence they were absent. Also, ten o'clock had passed. Soon, Quetzal would hold his meeting.

The Shadow doubted that a heavy cordon would be about the Carioca Club. Too many of Quetzal's men, at one spot, might excite suspicion from patrolling soldiers, after last night's brawl. The brawl, itself, had thinned the number of Quetzal's available men. Some of his stoutest fighters were in the local calaboose.

Dominio's office was visited, however, soon after The Shadow had gone. Into the lighted room stepped a dark-visaged, hard-lipped man: Sancho Maringuez. The bandit was rolling a cigarette in his careful fashion. He stared about the office. His eyes fixed on a pair of feet that projected from beside the little safe.

A minute later, Maringuez had released Dominio. Shoving the bald-headed man into the chair, Maringuez demanded harshly:

"What happened here? Word reached me that The Shadow was dead. I come from the casino, to find you a prisoner!"

Dominio pointed to the trapdoor.

"He came out!" he panted. "The Shadow—from there, where I had dropped him! He was a living ghost, I thought—"

Maringuez was holding his Quetzal token; Dominio, fumbling in his pocket, had brought a duplicate to view. The countersign seemed unneeded on this occasion. Though he had never met Maringuez before, Dominio recognized the bandit's authoritative manner.

"The Shadow knows of the meeting," gulped Dominio. "He came from the faro room. The dealer had already given the signal. The meeting should be changed from the Carioca Club."

"Who are you to make suggestions," sneered Maringuez. "Perhaps you are not so important to Quetzal as you suppose. He has a way of dispensing with those who fail and send in false reports."

The bandit lighted his hand-made cigarette. Dominio shuddered; began to whine. That veiled threat carried weight, coming from the lips of Sancho Maringuez. Dominio needed no more evidence to accept the bandit as Quetzal.

"Your pardon, Quetzal," pleaded Dominio. "I thought only that if the meeting place could be changed—"

"That is something to which I can attend. Meanwhile, remain here. Turn out the lights. Bar the door. Admit no one! Drop yourself through your own trap, if you have nothing else to do. Bah! It proved as worthless as you!"

MARINGUEZ strode from the office, joined Tompino at the foot of the stairs. He looked up to see Dominio's light turn out. Tompino questioned his chief:

"Where next? Back to the casino?"

"No," returned Maringuez. "Summon our men, Tompino."

"What! Our bandits? Here in Tia Juana--"

"Summon them! Other fighters have been puny. It is time that we showed what men from the Sierras can accomplish. Bring them silently, Tompino, as stealthily as we have done in the mountain passes. You have seen the Carioca Club. Bring them there."

Tompino, about to start away, ventured one more question that he hoped his chief would answer.

"We shall find someone there?" asked Tompino. "At the Carioca Club?"

"Yes," replied Maringuez. His purr was confident. "We shall find El Ombre!"

Tompino was leering as he sneaked away. The time that he had long awaited was due: Another meeting between Maringuez and The Shadow; not like the one wherein Poroq had figured. This time, Maringuez would be in full control. He would settle scores with The Shadow.

A squad of bandits, to Tompino's way of thinking, could accomplish more than a regiment of soldiers. With his own men behind him, Sancho Maringuez would prove invincible.

Tompino could foresee the finish of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BANDIT SNARE

SOON after Maringuez had sent Tompino to summon the banditti, an important event occurred in the faro room at the casino. There, Harry Vincent had been playing along with luck, wondering if The Shadow would return.

It was after ten o'clock. Unless The Shadow came soon, he would not come at all. Harry knew where he would go instead; to the Green Room at the Carioca Club. It never occurred to Harry that The Shadow could have encountered trouble. Harry had seen The Shadow experience luck on his own at gaming tables. The faro dealer's deliberate effort to give The Shadow money was something that Harry had not guessed.

Once again, The Shadow had left Harry in security. Every event in Tia Juana had pointed to a lone-wolf game by The Shadow. Since last night, Harry's position had been becoming constantly stronger. The faro room was a safe spot for Harry; moreover, there was a chance that he could still be useful there.

Harry, himself, suddenly saw the opportunity.

Without his knowledge, much had happened. The report of The Shadow's death had reached Quetzal. An order to change the meeting place was moving about, even before Maringuez's visit to Dominio's office. Harry saw the result.

An attendant said something to the faro dealer. Apparently, it concerned the matter of bets; but the sequel was a new drumming from the dealer's nimble fingers. As Harry fumbled with his chips, he heard the coded message, in its slow Morse:

Quetzal... Change meeting place... Boundary House. Time the same...
Quetzal.

An interval. The message was repeated. The dealer was gambling with more than the faro layout. He was counting on foreign agents being here. There was little reason why they should have left. It was not ten-thirty.

Some of the players left the faro table. None looked like men that Harry would expect as persons engaged in espionage. More followed; the faro game was going dead. Chances were large that in the general exodus, the wanted men were starting on their way. Harry could not tell by appearances.

He had a duty; and an important one. The Shadow had gone to the Carioca Club, in the heart of Tia Juana. Instead, his destination should be the

Boundary House, a hotel actually but a few feet from the border line between Mexico and the United States. It was Harry's job to get to the Carioca Club, find the Green Room and tip off The Shadow to the change.

