

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Maxwell Grant

Table of Contents

<u>THE CHINESE TAPESTRY</u>	1
Maxwell Grant.....	1
<u>CHAPTER I. EAST MEETS WEST</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II. FRISCO NIGHT</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER III. AT THE CLUB</u>	9
<u>CHAPTER IV. THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS</u>	13
<u>CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S MOVE</u>	17
<u>CHAPTER VI. STABS IN THE DARK</u>	20
<u>CHAPTER VII. A FRIEND IN THE FOG</u>	26
<u>CHAPTER VIII. KELROY TAKES ADVICE</u>	30
<u>CHAPTER IX. THE CHINESE AUCTION</u>	35
<u>CHAPTER X. FLIGHT IN THE DARK</u>	37
<u>CHAPTER XI. NEW PLANS BEGIN</u>	42
<u>CHAPTER XII. AT THE OFFICE</u>	46
<u>CHAPTER XIII. AT THE MUSEUM</u>	49
<u>CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW FOLLOWS</u>	53
<u>CHAPTER XV. NORTH OF CHINATOWN</u>	57
<u>CHAPTER XVI. A FRIENDSHIP RENEWED</u>	62
<u>CHAPTER XVII. THE BURIED LAIR</u>	67
<u>CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S ALLY</u>	70
<u>CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S RETURN</u>	75
<u>CHAPTER XX. KU LUAN'S MESSAGE</u>	81
<u>CHAPTER XXI. CROOKS STAND REVEALED</u>	85
<u>CHAPTER XXII. SPOILS RECLAIMED</u>	89

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

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- [CHAPTER I. EAST MEETS WEST](#)
 - [CHAPTER II. FRISCO NIGHT](#)
 - [CHAPTER III. AT THE CLUB](#)
 - [CHAPTER IV. THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS](#)
 - [CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S MOVE](#)
 - [CHAPTER VI. STABS IN THE DARK](#)
 - [CHAPTER VII. A FRIEND IN THE FOG](#)
 - [CHAPTER VIII. KELROY TAKES ADVICE](#)
 - [CHAPTER IX. THE CHINESE AUCTION](#)
 - [CHAPTER X. FLIGHT IN THE DARK](#)
 - [CHAPTER XI. NEW PLANS BEGIN](#)
 - [CHAPTER XII. AT THE OFFICE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIII. AT THE MUSEUM](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW FOLLOWS](#)
 - [CHAPTER XV. NORTH OF CHINATOWN](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVI. A FRIENDSHIP RENEWED](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVII. THE BURIED LAIR](#)
 - [CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S ALLY](#)
 - [CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S RETURN](#)
 - [CHAPTER XX. KU LUAN'S MESSAGE](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXI. CROOKS STAND REVEALED](#)
 - [CHAPTER XXII. SPOILS RECLAIMED](#)
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CHAPTER I. EAST MEETS WEST

THE man at the desk was a Chinaman.

An odd fact, considering his guise, his garb and his surroundings. Firm-faced, square-jawed, this individual had the air of an American business man. He was wearing American clothes. His office was fitted with a flat-topped desk, straight-backed chairs and a metal filing cabinet.

A stack of envelopes lay on the desk, close by the telephone. The Chinaman was opening one envelope; like the others, it was addressed to Doctor Roy Tam. Removing the letter from within the envelope, Doctor Tam read it carefully, then laid it aside and picked up the next envelope.

The office was lighted only by a desk lamp. Doctor Tam was in the center of the glare. Hence it was not strange that he had failed to detect a movement in the haziness beyond. The door of the office had opened while the Chinese physician had been reading the first letter. The door had closed again without Tam noting it.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Something, however, caused the Chinaman to look up while his fingers stopped upon the second envelope. Perhaps the cause was a faint swish that might have barely reached Tam's ears. The effect upon the Chinaman was instantaneous. Doctor Tam's square face became rigid. His eyes remained fixed upon the figure that they saw before them.

On the far side of the desk stood a being in black. A shrouded shape, this visitor had taken definite form in his approach to the lamplight.

His shoulders were mantled by a sable-hued cloak. His head was topped by a broad-brimmed slouch hat. Of his features, only his eyes were discernible. Fiery, they glowed from beneath the hat brim.

Doctor Tam's visitor was The Shadow. The rigidity of Tam's features showed a startlement that the Chinese doctor could not repress. Then the slow smile that appeared upon Tam's yellowish face was proof that the visit was a welcome one.

RISING, Doctor Tam bowed and indicated a chair close beside The Shadow. The cloaked visitor seated himself; Tam did the same. Leaning both elbows upon the desk, Tam spoke in perfect English.

"I had not expected you to arrive so soon," stated the physician. "It is a long journey from New York to San Francisco, even when one travels by air."

"Speed was imperative," replied The Shadow, his voice a weird whisper. "Our friend, Yat Soon, informed me that you had immediate need of my presence."

"That is true," nodded Tam. "The cause was urgent, although time still remains. Here, in San Francisco, I have encountered one of the strangest cases that I have ever seen in all my career as a physician.

"That is why I telegraphed Yat Soon, asking that he communicate with you at once. I urged that you should come here, to take my place, my hope being that you could gain the answer which I have failed to obtain."

The Shadow remained silent. Doctor Tam took this as a sign that he was to continue. Briskly, the Chinaman resumed his statements.

"I came to San Francisco," declared Tam, "to continue the work that I had begun when we first met: namely, to aid fellow Chinese in their efforts to adopt American ways and methods, to throw off superstition and achieve progress.

"In this work, I discovered that my fame as a physician was valuable. I was recognized because of my medical knowledge. As a consultant, I was welcomed in many quarters where ordinarily a man of my advanced views might not have been received. It was in the capacity of physician that I visited the home of Ku Luan."

There was something significant in the way that Doctor Tam pronounced the name Ku Luan. His emphasis expressed both awe and admiration.

"A dead man who lives."

DOCTOR TAM pronounced the sentence solemnly. His face was tense; his eyes strained as he stared toward The Shadow. Sincerely hoping to gain belief, Tam repeated the amazing statement.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"A dead man who lives!" Awe tinged Tam's tone. "That is the only way to describe Ku Luan. He is of old China, Ku Luan. He is one who served the Manchu dynasty in the last years of its reign. When the Emperor Suan-t'ung abdicated, nearly twenty-five years ago, Ku Luan left China. He came to America and has lived in San Francisco ever since.

"Five days ago" – Doctor Tam raised his right hand; outstretched thumb and fingers indicated the number – "five days ago, Ku Luan died. I say 'died' because he has shown no sign of life; yet in a sense he lives. Wearing, he knew that death was coming. Voluntarily, he chose the semblance of death before his hour had come.

"We know the reason why. Ku Luan has words to speak. He was living in hopes that he could talk to someone who is not yet here. Who that person is, we cannot guess; nor can Ku Luan's servants tell us. But of this, I am certain. Ku Luan, knowing that he had but ounces of strength left within him, showed the amazing power to reserve that last-minute effort until a future time.

"One might say that Ku Luan is in a trance; yet that does not properly describe his true condition. It is rarely true that a man can assume a trance at will; even more seldom can anyone rally from such a condition. Yet Ku Luan has taken on a condition that looks like death; and somehow I believe that he will shed it when he chooses."

When Tam delivered his final statement, The Shadow spoke in return. His whispered tone was one of analysis.

"You have spoken of Ku Luan," declared The Shadow. "Ku Luan is one who holds a message. He will resume life only when he is visited by a person to whom he is willing to entrust his secret. He will know when that person has arrived."

Doctor Tam nodded eagerly. Such were the very thoughts that he was holding.

"Though Ku Luan seems dead," added The Shadow, "you have tried to impress him with your will. You have hoped that he might speak to you."

"That is true. On my last visit to Ku Luan, I nearly gained success. As I spoke to him, I sensed that his life force was gathering for its final effort. I lacked the will, however. Ku Luan did not speak."

"You believe that Ku Luan would speak to me?"

"I do. My hope is that you will visit Ku Luan in my stead. He has accepted me as a friend, if not as a confidant. If he will accept you as he has accepted me"

Doctor Tam broke off, staring. Gloved hands were moving upward from the front of The Shadow's cloak. Blackclad fingers brushed away the slouch hat, then plucked loose the collar of the cloak.

Falling garments revealed a square-jawed visage. It was sight of that countenance that had caused Doctor Tam's astonishment.

THE Chinaman was looking at his own face, as clearly as if he had been staring into a mirror. The Shadow had taken Tam's request literally. A master of make-up, The Shadow had adopted a countenance that was the exact duplicate of Doctor Tam's.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"I am prepared," announced The Shadow. His voice had become the choppy speech that characterized Tam's own tone. "At what time shall Doctor Roy Tam visit Ku Luan, to learn a dead man's secret?"

Doctor Tam gasped. Then, managing a smile, he reached for the telephone. He spoke in Chinese, giving the name of Doctor Doi Yan. For the Chinese in San Francisco use their own exchange, where the names of fully one thousand subscribers are known and recognized by Chinese telephone operators. Doctor Tam referred to this fact while he waited for the connection.

"Although I consider myself to be American," stated Tam, "I wisely established my office within the boundary of Chinatown, in order to be closer to those whom I meet.

"Doctor Doi Yan is Ku Luan's physician. I shall learn at what hour he intends to visit his patient. I shall arrange for you" – with a broadening smile, Tam corrected himself – "I shall arrange for myself to accompany Doctor Doi Yan this evening."

The connection was completed, a few moments later. The Shadow listened while Doctor Roy Tam held a brief conversation with Doctor Doi Yan.

"It is nearly eight o'clock," Tam told The Shadow. "At nine, Doctor Doi Yan will stop at the new Sun Kew Restaurant. There he will meet Doctor Roy Tam. Together, they will visit the living dead man, Ku Luan."

THE SHADOW arose. Tam watched him fold cloak and hat, to place them within a flattened briefcase that opened from its collapsed condition and became a small satchel.

The Shadow was wearing street clothes; his attire resembled that of Doctor Tam. The square-jawed Chinaman smiled. His part was to remain here, out of sight, while The Shadow roamed as Doctor Roy Tam.

"At Ku Luan's," remarked Tam, "you will meet two servants. One is Tsing Chan, the steward; the other is Wong Soy, who is merely an attendant. I mention these names because I have met both Tsing Chan and Wong Soy. It would be natural for me to recognize them."

The Shadow bowed in Tam's own fashion, then responded with a perfect imitation of the physician's voice.

"I thank you," said The Shadow. "I shall remember the names that you have spoken. I shall meet Doctor Doi Yan when he comes to the Sun Kew.

"Meanwhile, you may call the Aldebaran Hotel and ask for Mr. Vincent. He accompanied me from New York by plane. Tell Vincent who you are and tell him the exact location of Ku Luan's house. Also tell Vincent that he is to be outside that house by half past eight, with 'Miles' Crofton."

Doctor Tam bowed. With one hand on the telephone, he watched The Shadow turn about and walk toward the door. Even to his gait, The Shadow was giving a perfect impersonation of Doctor Roy Tam.

This was not surprising, for in the past, when Tam had lived in New York, The Shadow had gained much knowledge of The Chinese physician's ways and manners. (Note: See "The Fate Joss," Vol. XIV No. 3.)

The door closed to mark the departure of the pretended Doctor Tam. Lifting the receiver of the telephone, Doctor Tam put in the call to the Aldebaran Hotel. Tam was smiling as he waited for the connection; and his smile was one of true satisfaction. For Doctor Tam was convinced that tonight would bring success.

He was sure that The Shadow would return with Ku Luan's secret, straight from the lips of the living dead man!

CHAPTER II. FRISCO NIGHT

EIGHT o'clock had brought a glow to the streets of San Francisco's Chinatown. Through the early mist of an incoming sea fog, many lights were gleaming in a galaxy of Oriental glamour.

In contrast, and as reminders that this was America, not China, huge structures loomed high above the bizarre Oriental district. Massive gray ghosts amid the increeping fog, these were the towers of the business section. Just beyond the outskirts of Chinatown, these modern skyscrapers told that San Francisco thrived on finance and big business.

The blanketing fog would have completely obliterated them except for the presence of scattered lights that shone from a few high windows, where a few offices were still open for night workers.

IN one such office, on a twentieth floor, a weary, gray-haired man was seated behind a mahogany desk. Wizen of face and bespectacled, he was eyeing a young man who stood beside the window puffing at a cigarette. The young man was wearing a tuxedo; he seemed anxious to leave the office.

"Your extravagance must cease!" The gray-haired man pounded the desk as he spoke. "I tell you, Colin –"

"Let me ask you a question, Mr. Dryer," put in the young man, impatiently. "Just what right do you have to criticize the way in which I spend my money?"

"Every right!" snapped Dryer. "As the administrator of the estate of Tobias Eldreth, it is my duty to see that no funds are wasted. Your grandfather was a careful man –"

"I know all that," interrupted Colin. "But your duty, Mr. Dryer, concerns only the funds that are under your direct management. My grandfather's will provided that I was to receive a definite income, with no strings attached. What I do with the money I receive is my business. Not yours."

"What insolence! Before your grandfather died, he told me specifically that I was to act as adviser to both his grandsons. He mentioned you by name: Colin Eldreth and Mark Eldreth. He said that I was to advise –"

"Save your advice for my cousin Mark. If he wants it, he can have it."

"But you must take my advice also, Colin. That was your grandfather's express command."

Colin Eldreth smiled as he stepped from the window and extinguished his cigarette in an ash tray.

"I'll take your advice, Mr. Dryer," he said, indulgently, "but I don't intend to use it. There is no clause in the will that says I have to follow what you tell me."

"But you have become a ne'er-do-well – a spendthrift – a wastrel –"

"And I intend to keep on with it. That's why I'm here tonight. To get my regular quota. The monthly cash and that special quarterly allowance that we were talking about last week."

DRYER shrugged his shoulders in resigned fashion. He opened a desk drawer and brought out a large, flat

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

check book. Colin Eldreth saw him tear out a check which bore the printed statement "Weldon Dryer, Attorney-at-Law" along the perforated end. The young man smiled and shook his head.

"No checks for me, Mr. Dryer," he declared. "I would prefer cash. One thousand dollars as the monthly stipend; three thousand for the quarterly. Four thousand total."

"Four thousand in currency?" questioned Dryer. "That is a large order, Colin. I would much rather give you a check."

"But I want cash tonight. The full amount. Come along, Dryer; open that safe of yours. You have plenty of money in it. Count out four thousand. I'll sign a receipt."

Dryer hesitated, almost timidly. Colin chuckled and lighted another cigarette. He strolled toward the window.

"I won't be watching while you turn the combination," informed the young man. "I'll be looking at the city – that is, as much of it as I can see, through all this fog. Hurry it, Dryer. I have an appointment."

The lawyer arose. Creaky of gait, bent of frame, he crossed the office and stopped before the front of a large safe. While he manipulated the dial, Dryer threw suspicious glances over his shoulder. These assured him that Colin Eldreth was actually looking out the window.

In fact, the young man was utterly oblivious to Dryer's actions. Colin had found a sight that intrigued him, the lights of Chinatown. They rose in vivid, changing colors that blinked a swath through the evening fog. Exotic, mysterious, that glow compelled attention.

Colin Eldreth's gaze was fixed, almost as though his eyes had sought chosen points amid the Oriental district. The smile upon his lips was reminiscent, an indication that he remembered certain spots in Chinatown.

It was not until Dryer spoke to him that Colin came out of his reverie. The young man swung about to see the lawyer back at the desk. Dryer was counting out four thousand dollars in crisp bank notes.

COLIN approached the desk and picked up a pen. He signed a printed receipt slip that lay beside the money. Folding the bills, he thrust them into his pocket. With a friendly grin, he clapped Dryer upon one stooped shoulder.

"I'll be seeing you later, old chap," remarked Colin. "Probably next month, at the earliest. I may be needing some money by the first."

"What?" demanded Dryer. "You intend to spend all that you have received tonight?"

"Why not?"

"Because you should be storing for the future."

"While I still have half a million held in trust? Be yourself, Dryer."

"You cannot touch the trust fund, Colin."

"All the more reason why I should not worry about saving money."

"But you still have opportunity to accumulate –"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Dryer broke off as the door opened. A round-faced, moony-looking man stepped into view. Like Colin, this visitor was attired in a tuxedo. His face bore a slight resemblance to that of the young man at the desk.

"Well, well!" laughed Colin. "If it isn't Cousin Mark. Hello, old bean. Haven't seen you in a long while."

"Good evening, Colin," returned Mark Eldreth, in a cold tone. "Good evening, Mr. Dryer. Shall I wait in the outer office until your business is transacted?"

It was Colin who replied for Dryer. Strolling toward the door, Colin stopped beside his cousin. He and Mark made a definite contrast, for their resemblance ended with a slight facial likeness.

Colin was taller than his cousin. He was also more limber and looked younger, for Mark was somewhat portly. In addition, Colin possessed a nonchalance that was apparent in every action. His smile was one of sarcasm, his chuckle was tinged with unmasked disdain.

MARK, staring through large spectacles, looked troubled and disturbed at his cousin's contemptuous attitude. Serious of expression, Mark drew away to make a path for Colin's exit. He winced when Colin gave him a friendly jab in the ribs. That punch was more than the slight poke it appeared to be.

"Stay here, Mark," snorted Colin. "Talk to Dryer. Let him talk to you. He has plenty of wise advice on investments and you're the sort who would take it seriously."

"Say, old man!" Colin stepped back and pretended to notice Mark's tuxedo for the first time. "You're all dressed up! Don't tell me that you're stepping out for once?"

"I dined at the St. Francis," responded Mark, seriously, "and this evening, I am entertaining guests at my home. We are having a musicale, Colin. We expect an excellent cello soloist. If you would care to hear his recital –"

"Sorry, old top. I have another engagement. I may drop in some evening, though. Say!" Colin snapped his fingers. "I might be coming past your house later this evening. If it isn't too late, I may drop in, just to say hello and catch a glimpse of that long-haired cello player."

"Stofsky is not long-haired. In fact, he is almost bald."

"Indeed! A bald-headed cello player. That's worth seeing. Baldheaded, eh? You'll be that way soon, Mark."

Thrusting out his hand, Colin ruffled Mark's thin hair in a manner that was half rough, half good-natured. Mark made a grab to protect his spectacles. Colin took advantage of the move to give his cousin another poke in the ribs.

As Mark doubled, spluttering, Colin waved to Dryer and strolled from the office giving the door a slam as sequel to his departure.

"Outrageous!" stormed Dryer. "That young upstart nearly broke the glass panel in the door. It is becoming unbearable, Mark. Never have I seen such insolence!"

"Colin's all right, Mr. Dryer," puffed Mark. "He's – he's just – just happy-go-lucky. Even if he does have the habit – the habit of punching the breath from people. Who!"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"You call him happy-go-lucky?" quizzed Dryer, as Mark seated himself in front of the desk. "I have a different term for Colin. I say that he is a ne'er-do-well."

"Rather a harsh decision, Mr. Dryer."

"One that is justified by circumstances. You have always stood up for Colin, Mark, even though he holds nothing but contempt for you."

"We were boys together, Mr. Dryer. Almost like brothers."

"You have become grown men, well in your thirties. You have taken up the serious affairs of life, Mark. Like Colin, you have an annual income of approximately twenty-five thousand dollars. You have handled it wisely, putting much of your money into sound investments."

"Thanks to your advice, Mr. Dryer."

"That is the very point, Mark. I have given Colin the advantage of my same sound judgment. He has refused to take it."

"We discussed that fact a month ago, Mr. Dryer. I told you then that I was sure Colin was really saving money."

"YOU are wrong, Mark." Dryer paused, then continued. "Colin throws away every dollar that he gains. In fact, I suspect that he may even be in debt."

"In debt? With all the money he receives? Impossible!"

"I have had him watched, as I told you I intended to do. Even if I cannot cut off his income, I can perform my duty to your grandfather and keep an eye on Colin's affairs."

"But is it fair to Colin? Suppose he learns –"

"He will not discover that he is being watched. I have hired an excellent investigator, a private detective named Durling. He has reported that Colin goes regularly to the Club Monterey."

"Dreadful! That place has a terrible reputation."

"It is infested by gamblers. It leads to bad associations. Yet Colin continues to go there nightly. Though he did not mention it, the Club Monterey is his destination tonight."

Mark stared, aghast. Dryer shook his head in sorrowful fashion, then opened a drawer and brought out a stack of papers which he placed beside the check book.

"Let us talk about investments," suggested the lawyer. "Since you will probably wish to purchase more securities, we should utilize the remainder of your time here to discuss sound offerings at present on the market."

The conference began, with Colin Eldreth forgotten. That, in a sense, was unfortunate. For that young man was destined to play a part in coming circumstances that would involve the affairs of both Weldon Dryer and Mark Eldreth.

CHAPTER III. AT THE CLUB

IT was twenty minutes after eight when Colin Eldreth had left Weldon Dryer's office. Fifteen minutes later, an expensive coupe drew up in front of the pretentious Club Monterey. The driver of the coupe was Colin Eldreth. He was glancing at his watch when he alighted.

Ascending a flight of stone steps, Colin entered the portals of the gambling casino. As soon as he was out of sight, a stocky observer stepped into view from a doorway across the street. This lurker followed the path that Colin had taken.

Only privileged persons were allowed admittance to the Club Monterey. The stocky man was evidently one of these, for when he rang at an inner door, an eye observed him through a peephole and bolts unclicked immediately afterward.

But when the stocky man stepped past the inner portal, he was stopped by a big husky who drew him into a corner of the little anteroom.

"Listen, Durling," whispered the husky, "I'm takin' a chance on lettin' you in here. If the boss knowed you was a dick –"

"Forget it, Pete," returned the stocky man. "You know I'm not working with the force. I'm a private investigator."

"But that don't mean you won't be makin' trouble –"

"Who for?"

"For the boss, or maybe some of the boys –"

"Not a chance, Pete. Listen: Stew Randler is welcome to all the dough he can make out of this joint. The more suckers he takes over, the better."

"Then you ain't tryin' to drag nobody out o' here?"

"Not by a long shot. I'm watching that guy Eldreth, who just came in; but he don't know it. Where he goes, I go – that is, when he's loose around town. When he comes here, I've got to come here, too. That's all, Pete."

"All right. Go on in."

DURLING shoved a bill into Pete's fist. The husky grinned and pocketed the money. He unlocked an inner door. Durling strolled into a room where a crowd was thronged at tables and a bar.

This was the direct route to the roulette room, but before proceeding, Durling looked about for Colin Eldreth. He spied his man near the end of a bar.

Colin was talking to a tuxedoed roue whom he addressed as Reggie. Apparently the fellow was a wealthy young man of Colin's social set. Durling approached and ordered a drink. He listened to the conversation. Reggie was talking in maudlin fashion.

"Wish I had money like you have," announced Reggie. "Wish I did, Colin. You know what I'd do?"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Leaning half over the bar, Reggie stared at Colin, gesturing with a glass from which liquid spilled.

"You know what I'd do?" Reggie cocked his head as he repeated the question. "I'd clean up. Clean up, right here in this good old Club Monterey, at that good old roulette table. Yes, sir.

"I've picked up a system, Colin. Good system, too, but it takes money. If I had a piece of paper and a pencil, I'd show you the system. It works, it does."

Colin was smiling, shaking his head, to indicate his disbelief. Reggie grabbed the lapel of Colin's tuxedo.

"You have a million dollars," he announced. "A couple of million, Colin Eldreth"

"Certainly. But my cousin and I did not receive much of the money. The rest all went to colleges, museums and what not."

"That's too bad, Colin. Too bad, old fellow. Still, you have enough money to gamble with."

"I know it. That is what I have been doing, Reggie."

"Winning a lot of money?"

"No. Losing too much."

Reggie eyed his companion in disbelief. Colin strolled away, apparently anxious to end the conversation. Durling watched his quarry. He saw Colin stop and look toward the door. Following the direction of the young man's gaze, Durling observed a new entrant.

THIS was a man of medium height, broad-shouldered and hard-faced. Like Colin, he was wearing a tuxedo, and the smooth fit of his garb served well to modify his tough appearance. Durling knew the newcomer by sight. The fellow was "Hype" Mellick, a gambler of notorious repute.

More than that, Hype was a man of many connections, none of which were too definitely known. He had gained his nickname from a shady past in which he had been recognized as an ace at the "hype" game, a specialty among short-change artists.

Hype was looking for someone. It turned out to be Colin Eldreth. Watching both men, Durling saw a gesture pass between them. Colin swung about and strolled toward the roulette room. Hype approached the bar, loitered there a few moments and then followed. Durling waited a half minute before taking up the trail.

The dick had no trouble in looking for the faces that he wanted. A brief inspection showed him that Colin Eldreth and Hype Mellick were absent, although the pair had certainly come into this room. Durling stared about at curtained walls and doorways.

A man was entering the roulette room from a door at the opposite side. It was "Stew" Randler, the proprietor, a big, red-faced man with short-clipped hair.

Durling had met Randler and did not want the man to see him. Accordingly, the dick edged off past one of the roulette tables.

As soon as Randler had gone through to the barroom, Durling headed toward the door from which the proprietor had come. Entering, he found a passage, with doors on both sides. One barrier was ajar.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Durling approached it and peered into a lighted room. He saw Colin Eldreth seated opposite Hype Mellick, a card table between the two.

Durling had arrived too late to catch the opening conversation. However it had started, the matter was apparently reaching a settlement, for Colin had taken a roll of crisp bills from his pocket and was counting off bank notes of one-hundred-dollar denomination.

"Thirty-three – thirty-four –"

Colin stopped to add one more bill to the lot. He passed the cash to Hype with the comment:

"Thirty-five hundred."

Hype crinkled the bills as he received them, then eyed the money that Colin still held. Hype growled a reminder.

"It was supposed to be five grand coming to Zack and me."

"What of it?" queried Colin. "You know that I'll have the rest of the money for you."

"You've got it now. Right there in your fist."

"Only five hundred dollars. I need that much."

HYPE stroked his chin. His expression was dubious. Colin arose and clapped the man's chunky left shoulder.

"You remember how we arranged it, Hype," said the young man. "Right here in this room, two weeks ago. You, Zack Ruggey and myself. I paid you a thousand dollars apiece and told you there would be more in two weeks."

"You said you'd have the rest of it. Five grand all together. I was to collect Zack's part and pay off the rest of the crowd, too."

"I expected to have five thousand, Hype; but I had to pay more bills and that left me flat. Four thousand was all I could collect tonight. That was what I had coming from Dryer."

"Why didn't you talk the old geezer into giving you an advance?"

"On my next month's allowance? Say – he crabbed enough about passing over the whole four thousand. He wanted to invest it for me. Look here, Hype. Two weeks ago, you and Zack were willing to wait for payment, weren't you?"

"Yeah. It was the only thing we could do."

"All right. I've come through with thirty-five hundred, which proves I was good for the money. Another month and you'll have the rest of it. But I have to live in the meantime and put up a proper front."

"On account of Dryer?"

"Sure. The old boy's kind of suspicious. He thinks I've been gambling all my money. But as long as I don't touch him for a loan, I can keep him guessing. I can even tell him that I have a lot of cash tucked away."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"But once I try to get extra money, he will know that I am broke. Of course, he has to keep on giving me the payments that I am supposed to get. But if he thinks I'm flat, he's likely to snoop into my past affairs. That is something that none of us want. It wouldn't be healthy for either of us, Hype. Nor for Zack."

Hype considered; then shrugged his shoulders.

"Guess you're right, Eldreth," he agreed. "Old Dryer might make trouble."

"He certainly would," assured Colin. "Suppose he found out that I had been seen here with you and Zack. Suppose he learned that the two of you took money from me. What alibi could I give him? All I could say was that the pair of you trimmed me in a couple of poker sessions.

"That would pass with the average person. But old Dryer is death on gambling. He would come up here after Stew Randler's scalp. He would call the mayor and make him stage a police raid. He has influence, Dryer has, and he's a great believer in reform.

"A raid would put you in wrong with Stew. It would link your name with Zach's. That would give you a bad reputation, Hype. The police wouldn't figure that you and Zack were friends only at the card table."

HYPE MELLICK was rising. Durling scurried away from the door and sought refuge in a room across the hall. He was spying from a crack of the opposite door when the two men came from the room. Hype caught the final words.

