

Death in the Stars

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I. DEATH RIDES THE AIR.

The silvery plane hung high above the Sierras, like a hovering dragonfly. It always seemed to poise above the mountain tops during this stage of the trip from Los Angeles to Lake Calada. Drury, the pilot, was picking up altitude before beginning his glide to the sparkling bowl of water that nestled amid the summits.

There were three passengers in the plane. Like most visitors to Lake Calada, they had chosen the air taxi in preference to a day's trip of climbing roads that snaked through mountain passes. In fact, the air taxi was the one inducement that had made Lake Calada a popular resort.

By air, the lake was within an hour's reach of Los Angeles; and the perpetual sunshine of California, plus the skill of Drury, assured a safe and comfortable journey.

One of the passengers was a girl; the initials, "L. M.," on her handbag stood for Lois Melvin. At present, the handbag was open, and the mirror that Lois brought from it showed a very attractive face, which scarcely needed the make-up that the girl applied.

Limpid brown eyes beneath thin-penciled brows; lips that had a natural ruddiness, along with their

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tantalizing smile; a background of jet-black hair—such were the features of Lois Melvin. They combined to form a face that most men admired; but, so far, the girl's charm had not dented the reserve of the other persons in the plane.

Lois wasn't vain, but she was accustomed to admirers. She was puzzled, rather than angry, as she glanced toward the other passengers. Thinking it over, Lois was rather glad that the man across the aisle had not noticed her.

Lois knew his name: Edward Barcla. He wasn't much liked at Lake Calada. Barcla was one of the interlopers who had somehow managed to buy a piece of property on a back lot near the exclusive Calada Colony. But Lois did not dislike him on that account. She wasn't a member of the wealthy set; her natural sympathies veered toward Barcla's group. But Barcla, as an individual, was another matter.

He had a weasel face, with sharply sloping brow, scheming eyes, a mouth that showed oversized ugly teeth when he drew back his lips. Barcla's pasty complexion increased the unlovely picture. Lois had always disliked his looks; but on this trip, he had seemed uglier than ever.

The reason was, that Barcla had spent the hour muttering to himself and indulging in grins that were very much like leers. If he had known how his facial contortions worked against him, he might have been more careful.

His hands, too, were an index to a nasty character. The twitching of his ill-formed, sharp-nailed fingers reminded Lois of evil claws clutching at the throat of an imaginary victim.

Yes, Lois was glad that Barcla had not tried to further an acquaintance during this air trip. But she would have liked much to talk with the passenger who sat one seat ahead.

He was a man of dignity; his face, of hawkish contour, was so calm that it seemed almost mask-like. His eyes, when Lois glimpsed them, were steady, and she could fancy a piercing power behind their mildness. The hawk-faced man was a stranger; but Lois had learned his name when Drury addressed him, at the start of the trip.

His name was Lamont Cranston; he had come in from Honolulu on the Clipper. He was visiting Lake Calada to be the guest of Henry Denwood, one of the wealthy residents.

An odd contrast: Barcla, grimacing like an ape; Cranston, as immobile as a stone idol—yet each man wrapped in his own thoughts. Ignoring the two, Lois looked toward the front of the compact plane, saw Drury busy at the controls. The pilot's back was turned, but his actions indicated that they were near the landing field.

Lois gazed from the cabin window. They were beyond the mountains. Below, the girl saw the sheen of Lake Calada, set like a sapphire in the wooded slopes. The center of the lake made a long, clear stretch, for it was very deep; but there were capes and islands at the fringes that produced coves and bays.

It was difficult, from this altitude, to realize that the lake was several miles in length. But Lois had traveled it often, with Niles Rondon in his speedboat. The lake seemed to swing upward lazily as Drury banked the plane, and Lois viewed many landmarks.

She saw the Lodi Lodge, which looked like a Mexican hacienda transferred to a woodland setting. Other places were visible, including Rondon's, which was farther up the lake. Lois recognized Indian Rock, which made a shelving bulwark at the inner end of Indian Cove. She spied the ruins of the Pioneer Mine along the shore of another bay.

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At the far end of the lake were the white buildings of the Community Center, where the landing field was located. It was fortunate that the shore had one stretch of flat ground; otherwise, it would be difficult to reach Lake Calada by air, since the altitude hampered seaplanes.

Then, as the ship thrummed across the center of the lake, Lois smiled at sight of a stone-walled building resembling a medieval tower.

People called the place the "Castle," and it was the residence of Professor Scorpio. Lois dipped her fingers into the handbag, brought out a folded sheet of paper. It was one of Scorpio's horoscopes, that he had given her before she left Lake Calada. She hadn't bothered to read it; perhaps a perusal would while away the last few minutes before Drury made his landing.

Lois opened the paper. Her forehead wrinkled, as her eyes widened. She was scanning printed statements that actually astonished her. The chart said that her favorite color was olive-green, which happened to be true; that her lucky number was six, which also was correct, when she considered occurrences in which that number had figured.

Then, in larger type, Lois read:

"Be careful of your actions on the eleventh day of each month. On those days, make no hazardous journeys."

A thought struck home to Lois. Today was the eleventh. A trip by plane could be regarded as a hazardous journey. Lois was actually worried, as she looked toward Drury; then her anxiety faded.

About ready for his landing, the pilot had calmly taken a cigarette from a fresh pack he had just opened. Drury inserted the cigarette between his lips, ready to light it the moment the plane grounded and came to a stop. It was a daily ritual with him, this getting ready for a smoke.

Drury certainly was not worried over the routine maneuver that was about to come. There was no reason for Lois to be alarmed.

Again, the girl glanced from the window. She could see the landing field almost below, with little dots, representing people, near the veranda of the main community house.

There were boats, toylike in size, drawn up at the dock. Again, the whole scene lifted, as the plane banked. Lois watched for it to straighten.

Instead, came a sight that the girl had never before observed. The landscape took a sudden whirl. Hills, woods, lake, became a revolving jumble that made a daytime nightmare. Out of that blur of blue and green Lois could glimpse the jagged points of mountain tops and white streaks, as the buildings of the Community Center flashed before her vision.

The truth seemed to shout itself at Lois. Instead of swooping down to a landing, the plane had gone into a spin. Drury, the ever-reliable pilot, had lost control of the ship!

CLUTCHING the seat, Lois looked ahead. She saw Drury crouched over the controls. Whether or not his hand was frozen to the stick, she couldn't tell, for another man blocked full view. That man was Cranston; the hawk-faced passenger had lunged forward from his seat to grab Drury by the shoulders.

Lois screamed. As if in answer to her call, another figure leaped toward the pilot's seat. It was Barcla; despite the ferocious snarl that the fellow gave. Lois was all in his favor. If Barcla could only get Cranston away

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from Drury and let the pilot land the ship!

Lake, land and sky were still engaged in their madcap whirl, as the spinning plane plummeted groundward. Half from the seat, Lois tumbled forward of her own weight, as Barcla locked with Cranston. With a fury that matched his apish manner, Barcla yanked Cranston away from Drury; but his success was short-lived. Lois, reeling in upon the pair, saw a fist jab with the force of a pile driver.

The fist was Cranston's; its target, Barcla's chin. The blow crumpled Barcla; as he flattened, stunned, his weasel face took on a look of distorted surprise. Then Lois had replaced him; she was struggling with Cranston. Momentarily, she met blazing eyes from that masklike countenance; then, like Barcla, she was sprawling in the aisle.

Cranston had simply flung the girl aside. He was doing the same with Drury. The pilot's form came tumbling upon Lois, as Cranston twisted into the seat behind the controls. Her head thrust backward under Drury's weight, Lois looked into the pilot's face.

What she saw would have produced another scream, had her lips been able to supply one. Of all the horrors in those swift-moving seconds, that sight of Drury was the worst.

The pilot's face wasn't human. It had a glare that made Barcla's weasel countenance seem benign. Drury's eyes were wide, goggly things that bulged like balls of glass. His features were frozen in a grotesque expression that would have suited a demon. His lips were partly open, his teeth tight-clenched; between the lips, like a touch of comedy relief, Lois saw the unlighted cigarette the pilot had put there a few moments before.

Then, as the girl clawed wildly, Drury's body rolled away, its grinning face bobbing with a parting leer that Lois understood, too well. Drury was dead; stone-dead. He had died at the controls before Cranston could reach him.

Cranston's purpose had been to take over the ship: Barcla had tried to stop him. To Lois came the sickening thought that she, like a fool, had tried to help the wrong man!

Then, as the girl tried to find her feet, she thumped her head against a seat that had somehow come above her. She could feel the plane's dizzy spin, as she sank into a half-conscious state that promised to mercifully dull her senses before the coming crash.

The plane was diving down, down, down, to a sure destruction; such was Lois' half-dazed thought. But there was something else, as strange as the plane's sudden spin, as weird as that view of Drury's distorted face.

It was a sound that trailed along with Lois into a black and bottomless pit: a tone of sinister laughter, that seemed destined to accompany her into the hereafter.

Mirth that could have come only from one pair of lips; those of Lamont Cranston. Had Lois Melvin ever heard that laugh before, she would have recognized its full significance.

The laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER II. THE STARS FORETELL.

To the throng by the community house, sight of the spinning plane was enough to provoke horror. They knew

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the pilot, Drury, as a man of absolute reliability. Nothing could have induced Drury to stage a stunt act with his plane; yet it seemed equally impossible that the pilot could have lost control just before his landing.

Of the two evils, most viewers accepted the lesser. They thought that Drury must have departed from his custom and decided to give them a thrill. A few actually chuckled while the spinning plane was glinting in the sunlight; then, suddenly, all sounds turned to groans.

It was late afternoon; from the ground, the sun could not be seen beyond the mountain tops. Its spinning dive unchecked, the plane had passed the spot where the sun reached it. A mighty pall of semi-dusk caught it in a swallowing shroud that bespoke immediate destruction.

Then, the miraculous happened. No one remembered the exact details of those thrilling split seconds, that seemed too short for any pilot to use to advantage. They could hear the roar of the motor that accompanied the juggernaut from the sky; they could see the spin widen as the hapless plane neared them.

But the writhe that the ship gave was something beyond description. Its wing produced a flipping illusion; its veer became a swoop. There were persons who swore that they felt the graze of the propeller; others who testified that a canted wing stroked them as they flattened on the ground. Whatever the case, the doomed plane changed its status in a trice.

Its dive turned into the first stage of a pancake landing; in immediate sequence, the ship made a climb. It blotted sight of the community house, toward which it headed; then, one wing lifting to clear the roof, the plane swung full about and rode the surface of the lake with its tilted wing. Rising, it stabilized, found itself, and came to a sensible landing before the awed spectators had really found their breath.

First to reach the plane was a man of rugged build, whose well-matured face marked his age as in the early thirties. He yanked open the door, thrust his square jaw toward the aisle. Then his deep tone was soothing, as his strong arms gathered in a girl who came crawling toward them.

The man was Niles Rundon. Other arrivals stood back as he helped Lois Melvin from the plane. They could see the sympathy in Rundon's eyes, the strained look on his face. They heard Lois sob, and caught the things she said. But the girl's words were incoherent. She was grateful to be alive; that was all.

Near the door lay a groggy man, who was promptly pulled from the plane. People knew him, too, and had expected him as a passenger. But Edward Barcla was too stupefied to remember anything except his aching jaw. He looked around as if he expected to see a mule standing with a ready hoof.

Others were in the plane, calling to the pilot. Some were angry at Drury; others were offering congratulations. All stopped, open-mouthed, when they saw that the pilot wasn't Drury. They drew back, quite puzzled, as a hawk-faced passenger stepped from the plane.

They realized then, that he was the guest expected by Mr. Denwood. They waited while a young man stepped up to shake hands with the arrival. The young man was a likable-looking chap named Harry Vincent, at present one of Denwood's house guests.

Listeners heard Vincent inquire:

"You're Mr. Cranston?"

There was a nod from the hawk-faced passenger who had landed the plane.

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"You had better see to the pilot," remarked Cranston calmly. "I'm afraid that he is dead."

AMAZED onlookers brought Drury's body from the ship. They made way for a physician, one of the members of the Calada colony.

The doctor examined the body, gave a solemn nod. He gave orders to call the county coroner. After people moved away, the physician studied Drury's face, then muttered something very softly.

The case looked like murder, but the doctor wasn't entirely sure. He hadn't seen the cigarette that dropped from Drury's lips when people dragged the body from the plane.

It happened that Lois was mentioning the cigarette to persons at the community house.

"Drury couldn't have expected the heart attack," the girl was saying. "Why, he had thrust a cigarette between his lips one moment: then, when I looked again, he had sagged at the controls."

"I didn't realize what had happened." Her tone was rueful, as she turned to Cranston. "When I saw you grabbing Drury, I thought he was still alive. But he couldn't have been! The plane had already started its spin."

Lois' sincere tone brought an understanding smile from Cranston. Another man arose from a chair and came forward a bit unsteadily, his hand extended. The man was Edward Barcla.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cranston," said Barcla. "I made the same mistake that Miss Melvin did. That's why I barged in the way I did. The punch you gave me hurt"—he was rubbing his jaw, as he gave a rueful grin—"but it was a lot better than the wallop we would have taken if you hadn't socked me."

As the two men shook hands, Lois felt some sympathy for Barcla. The fellow's face looked pale, rather than pasty: his tone, though probably forced, was somewhat gentlemanly.

But as she watched Barcla leave the community house, Lois experienced a renewal of her former mistrust. She turned to Rondon, who was standing beside her, and spoke in a whisper.

"I don't like that chap Barcla," she said. "Maybe its silly of me, Niles, but I was watching him in the plane—"

Rondon gave a quick whisper for silence. Another man had entered the community house. He was tall, imposing in appearance, and clad in a suit of white linen. Topping the summer garb was a bearded face, dark, like the deep eyes that peered from it. Instead of an ordinary hat, the bearded man wore a white turban, glittering with a large ruby.

The arrival was Professor Scorpio, the mystic who rated as one of the founders of the Calada colony. He had arrived in his motorboat, just after the plane landed.

Professor Scorpio faced Lois Melvin.

"I warned you," spoke Scorpio, in a sepulchral tone that seemed muffled by his thick black beard. "My horoscope told you that it would be unwise to travel on this date."

"I know," admitted Lois. "But I did not read it until the plane had almost landed—"

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"Which would have been too late," interposed Scorpio. "Your star"—he raised a forefinger—"foretold death! I can only account for your good luck through the power of some intervening planet."

Looking about the group, Scorpio found his impressive gaze met by eyes as steady as his own. Those eyes were Cranston's: they held the professor rigid. Then came Cranston's quiet tone.

"Perhaps it was the influence of my lucky star," spoke Cranston solemnly. "I have been advised, by very good authorities, to always travel on the eleventh of the month."

Some of the listeners smiled, sensing a jest at Scorpio's expense. But the bearded professor proved himself equal to the test.

"Such things do happen," he affirmed. "I regard Drury's death as sufficient proof of my prophecy that danger would threaten Miss Melvin. All persons"—he threw a gaze around the group—"do well to heed the revelations of Professor Scorpio!"

CRANSTON'S eyes were watching other faces when Professor Scorpio strode away. He noted that most of the people present did heed the words and wisdom of Professor Scorpio. It fitted precisely with rumors that concerned the colony on Lake Calada.

As The Shadow, the being who hunted down unusual crime, Lamont Cranston had heard that Professor Scorpio had surrounded himself with many dupes. This scene was proof of it. Yet there were scoffers in the group; one was Niles Rondon. The Shadow could tell it from the smile that Rondon gave to Lois Melvin.

But the girl did not return the smile. Perhaps she would have scoffed at Professor Scorpio a few days ago; but recent events had made her wonder.

Looking out from the community house, The Shadow saw Professor Scorpio step into a motorboat that two servants had loaded with boxes of supplies. Harry Vincent side-toned that the commissary department was located near the community house; that everyone came there for supplies.

"Denwood's boat is waiting," added Harry. "He is expecting us, right away. He has much to tell you, Mr. Cranston."

They walked from the community house, past Drury's plane, where the physician was still waiting for the coroner. Denwood's boat was waiting at the dock, as were others.

The Shadow saw Rondon and Lois leave with a small party of friends. But there was no sign of Edward Barcla among any of the groups that were entering the boats. The Shadow inquired where the plane passenger had gone.

"Off by the road," explained Harry, as they stepped into Denwood's boat. "Barcla doesn't have a lake-front property. He lives in one of the back cabins."

They were in the boat; Harry was at the wheel. With no other persons present, Harry was no longer disguising the fact that he was well acquainted with Lamont Cranston. Remembering The Shadow's query, Harry began to wonder if Barcla had actually gone along the road. As the boat pulled away from the dock, Harry thought of a possible link between Barcla and the dead pilot Drury.

As a secret agent of The Shadow, Harry Vincent seldom put questions to his chief. This time, he could not restrain himself. Too much seemed at stake.

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"What about that heart attack?" queried Harry. "Did Drury really have one? Or do you think that—"

The Shadow interrupted. His tone was no longer Cranston's. His voice was whispered; it carried a sinister sibilance.

"Drury was murdered!"

It was not a completion of Harry's unfinished question. The Shadow's words were a statement of fact. It meant that his presence at Lake Calada was known; that measures had already been taken to end his career before he began an investigation of mysterious crimes that had lately troubled the mountain colony.

Harry was staring straight ahead, guiding the speedboat through the darkening water. In the murk ahead, he could visualize a picture from the past—that of a diving airplane which only The Shadow could have pulled from destruction.

It was lucky that Drury's murderer had not guessed that Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, was a skilled aviator in his own right. Otherwise, different measures might have been taken to prevent The Shadow's arrival at Lake Calada.

ACROSS a narrow stretch of lake, another boat was pulling into its dock. It was the boat that carried Professor Scorpio and the servants who had loaded the boxes. The Shadow reached for a pair of field glasses that lay on the seat beside Harry.

Last streaks of sunlight showed Scorpio's dock more plainly than the professor supposed. Lifting the glasses, The Shadow held them trained upon the dock. He saw Professor Scorpio step from the boat and take a path to his bungalow in the woods. The servants followed, leaving the boxes as they were.

Still watching, as his own boat sped along, The Shadow saw the boxes stir. A figure crept from them, rolled to the dock and crouched there. A few moments later, bunking lights from the bungalow announced that the stowaway could follow. As the crouched man rose, his face was plain in the glass.

The Shadow recognized Edward Barcla. Then the crouching man had crept along the path. Barcla had not gone to his cabin. He was keeping a rendezvous with Professor Scorpio.

Like the lake, the sky had darkened, when The Shadow stood on Denwood's dock, waiting for Harry to moor the speedboat. Off beyond the line of mountain summits, The Shadow saw the sparkle of early evening stars. The sight reminded him of Professor Scorpio, the bearded prophet who claimed to consult the stars in making his predictions.

According to Scorpio, the stars could foretell. Perhaps the bearded professor was right. For The Shadow, as he gazed, could gain an inkling of the future himself.

The Shadow foresaw that crime was due at Lake Calada; that the death of Drury was scarcely more than the beginning of a heinous campaign. Crime that could be as deeply hidden as the vast depths of the blackened lake.

But that was not the limit of The Shadow's forecast. However deep crime might lie, it could be solved. Already, The Shadow had gained certain inklings that would prove useful, later.

Harry Vincent, rowing in from the mooring buoy, heard the soft whisper of The Shadow's laugh issuing from darkness.

CHAPTER III. NIGHT OF CRIME.

DINNER was ended and Henry Denwood sat alone with his friend, Lamont Cranston. Through the cigar smoke, Denwood watched his guest's face, and its impassive expression pleased him. For Denwood was quite confident that this man who called himself Lamont Cranston was actually The Shadow.

In his turn, The Shadow was quite pleased with Denwood. He knew Denwood as a man of absolute integrity. More than that, Denwood owed a great debt to The Shadow.

Only a few years before, Henry Denwood had been on the verge of disgrace and ruin. Crooks had not only tried to steal his fortune; they had planned to blame Denwood for their crimes—when The Shadow intervened. (City of Shadows, Vol. XXX, No. 2.)

Since then, Denwood had sworn to aid The Shadow in any way he could. Here, at Lake Calada, where he was living in comfortable retirement, Denwood had observed the oncreep of subtle crime that threatened to rise to huge proportions. Therewith, he had notified The Shadow, through a message to Cranston.

Unable to arrive immediately, The Shadow had sent Harry Vincent in advance. His agent had seen evidence of the very things that Denwood reported. At present, Harry was on watch outside of the room where Denwood and Cranston were talking matters over.

A kindly man, white-haired and dignified, Denwood was the sort who often trusted persons too far. Experience had taught him to be more careful; but he had not profited enough. At dinner tonight, one of Denwood's servants had been missing, along with cash that belonged in Denwood's desk.

That was why The Shadow had posted Harry outside the study. He was quite sure that the missing thief had served as an eavesdropper on previous evenings when Denwood talked with Harry.

So far, The Shadow had not mentioned Drury's death in terms of murder. He wanted to hear Denwood's story first, and the white-haired man was giving it. A large map of Lake Calada was spread on the desk: Denwood was pointing out the homes of certain residents.

"One month ago," stated Denwood, "the Gillespie house was robbed. The bonds that were taken were valued at fifty thousand dollars. They are holding Gillespie's secretary in Los Angeles, but I don't think that they can prove the crime against him."

Cranston's eyes seemed to question why. Denwood explained the reason.

"The secretary had taken half the bonds to Los Angeles," he said, "and delivered them there, before the theft of the rest was discovered. No crook would have turned over one batch of fifty thousand dollars, while stealing another."

Denwood's logic was solid. The Shadow suggested that he proceed with his account.

"The next case," declared Denwood, "concerns the Jamison paintings. They were shipped here by air. When the crates were opened, the paintings were missing. But they were not opened until the day after they arrived. No one knows what happened to them.

"Those paintings were valued at approximately one hundred thousand dollars. So were the Albion statuettes, which were stolen next. Oddly, their case was just the reverse of the Jamison paintings. Mr. Albion had the

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statuettes here, and decided to send them away. They were packed in a safe and the whole thing shipped over the mountains, by truck, under proper guard.

"When the safe was opened at the Albion home in Los Angeles, it was found to contain blocks of lead, instead of platinum statuettes. Where, and how, the robbery occurred is a mystery. So far, news of it has been suppressed, except among influential members of this colony."

CRANSTON'S face was as impassive as ever, but Denwood could sense The Shadow's keen interest. Leaning forward, Denwood drove home the most important point.

"There were three important nights," he emphasized. "One, when Gillespie's secretary left for Los Angeles. The next, when the Jamison paintings arrived. The last was the night before the Albion statuettes were shipped. On each of those nights—"

"Professor Scorpio gave a séance," interposed The Shadow, "at the residences of the persons in question."

Henry Denwood smiled.

"I suppose that Vincent has already told you," he said. "So there is the whole story, Mr. Cranston. But Scorpio is clever, damnably so! There isn't a scrap of tangible evidence against him."

"He could have accomplices—"

"His spirits, maybe. He produces them whenever he gives a séance. People suspect that they are fakes, but it can't be proven. Besides, the spooks were always in sight, like the professor."

There was a pause. The Shadow's eyes steadied on Denwood; then came the question:

"What about your servant Mr. Denwood? I mean Horace, the chap who skipped this afternoon?"

"A petty thing," returned Denwood. "I had less than a hundred dollars in my desk drawer. Horace knew that I intended to discharge him. He couldn't have figured in anything more important, even with his eavesdropping—"

Denwood paused. He was considering Horace, wondering if the man had been important. Something in Cranston's manner impressed Denwood. He began to realize that The Shadow might have some deep answer to the Horace matter. He was about to inquire, when a knock at the door interrupted.

When Denwood gave the summons to enter, Harry ushered a bulky man into the room. Denwood was surprised to see Claude Kirk, the county sheriff, who displayed a badge on one lapel and a gun butt on the opposite hip. When Denwood introduced Cranston to the sheriff, Kirk promptly shook hands and came to business.

"You're the man I want to talk to," declared the sheriff. "It's about Drury. He was murdered!"

The Shadow saw the wave of real surprise that swept over Denwood's face. Maybe Denwood would begin to understand about Horace.

"Somebody gave Drury a package of poisoned cigarettes," explained the sheriff. "We found one of them on the plane; the rest in Drury's pocket."

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Denwood saw Cranston give a slow nod.

"I noticed the cigarette," declared The Shadow, in his calm tone. "Drury opened the pack and put an unlighted cigarette in his mouth just before he collapsed. It must have contained a most virulent poison."

"It did," maintained the sheriff. "Thanks for the testimony. It confirms what Miss Melvin told us. But we haven't found out where Drury got the package of cigarettes. Did you see him buy any in Los Angeles?"