DEPARTURE was easy. More players were cashing in their chips. Harry's supply was not a large one. He proffered them, received his money and went out through the casino.

The crowd was as large as ever. Near the roulette table, Harry saw Creeth, back from the racing club. The portly horse fancier was shaking hands with some old friends. Harry dodged out of sight.

A chat with Creeth; introductions to more people, would certainly delay Harry's task. Avoiding that complication, Harry reached the front of the casino and started a hasty walk toward the Carioca Club.

Though Harry did not know it, he had begun a race to the Carioca Club itself. His way would be barred if he did not arrive there before Maringuez's bandits. Luckily, the distance was short.

Harry arrived at the Carioca; found a good throng on the lower floor. The upstairs was completely darkened, presumably unoccupied. Harry found an outside stairway and reached the second floor.

There was a dim light in an inner hall. By its glow, Harry found the Green Room. He listened at the door; then cautiously turned the knob and entered. To his surprise, he found the Green Room illuminated.

Its windows were heavily curtained; they shut off this inside light. There were curtains, too, that denoted connecting doors; others, for servant entries. This room had been completely fitted and furnished, but never used.

All the curtains were green; so was the plush upholstery. The room looked deserted; its mild color gave it an inviting appearance. Quetzal had certainly chosen a good place to conduct his insidious business. It was one spot that no one would ordinarily suspect.

The thought struck Harry again that, after all, this Green Room would not be the meeting place. Harry knew that he must find The Shadow as soon as his chief entered.

A curtain stirred as Harry turned toward the outer door. From a draped window ledge, The Shadow stepped into view. He was cloaked in black; he had chosen a sure hiding place to await the coming of Quetzal and the unofficial representatives of certain foreign governments.

Seeing Harry, The Shadow approached; so noiseless was his stride that Harry was startled when he heard the whispered command:

"Report!"

Turning to find The Shadow right beside him. Harry gave the news of the faro dealer's new message. The Shadow breathed a laugh of understanding. He had foreseen that prospect, but had doubted that Quetzal would change plans at so late an hour.

Whether or not Quetzal had found Dominio was unimportant. The Shadow had counted upon Harry to spot a new signal. He had known that Harry would come here if such were given. There was plenty of time to reach the Boundary House. Quetzal, the foreign agents as well, would probably be delayed by the shift of arrangements.

THE SHADOW turned toward the door, and Harry followed. The noise that made The Shadow pause was one that Harry did not hear. Following The Shadow's gaze, Harry saw a rustle of a curtain at the side of the room. The Shadow watched it; his quick eyes caught the glint of a gun muzzle.

The weapon projected too far to be a revolver. It was a rifle—an unusual weapon to be used in Tia Juana. At that moment, The Shadow could have opened quick battle with the unwary rifleman. His gloved hand went toward his automatic; then paused.

Harry chewed his lips as he saw the halted gesture. Alone, garbed in black, The Shadow could have faded from that threat. With Harry present, The Shadow was handicapped. Harry had a gun of his own; he reached for it. He was

ready for battle, even if he should become the opening target. At least, Harry's few shots would help The Shadow.

That was not to be. The Shadow whispered restraining words to his agent. The rifle had partly withdrawn; only its very muzzle showed. The threat, however, had doubled. There was a second rifle beside the first.

Harry looked quickly across the room. Two guns were thrusting through from the curtains opposite!

More rifles showed at the curtains to the serving exits. Muffled sounds arrived from windows hidden beyond green drapes. The Shadow turned with Harry to see a gun at each window. Men with the agility of monkeys had scrambled up the outer wall to take their posts there!

The Shadow laughed.

His tone was a low one; more of understanding than of sinister mirth. Harry saw his chief look toward the outer door. It, alone, could afford departure; but chances of reaching it would be small. Guns could blaze from every other quarter. The Shadow and Harry Vincent were completely covered.

The last slim chance faded, as Harry stared. The main door, alone uncurtained, swung inward. Rifles bristled from the hallway, aimed by rough-clad men who wore sombreros. They looked like the bandits that they were. Four in all, they spread, as they heard a purred command.

Between the ranks stepped Sancho Maringuez, in his fancy attire. His lips held their downturned smile. He bore no weapon; he needed none. His loyal banditti held full control. Maringuez saw The Shadow, walked toward the waiting figure in black.

Behind Maringuez came Tompino, wearing a grin that spread across his scar-lined face. Maringuez had found The Shadow; and Tompino was glad. At last, El Ombre would meet his match. Perhaps Maringuez would duel him alone, since El Ombre was so fixed that he could try no tricks.

That would be good, thought Tompino. Very good, since The Shadow had a lieutenant, with whom Tompino could duel. Tompino surveyed Harry; decided that the Americano would be a worthy foe. Then, with a scowl, Tompino dismissed his idea as a dream. It would be better, easier for Maringuez to turn his bandits into a firing squad, to mow down The Shadow and the man with him.

Tompino had come to the very thought that was gripping Harry Vincent. This was to be the finish, Harry decided. At best, there could be short battle, an effort to dispose of a few foemen while murderous rifles pumped. Harry saw ridicule in the smile that Maringuez wore. He was impressed by The Shadow's pose. His chief was standing with folded arms, awaiting the bandit's approach. Perhaps The Shadow had some counterstroke in mind. Yet Harry could not see just how it would serve.