"Two friends owe me money," Colin was saying. "Both of them have promised to pay me before the end of the month. Two thousand dollars. You and Zack will get the fifteen hundred that's still true. I'll have five hundred for myself. That fixes all of us."

"It's not Zack, so much," Durling heard Hype say. "It's the other mugs. They're not due for much dough, but they're squawking just the same. I'll pay 'em off, Eldreth. Then I can collect on my own from you —"

The conversation faded. Durling crept out from behind his hiding place. He went along the hall, peered from the door and edged out into the roulette room after making sure that neither Colin nor Hype had stopped there.

Durling continued through to the barroom. There he saw Colin Eldreth, cornered by his friend Reggie. Hype Mellick had gone. Durling decided to stay around and see if Colin met other acquaintances.

PERHAPS the private dick would have learned more had he continued through to a side room beyond this thronged place, for it was in that direction that Hype Mellick had gone. The hard-faced man had not left the Club Monterey; instead, he was making a telephone call from a booth secluded in an alcove.

Hype was speaking in a low voice. He was talking to the very man whom he and Colin had discussed, namely, "Zack" Ruggey. Hype's lips were wearing a pleased, yet ugly grin.

"Sure..." Hype uttered a guttural chuckle. "Eldreth passed me the dough... Not all of the five grand, but most of it... Yeah... He's good for the rest..."

"I'm sticking here a while... Sure... A good place for an alibi... Yeah, I'll be in with Stew Randler... Don't call me, though. I'll see you later... Yeah. Tell the crew I'll pay 'em... Plenty..."

"Sure... Stick close there... Something's due to break and it may be tonight... Don't worry about the lay. I'm telling you, it's a set-up, once we find the bird we want... You'll get the tip-off when he comes to Ku Luan's... Yeah... Snatch him before he gets away from the place..."

Hype ended the call. He strolled out from the telephone booth. His grin gone, Hype was wearing a poker-faced expression. His was an air of confidence, a proof that he considered his plans to be close to the verge of success.

For Hype Mellick and his pal Zack Rugey were engaged in crafty crime. While Hype was establishing an alibi, Zack was holding a paid crew in readiness.

Events were shaping to an evil climax. Strangely, the place where crime was pointing was none other than the abode of Ku Luan, the very house in Chinatown that The Shadow had chosen as his own objective!

CHAPTER IV. THE DEAD MAN SPEAKS

IT was exactly five minutes before nine o'clock when Hype Mellick made his secret telephone call to Zack Rugey, from the Club Monterey. The precise time of eight fifty-five was registered elsewhere, in a place where many eyes could see it: namely, upon the huge clock dial of the San Francisco Ferry Terminal.

The fog was thickest near the waterfront, yet even its swirling density could not obscure the tower light above the ferry building. A great, glowing disk, its face marked by two clearly pointing hands, the giant clock shone like a perpetual beacon.

A young man was glancing upward at the big clock as he hurried across the car tracks at the foot of Market Street. Noting the time over his shoulder, he stopped and looked about to note trolley cars that were placarded with unfamiliar signs. He was a stranger to San Francisco, this chap, and that fact only added to the confusion of his hurry.

Lights from the ferry building showed the young man's face to be a pleasant one. His eyes were friendly, although they carried a bewildered blink. His shocky, light-brown hair peeked from beneath his weather-streaked felt hat.

He made a somewhat gawky figure because of his tight-fitting topcoat; and his suitcase, which closely resembled an old-fashioned carpet bag, was a final touch that gave him a countrified appearance.

A cruising taxi rolled up. The driver spied the half-bewildered man and shouted "Cab!" The young fellow nodded. The driver stopped and opened the door.

The young man clambered aboard with his carpet bag; then, leaning through the front partition, he unfolded a slip of frayed paper and pointed to a written address.

"This is where I wish to go," he told the driver, in a deliberate tone. "Make speed, my man, and I shall reimburse you for your effort."

The driver gulped as he put the cab in motion. He was going to a spot deep in Chinatown, to a house on a steep-pitched street that was almost completely unfrequented by Americans. The taximan knew the address, but never before had he taken a passenger there.

As he sped along, the driver wondered. He had a half guess that the young man might be heading for a secret

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

opium house. The neighborhood was just the sort to bide such a den.

THE trip from the ferry terminal to Chinatown was a rapid one. Looking in his mirror, the taximan could see his passenger's face when he reached the glare of the quaint Oriental quarter.

The jehu observed a gleam upon the young man's face; he noted eyes that sparkled, lips that formed a pleased smile as the passenger stared at signs in the Chinese language.

Then came the gloom of a narrow street. The driver jammed the brakes in front of a narrow, grimy-fronted house. The young man stepped from the cab and handed the cabby a two-dollar bill, with an order to keep the change. The driver stared, for the bill was one of an old series, the oversized type no longer issued.

With a glance at the gloomy street, the driver waited no longer. He shoved the cab into gear and headed his vehicle toward the lighted streets.

BACK on the gloomy street, the passenger from the cab had ascended a flight of old wooden steps, to ring a shaky doorbell. Half a minute passed; bolts clicked and the door opened inward. A suspicious, yellow face peered from the house. The young man bowed and spoke words in Chinese. He was admitted.

He entered a dull hall that showed an uncarpeted stairway leading to the second floor. Beyond the steps was a long, ground-floor passage.

The young man looked inquiringly at the suspicious-eyed Chinaman who had admitted him. He began to speak again, in Chinese; but paused when he heard footsteps creaking from the stairs.

Another Celestial was descending. Like the fellow who had answered the door, he had a suspicious gaze. Both Orientals were garbed alike, in black trousers and loose-fitting blouses of the same hue.

The average American would have taken them for brothers; but this visitor was quick to note their facial differences. More than that, he recognized at once that the man on the stairs was the more important of the two.

Again, the young American began to speak in Chinese. This time he addressed the second Chinaman. The man on the stairs smiled blandly and raised his hand in interruption.

"We speak in English, here," he declared, in an odd, choppy fashion. "My name is Tsing Chan. This man" – he paused to point to the Celestial who had opened the door – "is Wong Soy. What, may I ask, is your name, sir?"

"I am David Kelroy," replied the American. "I arrived this evening from Shanghai."

"You are the one that we expected," asserted Tsing Chan, solemnly. "Do you have the token that Ku Luan sent you with his letter?"

"It is here."

Kelroy produced a piece of crimson silk, a square that measured six inches in each direction. It was embroidered with gold design, the center of which formed the representation of a Chinese pagoda. Tsing Chan studied the cloth carefully. David Kelroy watched him.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Wong Soy was edging forward. A change had come upon the suspicious doorman's expression. His slanty eyes showed eagerness, as they darted glances toward Kelroy.

It was plain that Wong Soy had known only that a visitor was expected; David Kelroy's name was new to him, and so was that square of embroidered silk that Wong Soy seemed anxious to glimpse.

Tsing Chan was nodding his approval. Wong Soy drew back and stood beside the door. His flicker of eagerness had ended. He seemed indifferent to words that had passed between Tsing Chan and David Kelroy.

"It is well," said Tsing Chan to the visitor. "Come. Ku Luan awaits you. I, his trusted steward, shall lead you to the room wherein he lies."

Turning, Tsing Chan pointed to the stairs. David Kelroy ascended and the Chinese steward followed. Wong Soy remained motionless beside the door. It was not until both had reached the second floor that the doorman indulged in an ugly, gloating leer.

UPSTAIRS, Tsing Chan had turned the knob of a closed door. He started the barrier moving inward; then stepped aside and bowed, as a sign that Kelroy was to enter.

The young man stepped into a small, plainly furnished bedroom. He stopped just beyond the threshold. Tsing Chan, still in the hallway, drew the door shut, leaving the visitor alone in the little room.

David Kelroy did not hear the click of the closing door. His whole attention was directed elsewhere, toward a cot against the farther wall.

Upon that bed lay the strangest figure that he had ever seen, the shape of a wizened, parchment-faced Chinaman who looked to be a hundred years of age.

Scrawny hands were yellow upon the surface of the bedspread. The withered face, though yellow likewise, had attained a pallor that was indicative of death. As David Kelroy approached, step by step, he became positive that the ancient Chinaman was dead.

Soberly, Kelroy stood above the corpselike form, studying the closed, tight eyelids. He felt the chill that frequently comes to one who stands in the presence of death. He was fixed to the spot, staring at that scrawny, worn-out body from which all semblance of life had departed.

Then came horror; an emotion more vivid than the awe of death. As Kelroy gazed, his own eyes seemed to produce a life-giving power.

Ku Luan's eyelids flickered; they opened, to reveal a glassy stare. Parched lips wavered; at first they delivered only a gasp. Then came crackly tones, as though a voice from within the corpse was speaking:

"I am Ku Luan."

DAVID KELROY felt his own hands twitch nervously as his ears heard the statement. Rigid, he could only stare, in hopeless disbelief; yet the words that reached him implanted themselves within his brain.

"I awaited your coming." Ku Luan's voice was mechanical. "I saw the approach of death. I accepted death that I might rest. I have saved life's final precious moments, that I might speak to you."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Kelroy nodded. Feebly, he tried to speak his understanding. Ku Luan's ears must have detected the incoherent attempt, for the old man's voice proceeded with its crackle.

"I am of old China," declared the living dead man. "When I came from China, I brought wealth. My treasure is safe. I kept it for my nephew, who dwells in Peking. I believed him to be one who sought to restore old China."

A pause. Thin eyelids closed; then reopened.

"My nephew, Tyan Li, has failed my trust," resumed Ku Luan. "The treasure shall not be his. It shall be yours, David Kelroy, because your father and I were friends. To you shall belong the message that I prepared for my traitorous nephew, Tyan Li."

Pausing again, Ku Luan tried to raise one withered hand. At last succeeding, he pointed to a cabinet at the foot of the cot.

David Kelroy managed motion of his own. He went to the cabinet and drew open a small drawer which Ku Luan had apparently indicated. Within the drawer, he found an iron ring, from which dangled six huge brass keys, all of more than eight inches in length.

Though Ku Luan's fixed eyes had remained upward, the Chinaman's ears could catch the jangle of the brass. As Kelroy approached with the keys, Ku Luan spoke again.

"Go to my storeroom," ordered Ku Luan. "Use one key to enter. Use another to unlock the great iron chest. Remove the teakwood box that bears the silver dragon. Within the teakwood box you will find my message to Tyan Li. The message which belongs to you instead.

"One man alone was destined to aid the carrier of that message. The destined man was Tobias Eldreth, whom I knew when he lived in Peking. Tobias Eldreth is dead; but he has grandsons. They can aid in his stead. Take the teakwood box to them.

"Tell my steward, Tsing Chan, to show you the way to the storeroom. Go there alone. Do not return within these walls once you have gained the teakwood box. Tell no one – not even Tsing Chan – why you are going to the storeroom. Say only that it is my order.

"That is all. Yet I still have strength of life. Call Tsing Chan, that I may speak of matters which concern him only. Go. Call Tsing Chan. He awaits outside this room."

Kelroy thrust the brass keys into his pocket. He went to the closed door and opened it. He saw Tsing Chan, standing with bowed head. Kelroy beckoned to the steward. Tsing Chan entered the bedroom and approached his master.

Again, Kelroy heard Ku Luan speak, this time in Chinese. Knowing the language, Kelroy quickly closed the door and remained in the outside hall, that he might not be a party to this conversation.

MINUTES passed. The door opened. Kelroy faced Tsing Chan. The Chinese steward motioned. Kelroy entered the bedroom, with Tsing Chan, he approached Ku Luan's cot. The ancient man's eyes were still open; his lips were moving slightly.

As the watchers stood attentive, the lip motion ceased. A strange sightlessness disturbed the glassy eyes. What little light they had held departed.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Tsing Chan stood in solemn silence; David Kelroy likewise. Chinese and American, both were paying tribute to the memory of one Ku Luan.

For that last departing gleam had left no doubt in their individual minds. Unspeaking, both men had recognized that Ku Luan's ordeal had ended.

The living dead man was no more. The Shadow, when he came in the guise of Doctor Roy Tam, would be too late to hold speech with Ku Luan.

CHAPTER V. THE SHADOW'S MOVE

AT the very minute when death had gained its reign within the home of Ku Luan, two striding figures were approaching that secluded house.

One was The Shadow, in his guise of Doctor Roy Tam. His companion was Doctor Doi Yan, the San Francisco physician who had called Doctor Tam in consultation on the case of Ku Luan. They had met at the Sun Kew Restaurant; but not at nine o'clock. Doctor Doi Yan had been late.

The pair were nearing a lighted corner where a pagoda-topped building loomed like an ancient landmark. Shifting a medical bag from right hand to his left, the Chinese physician pointed to the entrance of a blackened street.

"We turn here," he stated, in English. "As I told you, Doctor Tam, the walk has proven a short one. It was better to come this way, on foot, than by cab from Grant Avenue, as we did the other times."

The Shadow acknowledged, using the careful English that characterized Doctor Tam's voice. As he spoke, however, he was looking carefully toward the corner. There he noted two Americans, engaged in quiet conversation beside the wall of the building that was topped with a pagoda roof.

The Shadow, like Doctor Doi Yan, was carrying what appeared to be a physician's bag. He stopped as they neared the corner, in order to tighten a fastening on the grip. Doi Yan paused, farther on.

He scarcely noticed that his companion was quite close to the two Americans. Doctor Yan, moreover, did not hear the whispered word that issued from The Shadow's slightly moving lips:

"Report."

One of the Americans heard the word and stared momentarily. After a temporary hesitation, the American spoke in an undertone.

"Suspicious-looking men somewhere in neighborhood," he informed. "They dived out of sight. All Americans. No Chinese."

"Cover them," whispered The Shadow.

"Taxi stopped at house," added the speaker. "Time, nine seven. Unable to see who entered."

"Report received."

With the gait of Doctor Tam, The Shadow moved along to join Doi Yan. The man with whom The Shadow

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

had spoken was his agent, Harry Vincent, who had traveled with him by plane from the East. Harry's companion was Miles Crofton, another agent regularly stationed in San Francisco.

"There is no need to hurry," remarked Doi Yan, as he and The Shadow paced into the gloom of the side street. "When I last saw Ku Luan, his condition was unchanged. According to your own analysis, Doctor Tam, there should be no alteration in Ku Luan's state until he himself exerts his will."

"Perhaps," observed The Shadow, in Tam's tone, "our patient has already chosen to exert his will."

"That is possible. Yet we have no indication of it, Doctor Tam."

"The case is unique, Doctor Yan. One can be sure of nothing."

"That is true. But – ah! Here we are, at the house."

Doi Yan ascended the steps and rang the doorbell. There was no immediate response. Doi Yan rang again. The Shadow, standing beside him, was silent. The Shadow could guess why the door remained closed.

Something had already occurred within the home of Ku Luan. Harry Vincent's report of an arriving taxicab was sufficient cause for such a conclusion.

IN fact, the clang of the doorbell had produced a sudden effect within those portals, particularly in the room where David Kelroy and Tsing Chan still stood silent beside the dead form of Ku Luan. The door to the hall was open; the first sound of the ringing had caused Tsing Chan to turn suddenly toward his American companion.

Beckoning, Tsing Chan urged Kelroy out through the hallway and toward the stairs. As they descended, Kelroy remembered the message that Ku Luan had spoken.

Wong Soy was in the lower hallway, apparently waiting Tsing Chan's order before admitting new visitors. Thinking nothing of the doorman's presence, Kelroy gripped Tsing Chan's arm.

"Wait!" exclaimed the young American. "I must tell you what Ku Luan ordered. I am to go to the storeroom; then to make my departure. You are to show me the way."

Understanding dawned upon Tsing Chan. The steward nodded solemnly and spoke, just as the doorbell clangd for a third time. Tsing Chan pointed along the hallway past the stairs.

"Go out by the little door," he said. "Follow the small passage until you reach the last door on the right. It is the house which holds the storeroom of Ku Luan."

Kelroy nodded and hurried along the hall. He reached a door at the back; as soon as it closed behind him, Tsing Chan turned to Wong Soy and babbled words in Chinese. The doorman stood still, waiting while Tsing Chan hurried up the stairs. Then Wong Soy unbolted the front door.

Doctor Doi Yan entered with The Shadow. Hardly had they stepped into the hall before Tsing Chan appeared upon the stairs. Coming down, the steward delivered a solemn bow. In English, he spoke sadly.

"You are welcome, gentlemen," announced Tsing Chan, "but you have arrived too late. I have come from bedside the body of my master. Ku Luan is dead."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Together, Doi Yan and The Shadow ascended. They entered the bedroom, conducted there by Tsing Chan. The steward gestured toward the body, as if inviting the physicians to study the glazed gaze of Ku Luan's eyes.

"Ku Luan is dead," decided Doi Yan. "I am sure of it. He is not as he was when we last saw him, Doctor Tam."

THE SHADOW nodded his agreement; then turned to Tsing Chan. Owlsh, the steward eyed the composed visage of Doctor Tam.

"You were the last who spoke to him?" queried The Shadow, in choppy fashion.

"I was the last, Doctor Tam," replied Tsing Chan. "He told me only that his instructions were to be obeyed."

"What instructions were those?"

"The ones that concerned Ku Luan's will. His goods are to be sold. I, Tsing Chan, am to retain one half of the amount and to divide the rest among his faithful servants."

"How many are they?"

"They are four."

"Including Wong Soy?"

"Yes. He is alone downstairs. The others are in their rooms above."

"Ku Luan spoke to one of them?"

"He spoke to me alone."

The Shadow questioned no further. Doi Yan, however, had gained an inkling as listener to the conversation. He spoke to The Shadow.

"You held to a theory, Doctor Tam," said Doi Yan. "You were sure that Ku Luan had been retaining life in expectation of some visitor. You thought it wise not to mention that fact to Tsing Chan; but since Ku Luan is dead –"

The Shadow shook his head, in Doctor Tam's fashion.

"Ku Luan is dead," he declared. "That alters the situation, doctor."

"But perhaps Ku Luan had a visitor," insisted the Chinese physician. Then, turning to Tsing Chan: "Did anyone disturb Ku Luan tonight. Did any stranger come to this house?"

"No one came here, doctor," replied Tsing Chan. "I alone have seen Ku Luan. Wong Soy remained below, where he is always stationed."

The Shadow had not needed to hear this falsehood. He knew, from Harry Vincent's report, that someone had come to the house. He had deliberately avoided too close a questioning of Tsing Chan.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"I have an appointment," said The Shadow to Doi Yan. His manner of speech was casual; apparently, he had accepted Tsing Chan's word. "There is no need for me to remain while you are preparing the death certificate. I shall leave you here."

He stepped briskly toward the door; then turned as Tsing Chan was about to follow.

"I shall unbolt the door myself," said The Shadow. "You can lock it later, Tsing Chan. For the present, you must remain with Doctor Doi Yan. He will need your statement when he prepares the death certificate."

TSING CHAN bowed his acceptance of the order. Bag in hand, The Shadow departed from the room, still copying the stride of Doctor Tam. He descended the stairs and reached the front hall. Wong Soy was not there.

A soft laugh came from The Shadows yellow-dyed lips. He had anticipated this possibility. He had wanted to see Wong Soy; more than that, he had wished to observe what the doorman was doing. There was one sure way to learn.

The Shadow unbolted the front door. That was to stand as evidence that Doctor Roy Tam had gone out to the street. The first point established, The Shadow began a quick obliteration of the character that he had represented.

He opened the bag that he was carrying. From it, he drew the black cloak and the slouch hat. Donning these garments, he pulled on a pair of black gloves.

Too late to interview a living dead man, The Shadow had chosen to learn more concerning the events that had preceded Ku Luan's sudden death.

Keenly suspicious of Tsing Chan's secrecy and Wong Soy's absence, The Shadow had donned his garb of black. He was ready to rove, unseen and unsuspected, within the confines of these premises that had so recently been the property of Ku Luan.

CHAPTER VI. STABS IN THE DARK

DAVID KELROY had acted promptly in making his departure from Ku Luan's house; but his hurry had ended the moment that he had stepped from the rear door.

He had found the little passage mentioned by Tsing Chan. Picking his way through the dark, the young man had reached the last one on the right.

Trying the brass keys, he had unlocked the door. He had entered a musty building. With the aid of a match, he found a light switch. He had locked the door behind him, then gone on through an open door to find a smaller chamber which proved to be the storeroom.

Another light switch had produced a glow that showed a huge assortment of crates and boxes. Wedged in a corner was the iron chest of which Ku Luan had spoken.

In Kelroy's opinion, the chest was the equivalent of a modern safe, for it stood more than six feet high and its blocky shape gave it a similar width and depth. The door, moreover, was massive. Trying the keys, Kelroy found one that fitted the lock.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Opening the big door, Kelroy stared at a varied assortment of unusual objects. The great chest was filled with curios: vases, gongs, small Buddhas, and even bells that could have come from some Pagan temple. Huge swords were stacked in one corner; other antique weapons were in view.

These, however, were not the items that interested the visitor. Kelroy was most concerned with a stack of boxes, all of teakwood, that were topped by a fragile vase.

Carefully, Kelroy removed the one breakable object, then lifted off a pile of boxes. The first had a plain top; the second was marked with a brass dragon. This was not the one that Kelroy wanted. Ku Luan had spoken of a box ornamented with a silver dragon.

The third box was plain. Kelroy was about to lift it from the stack when he imagined that he heard a sound from behind him. For a moment, he was on the point of turning; then he decided differently.

He knew that his nerves were keyed; he was sure, however, that he might have actually heard something. He saw need for real caution, for he remembered another of Ku Luan's injunctions. The dying Chinaman had told him to come here alone.

If some other visitor were present, that man did not belong here. It would be best to challenge the interloper; and to do that, Kelroy decided to make the intruder show his hand.

Deliberately, Kelroy shifted his body to cover the open front of the iron chest. Stooping, he fumbled with the boxes, keeping them well hidden.

Slight creaks came from the floor. Kelroy could sense footsteps creeping forward. The intruder was gobbling the bait. He was approaching, Kelroy was sure, to gain a closer watching post.

The footsteps were coming from the door. Obviously, the intruder was hoping to hide between a pair of crates, closer to the iron chest.

It was time for action! With a quick swing, Kelroy came to his feet, turning directly toward the spot where he was sure the intruder must be. Hands clenched, teeth close-set, Kelroy stared squarely toward a man who had crept half way across the room. The fellow was Wong Soy.

SURPRISED in an act of treachery, the black-bloused servant had made no effort to conceal his evil nature.

No longer impassive. Wong Soy had gained the look of a fiend. His ugliness was more apparent than it had been, back in the hall, when he had first expressed the eagerness that Kelroy had failed to observe. Wong Soy's lips were spread in voiceless snarl. His hands were clawlike, doubled against the front of his black jacket.

To another than David Kelroy, Wong Soy would have been a fearful sight. Kelroy, however, had spent all his life in the Orient. He was used to the ways of Chinese; he knew that those of the lower classes had a tendency to quail when challenged. Because of that, he showed no hesitation. Instead, he stepped directly toward Wong Soy. The Chinaman crouched.

"Why are you here?" demanded Kelroy. "Get back where you belong, Wong Soy. Back into the house. Report to Tsing Chan. Tell him I have sent you there; and explain to him why I sent you."

The words had no effect upon Wong Soy.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Striding forward, Kelroy shot one hand toward the Chinaman's shoulder. It was then that Wong Soy acted. Bouncing upward, he ripped forth a knife and hurled himself in a wild, quick thrust. His stabbing blade sped straight for the body of the American.

Again, Kelroy's past experience saved him. He had been ready for this move. His own hand, jabbing leftward, deflected Wong Soy's wrist. With a quick spring, Kelroy landed on the Chinaman and sent his attacker skidding halfway across the room.

Wong Soy still gripped the knife. Kelroy made a dive for the doorway and clicked out the light. He sprang into the outer room, looking quickly for some object that might serve as a weapon.

Wong Soy's voice came in a babbling call. It was that cry that made Kelroy swing toward the outer door. The barrier was open; Wong Soy was shouting for aid from outside helpers. Hesitating no longer, Kelroy plunged through the outer room, in an attempt to gain the passage.

Men rose to meet him. Hard-faced thugs, with ready revolvers. A pair of them loomed into the light, pounding down upon their prey, with upraised guns. Behind them came another group, a trio of would-be murderers.

Wildly, Kelroy grappled with the first attacker, trying to stop the man's swinging arm, hoping to use the thug's body as a momentary bulwark against the other hoodlums.

BRIEF moments, only, would have remained for David Kelroy had he continued to fight alone. But in that time of needed rescue came aid that was unexpected.

Guns roared from the rear door of Ku Luan's storeroom. Zipping bullets ricocheted from stone walls. Howls arose as fierce-faced thugs went sprawling. With leveled revolvers, the invaders turned to fire in the direction of those gun bursts. The second of the two leading thugs went springing out to aid his companions, leaving Kelroy with one man alone.

As crooks fired along the passage, a mocking laugh pealed forth above the roar of guns. With it came stabbing tongues of withering flame, the jabs of heavy automatics, gripped by an unseen foe.

The Shadow had come from the rear of Ku Luan's house. He had arrived in time to spy the mass attack by the aids whom Wong Soy had summoned.

These were the lurkers of whom Harry Vincent had spoken. Unlocated by The Shadow's agents, this band of crooks had taken their post in the alleyway behind Ku Luan's.

They were Zack Rugey's crew, and those who had come through the passage were but the vanguard.

A harsh command from the leader of that outside band. Zack Rugey's voice, calling for a mass attack. Fuming crooks rose up to make a forward surge. They were stopped by a new attack, from the end of the alley itself.

Harry Vincent and Miles Crofton had found the men they wanted. The Shadow's agents were entering the fray with a swift flank attack.

Thugs scattered as Zack howled his command to dive for cover. Wounded hoodlums were staggering from the passage. The very intensity of The Shadow's fire created the illusion that men were with him. Harry and Miles, spurred by the emergency, had begun an attack that indicated more than two men on the flank.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Zack then shouted a command to spread and dive for shelter. The Shadow's agents hearing him deliver that order, took advantage of it by giving bold pursuit.

MEANWHILE another man had been putting up a good fight. David Kelroy, harassed by a lone thug, was struggling desperately within the doorway of Ku Luan's storehouse.

Kelroy was long-limbed and wiry. He had gained a grip upon his opponent's gun arm. The two were locked in a hard grapple, equally matched as they staggered back and forth across the lighted outer room.

The Shadow's fight had been a swift one. His rapid fire had cleared the passage to the alley. As he struggled with the one opposing thug, Kelroy realized that the cessation of the shooting must mean that the way was open.

With a mad effort, the young man from Shanghai twisted toward the door, hoping to wrench away and take to flight.

Kelroy lost his grip upon the thug's wrist. The rowdy's gun hand descended. The revolver cracked against Kelroy's warding forearm; the barrel of the weapon glanced sidewise and thudded against Kelroy's head.

With a gasp, Kelroy staggered. Continuing his twist, he completed a long forward sprawl and plunged headlong through the door, rolling clear across the outside passage.

With a snarl, the thug aimed his revolver, intent to slay Kelroy before the young man could regain his feet. The light from the room showed Kelroy coming up on his hands and knees. Then a sudden surge of blackness eliminated the crook's view of his intended victim.

The would-be murderer spat an oath as he saw the mass of blackness take shape. A cloaked figure was driving in upon him; an automatic was looming from a gloved fist. The Shadow had arrived from the passage, just in time to prevent the death of David Kelroy.

Dropping back, the snarling crook aimed for this unexpected foe. Completely startled, the thug was an open target, but The Shadow could not take advantage of that opportunity.

Usually, The Shadow reserved bullets for an aftermath such as this. Tonight, the necessity of an immediate rescue had caused him to empty every cartridge in his guns.

The Shadow's only course was to overwhelm his opponent with one swift drive. Whirling forward, he accomplished his purpose with speed and precision.

The Shadow's right hand was driving downward with its automatic; his left fist made a quick pluck for the thug's right wrist.

The crook fired, an instant too late. His gun hand was already in The Shadow's grip. The flame from the revolver singed The Shadow's hat brim for the crook's hand went wide and high.

As the bullet whined uselessly from the revolver's muzzle, The Shadow's .45 cracked the would-be killer's head. Half stunned, the crook plunged forward, seizing The Shadow's body as he fell. Together, they rolled upon the floor.