There was a shake of Cranston's head.

"Drury could have gotten it here," mused the sheriff. "If that was his second pack, he wouldn't have opened it until he was coming back."

"Perhaps," was Cranston's calm suggestion, "Barcla can tell you where Drury obtained the cigarettes."

"I'd like to find Barcla!" stormed the sheriff. "He isn't at that shack of his. I'd like to know why he made that trip to L. A., in the first place. He rode out of here with Drury this morning came back again this afternoon."

"If we don't find him soon, I'm going to scour the woods for him. I've posted deputies on the roads, so he can't get through that way. Well, thanks again, Mr. Cranston. Maybe I'll be seeing you over at Miss Lodi's this evening."

The sheriff shot a grim look at Denwood, in departing. It had to do with the reference to Miss Lodi. But Denwood happened to be thinking about Horace.

As soon as the sheriff was gone, Denwood came to his feet.

"It's through my head at last!" he exclaimed to Cranston. "Horace heard me talking with Vincent. We mentioned your name and the fact that you were coming. Horace realized how important you might be, and passed the word along."

"You have struck it, Denwood," remarked The Shadow, with a smile, "and we can also surmise why Barcla went to Los Angeles."

"To watch you?"

"Exactly! Barcla is working with Professor Scorpio. It is his business to check on new arrivals at Lake Calada, when Scorpio considers them important."

"And Drury's death! That was arranged, too, so that the plane would crash while you were a passenger!"

"Precisely." agreed The Shadow. "There are things happening in this territory that cannot stand the strain of outside investigation. Sheriff Kirk has not solved them, but someone else might."

Denwood sat down. Sight of the opened desk drawer reminded him of Horace. He realized that the servant had staged the petty robbery to cover up his more important mission: that of learning facts regarding both Vincent and The Shadow.

Then came the quiet tone of Cranston: "The sheriff mentioned a certain Miss Lodi—"

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"The movie actress," added Denwood. "Paula Lodi, who lives in the lodge that looks like a movie set. She and her husband, Howard Carradon, are giving a party this evening. I suppose that everyone will be there."

"And everyone," suggested The Shadow, "should include Professor Scorpio."

Denwood came to his feet again.

"It will, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Paula Lodi is crazy about the psychic stuff! She came here originally because it was Scorpio's favorite spot. Yes, the professor will be there, and what is more, he will give one of his séances."

Lamont Cranston was lighting a fresh cigar. He blew a long puff of smoke and gazed reflectively into the cloud, as Professor Scorpio might have studied a crystal ball.

"Sometimes," observed The Shadow, "press agents tell the truth. If certain news reports are true, I can foresee Miss Paula Lodi bedecked in diamonds and other gems valued at a few hundred thousand dollars."

"She will be," expressed Denwood. "Paula Lodi always wears them. She hasn't any sense, but her husband, Carradon, has. You can depend upon it: he's the one who asked Sheriff Kirk to be on hand, along with the rest of the Calada colony."

"Including ourselves?"

For answer, Denwood stepped to the door. He requested Harry to bring the speedboat from its mooring buoy and have it ready at the dock. It could wait there, while Harry was changing to evening clothes.

"We've been invited to a party," said Denwood, with a smile. "and I've just found out that Mr. Cranston would like to go. We'll just have time to make it."

Fifteen minutes later the speedboat was purring from its dock, with three passengers, its searchlight cutting a swath along the three-mile stretch to the Lodi hacienda. Other lights were on the water, marking more boats bound for the same destination.

Everyone, it seemed, was anxious to visit Lodi's, where the spirits of the dead were scheduled to be the life of the party. The séances of Professor Scorpio were well liked by the residents of the Calada colony.

Only a few of the more privileged persons, like Henry Denwood, knew the full truth of the coincidental robberies that had occurred along with Scorpio's recent public appearances.

What Denwood knew, The Shadow had learned. Perhaps Denwood, along with others, doubted that another robbery would occur upon this occasion. Suspicion was closing in upon Professor Scorpio, even though facts remained unproven. With three robberies topped by murder, even the nerviest of supercrooks might deem it wise to call a short halt for a breathing spell.

The Shadow deemed otherwise. He had analyzed the case of Professor Scorpio and saw possibilities that others had not guessed. Confident that his conjectures were correct, The Shadow considered his arrival at Lake Calada most timely.

In fact, he could not have picked a better time. This was to be another night of crime!

CHAPTER IV. HANDS IN THE DARK.

THE living room of the Lodi hacienda was crowded. All eyes were upon Professor Scorpio, as the bearded mystic stood in front of a little alcove making his introductory speech.

Scorpio was wearing a long, white robe studded with mystic symbols; he had on a turban. Beside him, set in high metal standards, were two great torches, as yet unlighted.

Smooth-toned, careful in his choice of words, the professor was stating his case in very certain terms, meant for the benefit of those who might mistrust him.

Scorpio described himself as one of the early residents of Lake Calada. He asserted that he had chosen this spot because of its altitude; that it rivaled the mountain fastness of the Himalayas, in India, where the greatest of mystics abounded.

He reminded his listeners that they had come here of their own accord, building their lodges and bungalows on what were rightfully his preserves. For several years, they had appreciated Scorpio's séances, and the contributions which they gave him had been quite voluntary on their part and quite satisfactory on his.

Scorpio's speech, summed up in a few words, meant that he had built up a nice racket and did not care to lose it. That was a point that brought the faintest semblance of a smile to the lips of one listener: namely, Lamont Cranston.

"Strange things have occurred among these heights," concluded Scorpio, deepening his voice to its sepulchral tone. "Odd happenings over which I have no control. The answer"—he pointed a bony finger upward—"can be given only by the stars!

"Who am I to account for the disappearance of objects, or even of people? Who am I to pronounce myself master over life and death? I can declare the future only through the stars; to learn the past, I am dependent upon the spirits."

His statements were an excellent alibi. By the mention of disappearing objects, Scorpio referred indirectly to stolen goods; by people, he meant persons such as Denwood's servant, Horace. His talk of life and death covered the murder of Drury.

Then, as he was lighting a waxen taper, Professor Scorpio had an afterthought. Cunningly, he turned to his listeners and declared:

"There are those among you who can testify to the strangeness of these mountains. Those who have seen the mystic creature of the lake, that glides with silence through the heart of night. Let those who are fearful leave this enchanted domain; those who are bold may remain."

The Shadow gave an interrogatory glance to Denwood and Harry. They supplied information that they had forgotten to mention. It referred to the "creature" described by Scorpio.

"You've heard of the Loch Ness Monster, undertoned Denwood. "The sea serpent seen on a lake in Scotland. Somebody started a similar rumor here, about such a creature gliding through the water late at night."

"But no one is on the lake late at night," added Harry, in a whisper, "unless they're coming home from a party. Around here, they give parties that are parties. Some of the witnesses say they saw two of the monsters,

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which gives an idea of how much their word is worth."

Those side comments came while Scorpio was lighting the torches. Again, it was a matter of an alibi. Professor Scorpio was using a local rumor to back up his mystic claims.

Looking around the room, The Shadow noted other faces. There were some thirty persons present; most of them seemed to believe in Professor Scorpio. Of all the enraptured throng, the most conspicuous was Paula Lodi; owner of the hacienda.

PAULA LODI was a pronounced blonde, large-eyed and droopy-mouthed. She was registering a soulful expression that had proven a real tear-jerker when she displayed it in motion pictures. The trouble with Paula was that she looked older and stouter in real life, than in the movies.

Make-up could help her acquire a younger appearance; but it would take diet and exercise to restore the sleekness that had made her famous.

Meanwhile, Paula seemed to be enjoying her enforced vacation. She was clad in black because it was the best color as a background for her jewels.

As Denwood had guessed, she was wearing all her gems. Her fingers were encrusted with rings, her wrists massed by bracelets. She wore a diamond brooch and an emerald necklace. Even her ankles were circled by jeweled bangles.

Looking across the room, The Shadow saw Lois Melvin. Contrasted to the famous Paula Lodi, the brunette was a creature of simple but effective charm. She needed no jewels to enhance her beauty. Her trim figure seemed remarkably lithe and shapely when compared to Paula's.

Lois wore an expression of doubt. She was remembering Scorpio's horoscope, wondering how much truth there was in it. She didn't want to believe in the professor's powers, yet she could not declare them wholly false. She was saying something of the sort to Niles Rundon, who stood near her.

The square-jawed man gave a depreciating smile and remarked that Professor Scorpio was nothing more than a good guesser.

Apparently, Rundon did not like Scorpio, but he was not bitter about it. The man who really detested Scorpio was Howard Carradon, the husband of Paula Lodi. Seated near the movie actress, Carradon was showing a glower on his sharp but rather handsome face. He looked ready to choke Scorpio at a moment's notice.

Off in a corner stood Sheriff Kirk. He was fingering his badge and chewing a toothpick. Beside him was a half-filled glass; the sheriff took a long swallow from it. He evidently figured that he needed a drink in order to feel sober in a crazy scene like this.

The torches were ablaze. Professor Scorpio requested that other lights be extinguished. A servant pressed the light switches at the door which led to the veranda. Wavering flames illuminated the scene, except for a glitter near front of the group. The glitter came from Paul Lodi's jewels.

"You must move back a bit, Miss Lodi," declared Scorpio, courteously. "We need the light of the torches: nothing more."

Paula shifted her chair farther into the audience. The glitter of the gems diminished, satisfying the professor. All was still among the throng, as Scorpio began a strange, deep-voiced chant—a summons to the dead.

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Reaching up beneath his evening coat, The Shadow drew a hidden garment downward. It was a black cloak; from its folds rolled a flattened slouch hat. Though both Harry and Denwood were so close that they could touch him, neither saw the transformation whereby Lamont Cranston became The Shadow.

The reason was simple. Scorpio's torches were set high. Beneath them were bronze disks that kept the light from the floor. The flames looked powerful, but a mere glance at the ceiling showed that they reflected very little light.

Sometimes fake mediums used red lamp bulbs to produce a "lighted" scene. Red bulbs were a cute trick, for they weren't much better than total darkness. But Scorpio was going that stunt one better. His flickering torches, with all their show, were no stronger than half a dozen candles, and their glow was neatly deflected.

Cloaked in black, his slouch hat drawn down across his eyes, The Shadow was crouching along the floor of the room, getting closer to Scorpio's preserves.

The professor was visible because his attire was white, and enough of his face showed above the beard. He was keeping close to a torch, so that his features would be visible, adding to the impression that the scene was actually lighted.

The Shadow wanted to reach the alcove behind the professor. As he neared it, he heard a creaking sound from the opposite direction. Someone else was crawling into the scene, quite as invisibly as The Shadow.

Pausing, The Shadow watched the floor.

Professor Scorpio pointed, gave a dramatic cry. All eyes gazed downward. A disk of light appeared, uncannily, upon the floor. There were gasps from many of the women present, as the glowing circle enlarged.

THE SHADOW recognized the deception. It was the old materialization game. The person who had crept in from the alcove was wearing a luminous robe under a dark cloth. Mere manipulation of the cloth in its withdrawal, accounted for the appearance of the light.

Then the cloth was gone entirely, but the figure still appeared dwarfed. The person in the luminous robe was crouched, performing gyrations in front of Professor Scorpio. As the figure rose, inch by inch, it gave the impression that it had grown. Then, of a sudden, it expanded. A full-fledged spirit stood in sight.

To The Shadow, acquainted with such frauds, the spook looked definitely phony. Cheesecloth, smeared with luminous paint, was not a good enough disguise to fool a practiced eye. But to the other onlookers, most of whom were farther away than The Shadow, the sight was quite impressive.

The "spirit" certainly knew his business. He kept on the move, giving the luminous cloth a shimmer that, at moments, produced a really ghostly effect. The spook was a man; his voice, a deep whisper, revealed the fact. His face was a man's too, but it was a mask attached to the luminous hood of his robe.

There was a reason for the mask. That became apparent when the spook neared Paula Lodi. Seeing the outline of the false face, the actress gave a shriek:

"Francois!"

A buzz from the other sitters told the rest. Francois was Paula's first husband, who had departed into the land of spirits after a prolonged binge during the days of Prohibition. Professor Scorpio had supplied his accomplice with a mask that perfectly resembled the departed Francois.

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"Take these!" Paula had risen; her hands were glittering, as she started to peel rings from her fingers. "Take these baubles, Francois! Carry them back to the land of spirits—"

Professor Scorpio voiced a rumbling objection as he sprang forward. Much though he liked the gems, he didn't want to spoil the act by anything so palpable as a gift to a spook. Such trickery was antiquated when there were skeptics present.

But Scorpio was late with his objection. Another man intervened more rapidly. The sweep of an arm sent Paula spilling back into her chair; then the same man leaped for the spook. The man who was cracking up the séance was Howard Carradon, Paula's living husband.

The dodging "Francois" wasn't quick enough to get away from Carradon. The room became a bedlam, as the living husband tried to choke the dead one. Then Professor Scorpio was in the fight, struggling to get Carradon away from his precious spook.

Though close enough to settle the fray, The Shadow let it go to its conclusion, which came quickly enough. The ghost made another transformation; it dwindled in the combined clutch of Scorpio and Carradon. They were wrestling with a deflated spook, because the man inside the luminous robe had managed to slip out of it.

Unseen in the darkness, the fellow dived for the alcove; but The Shadow heard him go. There was a clatter of a hinging board, a slam as it went back in place.

Again, because of the shouts, no one heard the sounds except The Shadow. He was at the spot in the alcove where the clatter had occurred. Rolling against the wail, he felt the floor drop with his weight.

Then, as The Shadow began his drop to the abode of the departed spook, he heard a shriek from the living room. It was too late to return when the cry came. But The Shadow heard the words, recognized them, along with the voice that uttered them.

The shriek came from Paula Lodi:

"My jewels!"

CHAPTER V. COVERED FLIGHT.

HARRY VINCENT was among the first to spring to the aid of Paula Lodi. He had almost reached the actress, when he was shouldered aside by a milling throng of excited persons who were bashing through the dark.

Most of them were simply excited; but there were some—how many, Harry did not know—who were thinking of Paula's jewels. Grabbing at an arm that flew in his direction, Harry found it smooth. The arm was Paula's; its bracelets were gone. Rings, too, were absent from the hand that Harry managed to clutch.

Then his grasp was lost. There was the clatter of a chair; another shriek as Paula went over backward. A flying slipper hit Harry in the face. The crooks had overturned Paula and yanked the bangles from her ankles, sending the slippers ahead of them.

It was Paula, coming to hands and knees, who tripped Harry as he tried to grab at men in the dark. Except for the quick workers who had stripped away the jewelry, Harry was one of the few persons in the room who seemed to know what it was all about. Alone, he could do nothing. Too many people were blocking him off, even though they did not mean to stop him.

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There were shouts for lights. The milling mass of howling humanity was swirling toward the door. Suddenly, the lights came on, pressed by a disheveled man who had reached the door.

Harry saw Niles Rondon, very much the worse for wear. He had managed to keep his wits, like Harry; but Rondon, too, had met with difficulties.

So had Henry Denwood. The white-haired man was flattened at the spot where Harry left him, under a pile of floundering people.

Crooks had made a clean sweep of Paula's jewels. The blond actress was staggering to her feet, half-dazed. Her black dress was shredded, hanging by one strap. The mobsters had ruined it when they tore away the diamond brooch.

As order came from chaos, Rondon pointed wildly from the door; his finger was directed toward Professor Scorpio, who was still struggling with Howard Carradon. Rondon's yell was echoed by others who saw the fray:

"Get the professor!"

There was good reason to get Scorpio. Though the professor hadn't snatched the jewels personally, he was as good as caught with other goods. He and Carradon were still fighting for the remnants of the spook, which, in the light, definitely looked like cheesecloth.

Once captured with such goods, Scorpio would be branded as an impostor. The professor knew it and struggled fiercely. Starting for him, along with others, Harry looked for The Shadow. Seeing no sign of Cranston, he decided that his chief had headed on another mission.

Perhaps The Shadow had gone after the jewels. Even in the drive for Scorpio, Harry recognized that the gems were more important than the professor. It was that thought that guided Harry's later actions, through scenes that occurred with bewildering speed.

It started with a lucky break for Scorpio; the first of several that came the professor's way. Swept ahead of the rush toward Scorpio was Paula Lodi. She didn't grab for the professor; instead, she seized Carradon.

She was shrieking to her husband that her jewels were gone. Carradon didn't care about the gems as much as he did about Paula. Sight of his wife in the ragged remnants of her black dress made Carradon turn to her protection. The gesture helped Professor Scorpio.

Getting possession of the cheesecloth with one hand, the professor let go with the other fist. Instead of Paula floundering into Carradon's arms, he dropped into hers.

Having put that punch to Carradon's jaw, Scorpio scooped up the dark cloth that went with the cheesecloth. Springing away, he grabbed at the first handy weapon—one of the flaming torches.

Swinging the fiery cudgel, Scorpio was beating off attackers, among them Harry, when the second break came. Again the room lights were extinguished; but not by Rondon, or anyone in the room. No one was near the wall when the lights went off. Somebody down in the cellar had pulled the main switch.

WILDLY, Professor Scorpio made the most of the fresh darkness. He flung the flaming torch into the alcove, threw the cheesecloth and the dark cover along with it. He was getting rid of past evidence, along with present. Without the torch in hand, he couldn't be found in the crowd.

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Nevertheless, Scorpio's escape could still be blocked and the evidence against him reclaimed. That chance was diverted by a woman's cry, that came from near the window. The shouting girl was Lois Melvin.

With the lights in the room extinguished, Lois could see the scene outdoors. From the window, she spied bobbing lights heading in the direction of the lake front; the starlight showed the figures of scurrying men.

The girl told all as she shouted:

"The jewel thieves! There they go!"

Instantly, Professor Scorpio was forgotten. A wildly shouting throng made for the veranda door, and Harry was swept along with them. He went willingly, because of his accepted theory that the gems were more important than the professor.

Shots stabbed from the direction of the Lodi dock as pursuers arrived on the veranda. Those were warning shots; they betrayed the escaping crooks, but also indicated that it would be dangerous to follow.

The sheriff had reached the veranda; he was finding his first real chance to take part in the strife. Pulling his gun, he answered the fire from the shore.

Then, at the foot of the veranda steps, the sheriff grabbed the two men closest to him, who happened to be Niles Rondon and Harry Vincent. He was telling them to organize the rest and follow his lead, when new shrieks from the house made everyone turn.

The living room was lurid with light, far greater than the torches could produce alone. Flames were snatching at the woodwork, producing a first-class blaze. Crooks had to be forgotten, to save the hacienda. The sheriff pointed back to the house, telling the others to fight the fire, while he took up the chase alone.

Harry and Rondon reached the living room. The entire alcove was ablaze. Carradon, back on his feet, was yelling something about a fire hose in the hallway. The fire could be stopped before it spread, but the alcove and its outer wall were sure to go.

Professor Scorpio was lying on the floor, with one eye open. He let it close, as Harry stared in his direction. Paula Lodi and some of the other women were dragging the professor from the danger spot; still murmuring their belief in him. A bland smile showed on the bearded lips.

Scorpio had played an almost hopeless game; yet he had won. His toss of the torch had been a lucky trick. He could alibi it easily, by claiming that he had lost the torch in a struggle that had left him senseless. The damage could be blamed on his attackers, instead of himself.

But the damage was exactly what Scorpio wanted.

Already, the flames had consumed the spirit robe and the cloth which the spook had used to cover it. The alcove was going, too. From charred floor and flame-swept wall, no one could gain proof of the trapdoor through which the spook had made his escape.

A clever trick, Building the trap here in Paula's house during her absence. The professor had rigged it long ago, for an occasion like this evening. His game had turned into a boomerang, but he had managed to save the situation. The flames were killing the evidence. No one could brand Scorpio as an absolute faker.

As for the missing jewels, Scorpio was clear on that count. He hadn't touched Paula's gems. To Harry Vincent, the situation was disheartening. Harry felt that he had failed The Shadow: but that was not all. It seemed that The Shadow, too, had failed.

In fact, The Shadow's disappearance from the scene provided a very ominous touch. It made Harry forget the fire and start outdoors, gripped with the unreasonable dread that crooks had carried off his chief, along with the Lodi jewels.

This was the situation where everything seemed totally wrong. As Harry pictured it, there had been robbery in The Shadow's very presence: and that, in itself, indicated that something worse had happened. Others could worry about the jewels and the fire: Harry was thinking only of The Shadow, wondering what fate awaited him.

No qualms were needed from The Shadow, though Harry did not know it. The Shadow had chosen his own route, and was seeing it through. The persons who most deserved sympathy were those whom The Shadow might meet along the way.

CHAPTER VI. THE LAKE MONSTER.

THE SHADOW was on the trail of a ghost. The ghost, however, happened to be a very human one, quite confused in the darkness. The ghost was Edward Barcla.

There had been a few lights in the cellar beneath the hacienda when The Shadow landed there. By their glow The Shadow had spotted a scrambling figure reaching for the main switch that controlled all the lights in the house.

In one brief glimpse The Shadow had recognized the pasty features of Barcla, spread in their eager weasel-like grin. Then darkness, as Barcla pulled the switch. After that, The Shadow had kept along the trail.

Shouts from above, thumps upon the floor, meant that things were happening in the living room that The Shadow had so suddenly deserted. But there had been no shots. Nothing less than gunfire seemed enough to demand The Shadow's aid. With the fight a mere brawl, with crooks outnumbered, it was better to trail Barcla.

There was much that the professor's tool could tell, under The Shadow's persuasion. How much was a question; but it would be enough to make Barcla's capture worthwhile. Barcla would tell facts that Professor Scorpio would stoutly deny, if questioned. What was more, Barcla would reveal them without Scorpio's knowledge.

In a game like this, it was best to attack the weak links first. Once they were gone, the stronger ones would fall through their own sheer weight. That was why The Shadow kept to Barcla's trail.

Audible through the darkness, Barcla was easily followed by his stumbles. The puzzling thing was the length of the trail. The cellar seemed to be an absolute labyrinth, an almost endless maze, until The Shadow suddenly realized the ludicrous truth.

He had spent nearly ten minutes following Barcla in and out of passages, simply because the fellow had lost himself in the blackness!

It was no use lagging after that. Pressing forward, The Shadow closed in upon his prey. With shouts and

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roaring sounds coming from the floor above, Barcla was madly anxious to be out of the cellar that had become his self-made trap. The Shadow decided to conduct him out—at the point of an automatic!

There was another stumble, followed by a sprawl. Barcla had come across a flight of steps, leading upward. The Shadow was almost upon him, when Barcla, through sheer desperation, decided to take his newly-found route, wherever it might lead. He started upward with the speed of a scared rabbit.

Moving swiftly, The Shadow was right behind him at the top. Barcla didn't have time to yank open the door that he thumped against; but The Shadow, in his turn, lacked time to seize Barcla.

The door was ripped from the other side while Barcla was grabbing for the knob. Off balance, Barcla pitched out into the hall, scrambled madly past two men who were starting down into the cellar.

They were a pair of guests, coming to get fire extinguishers from the cellar. Though the flickers from the living room were guiding them, they failed to see Barcla because of the thick, swirling smoke. But they found The Shadow, when Barcla tripped them.

Headlong, the pair plunged down the steps, lurching squarely against Barcla's pursuer. From then on, it was a three-man tumble, with The Shadow beating off the flay of arms. Other faces appeared in the clearing smoke above the stairs, but the darkness of the cellar offset the fading light from the alcove fire.

New arrivals could only hear the shouts of the tumblers, claiming that they had grabbed one of the jewel thieves. More men came pounding down the stairs, toward crashes that they heard below.

The Shadow had used his attackers as buffers at the finish of the sprawl. Both still showing fight, he flung one foe into a wood bin; the other into an open closet. The clatter of tumbling logs, the smash of shelves loaded with preserves, were aftermaths of The Shadow's rapid action.

But The Shadow's route was blocked.

ILL LUCK had brought the attack in The Shadow's direction, instead of Barcla's. Half a dozen men were leaping down the stairs, intent to capture the unknown marauder. Against the last flickers of the fading fire, The Shadow saw their faces, Harry's among them. From darkness, The Shadow delivered a weird laugh.

The mirth carried no challenge, nor did it voice triumph. It was a ghostly laugh; one that would have fitted well in Scorpio's séances. There was a double purpose behind the trailing tone. The Shadow wanted to mystify these ardent, but misguided, attackers—with one exception; namely, Harry Vincent.

He knew that Harry would recognize the laugh, despite its disguise, and act accordingly. Harry did. As the others sprang for The Shadow in the darkness, Harry was with them. In blundering fashion, he began to trip his companions. His co-operation helped.