From The Shadow's own story of past events, Harry had linked Maringuez with Quetzal. He had recognized that the bandit leader and the superspy could be one. Here was the proof of it. Quetzal--otherwise Maringuez--had changed the meeting place so that he could trap The Shadow while the foreign agents were assembling elsewhere.

THE SHADOW spoke, in sibilant Spanish. His words were addressed to Maringuez. Harry understood their import.

"We meet at last," declared The Shadow. "I have awaited you long, Maringuez."

"Ah, si, El Ombre," returned Maringuez, with a bow. "This meeting is indeed a timely one."

To Harry, The Shadow's words were merely an effort to stay the slaughter. He took Maringuez's reply for a meek courtesy. The next occurrence came as a total surprise to Harry. His bewilderment, though, was outmatched by that of Tompino.

The Shadow peeled the glove from his right hand. He stretched his hand toward Maringuez. The bandit received it with a hearty shake. The Shadow's laugh was a pleased one; Maringuez's smile showed real enthusiasm!

Five seconds later, The Shadow was introducing Harry to Maringuez, who,

in turn, was ordering the astonished Tompino to have his men lower their rifles. From a spot where doom threatened, the Green Room had become a place of mutual accord

"I thought that Quetzal might be here," apologized Maringuez. "That is why I posted my men. We must make ready, in case he arrives."

"There is no need," returned The Shadow. "I saw your men from the window. I was coming out to meet you when Vincent arrived with news."

"Concerning Quetzal?"

"Yes. He has changed the meeting place to the Boundary House."

Maringuez registered a troubled look. He remarked: "Our time is short--"

"Not too short," interposed The Shadow. "We cannot reach the Boundary House before Quetzal arrives there. But we can enter long before he leaves."

"Only one could enter there, El Ombre. You, alone."

"You need not be distant, Maringuez. Cover from the south. I shall provide for the north. We can turn the boundary meeting to our advantage."

The Shadow and Sancho Maringuez had united in a common cause; together, they were sounding the doom of Quetzal. Again, they shook hands. Maringuez brought in his men for new instructions; The Shadow motioned Harry to follow him.

Outside the Carioca Club, The Shadow gave Harry a message to take across the Border and place with Vic Marquette.

As Harry nodded his response to the instructions, The Shadow faded with the night. His whispered laugh was a sibilant echo, stranger than Harry had ever heard it in the past.

Amazing had been Harry's past adventures with The Shadow; but never had any been as astounding as tonight's. The Shadow's meeting with Sancho Maringuez still held its dumfounding spell upon Harry Vincent.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE BOUNDARY

"NONE pass but Quetzal! His token is the jeweled serpent!"

The words were whispered by skulkers, as they met on gloomy streets close by the Boundary House. The order had come from Quetzal, promptly at half past ten. The master-spy had bided his time well.

Quetzal had waited for the foreign agents to reach their destination. They were in the Boundary House, protected by the cordon of desperadoes that Quetzal had supplied.

Buildings were thick where the road led across the Border. The Tia Juana of Mexico blended into the California town of the same name, except for the short space where all traffic stopped. There, the customs officials of both countries surveyed all passers.

Away from that lighted street, buildings thinned. Instead of watchful officers, a high, barbed-wire fence stretched in all directions. That barrier was not impassable; but getting through was not an easy task. American infantry were near, in case they were needed along the boundary. On the Mexican side, patrolling cavalrymen were constantly on duty.

Fugitives were not infrequent from California into Mexico. They stood little chance of making a run for it, with a horseman in pursuit.

The Boundary House was not on the main street. It was just off the line of main traffic; and it was entirely on the Mexican side of the Border. The north wall of the old hotel stopped short of the barbed-wire fence, allowing about a dozen feet of space. Patrolling cavalry rode through there whenever they were on duty.

The Shadow knew that Quetzal's men would be covering the Boundary House, but he doubted that they would be numerous near the northern wall; Quetzal had not conspired with the military in Tia Juana, as he had in Ensenada. Suspicious prowlers would be apprehended if they lurked along the north wall of the old frame hotel.

That situation did not handicap Quetzal. In a sense, it made matters somewhat easier for his depleted squads of men. They could leave the boundary

line to the regular patrol. Quetzal had simply ordered that a watch be kept near the fence. That fitted with The Shadow's expectation.

The Shadow had preserved a former advantage. Quetzal had not found Dominio. It was Maringuez who had discovered The Shadow's prisoner; and Maringuez had seen to it that Dominio would pass no further word. Shrewdly, the bandit leader had posed as Quetzal for Dominio's benefit.

Quetzal's change of the meeting place was simply a matter of policy. He wanted his men away from the Carioca Club; so that any rumor, started by The Shadow while alive, would be regarded as a false report if the law visited the Carioca. As for the new meeting place, Quetzal was positive that it remained unknown. Word of it had not gone out until after the supposed death of The Shadow.

SILENT, obscured in his garb of black, The Shadow neared a northern corner of the Boundary House. So far, he had easily circled Quetzal's men. Creeping closer, The Shadow sensed that his luck might soon end. He resorted to other tactics, when he heard a harsh growl in the darkness near him.