Kelroy, on his feet in the passage, saw the finish of that struggle. He spied The Shadow rising; then, beyond, he saw another combatant coming into the fray.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

It was Wong Soy, bounding from the inner room, the knife blade gleaming in his clawish yellow fist. The Chinaman was almost upon the stooped form of The Shadow.

A REVOLVER glittered from a gloved hand. Kelroy saw the flash as a finger pressed the trigger. The stab of flame went straight for Wong Soy's heart, delivered from a four-foot range. The Shadow had whipped up the stunned thug's gun to stop the Chinaman's attack.

Wong Soy's plunge did not end. Instead, his springing form landed squarely upon The Shadow, rolling the cloaked fighter to the floor. But Wong Soy's blade found no human mark.

Kelroy saw the knife slip from a loosening claw and rattle harmlessly upon the floor. Kelroy knew the reason. The Shadow's shot had finished the murderous Chinaman.

A wild impulse seized Kelroy as he saw The Shadow rolling free of Wong Soy's dead body. Who was this rescuer in black? Was he a friend, or another foe? The fact that he had beaten back a horde of assassins proved nothing.

Half groggy from the blow upon his head, Kelroy could fancy nothing except danger. In a dazed fashion, he realized that he had been the object of attack. The wild thought struck him that this cloaked battler might represent a rival faction, as dangerous as the crew that had responded to Wong Soy's cry.

The alley was clear beyond the passage. Flight was the hope that gripped Kelroy. Before The Shadow had time to rise, the young man made a dash.

He reached the alleyway and ran, stumbling, toward a lighted street beyond. He had chosen the course opposite to the one that Zack Rugey and the scattered crooks had taken.

BACK at the doorway of the storeroom, The Shadow stood viewing the passage. He saw that Kelroy had left; he knew the direction that the rescued man must have taken. But before The Shadow could follow, a strong flashlight gleamed from the back door of Ku Luan's. The Shadow dropped back from the doorway. As he waited, he heard the wail of a siren from the alley.

Tsing Chan was arriving from one direction; the police from the other. The Shadow swung swiftly toward the darkened storeroom. Entering, he found a space between two large crates. He squeezed between and wedged into an area behind the larger box.

Footsteps pounded from the passage. The babbly voice of Tsing Chan was audible amid the growls of policemen. The arrivals came through the outer room and turned on the light of the storeroom. Tsing Chan uttered a high-pitched cry as he pointed to the open iron chest.

Ten minutes of explanations followed. A plain-clothes man conducted the inquiry. The Shadow saw Doctor Doi Yan; the Chinese physician was addressing the official as Inspector Romson.

Uniformed officers were coming in with their reports. The first confusion gradually developed into an orderly conference. Inspector Romson, heavy-jawed and shrewd of eye, began to nod his agreement.

"That explains it," The Shadow heard the inspector say. "We know who these fellows are. They've been working with Zack Rugey. Like as not he's mixed up in it. Just the kind of a tribe that would stage a job of this sort. They've been seen around Chinatown lately. They must have had this place spotted."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Too bad about this fellow you call Wong Soy. He must have heard them breaking in; and came to see what was the matter. He got his, poor fellow. Well, the one break is that there must have been some feud among the guys in the outfit. They took this chance to work it out.

"Sorry to hear that old Ku Luan died tonight. We all liked him on the force, from what little we saw of him. Always minded his own business. That was the way Ku Luan was."

"You are right, inspector," assured Doi Yan in a sincere tone, "and this man Tsing Chan was Ku Luan's faithful steward. I can assure you that he is honest —"

"I know you, doctor," interposed the inspector. "Your word is good enough for me. You say that Tsing Chan here is honest; Tsing Chan tells me that Wong Soy was the same. The whole case fits. We'll put a guard on here until tomorrow."

THE inspector followed the two Chinamen from the storeroom. Tsing Chan had locked the iron chest; he was assuring Romson that nothing had been stolen. Lights blinked out; The Shadow moved from his hiding place.

Inspector Romson had left the outer door unlocked, intending to send in policemen from the alley. Tsing Chan and Doi Yan had gone back into the house. The Shadow took that direction.

Entering the ground floor hall, The Shadow reached the stairs. He heard voices from above; Doctor Doi Yan had gone up with Tsing Chan. The front door was still unbolted. The Shadow opened it and moved out into the darkness.

The front street was deserted. Its gloom afforded a sure route from this area. The Shadow took an uphill course, away from the lights that shone along the street below.

Crooks had scattered to safety. The Shadow's agents, pursuing, had completed their task and were under cover. The police had found hoodlums, dead and wounded.

The latter, perhaps, would talk, but could probably tell the police no more than they already knew; namely, that a mobleader named Zack Ruggie had brought them in on this job.

Those points were incidental. Paramount was the fact that an unknown stranger had come to Ku Luan's and had been marked for death. That man had been rescued by The Shadow; and had fled to temporary safety.

Tsing Chan had lied about the stranger's visit. Wong Soy, in turn, had allied himself with those who had sought the stranger's life.

Tsing Chan, explaining matters to the law, had deliberately covered up Wong Soy's part of treachery. Doctor Doi Yan, trusting Tsing Chan, had unwittingly aided the steward's game.

The Shadow's task was to learn the identity of that rescued man whose face he had glimpsed. Though he did not know David Kelroy's name, The Shadow intended to find him. That could be accomplished through Tsing Chan. Not by questioning the Chinese steward, for it was best that Tsing Chan should believe himself clear of suspicion. The Shadow's plan was more subtle.

The Shadow would watch Tsing Chan. The steward, thinking himself secure, would reveal his hand. When that time came, The Shadow would meet the man he wanted: David Kelroy.

CHAPTER VII. A FRIEND IN THE FOG

ELEVEN o'clock.

David Kelroy noted the time in mechanical fashion. His watch in his hand, he was seated on a dampened bench, in a little square. Huddled away from the light of a street lamp, he could see the watch dial only when he held his hand at an angle in front of him.

Kelroy's head was aching. His mind was in a continued whirl after his flight from Chinatown. Kelroy was trying to remember what had become of his carpet bag. This recollection had eluded him; suddenly, he gained it.

He had left the bag in the downstairs hall. He had forgotten it when he had descended with Tsing Chan. Probably the bag had been put somewhere by Wong Soy.

That did not matter. The bag contained nothing of importance. Kelroy had left Shanghai hurriedly, in response to Ku Luan's letter. He had money, still safe within his wallet. He could buy clothes tomorrow, something that he had intended to do anyway.

The teakwood box with the silver dragon. That important object had come to Kelroy's mind. He recalled that he had not even found the box during his short search through the iron chest. Wong Soy's interruption had come early.

Wong Soy! In his last glimpse of the fellow, Kelroy had seen Wong Soy in his death throes. Well, the traitor had deserved it. But what of the black-clad fighter who had eliminated the murderous Chinaman? Kelroy felt a sudden pang of regret.

After all, the cloaked fighter had saved his life. Had he shown the proper policy in taking to flight? Should he have remained to talk with the rescuer? The chances were that the capable avenger would have proven to be a friend. He had risked his life to mow down thugs.

A friend!

THAT was what David Kelroy wanted most at this hour. His mind was groping, seeking some chance hope. It came, along with new recollections of the important words that Ku Luan had uttered from his deathbed.

"The destined man was Tobias Eldreth – Tobias Eldreth is dead, but he has grandsons – take the teakwood box to them"

Such had been Ku Luan's order. Ku Luan had apparently trusted both Tsing Chan and Wong Soy. Yet David Kelroy had encountered trouble with Wong Soy; and it was possible that the fellow had acted at the order of Tsing Chan.

Had his mind been less confused, Kelroy might have figured that Ku Luan's estimate of the Eldreth grandsons could prove incorrect. But in his present dilemma, the young man from Shanghai did not reason that far ahead.

Kelroy felt himself to be a hunted man, betrayed by Chinese, sought by thugs who were still at large in Chinatown. He wanted security; he feared that no hotel would afford it. One friend in San Francisco was all he needed. His thoughts were concentrated on the name of Eldreth.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

ARISING from the bench, Kelroy pushed through the fog. The dank, swirling mist had become a slimy shroud; but Kelroy was grateful for its presence.

Few persons were abroad; those whom Kelroy passed were obscured by the haze.

He had reached a residential district in his flight from Chinatown. The dim lights of a small drug store caught his eye. Kelroy made in that direction; he stepped into an old-fashioned pharmacy that was to his liking.

The place was small; it had no soda fountain; and only the pharmacist was present. Kelroy saw a telephone booth and went there to consult the directory.

The name Eldreth was an uncommon one and Kelroy found it listed only twice. He noted that Colin Eldreth had his residence listed as the Coronado Apartments, while Mark Eldreth's name was followed by a street address. Kelroy let the telephone book fall and dangle from its chain. He made inquiry of the druggist.

"Whereabouts are the Coronado Apartments?" he inquired. "Very far from here?"

"A mile, I should say," replied the pharmacist. "A pretty steep walk getting there."

"I have a friend living there," stated Kelroy. "Maybe he wouldn't be there, though. Let me see —"

He pondered; then repeated Mark Eldreth's address aloud. The druggist nodded.

"That's nearer," he told Kelroy. "An easy five minutes' walk from here. On the way to the Coronado Apartments, too."

"How do I get there?"

"Well, the place is probably one of those old-fashioned residences on Nob Hill. got to strike California Avenue — you'll know it by the cable line. Here, I'll mark it out for you."

A FEW minutes later, David Kelroy left the drug store bearing a rough-penciled diagram that the druggist had drawn on a piece of wrapping paper.

Pacing through the fog, he found California Avenue and stopped while an old-fashioned cable car rolled past; taking an upgrade at a smooth, constant speed that made Kelroy stare in fascination.

Continuing, Kelroy reached a steep slope. By a street lamp, he observed a massive, reinforcing wall that rose to cliff-like proportions from the street corner. This was the street that Kelroy wanted. He advanced up the slope.

Another retaining wall supported a second house. The hill was so steep that these bulwarks were necessary to make ground-floor levels for the residences. There were steps at the front wall of the second house. Upon a post, Kelroy saw the number that he wanted. He had reached Mark Eldreth's.

Lights glimmered through the heavy fog. Faintly, Kelroy heard the sound of music. He ascended the steps and rang the front doorbell. A porch light gave sudden illumination; then the front door was opened by a liveried servant.

"I should like to speak to Mr. Eldreth," explained Kelroy. "Is he at home?"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

The servant stared at Kelroy's attire. He noted that the visitor was not wearing evening clothes.

"A recital is in progress, sir," explained the servant, stiffly. "The affair is a formal one. Mr. Eldreth is not receiving other visitors."

"But I must see him," protested Kelroy. "It is urgent. Please tell him so."

"The name, sir?"

"David Kelroy."

The servant ushered Kelroy into the hall; then motioned to a chair in the corner. Kelroy seated himself, then took a survey of his surroundings. Mark Eldreth's hallway was furnished in an almost Oriental fashion. Chinese rugs adorned the floor; a huge vase ornamented one corner. Chinese carvings were present on the wall.

A PUDGY, moon-faced man came from a doorway through which Kelroy had heard the sound of music. The man was attired in tuxedo, his air of inquiry indicated that he must be Mark Eldreth. Kelroy arose to meet him. Mark studied the visitor with a puzzled stare. He asked:

"You are Mr. Kelroy?"

Kelroy nodded.

"I have never met you," resumed Mark. "Perhaps my memory is at fault –"

"Not – at all," cut in Kelroy with a wan smile. "I have just arrived in San Francisco. I came from Shanghai."

"From Shanghai?"

"I was sent to you," explained Kelroy, "by a man named Ku Luan. A Chinaman who knew your grandfather. Is the name a familiar one to you?"

"Ku Luan." Mark Eldreth nodded. "Yes, I recall the name. I remember that my grandfather said that I might some day hear from him. Yet I never have, until tonight. I never understood why, Ku Luan lived here in San Francisco. But now that you say he is in Shanghai"

"Ku Luan is not in Shanghai," interposed Kelroy, soberly. "I met him here, in San Francisco, when I arrived tonight. I was almost too late. Ku Luan died shortly after I talked to him."

"You were Ku Luan's friend?" queried Mark, sympathetically.

"Ku Luan was my father's friend," replied Kelroy. "That was why Ku Luan sent for me. When he talked to me, Ku Luan spoke of your grandfather and said that I should call upon you or your brother Colin."

"Colin is not my brother," inserted Mark, abruptly, "he is my cousin; and I doubt that he would be interested either in you or Ku Luan. Colin is not a serious-minded person; and he takes but little interest in old family friendships.

"I should like to talk with you further, Mr. Kelroy. You are a stranger in this city; and you have come from Ku Luan. I promised my grandfather that I would receive Ku Luan as a friend, should he visit me. Since you

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

have arrived in Ku Luan's stead, I give you welcome."

MARK Eldreth extended his hand. David Kelroy received it. Mark's clasp was flabby; but it seemed full-hearted. Kelroy had not expected a firm grip from so lethargic a person; the mere handshake encouraged him.

"I must talk to you," he told Mark, in a confidential tone. "Strange circumstances involved the death of Ku Luan. I want you to know about them."

A troubled look displayed itself on Mark's roundish face. Kelroy hastened to reassure the man.

"I alone am involved," he explained, "but my position is not a pleasant one. The sooner that I talk with you, the better."

"Are legal matters involved?" queried Mark, anxiously.

"In a sense, they are," replied Kelroy. "If we could talk together, for fifteen minutes"

"Impossible, this evening," interrupted Mark, with a worried shake of his head. "I have guests and must be with them. Moreover, this apparently concerns my grandfather; I am not the only one with whom it should be discussed."

"Your cousin Colin –"

"No, no; Colin is a trifler. My attorney, Weldon Dryer, is the person with whom we should consult. You must communicate with him."

"Where shall I find Mr. Dryer?"

"Call him at his office, in the morning. He lives in Berkeley; it is too late to reach him tonight."

"And his office is –"

"In the Challis Building. On the twentieth floor. Weldon Dryer. He is listed in the telephone book."

The music had ended in the next room. Applause was sounding from the clapping hands of a dozen guests. Mark Eldreth again shook hands with David Kelroy. As the visitor turned toward the front door, the servant came from across the hall to usher Kelroy out.

On the porch, Kelroy turned about to look for Mark again. He wanted to explain his predicament regarding registration at a hotel. But Mark was gone, hurrying back to the music room. Kelroy shrugged his shoulders and descended the steps. The servant closed the door.

Standing beneath the light of a street lamp, Kelroy considered two plans: one, to call Mark by telephone and ask about hotels; the other, to go directly to a hotel and register under an assumed name. That, Kelroy decided, would serve to throw enemies off his track between now and tomorrow.

The whine of a motor in second gear caused Kelroy to turn about, startled. A swanky coupe was creeping down the steep hill, its driver wisely keeping the car in gear. Brakes brought the coupe to a sudden stop. A grinning face peered from the opened window and surveyed David Kelroy.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Well, well," remarked the driver of the car, his voice a sarcastic tone. "Trying to crash the gate? Or did they hand you the bum's rush?"

KELROY glared angrily, his fists half clenched. For a moment he had feared that this was some enemy hunting for him; then his survey of the car and its driver had caused him to drop that opinion.

"Don't be offended," chuckled the man in the car. Kelroy could see him more plainly and noted that his grin was not unfriendly. "I was just looking you over. I noticed that you were not wearing evening clothes. My cousin Mark is particular about his company."

"Your – your cousin?" queried Kelroy. "Is Mark Eldreth your cousin?"

"Sorry to say he is."

"Then you are Colin Eldreth?"

"In person."

Kelroy stepped to the side of the car and reached out to shake hands. He introduced himself.

"My name is David Kelroy," he explained. "I wanted to talk to your cousin, or to you. I came here first; but Mark had guests and couldn't talk to me long. I had important matters to discuss with him –"

"And failed to sell him the idea?" laughed Colin, as he gripped Kelroy's hand. "That's fine. Climb aboard and ride with me. I'll talk. Come on; we'll ride over to my apartment."

David Kelroy accepted the invitation. Boarding the coupe he dropped gratefully into the cushioned seat.

Kelroy felt truly at ease as they rode along. He could picture Colin's apartment as the very place of seclusion that he needed. But his mind would have enjoyed less comfort, had he been able to foresee the dangers that his chance meeting with Colin Eldreth were destined to produce.

Before many days, David Kelroy would be looking back to his forgotten regret, again chiding himself that he had not remained after the battle to make the acquaintance of that black-cloaked rescuer who had saved him from death in Ku Luan's storeroom.

For already, events were shaping to new climaxes in which David Kelroy again would greatly need the protection of The Shadow.

CHAPTER VIII. KELROY TAKES ADVICE

IT was morning. Fog had cleared from San Francisco. David Kelroy, awakening, was puzzled as he stared about the sunlit bedroom. Recollection was slow to dawn within his mind. When it came at last, Kelroy sidled out of bed and donned the slippers and dressing gown that he found upon a chair.

He was in Colin Eldreth's apartment. He had stayed here overnight at his new friend's suggestion. He had slept late, too, for a clock on the bureau showed half past ten.

Kelroy opened the door and stepped out into a living room. He found Colin Eldreth, fully dressed, reading the morning newspaper.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Hello, old man," greeted Colin, with a wave of his hand. "Park yourself over there in the dinette. You'll find fruit and cereal. While you're eating them, I'll fix some eggs and coffee. How long do you want the eggs boiled?"

"Three minutes," replied Kelroy. "What's in the newspaper?"

"Nothing about you," returned Colin, chuckling as he went toward a little kitchenette. "Just some junk about a brawl in Chinatown. Tough guys trying to crack Ku Luan's storehouse."

"Any arrests?"

"None of importance. The police have gained some leads, however."

"Regarding the thugs who invaded the storeroom?"

"Yes. They are looking for a yegg named Zack Ruggey. They think he was behind it."

COLIN gave a sharp glance over his shoulder as he made this mention of Zack Ruggey's name. Kelroy was busy with his dish of cereal. The name of Ruggey apparently did not register with him. A slight smile showed on Colin's lips as he turned to watch the boiling eggs.

The coffee and eggs ready, Colin brought them to the dinette table. Seating himself opposite Kelroy, he faced his guest in frank and friendly fashion. Evidently there was something that Colin wished to discuss; and he came directly to the point.

"You were somewhat incoherent last night," Colin told Kelroy. "It didn't surprise me, old man, for the story that you told me was tough enough to have given anyone the jitters. That's why I insisted that you turn in and get some sleep. Now that you are yourself again, I would like to go over some of the details."

Kelroy nodded. Colin proceeded.

"You received a letter from Ku Luan," he said. "With it was a token. You showed the latter when you arrived at Ku Luan's house."

"Yes. I gave it to Tsing Chan."

"Did Tsing Chan recognize your name?"

"Yes. He stated that I was expected."

"Good! That proves that Tsing Chan knew nothing about the teakwood box with the silver dragon, the one that you told me about last night."

"I see." Kelroy nodded. "Tsing Chan would have had no cause to wait until I talked to Ku Luan – that is, if Tsing Chan had known that the teakwood box was important."

"Not so fast," objected Colin. "You are going on the assumption that Tsing Chan wanted to see you murdered. We have no proof of that fact, as yet."

"But he talked with Wong Soy, the doorman," insisted Kelroy, "and it was after I left them in the hallway that Wong Soy came in to spy upon me."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Perhaps Wong Soy acted without Tsing Chan's knowledge."

"Possibly. What does the newspaper account say about Wong Soy?"

"It states that he was murdered." Colin reached for the newspaper. "Wong Soy is supposed to have fought against the marauders."

"Did Tsing Chan stand for the statement?"

"Apparently he did."

"Then Tsing Chan was behind Wong Soy."

"Not necessarily. Tsing Chan was not there to see Wong Soy's treachery."

Kelroy was forced to nod. The argument was a good one.

"I am assuming that Tsing Chan may be honest," proceeded Colin. "Wong Soy, alone, could have been the one who had contact with the outside crooks. Since reading the morning newspaper, I have found out a few facts about Tsing Chan."

"From whom?" inquired Kelroy, in surprise.

"From a Chinese friend," replied Colin. "One who works on the Chinese Free Press. I called him this morning. He told me that Ku Luan left orders for all his stored goods to be sold at auction, immediately after his death."

"Where? In Chinatown?"

"Yes. At one of the bazaars where auctions are held. The first sale will be made tonight."

"Who receives the proceeds?"

"Tsing Chan."

KELROY opened his eyes wide. This backed Colin's assumption concerning Tsing Chan's innocence. Kelroy had seen Ku Luan's storeroom. He knew that its contents were of high value. It did seem unlikely that Tsing Chan, already assured of a sizable legacy, should jeopardize his own position by backing murder.

"Notice of the sale," continued Colin, "has already been posted on a big bulletin board at Clay Street and Grant Avenue. Many Chinese will be present at the auction; and Americans as well. Ku Luan was always recognized as a connoisseur of rare art objects."

"You seem to know something about Ku Luan," smiled Kelroy. "Much more than your cousin Mark did."

"I am familiar with Chinatown," remarked Colin, idly. "I frequently visit the quarter. Mark probably would not go there on a bet. In fact, he would not make a bet to begin with. He is a stuffed shirt, a namby-pamby."

"He did appear timid," acknowledged Kelroy. "Last night, when I intimated that I had been in danger, he looked scared."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Mark values his own hide even more than he does money. That is saying a great deal, to anyone who knows Mark. The fellow is greedy for wealth; that is why he soaks much of his income into new investments."

"About Ku Luan," reminded Kelroy. "What else do you know concerning him?"

"His history," replied Colin, slowly. "Ku Luan was an important personage in the court of the Empress Dowager, many years ago. Later he became one of the young emperor's advisors. My grandfather had business interests in China at the time. He and Ku Luan were great friends."

"In fact, Ku Luan was responsible for my grandfather's success in acquiring a fortune in the Orient. When the revolution overthrew the Chinese dynasty, Ku Luan came to America. Like others who had supported the last imperial dynasty, he settled in San Francisco."

"Did he see your grandfather after that?"

"Quite often. That was while Mark and I were children. Ku Luan had brought many valuables from China. Some of the furnishings which are in Mark's home were sold to my grandfather by Ku Luan."

"Then Ku Luan needed money?"

"No. He had enough for his needs. He was through with show and luxury. He lived quietly, in the house where you saw him last night. I'm not surprised to learn that Ku Luan had treasure. You are fortunate, Dave, to have become heir to his hidden wealth."

"Why fortunate?" queried Kelroy, ruefully. "The treasure is mine; but how can I hope to find it?"

"By acquiring the teakwood box," returned Colin, with a smile, "when it is sold at auction."

KELROY popped halfway up from his chair. Colin's suggestion had come like a thunderbolt. Its possibilities were dazzling.

"You say there were several teakwood boxes," argued Colin, cannily. "Only one was the right one, the box with the silver dragon. You had not even found it in your search. Wong Soy alarmed you too soon."

"Like Wong Soy, Tsing Chan probably did not guess what you were after. The teakwood box apparently holds some clue that not even Tsing Chan would guess. We shall attend the auction tonight, you and I. When we see the box with the silver dragon, we can buy it."

"Go to Chinatown? Where Zack Rugey is likely to be?"

"I don't think that crook would chance visiting Chinatown after the mess he and his crew walked into, last night. The two of us will be there together, Dave. We should be safe."

"But if I try to buy the teakwood box, Tsing Chan may think –"

"Leave the buying to me, Dave. Tsing Chan has never seen me."

Kelroy was nodding his agreement as they arose from the breakfast table. Colin clapped his hand upon his guest's shoulder.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Meanwhile," he suggested, "stay away from Dryer's office. That old codger would ruin everything. He would want to go and demand the teakwood box from Tsing Chan. Then the game would be a give-away."

"But if Tsing Chan is honest –"

"We can't be absolutely positive about Tsing Chan. It is better not to let him know what we are after. He may think that you took away whatever object you went to get."

"Good logic, Colin."

SMILING, Colin lighted a cigarette. He puffed a cloud of smoke, then spoke in musing fashion.

"We shall see Dryer later," he decided. "He will know facts concerning my grandfather's dealings with Ku Luan. There were a number of transactions between them. Ku Luan sold grandfather some rare Chinese books; grandfather willed them to a library.

"Ku Luan supplied grandfather with Chinese curios for the Oriental Museum. He even superintended the preparation of a special Chinese room, filled with tapestries and statuettes. Once you have the contents of the teakwood box, a conference with Dryer may clarify the whole situation."

"Perhaps Dryer already knows something."

"Not a chance. Ku Luan was cagey. There's something deep in this, Dave. Something that Ku Luan alone knew. Once you have it, Dryer can help. That is why Ku Luan told you to look up Mark or myself. He probably did not know that grandfather left more details to Dryer than he did to us."

Kelroy was walking toward the bedroom. Colin stopped to fumble about a table drawer. Kelroy waited; Colin shook his head.

"I was looking for those Chinese prayer papers," he remarked. "I must have tucked them away somewhere else. They were given to grandfather by Ku Luan. I've had a batch of them ever since I was a kid. Mark had some, too, but he became too serious to play games with them, like I did. He told me once that he sold them."

"Were they valuable?"

"No. Picayune. But that's Mark for you. He's a penny snatcher. Never mind about the prayer papers, though. There's a slue of them at the museum. They have symbols on them, and each sign has some meaning. If we find that we might need them, we can go to the museum."

Dave Kelroy went into the bedroom and closed the door. As he began to dress, a sudden thought struck him. How was it that Colin Eldreth knew so much about Ku Luan while Mark Eldreth knew very little that concerned the ancient Chinaman?

After Dave had pondered briefly on this question, he dismissed it, preferring to concentrate upon the possibilities of tonight's visit to the Chinese auction.

In changing his line of thought, Kelroy unwittingly dropped a link that he had gained by accident – one that was far more important than he had supposed.

Trouble was brewing for the young man from Shanghai; and had he been keener, he might have guessed its source.

CHAPTER IX. THE CHINESE AUCTION

EVENING had arrived, bringing a light drizzle from the Pacific. But neither rain nor fog could dampen the brilliance of San Francisco's Chinatown. Dave Kelroy and Colin Eldreth were cognizant of that fact as they strode along Grant Avenue.

"An out-of-the-way place," Colin was remarking. "That's the only thing I don't like about it. There will be a crowd there, however, so I don't think that we will have to worry."

"About Zack Ruggey?"

Colin nodded; then spoke to change the subject.

"By the way," he asked, "what did you do with those big brass keys? The ones that Ku Luan gave you? Did you leave them in the bureau as I suggested?"

Dave nodded.

"All right," said Colin, breezily. They had turned a corner from the avenue. "No use in lugging all that metal around with you. Besides, you won't need the keys until after we land the teakwood box with the silver dragon."

The pair passed a line of quaint shops. Every house in this row had a store on its ground floor, the living quarters being on upper stories and in the basements. Dave Kelroy, as he glanced through shop windows, was reminded of Shanghai.

"Here is the bazaar," remarked Colin, as they turned into another street. "Look at the auction signs hanging from the windows."

DAVE paused to run his eyes upward. He read the auction announcements while Colin watched him. Dave had said nothing about his ability to read Chinese; and Colin was quite interested in the proficiency that his new friend displayed.

The bazaar consisted of a single large room, well crowded with prospective buyers. There was a platform at the far wall; at either side were gaping doorways, fronted by screens. Dave smiled and pointed to the screens.

"The old superstition," he said, in an undertone. "The screens do not prevent men from passing them, for men can walk around them. But they baffle devils, so the belief goes, for Chinese demons always dash in a straight line. When they strike the screens, they think they can't get through."

"A funny idea, isn't it?" chuckled Colin. "I have seen screens in the Chinese joss houses; but most of them are pictured. These are plain."

Both men turned their attention to the platform, which was stacked high with boxes containing goods that had belonged to Ku Luan.

While they watched, a Chinese auctioneer appeared from behind the screen at the right. Another Celestial followed him. Dave nudged Colin.

"That's Tsing Chan," he whispered. "I don't want him to recognize me."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Move over into the crowd," urged Colin. "I can stay here on the outskirts."

Dave shifted into a mingled gathering of Americans and Orientals. He edged behind a post and kept a careful eye toward the platform. Satisfied with his position, he at last eased his watchfulness and took a look at those about him.