Grasping hands missed The Shadow's cloak, as it whisked off into the darkness. Stumbling, they heard a swish; then the laugh again, from another section of the cellar. They were spreading, hence Harry could be of no further aid, but it did not matter. Once away, The Shadow was too elusive to be captured.

Even his uncanny laugh was vague, misleading. It seemed to echo in from different directions. Choosing his own path in the darkness, The Shadow had better luck than Barcla. Finding a window in a far corner of the cellar, The Shadow ripped it open and hauled himself through.

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By then, someone had found the main switch. Dim lights came on; men spied the open window and started for it. Ordinarily, they would have had no chance of overtaking The Shadow, once he was away; but it happened that the cloaked fighter had met with opposition.

Through the window The Shadow had spotted a moving flashlight, bobbing hastily through a grove of huge pines. Knowing that the light meant Barcla, The Shadow was rising to follow, when a man intercepted him.

The fellow was stocky and brawny. He lunged in from the corner of the house. He had a weapon, in the shape of a heavy hammer, which he swung at The Shadow's head.

A quick hand whipped up from cloak folds, bringing a gun with it. The Shadow hadn't time to find the trigger of the automatic; he was using the gun for a cross parry. His darting hand slithered the weapon between his dodging head and the descending hammer, just in time to deflect the blow.

Overbalanced by his swing, the squatty man struck the house wall, shoulder first. Thrusting the gun away, The Shadow caught the fellow with a jujitsu hold; flung him, like a human battering-ram, against the first men who were coming through the cellar window. Sprawled back through the outlet, they lost their chance of pursuing The Shadow.

Again their prey had become a living ghost, the only token of his departure a creepy, elusive taunt, as spooky as the wail of an invisible banshee.

Delay was costly, none the less. Barcla had profited from it, as had The Shadow. The fugitive crook had managed to elude his cloaked pursuer, as The Shadow learned, after covering a hundred yards through the pine trees.

There were no further signs of Barcla's flashlight; no crackling sounds of a person moving through the underbrush. Similarly, there was no glow from the hacienda, nor any roar of fire. The flames had been extinguished, the building saved.

Having crossed a knoll, The Shadow could not see the windows of the building, which now shone with the restored electric lights.

WITH Barcla's trail lost somewhere in the woods, The Shadow decided to skirt to the lake front, where he could appear as Cranston and join in the hunt for the missing jewel thieves.

Others had already started on that mission. Harry Vincent found himself with Howard Carradon, who was pointing a light along a narrow path to the left. From the right, they could hear the sheriff bellowing that there was no one at the dock.

"This way!" Carradon plucked at Harry's arm. "To the old boathouse! That's where they might be hidden."

Carradon started to the left. Harry paused, realizing that it might be more than a two-man job. He yelled for the sheriff to head to the old boathouse, and finally received an answer. By then, Carradon and his light were out of sight. Blundering along the path, Harry saw other lights closer to the water. He yelled and a return call came from Niles Rundon.

"Find Carradon!" shouted Harry. "At the old boathouse. He's alone! He may get into trouble—"

An interruption came, from Carradon himself. His yell was triumphant; with it, Harry heard a splintering sound, like an old door being ripped from its hinges.

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"Here they are! In the boathouse! Hurry up you fellows, before they can get away!"

Rundon's light cut a swath through darkness. It revealed the abandoned boathouse, the door wide open. Carradon came bounding into sight, his own flashlight in one hand, a broken canoe paddle in the other. He swung the improvised weapon at a pair of thuggish men who lunged for him from the boathouse.

The men were grappling with Carradon, when Rundon reached them. Harry had less than a hundred feet to go, but the ground was dark and rocky. He figured, though, that Carradon and Rundon could keep up the fight during the dozen seconds that he would require to reach them. But things went awry in that short space of time.

One thug yanked the paddle from Carradon. Harry saw it swing in the light, and Rundon took a long sprawl. His flashlight sailed from his hand and struck the ground. Harry had a fleeting glimpse of the rough-looking men shoving Carradon through the boathouse door. From the way Carradon was swept from sight, it was plain that other hands had received him.

So far, Harry hadn't used the automatic that he carried. This was the time to bring it into play. Rundon had rolled somewhere on the ground; Carradon was safe inside the boathouse. Hoping to bag the two crooks that he had seen, Harry yanked his gun and opened fire.

Instantly, a searchlight sliced a brilliant path from above the boathouse door. Harry was trapped in the beam; he was shooting blindly against men who had him as a target. Though the ground was uneven, stones were too small to offer shelter.

Flattening, Harry heard bullets whine past and crackle the turf of the slope behind him. From the closeness of those slugs, he could guess that the next few would find him, if his own shots did not score.

Then, from off a flank, came the fire of another gun. Its stabs were visible among the trees; with the tattoo of shots came the challenge of a mocking laugh, The Shadow's. The first bullet knocked the searchlight askew; the next shattered it.

Rolling along the ground, Harry was doubly safe. Foemen had lost his position in the darkness; they couldn't find it from Harry's next shots, for he had none left. Besides, they were busy blasting at The Shadow, the worst policy they could have chosen.

THE SHADOW was shifting as he fired: the spurts of his gun were useless as targets. But the crooks couldn't shift; they had dropped below the level of the boathouse door and were cramped there. They thought their shelter was sufficient; but it proved otherwise.

Picking their position, The Shadow provided accurate shots. A howl told that he had clipped one of the marksmen. Then, at a muffled call from somewhere in the boathouse, the crooks withdrew from the door. On his feet again, Harry stumbled forward; he was sure that he heard splashes as he neared the boathouse.

The Shadow's fire ended. Harry was met by the sheriff and others, who had dashed along the shore. Men were pulling Rundon to his feet. One hand clapped to his head, Rundon pointed dazedly to the boathouse.

"They slugged me!" he gulped. "They've got Carradon... in there! Help him—"

Harry was already at the boathouse, beckoning. Half a dozen men, with a variety of weapons, from golf clubs to empty fire extinguishers, joined him. They surged through the broken door and stopped short, staring at a blank stretch of water.

Death in the Stars

The boathouse was nothing but a wharf with a shed over it. There wasn't a place where a person could hide, not even under the planking, for it showed large gaps where old boards had been torn away. Carradon was gone; so were his captors, as surprisingly as if they had not been there at all.

From the shattered searchlight, wires ran to a storage battery that rested on the planking. The arrangement had been rigged from old equipment left in the boathouse, and it was the only tangible evidence that any persons had been around the place.

Why the thieves had abducted Howard Carradon was one riddle: how they had managed it, was another.

Like all mysteries, the problem of the departing crooks could be answered: but not by Harry Vincent, nor the others who had arrived after the fray. They had all come from one direction; Carradon's abductors had wisely gone the other way. One person had anticipated their route: The Shadow.

Instead of coming to the boathouse, he had made for the shore a hundred yards beyond, and to the left, intending to intercept his enemies. But they had fled by water instead of land. At the water's edge, The Shadow noticed the faint swash of ripples that others could not hear.

Looking out into the lake, he detected a dim phosphorescence, moving away at rapid speed. It was out of gun range, and shots would have spurred it, rather than stop its escape. Watching the course of that thin-foamed wake, The Shadow made out a flattish shape that vaguely resembled a large porpoise finning through the water.

It answered the description of the mysterious lake monster mentioned by Professor Scorpio. Like all the professor's statements, this one was subject to amendment.

The thing that The Shadow saw was making too timely a trip to be some finny creature of the lake. It was a man-made contrivance, carrying away Carradon, along with his captors, the men who had gained the stolen jewels.

His eyes fixed on the whitish flecks, The Shadow traced the path of the strange, noiseless craft far out into the lake. He took bearings on a mountain peak that made a jagged dent into the starlit sky.

Pacing to the boathouse, where Harry and the rest had finished their search, The Shadow placed his cloak and hat beneath a convenient plank, to be regained later.

Once more in the guise of Lamont Cranston, The Shadow started up the slope to the hacienda, to rejoin the guests of Paula Lodi and hear their conflicting versions of how crime had occurred.

CHAPTER VII. PROFESSOR SCORPIO APOLOGIZES.

CLAD in spotless linen, Professor Scorpio sat in a deep-cushioned chair, his head swathed in white. He wasn't wearing a turban; his headdress consisted of bandages. Despite his black beard, the professor looked very pale, as though still suffering from injuries incurred the night before.

Scorpio was in the reception room of the bizarre house that he called his Castle. He was receiving a committee of wealthy neighbors, who had come to express their indignation over the theft of Paula Lodi's jewels and the abduction of her husband. They were finding, to their surprise, that Scorpio was quite as indignant as they were.

Death in the Stars

There were three men on the committee: Henry Denwood, Niles Rondon, and a man named Hugo Grendale. Denwood had been chosen, because he was generally liked by everyone in the colony. Rondon represented the group who wanted action; he was known to be a go-getter, and was the one man who had actually managed to put up a struggle with Carradon's abductors.

As for Grendale, he was one of the wealthiest members of the Calada colony; therefore much esteemed in a community where money held the greatest sway. Moreover, Grendale had a domineering manner, that went with his big-jowled, beetle-browed face. He was the very sort to deal with a faker like Scorpio.

The committee had brought two others with them. One was Lamont Cranston, invited by Denwood, who felt that a newcomer's opinion might produce a fresh viewpoint. The other was Sheriff Kirk, summoned by Grendale, who wanted to show Scorpio that the law was on the side of the committee.

"No one can regret last night's events more than I," spoke Scorpio in a silky tone. "Miss Lodi was one of my most valued clients. It grieves me that she should have suffered financial loss."

"I think I understand," boomed Grendale, thrusting his heavy face forward. "You don't like your clients to lose money, or any other valuables that they might hand over to you."

"Exactly!" returned Scorpio, with a weary grin. "Paula Lodi was one of my best patrons. Does it occur to you"—he tilted his head, wisely—"that she might have given me her jewels, eventually, as payment for my séances?"

"Tommyrot!"

Before Grendale's booming tone had faded, Scorpio was gesturing about the room. The place was decorated with valuable tapestries, jeweled lamps, carvings of jade and ivory. Even the floor was covered with rare Oriental rugs, so thick that they overlapped.

"All these," declared Scorpio, blandly, "are the gifts of those who believe in the stars, and word from the spirits who dwell in the beyond."

"Which brands you as a swindler!" thundered Grendale. "I'll drive you and all your sort out of this colony!"

"Begin with your own committee, then." suggested Scorpio. "You have quite a reputation as a financier, Mr. Grendale. I happen to know the inside of that story; how you bought up worthless lands, and then swung irrigation projects your own direction."

"If you feel that I swindle the rich, I can only reply that you have swindled the poor. As for you, Rondon"—Scorpio swung to the square-jawed man—"you are quite young to possess a fortune, considering that you did not inherit one. I understand that you are a promoter who puts new inventions on the market. You have found it a very profitable business, haven't you?"

"Yes. I have," returned Rondon, hotly, "because I do my best to give full value to the stockholders in every new company that I form."

"But some of those companies have faded—"

"Because no one can guarantee the success of a new invention," retorted Rondon. "Since promotion is my business, I have to consider my own profit. But I can't pick sure things always."

Death in the Stars

Professor Scorpio clapped his hands. Two darkish men appeared; both were tall and very thin, and clad in white like their master. They had the look of Hindus.

"Serve the refreshments, Chandra," ordered Scorpio. "Go to my study, Agbar, and bring me one of the astrological charts under the sign of Gemini."

CHANDRA brought drinks, which Grendale and Rundon accepted gingerly, as though they suspected poison. Even Denwood was a bit apprehensive, until he saw Cranston smile and raise his glass. By that time, Agbar arrived with the astrological chart, which proved to be a large, handsomely printed sheet.

"For you, Rundon," announced Scorpio, extending the chart with a slight bow. "Your birthday happens to be on June 7th, which is under the sign of Gemini, or the Twins. The chart reveals that you have great ability as a speculator. Your danger lies in undertaking too many enterprises at the same time.

"Gemini people are clever"—Scorpio's eyes narrowed toward Rundon—"and highly aggressive. But they think too much of their own opinions. When they meddle with the affairs of others"—the professor's tone lowered to its sepulchral pitch—"they are apt to bring disaster to themselves."

Rundon's anger rose.

"If this is a threat, Scorpio," he began, "I warn you—"

"No warning is necessary," interposed Scorpio, smoothly. "I have simply quoted the chart that you hold in your hand. It was prepared long before I ever met you, Rundon. Remember, the stars never fail."

Rundon's next action actually backed Scorpio's claim that the Gemini nature was twofold. Settling suddenly in his chair, Rundon forgot his anger and decided to treat the whole thing as a jest.

"The stars never fail," he laughed. "Neither does ice. Good work, professor. You've kidded us so far. Let's go back to our real purpose. You say that Paula Lodi would have given you her jewels eventually, if she had managed to keep them."

"Very probably," nodded Scorpio, "and of her own volition."

"I guess your point is proven," conceded Rundon, ruefully. "Paula was even starting to hand over some of her rings to that spook that you produced—"

Rundon's pause tricked Scorpio. The professor thought that the speaker had finished his sentence; but such was not the case. Rundon was raising his glass, to help the pretense; and that clever touch brought just what he wanted—a triumphant grin from Scorpio's beard. Like a whiplash, Rundon snapped the rest of his statement.

"—when Carradon tried to stop her!" The glass aside, Rundon was thrusting his strong jaw forward, while his eyes showed an accusing blaze. "That was the stumbling block, Scorpio! You'd never have gotten those jewels from Paula; not while Carradon was around!"

Scorpio began to fume denials; but Rundon held the upper hand.

"You even rang in a fake spook of Paula's first husband," continued Rundon, "figuring that was the only way of offsetting Carradon's influence. But Carradon spiked that game, the moment he saw it. He grabbed the phony ghost."

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"That's when your pals snatched the jewels. That's why they grabbed Carradon later. He knew that the ghost was cheesecloth, and that you were a faker. But even more important, he proved that he wouldn't let his wife remain a dupe."

Totally outguessed by Rondon, Scorpio lost his head. He even forgot his weakened pose, by springing from his chair. In the light, The Shadow saw flecks of powder on Scorpio's beard; he had used it to make his face look pale. Forgetting discretion, the professor would have stormed some statements admitting his real racket, if another man hadn't entered the argument.

It was Grendale who interrupted. Overanxious to dominate the situation, the big-browed financier decided to force the issue, and, thereby, he unwittingly helped Scorpio.

Bounding to his feet, Grendale shook his fist at Scorpio's beard; used his other hand to beckon to the sheriff.

"This man is a rascal, sheriff!" roared Grendale. "I demand his immediate arrest! Act at once, in the name of the law!"

With Grendale's voice drowning out Rondon's, Scorpio came to his wits, shifting his defense to meet the new challenge.

"My arrest?" he queried. "On what ground, Mr. Grendale?"

"On a swindle charge," retorted Grendale. "Because of the fake ghost you produced last night."

"What proof have you that the ghost was not real?"

"The cheesecloth that Rondon mentioned!"

Professor Scorpio shrugged. He looked around the room, as though expecting to see shreds of cheesecloth decorating the chandelier and other fixtures. He glanced at his visitors questioningly. Then, as the sheriff's hand clamped his shoulder, Scorpio chortled:

"I see no cheesecloth. I still claim that my ghost was real. Where is your evidence that might prove otherwise?"

"Search the place, sheriff!" ordered Grendale. "Turn it inside out. We'll find the proof of this fellow's fakery. We'll show him the evidence!"

SCORPIO'S lips made a ruddy curve through his beard. He was grinning, with good reason. Last night's evidence had been destroyed and could never be used against him.

There was another factor, that The Shadow recognized. Though Scorpio undoubtedly had other props, he certainly wouldn't keep them where any ordinary search would disclose them.

The professor brushed the sheriff's hand aside as though it were a bothersome fly. Suave again, he bowed.

"Go right ahead," he began. "You are quite welcome to search these premises, inside and out—"

He paused. Fortunately for Scorpio his beard concealed his change of expression. He had forgotten something very important. The fact was apparent to The Shadow, though neither Grendale nor the sheriff caught it. Then, remembering Rondon's trick, Scorpio tagged another statement to his incompleting sentence.

"Inside and out," he repeated, "after you come here with a search warrant! Until then, gentlemen, let us postpone our discussion."

Scorpio clapped his hands for the Hindus. With many bows and courtesies, the servants ushered the visitors toward the door. Grendale was still trying to argue, but Rondon kept urging him along, insisting that a further stay was useless, to which Denwood agreed, after a glance at Cranston.

Outside, they separated. Rondon and Grendale were taking a boat back to the Community Center, and the sheriff went with them. It was beginning to dawn on Grendale that he had ruined Rondon's efforts to make Scorpio show his hand.

Something was dawning on Denwood, too, as he and his friend Cranston entered the speedboat which Harry Vincent had waiting at the wharf. Glancing back at the Castle, Denwood remarked:

"Scorpio made a bad slip, but his recovery was clever. He'd have shown us through the place, if he hadn't remembered something. It couldn't be the stolen goods; that's something he never would have forgotten. I wonder what it is that he has hidden."

"Something that he found quite useful," returned The Shadow, in Cranston's tone, "and which he may need again."

"But what could that be?"

There was a smile on The Shadow's disguised lips, as he named the answer to Denwood's question:

"Edward Barcla."

CHAPTER VIII. THE CHANCE TRAIL.

BACK at Denwood's lodge, The Shadow summed up the Scorpio situation as it stood, doing so in a calm, impartial style suited to the manner of Lamont Cranston. He made his summary for the benefit of Harry and Denwood, whose cooperation he needed in ferreting out the sequence of unusual crime.

The logic of Scorpio's position was The Shadow's theme. The bearded professor had spoken the truth, when he stated that the wealthy residents of the Calada colony were voluntarily pouring cash into his coffers. There were two weaknesses, however, to the original game, and each was dependent upon the other. The Shadow pointed them out, in detail.

The first was how long the racket would last under rising opposition; the second, how soon Scorpio would be detected in a fraud.

"We saw what happened last night," explained The Shadow. "Carradon was ready to do anything to combat Scorpio. But he acted through rage, not wisdom. He wanted to stop the séance, rather than expose it; but he almost accomplished both."

"But what about Carradon?" queried Denwood, anxiously. "Is he dead or alive?"

"Probably quite alive."

"But he might be dead! Don't forget, Cranston, Drury was murdered in an attempt to kill you!"

The Shadow shook his head.

"The major crime is robbery," he declared. "on a wholesale basis. We must consider everything else as incidental. I was not scheduled for murder, Denwood. I was simply slated for elimination."

"For elimination?"

"Yes. Through death, because it happened to be the easiest way. If the plane had crashed, it would have been termed an accident. But in Carradon's case, abduction was simpler. If the crooks had been told to kill him, they would have settled him with bullets and left his body in the boathouse."

The logic impressed Denwood. He began to see that crime had efficiency behind it. He could picture, too, that Carradon, or other persons—in fact, anyone but The Shadow—might be more useful to the crooks alive than dead.

"Consider this question," suggested The Shadow. "Why was Carradon abducted at all?"

"Simply answered," returned Denwood. "Because he grabbed the fake ghost."

"Not at all," declared The Shadow. "Scorpio destroyed that particular evidence. Carradon was carried away because he saw the so-called lake monster and learned that it was actually a boat, used to convey stolen goods."

Denwood's expression was one of complete amazement. He had thought of the lake monster as a myth; a wild dream of mistaken observers, which Professor Scorpio had heard about and exaggerated. No one, other than The Shadow, had guessed that criminals had escaped by water the night before. The consensus was that they had fled through the woods beyond the boathouse.

Scorpio can talk, and will," assured The Shadow, "but not under the crude persuasion used today. He must be confronted with facts that we can obtain through an accomplice."

"Such as Barcla?" questioned Denwood.

"Yes," replied The Shadow. "But Barcla is now with Scorpio. We must look for another man."

"Among the actual jewel thieves?"

"No. They came into the living room in the dark, and went out by the veranda door, to escape in the boat. They had nothing to do with the spook act. But there was a man that I met outside the cellar window, who had a hammer. His job was to nail the trap from below, after the séance; but Scorpio decided to fire the house, instead."

"One of Scorpio's Hindu servants?"

Again, The Shadow answered. Denwood was jumping to too many wrong conclusions. The Shadow explained that he had gone to Scorpio's today partly to check on the servants in question. Neither of the scrawny Hindus could have been the hammer man. His build was chunky.

"In all probability," decided The Shadow, "the man was one of the Lodi servants, planted there by Scorpio. One of your servants betrayed you, Denwood; hence we can assume that there are other traitors in the colony. I think that Vincent and I shall call at the Lodi home, this evening."

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THE SHADOW finished with a cryptic smile, which indicated that he had no more to say. But Denwood, viewing the inscrutable features of Cranston, decided that there were many more details that remained unmentioned.

Until dusk, The Shadow worked at Denwood's desk, studying the locations of the previous robberies and asking about rumors that concerned the lake monster.

Recalling those rumors, Denwood realized that the monster had been seen on the evenings when Professor Scorpio had given séances, and could, therefore, be linked with the crimes.

So far, suspicion had attached only to Scorpio, because he had been in the homes where valuables had been missing later. Furthermore, Scorpio, despite his mystic claims, was a tangible thing, whereas the lake monster was commonly regarded as imaginary.

It was bold of Scorpio, Denwood decided, to talk openly about the thing seen in the lake. Since people who challenged Scorpio doubted everything he said, they would naturally reject the monster story more and more, every time Scorpio mentioned it.

By dusk, Denwood's chart was crisscrossed with lines, the main stem being the bearings that The Shadow had taken on the mountain peak the night before. The lines were a mere maze to Denwood, but he felt that The Shadow was tracking down the curious man-made creatures that actually glided through Lake Calada on nights when crime was rampant.

With Harry, The Shadow set out in the speedboat, but when they reached the Lodi dock they separated. Harry took the path to the hacienda, while The Shadow circled through the woods. He wanted to take another look into the cellar, to see what evidence he might discover of a trapdoor in the charred remnants of the alcove floor.

Paula Lodi was in the living room, in a very weepy mood, but quite pleased because people had come to visit her. She was talking about Carradon in one breath, and Scorpio in the next. Both were "poor dears," in Paula's estimation, and she felt that they would eventually understand each other.

She was sure that Carradon would return, and she hoped that Scorpio would be well enough to give his lecture at the Community Center, which was scheduled for this evening. Unfortunately, Paula would not be able to go, but Professor Scorpio had sent a horoscope to cheer her.

Among those present, Harry saw Lois Melvin, who—to her credit—was not much impressed by Paula's weeping. But Harry was more interested in noting the servants; and he spotted the man he wanted, a stocky fellow named Rufus.

He was the only one who answered the description given by The Shadow; and his face was new to Harry. Evidently, Rufus had kept very much in the background the night before, which further identified him as the hammer man.

Cutting his visit short, Harry went down to the dock, but found the speedboat missing. He heard its thrum out on the lake and knew that The Shadow, not expecting him so soon, had gone on an excursion after finishing his trip to the cellar. Harry decided to wait on the dock.

A TRIP back to Paula's living room would have been preferable, for a reason that Harry did not guess. At that moment, Paula, in her usual fluttery fashion, was handing the horoscope to Rufus, telling him to put it carefully away.

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Carrying the printed paper, Rufus stopped near the fireplace; studied the horoscope by the light from the logs.

Only Lois noticed the servant's action. After Paula sent Rufus on some errand, Lois stepped to the bookshelf where he had tucked the horoscope, and obtained it. Since no one was near the fireplace, the girl copied Rufus' action of reading the paper by the firelight. She scanned one paragraph:

A usual characteristic of this sign is medium height, few persons being over five feet nine. It is not meet for them to worry at trifles: they should watch their action, and place confidence in friends, before making decisions.

A change came over the paper. An invisible hand seemed to imprint it with dabs of brown. The thing was spooky, and Lois nearly lost the paper from her shaky hands. Then, steadying, she saw that the marks were numbers, each inscribed upon a word.

The paragraph then read:

A usual characteristic of this sign is medium height, few persons being over five feet nine. It is not meet for them to worry at trifles: they should watch their action, and place confidence in friends, before making decisions.

In rotation, from one to ten, the words spelled a message:

Meet at usual place before nine and watch for sign.

Lois turned from the fireplace. Nearing the bookshelf, she glanced at the horoscope again. The brownish numerals had faded from the important paragraph. She recognized that they were in a sympathetic ink that appeared under heat but faded when the paper cooled.

Hurriedly thrusting the paper where she had found it, Lois went out to the veranda just as Rufus returned.