One of Quetzal's hidden pickets had heard a slight sound that The Shadow purposely made. That noise was bait, to draw the lurker from cover.

Waiting, The Shadow counted on the chance that the picket would retire. Instead, the man crept closer; gave a sharp hiss to call a comrade. Peeling his gloves from his hands, The Shadow answered in whispered Spanish. He gleamed a tiny flashlight, close to the ground. The two men saw a coin of Quetzal beneath the glow. The token glittered from The Shadow's palm.

Questions in the darkness. The Shadow replied that he was a new guard, sent to cover the space between the hotel and the boundary line. Quetzal's men guided him to his objective, reminding that he would have to be careful whenever the military guard went past.

At the corner, one picket returned to his post. The other remained with The Shadow, never guessing the identity of his companion in the darkness.

Against the white wall above his shoulder, The Shadow saw a window. He whispered that he would take this post. The picket started along the wall. As soon as the man was gone, The Shadow scaled to the sill above.

Tapping the window pane, The Shadow waited, confident that a response would come. The window slid slowly upward; a gun muzzle nudged The Shadow's ribs. One false move would have meant death from the inside guard. The Shadow held off doom by whispering the name that called for further countersign:

"Quetzal!"

The guard struck a match below the window level. Into the flame light came The Shadow's hand, flashing its disk. The gun muzzle moved away. The Shadow came over the sill to join the guard. He heard the man whisper:

"What is the message?"

"No message," returned The Shadow. "I come at Quetzal's summons. I am to pass."

The guard's answer was a fierce, half-suppressed snarl. He teathed the words: "None pass but Quetzal!"

THE utterance told The Shadow his mistake. He twisted; felt the movement of the guard's elbow as the man tried to cover him with the revolver. Sliding his hand swiftly through the dark, The Shadow located his adversary's gun wrist.

The bend that The Shadow gave that wrist not only turned away the gun; it brought the guard halfway to the floor. The revolver struck The Shadow's ankle, and scarcely thudded as it deflected to the floor. The Shadow sped fingers to the thug's throat, stopped the gargly cry that the man tried to give.

Others were questioning hoarsely in the darkness. The Shadow lost no time. Catching the doubled body of his gulping enemy, he hoisted the man off the floor and pitched him headlong through the window. There was a thump from the ground near the wire fence.

"What was the trouble?"

The Shadow answered the hoarse question with a snarl of his own. He was faking the voice of the overpowered guard.

"An impostor," he told the newcomers. "He tried to pass. I told him that none pass but Quetzal."

"Si," was the approving answer. "None pass but Quetzal."

"His token," added another voice, "is the jeweled serpent."

The Shadow struck a match; showed his token. It satisfied the other inside men. From the window, however, The Shadow could hear a stir on the ground. The stunned guard was recovering, In darkness, The Shadow prepared for emergency battle. He drew an automatic halfway, then let it slide back.

There were hoofbeats from the turf. A Mexican cavalryman galloped up, flashed a light upon the half-groggy guard and grabbed the fellow's collar. The Shadow heard the soldier haul the fellow away. There would be no trouble from that captured watcher.

Other sounds followed from below the window. Pickets had met; were discussing the capture. They decided that the prisoner was the newcomer who had joined them in duty. One less picket did not matter.

FROM then on, The Shadow's course was one of double caution. The other guards retired. He heard the creak of the door through which they passed.

Closing the window, The Shadow followed. From the darkened room, he reached a dim silent passage, that showed several doors ajar. Quetzal's men were listening from other darkened rooms. The Shadow glided noiselessly, chose a door that was shut tight. Easing it open, he stepped through to a new spot of danger.

He was in a tiny passage that opened directly into the dingy room that served as hotel lobby. There, he saw Mexicans chatting; fraternizing with a few Americans who looked like riffraff. A tiny mechanical piano was pounding from the corner, adding to the hubbub.

Some of those men, perhaps, were actual guests at the decrepit hotel. Most of them, however, were agents of Quetzal. The place was a hot-bed of foemen. One glimpse of The Shadow, and guns and dirks would have flashed in plenty.

It chanced that no one saw The Shadow. The rear of the hotel belonged to other guards, so no glances went in that direction. Moreover, The Shadow stood in a spot that was reasonably dark. His shrouded form could not have been glimpsed at first sight.

One thuggish rogue did stare in The Shadow's direction. He saw what he thought was an outlined shape; fancied that it stirred. Shiftily, the fellow approached; then he grumbled and went back to his chair. There was no one in the tiny passage.

The Shadow had gone. All that the watcher detected was his last motion of departure. Picking an opening to the right, The Shadow was creeping past the corner of a short hallway that was totally dark.

The direction of the hallway told that it led to the far side of the hotel. This was the route by which visitors had entered; the way by which Quetzal was due to come

Lurkers guarded the darkness. Pressing close to the wall to avoid a passer, The Shadow felt the edge of a stair above his head. He reached for the next step; found it lower down. Inching his way forward, he sought to gain the bottom of the stairway. A stir, up ahead, caused him to pause just short of his goal.

A door had opened; then closed. There was a new arrival in the pitch-black hallway. A flashlight gleamed low, advancing toward the bottom of the stairs. Guards were close beside the man who held the light in one hand, while he flickered its rays upon his other palm.