The Chinese were of mixed classes, a rather indiscriminate throng. The Americans were even less respectable in appearance; in fact, Dave noted two or three slouchers who could well have been pals of Zack Ruggie's thugs. Moreover, a foreign element was present. Dave saw several who looked like Mexicans.

The auction was beginning. Dave's attention returned to the platform. The first objects that were going up for sale were the teakwood boxes, the ones that Dave was sure he had seen in Ku Luan's iron chest.

Though he did not realize it, Dave Kelroy had become a figure of sudden notice. One of the watching rowdies had shuffled toward him. The fellow had apparently recognized Dave's face, for when he moved back, he made a sign to some others.

Colin, glancing idly toward Dave, was lighting a cigarette at the time; but his gaze was not in the direction of the spotter, hence he had seen nothing to indicate that Dave had been recognized.

From the platform, Tsing Chan was blinking beside the auctioneer, who had started a spiel in Chinese. Tsing Chan had spied Dave also; moreover, he had noted the rowdy's action. Yet Tsing Chan retained his blandness, apparently unconcerned with the crowd that stood before the platform.

A STRANGER had entered the bazaar. He was an American, tall and well dressed. His face was a hawklike visage, one that would have commanded attention but for its owner's quiet air.

He, too, had spied Dave Kelroy. He had noted the rowdy who was passing the word of recognition. In leisurely fashion, the hawkish personage strolled close to the clustered group of thuggish hoodlums until he was rubbing elbows with them. Dave Kelroy was fully a dozen feet away.

The hawk-faced arrival gave a signal. Two other men caught it as they entered the bazaar. These were the same who had fought so well last night: Harry Vincent and Miles Crofton, agents of The Shadow. They saw the direction of the eyes that peered from the hawk-like countenance. They edged over past Dave Kelroy.

The auctioneer was holding a teakwood box, one with a plain cover. He had opened it to display a silkish tapestry, woven in many colors, upon which were symbols set in squares.

Bids were given. They were raised. The auctioneer haggled and shook his head. Higher bids resulted. The box and its contents were sold. A second box came on the block, another with a plain cover. It contained a tapestry similar to the first and was auctioned off at almost the same price.

A third box. Dave Kelroy leaned forward from the post. His eyes were alert. This box had a silver dragon upon the cover. The auctioneer was opening it; his fingers were already plucking forth the tapestry when Tsing Chan intervened.

Placid until that moment, the crafty steward had spied Dave Kelroy's motion. Springing toward the auctioneer, Tsing Chan seized the teakwood box and slammed its lid. He began to babble in Chinese.

Dave caught his words. The box was not for sale. The auctioneer was jabbering in return. His claim was that Tsing Chan had no choice. The box must be sold. Colin had turned slightly, apparently seeking to catch

Dave's eye and to deliver a signal.

The thugs were muttering among themselves. They began to move toward Dave Kelroy, just at the moment when the auctioneer thrust Tsing Chan back and shouted, in English, that the box was for sale.

A CALL came from the hawk-faced stranger. Eyes upon the platform, he raised his voice above the chatter of the crowd. His very tone commanded instant attention; the words that he delivered brought stares of complete amazement.

"I bid for the box," announced the keen-eyed personage, his face as steady as a mask. "I demand that you hear my bid."

"A bid!" shouted the auctioneer. "What is your offer?"

"One hundred thousand dollars!"

Deep gasps from the throng. Approaching crooks stopped short, turning away from Dave Kelroy. Their eyes were upon this amazing stranger who had offered such a huge price for an item worth no more than fifty dollars. One thug growled to the others. They had been mistaken; this must be their man.

With one bound, they sprang upon the tall stranger, flashing revolvers into view. At the same moment, a trio of Mexicans drew knives and started for the platform.

Men of crime had sprung into action, their purpose twofold. They wanted to eliminate the person who sought the box, while their helpers snatched the prized object from the hands of the auctioneer.

One man – wounded in last night's affray – had correctly picked Dave Kelroy as the quarry they sought. But the action of the hawk-faced stranger had made the whole group change their direction of attack.

Quick though the crooks were, their intended victim was swifter. As he swung to action against the hard-faced crew, this lone warrior delivered a fierce and taunting laugh from his thin, masklike lips. That mocking challenge told the murderous attackers that their guess had been a wrong one.

Sinister and strident rose the laugh as long, quick fingers pressed the triggers of automatics. Each .45 roared deadly welcome, another proof of this fierce battler's identity. Trapping crooks had met a trapper. Again, the remnants of Zack Ruggie's outlaw crew were faced by their invincible foe, The Shadow!

CHAPTER X. FLIGHT IN THE DARK

AUTOMATICS recoiled as they coughed their deadly message. Long thrusts of flame scorched the foremost pair of ruffians who were bearing down upon The Shadow.

Sprawling, diving, the two killers pitched forward, their loosening gun hands useless. Clawing wildly, they gripped their enemy.

Four others were hard upon the heels of those who had tottered. Venomously, these thugs were aiming. They tugged at triggers as they surged into the fray. Revolvers barked; simultaneously, automatics blazed again. The Shadow had twisted in the grasp of sinking crooks. Wild bullets whistled past the spot where he had been.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Another rowdy staggered; but his body served to block The Shadow's fire. Squarely before the big gun muzzles, this fellow took the brunt. His pals were wheeling; but The Shadow offered them no chance to follow their advantage.

Lunging forward, he hurled away the sagging body that confronted him, and launched squarely into the midst of the murderous trio that remained.

Clutching hands grabbed for The Shadow's wrists. Wild fists swung revolvers, striking at a bobbing head. Arms up, The Shadow wrenched away and delivered a stroke with a ready .45; his weapon encountered the closest of three skulls.

The last pair grappled with The Shadow, grabbing with both hands, one on either side, while their pal sagged to the floor between them.

Two against one, they wanted a chance to kill; but they were dealing with a fighter who weaved about too skillfully for them. The trio staggered in a long, eccentric circle, while members of the crowd were scattering from their path.

Terrified bystanders had chosen the route toward the street. They had become a milling, frantic horde, all with one objective. The space where The Shadow fought had cleared. He and his two opponents were wrestling above the forms of sprawled thugs on the floor.

Upon the platform, the Mexicans had reached the auctioneer. One was covering the Chinaman, with upraised knife; another was snatching the teakwood box from the frightened Oriental's hands.

Tsing Chan was back against the wall, his arms outspread. A leering Mexican was close beside him, ready with a machete, should the Chinese make a move. Tsing Chan was motionless, almost bland as he eyed the gleaming blade of the long knife.

ACTION had started elsewhere. With The Shadow's first move, Harry Vincent and Miles Crofton had wheeled about, each drawing an automatic.

They had other tasks, while The Shadow fought. One was to rout the Mexican from the platform. Harry chose that duty. Springing forward with leveled automatic, he raised a cry to bring the trio toward him.

His gun was a threat that the Mexican would respect, for Harry could fire before they could reach him with their machetes. The Mexicans were mestizos, of low class, the very type that would scatter if their lives were menaced.

As Harry headed for the platform, Miles turned toward Dave Kelroy. The young man was staring, half bewildered, too astonished to make a move of his own volition.

Miles seized him by the arm and spun him toward the screened doorway at the right. He wanted to get Kelroy from the danger zone, before new assassins might arrive.

Until that moment, Colin Eldreth had made no move. He, like Dave Kelroy, had been rooted. He had given no sign to show his interest in proceedings. But when Miles leaped toward Dave, Colin came to life. Whipping a stubnosed revolver from his hip pocket, Colin sprang straight for Miles and Dave.

His lips gave a blurred, angry cry, as token that he intended to end this intervention. Miles wheeled to see Colin's aiming gun, covering both himself and Dave.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Instantly, The Shadow's agent sprang toward Colin, hurling his body in the path of the aiming gun, to protect Dave Kelroy from a shot.

Colin faltered momentarily, long enough for Miles to reach him. The Shadow's agent was swinging his automatic; Colin warded off the blow and spun about to gain new aim.

Harry Vincent, hearing the shouts, forgot the Mexicans long enough to whirl about. He saw Miles and Colin as they locked in a furious struggle.

Harry's later recollection of that moment was a vivid one, a fixed tableau that never left his memory. He had left the Mexicans half turned toward him, leering as they snarled from the platform, with Tsing Chan and the auctioneer motionless beyond them. He saw Miles Crofton at grips with Colin Eldreth.

He spied Dave Kelroy, halfway to the screened doorway, impelled to flight at Crofton's urge. Harry saw The Shadow, heaving off both thugs with one mighty effort. He saw the door, where a new band of hard-faced rowdies were carving in through the last of the fleeing crowd.

THEN came sudden blackness as someone switched off the lights of the bazaar. In one instant, the whole situation was changed. Lights from the street afforded no glow for the scene.

Guns roared; tongues of flame jabbed through the darkness. The Shadow had sprawled his last two foemen, in time to meet newcomers from the door. He had planned to down the new invaders with the aid of light. Darkness did not handicap The Shadow. He knew where the door was located. His aim was true.

Revolvers barked futile replies. Crooks were firing wildly as they fell. They had a lone target; The Shadow was aiming for a group. The darkness gave him welcome cover, that eased his task. Shouts told that the reserves were diving out to the street, repelled by The Shadow's lone attack.

Feet were scurrying from the platform, proof that the Mexicans were staging a get-away. No sound located Miles Crofton and Colin Eldreth. Harry could not guess in what direction those strugglers had staggered.

He was sure, however, that Miles could take care of himself. Harry's only possible opportunity at present was to get Dave Kelroy out of danger.

Hurrying blindly toward the spot where he thought Kelroy stood, Harry spoke a greeting, in an undertone.

"Hello, there," he addressed the darkness. "I'm a friend. Come along, I'll get you out of here."

"I'm ready," came a reply.

Reaching Kelroy by locating the man's voice, Harry gripped him by the arm. Together, they reached the nearer screen and crashed against it. The screen tumbled. The two kept onward. They found a passage and blundered through until they reached an outer door. Yanking the barrier open, they reached the dim light of a rear street.

Harry started to look about; then, with a sudden shout, he pointed. Three men were diving from another doorway, out into the street. They were the Mexicans; the leader of the trio was carrying a large black box. Kelroy saw the scurrying mestizos. He made a quick appeal to Harry.

"They've got the box!" cried Dave. "The box with the silver dragon! Stop them!"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Harry started from his own doorway, raising his automatic to fire. Another shout came from Kelroy. Before Harry could understand the warning, four men surged from the door behind him. They were Chinamen. With clawing hands they pounced upon The Shadow's agent.

HARRY swung hard with his gun. He staggered one Celestial with a single blow; then hit another with a glancing stroke. Dave sprang in to aid.

He grabbed one Chinaman and wrestled back and forth with his opponent. The two whom Harry had struck were staggering back into the bazaar building. Only one remained to fight The Shadow's agent.

Harry wrestled away from the Chinaman and took aim with his automatic. With a wild cry, the Celestial dived into the doorway. His last companion heard his call and pitched Dave Kelroy to the sidewalk. Harry fired hastily as this fellow also took to the doorway. The shots were wide.

Four Chinamen were on the run; and Harry might have followed them, for the Mexicans had by this time made their get-away. But there was a good reason why Harry failed to take up the chase. Dave Kelroy had slumped against the wall, half groggy from a thud that his head had received. Dave needed Harry's aid.

Harry hauled him to his feet and started to drag him along the sidewalk. As they neared the corner, the purr of a motor caused Harry to turn about.

A coupe had rolled alongside. From it was springing a man whose face Harry recognized. The arrival was Colin Eldreth, whom Harry had last seen battling with Miles Crofton. Colin was without his gun; Harry had pocketed his own weapon. Colin was coming to seize Dave Kelroy. Harry dropped the groggy man and swung to meet Colin.

Harry had shown himself a remarkable fighter when he had routed four Chinamen. Here was a lone opponent, who seemed easy to contend with. Harry shot a hard punch; Colin ducked as he warded it off with his left hand.

Then, from his crouched position, Colin jabbed a swift fist upward. The punch drove past Harry's guarding left. It clipped Harry's chin. Staggering backward, The Shadow's agent cracked against the wall and slumped downward to the sidewalk.

With a contemptuous laugh, Colin jerked Dave Kelroy back to his feet and rolled the young man into the coupe. Colin dashed around the car and jumped to the wheel. He saw Harry Vincent coming slowly to hands and knees. With another laugh, Colin shot the car into gear.

HARRY shook his head and stared at the departing tail-light. He was over the effects of the punch; it had staggered, but had not stunned him. He knew that Kelroy was being taken away – the coupe had reached the corner, and there was no chance to stop it, even with a pistol shot. But the tail-light was a bright one. By its glare, Harry spotted the license number of the car. Then the coupe had turned the corner.

Harry came to his feet. He was alone upon this street. Shrill whistles were sounding from the distance. Police were again converging within Chinatown. They had arrived late last night; they would be late again tonight.

Thugs had been scattered, the Mexicans had made a get-away with the teakwood box; the Chinese had doubtless fled through some side passage from the bazaar. Once more, Dave Kelroy, a prospective victim, had departed from the danger zone.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Yet Harry was not sure of Kelroy's safety. Colin Eldreth, whose name, like Kelroy's, was unknown to Harry, had come to carry the rescued man away. That action could have been a bluff on Colin's part. Once Kelroy had escaped assassination within the bazaar, it was policy for Colin to act as Kelroy's friend.

Until he thought of Crofton, Harry had been perplexed regarding the proper course to follow, now that Colin, like the Mexicans and Chinese, had made a get-away.

Harry was not concerned about The Shadow; he knew that his chief had actually cleared a way through the front door of the bazaar. But Harry could picture Miles, wounded or dead, on the floor beside the bodies of thugs who had fought against The Shadow.

Hastening back to the rear door, Harry regained the passage that he and Kelroy had used for exit. This time, he used a flashlight, for he was sure that the place had cleared. Sending the gleam ahead of him, Harry made toward the doorway where the fallen screen was lying.

Hardly had he reached that spot before another light gleamed close beside him. Harry was bathed in the glare of focused rays. He turned quickly, with his automatic ready, only to hear a hissed command. Lowering his gun, Harry held his flashlight fixed.

There stood The Shadow, still in his hawklike disguise. He was supporting a man who leaned heavily upon him: Miles Crofton. Except for those two, the auction room was empty. Tsing Chan and the auctioneer must have scurried away like the other Chinese.

MILES CROFTON was trying to support himself. His eyes were opened and as Harry came up, Miles shoved his free arm over his fellow agent's shoulder. The Shadow gave an order.

Harry turned off his flashlight, and The Shadow did the same. Picking a course through darkness, they took the doorway by the fallen screen, carrying Crofton between them.

"Report," came The Shadow's low-toned order.

Harry told his own episodes: how he had conducted Kelroy to safety; how they had seen the Mexicans with the teakwood box. He briefly described the fight with the four Chinamen and added the details of Colin's departure with Dave. Harry repeated the license number of the coupe.

They had reached the rear street. The Shadow was leading them across, to a darkened alley that offered a path for departure before the police arrived. Already sirens were telling that the law was close at hand. Miles Crofton muttered as they entered the black alley.

"Slugged me," Miles mumbled. "That's what the fellow did. Slugged me after the lights were out. I'm all right now. I can walk."

The last to depart from the Chinese bazaar, The Shadow and his agents were unscathed. Again had The Shadow conquered mighty odds; and his agents had done their best to aid him. Yet victory had been hollow.

Dave Kelroy still remained to be sought. The teakwood box with the silver dragon had become the property of crooks, and must be gained. More work lay ahead for The Shadow.

CHAPTER XI. NEW PLANS BEGIN

IT was two o'clock the next afternoon. Dave Kelroy was seated in Colin Eldreth's living room. The click of the door latch caused him to look nervously in that direction. Relief showed on Dave's face as Colin entered.

"Hello, old top," greeted Colin, with a cheery smile. He planked a stack of newspapers upon the table. "Well, the afternoon sheets don't know any more than the morning newspapers did. The police are still traveling in circles."

"They are no worse than I am," observed Dave, wearily. "This is getting to be a habit with me, this business of being banged on the head every night. I was still in a daze when I woke up this morning."

"So I noticed," laughed Colin. "The more I talked to you, the less you paid attention. How do you feel now?"

"Lots better, thanks. Good enough to talk things over sensibly. That is, if you have time, Colin."

"That's what I'm here for, Dave."

"No appointment this afternoon? You had one yesterday. I thought that maybe –"

"I had to drop in at my club," interrupted Colin, suddenly. He eyed Dave quickly, as he spoke. "That was why I had to leave you here alone, yesterday afternoon. I usually stop at the club in the evening; but since we were going to the Chinese bazaar last night I went to the club earlier."

DAVE wondered why Colin had dwelt at length on the subject of the club. Dave put a question:

"An exclusive place, your club?"

"Very exclusive," replied Colin, pausing as he lighted a cigarette. "Old families, exorbitant dues, and all that. Grandfather was a member of the Pioneer Club, so I have to keep up the tradition. Well, Dave, let's get back to our talk about last night. We nosed ourselves into a bit of trouble, didn't we?"

"Too much of it," returned Dave, ruefully rubbing the side of his head. "Things certainly went haywire as soon as we saw the teakwood box with the silver dragon. Tsing Chan must have guessed that the box was what I wanted. But how did he find out?"

"He must have spotted you, Dave. Perhaps you gave yourself away."

"Maybe. Yet I thought that Tsing Chan didn't even see me. Of course, those rowdies were much closer to me than he was. Do you think, Colin, that someone who was watching me could have passed the word to both Tsing Chan and the hoodlums?"

"I don't see the connection, Dave. You are suddenly beginning to connect Tsing Chan with the crooks. It doesn't fit."

"Yes it does, Colin. Let me give you my impression of the whole occurrence. Tsing Chan knew I was after something in the storeroom. He must have known also that nothing was stolen. So he was watching for me at the auction. But he probably guessed that he might not see me; and even if he did, he could not make a move himself."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"So he had the crooks there, like he did the night before. But he was without Wong Soy. He had to contact directly with the crooks themselves. Someone noticed me and was watching everything I did. That person passed a signal when I showed interest in the teakwood box.

"Tsing Chan caught the signal. He started a fuss about the box. That caused the commotion. The crooks made for me. Then a stranger put in a wild bid – a hundred thousand dollars and it was so outlandish that the crooks thought he must be in on the game. They started after him instead of me."

"Good theory," smiled Colin. "Go ahead. Finish it."

"Three Mexicans went to grab the box," stated Dave. "They were blinds, to make it look as though Tsing Chan had nothing to do with the crooks. The lights were switched out by one of Tsing Chan's helpers, off behind the screen. Some fellow helped me out of the mess. The Chinamen attacked us when we saw the Mexicans running. That proves the connection, Colin.

"The fellow who helped me was a fighter. He drove off the Chinamen, but it was too late to chase the Mexicans. They had made a get-away with the teakwood box. You came along; not knowing that I was with a friend, you slugged the fellow who had helped me."

"That was the only mistake I made," put in Colin. "Yet it was justifiable under the circumstances. Let me give you a real summary of what happened. A better one than your theory."

Dave was listening. Colin proceeded.

"FORGET all ideas of a connection between Tsing Chan and the crooks," declared Colin. "Study the situation as a simple one, eliminating complexities. Tsing Chan wanted to know what you were after, when you went to the storeroom. But that was only natural, because of the raid there, two nights ago.

"The crooks wanted to find what you were after, too. That is why they came to the auction. Their ranks must have been depleted; so they recruited some Mexicans. One of the thugs recognized you. He saw you fidget when the box was offered for sale.

"Tsing Chan may have spied you, or he may have noticed a motion among the hoodlums. Both, perhaps, for I feel sure that Tsing Chan saw you. Of course, he wanted to protect the teakwood box. That was why he argued with the auctioneer. He was too late, however.

"The attack started. Thugs wanted to get you; their Mexican cronies sought to seize the box. The stranger chanced to divert the attack; that fact saved you. But the Mexicans took the teakwood box from Tsing Chan, by force. I saw them do it."

Colin paused reflectively, then resumed:

"One of Tsing Chan's men must have turned out the lights. You were correct on that point, Dave. The Chinamen were behind the screen on the right. Not only did they try to save Tsing Chan, they also expected that the Mexicans would come in that direction. Instead, the Mexicans went out by the other door.

"Two chaps had come over to help you. They did not look like crooks, but I thought for the moment that they were. So I pitched on one of them. Then the darkness hit; the other chap took you through to the back street. The two of you spied the Mexicans running.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"You had gone right by the Chinese. They popped out upon you. They never saw the Mexicans, running up the street. What is more, you and your new friend did not try to explain matters. You were as excited as the Chinamen. You fought them and drove them back; they must have fled by some side passage of the bazaar, along with Tsing Chan and the auctioneer."

Colin was speaking with assurance. His survey sounded logical; Dave found his own theory dwindling. Colin smiled regretfully.

"I was quite excited, too," he stated. "I was lucky enough to crack the chap whom I was fighting. I lost my revolver; I wanted to leave in a hurry. There had been a lot of shooting at the front door; but it ended suddenly. The front doorway was completely blackened. I dashed out through it.

"I cut through to the street where we had parked the coupe. I had a hunch that you had made for the back door of the bazaar. I drove around there and spied the second of those two chaps hauling you along the street. You were groggy; I thought that he had slugged you.

"That was why I pitched into him. I sent him reeling under a hard punch. I pushed you into the car and drove away. It was no time to remain and exchange calling cards with any stranger. It was not until we arrived home that I learned my mistake. I did not know that the chap was all right, until you told me."

DAVE KELROY felt convinced in spite of himself. He tried to look for flaws in Colin's summary; but it was several minutes before he could find one. Suddenly, Dave pointed to the morning newspaper.

"Tsing Chan is missing," he asserted. "None of his servants are back at Ku Luan's house. All have vanished. Doesn't that implicate him, Colin?"

"Not at all, Dave," laughed Colin. "You are missing, too, yet you are innocent. When I say 'missing,' I mean you would be missing if the police knew about you. Like yourself, Tsing Chan has every reason to keep under cover. If the crooks fail to find you, they will go after him."

"That's true, Colin. This Zack Rugey appears to be a very dangerous character."

"He is. The police have linked him again. I thought he and his henchmen would not appear last night; but I was wrong. They did appear; but Zack stayed outside until just before the lights went out."

"How do you know that, Colin? The newspapers made no such comment."

Colin chewed at his cigarette; then laughed. His mirth was forced.

"I'm guessing," he declared. "I saw this man Rugey, once – that is, he was pointed out to me. There was a fellow who looked something like him, along with the crowd that rushed in just before the lights were extinguished."

Dave started to ask another question. Colin stopped him impatiently.

"Enough of these theories," decided Colin, his tone abrupt. "There is something I want you to do for me, Dave."

"Something important?"

"Yes. Very important. I want you to see Dryer."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"When? Today?"

"This very afternoon. Mark may have spoken to him; both may be wondering where you are. You must go to Dryer's office, as Mark suggested to you."

Dave nodded, knowing that more was coming.

"Make no blunders," added Colin. "Mention what happened two nights ago, because you already intimated that you were in trouble, when you paid your visit to Mark's house. But say nothing about having met me; and remember – you were not at the bazaar last night."

"But what about the teakwood box?"

"You will have to mention it. State that Ku Luan said it was to be yours. Dryer might know something that would help you. Sound him out."

"Regarding the possible contents of the box?"

"Yes. We both caught a glimpse of a folded tapestry, something like the others that were in the other boxes. Suggest to Dryer that the box might contain some sort of silk."

"I can say that Ku Luan intimated that fact."

"A good idea. When you have finished talking with Dryer, come back here. Maybe we shall then know more than we do at present."

"But where shall I tell Dryer that I am stopping?"

"At a hotel – any hotel. If he questions you too closely, tell him that you have checked out. Let him recommend a better hotel. He will think that you have gone there."

DAVE nodded slowly. He felt that he could manage the Dryer visit. Another matter was coming to his mind.

"About those symbols, Colin!" he remarked. "The ones on the tapestries. Of course, they were probably different from the tapestry we want. Ours was in the box with the silver dragon on its cover. But I observed one symbol on the first tapestry. It looked like a golden pagoda, the same design that was on the token sent to me by Ku Luan"

"Leave that until later, Dave," interposed Colin. "It's time to be off. Dryer sometimes leaves his office early in the afternoon. You must hurry along; take a taxi up at the corner."

Dave Kelroy departed. Colin Eldreth closed the door. His next action was proof that he had held good reason for his impatience to see Dave leave.

Stepping across the living room, Colin burrowed beneath the table and brought out a blocky-object that looked like a Mah Jong cabinet.

Colin raised the sliding front. A flood of papers poured from the small cabinet. Colin began to separate them; all the papers were long, square slips, each bearing a single symbol. Many designs were duplicated, but each appeared in various colors. Colin began to sort them.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

These were the Chinese prayer papers which Colin had mentioned prior to the visit to the Chinese bazaar. There was reason why the quaintly patterned sheets had become of present interest. For Colin had remembered the first two tapestries exhibited at the auction.

The symbols on the prayer papers were identical with ones that had appeared upon the silken drapes. Colin Eldreth had gained a vital link. Though he had not seen the final tapestry unfolded, he knew that the symbols which must appear upon it could be translated by these paper clues that he had held for years!

CHAPTER XII. AT THE OFFICE

WHILE David Kelroy was riding toward the downtown district, three men were holding conference in Weldon Dryer's office. One was the withery lawyer himself. The second was Mark Eldreth. The third, a silent listener to the preliminary conversation, was Durling, the private detective.

"I am truly anxious, Mr. Dryer," Mark was saying, soberly. "I assure you, the young man was quite sincere when he talked to me two nights ago. He intimated that he had encountered trouble in San Francisco; but he gave me no inkling of its nature."

"He mentioned Ku Luan, you say?" inquired Dryer.

"Yes," nodded Mark, "but he did not indicate that there had been any lawless activity at Ku Luan's. He told me merely that Ku Luan had died under strange circumstances."

"The young man's name was Kelroy?"

"Yes. David Kelroy. From Shanghai. Kelroy said that he would come to see you," he stated. "He should have been here yesterday. When I read the morning newspapers, I was aghast. I called this office, but learned that you were out of town."

"I had business in Sacramento," said Dryer. "Perhaps Kelroy called here by telephone; but if he did, he certainly did not give his name. All such calls are recorded by my secretary."

"This morning," went on Mark, "I read of another terrible affray at the Chinese bazaar. Once again, the name of Ku Luan was involved. I became more anxious than ever concerning young Kelroy. Do you think the poor fellow could have met with foul play?"

"That is difficult to guess," returned Dryer, "unless the police have already arrested Zack Ruggie. Do you think that your information would aid them, Durling?"

Mark blinked in surprise as he heard the question. He looked at Durling curiously.

"My information?" queried Durling. He shrugged his thick shoulders. "I don't know that I have any copyright on that dope, Mr. Dryer. Inspector Romson knows that Hype Mellick used to be a friend of Zack Ruggie's."

"Then why hasn't the inspector quizzed Mellick?"

"Because Hype has established too good an alibi. He has kept away from Chinatown. Nobody has seen him with Zack."

"But you told me that Zack had been at the Club Monterey"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Not since this trouble broke, Mr. Dryer."

Durling spoke in positive fashion; but Dryer looked worried. Mark Eldreth, staring in puzzled fashion from investigator to lawyer, finally ended the lull with a question:

"Who is Hype Mellick?"

"He is a gambler," returned Dryer, "who frequents the Club Monterey."

"The Club Monterey! Why that is the place where my cousin Colin spends so much time!"

"Precisely. It was while Durling was watching Colin that he saw Hype Mellick; and later heard mention of Zack Ruggey's name. Mellick received money; and he planned to give some of it to Ruggey."

"Mellick received money? From whom?"

"From your cousin Colin."

MARK stared as he heard Dryer's sober statement. Slowly, Mark's mouth formed a gaping oval in the center of his roundish face. He was at a loss for words. Dryer supplied them.

"I know what you are thinking, Mark," stated the attorney, slowly. "This money – it was cash that I gave Colin the other night – was paid prior to those frays in Chinatown. That is why I asked Durling if he thought the information would be useful to the police."

"But think of the scandal, Mr. Dryer!" protested Mark. "Colin cannot be dragged into public print! It would be terrible."