Lois linked the obvious. The chart was one of Professor Scorpio's. Rufus had held it by the fire to read it. There must be some connection between Scorpio and Paula's servant. As for the meeting place in the note, Lois could guess it: Scorpio's Castle.

Starting down the path, Lois used a flashlight to pick a side route. It was a little-used path along the water, that led to the Castle, nearly a mile away, on this same shore of the lake. Lois knew the path, was sure she could cover the ground in ten minutes. She wouldn't have to worry about the flashlight, she thought, as she neared the Castle.

From the dock, Harry watched the light dwindle among the trees. He did not follow; instead, he sneaked toward the boathouse and produced his own flashlight, intending to signal The Shadow as soon as the speedboat came close enough.

Suspecting that the person on the path was Lois, Harry darted occasional glances to make sure that no light followed the girl's. He saw none; hence reasoned that she was safe for the time being. But Harry could not observe what happened in the Lodi hacienda.

Rufus had stopped by the bookshelf. He noted the horoscope turned askew; drew it out far enough to notice dim marks in brown, that should have faded completely several minutes before.

Unobserved by Paula, the servant entered a darkened room, looked off in the direction of Scorpio's Castle. He caught the last twinkles of Lois' flashlight.

Easing the door shut, Rufus sidled to a telephone and made a prompt call, speaking in a whisper that he confined to the mouthpiece. He reported that Lois had intercepted the message and had started for the Castle. Rufus finished that call with a low chuckle.

It was only eight o'clock, an hour before the scheduled meeting time. But there would be a meeting, and not a usual one, in advance of nine.

Others would be promptly on their way, to handle this emergency. If he could get away conveniently, Rufus intended to join them. Their new purpose would be to put an end to Lois' expedition before she interfered with previous plans.

On this occasion, Rufus was quite sure that neither he nor his comrades in crime would meet with interference from The Shadow.

CHAPTER IX. DOUBLE FLIGHT.

THERE were lights on Scorpio's dock when Lois neared it. The fact puzzled her, for the moonlight showed the professor's own speedboat moored off shore, and Lois could hear the lap of water against its sides. The Professor's craft was small and rakish, about the fastest thing on the lake. It was one that Paula had given him.

Stealing closer through the trees, Lois saw why Scorpio had no need for his own boat. A compact cabin cruiser was at the dock; it supplied the lights that Lois observed. Some of the professor's loyal disciples had come to take him to the lecture. He was standing there, wearing an oversized turban, his two Hindus with him.

Lois watched the cruiser chug away. She remembered that Scorpio's lecture began at nine, and would take at least an hour. He wouldn't be back until ten-thirty, and his servants would be gone that long, too. It was rather puzzling, considering the secret message that had come to Paula's.

Suddenly, Lois had a likely answer.

Professor Scorpio was under suspicion; his servants likewise. He might fear that his Castle was being watched. If so, he would be making a grave mistake to meet with his accomplices. But that would not prevent them from meeting on their own, at his order. Perhaps special instructions awaited them in the Castle.

It might mean opportunity for Lois. With nearly a half hour to spare, she could enter the Castle; if she didn't find anything, she could hide and witness the coming meeting. With that plan in mind, the girl crept up the slope.

Lois hadn't bargained with her own imagination. At the shore, the purr of motors, the lap of the lake ripples, had been contact with life. All that was gone. Wooded silence was deadly. She felt dwarfed by the giant California pines towering above her.

The Castle reared up like an awaiting monster. Its stony hulk resembled a crouching sphinx come suddenly to life, ready to devour her. Shuddering, Lois took a while to regain her nerve; then she advanced, careful not to use her flashlight.

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She found the front door too formidable. Skirting the Castle, she was nearing a rear door, feeling along the stone walls, which had a clammy touch. Her head brushed a strip of wood. Lifting her hand, she found the strip to be the ledge of a small window. Probing, it swung inward and upward; even better, it was loose!

Lois paused long enough to reassure herself that no one could see her enter. She was wearing a dark-blue dress; her rubber-soled camp shoes were dark too, like her stockings. Her black hair helped; no one could see her face if she turned toward the window.

Drawing herself up to the high ledge, the girl pushed her hands through and swung the sash inward. Its hinges creaked; then Lois was gripping the sill within. She was halfway through the window, when a horror froze her.

In the thick gloom of that room, Lois was staring into a face that looked back with a gaze as petrified as her own!

The face was chalkish, but it couldn't have been whiter than the girl's. Teetered on the window ledge, Lois felt balanced between life and death. With a valiant shove of her numbed fingers, she gave herself an outward thrust, landing on the turf beneath the window.

She had a fleeting glimpse, as she went, of the other face, recoiling deeper into the room. That recollection saved her nerve. The horror, whatever it was, had been afraid of her; therefore, it couldn't have been as terrible as it looked.

Was it an artificial spook, placed there by Scorpio to scare off prowlers? A thing actuated by the lift and fall of the sash, so that it came forward and then returned?

Perhaps it was simpler than that. It could have been her own reflection, from a mirror that Scorpio had set inside the window. Yet Lois could hardly believe that her imagination had rendered her own face as hideous as the visage she had seen.

Satisfied, however, that trickery was the answer, she resolved to try another entry, this time using the flashlight. Pushing her hand through the window, she pressed the switch. The light showed a small, square room, empty except for a cot in the corner.

No mechanical ghost; no mirror. But Lois dropped outside again. There had been something in that room; something that lived. Perhaps the human horror was more afraid than she was.

Lois listened. She heard it creep inside the house, along a passage. It was moving toward the rear door, past a corner of the irregularly shaped Castle. Lois could hear the grating noise of a bolt being drawn; the click of a big doorknob. A wave of triumph seized the girl.

The horror was trying to escape her!

Quickly, Lois rounded the corner, just as the door creaked open. She saw an upright oblong of blackness, then a white face that shifted outward. The door was creaking shut when Lois pressed her flashlight switch again. The beam spread squarely on the closing door.

Against the shutting barrier. Lois saw the pasty, haggard face of Edward Barcla!

THE man gave a snarl that carried fear with its challenge. Wildly, he hurled a missile toward Lois. The thing was a big ball, black and twirling, that some people would have mistaken for a bomb; but Lois had seen a

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similar thing at one of Scorpio's lectures.

The sphere was a star globe, showing the constellations, like a map of the world. Barcla had evidently grabbed it as an improvised weapon.

Glancing from the wall, well wide of Lois' head, the globe bounded with a tinny plunk and struck the ground. By then, Barcla was in full flight, tearing through the underbrush like a maddened deer.

Lois hadn't a chance to follow him. She extinguished the flashlight and listened to his dwindling crashes. He was keeping to the back woods, traveling as if he expected a horde of demons on his trail.

It wasn't all cowardice on Barcla's part, though Lois did not realize it. Barcla simply thought that he had met the living ghost of the night before; otherwise, The Shadow.

As for Lois, she was considerably scared herself. She started to run, but she did not follow Barcla. Her feet simply took control and chose the easiest path—past the Castle and down the slope. Next, Lois was stumbling, rolling, fortunately escaping the trees. She wound up, laughing half-hysterically, near the water's edge.

Sounds from the lake sobered her. Feeling safe, she considered what she had learned. This much was certain: Professor Scorpio had been harboring Edward Barcla, a fugitive from justice. Barcla was one of Scorpio's tools; probably the most important one.

It wouldn't do to stay here for the meeting. Lois needed help; the one person she thought of was Niles Rundon. He was across the lake, at his cabin, expecting friends for a poker game. They always came on nights when Scorpio gave lectures, after leaving their wives at the community house.

There was a way to get to Rundon's in Scorpio's speedboat. Lois knew the craft well; she had driven it when it belonged to Paula. It had no ignition lock, merely a switch that anyone could press.

There it lay waiting some twenty yards from shore, a canvas already removed from the cockpit and lying over the stern. Probably Scorpio had intended to use it this evening, before the cabin cruiser came for him.

Reaching the dock, Lois looked for a rowboat and found one, but it was chained and locked. There was a quicker and quieter way to reach the speedster: by swimming to it. Once in the motorboat, Lois could come back and scoop her clothes from the end of the dock.

Lack of the dark dress wouldn't matter, for the lake, like the dock, was almost black and Lois expected no lights to come her way. She felt quite secure while preparing for her swim, for it was easy to watch the lake and make sure that no one approached. The speedboat was only twenty yards away; Lois could reach it easily.

Lights of moving boats all were distant; in fact, the nearest of such craft was loitering at Paula Lodi's dock, almost a mile away. Lois heard its idling motor throb louder just as she was diving into the water.

With the splash, there were sudden shouts from the shore, close by. Coming to the surface, Lois saw a flashlight lick from the direction of Scorpio's Castle toward the dock that she had just left. Some of the crooks had arrived for the meeting!

They were rushing out along the dock while Lois made quick strokes to the speedboat. Nearing the boat, the girl took an underwater dip, came up beneath and gripped the boat's far side. The mooring rope was handy; Lois worked at it.

Death in the Stars

She knew that the men with the flashlights had spotted the garments that she had left on the dock; but she had dived from the end and was sure that they would look in that direction first. They wouldn't know that she had veered to the left when she began her swim.

The boat that had been at Lodi's dock was throbbing this way, but it wasn't operating its searchlight. Lois still had the benefit of blackness all about her.

Two men were growling from the deck; Rufus and another. They had flashed their light straight out; deceived by the ripples, they thought that Lois had gone under the pier, as the nearest hiding place.

Their light did sweep the speedboat while the girl was undoing the mooring rope on the other side; it moved away again. They did not think that Lois could have reached the boat so quickly.

Then the rope was loose. Rolling over the low side, Lois drew back the sheltering canvas as she kicked the starter. The craft snapped into motion. There were snarls, as the light came its way. Over the stern, the men could see Lois' sleek back and shoulders as she crouched at the wheel. They yanked out revolvers and began to fire.

Bullets ricocheted from the water like skipping stones. Rufus and his crony were hoping to explain murder by claiming that they were preventing the theft of Scorpio's boat; but they didn't come anywhere near a hit. The speedster was a whisking thing, as it shot out into the lake under Lois skillful guidance.

The girl knew the boat. She veered it one direction, then the other. Even the flashlight lost its course temporarily. Then the foiled marksmen spotted it, whipping off to the straightaway, out of range. Over the stern, a girl's long, slender arm gave them a derisive wave.

Lois wasn't going back to the dock. The canvas tarpaulin could make amends for her scarcity of raiment when she reached Rundon's. The sooner she brought back aid, the better. Though Barcla was gone, there still might be time to trap Rufus and another, if they were foolish enough to stay near the Castle too long.

Perhaps it was the swim that had cleared Lois thoughts. At any rate, reason told the girl that she wasn't out of danger. There could be crooks on the water, as well as on land. Looking back over her shoulder, Lois saw something that fulfilled her conviction.

A speedboat had whipped in beside the Castle dock, from the direction of Paula Lodi's. It was the craft that Lois had seen while preparing for her swim. Spurts came from it—the jabs of guns. Foolish shots, thought Lois, for she was far from range.

The flashing light was gone from the dock; the large craft, veering, was turning after Lois' boat. Its own lights went off, too, which made Lois think that the men on the dock had exchanged shouts with those in the pursuing craft, telling them to take up the chase. She didn't guess that they had exchanged shots, not shouts, to the detriment of the men on the dock.

Lois needed no light. She was bearing on a darkened stretch of shore cater-cornered across the lake; that marked the location of Rundon's cabin. She was sure that she could outdistance the craft behind her. She looked for other boats, saw only one, indicated by tiny specks of light.

It was coming from the community house, a slow boat, bringing Rundon's friends, which meant that it must be close to nine o'clock. That boat would take at least twenty minutes to reach Rundon's; Lois could make the trip in half that time. She recalled again that this speedster she was in was the fastest thing on the lake.

Death in the Stars

Not quite. There was a craft that Lois did not know about—a slinking, silent thing that could slither through the lake with scarcely a wave behind it and touch speeds that would make it seem other than a man-made device.

It was more like a fabulous sea monster, rampant in the waters of Lake Calada; a low-built streak, awash with the very surface that it sliced. The ghost, perhaps, of some prehistoric denizen from a forgotten age.

Yet it was real, that monstrous craft, and it was actually in sight, had Lois known where to look and how to detect it. The thing was coming from another angle, gaining on the speedboat, as though hungrily seeking to devour it.

The mystery ship had been bound for Scorpio's Castle, when it veered; its hidden crew were taking up Lois' trail. Only foamy ripples revealed that men of crime were again on hand, this time seeking to thwart a rescue before The Shadow could arrive!

CHAPTER X. CRIME'S CHOICE.

FROM the shore in front of his cabin, Niles Rondon heard the loud roar of a wide-open motor and stared out toward the lake. He was expecting visitors, but not in a boat that came with a rattle like kettle-drums.

It couldn't be the crowd from the Community Center; they weren't due for a while. Besides, they had a plodding boat, and were conservative to insist on lights.

Rondon had a rickety dock, but he wasn't near it and had no time to get to it. The thing that was roaring in his direction threatened to climb the low shore and crash the cabin, which was only a dozen yards back. Hastily, Rondon found his flashlight and spotted it toward the lake.

He saw the boat and recognized it: Scorpio's speedster. The motor cut off instantly; the exhaust gave a chow, and the slim craft actually bounced toward the beach. Then, carried in by a sweep of waves behind it, the boat grounded violently. Its pilot practically hurdled over the bow, to land on the sand.

Rondon gaped at a figure clad in what seemed an enormous dressing gown; then he recognized the garb as a canvas tarpaulin, with a piece of mooring rope for a belt. He recognized Lois in the crazy-styled creation, as she came tripping toward him. He seemed to think that the girl had come from a masquerade.

"The skirt is too long," laughed Rondon. "I think a few tucks would improve—"

"Quick, Niles!" Lois was gripping his arm with earnest hands. "You've got to listen! They're after me! They'll make trouble for both of us!"

Rondon could hear another thrum from the lake. He took a quick look at Lois' improvised garb and turned her toward the cabin. He seemed to grasp much that had happened.

"Get in there," he told her. "Put on some dry clothes. The old outfit's there—the one you used for the camping trip."

"But you can't stay here alone—"

"I'll handle this, Lois," interrupted Rondon. "Nobody from Scorpio can give me any trouble."

Death in the Stars

Lois suddenly decided to obey. She saw Rondon reaching for his pocket, and thought that he had a gun. She didn't look back, as she stumbled toward the cabin. If she had, she would have seen that Rondon merely produced a pipe.

All the while, Rondon was staring at the water; his flashlight had a broad range and he saw what happened very close to shore. He spied Denwood's speedboat, cutting a wide arc toward the flimsy dock. For some reason, it had veered away from Lois' course.

It was swinging back again, and Rondon saw why. There was a glisten in the speedboat's wake; behind the shine, a long stretch of foam. The boat had made a remarkable zigzag between Lois and some craft that had pursued her speedster.

A clever maneuver, and one that had proven very timely. Otherwise, Lois would have been intercepted by the mystery ship before she reached the shore. Then Rondon gave a call; too late. The speedboat, slashing back again to cut off the strange craft, had run into uncharted shoal some distance from the dock.

There was a splintering, as the prow crashed the hidden rocks; a dying gasp of a motor. But Rondon, with a last sweep of his flashlight, saw the figure at the helm. The pilot of the speedboat added mystery to the situation; made Rondon momentarily forget the other water thing that he had glimpsed.

The speedboat's pilot was cloaked in black; he wore a slouch hat. Rondon could see him no longer, for he had sprung from the wrecked boat and reached the shore past a batch of large rocks. All that Rondon glimpsed was the cloaked pilot's companion, a man in ordinary attire, who also dodged behind the rocks.

A slight thump came from the opposite direction, near the dock. Rondon turned off the light to listen; then stole in the opposite direction. Hearing approaching steps, he ventured hoarsely:

"Who's there?"

LOIS heard the call, from within the cabin, where she was sliding into slacks and flannel shirt. She edged to a window, threw back her soaked hair and stared into the darkness. She thought she could hear mutters beyond where Rondon was, but they didn't worry her. She had heard the speedboat crash farther down the shore.

Then, as Lois was stooping to tie the laces of her sneakers, she heard Rondon's shout;

"Lois! Quick! Bring the rifle!"

It was above the big fireplace, Rondon's gun, and Lois took it for granted that it was loaded. Yanking it from the rack, the girl dashed to the door; she could hear Rondon, trying to voice another yell. Men were struggling along the shore near the little dock, and Rondon was trying to get away, to break for the cabin.

Lois dashed for the group. At that instant, a flashlight sent its gleam from behind a rock down the shore. From another angle, singularly close to the cabin, came a strident laugh that seemed to mock the fighters that the flash gleam displayed.

There were half a dozen of those fighters—rough-looking men, who were trying to suppress Rondon's punches. They flattened him as the light came; at the laugh, they scattered, leaving Rondon on hands and knees. Some were shooting for the light; their bullets were merely bashing rock. Others were trying to locate the laugh.

Death in the Stars

Their taunter aided them. He returned their fire, along with further mockery. His shots were like knife stabs; only the protection of trees saved his diving foemen. They were taking to the trunks of the huge pines, which were plentiful on this shore.

Into the path of light came a cloaked figure, swooping like a gigantic bat. It was Lois' first glimpse of The Shadow, and her last for a while. His move was a feint to make the foemen shift. They were stretching past the trees, shooting hurriedly, as The Shadow reversed his twist.

He was in darkness again, and he reached the corner of the cabin ahead of the aiming marksmen. From there, his gun blasted new responses, with results. Crooks had craned too far, and The Shadow winged a pair of them without even checking on their gun spurts. He simply jabbed his shots toward the sides of the trees, where he knew that they would be.

The howls of the wounded men brought a barrage from the others; not toward The Shadow, for they were dodging him, but in the direction of the light. They finished it, this time, but they didn't get a victim with it.

At The Shadow's order, Harry Vincent had simply perched the light on the rock and ducked away. He was already circuiting, to reach the cabin from the far side and join The Shadow at the sheltering corner.

There came new evidence of The Shadow's strategy; something which none of the foemen guessed. His shots were steady, at carefully spaced intervals. He seemed content to keep the crooks where they were.

Actually, Harry had taken over. Through darkness, The Shadow was making a swift, silent trip beyond the cabin, to come in upon the enemy from the rear.

Cut off from the craft that they had left at the dock, the whole tribe could be routed. The Shadow was acting as a one-man squad, in a game that promised a complete clean-up. Unfortunately, certain circumstances were combining against him.

Unwittingly, Lois was providing the first complication. She was creeping forward to where Rondon lay. He had found a tree of his own, away from the outspread path of fire. He heard Lois whisper, took the rifle that the girl handed him. Half gasping, he questioned:

"Did you load it?"

Lois suppressed a startled "No!" She wanted to creep back to the cabin; as she started, Rondon tried to follow her, but sank back with a stifled groan. Lois decided not to leave him, even to get the cartridges, for she was afraid he would be unable to use the rifle.

Amid spasmodic shots from trees and cabin, she whispered what had happened at Scorpio's Castle. She had concluded that brief account, when the next situation came; the one that most seriously damaged The Shadow's plans.

A chug sounded just offshore. The noise of guns had drowned its approach. A light swept the whole cabin front, a far greater glow than any flashlight could provide. It was the searchlight of the motorboat that was bringing Rondon's friends from the Community Center.

THERE were yells from near the dock, coupled with gunshots. The dock itself was in darkness; so was the peculiar craft beside it. In that boat were two men, reserves of the crew that had come ashore. They saw The Shadow moving in upon their pals.

Death in the Stars

With a quick whirl, The Shadow returned the fire. His shots clanged steel—the low deck of the imitation lake monster. There wasn't time for more fire in that direction. The men at the trees had wheeled, too. They had to be settled rapidly.

They heard Rondon's cry to Lois, a frantic one, inserted at the crucial instant:

"Back to the cabin! Don't let them get hold of you!"

But Lois wouldn't listen. She tried to drag Rondon with her. With one accord, the crooks converged upon the girl, not merely for her capture. They guessed that if they congregated around Lois and Rondon, The Shadow couldn't risk shots in their direction.

They made one mistake. In their haste, they did not fire at The Shadow. He took advantage of the momentary break. A streak of living blackness, he flung himself for the same goal. As the crooks reached Lois and Rondon, The Shadow was among them.

There was a clash of swinging guns. The Shadow started it, and his opponents, somewhat short on bullets, answered in kind. In toward the swirl came Harry Vincent; out of it came Lois Melvin. Spying Harry's dart, The Shadow had twisted the girl free and flung her to his agent.

Lois settled limply in Harry's arms. She had taken a glancing blow from a gun. Harry swung her from her feet, dropped her past the corner of the cabin, then wheeled about to aid The Shadow. Harry thought that his part was to be a minor one; instead, it was a lifesaver. If ever The Shadow had needed aid, it was then.

Some crook had gotten in a lucky gun stroke. The Shadow was reeling, blindly. He had struck a tree, but couldn't even grasp it to find shelter behind it. A pair of thugs were rallying, to aim at the cloaked foe who had almost demolished them.

Harry filled the breach with the most ardent rapid fire that he had ever supplied. He didn't care about anyone, Rondon included, when The Shadow's life was at stake. Harry would have delivered that heartfelt barrage even if Lois had still been a prisoner.

He was pumping with a fresh gun, stopping each recoil with a trigger tug. His aim was a trifle high, but it counted just the same. With bullets whining inches above their heads, the crooks did not stop to argue. The wounded pressed those who were aiming at The Shadow; they all went reeling away from the glare of the searchlight.

It was a strange flight. Of six men, two were crippled, another pair groggy, from the hammering of The Shadow's guns. They were actually propelled by the final pair, who had tried to finish The Shadow. In the mass was Rondon, stumbling helplessly, tripping over the rifle that his hands lost as he moved.

If only the men from the boat coming from the Community Center had turned their searchlight on those fugitives, complete victory would have been obtained. Instead, they had beached the boat near the speedster, and the lot of them were piling out, knee-deep in the water. They made a blundering crowd as they came ashore, blocking Harry's chances to fire beyond.

Sweeping Lois with him, Harry reached The Shadow, to find the cloaked fighter halfway to his feet. Despite his daze, The Shadow somehow sized the case. Gripping Harry, he pointed to the speedboat. They made for it, taking Lois on board with them. Seeing The Shadow lift a gun with renewed strength, Harry sprang to the wheel.

Death in the Stars

It took him too many seconds to get the hang of the boat; when he started the motor, he had to work it in reverse, to get clear of the gravel where Lois had beached it. By the time the craft was out from the shore, men were shouting along the dock: but they were the wrong crowd.

Aided by the two men who awaited them, Rondon's captors had clambered into the mystery boat. The yelling men were the ones from the Community Center, and they hadn't an idea of what had happened to the others. Smooth as ever, the so-called lake monster had slithered away.

People had seen it on other nights, but only when searchlights had happened to pick up the craft. Tonight, the only searchlight was turned toward shore. But from The Shadow's speedboat, as it swung out into the lake, a streak of foam was visible.

The Shadow's head had cleared; his eyes were as keen as ever. He saw that the trail was hopeless; the other craft had gotten too long a start upon his boat. But he could mark the direction that the departing boat had taken—toward an island farther down the lake.

Lois Melvin did not hear the whispered laugh that The Shadow uttered. She was limp and senseless. Only Harry Vincent heard it and understood.

Despite the getaway that the crooks had managed, The Shadow could count this night a gain. The abduction of Niles Rondon, like that of Howard Carradon, could be nullified in proper time.

The Shadow knew.

CHAPTER XI. THE PROFESSOR AGREES.

Lois awoke, the next morning, with a very bad headache. She was in her room at the Community Center lodge, the little hotel connected with the Calada Colony, and the fact puzzled her considerably. She had many hazy recollections of the night before, but couldn't remember arriving in the room.

She was trying to dismiss the whole thing as a dream, when she happened to look at the clothes on the chair beside her bed. Instead of her dark-blue dress, she saw her camping outfit.

The whole nightmarish sequence came back clearly. She remembered Paula Lodi's; the dock at Scorpio's, where she had left her other clothes. She recalled events at Rondon's; finally, she remembered returning here to the lodge. She had said good night to some friends, who had brought her back in Scorpio's speedboat.

Lois had been very tired. She had been asking about Niles Rondon, wondering what had become of him. That was the only thing she couldn't remember; and her questions hadn't been answered. Her headache was lessening, as her recollections cleared.

Anxious to learn what had happened to Niles, Lois hurriedly brought clothes from the closet, dressed, and went downstairs.

People were waiting to see her when she reached the dining room. Lois knew two of them as members of the committee which Niles Rondon had joined. One was Hugo Grendale, the other Henry Denwood.