There, almost within The Shadow's reach, was a shimmering cluster of tiny, resplendent gems. They sparkled from a large medallion that lay heavy in the outstretched hand. Those tiny stones were valuable because of their

matching, rather than their individual worth; They formed miniature mosaic, grotesque in its design.

The figure typified upon the jeweled medallion was the feathered, dart-eyed image of Quetzal. This was the master token of all those that depicted the plumed serpent god.

THE light's glimmer ended. Footsteps sounded upon the stairway. The jeweled token was no longer visible; it was being carried by the master-spy who had taken the name of Quetzal for his own.

The Shadow had gained opportunity to deal with Quetzal. Shots in the darkness could have dropped him. The Shadow let the opportunity pass. Death would have been his own lot, also. Quetzal's followers were too many, here in this lower hall that offered The Shadow nothing in the way of a barricade.

Stealth still remained The Shadow's policy. He used it with uncanny skill, as the followers of Quetzal whispered at his elbow. Their master had gone to a room above. They would let no one follow. As they took that oath, their very words were belied.

Upon the stairs that Quetzal had ascended, The Shadow progressed upward. Silent, he remained invisible in the darkness that Quetzal had provided for his own secret entry.

Quetzal's meeting was to have a visitor as uncanny as one returned from the dead. Alone, in the midst of surrounding foes, The Shadow was bringing his challenge to Quetzal.

CHAPTER XIX DEBTS REPAID

MEN were grouped about a squatly, plain-topped table, their figures scarcely discernible. The only light in the room came from a hanging lamp with battered cardboard shade, poised just above the table.

Only the trickles of light that filtered through the broken cardboard, showed traces of the grouped men. Their hands and arms were visible, however, around the table; and their low-toned voices were plain.

The men were speaking English; but with varied accents. Each in turn, they were addressing the man at the table head. He had arrived but a few minutes before.

"We have decided," came a foreign tone. "At first, we planned to bid for the information that you possess. Then we decided that such would be useless. The facts will be good for all. We shall share the cost."

The speaker paused, while men beside him gave their affirmation. There was a short halt in the transaction; then came a rasped statement from the man at the head:

"Quetzal never bargains. You have been told the price."

"Of course," agreed one of the foreign agents. "We have the money for you. Two million dollars that you ask. But before we deliver it, we must see the plans."

The hands of Quetzal produced a long envelope. From it, they removed a batch of thin papers. Drawn with a fine pen were diagrams in black ink. Some were maps; others, details of military fortifications. Charts of roads formed a clustered network on one paper.

Piece by piece, Quetzal had wormed information from different spies. No one man had gained items of complete value. Only by putting the bits together had Quetzal succeeded in gaining the whole. His harsh laugh told that story.

"The information is complete," announced Quetzal. "When old spies failed me, I employed new ones. Whatever was lacking in any particular, I learned through special search. Each item is placed where it belongs, to form a work of art. Like this--"

From his hand he flashed his jeweled medallion. Quetzal's visitors uttered their admiration when they saw the tiny mosaic, with its intricate workmanship. Quetzal could have chosen no better example with which to compare his documents. The foreign agents recognized that the prepared plans were as

complete as Quetzal claimed.

There was one lone objector. He began:

"These diagrams are not explanatory. They mean nothing as they stand. The symbols upon them do not tell what each item represents."

"Here is the code." Quetzal plucked one paper from beneath the others. "It bears the symbols. Space did not permit them on the diagrams. Furthermore"-his tone was convincing-"I kept them separate until tonight. Since one was useless without the other, the loss of either would not have mattered."

THERE were exchanged mutters of admiration from the foreign agents. Paper crinkled. Into the light, hands began to thrust their quota of money. Quetzal was being paid his millions in bundles of American currency.

Pushing the plans aside, Quetzal spread the cash in the light, noted the prevalence of thousand-dollar bills. With a chuckle, he reached to the side, raised the bundle of plans to pass them to his visitors.

"Which of you requires these?" queried Quetzal. "I suppose that you have decided that among you. Copies can be easily made-"

A hand stretched in from the table side. Upon its third finger shone a gem that captured Quetzal's eye. He would have paid high for that jewel; it was as unique as his gemmed mosaic.

Quetzal recognized the stone as a girasol, a jewel prevalent in Mexico; but this fire opal was matchless. He wondered which of the lucky foreign agents had found so rare a buy in Tia Juana, where good jewels were seldom seen.

The gem splashed living fire from its ever-changing depths. Quetzal saw azure change to crimson; then to deep maroon, as the hand moved back into darkness. The plans were gone with it.

Quetzal began to bundle his money. He halted, as he heard sharp words among the foreign agents.

"I was to hold the plans! That was our agreement!"

"It was you who took them!"

"That was not my hand-"

"Nor mine! Perhaps he-"

The voices shifted to a babble of foreign expression. One man's hand clamped upon Quetzal's fist. The man ripped an accusation that Quetzal understood. They were accusing him of using an accomplice.

"You tricked us! The plans were false!"

"Wait!" Quetzal bawled the interruption in English. "Someone else has tricked us! Someone still within this room! Stay here, while I find the lights."

He started from the table. The foreign agents blocked him. Furiously, Quetzal shouted that they were fools; that the thief was escaping, would be gone within a few brief moments. Quetzal shouted that the room must have light.