"Nevertheless we owe a duty to the law –"

"Wait a minute." It was Durling who gave the brusque interruption. "I'm not the only person who knows that Hype Mellick has talked with Colin Eldreth. The two of them were together at the Club Monterey, only yesterday afternoon. Hype was there last night, too; but Colin wasn't."

"Stew Randler, the proprietor knows about them. If Inspector Romson wants information, let him get it from Stew Randler. Once Stew has spilled the beans, I can talk; but not before."

"I got into the Club Monterey because I promised Pete, the bouncer, that I wouldn't make any trouble. What's more, I was doing confidential work, for you, Mr. Dryer. I'm a private investigator; and you're a lawyer. That gives us some privileges, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so," nodded Dryer. "But I have never been in sympathy with attorneys who have found ways to block paths of justice."

"Good enough," agreed Durling, "but there's another slant to this proposition. I've just said that Hype Mellick is a fox when it comes to framing alibis. Suppose I did tell Romson about the conversation I heard between Hype and Colin. What would Hype say when the inspector quizzed him?"

"I'll tell you what he'd say. His story would be that Colin owed him dough from a poker game. He'd say that Zack Ruggey and some other mugs were in on the same deal; that he was collecting for his friends. Romson would ask where Zack was; and Hype wouldn't know. He'd show Romson a wad of dough and say that he

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

was still waiting to hear from Zack, to give the guy what was due him.

"A phony story? Sure. But how could Romson crack it? He couldn't. Then where would I be? What would I be? I'll tell you. I'd be the champion palooka in San Francisco. In wrong, with everybody, including the cops. Nope, Mr. Dryer. I'm not going to visit headquarters until I'm called there."

THE elderly lawyer pondered; then nodded slowly. Mark settled back in his chair, solemnly sighing in relief. Dryer spoke tersely.

"There is merit in your argument," the lawyer told Durling. "I would agree with you, except for one reason. I am concerned about this young man who came to see Mark. We know that David Kelroy is actually missing. On his account, we must –"

Dryer paused. He had heard a rap at the door. He called, telling the person to come in. A stenographer entered.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Dryer," said the girl. "He says that it is urgent. His name is David Kelroy."

"David Kelroy!"

Dryer uttered the name spontaneously, while Mark and Durling gaped. Recovering himself, the lawyer spoke to the stenographer.

"Tell Mr. Kelroy to wait for a few minutes," said Dryer. "I shall ring when I wish him to come in. At that time, you may have him enter alone."

As soon as the girl had gone, Dryer swung to his companions. Carefully, the old lawyer rendered his decision.

"This changes matters entirely," he assured. "If our visitor is actually David Kelroy, you will know him, Mark. As soon as he enters, you will be the first to greet him – that is, if you recognize him. If he is not Kelroy, make no move. Do you understand?"

Mark nodded.

"If the man is really Kelroy," added Dryer, "we shall take your advice, Durling. What we know about Colin's connection with Mellick shall remain as our exclusive information, until new facts warrant a statement to the police.

"Colin was not directly concerned in either of those Chinatown forays. Our position was difficult only because we had reason to believe that David Kelroy had disappeared. Should this visitor be David Kelroy, we can afford to bide our time until we have gained more detailed information regarding Colin's dealings with Hype Mellick."

Weldon Dryer pressed a push-button. A buzzer sounded in the outer office, as notice to admit the waiting visitor. Silently, tensely, the three men watched the door. It opened; and Dryer saw a gleam in Mark's eyes as a young man stepped across the threshold.

Without need of noting Mark's next action, Dryer knew that this arrival must be David Kelroy.

CHAPTER XIII. AT THE MUSEUM

MARK ELDRETH came to his feet. Advancing, he extended his hand to Dave Kelroy. Today, Mark's clasp was more spontaneous. His moonish face showed a smile that was one of genuine pleasure.

Turning, Mark introduced Dave to Dryer. The lawyer, in turn, made a brief introduction of Durling, without reference to the private investigator's calling.

"Where have you been, Kelroy?" queried Mark. "We have been greatly concerned about your disappearance. Both Mr. Dryer and myself have read of the trouble in Chinatown. We were afraid that you might have met with foul play."

"I did have trouble," smiled Dave, "but all of it came before our meeting of two nights ago."

"But you said nothing to me when you visited my house. Nothing, I mean, that indicated serious difficulties. You did act oddly; but –"

"You were busy. I was a bit dazed. Suppose I tell my story from the start."

Nods of agreement. Dave spoke slowly and carefully. He told of his arrival in San Francisco and his visit to Ku Luan. Vividly he described the death of Ku Luan. He repeated the ancient Chinaman's admonition regarding the teakwood box with the silver dragon. He added the statements wherein Ku Luan had told him to visit some relative of Tobias Eldreth.

Dave recounted the details of Wong Soy's treachery; the attack made by thugs; the intervention of a mysterious fighter who had effected Dave's own rescue. He explained that he had looked up Mark's residence in the telephone book. So far, his story had been accurate.

Then, remembering Colin's injunction, Dave began to deviate from the truth. He described his departure from Mark's, but carefully avoided mention of Colin's chance arrival. Instead, Dave spoke of wandering vaguely through the fog.

"I found a small hotel," he stated. "I registered there under another name than my own. I slept late – almost all day, yesterday. When evening came, I realized that it was no time to call here, at Mr. Dryer's office. So I remained in the hotel all evening.

"I was worried; for a while, I lacked courage to leave my hotel. At last, I decided to come here. That completes my story; but I come without the teakwood box. All that I have are the keys that Ku Luan gave me."

MARK was the first to respond.

"I wish, Kelroy," he stated, "that you had started to tell me your story two nights ago. I had no idea that you had been in such serious difficulty."

"It wasn't so bad," rejoined Dave, with a smile. "The real misfortune was my failure to gain the teakwood box. Its contents must surely be vital to my future."

"You have no idea what it could contain?" queried Dryer.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"I can only guess," replied Dave. "You see, I lifted a few of the teakwood boxes, without finding the one I wanted. They were light; they were large enough to have contained some silk. Ku Luan sent me a little token of silk. That made me think that the boxes might hold silk also."

Weldon Dryer was stroking his chin.

"Kelroy," said the lawyer, "your father was a friend of Ku Luan; and so was Tobias Eldreth. I have known for years that some understanding existed between Ku Luan and Tobias Eldreth. I believe that this treasure exists. You say that you have some keys that Ku Luan gave you?"

"Right here," replied Dave, producing the ring of keys, and handling them to the lawyer. "Huge keys, aren't they?"

"Very large," nodded Dryer. "Keep them, Kelroy. They might prove useful. Come. Let us drive out to the Oriental Museum. I should like to talk to the curator, Doctor Lestman."

Dryer picked up the telephone and called a garage. He and the others went from the office. When they reached the street, a chauffeured limousine was awaiting them. The four men entered the car; it drove westward.

Dave Kelroy felt quite at ease in this company. Bright daylight made San Francisco a city of charm, with none of the sinister threat that Dave had encountered in the night-darkened streets of Chinatown. Dave was seated beside Mark; as they rode along, the lethargic man kept pointing out the sights. He indicated one building that caught Dave's interest, when he heard Mark say proudly:

"That is the Pioneer Club."

"You are a member there?" inquired Dave, casually.

"Yes," returned Mark. "My grandfather was a member of the Pioneer Club; and I have preserved the family tradition."

"Your cousin Colin, also?"

"Colin! The Pioneer Club means nothing to him. He was a member once; he was posted so often for non-payment of dues that they finally dropped him."

"Very long ago?"

"At least three years." Mark shook his head sorrowfully. "It was most unfortunate. Colin was the first member of the Eldreth family ever to be dropped from any club of standing."

DAVE conversed mechanically after that. He was recalling Colin's statements this very afternoon. Colin had said that he had gone to the Pioneer Club yesterday afternoon; that he had intended to drop in there again this evening.

Yet Mark's testimony, in Dryer's preserve, was proof that Colin had no entree to the Pioneer Club. Suspicion began to dawn within Dave's mind.

While Dave was still pondering on this situation, the limousine pulled up in front of a pretentious, granite-fronted building that faced the side slope of a hill. Dave alighted with the others; they entered the

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Oriental Museum.

Passing through a lobby that contained trophies of the Far East, they arrived at the curator's office. Dave found himself being introduced to a long-faced, bald-headed man whom Dryer addressed as Doctor Lestman.

Head tilted to one side, the curator listened intently to Dave's brief resume of his story as he had told it to Dryer and Mark. When Dave had finished, Lestman examined the large brass keys and shook his head.

Rising from his desk, he conducted the visitors through a long passage. A solemn-faced attendant followed them, and unlocked a large door to reveal a flight of stairs.

They stepped down into a square-shaped, windowless room, that measured thirty feet in each direction. In the center was a large bronze statue, a representation of an ancient Chinese emperor. The figure was more than life size; its pedestal was firmly fitted into the stone floor of the room.

The walls were hung with Oriental tapestries; between these drapes were niches, set at intervals, each like a window-ledge projecting into a solid wall. The niches were four feet from the floor; they measured about three feet in height and two feet in width. Their domes were oval-shaped, in contrast to the flat-bottom ledges.

DAVE noted nine such alcoves, three in each wall as a person faced from the door. Each niche contained an exquisite statuette, a dozen inches tall. The central statuette was of gold; the others were of silver, but all had the same fine workmanship.

The large bronze statue in the center of the room was the main object, however, and it was the one to which Doctor Lestman pointed.

"The guardian statue," explained the curator. "That was what Ku Luan called this figure of an early Manchu emperor. He brought the statue with him from China. I firmly believe that Ku Luan attached significance to this room, for he himself superintended its construction.

"And yet there is nothing here to aid us." Dangling Dave's keys, Lestman looked about the room; then toward the keys themselves. "There is no door, no opening, which any key might unlock. Particularly keys so large as these."

He returned the keys to Kelroy. All the visitors had finished a brief inspection of the room. They returned to the office, followed by the poker-faced attendant, who stood and waited for Lestman's order.

"Nothing more, Singledon," said the curator, briskly. "You may go back to duty." Then, when the attendant had gone, Lestman added to Dave: "These may interest you, Mr. Kelroy."

From a desk drawer he produced a small Chinese box and took out a stack of long, square-shaped prayer papers. As he sorted them on the table, he pointed to the symbols that appeared upon them.

Dave was intent; these were the very types of prayer papers that Colin had mentioned. More than that, their symbols were identical with some that had appeared upon the tapestries that Dave had seen at last night's auction.

"In the safe," remarked Lestman, "I have one complete set of these prayer papers which are marked with the English meanings of the symbols. A few of these are marked – such as this green sun, which has the

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

translation 'happiness' – but most of them are merely extras."

Dave was looking through the prayer papers as the curator spoke. He stopped suddenly; he had come to one that bore a picture of a yellowish pagoda, like the golden weave upon the silken square that Ku Luan had sent him as a token. This prayer paper was marked with a word in English: "Welcome."

Dave caught himself as he was about to speak. Idly, he tossed the paper back with the others and watched Lestman replace them in the box. Dave was thinking keenly and quickly.

He had gained an answer that he wanted. Should he ever gain the silver dragon teakwood box and find the tapestry within it, these prayer papers would serve as a translation to its message.

Colin had a set of the prayer papers. He had dropped mention of them after last night's visit to Chinatown. Colin, Dave knew, had recognized that the symbols on certain tapestries could be translated. But Colin, like Dave, had failed to see the all-important tapestry that was within the box with the silver dragon. The auctioneer had never had a chance to unfold that last sheet of heavy silk.

It was wise to make no comment in front of Dryer or Mark; for should he do so, Dave would have to explain the facts that he had hidden. He felt it policy to go through with the plan that he had started: to say nothing about his meeting with Colin and last night's adventure in Chinatown.

Tomorrow, Dave decided, he could pay another visit to this museum and express interest in the prayer papers. Doctor Lestman would suspect nothing; Dave could then examine the paper squares for clues. That one word 'welcome,' represented by the golden pagoda, was all that Dave had required as a clue.

Dave felt that Colin had tricked him. His only part was to continue that game, until he had gained the full confidence of these men who had shown him sympathy and friendship. After that had been attained, he could tell them his whole story.

TURNING from the desk, Dave smiled wearily as he faced Dryer. The old, lawyer placed a sympathetic hand upon the young man's shoulder. Mark shook his head slowly and sadly, to indicate that he, too, felt Dave's disappointment.

"Never mind the condolences," decided Dave. He was planning as he spoke. "I have a hunch that my teakwood box will show up somewhere. Suppose you drop me at my hotel, while we are driving down town."

"Where are you stopping?" inquired Dryer.

"At the Thurbley," replied Dave naming the first small hotel that came to his mind. "I don't know the way to the hotel, from here; but the chauffeur can certainly find it."

"Very well," decided Dryer. "We shall drop you there, Kelroy. Keep in touch with me from day to day."

It was nearly dusk as they left the museum. Singledon, the sour-faced attendant, closed the door after their departure. Peering through the crack, the man watched the four visitors enter the limousine.

Singledon looked about to make sure that Doctor Lestman was still in his office. Assured of that fact, the attendant indulged in an ugly smile.

Somewhere in the net that enmeshed Dave Kelroy, Singledon formed a link. Yet Dave – like others – had failed to guess that treachery might be present at the Oriental Museum.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SHADOW FOLLOWS

DUSK had deepened about the Coronado Apartments. A swath of light cut through the gloom as Colin Eldreth swung his coupe around the nearest corner. The car rolled to a stop; the lights blinked out.

Colin alighted and hurriedly entered the building. He had been out for an hour's drive; he had sped back in order to arrive ahead of Dave Kelroy.

Eyes from the dusk were watching the Coronado Apartments. Peering from across the street, a somber, shrouded figure saw lights blink from the windows of a second-floor apartment. A soft laugh whispered in the gloom. A shaded form crept forward.

The Shadow had checked the license number of the coupe which Harry Vincent had noted in Chinatown. Gaining the name of Colin Eldreth, The Shadow had come here to watch. He had seen the coupe drive up; he had watched for light somewhere in the apartment house. He had guessed where Colin lived.

The apartment was in one end of the building. Blank windows indicated bedrooms between a living room and the final wall. The ground was steep; its rise offered easy access to the second floor. The Shadow went in that direction. He merged with the darkened end of the building.

Up in his living room, Colin had opened the Mah Jong cabinet that contained the prayer papers. Unfolded with the papers was a sheet upon which he had written a list. Colin was checking the translations that he had compiled. He was noting the list:

After.....Blue Sun

Beneath.....Green Serpent

Bright.....Red Poppy

Casket.....Yellow Fish

Day.....Yellow Gate

Find.....Green Spider

Friend.....Red Sword

Gold.....Green Bell

Happiness.....Green Sun

Hidden.....Yellow Bird

Home.....Yellow Sword

Key.....Blue Pagoda

Land.....Black Bell

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Large.....Red Lantern

Night.....Black Gate

One.....Green Gate

Pride.....Purple Sword

Silver.....Red Crescent

Single.....Red Coin

Small.....Red Sun

Spring.....Red Spider

Statue.....Black Pagoda

Three.....Green Coin

Treasure.....Purple Bird

Two Blue.....Coin

Unlocks.....Yellow Poppy

Welcome.....Yellow Pagoda

Wisdom.....Blue Crescent

These were evidently terms that Colin had selected from a large assortment. He had a little stack of papers – the ones that bore the symbols in the list – and he set this pile carefully to one side, while he replaced the rest in the Mah Jong box. Nervously, Colin looked up from the table and stared toward the door of a darkened bedroom.

He had gained the sudden impression that eyes were watching him; but he saw nothing, and as he listened, his qualms ended. The net result was that Colin thrust the little stack of papers into his pocket, along with the special list. He started to light a cigarette; but stopped suddenly as he heard the telephone bell.

ANSWERING the call, Colin heard Dave Kelroy's voice. Anxiously, he began to make inquiry. Most of the conversation was plain from Colin's end of it.

"Hello, Dave..." Colin was tense. "I've been wondering where you were. What's that? At the Thurbley Hotel? Why did you go there?..."

"I see... You had to keep up the bluff with Mark and Dryer... Well, that was good business... So they took you out to the museum, did they?... Dryer's idea? I thought so. Did you learn anything?..."

"No? Well, that's too bad... Yes, we can talk it over later... Yes, I have to go down to the club... All right, I'll leave the door unlatched so you can come up here and turn in early... I see... You're under the name of Lawdon..."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Well, that's better than Kelroy... Yes, it was a good idea to register, even though you don't intend to stay at the Thurbley... Certainly. On account of Mark and Dryer... Yes, they might happen to telephone you... Best to have a room there..."

Colin ended the call. Strolling past the first bedroom, he entered the second and turned on the light. He pushed the drawer almost shut and began to lay out a tuxedo for evening wear. Colin was whistling in cheery fashion. He had suspected nothing from Dave's call.

Blackness stirred from within the first bedroom. A tall, cloaked shape emerged into the glow of the living room. Keen eyes looked toward Colin's door. The Shadow had observed Colin's sorting of the prayer papers; but he had not been close enough to note their symbols. He had finally gained an opportunity.

Away from the range of the door, The Shadow opened the Mah Jong cabinet. He began an inspection of its contents, his long, quick fingers selecting those prayer papers that bore words in English. It required only a few minutes for The Shadow to make two discoveries, with conclusions.

First: these were not ordinary prayer papers that conformed to the usual type found in Chinese temples. The symbols apparently belonged to a classification of their own. They were different from any that The Shadow had previously seen. Their purpose, however, was obvious. Temple priests, by taking clusters of these papers, could form crude sentences. Knowing the code, they could then give interpretations to the faithful who had come to consult them.

Next, there were no duplicates among the papers that were marked with English translations. There were, however, symbols that remained unexplained.

From this, The Shadow deduced that there was only one master set of translated symbols in Colin's collection. Those that Colin had thrust into his pocket were from the key group; hence the remaining lot was incomplete.

The Shadow had recognized the purpose of these papers. They could be used to translate symbols upon silken tapestries, like those which he had seen at the bazaar in Chinatown. The papers that Colin had removed were vital; but there would be no use in gaining them without also holding the tapestry that was in the teakwood box with the silver dragon cover.

The Shadow replaced the prayer papers in the cabinet. He blended with the darkness of the empty room, just as Colin came from the bedroom.

The young man strolled across the living room, unlatched the door and went out into the hall, pressing a light switch just before he closed the door. The apartment was filled with darkness.

Quickly, The Shadow entered the living room; then the far bedroom. His flashlight glimmered upon the coat which Colin had first been wearing. The pockets were empty. Colin had transferred prayer papers and list to his tuxedo pocket. The Shadow went out into the living room; thence to the hall. He descended rapidly by a pair of gloomy stairs.

OUTSIDE, Colin was starting the coupe. Just as the long car pulled away from the curb, a figure glided from the front of the apartment building. With a quick bound, The Shadow gained the rear of the coupe.

Riding upon a fender, he opened the rumble seat. Its space was ample; The Shadow slid into the interior. Colin never noticed a jar.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

After a quick trip, the coupe came to a stop. Some seconds passed, the top of the rumble seat opened. Peering out, The Shadow saw Colin ascending the steps of a pretentious building. The Shadow knew the place. It was the Club Monterey. The Shadow dropped to the street. He prepared to follow farther.

Inside the club, Colin stopped near the bar. While he was standing there, Hype Mellick strolled into view, coming from the alcove that led to the telephones. Hype noted Colin; a signal passed between them. Individually, they went toward the gambling room.

A few minutes later, a stocky man came in from the outside door. It was Durling. The private investigator gazed about in quizzical fashion. While Durling was still gazing, another arrival made his entrance. He was a tall, calm-faced stranger, whose features were masklike. He was carrying a small bag which he placed in the hands of an attendant.

The Shadow had gained entrance to the Club Monterey. Like Durling, he was looking for Colin Eldreth. But The Shadow, unlike the private dick, knew that his quarry had entered. The Shadow strolled into the roulette room and surveyed the crowd that was playing there.

Soon, a door opened on the other side of the room. Colin Eldreth stepped into view, nonchalantly smoking a cigarette. He strolled over to the roulette table; there he shook hands with an acquaintance, who introduced him to a friend. The Shadow heard Colin addressed by name.

The Shadow's attention was elsewhere, also; toward that door through which Colin had come. The door was opening again. This time it was Hype Mellick who appeared. The gambler passed the roulette table, heading toward the outer room. The Shadow watched his progress. He had seen the man before.

For Hype Mellick had long possessed a shady reputation, one that he had carefully bolstered during recent months. He had learned the value of an alibi; he had also found it wisdom to stay away from crooked pals. Hype had been watched by the law; and he knew it. But he had never guessed that he had been at one time under The Shadow's surveillance.

The Shadow had expected to witness contact between Colin Eldreth and someone at the Club Monterey. That contact had been made; The Shadow's next move was to shift his trail. He intended to follow Hype, without dropping Colin. He was thinking also of Dave Kelroy. For The Shadow knew that Dave must be the man whom he had twice saved in Chinatown.

STROLLING from the roulette room, The Shadow paused to again note Hype Mellick. The gambler had gone directly into the telephone alcove; he must have made a quick call, for he was already returning.

Hype headed for the bar and ordered a drink. Knowing that the man would be occupied for several minutes, The Shadow entered the alcove and went to a telephone booth. He called a San Francisco hotel and gave a room number. Harry Vincent answered.

In low-toned accents, The Shadow gave double orders. Harry was to don evening attire and come to the Club Monterey. He was to watch Colin Eldreth. Miles Crofton, in turn, was to visit the Thurbly Hotel, there to look for David Kelroy, registered under the name of Lawdon.

Coming from the alcove, The Shadow spied Durling. The man was standing at the doorway to the roulette room, keeping an eye straight toward Colin Eldreth. The Shadow's masklike lips formed a slight smile.

He spotted Durling as a private dick; the fact that the fellow was keeping Colin under surveillance was something that promised later investigation on The Shadow's part.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Hype Mellick was starting toward the outside door. The Shadow reclaimed his bag and followed. Hype went out; The Shadow paused to speak to the doorman. Pete grinned and addressed The Shadow as Mr. Arnaud; that was the name that The Shadow had used in visiting this gambling house.

"I may be back," stated The Shadow, quietly. "If a friend of mine – Mr. Vincent – comes here, admit him. He is all right."

Pete nodded in agreement. The Shadow stepped to the street. He saw Hype sauntering toward the corner. Moving into a blackened area, The Shadow whisked open the bag and donned cloak and hat. The bag collapsed and went beneath his cloak. He was pulling on black gloves as he followed Hype's trail.

At the corner, Hype had stopped to hail a taxi. As the cab door opened, Hype gave an address; then stepped aboard. The cab pulled away. Another taxi had stopped; its driver fumed because he had lost a fare. He was mistaken. As he started to drive away, a voice spoke from the interior of the cab.

Wide-eyed, the driver nodded as he heard an address. How this passenger had come aboard was a mystery to him. He had seen nothing; he had heard nothing. For that matter, neither had the driver of the first cab.

No one had seen The Shadow glide so close that he had caught the address that Hype Mellick had given. Nor had eyes discerned his swift passage to the second taxi. It was gloomy between the street lamps along this antiquated thoroughfare. The Shadow had found perfect cover for his rapid operations.

A soft laugh whispered in the darkness. There was reason for the mirth. No crime was due tonight; The Shadow knew that fact, because Hype Mellick was traveling abroad, with no need for an alibi. Crooks had already gained results. Tonight was one for planning.

CHAPTER XV. NORTH OF CHINATOWN

NORTHWARD, past the lights of Chinatown. Such was the route The Shadow's cab was following. The trail was moving into another of San Francisco's foreign districts, the Latin Quarter beneath the towering slopes of Telegraph Hill.

Extending from the neighborhood where Columbus Avenue makes its diagonal crossing of Broadway, the Latin Quarter forms a picturesque location. Kearny Street, extending northward, makes giant strides on the precipitous climb of Telegraph Hill, where toppy buildings cling precariously to the heights.

On the southern fringe lies the business section, as foreign as an old world city. It was to this terrain that Hype Mellick was riding.

The Shadow had lost sight of the cab ahead. He was pursuing a blind course, banking on reaching the destination not far behind Hype's taxi.

But when the cab swung across a lighted, populated street and stopped upon a steep, dingy thoroughfare, it was plain that The Shadow's driver had lost precious minutes in the race. Hype Mellick had arrived; his cab had gone.

A gloved hand thrust a fare through the front window. The Shadow stepped from the cab; he swung the door shut and faded into darkness. The cab pulled away; The Shadow's only clue was the fact that Hype had come here.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

For he was sure, from close observation of the gambler, that Hype had not suspected anyone upon his trail. Reasoning thus, The Shadow felt positive that Hype must be in one of the buildings close at hand.

Several of the structures appeared eligible. They were buildings that looked like half-deserted tenements, easy of entrance and with poorly lighted halls. The Shadow entered one of the buildings and began his search.

So stealthy was his action that spying eyes did not discern his cloaked figure. Those eyes belonged to a huddled watcher, crouched in a space between two buildings diagonally across the street.

In fact, the watcher was outside the building that Hype had actually entered. The Shadow had missed on his first choice, but he had puzzled the watching man. That fellow had seen the second cab arrive after the first; but he had not witnessed any passenger alighting from it.

Hence the watcher was half puzzled as he continued his vigil. There was a double reason for the spy's crouch. In addition to the fact that he was on secret duty, he was one who preferred to keep under cover in the Latin Quarter. The watcher was a Chinaman.

INSIDE the building, Hype had reached a dingy room at the rear of the second floor. Dim light had shown Hype as he rapped cautiously at the closed door. From across the hall, sharp eyes peered through the space of a door that was ajar.

The Chinaman, outside, was not the only watcher on duty about this crumbly building. Hype, however, passed the inspection of the inside guard. No motion came from that partly opened door.

The closed door opened in response to Hype's knock. The gambler entered; he came face to face with Zack Ruggie, who was standing in the glare of a kerosene lantern that rested on a rickety table. Hype delivered a grin; Zack responded sourly.

"What's the matter?" growled Hype. "Getting cold feet here in this hideout?"

"Pretty near it," retorted Zack. His face, unshaven, added to the ugliness of his appearance. "The bulls ain't going to look forever in Chinatown. This is their next bet, Hype."

"But they haven't spotted you yet. Not even when you sneaked down to that Mex restaurant to get my call."

"No. Nobody's bothered me. But it won't be long before Romson wises to himself. He knows we used greasers on that job at the bazaar. He ought to figure that they'd come from hereabouts."

"Romson is still looking for Tsing Chan." Hype chuckled. "That's keeping him busy. Tsing Chan has buried himself so deep that it would take a Chinaman to find him. No Chinaman will talk. For all the bulls know, Tsing Chan may have taken it on the lam."

Hype paused to look around the room. Zack opened the battered door to a closet and thrust his arm deep into a high shelf. He came out with a blackened object – the teakwood box with the glittering silver dragon!

"Here it is, Hype," stated Zack. "Time you were coming to take a look at it. What do you make of it?"

As he spoke, Zack opened the teakwood box and extracted a folded silken tapestry. He spread the cloth upon the table. Hype chuckled at the sight of ornamental squares. Each section of the tapestry contained a special symbol. There were twelve squares in all; three in each cross row, and the design was four lines deep.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Here's where I match them," announced Hype. From his pocket he drew a thick wad of prayer papers. "Let's see the top line on this tapestry. Blue pagoda – red sun – green spider. Here they are, on the prayer papers."

"Say!" exclaimed Zack. "Where did you get those? They've got words written on them –"

"Sure," interrupted Hype, with a snort. "That's why I'm using them. Blue pagoda means 'key'; red sun means 'small'; green spider means 'find.' That's pidgin English for you: 'Small key find,' for our first line."

CHOOSING more prayer papers, Hype formed a second line, matching the tapestry symbol for symbol. The characters were a yellow poppy, a green bell and a purple bird. The words were "unlocks," "gold," and "treasure."

"Unlocks gold treasure," quoted Hype. "Now we're getting somewhere, Zack."

"How about the small key we've got to find?"

"What do we need a key for? When we locate the swag, we'll crack whatever holds it. This next line is important, Zack."

A red lantern, a black pagoda, a green serpent. Hype found the prayer papers and read the words upon them:

"Large statue beneath."