With Denwood was a man whom Lois remembered even better: Lamont Cranston. She smiled when she saw him, to show that she was still grateful for his rescue on the diving plane.

Death in the Stars

They wanted to hear her story and Lois gave it, in perfect detail, up to the point where she and Rundon had been struggling in the hands of captors. Grendale and Denwood left to make telephone calls; turning to Cranston, Lois queried anxiously:

"What about Niles? Is he—"

"He is quite safe," interposed Cranston, calmly. "As safe as Howard Carradon."

"Do you mean that they abducted Niles, too?"

"Yes. Instead of you."

Lois shuddered. Cranston's calm gaze steadied her. Oddly, worries seemed to end with Cranston; perhaps because Lois still recalled the amazing finish of the airplane trip. She wanted to question him further; but, by then, Denwood and Grendale had returned.

"We've checked on Rufus," declared Grendale. "The fellow skipped. But Paula is giving the horoscope to the sheriff. We'll meet him at Scorpio's."

The bearded professor received them very cordially in his reception room at the Castle. Adversity seemed to add to Scorpio's suavity. He seemed quite intrigued with the horoscope that the sheriff brought. He tested its secret ink over the heat of an electric toaster.

"Quite cute of Rufus and his friend," said Scorpio; "to intercept my notes to Paula Lodi and fix them up as secret messages. Didn't you say that Rufus had a pal with him"—the professor turned to Lois—"when he fired at you from my dock?"

Lois nodded.

"Thank you," bowed Scorpio. "Sheriff, I shall drop all charges against Miss Melvin for stealing my speedboat. Considering her predicament, I am glad that the boat was available."

It was the sheriff's turn to storm, along with Grendale. Even Denwood looked annoyed; but Cranston seemed to take the situation rather lightly.

"You have no proof," reminded Scorpio, "that I marked the message on the horoscope. Speaking of horoscopes, I have one for you, Miss Melvin. A more complete one than I gave you before. Your birthday is September 10th. Am I right?"

"You knew that before."

"I suppose I did." Scorpio dismissed the fact with a shrug. "But this horoscope"—he passed a folded paper to Lois—"deals particularly with marriage. As you probably know, your sign is Virgo."

Lois nodded.

"No one born under Virgo," warned Scorpio, "should ever marry a person in Gemini; and it happens"—he stroked his black beard—"that Gemini is Niles Rundon's sign."

WITH all his fakery, Scorpio had moments when he seemed thoroughly sincere. This was one of them. His words impressed Lois. She had wondered sometimes about Niles—whether or not she was actually in love

with him. Despite herself, the girl had doubts.

But the others weren't thinking of Rundon in emotional terms. Scorpio's mention of the missing man roused Hugo Grendale to new anger.

"I see your intimation," began Grendale. "Something has happened to Rundon since his abduction: He is dead—"

"No, no," interrupted Scorpio. "Both he and Carradon are alive and well. Chandra"—he leaned forward to call the servant—"bring me those notes that we found here."

Chandra brought the notes. They were genuine, signed by the missing men, though they had evidently been written under pressure. Both were alike, stating that their captors were willing to consider negotiations for their release.

"It's the boldest thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Grendale, in total amazement. "Imagine it! A kidnaper handing over his own ransom notes in person! That's what you're doing, Scorpio."

"Not at all," argued Scorpio. "As I stated. I found the notes here. I thought that very probably"—his tone was shrewd—"some of you had received word that they were sent to me. Rather than put myself in a false position. I am turning them over to the sheriff. I also felt that, in any event, you would be relieved to know that the missing men were safe."

"Safe?" demanded Grendale. "Where?"

"I do not know." Scorpio gave a regretful shrug. "By the way, have you found any trace of Barcla? When you do, I would like to bring charges against him because of his forcible entry here. I am quite sure that Miss Melvin will testify against him, since she was the person who saw him flee from this house."

For sheer cheek, Professor Scorpio stood paramount. His suave twisting of circumstances to suit his own convenience was remarkable, even to The Shadow. As Cranston, The Shadow had chatted with many men who tried to cover up crookery, but none had come up to Scorpio. The bearded professor had a way of mixing fact with fable, that none could imitate.

His points driven home, he was rising from his chair to conclude the interview. Suavely, he was reminding everyone that he had been delivering a lecture all during the excitement the evening before; that his Hindu servants had been with him and could also be excluded from any blame for the things that had occurred.

The gaping sheriff tried to call a halt by producing a search warrant, but Grendale growled for him to put it away. There was no use searching Scorpio's Castle today, Grendale argued; not with Barcla gone.

As Scorpio smiled them to the door, Grendale was giving him a parting glower, nothing more. It was Denwood who caught a glance from The Shadow, and spoke for the committee.

"By the way, professor," declared Denwood. "We are looking forward to your next séance."

A troubled look flashed over Scorpio. Grendale took sudden interest.

"Where will it be?" he demanded. "And when?"

Death in the Stars

"At your house, Grendale," smiled Denwood. "Tomorrow evening. Mrs. Grendale arranged it, quite a while ago."

"Under the circumstances," began Scorpio, hastily, "I am quite willing to forego—"

"Not at all," interrupted Grendale with a dry chortle, catching his cue from Denwood. "I shall be most delighted to have you with us, professor."

"And the spirits also," added Denwood. "They never fail you, do they, Professor Scorpio?"

His eyes darting, Scorpio finally centered his glare on The Shadow. He was trying to get some inkling of the thoughts behind the impassive face of Cranston. Always a good guesser, Scorpio was quite sure that his impassive visitor was behind the plan suggested. But Scorpio was smart enough to show outward composure.

"The spirits will appear," he assured. "Like the stars, they have never failed me."

BY the time departers reached the dock, Sheriff Kirk wanted to go back to the Castle. He declared that he could settle matters by arresting Professor Scorpio. Grendale and Denwood argued the opposite, but it took The Shadow to convince the sheriff that a waiting policy was best.

"The greatest favor you could do for Scorpio," spoke The Shadow in Cranston's calm, convincing style, "would be to arrest him. The professor may like his Castle, but he would prefer your jail, sheriff, for the next few days. He would then be unable to give the séance at Grendale's."

"But he said he'd give it—"

"He tried to get out of it," interposed The Shadow. "Tell me, sheriff, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Of course not!"

"But you saw one at Paula Lodi's."

"A fake!" The sheriff gave a wise nod. "The ghost was Barcla, made up like Francois, Miss Lodi's first husband. He's a clever actor, that Barcla. We know he was working with Scorpio, even though his nibs won't admit it."

"You may be able to prove it tomorrow night."

The idea drilled home upon the sheriff. Even the others were just catching the full import of the plan inspired by The Shadow.

Scorpio's séance would be a failure, unless a ghost appeared. Such failure would do more than imply that he was a fraud; it would practically prove it. If a ghost did arrive, a grab by a concerted group would mean a capture. Barcla would be found without a further search for him.

All were enthusiastic, as they rode away in their boat. The sheriff was seeking suggestions for tomorrow night.

Grendale favored rapid action, once the ghost should appear. Denwood, again taking his cue from The Shadow, argued that more restraint would be preferable. The sheriff agreed that it would be better to trap Barcla after he had finished his spook impersonation. He looked to Cranston for approval.

Naturally, The Shadow agreed, since it was really his own idea. He said it would be wise to give Scorpio leeway, or the professor would warn Barcla off, considering a blank séance a lesser danger. It was possible, too, that Scorpio would find some way to outwit his opponents, if they acted too early.

Finally mollified, Grendale grumbled an agreement with the rest. Then, as an afterthought, decided:

"Yes, it's better to give Scorpio bait to bite at. I've got some, too, in that safe of mine. About fifty thousand dollars worth of utility stocks that Scorpio may have heard about. But I won't worry; none of my servants know the combination."

"I never trust my servants too far"—he looked at Denwood—"like you did with that fellow Horace. As for my guests, they are always the right sort. Tomorrow will be the first time that Scorpio will set foot in my house. I'd never have invited the rogue"—Grendale was scowling—"if my wife hadn't insisted on it. She was so set on this séance stuff, that I had to humor her."

Grendale's mention of the safe and its contents was a new point that The Shadow relished. The eyes of Lamont Cranston had a distant stare, as though gazing into the future. Lips formed the faintest of smiles, in lieu of a whispered laugh.

Matters were shaping better than The Shadow had anticipated. To-morrow night offered a double opportunity. There would be more than Scorpio's reputation as a spook-maker at stake. Crime, too, would be a prospect.

The mystery of previous robberies, the riddle of the lake monster, even the recovery of vanished wealth—all would be possible. More was at stake than the mere exposure of a faker. The Shadow could foresee the trapping of a master crook!

There was a knowing glint in the steely eyes of The Shadow as they gazed back toward Scorpio's distant Castle, a mere blotch of gray amid the trees.

CHAPTER XII. LURKERS BY NIGHT.

THAT afternoon, Lamont Cranston and Harry Vincent took a trip around the lake in a trim speedboat that Harry had obtained at the Community Center. As they rode along, Harry repeated some details that he had heard at the community house.

The sheriff had heard from Los Angeles. The police there had gained no clue to the poisoned cigarettes given Drury. They were sure that it must have been planted in the aviator's pocket before he left Lake Calada.

There were details, too, regarding previous robberies, and all indicated that crimes had occurred at Lake Calada, not elsewhere.

Gillespie's secretary, a man named Tudor, was to be released, exonerated of any blame in the bond theft. The Jamison paintings had been shipped to the lake intact; therefore, could not have been stolen beforehand. A thorough check-up proved that the Albion statuettes could not have been removed in transit after they left Lake Calada.

Such reports had not caused surprise. The robbery of the Lodi jewels, done in the presence of half the Calada colony, had convinced everyone that previous crimes were local.

Death in the Stars

Reviewing the meager facts, The Shadow decided that Harry was to go to Los Angeles, to contact Tudor and bring him back to Lake Calada, in case the exonerated secretary might prove valuable tomorrow. He told Harry to take the evening taxi plane for Los Angeles.

It was nearly dusk when The Shadow swung the boat through a channel by an island, leading into Indian Cove. Rounding a bend, they saw Indian Rock, an imposing shaft of granite, a miniature edition of the monumental rocks that could be viewed in Yosemite Park.

Rising a sheer two hundred feet, Indian Rock was precipitous on both sides; but it was marked with noticeable flaws. Among those regular fissures, Harry saw one crack that spread like a crude arch at the water's edge, but it was too low for the boat to pass.

Besides, the base of the rock looked unreachable, due to jagged chunks of stone that studded the water. Those barring points of rock had evidently broken from the crag in some past age.

As they headed out from the cove, The Shadow slowed the boat, to study Denwood's chart. Harry noticed that it was less of a maze than before. The Shadow had marked it with his own observation lines, erasing some of the more doubtful ones.

By a system of triangulation, he had picked the area near Indian Cove as the probable destination of the curious lake monster. Having seen that craft's course twice, The Shadow had narrowed down his quest.

There was another cove, however, that adjoined this one, past a jut of land called Piny Head. It was also in the area picked by The Shadow, and the cove furnished a landing to the old Pioneer Mine.

The Shadow swung into the cove, let the boat chug up to the remains of an old burned wharf. Gloom here was heavy; Harry, scrambling on the wharf to tie the boat, did not sense the stir about him.

Of a sudden, he was prodded with gun muzzles. He saw the bristling rifle barrels, determined faces behind him. Voices were ordering him to "put them up"; and he heard one call: "We've got him!"

Harry let his hands go up. His right came from his hip, bringing an automatic, as he wheeled away from the rifles. There was a crackle from one rifle: an answering shot from Harry's automatic. But not a bullet took effect!

The long-barreled guns were being knocked aside. Harry, as he fired, received a side-arm blow that sent his shot wide. The sweep carried him backward into the boat. On the wharf, he could see three men sprawling, their rifles clattering the charred timbers, as they succumbed to the barehanded punches of a lone attacker.

The Shadow!

He had leaped from the boat at the instant of the conflict, and was taking control as Cranston. One rifleman went splashing into the water; another landed headlong, into the boat with Harry. The third, shaken to his senses by hands that collared him, recognized the face of his shaker and gulped to the others:

"It's Mr. Cranston!"

THESE were the sheriff's deputies, on hunt for Barcla and missing servants like Horace and Rufus. They had mistaken Harry for Barcla, thinking that the missing crook had chosen this secluded landing spot. The Shadow's skill at breaking up a fight had proven as useful as his ability in prolonged battle.

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His swift and timely intervention had saved Harry's life, along with one or more of the deputies.

More men arrived, the sheriff among them. Congratulations were promptly given Cranston for halting mistaken battle. The sheriff had come to search the old Pioneer Mine, in case Barcla was using it as a hideaway. He invited the newcomers to join the party. Cranston accepted; but Harry had to leave, in order to catch his plane.

Alone in the boat, Harry idled the motor as he neared the site of Rundon's cabin, which was on the way to the end of the lake. He wanted to see what had been done with the wrecked craft belonging to Denwood; workmen had been sent to lift it from the rocks today.

Harry chose Rundon's rickety dock as a landmark and cut in close to it. Something he saw made him cut off the motor and glide to a stop.

Another boat was tied to Rundon's pier; it was Scorpio's speedster!

For the moment, Harry thought that Lois had come here; then he remembered that the girl had returned the borrowed boat to Scorpio. Stepping ashore, Harry saw a light glimmering from Rundon's cabin and crept close. Through a crack where a draped blanket failed cover the window edge, he looked in on two men: Professor Scorpio and Edward Barcla.

It was clever, those two meeting here. Probably Scorpio deserved credit for the idea; but Barcla gained the chief benefit. The missing crook was using Rundon's cabin as his hide-out, and had chosen a perfect spot.

With Rundon abducted, there was no reason for anyone to come here. It was the last place where the sheriff would look for Barcla. Scorpio, a master at the art of alibi, considered it safer to visit Barcla than have the wanted man visit him.

Scorpio was opening a wrapped package. Harry saw bundled cheesecloth, a wire mask. There were bottles that looked as though they contained paint; a box that appeared to be a make-up kit. Harry could hear Scorpio's words, purring and reassuring:

"It will be easy, Barcla. Less risky than staying here. The séance will square me, and give them so much to think about, they will forget you. It will be the biggest thing we've staged."

Barcla's negative headshakes lessened. He turned to a table, picked up a photograph of Niles Rundon and stared at it.

"But if Rundon ever comes back—"

"He won't," interposed Scorpio, in confident tone. "If we put this over one hundred percent, we can keep Rundon right where he is. I'll keep them buffaloed, Barcla, while you move in and out."

There was a nod from Barcla. It ended when he cocked his head, stared uneasily at the windows. He muttered something about the woods being safer than the cabin, to which Scorpio agreed. The two started toward the door, Barcla carrying the bundle.

Harry reached the pier, pushed the boat off and drifted out into the lake. He could hear sounds along the shore; he lay still, lest Scorpio and Barcla hear him. Darkness was thickening, particularly on the water. From his vantage point, Harry was barely able to discern Scorpio when the professor came out on the dock and entered his speedboat alone.

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Scorpio drifted, too, before starting the motor. As the speedster increased its distance from shore, Scorpio stepped it up. That made it safe for Harry to get going, but he throttled down his motor very promptly. He thought that he had heard Scorpio's speedster slacken, as though the professor had detected sounds behind him.

INSTEAD of going direct to the Community Center, Harry detoured across by Denwood's. There, he grabbed a few clothes and put them in a bag.

After leaving a coded message for The Shadow, Harry told Denwood that he was starting for Los Angeles, and hurried down to the dock. There was no sign of Scorpio's speedster; the professor must be back at the Castle.

Looking out across the blackened lake, Harry stared suspiciously at everything that resembled foam. Even the splashes of fish caught his attention. He was remembering the mystery craft that also plowed these waters, wondering if it had been around this evening.

Harry had forgotten the lake monster while thinking about Scorpio. Satisfied that the lake was as placid as it looked, Harry started off.

From Denwood's, a close inshore route was best, because of a shoal. Harry was sure that he had passed the danger spot, when he felt the prow of his boat quiver. He had struck something, too close for the searchlight to show; for Harry was using a high focus.

It was a shoal, and an odd one; for the boat seemed to climb along it as Harry cut off the motor.

It wasn't a shoal; it was an island! Added to that surprise, Harry recognized that it was moving. Before he could jump to a further conclusion, brawny hands descended upon him. Twisting, too late to struggle, Harry saw that he had struck neither shoal nor isle.

He had run upon the lake monster; lurking in the darkness, the strange craft had glided forward as Harry's boat struck it. It was as tricky as a crocodile, posing as a log, then turning to life. The long slope of the thin craft's deck had slithered under Harry's boat, to lift it from the water!

The men were coming from a tiny cockpit; as two hauled Harry down into their craft, a third rolled over into Harry's boat and added weight from the opposite direction.

Hands pinned behind him, throat half-throttled, Harry put up a final struggle, kicking hard with his feet. Just as he was wrenching free, a heavy, padded object struck him behind the ear.

Stunned, Harry settled helplessly. The two men pulled him down with them; drew a sliding hood, with a tiny celluloid window, over the space above their heads. There was a slight churn as the mystery ship worked backward; then it was gliding off into the lake. The man who had taken over Harry's boat continued toward the Community Center.

AT the Pioneer Mine, a search had proven fruitless. After going through old shafts with flashlights, the searchers ended at a spot where a large chunk of payless ore had settled down into a cavity. The blocking rock was too deep-set for them to haul it out.

"Barcla couldn't have gotten that chunk out," said the sheriff, as they left the mine. "Anyway, Mr. Cranston, I'm just as glad we haven't found him."

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"On account of the coming séance?"

"That's it." The sheriff nodded. "I like your idea of nabbing Scorpio and Barcla together. But I kind of figured they'd get leery if they heard we weren't hunting any more. So I thought it best to keep the boys busy."

The Shadow complimented the sheriff on his foresight. As they met the others, they parted in a group. Near the lake the crowd divided. They had come in two boats, which they had left in different spots. Each crew thought that the helpful Mr. Cranston was going back with the other. Both were wrong.

From beneath the charred wharf, The Shadow picked up hat and cloak that Harry had left there for him. Completely enveloped in black, he used the cloak folds to shield the glow of a tiny flashlight, as he picked a course of his own along the shore.

It was only a short route, along the curve of Piny Head, to the channel between that promontory and the island. The channel in question was the entrance to Indian Cove.

The Shadow expected slight ripples from the direction of the bay; but he gave occasional glances toward the lake. He suddenly spotted a streak of foam along the blackened water, heard the slight swash of little waves. He was clinging to a bush on a rocky bank just above the channel, as a slender thing of steel eased through the tiny inlet.

With a roll, The Shadow landed on the metal creature's long back. His fingers dug among rivets; his soft-tipped shoes allowed him a toe hold. High and dry, yet with wavelets scudding up beside his shoulders, The Shadow clung to the lake monster as it gathered speed.

The thing whisked through the cove, then slackened. Still riding it, The Shadow checked the tricky channel it took among the stony piles. It had two propellers, that craft, and they enabled it to pivot sharply. It found a course where, earlier, neither The Shadow nor Harry had observed one. But The Shadow had suspected such a channel.

Solid blackness loomed ahead—the heights of Indian Rock. There was a gap: the arch-like crevice at the water line. The long, low hull had been designed to pass under it with only a few inches of clearance. Not enough for The Shadow, too, but the slow-motion approach gave him time to reach up from the stern and clutch the rock above.

Its cracked surface gave him a grip; he found it just as he was toppling backward. The steel monster was gone from beneath him, in under the very rock to which The Shadow clung. Swinging sideward, the cloaked investigator found a foothold and began to worm his way up the rock.

Soon, The Shadow reached a narrow split; when a loose bit of stone slipped through the fissure, he heard it plunk into water below. The discovery was one that would prove useful later; for the present, The Shadow wished simply to reach solid ground.

A sideward trip brought him to turf that marked the edge of the great granite rock. From there, he reached the woods.

It would be a long trip by land, back to some spot where The Shadow could find a boat; but he had all the time he wanted. His work for tonight was ended, according to his calculations. Above the lake, The Shadow saw the rising lights of the taxi plane, winging toward Los Angeles.

There was a whispered laugh in the darkness, signifying that The Shadow thought that all was well. For he believed that his agent, Harry Vincent, was safely on board that plane, taking a night flight to the city. The Shadow had considered it good policy to let the crooks in the lake monster return to their base unmolested.

The Shadow was to change that opinion, later, when pieced facts would tell him that Harry had been a prisoner within the mystery ship, while The Shadow, himself, was riding as an unseen passenger upon the deck!

CHAPTER XIII. PLACES OF DARKNESS.

WHEN Harry Vincent awoke, he could remember a long succession of strange nightmares, interspersed with darkness and light. He had heard voices, some ugly, others friendly, but none had roused him from his coma until the present moment.

His eyes opening slowly, Harry saw two men standing, with a lantern, above a cot on which he lay. He recognized them; one was Horace, the sly servant who had tricked Denwood; the other was the missing man from Paula Lodi's, the husky Rufus.

"He'll come to," growled Horace, in reference to Harry. "Leave him lay. We've got to get started for Grendale's."

"Not yet," returned Rufus. "But we may as well let the other simps work on the guy. Come on."

Rufus hung the lantern on a hook. The two men went out. Harry tried weakly to rise; sank back as the door of the room opened. Eyes half shut, he saw another pair entering. They came unwillingly, at the points of guns: Howard Carradon and Niles Rondon.

Both looked the worse for wear. Carradon, who had been missing longer, was badly in need of a shave, while Rondon showed the effects of his hard struggle by a bloodstained bandage wrapped around his head. The two approached Harry, then looked back gingerly at a guard who stood in the doorway.

Harry opened his eyes. Eagerly, Carradon and Rondon propped him up, and swabbed his face with a sponge from a handy water bucket. They were asking questions, anxiously, eagerly. At first, Harry looked askance at the guard in the doorway; then he saw his fellow prisoners smile bitterly.

"Nothing you can tell us will hurt," said Carradon. "These fellows know everything that's going on."

"But they've told us very little," added Rondon. "There's a lot we'd like to learn. Did they deliver those notes?"

Harry nodded, then remarked: "To Scorpio."

Both men looked puzzled. When Harry explained how Scorpio had claimed full innocence, the pair showed anger. It was Carradon who gave chief vent to his opinions.

"The nerve of him!" Carradon stormed. "I'd never have believed it! But it sounds like Scorpio, all right—to send notes to himself!"

"Was Scorpio here?" asked Harry.

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"No," replied Carradon. "Rufus told us what to write. There wasn't any use to argue. We knew the notes would tell people that we were alive."

"He'll probably make you write one next," added Rondon. "Then he'll send it over to Scorpio in that crazy ship this bunch his bunch is using."

Harry shook his head.

"It won't be delivered tonight," he said, "unless a spook brings it. Scorpio is putting on a show at Grendale's."

Rondon snapped his fingers and turned to Carradon.

"That's why Barcla hasn't been around!" he exclaimed. "We figured he was Scorpio's pet spook. He'll be needed over at Grendale's."

Further conversation was ended by the arrival of Rufus. For the first time, Harry noticed that Rufus had a bandaged shoulder. One of The Shadow's bullets had evidently clipped him during the passing fray at the Castle dock, two nights before.

Yanking Harry to his feet, Rufus lined him up with Carradon and Rondon. The three were marched in lock step through a passage, down natural steps in the rock. Rufus followed with the lantern; they came to a row of crannies in the wall. Each crevice had a metal gate."

The three were stowed in their improvised cells, where cots awaited them. They were some distance apart, but they could all hear Rufus clank the locks on the other cells. Then the fellow growled:

"No jabber tonight. You've had enough time to talk. Any guy that opens his trap will get another tap in back of the ear. If you can't go to sleep, we'll show you how!"

WITH the lantern gone, the cell passage became absolutely black. Lying on his cot, Harry could almost imagine that he was in a huge cave, instead of a tiny rock crevice

He heard slight stirs from the others: the darkness seemed to annoy them. Finally, they quieted. But the darkness didn't bother Harry. He rather liked it.

Harry's head was aching badly; even the brief display of light had hurt his eyes. Besides, he could think well in darkness. He realized that his half-conscious spell had carried him over a full day. It was night again, and it would soon be time for Scorpio's séance. The time when The Shadow planned a big surprise for the artful professor and his tool, Barcla.

The others would be there, too—Rufus, Horace, and a few more servants who had skipped from the Calada colony under pressure.

They wouldn't be all; this strange lair, wherever it was located, had been peopled all along by hidden workers who were in the crooked game. But there still might be a chance for a showdown—by The Shadow.