A switch clicked from the wall, close by the door. Quetzal's request was granted. Old wall fixtures provided light that showed the entire room. Quetzal, head down, was wrestling himself from the clutch of three fighting men, who stopped their brawl when the lights came.

Near the door was the person who had pressed the switch; one whom Quetzal trusted. For a moment, the foreign agents thought that she could have snatched the plans, for they remembered that a dark-skinned woman had received them here.

The woman at the door was Dolores Borenza. She had come to the room when she heard the excitement. Beside her was the opened door. In her right hand, Dolores held a revolver; avidly, she was searching for a living target. Her eyes gleamed as she saw the one she wanted.

Just outside the doorway was The Shadow. His hands were gloved again; he was a figure of jet-blackness. Like his girasol, the fortification plans were gone from view. They were tucked deep in a fold of his black cloak.

WITH one hand on the doorknob, The Shadow gripped an automatic with the other. He had expected to be clear; to have the door closed before Quetzal and the foreign agents began their pursuit. Dolores, sliding in before The Shadow reached the door, had managed to stay the cloaked visitor's departure.

Dolores was the immediate menace. The Shadow saw her from the corner of his eye. As the woman swung the gun and jabbed it toward The Shadow, she made the thrust too far; The Shadow's free hand whipped from the knob. It caught Dolores by the wrist.

The murderous senorita fired wildly, as The Shadow ended her aim. The Shadow's forearm tugged with piston-like power. His fingers relaxed. Dolores took a headlong lurch across the room. She hit the wall; her gun bounded from her hand. The Shadow swung to aim for Quetzal.

Away from the foreign agents, Quetzal was facing The Shadow; he was tugging to produce a gun, while his face glared its rage. The man's broad countenance was distorted; but even when he played the role of Quetzal, he could not lose the features that belonged to him. The vicious face of Quetzal was that of Latimer Creeth!

ONLY luck saved Creeth at that moment. He was slow on the draw; and The Shadow did not intend to wait for the murderer to gain a weapon. Had the duel been unmolested, The Shadow could have dropped Creeth while the self-styled Quetzal was still fumbling for his gun. The foreign agents provided the intervention that saved Creeth.

They wanted their plans. They wanted escape. They saw The Shadow as a blurred shape; took him for an ordinary intruder. They surged forward, shouting, straight into his path of fire.

The Shadow shifted from the doorway. These men were not murderers. Scummy though their enterprise might be, they were following orders that they had to take.

In the hallway, The Shadow flung the grapplers wide. He chucked one for the stairway; hoisted another into the room where Dolores had been hidden; flung the third to the end of the darkened upstairs hall. Wheeling to handle Creeth, The Shadow saw the arch-spy coming for the door. Again, The Shadow had no chance to handle Creeth.

The shot that Dolores had fired was a damaging one. It had echoed far-down to the floor below, out through the partly opened window. Quetzal's men were piling up the stairs. Reserves were pouring to the lower hall from everywhere.

The Shadow ripped shots down the stairs. Men fired upward; but they were stumbling as they came. The Shadow gripped the only one that arrived; poured more lead upon the others. He emptied his automatic in a hurry, then flung the weapon downward to crack the skull of a rising foe.

That attack had faltered. The Shadow thought of Creeth. Struggling with the man who had reached him, The Shadow spun the fellow about and used him as a shield while getting another gun. Propelling his victim ahead of him, The Shadow bowled toward the door of the meeting room. He found Creeth at the threshold.

Creeth fired viciously; clipped his own man with the bullets. He hoped that slugs would penetrate through to The Shadow; but they did not. The Shadow chucked his human shield toward Creeth, just as the murderer started more gunfire. With the slumping thug sprawling between, The Shadow leaped for Creeth, to knock away his gun.

Creeth dived back into the room, losing his aim without waiting for The Shadow. There, he turned suddenly, sprang for the door again as The Shadow came through. There was time for neither to aim. They grappled; went staggering across the room. They hit the table; it clattered. Creeth's money fluttered all about them. The portly murderer saw the sight, as he began to weaken under The Shadow's pressure.

Creeth saw more. Dolores had risen. She was standing by the low-gilled

window, aiming with her revolver. She wanted one chance to clip The Shadow. Creeth tried to help make it, but could not.

The Shadow, too, saw Dolores. He was holding Creeth's bulk in her direction.

DESPITE his predicament, Creeth grinned. His leer was ugly; it expressed his thoughts. Tumult had begun below; shots were barking everywhere. From that bedlam came the pound of footsteps on the stairs. Rescuers were at hand. They would clip The Shadow from their angle, if Dolores failed to get him from hers.

That thought inspired Creeth to tremendous fury. He became what he had prided himself as being: Quetzal, the serpent master, whose ways were more powerful than those of man. He had fared badly in a scuffle with The Shadow at Ensenada; but Tia Juana would tell a different story.

Creeth writhed with amazing strength. He could not pluck himself from The Shadow's grasp, but he did accomplish a result that brought a cry of murderous encouragement from Dolores.

As stamping feet reached the top of the stairs, Creeth forced The Shadow's gun hand downward. With it, Creeth shoved the muzzle of his own revolver hard against The Shadow's neck; Dolores saw Creeth's finger on the trigger; heard the muffled report of a gun. She shouted shrill triumph that faded on her lips.