Zack gave an explanation. Grinning, Hype silenced him and arranged the last line that matched the tapestry: a yellow fish, a green gate and a red coin. He laughed as he read the three words: 'Casket – one – single.'

Fingering each paper, following the lines in order, Hype repeated his entire finding aloud, in short, choppy sentences:

"Key small find. Unlocks gold treasure. Large statue beneath. Casket one single."

Then, looking at Zack, Hype commented:

"Trust a Chinaman to frame a message like that. He tells us about the small 'key'; and what it does. Then, in three words, he puts us wise to where it is. After that, we find out that the swag is in one casket and to make sure we understand it, he tacks on the word 'single' at the finish.

"What counts is that third line: 'Large statue beneath.' Well, Zack, ever since we came in on this racket, we figured that the Chinese room at the Oriental Museum would be the spot. Ku Luan had a chance to bury his dough there, like Wong Soy suggested. That's why we fixed Singledon to work with us."

"But we've laid off cracking the museum, Hype. After we dug in under the room, from the house next door, you said to quit for a while."

"Sure I did. There was no use busting in until we knew where the swag was. We'd have queered the racket. Listen, Zack: the walls in that room are smooth. The floor is rock, even though it isn't thick. The big statue of the Chinese emperor is right in the center."

"It's the only big one?"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Yeah. The nine little ones are set in the walls. Most of them made of silver – one gold one, as I remember it – but they're anchored. Hollow probably – not worth grabbing, even to melt. What we want is the big swag. It's going to be a cinch to get it."

"By shoving the tunnel farther?"

"Sure. Straight under the center, where the big statue is. Singledon is on night duty. He can get into the Chinese room and signal us with taps. I'll fix all that, Zack. Maybe we won't have to carve up through the floor at all. This is what we wanted – the secret we were after."

"We'd have had it the first night, if Wong Soy had let that mug Kelroy find what he was after. We could have bumped Kelroy and grabbed this teakwood box. Well, we got it, thanks to that Mex crew of yours. Everything's jake."

"What about Kelroy?" inquired Zack. "Ain't he due to be rubbed out anyway?"

"Later, maybe," decided Hype, "but after we grabbed the box, Kelroy didn't count. We're leaving him alone tonight. He's down at the Thurbley Hotel."

"When did he blow in there?"

"This afternoon. I got the dope when I picked up these prayer papers. Forget Kelroy. When he's slated for a bump, we'll decoy him to the spot. Right now, the swag is more important. We want to snatch the casket." Hype chuckled as he copied the prayer-paper message upon the back of an envelope. "The 'one single casket.' Well, one's all we've got to find under that large statue."

HYPE folded the tapestry and replaced it in the teakwood box. He handed the latter to Zack and motioned toward the closet shelf.

"Stow it," ordered Hype. "We'll scam by the back door. I'm on my way to spill the news and give back these goofy prayer papers. You round up the regulars and head for the old house next to the museum."

"You'll be up at the Club Monterey?"

"Not a chance. I'm through with that joint from now on. I've got a meeting away from there; after that, I'll join you and pass the word. Say, what about the mugs you've got around here? You ought to pay them off."

"Slip me the dough."

Hype pulled out a roll of bills, the same money that Durling had seen him receive from Colin Eldreth. He counted off some large denomination currency. Hype took the bills.

"I'll hand this to the boss Mex across the hall," said Zack. "He can fix the guys with him. He'll take care of the other guys outside, too. I'll tell 'em to lock this room and stay away from it. Unless you want to take the box along with us."

Hype shook his head.

"The box is safer here," he decided. "We've got to move careful when we get outside, Zack. Nobody knows about this joint. Let the box stay here in the hide-out."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Zack went across the hall. He returned and motioned to Hype. They extinguished the lantern, stole through the gloomy hall and descended the stairway. After they were gone, two Mexicans came from the room across the way. One motioned the other to watch the stairs while he went to lock the door of the abandoned hide-out.

As the Mexican stooped beside the door, he heard a sudden gasp from the gloomy stairway. Swinging about, drawing a machete, he saw his companion locked in a sudden struggle. A weird, black-cloaked being had sprung suddenly from the lower darkness, to battle with the Mexican on the stairs.

THE SHADOW had arrived at the right house, just too late to spot Hype and Zack in their departure through a lower rear door. Coming up, he had encountered the Mexican. He had caught the fellow's throat in a choking grasp. For The Shadow knew that he was dealing with one of those invaders who had carried away the teakwood box at the Chinese bazaar.

Twisting as he battled, The Shadow spied the Mexican above. The fellow was coming from the door, in one terrific leap. His hand was already driving forward, to loose the machete in a deadly whirl. Locked with one antagonist, The Shadow had no chance to dive from the well-aimed blade.

Instead, he wrenched his foe about. With one hard twist, The Shadow threw the fellow's body straight into the path of the glimmering blade. The machete whistled to a human mark, the back of the Mexican with whom The Shadow wrestled. The blade drove deep, clear to its hilt. The Shadow's antagonist emitted a gargled cry and sagged, clawing helplessly at the air.

The driving Mexican stopped, weaponless. Then, with a snarl at his adversary, he sprang bare-handed upon The Shadow. The cloaked figure came up to meet him at the head of the stairs.

The Shadow dropped as the Mexican struck him; then the cloaked shoulders launched upward. Head-foremost, the leering attacker went hurtling down the steps, to strike the wall with a smashing thud.

The Shadow surveyed the thwarted cutthroats. The first man had ceased writhing. The knife blade had done its deadly work. The one who had hurled the knife was motionless. His head had been cracked when it struck the crude brick wall at the landing of the stairs. His neck was broken also; the twist of his head gave proof of that.

The would-be killers were finished.

Noting the open door, The Shadow hoisted one body and carried it into an empty room. He did the same with the other. He closed the door and stepped across the hall

Well had The Shadow guessed what had happened before his arrival. Hype Mellick had met with some subordinate, probably Zack Ruggiey. The two had left the hide-out and would not return.

It would be long before the bodies of the Mexicans were discovered. That was to The Shadow's liking; it meant that he could set out on a trail, without the likelihood of the crooks learning that he had waged a battle here. But before departing, The Shadow intended to search that room where he had first seen the stooping Mexican at the door.

The Shadow entered the hide-out. He left the door open, to gain slight light from the hall. He spied the closet door; he opened it and saw the shelf. The Shadow reached up; his gloved hands found the teakwood box.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Drawing it from the shelf, The Shadow carried his prize toward the hall. Dull light brought a glint from the silver dragon. Then came startling surprise.

For once, The Shadow was too intent upon a discovery. His hands were already lifting the cover of the box; even his keen ears had failed to hear a sound. It was the sight of two driving hands that woke The Shadow into belated action.

Swift, yellow claws, they thrust themselves straight beneath The Shadow's eyes and grabbed the teakwood box. Looking up, The Shadow stared squarely into the face of a glaring Chinaman clad in a loose-bloused native costume. It was the man who had been on watch outside. He had not seen The Shadow enter; but he had caught sounds of the fray with the Mexicans. Arriving with surprising stealth, the Chinaman had come in time to snatch the teakwood box from The Shadow's very clutch. Nor did he stop with that defiant deed.

WHEELING, the Chinaman made one long bound for the stairs. He reached the landing with a single leap, as The Shadow, whisking forth an automatic, came after him.

Rebounding as he hit the wall, the Chinaman dived for the bottom of the stairs, still ahead of his cloaked pursuer. Before The Shadow could overtake him, he had scurried through the rear door, to dash off amid the darkness.

The Shadow stopped in the lower hall. Pursuit was useless; he had been balked in a fashion that he had never before experienced. Yet from his lips came a whispered laugh, grim and prophetic.

For in this loss of the teakwood box, The Shadow had gained proof that forgotten factors were still at work. Though he held his prize no longer, he knew where it had gone.

A new, swift quest would be The Shadow's. One that he had dropped because of others, a trail which he had expected to take later, after other matters had been finished. Urgency now compelled him to alter the course that he had previously chosen.

Again The Shadow laughed. His whispered mirth faded with his figure. Lost in blackness, The Shadow was bound on the trail of the Chinaman who had vanished with the all-important teakwood box.

CHAPTER XVI. A FRIENDSHIP RENEWED

Two hours had passed. Fog was thickening about the front of the Coronado Apartments. A man across the street was watching the only entrance to the building. The look-out was Harry Vincent. The Shadow's agent was on the job.

Harry had gone to the Club Monterey. He had spotted Colin Eldreth from The Shadow's description and had watched Colin for more than an hour. Harry had noted Durling, also. When Colin had left the gambling casino, Durling had followed. Harry had done likewise. Through the increasing mist, two cabs had trailed Colin's coupe.

Durling had left the scene after following Colin to the Coronado. The dick had not suspected Harry's presence, nor had Colin. Harry had remained outside, watching the doorway, and also noting the faint glimmer of lights from Colin's living room. As he waited, Harry saw the glow blink out.

Hastily, The Shadow's agent moved along the street. He turned a corner toward a garage, where Colin's coupe had been taken by an attendant. Harry saw the coupe roll from the garage. Evidently, Colin had called for it.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Harry, however, had a way to match the game. Hurrying past the garage, he found a taxi parked around the next corner. Harry roused the sleepy driver.

The Shadow's agent had paid the taximan a few dollars to remain in this vicinity. Knowing that another fare was coming, the driver became active. Harry climbed aboard; the cab rolled from the corner just in time for Harry to spot Colin's coupe starting from the Coronado. Harry ordered the taxi driver to take up the trail.

A DOZEN minutes later, the coupe pulled up in front of an antiquated hotel that bore the sign "Thurbley." Harry paid the taxi driver and followed Colin into the lobby. Colin was no longer wearing his tuxedo. He had changed clothes during his brief sojourn at his apartment.

Idling in the lobby, Harry heard Colin inquire for Mr. Lawdon. The clerk gave the room number as 308. Harry watched Colin enter an elevator. As soon as the car had started upward, Harry edged to an old stairway. Unspotted by the clerk, he made for the third floor. He arrived to observe Colin knocking at the door of 308. The portal opened; Colin was admitted.

As soon as the door closed, Harry sidled into the hall and crept forward. He stooped outside the door and listened. A moment later, he was startled by a warning whisper.

Harry snapped about, toward the next door, 306. He saw Miles Crofton beckoning from the threshold. Harry crept into a darkened room. Miles closed the door.

"I managed to get this room," whispered Miles. "No chance to shove a mike into Kelroy's room; but we don't need a dictograph. We can listen through the connecting door. There's an old wardrobe closet on the other side of it. Kelroy doesn't know the door's open.

"I muffled the telephone bell and stowed the telephone in a closet. There was a call from Doctor Tam – I'd been in touch with him – and we're to report to Tam until further notice."

Harry nodded in the darkness. He and Miles edged toward the corner where the door connected with 308. Listening, they could catch plain-spoken words that passed between Dave Kelroy and Colin Eldreth.

The two were seated in the light; but The Shadow's agents could not see them because of the blocking wardrobe. Dave was in his shirt sleeves, eyeing Colin with an air that betrayed suspicion. Colin was nonchalant; he gave no indication that he noted Dave's attitude.

"I expected to find you back at the apartment," Colin was remarking. "I was worried when you weren't there. That's why I came down here. Right after I arrived home from the club."

"From the Pioneer Club?" queried Dave.

Colin nodded. He was lighting a cigarette. As he flicked the match into an ash stand, his face showed a serious frown.

"This is bad business, Dave," said Colin. "It's not wise for you to stay down here alone. You know the trouble you had in Chinatown."

"This isn't Chinatown."

"Admitted. Nevertheless, you are alone."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"What of it? I had trouble when you were with me. So what's the difference?"

Colin puffed at his cigarette. Approaching, he clapped his hand upon Dave's shoulder. There was a tone of deep sincerity in his voice.

"What's happened, Dave?" asked Colin. "Don't you trust me? Out with it, old man."

"All right," retorted Dave. "I don't like double-dealing. You forced me into such methods, this afternoon."

"When I told you not to mention me to Dryer?"

"Yes. He received me cordially. So did Mark. They wanted to know my story. I was forced to lie."

"I did not want to embarrass you, Dave. That was why I told you not to mention my name. Moreover, I was thinking of your safety. Suppose some enemy had been watching Dryer's; suppose someone had heard you mention that you were living at my apartment?"

DAVE considered; but made no answer. Colin smiled.

"There's more to it than that, Dave," he declared. "Someone has poisoned your mind against me. Probably my cousin Mark."

"Mark said nothing," began Dave, hotly. "He —"

"Wait," interposed Colin. "If you are really sore, Dave, it's because you think I've actually lied to you myself. If it concerns those prayer papers I spoke about, you're all wrong. I looked in the wrong place for them; but I've found them since."

"What's more, they may be important. More important than I thought at first. You'd better come with me, back to the apartment. I want you to go over them with me."

"Not a chance, Colin. We're through as friends."

"What's biting you, Dave?" Colin's tone was wondering. Suddenly, he snapped his fingers and chuckled. "I've got it. The Pioneer Club. There's where I did fake my story."

Dave's expression showed that the truth was out. Colin laughed dryly.

"I've been bounced from the Pioneer Club," he admitted. "The only hangout I have is the Club Monterey. It's a gambling joint and I've lost a lot of money there. That's one reason why I didn't care to talk about the place. But I haven't been doing any gambling lately, Dave."

"The real reason I've been stopping at the Club Monterey is to put up a bluff. To help you, Dave. If I hadn't blown in there, certain people might have wondered where I was keeping myself. That wouldn't have been so good, since you were keeping out of sight at my apartment."

Dave looked partly convinced. Colin added to his account.

"This fellow Zack Ruggey," he remarked. "I told you I had seen him once. It was at the Club Monterey, in a poker game. Zack had a friend who still hangs around there. A gambler named Hype Mellick. I doubt that there's any real connection between them, for the police haven't quizzed Hype. But since Zack was mixed in

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

the Chinatown business, it was only wise to keep an eye on Hype.

"I've been friendly with the fellow, particularly because I owe him a few dollars from a gambling debt. I keep assuring him that he'll have his money soon. Have to convince him that I'm strapped, right at present, with just enough cash to carry me through the month.

"But I didn't want to alarm you. Dave. That was all. You've heard my story. Go ahead and check it. If Mark or Dryer have been snooping and hearing things about me, I'd like to know the truth of the matter. What did they tell you, Dave?"

"Nothing," replied Dave, a bit sheepishly. "Mark merely mentioned that he was a member of the Pioneer Club. When I asked about your membership there, he said that you had been dropped long ago. It made me suspicious though."

"Naturally. I had told you definitely that I had been to the Pioneer Club and was going there again. Now you know the truth. Does that square it?"

"Yes. Your story clears the whole matter. We might as well go back to the apartment, Colin. You're right about the possibility of danger here."

"All right. But before we start, tell me about your trip to the museum. You were pretty sketchy when you called me on the telephone. What did you think of the place?"

"I saw the Chinese Room. I didn't say much about it; but it impressed me as a place of importance. The curator said that Ku Luan superintended its construction."

"I know he did."

"It looks air-tight, Colin. That fact made me do some thinking. I've lived in China. I know how crafty the Chinese can be when it comes to hiding treasure."

DAVE paused. He was picturing the room at the museum.

"That large statue in the center," he said, slowly. "It was firmly set in place, Colin. Ku Luan could have put it there with purpose."

"There are other statues in the room?"

"Yes. But they are all small. One is gold, the rest are silver. But the large statue is bronze, and it is by far the heaviest. It looks very bulky, standing in the center of the room. I would like to see what is under it, Colin."

"Tell that to the curator," chuckled Colin. "He wouldn't budge that statue on a bet."

"He might," objected Dave, "if I had evidence to prove that something important lay beneath."

"But where's the evidence?"

"In the teakwood box, perhaps."

Colin nodded.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Back at the start again," he mused. "Dave, we'll have to locate that teakwood box. It may mean a search in Chinatown."

"I'm game, Colin. Trouble has ended there. I know the language –"

"You'd better not think about Chinatown until tomorrow. If we're starting for the apartment, Dave, we'd better be –"

Colin paused suddenly. He was facing toward the corner where the wardrobe cabinet stood. The top of the bulky piece of furniture did not come quite to the level of the connecting door. Just by chance, Colin had spied something. He had seen a motion of the door.

"We'd better be going, Dave," resumed Colin. As he spoke, he nudged his companion and swung Dave about. "That is, if we're going at all. I'm beginning to see good reasons, though, why we ought to stay right here."

Dave, too, had caught the slight quiver of the door. Someone beyond had accidentally jarred it. Listeners were at hand, even though they could see nothing. Dave stared at Colin, puzzled.

"It's foggy out," remarked Colin, glibly. "Bad driving; and this room will do for both of us. It's big and comfortable. We might as well keep it for the night. You've paid for it, anyway."

"A good idea, Colin." Dave was still perplexed. He watched Colin pull an envelope from his pocket, thrust it back and bring out another. "We won't be starting anything until tomorrow. That will be the right time to start our new plans."

Colin was writing with a pencil. He began new talk about the fog. His writing complete, he thrust the envelope into Dave's hand; then strolled to the window and opened it. He uttered a "brrr" as he felt the chill of entering mist. Dave was noting Colin's written message.

"We are watched," it said. "Pretend that we are staying here. Turning in. Once the lights are out, we can sneak away."

DAVE looked at Colin and nodded. Colin, in turn, nudged his thumb toward the window. Dave remembered an outer roof, the top of a two-story extension at this side of the hotel. It offered a perfect avenue for departure.

"Chilly," wheezed Colin from the window. He lowered the sash. "We'll keep this window closed until we turn in. Let's have a drink, Dave."

Catching the idea, Dave began a clatter with some empty glasses that were on the bureau. Colin, approaching, whispered:

"Later, we'll fake going to bed. With the lights out, we can do a sneak through the window. Meanwhile make it sound like we're working on a bottle. Getting soused, so we couldn't keep quiet even if we wanted to."

In the next room, Harry Vincent had entered the closet to make a cautious telephone call to Doctor Roy Tam. The Shadow's agent was sending a report of what he and Miles Crofton had overheard. Harry was forwarding full details of the Chinese Room at the Oriental Museum. On that point, he and Miles had scored.

Otherwise, however, The Shadow's agents had been bluffed. They had fallen for the stall that Colin Eldreth had connived. Oddly, Colin's efforts to regain Dave Kelroy's confidence had been aided by the unwitting

agents of The Shadow.

CHAPTER XVII. THE BURIED LAIR

DOCTOR ROY TAM was seated at his desk. His hand was resting idly upon the telephone, as indication of a completed call. Doctor Tam had just heard Harry Vincent's report from the Thurbley Hotel. New word for The Shadow.

That was why Doctor Tam's face was troubled. He had expected the call to be from The Shadow himself. The Shadow had fared forth upon a lone and dangerous quest. He had gone against the advice of Doctor Roy Tam.

True, The Shadow had adopted a Chinese guise; but even that fact did not assure his safety. Staring from the window of his office, Doctor Tam could see the brilliance of the street, where long lines of incandescent bulbs festooned the walls of pagoda-topped buildings. Glittering restaurant signs, bright windows of Oriental marts, the light-splashed marquee of a Chinese theater – such showed Chinatown upon the surface. That was all.

Below lay obscurity. No one – not even so well-versed a Celestial as Tam – could guess the full extent of Chinatown. Years ago, before the fire, Chinatown had been termed a portion of the city of Canton, transported to San Francisco.

Destroyed by flames, old Chinatown had presumably passed into oblivion. The modern district, so it was claimed, consisted of an orderly array of shops and business houses. But Doctor Tam knew differently.

He could feel the pulse throbs of Chinatown. He knew that in a well-massed district of nearly twenty thousand population, there would remain the same desires, the same intrigues, the same feuds that had existed in an earlier day. Old catacombs had been unearthed; secret dens had been destroyed. In their place had grown others, hidden and unsuspected.

As proof, a map lay upon Tam's desk. It showed Chinatown as a strange, unexplored terrain. Certain marks indicated hidden lairs that had been actually located and identified.

Other marks showed spots that could be described only by pure guesswork. Tam's finger rested on one isolated sector. That represented the point where The Shadow had chosen to make a thorough search.

UPON the surface, that particular portion of Chinatown appeared serene. It was near the outer rim of the Chinese quarter; though quiet and little frequented, it boasted its array of well-kept shops. Above the lighted windows were darkened upper stories that seemed like ordinary dwelling quarters. Below were the gratings of basement windows.

Those, too, betokened living quarters in Chinatown; and in such apartments lay mystery. Those who preferred to be in hiding invariably preferred underground lodgings. That was why some windows were invariably dark.

Beneath one Oriental shop, lights showed through a grating. People passing could peer below to see two busy laundrymen at ceaseless labor over their ironing boards. They looked like coolies from some Hong Kong wharf, tired workers who were envious of boat dwellers who paddled freely in their sampans. Yet, like slaves, they had accepted their unfortunate lot.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Such was the surface appearance. Actually, there was a secret reason for the industry of the two laundrymen. Their shop was a blind, wherein they and others worked in shifts.

The doorway at the rear of it led to a grimy passage, through which the laundry was carried in and out. That pathway formed another route as well. It was the main road to a hop joint, a windowless den that only known customers could enter.

A single light illuminated the inner passage. Beyond the range of glow were dark depths. At present, no Chinamen were in the narrow hallway; hence no one saw the strange phenomenon that occurred there.

Blackness came from blackness. It crossed the lighted area and faded into dark. During its gliding course, that shape became the figure of a being cloaked in black.

The Shadow had set forth as a bespectacled Chinaman; with him he had carried folded, well-packed garments. He had used his guise of black to pass by various barriers. Already, he had scoured two thirds of the dangerous area which troubled Doctor Tam.

This time, he had passed the outside entrance to the hop joint, so stealthily that a guardian Mongol had failed to glimpse his shape. Still cloaked, he was through the inner portals.

He was nearing the doorway to the opium den itself. Shrouded in gloom, The Shadow paused. His gloved hand pressed a barrier inward. Keen eyes peered through the crack of a door.

Steps led to a room where light was hazy, because of blue-wreathed smoke. The atmosphere was pungent, almost overpowering. The smoke was curling from the slits of canvas curtains, that formed lines on both sides of the narrow room, oddly like the berths of a sleeping car.

UNTRoubLED by the overwhelming aroma, a tall, stoop-shouldered Chinaman was patrolling back and forth between the lines of tawdry curtains. He stopped with every other pace, to hover and listen outside the opium bunks.

The stooping Celestial turned. He stalked to the far end of the room. The Shadow saw him pass through a curtained doorway, evidently enroute to report to the Chinese manager of the secret den. Slowly, The Shadow pressed the door farther inward. He glided to the steps and closed the barrier behind him.

Among the curtained bunks, The Shadow had noticed one at the far end. It differed from the others; not only was its canvas more tightly drawn, but there was no sign of smoke from its interior.

With quick, silent stride, The Shadow reached the distant bunk. He found the lower corner of the curtain hooked in place. He loosened it and edged within. The bunk was empty.

The patrolling Mongol was returning. The Shadow could hear his passing footfalls. The reek from the opium pipes was stifling; yet The Shadow made no move to leave. Crouched against the edge of the bunk, he waited until the Chinaman had reached the other end of the long room.

The Shadow tested the bunk. It yielded to pressure, but only in an upward direction. Pressing, The Shadow found that the inner edge was on a hinge. The bunk swung up against the wall; square, blockish legs came with it. They brought the floor along with them. Below the bunk lay gaping blackness.

Sliding downward, The Shadow entered the yawning hole. His feet struck the rungs of a ladder. Descending slowly, he drew the bunk down with him.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Cool air, refreshing despite its mustiness, was proof that The Shadow had found wide spaces underground. His feet pressed slimy stones when they reached the bottom.

A flashlight glimmered. It showed a wide passage, like a portion of a cellar. This was no secret tunnel, burrowed by Chinese workmen. It was an old wine cellar, a relic of the days before the fire. Wisely had crafty Chinese built new abodes on this border of their quarter.

By so doing, they had avoided the trouble of tunneling new catacombs to replace ones that had been filled. They had simply formed a flooring over the former cellars of fire-ruined American residences. The original owners had moved to some other section of San Francisco. The Chinese had adapted the basement ruins for their own use.

Should the opium den above be raided, it would begin business afterward, within this musty subcellar. Such had been done before, despite the vigilance of the police.

Scheming Chinese, when they wished, could keep one jump ahead of the law. In the meantime, this underground room was empty, serving only as an emergency exit in time of trouble.

The Shadow found a passage that led toward the street. It did not interest him. His light was glimmering toward the low ceiling and it found the spot he wanted. He was directly beneath the stairway which he had used to descend into the opium den. The ceiling, however, was level. It did not conform to the steps above.

The Shadow reached up and worked upon the tight-fitting boards. They loosened; with a sudden click, a long strip of the ceiling swung downward on a hinge. Its upper surface was crossed by wooden cleats, that served as ladder rungs.

The Shadow went upward; he reached a three-foot space between the lower ceiling and the upper. It was wide enough to turn around in. The Shadow swung about and drew upon a cleat to bring the hinged ceiling up into its place.

FEET foremost, The Shadow wormed his way ahead. His flashlight was extinguished; in the darkness, his legs found a new opening. This time, the downward space was not provided with a ladder.

Sliding from the edge, The Shadow reached a stone floor only four feet below. Stooping, he gained steps. His flashlight glimmered downward. He had come to the subcellar of another forgotten building.

The glow of the flashlight revealed a closed door in the far wall of a rectangular room. As he spied the barrier, The Shadow also spotted a living guardian, who had shifted away from the door at first notice of the flashlight's glimmer.

Hurling in from an angle was a long-limbed Chinaman, whose knife sparkled momentarily in the gleam. Then The Shadow's light clicked off; he was twisting in solid darkness.

A chunky form thudded The Shadow's shoulder and gave new impetus to his twist. A knife blade slicked a fold of the sweeping cloak, then skidded to the floor as The Shadow caught the attacker's wrist.

The Chinaman writhed about; The Shadow rolled him to the floor with a quick jujutsu hold. With one hand, he clamped the fellow's mouth; with the other, he produced a handkerchief, to wedge between the man's teeth.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Except for the click of knife on stone, the battle had been almost silent. The muzzle of an automatic pressed the guard's neck. Whispering words in Chinese, The Shadow ordered the man to his feet.

Using his flashlight, he thrust the Chinaman toward the closed door. Again he whispered an order. The prisoner hesitated for a moment; then rapped.

A Chinese voice babbled the order to enter. The guard thrust the door inward, then went sprawling forward as The Shadow gave a hard thrust with his gun hand. As the gagged Chinaman floundered, a black-jacketed Celestial leaped to his feet, only to be covered by The Shadow's gun.

Grimacing, the trapped man sank back into his chair, beside a table whereon an electric lamp was shining. Hands raised, this new prisoner stared blinking at the cloaked intruder who had captured him.

A whispered laugh came from The Shadow's hidden lips. Its uncanny tones were echoed from the stone walls of this tiny room. The Shadow had conquered danger to find the man he sought. The Chinaman in the chair was Tsing Chan, the missing steward who had served Ku Luan.

No one had seen Tsing Chan since his disappearance from the Chinese bazaar. The law had searched for him in vain. But The Shadow had found Tsing Chan, deep within the secret walls of this guarded, underground lair!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE SHADOW'S ALLY

TSING CHAN looked like one who had seen a ghost. His gaze was fixed upon The Shadow's black-cloaked form, where only burning eyes were visible beneath the brim of the slouch hat.

Then to Tsing Chan's ears came sounds that made him certain that this visitor had stepped from another world. The Shadow was speaking; his words were in Chinese.

Feebly, Tsing Chan replied. As if to experiment, he tried a sentence in English. He thought himself faced by some Oriental demon, who had gained this room because the doorway had no blocking screen.

Tsing Chan was almost hopeful; for he doubted that any Chinese devil spirit could speak other than the language of the Far East.

"Why – why have you come?" gasped Tsing Chan. "No evil is mine –"

"You have spoken truly, Tsing Chan," interposed The Shadow, in a whispered tone. "Your part is known to me. Your innocence was proven, in my sight."

Tsing Chan smiled weakly. His eyes lighted; cannily, they surveyed The Shadow's height.

"You were the one who came and departed unseen," he stated slowly. "The one who must have saved my master's friend, upon the night of Wong Soy's treachery. You were the one who stood alone at the bazaar. It was there that I saw your face, when again you brought rescue to David Kelroy."