Harry wasn't worried about his chief, not even when the opposition was numerous. But he foresaw one serious handicap. The Shadow had depended upon Harry's return to Lake Calada. Whatever his plans, The Shadow would have to change them at the last moment.

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It wasn't a pleasing prospect, considering that there was no one else who could supply whatever duties The Shadow expected from Harry.

Across the lake, at Denwood's, The Shadow was considering that very factor while sitting at the desk in the study. The Shadow had read Harry's note, written in special ink that faded, the sort that The Shadow and his agents always used in correspondence.

The Shadow had read it that morning, and had thereby obtained some very useful information, proving a prospect that he had considered a likely one. All day, The Shadow had been expecting Harry's return, since Denwood had been sure that the agent had caught the last plane.

But Harry had not come back. The afternoon plane was already here from Los Angeles, and Harry should have been on it. Remembering the return of the mystery craft to Indian Cove, The Shadow could picture only too well what had happened to his agent.

The rented boat was back at the Community Center, but no one remembered that Harry had delivered it personally. Nor was anyone sure that he had been among the half-dozen passengers who had taken the plane to Los Angeles.

There was a knock at the study door. It was Denwood, ready to start for Grendale's. With one of Cranston's affable smiles, The Shadow went along, to a hired boat that was waiting at the dock. His maskish face showed none of the worry that he actually felt.

Impulse urged The Shadow to make a prompt trip to the lair beneath Indian Rock; there to deal with crooks. But he resisted his wish to speed to Harry's rescue. If still alive, Harry would be safe until later. Moreover, if The Shadow's analysis of the crime situation was entirely accurate, there would be a very good reason for Harry, or any other prisoner, to be alive.

There was a throng at Grendale's wharf. Everyone had begged an invitation tonight, most of them hoping to witness a failure on the part of Professor Scorpio.

Carrying dark garments over his arm, The Shadow let the others go ahead, Denwood included. Stepping from the path, he lost the guise of Cranston, when he cloaked himself in black.

AS The Shadow, shrouded creature of gloom, the cloaked investigator made a detour to the side of Grendale's elaborately built lodge, found a cellar window that offered him entrance.

The sheriff's men were guarding the premises, but they were keeping to the fringes of the woods, forming a semicircle to the water front. They weren't to close in until they received a signal from the building.

His flashlight dabbing tiny spots through the cellar, The Shadow sought for some hidden opening to the floor above. So far, Scorpio had preserved the main secret of his séances, namely, that he had tricked every house in the Calada colony, so that fake ghosts could enter and leave at their convenience.

The game had gone bad at Lodi's, but the professor's incendiary job had fixed the trick alcove. Here at Grendale's, however, The Shadow expected a more clever set-up.

With Rufus at hand, ready to do hammer duty, Scorpio had risked a loose trap the other night. He had no accomplice among Grendale's servants, so far as The Shadow had been able to discover.

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Passing a partition in the cellar, The Shadow noticed that it was set at a trifling angle. Instantly, he tried it, and discovered that it would shift slightly under pressure. Above was a broad slab set in masonry. The Shadow gave a whispered laugh. The shift of the partition left that slab entirely free.

Pushing the partition back in place, The Shadow moved back to the window. He knew why the partition had been set a bit off; on account of Barcla's occasional spells of dumbness. The fellow had blundered badly over at Lodi's when he hadn't been able to find his way out from the cellar.

Reaching the ground, The Shadow made a blackened blotch against the side wall of the lodge, as he looked into the big room where the séance was to take place. Professor Scorpio, smirking through his beard, was allowing himself to be searched. So far, his sleeves were proven free of spooks.

"Thank you, gentlemen," declared Scorpio, with a sarcastic bow. "Here is my turban; you may examine it, too. Meanwhile, you may return my watch, my wallet, and other odds and ends."

The Shadow saw the objects that were returned to Scorpio. The Professor was standing in front of a huge fireplace, which was not lighted, because the séance was to be in darkness. Analyzing various aspects of the situation, The Shadow made further observations.

He saw the safe, in an alcove fairly remote from Scorpio. He watched the Hindu servants remove bulbs from light sockets, so that no one could press a switch at the wrong time. They were screwing red bulbs into wall brackets: such lights would not hinder the professor.

All ordinary bulbs were gone, except for one. Taking a chair, Professor Scorpio gestured around the circle.

"I have been searched," he told the group. "So, before we begin, I ask the same privilege. My servants will relieve you of all flashlights"

There was grumbling; some discord regarding the fact that the Hindus were present at all. Scorpio agreed that they could be placed in another room, under the surveillance of a committee. They went, taking the flashlights with them. Scorpio ordered the door locked, the key brought to him.

Henry Denwood was near the window, which was open. He was watching Scorpio step to the last light. The professor removed the bulb and only the red glow from the wall brackets remained. Scorpio, clad in white, was vaguely visible; Denwood heard the light bulb tinkle as the professor dropped it near the fireplace.

Then, in that eerie setting, Denwood heard Scorpio intone:

"There will be spirits shortly; nay, immediately! The psychic mood is upon me—"

THE drone became a babble; simultaneously, a wraithlike thing began to float close beside Scorpio, growing slowly, yet so suddenly in evidence that Denwood gasped along with the rest.

But Denwood, despite his fascination, was suddenly conscious of a hand that gripped his shoulder. The touch made him shudder. It chilled him, with a sensation of real coldness that left Denwood very nervous, until he sensed that he was holding a flashlight. It had come from the outer darkness, but not that of ethereal space. The flashlight came through the open window.

So did the voice that whispered close to Denwood's ear; a tone that the gray-haired man alone could hear:

"Be ready! You will know when."

The voice of The Shadow! Grimly, Denwood settled in his chair, clutching the precious flashlight, prepared for the part he was to play in the trapping of Professor Scorpio.

CHAPTER XIV. AMONG THE GHOSTS.

A CHILDISH spook was wavering near Professor Scorpio, bowing to the astonished sitters. Scorpio had ceased his babble, so that the half-grown spirit could talk. It muttered words in a falsetto, but did not identify itself.

The Shadow knew the source of that pretended ghost; that it could vanish as rapidly as it had arrived leaving no evidence. The voice was simply Scorpio's own, which gave a ventriloqual effect in the darkness. The professor was testing out his audience. If persons made a grab for the baby spook, they would catch nothing but thin air.

The spirit was saying that it would have to go, but that soon it would return. Some other spirit wanted the floor. Scorpio's test had worked; he intended to bring back the tiny spook to cover the departure of a full-sized ghost, just as he was using it now as a preliminary precaution.

Quite satisfied with that situation, The Shadow listened for outside sounds. He heard them—the slight swash of wavelets near the shore, then a creeping sound among the trees. He traced an approach toward a cellar window; one that hesitated. There were other crunches from surrounding directions.

A last glance through the window. The baby sprite had diminished, then bobbed up again. It was babbling happily in Scorpio's falsetto, coyly deciding to chat a while longer with the "meedie," which was its pet term for the bearded professor.

As the thing finally faded, Scorpio's own voice returned. In trance-like tone, he asked for someone to name a ghost that they should like to have appear. Paula Lodi spoke ardently from the circle:

"Francois—"

There was a buzz. Paula gasped. She sounded as though she had responded with that name by arrangement with Scorpio. Perhaps such was the case; possibly, the professor had known how Paula's mind would run. At any rate, she changed her request as perfectly as if Scorpio had cued her.

"No, no!" exclaimed Paula. "I want—Howard!"

The buzz was louder. Scorpio silenced it.

"Howard Carradon is still among the living," he declared, in an impressive monotone. "But there is another, who may have gone to the world beyond—"

The Shadow was moving to the cellar; his own window was away from those where he could hear slight creaks. Hence The Shadow did not see the events that followed; but he could picture them.

A luminous circle twisted beneath the red lights; it swirled near Scorpio and grew rapidly. It was the old trick of a secret arrival lifting a black cloth, but this pretended spirit developed much more rapidly than usual. The man playing the part of spook wanted to get the job done.

As the face showed itself, onlookers became aghast. The face glowed with sickly green, but it was

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distinguishable as one they recognized, though its contour seemed misshapen.

The face of Niles Rundon!

"I have a message"—the voice had Rundon's depth, but it was harsher—"a message for Lois Melvin!"

"It's not Niles!" came Lois reply from the circle. "I am sure it isn't! This is a trick"—her voice firmed—"and a poor one! If you are Niles"—she was on her feet, addressing the ghost—"I have a question for you!"

The ghost vanished, overquickly. Professor Scorpio inserted sharp remarks. He knew that the spook was still at hand, but others didn't. It was up to him to fill the breach.

"We must have quiet," he ordained. "Perhaps the spirit will return. Those newly departed to a higher plane are seldom able to develop with ease, or remain among us long. Be patient, Miss Melvin."

WITH that, Scorpio went into mutters, distinguishable to no one in the circle. They were meant for the ghost, alone. Under his breath he was criticizing Barcla for having done the impersonation sloppily and playing it too strong. Then:

"If you will put the question to me, Miss Melvin, I shall induce the spirit to return." Scorpio was making his plea ardent. "You must try a simple question, at first. Perhaps we can allow others later."

Lois asked for the spirit to name the day when she had been to Los Angeles. She was willing to play the game as Scorpio wanted, sure that she could press the situation later. Scorpio requested the spirit to return and answer.

It didn't appear, at first. The professor appeared rather satisfied. He talked in a coaxing tone. At last, the bashful spook revealed itself with a swirl. Rundon's face showed, its expression a bit distorted: in an attempt at a milder tone, its voice said.

"Tuesday."

"Tuesday is right," began Scorpio. "And now, Miss Melvin—"

"Another question," snapped Lois. "Whose picture is in the back of my wrist watch?"

The spirit spoke for itself. "My own picture," it began, warily. "When I was in my earthly form. The form of—"

"Of a white poodle?" queried Lois, sweetly, "who answered to the name of Alphonse?"

The fake ghost disappeared so suddenly, that most of the sitters could guess that a cloth had dropped over it. Scorpio was shouting above the bedlam, trying to reverse the situation in his favor. He heard cries of "trickery" and took up the challenge.

"Yes, trickery!" he shouted,

"Trickery on the part of Miss Melvin, who changed the photograph in that watch! Silence, everyone!"

There were calls of: "Bring back the spook!"

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"I shall bring back the ghost," promised Scorpio, "the moment that proper conditions are restored"

Shouts diminished. The Shadow could hear them subside from where he waited below, by the partition in the cellar. The boarding was swung wide; The Shadow had found it that way on his return. Listening, he heard a slight click, the slab above was sliding in the darkness.

Something landed with a plop close beside The Shadow. It didn't wait to swing the partition back in place; huddled, it started to grope out through the darkness. The Shadow reached a gloved hand to the top of the partition, then grabbed the edge of the opening.

Two seconds later, he was crouched in the big fireplace, having drawn its sliding base half shut. One glove drawn from its hand, The Shadow was dabbing thumb and forefinger against two tiny sponges that he had in his other gloved palm, while he watched Professor Scorpio's efforts to conclude the séance.

Scorpio was bringing back a spook, but not the right one. The thing that had again come to sight was the luminous form of the baby spirit.

Mutters told that it didn't satisfy the sitters; and Scorpio was trying to mollify them by sending the spook out over their heads, apparently beyond any possible control on his part.

Quickly creeping close to the occupied professor, The Shadow stretched his hand up close to the faker's beard and snapped thumb and finger together. The result was more startling than anything that Scorpio had produced.

The chemicals—which had been on the sponges—exploded with a blinding flash; they caused a report louder, sharper than a pistol shot. That blast from nowhere literally staggered the professor. He keeled backward with a wild cry. The floating spook bobbed toward the ceiling.

Denwood, though as startled as the rest, knew that this was his cue. As new bedlam rose, he pressed the flashlight switch, spreading a wide beam in Scorpio's direction. The sudden light caught Scorpio with the goods.

THE professor was handling a reaching rod—a long hollow, telescopic tube which stretched from his lips. At the end of it was the floating baby spook.

The rod was very thin, and cleverly constructed. It was an extension brought out from the interior of his big gold watch, when he pulled the stem.

Filled with balloon-like silk, the watch provided the spook when Scorpio blew through the tube. The case of the watch was open, on the end of the reaching rod, and he had inflated the "ghost" with his breath.

At present, the shape was drooping, for Scorpio had no breath left. He had let the distant watch case tilt and the luminous silk had flopped over the edge, instead of settling back where it belonged.

A dozen hands were grabbing for Scorpio. The Shadow's were not among them. He had reached the window and was springing across the sill. Men were shouting from all around; they were the deputies, closing in, because they thought they had heard a gun go off.

Scorpio should have fallen prey to the throng that grabbed him, even though a few snatched for the reaching rod and its fake ghost, instead of the professor. But Scorpio heard a yell that drove him to maddened effort. The man who shouted was Grendale.

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The financier was pointing to his safe; its door was open wide, the contents scattered. Among the disorder, Grendale saw no sign of a certain bundle that he prized.

"My stocks!" he howled. "The big ghost took them!"

Losing robe and turban, Scorpio wrenched loose. A skinny figure with his outer garments gone, the maddened professor dived for the base of the fireplace, which he saw half open; went through it as it was, and landed in the cellar.

Bobbing up, he hoisted himself at the partition and slashed the slab shut. Yanking the partition into place, he blocked off pursuers.

Outside, The Shadow's gun was talking. He was shooting at half a dozen men who had opened fire on the deputies. It was dark outdoors, and when a deputy grabbed a figure that came his way, dark cloth fell far enough to show the ghostly face of Rundon.

The deputy dropped back. A very solid ghost, the thing sent the deputy farther, with a hard punch. Bundling itself under the cloth, the ghost was out of sight before The Shadow could open fire on it.

Almost immediately, the luminous face showed up again, this time a dozen yards away, in a cluster of crooks who were slugging at the deputies. Men from the house were yelling: "Grab the ghost!" so the deputies obliged. Shots rang out, as the crooks took to their heels, leaving the luminous fighter struggling alone.

The ghost sagged. A flashlight streaked its face. It looked like Rundon's, until someone whipped away the thin metal mask. Beneath, the deputies saw the features of a man they had long hunted: the dying face of Edward Barcla.

Crooks were dying, too, but some had gone crashing toward the shore. They were saved, momentarily, by yells from the house, urging the deputies to go after Scorpio, who had taken to the woods. Some responded, beginning a belated chase, for the frantic professor had gained too long a start.

Others, however, heard the crashes at the shore and headed there. They heard shots, too, and the ring of a strident laugh—The Shadow's. But when they reached the lake front, accompanied by arrivals from the house, they halted, baffled.

The crooks were gone; so was The Shadow. The faint swash from the water never could have given them the trail in time. It took something more audible to produce the long-needed result. It came, that needed token.

The laugh of The Shadow!

THE weird taunt sounded from the blackened water. Instantly, lights sliced toward it. They saw The Shadow, those men on shore, as he rose from the surface of the water, beckoning. He was already a hundred yards away, traveling rapidly, but the glare that he had called for showed the thing that he wanted seen.

It was the lake monster, for the first time revealed as a low-lying, scooting craft, glistening under a sufficient glow of light. They couldn't lose it, if they pursued it this time. For the thing was carrying an outside passenger, unknown to the depleted crew within it.

Half crouched, The Shadow was riding the strange ship, still sending back the eerie laugh that would serve as a guide, should lights lose sight of the craft that he had boarded!

Already, a speedboat was starting from Grendale's wharf, proving that one man had reached there. Roused to the occasion, a score of men sped to other boats. The dock itself seemed to roar, as the flotilla got under way.

An extended procession was off on the greatest water race that Lake Calada had ever known. The Shadow, though out of sight, was still the beckoner; not by gesture, but through his laugh, which trailed its repeated mirth from far ahead!

CHAPTER XV. THREEFOLD RESCUE.

THE lake monster had reached its haven. It was picking the tricky channel among the stony blockade that fronted the base of Indian Rock. Back by the entrance of the cove, The Shadow could see pursuing craft.

Some had lost the trail, for the nearest boat had gone wide of the Indian Cove channel and swung into the cove by the Pioneer Mine, with others following.

Only about half the pilots made that mistake; the rest, guided correctly by The Shadow's distant laugh, had reached Indian Cove. Echoes were trailing there; the tones of The Shadow's mockery reverberated from the hills. It seemed to draw them toward a final goal, the great rock that formed the inner buttress of Indian Cove.

The laugh ended abruptly. The steel creature that The Shadow rode was nosing its way beneath the natural arch under Indian Rock. Its occupants, snug in their sealed cockpit, hadn't an idea that The Shadow was on the deck above. In fact, he wasn't, when the ship pushed past the arch.

Lacking clearance, The Shadow had slipped over the stern and was trailed out behind the rudder that ran between the twin propellers. Away from the churning blades, he kept his head above water as he was hauled into the space beneath the rock.

The boat scraped against a ledge that served it as a pier. Men scrambled from their craft and turned on flashlights. The beams showed a natural cave, with a split in the rock ahead, evidently the entrance to the lair, for the crevice formed a passage a few feet above water level.

They were turning the lights on the boat in order to haul out crippled members of the party. The Shadow saw the scowling face of Rufus, heard him address another man as "Horace." Those two were uninjured, as was a third man; but the three that they brought from the curious boat showed the effects of bullets.

Thus, The Shadow counted six who had returned. He calculated that four had fallen in the battle wherein he had sided with the deputies, and had been left dead on the shore at Grendale's, along with Barcla.

While the wounded men were being helped from the steel lake monster, The Shadow gained a good view of the craft. Its motor was still running, with a sighing hiss.

The Shadow noted low lumps, like ventilators, in front of the cockpit and recognized their purpose.

They were intakes, sucking in air to a hidden device that separated the component elements. Similarly, there were valves along the water line near the bow of the boat, that took in water. Near the stern, bubbles were drifting from outlets, accounting for the foamy wake that The Shadow had seen on other nights.

The Shadow recalled a story of a crazed inventor, now dead, who claimed that he had created a hydro-vapor motor which combined oxygen from the air with water, to form an explosive chemical combination, H₂O₂. Such an invention had been doubted on the grounds that the apparatus would have been highly improbable.

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Evidently it worked, for this ship fitted with the story. The lake monster's cigar-shaped hull housed a floating laboratory which could combine air and water into a vaporized fuel. However complicated the mechanism, once working, it could continue almost indefinitely, and the motor had added qualities unstated by its inventor: those of speed and silence.

Criminals had acquired it, diverting the device to their own purpose. Confident that the mystery ship would never be recognized as a vessel, they had kept their game concealed until The Shadow arrived at Lake Calada. Even yet, they supposed themselves safe, here in their subterranean lair.

MOVING behind the men with the lights, The Shadow was working toward the crevice in the rocks. His course was slow, for he was dripping wet and had to avoid sloshing sounds. He wanted to enter the lair itself before the crooks arrived.

Deep in the split, The Shadow found his path barred by a formidable door of metal, that had a large keyhole. Bullets could settle that lock, but it might take a gunfull of them; and the sounds would be heard on the other side. It would be better, The Shadow decided, to follow Rufus and the others through.

An automatic drawn from its waterproof holster, The Shadow started to retrace his steps. As he neared the watery vault where the lake monster was berthed, he found that he was too late. Rufus and the others had come along the landing rock, flashing their lights ahead of them.

Supporting one of the wounded pals, Rufus was displaying a large key. That, plus the fact that Rufus hadn't come ahead alone to get help for the wounded, indicated that all the crooks had gone on the night's expedition.

Had The Shadow blasted the door with bullets, he would have brought no opposition from within. But that course had become too dangerous, with Rufus and the rest on their way here. The only thing to do was settle the crooks first.

The Shadow gave them chance for life.

His laugh reverberated suddenly through the vaulted chamber, unearthly in its stridence. It seemed a voice of mockery from a tomb, in a setting well suited for it.

Walls, dome, even the water's surface caught the taunt and threw it back. It might have been a laugh from the sleek lake monster, for the echoes made it impossible to locate.

The Shadow expected consternation from the crooks. They wouldn't guess that he had gone past them at the boat. By rights, they should have picked the channel under the arch as the place of the laugh's origin, and turned in that direction. Once scattered, looking for battle from the rear, they would be harmless.

But the thugs saw The Shadow.

Rufus, trying to twist for cover, was grabbed by his wounded pal, who wanted the light extinguished. In their struggle, they staggered toward the cleft where The Shadow stood. The beam turned toward the black-cloaked fighter; Horace gave the shout that told the others where real danger lay.

Even the wounded men showed agility, as the whole crew dived for sheltering rocks, bringing out their guns. They were shooting with frantic determination, as The Shadow wheeled for shelter of his own. Rufus was quick enough to reach the very edge of the cleft. He yelled for the rest to help him trap The Shadow.

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Back by the metal door, The Shadow was jabbing shots that held the crooks where they were. His fire was spasmodic. He knew that he faced a bullet shortage, if this fray kept up. Lights were gone: a drive out toward the enemy marksmen would be dangerous, except as a last resort.

They were copying The Shadow's measure, making their shots occasional, confident that their cloaked foe would drop if he tried to squeeze out through the cleft. But their fire would come closer the moment that The Shadow ceased to return it. For that reason, he could not spare time to blast the stout lock of the door behind him.

The Shadow was trapped; but the crooks did not guess why he had allowed himself to be.

Half a dozen boats had reached the stone-jutted channel that fronted Indian Rock. The occupants of those boats could hear the hollow blasts of gunfire. They could locate it, too, coming from within the mighty rock itself.

Fitful reflections of light came from the archway at the water line.

Men were working their boats toward that inlet, using searchlights to study the entrance. Their trouble was how to get through; none of their boats were low enough.

AMONG the arriving craft was Scorpio's speedboat. Lois had seen it at the dock and had used it to join the chase, with Denwood as a passenger.

Other boats had crowded through the stony channel toward the rock; by that delay, Lois and Denwood were able to aid The Shadow. They saw the thing upon which he depended.

Reflected gun spurts were no longer visible at the water-line arch because of the searchlights. But Lois and Denwood saw the same tokens higher up, from a crack that no one else noticed. They shouted to the boats ahead; when an obliging searchlight swung toward them, Lois pointed upward.

During the next five minutes, men were busy scaling to the fissure that the girl indicated. All the while, the muffled reports of guns came at paced intervals. The crooks were keeping up their policy of wearing down The Shadow; he was letting them continue, confident that it would produce their own disaster.

The catastrophe came. The thugs suddenly heard shots from a new direction. Turning, they saw guns spurt from a slit in the front dome of the vault. Men had spotted their flashing guns and were giving them a barrage.

Danger of exhausted ammunition applied to the crooks. Bullets were nicking the rocks about them. They had only one course: to rush The Shadow.

They came, en masse, the wounded with the rest. Then all were staggering out again, met by fire that was quicker than their own. They were dropping guns; some were stumbling into the water, as they tried desperately to reach their only refuge, the berthed ship.

Too late. Splashes near the arch told that men had dropped through from the crevasse above. Flashlights began to gleam, as the newcomers found the ledge that formed a shore. The crooks, already crippled, hadn't a chance against that insurge. The Shadow's expected supporters had arrived.

Reaching the metal door, The Shadow used his remaining bullets to ruin the lock. They weren't quite enough; he hammered steadily with the butt of an automatic to complete the work. Haste was no longer needed; still,

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The Shadow always counted minutes. He had spent at least a dozen, from the time that he had arrived on board the lake monster.

Through the door, The Shadow followed passages with his flashlight. He encountered other barriers, set in narrow places, but they were comparatively flimsy. Reaching a squarish room, The Shadow saw a flight of rough-hewn steps. He called below.

A shout answered him; he recognized the voice as Harry's. Another voice joined in; The Shadow could hear the rattle of doors as he dashed down the steps.

Then the clatter increased; a third voice added its bellow. It was louder than the others, for it came from the nearest cell; there, The Shadow's light showed Niles Rondon.

Smashing the locked gate with his heavy automatic, The Shadow went on to the next. He finished it in quick time, and slashed at the third. Rondon was stumbling for the steps, followed by Harry and finally Carradon, when The Shadow turned about.

From above the steps, he saw the wavering flicker of a flashlight. Shouting to the rescued men to watch out for an attack, The Shadow sped to overtake them. He heard yells as he reached the top of the steps. His flashlight showed the last of the crooks who had opposed him out by the boat.

It was Rufus. Though wounded, the fellow had avoided bullets well. He had dragged himself through the passages; in the squarish room, he was tugging at a chain set in the wall, snarling that he would bring death to all.

Niles Rondon was grappling with him, but his clutch on Rufus' hand only tightened the fellow's clench. Though weak from their imprisonment, Harry and Carradon managed to add weight in Rondon's behalf. Rufus sagged, as Rondon hauled him downward. But the chain was tugged, and it produced an instantaneous result. From somewhere in the depths came a muffled echoing explosion.