Creeth, not The Shadow, was the one who slumped. White smoke that curled upward was from an automatic pressed against Creeth's ribs. The revolver was dropping unfired from Creeth's fingers. The Shadow had dealt a mortal wound to Quetzal.

CREETH'S finish brought sudden elation to Dolores. Her service with the superspy had reached its end tonight. The reign of Quetzal was ended; that did not matter to Dolores. She had gained the opportunity that her murder-crazed mind had long craved: her chance to settle with The Shadow.

This time, it would be a certainty. The Shadow was turning to meet her aim; and with it, he was settling his own doom. Even if The Shadow fired first, he would die. The surge of men from the stairs had reached the door. By turning toward Dolores, The Shadow had rendered himself helpless before that outside attack.

Dolores, as she aimed, was willing to take her chance of death, because it nullified The Shadow's hope of life. There would be no time for him to deal with others. At last, The Shadow had reached a final trap!

The Shadow's aim overtook the move of the senorita's gun. So far as Dolores was concerned, The Shadow was winning by a split-second, although the woman did not recognize the fact. For a long instant, The Shadow's gun muzzle loomed straight for the eyes of the murderess. The gloved finger paused on the trigger of the .45, and made no further move.

A rifle shot had boomed from outside the hotel. With it, Dolores jolted. The senorita swayed; staggered back to the low sill. She lost her balance at the window; plunged out into the darkness below. No cry came from her lips. Dolores Borenza was dead before she pitched to the ground outside.

A revolver spoke from the doorway of the room. Its aim was not toward The Shadow. The bullet was for Creeth, who had made a frenzied effort to rise, despite his mortal wound. The slug stopped the vanquished Quetzal; rolled him upon the heaps of blood money that were strewn on the floor.

The shot was not necessary. Creeth never could have strengthened to take aim at The Shadow. The man who had fired did not know that. The Shadow turned to greet Sancho Maringuez.

The bandit leader and his men were the ones who had arrived from the stairs. Only Dolores had mistaken them for Quetzal's reinforcements. The Shadow had known that Sancho would arrive.

"ONE takes lessons from El Ombre," Maringuez purred, smoothly, as he

looked toward the window. "You already had the senorita helpless when Tompino fired from outside. Yet Tompino did well, from the distance where I placed him.

"As for Quetzal"-Maringuez looked toward Creeth's body-"I can see that you held him also, El Ombre. He was as good as dead when I gave him another bullet."

With downturned smile, Maringuez ordered his bandits to gather up the bloodstained money that surrounded Creeth. In his smooth tone, Maringuez spoke to the unhearing dead man:

"Ah, Senor Creeth, you paid me one thousand pesos. for your protection. Perhaps you were sorrowed when I fired-if you were not already too unhappy because of El Ombre. But remember: I, Sancho Maringuez, have kept my word. I gave protection to Latimer Creeth; but I made no bargain with Quetzal."

Battle had ended outside the hotel. The last of Quetzal's followers were captured. Some had been bagged by Maringuez's outside men. Others, trying to squeeze through the boundary wire, were grabbed by patrolling Mexican cavalry.

Those who did get through were captured also. Men met them on the other side. Those same men came through the fence, piled into the hotel and hurried upstairs. They were United States government men, headed by Vic Marquette. Harry Vincent had brought them to the scene of battle.

Sancho Maringuez, turning, looked for The Shadow. The bandit's eyes blinked. El Ombre was gone. As Maringuez still stared, puzzled, Harry arrived with Marquette. The Shadow's agent introduced Vic to Maringuez.

Smilingly, the bandit leader ordered his men to turn over Quetzal's wealth. They did so, giving the cash to Vic and the government men. Bandits lifted Creeth's body, carted it from the room. Marquette spoke anxiously to Maringuez:

"The stolen plans-where are they? We captured the foreign agents, but they had no papers on them-"

"The plans are safe," purred Maringuez. "You will receive them soon, senor, from one who will never lose them. They are in the keeping of El Ombre!"

From somewhere in the stilled outer darkness came a weird, untraceable token that justified the statement of Sancho Maringuez. A startling burst of sinister mirth, it rose to eerie crescendo; then faded, shuddering into the quiet of the night.

That laugh told the triumph of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XX

THE SHADOW TALKS

THERE were three who met, the next night, on the veranda of the hotel at Agua Caliente, near Tia Juana. There, Vic Marquette introduced Sancho Maringuez to Lamont Cranston.

"Mr. Cranston served as contact with The Shadow," explained Marquette. "The Shadow has delivered the papers that he took from Creeth. The spy's plans have gone to Washington, with the two million dollars."

Maringuez seemed pleased at meeting a friend of The Shadow. Vic suggested that Sancho tell the details of the part he played.

"I work with the Mexican government," spoke Maringuez, with a smile. "They ask me, senor, to search for Quetzal. So I become a bandit on the road between the Colorado River and Tia Juana. With two lieutenants, Poroq and Tompino, I watch the hacienda owned by Latimer Creeth.

"I suspect that spies are using that hacienda; but I am not sure. I learn that two Americanos come there, so I search. I have gone back to the mountains, when-pouf!-Poroq disappears. There is only one place he could go: to the Ensenada road.