Tsing Chan's speech marked him as a Chinese of unusual education, the very type of man whom Ku Luan would have chosen for faithful stewardship. His frankness was proof that The Shadow had correctly divined that Tsing Chan was no traitor.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"I am the one of whom you speak," announced The Shadow. "I have come to gain the teakwood box. The box with the silver dragon."

TSING CHAN smiled.

"The box is safe," he declared. "My servant, Lee Yan, was fortunate to gain it. He told me how he seized it. He did not understand that you –"

Tsing Chan paused. He shook his head; then added:

"Nor did I truly know. Lee Yan spoke only of one clad in black. Fear seized me when you entered. It was not until this moment that I realized all the truth."

The Shadow remained silent. Tsing Chan had gained calmness. He began to tell his story.

"My master, Ku Luan had two great, honored friends," declared the steward. "One was Tobias Eldreth, who lived here in San Francisco. The other was David Kelroy – the senior – who dwelt in Shanghai. Ku Luan had treasure, which he wished to give to his nephew Tyan Li.

"To Ku Luan came disappointment. His nephew, Tyan Li, had shown himself unworthy. In his stead, Ku Luan chose the younger David Kelroy. For the father, like Tobias Eldreth, was dead. To me, Ku Luan entrusted the duty of giving welcome to David Kelroy. On that same night, Ku Luan spoke to him alone."

Tsing Chan paused. His eyes were far-away in their gaze. They were visualizing that weird death scene; when Ku Luan, the living dead man, had parted finally with life.

"Ku Luan had wisdom," resumed Tsing Chan. "When the wise choose, the simple should not find fault. It was part of Ku Luan's wisdom to tell me very little. To Wong Soy, he spoke even less. I knew nothing of the object which Ku Luan preserved for David Kelroy; nor did I know its meaning.

"Wong Soy knew only that Ku Luan awaited someone; that wealth was the cause of Ku Luan's waiting. Wong Soy became a traitor; yet neither Ku Luan nor I suspected. When David Kelroy came, Ku Luan sent him to the storeroom. Wong Soy followed while I was by the body of my master.

"Evil men came at Wong Soy's call. I knew that when I saw his body in the storeroom. Wong Soy was a traitor; but I could not tell the law. I could not speak the name of David Kelroy. Ku Luan, upon his deathbed, told me to keep secret the visit of his heir."

Tsing Chan had risen from his chair. He had recognized that by speaking to The Shadow, he could best serve the wishes of Ku Luan. Tsing Chan was displaying wisdom of his own.

"Nothing was gone from the storeroom," he explained. "I knew that David Kelroy had escaped. I feared that he would not trust me, for he had witnessed Wong Soy's treachery. Yet I knew that he must come to gain some object that was among the many belonging to Ku Luan. I watched for David Kelroy at the auction. He came there; I saw his eyes light when they spied the teakwood box that bore the silver dragon.

"Then came the fire of many guns. Men with knives seized the teakwood box. Lee Yan, once my master's servant, was quick to turn off the lights. He and three others sought to aid David Kelroy. He and a friend did not know their purpose. They were driven off; they joined me after I had fled.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Those men who took the box were Mexicans. While I was hiding, Lee Yan searched for them. He found their hiding place tonight. He entered, when he heard sounds of battle. He saw the teakwood box in the hands of an unknown. He grasped the box and brought it here to me."

WITH a profound bow, Tsing Chan resumed his chair. Words came from The Shadow's lips:

"You saw the tapestry within the box?"

Tsing Chan nodded.

"Yes," he stated. "It was of silk, with many pictures, like those that were in the other boxes. Its meaning was unknown to me. My duty was to place it in the hands of David Kelroy. When last I saw David Kelroy, I saw another whose face I had seen before. His name was Colin Eldreth.

"So to Lee Yan, I gave a simple task. He has gone to the apartment of Colin Eldreth, carrying the teakwood box and the tapestry contained within it. There, Lee Yan will leave it, so that it may be found by David Kelroy."

As Tsing Chan completed his statement, a bell tingled. With a bland smile, the steward lifted a square box and picked up a telephone. In English, he stated:

"This is one extension. It is from the wire of my friend, Sim Kee, whose shop is above this secret room."

Raising the receiver, Tsing Chan babbled briefly in Chinese. He nodded as the call ended.

"It is Lee Yan," he stated. "He has left the teakwood box in the empty apartment of Colin Eldreth. Lee Yan will soon be here."

The Shadow took the telephone from Tsing Chan's hand. Speaking in Chinese, he gave the name of Doctor Roy Tam to the Chinese operator.

When the connection was completed, he talked briefly with the Chinese physician. Turning to Tsing Chan, The Shadow calmly removed his hat and dropped the folds of his cloak.

TSING CHAN gaped. He had expected to see the face that he had noted at the bazaar. Instead, he was staring at the placid countenance of a Chinaman, whose eyes were half hidden by thick, dark spectacles that dropped into place as the hat was lifted.

Like Tsing Chan, the Chinese guard was amazed. The Shadow's first prisoner had long since removed his gag, to stand by while Tsing Chan talked.

"I have learned," stated The Shadow, his voice changed to a choppy tone, "that neither David Kelroy nor Colin Eldreth will return to the apartment where Lee Yan placed the teakwood box. I shall, therefore, visit that place myself; that I may examine the silken tapestry."

Tsing Chan bowed in acknowledgment of The Shadow's wisdom.

"There is no need for further hiding," assured The Shadow. "Before this night is ended, all will be well. I have talked with Doctor Roy Tam. You may rely upon his aid, Tsing Chan, to clear you of all the blame which is not yours."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Tsing Chan's bow was one of thanks.

"I shall depart." The Shadow arose as he spoke. "Be ready in case of call. I may need you, Tsing Chan. When I do, you will have opportunity to strike against those who have done evil."

Footsteps arrived as The Shadow turned. Lee Yan had arrived; he was staring from the doorway, amazed at the sight of this black-cloaked figure with the Chinese countenance. The Shadow closed the folds of his cloak and donned his slouch hat. Lee Yan's astoundment increased as he recognized the very shape from which he had seized the teakwood box.

The Shadow strode past Tsing Chan's stupefied servant. He was departing by the lower passage, beneath the opium den. Once located, it formed the logical exit from Tsing Chan's underground abode.

LURKING fog seemed to cling to the small coupe that stopped, soon afterward, near the Coronado Apartment. From its interior came The Shadow. He had obtained this car from Doctor Tam. Entering the apartment building, he ascended to the second floor.

Harry Vincent had given full assurance that Dave Kelroy and Colin Eldreth intended to remain all night at the Thurbley Hotel. To make certain that the situation had not changed, The Shadow used Colin's telephone to communicate with his agents. Harry's voice was the one that made cautious reply.

Harry informed his chief that the lights had just been extinguished in 308; and that Miles had carefully closed the connecting door. Dave and Colin had retired for the night; the agents, however, would keep alternate watch on the outer door of the next room.

The Shadow turned on the light in Colin's living room. He saw the teakwood box upon the table, its silver dragon gleaming beneath the glow. Opening the box, The Shadow removed the silken tapestry and spread it upon the table.

Stepping to Colin's bedroom, he saw a tuxedo coat spread over the back of a chair. Reaching in the pocket, The Shadow found a wad of prayer papers.

He brought these with him into the living room. As he sorted the pictured sheets, he discerned that Colin had guessed well. Every needed symbol was present. That was not surprising, for many of them were ones that might have referred to treasure.

Soon, The Shadow had the proper prayer sheets spread in duplicate fashion, exactly as Hype Mellick had arranged them. Carefully, he studied the symbols. He knew that they referred to the Chinese Room that Ku Luan had furnished for the Oriental Museum.

Through his telephone conversation with Doctor Tam, The Shadow had gained a full report of all that Harry and Miles had overheard. Dave and Colin, in their descriptive discussion of the Chinese Room, had provided The Shadow with facts that fitted perfectly.

The Shadow replaced the prayer papers in Colin's tuxedo pocket. He folded the tapestry and put it back in the teakwood box. Extinguishing the living room light, The Shadow went out into the hall. He had found the door unlatched. He left it in the same condition.

REGAINING his coupe, The Shadow drove slowly down a steep street. Thick fog swallowed the light car in its depths. The night had become as bad as Colin had predicted, when he made his bluff for the benefit of Miles and Harry.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

In the report to Doctor Tam, Harry had stated Colin's reason for remaining at the Thurbly. The Shadow, noting the depth of the fog, was fully satisfied as to the accuracy of Harry's report.

After a devious route, the coupe stopped before a mist-enshrouded building. The Shadow had reached the granite front of the Oriental Museum.

He put out the lights of the coupe and stepped into the chilly gloom. Afoot, he circled the building until he reached the low extension that housed the Chinese Room.

From Harry's statement, this looked like the correct portion of the museum. The wall was windowless; it was formed of large blocks of granite, with crevices between. The height, however, was not great. The Shadow decided to scale the wall; for all windows on the ground floor were barred.

Producing a pair of flat rubber disks, The Shadow gripped one in each hand. The disks were concave; reaching up, The Shadow pressed one against the wall; then the other. Usually, he employed four of these suction cups to gain a grip, attaching a pair to his feet as well as his hands. Tonight, the procedure was unnecessary.

The wall was drippy with drizzle from the fog. The surfaces of the granite blocks were wet enough to afford unusual suction. The crevices allowed for toe-holds, while The Shadow alternately detached and affixed each disk. Moreover, the climb was no more than a dozen feet; hence no great hazard was present.

Apparently, the sheer wall of the wing had been accepted as a sufficient obstacle to marauders; for when The Shadow reached the roof, he found a small window low in the wall of the main building. Invisible from the ground below, this window could be spotted from the low wing roof.

A slight glow showed through the window; it came from a night light on the second floor of the museum. The window had bars set in an iron frame; but they proved no obstacle to The Shadow.

With a small metal rod, he forced a clamp that held the bars tight shut. Swinging the frame on its rusty hinges, The Shadow pried open the window within. This action cleared the pathway into the Oriental Museum.

ENTERING the second floor, The Shadow found a stairway. He listened to the tramp of a watchman's footsteps. He heard mumbled tones of conversation, a proof that two men were on duty. Descending the steps, he came to the locked door of the Chinese Room.

Black against the door, The Shadow picked the lock. It was a strong one; but not formidable. The Shadow opened it with the twist of long, thin pliers, that formed one end of a special instrument.

He descended the steps, closing the door behind him. His flashlight formed a sweeping glare as it swung about. Small statues glittered from their niches. Eight of silver; one of gold, all statuettes of masterful creation.

The flashlight swung toward the bulky statue in the center of the room. The gleam revealed the likeness of the solemn Manchu emperor. The Shadow studied the figure of bronze. Silent, motionless as the statue itself, he had reason to be interested in the bronze creation.

Scraping sounds were coming from beneath the statue. Dull, barely audible, they were easily located at the edge of the pedestal, nearest to the far wall. The Shadow listened; the scrapes were slow but steady. Sappers were burrowing toward a final goal.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Like The Shadow, other possessors of the teakwood box had found a translation to Ku Luan's tapestry. That was a possibility that The Shadow had considered, ever since he had visited the Chinese bazaar.

He had not expressed his opinion to Tsing Chan; but The Shadow's belief that crooks might already have gained the secret was the reason why he had told Tsing Chan to be ready.

Grim were the sounds beneath the large bronze statue. Ghostly creeping that told of a stubborn approach. Men of crime were pressing hard to gain Ku Luan's treasure. Their burrowing had a weirdness that rivaled the work of ghouls.

Yet the laugh which whispered through the square-walled Chinese Room was a tone of sinister mirth far more uncanny than the scraping sound of sappers. Despite its repressed tones, it carried a note that boded thwarted hopes to those who sought to undermine the Manchu statue.

Somehow, that eerie whisper left an impression when it faded. The silence that followed seemed to tell that The Shadow was pleased to learn that Hype Mellick and Zack Ruggie were almost to the goal that they had chosen.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SHADOW'S RETURN

AT the exact time when The Shadow had entered the Chinese Room of the Oriental Museum, two men were engaged in stealthy action elsewhere. Dave Kelroy and Colin Eldreth had no roof to scale; their task had been to drop from one, after sliding from the window of their hotel room.

Unheard by The Shadow's agents, Dave and Colin had made their getaway. Sneaking along a cement passage beside the Thurbley Hotel, they gained the street and entered Colin's coupe. A chuckle came from Colin as he started the car and piloted it slowly through the fog.

"Just midnight," commented Colin, glancing at the clock on the dashboard. "Well, this has been an eventful evening. It was about eight o'clock when I arrived at the Club Monterey. It was around ten when I landed back at the apartment. I couldn't have stayed there more than half an hour, because I reached your hotel before eleven."

"You came in there at quarter of eleven," recalled Dave. "We stalled for more than an hour, bluffing those fellows in the next room."

Colin's time estimate had been approximately correct. His evening, however, had not been surprisingly eventful, when compared with The Shadow's. That strange master of the darkness had accomplished many results in the same time period.

The Shadow had visited the Coronado Apartments at dusk. Following Colin to the Club Monterey, he had picked up Hype Mellick's trail shortly after eight. The trip to the Latin Quarter had been a rapid one; for The Shadow's fight with the two Mexicans had begun at approximately eight forty-five.

Then had come his search through the hidden lairs of Chinatown, a quest that had not ended until a quarter past eleven. In forty-five minutes since his interview with Tsing Chan, The Shadow had gone to Colin Eldreth's; then on to the Oriental Museum. Even the heavy fog had failed to halt The Shadow's speed.

Of these facts, Dave and Colin knew nothing. As they rode along, their talk concerned the spies who had been in Room 306. Dave was wondering who they could have been.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Colin's opinion, as expressed by him to Dave, was that the spies must represent the same crime faction that had caused the previous trouble.

"I'm not sure of that, Colin," objected Dave. "Remember, there were fellows who tried to help me out. I can't forget my mysterious rescuer, that night at Ku Luan's; nor that fight at the Chinese bazaar."

"I don't know much about Ku Luan's," returned Colin, "but the fracas at the bazaar was a general mix-up. You can't count too much on more aid from fellows who simply pitched in to help you during a brawl."

"But the being in black was like a ghost, Colin. I saw him at Ku Luan's. He could have been the same person who appeared at the bazaar. The man who bid one hundred thousand dollars for the teakwood box –"

Colin broke in with an interruption. He was pointing from the window of the coupe, as they swung along a steep street. He was indicating the lighted windows of a fog-wreathed house.

"We're passing Mark's place," remarked Colin. "He's getting to be a regular night owl. Fancy it! Entertaining until after midnight!"

The high notes of a soprano voice came from the windows. Dave and Colin heard a flurry of applause from clapping hands. As the coupe rolled along, Dave made comment.

"IT'S a late recital," he stated. "It wasn't scheduled until after eleven o'clock. The singer is a concert artist, who had an earlier engagement. Mark told me about it while we were driving in from the museum."

"He did, eh?" queried Colin, sourly. "Well, why wasn't he decent enough to invite you?"

"He did invite me," returned Dave, "but he mentioned that it was to be a dress affair. I don't have any evening clothes. That's why I declined."

"Too bad you didn't show up at the apartment," jeered Colin. "I'd have loaned you my tuxedo, or a full-dress suit if you preferred. You'd have been in time for that eleven-o'clock concert. Humph! Maybe I'm wrong; but I can't see why I shouldn't gamble my dough if Mark wants to spend his entertaining a bunch of stuffed shirts."

"It may be good business on his part, Colin. He may make social contacts which count."

"He does. You can trust Mark for that. He always kowtows to people who have wealth. Mark wouldn't spend a nickel if he didn't think it might lead to some business deal later. Grabbing money, stowing it away – those are his only aims in life."

Dave was silent. He felt that Colin's criticism of Mark was too caustic. Colin darted a sidelong glance at his companion; then decided that it would be best to temper the remarks that he had just made.

"Maybe it's just sour grapes on my part," said Colin, casually. "Mark has been successful. I haven't. That is probably why I like to crab about it. Mark is all right; he and I just have different ideas, that's all."

The note in Colin's voice was convincing. For a brief interval, his renewed friendship with Dave had been tending toward another break. Colin had smoothed matters neatly. He was smiling to himself as he pulled up in front of the Coronado Apartments.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

WHEN they reached the second floor of the apartment house, Dave was surprised to see Colin turn the doorknob of his apartment without first employing a key.

"You left the door unlatched?" he inquired. "What was the idea, Colin? Anyone could have walked into the place."

"I left it unlatched for you," returned Colin, pressing the light switch. "I told you I'd keep it unlocked so you could come in without a key."

"But that was before you started down to the hotel. You knew you were going to see me, the last time you came out. It was foolish to leave the door unlocked."

"I forgot all about it. Don't worry. Nobody has been in here. If –"

Colin broke off. Dave was staring at the table. Colin saw him advance in slow, mechanical steps; then he, too, spied the object that had caught Dave's eye. It was the teakwood box, with its silver dragon top!

"Look!" Dave was gasping. "How did this come here? Who brought it, Colin?"

Eagerly, Dave yanked open the lid. He saw the folded silk. He pulled out the tapestry and spread it, his eyes lighting as he observed the squares and their curious, embroidered symbols.

Dave caught a glimpse of Colin's face. Hand to chin, Colin was staring, his expression almost one of anger. Before Dave could speak, Colin wheeled away and headed for a bedroom.

A sudden suspicion gripped Dave. Colin had left the apartment door unlocked, excusing it only on the ground of forgetfulness. Someone could have come in here; someone whom Colin had expected.

Such a person could have left the teakwood box. There was good reason to believe that the visitor was a pal of crooks. A pal, perhaps, of Colin, also.

Colin was coming from the little room. He was carrying his tuxedo coat. His hand was fumbling in a pocket. Dave made a forward bound and grabbed Colin's arm. He shoved Colin backward and wrenched away the tuxedo coat.

"Getting your revolver?" demanded Dave. "No wonder. One of your cronies made a slip, didn't he? He should have put the box where I couldn't see it."

Momentary rage had dominated Colin's countenance. Dave scowled. He was ready for a fistfight, confident that he could settle scores with one lone antagonist.

"You gave it away, Colin," he accused. "I saw your face before you made that dive into the other room. Well, before we settle things, we'll eliminate the gun that you were going after."

DAVE shot his hand into one pocket of the coat. It was empty. He reached into the other. Instead of metal, he found crinkly paper. Puzzled, he pulled out a sheaf of square sheets.

"The prayer papers!" he exclaimed. "The ones that you found here, Colin! With a list –"

"Never mind an apology, Dave," interposed Colin, in a smooth tone. He was smiling as he calmly began to light a cigarette. "You were excited and so was I. That was why you misunderstood my actions."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"I suppose I looked rather sore for a minute, didn't I? Well, no wonder. I was mad because I had been dumb enough to leave the door unlocked. I was afraid that the fellow who left the teakwood box had found the prayer papers."

Pausing, Colin eyed the unfolded tapestry. He shook his head; then spoke in a persuasive, purring tone.

"I can't guess who brought the box here," was his comment. "It is a mystery to me, Dave, and a deep one. But if that is the right tapestry, we are in luck. Suppose we look over the prayer papers and try to match them with it."

Dave nodded in agreement. He began to sort the prayer papers. He noted that the wad was not unusually thick.

"Are these all of the prayer papers?" queried Dave. "I saw some up at the museum today. It seemed to me that the curator had a larger variety."

"These are the most important ones," returned Colin. "I was sorting them out this afternoon; and I picked the ones that I thought might apply to the treasure. The rest are in the Mah Jong cabinet in the corner."

Dave was laying out the first row, from the papers in his hand. He completed it and began the second. Hurrying through, he finished the third and fourth rows. Colin approached to join him in an eager stare. In choppy sentence, Dave read the rows aloud:

"Key small find. Unlocks gold treasure. Large statue beneath. Casket one single."

Colin grinned, half laughing.

"Pidgin English, all right," he remarked. "What do you make of it, Dave?"

"It's plain enough," returned Dave. "Find the small key and unlock the gold treasure that lies beneath the large statue. The gold will be in a single casket. Colin, it's obvious that this refers to the Chinese Room at the museum."

"Where are those keys that Ku Luan gave you?"

"Here." Dave produced the long keys from his pocket; then shook his head. "None of them are small ones, though. There must be another key – a little one."

"Which you don't have. That is an obstacle at the very start."

"I don't see why." Dave glared, almost angrily. "The first job, Colin, is to find the casket that holds the gold treasure. So we'll start at the museum."

"It is closed tonight."

"But I'm not going to wait until morning. I'm going to call Dryer. He is the one person who can help us."

"He is over in Berkeley, Dave"

"That's where I'm going to call. Then I'll get in touch with that police inspector, Romson. It is time we brought in the law, Colin."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

DAVE was determined in his statement. His eyes showed new suspicion. Colin noted it; then shook his head.

"Still doubtful, aren't you?" he inquired, in an injured tone. "Just because I want to study matters before we make too rapid a move. Be sensible, Dave. I'm ready to agree with you on certain points."

"Which ones?"

"About going to the museum tonight. You are set on the idea. I begin to think that you are right."

"But what about calling Dryer?"

Colin shook his head.

"Calling the police inspector, then?"

Another headshake.

"The right man to call," stated Colin, slowly, "is Doctor Barnett Lestman, the curator. He has full charge of the Oriental Museum. It would not be wise to question his authority. Furthermore, we should begin with a quiet investigation.

"If you call Dryer, you will have to make long explanations. You will have to do the same if you call Romson. This is no time for useless discussions. Call Lestman; tell him that you would like to meet him at the museum."

Dave nodded. Then his face became doubtful.

"I met Doctor Lestman for the first time this afternoon," he declared. "He was cordial; nevertheless, he might be mistrustful."

"Tell him," suggested Colin, "that you are coming to the museum with Mr. Eldreth."

"You want me to call Mark afterward? To ask him to go with me?"

"Not at all. I shall go with you. My name is Eldreth."

"But Lestman will think that I mean Mark."

"Let him. We can explain matters when we meet him at the museum. I know Doctor Lestman. I can handle it after we see him."

Colin strolled over and picked up a telephone book. He found Lestman's home number, and dialed it. A sleepy voice answered. Colin handed the instrument to Dave. Doctor Lestman was on the wire.

Dave spoke to the curator. He gave his own name; and Lestman seemed to recognize his voice. Dave stated merely that he had found the teakwood box; that it contained a message that referred to the museum. Lestman did not balk until Dave suggested that he open the museum.

"Really," came Lestman's objection. "It would be quite unusual. I have only your assurance that this is important –"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Mr. Eldreth considers it important," put in Dave, promptly. "I have just talked with him. He will come to the museum with me."

A pause; then came Lestman's decision.

"Very well," said the curator. "I shall meet you there in half an hour. The watchmen are on duty; but do not ring the night bell until I arrive."

"Good!" returned Dave. "In half an hour."

COLIN heard the statement. He folded the silken tapestry and placed it in the teakwood box. He put the prayer papers in also. He picked up his hat and coat and motioned for Dave to do the same. Leaving the apartment, the two men entered the coupe and drove away.

Slow minutes passed. A light coupe appeared amid the fog in front of the Coronado Apartments. Keen eyes looked upward. They saw a light glowing in Colin Eldreth's living room. Colin had neglected to turn off the lights, although he had remembered, this time, to lock the apartment door. The Shadow, returning from the Oriental Museum, had spied the light.

Soon afterward, a shrouded figure entered through the window of one bedroom. A slight scraping marked The Shadow's arrival; but the sound was too muffled to reach the lighted living room. A short interval; then the figure of The Shadow appeared.

The Shadow saw the bare table, with the discarded tuxedo coat beside it. The teakwood box was gone; the pockets of the tuxedo were turned inside out, a proof that the prayer papers had been taken also.

The Shadow glided across the living room. He called the Thurbley Hotel and asked for Room 306. His voice was a quiet tone; it became a whisper when Harry Vincent answered.

The Shadow ordered an investigation of the adjoining room. He waited. Two minutes later, Harry's voice again came over the wire. The agent was reporting that Room 308 was empty. The news did not surprise The Shadow.

Calmly, he gave brief instructions. Hanging up, he waited a few moments, then put in a call to Doctor Roy Tam. He held a brief conversation with the Chinese physician. His call completed, The Shadow departed by the door of his apartment. He tried the lock, to learn that the latch was set.

Shortly afterward, a weirdly whispered laugh was uttered within the confines of a small coupe. The Shadow, driving down a slippery slope, had found good reason for sinister mirth. His tone carried a prophetic note.

As yet, The Shadow had planned only to balk men of crime in their foray for hidden treasure. He had found a way to blunt their evil hopes; but he had not dealt with them in person. He still had work to do; to pin the blame for crime where it belonged.

A sudden change of situation had arisen; but through it, The Shadow could see a coming break. Once again, Dave Kelroy needed rescue. This time, in such accomplishment, there would be a chance for final clues.

Treasure was the goal of crime. Upon that fact, The Shadow based his belief that he might clear the whole mystery before this night was ended.

CHAPTER XX. KU LUAN'S MESSAGE

DAVE and Colin had reached the Oriental Museum. They were standing in front of the granite building when a large car pulled up. By a glimmering street lamp, Dave recognized the hired limousine in which he had ridden that afternoon. Before he could make a comment, a man stepped from the car. It was Doctor Barnett Lestman.

"Here's the curator," chuckled Colin. "Leave it to me, Dave. I'll explain to him —"

He stopped abruptly. Two others were also stepping from the car. The light showed the faces of Weldon Dryer and Mark Eldreth. Following close behind Lestman, they paused when they spied Colin on the steps with Dave.

"So this is our answer!" exclaimed Dryer, in a harsh tone. "We never thought that you would be here, Colin! Come! Explain yourself!"

"Why should I make explanations?" demanded Colin. "It seems to me that they should come from you. Who asked you to join us, Dryer? Or you, Mark?"

It was Lestman who replied.

"I was the one responsible," acknowledged the curator. "I realize now that I misunderstood Mr. Kelroy. When he said that he was bringing Mr. Eldreth, I thought he meant Mark — not you, Colin."

"What did you do?" queried Colin. "Call Mark up to make sure?"

"I merely thought it best to ask about Mr. Dryer," returned Lestman. "I happened to know that he stays in town, at times, when the bay is very foggy. That was why I called Mark Eldreth's home. I learned that Mr. Kelroy was not there."

"So I told Doctor Lestman to call Mr. Dryer," added Mark, his rounded face meeting Colin's scowl. "I thought that perhaps Mr. Dryer was staying over night at the St. Francis. It chanced that he was."

"Your question is answered, Colin!" snapped Dryer. "It is your turn, now, to tell us how you happened to meet Mr. Kelroy; and why you instructed him to hoax Doctor Lestman."

"Hear that?" asked Colin, turning to Dave. "I told you what would happen if Dryer and Mark were called in. Well, we've kept our appointment. Suppose we stroll along. We can come to see you tomorrow, Doctor Lestman. Kelroy and I, alone."

As Colin tried to draw Dave from the steps, a roadster pulled up at the curb. From it stepped a stocky man who approached with long strides.

"This is Inspector Romson," remarked Dryer, eyeing Colin. "Perhaps he can prevail upon you to alter your decision. I called the inspector after I heard from Doctor Lestman."

"What about Mare Island?" gibed Colin. "Did you call there, too? Or did you think it was too foggy to invite the marine corps over from the Navy Yard?"

Dryer made no answer. He was turning to greet Romson. Briefly, the lawyer related circumstances to the

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

inspector. Colin shook his head wearily and turned to Dave.

"More explanations needed," he declared. "Romson will have to know who you are – why you came from Shanghai – whether or not you are actually missing –"

"Cut it," snapped Romson. "I saw Mr. Dryer earlier this evening. He told me all about the case. I intended to see you tomorrow, Kelroy. We're making it tonight instead. Give me that box you're holding. Humph. So this is what the Chinamen were battling about. They and Zack Ruggey's outfit. Come on – let's be getting inside."

DOCTOR LESTMAN rang the night bell of the museum. A minute passed; eyes appeared through an opening wicket. Then the door swung wide. Lestman looked at the watchman who admitted them.

"Why are you here alone, Perry?" demanded the curator. "I thought I gave orders for both you and Singledon to be together when you answered the door."