The walls of the room seemed to rock while The Shadow was scattering the other men, rolling them toward the outer passage. Titanic crackles told of ledges breaking throughout the stratified granite.

There were clatters, as stony chunks gave way, but all came from far below. Finally, reverberations ended, leaving the squarish room intact.

As the rescued men were starting out through the passage, The Shadow took a look into the cell room below. It was intact, too, except at its deepest end. There, masses of stone had sagged. Evidently the explosive charge had been buried well beyond that point. Rufus had calculated upon a complete destruction of the underground lair; but the charge had not been sufficient. The damage was comparatively small.

Not only were the rescued men delivered by The Shadow; he, too, was safe. Only one man expired with the blast; Rufus, himself.

Niles Rondon had given the crook's head a bash against a rock. Already seriously wounded, Rufus could not stay the blow, nor survive it. He was dead when The Shadow viewed him under the flashlight. The cloaked fighter's laugh was solemn, mirthless, much like a knell.

When The Shadow reached the outside passage, he found the rescued men stumbling toward persons that they recognized as friends. Rondon lost his footing, skidded from the ledge and went shoulder deep into the water before hands caught him. Harry was grabbed before he made a similar stumble.

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The two were telling their story, as was Carradon. The Shadow edged into a darkened niche, as men came through to search the underground passages and hunt for stolen goods. Others took Harry, Carradon and Rondon out to the boats.

Some were examining the strange lake monster, when The Shadow passed them in the background. Instead of using ropes that hung from the higher crevice, The Shadow made his exit by a silent swim beneath the arch.

He was climbing, unseen, among the stony pilings, when he heard excited talk ahead.

A boat had just arrived from the Community Center, bringing news of Professor Scorpio. The arch-faker had made a bold escape. He had shown up at the landing field wearing oversized clothes and carrying a shotgun that he had stolen from some cabin.

At the twin points of his double-barreled weapon, Scorpio had made the new pilot take him in the plane, promising the fellow death like Drury had received, if he refused to aid the getaway. When last seen, the plane's lights had been twinkling beyond the mountain pass, carrying Scorpio off to safety.

Some of the persons who listened that news also thought that they heard an eerie sound, much like a whispery laugh, coming from the darkness near the base of Indian Rock.

The Shadow was not displeased because of Scorpio's escape; quite the contrary. The departure of the professor kept the case wide open, promising a final solution of every question that crime had produced.

CHAPTER XVI. THE MAN WHO BELIEVED.

DURING the next few days, enough mysteries were solved to satisfy most members of the Calada colony. The whole case was sensational from start to finish: Professor Scorpio stood branded as a crook as well as a rogue. His folly had been his own act of terminating a profitable racket, by turning to crime for bigger stakes.

Search of the Castle brought many discoveries; among them secret filing cases, hidden in walls, that contained evidence of Scorpio's long-played game. He had owned much land around Lake Calada, mostly by proxy. He sold property to the right people; namely, those who would fall for his spook racket.

Part of his game had been the bribery of servants. Through them, he had picked up large amounts of valuable information, which he served back to his clients in the form of astrological readings, slate messages, and the utterances of materialized spirits.

Only a few such servants had been used for crime, later, and permitted to join the band of strong-arm crooks who had been quartered under Indian Rock.

The rest were still trusted by their employers; when the names of such servants were found in Scorpio's files, the culprits broke down and confessed.

They told how they had been bribed, often with trifling amounts. Scorpio was clever that way; once under his thumb, he scared his tools and made them stay with the game.

Curiously, most of them actually believed that the professor had some occult power, for he had told them things about themselves that amazed them.

It hadn't struck them that so many were in the racket; that Scorpio had a few servants spying on the rest. A

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very tricky gentleman, Professor Scorpio, and his ace in the hole was Edward Barcla.

All evidence showed that Barcla, alone, had impersonated spirits. In that way, Scorpio had kept many of his spies puzzled as to the workings of the ghost business. His Hindus, too, had evidently helped him in some important details that his other spies knew little about.

The thing that amazed the confessing servants most was the lake monster. They had actually believed that the thing was some weird creature.

Barcla was dead: so were all the crooks who had used the mystery boat. Therefore, the Hindu servants supplied the only close links to Scorpio. But they swore that they had been connected with the ghost racket only; not with robbery and murder. They stuck to that story so stolidly, that everyone believed them.

As The Shadow had foreseen, the case remained open.

Not a trace of any stolen goods could be discovered. The Castle was practically torn apart; every cranny in the lair beneath Indian Rock was thoroughly searched, without result.

Gillespie still lacked his bonds, Jamison his paintings. The Albion statuettes were untraced; Paula Lodi's jewels were still glittering, but where, no one knew.

Added to that, Hugo Grendale had lost his utility stocks, on the very night when criminals had met their watery Waterloo in combat with The Shadow.

Professor Scorpio, too, was missing. He had made the plane pilot land him on an obscure field, where Scorpio had taken an old automobile from a disused hangar. The professor had fixed everything for a personal getaway, when required.

It was conceded that he must have shipped stolen goods away beforehand, and carried along the pelf from Grendale's when he made his own departure.

ALL this was the subject of a late afternoon discussion in Denwood's lodge. Esteemed by everyone in the colony, Denwood had been asked to act as chairman at a very important meeting.

Present were the victims of the recent robberies: Gillespie, Jamison, Albion, and Grendale. Paula Lodi was absent, but she was represented by her husband, Howard Carradon. He also belonged with another group: the three who had been rescued by The Shadow.

Harry Vincent and Niles Rundon were giving the same old testimony regarding their stay in the underground cell room. Carradon repeated it, too. They had seen the inside of crime, they all agreed, but so little of it that they could furnish no facts leading to the discovery of the stolen goods.

Talk turned to The Shadow. People wanted to know who he was, how he had accomplished so much. No one seemed able to answer, not even Lamont Cranston, who had been invited to the meeting at Denwood's request.

All during the meeting, Cranston had been in the background, his face impassive, except when the buzz of the arriving taxi plane above the lake had reminded him of his own landing at Calada. Then, Cranston's lips had faintly smiled.

The meeting had thinned away to a total disappointment, when Grendale smacked the desk angrily.

"Here we are," he boomed, "the wealthiest men on the lake, all victims of Professor Scorpio. I'd pay anything to bring that rogue to justice! No one in this colony can put up more cash than I can, if we offer a reward."

The others looked annoyed by Grendale's boast. They looked to Denwood, who softened matters with a smile. Then, turning to Grendale, Denwood asked:

"Have you forgotten Percy Claremont?"

Mere mention of the name evoked Grendale's wrath.

"That doddering fool!" he stormed. "Old Claremont may be worth millions, but he didn't make his money with his brains. Why, he was right at the top on Scorpio's sucker list!"

The Shadow remembered Claremont's name. Scorpio's files had contained plenty of Claremont data, as Grendale stated. Though extremely wealthy, Claremont lived frugally when he came to Lake Calada; he owned a small bungalow that looked dwarfish on the huge lake property that it occupied.

Claremont had been in New York all during the Scorpio trouble. No one knew when he was coming back to Lake Calada. His visits were comparatively rare, and usually brief. If Denwood had not mentioned his name, to tactfully handle a troublesome situation, there would have been no thought of Claremont at all.

Others apparently agreed with Grendale's summary of Claremont, for they smiled. Grendale was about to expand his views of the doddering multimillionaire, when a servant knocked at the door. In answer to Denwood's summons, the servant announced a visitor:

"Mr. Claremont."

Surprised looks turned to smiles, as everyone realized that Claremont must have come in on the afternoon plane. Looking toward The Shadow, Harry saw a gleam of interest on the usually immobile features of Cranston.

Harry knew that his chief had intended to take up new angles of the Scorpio matter, after all others had finished their say. But with Claremont's arrival, The Shadow decided to wait.

WHEN he entered, Percy Claremont fulfilled Grendale's description to a nicety. He did, in fact, look doddering. He was withery, to his sharp-jawed, tiny-eyed face. His dryish lips were twitchy; his bald head glistened like polished marble, above thin streaks of grayish hair. His tiny eyes were sharp, as they peered through large-rimmed glasses.

Claremont was stoop-shouldered; he hobbled in upon a stout cane that, in comparison, made his bowed figure look frail. But he was alert and active, as he proved from the moment of his entry.

Planking a small, wrapped package on Denwood's desk, Claremont grimaced at the group, then demanded in cackling tone:

"What's this I hear about Professor Scorpio? Why have you driven him away? Show me the men who hounded him. By gad!"—he supported himself against the desk, in order to wave his heavy cane—"I'll crack their heads for them!"

"No one has hounded Scorpio," assured Denwood, quietly. "If you had been here, Claremont, you would agree with us that Scorpio is a rascal who deserves all the punishment that the law can possibly give him."

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Claremont gave Denwood a scoffing look, as though he pitied him. Again leaning upon his cane, the withery man pointed his other hand upward, extending a bony forefinger. His tiny eyes glittered.

"My star is in the ascendant," he declared. "This is the day that I have long awaited—when Professor Scorpio has promised to reveal the future that still awaits me! Only upon this evening can I learn the answer that lies in the heavens."

Side glancing toward Cranston, Denwood caught a nod. Mildly, Denwood questioned:

"Do you expect Scorpio to visit you tonight?"

"I do," snapped Claremont, "and this talk of thievery is tommyrot! Scorpio did not have to steal. He knows that I keep my promises. I told him that in return for his all-important message, I would give him—this!"

His bony hands ripping the package, Claremont displayed a sheaf of bank notes. The top bill was of a thousand-dollar denomination. So were the rest, as Claremont counted them, chuckling each time he moistened his thumb.

There were exactly two hundred and fifty bills in that stack of thousand-dollar notes. Percy Claremont, the eccentric millionaire, had brought a quarter of a million dollars to Lake Calada as a personal gift to Professor Scorpio!

BEFORE the glued eyes of silent witnesses, Claremont bundled up the cash again and tucked the packet under his arm. He hobbled to the door; as he gripped the knob, he turned to wag his cane.

"Like the stars," he clucked, "Scorpio will not fail me. But I have a warning for every one of you to heed. My property is my own. I shall brook no trespass. I say again that Scorpio had too much at stake"—he gestured the money bundle beneath his arm—"to turn to criminal pursuits."

"I have given you proof of Scorpio's honesty. I expect to have you prove your own, by staying away—all of you—from my preserves. Good day, gentlemen"—Claremont's tone was dryly sarcastic, as he pronounced the term—"and if you can not solve your present problems, I advise you to consult the stars!"

The door closed on Claremont's trailing crackle. Seated in silence, the group heard the front door slam. They were still quiet, when the sput-sput of a motor sounded from Denwood's dock. The brief visit of Percy Claremont, the man who still believed in Professor Scorpio, had left them doubting their own senses.

Only the steady eyes of Cranston seemed to understand, as The Shadow studied the baffled faces all about him.

CHAPTER XVII. OUTSIDE THE LAW.

SEEING was believing.

Perhaps the rule did not apply in the case of Scorpio's séances, for they were held in darkness; but it certainly held true with Percy Claremont and his money.

Here, in Denwood's study, were more than a half a dozen men who could testify on oath that the eccentric millionaire had brought two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to Lake Calada. Claremont's statement that the money was for Scorpio, might be outlandish, but no more so than the fact that he had brought the cash

itself.

Granting the situation to be precisely as Claremont had put it, the committee proceeded to debate an important point; namely, Claremont's argument that Scorpio would not have turned crook when he knew that he could gain a quarter of a million dollars without recourse to crime.

It was Grendale who talked first. He tried to laugh off the matter of the money, insisting that Scorpio had made a bigger haul through crime than he could otherwise. But Jamison, Albion, and the other victims of the robberies shook their heads.

Combined, their losses might total more than a quarter million, but not in cash. Claremont's argument still stood. It was due to be shattered, though, as The Shadow could tell from the trend of the conversation. It was Carradon who struck the answer.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed. "It's Scorpio, the alibi artist, all over again. The fellow is so crooked he can't think of anything straight. When anything legitimate comes his way, he tries to think how he can use it to cover something else.

"Suppose we didn't have all the goods on him. Suppose he was still in his Castle, under suspicion of the heaviest sort, but with nothing fully proven. What would our reaction be, after what Claremont just told us? Why, we'd go over to see Scorpio, and apologize for ever suspecting him of crime!"

Carradon's analysis brought a chorus of assent. It fitted perfectly with Scorpio's actions all along. Claremont's arrival could be regarded as Scorpio's trump card. No one wondered any more why the professor had so brazenly waited out events.

Niles Rondon picked up where Howard Carradon left off.

"What about tonight?" queried Rondon, suddenly. "Are you going to stand by and let Scorpio get away with something else?"

Some listeners were puzzled. Rondon laughed.

"You don't think the professor will pass up Claremont's cash, do you?" continued Rondon. "Carradon is right; this deal is Scorpio's alibi. But it's also his chance to more than double his haul, here at Lake Calada."

A buzz circled the group. Henry Denwood looked toward Lamont Cranston. He caught the slightest of nods.

"Claremont must be warned," decided Denwood. "At once."

The statement produced derisive chuckles that grew into hearty laughs, with Grendale's booming loudest.

"Warn Claremont!" expressed Grendale. "Why, he's warned us! Anyone who interferes with his affairs will probably get a load of slugs from a blunderbuss or whatever kind of gun that old miser has over at his place.

"I've never known it to fail. The men who can squeeze pennies out of people and turn them into millions, are always the quickest to hand over their wealth to clever fortune hunters."

The rest seemed to agree, with the exception of Cranston. The Shadow felt that the rule did not apply in Grendale's own case. The financier was a first-class penny squeezer, but he had never shown himself open-handed or big-hearted toward anyone.

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All that, however, was apart from the major theme. The question was: would Scorpio visit Claremont? The answer was unanimously yes. Which produced another question: What could the committee do about it?

Denwood suggested calling in the sheriff, but he was promptly overruled. Should Sheriff Kirk agree to call at Claremont's, it was a foregone conclusion that Scorpio would not show up. On the other hand, if the sheriff knew that volunteers were going to Claremont's against the old eccentric's wish, he would probably use his authority to prevent such an expedition.

It was Grendale who summed it up, with the first really sensible suggestion that he had made that afternoon.

"We've got to handle this ourselves," he declared, emphatically, "and do it outside the law."

The thing seemed justified, the more the group considered it. In fact, several of the others had been on the point of putting the same proposal. Two points were at issue: Claremont's property rights, and the quest for Scorpio. Denwood found the situation comparable to a previous one.

"When we wanted Barcla," he reminded, "we let Scorpio go through with a séance, knowing that Barcla would surely come. We had men in the offing, who closed in and prevented Barcla's departure. In this case, we know that Scorpio will visit Claremont. Perhaps our former method will work again."

Denwood looked toward Cranston as he spoke. He knew that it was The Shadow, not the deputies, who had assured success the night of the séance. He was sure that The Shadow would act again, this evening.

"Excellent, Denwood!" agreed Grendale. "We caught Barcla with the goods—those spooky robes that he was wearing. We'll get Scorpio with the goods, in the shape of Claremont's money."

"Not at all" returned Denwood, "because the money will be a voluntary gift. Scorpio will be taken because of his past crimes. Even if it happens on Claremont's property, I think the captors will be justified."

ALL were enthusiastic, but The Shadow could foresee a sudden cooling. He was smiling slightly when it came.

When Carradon proposed that they form a party for the trapping of Scorpio, everyone favored it but no one wanted to be included, not even Carradon himself. He had beaten the others to the proposal, apparently in order to get out of it.

"Come, gentlemen!" exclaimed Carradon. "You are all big losers. Aren't you willing to take a risk in order to regain your losses?"

Apparently, they weren't. Grendale argued that they had lost enough already. Gillespie, Jamison, and Albion concurred with him. Derisively, Grendale demanded:

"Why don't you go, Carradon? You're a loser, too."

"No, no," smiled Carradon. "Paula is the loser. Those were her jewels. I've lost nothing."

"Then take the risk," retorted Grendale, triumphantly. "You have a score to settle with Scorpio, anyway. He had you cooped up for a few days underground."

Carradon gestured toward Rondon and Harry, said, "They were prisoners, too."

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"Then why don't you all go?" parried Grendale. "You're all in the same boat." He chuckled, feeling that he had made a jest. "All in the same boat; that's it! Go in a boat together, over to Claremont's this evening."

No one laughed at Grendale's self-appreciated joke. Carradon's face had sobered, with recollection of his imprisonment under Indian Rock. Looking at Rondon, Carradon saw an expression that matched his own. Both glanced toward Harry Vincent. He, too, was serious, but his eyes were gazing elsewhere. Harry was awaiting a flash from The Shadow.

"I'll go," decided Carradon, suddenly. "Someone has to break the ice, and it appears that I am justified."

"Which puts it up to me," declared Rondon. "I was in trouble before, along with Carradon, and both of us got out of it. I'll go along with you, Howard."

Harry caught a glitter from Cranston's eyes, while Carradon and Rondon were shaking hands to close the deal. When the pair turned toward Harry, he met their combined stare squarely and said:

"You may count me in."

Grendale was on his feet, warmly pounding the shoulders of the venturesome three. He winced a bit, when Albion added to the approbation by saying that he and the other losers—which included Grendale—would combat any lawsuit that Claremont might institute against the trespassers.

The commotion simmered down to a discussion between the three volunteers. They decided that they would start from the Community Center at dusk, using a canoe to reach Claremont's property, which was only about a mile away. The water route was preferable, since Claremont's preserves were surrounded by a picket fence, which might be troublesome to cross.

"If Scorpio comes by water," declared Rondon, "we will probably hear him. But my hunch is, he'll use the woods."

"We'll have to close in on the bungalow, then," put in Carradon. "If we don't hear Scorpio climbing the fence, we'll certainly know when he goes into the house."

"The fence is a big help," added Rondon. "It means we'll have Scorpio boxed when he leaves."

"Except for the water front," reminded Carradon. "It's a pretty wide expanse at Claremont's."

The point in question bothered the listeners. In picturing the lake front at Claremont's, they also recalled Scorpio's getaway on a previous night, when the professor had transformed himself from a robed mystic into a limber cross-country runner.

They remembered, too, that Scorpio had wrenched himself from more than three men who grabbed him. Physically, the rogue was quite as slippery as he was mentally.

"We'll have to bring in the sheriff," decided Rondon, ruefully, "and a bunch of deputies. But if we can only keep them off until we need them! Somebody's got to handle it."

RUNDON looked to Grendale and the other money men. They, in turn, appealed to Denwood, who shook his head slowly. He doubted that he could handle the thing himself; and it was difficult to pick from among the others. Whoever was chosen couldn't afford to bungle; and it was too likely that the man would.

They were buzzing among themselves, however, and eyes were turning toward a person who had hitherto been little more than a spectator: Lamont Cranston. He had suddenly become the choice of everyone, for a very sensible reason. Sheriff Kirk held a high opinion of Cranston and had voiced it heartily. He credited Cranston with being the quickest thinker that he had ever met, because of the episode at the Pioneer Mine. The deputies liked Cranston, too, because he had saved the lives of a few of them during their mistaken encounter with Harry Vincent.

Catching the buzzed words, Denwood glanced toward his friend and received The Shadow's nod. Denwood settled the discussion.

"Our minds are all agreed," he declared. "The sheriff values Cranston's opinions and will follow his suggestions to the limit. He knows, too, that Cranston has visited obscure sections of the lake and might pick up a clue to Scorpio, should the professor come back through the mountain pass and stay in hiding hereabouts.

"I believe, knowing Cranston as I do"—Denwood was keeping his tone as casual as possible—"that he will be able to keep the sheriff quite satisfied, yet unaware of actual matters, until the time for action. There is just one question, and Cranston alone can answer it: Will he accept the assignment?"

Eyes turned hopefully toward The Shadow. They saw the impassive face of Cranston light with what seemed a real enthusiasm.

"Gentlemen," came the calm-toned reply, "I shall be delighted to undertake the intriguing task that you suggest."

Only Harry Vincent, long in The Shadow's service, could sense the mockery behind that acceptance. He was sure that The Shadow was laughing inwardly; later, perhaps, Harry would know why.

At present, only The Shadow knew!

CHAPTER XVIII. THE COMMON GOAL.

They dined at the community lodge—Harry, Carradon, and Rondon. Lois Melvin was at their table, because her presence would naturally be expected. By mutual consent, they took the girl into their confidence, enough so to curb her curiosity.

Lois could be trusted not to talk, and she wasn't the sort to fuss about anyone taking risks. The trouble was something that Harry should have anticipated. Informed briefly of what was to happen, Lois wanted to go along.

No argument would persuade her otherwise. Rondon became testy, in an undertone, and Lois displayed anger in her flashing eyes.

"Scorpio was right on one thing," she told him. "Gemini doesn't harmonize with Virgo. You turn facts to suit your wishes, Niles; while I only want things that facts permit me to have."

"Just how does that apply in this case?" growled Rondon.

"Very definitely," replied Lois, firmly. "You want to trap Scorpio, and you've talked your friends into thinking that the three of you can do it."

"It was Carradon's idea—"

"Your own, too, Niles," interrupted Lois. "You have good points, as well as faults. You are generous, overly so, in giving credit to others. But you haven't stuck to facts. You three are the last who should have been selected for this job."

"Why?"

"Because Scorpio tricked all of you, and captured you in the bargain. Individually, you have demonstrated just one ability—that of being trapped."

Rundon's eyes flashed fury. Carradon looked very much annoyed. But Harry eased the tension with a chuckle, as he told the others:

"Lois is right."

"Perhaps," said Rundon, regaining his calm. "But tonight there are three of us."

"Which doesn't change the case, returned Lois, sweetly. "What you need is somebody that Scorpio can't catch."

"Yourself, I suppose."

"Exactly!" argued Lois. "Think back, and you'll recall that I'm the one person who did manage to give Scorpio's bunch the slip. It's nearly dusk"—she glanced from the window—"so I'll go and change to my camping outfit. I'll meet you in the canoe."

She looked to Harry and Carradon as they walked from the dining room. Both looked doubtful, yet neither could find a solid reason why the girl should not accompany them. It seemed that Virgo people were unbeatable, when it came to logical argument.

It was up to Rundon to spike the idea, if he could find a way, and Rundon was doing some quick thinking. Laughing, Lois said that he was giving a display of Gemini ingenuity; but she reminded him that this was a sporting proposition, which should also appeal to people born under the sign of the Twins.

Rundon paused by the clerk's desk, stalling while he watched Sheriff Kirk come into the lobby and enter a telephone booth. He whispered to the others:

"That's Denwood calling, asking Kirk to come over and talk to Cranston."

"Which means it's time to start," analyzed Lois. "I'll go up and change."

"Wait!"

Rundon turned to the clerk, asked him to hand over a pack of cards that lay near the telephone switchboard. Stepping to a table near the stairway, Rundon spread the pack in front of Lois.

"We'll make it a sporting proposition," he decided. "Take any card you want, and carry it up to your room. If it's a low card, you can get into that camping outfit and join us at the canoe."

"And if it's a high one?"

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"You're to go to bed and stay there, as a lesson that Virgo persons should not interfere with other people's business."

Lois calculated, then asked how high the low cards went.

"I'll be generous, as usual," conceded Rondon. "I'll give you from deuces up through eights, which is more than half the pack."

Lois drew a card, and snuggled it against her waist as she started up stairs. Reaching her room, she started the change to her camping garb, confident that her luck would hold. At the last moment, she turned the card face up.

It was a jack; a high card.

ANGRILY, Lois threw the card on the floor, her camping outfit with it. Obtaining pajamas instead, she finished undressing and flung herself into bed. Sullenly, she decided that people of her sign weren't good losers.

She wished that she hadn't taken up the proposition. By this time, the canoe had started, and she would have forgotten about it, ordinarily. She could have gone to the community movies instead, as everyone else was doing, judging from voices and laughter that she heard from the pier and the darkening ground outside her window.

Instead, she had sent herself to bed at sunset, by drawing the wrong card. It would be a miserable ordeal, lying awake for hours, listening to all the fun around the Community Center. But Virgo people always kept their agreements, just as they also cried over spilled milk.

They analyzed, too, as Lois had said, particularly when they had nothing else to do. It wasn't long before she began to wonder why Rondon had told her to take the card upstairs before she looked at it. The others should have seen it, too, to know whether or not they should wait in the canoe.

Scrambling from bed, Lois put on slippers and dressing gown; telephoning the clerk, she told him to send up the pack of cards that Rondon had borrowed.