"I send Tompino there to look for him; and I follow with my men. Tompino thinks that he has shot El Ombre; instead, we find Poroq. I was very glad. I did not know that El Ombre was in Mexico, or I would not let him make so bad a mistake."

Pausing, Maringuez produced the token that he had taken from Poroq's body. He showed the disk, with its device of Quetzal.

"I suspect Poroq," explained Maringuez, "because he has tried to kill El Ombre. I find this token with Poroq. I had sought long to gain a token used by Quetzal. Tompino and I, we go to Ensenada. There, I learn that El Ombre has been captured; that he is to die at dawn.

"I had been told of Moyo, the Indian. To him, I give a message, with the order signed by the president of Mexico. It reaches Lieutenant Coroza. El Ombre is safe. Ensenada becomes-as you would say it-'too hot' for Quetzal. So we go to Tia Juana.

"Still, I do not suspect Creeth. El Ombre came from the hacienda. Perhaps he is one friend to Creeth. Perhaps not; it may be that Creeth bribed Poroq. So I wait in Tia Juana. I meet El Ombre. Then all is well."

FROM his pocket, Maringuez brought a crumpled piece of paper. Upon it were written sentences that were broken by a torn edge. The paper read:
Latimer Creeth is Quet
He will visit Tia Ju
to give plans to for
agents. Watch for si
from dealer at faro t
in main gambling casi

"I found this in Creeth's pocket," remarked Maringuez. "It is the big part of a note that he must have torn away from James Rikeland. Perhaps The Shadow found the rest."

In Cranston's leisurely style, The Shadow produced the remainder of the note, as though he had just remembered it. He added it to the large portion, to produce the complete message:

Latimer Creeth is Quetzal.
He will visit Tia Juana
to give plans to foreign
agents. Watch for signal
from dealer at faro table
in main gambling casino.

Maringuez eyed the small section at the right of the message. His expression showed both wonder and admiration, as he tried to figure that trifling clue. He heard the quiet voice of Cranston explain:

"The Shadow knew that the first sentence named Latimer Creeth as Quetzal. The syllable 'zal,' explained that; because it finished the word 'Quetzal' and was followed by a period. The second line ending in 'ana' obviously referred to Tia Juana. The words 'foreign' and 'signal' were also plain by their endings. They gave the key to the message.

"Quetzal-Tia Juana-foreign agents-signal. A signal that would be given where? That might lie in the last word. Many words end in 'able'; one such word is 'table.' To The Shadow, that signified the probability that the signal would be given at a gaming table; and the finish of the message proved it. The message would not end with the word 'no'; therefore, those two letters could mean only the word 'casino.'"

About to ask a question, Maringuez heard Cranston add:

"The Shadow picked the faro table, because it was the only one of its kind in the casino. There were several roulette tables. To specify one such table, with the longer word 'roulette,' the fifth line of the message would have carried too far."

"Very good, senor," commented Maringuez. "Yet how did El Ombre judge the length of those lines? He had but one bit of paper."

"From the same pad that Rikeland had used previously, when he gave a complete message to Moyo. The paper was the same. The Shadow compared it; and therefore knew the size of the sheet."

Maringuez was thoughtful, as he rolled his cigarette. He purred the one question that still puzzled him:

"Why did El Ombre think that Latimer Creeth was Quetzal? Why could not the message have said Sancho Maringuez?"

"Creeth suggested that The Shadow go to Ensenada," was the calm reply of Cranston. "He also joined Poroq, outside the hacienda, when Poroq was searching for the two Americans. Poroq's ambush was a one-man job. When you and your men arrived, you did not shout for Poroq. You did not expect to find him there.

"The Shadow understood all that. He learned more, the night in Ensenada, when Moyo came to the prison at the presidio. Moyo described the man who gave him the order for Lieutenant Coroza. His description fitted you, Maringuez."

ALL was explained to Sancho Maringuez. He recognized that The Shadow had divined every detail. Maringuez knew that he did not have to explain how he had kept Tompino in ignorance of the fact that he-Maringuez-was working with The Shadow.

Keeping Tompino uninformed was Maringuez's only policy, after Poroq had demonstrated treachery. Maringuez knew that the hand of Quetzal could reach far.

Silence fell upon the veranda. It was moonlight at Agua Caliente; the soft Mexican night was languorous. The crimes of Quetzal; the battle of the night before, seemed very far in the past. Yet, as the three talkers parted, Sancho Maringuez gained chilling recollection of a sound that he had heard before. He thought that his ears caught the echoes of a sibilant laugh-a haunting tone that came from spaces of the past.

The laugh could not be Cranston's, thought Maringuez; for Cranston's masklike lips were immobile, when Maringuez glanced quickly toward the spot that he had just left. Nor did Vic Marquette suspect the source, when he, too, caught the tone. Like Maringuez, Marquette classed the whispered mirth as a recollection of the past.

Yet it was from Cranston's motionless lips that the weird taunt had come. The triumph laugh of The Shadow!

Echoes of The Shadow's laugh would hardly be stilled before the Master Crime-fighter would become aware of a "Death Token" that brought destruction to all who came within its sphere of influence!

"Death Token"-a silver franc piece-yet many would die before The Shadow pierced its secret!

THE END

40
The Shadow

39
Quetzal