"I haven't seen Singledon for some time, sir," returned Perry. "That was why I came alone. Ah! Here is Singledon."

The sour-faced attendant had arrived. Lestman questioned him. Singledon replied that he had been in a far corner of the second floor when he first heard the bell.

"We shall go directly to the Chinese Room," decided Lestman. "Come along, Singledon. You have the key."

They reached the Chinese Room. Singledon was wearing a smug smile when he unlocked the door. He had good reason; for he had visited this room when he first heard the curator's ring.

Inside, Singledon had signaled by taps beside the Manchu statue. He knew that all would be silent when these visitors entered. Close against the door, Singledon's face was hidden. No one observed his smile.

Lights turned on, the group assembled in the Chinese Room. Only Perry was absent. Lestman had sent the watchman back on duty. The curator motioned to Singledon to leave; the attendant did so, pulling the door almost shut behind him. Lestman looked about the room.

It appeared to be totally undisturbed. Dave watched the curator, then looked toward Colin, who changed a frown into a smile and gave a pleased nod.

"Everything looks excellent," observed Colin, blandly. "I must compliment you, Doctor Lestman, on the way you keep up the standard of the museum. It has been quite a while since I was here in this Chinese Room. I had forgotten what the place looked like. Too bad we have to do some excavation."

"What do you mean?" stormed Lestman. He had detected sarcasm in Colin's first remarks. "Excavation?"

"Certainly," returned Colin. "Bring out some picks and shovels. We are going to wreck the pedestal of this large statue."

"You will never receive my permission!" shouted the curator, infuriated by Colin's statement. "Inspector Romson, I demand you arrest this man!"

"I'll do it," put in Romson, gruffly, "as soon as he starts something."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"Let me explain matters, Doctor Lestman," put in Dave. "We found a message on the tapestry in the teakwood box. It says that the treasure is beneath the large statue."

DAVE turned to Romson, who was holding the box. The inspector opened it; he allowed Dave to remove the tapestry. Noting two small hooks at the sides of a niche in the end wall, Dave hung the tapestry from them. Plucking up the prayer papers, he began to arrange them on the floor, just below the tapestry.

"Where did you find these prayer papers?" queried Lestman. "They are ones that bear translations."

"They belong to me," asserted Colin, stepping up to the curator, as the latter stooped to read the papers. "They tell their own story. They give the reason why you will have to demolish the large statue."

Dave was pointing out the message. Lestman read it slowly; shook his head.

"Key small find," he objected. "Who has the small key to begin with –" Dave was producing his ring of keys. The curator gestured disparagingly. "Those keys are not small. As for the rest of the message, some of it is plain; the rest obscure. 'Unlocks gold treasure, large statue beneath' – that part is passable. But who ever heard of a 'casket one single'?"

"Pidgin English," assured Colin. "It means one single casket. That's what holds the treasure. Clear enough when you read it carefully."

"Pidgin English?" queried the curator. "Bah! Even an untutored Chinese would not speak in such ridiculous fashion!"

Colin shrugged his shoulders. He turned to Dave, who was pondering as he studied the tapestry.

"Come along, old man," suggested Colin. "We can take this matter up again in the morning. In the meantime, Doctor Lestman, do a little thinking of your own. As I recall it, Ku Luan reserved certain rights to this room. I remember my grandfather mentioning the fact. Dave Kelroy comes from Ku Luan. He can assert his rights if he so chooses."

"That can be considered later," announced Lestman. "If Mr. Kelroy is willing to contract for the removal and replacement of the bronze statue, and can pay for the work, I shall cooperate. But the matter must first be discussed with the directors of the museum."

Turning from Colin, Lestman spoke to Dave.

"You heard my statement," he affirmed. "I do not blame you for this trouble. Come here tomorrow, alone, and I shall receive you. But you will have to bring better evidence than that obscure message on this silk tapestry."

Dave was about to speak, when Colin again interjected an argument.

"Remember, Doctor Lestman," he warned. "We shall hold you responsible in the meantime. If anything should happen to the treasure, you will be liable –"

"You are threatening me!" roared the curator. "That is enough! Out of here! I order you from the premises!"

Colin glared stubbornly. Romson thrust forward and gripped him by the shoulder. Colin twisted away from the inspector. Mark leaped forward to join the scuffle. With an open hand, Colin gripped his cousin's chin and

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

shoved Mark backward. Romson pinned Colin's arms as Mark went sprawling.

"Next time," jeered Colin, looking toward the floor, "it will be a punch that lands on that big moon face of yours, Mark. You've mixed in too many businesses that don't concern you."

"Arrest him, inspector!" blurted Mark, coming to his feet. "Take Colin out of here, before he makes more trouble. I shall go with you, to prefer charges against him. Bring the others as witnesses to the fact that he assaulted me."

ROMSON started Colin moving toward the door, where Singledon had appeared, attracted by the noise of the fray. Colin was laughing as he went along.

"How the newspapers will like this!" he chortled. "Moon-faced Mark, on the front page. Too bad I didn't hand you a fist massage while I had the chance, Mark."

"There will be other charges against you, Colin!" stormed Mark. "Mr. Dryer has had a private investigator following you. His name is Durling. He has seen you around the Club Monterey, giving money to a gambler named Mellick."

Inspector Romson stopped short. He stared at Mark; then at Dryer. The two exchanged looks; then Mark spoke:

"Thirty-five hundred dollars," he declared. "That's the amount Durling saw you hand over. It was early in the evening, the same night that Kelroy ran into trouble."

"What about this?" queried Romson, turning to Dryer. "Was Durling working for you?"

Dryer nodded.

"He was giving me confidential information," explained the lawyer. "I had chosen not to make it public. I was within my rights, inspector."

"Maybe you were." Romson looked at Colin, who seemed shaky. "Well, fellow, since you know Hype Mellick, maybe you know Zack Rugey, too."

"I met him once," replied Colin, slowly. "It was in a poker game. He and Hype trimmed me."

"And that's what you slipped Hype the dough for?"

"Yes."

Romson snorted.

"Maybe you'd better call Mare Island and talk to the marines," he said to Colin. "This business is beginning to look mighty phony. That teakwood box was what crooks were after; they got hold of it, and it shows up in your apartment. You have the prayer papers that translate it. What's more, you seem to know a lot about this museum."

"How about it, Kelroy?" Romson swung to Dave, who was standing by the far wall. "Come clean. How long have you been traveling around with Colin Eldreth?"

"I met him a few days ago," began Dave. "But –"

"I thought so," interrupted Romson. "We're getting the real dope, now. Come along – all of you, down to headquarters! You, too, doctor. Forget those prayer papers."

LESTMAN was still stooping near the wall, almost oblivious to the argument. As he heard his name mentioned, he popped up from the floor. A gleam showed on his face as he pointed excitedly with his left hand.

"I have it!" exclaimed the curator. "I have it! The message on the tapestry! It changes everything! We can search for the treasure, here tonight!"

Eager faces peered toward Doctor Lestman as he indicated the tapestry with one hand, the prayer papers with the other. In that moment of tenseness, feuds and accusations were forgotten. Colin and Mark stared with the others; even Dryer looked interested, as he stood at the foot of the steps.

Behind the lawyer; Singledon was crouching, just within the door that he had pushed ajar behind him. The attendant's face showed a wicked gleam. He, too, had interest in whatever might develop within this Chinese Room.

CHAPTER XXI. CROOKS STAND REVEALED

"LOOK!"

Eagerly, Doctor Lestman was unfolding a sheet of paper that he had taken from his pocket. Resting the paper against the wall, he began to write words upon it, in large, plain letters. He was copying the meanings of the prayer papers.

"There is the message, in English words!"

The paper read:

KEY SMALL FIND

UNLOCKS GOLD TREASURE

LARGE STATUE BENEATH

CASKET ONE SINGLE

"I don't see anything new about it," objected Inspector Romson. "Why all the confusion, Doctor Lestman?"

"Ku Luan was a Chinaman!" exclaimed the curator. "A Chinese of the old regime, versed in his native literature –"

"We know all that. We've investigated Ku Luan's past history."

Lestman turned appealingly to Dave.

"You understand, don't you?" he queried. "You come from China. You talked with Ku Luan."

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"He told me that the teakwood box was meant for his nephew, Tyan Li," said Dave, slowly. "But Ku Luan chose that the treasure should be mine, instead."

"But the message was already prepared?"

"Certainly. It could not have been otherwise. That tapestry is not a new one –"

Dave paused. His eyes lighted as he stared at the paper that the curator was holding close beside the tapestry. One by one, Dave read the words to himself. Then, he exclaimed:

"I see it! How could I have been so thick! These symbols do for Chinese as well as English translations. They were prepared for Tyan Li, a Chinaman – not for an American –"

"But if they're the same in meaning," interrupted Romson, "what's that got to do with it?"

"Everything," returned Dave. "The meanings are the same, but their arrangement must be considered differently. Chinese characters are not written in cross lines, from left to right, like English." (Note: Today, some may contest this statement, for the Chinese have changed their method of writing and reading to some extent in certain sections of the country. The most modern Chinese writing is done from left to right, just as our own writing. This, however is not yet general. And I add this explanation in order to prevent possible misunderstanding or controversy on this point. – Maxwell Grant.)

"They read them downward," nodded Romson.

"Yes," agreed Dave, "and the Chinese start with the line on the right."

"Exactly," chuckled Lestman. "We read the message improperly at first. I was right when I said that its meaning was somewhat obscure. Read it downward, the right line first. Aloud, Kelroy."

"Find treasure beneath single small gold statue," spoke Dave, quoting the message in its proper form. "One key unlocks large casket."

"You have the keys," remarked the curator, quietly. "The single gold statue is in the central niche, directly opposite the door."

DAVE pulled the keys from his pocket. He turned to see the gold statue, glittering from its niche. The tiny image was the only one of gold; the other eight were silver. Stepping forward, Dave eyed the flat base of the niche. Lestman came to join the examination.

"It may be removable!" exclaimed Dave. "Wait – the statue is firmly located. I can try to draw it forward. The space in the wall below should be sufficient to hold a large casket."

He laid the keys beside the statue. Gripping the gold image, he tugged. Something clicked; the flat ledge of the niche began to slide forward as Dave pulled. Then a sudden commotion broke loose behind him. Startled, Dave wheeled about.

Colin was wrestling with Romson. The argument must have concerned Mark, for the roundish-faced man was gesturing excitedly with one forefinger.

"I insist we take him out of here!" Mark was storming. "The search for the treasure can continue later. Come, inspector! You have witnesses who can testify to the capture of a rogue. What you have said is true. Those

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

prayer papers incriminate Colin!"

"They do?" Backed into a corner, Colin made savage retort, while Romson held him pinned. "Well, if prayer papers incriminate me, what about Mark? He had a set of his own. He knew who Ku Luan was. Don't let him bluff you, inspector. Keep him here along with me, until Kelroy gets his treasure."

Dryer stepped up to Romson. The lawyer was intervening in Colin's behalf. Romson eased his grip to listen.

"What Colin says is fair," decided Dryer. "I am his attorney, as well as Mark's. Let me settle this dispute, temporarily, at least. Our first duty is to locate the treasure. Until that is done, we should avoid all interruptions."

The inspector nodded. Still pressing Colin, he turned to Dave and nodded for him to proceed with the removal of the gold statue. Colin and Dryer looked in Dave's direction; so did Lestman. Mark was forgotten, until Dave again placed his hand upon the statue. Then came another interruption, more startling than the first.

It was a venomous snarl, that could hardly have come from human lips. Facing about, all saw Mark Eldreth standing with leveled revolver. His lips were furious; his moonish face had taken on a vicious glare.

No one had taken Colin's challenge seriously; they had thought that he was merely losing spite at his hated cousin. All were wrong; Mark stood revealed as a factor more dangerous than even Colin had suspected.

Nor was Mark alone. Singledon had also drawn a gun. Momentarily, the attendant had been stupefied; for he had dealt only with Hype Mellick, and had not guessed that the gambler was backed by a hidden chief. Mark's action, however, was all that Singledon had needed. Mark had guessed that the crooked attendant would rally to his aid. Mark had guessed right.

Two men held five completely covered. Mark had Romson, Colin and Dryer, all in a single cluster. Singledon was aiming his revolver squarely toward Dave and Lestman, who were close together. Hands were coming upward; to a man, the startled five knew that they had no chance for battle.

MARK ELDTRETH tilted his head and gave a sidewise nod toward the statue of the Manchu emperor. Singledon understood the gesture. He was close beside the statue; he pounded his heel twice against the surface of the raised pedestal. He repeated the action twice again, delivering the later strokes more quickly.

The pounding sounded hollow. It was a signal that foreboded trouble, for Singledon was quick to slide away from the statue. He stood close beside Mark, gloating while the moon-faced man delivered contemptuous, sneering words.

"Colin guessed right," decided Mark. "The game was mine. I figured that Ku Luan had treasure buried somewhere. I called in Hype Mellick. He bribed both Wong Soy and Singledon, for I was sure that the wealth must be at Ku Luan's or here.

"Wong Soy told Hype that Ku Luan had summoned someone. Hype passed the word to me; he had Zack Ruggie ready. Wong Soy was the tip-off; but he slipped. Zack had to raid the Chinese bazaar. His crew and his Mexicans were there. They spotted Kelroy and saw that he wanted the teakwood box with the silver dragon.

"Zack called Hype and told him about the tapestry. I saw the significance of the prayer papers. Hype came secretly to my house early this evening. I gave him my set; he brought the prayer papers back to me, shortly

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

after nine o'clock."

The listeners were staring. Colin's eyes were fixed in astonishment. Vaguely, he was realizing that Mark's supposed timidity had been a presence. He recalled how Mark had once gained self-assurance, then had lapsed back into a cautious, almost fearful type of person.

That had been Mark's way of covering his secret scheming, a perfect blind that had bluffed everyone. Mark saw Colin's amazed expression. He scoffed at his helpless cousin.

"Hype framed you, Colin," jeered Mark. "I knew that Dryer planned to have you watched. That was why Hype and Zack trimmed you at the Club Monterey. Hype knew Durling was watching you; he fixed it so the dick would see you pass the money."

Just after Mark delivered this outburst, a muffled boom occurred beneath the Manchu statue. The floor quaked momentarily. Helpless men were startled; but neither Mark nor Singledon moved as they felt the tremor. Their eyes, their guns, were still fixed on the prisoners. The five captives, however, had turned instinctively toward the Manchu statue.

The squatly bronze image had quivered with the muffled explosion. The pedestal had cracked; the statue had swung from its position to lean at a precarious angle. The main portion of its base had jammed, otherwise the statue would have fallen.

THE loose half of the cracked pedestal moved upward, pushed by ready hands beneath. A hole gaped; from it shouldered two men. The first was Hype Mellick; the second, Zack Ruggey.

They had found nothing beneath the large statue; but they had heard Singledon's signal to come through. They had "souped" the base of the statue; waiting in their underground passage, they had followed through after the explosive had done its work.

Fumes accompanied the arrival of the crooks. Coughing, clutching guns, Hype and Zack stared from the bluish smoke. They saw Mark; they saw Colin. They needed no words to inform them what was due. A rub-out was in order. Crooks would flee, leaving five dead men; the only survivors would be Mark and Singledon.

Mark would tell his story of the fray. Singledon would support it. Durling would be called in to supply evidence. All blame would be placed on Colin. Already, Singledon had caught Mark's nod; the attendant was turning to aim his revolver at Colin. At Mark's word, Singledon would fire. Colin, dead, would be classed as the one crook slain in a supposed combat.

Hype had growled to Zack. The latter was beckoning at the yawning gap beside the tilted statue. Other heads and hands were appearing. The crew was coming through. Gloatingly, Mark spoke to Hype.

"Remove the treasure," ordered the master crook. "It is in that space beneath the gold statue. Bring out the casket, Hype. After that, we start."

Hype strode toward Dave and the curator. He pocketed Dave's keys, which he saw beside a silver statue. Grasping the small gold image, he pulled it and its sliding ledge completely free and flung them clattering to the stone floor. He stared into the opening beneath the niche.

A sudden snarl came from Hype's lips. The gambler rasped an oath as he spun about. For a moment, he fumed; then he became coherent.

"It's empty!" spat Hype. "Empty! Someone lifted the swag!"

Hype's eyes bulged suddenly as they spied the outer door. Singledon had left that barrier ajar. It was swinging open as Hype stared. Alone, of all the crooks, Hype saw the figure of vengeance that had appeared upon the threshold.

Cloaked in black, armed with bulking automatics, a master fighter had arrived. Hype Mellick knew the identity of that foe of crime. The being in the doorway was The Shadow!

CHAPTER XXII. SPOILS RECLAIMED

THE SHADOW had entered the museum by the route that he had chosen before. Delayed by his trip to the Coronado Apartments, he had not arrived until events in the Chinese Room had neared their climax. He had heard the finish of Mark Eldreth's tirade; then had come the muffled explosion that had shattered the pedestal of the Manchu statue.

From that moment, The Shadow had waited, vigilant. He had known that crooks were due for a surprise; he had chosen the approaching moment as the proper time for action. Opportunity had come. The Shadow had taken it.

Hype Mellick, alone, had gained knowledge of The Shadow's presence a brief two seconds before the moment when The Shadow had planned that all should learn of his advent.

Before crooks could guess why Hype stood startled and transfixed; a weird sound burst from the opened doorway. The taunt of a sinister laugh rang out in strident challenge. Astonished at the burst of sardonic mirth, every man in the Chinese Room wheeled toward the source of the mocking cry.

Mark and Singledon spun about together, holding their leveled revolvers. Hype was holding his .38 lowered in his right hand. Impelled by the emergency, he brought the weapon upward.

Zack Ruggey was stooping as he beckoned to his henchmen. He whirled about as he heard The Shadow's gibe. Like the others, Zack sought to gain quick aim at the shrouded figure in the doorway. As for the thugs within the passage, two had already thrust their heads and shoulders up into the room. They were holding guns; but their position placed them at a disadvantage. They were the last to aim.

Boldly, openly, The Shadow had made himself the target of murderous revolvers. His deed, however, had been wise as well as timely. The very cadence of his laugh had brought every killer toward him; thus had The Shadow made the crooks divert their aim from helpless, contemplated victims.

Though his foes were several, The Shadow held the upper hand. His guns were ready, while those of enemies were wildly on the move. Moreover, The Shadow had counted upon the prompt aid of the men whom he had released. Events broke as The Shadow had anticipated.

REVOLVERS barked, while automatics spurted. Crooks jabbed their opening shots as The Shadow began his fire. But the first bullets from the revolvers were dispatched in haste. They cracked the stony walls beside the doorway; they clanged the brass of the half-opened door itself. The Shadow's guns, in contrast, were aimed straight for living targets.

Hype Mellick and Zack Ruggey first. Both were straight ahead, Hype at farther range. The Shadow's left-hand gun was tilted higher than the right. Both weapons were perfect in their aim. Hype tumbled

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

forward, snarling, as he pumped useless, hopeless shots. Zack sprawled as he fired wildly.

The Shadow's left gun swung to the left, for Mark and Singledon, while his right-hand weapon aimed downward toward the exit of the underground passage. Shots were coming from both directions. Mark and Singledon had opened fire; so had the crooks in the hole below the statue.

As he fired again, The Shadow sprang forward, downward from the steps. Revolver bullets whistled high; The Shadow's laugh was mocking. Mark and Singledon were springing forward from the left; the crooks in the opening were bounding upward. The Shadow's automatics delivered withering shots.

One stream of bullets nipped Singledon, who was ahead of Mark. The attendant's body stopped the hail, blocking The Shadow's aim at Mark. The slugs from the other .45 sprawled the pair of thugs who were clambering from the hole. Others appeared behind them. The Shadow aimed both automatics toward the newcomers. Wild-eyed thugs dropped back to cover.

The Shadow had no further need to deal with Singledon and Mark. He had dropped the attendant; already, Dave Kelroy had jumped forward to wrest the revolver from Singledon's loosening fist. As for Mark, two men had pounced upon him. Inspector Romson and Colin Eldreth had gripped the master crook's gun arm and were lurching Mark about the floor

For a moment, the blast of guns was stilled. Then, from underground, came muffled barks of other weapons. Crooks had decided on a get-away. They were meeting with opposition at the farther end of their subterranean passage.

SILENTLY, The Shadow was backing toward the steps; he calmly placed his automatics beneath his cloak. His hands drew out a brace of fresh weapons while the noise of underground gunfire came closer.

The rescued prisoners formed a rigid tableau. Mark was tight in the grip of Romson and Colin. Dave was standing with Singledon's revolver. All had reached a spot just beyond the tilted Manchu statue. Past them were Dryer and Lestman, too amazed to move.

Barking revolvers, muffled, told that the trapped crooks were coming back in this direction. The Chinese Room was their only outlet. Yet the forms upon the floor: Hype, Zack, Singledon and the two thugs – those were proofs of the fate that new criminals might expect.

When the surge came, it was sudden. Thugs en masse bobbed from the hole in the center of the floor. Those ahead were thrust upward by the ones in back of them. Guns glimmered in the fists of the first pair, the vanguard of a dozen desperate criminals.

Aids of The Shadow had entered the house from which the crooks had burrowed their tunnel. Blocking the pathway, valiant fighters had stopped the get-away. The thugs had chosen the only course. They were prompt to regret their choice of the Chinese Room.

The only foe whom they could see was The Shadow; for he held the door, while the rescued men were beyond the leaning statue. Thrust upward from the outlet of the tunnel, the first two crooks tugged at the triggers of their revolvers. Ready-aimed, they fired as The Shadow performed a sudden, sidewise fade.

Elated oaths from snarling lips. Crouched on the floor, the two thugs thought they had gained a hit. They were wrong. From the blackness of The Shadow's cloak front, two automatics spoke their deadly thrusts. At the same time, the two thugs bounded upward. Thrust clear by their companions, they staggered against the heavy bronze statue.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

From the floor came upraised hands, gunless. Below, muffled guns were delivering new staccatos. Coming crooks had seen the fate of their companions who had tried to down The Shadow. They knew that further fight against such a foe was useless. The sound of gunfire below told them that all hope of retreat was ended.

One man alone was roused to desperate fight. That was Mark Eldreth. While writhing crooks were clawing at the surface of the Manchu statue, Mark acted with sudden fury. Romson had wrested away Mark's gun. With a sudden cry, the master crook snatched at the weapon to claim it.

Twisted between Romson and Colin, Mark had a chance. Dave had Singledon's gun; but could not fire. Clawing, Mark regained his own revolver from Romson. The inspector was gripping the barrel; Mark had the handle.

His finger jabbed for the trigger as he thrust the muzzle against Romson's ribs. Colin was diving in to aid the police inspector.

AN automatic spoke. A sizzling bullet whizzed an inch from Colin's driving hand, to clip Mark's wrist. With a cry, Mark lost his clutch upon the gun. Romson wrested it away and leaped backward, while Mark staggered, at mad grips with his hated cousin. The two sprawled at the base of the bronze statue.

Sagging crooks had already added their weight to the tilted image. The statue quavered as Mark and Colin rolled against the farther portion of the pedestal.

Dave Kelroy uttered a hopeless shout. He leaped forward, too late. The heavy statue was toppling down upon the forms of the writhing men.

Covering disarmed crooks with one gun, The Shadow had aimed for Mark with the other. A single shot could end the villain's fight; but The Shadow did not dispatch the bullet. Colin had heard Dave's cry. With a hard twist, he wrenched away from Mark, just as the statue's slow fall gained momentum.

Mark's head came up; his lips ejaculated a hideous scream as his eyes saw the descending mass of bronze. His discovery was too late; before he could follow Colin's roll, Mark was floundered by the crushing bulk.

Like a Juggernaut of doom, the shoulders of the statue drove down upon Mark's skull. An instant later, the terrified crook was flattened beneath the weight of the overturned bronze.

The floor quivered with the thud as the statue rolled from Mark's body.

Motionless, his body broken like his skull, Mark Eldreth had met with sudden doom. Solemn men stood staring at the overwhelmed form of this monstrous schemer who had planned their deaths.

Sullen crooks had crawled up from the passage. The crash of the statue had startled them into more rapid surrender. They were facing The Shadow, holding their arms upraised. Eight in number, they stood powerless before two looming guns. Then, from the hole, came yellow hands that clutched revolvers. Chinese faces followed.

"Tsing Chan!"

Dave Kelroy uttered the name as he recognized the leader of the Chinese squad. Tsing Chan smiled and nodded as four followers lined up in back of the eight thugs. Each Chinese had a pair of revolvers. Every crook could feel the jab of a gun muzzle against his back.

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

Dave saw two others just below the opening in the shattered floor. Colin saw them also. Both recognized the two men who had been at the Chinese bazaar – Harry Vincent and Miles Crofton. The two had been with Tsing Chan's fighters; catching a signal from The Shadow, the agents dropped from view.

Harry and Miles were no longer needed. Inspector Romson was taking charge of the crooks; and the Chinese held the conquered thugs helpless. Seeing The Shadow's agents no longer, Dave looked toward the door of the room. He gripped Colin's arm, and pointed.

The Shadow was by the steps no longer. With a sudden turn, he had swept upward to the door. The metal barrier was closing; beyond it, blackness blocked the dim light of the museum passage. Burning eyes flashed momentarily; the weird notes of a parting laugh awoke final, startling echoes. Captured crooks shuddered as they heard the mocking quiver of The Shadow's triumph.

LESS than one hour later, four men entered Colin Eldreth's apartment at the Coronado. One was Colin himself; the others were Dave Kelroy, Weldon Dryer and Tsing Chan. They had come here at the Chinese steward's suggestion.

Explanations had been given. Inspector Romson had forced confessions from the captured underlings. Those thugs were already on their way to jail, guarded by a squad of police. Tsing Chan's status was established. His cryptic talk of a visit to Colin's apartment had been accepted.

The living room was just as Colin and Dave had left it. Tsing Chan pointed to one darkened bedroom. It was the one that Dave had occupied; the room through which The Shadow had gained entrance. Dave entered and turned on the light.

Upon a corner table rested a large metal casket, almost the exact size of the space that had been beneath the gold statuette. The casket had a large keyhole; eagerly, Dave brought forth the reclaimed keys that Ku Luan had given him. One key fitted. Dave opened the casket.

Within were jewels, set in exquisite mountings of heavy gold. Tiny Buddhas, with emerald eyes; large buckles studded with matchless rubies; massive rings, with clustered sapphires and diamonds. These lifted with a tray that occupied the upper third of the large casket. In the next compartment, Dave found stacked bundles of securities.

Ku Luan had been wise in his choice of wealth. He had brought money from China, years ago; he had invested it in securities. Dryer nodded as he noted the bundles. These represented holdings in companies with which Tobias Eldreth had held interests.

Dave lifted the large casket; it still seemed too heavy, despite its considerable size. He found that the securities were in a second tray. He removed it; beneath shone the glimmer of closely stacked gold coins. Here was wealth, in itself, the residue of the money that Ku Luan had neither spent nor invested.

Dave turned to Tsing Chan. He asked a question that had not yet been answered.

"You knew the secret?" queried Dave. "You brought this casket here?"

Tsing Chan shook his head.

"But you sent teakwood box, Tsing Chan –"

THE CHINESE TAPESTRY

"That was before," interposed Tsing Chan, quietly. "The casket was brought here later. No knowledge came to me until the time that word was given. The word that I should bring faithful men to the house near the museum."

DAVE suddenly understood. He looked at Colin, who nodded that he also guessed the truth. The Shadow was the one who had preceded them to the museum, this very night. He had seen the Chinese tapestry; he had read its message correctly. He had gained the treasure and had brought it here.

Learning that Dave and Colin had returned, to study the tapestry themselves, The Shadow had followed to the museum. He had left the treasure here, in the last place where anyone would have expected to find it. The Shadow had told Tsing Chan alone.

As if in approval of the guessed solution, a sound came from the foggy darkness of the night. Dave Kelroy sprang to the window; he unlocked it and raised the sash. He and the others heard the sound again, more clearly. It was like a voice of the fog itself.

Elusive, chilling, the tones of triumphant mirth broke into fading echoes. Stilled atmosphere seemed to quiver. Dark, swirling fog formed a creeping shroud about the unseen author of that eerie call. But listeners well knew from whose lips that final mirth had issued.

Again, Dave Kelroy had heard the triumph laugh of The Shadow.

THE END