The pack arrived. Closing the door, Lois examined the cards by the table lamp. Her lips compressed in anger. It was just what she expected; Rondon had carried his ingenuity too far. This was a forty-eight card pinochle pack; it didn't contain a card under a nine spot!

Guests on the veranda were suddenly disturbed by a shower of cards that came fluttering from a second-story window. Caught by a spanking breeze, the pinochle pack was distributed all over the lawn, as a token of Lois' sentiments toward it.

Stirred by the same breeze, the surface of Lake Calada was rolling wavelets in toward Claremont's shore, slowing the progress of the canoe.

Harry and his two companions had agreed to hug the shore very closely, and it was difficult, considering the choppy water, which frequently threatened to beach their craft too soon.

Carradon grumbled about it, claiming that they might be too late to trap Scorpio, but Rondon reassured him. The professor couldn't approach Claremont's by daylight; therefore, at best, he would still be on his way.

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In Rondon's opinion, the waves helped matters. They would be an excuse for Cranston to keep the sheriff's boats well off Claremont's shore.

Beaching the canoe near Claremont's dock, the three men moved along the tree-shrouded frontage, guiding themselves by the starlight that had replaced the afterglow above the mountains.

Satisfied that no other boats had been here, they spread, working their way up toward the bungalow well back on the gently rising slope.

The building looked very small from the water because of the wide woods surrounding it, but its sprawling shape enlarged at close range. Evidently, Claremont had built on a larger scale than most persons supposed; but none of his neighbors had ever visited him, to find out what his residence was like.

Converging near a porch that jutted from the bungalow front, the three men held low conversation. Rondon pointed toward the lake, black through the wavering trees, to little lights that dotted the waters.

"The sheriff's boats," he undertoned. "Cranston's keeping them well out."

There were echoes of a spurting motor from the flotilla. One batch of lights headed down the lake; soon, another followed. Rondon chuckled softly.

"He's giving them the runaround, too," he said. "A good stunt, having them anchor off this shore as if by chance. If Scorpio sees those lights, he won't suspect trouble. They're thinning out very neatly."

ACTUALLY, The Shadow was keeping the boats on the move, much to the mystification of Sheriff Kirk, who wondered what was in Cranston's mind. The sheriff had a lot to be puzzled about, because he wasn't in one of the motorboats at all.

With Cranston, the sheriff was floating in a very curious craft, that bobbed like a coracle upon the black waves. The thing was big and round, like an enormous automobile tire, and its bottom was nothing but a thin layer of rubber.

The Shadow had inflated this rubber boat with a pump attached to a motor. He and the sheriff had left the few remaining boats in the anchored flotilla and were floating in toward Claremont's wharf. The sheriff noted that Cranston was guiding the craft with a short paddle.

He noted, too, that the sides of the rubbery nest were quilted, but did not realize that they consisted of compartments. In those secret pockets were the guise that The Shadow favored—black cloak, hat, and gloves, that could render him invisible when he reached the shore.

They reached the dock. The rubber coracle made no sounds as it grazed. The only noise was the soft whispering of the tree boughs, high above. Then the sheriff undertoned:

"Say! This is Claremont's dock. The old boy showed up today. He's kind of fussy about people using it."

"In that case," came Cranston's calm suggestion, "we can go ashore."

The sheriff went ashore, and was scratching his head when Cranston joined him.

"Claremont wouldn't like this, either."

"Is he likely to be strolling around, sheriff?"

"Not him," returned Kirk. "Fresh air poisons that old fossil. He'll be in his bungalow, maybe with a fire lighted."

"If the bungalow is up the slope," decided The Shadow, in Cranston's deliberate fashion, "it would be just the place from which we could properly watch the boats."

"But if Claremont hears us—"

"You can tell him why we're here. As sheriff, you have the necessary authority. But if we ascend carefully, without lights, Claremont will neither see nor hear us."

The sheriff hadn't been informed of Claremont's threat against visitors this night. He merely considered Claremont to be an old crab, who would listen to reason after having his say. With Cranston, who was carefully muffling a flashlight in something that hung across his arm, the sheriff moved toward the bungalow.

Halfway there, the sheriff stopped short and gripped Cranston's arm, but not the one that held the cloak.

"Hear that?" he whispered.

The Shadow heard it—a distant clang, that ended with a slight rattle. He pretended not to know the cause; so the sheriff explained it.

"There's a picket fence along the property line. Somebody's climbing over it, Cranston!"

Ready to throw aside caution, the sheriff pulled gun and flashlight. The Shadow stayed him, undertoning a warning in the sheriff's ear.

"It would be better to approach the bungalow," advised The Shadow. "I have heard that Percy Claremont is expecting a visitor this evening."

"A visitor?" came the sheriff's echoed whisper. "Who could it be?"

The time for subterfuge was past. In the midst of that strange, whispery darkness The Shadow spoke two words, that told the sheriff all he needed. Enough to spur the sheriff to any action that Cranston might suggest.

The Shadow's calm words were:

"Professor Scorpio!"

CHAPTER XIX. DEATH'S TRAIL.

THE three men at the cabin had heard the slight clang from the fence. Rundon, always ingenious, was the first to suggest a plan that would suit the situation.

"We've got to cover all doors," he told the others. "Whichever of us sees Scorpio enter must inform the others. He'll probably come out the way he's going in."

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Creeping upon the porch, Rondon tried the front door and whispered down to the others:

"It's locked, but maybe Scorpio has a key. I'll stick here, while you pick other places."

At the side, Harry and Carradon found another door. It was locked, but Carradon covered it, while Harry went on to the rear. Finding a back door, The Shadow's agent tried it, discovered that it was locked, too.

Dropping back, Harry waited. Judging the distance to the side fence, he decided that Scorpio would reach the bungalow very soon.

Then, from within the house, Harry heard slight creaks. He decided that they must mean Claremont, for he was sure that the wealthy recluse was at home, even though the venturers had seen no lights.

The creaks traveled eerily, almost like one of Scorpio's spooks. Harry thought he heard them from two separate quarters.

Maybe it was his imagination. It had been proven that persons who saw two lake monsters had seen the same one twice, but had been fooled by its speed. There was argument, too, about the time of Barcla's capture; deputies claimed that they had spotted the bobbing ghost near one side of Grendale's house, while the rest had been spying Barcla at the other side.

But there was no mistake about the creaks. Momentarily, Harry heard both sets at once; knew that two men must be in the house. There was a fourth door, probably, or a convenient window through which Scorpio had crept. The professor was meeting Percy Claremont.

Edging off, Harry decided to find the entrance place and report back to Rondon and Carradon. Before he had gone a dozen steps, the indoor creaks were ended. Other tokens replaced them. Things that came with fearful suddenness.

A light gleamed through a shaded window. There was a sudden cackle, in Claremont's high-pitched voice. Scuffling sounds, followed by the hard thwack of a club, that must be Claremont's walking stick. Then, a triumphant shout in a voice that Harry knew too well: the tone of Professor Scorpio!

Hard upon that shout came two reports from a revolver, splitting sounds, that seemed to quiver the atmosphere. Before he could get to a door, Harry heard the smash of another barrier; then a terrific clatter, as an entire window was ripped from its frame.

A figure bounded quickly from beside the house wall. Harry took after it, yelling for the others. Carradon deserted the door that he was watching and joined in the chase. They heard Rondon's voice, gasping but loud, from the window:

"It Scorpio! Get him!"

Two others—the sheriff and Cranston—were coming through the front door. Hearing them, Rondon staggered about, stumbled toward them, and sagged into a huddled shape. He stabbed his finger toward the lighted room. His words were panted.

"Scorpio... came in by the front!" Rondon gave a gulp, pressed his hand to his collar, which was ripped. "I... I followed him. He had a key. Wouldn't have jumped at him... was going to get the others... only, he got Claremont. In there!"

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Outside, shouts told that Harry and Carradon were still in pursuit of their quarry. Suddenly, Harry yelled; a gun barked twice. With the echoes, they could hear Carradon's angry snarl.

"Scorpio went that way," panted Rondon, pointing to the window. "Maybe... maybe they couldn't catch him."

The sheriff hesitated, looked at Cranston.

"You see to Claremont," The Shadow told him, pointing to a groaning form by a desk in the lighted room. "I'll go along the trail."

It was a trail, indeed. Along the hallway to the window lay half a dozen bills, all of thousand-dollar denomination. Vaulting the window sill, The Shadow bored his flashlight as he struck the ground, and saw more money scattered irregularly ahead.

One fluttering bank note had stopped against a tree twenty yards away, but beyond that point, the direction changed.

Harry and Carradon were down by the water front, with flashlights. Boats were racing in from the lake, spreading to control the shore. Deputies had heard the gunfire; they took it as a signal from the sheriff.

Stopped outside the window, The Shadow extinguished his flashlight. His laugh, low-toned and under-standing, seemed to blend with the whispers of the breeze-swayed trees.

Within the lighted room, the sheriff was stooping above the prone form of Claremont. The withery millionaire was staring feebly with his tiny eyes, that were bead-like through his thick glasses. His long jaw wagged, weakly. Sheriff Kirk could see a clawlike motion of the long, bony fingers. It was a death pluck.

Rondon was crawling in from the hall. Weakly, he pointed to the dying man. His breath returned, Rondon was able to furnish details.

"Claremont is trying to tell you what happened," said Rondon. "He'd promised that money to Scorpio; but the professor was too eager for it. Claremont swung at him with the cane—"

The cane was lying broken beside the desk, which bore a great dent from the blow that Claremont had meant for Scorpio. But that was not why Sheriff Kirk motioned to Rondon for silence. It happened that Claremont was managing to speak.

Words came with a death cough; a tone so forced that it was no more than a croak.

"He... shot... me—"

A bony hand had lifted; it settled, its wavering finger pointing along the floor toward the door.

There was a ratty gargle from Claremont's throat; his last.

"Yes, Scorpio shot Claremont," nodded Rondon. "From the doorway, just like he said. He'd have shot me, too, when I pitched on him, only he'd put his gun away, to grab the money. He got me by the neck, though, and chucked me long enough to smash out through the window. He lost some of the money when he went."

The sheriff stood looking at Claremont's body, noted the two bullet holes that marred the old man's shirt front. He swung to Rondon, who was rubbing the side of his head, muttering that he had struck a wall when

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Scorpio flung him.

"Scorpio didn't give the poor old fellow a chance," growled the sheriff, bitterly. "Shooting from the doorway, like that—why the range was only about six feet!"

"Just about," began Rondon, turning toward the doorway, as did the sheriff. "He was right there—"

Rondon halted, his mouth and eyes wide open, like the sheriff's. They were even more astonished than if they had seen Professor Scorpio. For there was a figure on the threshold; stranger, more mysterious than Scorpio had ever been, even in his Hindu robes.

It was a figure cloaked in black; a shape of the night come into light. A weird form that dying crooks and rescued prisoners had mentioned, yet which none had seen more than hazily. This was the fighter who had done so much to stifle crime at Lake Calada.

The Shadow!

THERE was no identifying him as Cranston. The collar of the cloak was lifted, the brim of the slouch hat turned down, so effectively that they hid all the black-clad crime-fighter's features except his burning eyes.

Orbs that seemed to flash with vengeance, those eyes turned upon the figure on the floor. In Percy Claremont, The Shadow saw a man who should not have died; yet the weird, quivering laugh that whispered from hidden lips was one of satisfaction.

Riveted, Rondon and the sheriff followed The Shadow with their eyes, as though his approaching figure magnetized their gaze. He passed between them, came close to Claremont's body and stared down at the scrawny, dry face. The Shadow's arms were folded in front of his cloak. He extended one hand, pointed with a thin gloved finger.

"Those glasses, sheriff," spoke The Shadow in a sibilant tone, "mark Claremont as a man of very exceptional eyesight."

Sheriff Kirk shook himself from his daze. To hear this creature of darkness address him so familiarly was as amazing as a meeting with an actual ghost. Rather numbly, Kirk approached the body. He found his voice.

"Poor eyesight," he corrected. Then, hastily: "Not that I want to argue. But the glasses are thick, like magnifiers."

"They do not magnify," said The Shadow. "They reduce. Those glasses are part of a disguise."

Stooping, The Shadow plucked away the spectacles. The eyes beneath the glasses enlarged, as did their sockets. Instead of tiny beads, the eyes were large and glary; their power was apparent, despite the death glaze that had come over them.

Claremont's eyes seemed wider apart, too, with the glasses removed.

The sheriff was wondering where he had seen those eyes before, when he noticed that The Shadow's hand was moving between the dead man's face and the light.

The hand stopped, casting a shadow that obscured the long jaw with blackness that suddenly reminded the sheriff of a beard. From Kirk's throat came the amazed ejaculation.

"Professor Scorpio!"

Even as the sheriff shouted, The Shadow wheeled. His other hand whisked from the cloak, swinging an automatic. The muzzle of the weapon covered Rondon, as the fellow was springing toward the door. Coming full about, Rondon froze.

He had a revolver half drawn; thousand-dollar bills were dripping, in slow flutters, from a packet that he had stowed deep beneath his coat. He was caught with the evidence of crime upon him, unable to make another move.

The Shadow's laugh told Rondon something that he had learned too late: Only one person had guessed the dual identity that was Professor Scorpio and Percy Claremont. That person was The Shadow. With Scorpio both the killer and the victim, by Rondon's statement, it was plain that Rondon, himself, was the master hand of crime.

The supercreek who had managed criminal schemes at Lake Calada, Niles Rondon, had exposed his entire game by murdering his living alibi, Professor Scorpio!

CHAPTER XX. THE LAST FLIGHT.

STEADILY, in a tone that seemed to throb with echoes from the past, The Shadow was telling the truth of Rondon's crimes, so clearly that every word struck home to Sheriff Kirk. Rondon, the culprit, stood listening, while the money fluttered, building a little mound of wealth beside his feet.

"With Scorpio's innocence now proven," spoke The Shadow, "my task was to pick the guilty man from others. Scorpio's innocence was proven, from the very start. Facts told that he was not the murderer of Drury."

Rondon's eyes actually bulged, as he heard the revelation that proved The Shadow's early knowledge.

"Clever of you, Rondon," declared The Shadow, "to seek the death of a troublesome Mr. Cranston. Clever, too, to willingly sacrifice the life of Lois Melvin, the girl you claimed to love, in order to strengthen your own alibi."

"But you forgot another passenger on board that ship: Edward Barcla. You knew that Barcla was Scorpio's accomplice; but it did not occur to you that Barcla would logically have cut adrift from Scorpio had the professor tried to wreck the plane."

It was now occurring to Rondon, as he listened; but the idea came too late. The sheriff gave an understanding grunt, that carried self-reproach. He realized that Scorpio never could have explained the episode satisfactorily to Barcla.

Both the professor and his star accomplice knew that someone else had been behind the thing; in all probability they had suspected Rondon, but kept it to themselves.

There were others who heard The Shadow's denouncement. Harry Vincent and Howard Carradon had arrived in the hallway, bringing Lois Melvin along. She was the person that they had pursued outside the bungalow. Her camping clothes formed her present attire; they were torn from her climb over the pickets.

The Shadow's words were continuing to hold his listeners spellbound. Briefly, he was tracing the

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circumstances which showed how simple crime had been, though seemingly complex.

Scorpio had been deep in the spook racket. He had bribed many servants, had tricked up many houses, for his séances. In so doing, he had made himself a perfect target for a schemer more clever than himself: Niles Rondon.

Going in for crime in a big way, Rondon had bought out a few of Scorpio's most capable tools, to work with his hidden crew. He had assembled the mystery boat, its plans stolen from a crazed inventor, to insure his criminal success.

The Shadow revealed the strongest part of Rondon's game. It was his trick of staging crime only on the nights when Scorpio gave séances. Rondon was throwing suspicion upon a man who could not stave it off, considering that Scorpio, himself, was engaged in an illegitimate racket!

Earlier robberies had been simple. At Paula Lodi's, where quick action was needed, Rondon and a few others of his band had stripped the jewels from the actress, sending the swag out by the veranda door while everyone was after the ghost.

A daring thing, yet it had made it very bad for Scorpio and Barcla. To cover their game, the fleeing crooks had been forced to carry Carradon along; for he had seen the lake monster, harbored in the boathouse, and had recognized it as a water craft of sorts.

"You were prepared for that, Rondon," accused The Shadow. "Even your own men did not know that you were the man behind crime. Some of them, like Rufus, actually believed that they were working for Scorpio. You encouraged the idea, by using horoscopes to send your secret messages.

"They followed form when they abducted you outside your own cabin, for you saw the mystery ship, too, though Lois did not. But you thought of everything, Rondon"—there was an ironic touch in The Shadow's sinister laugh—"even to concealing keys in the cells beneath Indian Rock!"

THAT was one that amazed Carradon and Harry. They realized that they, as fellow prisoners, had testified that Rondon was with them on the night when Grendale's stocks were stolen.

It was a robbery that only Rondon could have managed, as Harry suddenly understood. The Shadow came to that event, disclosed it as a duel of wits between Scorpio and Rondon.

"Scorpio knew you were working up an alibi," The Shadow told Rondon. "To ruin it, he told Barcla to impersonate you at the séance. Should you return, later, alive, it would have made matters very hard to explain.

"You met that one, Rondon, by coming in person. You were the ghost that entered; you knew the combination of Grendale's safe, as many of his friends did, and robbed it during your brief intermission of disappearance."

From the doorway, Lois could not suppress an ejaculation:

"But I didn't think the ghost was Niles! He failed to answer my question."

"Because he was purposely bungling his impersonation of himself," explained The Shadow. "His men had already captured Barcla, and were prepared to throw him into the path of guns. Rondon wanted Barcla to take the whole blame—as Barcla did."

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There was mockery in The Shadow's final words, telling that he had divined the twofold game. Harry remembered the talk of two ghosts on that night outside of Grendale's. There had actually been two, but one had made a getaway.

Rundon had reached a hidden speedboat, the one that had led a false chase to the cove, when others pursued the lake monster.

The Shadow turned an almost sorrowful gaze toward Scorpio's body. The dead man was a rascal; in a measure, he had furthered murder by continuing his secret duel with Rundon. The death of Scorpio was no loss to humanity; still, Scorpio deserved credit for the scheme whereby he had later aided the trapping of Rundon.

While The Shadow had been looking for a way to put full blame on Rundon, Scorpio had returned to Lake Calada as Percy Claremont. He had actually shaved his beard, as he had evidently done often before, to pay one of his occasional Claremont visits.

Scorpio had brought the money as bait for Rundon. He was confident that Rundon did not know Claremont's other identity. Only The Shadow divined it; perhaps because he had never met Claremont before and had been solely on the outlook for Scorpio. The disguise had been almost perfect, the trap excellent.

As Claremont, Scorpio had expected to down Rundon with his cane and expose him as a crook. Later, the withered Mr. Claremont could have returned as Professor Scorpio. But Rundon had won the physical duel, stabbing home shots as he managed to half-dodge the hard-swung cane.

It was Lois who supplied the final accusation, as she pressed forward into the room. Her horror of Rundon had become indignation, particularly because he had dragged her into the final game.

"You thought you'd get here ahead of Scorpio," exclaimed the girl. "You wanted to murder Claremont and leave a false trail. But someone had to be prowling around, to draw the others off. You wouldn't bring me in the canoe, but you found a way to make me come by land. You knew I'd guess the trick you played, and that I'd be angry enough to set out alone!"

Stooping, the girl picked up the flood of thousand-dollar bills that had piled around Rundon's feet. She intended to hand them to the sheriff, then go out and pick up those in the hall, plus the ones that Rundon had tossed from the window so that the breeze could continue the false trail.

SIGHT of the money, more than the accusations, drove Rundon to his desperate step. Seizing Lois, he whirled the girl between himself and The Shadow's gun; drove for the door, dragging her behind him. His revolver was gone; hence Harry and Carradon tried to grab him, Rundon broke free.

This time, it was Lois who left an actual trail. Rundon was stifling her screams as he headed toward the lake, but the girl was letting the money strew behind her.

Coming along with flashlights, Harry and Carradon were spotting the fluttering bank notes, as they shouted for the deputies to head off Rundon and his prisoner.

The Shadow had taken a shorter route, through the window broken earlier by Rundon. He heard Rundon trying to start a speedboat; there were scuffling sounds, as Lois fought to stop him. Then a big splash, as Lois went overboard. Rundon had taken the only way to free himself of the battling girl.

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The speedboat was off. The Shadow leaped aboard another, and Harry sprang in with him. They saw Lois scrambling back to shore; she was yelling that she'd reclaim the money, if they would handle Rondon. The chase was on, in full, for deputies had reached other boats and were following The Shadow's lead.

Rondon headed where The Shadow expected—to his cabin. Reaching it, he grabbed for his rifle and a batch of cartridges, finding them in the darkness. Then a circle of flashlights burned upon him. Startled, Rondon almost dropped the rifle.

All about him were the fruits of former robberies: bonds, paintings, statuettes, jewels, and stocks. The men with the lights were deputies. The Shadow had sent a boatload of them earlier, with instructions to dig beneath the cabin and bring up whatever they found. They had assembled all of Rondon's spoils.

Outside, the stopping chugs of a speedboat told that The Shadow had arrived. Flailing wildly with the rifle, Rondon broke from the circle of deputies. Somehow managing to escape their prompt gunfire, he took to the back woods.

He was loading the rifle as he went, for occasionally he snapped shots back at them. But they kept up the pursuit, close enough to keep constantly on his trail.

The trail led to the Pioneer Mine. Rondon bobbed from sight. When the deputies caught up, the sheriff was there to flag them down. He had joined Harry and The Shadow; the trio had come here by water. The Shadow was leading the way down into the mine.

A light was glimmering in the deepest pit. There, Rondon was using his rifle to pry up the sunken stone that the sheriff and his men had once ignored. Rondon had ruined the rifle barrel in his frantic efforts.

"His route to the cave," whispered The Shadow, to the sheriff. "He must have kept that large stone loose, except when he was on the other side; then, he could let it settle."

The sheriff understood. The stone could be easily hoisted by pressure from below. But Rondon had not come out that way the last time he had used his secret passage. In fact, it was unlikely that the passage would be any good to him on this occasion.

Actually aiding the dying hand of Rufus, that time beneath the rock, Rondon had blasted most of the passage, to cover the secret route by which he had managed to remain a prisoner and still be at large. Even the crooks had been fooled by that deception.

Rufus had really thought that the chain he grabbed would blast the whole cavernous depths, for Rondon's messages to his tools had claimed that such would happen. At present Rondon, like Rufus, was banking on a hopeless thing.

At least it so seemed, until Rondon, by a Herculean effort, got the stone loose. He rolled it aside and squirmed down into the cavity. They heard him clattering below. Then, his head and shoulders appeared, with the light.

The sweep of his flashlight showed his other hand. It contained a bomb-shaped object. He'd been seeking it, instead of an outlet. Remembering what Rufus had tried to do, Rondon was banking upon taking The Shadow and others with him to a deep and permanent grave. But he hadn't expected The Shadow quite so soon.

RUNDON'S light outlined the black-cloaked figure before the crook had lifted the roundish object in his other hand. Frantically, Rondon tried to make his throw; but the roar of a gun stopped him. He seemed to

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stiffen in his pit.

With the recoil, The Shadow whirled; he hurled Harry and the sheriff back along the passage. A howl sounded, as Rondon's wounded form went straight down, the light and the bomb going with it. After moments of interminable suspense, scurrying men heard the bomb's great blast.

The Shadow's gunshot had echoed loud. This report actually drove air ahead of it. The ground was quivering; masses of ore were collapsing; walls of the old shaft were dancing, as The Shadow rushed his companions between them.

Having confined the blast to the lower pit, The Shadow had gained moments that proved vital. Ahead of the deafening, increasing roar, he and the men with him dived out to the ground before the underground avalanche could overtake them.

The explosion had found one victim only, the man responsible for it. Niles Rondon, leader and only survivor of a criminal band, had finished his career, by blowing himself to atoms and burying his scattered remains beneath tons of shattered rock.

From the outer darkness came a quivering laugh, that seemed to pick up the reverberations of the blast and add a touch of triumph to their fading echoes. Those who heard it recognized the laugh of The Shadow.

Later, the wind quieted, the surface of Lake Calada lay motionless. Waters of crime had stilled; but their blackness showed the reflection to two twinkling lights, red and green, that seemed to scoot through vast depths.

The lights themselves were high above; they came from the night plane bound for Los Angeles. Among the passengers were two who glanced back, as the plane banked, for their last look at Lake Calada.

Lamont Cranston and his friend Harry Vincent had finished their play with Henry Denwood. They could count their work complete.

Black though the waters lay, they harbored crime no longer. Evil had gone from Lake Calada, banished by The Shadow!

THE END.